

KW

# 소설 속 에스트라

지갑송 퓨전 판타지 장편소설



# **The Novel's Extra**

**- 소설 속 엑스트라 -**

**- Volume 3 -**

**-Author-**

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**[ FudgeNouget (Wuxiaworld) ]**

*Goo Yeonha*



*Chae Nayun*



*Rachel*



# Chapter 67

## Guild (1)

After finishing his evening training, Kim Suho headed to Cube's cafeteria. Although Cube had several restaurants and cafes, the cafeteria was the only place cadets could eat for free. As such, Kim Suho and other cadets from non-wealthy backgrounds frequented this place. Most likely because it was summer break, only few cadets were inside the cafeteria.

Kim Suho ordered a dinner set, then headed to grab a random seat.

"Huh? Why are you guys here?"

But on one table, he found two people he never expected to see, Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun. They were whispering to themselves and were startled when Kim Suho came up to them. Then, they dodged each other's gazes with somewhat awkward gesticulations.

"O-Oh, you're here."

Chae Nayun then spoke up.

"What were you two talking about?"

"Nothing."

Kim Suho sat down next to Chae Nayun, then Chae Nayun sniffed him.

"Did you come from the Fitness Center?"

"What's the point in sitting around, right?"

"...You're obsessed. Can't you take a break for a day?"

Chae Nayun narrowed her eyes.

“Rather than that, why are you guys here? I thought you didn’t like cafeteria food.”

Kim Suho couldn’t understand what Chae Nayun was doing here. She was well known for eating her every meal at restaurants. No one would have expected to see her in the academy’s cafeteria.

“Well... I realized during the final exam that my pickiness can become detrimental.”

Chae Nayun was speaking in a grave tone, but Yoo Yeonha immediately added a piercing jab.

“You stopped eating after three spoonfuls.”

“...I wasn’t hungry.”

Hearing Chae Nayun’s excuse, Kim Suho lightly smiled as he picked up his spoon. Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun glanced at him, then met each other’s eyes. In truth, Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun were talking about what one would expect from girls their age. The topic of their conversation was the person who was at the center of many emotions and mysteries, Kim Hajin. Suddenly, Yoo Yeonha had a mischievous thought. She tapped Kim Suho’s shoulder.

“Kim Suho.”

“Hm?”

“Are you close to Kim Hajin?”

Chae Nayun reacted strongly to Yoo Yeonha’s question. She furrowed her brows and glared at Yoo Yeonha. Meanwhile, Kim Suho answered.

“No, I’m not that close.”

“But you’re probably the closest one out of all the male cadets.”

“Huh?”

At these words, Kim Suho tilted his head. The corner of Yoo Yeonha’s mouth curled up to a smile as she continued.

“Isn’t it weird? Out of everyone in our class, only a few have talked with Kim Hajin. Be it a guy or a girl, Kim Hajin never approaches them first, and he responds coldly to anyone who approaches him, driving them away.”

At this point, Chae Nayun’s face contorted to a frown. Yoo Yeonha seemed to be planning on telling Kim Suho about everything they had talked about.

“But there’s one person Kim Hajin is noticeably interested in. Can you guess who?”

Kim Suho stared at Yoo Yeonha for a moment, then made a thin smile.

“Of course, I’m not that dense.”

“...Really?”

“Haa.”

Meanwhile, Chae Nayun sighed with mixed feelings and massaged her temples. On the other hand, Yoo Yeonha’s face was filled with an even greater enthusiasm.

“Who is it?”

Rather than answering, Kim Suho looked at Chae Nayun. Chae Nayun also looked back at Kim Suho. Their eyes met, and that was enough of an answer.

“...Agh.”

Chae Nayun clenched her head and leaned against the back of her chair. Then, as though she found a counterargument, she faced Yoo Yeonha with sparkling eyes.

“Wait, Yoo Yeonha, wasn’t Kim Hajin close to you at first?”

However, Yoo Yeonha cut down her counterargument instantly.

“He approached me because he wanted something from me.”

Just like Chae Nayun said, Kim Hajin had approached her first. However, his interest disappeared completely once he received the Desert Eagle. Of course, Yoo Yeonha

wasn't disappointed or sad. In fact, it was a clear exchange that Yoo Yeonha preferred. After striking down Chae Nayun's argument, Yoo Yeonha quickly asked again.

"So, what are you going to do?"

"Do what?"

Chae Nayun didn't answer. She was concerned about Kim Suho who was sitting next to her.

Chae Nayun then glanced at Kim Suho. To provoke jealousy, Chae Nayun asked.

"...Hey, what do you think?"

"About what?"

Kim Suho's reply was completely innocent.

"Oh yeah, you've been single your entire life."

"...So have you."

"What? No, I'm not. I'll have you know when I was 7..."

"Oh~ You guys are here too?"

At that moment, Yi Yeonghan appeared out of nowhere. He sat down next to Yoo Yeonha, and Yoo Yeonha scooted to the side with clear displeasure.

"Yi Yeonghan, you didn't leave yet?"

"Yeah, and it looks like I came just in time for the interesting part."

"You should've left."

"...Aren't you being too mean?"

At that moment, the cafeteria door opened once again. Speaking of the devil, the person who walked in was... Kim Hajin. He seemed to have come from the Fitness Center just like Kim Suho as he pushed up his wet hair and pulled out a meal ticket.

Yi Yeonghan chuckled and spoke.

“He’s here too. At least he’s working hard, right?”

Seeing Yi Yeonghan talk condescendingly, Yoo Yeonha felt a deep disappointment. Yi Yeonghan clearly had no clue what he was talking about.

“You should work hard yourself.”

“Huh? I am! My end of the semester grades are higher than his.”

“...Sure, just focus on your grades for the rest of your life.”

At that moment, Kim Hajin received his food in a to-go box, then turned around. He stared at them for a moment before turning around. Although he only looked at them for a split second, Yoo Yeonha made a big fuss.

“You see that? He was looking at Nayun just now.”

“Okay! I get it! Can you stop talking?”

Chae Nayun yelled, half-embarrassed, half-annoyed. Yi Yeonghan then widened his eyes and cut in.

“What? Chae Nayun likes Kim Hajin?”

“What, where did that come from? Screw off, Yi Yeonghan.”

Chae Nayun reacted sensitively. One reason was that Kim Suho was sitting next to her, but another was that Yi Yeonghan was known for being a loudmouth.

Knowing this, Yoo Yeonha gave Yi Yeonghan the fuel he needed.

“No, we think it’s the other way around.”

“Ah, really? Kim Hajin likes Chae Nayun? But didn’t you guys argue and fight? Oh, is it like what happens in dramas? You know... love sprouting up while arguing and fighting... Uh, I guess the gap in your strength is too far for that. Right, rank 4 and rank 934 is too far apart.”

Feeling Chae Nayun's deadly killing intent, Yi Yeonghan quickly changed his tune in the middle of his speech.

"Screw off."

After blurting out fiercely, Chae Nayun glanced at Kim Hajin, purely out of curiosity. But Kim Hajin just happened to be looking at them again, and their eyes met. Chae Nayun quickly averted her gaze, then scratched her face awkwardly.



—...The gap in your strength is too far for that. Right, rank 4 and rank 934 is too far apart.

"What are they talking about?"

I only listened in at the end, so I couldn't understand what they were talking about. But I didn't really mind since it seemed like they didn't realize I had two people's worth of food. I no longer cared about people talking about me behind my back.

I took the to-go boxes and returned to my room.

As soon as I opened the door, Evandel ran up to me hastily. I quickly shut the door first.

"Daddy~"

"Not Daddy, Uncle."

After picking up Evandel and letting her sit on my arm, I placed the to-go boxes on the kitchen table.

"I brought food, but before we eat, let's test what we practiced."

"Un!"

I put Evandel down on the couch. Although Evandel didn't need to consume food like humans, she seemed to love the taste, so I prepared them.

"Okay, first, try this one."

Using my smartwatch, I projected a picture of an adorable cat.

Evandel then transformed into the cat in the picture. Other than her hair being blonde, she looked just like the cat in the picture.

“Oh~ great. Next is this, a bird.”

Evandel immediately transformed into a cute crow-tit. She was a bit big, being the size of about six rice-balls, but it was within an acceptable range.

“Well done~~”

I patted her tiny head. Evandel transformed back and giggled.

“Did I do well?”

“Of course.”

Was it because she inherited Rachel’s bloodline? She was a good listener.

When I was showering Evandel with praises, my smartwatch suddenly rang.

[Today at 6 P.M., guilds released their lists of cadets for Guild Experience Program. Selected cadets will be contacted via their smartwatch.]

Guild Experience Program.

It was exactly what it sounded like. The program lets cadets, who didn’t have things to do over the break, observe Heroes working in guilds.

But well, it wasn’t something that concerned me.

In order of rank, guilds in Korea were given the right to select three cadets from first and second-year cadets. As such, most first-year cadets had to be in the top 300 of their class to have a chance to be selected. No matter how well I did on the final exam, it wasn’t enough to put me above rank 300, so there was no way I could have been chosen.

But almost as to prove me wrong, my smartwatch rang once again.

[Kim Hajin – Essence of the Strait]

[Contact us if you would like to turn down this offer.]

“...Huh?”

Essence of the Strait chose me? Why?

“Ah.”

Soon, I figured out why. There was one girl who had a strange fantasy about me.

“It’s Yoo Yeonha.”

As the guild leader’s daughter, it made sense for her to have such authority. But wasn’t this abuse of power? I hoped it wouldn’t cause trouble for her position as the successor.



I stood under the blazing sun and the blue sky, enjoying the clear and warm Seoul weather. The only thing that worried me was the fact that I left Evandel at home. I told her sternly not to leave the room, but I still felt uneasy. Was this what all fathers felt?

“You’re here.”

I was waiting at the Gwanghwamun Plaza, and soon, Yoo Yeonha came up to me. Looking at me, she tilted her head.

“Wow, this is unexpected.”

“What is?”

“I thought you’d reject the offer.”

Just like she said, I planned to reject the offer at first, but I suddenly became curious about what kind of work Heroes did. There had to be things other than what I had set.

“We’re still waiting on one more person, but it looks like we’ll have to wait quite a while. Should we go ahead first?”

“I don’t care either way.”

“Then let’s go.”

At the same time, a limousine stopped in front of us. It was a long, luxurious limousine that was often seen in movies.

The driver then came out and opened the door for us.

“Get in.”

I got inside the limousine with Yoo Yeonha. The car seat was extremely comfortable. Just sitting in it made me drowsy.

“Let’s go.”

At Yoo Yeonha’s words, the driver drove off. The limousine moved without shaking in the slightest, and before long, we arrived at Essence of the Strait’s guild building.

As expected of the world’s second ranked guild, the building’s exterior looked spectacular. Each part seemed to have been designed carefully as the building looked both beautiful and geometrically marvelous. This tall building was undoubtedly built using cutting-edge magic engineering and technology.

“Let’s go in~”

Yoo Yeonha led me into the building. The lobby that entered my view could only be described as vast. It almost felt like I was in a concert hall.

“Offices for Heroes are on the second floor and up, but there isn’t much to see on the first four floors. The real thing begins on the fifth floor. The first floor has the lobby you see here, a lounge, a training room, and a sparring room. Ah, there’s a sports field too.”

I was completely absorbed in looking around the first floor, which, according to Yoo Yeonha, had “not much to see”. Marble flooring and sleek interior, and in the distance, I could see a grass lawn the size of a soccer field. It was an indoor sports field.

“First, let’s go meet the Hero in charge of the program.”

“...Oh, right.”

It was then that I remembered I was here for the Guild Experience Program. Because of how familiar Yoo Yeonha was with everything, I almost thought she was the one in

charge.

Together with Yoo Yeonha, we stood in front of the elevator.

“Ah, by the way, the person who isn’t here yet isn’t Chae Nayun.”

“Huh? Uh, okay.”

What was she talking about out of the blue? I muttered thoughtlessly, but Yoo Yeonha looked at me with meaningful eyes, then snickered.

Ding—

The elevator then arrived, and Yoo Yeonha hopped in and pressed the third-floor button.

After a brief moment, the elevator arrived on the third floor. Immediately, I saw a large circle-shaped lobby and office doors spaced out along the wall.

“Follow me.”

Yoo Yeonha guided me to an office labeled A-35.

“To be honest, you won’t be doing anything special. Today, you’ll just look around the building, then starting from tomorrow, you’ll get to interact with other guilds. You might also get to follow a Hero to see him exterminate monsters.”

With that, Yoo Yeonha opened the door.

Unlike what it looked like from the outside, the office was quite spacious. The owner of the office seemed to have a gentle character as there were flower pots under the window sill and documents were stacked nicely on the office desk.

“Have you heard of Park Sangho?”

“Uh... I think I’ve heard of him.”

“Sangho-ssi is a very highly ranked Hero.”

In truth, I haven’t just heard about him, I knew him better than Yoo Yeonha.

Park Sangho. Although he was acting as Yoo Yeonha’s right arm, he was devious and sly on the inside. He wasn’t a Djinn but was someone who would betray Yoo Yeonha in the future. A bit harshly, at that.

“Oh right, I saw that you did well on the final exam.”

“Please, I only had 67 points.”

“If you wanted to stay around the average mark, you should have given away 20 or so points. Now, other guilds are starting to pay attention to you.”

“ ... ”

“You don’t like being in the center of attention, right? That’s why I’m letting you know.”

I decided to just ignore the strange things Yoo Yeonha sometimes said.

# Chapter 68

## Guild (2)

“Oh, you’re already here.”

While we were looking around the office, the door opened, and a man presumed to be Park Sangho walked in.

“It’s nice to meet you.”

Park Sangho held out his hand with a warm smile. He gave off a good first impression, like an older brother next door, a completely different character than his real self.

“Hajin-ssi, right?”

“Yes.”

I shook his hand.

“And I’m sure I don’t need to introduce myself to Yeonha-ssi.”

Yoo Yeonha smiled at Park Sangho’s joking words. He hung his jacket on the back of his chair, then tapped on the documents stacked on his desk.

“I know this is the Guild ‘Experience’ Program, but most of our work is done indoors. That’s why most team leader-grade Heroes who use the A-rank offices have 4 or 5 office workers.”

Park Sangho continued in a soft voice.

“Dungeon conquests and subjugation for monsters high-intermediate rank and above require thorough analysis in this office first. In other words, our work begins here, and only when everything is perfect do we set out. But, mm... let’s get out of here for now. To be honest, it does get a bit boring being in here all the time.”

Park Sangho led us outside. Yoo Yeonha followed after him immediately, but my eyes stopped at the safe installed in his drawer. Inside should be all the condemning evidence Park Sangho gathered about Yoo Yeonha's family.

"Hajin-ssi?"

"Ah, yes."

With Park Sangho calling me, I scurried out of the room.

"Oh right, there are also periodic deployment orders. You know how the North Hamgyong Province belongs to monsters now."

Park Sangho continued to speak as we walked.

"About 3000 Heroes take turns every month for four days to reduce the number of monsters there. That way, there won't be a monster outbreak from overpopulation. Once you become a Hero, you'll go there about twice a year."

Park Sangho stopped near the end of the third-floor hall. We were standing in front of a door that said 'Analysis Room'.

"This is the place I wanted to show you first since I heard Hajin-ssi was first place in theory."

Park Sangho opened the door.

The analysis room looked surprisingly ordinary. In a spacious room, tables, chairs, and fancy computers were lined up.

"There's a separate conference room on the other side. Huge, isn't it?"

Park Sangho added proudly.

The analysis room had many Heroes in it. They all seemed to be hard at work.

"Oh, Sangho-ssi, the kids are here?"

At that moment, a woman who was glancing at documents looked up and noticed us.

"Yeah. Hajin-ssi, Yeonha-ssi, this is Yi Jin-Ah. She's a high-intermediate rank Hero."

“Hi. You said two of the three were girls... so you must be Kim Hajin.”

“Ah, yes.”

“The world sure has changed. Who would have thought rank 934 could come to our guild as part of the Guild Experience Program? I wonder who was behind it.”

Yi Jin-Ah expressed her displeasure in a roundabout way. However, the target of her displeasure wasn't me, but Yoo Yeonha. Of course, Yoo Yeonha wasn't looking at her with pleased eyes either.

In reality, Yi Jin-Ah belonged in a different faction within the Essence of the Strait guild. The leader of this faction was Jung Hosuk, the guild's vice-leader. But since she would eventually switch to Yoo Yeonha's faction and become the guild's vice-leader, she could be said to be an important character to note.

“But Hajin-ssi is rank 1 in theory.”

Park Sangho defended me.

“Haha, rank 1 in theory? That's amazing, so was I! But cadets don't really learn much, so don't be too overconfident.”

Yi Jin-Ah took off her glasses as she snickered. Then, she tapped on the document she was just reading.

“Now then, rank 1 theory Kim Hajin-ssi, would you like to take a look at this?”

“Hey, you can't show the guild's internal data so easily.”

“It's not that important.”

Yi Jin-Ah got up. Just like in my setting, she was fairly tall, making me take a step back subconsciously. She seemed to be slightly taller than me.

“Here. It's a copy, so you can do whatever you want with it. Don't feel pressured.”

Yi Jin-Ah handed the document she was reading. I took it for now and glanced at it. Although it was written in Korean, it was mostly filled with equations and

mathematical expressions.

“Take a look. Though, I doubt a kid can even recognize it.”

I got a bit ticked off at being called a kid. Although I knew she didn't mean it in a physical sense, I wanted to argue that my height was average.

“ ... ”

I sat down on an empty chair nearby. As I took out a pen from my cross bag, I also took out my laptop and placed it on the desk in front of me in a smooth motion.

My Gift, Observation and Reading, activated.

The problem on the document seemed to be estimating variables that could happen while conquering a Dungeon. But weren't ordinary office workers used for something like this?

In any case, the calculation procedures and results appeared in front of my eyes. All I had to do was copy it down.

I asked Yi Jin-Ah.

“Do you have a piece of paper?”

“...Pft, what do you need it for?”

Yi Jin-Ah sneered without giving me any paper.

“It'll be difficult. Hajin-ssi. That's not on the level of an exam problem.”

Park Sangho gave me a paper instead.

Because of Yi Jin-Ah's bitchy attitude, I was even more driven to prove her wrong.

I clenched my teeth lightly as I began to write down the calculation procedures and results. While I was in the middle of it, Yoo Yeonha suddenly spoke.

“Um, the other cadet just arrived on the first floor.”

“Oh, really? Let's go together.”

Yoo Yeonha left the analysis room with Park Sangho, but I stayed and continued to

write everything down. In academia, it was standard procedure to write down every step of the calculation.

However, when I was mostly done and only had the final step left to finish, someone snatched the paper I was writing on and flipped it over. Obviously, it was Yi Jin-Ah.

“Listen, kid, stop wasting your time and screw off. Can’t you see? The other two already left.”

“..”

She gave off an uninviting impression to begin with, but now that she frowned, she even looked a bit scary. Knowing I was powerless here, I got up.

“I’ll leave my solution here, so feel free to look over it when you have time.”

“Don’t even try to waste my time, tsk.”

Yi Jin-Ah shooed me away.

Just like that, I was practically kicked out of the analysis room.

“...What a crazy bitch.”

I didn’t finish the last step. She better not ask about it later!

I went back to the elevator and came down to the first floor.

There, I saw the third cadet who supposedly just arrived. The cadet was someone I was too familiar with. Right, it was Chae Nayun once again.

When she saw me, she shouted with a look of surprise.

“W-What!? Hey, why is he here?”

“Who knows~?”

Yoo Yeonha smiled playfully. I also had something to say to her.

“You said Chae Nayun wasn’t coming.”

“Did I?”

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha's smartwatch buzzed. Her expression stiffened, making me wonder who it was.

"You two can go ahead. I need to use the restroom."

Then, she furtively escaped.



'Private Broker Yoo Jinhyuk'

Under a worn-down neon sign, Yoo Jinhyuk was staring at a document in a daze. This thin document contained a summary of an incident that happened 16 years ago.

"Haha."

Suddenly, he chuckled.

He explored the past for close to a month. However, he couldn't find out much about Kim Hajin's past. There were many complicated reasons for it, but the biggest reason was that there were way too many people tangled up in his past.

But as the difficulty of the matter increased, so did his interest. As a result, he buried himself in this job for a month without complaining, and he finally discovered a crucial hint.

[Kwang-Oh Report]

[Casualty: 96]

[Special note – the death of a woman in her last month of pregnancy.]

'Kwang-Oh Evacuation Shelter Massacre'

When monsters flooded the Kwang-Oh Fortress region, 87 ordinary civilians and 9 Heroes who were defending an evacuation shelter were all killed.

Although the government and the Association concluded Djinns to be the perpetrator, Yoo Jinhyuk knew the hidden truth. The reason he was kicked out of the Yoo clan in the first place was because he tried to uncover the truth.

Simply put, this 16-year-old tragedy wasn't the doing of Djinns.

" ... "

Yoo Jinhyuk knew the people behind this incident.

They were all powerful figures who most people wouldn't dare to name.

First was Kim Sukho, then President of South Korea.

The second was Chae Joochul, the President of Daehyun conglomerate.

The third was Yoo Taeho, Yoo Yeonha's grandfather and Yoo Jinhyuk's own father.

Of course, from their perspective, they had only killed a few harmful bugs. To prevent anyone from ever finding out, they had employed an organization that only operated in the darkness. The three of them probably didn't even remember this incident.

But if there was a survivor of this incident... if Kim Hajin's parents were victims of this massacre, and if his mother was the pregnant woman written on the report...

"Huu."

Of course, it was still only an unverifiable theory.

But Yoo Jinhyuk wondered, why did his niece want to dig up this man's past?

Breathing out a deep sigh, Yoo Jinhyuk called Yoo Yeonha.

She picked up almost instantly.

"Hello?"

—Yes, Uncle.

"...You sound prettier now, kid."

—Nevermind that, what happened to what I requested?

Yoo Jinhyuk casually glossed over it.

"Oh that, I haven't been working on it. I've been too busy."

—W-What? You're joking, right, Uncle?

Yoo Yeonha's angry voice stung Yoo Jinhyuk's ears.

Yoo Jinhyuk tried his best to maintain the lighthearted uncle character as he asked indirectly.

"Hahaha, I mean, why are you trying to find his parents anyway?"

—...That's none of your business.

“What about him? Does he want to find his parents?”

This was an extremely important question. If he didn't want to find out, if he wanted to just live his life as it was, everything would be fine.

—Yes, most likely.

“...And how do you know that?”

—Hm, what's up with all these questions?

“You know how it is, information is gold! If I know how he became an orphan, I could finish faster.”

His excuse seemed to be persuasive enough as Yoo Yeonha became momentarily silent. Soon, Yoo Yeonha whispered in a much quieter voice than before.

—You see, I think his parents got wrapped up in a crime. He has the list of wanted criminals memorized.

Hearing this, Yoo Jinhyuk couldn't help but breath in a gasp of air.

“He memorized the entire list?”

—Yes. I think he reached a certain point in his own investigation.

“...Right, you said he was smart.”

—He's rank 1 in theory. From what I hear, he didn't get a single problem wrong in the midterm and final exams.

If he was that smart, it wasn't impossible for him to have investigated the Kwang-Oh incident.

But thankfully, he seemed to have taken a wrong turn.

The perpetrator of that tragedy wasn't some wanted criminal.

They were 'true nobles', who still had great influence over the entire country.

“Hmm...”

Yoo Jinhyuk sighed once again.

He had to end this matter here.

If he dug in too deep and was noticed by that old codger, he wouldn't be able to guarantee his own safety.

The unpleasant old codger who seemingly harbored countless snakes in his body; one of the strongest men in Korea both in name and reality who unfortunately fell short of the league of Nine Stars 50 years ago; the second-generation successor and the real owner of Daehyun – Chae Joochul the Immortal.

This old man was not someone Yoo Jinhyuk could handle.

“...Ah, I just got a call. Let's talk later!”

The Yoo clan has grown, but from its founding, it was the hunting dog of the Chae clan. Chae Joochul was someone who would abandon his hunting dog without hesitation, so he wouldn't mind letting a few of that hunting dog's children die.

—Wait, Uncle, when will you be done with...

Yoo Jinhyuk hung up before Yoo Yeonha could finish.



“Why were you late, Nayun-ssi?”

Waiting for Yoo Yeonha to come back from the restroom, Park Sangho asked Chae Nayun.

“Ah, well, I visited Grandfather.”

“Nayun's grandfather? So that must be... his honor Chae Joochul.”

“Yes, I haven't seen him in a while, so it took some time. Sorry.”

“No, no, it's only natural. So, I presume he's doing fine?”

Park Sangho made a fuss, which was understandable since Chae Nayun's grandfather,

Chae Joochul, was one of the strongest people in the entire world.  
There was no Hero who didn't look up to him.

“Ah, sorry, I'm done now.”

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha came back from the restroom. Chae Nayun blurted out jokingly.

“How does it take you so long to take a dump?”

“I didn't. Anyways, Sangho-ssi, what's our next schedule?”

Yoo Yeonha's voice seemed somewhat sharp.

# Chapter 69

## Break (1)

The next task on the Guild Experience Program was deployment.

A deployment referred to Heroes intercepting monsters that invaded civilian territory. However, such occurrences were rare in Seoul, so we took a Portal to Essence of the Strait's Gangwondo branch, where several deployments happened every day.

“Park Sangho here. I just arrived in Chuncheon[1] If there's an incident nearby, let me know first. Ah, I have cadets with me, so anything above intermediate rank grade 4 will be difficult.”

Park Sangho let the branch know that we arrived, then turned towards us. With a big smile, he spoke.

“While we wait for the deployment order to come, let's eat. I know a good restaurant nearby.”

Park Sangho then led us to a fancy, traditional Korean restaurant.

“Four people, please.”

We were led inside by an employee. While we were waiting for our food to come, Park Sangho glanced at me and asked.

“Hajin-ssi, how tall are you?”

“Me? I'm 174.”

Chae Nayun then cut in.

“So not that different from me.”

“What? I'm a lot taller than you. You're 166.”

According to my setting, Chae Nayun was 166.3 exactly. The reason I needlessly attached a decimal unit was because I was 174.3. Most main characters had 0.3 attached to their heights.

“...What.”

It was something I said thoughtlessly, but Chae Nayun made a strange expression in response. She narrowed her eyes, then asked.

“How do you know how tall I am?”

Hearing that, I froze. There really was no explainable reason for me to have her height memorized, not unless I was a stalker. I only blurted out thoughtlessly because Chae Nayun poked at my pride.

“Ca, cadet profiles are public.”

“Yeah, but still...”

*Drrrk—*

Then, the door opened and thankfully interrupted this awkward conversation. The server began to put down a tableful of dishes. Korean-style braised short ribs, grilled fish, steamed egg, octopus sashimi... my jaws dropped at the sight of this kingly lunch table. On the other hand, everyone else seemed used to such a sight as they looked completely indifferent.

“Now, let’s eat.”

With Park Sangho words, I picked up my chopsticks. I was focused on savoring the taste of each dish, while the other three leisurely ate as they talked to each other.

“Do you have a girlfriend, Sangho Hero-nim?”

“I don’t. What’s your ideal type, Nayun-ssi?”

“I... like tall guys, so he would have to be at least 185.”

Chae Nayun’s words struck me particularly hard. I didn’t think it was bad or anything

since it really was no different than how guys liked beautiful women. But there was one problem...

“Yeah, my ideal type is someone who’s tall.”

She kept staring at me as she said it.

“He would have to be at least 15cm taller than me. Mm... yeah, 15 cm. 20cm would be too much.”

What did she want me to do about it?

When I furrowed my brows, Chae Nayun stealthily looked away.

In any case, while we were continuing with our meal... a voice rang out from Park Sangho’s smartwatch.

—Deployment order for high-intermediate rank Hero, Park Sangho. The coordinate is...

“Let’s go.”

Park Sangho got up in the middle of eating. Yoo Yeonha, Chae Nayun, and I quickly followed after him.

After running out of the restaurant without even paying, Park Sangho kicked off the ground and stormed forth. Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun chased after him similarly. However, I was the only one lagging behind. I was running as fast as I could, but I quickly fell behind from the rest.

“Jesus, is this a wuxia novel? They’re inhuman...”

They were practically flying. I realized just how lacking my stats were.

I pondered as I raced forward.

It was impossible to catch up to their physical power, which they built with 10 years of hard work, in just six months.

“Huu... huu...”

I continued to run without stopping to rest. Thankfully, my Thousand-Mile Eyes kept an eye on them, so I didn’t have to worry about getting lost.

After about three minutes, a fight broke out. Five limestone golems shot up from the

middle of the street. Limestone golems were at least low-intermediate rank grade 5, meaning they posed a great threat to civilians.

They were trying to break buildings with their huge arms. However, a whip flew in, restraining their arms.

It was Yoo Yeonha.

The golems' gazes fell on her. Enraged, they tried to cut Yoo Yeonha's whip, but to no avail. Meanwhile, Park Sangho charged in with his spear, thrusting out at a golem's core.

"Huk... huaa..."

...I was still running to the scene of the fight.

After running at my top speed for over 10 minutes, I finally became close enough to see them with my naked eyes. A new golem was approaching Chae Nayun.

The golem was short, being about 2.2 meters tall, making it look somewhat humanlike. Chae Nayun put her bow down and pulled her sword out. She seemed to be thinking that she could take it on with her sword since it was short for a golem.

However, limestone golems had a special ability that differentiated them from other golems – self-compression.

The smaller they were, the studier and stronger they got.

*Koong—!*

Chae Nayun's sword clashed with the limestone golem's fist, limestone dust scattering into the air.

Chae Nayun fought normally. After parrying the golem's fist to the side, she aimed for the limestone golem's weak point, its ankle.

However, the limestone golem responded to her attack smartly, kicking Chae Nayun with its foot, an uncommon attack for a golem to make.

"Uk!"

Chae Nayun was covered in a qi reinforcement, but it was a golem's attack. Chae Nayun fell back, grabbing her stomach with her hand.

The limestone golem didn't give her any time to rest. It bolted towards her in a flash, then slammed its fist down on her head. Chae Nayun froze, struck by her fear of close-ranged combat and taken aback by her lack of combat experience.

When the golem's fist was about to make contact with Chae Nayun... something grabbed her by the waist.

It took me a moment to realize that it was... Aether.

Aether coiled around her waist, then pulled her towards me. It must have read my mind, which was screaming, 'I need to help her—'.

“...”

Before I could fully comprehend what happened, I found Chae Nayun in my embrace. I stared down at her silently.

To be completely honest, I had a brain lag.

Aether... did the right thing. If Chae Nayun got hit, she would have been critically injured. It was just that... Aether did things a bit awkwardly.

—Gulp.

Chae Nayun swallowed hard.

Feeling like I had to say something, I did.

“...If you're going to freeze up in crucial moments, don't get near the enemy in the first place.”

To be honest, I wasn't in any position to say something like that. After all, I chose a gun because I was scared of close ranged combat.

“Just fight from afar. Your sword can get longer than a spear.”

Chae Nayun's Gift was 'Sea of Magic Power'.

Her Gift made her innate mana capacity several tens of times greater than an average Hero.

Of course, even though her mana capacity was large, it took a long time to completely fill it up. Even if she did, there was a limit to how much she could take out at a time. However, when a sword was used as a conductor of magic power, this limit disappeared.

Although it didn't look all that impressive because of her lack of experience, this was the true reason Chae Nayun had to be a swordsman.

“...Let, let me go.”

Chae Nayun pushed me away. Tucking her hair behind her ear, she held up her sword once again.

“I was just caught off guard last time. Take a good look.”

Chae Nayun spoke confidently.

...At that moment, I got the feeling that someone was looking at me. Somewhere... above.

I raised my head.

On top of a nearby building, I found a girl looking down at me.

“...”

Our eyes met. For some reason, I felt like I knew her. She looked just like how I imagined her to be.

“Huaaaap—!”

Chae Nayun charged forward with a strange shout. Startled, I turned my gaze, and by the time I looked back up, the girl was gone.

I felt a bit sorry at the girl who disappeared.

She was the antagonist who was supposed to be the original owner of Aether, ‘Tomer’.

“Hey! Help me!”

I could hear Chae Nayun shouting.

“...The heck.”

Chae Nayun managed to sever one of the golem’s arm and a leg but was grabbed by the golem’s other hand, she was dangling down like a piñata.

“H-He, help! Ah, uwaaat!”

Chae Nayun screamed for help, but before anyone could react, the golem flung her away like a toy he got tired of using.



“Kuuuu~ I’m so exhausted.”

On the other hand, in Essence of the Strait’s analysis room, Yi Jin-Ah stretched after two hours of wrestling with her computer.

Then, a colleague approached her and spoke.

“Hard, right? You should really just make the office clerks work on that.”

Yi Jin-Ah was currently working on analyzing a Dungeon’s mana density based on the Dungeon’s formation and inhabiting monsters. She needed to find the spots where the mana density would suddenly change, as well as the possible location of traps.

It was a tiring work that required a full week’s worth of time even with a team of office clerks.

“I just need to estimate one last variable. Plus, I’m smarter than them.”

Heroes were superior to ordinary people in every aspect. Yi Jin-Ah believed it was because Heroes inherited superior genes. She was also a highly-regarded Hero when it came to analysis.

“You said it was a large-scale Dungeon, right?”

“Yep.”

“And you’re doing that alone? You’re really something...”

The colleague made a meaningful nod, then turned back. Then, he spotted a piece of paper on her desk.

“Hey, what’s this?”

Yi Jin-Ah glanced at the paper.

“I don’t know.”

“Isn’t it yours? Ah, but you don’t usually do calculations with a pen.”

“...What are you talking about?”

Because her colleague was scanning the paper with eyes full of curiosity, Yi Jin-Ah quickly snatched it out of his hands. On a standard printer paper, several calculations and sentences explaining the procedure were written down.

“Oh, he wrote this.”

“Who?”

“Some kid who’s apparently rank 1 in theory. Ha, looks like he managed to write something down.”

“You should take a closer look at it. It looked pretty good.”

“Oh please.”

She snorted as she began to read the paper closely.

It wasn’t out of curiosity, but purely to feel a sense of superiority. In her mind, there was a countless number of cadets who thought they were special with only mediocre knowledge.

However, Yi Jin-Ah’s face stiffened as she continued down the paper.

Calculations were clean and concise, and every deduction he made was flawless and persuasive. But what caught her attention the most was his creative method of approaching the problem.

“...The hell.”

By the time she reached the end, she could only say those two words.

It was because the final conclusion and the critical step to reaching that conclusion were missing. It was an unpleasant feeling, kind of like being interrupted in the middle of singing the highlight of a song.

“Where’s the rest?”

Yi Jin-Ah flipped the paper over, even while knowing that nothing was there.

“Let me see that too.”

Her colleague reached to grab the paper.

“Go away.”

*Tak.*

Yi Jin-Ah shoved his hand away, then carefully put the paper in her pocket.

“Hey, you said it wasn’t yours. I found it, so it’s mine.”

“Please, I *requested* him to do this for me.”



“Ah, I’m so exhausted.”

I came back to the dorm around 9 P.M.

Evandel was sleeping on the couch, seemingly having gotten tired from watching TV. I picked her up and put her on my bed. After putting the blanket over her, I came back out.

“...Hmm.”

I thought about showering and sleeping early, but then I remembered something important. I headed to the kitchen, then took out the Butterfly Seedling Dust from the drawer.

It was still glowing with a brilliant, blue light.

There was a lot more than I thought. There seemed to be enough for three usages...

“It really might be okay for me to use some...”

I tried dividing it up into three clumps.

Just as I expected, each clump had enough to fulfill its role.

Then to strike the iron while it’s hot, I should just use it now.

I already thought of what to use it on.

It was a waste to use it on myself. My laptop could view my status, and I had no hidden potential.

What I had in mind was an item, Aether.

I condensed Aether into a ball a bit smaller than a soccer ball, then placed it on the table. Next, I grabbed a clump of the Butterfly Seedling Dust.  
All I had to do was sprinkle Aether with it.

With anticipation, I dropped the dust on Aether.  
Just like snow, the blue light fell on the ball, melting into it. Soon, the dust began to shine in Aether's transparent core.  
Now, I just had to wait until the light fully spread.

*Ding—*

At that moment, my smartwatch rang.

[Hey, thank you for today. By the way...]

The sender was Chae Nayun. I stared at her message, waiting for her to finish her sentence.

Ten minutes passed by. Chae Nayun still didn't say anything. Tired of waiting, I messaged her first.

[What.]

Chae Nayun replied instantly.

[What.]

I also replied instantly.

[What.]

She said the same thing.

[What.]

"...Ehew."

[Just go to sleep.]

[ㅋㅋㅋ No you ㅋㅋㅋ]

The conversation ended just like that.

Looking at this string of messages, I suddenly felt somewhat moved.

After starting out as an extra with no connection to the main story, I managed to come this far. If I had to describe myself now, I was undoubtedly one of the supporting characters. A supporting character with no defined role, one that could change at any moment...

—*Ding*

While I was feeling a bit sentimental, I received another message.

[Next Friday, there will be a shareholder meeting for Packhorse Master.]

“...Looks like they’re going to announce their next move.”

With Packhorse Master conquering Suwon Royal Devil’s Nest, it wouldn’t be long until I was swimming in money.

—*Ding*

I received another message from an unknown number.

“What’s up with today? I’m suddenly getting flooded with messages.”

This time, I furrowed my brows the moment I saw the message. It was from a certain rude individual.

[Um, Hajin cadet-nim? This is Yi Jin-Ah, you saw me during the day. Can we talk?]

Would you if you were me?

That’s what I wanted to write back, but she immediately called me. I didn’t pick up. Then, I immediately received another message.

[Ah, right, you’re coming to the guild tomorrow anyways. Let’s talk then.]

No, a day was enough to see how a guild operated. I had things to do, like looking after Evandel and preparing for the next arc in the story.

I pulled out Park Sangho’s business card, which I got from him earlier in the day, and

messed him.

[Sangho Hero-nim, I'll be quitting the Guild Experience Program.]

[Huh? Why?]

Park Sangho sent an immediate reply.

I was about to tell him it was for a personal problem, but I got a better idea and changed my mind. I could be petty if I wanted.

[Someone told me to quit, telling me that I'm only a rank 934 and didn't belong. I thought I should give the opportunity to another cadet if I was only going to be berated during my time there... sorry.]

---

1. The capital city of Gangwondo, which is a province.

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### **FudgeNouget's Thoughts**

ㅋㅋㅋ is like "LOL", but can be a bit more subtle. Korean people jokingly say that one ㅋ is sarcastic laughing, two ㅋ is normal laughing, three ㅋ is laughing hard, four or more is dying laughing, etc.

# Chapter 70

## Break (2)

Late night.

Yoo Yeonha was sitting in front of her computer, completely focused on finishing her work. She had organized the Guild Experience Program matter from earlier in the day, and she also had to upload a job post on Violet Banquet. Now, she was working on something she had prepared for a long time.

[Information Guild 'Falling Blossom' – Now Hiring]

[A new information guild, Falling Blossom, is looking for elite agents.]

The founding of an information guild.

Of course, Essence of the Strait had its own information team, but that wasn't enough. Yoo Yeonha wanted independent 'shadows', who only dealt with information. As such, she worked to establish an information guild for the past year, and now she reached a point where she only needed to find members.

"...Rather than waiting for that lazy bum, I'll look into it myself."

Yoo Jinhyuk suddenly popped up in her mind, and Yoo Yeonha growled.

Meow—

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha's smartwatch meowed, a ringtone she had personally set. The sender was Chae Nayun. Yoo Yeonha immediately checked the content.

[Hey, did you see the footage from our fight with the limestone golems?]

As expected of Chae Nayun, she asked something that seemed completely random.

[Yeah, why?]

When Yoo Yeonha sent her reply, she was immediately bombarded with messages.

[Well, you see]

[Um]

[How do I say this]

[Today...]

Yoo Yeonha sighed. She had an idea of what Chae Nayun wanted to say.

[Are you talking about Kim Hajin saving you? It got recorded beautifully. You were practically in his embrace.]

[What... Why are you looking at that?]

[Because I have to write a report.]

Nowadays, drones were deployed faster than Heroes. When a report came in, drones would be sent out from the nearest drone hangar to verify the report. Heroes could only be moved afterward.

As such, the scene of Kim Hajin using his magic power to pull Chae Nayun into his embrace was recorded in high definition.

[Argh, don't you dare spread it.]

[I won't, hehe. So? Did you like it?]

[As if. Anyways, I'm going to a seminar next Tuesday with Kim Suho. Do you wanna come too?]

Chae Nayun quickly changed the subject. Yoo Yeonha retorted shortly.

[No.]

[Shin Jonghak's coming too.]

[Fine, I'll go.]

At that moment, a lion's roar rang out from her smartwatch.

This time, it was a phone call.

The caller was Park Sangho.

Yoo Yeonha picked up the phone thoughtlessly.

“Yes, Park Sangho Hero-nim.”

—Um, Yeonha-ssi.

Park Sangho spoke in a hurry. As she listened to his explanation, Yoo Yeonha’s face contorted to a frown.

—Um, it looks like Jin-Ah messaged Hajin-ssi on her own. Jin-Ah is saying she didn’t mean it that way, but Hajin-ssi is saying he’s quitting the Guild Experience Program because of it...

“What? Okay, I’m hanging up for now.”

Yoo Yeonha bit down on her lips. She was fuming.

“That damned woman must have finally gone mad. We should be sweet talking him to get him to join us, but this is what she does?”

Yoo Yeonha felt enraged for the first time in a long time. Yi Jin-Ah would always criticize her for every little thing, but Yoo Yeonha endured it because Yi Jin-Ah was a competent person. Knowing that Yi Jin-Ah would eventually come under her leadership, Yoo Yeonha didn’t act hostile on purpose. But what she did today was absolutely unforgivable.

“I didn’t want to resort to this...”

Yoo Yeonha took a deep breath.

She needed to prepare her heart to maximize the effectiveness of this method. Just thinking about it made her face redden, but now was the time to put on a thick skin.

Huuuu—

After taking three more breaths, Yoo Yeonha made a call.

The receiver picked up almost instantly.

Yoo Yeonha twisted her tongue as much as she could.

“...Un, Daddy~ You still weren’t sleeping~?”



The next morning, the office of the Essence of the Strait's vice-leader. Yi Jin-Ah stood with her back straight in front of the vice-leader, Jung Chulsoo. Looking wronged and upset, she gave an explanation of what happened the day before.

"Well, no, you see, vice-leader-nim, I did message him after he left, but..."

"So it's true that you messaged him privately. How did you even get his number?"

"Well, I have a friend who works in Cube as a vice-instructor..."

The vice-leader let out a sigh.

"What a mess."

"No, vice-leader, I swear I didn't mean to threaten him in any way."

Yi Jin-Ah was about to explode from frustration.

"I didn't explain in detail, so I understand how he might have misunderstood, but..."

—Um, Hajin cadet-nim? This is Yi Jin-Ah, you saw me during the day. Can we talk?

—Ah, right, you're coming to the guild tomorrow anyways. Let's talk then.

Thinking back to her message, Yi Jin-Ah really didn't know what to do. It seemed that the cadet misunderstood her intention.

"Then why were you trying to talk to him privately?"

Yi Jin-Ah muttered hesitantly.

"...It was to talk about a scholarship."

"Shut it. The guild leader is going to have a private meeting with you."

At that moment, Yi Jin-Ah's expression broke down.

A private meeting with the guild leader.

An outsider could think that it was a better punishment than being demoted or getting

a reduced salary. Although it didn't even come close to the serious punishments, in Essence of the Strait, there was no other non-serious punishment more fearsome than a private meeting with the guild leader.

Yi Jin-Ah swallowed hard.

"S-Spare me just this once."

"I'd love to, but I have no choice. It's an order from the guild leader."

"No, please..."

Yi Jin-Ah really was desperate. She was only 25, and the last thing she wanted to do was to meet with the guild leader, which supposedly made one age by five years.

"It's already decided. Go back."

However, the vice-leader was resolute.

In the end, Yi Jin-Ah made her final ditch effort.

"B-But come on! That kid really isn't up to our guild's standards! He's rank 934 for god's sake! Even if he's rank 1 in theory, he wouldn't be here without his connection to Yoo Yeonha, and a mere cadet shouldn't be allowed to interfere with a guild's administration!"

On the surface, everything she was saying was right. In truth, even the vice-leader had similar doubts about how a rank 934 cadet was selected to the Guild Experience Program.

"...Huu."

However, such doubts were washed clean by what Yoo Jinwoong said yesterday. He spoke.

"Mountain Tyrant. You've heard of that name, right?"

"Of course, do I look like a rookie?"

"Then you should know that the Mountain Tyrant's vital point is in our guild's database."

“Yes, though you wouldn’t tell me even if I asked.”

Data on a high-rank monster like the Mountain Tyrant was top-secret information. Even within Essence of the Strait, there weren’t more than ten people who had access to this data. Furthermore, those that knew had their mouths sealed with a magic contract.

“Come here.”

The vice-leader gestured with his hand. Yi Jin-Ah walked up to him stiffly. The vice-leader then whispered into her ear. Immediately, Yi Jin-Ah was dumbstruck.

“...Is that true?”

“Yeah. Kim Hajin is the one who provided that info.”

“H-How?”

“This isn’t the first time we’re seeing an oddball among Cube’s cadets. I’m sure he analyzed it himself. It’s not like there aren’t videos of Mountain Tyrant hunts. And didn’t you say so yourself? That he’s rank 1 in theory.”

Yi Jin-Ah shut her mouth. Thinking about it now, it wouldn’t be impossible for someone so outstanding in problem-solving to analyze a few monsters’ vital points.

“Listen, this is why I always tell you not to judge people by their ranks. Ranks can’t fully encapsulate cadets’ abilities.”

“...”

‘But last hiring season, you told us to reject anyone below rank 100... ’ Yi Jin-Ah pouted, not daring to voice her thoughts.

“So just accept your punishment.”

“Ah...”

A private meeting with the guild leader wasn’t really a meeting, but a hellish, week-

long training. As this “meeting” was under the pretense of a training, there was no trouble with the law, and because anyone would be happy to train under an expert like Yoo Jinwoong, you couldn’t complain about it either.

If Yi Jin-Ah could become stronger through this training, she wouldn’t be so against it. However, because the difference in skill was too big, she would only act as a sandbag for a week.

“...uck.”

“What uck?”

“...Nothing. I’ll be on my way.”

Yi Jin-Ah bowed and turned around.

“I’ll hope to see a new you in a week.”

“...”

“I’m only doing this because I care about you. You might be scared now, but it’s better than having it stay on your record.”

The vice-leader then admonished her.

“Also, don’t even think about contacting him again.”

“I won’t.”

“Good. You can go now.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

When Yi Jin-Ah grabbed the doorknob, vice-leader chattered for the last time.

“Ah, before you go into training, make sure you apologize to him.”



[You obtained 89SP!]

[Luck bonus applies! You obtained 12 additional SP!]

“...What now?”

When I was looking at my laptop screen nervously, an alert suddenly popped up. I didn't know what happened, but I was happy to get more SP. However, I didn't have time to celebrate.

“Huu.”

I let out a deep sigh and got back my focus.

Currently, I was planning on using about 1500SP to create a new Gift.

It wasn't a Gift related to physical abilities or magic power.

I realized from my fight with the limestone golems that no matter how much effort I put in, my physical stats would only lag behind as time went by.

So rather than investing in my body, I would invest in equipment.

The following was the Gift I wrote.

===

[Random Consolidation System]

[Low rank] [Spirit attribute]

—Scanning

\*Scans a designated equipment.

—Random Consolidation

\*Consolidates the 'concept' of the scanned equipment by 1~100%. The consolidation lasts for 24 hours, after which the consolidation percentage will be randomized once again.

—Growth

\*You can use SP to strengthen the Gift 'Random Consolidation System'.

===

Random Consolidation System.

It was a Gift that fully utilized my incredible luck stat.

The concept of an equipment was exactly that. For example, consolidating a gun's concept would strengthen its accuracy, recoil, rpm, firepower, and stability;

consolidating a vehicle would strengthen its sturdiness, speed, fuel consumption rate, maneuverability, among others.

Since the boost percentage was completely random, it might seem like it's completely reliant on luck, but it just so happened that my luck stat surpassed the human threshold. Given that, this Gift was extremely efficient.

"Let's go."

I was more nervous than when I consolidated my equipment in games.

"May Lady Luck shine on me..."

*Tap.*

I hit [save].

A message popped up on the laptop screen.

[You do not have enough SP. The Gift will be modified accordingly.]

[An incredible luck applies! A portion of the Gift has been restored.]

===

[Random Consolidation System]

[Lowest rank] [Spirit attribute]

—Scanning

\*Scans up to five designated equipment at once.

—Random Consolidation

\*Consolidates the 'concept' of the scanned equipment by 1~44%. The consolidation lasts for 24 hours, after which the consolidation percentage will be randomized once again.

\*A scan on an equipment can be canceled, after which it will return to normal in one hour.

—Growth

\*You can use SP to strengthen the Gift 'Random Consolidation System'.

===

I wasn't too happy with it, but considering this was what I got after my luck preserved some of the original effects, it only meant what I had first was too absurdly strong. I had to be content with what I got.

"...Hm."

I checked the message I got on my smartwatch some time ago.  
This was the reason I was racking my brain trying to come up with a Gift.

[Traveling Club Next Friday. Destination: England.]

It was an announcement from the traveling club.  
The next main story event was here.  
I picked up the magic sword I kept in my drawer.



English Royal Court.

Rachel was enjoying her break in her room. Free from studying, training, and potential danger, she spent the entire day sleeping on her bed.

“Uuun~”

The morning sunlight felt pleasant after 14 hours of sleep.  
Each day seemed to get brighter after experiencing a portion of her future on that day.

*Tok tok—*

Someone knocked on her door.

“Come in.”

The old man who walked in was Henry, the butler of the English Royal Court, Henry. His hair had now turned grey, and Rachel was more comfortable around him than her own father.

“How was your time in Cube?”

“It was fine.”

Rachel replied with a smile. However, Henry knew the various fears that were suppressed in her heart.

“You don’t need to worry from now on. We made an agreement with Cube. We’ll be sending a trustworthy agent to Cube.”

Rachel was relieved to hear the news. With a gentle smile, Rachel praised the butler.

“Ah, also, about the cadet that saved Princess...”

He brought up something she had been wondering about, a request she personally made as soon as the final exam ended. Rachel’s ears stood up.

“The Royal Court will contact him.”

“...Good.”

Rachel nodded in satisfaction.

Of course, the English Royal Court wasn’t worth much compared to Korea. However, the English Royal Court was a competitive place to get into in its own way, and it also had fairly distinguished Heroes.

Although it wasn’t a particularly enticing choice for the top 100 cadets, Kim Hajin wasn’t in the top 100. He was currently ranked strangely low, being at rank 934.

However, his true strength wasn’t on the level of rank 934. Rachel could still clearly remember what happened that day. A single bullet had blown away an assassin she had trouble dealing with.

But for some reason, Kim Hajin was hiding his true strength. Rachel was happy with it since it meant there wouldn’t be guilds approaching him. Even if there were, that would be illegal. However, as the English Royal Court had a special privilege that allowed them to recruit cadets before graduation, they could make recruitment offers to cadets without breaking the law.

“Thank you, Henry-ssi.”

“No problem. I’ll leave you to rest then.”

The butler went away.

Rachel’s room was large and silent. There weren’t many fun things to do either. There were Welsh Corgis in the garden, but they seemed to hate her.

As such, Rachel went back to rolling around on her bed. Then suddenly, she rubbed her belly. Her stomach was flat with well-defined abs, being nowhere big enough to carry a life. But one day... one day...

A shy smile bloomed on her face.

# Chapter 71

## Break (3)

My summer break was a series of hellish training.

Although I invested in strengthening my equipment with Random Consolidation System, that didn't mean I gave up on training my body. I formed a workout routine using posts on Hero Community, and I put the effort in to match my perseverance stat.

A week went by in a breeze.

My body's growth was still stunted. However, Aether had finished its awakening.

===

[Aether - Awakened]

[Mystic - Formless] [Evolving]

A corporeal, but formless, weapon. Adheres to its master or his weapon, reinforcing their strength.

A portion of its potential was awakened through a mystical elemental's power.

—Master Selection

\*Will not adhere to another being once a master is chosen.

—Physical Body Reinforcement

\*Increases all variable stats of its owner by 0.7 points.

—Weapon Reinforcement

\*Adheres to its master's weapon and strengthens the weapon's attack power. Aether itself can also form a weapon. (Current weapon-form Aether rank - 'high rank')

—Detail Materialization

\*Aether can manifest color and texture (cannot be too complex).

—Evolving Weapon

All of the above functions evolves with its owner. Depending on the state of Aether's awakening, other functions can develop.

===

To summarize, Physical Body Materialization's variable stat boost increased from 0.6 to 0.7, and it awakened a new function called 'Detail Materialization'.

I quite liked this new function.

In the original story, Aether only had two colors, white or blue.

As such, weapons formed with Aether were noticeable, being either entirely white or blue.

But with Detail Materialization, it would be different.

An ordinary knife, ordinary hammer, ordinary gun... though, it said that it couldn't be too complex, so maybe a gun wouldn't work.

"...Would it?"

It didn't hurt to try.

When I thought about forming a gun, Aether squirmed around, trying to change to the shape of a gun. In the end, something went wrong and it ended up looking like a croissant.

"So it doesn't work."

Next was a knife.

Aether managed to form a knife without difficulty. A 35cm long blade and a black plastic handle... I grabbed the knife to feel its texture. Just like I thought, it was no different than an ordinary knife.

The keyword was 'ordinary'.

"Evandel, Uncle is going to go out for a bit."

"...Un."

"I'll bring back yummy food, so don't play with that for too long. If you get sleepy, just sleep."

Evandel was molding her magic power as though it was a clay dough. Her instinct as a witch was telling her to make ghosts. I was a bit glad she was playing well by herself...

"Un~"

"Make cute animals with that, alright?"

Please don't make humans.

"I know, I know."

Evandel blocked her ears and shook her head. She seemed focused and didn't want me bothering her. For some reason, it felt like she was already coming to resemble Rachel.

I stroked Evandel's head and left my room.

Perhaps because it was a break, Cube was empty. It was only 9:00, but there were a few rooms with their lights on. I enjoyed this scenery quite a lot.

I moved to a nearby forest.

After walking into the middle of the forest, I stopped and held my Aether knife.

Then, I murmured quietly.

"Scan."

In an instant, the number '31' appeared on the knife's blade before disappearing. It didn't look any different from the outside, but Aether's output should be 31% stronger.

"..."

I stared at a boulder about 200 meters away. It was large and looked hard.

"Huup!"

I threw the knife at the boulder.

Drawing a streak of light, the knife reached the boulder but didn't get stuck in it. Instead, it went through it. Unable to withstand the shock, the boulder split in half. The knife continued flying after tearing through the boulder, then flew back into my hand when I gave the thought.

"Oho."

Detail Materialization turned Aether into an ordinary-looking weapon that wasn't so ordinary in power.

"Not bad."

Weapon artifacts scattered around the world had extraordinary outward appearance befitting their lofty status. The depth of history and time was something that couldn't be hidden.

But the weapon in my hand was different. No matter how you looked at it, it was an ordinary, modern knife. Of course, although it could penetrate a boulder, it wasn't guaranteed to break through a qi reinforcement. But, an ordinary outer appearance induced carelessness, and a moment of carelessness would be enough to deal a lethal blow.



Noon.

The traveling club gathered again under a blazing summer sun.

The meeting place was the Seoul Portal Station. Chae Nayun, Kim Suho, and Yoo Yeonha had already arrived and were waiting for other cadets to come.

“God, it's so hot. When are they coming?”

Chae Nayun grumbled as she fanned herself with her hand. Yoo Yeonha muttered from next to her.

“Who told you to wear the cadet uniform?”

“...”

Rather than wearing a 3 million won jacket that provided temperature control, Chae Nayun wore her cadet uniform, thinking Kim Suho would do the same.

But in reality, Kim Suho wore a white shirt with black slacks. It suited him so well that she couldn't even get angry.

“Oh look, here comes another cadet uniform.”

Yoo Yeonha pointed to a distant place, and Chae Nayun turned her gaze. It was Kim Hajin. He was also wearing his cadet uniform, but with a black jacket on top of it.

“...How is he not burning in that thing?”

However, unlike what Chae Nayun thought, Kim Hajin was feeling great. What he was

wearing was the Cloth Armor gifted by Rachel, which had a temperature control functionality.

Kim Hajin walked up to the others.

“Hey, Hajin.”

Kim Suho waved his hand and greeted him.

“Yeah.”

Kim Hajin nodded.

Looking back and forth between the two of them, Chae Nayun smirked. They were just too awkward.

At that moment, Oh Hanhyun yelled as he clapped.

“Now that Hajin-ssi is here, let’s go.”



After checking in our passport at the Portal Station, we arrived in London.

It was my first time being here, and I found the scenery both crowded and beautiful.

“As you all know, we will be going to Clancy Islet today.”

Clancy Islet was a gathering place for the European upper class, known for its gambling, shopping, fine dining, and entertainment. In a way, it was similar to America’s Las Vegas.

“Hmm, good, very good.”

Chae Nayun revealed her excitement as she clenched her fists.

“We have free time, right?”

“Yes, until 7:00 tonight. There’s a big event going on tonight, and that’s why we’re going to Clancy Islet. When I contacted them about coming to watch, they happily said yes.”

Just like Oh Hanhyun said, there was a big event planned for tonight. It was so big that

it would draw all sorts of unwanted flies.

...No, they were too strong to be called flies. Perhaps it was better to call them beasts.

“Alright, let’s go.”

I began walking with the rest of the group.

After following along the Thames River for about 10 minutes, we could see an island floating in the sky.

It was about 4.2 square kilometers in size, floating at about 700 meters in the air.

This was the floating island, Clancy Islet, created using the English government’s ‘buoyancy stone’. This island of riches generated close to 30% of England’s tourism profit.

“Wow, it’s been so long. I must have been 11 when I was last here.”

Chae Nayun smiled feeling reminiscent. However, her face quickly darkened. It must have been because her older brother was with her the last time.

“It’s my first time here. Are you going to be our guide?”

Kim Suho asked. Chae Nayun became energized again and retorted, “Of course!” Everyone continued to chatter, and I walked as I listened in half-heartedly.

“Hajin, have you been here before?”

Then suddenly, Kim Suho asked me.

“No.”

“Oh, then two of us are newbies.”

“I guess we are.”

While I talked with Kim Suho, we arrived at Clancy Islet’s entrance. There was a Portal build on the Thames River that led up to the island, and it was easy to see that there was stricter security around it.

“Here is my cadet ID and an invitation from Jamie Kim-ssi.”

Oh Hanhyun approached one of the guards in front of the entrance and gave him his cadet ID and the invitational letter.”

“Wait here.”

The guard went away to confirm the invitation letters authenticity, then came back to let us in. Of course, we had to go through a baggage check and body scanner to make sure we weren’t carrying any weapons.

“How strict.”

Clancy Islet had everything to offer in regards to money: casinos, dueling arenas, auction houses, academic seminars, lectures, corporate keynotes, etc. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say Clancy Islet was the reason England was the second most powerful country in Europe.

“Oh right, we can go to the casino, right?”

Chae Nayun asked. She seemed to be itching to go already.

“Yes, Cube’s cadets are treated as adults here.”

Being a Cube’s cadet was a great status as it allowed minors to do things minors normally couldn’t. Furthermore, if a problem arose because of it, the country would take responsibility.

Of course, that didn’t mean we could commit crimes.

“Nice!”

Chae Nayun clenched her fists triumphantly.

However, I knew her excitement would disappear in just three hours.

Chae Nayun brought 300 million won today, which was half the amount she had saved up from her allowances. She should have planned to spend 15% of it on gambling and the other 85% on shopping.

But she would blow all of it in just three hours of gambling.

Even as the original author, I didn’t know which was more absurd, having 300 million won from allowances or losing all of it in just three hours.

“Huu.”

I tried to maintain my cool as much as possible, but I was also nervous. I was itching too. To me, casinos were gold mines. I didn't plan on going overboard and drawing unnecessary attention on myself, but I didn't plan on going home empty handed either.

Before tonight's incident, I planned to make as much as I could.

“Let's go in.”

We walked into the Portal.

In the blink of an eye, the scenery changed.

A giant fountain, flamboyant casino hotel, auction house, fancy restaurant, and fleeting clouds. It was a paradise on earth.

“Casino! Who wants to go to the casino!?”

Chae Nayun shouted excitedly. Yoo Yeonha and Kim Suho had no choice but to go with her.

I also planned on going to the casino, but I didn't follow Chae Nayun.

Kim Suho asked me.

“Hajin, where are you gonna go?”

“...I'm tired, so I'll rest a bit in my hotel room and grab lunch afterward.”



Although that's what I said, I headed straight to the casino after I dropped off my bag in my room.

It was my first time coming to a casino, and it was even more amazing than I imagined.

“...Ooh.”

In a large area with no mirrors or clocks, the sound of spinning slot machines resounded, and various languages went back and forth.

'What should I do? The slot machine? Or grab one of the tables? Ah, I have to get some chips first.'

First, I headed to the currency exchange. I brought 10 million won in cash to exchange.

"Can I get your ID?"

The cashier spoke in fluent Korean with a bright smile. I gave her my cadet ID. The cashier converted my money into chips without batting an eye. Staring at her, I asked casually.

"How long have you been working here?"

The cashier, or rather Jain who was disguised as a cashier, replied with a smile.

"It's been six years."

"So it's been a while."

"Yes."

I took my chips and turned around.



'Do I go for a slot machine jackpot? Or do I empty out a dealer?'

"...Ah, so close!"

When I was pondering between two choices, a familiar voice rang out.  
It was Chae Nayun.

"You really lost by an inch."

Chae Nayun was sitting at a seven-card stud table.

There were many different poker tables in this casino, but only three of them were for the seven-card stud variant. But because seven-card stud was the only poker variant she knew, she sat down at a seven-card stud table as if it was the most obvious choice.

“Man, I almost had it...”

Hearing her dejected voice, a man sitting next to her consoled her.

“You were close, haha.”

Close my ass.

It was easy to spot a pushover like Chae Nayun. All four people sitting with her on that table were working together to scam her.

From the distance, I could see that she lost 10 million won in her last pot. That seemed to have been too much for her as she tried to get up.

“I’m leaving now.”

“Haha, see ya. But well, I feel bad taking money from a kid. Here, I’ll give 25% of it back.”

The leader of the four provoked her.

Bert, the scammer.

He was a tall Caucasian man, who rarely suffered a loss in my novel.

“What? It’s only pocket change. I can make it back whenever I want.”

Chae Nayun sat back down, her competitive spirit burning.

Baring his sly teeth, Bert handed a stack of chips to Chae Nayun.

“Come on, don’t be like that. Here, just take this and go. I’m saying this to you, young lady.”

“Screw that, let’s go again.”

...Just like that, Chae Nayun fell into their trap.

She won the next two pots, earning 3 million won in total, then lost 8 million on the third. She earned 2 million on the fourth, then lost 20 million on the fifth and sixth.

“Ah~ so close.”

On the eight, Bert lost on purpose. Chae Nayun laughed, not knowing that he was only pretending.

“Please, I was obviously going to win that one.”

“...Maybe?”

Although Bert was a scammer, he wasn't cheating at the moment. Casino cards were all specially made artifacts so that no Hero could see through it (except me, of course) or pull some sort of a trick.

Bert was only reading the faint changes in Chae Nayun's expression to read her hands. Since you carried more cards in your hand in a seven-card stud, Chae Nayun simply didn't stand a chance.

“Ehew. I fold.”

The rounds continued until it eventually reached the eleventh round. Chae Nayun folded with two pairs in her hand. Bert had one pair, and his teammate had a queen high.

“I fold too.”

However, Bert folded to provoke Chae Nayun even more. Then, he asked his teammate with a furtive smile.

“Hey, can I see your hand? I'm curious what you had.”

“Haha, it really wasn't my pot to win...”

When his teammate showed his queen high hand, Chae Nayun's face turned red.

“Aw, come on!”

Now that things had come this far, no one could stop Chae Nayun.

In just two hours from now, Chae Nayun would lose all her money, then hole up in her hotel room to cry.

Of course, I wasn't interested in the grievances Chae Nayun would face. However, I was interested in the scammer Bert.

I slowly approached their table, then tapped on Chae Nayun's shoulder.

“Hey, stand up. I’ll play here.”

“W-What, when did you get here?”

When I tried to drive Chae Nayun out, the scammers’ faces instantly stiffened. They were quick to act.

“Ah, I got a phone call. I’ll stop here.”

One member got up, pretending to pick up a call. Bert then spoke with a smile.

“Looks like there’s an open seat for you.”

“...Can I join in?”

I sat down, pretending not to know what he was doing. Bert welcomed me with a big smile.

“Of course.”

“Hey, are you sure you have the money? The minimum betting price is 100,000 won.”

“I’m fine, just play.”

The game then resumed with the dealer giving each of us three cards. Everyone checked their hands, then picked one of their cards to reveal.

“...Hm?”

But not me. I left my cards exactly where the dealer placed them. I didn’t turn the cards over to check what they were.

“Hey, aren’t you going to see your hand?”

One of Bert’s team members asked. It was a bald guy with an intimidating face. I smiled and nodded.

“No, I’m not.”

Even if I didn't flip them over, I could see what was on them.  
Two queens of hearts and a three of spades.

"You know the rules, kid?"

"What, you think I would be here if I didn't?"

Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. Singing this song, I picked up one of the cards to reveal.  
It was the three of spades.  
Immediately, veins bulged upon the man's temples.

"...What's your problem?"

"What's yours?"

"What?"

"Hey."

Bert quickly cut in.

"Haha, can't you see what he's wearing? That's Cube's cadet uniform. Let's be respectful to each other, okay?"

Although that was what he said, Bert's face was also a bit stiff. From the looks of it, even the almighty Bert must not have expected to see someone who wouldn't even look at his hand.

But well, technique in gambling only went so far.  
Luck was king.



"Reporting. Six Djinnns from the Evil Society, three Heroes from the Association, and some random scammer. Oh, and there's one person from the Vast Expanse. It looks like he's only here to sightsee."

Jain reported her findings.

Djinns from the Evil Society.  
High rank Heroes from the Hero Association.  
A hunter from the Vast Expanse.  
And the Chameleon Troupe.

With the scale of the event being so big, all sorts of people flocked to it. Jain had only reported on what she could personally confirm. There were undoubtedly many more lurking in the shadows.

“Oh right, there’s also Kim Hajin, who Boss likes.”

Jain ended her report with Kim Hajin.

—...Standby for now. Also, I do not like Kim Hajin.

“Really? I didn’t know.”

Jain ignored the latter part of Boss’ sentence.

“By the way, Kim Hajin saw my face. Do you think he noticed?”

—He needs to concentrate his magic power around his optic nerves to see through your Gift. There’s no reason he would use his magic power while looking at an ordinary person.

“...I guess so. I didn’t feel any movement of magic power either.”

# Chapter 72

## White Crystal (1)

Seven-card stud had a simple set of rules.

At the beginning of the game, players were each dealt three cards by the dealer. Each player would then choose one of those three cards to reveal while keeping the other two hidden.

Then, players would begin betting, with dealers providing each player with a new open card. When the number of cards became seven, the betting would stop.

Players who were still in the round would show their hands, and the person with the best hand would win.

“This bastard really won’t look at his hand until the end... Look at your hand for god’s sake! How can you be so confident?”

“You’ll read my face if I do. I’m not confident in maintaining a poker face.”

The bald guy sitting next to me kept pestering me. However, I only glared at Bert. To be exact, I was glaring at the bracelet on his left wrist.

An obsidian bracelet with black luster.

That was an artifact Bert obtained through one of his scams. However, Bert didn’t know that it was an artifact, yet.

Rather than Bert’s money, I wanted his bracelet.

Currently, we were in our twelfth round of poker.

Chae Nayun was still in the negative, while my chips had multiplied to 60 million won.

“...Tsk.”

Bert was angry, understandably so. I would be angry too if a random kid suddenly barged in on my scheme and took 50 million won.

However, Bert currently had the best hand. Five cards had already been dealt, so there were two cards left until we would show our hands. If Bert got an ace, he would complete an ace-high full house.

“Next hand.”

The dealer dealt the sixth round of cards.

Bert got an ace of hearts.

He had completed his ace-high full house.

The chances of getting an ace-high full house were 0.144%. It was a hand that normally didn't lose as the only hands that won against it were four of a kind, straight flush, or royal flush. The chances of getting a four of a kind when someone else had a full house was even lower than winning a lottery.

However, there wasn't even a single movement in Bert's facial muscles. Since I couldn't tell even with my heightened perception, it was safe to say he had a perfect poker face.

“...Hm.”

But I was fine.

My luck led the situation to my advantage. If I had a four of a kind and my opponent had no hand, I would be unlucky as my opponent would just fold.

The opponent having a full house was the perfect trap.

That said, my four of a kind was still incomplete.

In my hands were the deuce of diamonds, deuce of hearts, and deuce of clubs. I was still missing the deuce of spades.

However, I trusted my luck.

“Call”

Bert made his bet, maintaining his calm.

“I raise!”

The bald man increased the pot size with a terrible hand. I wasn't sure what happened, but he must have received Bert's sign somehow.

“Call.”

Chae Nayun also called carefully.

...She really was terrible at this game.

In any case, I also called just like Bert wanted. In this seven-card stud table, the

maximum betting limit was 500 million won. Although I made quite a bit, I was still short stacked compared to the other more rich players on the table. With that last call, I had gone all-in.

“Here’s the final hidden card.”

Deuce of Spades.

My four of a kind was complete.

“Ah, kid, you already went all-in, so you can’t bet anymore, huh.”

Just like Bert said, I was out of money. There was still a round of betting left.

Bert asked casually.

“Why don’t you bet that ring on your finger instead?”

Bert noticed that the ring on my finger wasn’t an ordinary ring. As expected of a scammer, he had good eyesight.

“What!?”

However, the one who reacted fiercely wasn’t me, but Chae Nayun.

“Is this guy crazy!? Hey, let’s just leave!”

“...What, the game isn’t even over yet. Just stay put.”

“It’s fine, I’ll give you the money you would have lost—”

“Just sit.”

What’s up with her? I grabbed Chae Nayun’s wrist and made her sit.

“Fine, I’ll bet this priceless ring, so you bet that too.”

I pulled my ring out and placed it on the table. Then, I pointed at the obsidian bracelet on Bert’s left wrist.

After thinking about it for a moment, Bert took his bracelet off.

“Deal.”

Then, Chae Nayun whispered into my ear with a worried face.

“Hey, are you really okay with that? That’s your family keepsake—”

“I won’t lose, so just stay still. I would have folded if I didn’t stand a chance.”

I didn’t even hear what Chae Nayun was saying.

“Now then.”

The pot size was 300 million won, but the real value of the pot was much higher with two artifacts on the line.

“What will the others bet?”

When I asked, Bert’s teammates immediately folded.

“...I also fold.”

With that, Chae Nayun also fell silent.  
Only Bert and I were left in the pot.

“Then shall we show our hands?”

“Sure.”

“I’ll go first.”

Bert revealed his hand, ace-high full house.

“Full house?”

Chae Nayun’s face stiffened. For some reason, she seemed to care more about the outcome of this match than me.

“Haha, sorry, kid.”

Bert grinned and moved to sweep the chips to his side. It was the stereotypical scene of someone about to lose.

“Hold on, I haven’t revealed my hand yet.”

“...What?”

Just like what victors would do in gambling movies, I grabbed the loser’s wrist and stopped him from sweeping the chips away. Then, I slowly revealed my hands. Four cards, all with the number 2, showed up.

“Four of a kind. It’s my victory.”

Immediately, Bert’s expression darkened. Chae Nayun cusped her hands and shouted.

“Wow! A four of a kind! H-How!?”

Chae Nayun’s hair stood on ends, as did mine. Although I already knew I would win, winning brought a great sense of ecstasy.



Just as I expected, Bert made a big scene, calling me a scammer. However, Chae Nayun subdued him before the security guards could even arrive, and I grabbed all the chips along with his obsidian bracelet.

===

[Athenian Citizen’s Obsidian Bracelet] [Magic Artifact]  
A bracelet with magic seals.

<Magic Seal (1/4)>

—Shock Absorption & Automatic Recharge

\*When its wearer receives damage, some of it is converted into magic power and stored in the bracelet.

\*Slowly charges magic power when exposed to air.

===

Although this bracelet could store magic power, the wearer couldn’t use it directly as

the magic power would only linger inside the bracelet. This was the reason that Bert wouldn't realize the true worth of this bracelet until a year later. Of course, that was in the original story. Now that the bracelet was in my hands, he would never find out about its true worth.

Then how could this bracelet be used?

It was simple. You just had to engrave another magic seal into the bracelet.

This bracelet could store up to four magic seals. For now, I planned to put seals that enhanced my physical body.

“...What were you going to do if you lost?”

Chae Nayun, who was walking next to me, suddenly asked.

“Jump off a bridge.”

I meant it to be a joke, but Chae Nayun made a serious face.

“...Don't say that. You have to live your life to the fullest.”

It was surprising to see her say something like that in such a serious tone.

“What is it all of the sudden? What, you want your money back?”

Of the 300 million I won, 100 million belonged to Chae Nayun.

“No, you use it. You won it fair and square. I'll consider it a lesson fee. I won't gamble ever again.”

Chae Nayun walked forward while grumbling. It seemed she planned to leave the casino.

“Oh, by the way.”

Then, she suddenly came to stop and turned around to face me. After hesitating for a moment, she spoke abruptly.

“You were pretty cool today.”

With that, she turned back and left the casino.

“...I guess I was.”

Of course, I had no plans to leave yet.

Standing in the middle of the casino floor, I breathed in the heated atmosphere’s air.

*Trrrrr—*

The sound of a spinning roulette struck my ears.

I could hear people screaming at a baccarat table.

Slot machines tempted people with their addictive tune.

The laughter of dealers rang out, and tables were stacked with chips and cards.

Casino, where the fate of fortune was decided by luck.

Here, I was king.

“ ... ”

I clenched my fists and chose my target.

First was the roulette.

I walked up with heavy steps and put down 100 million won.

“1 to 12.”

Spectators gave me curious glances.

*Chweek—* The roulette spun.

Its destination – the number 12.

“Oooh!”

Spectators and players cheered as my money became 130 million won. A confident smile emerged on my face.

After that, I tried all sorts of games.

Blackjack.

Indian Poker.

Baccarat.

Texas Hold'em.

Even Go-Stop.

Every time I moved to a new table, my money multiplied like a colony of bacteria.



6:10 P.M., 50 minutes before the start of the event, it was time for the traveling club's members to meet.

Other than Kim Hajin, everyone was waiting at the appointed location.

"Ah, Hajin is here."

Kim Suho spoke, pointing in the distance.

"Finally, why is he always la..."

Chae Nayun couldn't finish her sentence.

Kim Hajin had changed significantly compared to a few hours ago.

His shaggy hair was brushed up neatly, and he had changed out of his cadet uniform and was now wearing a brand name suit. With his luxury dress shoes making him 6 centimeters taller, he walked up, exuding confidence.

"..."

"..."

"Oh, Kim Hajin! What happened?"

Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha stood in a daze with their mouths half-open, and Kim Suho asked with a surprised face. Kim Hajin grinned. His white teeth glistened under the sunlight.

Dumbstruck, Chae Nayun asked.

"What, did you get your teeth whitened too?"

"Hm? Ah, something like that."

It happened at an antique shop. Using his laptop, Kim Hajin checked whether there were any useful items, and then he found a '300-year-old toothbrush' which supposedly raised the charm stat by 0.01 points. The increase in charm came from having his teeth cleaned, which included teeth whitening.

“Your clothes... did you buy them...?”

“Yeah.”

Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun scanned him from top to bottom. Feeling confident, Kim Hajin crossed his arms and even put on sunglasses.

‘I might look like Ryu Junyeol’.[1]

At that moment, a soft, silvery voice rang out.

“Oh, who’s this?”

The group turned to the direction of the voice.  
There, we saw Kim Junwoo, a hunter of the ‘Vast Expanse’.

“Chae Nayun?”

Kim Junwoo looked at Chae Nayun and waved his hand. Chae Nayun’s eyes widened.

“Ah! Why are you here, Oppa!?”

“Nothing much, just hanging out.”

Kim Junwoo scratched his head and smiled modestly. Then, Yoo Yeonha approached him with her eyes flashing.

“Could you be... Kim Junwoo from the Vast Expanse?”

“Yup, that’s me. It looks like my name is still worth something, haha.”

“It’s nice to meet you.”

Yoo Yeonha shook hands with Kim Junwoo. Then, Kim Junwoo turned towards Kim Hajin, seemingly recognizing him.

“Ah! You’re the kid who was making bank at the casino! You were Nayun’s friend? Nice to meet you, man. I’m jealous, I only lost money.”

“Making bank...?”

Chae Nayun, Yoo Yeonha, and Kim Suho tilted their heads simultaneously.

“Yeah, I think he made around... 2 billion?”

“““2 BILLION!?!?””””

The three of them shouted at the same time. Even to Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun, 2 billion won was a lot of money.

Kim Junwoo rubbed his chin and spoke.

“I think so. A bunch of big guys in suits dragged him out after a while.”

“They didn’t drag me out. They gave me a key to the hotel’s best suite and even guided me there. To take a break.”

“Oh, is that what happened?”

Hearing Kim Hajin, Kim Junwoo nodded with a smile. Then, he glanced at Kim Suho. Chuckling like an old man, he whispered into Chae Nayun’s ear.

“Who’s he? Your boyfriend?”

“W-What are you talking about?”

Chae Nayun glanced at Kim Suho, then glanced at Kim Hajin.

“He’s not.”

Seeing Chae Nayun’s eyes, Kim Junwoo made a mischievous smile.

“Don’t tell me, you’re hunting two rabbits at the same time?”

“W-What are you talking about!?”

“Polyandry should be okay for someone like you, Na— Uk!”

“Stop!”

Chae Nayun struck Kim Junwoo’s solar plexus with her elbow. Kim Junwoo held his stomach exaggeratedly and yelled surrender.

...Meanwhile, there was a man who was watching the rowdy scene in hiding.

Evil Society’s ‘Bermund’.

His strength was around the middle of the pack in everyone attending today’s event.

“From the looks of it, Kim Junwoo doesn’t know about the details. Yes, I’ll join up soon.”

Finishing his report, he turned back.

“...!”

But as soon as he turned around, he saw a woman enveloped in darkness. Immediately, Bermund became breathless.

Long black hair, deep dark eyes. Her murky eyes seemed to be devouring him.

Staring at Bermund, the woman called someone.

“Jain.”

“Yeah, I’m here.”

Another woman appeared beside her.

At that moment, Bermund felt his death.



Same time.

A limousine stopped in front of the Thames River’s opening leading to Clancy Islet. Countless reporters and cameras were concentrated around the limousine, and the door of the limousine then opened.

From inside, a long, beautiful white leg appeared.

The woman who got out of the limousine was Rachel, wearing a silver dress.

The princess and pride of England.

When she appeared, the flashes of the reporters busily flickered.

“Do you have any thoughts on tonight’s event?”

“According to the rumors, you lost Cube’s rank 1 theory spot. Do you have any comments on the matter?”

Responding with a smile, Rachel continued to walk. Although she wasn’t accustomed to wearing high heels yet, her steps were more perfect and beautiful than a model’s. Arriving in front of the Portal, Rachel met a businessman.

“Thank you very much for personally visiting us today, Princess.”

He was Zelen, the CEO of the multinational 'Roton Corporation’.

Today, in Clancy Islet’s Clancy Hall, he would personally reveal how to effectively utilize the [White Crystal], in which tens of thousands of magic power were concentrated.

Furthermore, Roton Corporation had asked the English Royal Court to attend to heighten the formality of the presentation. As Roton Corporation was the greatest sponsor of the English Royal Court guild, Rachel couldn’t refuse their request.

“Have you increased security for the event?”

Rachel asked Zelen.

“Haha, of course.”

There was always the potential of Djinns or bandits interfering. Because of it, events of this scale rarely happened. However, Roton did not want to give up on the stock price increase and other astronomical profits they could make from this announcement.

Of course, they made thorough preparations for potential threats. They chose 'Clancy Islet' as their venue, which was arguably the safest place in Europe, and hired numerous mercenaries, and even lobbied the Hero Associations to have high-rank Heroes dispatched.

“You can look forward to it, Princess.”

Zelen's eyes scanned her.

Rachel did not like his lustful, snake-like eyes.

“As the biggest sponsor of the Royal Court guild, Roton will promise to elevate the

guild's status.”



Clancy Islet's largest luxury hall, 'Clancy Hall'.

There was still thirty minutes left until the event started, but the place was filled with people. Adorned in luxurious clothes, they were all members of the upper class.

However... I didn't lose out to anyone in terms of luxuriousness.

300 million won suit – it was so expensive because it was a Cloth Armor – and a partial artifact jacket.

It was enough to make me look like an Asian millionaire.

“Mm.”

Sitting alone in a cool posture, I looked around the hall.

Yoo Yeonha was busy trying to build connections, and Chae Nayun went to the bathroom saying she needed to take a dump.

“You're here too.”

At that moment, someone's voice rang out from behind me. I turned around.

The boss of the Chameleon Troupe, currently 'Li Xiaopeng', was there.

“Oh, you came too, Xiaopeng-ssi.”

"Right. As a Hero in charge of guarding... what bullshit. "

However, Boss suddenly stopped cursed in the middle of talking.

I understood why.

I had also heard what Jain whispered in her ear. It was thanks to my Gift, Observation and Reading.

—You finally met your crush, Boss. Congratulations.

“Kuhum. Kuhum.”

A dry cough came out of my throat.

“Ah, s-sorry. My colleague was saying something strange through my earphone...”

Boss made an excuse, tapping on the earphone in her ear.

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1. Ryu Junyeol is a famous Korean actor, who is known for being ugly as Korean male actors are generally very handsome. A funny joke that most Korean readers would understand.

# Chapter 73

## White Crystal (2)

6:40 P.M., Clancy Hall.

Boss was still sitting next to me.

*Nom, nom—*

She was busily chewing on a chocolate that she got from the waiter. She must really like it as her eyes were shining brightly.

Looking at her from the corner of my eyes, I thought about how I should respond.

The 'White Crystal' would be revealed soon.

That was something that could not fall into the Djinn's hands. However, I wasn't strong enough to prevent them from carrying out their plan, and even if I was, I shouldn't interfere and draw unwanted attention on myself.

Roton Corporation was one of the most corrupt corporations in my setting. Although there were no Djinn's among their executives, many of them were so vile that Djinn's would have been better off being in their positions.

No matter how I thought about it, it was best for the Chameleon Troupe to take the crystal like in the original story.

"Waiter."

Suddenly, Boss called the waiter. What did she want now? I focused my attention on her action.

The waiter came up to her and spoke politely.

"Yes, madam."

"Do you have any more of that chocolate you gave me before?"

Boss asked as she smacked her lips.

"Yes, here you go."

"No, not one. I think I'll be satisfied with about three."

“...Yes?”

While Boss was craving chocolates, Chae Nayun and Kim Suho returned. They looked around for their seats, then tilted their heads when they saw me.

They then walked up to me.

“Hajin, who is that next to you?”

“Who...?”

Kim Suho and Chae Nayun didn't yet know about Chameleon Troupe's Boss.

“Ah, she's someone I know, her name is Li Xiaopeng. She's a high-intermediate rank Hero. We met coincidentally.”

I put my hand on Boss' shoulder, pretending to be friendly.

Boss was still munching on a chocolate.

“Nyam. Ah, mm, right. I'm Li Xiaopeng.”

“Ah, yes, it's nice to meet you.”

Chae Nayun greeted her a bit awkwardly, while Kim Suho bowed respectfully.

“This is Chae Nayun, and this is Kim Suho—”

“I already know. They are famous cadets.”

Just like Boss said, the two of them were so well known that it would be strange for anyone in this business to not know them.

After finishing their introductions, Kim Suho and Chae Nayun sat down side by side.

“You guys are here too~?”

A soft voice flowed towards us like a current of warm air.

It was Kim Junwoo. He smiled, making his already small eyes smaller.

His narrowed eyes landed on Boss.

At the same time, Boss' eyes also landed on Kim Junwoo.

They seemed to see through each other's strength at first glance.

"...This is?"

Pointing at Boss, Kim Junwoo's voice had gotten a bit calmer. Boss only stared at him without giving him an answer. As a result, Chae Nayun spoke up instead.

"This is senior Li Xiaopeng, a high-intermediate rank Hero, and Kim Hajin's acquaintance. By the way, Li Xiaopeng-ssi, how do you know Kim Hajin? You're really pretty, so how did Kim Hajin..."

"You're right, she's a beauty... Um, may I ask how old you are?"

Kim Junwoo asked.

Boss was surprisingly young, twenty four. She was only seven years older than Kim Suho, and she was younger than my real age. However, Boss had a bit of a complex about her young age.

"No."

"...Mm, yes, well, I'll take my leave. Bye kids. Call me if anything happens."

"Okay, see you later, Oppa. Let's grab some food after this."

Kim Junwoo withdrew easily.

"I have to go on my guard duty, so..."

Not long afterward, Boss also got up and left. Then, Yoo Yeonha and Oh Hanhyun came over as if to replace her.

"By the way, are other club members not coming anymore?"

"Probably not. They'll be third years soon. The second semester of the second year is one of the busiest times for cadets. I'm sure they're busy making all sorts of preparations."

Listening in on their conversation on one ear, I thought about the major Djinnns that would participate in today's event.

First was Neide. He was the crystal's carrier.

The second was Silasen. He also participated in Paris' masquerade party incident. Today, he would be acting as a combatant.

And finally, the team leader of Evil Society's 'Artifact Retrieval Team', Kim Hakpyo.

Before I could finish my thoughts, the lights in the hall went out.

The clamorous hall also quieted down, and soon, a complete silence descended.

The curtain covering the stage was lifted.

*Tap, tap.* The sound of boots rang out clearly.

Roton's CEO, Zelen, appeared in the middle of the stage.



"It's an honor to have you here tonight."

When Rachel arrived at Clancy Hall's VIP balcony seat, a Hero guard bowed respectfully.

Rachel replied with a small smile, then sat down on her seat. Hero guards then circled her surroundings thoroughly.

Rachel looked down at the first floor's VIP seats, looking to see if there was anyone she knew. Because she was looking down from the top, she couldn't make clear distinctions. However, there was one particularly noticeable face.

'...Kim Hajin?'

His attire was different than what he usually wore in Cube. He was wearing a full, brand-name luxury suit.

Plus, the jacket-cum-coat he was wearing was definitely the 'partial artifact' that she gave to him as a present.

Next to him was Kim Suho, Chae Nayun, and Yoo Yeonha, in that order.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it's great to have you here tonight. I am Zelen, the CEO of Roton Corporation, a leader in innovative technology."

While Rachel was caught off guard by seeing her classmates here, Roton's CEO, Zelen, appeared on stage.

Zelen recited his opening remarks, then pointed at the second-floor balcony, saying,

'before we begin, let me introduce to everyone the English Royal Court's jewel—'

At that moment, a spotlight fell on Rachel's head. It was so bright that she couldn't even open her eyes. Still, Rachel stood up from her seat and gave the audience a gentle smile. Applauses rang out from the VIP seats. Soon, the spotlight turned off, and Rachel sat back down.

"Now, everyone, what is the power that forms the origin of all things?"

Zelen's presentation started in full. Rachel was a bit disgruntled that a presentation on English soil was being done in Korean. Though, it was being translated into English in real time as well.

"That's right, it is mana! Somewhere in this world, mana naturally coalesces into natural treasures. Even among these natural treasures, White Crystals are especially precious, fully deserving of the phrase 'humanity's blessing.'"

On a big screen behind the stage, a beautiful crystal popped up.

That was a White Crystal, an essence of magic power that was formed from natural accumulation and condensation of mana. It was a natural treasure that was full of nature's life energy.

Just by existing, a white crystal increased the atmospheric mana density, making it a priceless treasure that couldn't be bought with money.

"Currently, 480 crystals have been found. However, there has not been a way to properly utilize this precious crystal."

Zelen paused and made a meaningful smile.

"From now, we, the Roton Corporation, will present the true method of using the white crystal."

Next, a staff dragged a strange cart to the stage. There seemed to be something on the cart, but it was covered with a cloth, hiding it from view.

Without delay, Zelen lifted the cloth.

A white crystal was floating inside a cubic glass tube.

Seeing the beautiful, pure white crystal, the audience burst into shocked cries. However, Zelen focused on the cubic glass tube, not the white crystal.

“This vacuum cube... ah, don’t misunderstand it with the Korean Peninsula’s Cube.”

The audience laughed at the objectively stale joke.

“This cube can trace its origin all the way to the Persian Empire. This cube was originally an earthenware. But we, in Roton Corporation, are a leader in the partial artifact industry, where artifacts are dismantled and reforged. We decomposed this earthenware into soil and sand, then recreated it into a glass tube using a state-of-the-art mana engineering technique.”

The audience was immediately stirred.

However, the stir wasn’t purely from the shock of Zelen’s announcement.

Looking down from above, Rachel could feel the presence of irregular movements.

Black figures began to appear from the pathways on the side of the VIP seats. At first, Rachel thought they were guards. However, she soon realized that their movements were strange.

Rachel spoke to her Hero guards.

“I’m fine, so keep your eyes on them.”

The Hero guards seemed to be thinking the same thing as they went downstairs, only leaving the minimum number of personnel behind.

It was then.

A person sitting in on the first-floor seat suddenly shot up.

He was particularly eye-catching. It was a man Rachel was familiar with, Kim Hajin.

Rachel suddenly remembered things that happened in the past. Kim Hajin always showed up where incidents occurred.

In that case, even now...

“Wait just one moment.”

She left Clancy Hall, restraining the guards who tried to follow her. Before she chased after Kim Hajin, she activated the magical effect stored in her necklace, ‘Shade’. Her presence disappeared, and any noise she made was extinguished. Rachel walked like a shadow.

At first, she tried to go downstairs. It was because she thought Kim Hajin would be there.

But contrary to her expectations, Kim Hajin came up.

“Hiik!”

About to run into him, she quickly hid behind a wall.

Wearing a pair of sunglasses, he climbed the central staircase. His steps were unhurried and stately. Rachel fell back a bit more, then chased after him using the emergency staircase.

Eventually, Rachel reached the rooftop.

However, Clancy Hall’s rooftop wasn’t a place a guest could enter. Only engineers would come 3 to 4 times every year for repair or maintenance.

As such, the door to the rooftop was firmly closed.

Without a key, that door could not be opened.

*Click, click—*

Kim Hajin tried to open the door, but the door did not budge. He tilted his head, then took out a hammer.

It was a seemingly ordinary hammer with a steelhead and a wooden handle. It looked old and worn-down, making it all the more shabby.

Without explicit permission, weapons couldn’t be brought into Clancy Islet. He probably had no choice but to bring a worn-down tool like that hammer.

“...?”

Suddenly, Kim Hajin positioned himself to strike the door with the hammer. Almost as if to break the door.

However, that was impossible. There was no way. That iron door was made using mana alloy. A mere hammer, especially one that looked so worn-down, couldn’t possibly...

Kim Hajin smashed the door with the hammer.

*KWANG!*

A thunderous vibration erupted.

“ ”

In the next moment, Rachel found herself at a loss for words. It was as if her brain stopped functioning.

The iron door was struck by the hammer, one that was clearly on the verge of breaking. However, the iron door was completely obliterated. It was dented as though it was struck by a truck.

Staring at the now widely open rooftop entrance, Rachel fell in thought.

Was the hammer clad in magic power?

No, that wasn't it at all.

But if it wasn't magic power, what was it? Only his physical power? To break an iron door made with mana alloy?

Rachel dropped on the floor and tried to comprehend the incomprehensible situation.

—Kyaaaak!

However, a bigger disturbance and screaming rang out from below.

Rachel quickly snapped out of her daze.



—I have confirmed Roton's internal document. The item currently in Clancy Hall is the real one.

Hearing this report, Evil Society's executive, Kim Hakpyo, grinned.

"It doesn't matter what these insects do, the result is all the same."

Even Kim Hakpyo wasn't sure that Roton Corporation would bring out the real priceless crystal and ancient artifact.

However, with his craze for money, Zelen had done it. He didn't want to miss the astronomical profit he could gain by presenting the real product.

Of course, it wasn't a bad idea.

Clancy Islet, the floating island.

Entrants of the island were strictly vetted, and because the island itself was made with magic power, artificial Portals couldn't be made either.

However...

They couldn't have imagined that Evil Society would utilize an aerial carrier.

"Begin."

Kim Hakpyo gave his command. Immediately, a dense black fog welled up beneath his feet. The VIPs seemed to think the situation was an event, but the blood curdling screams that rang out soon proved otherwise.

Kuak!

Uk!

Aaak!

Hearing the screams, the VIPs lost their composure and stood up.

Kyaaak—

Sharp screams spread out like an epidemic, and the entire hall broke out into a pandemonium.

Sitting in a seat, Kim Hakpyo smiled.

He always welcomed confusion and chaos.

Now, everything would be taken care of in this pitch black darkness.

# Chapter 74

## White Crystal (3)

The 22 elite members of Evil Society quickly went to work. They first blocked out pathways off the stage, then decimated the security. Furthermore, they didn't distinguish between security guards and ordinary civilians. Anyone who got in their way was cut down. As a result, the peaceful hall quickly turned into a scene from hell, and at the forefront of it all was Team 1's executive, Neide.

He was a grade-1 wanted Djinn who was on the Association's violet list.

"Heroes! Over here! Here!"

Zelen was attracting Heroes to himself in despair. Neide first shut his mouth, and let his underlings deal with the Heroes that came to help. Then, with nimble and fluid movements, he snatched the cube and the crystal inside. At that moment, a man walked up to him.

"Where are you going? Let me introduce myself. I'm a high-rank Hero, Jin Xiangchen."

The man introduced himself in poor Korean. Neide stared at him silently. He had no plans to waste time fighting a high-rank Hero.

With a smirk, Neide's body multiplied. Eight clones of Neide appeared in a flash.

"What a troublesome ability."

Jin Xiangchen prepared to fight all eight bodies simultaneously, but Neide had no intention of attacking.

The eight Neides ran away, splitting up in eight directions.

"Y-You motherfucker."

Xiangchen pondered.

Which direction should he choose?

After thinking for a moment, he chose to follow the one running eastward.

Meanwhile, Boss was staring at the stage through the darkness. When Neide split up and ran away, she began to walk not east but north.

“Hmm.”

...From the midst of darkness, a short breath came out.

A man who was observing the situation slowly raised his body. Walking through the darkness, he grabbed the wrist of a Djinn who was about to cut down a man.

“Kuak!”

Twisting his wrist and making him drop his weapon, the man grabbed his neck.

1 second, 2 seconds, 3 seconds...

The Djinn died, bleeding from all orifices.

Throwing the corpse aside, Kim Junwoo grabbed the sword the Djinn dropped. Next, he began to cut down every Djinn he came across, making his way to Chae Nayun’s party.

“Oppa!”

Chae Nayun and her friends ran up to him. Without a word, Kim Junwoo threw a Djinn’s sword over to Kim Suho. Kim Suho received it, staring at Kim Junwoo.

Kim Junwoo smiled.

“Shall we fight?”



Just like in the original story, Neide split into eight bodies and escaped.

Standing on the rooftop, I saw which Neide had the crystal.

To the east, there was a Hero chasing after Neide, but that one didn’t have the crystal. To the south, Jain, who was disguised as a Djinn, was accompanying Neide. However, that Neide didn’t have the crystal either.

And to the north, the one Boss was chasing after should have the crystal according to the original story.

I closely watched the north side.

—Stop!

Twelve Djinns got in front of Boss.

Boss immediately unleashed her magic power, a tiny black ball of magic power that looked ordinary from the outside. However, the twelve Djinns were sucked into that tiny ball effortlessly. Then, they were twisted and distorted to the point of being unrecognizable.

Void Sphere.

It was a destructive ability that was only a tiny portion of Boss' Gift.

After lightly shaking off the blockade, Boss chased after Neide. From now, she would easily steal the crystal from Neide's hands.

I stared at Neide, who was still running away.

"...What?"

At that moment, my head shook.

This Neide didn't have the crystal either. Again, the Neide in the north didn't have the crystal.

"How..."

I quickly turned on my laptop. However, there were no alerts. If it wasn't because of a settings change, then what changed the situation?

I broke out into cold sweat. My head felt numb, and my heart began to beat wildly.

I hurriedly looked around the hall, but I couldn't find the crystal with so many people running around.

"..."

Suddenly, an idea popped up in my head.

Although I had never tried it, there was no time to waste.

I concentrated Stigma's magic power on my retina.

No, to be exact, I concentrated it around my Gift, 'Master Sharpshooter – Thousand-Mile Eyes'.

Stigma's magic power moved and exerted itself according to my will. In that case, it should be possible to strengthen the Thousand-Mile Eyes for a moment...

In an instant, the scope of my vision transformed.

Just like how satellites looked down on the earth, a wide range entered my sight. Civilians hurriedly escaping the hall, Heroes fighting against Djinns, strange monster-like one-dimensional shapes summoned by Djinns to incite chaos, and... the white crystal I needed to find.

As the essence of magic power, the white crystal was easy to spot. The crystal was inside a fast-moving sedan. Inside the sedan was only one person.

*Thwak—*

However, with the sound of blood vessels being cut, my vision narrowed once again.

“...!”

I grabbed my eyes and knelt. I was struck with a pain so intense that I couldn't even scream. However, I didn't even have time to writhe in pain.

I took out the Desert Eagle. I planned to snipe the sedan. However, it seemed my Thousand-Mile Eyes were overloaded as I couldn't aim properly.

Without a choice, I jumped down from the rooftop. It was thanks to Parkour's power.

As soon as I landed on the ground, I looked for something to ride. My luck seemed to have helped me again as there was a motorbike parked nearby.

It was a black bike that looked expensive even at a glance.

I had experience driving a motorcycle since I often did delivery as a part-time job before going to the army.

“Everybody, stay calm as you evacuate!”

At that moment, I heard a familiar voice. It was Chae Nayun. Without a weapon, she was holding onto magic power condensed in the shape of a stick. Feeling somewhat bad, I shouted at Chae Nayun.

“Hey!”

“Uh, what, Kim Hajin!? Where have you...”

I took out the magic sword I kept in my Stigma and threw it at her.

“Be careful not to get hurt.”

Then, I ran to the place where the bike was parked.

I didn't need the key. As all car keys in this world were digital, I just had to hack into the bike with my laptop.

Sitting on the saddle, I muttered in a low voice.

“Scan.”

The result was... 40%.

A jackpot. The number 40 was engraved on the body of the black bike.

Like so, Random Consolidation System also worked on vehicles.

“Hey, where are you going!?”

Chae Nayun hurriedly asked. I started the engine without answering her.

Vroooaaang—! The engine's beast-like roar rang out.

“Whoa!”

The bike charged forward the moment I stepped on the accelerator. Its sheer speed was something I wouldn't dare to wield.

Covering my insufficient driving skill as much as possible with my acute dynamic vision, I stormed down the road.

The direction was southeast. Pushing the air to the side, the bike rushed through like a streak of light.

Three minutes was enough to reach the goal.

At the end of the supersonic charge, I began to see the back of the sedan.

What I planned to do from now could only be described as daring.

I put Aether around the bike and pushed on the accelerator even harder.

The speed shot up endlessly. Piercing wind struck my body, and the air pressure prevented me from breathing.

Even so, I never let go of the gas.

...The bike rammed into the back of the sedan.

*KWANG—!*

The bike and sedan collided.

In most instances, the motorcycle would have been blown away. However, it was different this time.

The force of the collision caused the back of the sedan to shoot up. Overturned like a tin can, the sedan barreled through the air and slammed into the trunk of a tree.

“...Haa.”

I stopped the bike and let out a breath I had been holding onto this entire time.



“...”

Chae Nayun stared blankly at what just happened. Her eyes and ears were solely focused on one spot. The bike that ran out into the road had already become a tiny dot. To be completely honest, she just saw a scene of her dreams. A lightspeed bike, and driving it masterfully in a cool manner...

“Kyaaak!”

However, a desperate shriek dragged her back to reality.

“What?”

Chae Nayun stared at the magic sword she received while she was in a daze.

‘Where did he get something this expensive? He said he won 2 billion won, so did he buy it with that? To give it to me? No, that can’t be...’

Regardless, it was undoubtedly helpful. With a grin, she imbued her magic power into the sword.

*Wiing—*

A clean, sharp blade of magic power rose up.

“...Huup.”

Chae Nayun continued to imbue magic power into the sword. The blade continued to get longer until the blade eventually reached 4 meters in length. The blade burned clearly without a single blemish, showing the world the power of her true Gift.

“Someone save me!”

At that moment, someone’s scream struck her ears.  
Chae Nayun shouted with the sword in her hand.

“I’m coming!”



I approached the overturned sedan. The magic power that flowed out of Stigma gathered in my hand and formed the Desert Eagle.

*Drkk—*

The sedan’s driver seat door opened, and a Djinn crawled out. He was holding a suitcase in hand.

“Crazy bastard...”

The Djinn cursed as he glared at me.

“You’re dead.”

Where did his confidence come from? When I pondered, I saw a flashing object in the distance. It was an aerial carrier with a stealth function. The Djinn’s face brightened. However, I took out my laptop extremely casually.

“O-Over here! Brothers! Over here!”

The Djinn even shot a flare gun to announce his position.

I didn’t stop him. No, I didn’t need to. Instead, I used the laptop to connect to a [peripheral server].

‘A0936-B Carrier’.

I needed 100 SP to access it. I felt a bit regretful, but it was still worth paying.

Tak.

I closed the laptop.

Suddenly, the carrier began to move backward.

“A-Ah, w-where are you going!? Over here, I said!! HEY! WHERE ARE YOU FUCKING GOING!? I mean, where are you going, sirs? Guys??”

The moment the Djinn was coughing up blood and going insane...  
A terrifying wind pressure blew, and something huge fell down on the ground.  
KOONG!

Shock waves shook the area at the moment of landing. A rock accompanied the shockwave, striking his head and crushing it.

I stared at what landed.

“...”

A giant over 2.2 meters. This man, who gave off an overwhelming presence just by standing, was a man who could be said to be the strongest in close ranged combat – Cheok Jungyeong.

However, a girl was caught in his hand like a pet.

“L-Let go! Let me go!”

Rachel struggled as much as she could, but Cheok Jungyeong didn't even flinch.

“Let me go! This is England's territory, and I am England's princess...”

When I stared at her, Cheok Jungyeong spoke with a smirk.

“Oh, this girl? It looked like she was following you, so I brought her.”

Rachel met my eyes. She clenched her teeth. Leaving Rachel alone for a moment, I picked up the now ownerless suitcase.

Cheok Jungyeong then spoke softly.

“Put that down.”

I retorted briefly.

“You first.”

“...”

Cheok Jungyeong didn't respond. He only stared at me with the eyes of a dead fish. Without a choice, I pointed my gun at the suitcase. Immediately, Cheok Jungyeong's

expression changed.

“Eh? Hey, hey, do you know how much that’s worth?”

Without answering him, I transformed the Desert Eagle from a handgun to a shotgun.

“Fine, you want to try me? Let’s see who’s faster. Me ripping of this girl’s head, or you drilling a hole through that suitcase.”

I put my finger on the trigger.

For a moment, an intimidating confrontation continued, but soon, Cheo Jungyeong sighed as though he was giving up.

“...Fine, little bastard.”

Then he threw Rachel at me.

“Kyaa!”

Rachel fell at my feet. I was curious why Rachel was here, but now wasn’t the time to ask.

Cheok Jungyeong’s heavy voice knocked on my ears.

“Now, put that down.”

“...”

In the first place, this crystal wasn’t something I could handle. The ideal plan was to give it to Rachel to make it the English Royal Court’s possession, but it was impossible now that Cheok Jungyeong was here.

“Fine.”

I threw the suitcase down without hesitation. Cheok Jungyeong picked up the suitcase. In his hands, it looked more like a purse.

It was then.

*Wiiing—*

A fly landed on my nose, distracting me for a second.

But in the next moment.

A fierce wind blew towards me.

All the hair on my body flew backward. I couldn't think. When I looked forward, a head-sized fist was in front of me. Beyond the fist, Cheok Jungyeong made a satisfied smile.

In the blink of an eye, Cheok Jungyeong had charged towards me and stretched out his fist.

3 cm.

Just 3 cm closer and my head would have been crushed.

"...Looks like you aren't so rotten."

Cheok Jungyeong seemed satisfied at my calm(?) response as he turned back with those few words.

His heavy steps resounded.

My body didn't move until he completely disappeared. My head was completely blank, not a single thought existing in it.

My body and conscious were frozen.

# Chapter 75

## Short Break (1)

A huge forest was built on the outskirts of Clancy Islet. This forest served to protect the island from crashes without exterior damage to the island, so all the trees in the forest had strong and large trunks.

I picked a random tree to lean against.

“Auu...”

My heart, which stopped momentarily, trembled greatly and began to beat again. Holding my thumping chest, I recalled what just happened... then stopped. I went back to focusing on the present. For the sake of my sanity, it was better to forget about what happened.

I looked around the dark forest. The overturned sedan that the Djinn rode was stuck in a ditch, and my bike was lying a little distance away.

The bike was fine. It had a 40% consolidation on top of being reinforced with Aether, so there was no way it could have been destroyed.

I slowly walked up and raised the bike. For some reason, I wanted to take it back with me. Was there a way I could?

While I was having a slightly illegal thought, I suddenly felt someone’s gaze.

“...”

Rachel was staring at me while sitting like a mermaid. Because Cheok Jungyeong gave me such a big shock, I had forgotten about Rachel’s existence for a moment.

“...Are you okay?”

She didn’t seem hurt at first glance, but I still asked. Rachel nodded silently. With a dazed face and her mouth half-open, I could see the front of her teeth.

I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Why did you follow me?”

“...”

Then, Rachel closed her mouth and stared at me for a while. I didn't avoid her eyes. An exceptionally bright moonlight blanketed the dark forest of the floating island. Rachel shined silver from this light.

She looked into my eyes for a long time, then pulled something out of her pocket. It was a bullet. To be exact, it was a bullet without the casing. What was that? I tilted my head.

“Hajin-ssi.”

Suddenly, she called my name. I thought for a moment that my ears were acting up. However, I wasn't mistaken. Rachel had certainly called my name.

“...Ah, yes.”

I replied hurriedly.

“This belongs to Hajin-ssi, right?”

“...”

I stared at the bullet. I didn't have the ability to distinguish bullets just from their shapes, but it did look like a bullet for the Desert Eagle.

“Yes, I think so.”

I reached out to grab the bullet, but Rachel put the bullet back into her pocket, pretending not to have noticed.

“Um, where did you get...”

“I found it during the final exam.”

“...Huh?”

I finally understood the situation.

She must have found it when I helped her by sniping Lancaster Djinn.

“I thought something similar might happen again, so I followed you.”

Rachel scratched her cheek as she pulled out the sword hanging on her waist. I knew what that weapon was. It wasn't just a training rapier given by Cube Galatyn.

It was a legendary sword said to be used by one of the twelve Knights of the Round Table.

But no matter how good the weapon was, Rachel didn't stand a chance against an overwhelming opponent like Cheok Jungyeong.

“...Aha.”

“By the way, Hajin-ssi...”

Suddenly, Rachel's voice became firm. She stared at me fixedly and asked.

“Back then, why did you help me?”

I didn't know what to say, so I just stared at her.

Rachel wasn't finished yet.

“During the midterm exam and then the final exam. Thinking about it now, Hajin-ssi was there, uup!”

A chilly wind blew, and Rachel's long hair curled into her mouth. I barely held myself back from laughing.

Rachel tied her hair back, then cleared her throat.

“Kuhum. I can see how what happened during the midterm exam was a coincidence, but for the final exam... no matter how much I think about it, the only explanation I can come up with is that you were watching me.”

I scratched the back of my neck.

Rachel was a pivotal character who was exposed to extreme danger. If she got hurt or was killed, the story progression would be distorted greatly. That was why I was watching her. Since only I could prevent it.

However, that wasn't something I could explain to her.

As such, my answer was simple. It was simple enough to be acceptable and convincing.

“I’m your fan.”

“...?”

Rachel widened her eyes and tilted her head.

“I’m your fan. I’m even a member of your fan café.”

Rachel’s fan café did exist. England’s fan café had about 500,000 members, and even the Korean one had about 10,000. I checked it before when I didn’t have anything better to do.

...But it was perhaps too absurd of an excuse as Rachel shut her mouth tightly.

*Whiish*— The wind blew, shaking the leaves of the trees around us.

The awkward silence continued for about five minutes, then...

Rachel asked with a quivering voice.

“Does that mean... you like me?”

“...Yes?”



Cheok Jungyeong returned with the crystal to the hotel suite, where everyone else was waiting.

“Uhahaha, that’s right, I’m back.”

When four members of the Chameleon Troupe stared at him, Cheok Jungyeong burst into laughter.

“Haha, it’s almost like I’m the main character.”

He pushed his hair back as though he was embarrassed, then put down the suitcase. Jain snatched up the suitcase.

“This better be the real thing.”

She swallowed her saliva and opened the suitcase slightly. A brilliant white light shone

through the opening gap, letting her know that it was the genuine crystal.

“...It is.”

A smile emerged on Jain’s face. Satisfied, she closed the suitcase.

“Well done.”

“Haha, it was a piece of cake.”

“...Wait, why are you so happy? Don’t tell me you killed him?”

Boss’ eyes suddenly flickered coldly.

“No, I didn’t. Ah, I was planning to at first.”

Cheok Jungyeong smiled deeply.

At first, he wanted to blow up his head.

If his eyes trembled even a little bit, or if he tried to dodge or show any sign of fear, Cheok Jungyeong probably wouldn’t have stopped his fist.

However, the man continued to stare at his fist. Without being flustered, he observed Cheok Jungyeong’s movements, showing the fearlessness of a warrior.

Cheok Jungyeong liked his manliness.

“Are you sure he wasn’t frozen from being scared? Did you check his pants?”

“...Jain, if you underestimate him, you might regret it one day.”

“...Tsk.”

Jain furrowed her brows. Cheok Jungyeong shook his large head sideways as he murmured, ‘just kidding, just kidding.’

“I would know if that was the case. I purposely charged in a little slowly. Also, he was facing me directly, but he didn’t bat an eye.”

To demonstrate, Cheok Jungyeong pushed his fist at Jain. Jain was startled even by this tiny movement.

“See, strong people and people who will become strong have a different mindset.”

Cheok Jungyeong spoke as he pounded his chest proudly.

“Courage, boldness, fearlessness... all of these are impossible to have without a strong heart. Closing your eyes when your sword is clashing is the same thing as having your neck cut—”

“Be quiet.”

Droon interrupted Cheok Jungyeong’s passionate speech, making him frown.

“...Tsk. Brat, don’t cut in when an adult is talking.”

However, he couldn’t do anything about Droon.

Although he loved fighting and killing, there was one absolute rule he never broke.

“Try that in three years and you’ll see what happens.”

To never touch young children.

That was his rule.



The turmoil in Clancy Hall was quickly suppressed.

Although Evil Society’s executives weren’t captured, there weren’t too many casualties thanks to the total mobilization of England’s Heroes.

“Ehew.”

Broken down buildings and battered roads.

While Heroes and paramedics were busy going back and forth, Yoo Yeonha was sitting on the ground, staring at her hair that had been blackened.

She sighed. How much time and effort would it take to restore this hair at the beauty salon?

‘...Dammit.’

Yoo Yeonha kept sighing, and soon, Chae Nayun walked up to her.

“Hey, did you see that?”

Chae Nayun asked without any explanation. Yoo Yeonha became annoyed for a moment but pushed her complaint back into her throat.

“See what?”

Yoo Yeonha had seen many things. First was Kim Junwoo’s overwhelming might. He tore countless Djinn apart with his bare hands, making him truly worthy of being a hunter of the Vast Expanse.

Next was Kim Suho.

His talent also stuck out like a sore thumb. There was nothing that the metal attribute covering his sword couldn’t cut. His final sword dance, which cut down raining fireballs, was one that still stayed in her mind.

“Kim Hajin. He went off on a bike.”

“...Ah.”

Yoo Yeonha had also seen that eye-catching scene. Just like Chae Nayun said, Kim Hajin went off somewhere on a motorbike. He was so fast that Yoo Yeonha had to do a doubletake on whether bikes could go that fast.

“Yeah, I saw him, but where did he go?”

“I don’t know, but where do you think he got that bike? I want to buy one too.”

Chae Nayun’s eyes flickered as she smacked her lips.

Kim Hajin didn’t make any special accomplishments in today’s incident. However, Yoo Yeonha had a suspicion. Kim Hajin’s driving skill. He seemed too experienced for a mere cadet.

At that moment, Kim Suho hastily walked up to them.

“...What’s wrong?”

“The princess is apparently gone. Have you guys seen Rachel?”

“Huh?”

Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha looked around the area. Although the incident had been

settled, Heroes were beginning to get busy once again. The word 'Princess' didn't disappear from their urgent conversations.

Yoo Yeonha suddenly felt a chill down her back.

She muttered in complete shock.

"...Their goal was the princess?"

"What? Really?"

"Yeah, it makes sense. Rachel is England's most precious treasure. If they kidnapped her..."

It was then.

A black bike was coming their way, making broken clunking noises. Everyone other than Yoo Yeonha, who was focused on making deductions, turned to the direction of the bike.

On the bike's saddle was Rachel, who was wearing a helmet and trembling as she drove the bike.

"If they kidnapped her to take her hostage, England wouldn't hesitate to hand over the rights to Clancy Islet. Their goal must have been the entire country, not just Roton Corporation. Those evil bastards..."

"Hey, stop murmuring to yourself and look over there."

Chae Nayun nudged Yoo Yeonha's shoulders.

"What, I'm busy right... now... Eh?"

Yoo Yeonha suddenly felt drained. This time, Chae Nayun murmured seriously.

"That's the bike Kim Hajin ran off on."

"...!"

Yoo Yeonha's face became serious once again. Her head spinning fiercely, she continued her detective work.

While everyone was distracted by the attack in Clancy Hall, Kim Hajin had run off on a bike. However, it was now Rachel who was riding on that same bike. Did that mean

Kim Hajin defeated all those Djinns by himself and rescued Rachel?  
Impossible, not even Kim Hajin could be so fearless...



Rachel and I split up in an awkward atmosphere.

—Does that mean... you like me?

I denied her, but it didn't look like Rachel believed me. She said that she understood, but I felt like she interpreted things the wrong way.

In any case, I returned to my hotel room alone.

Of course, if I returned with Rachel, I would have been able to obtain a lot of SP as 'the cadet who saved the princess'.

However, receiving more attention than necessary was poisonous.

Currently, Clancy Islet was filled with Evil Society's Djinns. They had failed in their mission, and no one knew where their fury would go.

The Chameleon Troupe was fine since they were a group with the might and wealth to withstand Evil Society, but if Evil Society chose to vent their anger on me... my future would be bleak.

"...Anyways, this place is amazing."

My hotel suite was beyond anything I imagined. Not to mention, it was all free. After winning 2 billion won at the casino, the casino manager told me to rest and upgraded my room for free.

I sat down on the comfy couch and made a video call with my smartwatch.

The call went through, and the face of a cute child popped up on the screen.

—Hajin!

"Hey, have you been doing well?"

Evandel was a quick learner. She quickly learned to use basic electronic devices, and because I told her not to call me Daddy, she even started calling me by my name.

—Un, look at this!

Evandel showed me a cat she made.

A cat ghost.

It was small and cute.

“Wow, good job. It’s really cute. I want to pet it.”

—Heehee, right, right?

I learned from the internet that praises were important for raising a child.

—By the way, Hajin, when are you coming back?

“Tomorrow morning. I’ll be there as soon as I can. Wait just a little bit more.”

To be honest, I wanted to go back right away. But because the entire island was undergoing a vetting process, I couldn’t leave even if I wanted to.

“I’ll bring back something delicious. What do you want to eat?”

—Fried chicken!

“Alright, got it.”

*Wiing*—

I received a message on my smartwatch.

The sender was Chae Nayun.

[Hey, are you busy? Everyone is going to go get food.]

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## **FudgeNouget's Thoughts**

In case you haven't noticed/understood, "yes?" (with a question mark) means the same thing as "excuse me?" or "say what?"

If you've read or watched Japanese stuff, it's the same thing as "hai?" in Japanese. (they both translate to "yes?", but means "excuse me?" or "say what?"); I personally like keeping it this way instead of using "excuse me" or "say what"

# Chapter 76

## Short Break (2)

Rachel returned to the Royal Court under the protection of numerous Heroes. Her mother and father, the Queen of England and her consort, were worried sick, thinking that she had been abducted by Evil Society.

Rachel corrected their misunderstanding, that she wasn't abducted, but had left of her own accord. Naturally, she had to tell them about the giant who ended up taking the White Crystal.

Then, their worry became anger, and Rachel ended up being scolded.

Their nagging continued for 30 minutes, telling her not to do something so reckless ever again, and that she would be transferred to England Academy if something similar happened again.

After enduring their threats and scolding, she returned to her room.

She felt like her ears were bleeding.

Tired, she buried herself on her bed.

“...Haa.”

Many things happened today that caused her to sigh.

Roton Corporation's CEO, Zelen, was taken to the hospital after fainting. Once the stock market opened tomorrow, Roton Corporation's stocks were sure to plummet.

What happened today wouldn't hurt England. Zelen had written a contract, vowing not to blame England no matter what happened.

However, the 'Royal Court' guild would undoubtedly be impacted as Roton Corporation was its biggest sponsor. If Roton retracted their support, the Royal Court guild would surely falter financially.

“...”

Putting aside such concerns for now, Rachel thought about the incident that happened only two hours ago.

First was Kim Hajin.

He had used some unknown method to identify the Djinn who fled with the crystal and then chased after him. He had almost succeeded in retrieving the crystal, but a mysterious giant intervened and took the crystal away.

In the end, the crystal was lost.

However, the image that stayed in Rachel's mind wasn't the lost crystal, but the man who bashfully confessed that he was her fan.

...Suddenly, other thoughts began to emerge in her mind.

He had left behind many 'hints'. The biggest hint was the theory class.

Kim Hajin was good at studying, but he was well known for not sharing his knowledge with others. She had also heard the slanderous rumors about him.

'But... it was different with me. He always answered any question I asked. And during the final exam, he immediately revealed his location with me, strongly expressing his desire to be with me. But I refused, and he watched over me from afar, helping me when I was in a dangerous situation.

'At first, I didn't understand why. I couldn't find any reason he would help me. But now... everything makes sense. If what he did wasn't directed by reason but feelings, then everything makes sense.'

"...!"

At that moment, Rachel was struck with a flash of insight.

Perhaps, this was a great opportunity. The Royal Court guild needed someone strong in both theory and combat. Kim Hajin was such a person. If it was him, he would be able to raise the Royal Court guild's prestige.

'Then, if I could lead the favorable feelings he has for me in that direction... No.'

Rachel shook her head.

It was still someone's feelings. Manipulating and making use of someone's feelings was something that people shouldn't do. Rachel immediately shook off the horrible thought she had.

*Tak.*

She even smacked her own head.



10 P.M.

I came to the first floor of the hotel-casino. I thought that traveling club's members would be waiting there. However, Chae Nayun was the only one in front of the hotel entrance. She was killing time tapping on the ground with her toes.

"Haaam..."

Chae Nayun yawned as though she was sleepy, and then noticed me. She looked at me and grinned.

"Why are you staring?"

"..."

I shrugged without answering her.

"Where are the others?"

"They went ahead. Why are you always late?"

I ended up being late because of the video call with Evandel.

"Sorry, I had something to do."

"...Hm."

Chae Nayun took out the magic sword I gave her from her pocket.

"Anyways, thanks for giving me this. It helped a lot."

"No problem."

I didn't really need it back, but I still took it and put it in my pocket. Chae Nayun pointed to the front and exclaimed heartedly.

"Let's go. I'll pay for the food."

She then stomped forward excitedly. I followed her out of the hotel. It was dark outside, but beautiful lights lit up the darkness. Because today's trouble was limited to Clancy Hall, other places were operating as usual.

"Hey."

While I was walking slowly, Chae Nayun suddenly tapped on my shoulder.

"What?"

"Isn't that yours?"

"What... Huh?"

At the place Chae Nayun pointed, the motorbike I drove earlier in the day was parked. I sneaked up to the bike. I really wanted it. It seemed the owner of the bike was a guest of this hotel.

Chae Nayun smacked her lips and asked.

"Can we ride it there?"

"It's not mine. I borrowed it back then too."

"...Really?"

We both walked away reluctantly.

*Tak, tak.*

We began to walk towards the restaurant again. I turned on the smartwatch GPS. Chae Nayun was the last person I trusted to guide me.

"Hey."

I was walking silently, and Chae Nayun suddenly initiated a conversation. I looked back at her.

Under a dim streetlight, she smiled coolly. Then, she asked fleetingly.

"Don't you think we can be *friends*?"

My feet came to a stop.

Friends. It was a word that never crossed my mind.

I stared at Chae Nayun blankly. She was playing with her hair and pretending to be indifferent. I didn't know what she was thinking or why she suddenly said what she said.

However...

"No."

Staring at her directly, I cut down her offer coldly.

"I don't think so."

There was no way we could be friends. As someone who would eventually leave this world, and as someone who would kill her most precious person...

I couldn't become her friend.

"..."

Chae Nayun stood still, seemingly taken off guard. She stared at me without even breathing. Soon, with a slightly stiff expression, she let out a sigh, then forcefully made a smile.

"S-Screw you. Fine, if you don't wanna be friends, then screw off."

She smacked my shoulder, then ran forward.

"..."

Silently staring at her back, I rubbed my shoulder.

"...That freaking hurt."

To be honest, it felt like I was hit with a hammer.



Next day.

I went shopping, finishing up what I went to do yesterday.

I visited another antique shop. Although most antiques were only a little special in

appearance and otherwise useless, I was able to pick up two items.

===

[Horse Saddle] [Antique]

A horse saddle used by a nameless cavalryman 500 years ago.  
If you sit on this saddle, you will be able to handle rides better.

===

===

[Hornflute] [Antique]

A flute used by a wandering minstrel of Joseon.

If you blow this horn, your throat will become clean and your voice will become clearer for three hours.

===

They were useless in combat and were for more practical uses. Still, I really liked the horse saddle. Although it was expensive, I knew it would pay for itself one day.

“Let’s go.”

Now, it was noon.

We stood in front of Clancy Islet’s Portal. With our status being clear, we didn’t need to undergo further investigation.

But behind us, a group of five people was lined up, waiting for their turn. I tried my best not to stare at them inadvertently. They were all members of the Chameleon Troupe, who were disguised with Jain’s Gift.

From Clancy Islet to England, then England’s Portal Station to Seoul.

We used two Portals in total.

“There was an unexpected trouble yesterday, but as Heroes, we should start getting used to such situations.”

That was what Oh Hanhyun said after we arrived at Seoul Portal Station. Everyone nodded as they made bitter smiles.

“Now, let’s all go back home. Well done everybody, both yesterday and today!”

After Oh Hanhyun’s words of encouragement, we left the Seoul Portal Station.

Then, everyone other than me froze.

The outside of the Portal Station was bustling with reporters.

—Ah, they're here!

—They're back!

The reporters' cameras flashed blindingly.

—Is it true that Princess Rachel was abducted yesterday in Clancy Islet?

—Just what happened!?

—There have been reports that Kim Suho cadet performed great service at the incident...

The reporters bombarded us with questions. Videos of what happened in Clancy Hall must have spread to Korea, and Kim Suho's outstanding performance surely made headlines.

The other club members were standing in a daze, but I wasn't. I knew that the reporters would have no interest in me.

Stealthily turning back, I sneaked away to a restaurant known for its roasted chicken. I had to buy snacks for Evandel who was waiting for me at home.

"Give me two... no, three."

"Three, got it."

After buying three roasted chicken, I went back to the Portal Station.

The interview was still ongoing. Yoo Yeonha, who liked media attention, was talking to the reporters as her hair fluttered in the air.

Ignoring them, I went to the Portal leading to Cube.

"Hua."

Cube's scenery was familiar like home. Feeling the air of the East Sea, I walked through the central park. Soon, Dorm 1 appeared. My room was number 109, which was convenient since I didn't need to take the elevator. I put my thumb on the fingerprint scanner.

Tiririk— The door opened with a ringing tone.

I slammed the door shut as soon as I got in.

At the same time, Evandel and all the animals she created ran at me.

“Hajin~”

I hugged Evandel who ran into my embrace. She rubbed her face against my chest, showing her joy. In an instant, my heart became calm and full.

I wondered if I’ll be able to feel this when I have kids in the future.

Evandel looked at me with twinkling eyes and asked.

“Did you buy chicken?”

“Yeah, I bought a lot.”

I held up a plastic bag full of chicken.



Three days until the start of the second semester.

I thought I had quite a fruitful break. I hunted hard, trained hard, and added another function to my laptop - 'Smartwatch Link'.

It was annoying having to open the laptop every time something happened, but I was putting it off because I didn’t want to use SP.

[An incredible luck applies, warding you from certain death!]

[Narrow Escape from Death (3/9) – A special stat, accumulation of luck, becomes partly unlocked!]

[You obtained 193 SP!]

I made the change using the 193 SP I gained thanks to Cheok Jungyeong. Now that I had it, I wondered why I delayed such a convenient function until now.

—Oh, Hajin, what’s up?

I called Park Soohyuk using my upgraded smartwatch.

“Hyung, did you get what I wanted?”

Last week, I asked Park Soohyuk to get me a motorcycle. I was calling him now to check

how it was going.

—Yeah, I looked up the motorcycle with the best specs like you wanted, but it's really expensive. 150 million won. Agusta, I think it was called?

“Is that including all the additional functionalities you can put on it?”

—No, it gets even more expensive. With things like mana coating and engine reinforcement, the final cost will be way more than what it's worth.

“Do it anyway. I won a lot of money at the casino.”

I won 2 billion won at the casino. Plus, that day was also approaching.

The day Packhorse Master would conquer Suwon Devil's Nest, and consequently, the day I would become rich.

—...Okay, I'll put in an order. But where are you going to ride it? There isn't anywhere in Korea that's suitable for such a high spec motorcycle.

“It's fine.”

I had Aether, and I even had Horse Saddle which would improve my driving skills even more. In the case of an emergency, I could also use Bullet Time.

—Okay, I'll order it under our company's name, so come to pick it up later.

“Thanks. Oh right, is the company growing well?”

—...Haha.

Park Soohyuk replied with a laugh.

—We have 13 hunters with us now. You don't have to worry.

“Ooh, what an improvement~”

—Haha, it's all thanks to you. We're preparing to expand our business. We're going to move to a better place soon too.

“Then I’ll invest. Like I said before, I won a lot of money at the casino.”

When I was excitedly talking with Park Soohyuk, an alert suddenly popped up on my laptop.

In an instant, my face stiffened.

It was from Violet Banquet.

I hung up the call and confirmed its content.

Someone had made a commission to the Truth Agency. It was the first commission in about a month and a half.

[Please find this person.]

Although the sentence was short, it came with the detailed personal information and picture of a man.

His name was Fernin Jesus

“Eh?”

I knew who this man was.

Fernin Jesus.

This was the man ‘Tomer’ loved and hated more than anyone – her father.

---

## **FudgeNouget's Thoughts**

Author’s note: Tomer – Aether’s original owner

Translator's note: Last chapter Evandel asks for fried chicken. In the RAW, she just asks for "chicken", which in Korea refers to fried chicken 99.9% of time. In this chapter, Hajin specifically buys roasted chicken; could just be the author not putting too much thought behind it, or we can chuck it up to Hajin being a good dad and buying healthier food.

# Chapter 77

## Attraction (1)

The Hero Association gave the title 'Nine Evils' to the nine Djinn who rose to the peak of Djinn society. It was meant to brand them as 'the evils of humanity' or 'nine roots of evil', but the Djinn happily accepted the title, calling it the highest praise.

"It'll be a waste of time again..."

This place was the base of Wicked, the third-ranked Djinn of the Nine Evils. This base was a secret sanctuary made by reconstructing a deep cave in South Hamgyeong Province's mountain.

[Truth Agency]

—We will answer anything.

In this sanctuary, an ordinary Djinn named Tomer was looking into a computer. Her brown Latino skin and healthy figure shone even in the dark cave. However, there was no one giving her lewd glances.

Even among ordinary Djinn under Wicked, Tomer was a bit special. She was an odd one who didn't care about missions and only cared about pursuing strength. A few Djinn even doubted her being a Djinn.

"...What wind blew to make that woman stay in the office?"

Another ordinary Djinn muttered quietly as he stole a peek at Tomer. It was uncommon to see her glued to her desk like she was now.

"Someone told her about an information agency on Violet Banquet."

"Who?"

"Probably Seth. That guy's crazy about women."

At that moment, a field agent walked into the office. The two gossiping Djinn quickly buried their faces on their desk. The field agent looked around the office, then called someone's name.

"Tomer."

'...What now?' Tomer slowly got up, murmuring quietly to herself. The field agent heard her complaint clearly, but he only furrowed his brows and did not say anything about it. Tomer was a young, ordinary Djinn who was only 20 years old. But it was only her position that was ordinary. Her skill was enough to classify her as an elite.

"There's a mission."

"...A mission?"

"Yeah, an observation mission."

The agent handed a thick stack of documents to Tomer. Frowning, Tomer received the documents.



"Hmm..."

Looking fixedly at my laptop, I pondered.

Tomer was a bit of an unusual Djinn. She became a Djinn for one purpose.

To kill her father with her own hands.

To achieve this goal, Tomer sold a part of her soul.

Tomer was that unfortunate.

When she was seven, Tomer's father killed her mother and abandoned her.

At first glance, he was just a human garbage, but there was another reason behind it.

This setting was a device I implemented to eventually bring Tomer to Kim Suho's side.

Though, I stopped serializing before I ever got to that part.

In any case, with Wicked's help, she would eventually find her father even without me helping her. After killing him with her own hands, she would swear loyalty to Wicked.

Before I went on hiatus, she had even become one of Wicked's executives.

For the record, Wicked's executives were on a much higher position than ordinary executives. The executives of Wicked were only inferior to the Nine Evils themselves.

In other words, they were the future leaders of Djinn society.

“Hm.”

If I found Tomer’s father for her, would I be able to bring her to my side?  
Probably not. But if I used the plot device I created for Kim Suho...

For now, I unleashed the Book of Truth.

I didn’t know for sure where Tomer’s father was. Thinking about all the information Tomer gave me, I willed the book to reveal his present state of affairs.

Two streaks of Stigma disappeared in an instant.

My left arm felt numb, and an intense headache shook my head. It felt like my vision was turning white.

“Argh.”

I collapsed on the ground, unable to endure the pain.

The throbbing pain lasted for a minute before subsiding. I raised my head and looked at the Book of Truth. With two streaks of Stigma, I could find out about Fernin Jesus’ current status, but I couldn’t find his current location.

[Fernin Jesus changed his name to ‘Agus Benjamin’, and has retired after undergoing plastic surgery.]



Sunday before the start of school.

I visited Seoul’s Magic Tower. It was to engrave magic seals on my obsidian bracelet. As the Magic Tower society was filled with materialistic snobs, I wore the luxury suit I bought in Clancy Islet to avoid being ignored.

“Kim Hajin-ssi. Welcome.”

A guard mercenary checked my name on the reservation list and let me in.

In the Magic Tower, where classical music flowed calmly, there were many others who made reservations to come. A magician approached me while I was looking around.

“Kim Hajin-ssi?”

“Ah, yes.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Jin Yohan, a 4-star magician. You made a reservation for magic seal-related business, correct?”

A 4-star artifact artificer was the highest ranked magician an ordinary person could meet. I nodded in satisfaction.

Jin Yohan scanned me up and down, then spoke with a smile.

“Follow me. Let’s go to the office.”

Jin Yohan’s office was on the 33rd floor.

As soon as he sat down on his counseling chair, his secretary brought him a cup of coffee. Jin Yohan took a sip, then cut straight to the chase.

“What kind of magic seal are you looking to engrave?”

“Physical ability enhancement. Or do you have a physical defense magic?”

“Ah, yes we do.”

Jin Yohan projected a hologram in the air.

“First is this. Speed boost.”

Speed boost, strength enhancement, barrier, blood circulation, etc...

Most were fairly mediocre magic seals.

“Do you have any that runs with more magic power?”

Most magic seals engraved in artifacts used little magic power, as no matter how much internal magic power an artifact had, it wasn’t enough to use anything above ‘Speed Boost – Haste’.

However, this obsidian bracelet didn’t have such restrictions. I needed a powerful, high-cost magic seal, even if it could only be used once a week.

“For example, qi reinforcement or momentary awakening.”

“...”

Jin Yohan gave me a strange look, then nodded.

“It’s possible, but it will be very expensive.”

...30 minutes later.

I left after making a reservation.

It seemed I needed to wait a bit more until I could obtain magic seals.

At least until Packhorse Master finished conquering the Suwon Devil’s Nest.



The month-long summer came to an end. Other cadets were busy traveling abroad and whatnot, but I spent most of the time training and raising a kid.

“That picture you took in Japan came out really well.”

“Ah~ I wanted to go to Spain. If only my Portal pass didn’t suddenly expire...”

Cadets who came back to Cube seemed to have enjoyed their break as they all had bright faces.

Even without seeing their faces, I could find out through their social media. Most went on vacations abroad, and some posted pictures of themselves training during their break.

[Enduring a hard day, hoping for a better tomorrow.]

That was one of Shin Jonghak’s social media posts. The picture he uploaded with it was even more of a spectacle. It was a clear set-up shot with his sweaty head leaning on his spear. Because of his handsome appearance, I had to admit that he looked like a model.

Just like this, I often checked the major characters’ social media.

Kim Suho and Yoo Yeonha were rarely active on social media, and Rachel’s social media was administered by the English Royal Court. As for Chae Nayun, she hasn’t posted anything since the casino incident.

[...Too complicated. #FirstTime #ClancyIslet #Flustered #Annoyed #CubeCadet]

Along with the short phrase and a string of hashtags was a picture she took of Clancy Islet's night scenery.

This was Chae Nayun's last post.

It looked like a typical attention-seeking post from a high schooler, but the reaction was explosive.

===

3982 likes.

Uyeonha [Don't think too complicated.]

Orange2574 [What? ㄸ ㄸ Did something happen?]

Jonghak2 [Call me]

Aeoaeo [Unni, why aren't you posting anything nowadays?]

===

"...She has so many likes."

As expected of a celebrity, Chae Nayun had many followers.

Looking at it, I felt ostracized, so I went back to looking at stocks. It shouldn't be long until Packhorse Master's stocks skyrocketed.

Five minutes later, 8:00 A.M.

Kim Soohyuk walked into the classroom.

As soon as he arrived, he knocked on his desk loudly and gathered the cadets' attention.

"Today is the start of the second semester. As you all know, the second semester comes with a big change. Not only will your rankings be different, new cadets will also join the class. Maybe some of you went to the welcoming ceremony yesterday."

Welcoming ceremony. Starting from the second semester, magicians who wish to become Heroes will come to Cube from Korea's ten magic academies. 20 magicians per class for a total of 200. I already took note of magicians who would play important roles.

"These transfer students will join us starting from today. Come in."

With the instructor starting to clap, cadets also began clapping. Then, the front door

opened, and 20 black-robed magicians walked in.  
At first, I stared at them without much thought.  
One, two, three... Then suddenly, my eyes widened.

“...What.”

Among the twenty magicians, there was someone who shouldn't be there.  
Her skin was whitened and her hair dyed darker, but I was sure.

It was Tomer.

Tomer was raised in Korea from when she was 10 and was admitted to Gangwondo Magic Academy. Although she quit after 4 years, disillusioned with the magician community, her status was guaranteed just by having been admitted. With the few Djinns who were part of Cube's executives, she was indeed a good person to infiltrate Cube.

“Everybody, take a seat.”

At Kim Soohyuk's words, the magicians sat down in empty seats.

“Now, I will announce the ranking change.”

Tomer sat in the middle seat.

Using my smartwatch, I checked whether I received any messages on my laptop.

[Tomer – Although she plays an important role in the story, her appearance and strength are too sudden. It is better to create a connection between her and other major characters from the beginning.]

“...Tsk.”

Doing useless things again.

“Rank 1, Kim Suho!”

Kim Soohyuk began to announce the rank change. He only voiced the top 10, and the rest was posted on a wall poster.

===

Rank 1 Kim Suho  
Rank 2 Shin Jonghak  
Rank 3 Rachel  
Rank 4 Chae Nayun  
Rank 5 Shen Yu'an  
Rank 6 Yoo Yeonha

...

Rank 11 Yi Yeonghan

...

Rank 17 Kim Horak

...

...

Rank 334 Kim Hajin

...

===

Rank 334. My rank had gone up 600 places. Mmn, it was a moderate, average rank. I was satisfied.



The first outdoor class was training. The purpose was supposedly to get to know the transfer students. The name of it was 'dangerous hike'.

"There aren't any dangerous monsters on this mountain. But..."

The chief instructor, Kim Soohyuk, held up his index finger with a scary face.

"There are terrifying hidden traps. They're replicas of what Djinn's once used. You might end up being hospitalized, so make sure to stay on your toes."

Next, Kim Soohyuk divided 120 people into 10 groups of 12.

The 10 groups then began to climb the mountain from different starting points.

"Alright, everyone, let's go!"

Chae Nayun belonged to Group 3, which included Kim Suho.

“Oh, Chae Nayun.”

“Hey.”

Chae Nayun and Kim Suho led two magicians and eight cadets to the foot of the mountain.

Not long afterward, goosebumps began to appear on their arms. Not only did the wind get chilly, their surroundings also got dark. For the record, it was currently 10:30 A.M. Just the environment was scary and spooky enough, but there were also all kinds of traps just like the instructor said.

Flames suddenly sprang up from the ground, tree branches coiled around them like tentacles, and even ghosts appeared to frighten them.

“...God, my heart almost dropped.”

When a creepy female ghost appeared, the cadets all fell on the ground. Was Cube trying to give them nightmares to celebrate the start of school? Chae Nayun let out a deep sigh as she placed her hand on her heart.

“Geez, this is too scary.”

Even Kim Suho was murmuring in cold sweat.

Looking at him, a thought suddenly flashed across her mind. The person who she was constantly thinking about, and made her feel complicated...

“Hey.”

“Hm? What?”

Kim Suho tilted his head. Chae Nayun looked around sneakily. Other cadets were trying to calm their startled hearts and weren't paying attention to them.

Consequently, she tried to act as nonchalant as possible, as she brought up something that didn't have much to do with the current situation.

“Hey, you're my friend, right?”

“What? Why ask that all of a sudden? Are you sick?”

“...Just answer me.”

“Well, of course I am.”

At Kim Suho’s immediate answer, Chae Nayun smiled bitterly. As expected, Kim Suho thought of her as a friend. Perhaps this was the normal reaction.

However, Kim Hajin had clearly stated that he couldn’t be her friend. Unlike Kim Suho, he was proclaiming that he would be more forward.

“What was that?”

“It’s nothing...”

At that moment, a bush on the right side suddenly rustled, and a familiar face popped out.

Speak of the devil, it was Kim Hajin’s Group 6.

# Chapter 78

## Attraction (2)

Besides Kim Hajin, Group 6 had the 41st ranked Simon Delick and the 20th ranked Yi Jiyeon. Group 3 met them coincidentally, and now they were taking a break together.

“...Illusion barrier?”

Group 6 had an easy time in the beginning with only a few wild animals appearing on their hike, but they had unknowingly entered an illusion barrier.

“Yeah, I think we must have been lost in there for an hour or so. But suddenly, that guy told us to move with a frustrated face.”

Simon Delick pointed at a man sitting by a tree. Chae Nayun glanced over to that direction. There, Kim Hajin was looking at his smartwatch.

“At first, we were like, who is this kid? But then he went ahead and found the exit instantly.”

Chae Nayun nodded silently.

“Oh right, did you decide on your team for the upcoming team challenge?”

Simon Delick asked, changing the topic.

Just like he said, there was a team challenge coming up. Although nothing about it was announced, team challenge was a joint training exercise that was a tradition in Cube.

“No.”

Chae Nayun shook her head.

Teams for the team challenge had to be fair. As such, top-ranking cadets like Chae Nayun, Kim Suho, Yoo Yeonha, and Shin Jonghak couldn't team up.

Most teams were composed of 'one one-digit rank, one two-digit rank, two three-digit ranks, and one low-rank magician'; or 'two two-digit ranks, two three-digit ranks, and

one upper-rank magician'. Of course, specific rankings were taken into account as well.

"I'm thinking about asking Kim Hajin."

At that moment, Yi Jiyoong who was sitting quietly suddenly interjected. Caught off guard, Chae Nayun's body shook a little.

Kim Suho laughed and chimed in.

"Hajin? He's a good choice."

"Kim Suho, you're close even with him?"

Yi Jiyoong asked with a smiling face.

"Uh... yeah."

Although Kim Suho felt his relationship with Kim Hajin was a little vague, he still nodded. Then, Yi Jiyoong's face brightened.

"As expected of Suho, you have so many connections."

Like a sly fox, Yi Jiyoong was good at flattering people. Chae Nayun felt slightly displeased.

"But why Kim Hajin? There are bad rumors about him."

Simon Delick asked in a slightly jealous tone. Just like he said, there were horrible rumors about Kim Hajin. On the other hand, Yi Jiyoong was on the popular side. Not only was her pure and innocent face well liked by guys, her Gift was also one of the best among supporters.

"Everyone wants to have you on their team, Jiyoong."

She could shoot magic arrows imbued with a special buff. As its effect was exceptionally strong, most high ranking guilds in the country already had their eyes out for her.

"Kim Hajin is the best candidate among three-digit cadets. He's smart and his combat prowess is exceptional. You remember his fight with Kim Horak, right?"

Yi Jiyoong sent Kim Hajin who was sitting far away a meaningful look. No one knew whether he had heard Yi Jiyoong's praise, but he scratched his cheek. Yi Jiyoong turned her gaze to Chae Nayun.

"Nayun, what do you think?"

"...Eh?"

Yi Jiyoong and Chae Nayun were stereotypical social media friends, the type that only exchanged likes and comments online.

Chae Nayun brushed her hair aside and replied nonchalantly.

"Well, you can team up with him if you want. Why ask me?"

Although that's what Chae Nayun said, she certainly felt the same way.

Kim Hajin was too good of a resource for someone in the 300's. No, in the first place, he wasn't someone who should be sitting in rank 334. For both Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun, this was a matter of fact.

"Really? Then I should try asking him today."

"...Wait."

When Yi Jiyoong seemed ready to go, Chae Nayun hastily spoke up.

"He's really picky. So um, he might not say yes."

"...Eh?"

"That's... um, you might get hurt, Jiyoong. He's a bit cold."

"Nayun is right. Haven't you heard the rumors about him?"

Simon Delick also chimed in. Clearly, he was excited to bad-mouth Kim Hajin. Immediately, he began to recite some of the ill rumors; that Kim Hajin goes to Seoul every weekend to visit brothels and nightclubs, or that he receives money from gangs and other violent organizations, or that he has several sugar mommas... They were exaggerated rumors completely blown out of proportion.

“...Do you really believe that nonsense?”

“Hey, Delick, have you personally seen him?”

Unable to endure his rambling, Chae Nayun and Kim Suho interrupted him simultaneously. Taken aback, Delick’s pupils trembled.

“W-What, am I wrong?”

Chae Nayun glared at Delick silently, then got up.

Kim Suho clapped his hands and changed the atmosphere.

“Alright, let’s get going, guys. Otherwise, we’ll be late.”



Night, after end of classes.

Yoo Yeonha finished preparing for a video call. Her face was completely covered, and her voice was changed as well.

“Hmhm.”

Today was the first meeting with the information guild she established, Falling Blossom. She cleared her throat as to not have a voice crack.

—*Tiriring.*

Soon, the video call began. The three team leaders of Falling Blossom guild greeted Yoo Yeonha with bare-faces.

“It’s nice to meet you all.”

—It’s an honor, Master.

Yoo Yeonha was satisfied with the team leaders’ respectful tone.

Falling Blossom’s members were people Yoo Yeonha personally evaluated and recruited. Although their resumes might not be spectacular, she snatched them up without hesitation if they had potential.

There were 21 founding members.

Yoo Yeonha separated these 21 members into three teams.

Members of the first team were Spies. They were in charge of gathering information on rival guilds.

Members of the second team were Hawks. They were in charge of locating and identifying new Dungeons or monsters above the high-intermediate rank.

Members of the third and final team were Shadows. They were in charge of taking care of Yoo Yeonha's private requests.

"Team 1's top priority should be to find out the plans of rival guilds, namely Creator's Sacred Grace and Desolate Moon. Team 2 should..."

Yoo Yeonha began to talk in a formal manner that made it hard to distinguish even her gender. After giving Team 1 and Team 2 their respective missions, she ended her call with them.

Now, only Team 3 remained. Members of Team 3 were elites that Yoo Yeonha was especially careful in choosing.

Team 3 would thoroughly work in the shadows. From background investigations to tailing to kidnapping, threatening, and, if it came down to it, killing, they were to be Yoo Yeonha's secret weapon.

"I command you to thoroughly dig up the following members' backgrounds. However, it is strictly forbidden to hurt them or to be discovered."

Yoo Yeonha gave Team 3 information on five individuals. However, four of them were only there to fill the number. There was only one she wanted to know.

===

[Kim Hajin – 17 years old]

—From Seju Orphanage.

—When he was 9, he was discovered by periodic orphanage inspection and entered Agent Military Academy.

—Currently 334th ranked Cube cadet.

—Supplied Essence of the Strait with information worth hundreds of millions of won.

===

That was Kim Hajin.

—Understood, Master.

Team 3's team leader went away with an affirmation.  
Yoo Yeonha nodded in satisfaction, then jumped into her bed.



*Beep— Beep—*

6:30 A.M.

I opened my eyes, awakened by the alarm.

“Mmm.”

When I stretched, I noticed something light stuck to my side.

It was Evandel.

Puu, puu. She was letting out tiny breaths while sleeping. I grinned and put my finger over her nostrils.

One second, two seconds, three seconds... Evandel quivered and shook my hand away.

“Huhu.”

A smile bloomed on my face. I stroked Evandel's soft hair for five minutes before getting up.

“...You're awake too?”

On the living room couch was a cat Evandel made. The cat jumped down from the couch and walked up to my feet. When I tried patting it, it growled.

This cat wasn't an illusion or a spirit. It was a real cat Evandel made with her ability. Although it had no other ability other than being cute, it would become strong and help me out one day.

I put on my clothes. I had to go bring breakfast. Of course, it was more convenient to eat outside and head straight to class.

But nowadays, I felt happier eating together with Evandel.

I put on slippers and went out.

When I was waking to the cafeteria while yawning, someone approached me giving off a fragrant scent.

“Where are you going so early in the morning?”

It was Yoo Yeonha. She seemed to be out for a morning jog as she was wearing a comfortable-looking tracksuit.

I replied briefly.

“The cafeteria.”

“Hmm.”

Yoo Yeonha made a nasal sound, then began to walk alongside me.

“Anyways, I noticed your ranking went up a lot.”

“Yeah, I think it’ll stay in that range in the future.”

“Mm...”

Yoo Yeonha nodded, seemingly thinking about something.

By the time the cafeteria was coming into view, Yoo Yeonha asked again.

“Have you thought about your future?”

Future...

It was a word that didn’t really click with me, so I just replied half-heartedly.

“I still have a lot of time to think about that sort of stuff.”

“A lot of time? It’s only a year and three months. Once we’re in our third year, we’ll be too busy with things like Hero internships and deployments.”

Just like she said, third years were no different than real Heroes. They only came to Cube once or twice a week and spent the rest acting as apprentice Heroes in different guilds.

Yoo Yeonha continued.

“How’s Essence of the Strait?”

She was clearly trying to coax me.

Essence of the Strait, the guild that would later become Yoo Yeonha's.

To be honest, it was a guaranteed success.

Although it was currently ranked second because of Creator's Sacred Grace, it would reign supreme as the unshakable rank 1 guild once Creator's Sacred Grace failed their Tower of Miracle conquest. This wouldn't change even when Kim Suho joins Creator's Sacred Grace and brings it to a new height.

"...I was thinking about becoming a hunter of the Vast Expanse."

I was half-serious.

Vast Expanse, a hunter group founded and named after Kwangwon[1], who was comparable in power to the Nine Stars.[2]

Although they operated like a mercenary group, they worked on a completely different scale. The main customers of the Vast Expanse were large guilds or large corporations. Individuals who wanted to employ them had to be multimillionaires.

As hunters of the Vast Expanse were mercenaries at their core, they were given an incredible level of freedom. There couldn't be a better status for someone like me.

"Though, I'm not sure if I could become one."

"..."

Yoo Yeonha didn't say anything for a while. When I glanced at her, she was in deep contemplation with a very serious face.

"...I'll change your mind."

Then, a determined voice rang out. Yoo Yeonha continued as she stared at me fixedly.

"If I bring what you've been looking for all this time, wouldn't you change your mind?"

"..."

'And what's that?' I furrowed my brows.

Then, Yoo Yeonha snickered and suddenly changed the topic.

"Oh right, remember Yi Jin-Ah who bullied you? She got scolded reaaaaally hard. I even have a video of it. Do you want to see it? She's crying like a baby."

Yoo Yeonha walked strangely when she was feeling good. Like a daring little princess, she had her hands clasped behind her back and hopped.

Then suddenly, she shot backward.

As expected, there were other cadets some distance in front of us.

“Then I’ll see you later.”

With that, Yoo Yeonha disappeared.



“Alright, attention!”

Wednesday, morning announcements.

Kim Soohyuk’s voice was just as loud in the morning as any other time.

“You will need to form a team of five.”

It was finally here.

I closed my eyes and clenched my lips.

Team challenge. It was kind of like a group project. From now, I would be doing rather annoying things as a member of a team. For example, conquering a miniature Tower, capturing artifacts against other teams, or going on team-building trips.

Thankfully, team challenges only lasted until the midterms in six weeks.

“Get into teams that meet the requirement and submit a team member list by the end of next Wednesday. If you don’t have a team by that time, I will place you in teams myself.”

“Huu.”

Forming a team was too sorrowful for outcasts like me.

Though, I might be the best choice among three-digit cadets like Yi Jiyeon said.

*Tap, tap, tap.*

“...?”

At that moment, I heard tiny tapping sounds.

I turned around. On a seat a little ways behind me, Rachel was tapping on her desk with an anxious face.

Oh right.

Rachel was also in a similar situation to me. The difference was that I was ostracized while she was aloof, but it was the same in that we had no friends.

Since that was the case, it might be good for us to team up.

Plus, I had something to give her as well.

‘Butterfly Seedling Dust’.

I had to give it to her even if I had to use force. Originally, Rachel was supposed to obtain a hint of her Enlightenment during the final exam. If it was delayed any longer, there was a chance that her basic specs would become lower than in the original story.

“Huu.”

Although I was a bit nervous, I took a deep breath and sent her a message.

[Rachel-ssi, would you like to team up with me?]

But before she could check my message, someone approached her.

“Would you like to team up?”

It was the robed magician, Tomer.

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1. Same name that is being translated as Vast Expanse. Will keep the name Romanized, and the group name translated.

2. Nine Stars were briefly mentioned in chapter 18. They refer to the nine strongest Heroes in the world.

# Chapter 79

## Attraction (3)

Tomer's boldness attracted the attention of the entire class.

Rachel stared at Tomer with puzzled eyes, but Tomer even reached her hand out to Rachel.

Looking back and forth between them, I couldn't help but wonder why it was Rachel. Within the Djinn society, Wicked had a similar position to mercenaries. They accepted money to carry out missions. Considering that Tomer approached Rachel, it was likely that Lancaster was the mastermind behind the mission Tomer received.

"I'll think about it. There's still a lot of time left."

Rachel sent Tomer back for now. Then, she checked her smartwatch. It seemed she saw my message as her eyes widened.

She glanced at me and our eyes met.

*Sssk.*

Rachel's head unnaturally turned to the window. She was trying to pretend that she wasn't trying to look at me.

In any case, it seemed getting two offers made her happy as the corners of her mouth curled into a smile.

I turned back around and faced the front of the class.

After about 10 minutes of waiting, she gave me a reply.

[I'll think about it.]

I hoped she would pick me since we already had somewhat of a friendship.

Now, I stopped thinking about the team challenge and focused on the more important issue.

I stared at Kim Suho's back.

Summer break had passed, so it was almost time.

Currently, Kim Suho should be preparing to tackle a Dungeon. Just like protagonists of novels often did, he was planning to do it solo.

However, most Dungeons couldn't be soloed unless the challenger was uncharacteristically powerful or the Dungeon was uncharacteristically weak.

However, the Dungeon Kim Suho was planning on conquering was an exception. It was a matter of suitability.

This Dungeon was small, with weak minions but a powerful boss. This boss was the Swordsman of Destruction, a monster that even a high-intermediate rank Hero would find difficult to handle.

Right, he was a swordsman.

Swordsman and a Sword Saint.

Even Evandel could easily answer which of the two would win.

The Sword Saint's magic power would easily shatter the swordsman's sword, and only a single tree branch would be left upon the swordsman's defeat.

This branch was Kim Suho's weapon.

Its divine name was Misteltein, also known as the god-slaying branch.

It was a generic weapon of legends. It was a branch in some versions, but a sword or a spear in others. In the end, I set its unawakened form as a branch, so that it would become more sword-like as it awakened.

However, because of its ordinary appearance, Kim Suho didn't know what it was at first.

What changed this ordinary appearance was the Butterfly Seedling Dust. The Butterfly Seedling Dust would allow the ordinary branch to undergo its first awakening, turning the ordinary branch into a black branch.

It was comical how powerful monsters like King Ogres and Sea Kings were beaten to death with a branch. Thinking back to the Kim Suho of my novel, I couldn't help but chuckle.

In any case, I had to join this Dungeon conquest. After all, the Butterfly Seedling Dust was on me.

But that wasn't the only reason. Frankly, I was worried.

I wasn't sure Kim Suho could beat the Dungeon by himself. This world wasn't as easy and lax as the one I set up.

...Also.

There might be breadcrumbs prepared for me as well.

"Now, go to class."

While I was in thought, the morning announcement ended.

I got up to go to class like I always did.

“Ah, Hajin, where are you going?”

However, a girl I had never seen before clung to my side.

“...What?”

I’m going to class, where else would I be going?

“Well, you see, I was wondering if you had—”

Before the girl could finish, someone else cut in. This time, it was a guy.

“Hajin!”

Jin Hoseung. He was a male cadet who was in my team at the beginning of the first semester.

“I got tickets to go to the French Artifact Museum. Apparently, Napoleon’s rifle will be on display tomorrow...”

I ended up accepting the ticket in the suddenness of the situation.

But it didn’t end with Jin Hoseung. A bunch of students, some who I knew the names of, some who I only knew the faces of, and some who I didn’t know at all, all started bribing me.

I accepted their gifts without declining.



My room, after all the classes ended.

Sitting on my couch, I pondered. Evandel was sleeping using my thigh as a pillow, so I couldn’t make any big movements.

“...How should I handle it?”

I was thinking about Tomer.

I knew how to appease her.

Currently, she wasn’t fully assimilated to the Djinn’s side. In a way, she was currently following the philosophy of the golden mean.[1]

As such, I felt like I could bring her to my side as long as I helped her find her father. But that was the problem. I couldn't find him. For some reason, the Book of Truth wasn't working.

I would have no choice but to employ another method to find him. Yoo Jinhyuk was undoubtedly the best background informant, but he was too expensive and, more importantly, limited in range. To maximize his ability, Yoo Jinhyuk restricted the range of his ability to the Korean Peninsula. If Tomer's father wasn't in Korea, it would only be a huge waste of money and time.

"...Oh right."

Suddenly, I recalled something.

I knew an informant, a trustworthy one at that.

He was Kim Chundong's sole connection, an informant who looked like a piglet. What was his name? Kim... right, Kim Hosup.[1]

Of course, we haven't talked to each other since I was admitted to Cube, so I didn't know his phone number. However, that was something I could easily find out.

I quickly opened the Book of Truth.

What I wanted to know was Kim Hosup's phone number.

"Argh."

Just looking up a single phone number consumed 30% of my magic power. Was Book of Truth too costly? Or was two streaks of Stigma too little?

In any case, I got the phone number I wanted. I immediately made the call.

Tururu— Tururu— Three piglet brothers—

He had a strange ringtone, but he quickly picked up.

—Hello?

Kim Hosup's had a deep voice unlike what I expected.

"...Hey, Hosup. It's Hajin. How have you been?"

—Ah~ Hajin-chan~ It's been a while!

His tone was quick to change.

—What's up?

“Um... Hosup.”

—Uuun~?

“What have you been doing lately?”

—Me~?

The way he dragged out the end of his sentence got on my nerves, but Hosup was an important connection nonetheless.

Although he wasn't treated well because of his outer appearance and his strange personality, he would be noticed by Yoo Yeonha in seven years and come to play an important role.

—I'm... doing okay. Why did you call me?

His voice was noticeably meek. Tsk, it seemed he was being bullied by seniors in his workplace.

Unfortunately, I didn't have the time to comfort him.

“Nothing much. Just... I'm wondering if you can help me find a person.”

—A person?

“Yeah. I'll send you a supercomputer as a payment.”

Hosup's Gift was related to computers. As such, a good computer amplified his Gift's power.

—Supercomputer~? But isn't Hajin-chan poor?

“I have a lot of money now. I'll be able to send it to you this week. So, can you do it?”

—...If you have a little bit of his background information, it should be possible~.

“Perfect. I'll send it to you immediately.”

I sent him Fernin Jesus' false identity, which I found out with the Book of Truth, and the picture of him I got from Tomer.

“Alright, I just sent it. Also, Chundong... I mean, Hosup.”

For a moment, I got the two names confused.

—Hm?

“If you're going to quit your job...”

Kim Hosup was a good person. He might not be an altruist or a philanthropist, but he wasn't someone who would do anything bad.

In other words, he would be more helpful the earlier he was discovered.

“There's a new information guild called Falling Blossom. You should join it. They only care about your ability, so they'll treat you well.”

I told Hosup the workplace he would shine in in the future.



10:00 P.M., a time when no classes were going on.

Kim Suho was training alone in a dark forest inside Cube.

Shwik—

The sword he stretched out caused the air to undulate. After a light jab, he let out soft slashes, followed by a spinning slash. The perfect flow in his movements made it seem like the sword was protecting the swordsman.

It was a flawless sword technique, sharper than a blade and lighter than a feather.

Just like this, Kim Suho reflected on his sword technique every night. To not lose the mindset of a Knight, and to advance his sword technique a step further.

Nowadays, there was another reason he was devoting himself to training. That was...

“Are you training?”

At that moment, someone's voice rang out.

Startled, Kim Suho turned around.

“...Kim Hajin?”

Kim Hajin was leaning against a tree, seemingly having watched his sword training. Kim Suho put his sword away. Kim Hajin approached him with a smile. Kim Suho quickly asked.

“Are you also here to train?”

Kim Hajin shook his head.

“No, I’m just on a walk. Anyways, it’s still early in the semester, but you sure are hard at work. If someone saw, they would think you’re trying to conquer a Dungeon alone.”

“..”

Immediately, Kim Suho’s body shook slightly.

Kim Hajin maintained his smile as he continued to chatter uncharacteristically.

“No way, am I right?”

“...No.”

Kim Suho denied with a smile. However, Kim Hajin’s eyes were narrowed, giving a meaningful look. Faced with his eyes, which seemingly pierced through everything, Kim Suho shrunk back slightly.

“You went out last week, right? To Kamak Mountain. I saw you on my way back.”

“..”

Kim Suho silently stared at Kim Hajin.

Resonance of the sword.

That was what Kim Suho felt from Kamak Mountain.

At first, he had climbed the mountain to feel its life energy.

However, a sword qi buried in the mountain called him. This strange yet desperate call attracted his attention, and when he went to the epicenter of the sword qi, he found an unidentified Dungeon.

“...How did you know?”

Kim Suho asked, his voice vigilant.

“I saw you coincidentally. You know how I like to go out a lot. And not to brag or anything, but my eyes...”

Kim Hajin tapped his eyes as he spoke.

“If I climb Kungang Mountain, I can see up to Seoul... no, Uijeonbu.”[2]

Kim Suho continued staring at Kim Hajin without talking. Silence usually made people anxious. However, Kim Hajin was completely at ease as he continued to say what he wanted.

“If you really plan on conquering a Dungeon, let me join. I’m pretty useful outside of Cube.”

“...”

“We’ll split the loot 9:1. If you get a tree branch, I’ll only take a few leaves.”



A week passed by in the blink of an eye, and Monday came around once again. There were only two days left until the team submission deadline.

“Hmm...”

Chae Nayun was in thought, looking at the notebook on her desk.

There was one spot left on her team. She needed a cadet outside of the top 100.

In team challenges, a team with a lower average rank was given bonus points. Naturally, you wanted a cadet who was cost-effective, and that had to be... Kim Hajin. She sneaked a peek at Kim Hajin’s seat.

Kim Hajin’s name popped up often in the class group chat, which showed just how popular he was for the team challenge selection. However, Chae Nayun was fairly confident that he would choose her if she asked.

There was only one reason that she hesitated to ask him.

She was worried that Kim Hajin would misunderstand.

She wanted him to join her team for the team challenge. There was no ulterior motive.

“Hm...”

“What, are you having trouble forming your team?”

At that moment, Shin Jonghak, who was sitting behind her, asked.

Shin Jonghak already had his team – Kim Horak and three others. Because 2nd ranked and 17th ranked cadets were in the same team, the other three were way below average in rank, but since it was Shin Jonghak, he would find a way to squeeze out their potential.

“No, I’m just thinking—”

“Let me see.”

Shin Jonghak suddenly reached forward and stole Chae Nayun’s notebook.

“Ah, HEY”

“Hazuki, Raymond, and... Kim Hajin? Kim Hajiiin?”

He repeated Kim Hajin’s name loudly. Immediately, the attention of the class fell on her. Naturally, Kim Hajin was included.

Kim Hajin was staring at her. Chae Nayun felt her face growing red like a tomato.

“Eeee, ee...”

“Didn’t you say Kim Hajin—”

“Shut your mouth!”

“Uk!”

Chae Nayun struck Shin Jonghak’s solar plexus.

Shin Jonghak was completely caught off guard by Chae Nayun’s sudden attack.

Slumped down on the desk, Shin Jonghak endured the pain.

“...uuu... uuuu...”

Shin Jonghak's scream rang out intermittently.

"Don't steal and look at other people's stuff. Hey, Kim Suho."

Chae Nayun quickly changed the subject. Kim Suho was sitting next to her.

"Who are you going to team up with?"

"..."

Kim Suho was silent. He was tapping on his notebook with a pen, seemingly thinking about something.

"Kim Suho?"

"...Huh? Oh."

When she called him again, he finally turned around in a daze. Chae Nayun peeked at his notebook.

"What, you're asking Kim Hajin too?"

Kim Hajin's name was written in his notebook.

"Huh? Oh, um, I guess so."

"...Everyone's asking Kim Hajin."

"A fitting... combination..."

At that moment, Shin Jonghak reined in his pain and muttered just barely.

"Two... trifling commoners..."

"Shut it. Yoo Yeonha, what about you?"

Yoo Yeonha, who was staring at her smartwatch, raised her head.

“Me? My team’s already decided.”

Yoo Yeonha formed her team with people she could easily manipulate. Although she also coveted Kim Hajin, she was more comfortable with people whom she could handle with ease.

“Hm...”

At that moment, the theory instructor walked in.  
He placed a thick textbook on the podium and started taking attendance.

“Oh, by the way, there will be team challenges for theory classes as well.”

That was what the instructor said next.  
Chae Nayun decided as soon as she heard those words.  
Bless Kim Hajin.



“That’s it for today. Make sure you review it before next class.”

The class ended. Chae Nayun snapped up from dozing off. She got up quickly and chased after Kim Hajin, who just left the class.

“...Hey.”

She grabbed Kim Hajin’s shoulder.  
Kim Hajin looked at her and asked what was going on with his eyes.  
Chae Nayun felt a bit nervous.

“Um, about your team...”

When she was about to ask, someone walked past her.  
Blonde hair and delicate fragrance.  
It was Rachel. With an innocent face, she tilted her head and asked.

“Team?”

“Huh? Oh, it doesn’t concern you...”

“Hajin-ssi decided to team up with me.”

“...Eh?”

Chae Nayun’s facial expression became stiff. She swallowed hard, then turned to Kim Hajin. Kim Hajin nodded somewhat regretfully(?).

“Uh, um, really? Well, I, uh, didn’t think you had anyone to team with, so I thought I’d save you. You know, as a fellow traveling club member. Right... well... good luck.”

Without knowing what was coming out of her own mouth, Chae Nayun turned around after smacking Kim Hajin’s shoulder.

At first, she didn’t know what to think. She was just in a daze. But while she was walking, she suddenly got annoyed and turned back around.

She coincidentally met eyes with Rachel who was going the same way.

Rachel gave a small nod in greeting. Chae Nayun clenched her teeth.

Same sex, but opposite personality and similar grades (theory excluded).

Rachel was someone who Chae Nayun regarded as a rival second only to Kim Suho.

No, nowadays, Rachel had surpassed Kim Suho to become her soul rival.

‘...Why her of all people?’

Chae Nayun stomped away like a raging bison.

---

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_mean\\_\(philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_mean_(philosophy))

2. Uijeonbu is a city that’s slightly closer to Kumgang Mountain than Seoul.

1. Kim Hosup was introduced in chapter 0.

# Chapter 80

## Teamwork (1)

Rachel stopped in the middle of walking. Seeing that she had somewhat of a serious face, I also stopped with her. She stared at me fixedly, then spoke.

“I already submitted the team list.”

Team Rachel was composed of the following members: Rachel, Jin Hoseung, Yi Bokgyu, Kim Hajin, Tomer.

Rachel had the highest rank, and Jin Hoseung and Yi Bokgyu were rank 108 and 173 respectively. The team list deadline was Wednesday, but Rachel had already submitted it.

“...So you can't go somewhere else.”

That's what Rachel said. Perhaps because of what Chae Nayun said, her eyes and voice seemed a bit worried.

“Of course.”

“Ah, they're over there!”

At that moment, the other team members arrived. Jin Hoseung, Yi Bokhyu, and Tomer, all of them.

“We're in the same team now. Let's go get some food together.”

Jin Hoseung spoke excitedly. Was it because he was in Rachel's team?  
I glanced at Rachel who nodded.

“So where are we going?”

“Mm... well, what do you want to eat, Rachel-ssi?”

“I’m fine with anything.”

Rachel wasn’t a particularly picky eater, but there was something she liked.

“Let’s go to Hangyujung, the Korean restaurant.”

“Uh, sure.”

Yi Bokgyu and Jin Hoseung didn’t seem to mind, and Rachel let out a satisfied cough. Only Tomer had no reaction.

“Are you okay with that?”

“...Yeah.”

It was a short answer.

“Great.”

It was decided.

“Oh right.”

While we were walking looking at a GPS, Jin Hoseung suddenly came up to me.

“Hajin, about the ticket I talked about before, it’s in two days. Do you want to come with me?”

“...To France?”

Immediately, Rachel’s eyes flickered fiercely. France and England had a relationship similar to Korea and Japan. Because I added a setting that England and France had an artifact scramble about 20 years ago, the feeling between the two countries was at its worst.

“No, I’m fine.”

To be honest, I was curious about Napoleon’s rifle, but I didn’t want to go all the way to France just to see it.

“Why? Who knows, maybe Napoleon’s rifle will become yours.”

“...Napoleon?”

Rachel muttered in a small voice.

“How? I’m rank 334.”

“Well, it’ll be better to put it to use than to just keep it in the museum... By the way, Hajin, don’t you think your voice changed a bit?”

“Kuhum. Did it?”

That was thanks to the flute I bought in Clancy Islet’s antique shop.

===

[Hornflute] [Antique]

A flute used by a wandering minstrel of Joseon.

If you blow this horn, your throat will become clean and your voice will become clearer for three hours.

===

I used it for the first time about five minutes before I went to see Kim Suho. Because a deep voice carried more reliability.

Ever since then, I’ve been using the flute often. I liked how my voice sounded clearer, and it felt great to open up my throat in the morning.

“Yeah, is it puberty?”

“..”

Thankfully, I didn’t have to answer his question that lacked common sense, as we arrived at the Korean restaurant.

Rachel went in first, smacking her lips.



An abandoned factory in Suwon.

After nine months, all members of the Chameleon Troupe gathered in their hideout. Droon had finally figured out how to use the White Crystal, and the purpose of their gathering was to spectate.

“...Kid, do I really break it?”

Cheok Jungyeong asked again, carrying an artifact sword in one hand. Droon frowned and urged him on.

“Yeah, do it.”

“Tsk, don’t blame me if anything goes wrong.”

Cheok Jungyeong grumbled as he wrapped his fist with magic power. The density of the magic power made it seem as though he was wearing a gauntlet.

*KWANG.*

Cheok Jungyeong’s fist clashed with the artifact sword. The result was that the sword shattered like glass.

“Happy?”

“Yep.”

Droon picked up a fragment of the shattered sword and placed it on a stone table.

“I’ll initiate it now.”

*Woong*— The White Crystal began to resonate, unleashing magic power. The magic power condensed inside the cube encasing the crystal then began to radiate towards the sword fragment. The crystal’s white magic power clung to the fragment, forming a crystalline sword.

“Oooh.”

Cheok Jungyeong applauded in amazement, while the rest of Chameleon Troupe members made shocked faces.

“There. Just like that, the tiny sword fragment became a partial artifact. According to my test, it’s at least as strong as a low-rank artifact. A single artifact can produce about 30 partial artifacts and taking the crystal’s magic power capacity into account, we’ll be able to make about 600 more.”

“And we sell each partial artifact for about 700~800 million won... Amazing.”

Even with a simple calculation, one could see that it was close to a 500 billion won profit. Even after deducting the black market and money laundering fees, it would be about 20 billion won per member. It was indeed worth the risk.

“Yeah, but it’ll take at least 5 years to sell it all.”

“That’s fine. Oh, by the way.”

Jain suddenly cut in.

“Packhorse Master started their Suwon Devil’s Nest conquest.”

The eyes of the Chameleon Troupe’s members flickered with a conspicuous light.

Packhorse Master:

They were the prey Chameleon Troupe was eyeing.

They had finally started their activities.



“Look, if you do this...”

9:00 P.M.

It was time for children to sleep, but Evandel was busy playing with clay dough. She seemed to be using too much magic power on creating spirit bodies, so I prepared a toy she could use to have fun.

“Tada~”

“Wow, what’s this?”

Evandel made a penguin with glasses, which she often saw on TV. I opened my eyes wide in surprise. Evandel puffed out her chest with a proud face.

“How did you make it? Are you a genius?”

“Hihi, want me to tell you?”

“No, I won’t be able to do it even if you did. This is a skill you were born with.”

While I was making Evandel smile with continued praises, my smartwatch suddenly rang.

It was Kim Suho.

[Can you come out to the forest we met at last time?]

‘Oho, so you finally made your decision.’

With a smile, I got up from my seat.

“Evandel, I’m going to be out for a bit.”

“Un? Where are you going?”

“Uh... to buy some snacks for us to eat before bed.”

“Snacks? I want cake!”

“Okay.”

“Cake, cake!”

“I’ll buy some, don’t worry.”

Using that as an excuse, I went outside.

Cake, cake.

Repeating the word ‘cake’ so as to not forget about it, I headed to the forest where Kim Suho was waiting.

Cube’s night was chilly even during summer. It was because Cube was an island in the middle of the East Sea.

Rubbing my shoulders every time the wind blew, I arrived at the meeting spot.

In the middle of the dark forest, Kim Suho was standing with a serious face. His usual gentleness was gone as the air carried a heavy atmosphere.

“Yo, Kim Suho, why’d you call me?”

Hearing my voice, Kim Suho turned around.

He stared at me for a long time with heavy eyes, then let out a deep sigh. It seemed he was about to say something serious.

“...Do you remember what you said to me last time?”

“Huh? Oh yeah, what about it?”

“Just like you said... I recently found a Dungeon.”

I smiled silently. I already expected him to say this.

“It must have been formed recently since it’s small. So I was thinking about challenging it alone.”

“...But it’s still a Dungeon. It’s a big risk to try to conquer it alone.”

I crossed my arms leisurely and interrupted him.  
Kim Suho calmly nodded in response.

“Yeah, I’ve been thinking the same thing...”

Kim Suho suddenly threw down his jacket.

“But if I’m going to trust my back to you, I’ll need to verify your skills.”

He murmured in a low voice as he stared at me.

“...Huh?”

I was taken aback. The situation was turning out a bit differently than I had expected.

“I know the exact location of the Dungeon. So it’s okay if I determine whether you will be a help or a burden, right?”

“...Right. Kuhum.”

My crossed arms began to tremble.

To be honest, even if Kim Suho was blind and left-handed, I wouldn’t be able to defeat him. That was the difference between our skill. Not to mention, Kim Suho was a swordsman, while I was a sharpshooter.

“You’re right, but there’s one thing you haven’t considered.”

“...What’s that”

I racked my brain to try and avoid this fight.

Should I try showing him the power of my Desert Eagle? Even without having to fight, he should be able to see my attack power if I shoot a tree trunk.

“It’s not fair for a sharpshooter and a warrior to fight one-on-one in an open field. Plus, I’m a bit reliant on my weapon. Depending on the type of gun, the difference in my attack power will be like the difference between heaven and earth...”

“You don’t have to beat me.”

However, Kim Suho cut me off.

“And the weapon doesn’t matter. I’m not trying to test your weapon’s power.”

“...Really?”

“Yeah, I’ll stop when I’m satisfied.”

Now I had nothing to say.

Kim Suho took out his sword. It wasn’t a cadet sword, which was made out of steel, but a wooden sword for sparring. However, the quality of a sword didn’t matter for Kim Suho.

The moment his magic power surrounds that sword, my bullets would stop working. Using anti-magic wouldn’t change a thing. Kim Suho’s magic power existed on a higher dimension, and it could even cut ‘anti-magic’.

...A good idea suddenly popped into my head.

“Oh, but I forgot to bring a gun.”

“What’s that on your waist?”

I looked down at my waist. The cadet handgun I usually carried around was in my belt’s holster.

“Oh... I brought it... I forgot...”

Without any other choice, I took the gun out.

“But will it be okay? Unlike a wooden sword, I won’t be able to control my gun’s strength.”

“It’s fine.”

“...Also, this isn’t my real weapon. I’m using this since we’re prohibited from carrying personal weapons in Cube, but...”

I racked my brain as I tried to buy time. I began to look around for something that could trigger my luck.

First, I checked the surrounding terrain.

We were in a forest, the sky was dark and the wind was cool.

Kim Suho’s hair fluttered from the westerly wind, and the jacket he threw down flapped on the ground.

...Wait.

Jacket.

The jacket on the ground.

To be recognized by Kim Suho, the help of my SP and luck was necessary.

“Are you ready?”

Seeing me staring at the ground, Kim Suho spoke up.

“Hold on. Someone sent me a message.”

I wasn't ready yet. I began to operate the laptop on my smartwatch.

...For two minutes, I busily tapped on the holographic keyboard. The result was as follows.

===

[Cadet Jacket]

A jacket created by Cube.

—Trap Transformation

\*When someone steps on this jacket, an unknown force will strongly push the person off.

\*This effect lasts for 10 minutes and will disappear after one activation.

===

[25 SP will be consumed. Would you like to save?]

Perhaps because it was a one-time change that wouldn't deal any damage, I needed less SP than expected. This was undoubtedly worth the investment.

"I'm ready."

I turned the smartwatch off, then took a deep breath.

Saved.

"Then let's start."

"...Yeah."

The man who would become the worlds strongest was standing in front of me. He was only standing, but I felt an immense pressure pressing down on me.

I held my breath in the surging tension. Then, Kim Suho charged towards me. His speed was beyond what I could follow with my naked eyes.

Normally, I would have been incapable of reacting to his movements, but I was able to with Bullet Time.

My sense of time slowed down.

Although Kim Suho was still much quicker than me, I could see his wooden sword clearly.

After ducking and barely avoiding a slash, I glanced away to locate the jacket.

Four steps.

I didn't wish for anything more.  
I just wanted to walk four more steps.

*Whish—*

Kim Suho's wooden sword swung past my eyes. I fired at Kim Suho's foot, which Kim Suho dodged by jumping up lightly. Then, he swung his sword, swirling backward. The wooden sword grazed my shoulder. A burning pain overwhelmed me, but I managed to take two steps.

However, Kim Suho's sword, which just grazed my shoulder, soared up.

My instincts roared.

This attack was going to hit.

I was physically incapable of dodging it. How could someone like me avoid a sword that hurled toward me five times a second?

With no other choice, I used Aether.

Aether shot up from my feet, pushing me to the side. With that, I was only a single step away from the jacket.

Kim Suho seemed surprised that I avoided his consecutive strikes. However, he chased after me without giving me a chance to collect my breath. Charging at me like a drill, he swung his sword at my shoulder.

However, before his sword could hit my body...

He stepped on the jacket.

That was it.

"...!"

Kim Suho's body disappeared from my sight. Without even a scream, he was sent flying.

His center of gravity was pushed forward because of that final strike, and because he was completely caught off guard, Kim Suho couldn't make a proper landing. He fell and rolled on the ground about 50 meters away.

He tried to get up quickly.

However, my bullet struck first on a rock next to Kim Suho's head.

"...In a real fight, that wouldn't have missed."

Though, it would have been blocked by his qi reinforcement anyways.

I trudged up to Kim Suho. He had a soulless, blank face.

When I reached out to lend him a hand, a deep smile emerged on his face.

# Chapter 81

## Teamwork (2)

Under the faint moonlight, Kim Suho was walking alone to his dorm room. As he walked along the dark road, he suddenly burst into laughter.

The fight he just had flashed before his eyes. He was flown away helplessly when he was only an inch away from Kim Hajin. Even now, he was unable to understand what attacked him.

Was it a physical attack or an instantaneous emission of magic power? In either case, a mysterious force had struck him away from the battlefield, and Kim Hajin was able to deal a valid blow.

‘...I thought I was the only one hiding my power.’

Abnormally high strength would undoubtedly attract unwanted suspicion. As such, Kim Suho had only revealed enough of his power to maintain first place rank in Cube. He was hiding his power for himself, and the only reason he maintained first place was for his family.

‘So there was someone else thinking the same thing as me.’

Kim Suho didn't go easy in his fight with Kim Hajin. Still, Kim Hajin managed to avoid his attacks with strange movements. Even now, Kim Suho felt that Kim Hajin's movements were completely mysterious.

It was seemingly mindless and lacking in foundation.

He seemed slow and full of openings, so much so that Kim Suho saw dozens of opportunities to attack. However, his attacks only grazed him or slashed through the air.

Even when he thought it was over, Kim Hajin escaped his range with incomprehensible acrobatics. It seemed like an easy victory at first, but he couldn't close out the fight.

He truly couldn't tell whether Kim Hajin was real or fake.

It was flawlessness masked as weakness.

“...Hm?”

At that moment, Kim Suho heard the sound of a sword cutting through wind. He could even hear a small, clenched shout. The sound was coming from the park near the dorm. Curious, he headed over, whereupon he saw a girl swinging a sword. It was Chae Nayun.

“What are you doing?”

“...Hyak!”

Startled, Chae Nayun threw the sword she was swinging. The sword flew like a baseball bat and struck a dorm window. Thankfully, the window didn't break, but the cadet inside seemed to have woken up as the lights came on.

“Wh, what!”

“Why are you so surprised?”

“...”

Chae Nayun glared at the sudden uninvited guest. Kim Suho smirked and asked.

“Were you doing sword practice?”

“...Just stamina training.”

Chae Nayun unleashed magic power. The sword flew back into her hand following her magic power.

Chae Nayun dusted off the dirt on her sword and pointed it at Kim Suho.

“Where are you coming back from?”

“Me?”

Kim Suho answered honestly.

“I met with Kim Hajin.”

Chae Nayun's eyes widened.

“Kim Hajin?”

“Yep.”

“...What for?”

Chae Nayun asked as she tucked her hair behind her ears, pretending to be unconcerned. Seeing this, Kim Suho had a mischievous thought.

“We were talking about you.”

“Wha, wha, what. Bu, bullshit.”

She reacted rather strongly. Her face flushed all the way to her ears, and her hands and feet couldn't stay still. Kim Suho shook his head while laughing.

“It was a joke. We sparred.”

“...Sparred? You and Kim Hajin?”

“Yeah.”

“Who won? No, you must have won. But why?”

“...You don't need to know that.”

Chae Nayun stared at Kim Suho sourly. Then, she turned around and began to focus on her sword practice again.

*Whish. Whish.*

She swung her sword, but she was putting in too much strength.

Kim Suho stepped in, unable to bear watching it.

“You can't hold a sword like that.”

“...What.”

“If you put that much strength into your grip, you won't be able to cut what you should be able to.”

Kim Suho pulled out a wooden sword and gave a demonstration. He didn't grip his sword tightly. He held it lightly yet firmly enough so that he could change his grip at any moment.

Kim Suho swung his sword as a demonstration, drawing a clear sword wind in the air. The sword wind touched Chae Nayun's hair and scattered.

Chae Nayun's unenthusiastic attitude took an immediate turn. She carefully watched Kim Suho's grip and copied him.

"...Like, like this?"

The lesson she suddenly started with Kim Suho continued until midnight.



When Chae Nayun returned to her dorm room, she immediately made a video call to Hazuki. It was to tell her about the team she decided on.

She made Hazuki the vice-leader and selected an average supporter and sharpshooter in addition.

Two warriors, one support, one sharpshooter, one magician.

As the magician was from the upper ranks of Seoul Magic Academy, it was a well-balanced team. Furthermore, Chae Nayun could act as both a warrior and a sharpshooter, making her team even more flexible. Her team wasn't just decent, it was undoubtedly one of the best.

—Ah... then is Hajin-ssi not joining us?

However, in the holographic video call, Hazuki murmured regretfully.

"Uh, well, I can bring him if I wanted, but then I'd feel bad for Rachel's team. Other than Rachel, everyone on that team is only average."

Conscientiously, Chae Nayun replied with a loud voice.

Just like she said, without Rachel and Kim Hajin, Team Rachel wasn't particularly outstanding. First, their team had three warriors and no supporter, and the magician named Tomer was below average as well.

—But...

"Let's not think about them. I'm going to submit the team list like this, okay?"

—Y-Yes.

Just like that, Team Chae Nayun was confirmed.

Chae Nayun hung up the call and jumped on her bed.

It was time to sleep, but she wasn't sleepy.

Frankly, she was frustrated and annoyed. If she knew this would happen, she would have asked Kim Hajin much earlier. That way, they would have been able to obtain a good score in theory too. Because she kept hesitating, he ended up being taken away by Rachel.

“...Am I going to lose again?”

She could still remember her defeat during the midterm. The result of her duel with Rachel was perhaps a decisive reason she switched to the sword.

Chae Nayun, who was recalling this bad memory under the blanket, suddenly shot up. She simply couldn't fall asleep.

Without a choice, she picked up a helmet lying next to her bed. To relieve stress in this late hour, playing games was the only option.

[Gladiator of the Century]

It was a famous virtual reality game whose competitive scene was frequently on public broadcasts.

Because it helped with image training, it was enjoyed by many Heroes and cadets all over the world. With its popularity, the rank 1 player of each season was naturally at the center of media attention.

[Nayunjajangman]

[98 wins 17 losses]

Her dazzling win rate was something Chae Nayun was very proud of.

“Hm.”

Unranked matches were better than ranked matches for relieving stress.

Chae Nayun rolled her eyes as she searched for an opponent. Soon, she found someone suitable.

The player's nickname was Extra7. He was in platinum league with 43 wins and 43

losses.

It seemed like an easy victory.

[You asked Extra7 for a duel.]

[Extra7 has accepted your duel.]

“Oho, this guy is quite bold.”

Chae Nayun grinned as she focused on virtual reality.

There were no stats or items in this game. Only battle sense and superior control determined victory or defeat.

[Start!]

The duel began. Chae Nayun wanted to take things slow and test the waters. However, the opponent was unexpectedly reckless. Before she could adapt to his sudden attack, her character floated up and was torn apart by a series of consecutive strikes. By the time she knew what happened, her vision had turned red.

“Eh, what? A-Ah!”

She tried to take things more seriously, but her HP was too low.

...In the end, she lost after just three minutes since the start of the duel.

[Defeat]

Chae Nayun stared at this word blankly, then frowned.

“Argh, this sly piece of crap!”



[Victory]

I won again. I was currently playing a game called [Gladiator of the Century]. It was quite realistic, both in terms of graphics and movements, so I've been playing it recently as a way to image train.

“So, it works on this too.”

The number 37 was engraved on the console helmet. It meant Random Consolidation

System was active.

===

[Random Consolidation System]

[Low rank] [Spirit attribute]

...

—Random Consolidation

\*Consolidates the ‘concept’ of the scanned equipment by 1~44%. The consolidation lasts for 24 hours, after which the consolidation percentage will be randomized once again.

...

===

The consolidation of ‘concept’. Using this ability, my game console had become something else. Not only did the console’s functionality and performance increase, the speed of my thoughts and feelings also increased by 37%. It was 37% numerically, but I felt like it was a bigger increase.

“I won seven times in a row.”

Thanks to my new Gift, I ended up defeating a 98-win-17-loss veteran seven times in a row. Of course, it was an unranked match, so it didn’t really impact my ranked stats.

[Nayunjajangman requests a rematch.]

[Nayunjajangman requests a rematch.]

[Nayunjajangman requests a rematch.]

“This kid sure is tenacious... Well too bad for you, I have to sleep now.”

I turned the game off and put the helmet away. Suddenly, I caught sight of Evandel in the corner of my eyes.

“Yummy. So yummy.”

She was asleep when I got home, but she woke up when I started to play Gladiator of the Century, and now she was fully awake and munching on cake.

The huge cake I brought had been reduced by half. Was she allowed to eat that much? I was a bit worried.

After watching Evandel for a bit, I confiscated the cake.

“Ah, aan! W-What ish it!”

“...Let’s save the rest of it for later.”

“Why, why!?”

“It’s not good for your health.”

Evandel hopped up to try and grab the cake. However, I was coldhearted. I put the cake away on the topmost shelf in the fridge.

Realizing that it was away from her reach, Evandel placed her hands by her waist and frowned. It was almost as if she was disgruntled with the whole world.

“I want more! I want more!”

She even learned to complain...

I placed my index finger over my mouth.

“Shh. You should only eat a little snack after meals. Also, you can’t be loud at night.”

“...”

Although she quieted down at my warning, her tiny hands were trembling. Without any other choice, I held up Evandel.

“Tomorrow, you can eat the rest of it tomorrow, okay? I’ll buy even more delicious food tomorrow.”

“...Really?”

“Of course. Have you seen me not keep a promise?”

When I stroked her head, she finally seemed to have been appeased.

Not long afterward, Evandel fell asleep, and I placed her on my bed.

When I checked my smartwatch afterward, I noticed that Kim Suho had sent me a message two hours ago.

[Second week of August, Friday. Let’s meet then.]

“...Whew.”

===

[Cadet Jacket]

A jacket created by Cube.

—Trap Transformation

\*When someone steps on this jacket, an unknown force will strongly push the person off.

\*This effect lasts for 10 minutes and will disappear after one activation.

===

It seemed he recognized my skill. It was all thanks to the cadet jacket I modified. Kim Suho didn't seem to suspect anything either. Of course, it was his jacket, so there was no reason for him to suspect it.

Moreover, it was an 'unknown force' that pushed him. Kim Suho would never figure out what had done him in.



Wednesday.

It was the first class since the team formation, a combat training called 'Dungeon Investigation'.

Normally, when Heroes find a Dungeon, they would dispatch an advance party first in order to get a rough idea of what's inside the Dungeon. In this combat training, cadets would act as this advance party.

“Ah, it's so cold.”

“Auuu, aren't you cold, Hajin?”

My team was currently inside a Dungeon that was covered in ice. The five of us shivered in the cold as we walked onward.

After about 20 minutes, the road suddenly forked into five branches.

“It's here.”

Tomer suddenly pointed at the rightmost path. I opened my eyes wide and stared at the direction Tomer pointed. As expected, there was a trap there.

“No, that’s the wrong place.”

“What? No, it isn’t.”

Tomer was purposely leading us into a trap. I didn’t think there was a Djinn waiting to ambush us, but she must have set some sort of a life-threatening trap.

“In a Dungeon Investigation, it’s common sense to listen to your sharpshooter.”

“..”

Tomer stared at Rachel. Too bad for her, Rachel was also on my side.

“Let’s go as Hajin-ssi says.”

“...Don’t regret it later.”

Tomer was a sore loser.

“There’s a yeti up ahead.”

A yeti was sleeping in the pathway I chose.

The Dungeon’s first monster, yeti.

We advanced forward, keeping our guard up.

After that, Tomer continued to try to lead us, especially Rachel, into a trap. However, I was always there to prevent her.

“Guys, I think it’s this way, for real this time. If you see the traces of ice around there...”

“No, it’s not.”

“No, trust me just this once. Rachel-ssi, come with me. Wouldn’t it be more efficient to split into two groups?”

“No, we can’t.”

I had to commend her for her constant effort, but that didn’t mean I could let her do as she pleased. I grabbed Rachel by her wrist, and she followed me silently.

As time passed, Tomer's expression grew more and more irritated.

"Um..."

My Thousand-Mile Eyes found the shortest path in this maze-like Ice Dungeon. There were no obstructions and no difficulties.

By the time we caught a glimpse of the instructor waiting at the exit, Rachel spoke uncomfortably.

"Um... Hajin-ssi."

"Yes?"

"This..."

Rachel glanced at her wrist. I was holding onto her, thinking Tomer might take her away.

"Oh right, sorry."

"No, you don't need to be..."

"Team Rachel!"

The instructor spotted us and shouted in a thunderous voice. We hurriedly ran up and stood in front of him.

"Your findings?"

"Yes. A yeti, snowbeast, white calamity, white drake..."

Rachel recited the result of the investigation. The instructor listened quietly and compared the findings with a list. Then, a faint smile appeared on his face.

"Based on the rank of the monsters distributed in the Dungeon, the Dungeon's boss is likely to be at least intermediate rank grade 3."

"Good. Team Rachel, perfect score."

Rachel's face turned bright. It was the same with the other team members. They clenched their fists and deliberated on the words 'perfect score'.

"...Dammit."

Meanwhile, Tomer kicked a rock with an irritated expression of her face.

# Chapter 82

## Teamwork (3)

“Ehew.”

After returning to the magicians’ dorm, Tomer let out a deep sigh.

[Tomer, why is the mission being delayed? Are there other variables?]

Her boss sent her a grumpy message.

Tomer’s mission was to injure or weaken Rachel. She only had to make Rachel take a break from her usual daily life for a bit.

With the cooperation from Djinn’s acting as spies in Cube’s executives, she thought she could quickly take care of this mission and go back, but there was a constant heckler obstructing her.

“Do I have to take care of him first...?”

Nowadays, she felt sour just seeing Kim Hajin’s face. Every time she tried to do something, he seemingly appeared out of nowhere and foiled her plans. Whether it was before class, during class, or after class, Kim Hajin refused to leave Rachel’s side.

“Tsk, can’t he know his place?”

Tomer simply couldn’t understand how a rank 334 cadet had the gall to act so straightforward. She already investigated his background, and he didn’t even have parents, much less a proper backing. Did he really believe that he could win a beauty’s heart just with courage?

“...Wait.”

A flash of insight sparked in Tomer’s head.

Kim Hajin had strong feelings for Rachel. Tomer was sure of it. However, although she didn’t openly show it, Rachel was undoubtedly uncomfortable with his advances.

He was trying to make a move one-sidedly.

There were many ways to spread malicious rumors. You could bad-mouth someone behind their back, or you could exaggerate rumors that were already present.

But for now, there was no need for such complicated schemes.

She just had to say things as she saw them, albeit exaggerating things a little.

To do that... she would have to first get close to Kim Hajin and Rachel... no, to the entire team.

Tomer messaged her boss.

[Is the mission really just to separate this girl?]

[That's right. Afterward, the agent we dispatched will take care of the rest.]

'Good, it's time for a change of plans.' Tomer laughed maniacally.

It was then.

Her smartwatch vibrated. The especially intense vibration signaled that it was from Violet Banquet. Tomer quickly turned on her smartwatch.

[Truth Agency]

[We have accepted Jamie Jamer-ssi's request.]

"They're replying now?"

She had forgotten about Truth Agency because it was 2~3 weeks ago that she put in a request. She had assumed they were unreliable since they didn't answer.

Did they just have too many clients?

In any case, she was satisfied.

As long as she could find out where that bastard was, she was happy to wait.



"Next week, each team will select a small-scale Dungeon and do a presentation on the best way to conquer it."

Friday's theory class – 'Phenomenon Realm Analysis II'.

Just before the class ended, the professor gave the cadets their team assignments. Cadets immediately broke out into groans. However, Jin Hoseung and Yi Bokgyu, who were sitting in front of me, didn't seem all that worried. They turned around, looking

at me happily.

“We believe in you, Hajin.”

It wasn't just them.

Other cadets were also looking this way with envious eyes.

“Have a good weekend.”

With that, the professor left the classroom. Members of Team Rachel, including myself, got up.

“Guys, there's a team leader meeting next Wednesday. Don't forget to come to the auditorium if you're a team leader.”

At that moment, the class president, Yi Yeonghan, loudly shouted. I looked at Rachel, who was putting her writing utensils away, and our eyes met.

I spoke.

“For today, let's go to the café and just divide up the work.”

“Alright.”

This wasn't Rachel's voice. I turned my gaze to the side. It was Tomer.

“Let's go to the café.”

Tomer had a very bright face.

“...What's up with you?”

“What do you mean? Everyone, Rachel-ssi, let's go. We don't have time.”

Tomer stepped in and began to urge other team members. I stared at her with a daze. What was she scheming this time? Did she have a nuclear bomb set up at the café?

...10 minutes later.

We arrived at the café.

I tried peering through the roof and ground, but I couldn't find any traps in the café.

Although I was still suspicious, I started dividing up the work among others.

“Hoseung and Bokgyu can look up the data on the Dungeon. Jamer and Rachel-ssi can calculate the mana density.”

That was the result of our 30-minute discussion.

They would send their results to me, then I would assemble everything together into a presentable PowerPoint.

“That sounds good.”

“I agree.”

The team members agreed with a bright face.

When I was about to grab my bag and leave, Rachel suddenly grabbed my sleeve.

“Um, Hajin-ssi.”

“Yes?”

“Didn’t the English Royal Court contact you?”

“Eh?... Um, what contact?”

At that moment, Rachel slightly furrowed her brows.

“Um, the English Royal Court guild...”

“?”

I tilted my head. Although I didn’t remember something like that, I checked my email just in case. There were 1097 unread emails. I tried searching for the phrase ‘royal court’.

I found one email.

“Ah, they emailed me. Sorry, I don’t check my email that often.”

“They... emailed you?”

I didn't know why, but Rachel seemed to be a bit angry as her lips stuck out in a pout.

"Try reading it when you go home."

"I'll just read it now."

I clicked on the email. Just like Rachel said, the English Royal Court guild had contacted me. It was written in Korean, so I had no trouble reading it.

A 100 million won salary with additional benefits.

It wasn't a particularly good condition for a pre-contract.

"Can I take a look?"

"Sure."

Rachel peeked her head in and checked the content of the email. Her eyes moved around busily, then she frowned strongly.

"What kind of a contract is... nevermind, don't read this."

Rachel stood up, fuming. Then, she hurriedly rushed out of the café. She had the angriest face I've seen since I entered Cube.

"...What, why is she so mad?"

The rest of the team members watched her leave in a daze.



Sunday night, a time I set out for the sake of my sanity.

I was currently focused on playing a game.

[Victory]

I won once again.

[Nim][1]

[Yes?]

[How did you do that combo just now?]

The loser, Nayunjajangman, messaged me.

We became friends since we played on Wednesday. Because we were logged on around the same time, we've been playing against each other often. Thankfully, Random Consolidation System gave me numbers like 37, 40, 39, so I haven't lost a single game.

[You must stay calm.]

[How are you so good? Are you an active Hero??]

[No, not at all.]

Strengthening of concept. It increased understanding of what combo to use and what combo was most efficient, boosting even the sense of time and movement within the game. Although my skills would vary depending on what number I rolled, I was undoubtedly worthy to be called an expert.

[By the way, why is your ranked match stats 43 wins and 43 losses?? Did you lose on purpose?]

[Yes, because I didn't want to be someone who was intensely attached to mere numbers.]

I lied without even batting an eye.

[Ah... I see. You're amazing. I can't sleep properly if I lose a ranked match. Do you log on around this time every day?]

[Yes.]

[Can I ask you to teach me a move or two around this time?]

I couldn't help but smile. He was surprisingly polite.

[Gladly. But I'll be going offline now. I must go work out.]

[Oh! ㄹㄹ I was about to go work out too ㄹㄹ Jinx!]

I didn't reply to him and just put my helmet down.

I carefully opened the door so as to not awake Evandel.

Then, I headed to the Fitness Center.

After about five minutes of walking, I arrived.

When I came out of the changing room in my sportswear, I ran into Chae Nayun who was also entering the Fitness Center.

“What, you’re here to work out too?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah.”

“...Alright, work hard.”

Chae Nayun walked past me into the girl’s changing room. I then headed to the treadmill without much thought. Suddenly, a thought flashed through my head.

Nayunjajangman.

Nayun. Chae Nayun.

“Mm... no way, right?”

It was unlikely. In the first place, Chae Nayun didn’t like jajangmyeon[2] that much. There was no reason she would use it as her ID. Not to mention, Nayunjajangman spoke like a man.

*Beep—*

I set the treadmill speed to 20km. I wouldn’t have even imagined it in the past, but now it wasn’t so difficult.

For the next 30 minutes, I ran on the treadmill. By the time I got off, I was soaked with my own sweat.

“Huu...”

I took out a sports drink from the fridge.

Chae Nayun, who just got out of the gravitation room, slowly came up next to me.

“Hey.”

I stared at Chae Nayun silently. She fidgeted around, trying to buy time.

“What? Say something.”

“...You see, my team got the Hongcheon Mantis Dungeon.”

It seemed Chae Nayun was worried about her team challenge. A Mantis Dungeon... She ended up taking an insect Dungeon, which was one of the trickiest out of all Dungeons.

“Do, do you know anything about it?”

“...How did you choose the most difficult one?”

“I know right? The annoying magician in my team kept telling me to choose it.”

The magician in Chae Nayun’s team was Oh Junsik. He was recorded in my settings book. Although he was skilled, he was a bit of an ass. Because his aunt was a 7-star magician, he probably wouldn’t bend down to Chae Nayun either.

“He probably thought that he could get bonus points with a difficult assignment. But he’s probably going to be sloppy in his presentation. He’s going to stutter and make you facepalm.”

“I know, I was willing to overlook it, but now... Ehew, I’ve never met someone who is more headstrong than me.”

At least she knew she was headstrong.

“If possible, let someone else do the presentation. Unexpectedly, Hazuki seems to be a good choice.”

“I want to, but I doubt that bastard will agree... Kuhum.”

Suddenly, the atmosphere turned awkward. We both distanced ourselves as though we remembered our relationship. After all, we weren’t friends who could chat so amicably.

“...H-Have fun exercising. I’m going back to the gravitation room.”

“Uh, yeah, I’ll go lift some weights.”



August 12th, Tuesday, dusk.

In an empty park, a sharp sword swinging sound resonated through the area.

“Hey, didn’t I get better?”

Chae Nayun, who was just wielding a sword, asked with a bright face. Kim Suho nodded with a laugh.

“Yeah, you stopped closing your eyes.”

Only seven days had passed since Kim Suho started acting as Chae Nayun’s teacher. Chae Nayun was certainly growing at an incredible pace. Her biggest achievement was that she stopped fearing close ranged attacks to a certain extent.

“I think playing that game really helped me.”

“Game?”

Kim Suho asked as he tilted his head.

“Yeah, I met someone who’s even better than you. A super expert who only does close ranged combat.”

“Ah~ Gladiator of the Century? But you don’t move your body in that game.”

Gladiator of the Century used brainwaves and iris-movements as control. Of course, you could play it with a keyboard and a mouse, but that would significantly slow down your reaction time.

“Yeah, but an ordinary person would never be able to do what he does. He’s my mentor!”

“Oh, he must really be an expert then.”

Chae Nayun’s mentor. It meant that the prideful Chae Nayun had acknowledged him to be superior.

“Yeah, he has a great personality too. He apparently matches his win-loss ratio because he doesn’t want to be intensely attached to mere numbers. Isn’t that cool?”

Most people played ranked matches to win, resulting in a rather boring match. Each side would first test out the waters with small maneuvers, and the outcome of the battle would end up being determined by which side dealt more effective blows. It was kind of like a boxing match, except that it was rare for one side to be KO’ed.

However, Extra7 was different. He charged at you directly and almost recklessly. Each of his movements were potentially lethal, helping Chae Nayun get over her fear of close ranged combat.

“If he’s that good, he must be an active Hero, right?”

“No, I asked him, and he said... Eh?”

It was then.

A man appeared in the distance wearing flip-flops.

It was Kim Hajin.

“Oh look, Kim Hajin’s here.”

This didn’t surprise Chae Nayun. Kim Suho had already told her that Kim Hajin was coming to talk to him and that he could only teach her until Kim Hajin came.

“Hm? Oh, you’re right. Then I’ll be going now.”

Kim Suho got up.

“Yeah, take care.”

“Don’t overwork yourself either, okay?”

Chae Nayun watched Kim Suho walking up to Kim Hajin.

It felt like they had gotten close recently. But how?

‘Now that I think about it, Kim Suho jokingly said they talked about me. Was it because of me...?’

Kim Suho and Kim Hajin walked off, chatting together. Chae Nayun strained her ears.

—How's your condition?

This was Kim Hajin's voice.

—Pretty good.

That was Kim Suho's.

—Don't overwork yourself. Friday's right around the corner.

—Of course.

—Oh, and how's Chae Nayun?

At that moment, Chae Nayun's heart dropped a beat.

This was the most important part, but they were now too far for her to listen in.

"...The heck."

Chae Nayun stared at them with a complex mix of emotions in her eyes.

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1. "nim" is the respectful way of addressing people online.

2. Jajangmyeon is Korean black bean noodles. Personally, one of my favorite dishes.

# Chapter 83

## Scout (1)

I came to a rice soup restaurant[1]. Cube had all sorts of restaurants, but this place, Grandma's Home Flavor, was the only rice soup restaurant that ran 24/7.

“...”

Seeing Kim Suho eating a bowl of rice soup, I became lost in thought.

Kim Suho's current power was at least at the level of an intermediate rank Hero. This world still had many hidden pieces that I set up left undiscovered.

Among these, there were some that would fall into antagonists' hands. Items like the 'Lucifer's Feather' and the 'Snaketooth of Beginning' were things that I wouldn't dare to try to obtain, but with Kim Suho's assistance, I might be able to stop them from falling into antagonists' hands.

...Thinking about it this way, Kim Suho suddenly became a lot more attractive.

I stared fixedly at Kim Suho. He looked like a main character no matter how I looked at him. The rice soup must be delicious as he didn't notice that a grain of rice was stuck next to his mouth.

“You have a grain of rice stuck there.”

I took out a few sheets of tissues and took off the grain of rice.

“Ah, thanks.”

Kim Suho spoke with a thin smile.

“By the way, are you going to do the powerpoint presentation for your class?”

“Yep.”

“Aren't you nervous? I would be.”

“I’ll eat a serenity pill before it, don’t worry.”[2]

I learned long ago that it was foolish to be obstinate about eating medicine. Although I quit college to focus on writing, I still attended until I was a sophomore. I’ve been in 4~5 group projects as well, so I was fairly experienced with presentations.

I also planned on investing some SP into the serenity pill, not necessarily for me, but for Rachel and my other teammates, who had high expectations of me.

If I also add an increased eloquence and persuasiveness effect on the hornflute, it should be a breeze to ace the presentation.

I asked Kim Suho.

“Anyways, the Dungeon is near Suwon, right?”

“Yeah, we should be careful.”

Suwon was the most dangerous area of the three capital areas: Seoul, Suwon, and Incheon. During Outcall, Suwon went through a bizarre terraforming, turning more than half of the region into a horrifying mountain zone.

Because of this, the west side of Suwon was completely off-limits to the public. Kamak Mountain, which was our destination, was just at the border of this restricted zone.

It was then.

The restaurant’s door opened, and someone clad entirely in black walked in. A big hat, a black mask, and a long, full-body coat. This person could easily be mistaken for a criminal.

“Um, I just called...”

The woman clad in black notified the staff in a soft voice. She then glanced at Kim Suho and me, who were the only other customers in the restaurant. Immediately, her shoulders trembled violently.

“Ah yes, wait just one moment.”

The staff went into the kitchen. I smirked and turned to the woman. She was frozen like a statue.

“Oh, who’s this?”

I suddenly remembered. Along with hamburgers, rice soup was one of her favorite dishes.

“Yo, Yoo Yeonha.”

“...”

She was desperately pretending to not have heard my crystal-clear exclamation. Seeing that she wasn’t running away, she must still want the rice soup she ordered. I got up and approached her.

“Since you’re here, why don’t you join us?”

“Y-Yes? Who, who might you be? I don’t know anyone like you...”

She was desperately trying to sound different, but it was too obvious.

“Eh? Yoo Yeonha? You’re Yoo Yeonha?”

Kim Suho also responded. Then, Yoo Yeonha’s eyes began to tear up under her big hat.

“N-No, no, I’m not. I don’t know anyone by that name...”

“Here you go.”

The staff then came out and handed her a packaged rice soup. Yoo Yeonha quickly snatched it out of her hands before running off.

“A-Ah, wait! You need to pay for that!”

The staff shouted at her, but Yoo Yeonha disappeared like the wind. Then, the staff’s gaze slowly turned towards me.

Without any other choice, I took out my card.

“I’ll pay for it.”

“Yes, thank you~”

For the record, for the next three days...  
Yoo Yeonha couldn't even meet my eyes.



Friday, the day of Phenomenon Realm Analysis team challenge presentation.

Currently, Chae Nayun was in a terrible mood.

Her team had been the first team to present. The result was a disaster, even by Chae Nayun's standards.

Just like Kim Hajin said, Oh Junsik insisted on doing the presentation, stuttering throughout and messing up the entire powerpoint.

"...Ah, I was too nervous. Sorry, I'll be better next time."

That was what he said afterwards. Chae Nayun wanted to smack his head, but she held herself back since class was still going on.

"Next team."

Next up was Team Rachel. A man sitting in front of Chae Nayun got up. It was Kim Hajin.

Wearing a pair of round glasses, he got up on the podium.

"Hello, I am from Team 3. Our Dungeon was the Walsin Dungeon. This Dungeon existed on the foot of Gangwondo Snow Mountain, but because the guild in charge of it, the Desolate Moon guild, hasn't released any information on the result..."

Kim Hajin's presentation was smooth. His voice was soft, and he didn't seem nervous. He first introduced the information gathered by his team, and then estimated the Dungeon's internal structure using calculations. He even had a cross-sectional map prepared.

Chae Nayun stared at Kim Hajin's presentation in a daze, her chin sitting on her hand. His voice was slightly different, and a sense of ease was carried in his occasional smiles. Together with his round glasses, it was as if he was giving the class a lecture. A smart guy was surprisingly cool.

"Wait, I have a question."

“Yes.”

“How can you estimate the counterflow of magic power with such a small amount of data?”

At that moment, the professor interrupted him and asked a question.

“Ah, about that, if you look at the calculations here...”

However, Kim Hajin answered the professor just as smoothly as he always had. Seeing this intellectual side of him, Chae Nayun fell into a trance. With Kim Hajin’s answer, the professor backed down with a satisfied smile, and the presentation soon concluded.

“That’s it for our team’s presentation.”

Kim Hajin finished his presentation as he pushed his glasses up. Afterwards, he returned to his seat, which was next to Rachel’s. Chae Nayun stared at Rachel half in regret, half in envy. Rachel and Kim Hajin smiled and gave each other a high-five.



After the class ended, I was returning to the dorms with Rachel. Tomer and other team members strongly asked for a celebratory afterparty, but Rachel and I didn’t participate. I had another appointment, and Rachel just had a reserved personality.

We walked together talking about today’s team challenge. About how Chae Nayun’s team bombed the presentation, about how Shin Jonghak made his presentation so intimidating...

“...Oh right, here.”

When we reached the crossroad to Dorm 1 and Dorm 2, Rachel handed me a piece of paper.

“What’s this?”

“Are you perhaps interested in the English Royal Court guild?”

“...Yes?”

Before I could give a proper answer, Rachel continued speaking.

“In truth, I asked the Royal Court guild to contact Hajin-ssi, but it seems they assumed things on their own by looking at Hajin-ssi’s rank.”

Hearing that, I looked at the paper she gave me. It was a contract. Indeed, it had better conditions than the one I saw in the email. If I was still on Earth, I never would have imagined such a treatment.

“...Please consider it.”

Rachel gave a light bow, then turned and walked to the right.  
I watched her leave quietly.



After playing with Evandel for about 30 minutes, I headed to a bus stop near Suwon Station, where I promised to meet Kim Suho.

Kim Suho had arrived long ago and was waiting for me.

“Hey Hajin, your presentation was amazing.”

Kim Suho was wearing light clothing. He was currently low on money, so I volunteered to take care of food and equipment.

“Everyone was full of praises for you.”

“Oh yeah? Well more importantly, which way should we be going?”

“Follow me.”

Kim Suho took the lead, and I followed.

Not long afterwards, we arrived at Kamak Mountain.

We then hiked deep into the mountain. Because powerful beast-type monsters lived in Kamak Mountain, we were both on the lookout to avoid them.

“It’s here.”

Finally, we arrived at a dead end. Kim Suho pointed at the wall in front of us, which was covered in moss and vines.

“...So this is why it hasn’t been discovered until now.”

Even if you knew it was there, it would have been hard to find it. Not only was it covered in all sorts of vegetation, the entrance was narrow. At first glance, it only looked like a tiny gap.

“Once we go in, it won’t be easy to escape. Are you prepared?”

“Of course.”

I took out the Desert Eagle from my pocket.

“This is pretty strong.”

I even prepared a light bullet just in case. Swordsman of Destruction should be a high-intermediate rank monster. The difference between intermediate rank and high-intermediate rank was immense. Even this light bullet, which cost 70 SP to make, would likely only distract it for a moment. However, a moment of distraction was enough. Kim Suho would take care of the rest.

“Then let’s go in.”

Kim Suho and I jumped into the narrow gap. The gap widened as we walked, eventually becoming big enough to be a tunnel.

The inside of the Dungeon was covered by dense darkness. Instead of turning on a flashlight, I grabbed Kim Suho’s hand and guided him. Shining light unnecessarily could provoke spirit monsters.

“It’s kinda creepy.”

“Tell me about it... Hold on.”

I suddenly stopped and widened my eyes.

There was another pathway on the other side. If we started from the right side, it meant there was another entrance from the left. Was it like this in the original story? No, I didn't think so.

Two people were walking forward from the pathway.

—Where is this?

—A hidden stage I'm guessing?

I couldn't tell who they were from their faces, but considering the feeling I got from them and the tattoos on their faces, they didn't look like kind people.

“...Wait, stay quiet for a moment.”

I quickly checked my laptop using my smartwatch.

There was an alert, just as I expected.

[Criticism – Kamak Mountain Dungeon, which Kim Suho conquers, is too small considering its reward.]

[Solution – Made Kamak Mountain Dungeon a hidden stage in Suwon Devil's Nest.]

In other words, Suwon Devil's Nest became connected to Kamak Mountain Dungeon. Coincidentally, today was August 14th, the day Packhorse Master would conquer Suwon Devil's Nest. In that case, those two guys should be Djinnns from Packhorse Master.

“Why?”

Kim Suho whispered.

I clenched my teeth. Packhorse Master's Djinnns were fairly powerful Djinnns. They were disguised as Heroes, being at least intermediate rank in power. Even Kim Suho would have trouble dealing with them.

“There are other people in here.”

“...Damn.”

For now, I closely watched their movements as I eavesdropped on their conversation.

—Let's go back first. Rather than arguing with the rest about what we got out of the

hidden stage, it'll be better to conquer it together.

—...Yeah, you're right.

Thankfully, they went back after confirming the hidden stage's location.

“Let's finish this fast.”

I concentrated magic power on my Thousand-Mile Eyes. In an instant, my vision expanded, and the Dungeon's internal structure entered my sight.

The Swordsman of Destruction's location...

Straight, then two turns to the right. The Swordsman of Destruction was sleeping inside the boss room.



[Suwon Devil's Nest]

A medium-scale Dungeon located in the valley of Suwon Mountain Range. By the time this Dungeon was close to being completely conquered, the owner of Chameleon Troupe's seat of Blue, an African-American man named Khalifa, looked around at the members of Packhorse Master. He had infiltrated the Packhorse Master guild.

Seven of the nine members who participated in the Dungeon raid was sitting on the ground, collecting their breaths.

“James, Johong, did you find something?”

The guild master contacted the group's two scouts with a communication device.

—Yes, we discovered a hidden path. It seems to be a hidden stage.

“Oh, is that so?”

Khalifa quietly listened in on their conversation.

—We're currently on our way back. We can conquer it together.

“No, we'll go there. You guys can continue your investigation.”

—Yes, understood.

“You hear that guys? It’s time to get up!”

They were currently missing two men.

In that case, now was the best time.

Khalifa tapped his ears, transmitting a signal. Then, he unleashed his magic power in the shape of a door.

Phase Shift. It was an ability that connected one space to another, so long as it was not too far apart. Naturally, this was part of Khalifa’s Gift.

“Cullen, what are you doing? Who told you to open a Portal?”

Although it had a few differences from a Portal, because it looked like one, almost everyone mistook it for an artificial Portal. Khalifa didn’t go through the trouble to correct them.

“...Cullen, close the Portal.”

“ .. ”

Khalifa silently put on a pair of sunglasses.

“CULLEN!”

Annoyed by the guild master’s loud shouting, he even put on earplugs.

“You son of a bitch...”

Enraged, the guild master walked up to the Portal.

It was then.

A black blade shot out from the Portal.

The blade cleanly severed him in two. Without even having to ask, the guild master was dead. Immediately, the guild master scattered into black dust.

...A thick silence descended.

The group’s leader had been killed by a single blow. Other Djinns simply stared into the Portal. They couldn’t bring themselves to move or even speak.

Soon, a woman walked out of the Portal.

She had an average height, but a beautiful appearance. When the Djinn met her eyes, their consciousness was sucked into a deep abyss.

One, two, three, four... six Djinn collapsed like lifeless dolls.

“We’ll have to keep one for the sake of stock price.”

Boss stared at Khalifa, murmuring in a cold voice. Khalifa grinned, then spoke.

“You’re right. Now then, should we go find the hidden stage?”

“You wait here.”

“...Yes?”

Khalifa tilted his head. Boss retorted briefly.

“The two people inside the hidden stage are candidates.”

“...Aha.”

Candidates. They referred to individuals selected by Boss and the members of the Chameleon Troupe to have the qualification of becoming Chameleon Troupe’s new color.

“Is it a... test?”

Boss liquified her body without answering Khalifa. In an instant, her body turned into a black liquid and stuck to the ground. In that state, she moved quickly.

---

1. A rice soup is a more homely restaurant that feels more like you’re eating at home. The food served is also less restaurant-ish and feels more like home. See “gukbap” on Wikipedia for more info on different types of rice soups.

2. Serenity pill: a traditional Asian medicine that is said to calm one’s mind.

# Chapter 84

## Scout (2)

The path to the boss room was wrought with monsters. I didn't plan on letting Kim Suho take care of them. Since they were at the level that I could kill with my gun, I wanted to kill them and pretend that I helped.

Currently, there were six ghouls in front of me. They were low-intermediate rank grade 9 undead monsters.

I tightly gripped the Desert Eagle. Even in the pitch black darkness, its platinum exterior shone brightly. I aimed at the ghouls' swollen right eyes, where their tiny brains were located.

I pulled the trigger without hesitation. Six bullets shot out simultaneously, piercing the ghouls' vital point. A blue light seemed to flash, then the ghouls collapsed.

"Oh, as expected..."

Kim Suho exclaimed in awe. However, I didn't have time to feel happy. I operated in the principle of Strong Against Weak, Weak Against Strong. Although I could slaughter an army of weaklings, I wouldn't stand a chance against a single expert. No, I would have to run away from someone even slightly above me.

"Let's hurry, we don't have time."

We ran through the cave. Monsters were around every corner, but because they were weak, it was easy to take care of them.

After running for about ten minutes taking care of ghouls, zombies, and ghosts, we arrived in front of a giant stone wall.

At first glance, it seemed like a dead end, but strange symbols were written on the wall.

These symbols were an ancient language that only existed in Dungeons. Thanks to modern technology, an ancient language of this level could be translated using a smartwatch. That's what Kim Suho did in the original story as well.

I took out my smartwatch and scanned the symbols on the wall.

- ‘This’ and ‘That’ always accompanies each other.
- Observed from a close distance, ‘This’ and ‘That’ feels simultaneous.
- But from afar, ‘This’ comes before ‘That’.
- What is ‘This’?

Kim Suho glanced at my smartwatch and saw the riddle.

“...Ah, it must be a riddle. I heard there are Dungeons like this.”

In the original story, Kim Suho was unable to solve this riddle and had to text Yoo Yeonha for help. Yoo Yeonha contacted an information guild and got the answer in five minutes.

However, I didn’t have time to wait.

This riddle was something I half-heartedly made. The answer was lightning. ‘This’ was lightning, and ‘That’ was thunder.

Although lightning accompanies thunder, light traveled faster than sound, making lightning visible before hearing thunder.

“Lightning.”

I muttered the answer, and the stone wall reacted. The symbols on the wall glowed with a blue light, then disappeared into particles of light. Immediately afterwards, the stone wall rumbled and sunk underground.

“What, the answer is lightning?”

“Yeah.”

“How did you figure that out so fast?... Wow, you really are a genius.”

Kim Suho was looking at me like I was some kind of a sage.

“I’ll tell you how I found out later. For now, let’s clear the Dungeon before anyone else arrives.”

I pushed Kim Suho into the boss room.



“ ... ”

Boss stared blankly at Kim Hajin walking into the boss room.

To be completely honest, she was in awe. Decisiveness, drive, boldness, and even intelligence. Although it was a mere hidden stage, he had come this far in just 10 minutes. That was something ordinary people couldn't do.

“Truly extraordinary...”

She blurted out subconsciously. She had heard the same words from her master, the previous boss of the Chameleon Troupe, who no longer existed in this world. She suddenly wondered, ‘what did Master see in me to say that...?’

She let out a deep sigh.

With what happened today, she became certain. Kim Hajin was someone who she wanted by her side.

But before that could become reality, he had to meet a few conditions. The most important condition was whether he could kill a human being without hesitation.

—Argh, it's a maze. Why is a hidden stage so complicated?

—Quiet.

Boss looked far behind her. Two Djinns from Packhorse Master were wandering around.

Kim Hajin didn't know they were Djinns.

Since that was the case... she decided to make use of them.



In the middle of an empty cave lied a throne made of stone. Sitting on this throne was the Swordsman of Destruction, staring down at us. He was completely covered in black armor. His eyes oozed with boredom, as though he only just woke up from his sleep.

However, in the next instant, the swordsman's eyes burned blue. He met Kim Suho's eyes and made a small smile.

It seemed it was true that the strong could recognize each other.

—...What an interesting kid.

A chilling sound resounded. Kim Suho's face was frozen in nervousness. A monster capable of speaking human language signified that it wasn't ordinary. Even in reality, monsters high-intermediate rank and above had intelligence on par with humans. Though of course, talking was still limited to humanoid monsters.

“ ... ”

Kim Suho quietly took out his sword. I felt like I understood what he was thinking. After all, I had written it myself.

「He emitted extraordinary hostility and spirit. I became certain that he was at least high-intermediate rank. At the same time, I began to worry. Would I be able to defeat him? Soon, I even began to feel afraid.

However, when the Swordsman of Destruction pulled out his sword, an unknown sense of confidence surged within me.

My Gift was Sword Saint. I was someone who would stand on the peak of swordsmanship.

Against a swordsman opponent, there should be no reason for me to lose... 』

“There should be no reason for you to lose.”

I emphasized his last thought.  
Startled, Kim Suho stared at me.

“His real body is his sword.”

“...Sword?”

Kim Suho stared at the swordsman's sword. Crimson sword qi waved around his black blade.

“The voice just now came from that sword. That body should just be a corpse.”

In the original story, Kim Suho figured this out while exchanging blows with the Swordsman of Destruction. However, I couldn't wait for him to realize this on his own in a situation where intruders could arrive at any time.

The Swordsman of Destruction slowly raised his sword.

His blade vibrated, letting out a stiff voice.

—Come. It's been a while since I last obtained a body.

Kim Suho stepped up. I also took out my gun.

“You don't need to attack his body. Just hit the sword. I'll support you from the back.”

“...I trust you.”

Now, it was Kim Suho's turn. The sword he had in his hand should be a high rank sword which he even took out loans to buy. The magic power of a Sword Saint rose up clearly from this high-class sword.

The Swordsman of Destruction made the first move, rashly rushing in and striking down with his sword. Kim Suho raised his sword and blocked him.

*KWANG!*

The two swords clashed. The Swordsman of Destruction pulled his sword back and repeatedly struck down. It was as if he wanted to break Kim Suho's sword.

However, not even a single scratch appeared on Kim Suho's sword. Normally, it would have already been destroyed multiple times by the Swordsman of Destruction's strength and the density of his magic power. However, a Sword Saint's magic power couldn't fall to a mere metal.

Watching them fight, I slowly raised my gun.

I couldn't use a shotgun as it might injure Kim Suho.

Using a sniper rifle in this close range would lower the accuracy.

Without a choice, I selected the handgun.

*Clang. Kwang. Koong. Kwaaaang!*

Under the thunderous noise, I aimed my gun at the swordsman's shoulder. Then, at the instant that his sword clashed with Kim Suho's, I fired.

*Shuuuuu—*

The light bullet shot forward, leaving a white trail behind it, then digging into the swordsman's rotten body.

For a fraction of a second, he stopped moving.

Immediately, Kim Suho began to counterattack.

He unleashed the magic power of a Sword Saint. His clear magic power rose up like a tornado, and his sword shone with a golden light.

Next, he unleashed his own sword technique.

A powerful strike that shot up like lightning, consecutive strikes that could seemingly sever rivers... the Swordsman of Destruction held up his sword to block them. However, each time the swords clashed, a crack appeared on the swordsman's sword. Because of the bullet in his shoulder, his movement had also slowed down.

Kim Suho followed my advice and only attacked his sword.

It was the right method of defeating it.

The swordsman didn't last long. Although Kim Suho was striking the sword, the swordsman's body began to crumble.

"Huaaap!"

Kim Suho dealt a final blow with a powerful shout.

Just like that, the sword shattered, and the swordsman's body turned into dust and scattered into the air.

In the place of the swordsman...

All that was left was a single branch.

"...Eh?"

Dumbstruck, Kim Suho stared at the branch.

"W-What's this?"

He looked around the room just in case he was missing something. However, there was no weapon or armor like the one he expected to see. The sword used by the Swordsman of Destruction had turned into dust, and the armor he was wearing had also disappeared.

In other words, the only thing that could possibly be the reward was the single branch in front of him.

"This is it...?"

Disappointed, Kim Suho fell to the ground. I smirked and walked up to him.

"Hey, this branch is..."

When I was about to tell him about Misteltein...

“Who are you?”

A deep voice rang out.  
I quickly turned around.

“...Shoot.”

I bit my lips.

They were the two Djinns I saw before. One was holding a greatsword, and the other was holding a double-edged axe the size of his body.

Didn't they say they were going to go back? How did they come back so quickly?

“Oy, we just asked who you were. How did you get in here?”

The axe-wielding baldy scowled intimidatingly, but the sword-wielding Caucasian man stopped him. He then spoke more politely.

“Our Packhorse Master guild put in an official declaration to take on this Dungeon. Who are you guys?”

Pretending to answer him, I stepped up and kicked the branch to the corner of the cave.

“...Ah, is that so? We didn't know. There was another pathway in here. That's where we came from.”

“Another pathway?”

“Yes.”

“..”

The Caucasian man's expression stiffened.

“What did you do here?”

“We hunted a monster.”

“And the reward?”

“As you can see... nothing.”

I raised my hands, smiling.

Then, the baldy next to him whispered. He pointed at Kim Suho who was still on the ground.

“Wait, isn’t that... Kim Suho? You know, the rank 1 cadet in Cube?”

“...Hm.”

The Caucasian man stopped and messaged his comrades.

“Yes, this is James. Yes, something came up. There are two Cube cadets here. One of them is...”

Before he could finish his sentence, a clear command rang out.

—Kill them.



At the same time, in Cube’s Fitness Center far away from Suwon’s Kamak Mountain.

“Huaa...”

Rachel just finished her 4-hour-long training session. Her day had finally come to an end.

Letting out a sluggish sigh, she murmured quietly.

“I’m sleepy...”

‘Now let’s go back to my room, take a shower, and sleep. Since tomorrow is Saturday, I should be able to sleep in. Right, I should sleep until 3 P.M. That’s a good plan.’

When she grabbed the changing room’s doorknob with such happy thoughts, she happened to hear two cadets gossiping.

—...Did you know Kim Hajin likes Rachel?

Immediately, Rachel's shoulders strongly shook.

—What, really? No way.

—Yes way. Can't you see how he's been following her around recently? People are saying he's going to confess to her soon.

—What? Confess? I don't believe it. Someone like him?

Rachel let go of the doorknob and slowed backed off. She was unable to understand what was happening and suddenly felt a bit dizzy. Confess? So suddenly? How did they know this?

...At that moment, she bumped into someone.

“Ah!”

Rachel quickly turned around. Chae Nayun was glaring at her with furrowed brows.

“What are you doing?”

“...Nothing.”

“No, not nothing. You're stepping on my foot.”

Only then did Rachel begin to understand the situation. Indeed, she was stepping on Chae Nayun's foot.

“...Ah, sorry.”

“Tsk.”

Chae Nayun clicked her tongue and grabbed the doorknob.

“Ah!”

Rachel flinched. She didn't want more people to overhear their gossip... but before Rachel could stop her, Chae Nayun walked in.

“...Hello? Rachel-ssi?”

Then, someone else approached her. It was Yoo Yeonha.

“...Yes?”

“Aren’t you going in?”

Rachel scratched her cheek and backed off.

“No, please go ahead.”

“...Hmm.”

Yoo Yeonha gave Rachel a meaningful look before walking into the changing room. The door then closed, and Rachel strained her ears once again.

—Oh hey! Nayun, Yeonha, have you guys heard?

—What.

—I hear Kim Hajin is going to...

“T-Those girls...!”

She couldn’t allow these rumors to spread. Rachel opened the door strongly and barged in. Seeing her, the two gossiping cadets fell silent.

“W-What? What about Kim Hajin?”

Chae Nayun didn’t even glance at Rachel as she urged the two cadets to speak.

“I-It’s nothing!”

They quickly ran away. Seeing them leave, Rachel let out a sigh of relief.

“...Whew.”

Yoo Yeonha, who was watching Rachel, suddenly made a meaningful smile as though

she suddenly remembered something.

“Oh right, Rachel-ssi.”

“Yes?”

“You’re in that person’s team, right?”

Rachel tilted her head.

“That person...?”

“She’s talking about Kim Hajin. For some reason, she can’t call Kim Hajin by his name.”

“...Yes I can.”

Yoo Yeonha let out a dry cough.

“Anyways, how is he?”

“Yes? What do you mean by...”

Then for some reason, Yoo Yeonha made a somewhat angry face.

“Rachel-ssi? Aren’t you looking down on me too much? I know that the English Royal Court guild made him an offer. Everyone knows it.”

Immediately, Rachel’s expression stiffened.

“That... I don’t know anything about...”

“That can’t be. The English Royal Court guild is only given two chances per year to contact cadets. What fool would spend one on a rank 334 cadet?”

Yoo Yeonha cut Rachel off and continued to speak quietly.

“Not unless you personally witnessed what that rank 334 cadet is hiding.”

Yoo Yeonha gave Rachel a cold glare. However, she soon put on a bright smile.

“...Well, I’m kidding. But I don’t think you should use the Royal Court guild so easily. I know it’s a special privilege acquired through an agreement between two countries, but doing so might create unnecessary enemies.”

Yoo Yeonha made a warning masked as advice.

Right.

This was a warning.

At the same time, Rachel felt a cold emotion wavering deep inside her heart.

“...”

Rachel glared at Yoo Yeonha with a look that could cut. Yoo Yeonha didn’t avoid Rachel’s eyes, receiving it leisurely.

“What, what are you guys talking about?”

And Chae Nayun couldn’t understand their conversation, even though she heard everything.

# Chapter 85

## Scout (3)

—Kill them.

I could hear their communication. Immediately, I felt a chill run down my back.

“...Are you sure?”

The Caucasian man asked again. However, the answer was the same. The Caucasian man calmly nodded, gripping his greatsword. The baldy grinned as he held up his double-edged axe.

“Blame your curiosity.”

The moment the Caucasian man muttered, the surroundings changed. A tide of darkness shot up from the right side, engulfing everyone.

Kim Suho disappeared into the darkness, and I was left alone with the bald barbarian. It was an isolation barrier.

“...Haha, big bro always leaves me with the boring work.”

Boring work. He was obviously referring to me, but I couldn't refute him either.

Two golden axes were engraved on the chest region of his leather armor. It was a symbol used by Heroes to denote their rank. Two golden weapons indicated intermediate rank. Since there was nothing else other than the two golden axes, he was a grade 9 hero.

“...Why is an intermediate rank Hero doing something like this to a cadet?”

Although I knew the answer, I asked anyway. The baldy smiled without replying. Unlike what his appearance might suggest, he didn't seem to be the talkative type.

The baldy collected his magic power silently. A powerful current of magic power rose up around his axe, heating up the space within the isolation barrier.

Sweat formed on the tip of my nose, and a cold sweat dripped down my back.

I couldn't win against that baldy. His axe could easily split my skull in half, and with the isolation barrier surrounding us, I had no way to run.

But there had to be something I could do...

Suddenly, I had a flash of insight.

I didn't know much about that baldy's personality.

But from his barbaric appearance, I could surmise that he was belligerent, prideful, and reckless.

It wasn't a really logical deduction, but people like him usually looked down on their opponents. He was a typical cliché character that would have appeared several times in novels I've read and written.

"...Huu."

I sighed almost subconsciously.

I bent down and pretended to pick up a rock as I molded Aether into the rock.

95% of Aether was turned into a rock, while the remaining 5% was used to form a transparent thread that wrapped around my wrist and was tied to the rock.

Then, I muttered softly.

"Scan."

The result was 30%.

Although it was above the average, I was less fortunate than normal. The difference in 14% was huge in practice.

"What are you going to do with that?"

Seeing me holding the rock, the baldy showed interest. I fell into thought. Should I just throw it at him? Or tick him off a little more?

"...I just thought this would be enough."

I chose the latter. Immediately, his veins popped up in anger.

My lips dried up.

Will he charge at me in anger? Or will he examine me more closely?

"Where is your confidence coming from?"

The baldy widened his eyes and stood on guard. He seemed to be searching me for hidden weapons. Of course, with not even a tiny movement of magic power within my body, the baldy could only frown.

“...You little brat.”

I stared at him as I fiddled with the Aether rock. The baldy stood still with his double-bladed axe. Though he called me a brat condescendingly, he seemed to be wondering what I would do.

“I’m gonna throw this.”

Since he was letting me have the first attack, I accepted it gladly.

I threw the rock with all my strength. It flew quickly and accurately.

However, before the rock could reach his head, he leaned slightly to the side. The rock easily flew by him.

A big smile emerged on the baldy’s face.

However, I wasn’t disappointed. This was within my expectations.

He easily dodged the rock. Me acting like there was something about the rock had forced him to dodge it. Since he could see that there was nothing to it, he undoubtedly had his guard down now.

I had saved Stigma’s magic power for this exact moment.

“Huup!”

I poured all of Stigma’s magic power into the Aether thread that connected the rock and my wrist. Then, I yanked it with all the strength I could muster.

Stigma’s magic power flared up explosively on the transparent Aether thread. This burning of magic power could undoubtedly be seen with the naked eye.

Immediately, the leisurely smile on the baldy’s face disappeared. Taken aback by the sudden eruption of magic power, he readied his qi reinforcement. However, it was too late.

Before his qi reinforcement could fully form, the rock that flew by his head came back with even more power, striking his head like lightning.

Thwack.

With the sound of a rock cracking, the light disappeared from the baldy’s eyes.

Thud.

His muscular body fell to the ground.

“...”

I staggered toward him. He wasn't dead yet. Djinns had abnormally high recuperative power. I had to end him quickly...

I aimed my gun loaded with a light bullet at the back of his head. I didn't have the magic power to transform it into the shotgun mode.

Without even a moment of hesitation, I pulled the trigger.

*KWANG!*

The light bullet struck his head squarely.

Pssh...

However, the bullet was blocked by his dense skull and was unable to pierce through. The baldy suddenly raised his head.

“GAAH!”

He then let out a loud roar. The soundwave struck my stomach. Although Aether formed a barrier before it was too late, a huge shock shook my body nonetheless.

I was sent flying back and struck the wall. Immediately, my vision grew thin. A mere sound attack without physical contact transmitted shock that seemingly ruptured my organs.

“...You son of... a bitch...”

The baldy staggered up as he cursed. His face didn't seem human. His skin turned pitch black, his eyes were glowing red, and most importantly, sheep horns had grown on his head.

...Devil Transformation.

I closed my eyes and sighed.

No matter how lucky I was, this was the end of the line. I should have ended things before it got to this stage, but I couldn't.

“I wasn't going to use this, but you...”

At that moment, the sound of something cutting through flesh rang out in the empty cave.

Puzzled, I opened my eyes.

A black blade going through the baldy's chest.

“What...?”

The baldy stared at the blade piercing through him, then fell down and lost consciousness. Before his body could touch the ground, it transformed into black dust and scattered.

“...”

In place of the baldy was Chameleon Troupe’s Boss.  
Stunned, I stared at her in a daze.  
She let out a dry cough, then spoke briefly.

“Nice to meet you.”

“...Yes?”

Boss stared at me with a very calm expression.  
Chameleon Troupe’s boss. I somewhat understood why she was here. Chameleon Troupe was supposed to interfere with Packhorse Master.  
But what I couldn’t understand was why she kept appearing in front of me.

“...We’re running into each other rather often, huh.”

“Of course.”

Boss answered sincerely at my somewhat sarcastic remark.

“Because I was watching over you.”

“...Yes?”

Boss approached me silently, then handed me a business card. This time, it wasn’t a guild business card belonging to Li Xiaopeng.

[Jeronimo Mercenary – Yi Saeyeon.]

Jeronimo Mercenary. Although it was a mercenary group second only to Vast Expanse, in truth it was Chameleon Troupe’s disguise. In other words, Jeronimo Mercenary Group was Chameleon Troupe.

“Jeronimo...?”

My eyes widened.

I wasn't pretending to be surprised. I truly was.

One of the important events I wrote was unfolding in front of my eyes in a completely different way.

「... She stood before Shin Jonghak. He already knew who she was as he had seen her many times before.

“Nice to see you.”

After appearing out of nowhere, she greeted him out of the blue. Shin Jonghak laughed, unable to comprehend the situation.

“Aren't you showing yourself too frequently?”

“I couldn't help it.”

She made a small smile.

“Because I was watching over you.”

Then, she handed Shin Jonghak a small business card.

‘Jeronimo Mercenary’.

When Shin Jonghak saw this, his eyes glimmered with a bright light.]



Yoo Yeonha's room, Dorm 6's penthouse.

“ ”  
...  
“ ”  
...  
“ ”  
...

Three people were sitting in a circle, watching each other silently.

None of them wanted to lose an inch, leading to the creation of this ill-matched group.

It all started with what Yoo Yeonha said out of courtesy.

‘Since we ran into each other, would you like to come for a night snack at my place?’

Anyone could tell these were empty words. In reality, there was only a single bag of chips on the table in front of them.

However, Rachel accepted this offer.

“...Would you like some juice?”

“No thanks.”

Unable to endure the awkward atmosphere, Yoo Yeonha made an offer, which Rachel refused.

After that, another 10 minutes of silence continued.

When the bored Chae Nayun sprawled down on the couch and scratched her belly half-asleep...

“I want to ask.”

Yoo Yeonha opened her mouth. She was talking to Rachel.

“How did you find out?”

It was a vague question, but Rachel knew what she was referring to. She was asking about Kim Hajin.

“...I found out naturally.”

At Rachel’s nonchalant answer, Yoo Yeonha smiled somewhat scornfully.

“But you don’t know why that person is hiding his power, right?”

“...”

Rachel closed her mouth. She was convinced that Kim Hajin was hiding his power, but she didn’t know why.

At that moment, Chae Nayun woke up from her sleep and interjected.

“Hey, what are you talking about? “

Then, Yoo Yeonha made a triumphant smile.

“Well, that’s not something that’s easy to find out.”

Rachel glared at Yoo Yeonha, annoyed by the triumphant air she put on. Yoo Yeonha got up leisurely. She then brought orange juice and poured it into wine glasses. Staring at the glass of orange juice, Rachel asked.

“Does knowing that change anything?”

“It changes everything. Isn’t that obvious? It’s like how Essence of the Strait is bigger than most government guilds.”

“No, what I’m talking about is...”

In truth, Rachel wasn’t too concerned about Kim Hajin. However, she didn’t want to lose to Yoo Yeonha.

“Rather than finding out about it myself, it’s better to wait until that person tells me about it himself.”

Yoo Yeonha’s face immediately turned cold. Her investigation had been done in private. Kim Hajin didn’t ask for it, nor was it for the good of the public.

“At least, that’s what I think.”

With that, Rachel got up from her seat.

“Then I’ll be off. It’s gotten too late.”

Rachel walked to the front door. Yoo Yeonha glared at her exiting form with strange eyes.

“...Wait, why am I the only one out of the loop? Hey, Yoo Yeonha, are you sure you were speaking in Korean?”

Meanwhile, Chae Nayun grumbled in frustration.



“Huu...”

The barrier shattered.

Soon, Kim Suho appeared with a haggard expression. James was sprawled on the ground, unconscious, and Kim Suho was holding a branch in his hand.

I immediately had a hunch.

That Kim Suho won by himself.

Of course, Misteltein was an amazing weapon even without being awakened. Since that Djinn was also a sword user, Kim Suho would have been well-suited to fighting him.

I spoke to Kim Suho.

“You won?”

“...So did you.”

We looked at each other and laughed.

But soon, Kim Suho put on a serious face.

“...Anyways, Hajin, I don’t think this is an ordinary branch.”

“Oh yeah? To me, it looks amazing at first glance.”

“Really? How?”

“Take a seat.”

First, I sat Kim Suho down. I had trouble staying standing as I felt a bit dizzy. Both physically and psychologically... I was quite exhausted.

# Chapter 86

## Words Without Legs (1)

I tried to explain the true value of the branch logically. The evidence I provided was rather simplistic, but it was persuasive nonetheless.

I said that it was impossible for a simple branch to be the reward for killing the Swordsman of Destruction. So rather than concluding that this branch was an ordinary branch, it was more logical to assume that it was special.

I then pretended to think about folktales and legends related to a branch and said there was one folktale that fit the bill.

“...There’s only one branch that comes to mind. Misteltein.”

Misteltein, the branch that slew the Nordic God of Light, Baldur.

When Kim Suho heard this divine name of myths, his eyes widened in shock. I continued my explanation.

“But as you know, a divine weapon needs to undergo one or more awakenings to fully reveal itself. This branch must be the unawakened Misteltein.”

I stared at the branch on the ground. It really did look like an ordinary branch.

“That’s why it looks so simple.”

“Ah, I see... then we should figure out how to awaken it, right?”

“About that...”

I stared at the Caucasian man Kim Suho defeated. He was collapsed on the ground. It didn’t look like he was pretending to be unconscious either.

The fact that his body was there meant that Kim Suho had not killed him.

Of course, Kim Suho didn't have a real reason to kill him, as it looked like the man didn't reveal that he was a Djinn.

In reality, Devil Transformation was close to being a forbidden, secret technique among Djinns who infiltrated human society. The baldy only used it because he felt he

would have died otherwise.

“Why don’t we get out of here first?”

I spoke as I pointed at the Caucasian man. As I didn’t know when he would wake up, it didn’t feel right staying here any longer.

“Yeah, that’s a good idea.”

I didn’t reveal to Kim Suho that the Caucasian man was a Djinn.

It was because I was worried about the stock price plummeting. The worst thing that could happen was Packhorse Master’s stock becoming trash. After all, I threw all the money I made so far into it.

“Oh right, what happened to the man you fought?”

Kim Suho suddenly asked.

“...He ran away.”

“Oh, then what should we do about that one? Shouldn’t we report him to the Association?”

“No, we don’t have any evidence. Plus, this place is the hidden stage of the Dungeon they were conquering. Since we are the ones who entered without going through proper procedures, we might end up getting punished instead.”

Of course, this was all a lie to protect my wealth.

We walked out of the Dungeon while talking about various things.

The outside world was already dark. The mountain was eerily lit up by the moon, and the cries of wolves and owls rang out.

It was practically a scene from Hometown Legends.[1]

I was scared, but I didn’t have the strength to continue walking. I sat down on the ground to rest.

“...Auu.”

My whole body was plagued with pain and fatigue, especially my upper arm. Because I used all of Stigma’s magic power in one blow, it kept throbbing painfully. I couldn’t

even move my left arm.

Kim Suho sat down next to me. I pointed at the branch in his hand.

“Put that branch down for a minute.”

“Sure.”

Then, using only my right arm, I took out the Butterfly Seedling Dust from my belt bag.

“Take a look.”

I proudly showed him the Butterfly Seedling Dust. Its blue glow made it look like a treasure even at a glance.

Kim Suho asked in surprise.

“What’s this?”

“This is...”

I stopped in the middle of my sentence. Then, I looked at Kim Suho’s eyes, which shone with curiosity.

This dust was supposed to belong to Kim Suho, but since it ended up in my hands, I thought to use it to give Kim Suho a favorable impression of me.

“It’s a family keepsake...”

“What? Keepsake?”

“N-No, it’s not a keepsake. I’m just saying that it’s very important to me.”

I quickly corrected myself. Admittedly, saying that it was a family keepsake was going a bit overboard.

“Anyway, this mystical dust can act as a catalyst for awakening hidden potentials of objects and humans. It was a gift from an elemental. You've heard about elementals, right?”

‘I’m using this precious item on Misteltein. Just for you. So, feel grateful.’

That was the nuance I suggested with my words.

It seemed to have worked as Kim Suho put on a serious face.

“If I put this on Misteltein... something should change.”

I knew that it would undergo its first awakening. Afterwards, the branch would take the form of a sword on its own based on Kim Suho’s increase in skill and the demonic energy cut down by Misteltein.

“I’m going to apply it.”

I went to apply the dust on the branch.

“...Wait.”

But suddenly, Kim Suho grabbed my wrist. He looked at me with a worried face.

“Are you sure?”

“About what?”

“Didn’t you say it was important to you?”

“...Ah.”

I laughed subconsciously.

“It’s important, so it should be used at a time like this. Where else would I use it, if not on a divine grade weapon like Misteltein?”

“But still...”

“Just shut up and take it.”

I cut him off and swiped Kim Suho’s hand away. Kim Suho scratched the back of his neck and looked at me half-gratefully, half-worriedly. I could tell that he was deeply touched. It seemed making a big deal out of this was worth it.

I carefully sprinkled the Butterfly Seedling Dust on Misteltein. The dust seeped into Misteltein, and change was quick to happen.

The dust's blue light flowed through the branch, and soon the surface of the branch turned black.

Now, it no longer looked like an ordinary branch.

However, there was another change. A leaf sprouted up from the tip of the branch, then fell to the ground.

Was it like this in the original story?

"See, I was right."

"...Yeah."

Kim Suho looked down at Misteltein and muttered in awe.

From this black branch, Kim Suho should be able to feel the hidden power of legends and myths.

"Then, as promised..."

I gave Misteltein to Kim Suho. Then, I picked up the leaf on the ground.

"You take the branch, and I'll take the leaf."

"Hajin... are you sure? Why don't we share this weapon? You can use it whenever you need it."

"Please, I'm not a swordsman. I'll just die if I fight with a sword."

I made Kim Suho back down, then stealthily turned on my smartwatch.

===

[Misteltein Leaf]

—A byproduct left by the god-slaying branch after its awakening.

You can drink a tea brewed with it, which will increase your body's health, or you can grind it and use it to make an amazing weapon.

===

I was more than satisfied with this outcome. I smacked my knees and got up.

"Alright, let's go back now."

“...Yeah.”

Kamak Mountain was too dangerous for us to stay overnight. We went down the mountain together. Kim Suho took the lead as I followed behind him.

In the middle of walking down the mountain... something grabbed my foot strongly. My body leaned forward.

“...!”

Thud. I fell to the ground.

I wasn't hurt. A strong sense of déjà vu came over me.

‘Don't tell me...’

I inspected my foot.

As expected, I had tripped on a root.

I dug it up carefully. It was a ginseng.

I swallowed hard.

It had a thick body and several roots branched out of it.

It was smaller than the last one I obtained, but it was undoubtedly a ginseng.

Jackpot.

“Hm...”

I stealthily put it in my cross bag, then chased after Kim Suho who went ahead.

After 30 minutes of hiking down, Kim Suho and I arrived at the Portal Station.

Currently, it was 1:53 A.M. The Portal closed at 2:00.

We barely made it on time.

“Hajin.”

In front of the Portal Station, Kim Suho turned to face me. His soft voice flowed into my ears.

“Let's split up here.”

“Hm? What about you?”

“Since I came all the way here, I’m going to stop by and see my family.”

Kim Suho smiled.

“And thank you for today.”

At that moment, a bright moonlight shone down on his face. The silver light revealed his honest eyes and clear smile.

...His appearance evoked something inside me. I remembered something I forgot for a moment.

The man in front of me, Kim Suho, was this world’s main character.

A man who only walked the path of righteousness.

A man who never compromised or abandoned his beliefs.

An ally of justice with conviction stronger than steel, and a seeker of truth who always treaded the correct path.

An existence that was already extinct in the modern world, but one that I always hoped would exist.

A righteous hero, one that I could trust more than anyone else in this world.

That was Suho (守護).[2]

Just like his name, he was the true savior who would protect this world.

“...Yeah.”

I spoke as we separated.

“See you later.”



I came back to the dorm. The room was pitch black.

The sound of the door opening and closing seemed to have awoken Evandel as she trudged into my arms. I went to the couch with Evandel in my embrace. I was dead tired, but I still had one more thing to do.

[Jeronimo Mercenary]

I looked it up on the internet.

[Peak of mercenaries, Jeronimo. Mission success rate 99.7%]

Jeronimo Mercenary had 23 members. Their profiles were shown on the portal site along with photos.

They were all famous in the field of mercenaries, but in reality, these 23 members were disguises of 5~6 members of the Chameleon Troupe. The one who made this possible was Jain, who had the Gift 'Camouflage'.

“...”

I took out the business card I received.

[Jeronimo Mercenary]

Boss scouted me, not Shin Jonghak, into Jeronimo Mercenary. I didn't know why, but it seemed she wanted me to fill in Chameleon Troupe's empty seat.

I looked down at my smartwatch. Someone had sent me messages four hours ago.

[Yo]

[Can you help me study?]

[I'll buy you food]

[Answer me]

[You gonna ignore me? ——]

[Oi ——]

It was Chae Nayun. When I saw her messages, I thought about her older brother, Chae Jinyoon. This thought then connected to my thoughts about Chameleon Troupe.

With Chameleon Troupe's help, I might be able to kill Chae Jinyoon.

Without anyone finding out.

...Without anyone finding out.

◇ ◇ ◇

Suwon Devil's Nest. Everything had already been taken care of in regards to Packhorse Master. Now, Chameleon Troupe's boss and Jain were watching a video on Kim Hajin.

“A simple rock with that much power... indeed, he's full of potential. You were right,

Boss.”

Jain laughed lightly as she admitted to being wrong.

Although it was the result of pouring out magic power, it wasn't easy to create such destructive power with just a rock.

But what Jain liked more than his combat prowess was his mercilessness.

If the enemy wasn't a Djinn, he would have lost his life when he was struck by the rock.

At the time, Kim Hajin didn't know that his enemy was a Djinn.

Kim Hajin had attacked him with calm yet firm killing intent.

“But Boss, why aren't you watching it until the end? I want to see his Devil Transformation.”

“This is enough. Plus, I don't want to see that.”

“...Why?”

Jain asked, tilting her head. Boss pouted a little and murmured.

“...It's gross.”



The weekend flew by in a breeze, and Monday arrived.

A new week had begun.

“As you all know, Class Competitions will start this Friday. I'm taking volunteers to participate in the events! There's a variety of them, so each person will have to participate in at least one event.”

Before the start of class, during morning announcements, Yi Yeonghan reminded the class of the upcoming Class Competitions.

“Oh right.”

I only just remembered it.

Class Competitions.

It was the first and final event before the midterms.

Just like its name suggested, classes would compete against each other in several

events covering all sorts of topics. There were combat-related events like duels, dungeon time attacks, and magic battles, but also entertainment events like gaming, singing, and soccer.

If this was an official competition, only combat events would have been allowed, but this was a festival of sorts for cadets.

Naturally, the cadets began to chatter about the events they wanted to participate in.

“What are you going to do, Rachel-ssi?”

I asked Rachel, who was sitting next to me. Then, Rachel flinched slightly before replying with an awkward smile.

“I’m... planning on doing the quiz event.”

“Oh, the quiz event. Maybe I should do that too.”

“Quiz event is already full.”

Jin Hoseung cut in. I turned toward Jin Hoseung, then faced Rachel again. She nodded.

“Y-Yes... it’s already full. Unfortunately...”

“Oh, I see.”

“Now, now, soccer and basketball are already full. Calm down, everyone.”

Hearing Yi Yeonghan explaining to the class, I couldn’t help but wonder what kind of superhuman sports events they would be.

“We need someone for singing and archery...”

Yi Yeonghan paused momentarily and looked at me. At first, I thought he was looking at someone else. But seeing him grin when he met my eyes, I knew he was looking at me. Soon, other cadets also turned to face me.

I let out a dry cough and spoke.

“...I can handle archery.”

“Perfect.”

Smiling, Yi Yeonghan put my name down.  
Not just in archery, but also singing.

“Wait, hey! What are you doing? Erase that!”

“Alright, thank you everyone! We’re done!”

Yi Yeonghan hit Enter, submitting the participants.

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1. Korean drama about ghost stories
  2. His name means “to protect”
- 

### **FudgeNouget's Thoughts**

The title comes from a Korean proverb, “words without legs go a thousand miles”. It’s also a pun, as the Korean for “word” is the same as the Korean for “horse”, which is where the “legs” come in. So the meaning of the proverb is that ‘words between people travel extremely quick, so one should be careful in what they say’.

# Chapter 87

## Words Without Legs (2)

Evening, after the end of classes.

Tomer was fitting in naturally among cadets. It was the result of the effort she put in for the past two weeks, going so far as to kill her temper.

Now that she had a plan for the direction of her mission, she tried her best to get close to other cadets. As a result, both magicians and cadets saw Tomer favorably.

Now, she was at a point where she could invite cadets to a café on her own initiative.

“Wow, Kim Hajin likes Rachel? Really?”

After ordering coffee and honey bread that suited their tastes, female cadets began to gossip earnestly.

The topic of their conversation was Kim Hajin and Rachel. Tomer had stealthily brought up the subject.

“They’ve been pretty close lately... but isn’t it because they’re on the same team?”

There were many male cadets who secretly admired Rachel. Not just many, but a lot. But no one had ever been bold enough to directly go after her. It was because of Rachel’s identity and her future path that was the result of her identity.

Once Rachel graduated from Cube, she would most likely enter the Royal Court guild, becoming the youngest guild executive.

“I guess Kim Hajin is perfect for the Royal Court guild. He rose to rank 334 this time.”

The English Royal Court was the world’s 60th ranked guild.

Cube cadets in the 400~500 rank range would have fantasies of joining this guild and becoming the head of a snake.

However, no powerful cadet was blinded by love to enter the Royal Court guild to chase after Rachel, and Rachel wouldn’t be satisfied with cadets who were only at the 400~500 rank positions.

“No, no, I’m in the same team. Trust me, you would say the same thing if you saw his

eyes. How do I say this... his eyes turned heart-shaped!”

However, Tomer tenaciously instigated them, even making ridiculous claims.

“Really?... Oh yeah, isn’t Kim Hajin singing in the upcoming Class Competitions?”

Suddenly, one of the cadets widened her eyes and raised her voice.

“He’s not going to confess, is he!?”

“Kyaaaak! Just thinking about it gives me goosebumps. I’m going to stab him to death if he does...!”

“...Eh? Stab him to death?”

Just how were these cadets who spoke such ferocious things different from Djinnns? Tomer thought seriously.



“Singing...”

I sighed and murmured as soon as I returned to my room.

Back on Earth, I often went karaokeing after school, so I knew how to sing.

But of course, that didn’t mean I was a good singer.

I was average, not so bad and not so good.

“Argh, why do I have to sing?”

Of course, I had the horn-flute to improve my voice, so I was confident that I would be better than the average person. But cadets from other classes would have volunteered to sing, so they were undoubtedly great singers.

Furthermore, I had no experience singing in front of a crowd. Rather than being nervous in front of hundreds of eyes, I preferred being in a position where I wouldn’t have to be nervous.

“Will I need to eat a serenity pill like I did for the presentation...?”

“Singing~? I can sing the Pororo song!”

Evandel, who was in the middle of making a nightingale, shouted with a blooming smile. I replied with a grin.

“Really? Let me hear it later.”

“Un! But why singing~?”

“Ah, well... I got done in by a villain, so I have to sing now.”

“A villain!?”

Evandel’s eyes suddenly shot open, and she strongly twisted the nightingale’s neck. I’ve been letting her watch superhero cartoons lately, so her reaction was big.

“Villain! Villaiiin!”

“Ah, no, I misspoke. Let go of that nightingale. It’s going to die.”

“Un?... Ahh!”

Startled, she looked down at the nightingale. Unfortunately, it had already lost form and was beginning to melt.

“Ii, iiiiing...”

Seeing the nightingale she worked hard on going limp, Evandel began to tear up. I silently called Evandel into my arms.

“Don’t worry. You have to make a mistake, so you know not to make the same mistake next time.”

I consoled the sobbing Evandel and turned on the laptop.

“Let’s see...”

It’s been a while, but I planned to use my laptop’s hacking functionality. The target was Tomer’s personal smartwatch.

Last night, I met Tomer at a convenience store, and she approached me to say hello.

But at the time, she was wearing a personal smartwatch rather than the cadet smartwatch provided by Cube. Its design was a clear imitation of the cadet smartwatch, so it might have tricked instructors and other cadets, but it couldn't trick my laptop.

[80 SP will be used. Would you like to continue?]

“Really?”

It seemed to be a highly secure smartwatch as it took quite a bit of SP. I was spending too much SP lately...

I held back my tears and clicked Yes.

[Tomer, you will have to pick up an item during this week's Wednesday class. It will help you in your mission. I'll tell you about the details tomorrow.]

An unknown person had sent this message to Tomer today.

I began to read other messages stored on her smartwatch and came to ascertain that her target was Rachel.

...Ah, another message just arrived.

[Wednesday's class will be Mock Artifact Scramble. There is an administrative center in the B-3 zone on the lowest floor. The item will be left there. The administrative center will be empty from 11:00 to noon, so take it during that time.]

Tomer ended up becoming a spy without even knowing it.

Lowest floor. B-3 zone.

While I was repeating those words to myself, I received a message on my smartwatch.

A picture of a problem along with a few lines of text.

When I saw the message, I thought it was Rachel.

[Can you please teach me how to solve this problem?]

But the sender was Chae Nayun.



Inside a tranquil library, the only sounds present were the sound of pencils scratching on paper and the sound of pages turning.

“...”

In this dead-silent atmosphere, Chae Nayun was staring fixedly at a reference book. She tried to study, but unable to achieve her goal, she could only mess with her hair idly.

[It is important to calculate the density of magic power in a Dungeon. This is one of the most important skills for a Hero to have. This is because a Dungeon’s magic power density can suddenly change depending on what happens inside the Dungeon.

Take a look at the following formula...

...

...

Example 1) Suppose that a magic power explosion happens in a tiny-scale Dungeon with six cobalt kobold goblins...]

“Why do I have to learn this?”

Chae Nayun murmured silently and leaned back.

She couldn’t even solve the first example. She was okay with memorization courses, but she could do nothing about the damned Phenomenon Realm Analysis II, which was full of calculations.

“...”

She glanced to the side in despair. Rachel was sitting there with an empty seat between them.

In truth, Chae Nayun sat here on purpose. She wanted to peek at Rachel.

From the side, Rachel looked a bit sullen. With her chin resting on her palm, she seemed to be in deep thought, worrying about something.

‘I guess she has her own troubles.’

It seemed she couldn’t come to a conclusion, as she suddenly turned on her

smartwatch. Then, she hesitated for a moment before shaking her head and turning it off.

“...What’s up with her?”

Char Nayun muttered softly and turned back to her reference book.

[Example 1) Suppose that a magic power explosion happens in...]

She stared at the words, but nothing entered her mind. Without a choice, she held up her smartwatch. Then, she took a picture of the page with the watch’s built-in camera.

Next, she looked through her contact list. Someone who could help her... was Kim Hajin.

[Help me with this]

She typed this message, then erased it. It felt too impudent.

[Can you help me with this? I’ll buy you food]

“No, this one doesn’t feel right either.”

[You’re a genius if you can solve this! ㄹ ㄹ ㄹ]

“This seems a bit stupid...”

After much thought, she made her message as courteous as it could be.

[Can you please teach me how to solve this problem?]

Then, she put down her smartwatch.

1 minute, three minutes, five minutes... Time flew by.

‘Is he not going to reply?’ When Chae Nayun was about to put her reference book away with a sullen face, her smartwatch rang.

“Ooh!”

Chae Nayun hurriedly checked the content.

Kim Hajin had sent a very kind and detailed solution.

“Heehee.”

Chae Nayun smiled brightly and took her reference book back out. At the same time, she received another message.

This time, it was a message from Yi Yeonghan for everyone in Veritas class.

[On Wednesday this week, we will have a Mock Artifact Scramble. Be prepared everyone~]



“Today’s combat training is Mock Artifact Scramble!”

Today was Wednesday. Just like I read in Tomer’s smartwatch and Yi Yeonghan’s announcement, Wednesday was set aside for a single combat training from 9 A.M. to 2 P.M.

Mock Artifact Scramble. Just like its name suggested, it was a competition to obtain artifacts.

125 cadets of the Veritas class gathered on the first floor of Underground Plaza, where the scramble would take place.

“Artifact Scrambles are something Heroes will experience at least once every year.”

Real artifact scrambles happened in places outside of government control. This was because artifacts found inside a country belonged to the government by law.

In this world, numerous countries collapsed during Outcall, and many of their territories remain ownerless to this day.

Most of Africa was overrun by monsters, and Central Asia was dominated by the Djinns’ rule. In these regions, artifacts belonged to whoever found them.

“The size of the artifact excavation site is ‘massive’, and the concept is ‘brawl’. You will not know the enemy command structure, nor will you have a way to contact your allies and nor will you have the locations of the artifacts!”

Mock Artifact Scrambles often used the brawl-format because of a Djinn with a Gift called ‘Brawl’.

In real life, artifact scrambles happened between guilds, or between guilds and Djinn

groups. The former only happened 20~30 years ago when laws regarding artifact scrambles weren't in place. Nowadays, artifact scrambles were mostly fights against Djinns.

“We separated you into Team White or Team Black. Team White will be defenders, and Team Black will be attackers. Remember that the concept is ‘brawl’! In addition, you can shout ‘surrender’, and you will be considered eliminated.”

Until the 90's, humans were in an advantage due to their efficient command structure and sturdy organizations. However, the situation was reversed because of one Djinn.

Bermut.

His Gift randomly distributed humans and Djinns in an area. This effectively destroyed humans' formations, and since Djinns were able to use Devil Transformation, they were stronger than humans in one-on-one battles.

“Now, we will take away your vision.”

With that, my vision turned dark. A few surprised cadets let out short shrieks.

“It's an instructor's magic. Stay calm. You don't need to try to disable it.”

It seemed a high-intermediate rank Hero could easily blind 125 people.

Of course, that didn't apply to me.

When I opened my eyes, I could clearly see what was in front of me.

“We will now guide you to your designated locations.”

Artifact excavation sites were usually huge, having multiple floors and even a residential area. Most artifacts were buried deep underground, so excavating them took at least 2 to 3 weeks.

Although excavation sites were underground, it didn't mean that they looked like caverns or tunnels.

Because of technicians with extraordinary Gifts, excavation sites looked more like futuristic underground bunkers.

“Hey, hey, don't step on my foot.”

“Ah! Somebody hit me.”

Cadets were led underground together.

15 were placed on the first floor, and 25 were placed on the slightly bigger second floor.

Chae Nayun was placed in the middle of the third underground floor. Rachel was also nearby, placed on a balcony that was connected to the third floor’s residential area.

Their fight was inevitable.

As for me, I was placed in a small room on the fourth floor. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to see where Shin Jonghak and Kim Suho would be placed.

“...Eh?”

But a problem arose.

Yoo Yeonha was in the room right next to me.

Considering the layout of the floor, I needed to cross her to get out to the hall.

In addition, I was in Team Black, and Yoo Yeonha was in Team White. We were enemies.

At that moment, a loud voice rang out from the speaker above me.

—Artifacts are being kept or moved by NPCs. Team White must protect the artifacts, and Team Black must steal them. Now, we will start the countdown.

The opened doors all closed, and the countdown began.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Once the countdown ended, the blinding magic disappeared.

I checked the magazine of my cadet training issue handgun. Then, I checked the coordinate I needed to get to.

The lowest floor’s B-3 zone.

—I heard a sound next door...

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha’s voice rang out. I quickly turned to face the closed door.

*Tak, tak.*

Yoo Yeonha walked forward, intentionally making loud footsteps. Then, she knocked on the door of the room I was in.

—I know you’re there. Are you in Team Black or Team White? For the record, I’m in Team White.

I stayed silent.

Yoo Yeonha then hummed joyfully and grabbed the doorknob.

—No answer? I assume that means you're in Team Black. How unfortunate, you must have been looking forward to today's class. Consider yourself unlucky...

Ssss—

The door opened, and Yoo Yeonha appeared with a bright face.

Then, her eyes met mine.

“...!”

In an instant, Yoo Yeonha's expression froze. Her smiling lips trembled, and the wide eyes turned stiff.

We were on the opposite team.

In other words, we had to fight.

But for some reason... it looked like Yoo Yeonha was scared of fighting me.

Gulp.

Yoo Yeonha swallowed hard. Her hands were shaking faintly, and I could clearly see sweat forming on her forehead.

After a brief confrontation, my neck felt itchy, so I moved my hand up to scratch it.

However, Yoo Yeonha reacted oddly even to this simple movement.

“Stay, stay away!”

“...What?”

I tilted my head. You were the one who came to me!

# Chapter 88

## Words Without Legs (3)

With Kim Hajin in front of her, Yoo Yeonha was torn between fighting him or running away. Although she came into the room confident in her abilities, she didn't expect to meet such a powerful enemy from the beginning.

“ ... ”

Kim Hajin stood still, seemingly unaware of her worry. However, his relaxed attitude made Yoo Yeonha even more nervous. She couldn't take his gaze head-on. This was the first time she had ever felt like this. It wasn't like this before...

Then suddenly, Kim Hajin raised his hand.

In truth, Kim Hajin was only trying to scratch an itch on the back of his neck.

“Stay, stay away!”

But Yoo Yeonha, who didn't know this, shouted subconsciously.

Kim Hajin stared at her silently, then slowly dropped his hand.

His gun was already in his right hand. It wasn't the Desert Eagle Yoo Yeonha gave him, but a normal cadet handgun.

However, Kim Hajin had destroyed Kim Horak's qi reinforcement even with an ordinary gun. It was precisely why he received the attention of top-ranking guilds for a while.

“ ... ”

Kim Hajin raised his gun. Yoo Yeonha could feel beads of sweat flowing down her face. First, she calmly examined her surroundings. Behind her was a narrow, straight hallway, making it difficult for her to escape the range of his gun. She only had two choices: fight, or be beaten.

Yoo Yeonha looked down at the whip in her hand. Then, she suddenly thought of something.

‘Perhaps this is the best chance for me confirm his skills. My current estimate of his strength only comes from observation. If I fight him now, I should be able to see a glimpse of his real power...’

At the same time, she had a different thought. This time, it was more cowardly.

‘If I fight Kim Hajin and lose, I’ll likely be the first one to be eliminated. I don’t want that to happen, but struggling for my life doesn’t suit my style either. It’s definitely not because I hate pain.’

After calmly weighing her options, Yoo Yeonha sighed.

Then, she opened her eyes wide as though she came to a decision.

Glaring at Kim Hajin with eyes sharper than the glare of a lynx, she swung her whip. Her whip moved fluidly like it was part of her limb, then it grabbed onto Kim Hajin’s gun.

*Shweeek!*

In the blink of an eye, Kim Hajin’s gun was snatched out of his hands.

Yoo Yeonha stared blankly at the gun that fell into her hand.

“I, I did it! Ha, haha!”

‘I never thought I’d succeed! Ahahaha—!’

Yoo Yeonha laughed proudly and thought, ‘maybe this person isn’t that amazing after all!’

“Even if it’s you, without a weapon...”

But in the next moment...

The gun flew back into Kim Hajin’s hand as though it was enchanted by something.

“Ah, aah! W-Where are you going!?”

Yoo Yeonha tried to grab the gun midair, but it was too late.

The ‘Aether wire’ Kim Hajin secretly shot out adhered to the gun and retrieved it. With Aether’s Detail Materialization trait, Aether wire was invisible unless one’s eyes were imbued with magic power. As a result, Yoo Yeonha thought that this phenomenon was the result of Kim Hajin’s magic power.

“...”

The smile on Yoo Yeonha’s face quickly disappeared. She stared at Kim Hajin even more nervously than before. Now, she was left with one choice. Since she was the one who made the first move, she believed she had to endure whatever came her way... Yoo Yeonha swallowed hard.

“...Haa.”

Then, Kim Hajin let out a deep sigh and held up his gun. He aimed it forward, and Yoo Yeonha shuddered. In front of his steel muzzle, her mind blanked out.

How should I dodge it?  
Will it hurt?  
Maybe I can dodge it?

All sorts of thoughts flashed by her head, but Kim Hajin didn’t fire. He smirked once, then put his gun back into his holster.

‘What?’

While Yoo Yeonha was puzzled, he trudged up to her and tapped on her shoulder.

“It’s still early, so let’s take it easy.”

After murmuring incomprehensible words, he walked past her to the outside. Yoo Yeonha watched him leave in a daze.



“Argh, it still hurts.”

My right wrist was sore. Yoo Yeonha’s whip only lightly grazed it when she was snatching my gun, but it tore my skin and turned it red. If it had hit me directly, it would have broken my bones for sure. As I thought, Yoo Yeonha was quite strong as well.

“Ehew, what a relief.”

With my bluff working well, I safely went past Yoo Yeonha and entered the fourth-floor lobby.

The fourth-floor lobby was quite huge but oddly silent. There were no voices nor were there any noticeable presences.

What’s going on? Did everyone go elsewhere?

I turned on my smartwatch.

All cadets participating in the Mock Artifact Scramble were wearing ‘life-detection devices’. These devices accurately measured the HP of each cadet, eliminating those that received critical damage.

Through the smartwatch which was connected to the laptop, I checked the GPS coordinates of these devices.

There were only ten cadets on this floor, including me and Yoo Yeonha.

Six of these ten were already traveling in teams.

“Tomer...”

Next, I checked Tomer’s GPS coordinate.

Currently, she was in a bathroom on the seventh floor. It seemed she was planning on killing time there, as she showed no sign of movement.

In that case, I had to chase after her.

...Then suddenly, I felt curious about what the other cadets were doing.

A fight had broken out on the third floor, the floor above me, but the big match had yet to start. In other words, Chae Nayun and Rachel had yet to meet.

However, on the fifth-floor lobby, a big match that anyone would want to see was starting. The cadets facing each other were that great.

Shin Jonghak and Kim Suho. The two cadets, who could be said to be the representatives of Team Black and Team White, had met.

I put on the CCTV watching their fight.

—I knew this day would come, Kim Suho.

Shin Jonghak muttered in a serious tone.

—...

However, Kim Suho faced Shin Jonghak silently.

—Come. I'll show you the difference between our level.

Kim Suho pulled out his sword in response to Shin Jonghak's provocation. Shin Jonghak also held up his spear.

Kim Suho was the first to attack. He charged in and swung his sword. Shin Jonghak stepped back as he blocked Kim Suho's attack. Sparks flashed at the clash between a spear and a sword. They both properly utilized the strengths and weaknesses of their weapons for offense and defense.

At that moment, someone quickly shot past me.

*Stomp, stomp, stomp*— A harsh stair-climbing sound rang out.

I glanced up and saw Yoo Yeonha. She was running away faster than anyone I had ever seen before.

“...Oh right.”

Thanks to her footsteps, I snapped back to reality.

Although a marvelous, intense exchange of spear and sword was happening below me, I didn't have the time to leisurely watch them.

I headed to the emergency stairs. As it was smaller than the staircase in the central lobby, I would be able to avoid enemy encounters.



“I, I surrender!”

A male cadet shouted surrender in front of Chae Nayun's sword. The moment he said the safe word, he was blindfolded. He would now be transported to the third floor's 'elimination lounge', where other cadets eliminated from the third floor would be waiting.

“Whew... easy.”

Chae Nayun murmured proudly as she wiped off her sweat.

This was already her third kill.

“It's only been three months since I switched to a sword and I'm already this strong. I must be really talented with the sword.”

While Chae Nayun was brimming with confidence, someone shouted softly at her.

“Nayun—!”

Chae Nayun turned toward the direction of the voice. It was Yi Jiyeon, who was wearing a white cadet uniform. She ran toward Chae Nayun in short, quick steps.

“Whew, thank god.”

Clinging to Chae Nayun, Yi Jiyeon let out a sigh of relief.

“Were you hiding this entire time?”

A supporter like Yi Jiyeon was weak in brawls like this. An attack-focused supporter like Yoo Yeonha would be able to shine depending on the situation, but Yi Jiyeon was a purely support-oriented supporter.

“No, I managed to defeat one with my weakening debuff.”

“Oh really? That’s good. Anyways, it’s nice to see you.”

Chae Nayun was also happy to see Yi Jiyeon. She was a supporter that enhanced warriors in particular. She provided various physical buffs that made warriors feel like they became Superhuman.

“Ahh, I really thought I was dead...”

Yi Jiyeon calmed her heart for a bit, then spoke as if she suddenly remembered it.

“Oh yeah, Rachel’s on this floor.”

“Rachel?”

Chae Nayun’s eyes widened.

“Yeah, I was so surprised! I barely managed to escape because I ran away the moment I saw her.”

It was then.

*Stomp, stomp, stomp*— Someone ran upstairs out of breath.

“Wait.”

The two stared at the staircase nervously. Yi Jiyeon held up her bow, while Chae Nayun pointed her sword at the stairs.

However, the person who showed up was someone on their team, Yoo Yeonha.

Yoo Yeonha seemed to be relieved as well, as she let out a sigh of relief when she saw Yi Jiyeon. Chae Nayun tilted her head and asked.

“Yoo Yeonha, why are you sweating so much?”

“Huh? Uh, it’s nothing.”

Yoo Yeonha looked haggard, unlike her usual self.

Chae Nayun asked in doubt.

“Who’s downstairs?”

Yoo Yeonha replied softly.

“...Kim Hajin.”

“Kim Hajin?”

Yi Jiyeon and Chae Nayun both asked back.

“Mhm.”

“Oh, then Kim Hajin must be eliminated.”

Yi Jiyeon asked innocently. Yoo Yeonha shook her head with a bitter smile.

“No, he didn’t get eliminated.”

‘But I almost did.’ Embarrassed, Yoo Yeonha didn’t say the last part out loud.

“Really?”

Chae Nayun, who was scratching her cheek and pretending to be unconcerned, asked in a casual tone.

“So, uh, what was he doing?”

“I don’t know.”

Yoo Yeonha replied half-heartedly, but then Yi Jiyeon butt in with a strange smile.

“Maybe he’s looking for Rachel?”

At Yi Jiyeon’s remark, Chae Nayun tilted her head.

“Eh? Why Rachel?”

“Because Kim Hajin likes Rachel.”

“...Huh?”

This time, both Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha were confused.

“What are you talking about?”

“Eh? You guys don’t know?”

“...K-Know what? What about Kim Hajin?”

Chae Nayun stuttered as she asked again. Yi Jiyeon tilted her head.

“You really don’t know? I thought everyone has heard the rumors by now.”

“Then it’s just a stupid, groundless rumor.”

Yoo Yeonha spoke firmly. As far as she was concerned, there were more important things to worry about at the moment than such absurd rumors. After all, this Mock Artifact Scramble held great weight in their grades.

“Anyways, did you locate the artifacts?”

“Ah, yeah, I have one on me. I ran into an NPC on my way here.”

Yi Jiyeon took out a small box from her uniform pocket. Yoo Yeonha’s expression quickly brightened.

“I’m glad. First, let’s transport this to the first floor.”

“Yeah.”

“And Yi Jiyeon, you’re mistaken. That rumor probably spread because Kim Hajin and Rachel are on the same team...”

While Chae Nayun was murmuring somewhat seriously...

Arrows suddenly rained down. Yoo Yeonha quickly swung her whip and smacked them away.

“Who is it!?”

Chae Nayun shouted with enraged eyes. Although the rain of arrows was mostly blocked by Yoo Yeonha’s whip, Chae Nayun was still irritated by the ambush.

The three of them turned to the balcony and saw Rachel and other cadets in Team Black.

“Rachel! How can you ambush us like a coward!”

Chae Nayun trembled with anger.

However, Rachel looked down at them calmly as she pulled out her rapier.

“I’m going in.”

At her soft voice, the members of Team Black reacted simultaneously.

# Chapter 89

## Fake and Real (1)

Two archers shot arrows from the balcony, while four warriors charged forward. The cadet at the core of this ambush was Rachel. She entrusted Yi Jiyeon and Yoo Yeonha to the other three warriors and dealt with Chae Nayun herself.

As Chae Nayun was a beginner who only just recently switched to a sword, Rachel was confident in her ability to defeat Chae Nayun.

“Dammit...”

On the other hand, Chae Nayun clenched her teeth as she exchanged blows with Rachel. She could feel the difference in their skill and experience.

Every time she swung her sword once, Rachel swung her rapier twice. Furthermore, Rachel easily parried attacks she couldn't parry.

It wasn't that there were distractions. Other than Rachel, everyone was focused on dealing with Yi Jiyeon and Yoo Yeonha. As a result, Chae Nayun and Rachel were having a purely one-on-one battle.

*Clang! Clang!*

Every time Chae Nayun's sword clashed with Rachel's rapier, Chae Nayun felt like her hands were being torn apart.

As expected, Rachel was an expert who carried immense strength in her thin rapier. The only thing Chae Nayun could do was to block her attacks.

“Goddammit—!”

However, Chae Nayun didn't want to lose.

At the very least, she didn't want to lose to Rachel.

Her desire to win and unyielding spirit led to an incredible eruption of magic power. Chae Nayun's magic power exploded, soaring high and gathering around her sword. Her magic power formed a giant sword that was both long and wide.

“...!”

The vicious yet imposing appearance of the giant sword made Rachel flinch.

Chae Nayun swung this giant sword with all her strength.

However, a large movement left room for openings.

Rachel didn't receive her attack, instead, she rolled to the side and dodged. As a result, Chae Nayun's sword only hit the ground.

Immediately afterward, something Rachel didn't expect happened.

*KOONG!*

Struck with Chae Nayun's sword, the floor collapsed.

Rachel, who had rolled to the side to avoid Chae Nayun's attack, fell to the next level without having a chance to be surprised.

Thud.

After landing on the fourth floor, Rachel stared at the hole above her as she felt pain on her waist. Was the floor supposed to collapse that easily?

"Where did you go!?"

A lion-like roar rang out from above. Rachel quickly got up. She wanted to return to the battlefield as quickly as possible. Her teammates were too weak to contend with Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun without her...

But at that moment, someone appeared in front of her.

Rachel turned stiff.

Wearing a white cadet uniform, which was the symbol of Team White, he held up his sword.

It was Kim Suho.

He had defeated Shin Jonghak on the fifth floor and had climbed up to the fourth floor. Rachel bit her lips.

From the looks of it, Kim Suho had no intention of going easy. The moment he confirmed that Rachel was in Team Black, he charged toward her. Rachel received his sword with her rapier.

A power on a completely different level pressed down on her, making her tremble.



I stopped in front of the sixth-floor bathroom.

"Is there an artifact around here...?"

I even pretended to be looking for artifacts to trick the administrators who should be watching me. I double checked the message Tomer received on my smartwatch.

[There is an administrative center in the B-3 zone of the lowest floor. The item will be left there. The administrative center will be empty from 11:00 to noon, so take it during that time.]

The lowest floor was floor 7. B-3 zone referred to the seventh floor's room 3 of sector B.

"Artifact~ are you here~?"

I checked the time as I went into the bathroom. Currently, it was 10:45 A.M. I still had about 15 minutes left.

"...Eh? What's this?"

However, I found a holographic man carrying something in his arms, hiding in a toilet stall.

I opened the stall's door. The holographic NPC flinched after seeing me. Startled, I also raised my gun.

"There really was one here?"

Without firing, I reached forward and grabbed the artifact. The man looked too real as he became pale in fear.

After having the artifact stolen, the NPC ran away.

With this, I managed to obtain an artifact.

I put the artifact in my pocket, then looked below me.

In the tile right below me, in the toilet stall of the seventh-floor bathroom, Tomer was still lying in wait.

"Hmm."

I fell into thought. If I wanted to receive this item in place of Tomer, I had to eliminate her. But how?

I began to look around for anything that I could use.

Then, I found it.

I was inside the sixth-floor bathroom. There was a vent connecting this bathroom to the seventh-floor bathroom.

“...Perhaps?”

I looked at my upper arm on which two lines were tattooed in the shape of a cross. Stigma’s magic power could be used in more ways than I imagined.

I sent my will into Stigma.

‘Become a magical smoke that can put Tomer to sleep.’

In an instant, 1.5 streaks of Stigma were used up, and a grey smoke began to rise from my upper arm.

I stared at the smoke in a daze. Surprisingly, the smoke moved according to my will.

“With this...”

I should be able to do it.

I sent the smoke down to the seventh-floor bathroom through the vent.

Using my Thousand-Mile Eyes, I watched the process.

The smoke danced in front of Tomer’s nose. She frowned and tried to wave the smoke away, but the smoke went into her nose, causing her to cough.

Soon, her eyes started to droop and blink. Tomer yawned and checked her watch.

‘I can’t fall asleep.’ Tomer mumbled and tried to get up. However, she collapsed before she could. She had fallen asleep on the toilet.

“Whew.”

Perfect. Now that Tomer was asleep, I could go to the administrative center instead of her.

I went down to the seventh floor.

The moment I arrived, the time became 11 A.M. I headed to the B-3 zone without hesitation. The pathway to the administrative center was hidden under a decorative flower bed.

I went down the pathway.

“No one’s here.”

Just like the message Tomer received indicated, no one was inside the administrative center, which had about twenty monitors like a security room. I approached the large desk in the center of the room. A black box was sitting on top.

===

[Awl of Weakening] [High rank – Enchant] [Poison attribute]

\*An awl that weakens the pricked target.

\*Enchanted with the high-rank magic effect ‘Weakening’.

===

Inside the black box was an awl that looked special even at first glance.

“Wow, what’s this?”

I was surprised. It was a high-rank enchantment. Although the item itself wasn’t an artifact, it would easily fetch 1.5 billion won in market value.

It was an unexpected gain.

“Kuhum.”

I let out a dry cough and looked around the room.

“From now on this is mine.”

I put the awl in my pocket and left the room. I didn’t forget to delete the CCTV footage by hacking into its server.

Afterward, I left the B-3 zone nonchalantly, then went back up to the sixth floor.

“...Hm?”

But when I arrived on the sixth floor, I was slightly surprised. I found Rachel not so far away.

“What happened to her?”

For some reason, she looked very haggard. She looked exhausted as though someone had beaten her, and her cadet uniform was tattered.

I ran up to her.

“Rachel-ssi.”

I called her name once she was visible with the naked eye.

“...!”

Rachel jumped even at the slightest noise. Her slender shoulders trembled as she turned her head toward me.

“It’s fine. I’m on the same team.”

“Ah... whew.”

She sighed in relief.

By the looks of it, she seemed to be troubled. I approached her with a thin smile.

“Did something happen? You don’t look well.”

Rachel looked up at me and replied briefly.

“I tried to ambush the enemy but failed.”

“Oh.”

Rachel continued speaking in a weak voice.

“Then I met Kim Suho and lost.”

“...Oh.”

She dropped her head sullenly. However, she wasn’t finished yet.

“I barely ran away from Kim Suho, but Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha chased after me... After I escaped from them, magicians started shooting magic at me...”

Like a tattletale, Rachel recounted what happened with downcast eyes. Then suddenly, she asked.

“...How many eliminations did Hajin-ssi get?”

“I have none.”

“Ah... I have one.”

Points were given based on the number of artifacts acquired and the number of eliminations. At this rate, both of us would rank near the bottom. Ah, I would be fine since I had an artifact.

In any case, I didn't mind scoring near the bottom. I only needed to maintain an average grade overall.

But Rachel was different. Her goal was the first place. If she didn't score well on this artifact scramble, it would be difficult to recover from falling behind.

It seemed she knew this as well, as she stared at the floor with devastated eyes. Then, she kicked a poor rock. The rock flew across the room and hit a wall.

I rummaged through my pocket and spoke.

"We still have time. It's not over yet."

Rachel slowly raised her head.

Looking at her, I took out the artifact in my pocket.

"Here. You can have this."

Rachel eyes immediately opened wide.

"Please carry it upstairs. Rachel-ssi is faster than me."

"...No, this is yours—"

"Just take it."

I cut her off before she could refuse. I just felt like helping her out.

"You see that emergency staircase on the right? It should be..."

I examined the emergency staircase with my Thousand-Mile Eyes. A few quick-witted cadets were blocking the way, but they were on the same team as Rachel.

"Fairly empty."

I smiled as I told her where to go.

“Over there!”

At that moment, a thunderous shout rang out. Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha ran in along with other members of Team White.

In the blink of an eye, Rachel and I were faced with enemies.

There were six on their side versus just Rachel and me.

This surprisingly became a drama production.

“...Kim Hajin.”

Chae Nayun pointed her sword at me. Then, she discovered the artifact in Rachel’s hands and widened her eyes.

“Ah, she’s holding an artifact! Who did you steal that from!?”

“Quick, run away. I’ll delay them as long as possible.”

Rachel hesitated, then murmured at my urging.

“...Yes, thank you.”

With that, she ran.

A white team archer shot an arrow at Rachel. ‘Hmph. As if I’ll let that happen.’ I shot a bullet, predicting the trajectory of the arrow. The arrow was struck down by the bullet, and the archer stared at me with a shocked face.

“Junyoung and I will chase Rachel.”

Two cadets from the white team ignored me and tried to chase after Rachel. However...

“No.”

Yoo Yeonha stopped them.

“...Stay on your toes. He’s a tough opponent.”

With that comment, she tightened the grip on her whip.

I looked around the room for a moment. There were plenty of things to grab onto. If it came down to it, I should be able to run away with Parkour.

“What, you want to fight six of us alone? Are you crazy?”

Chae Nayun asked. I shrugged without answering. For now, my goal was to buy time.

“What should we be afraid of? It’s just one guy with a gun! I’m going in!”

Then, suddenly, a warrior wielding an axe charged toward me. I fired several times along the predicted path he would take. With that, I was able to delay his charge for a moment, but Yoo Yeonha’s whip and an archer’s arrow flew toward me even more threateningly.

I activated Bullet Time.

Immediately, my sense of time slowed down. I could clearly see and predict the trajectory of the whip and arrow.

I fired at the arrow and dodged the whip.

However, something unexpected happened.

The archer’s arrow changed course because of my bullet, turning sideways to the chest of the axe-wielding warrior. His HP must have been low from a previous battle as he was eliminated on the spot.

“Ah, fuck! Hey, watch where you’re shoot—”

Before the axe-wielding warrior could finish speaking, he was blindfolded and muzzled. Uuuup, uuuup! It was a bit pitiful how he struggled. But the arrow struck his chest just now, which undoubtedly counted as a critical blow.

Just to be clear, this happened purely by luck.

“He changed the arrow’s trajectory...”

But Yoo Yeonha seemed to think it was my intention, as she muttered seriously.



On the other hand, Rachel safely joined up with other members of the black team with the artifact.

“Rachel stole an artifact!”

Six members of Team Black cheered when they saw Rachel alive, but Rachel was having many complicated thoughts.

Obviously, it was because of Kim Hajin.

“...”

Rachel stared at the artifact in her hand. Kim Hajin had given it to her with a warm smile, and she felt like she could still feel his warmth from it.

“Haa.”

She sighed.

‘I shouldn’t have received it.’

She wasn’t deaf. She knew what kind of rumors Kim Hajin’s actions created, and she had heard about the rumors going around cadets. Until now, she was telling herself that it wasn’t true, that it was only gossip.

But with what happened today, she had to admit that Kim Hajin’s feelings were real. Thinking about it, she felt she should have noticed it earlier. After he became her teammate, he always stayed near her, whether from a distance or close range...

The countless rumors she heard entered her mind once more.

That Kim Hajin would confess to her, that he would serenade her—

However, Rachel shook off such thoughts.

She felt that she wasn’t in a position to share her feelings with someone. For her country, for her parents, and for the Royal Court guild, she had long since given up on such matters.

...But perhaps, it was all an excuse.

She remembered what her mother and father told her in the past. That when someone she truly loves appears, she would want to be with him even if she had to throw everything away.

But even now, she never felt such a desperate longing.

She didn’t want to give up on the countless values she put before herself.

“...Ah, right!”

In the middle of a deep contemplation, Rachel suddenly remembered that she left Kim

Hajin behind. She became frantic. Kim Hajin was currently fighting six people by himself!

“Let’s go! We need to go save someone!”

“Eh? Where are we going?”

“Follow me!”

Rachel ran down to the sixth floor along with the other members of Team Black.

# Chapter 90

## Fake and Real (2)

Rachel returned to the sixth floor, other members of Team Black following suit. They asked what was going on as they chased after her, but Rachel only ran.

“...What.”

When they arrived on the sixth floor, they saw three cadets lying on the ground. They were all from the white team, and their hands and feet were tied together, leaving them wriggling like caterpillars.

“Um, what’s this?”

The members of Team Black were befuddled by this bizarre scene. Rachel’s head also drew a blank, but she soon realized what happened. She thought that even Kim Hajin wouldn’t be able to handle six cadets at once, but it seemed she was wrong.

“Um, Rachel-ssi?”

“Ah, it looks like the situation is already taken care of.”

Rachel replied somewhat in awe.

At that moment, a spearman walked in from the other side of the lobby.

“Ah, it’s Shin Jonghak! Jonghak~!”

Yi Kyungrak, one of Shin Jonghak’s lackies, ran up to him. Looking at him, Shin Jonghak made a leisurely smile.

Although he lost to Kim Suho, he avoided taking critical damage. After escaping to the sixth floor’s residential area, he was catching his breath.

“Nice to see you.”

Shin Jonghak spoke to his team members, then was surprised when he saw Rachel.

Rachel gave a slight bow in greeting, and Shin Jonghak greeted back with a light nod.

“Jonghak, do you know what happened here?”

Yi Kyungrak asked as he pointed at the tied up cadets on the ground. Shin Jonghak replied in a perfectly calm manner.

“I do. I eliminated two of them.”

Immediately, Rachel furrowed her brows.

Although what Shin Jonghak said was the truth, Rachel thought he was trying to steal Kim Hajin’s achievement.

What really happened was that Shin Jonghak saw Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun fighting with some nimble guy, and used the opportunity to eliminate two cadets by ambushing them.

“Kuhum. Then from now... I’ll take command.”

Shin Jonghak spoke as he glanced at Rachel. Rachel looked at the other members of the black team. They looked more comfortable with Shin Jonghak being their leader. However, Rachel didn’t want to be with someone who would steal someone else’s achievements. Not to mention, she was the one with the artifact.

“Then I’ll take my leave here.”

“Ah, you should come with us.”

Yi Kyungrak tried to dissuade her, looking visibly wistful, but Rachel was resolute. She walked to the east emergency staircase, and Shin Jonghak watched her leave for a while before leading the black team to the central staircase.

From then, the Mock Artifact Scramble resumed at a quick pace.

Shin Jonghak gathered all surviving members of the black team and managed to steal two artifacts. Rachel also made great achievements through guerilla tactics.

On the other hand, the white team protected many of their artifacts despite being chased around by Rachel. Kim Suho displayed outstanding leadership and might, safely transporting five artifacts to designated locations.

Thanks to Kim Suho and Chae Nayun’s performance, Team White came out victorious in the scramble. However, Rachel and Shin Jonghak also managed to get satisfactory

individual grades.

...For the record, Kim Hajin, who miraculously survived Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha's joint attack, spent the rest of his time hiding in the fourth floor bathroom.



“...Huaaam.”

Seventh floor bathroom.

Tomer finally opened her eyes. After waking up, she blankly stared at the ceiling for a moment. She was still a bit drowsy.

“Oh right, the mission.”

She then remembered her mission and checked her smartwatch.

“...Huh?”

But when she saw the smartwatch screen, she fell into a daze.

Currently, it was 3:02 P.M.

Thinking her smartwatch was broken, she rummaged through her pockets and took out the cadet smartwatch.

On it, a more definitive truth was being shown.

+Mock Artifact Scramble Results+

[Final survivors – Black Team: 12 / White Team: 11]

[Artifact Possession – Black Team: 3 / White Team: 5]

[White Team MVP – Kim Suho, Chae Nayun]

[Black Team MVP – Shin Jonghak, Rachel]

+White Team Victory+

“...What?”

Tomer slapped her cheeks, thinking it was all a dream.

However, the smartwatch screen remained unchanged. Next, she tried slapping herself harder. But everything was still the same.

“No way, no way, no way...”

She hurriedly ran out of the bathroom.

With classes over, all lights were turned off and the seventh floor lobby was pitch black.

“Ah...”

Devastated, Tomer dropped to the floor.



After the end of combat training.

Cadets were sitting on a grass field. Some were frowning as they were treated with potions, but most were talking about the artifact scramble either happily or regretfully.

“Jamer, is Jamer not out yet?”

Among the cadets was the instructor Kim Soohyuk, who was calling Tomer’s false name and looking for her.

“...Tsk.”

On the other hand, Chae Nayun was sitting alone, picking on poor grass.

There were many things she was unhappy with. Of course, the scramble ended with the white team’s victory.

But her fight with Rachel didn’t come to conclusion, and even in a one versus six situation – though Shin Jonghak interfered in the middle – she was unable to defeat Kim Hajin.

Most importantly... although she didn’t act like it, she was concerned about what Yi Jiyeon said during the scramble.

“Hmm~”

Then, someone came up to her, making an audible sound. Chae Nayun turned her gaze. It was Yoo Yeonha.

Yoo Yeonha struck up a conversation with a grin.

“Are you bothered?”

“...What do I have to be bothered by?”

Chae Nayun retorted bluntly at the sudden question. Yoo Yeonha rebutted with a nod.

“Oh really? I just thought you were bothered by what Yi Jiyeon said.”

“W-What, are you crazy? Why would I be bothered by that? I don’t even remember what she said.”

“But still~”

Yoo Yeonha stared at Kim Hajin. He was sitting with his team in a shade under a big tree. In other words, he was with Rachel.

Yoo Yeonha spoke straightforwardly.

“At this rate, he might get taken away.”

“Wh, what? Taken away? Can you stop spouting shit. He was never mine in the first place.”

Even though she said that, her actions clearly contradicted her words, her fists clenched and shook slightly. Yoo Yeonha looked at her for a moment, then continued speaking.

“Well, I don’t believe in those rumors either, but he might be searching for someone else because you keep pushing him away.”

Then, Chae Nayun’s gaze slowly turned toward Kim Hajin. She saw Rachel next to him. Chae Nayun furrowed her brows and looked away.

“...If his feelings change that easily, he isn’t my type to begin with.”

“Pft.”

Yoo Yeonha couldn’t help but laugh at Chae Nayun’s self-justifying excuse. Chae Nayun seemed to want to strike back, but Yoo Yeonha continued talking first.

“Nayun.”

“What now?”

“Between Kim Suho and Kim Hajin, who is it?”

“You—! It’s not like that!”

Chae Nayun shouted with a reddened face. Gazes of nearby cadets fell on them, but Yoo Yeonha didn’t stop laughing.

“Then is it Jonghak?”

“Are you crazy?”

She reacted much colder than last time. Shin Jonghak was clearly out of the picture. Somewhat relieved, Yoo Yeonha blurted out feeling a bit bitter.

“...I’m jealous.”

“About what?”

“I have no one, but you get to choose from three.”

“Ueek.”

Chae Nayun simply shook her head, not bothering to answer Yoo Yeonha.

It was then.

Shin Jonghak approached them, wagging his butt.

After getting nine eliminations and stealing two artifacts in this Mock Artifact Scramble, his mood was through the roof.

“Yo~ Chae Nayun.”

“Oh, Shin Jonghak. Your team lost, how do you feel?”

Chae Nayun snickered as she made fun of him. However, Shin Jonghak was satisfied with being the MVP of his team, so he rebutted leisurely.

“It was inevitable. You were in the white team.”

“...Hm, I guess you’re right.”

At that moment, Tomer walked out of the excavation site. Chae Nayun glanced over as well. Kim Soohyuk was approaching her with a scary expression.

“Jamer, why did you come out so late?”

“...”

“I checked your smartwatch GPS, and it looks like you stayed in the seventh floor bathroom the entire time.”

For some reason, Tomer looked completely lost as she couldn’t even reply quickly.



Once the scramble ended, I returned to my room. My body was aching all over the place. Perhaps I should have killed myself during the scramble. Because I didn’t write about the Mock Artifact Scramble in detail, I stayed until the end to see how everything panned out, but I only ended up fatigued.

“Hajin~ Hajin, Hajin~”

But the fatigue melted away when Evandel ran up to me with a bright smile. I held her up and looked around the room. Nightingale, crow-tit, dog, cat... Evandel made all sorts of animals.

“You didn’t forget to keep them inside the room, right?”

“Un!”

Evandel replied energetically as she checked my hands and pockets. However, I didn’t bring anything back. Next, she peeked over my shoulder and even checked my back. There wasn’t any food there either.

Evandel gave me a confused look.

“Hajin, you didn’t bring anything...?”

“Ah... sorry. I was tired, so I forgot.”

“...”

Evandel closed her mouth. Her sparkling eyes became filled with disappointment and betrayal, and began to tear up. I stopped her from crying with just one sentence.

“I ordered chicken and pizza. It’ll arrive soon.”

Evandel’s expression immediately brightened up.

“Aha~ I see~ I see~”

Of course, it was a lie. I would have to order them while I pretend to take a dump.

“I need to use the bathroom.”

I put Evandel down and walked into the bathroom. Sitting down on the toilet, I ordered a chicken and pizza set.

Then, I checked the most recent news.

“...Oh!”

I exclaimed loudly.

Finally, the news I was waiting for was trending on the front page.

[New guild Packhorse Master conquers Suwon Devil’s Nest!]

August 14th came and went a long time ago without any news, so I’ve been worried thinking that something went wrong.

But after seeing this news, I knew once again that I was rich.

I quickly entered the guild stock market.

As expected, 1.5 billion won had turned into 10.3 billion won.

“Bravo.”

I was happy, but also a little worried. Should I sell this now or later? The stock price was supposed to shoot up ten times, but currently it had only gone up seven times.

Perhaps I could check again tomorrow.

Of course, even if I sold everything now, I would get 10.3 billion won. That was enough for me to live the rest of my life doing whatever I wanted.

I could do whatever I wanted... but the money would be gone once I returned to my world.

“...”

Suddenly, an odd feeling rose up from my heart. It was difficult to describe, but if I had to put it, it was a mixture of bitterness and heart-wrenching emptiness.

“Ah, rather than that...”

I slapped my cheeks and shook off these thoughts.

Currently, there was another thing I needed to worry about.

“Singing, singing... Yi Yeonghan you son of a bitch.”

My next biggest concern was singing.

Until the end of the next midterms, no special enemies would infiltrate Cube, so I only had ‘singing’ to worry about.

...Yi Yeonghan, you fuck.

“Ah...!”

I was thinking about what to do, when I suddenly remembered about ‘art’.

I quickly accessed my laptop.

[Art (1/3)]

According to the laptop, I could create up to three Arts. Currently, Parkour was the only Art I had.

However, I would be crazy to fill one of these precious spots with singing.

Not unless I could delete an Art whenever I wanted.

Just in case this was possible, I tried deleting Parkour.

[Parkour Art will be deleted. 200 SP will be refunded, but you will not attain the level of the Art you achieved.]

“Oh geez.”

Frightened, I canceled immediately. Thankfully, I found out that Arts could be deleted. Not only that, a portion of SP was even refunded. In that case, singing was worth considering.

I projected up a hologram keyboard and tried writing an Art.

===

[Master Singer]

—Allows you to sing masterfully.

===

“...It’s only singing. How expensive can it be?”

I tried hitting save.

===

[Master Singer] [Practical]

—Allows you to sing masterfully.

—Allows you to clearly imbue emotions in your singing.

[500 SP will be used. Would you like to save?]

===

500 SP. 500 SP... It was more expensive than I thought. It seemed this Art made someone sing at an artistic level.

“I don’t really want to sing *that* well.”

I had no intention of shocking the crowd by being able to hit high notes. It wasn’t like I planned on becoming a singer. 500 SP was too expensive to avoid a one-time embarrassment.

If I had to explain it, I wanted to sound like a ballad singer, someone like Sung Sikyung or Kyuhyun.

“...Is it possible?”

I tried to change the content of the Art.

—Allows you to sing beautifully.

[150 SP will be used. Would you like to save?]

150 SP wasn't cheap either, but it was acceptable. It looked like there would be at least 4000 spectators. Singing in front of such a crowd would net me 60~70 SP as well.

“Yi Yeonghan, you son of a bitch.”

I cursed the source of this evil once again, then hit save.

“Ah, aaah, aaaaaah. Oho oho, oho oho.”

I tried making noises as I pressed my neck.

“Hyohyohyo, yohyohyohyo, yohyohyo. Yodelei~ yodelei~”

I couldn't really tell the difference.

*Tok, tok.*

At that moment, Evandel knocked on the bathroom door.

—Hajin~ someone knocked on the door. Hehe, I think the chicken is here.”

Evandel seemed to be drooling already.

“Uh, yeah, got it.”

I quickly ran out and received the chicken and pizza.

When I came back in, Evandel was sitting modestly in front of the kitchen table, wearing plastic gloves. I placed the chicken and pizza on the table, then opened it up nicely.

“Make sure to chew carefully.”

“Un!”

Then, I went back to practicing. Ah, Aaah, aaaaaah.

*Woong—*

Then suddenly, my smartwatch rang.

[Hajin, you have to sing, right? Don't you need to practice?]

Jin Hoseung messaged in our team's group chat.

[ㄱㄱㄱ Wanna go karaoke? What do you think, Rachel-ssi?]

That was from Yi Bokgyu. I secretly looked forward to Rachel's reply. With my new Art and the hornflute I had, I was confident in being able to sing well.

[I have to study... I want to go, but... I don't have the time ㅠ.ㅠ]

However, it seemed Rachel was unavailable.

"Damn."

Then there was no reason for me to go either. Why would I go karaoke with a bunch of guys?

I replied that I couldn't go, then took off my watch.



Jerónimo Mercenary's office, located in the center of Seoul.

Jain was currently staring at a monitor, wearing the face of the world's 58th ranked mercenary, Yohan Zestiops.

"...This will do."

She was looking for a mission for an apprentice mercenary. The mission had to involve killing someone, but that person had to be an evildoer who deserved death.

After finding a mission that met the criteria, she contacted her boss.

"Yeah, Boss, I found one."

—What is it?

"An Italian Mafia. He's apparently a Djinn. No, he's *like* a Djinn."

—...Not bad.

“Ah, but are you sure he accepted your offer?”

That was the problem. Jain wasn't sure whether Kim Hajin had decided to join Jeronimo Mercenary.

—I received a positive reply.

“...Really? What did he say?”

—Mm... hold on.

Boss went silent as she seemed to search through her message log.

—I got a message that says, ‘I'll contact you soon when I have time...’ Mm, I think this is a very positive reply.

Jain felt a headache the moment she heard Boss' words.

“Boss, you... when did you get that message?”

—The day I gave him our business card.

“That was two weeks ago.”

—Yeah, so he should be contacting me at any time now. So make sure you have that mission ready.

Boss said what she wanted to say and hung up.

Jain sighed from the bottom of her heart. Was it because Boss never experienced normal social life? Or was she like this naturally? In any case, she was too dense.

“Tsk. I guess I have no choice other than to do as I'm told.”

Jain placed the mafia assassination mission in the ‘confirmed’ folder.

# Chapter 91

## Fake and Real (3)

“...Hm.”

Thursday, after end of classes.

Currently, I was standing in front of the Dorm 2 entrance.

Dorm 2 was the girls' dorm, so it was the last place I expected to visit.

But I had no other choice. If I didn't get it over with today, it would be too late. Class Competitions were starting tomorrow, and once that was over, everyone would be busy preparing for the midterms in two weeks. It wasn't that I would be busy, but the person I was planning on meeting was.

After taking in a deep breath, I walked into Dorm 2's pretty entrance.

Not long afterwards, I ran into someone unexpected.

Wearing comfortable clothes, she seemed to be on her way to the library. I greeted her.

“Rachel-ssi!”

When Rachel saw me, she stopped in place and swallowed hard. It didn't look like she planned on moving from that spot, so I approached her first.

“Are you going to the library?”

“Y-Yes... what are you doing here?”

“Ah, I have something to do.”

I replied with a smile. Then, I examined her carefully.

During exam periods, she looked a bit different. Her hair seemed more disheveled and unkempt. She seemed to be pushing herself because I was her competitor.

“Oh right, you haven't been asking me any questions lately.”

“...I thought I should try to solve them myself before going to seek help... Also, Hajin-

ssi needs to study too.”

“Oh really? If you’re having trouble, you can always ask me. I’m fine with it.”

In response, Rachel nodded silently.

I wanted to go with her to the library, but I didn’t have time.

“Then you should get going. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Yes...”

Rachel trotted off. She seemed to be in a haste to get to the library. Did she want to study that much?

In any case, I headed deeper into the dorm.

My destination was a pavilion near room 201. Someone was waiting there by the time I arrived. I walked up to her. She seemed to have seen me too as she lightly waved her hand.

“You’re here.”

Yoo Yeonha spoke with a bright smile. Just like always, her casual clothes were black. Her white skin suited her black blouse and black skirts.

“Yeah.”

“So, why did you call me?”

Yoo Yeonha looked at me with eyes full of interest.

The reason I came to her was simple.

It was because of the ginseng I found when I went to Suwon with Kim Suho. It was a five-year-old ginseng, and I thought carefully about how to use it.

I didn’t plan on selling it as I now had more than enough money.

The best use of it would be to produce medicine, but I didn’t have the connections and equipment to do so. I tried using Stigma’s magic power just in case that was possible, but it seemed two streaks of Stigma was nowhere close to being enough.

“You made a pharmaceutical firm, right?”

“...”

Yoo Yeonha flinched at my straightforward question. But anyone could have found out about it. Most people in Cube already knew that Yoo Yeonha was doing business.

“...It’s been about two months. My close acquaintances all know about it. What about it?”

Yoo Yeonha’s pharmaceutical firm was destined to succeed.

I had Hosup do a quick background check, and it seemed it wasn’t going so well currently. Although she had the researchers and necessary equipment in place, she was lacking materials.

It was understandable. For the current Yoo Yeonha, finding a proper ginseng digger would be difficult. Most skilled ginseng diggers already had exclusive contracts with giant pharmaceutical companies, and these companies were true giants that wouldn’t flinch at Essence of the Strait’s name.

However, ‘pharmaceutics’ was a huge industry in this world, so Yoo Yeonha wouldn’t give up.

Eventually, her pharmaceutical firm would become one of the top three pharmaceutical companies. Thanks to the ‘connections’ Yoo Yeonha was always obsessed about, it would only take ten years.

“Here.”

I threw her the ginseng. Yoo Yeonha received it with a confused look. Once she identified it, her jaws dropped.

With this, I hoped I could be considered one of her ‘connections’.

“T-This...”

“It’s a five-year-old ginseng. Use it for research, and you can pay me back later with a high quality medicine.”

That’s what I said.

The person in charge of Yoo Yeonha’s pharmaceutical firm... if I remembered correctly, his Gift was ‘Researcher’.

With this Gift, he never forgot a technique he acquired. I wouldn’t have to wait long until I could receive high-intermediate rank medicines.

Yoo Yeonha looked back and forth between me and the ginseng, then put the ginseng

away.

“Where did you get this? Ginsengs don’t appear often in the market these days...”

Immediately after saying that, Yoo Yeonha flinched. The market she was referring to was Violet Banquet, a black market. She started to sweat a little bit, and I smirked.

“It’s possible, right?”

“...Ah, yes, of course. I’ll even pay you back with interest. It will take a while though.”

“That’s fine.”

I gave her a thumbs up. Yoo Yeonha stared at me calmly, then made a mischievous smile.

“...By the way, have you prepared for the singing competition?”

“Yeah, I picked a song, and I went to a rehearsal this morning.”

“This morning?”

“Yeah, that’s why I wasn’t in class for the morning announcements.”

Cube even hired professional musicians for the Class Competitions. They were all people with Gifts related to music, and they arranged the song I chose in under an hour.

“Huhu, then can I look forward to it?”

Yoo Yeonha seemed to be laughing at the thought of me singing, but I retorted confidently.

“Yeah, look forward to it. It’ll go beyond your expectations.”

Then suddenly, Yoo Yeonha’s smartwatch vibrated. It was a call. Yoo Yeonha glanced at her smartwatch, then looked back at me.

“I’ll take my leave now.”

“Yes, thank you. I’ll return today’s favor two... no, threefold in the future.”

When I tactfully turned to take my leave, Yoo Yeonha picked up the call with earphones.

But suddenly, I grew curious of its content, so I strained my ears. My Gift, Observation and Reading, activated, making me eavesdrop on Yoo Yeonha’s call.

—...Yes, I’m in Daehyun hospital. Nurses are saying that Chae Jinyoon’s finger just moved. I stopped by to check if it was true.

When I heard this voice, my feet suddenly stopped in place.  
I quickly turned around and faced Yoo Yeonha.

“Really?”

—Yes, but...

“Ah, hold on a minute.”

Yoo Yeonha put the call on hold and glanced up at me. I asked without caring about being tactful.

“...What is it for?”

“Uh, well, just networking.”

“...I see.”

“Um... what’s up with that face?”

I turned around without answering her.

I felt a stinging pain on my temple. I pondered as I walked in a daze.

Chae Jinyoon’s finger moved.

Of course, it might have been a mistake by the nurses, or even a simple convulsion. But regardless, this news made my heart beat harshly.

“ ... ”

After walking for a while, I came across a bench. I sat down.

I fell in thought, almost soullessly.

The point the seed germinates.

I needed to know the specific time.

Now that my feet were on fire, I remembered the Book of Truth. I immediately opened it and asked.

‘When will the Devil’s Seed in Chae Jinyoon germinate?’

The Book of Truth didn’t tell me the answer, meaning Stigma’s magic power wasn’t enough.

I broadened the scope of the question and asked again.

‘Give me an approximate estimate on how much the Devil’s Seed in Chae Jinyoon has developed.’

This time, all two streaks of Stigma were sucked away.

Then, the number 89% was engraved in the book’s page.

89%.

Assuming that the seed has a five-year incubation period, I only had half a year left.

Half a year.

Six months.

Before the end of winter and the return of spring... that was it.

I didn’t have much time.

With a stiff face, I held up my smartwatch.

‘When will you contact me again?’

Boss’ message entered my eyes.



—Cube’s first-year Class Competitions begins now!

The first-year cadets’ long awaited Class Competitions finally began.

The first day of Class Competitions started with a soccer tournament. Everyone from Veritas class went out to cheer for the eleven classmates who were participating. While most cadets were rejoicing at the fact that there would be no Phenomenon Realm Analysis class, the soccer match began.

“...Wow.”

That was my reaction after observing the match for just twenty minutes.

I was glad I wasn't participating.

That was how intense it was. Although using magic power was forbidden, cadets were existences whose physical abilities had transcended those of humans. For these monsters who could run 100 meters in 3 seconds, it was impossible to hold a normal soccer match.

The soccer ball flew back and forth, as did the players. I watched this wuxia world soccer match like I was watching a movie.

Then suddenly, Rachel, who was sitting next to me, poked my shoulder.

“Hm?”

When I turned around, Rachel looked at me and mumbled.

“Um...”

“Yes?”

“Today's singing...”

“What about it?”

“What song...”

“What song am I singing?”

Rachel nodded. She seemed a bit worried, but also scared. Was she worried that I would fail? How kind.

I replied with a smile.

“Have you heard of If?”

“Yes?”

It didn't look like she knew. I couldn't blame her. If was a song released in 2008.

Perhaps because I mentioned a couple real singers when I was writing this novel, ‘Taeyeon’ existed in this world as well. Naturally, her song, ‘If’, also existed.

Although it was a song from a female artist, I chose the song because I empathized with the song's lyrics, specifically the line, 'I'm afraid to meet because of the goodbye that would come in the future'.

"Rachel-ssi probably hasn't heard of it. It was released in 2008."

"...2008?"

"I think so."

I had to lower the key, but the musicians Cube hired made all the necessary arrangements. They even praised me, calling me a great singer.

"Whoaa!"

At that moment, the crowd broke out into cheers. I looked at the match and saw Kim Suho doing a goal celebration. Now that I think about it, the Class Competitions was a way to make Kim Suho shine.

"..."

Then, I discovered Chae Nayun sitting in the front seat, happily cheering.

A part of me immediately felt uneasy.

Did Chae Nayun hear the news? Did she know that her older brother would wake up in half a year?

At that moment, Chae Nayun turned around and met my eyes. I gave her a weak smile, then turned away.

...Time passed by, and the 90-minute-long soccer match ended.

Our class was the obvious winner.

Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak scored three goals and two goals respectively, and the opponent didn't score a single time thanks to Yi Yeonghan's miraculous saves and Kim Horak's stalwart defense.



Outdoor competitions continued until 5 P.M. Afterwards, cadets moved to the indoor auditorium to watch today's final event, the singing competition.

In the auditorium that had a maximum capacity of 4000 people, second and third-year

cadets could also be seen.

“Oh right, Class Competitions are only for first-years. That’s why there are so many seniors here.”

Chae Nayun, who was looking around the auditorium wondering why there were so many upperclassmen, finally came to a realization. Yoo Yeonha retorted lightly.

“Yeah, our second-year seniors can’t participate even if they wanted to, so they’re spectating instead.”

“Is Kim Hajin really going to represent our class?”

As she said that, Chae Nayun looked around. Kim Hajin was nowhere to be seen. He was likely in the waiting room, and Chae Nayun couldn’t help but worry.

No matter how much she thought about it, Kim Hajin didn’t look like the type who could sing well. He looked like a stereotypical tone-deaf person. Wouldn’t he just embarrass their class?

“He looked confident. He told me to look forward to it, so I am.”

Yoo Yeonha snickered and turned her gaze to the stage.

The emcee appeared at that moment.

He exchanged small talk with the audience, then started the singing competition at exactly 6 o’clock.

The first on stage was Neilee, a female American cadet from the World class.

—I... chose a song called Promise.

Neilee sang an R&B song called Promise.

“Oh, I know this song.”

Chae Nayun got excited as it was one of the songs she liked.

Neilee met Chae Nayun’s expectations, heating up the atmosphere with her explosive voice and vibrations.

“...She’s gotta be the first place winner.”

“Yeah, she’s a great singer.”

Kim Suho suddenly replied to Chae Nayun’s mutter. He had approached her before she noticed.

“Kim Suho? When did you get here?”

“Just now. So when is Hajin coming up?”

“I don’t know.”

After Neilee, a Chinese cadet from Cultivation class named Jin Harim came up. He sang a song called ‘Sad Day’, yet another song laced with high notes.

It was the same for the cadet after Jin Harim.

Cadets chosen as their representatives all chose songs with high notes and powerful climax.

The competition continued and eventually reached the ninth stage.

“Auu, my ears.”

Chae Nayun and many of the cadets in the audience were growing tired of hearing the same kind of songs. It was then.

Tak, tak.

Kim Hajin walked up to the stage with resounding footsteps.

He was dressed nicely unlike his usual self. His black jacket and jeans suiting him well, and he seemed taller than usual as though he had shoe inserts.

“Ooh, look at Hajin~”

The corners of Kim Suho’s mouth were practically hung on his ears as he looked at Kim Hajin. Chae Nayun was dumbstruck looking at such Kim Suho.

—Please introduce yourself.

The emcee told Kim Hajin.

Until then, the audience was still noisy. Perhaps because the eighth contender sang too well, everyone was busy talking among themselves to pay attention to Kim Hajin. However...

—I'm Kim Hajin from the Veritas class.

A single sentence by Kim Hajin silenced the crowd. The way his voice rang on the microphone was surprisingly pleasant.

—I prepared a song called If.

—If?

—Yes. I don't think many people have heard of it. It was released in 2008.

Then, the audience began to stir.

“What?”

“2008? Is it trot?”[1]

“Is he an attention whore?”

2008.

That was when first-year cadets were born. Hearing that the music was from almost two decades ago, most cadets seemed to think it was old-fashioned.

However, Kim Hajin remained unperturbed and began.

—Then I'll start.

The lights went off other than the stage light shining on Kim Hajin, and monotonous piano accompaniment rang out. Soon, Kim Hajin's breath melted into the piano sound...

—If I were to go...

And the first line of the song rang out. That was enough. That single line scattered the audience's complaints away.

His soft vocals seemingly embraced the auditorium.

First line, second line... As the slow song progressed, the auditorium grew quieter until only his voice filled the huge auditorium.

—Because I'm like a fool, and can only watch you from afar...

With his eyes closed, Kim Hajin recited the lyrics like he was savoring them. There

wasn't a single high note or fancy technique. However, his impossibly beautiful voice captivated the entire audience. Heavy, delicate, sweet, and temperate; everyone held their breaths as they savored this moment.

"...His voice."

Chae Nayun murmured in a daze. Sincere goosebumps rose up on her arms, while her eyes captured Kim Hajin's singing figure. His voice seemed to flutter in front of her, shining brilliantly to the point that she felt like she could touch it if she reached out just a bit.

—Because I'm afraid of the sadness and hurt that comes after our meeting.

The final line of the song was the nail in the coffin. A cold falsetto perfectly melded into the heated atmosphere. Even after the song ended, the audience was in a daze as though they just woke up from a dream.

Soon, they applauded.

However, Chae Nayun stayed still without any motion.

The song no one in the audience had heard about was brilliantly perfected by Kim Hajin. Its lyrics were still lingering in her ears.

"Thank you."

Kim Hajin made a bashful smile as he bowed to the audience.

At that moment, his eyes met Rachel's. For some reason, Rachel's eyes were wet with sorrow.

'This music is pretty sad.'

Thinking so, Kim Hajin smiled lightly.

But behind Rachel was Chae Nayun. When he discovered Chae Nayun, the smile on his face disappeared, and he turned around feeling a bit uncomfortable.

Soon, he received an alert on his smartwatch.

[You obtain 98 SP!]

[Luck bonus activates! You obtain 15% additional SP!]

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1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trot\\_\(music\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trot_(music))

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## **FudgeNouget's Thoughts**

Author's note: The song Kim Hajin sang is this!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrpDmvrBOX0>

Taeyeon is the original singer, but Sung Sikyung's version is my favorite.

# Chapter 92

## Worry (1)

The singing competition ended, and the results came out before the lingering aftertaste of the music disappeared.

Veritas class' Kim Hajin didn't get first or even second place. He got fourth.

Although his choice of music and voice were great, how well someone nailed high notes was still used to grade someone's singing.

However, Kim Hajin was undoubtedly first place in terms of cadets' topic of conversation. His performance was already uploaded and gaining hits on several cadets' social media.

"...Ah~ it feels like I went to a concert."

"Right? Who was your favorite?"

"Kim Hajin, Neilee, and Harim. But Kim Hajin really caught me off guard. I heard he goes out a lot. Maybe learned how to sing at karaokes."

Currently, Rachel was still sitting in the audience, now listening to other cadets' conversations. She needed some time to organize all the complicated thoughts coursing through her head.

Today, Kim Hajin showed a good performance. He didn't confess to her like many people were saying he would. She was having trouble sleeping lately because she kept having nightmares about it. She was glad that it was over now.

However, the song Kim Hajin chose kept bothering her. His voice felt sincere, and the lyrics that said he wanted to get closer but was afraid of being rejected.

It was a meaningful song.

'Perhaps he realized I was avoiding him. Now that I think about it, I've been avoiding him too noticeably lately. There's no way he wouldn't have found out...'

Feeling sorry, Rachel let out a small sigh.

“What are you doing here?”

“...?”

A strong voice interrupted her thoughts. Rachel slowly turned her head towards the direction of the sound.

There, she saw Chae Nayun, who spoke as she pointed at the exit.

“Aren’t you leaving?”

It was only then that Rachel caught sight of her surroundings. The auditorium was already empty.

“Ah.”

Rachel got up and began walking to the exit. Chae Nayun stared at her back with a strange gleam in her eyes. Then, she followed Rachel.

It was already 10, and darkness blanketed the outside world.

Rachel trudged forward with a face full of worries. Chae Nayun gave her sideway glances, then went ahead and joined up with cadets who were waiting for her.

“Chae Nayun, where are you going next?... Huaam.”

“Back to my room.”

After retorting briefly, she looked around.

“By the way, where did he go?”

“Who?”

“...Kim Hajin.”

Yoo Yeonha replied to her question.

“That person went that way. To the church.”

“Church?”

“Yep.”

Cube also had religious facilities to support cadets who came from various backgrounds. Most religious cadets were Protestants, and there were some devout cadets who wanted to become priests in the future.

“Why a church?”

“I don’t know... why, does it bother you?”

“Oh please...”

Chae Nayun replied indifferently, but kept glancing at Rachel. She was walking towards the direction of the dorm.

For the record, dorms were on the opposite direction of the church.

“Well, if you aren’t doing anything else, I’m going to bed... Huaam.”

Shin Jonghak yawned. Today, he participated in three competitions: the soccer match, Dungeon speedrun, and duel. He was justifiably exhausted.

Chae Nayun waved her hand as if to say, ‘I don’t need you.’

“Yes, please just go back and sleep.”

“...Hm.”

Yoo Yeonha meaningfully watched Chae Nayun’s oddly temperamental attitude.

“Nayun, what are you going to do?”

“Nothing. Just gonna go back and play some games before sleep.”

“Mmm... you’re not gonna go to the church, right?”

“W-Why would I go there? I never believed in a religion my entire life.”

Chae Nayun grumbled with an uncomfortable expression.



I sat down on the worship chair. The wood creaked as it embraced my body. I stared at the cross hanging in front of me. A dark light shone through the stained glass on the side. I turned my gaze sideways. The colorful art inscribed on the glass glistened in the darkness.

This was the sanctuary of God.

A holy place of confession for those who wished to confess and atone their sins.

Sitting in this huge chapel and reflecting on myself, an unknown reverence and holiness embraced me...

“...or so I expected, but well... there’s nothing special.”

I scratched the back of my neck. There wasn’t some grand reason that I came to the church. It was just that in movies, main characters often visited a church when they were in anguish. Then, they would suddenly be enlightened to their direction in life!

“Haam.”

But it seemed that only happened in movies. Or maybe, it was because I was an extra and not a main character. In any case, the silence was only making me sleepy. After making a big yawn, I stared at my smartwatch again.

[You might have to kill a person.]

[But you will receive a hefty reward.]

[You won’t have to worry about hiding your identity. As Jeronimo Mercenary’s apprentice mercenary, we will guarantee your identity will be kept a secret. If you want, we can extend this guarantee even when you become an official mercenary.]

This was the reply she sent in response to my message, ‘how much will working there pay?’

To be honest, I wasn’t short on money and only asked them that to play along with their methods. As Boss was socially inept, she only knew how to appease people with money.

“Mercenary...”

Anyone could become a mercenary by law. They could even hold the position concurrently with another job. I heard there were many Heroes who worked as

mercenaries part-time because they were chased on money.

About 50 to 100 Cube graduates and probably half of the cadets who had to drop out would end up being mercenaries.

It wasn't a bad choice for me.

Chameleon Troupe participated in huge events like major artifact scrambles and the conquering of the Tower of Dimension. If I joined them, I at least wouldn't have to worry about straying from the main storyline.

And most importantly... I would be able to kill Chae Jinyoon without difficulty. Even if he was a third-generation chaebol, 5 years had passed since he fell into a coma. The security around him should have gotten lax.

"...Huu."

But still, the fact that I had to kill someone got on my mind.

Chameleon Troupe would continue to kill many people.

The only difference between Chameleon Troupe and Evil Society was that Chameleon Troupe didn't kill needlessly. They were no different in that they killed people and plundered their wealth.

Would I be able to commit these crimes?

I had doubts in this regard. This world was no longer just a world inside a novel...

While I was pondering with my eyes closed, I felt the door creak open.

I slowly opened my eyes.

Footsteps continued slowly, and soon, someone sat down next to me.

"Are you Christian?"

The voice echoed inside the church.

I glanced to the side, then spoke with a grin.

"...No. What about you?"

"Hm..."

Kim Suho gazed at the cross as he answered.

"No, me neither."

Despite what he said, Kim Suho's eyes carried a hint of reminiscence.

"Then what's up with that meaningful gaze?"

"Oh, I didn't notice."

"You looked like a devout believer. I would have believed you if you said you wanted to become the Pope."

"Pft, it's not like that... I just remembered something from the past."

The past. Indeed, Kim Suho's past was a bit special.  
I made a small smile.

"You used to go to a church?"

"No, but something like that."

"Catholic?"

Kim Suho shook his head.

"Buddhism?"

This time, he smiled without answering. He was saying no.

"Mormonism? Zoroastrianism? Hinduism? Islam? Greek Orthodox? Confucianism? Taoism?"

"Hahaha, no, none of them. I wasn't really a faithful believer either."

Hearing Kim Suho say this, I threw out a sentence nonchalantly.

"Then what, is it a religion from another world?"

"..."

For a moment, Kim Suho's eyes opened wide. I just threw a tiny stone in Kim Suho's heart, but I pretended to be oblivious and smiled.

“...Please.”

Kim Suho laughed and shook his head. Then he suddenly wore a serious expression and asked.

“But Hajin...”

He asked with an unconcealable sorrow and reminiscence.

“Do you think there are other worlds? You know, like Lord of the Rings.”

Tolkien died in 1973. As Outcall happened around that time, Tolkien’s work stood firmly in this world as a timeless masterpiece.

Without meeting Kim Suho’s eyes, I looked at the cross in front of me.

The crucified son of God entered my eyes.

“...Outcall happened 50 years ago. Even without looking through Earth’s history and just looking at anno domini (A.D.), you’ll see that there were no monsters in this world for 1970 years.”

I faced Kim Suho once again.

“Then rather than saying that monsters suddenly appeared on Earth, it would make more sense to say existences from a different world crossed over to ours.”

“...”

Kim Suho was silent.

I wondered what was on his mind.

In truth, Kim Suho and I had similar circumstances. However, he came to this world when he was young and he even had another family. So unlike me, he didn’t have to feel lonely. He probably only missed his family back home every once in a while...

Kim Suho’s lips moved slowly.

“Then do you...”

“That’s part of the ‘Otherworld Theory’ presented by Dr. Jerus.”

I shrugged and cut him off.

Kim Suho jumped slightly in surprise, then laughed.

“...Ah, is that one of the theories explaining Outcall?”

“Yeah. It’s being criticized for being completely groundless, but I think it’s pretty convincing. Outcall happened out of the blue. I think it’s stupid to use logic to explain something illogical.”

“I guess so.”

We became silent, but the silence didn’t make me feel uncomfortable. Then, I suddenly grew curious and broke the silence.

“Oh right, are you using Misteltein well?”

“Of course. Just like you suggested, I’ve been going out frequently hunting monsters. I feel like it’s gotten harder.”

“Haha, really? Then in the future, let’s go together to find better equipment. Oh by the way, you don’t have an agent, right? I’ll introduce one to you.”

Kim Suho had to get stronger.

He had to be faster than now, and he had to get stronger than in the original story. In a way, Kim Suho was the only method I had in dealing with uncertain danger.

My goal was to finish the main story. However, it didn’t have to be me that finished it.

Even if I died in the middle, if Kim Suho could continue the main story...

Kim Suho interrupted my thoughts.

“An agent, huh... by the way, what could be better than Misteltein?”

“Who knows? The world is big and full of artifacts.”

With that as my final thought, I got up.

I’ve been here long enough, and I thought about my worries more than enough.

“I’ll leave first.”

“Oh, okay. I’m gonna stay here a little longer.”

“See you later.”

I left the church, leaving Kim Suho behind.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Hu...”

3 A.M. It was now Saturday.

[Victory]

Looking at the text in front of me, I breathed a sigh of relief. I almost lost this time. If Random Consolidation System was just 3% lower, I would have been defeated.

—Wow, you’re amazing as expected, hyung-nim. I went all out this time too.

Jajangman messaged me.

—I almost lost. You’re getting stronger by the day... I might not be able to win anymore after a couple months.

I couldn’t fall asleep, so I put on my helmet to play a match or two. Jajangman happened to be up, so I ended up playing seven matches with him.

—ㄱㄱㄱ True, I’ve been getting stronger quickly ㄱ

Jajangman and I became close enough to call each other brothers. It was probably because I could act my original age (26) online.

—Why are you up so late?

I changed the topic.

Currently, it was 3 A.M. I already beat him seven times in a row, and I was getting sleepy.

—Oh, well, something happened today... I can't fall asleep ㄹ ㄹ

—What happened?

—It's not really something I should say... ㄹ ㄹ

Oh? From the looks of it, it was a relationship problem. Well, Jajangman was a teenager, so he was at that age. Half of his life should be about friends and the other half about girls.

I couldn't help but feel a little jealous. After all, I had to worry about killing someone or figuring out a way back home.

—Tell me. I'm 8 years older than you, so I have more life experience.

—Well, it's nothing big... just that, um...

—Yeah?

—It's like... you don't really want it, but you don't want someone else to have it either.

Aha, I get it. This son of a bitch, he's the popular type!

—So you're the one on the receiving end?

—Kuhum, well, I can't say I'm experienced with giving things out~

'Why does he sound so much like a dick today?' I smirked and replied back.

—But why so suddenly?

—No reason, just that it's been on my mind recently.

—On your mind?

—Yes ㄹ ㄹ;; A little bit.

—Really? Well, you've gotta have a reason, right?

This was getting interesting.

—Yes, so um... that person sang in a talent show we had today. I think the song was aimed at me.

—Whoa...

A girl appealing to a guy with a song? She must be quite the assertive one. Or maybe Jajangman was just really handsome.

—Then can't you just accept her feelings?

—No, I don't think that's right.

—Why not? What if someone steals her away? You might regret it later.

This was coming from experience. As a 26 year old, I had relationship experience, and I knew girls who had crushes on me.

At the time, I rejected them because I wasn't interested, but when I saw them going out with other guys later, I always felt a bit sour.

I even remembered thinking, 'that girl used to like me—', like a loser.

—Wow, you're saying the same thing as my friend. ㄹㄹ But I don't really think I'll regret it.

—Of course you don't feel that way right now, but you will later. Plus, didn't you say that she was on your mind?

—Just a little bit. No, a tiny bit.

Just a little bit. No, a tiny bit.

From this message, I could feel that he was a proudful person who didn't like losing. It seemed he really was too young. You had to lose every once in a while to not regret it later on.

—But doesn't the fact that you're staying up late because of her contradict what you're saying?

—Yes? Uh... no... right?

—Trust me. I've been through the same thing. From today, you'll suddenly only see her good points. Once she gets a boyfriend, it'll be too late.

After sending that message, I waited for his reply.

1 minute, 3 minutes, 5 minutes...

No matter how long I waited, there was no reply.

“Did he fall asleep?”

'Damn, I was wondering what he planned to do.'

I opened up the in-console clock. It was already 3:40. It was time for me to sleep. I hurriedly took off the helmet and fell on my bed.

# Chapter 93

## Worry (2)

Saturday's Class Competitions start with archery.

Just like for the soccer match, a large crowd gathered at Cube's archery range. In this world, archery was a rather extreme sports, so many people wanted to see it.

It was boring to just shoot a faraway target. What fun would it be to shoot targets 1km away, which ordinary people couldn't even see? In this world's world of sports, distance records had little meaning.

Instead, archery sports came with all sorts of magic effects and summoned monsters that hindered the archers. These effects provided something to see for the audience, making the sports far more thrilling than simply shooting a target. Naturally, being professional archers came with great honor and wealth.

"...Mm."

And currently, I was sitting in the waiting room, watching the archery match happening outside.

The rule of the competition was simple.

Two archery representatives would stand in their own 75-meter-wide lane. They would both only have one chance, and the final score would be the farthest distance they reached.

But one important thing to note was that the competition wasn't done in a tournament format. Because each archery match cost a surprising amount of money, representatives from each class would only participate in one match. In other words, there would be six archery matches in total, with two representatives going up per match. First place to twelfth place rankings would then be determined by the score they achieved when they were up.

—The match between Acceptance class and Cultivation class ended. Currently, the first place record is 320 meters, held by Eustass Haim.

The fifth match came to an end.

However, the first place record was only 320 meters. I would soon find out why.

“The last match will be between Veritas class and Virtue class. Representatives, please come out.”

A staff called me over. Veritas class’ representative was me, Kim Hajin, and Virtue class’ representative was a French cadet named Baire Moren.

Moren was someone I knew. He was one of the top sharpshooters in Cube. In the future, he would join Creator’s Sacred Grace and constantly oppose Kim Suho. In being an opportunist, he would join Kim Suho’s side in the end. In terms of pure archery skill, he should surpass Chae Nayun.

I glanced at Moren and checked my Gift’s proficiency grade.

===

▷ 「Master Sharpshooter」

[Intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [Evolving — Grade 6] [Proficiency EXP 27%]

===

Its growth halted at grade 6, and its proficiency experience was low as well.

Although I was slightly worried, I wasn’t confident.

In losing, that is.

“Yes, the representatives are coming. Cadet Kim Hajin, cadet Moren, please head out to the field.”

I left the waiting room with my bow hanging on my back.



Noon.

The sunlight shone down perpendicularly, making no shade.

Chae Nayun was sitting with a bag of popcorn and a can of Coke.

“...Why are there so many magicians?”

Chae Nayun murmured as she looked around the archery range. She spent most of her morning loitering around the school, then arrived at the archery range with food when it was Kim Hajin’s turn to go. She was surprised how many robed magicians were around.

“An 8-star magician is coming today. They’re probably here to see her face.”

Yoo Yeonha pointed at the VIP observatory a little ways away.

“Oh, Magician Ah Hae-In?”

Ah Hae-In. She was a French-born 8-star magician, who became a naturalized Korean citizen at the age of 11.

As one of the world’s 300 8-star magicians, she was young and extremely beautiful. Although her personality was often described in strange ways, she was practically an idol to young magicians.

“I heard she was coming. So this is where she was. I was wondering why I could feel the earthquake from so far away.”

Earthquakes were the most common magic effect used in competitive archery. There were also effects like summoned monsters and plant traps, which Chae Nayun was looking forward to seeing.

She couldn’t wait to see Kim Hajin suffer.

—Next is Veritas class’ representative, Kim Hajin, and Virtue class’ representative, Baire Moren.

“Oh, it’s our class’ turn.”

Chae Nayun looked at the archery range with popcorn in her hand.

Kim Hajin and Baire Moren came out side by side. They shook hands, then split off into their own lanes.

“Hmm...”

Yoo Yeonha observed Kim Hajin’s movements with her chin on her hand.

Just now, Kim Hajin got up on the archery plate. The way he walked and carried himself exuded confidence.

“Looks like we have nothing to worry about.”

The Class Competitions event was a matter of pride for cadets. Furthermore, Veritas class was the favored winner because of its cadets. As a result, every time Veritas class lost, they felt bitter for a while because of the sense of pride and belonging they had

with the class.

In a way, it was similar to what Koreans felt when they lost in international competitions.

“...By the way, what is he mumbling?”

At that moment, Chae Nayun furrowed her brows. Yoo Yeonha turned her gaze to the two competitors.

Indeed, Baire Moren was saying something to Kim Hajin.

“Trash talk, I guess? Baire Moren is supposedly sly and ill-tempered.”

“Oh really?”

Yoo Yeonha rarely gave false information, so Chae Nayun believed her wholeheartedly.

‘Now that I look more closely, it does look like he’s provoking Kim Hajin. I see, Moren is a piece of shit.’



VIP observatory, where Ah Hae-In was sitting in. To greet the honored 8-star magician, the observatory was adorned with all sorts of decorations and food.

“...Grand Duchess Ah Hae-In, is that child your nephew?”

During a break, a 5-star magician who volunteered to be her attendant carefully asked.

“Unofficially, yes. Officially, I’m the founder of the Ah clan, so I have no relatives.”

Ah Hae-In grinned as she looked down at the archery range. A part of the reason she came today was to see her nephew. As expected, he grew up well. He stood out especially because he was next to some average-looking guy.

The 5-star magician looked at Ah Hae-In in admiration, then spoke with a trembling voice.

“...Ah, it’s starting.”

“Is it?”

Ah Hae-In placed her hand on an orb placed on a supporting platform in front of the observatory.

“I just need to continue doing what I did before, right?”

“Yes, you can start with a light earthquake.”

“I can do what I want starting from the 350-meter range, right? Since no one managed to get to 350 meters yet.”

“...Yes, but the obstacles have to be the same for both lanes.”

Ah Hae-In burst into laughter at the 5-star magician’s admonishment. Then, she shot back at him.

“Would I be able to do that? Don’t you know how much I cherish my nephew?”

“Ah...ahaha... Well, it’s not a test, but a small festival for cadets. I’m sure it’s doesn’t matter what you do. Do as you wish, Grand Duchess. Cadets will feel honored just by having you participate...”

The subordinate magician showed excessive loyalty.

There was a good reason for it too. 8-star magicians were nobles among nobles, with only 87 of them existing in Korea. The title ‘Grand Duchess’ wasn’t just for show. As Class Competitions had several events, offering a single archery event as bribe wouldn’t cause much of a problem.

In fact, if the Grand Duchess came to Cube as a guest lecturer in exchange for this favor, it would be a huge boon for Cube.

“If you say so.”

Satisfied, Ah Hae-In smiled.



“Damn.”

There was a reason why the first place cadet only reached 320 meters.

I only passed the 250-meter mark just now, but my legs were sore. It was because of the earthquake that just shook the ground I was standing on.

“Wow, you’re pretty good. I guess it’s true that you have a Specialized Gift.”

Moren spoke from next to me. However, he looked relaxed. Naturally, I had some doubts about what was happening. It was a justifiable suspicion. The extent of obstructive effects were clearly different for when I was shooting and when he was shooting.

“Tsk, you sure are relaxed.”

“Are you sure it’s not you who just trained lazily?”

“...Ehew.”

He kept provoking me with a smiling face, making it all the more irritating.

I opened my eyes wide and stared at the observatory where the magician in charge of the obstructions should be staying.

With my Thousand-Mile Eyes, I saw a Western woman using magic inside the observatory. Her red hair and white skin blended well together. Engraved on her black cape were eight golden stars, and some magician was standing next to her, flattering her.

“Hm...”

I knew of one woman with such a setting.

Ah Hae-In.

Thinking about it now, she had some sort of a relationship with Moren... I stealthily turned on my smartwatch and opened my settings book.

...Aha.

“Hey, your aunt is over there. Are you gonna go say hi afterwards?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

Moren’s expression and voice were saying he was oblivious, but the corner of his mouth was slightly curled up. This son of a bitch definitely knew what was going on.

“Your aunt keeps harassing me.”

“What do you mean? Are you making excuses because you think you’re going to miss? Just hurry up and shoot, please.”

“...Tsk.”

I raised my bow. Immediately, an earthquake broke out beneath me. It wasn’t just an earthquake. Suddenly, hail began to hammer down from the sky. I was now in the 300-meter mark. It seemed a new trial was beginning.

The hail struck my shoulders and fingers, and blocked my vision. It was cold and painful.

However, my desire to win grew stronger.

I focused all my senses on my bow and target.

*TANG!*

The arrow shot forward and successfully hit its mark.

“...Huu.”

“Wow, congrats.”

Next was Moren’s turn. However, the hail falling on him was small and soft. If the hail I faced were like 228cm and 521kg hulks, the ones this guy was facing were... like Evandels.

Moren hit his mark without difficulty.

“It’s your turn next.”

“...”

The favoritism continued to escalate. I had no choice but to smile forcefully and keep pushing forward.

In the end, I reached the 350-meter mark after a painstaking effort.

—Both sides have surpassed the first place record! From the 350-meter mark, the target will move 50% faster and the participants’ turn order will change! In other words, Baire Moren will go first!

Moren sighed as he raised his bow. It seemed he was nervous.  
I wondered what the next obstacle was.  
When I was looking at the lanes half in worry and half in expectation...  
Huge vines suddenly shot up from the ground.

“Whoa! What’s this!?”

Moren shouted in surprise. 10-meter-tall vines shot up as if to swallow the entire lane. Among them, a few that were especially close to Moren swirled around him, then KWANG!

They slammed down on the ground next to him.

However, Moren remained poised. All archers cultivated patience and calm.

Unless he stepped off of the archery plate, he didn’t need to worry about being attacked by the vines.

Not to mention, the vines were acting warm towards him. Almost like reeds, they only swayed back and forth. It was almost as if they were fanning him to cool him off.

“...Ah!”

Still, Moren failed.

Under the pressure from constant earthquakes and hail, he was unable to hit the target that got 50% faster. This was his limit.

—Ah! Moren regrettably misses his target!

It was my turn once again. To be honest, I was worried. I raised my bow, swallowing my fear.

Then just as expected, the damned vines became fiercer. They were swaying freely when it was Moren’s turn, but now they were spazzing out violently.

“...”

I stopped thinking for a moment.

Anyone could see the favoritism that was going on. But I could just tear through it as well. In a way, I also had an incredible backing in the form of Lady Luck.

I nocked an arrow and pulled on the bowstring.

Immediately, the vines became even more astringent, almost like they were just dumped by their lovers... I could feel their rage and agitation.

Then it was time for me to get serious too.

I activated Bullet Time. In an instant, the world slowed down. At the same time, the target shot up from a point 350 meters away.

But no matter how I thought about it, I couldn't hit that target.

The angle simply made it impossible.

The target flew through the air, and the monster vines moved meticulously, completely blocking the path between me and the target.

I was running out of time.

The target could disappear at any moment.

I tightened my grip and bit my lips.

In a situation where I couldn't use magic power, would I be able to shoot an arrow through those vines with precise control?

...Just when I was thinking about giving up, a thought flashed across my mind.

“Scan.”

I murmured silently.

I scanned my bow and arrow. The numbers 40 and 41 popped up.

The elasticity of the bowstring, the flexibility of the arrow, all concepts making up the two objects were strengthened.

I opened my eyes wide and peered through vines at the target I had to hit.

Accurately tracing the predicted trajectory of the target, I nocked the arrow leaning slightly to the right.

Then, I pulled the bowstring.

*Shwiiik—!*

The arrow flew forward, bending in a strange way. It flew right, dodging all the obstacles in the path, then curled left before flying straight like a bullet.

The result was obvious.

—...Veritas class' Kim Hajin! He succeeds on the 350-meter mark!

“...The hell, how did that arrow bend?”

After watching my arrow in complete shock, Moren uttered with an expression of disbelief.

“Did you use magic power?”

“You think your aunt wouldn’t have noticed if I did?”

“Then what...”

I chucked my bow in front of me. Now that I got first place even through such blatant favoritism, I felt I needed to make things clear.

“This is the difference in our league.”

I turned around and checked my smartwatch.

I felt something just now.

100%.

I had to have received a gift.

“...I knew it.”

There were several alerts on the smartwatch.

[You performed a curving arrow. Master Sharpshooter’s proficiency EXP increases by 15%.]

[Low rank Gift, Curve Shot, has been added to Master Sharpshooter.]

===

□Curve Shot

—Long ranged attacks will curve depending on the shooter’s will. (The extent of curving will change depending on the Gift’s grade and the type of weapon.)

===

“...”

The corner of my mouth twitched.

Curve Shot.

Another low rank Gift got added to Master Sharpshooter.

To reiterate, my Gift’s strongest point was its scope of use. Proficiency gained by using a gun could be used on a bow. Likewise, a Gift obtained by using a bow could be used with a gun.

In other words, I was now able to shoot curving bullets.

# Chapter 94

## Initiation (1)

Ordinary people might not have seen what happened due to being blindsided by the angle.

The vines filling up the sky were overwhelmingly big, and Kim Hajin's arrow was like a needle in comparison.

However, every cadet could see what happened. Kim Hajin's arrow had clearly curved. In a way, it was a common sight. If it was a magic arrow, that is.

However, magic power wasn't involved in Kim Hajin's archery.

As such, they could hardly believe his arrow's flight path even after seeing it with their own eyes. Rather than an arrow, it was more like a well-trained raptor, cutting through the tiny gap between the vines and chomping down on its prey.

"Whoaa!"

At that moment, Chae Nayun felt a catharsis and squeezed the popcorn bag in her hand. Popcorn shot out of the crumpled bag and fell on the front seat like hail.

"Ah, fuck, what is it!?"

"Fucking hell, who did... Oh, it's Nayun."

"Ah, sorry. You guys can eat that."

"...Huh? Oh... Uh, sure."

The cadets sitting in front of her began to munch on popcorn. Chae Nayun watched them for a moment, then turned towards Yoo Yeonha.

"Hey, Yoo Yeonha, you saw that, right?"

Hearing Chae Nayun's awestruck voice, Yoo Yeonha grinned.

"Looks like he didn't want to go easy this time."

“...Huh? What are you talking about?”

Yoo Yeonha’s eyes were fixed on the archery range as she muttered. Chae Nayun turned her gaze to the archery range following Yoo Yeonha.

Ah. Kim Hajin threw his bow away just now. He seemed somewhat angry.

“The favoritism was too harsh. It looks like he’s quite mad.”

“Yeah... surprisingly, he has quite a temper... Oh yeah, it was too obvious starting from the half-way mark. Is the magician discriminating against Kim Hajin because of his looks!?”

“...Hu, huhum.”

Yoo Yeonha barely held back the laughter that rose up from her heart. She didn’t think Kim Hajin was that ugly, but it was true that he was uglier than Moren.

“It’s not because of his looks. Grand Duchess Ah Hae-In must have intervened. Moren is her nephew.”

Ah Hae-In was the greatest expert of summoning magic, a Master rank magician who was bestowed the title ‘One Man Army’ by the Magic Tower Association. She could apparently summon and control seven high rank monsters. As most high rank monsters had intelligence, it was difficult to even estimate how amazing she was.

“Didn’t Grand Duchess Ah Hae-In become a naturalized Korean citizen a long time ago? How can she have relatives?”

“Moren is her old relative. Her older sister still has French citizenship. Moren is her older sister’s son.”

Grand Duchess Ah Hae-In was a celebrity who proudly claimed an S-rank grade on Yoo Yeonha’s talent book. Naturally, Yoo Yeonha knew all about Ah Hae-In’s family background.

“...How do you know all this?”

That was what Chae Nayun wanted to know. As far as she was aware, there was

nothing Yoo Yeonha didn't know when it came to people.

"You should take some time to study too."

"I'm too lazy."

Chae Nayun retorted briefly, then stared at Kim Hajin. The judge asked Kim Hajin if he wanted to participate in the 375-meter range, but Kim Hajin shook his head. Then, he turned towards the crowd.

At that moment, their eyes met.

Kim Hajin looked at Chae Nayun. Although he quickly averted his gaze, Chae Nayun still received an odd feeling.

"..."

She carefully placed her hand over her heart. It was beating a bit differently than usual. Chae Nayun couldn't help but remember what her teacher told her. That she would begin to only see his good points...

"No way, I'm not crazy..."

Chae Nayun laughed it off.

Then, the host of the competition shouted loudly.

—Veritas class' Kim Hajin succeeds at the 350-meter mark, achieving the first place record!

*Clap, clap, clap*— The competition ended with the applause from the crowd.

But when Chae Nayun was about to go back, she saw Kim Suho heading to the waiting room.

Chae Nayun asked Yoo Yeonha.

"Hey Yeonha, wanna go to the waiting room?"

"No~"

Yoo Yeonha stretched and got up.

"I'm busy. I have to go work."

She had many things to do today. The analysis of the ginseng Kim Hajin invested would arrive in the afternoon, and there was also a meeting planned for Falling Blossom. In this meeting, she hoped to gain even a hint on Kim Hajin's past. That way, she would be able to repay her gratitude at least somewhat.

"How do you have so much work as a cadet?"

"I know right~?"

After replying quietly, she began to head back to her dorm.

"..."

Waiting room, dorm, waiting room, dorm.

Chae Nayun hesitated between the two, and in the end, she sighed and began walking back to her dorm.



"Uh..."

The archery competition was now over. Currently, the 5-star magician was at a loss for words.

Even with an incredible level of favoritism shown towards Baire Moren, it was Kim Hajin who came out victorious.

In that case, how was he supposed to react?

Even he wasn't so audacious as to say, 'I'll punish that cadet for beating Grand Duchess' nephew—!'

"Pft."

But contrary to his expectations, Ah Hae-In was full of smiles.

"Why are you so scared? It's only natural that my nephew would lose against someone like him."

Only then did the 5-star magician's throat clear.

“Ha, haha... is, is that so?”

“Of course. Anyways, I’m jealous. That’s what a Specialized Gift is?”

When she was young, becoming a Hero was her dream. However, no matter how much effort she put in, her body wouldn’t develop. Her body and Gift were only specialized for magic, leaving her with no choice but to become a magician.

“Tell my nephew I want to see him. I want to take him out for lunch to console him.”

“Yes, understood.”

Ah Hae-In got up from her seat. The 5-star magician bowed as he glanced up at her. She barely passed 164cm thanks to the kill heels hidden under her cape, but her real height was only 151cm (there was a rumor that she was even shorter, and that her official height was the result of her tiptoeing during her physical measurements). Furthermore, her small face lacked even a single wrinkle, and her eyes were sparkly like a child’s.

The 5-star magician secretly had doubts.

What sane person would believe Ah Hae-In to be 30 years old? What sane person would connect her appearance to her title, One Man Army, without hesitation?

Weren’t most Caucasians tall? Why was the Grand Duchess so short? Even the 5-star magician’s fourth grade son seemed taller than her.

...It was then.

Ah Hae-In suddenly turned around. She stabbed at the magician’s heart with sharp eyes that she never showed before.

“What did you just think?”

“Y-Yes? Ah, n-nothing. I just thought the golden stars on your cape were beautiful...”

“Tsk.”

Ah Hae-In lightly clicked her tongue. The magician felt a mysterious chill. Even in reality, the magic power Ah Hae-In released from her body cooled the internal temperature.

“Don’t stare at me when I’m standing. I don’t like it.”

After giving the magician a sharp admonishment, Ah Hae-In left the observatory. The magician stood in a daze for a while.

“Uh...”

The only thing he knew was that the points he won by flattering her all day, even going so far as to mess with the final match, had returned to zero.



Sunday, 3 A.M.

At this late time when children should have gone to bed long ago, Rachel opened her eyes in her wide bed.

Her eyes hurt, perhaps because she shut her eyes too tightly trying to fall asleep.

She sighed and raised her body.

The penthouse room’s wide space entered her sight. Her room was huge, but empty. She had no talents for decorating, so she left the room the way it was when she received it. The only things inside were the standard furniture, a couch, a bed, and a TV.

The size of the room perhaps had something to do with how empty it felt.

“...Ehew.”

Lately, she was being wrought with insomnia. Of course, insomnia was a chronic disease she was suffering with ever since ‘that incident’, but lately, it became too severe.

Every time she laid down to sleep, anxiousness and apprehension coiled around her, and embarrassing moments from recent days rose up in her mind.

Especially the Mock Artifact Scramble.

That was a class full of hurt. Even if Kim Suho was her opponent, she never expected to lose so helplessly.

Furthermore, although her fight with Chae Nayun didn’t come to a conclusion, she thought of it as her loss. After all, Chae Nayun had only switched to a sword a few months ago.

If Kim Hajin wasn’t there, Rachel’s rising star title might have crumbled.

Kim Hajin...

She stopped thinking there.

Rachel turned on her smartwatch. She only had 37 numbers on her contacts. She had lived most of her life without friends. Still, she entered the one group chat she was in. There were 153 unread messages.

[Kim Hajin you little bastard, you were amazing today. How did you make that arrow curve? ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ]

[I know right? The singing competition and now archery. Hajin hard-carried the two events he participated in.]

[Oh right, Jamer, are you here??]

[...What.]

[Why aren't you talking?]

[I'm sick. Don't talk to me.]

[Oh look, there's an official video of Hajin's performance ㅋㅋㅋ There are already 10000 likes ㅋㅋㅋㅋ]

The talkative Jin Hoseung added a link to the group chat.

'What is it?'

Suddenly growing curious, Rachel wriggled her hand up and pressed the link. In an instant, a hologram video popped up over a social media page. The title was as follows.

[The rising star Cube cadet's live performance - 'If']

"...Ah."

'It's the song Kim Hajin sang before.' Rachel moved her finger to stop the video, then paused.

Although she found the lyrics to be slightly overbearing, the song itself was good enough to warrant listening to it multiple times.

“Huhum.”

Rachel let out a dry cough and hit the resume button while pretending she did so by mistake.

After a calm piano melody...

—If...

Kim Hajin’s sweet voice rang out.

The music resounded in her huge room, filling up the empty space.

Rachel went under the blanket and closed her eyes.

Listening to music calmed her down.

‘...But he sounded much better live. His voice was clearer. Should I go buy a Bluetooth radio tomorrow? Bluetooth... blue tooth... that reminds me of Rome... et tu, Brute... ’

Rachel’s random thoughts cut off, and she fell asleep.



Sunday. With a final Dungeon speedrun event, the Class Competitions came to an end. The first place naturally belonged to Veritas class, where all the top ranking cadets were gathered, but that didn’t mean they won overwhelmingly.

Because other classes scored the majority of points in non-combat-oriented events like gaming, drawing, dancing, and cooking, the difference between the first and second place was only about 30 points.

In any case, Veritas class still won, and they held a big celebratory afterparty, sponsored by Shin Jonghak.

“Yummy, yummy.”

Of course, I didn’t participate and was spending time with Evandel at home.

Evandel was munching on a chicken wing next to me as I examined a document.

==Apprentice Mercenary Mission==

[Difficulty: D]

[Reward: 300,000,000 Korean won or an item of a equivalent value]

[Goal: Assassinate Siemens, the advisor of the chief of Colaion Mafia’s Southern Torino Branch.

[Siemens is a notorious mafioso known for committing murder, rape, blackmail, and human trafficking. Some even say he is a Djinn.]

==

This was the document sent by Jeronimo Mercenary.

“...Colaion.”

It was quite the coincidence. The Colaion Family happened to be a Mafia family that happened to play a role in the middle parts of the main story.

“An apprentice mercenary is supposed to do this?”

Looking at the document, I felt a tinge of regret.

I accepted their offer, telling myself that I would write out my own story, but wasn't the difficulty too high?

The Mafia in this world were dozens of times trickier to deal with than the real world's. Especially in Italy, the Mafia became much tighter after Outcall, and their unity rivaled that of a country's because of monsters lessening government crackdown.

The advisor of a Mafia branch chief... he had to be at least as strong as a low rank grade 1 Hero.

“A Djinn...”

But if he was a Djinn, I would feel less guilty killing him.

Furthermore, ‘assassination’ was likely my specialty. Using the Desert Eagle's sniper mode, I could attack from at most 2km away. Though, I would have to fire within 1km since my attack power would plummet otherwise.

In any case, I had no plans to immediately accept this mission.

The world outside of Cube was the wild. Even if I fully prepared myself to go out, I couldn't I say I really was.

“Let's see~”

[Physique (0/3)]

For now, I planned on creating this so-called Physique.

# Chapter 95

## Initiation (2)

Physique.

By definition, it was the innate physiological property or health-related trait of a person's body.

The same definition applied to this world's meaning of Physique, making it somewhat similar to Gifts. In fact, it wouldn't be wrong to call it the body's Gift.

Recovering quicker, taking in mana better, having superior organ functions; there were all kinds of Physiques.

However, the Physique I planned to create now was a little more complex.

===

[Magic Dysfunction Physique]

□ Magic Dysfunction

—Physique that prevents the body's emission of magic power, trapping mana inside the body.

===

Magic Dysfunction Physique.

A body that can't use magic power.

At first glance, it was easy to see it as an undesirable negative Physique.

However, that wasn't the case for me.

Since I couldn't use the magic power in my body anyways, I wouldn't be suffering any loss. Stigma's magic power was a different entity than my body's magic power.

That was the important thing.

I wasn't suffering a loss.

So I could just give up on it.

But objectively, being unable to use magic power was a huge flaw. In other words, this was a huge restriction. By applying a negative effect that served as a huge restriction, I could apply an equally powerful positive effect at cheaper cost.

===

Energy Conversion

—Mana stored in your body will not disappear; instead, it will be converted into

energy and stored. Stored energy can increase your physical stats up to twice their base values, but will be used every time you move your body.

===

This was the positive effect.

Simply put, my physical stats would increase up to two times if I just ate well and slept well.

However, the stored energy would be used up with physical activity, so I would get weaker as the fight dragged on. Still, having my stats doubled could prevent me from dying from an ambush.

I thought of this Physique to protect myself from my greatest weakness – ambush. I could only trust in my luck so much. After all, my stats were just too pitiful.

===

[Strength 2.570]

[Stamina 2.580]

[Speed 3.265]

[Perception 4.220]

[Vitality 2.670]

[Magic power 1.930]

===

Nothing increased over 0.2 points since a month ago. At this rate, I would only be in the 4~5 point range in 10 years. With those stats of a low rank Hero, there was no way I would survive in the main story.

As such, this Physique was the best way to bridge the gap.

Without hesitation, I clicked on...

“Oh, wait...”

I tried changing my Physique just to see.

[Mana Affinity Physique]

[You do not have enough SP]

“Can’t you tell me how much I need?”

I got my reply pretty quickly.

[About 5500 SP is required.]

“...Fine, fine.”

I changed it back to Magic Dysfunction Physique and hit save.

[500 SP will be consumed. Would you like to save?]

Because of the restriction of being unable to emit magic power, I needed much less SP than expected. With 500 SP, I would have about 350 left in my bank.

Currently, my singing performance was spreading through social media like wild fire, raising my SP periodically.

I hit Enter.

“...Huh?”

Suddenly, a golden light erupted from the laptop screen, and several messages popped up.

[Your special stat, accumulation of luck, activates!]

[Golden characters rain down, forming words!]

Then, a new low rank Physique appeared.

===

□Blessing in Disguise

—With a certain chance, a tiny portion of your stored energy will lead to a permanent stat increase. (the stat increase chance is affected by your invariable luck stat.)

===

“...The heck.”

I became absent-minded for a moment.

This... it seemed like a weaker version of the ‘Getting Stronger Everyday’ Gift I thought of long ago.

...In any case, it was free so I had nothing to complain about. Even a 0.001 increase per day would be a net gain.

“Nice!”

Unable to hold back my joy, I hugged Evandel who was munching on a chicken leg next to me.

“Ak, what is it?”

Evandel continued eating even in my arms. *Nom, nom, nom, nom.* She sped up, thinking I was trying to steal her food.



The week after Class Competitions.

Cube suddenly became desolate.

It was because cadets knew exams were coming up in two weeks.

Cadets moved back and forth between the Fitness Center and the library with tired faces, and they looked even more dreary during class. Naturally, they were less energetic for team challenges.

“Huu.”

Days went by in this way.

Currently, it was Thursday after class.

I stood in front of Cube’s Portal Station.

My destination was Seoul.

There were things I needed to bring from Seoul before the next main story began.

While I was checking my wallet and cadet card in front of the Portal Station’s automatic door, a voice rang out from my right hand.

“Hajin, Hajin.”

“...Like I said, you’re not allowed to talk.”

“It feels stuffy.”

“...”

Currently, Evandel was inside a pet cage. When I told her I was going to Seoul, she threw a tantrum saying she also wanted to go, so I had no choice but to bring her along.

“I want to get out of here.”

She transformed into a rather unique puppy. She looked like a short-haired Pomeranian, but she had long golden hair growing on her head. Because of it, she looked cuter and more high-class.

“I’ll take you out once we arrive, so wait until then.”

“...”

Evandel whimpered instead of talking. I let out a dry cough and approached a Portal worker.

“Oh? A star is here.”

That was the first thing the Portal worker said.  
I tilted my head.

“...Yes?”

“Haha, I was just listening to it. If.”

The Portal worker laughed and showed me her watch.  
[Kim Hajin (Singing Competition vers.) – If.mp3]

“There’s an mp3 version of it?”

“It’s extracted from the video. Many people downloaded it, you know.”

“Oh... really?”

“Yes. You were great.”

The Portal worker smiled as she wrote my name down.

“Take care. Though, I don’t know where you’re going with your pet.”

“Ah, yes, thank you.”



===

[Athenian Citizen's Obsidian Bracelet] [Magic Artifact]

A bracelet with magic seals. Used by an ancient Athenian noble.

I went to the Seoul Magic Tower and brought back the obsidian bracelet I left. The obsidian bracelet had a new magic seal – magic power reinforcement. It was similar in function to qi reinforcement.

—You will only be able to use it once, so only use it when it's absolutely necessary.

That was what the artificer told me, but that was because he didn't realize the bracelet's Automatic Recharge function. Still, I was impressed with his honesty. I made a note to myself to recommend him to Yoo Yeonha's future Magic Tower.

Next, I went to SH Agency's office. There was something I had to pick up from Park Soohyuk.

When I went there, I was shocked by the scale of the agency's office.

"We already have 11 employees and 5 hunters with exclusive contracts. Ah, this office is thanks to Lady Yoo's investment."

Park Soohyuk spoke proudly. Lady Yoo was obviously Yoo Yeonha.

"That's great. You didn't forget what I invested right?"

"Of course not. You gave it in stocks. I'll multiply in tenfold and give it back."

"Oho."

I looked around the office in awe. The interior design was sleek, and there was even a café. It was also located in a good environment.

"Let's go downstairs. What you ordered is in the parking lot."

Park Soohyuk spoke with a smile.

I went downstairs with Park Soohyuk to pick up the bike I ordered before.

“Oh, is that it?”

Once I arrived at the parking lot, I saw a sparkly motorcycle taking up two parking spaces.

“By the way, Hajin, where did you get this puppy? She’s adorable.”

Park Soohyuk smiled like a dad looking at Evandel in his arms. Evandel was smiling brightly as she calmly leaned against his chest.

Little did he know, Evandel was cuter in her human form.

“Uh... try contacting a pet adoption center.”

I replied half-heartedly and examined the bike.

===

[Agusta Vigilante] [Masterpiece]

□High rank Mana Frame

□Weight Reduction & Reinforcement Preservation

—Reduces the weight of the vehicle and increases its speed. Reinforcement Preservation prevents the weakness to strong impact that would result from Weight Reduction.

□Mana Booster

—Uses mana for instantaneous acceleration.

===

It was labeled as a masterpiece even though it was a manufactured product.

It was worth its cost, but its size made it cumbersome to bring along.

“Ah, Hajin, I have to go now. My employees are looking for me.”

“Oh, okay, I’ll see you later then, Hyung.”

“See you~”

Luckily, Park Soohyuk had to leave. He put Evandel down and quickly ran off. Once he disappeared, I looked around the parking lot.

As expected, there were security cameras.

“Tsk.”

Without any other choice, I picked up Evandel and got on Agusta. I slowly drove to a nearby alley.

Then, I added a setting.

===

□Portability

—By using Stigma’s magic power, it can transform into a suitcase.

[100 SP will be consumed.]

===

Thanks to having Stigma’s magic power be a requirement, I only needed 100 SP for the modification. A vehicle was something I desperately needed for the next main story, and also the ‘work’ I planned on doing.

I hit save without hesitation.

“Let’s see...”

I tried imbuing Stigma’s magic power into the bike. The motorcycle then creaked and was dismantled. Then, it reassembled into a suitcase form.

I picked it up by the handle.

It was heavy. It had to be at least 20kg.

But well, with my strength, it wasn’t the least bit burdening.

“This is great.”

Holding the suitcase in my hand, I muttered in satisfaction. Evandel stood on her hind legs and asked.

“Hajin, Hajin, where are we going next~?”

“Let’s go eat. How’s steak?”

“Steak?”

Oh right, she's never eaten steak before.

"It's really yummy."

"Yummy?"

"Yeah, but first... transform back into a human. I think it's okay now."



Seoul Cheongdam-dong intersection.

Yoo Yeonha was walking down the street with her mother, Jin Yeojung, for the first time in a while.

"Take a good look. All this land will become yours in the future."

"Don't worry, I've already thought about how to use it."

This cleanly arranged intersection was Jin Yeojung's property.

She was one of Korea's top real estate chaebols and an extraordinary businesswoman who invested her rich farmer father's money to make billions of won. Not only did she own Essence of the Strait's guild building, she also owned the buildings of Essence of the Strait's businesses, like 'Essential Armory' and 'Essential Insurance'.

There was a reason why Yoo Jinwoong the Berserker was like a child in front of his wife.

"Yes, I believe you Yeonha. You're not a kid like your father."

"Dad isn't that bad. He's gotten better lately..."

Yoo Yeonha suddenly stopped her sentence and sniffed the air. A delicious smell had entered her nose. She glanced at her mother, then slowly looked around the intersection.

In a nearby alley, there was a food stand selling spicy rice cakes, sundae, and tempura.

'Ah, I know that place. It was even featured on a TV show for being delicious. I want to try it, I want to try it...'

"...Yeonha?"

At that moment, Jin Yeojung's cold voice rang out. Startled, Yoo Yeonha turned back to her mother.

Jin Yeojung looked at the food stand Yoo Yeonha was looking at, and furrowed her brows.

"Yeonha, don't tell me you haven't quit yet."

"Yes? Ah, sssp, of course not. I'm not a child... ssp. I already graduated from that a long time ago."

Yoo Yeonha shook her head nonchalantly.

"Then why are you drooling?"

"Yes? Ah~ my mouth has been dry lately."

Yoo Yeonha quickly averted her gaze elsewhere.

At that moment, her eyes widened.

"...Eh?"

She saw someone familiar.

"What are you talking about. We have many things to do today. We have to inspect the area and meet with the occupants. You'll inherit this place, so you need to know what's going on."

"Mother, there's something I need to—"

"Quiet. Follow me."

Jin Yeojung snatched Yoo Yeonha's wrist.

"Ah, Mom, really... Aaah..."

As Jin Yeojung lived a tough life of her own, Yoo Yeonha couldn't win against her strength and was dragged away.

# Chapter 96

## Initiation (3)

I came to a steakhouse with Evandel. It was supposedly a famous restaurant and as expected, it was jam-packed with people.

“I’ll help you with your order.”

“Ah, yes, can we have eight steaks in the most expensive order?”

“...Yes?”

The waiter tilted his head. Evandel and I could easily finish eight dishes. Three for me, five for Evandel.

“Eight?”

“Yes, and all in medium please.”

“Uh... yes.”

After ordering, I noticed that other customers were giving us strange looks. Even though Seoul had many foreigners, it seemed Evandel’s appearance naturally drew people’s attention. For this reason, I didn’t take off my sunglasses. That way, people would think Evandel was a child of a Western noble and I was her guard or attendant.

“Here you go. This is garlic steak.”

Our first order came out, a steak accompanied with garlic. Evandel’s eyes glistened at the steak’s savory smell and appetizing plating. I cut the steak in bite-sized chunks and gave it to Evandel.

Evandel’s hands trembled in excitement as she stabbed her fork into one.

Then, a piece of steak entered her mouth.

“...!”

Evandel quivered with a face of ecstasy. Afterwards, her hand busily moved from piece to piece.

I stared at her silently, then spoke when I saw the chance.

“Evandel, do you think you could stay home alone for the weekend?”

Evandel, who was chewing on a piece of steak, suddenly stopped. She looked up at me silently. She wasn't chewing on the steak in her mouth and was only staring at me with a fork in hand.

For some reason, I felt uneasy. To think she would stop eating... She's not going to cry, right?

“...In exchange!”

I spoke up before I could confirm my suspicion.

“I'll buy lots of toys for you today.”

“...Lots?”

“Yes, lots.”

I was overflowing with money, so I planned on buying anything and everything as long as they could keep her company.

Evandel looked at me, then nodded with a half-sulking, half-sad face. She stopped eating steak. When she was about to put her fork down...

“Next is the Tomahawk steak.”

The waiter brought a gigantic piece of meat. It had an overwhelming size that was just as big as Evandel's head.

“Uwhoa! What's this!!”

Evandel quickly regained her energy.



After eating at the steakhouse, we went to the New World Shopping Mall.

At first, I planned to take her to the floor selling toys. However, Evandel fixed her attention on a strange place. Evandel stared at this place silently and didn't respond to me calling her.

What caught her attention was a pet store on the first floor and a white cat sitting in a glass cage.

“ ... ”

In a daze, Evandel exchanged looks with the cat. I also turned my attention to the pet store. Admittedly, the white kitten was adorable.

Cat... I immediately calculated the size of my dorm room.

A 60-square-meter room with two rooms.

It was enough to raise a child and a cat.

And well, I've always wanted a dog or a cat as well.

“Hajin, Hajin.”

After staring at the cat for a long time, Evandel pulled on my sleeve. It was easy to tell what her intention was.

“I want to play with Hayang.”[1]

Evandel pointed at the cat with her finger. She had even given the cat a name.

“Hayang? You mean that cat?”

“Un!”

Evandel replied with a bright smile. I glanced at the cat.

Meow— When our eyes met, the cat raised its tail and meowed.

I couldn't help but smile. I went on my knees and got on Evandel's eye-level.

“...But Evandel, if we raise Hayang, what are you going to do about your ghost friends?”

“Ghost friends?”

“Yeah. They might fight.”

There were ten or so animals that Evandel made.  
Evandel fell in thought at my words, then spoke resolutely.

“I’ll make sure they don’t fight.”

“...Really? Then, promise.”

I raised my pinky. Evandel moved her hand clumsily and promised me. I rubbed Evandel’s squishy cheeks with my fingers and got up.  
Then, I went into the pet store and asked the employee.

“Hello, how much is that cat?”



Two days later, Friday 5 P.M., end of classes.  
Before I opened the door and left, I looked back.

“Hayang, you... why did you bite this! Do you want me to scold you?!”

Evandel was training our new cat with a stern face. I wondered if it was possible to train a cat, but that cat cost 6 million won. It would only make sense for it to understand a few human words.

In fact, it wouldn’t be strange if it could talk.

“Evandel, I’ll be back soon, so have fun with Hayang, okay?”

“We’re not having fun.”

Evandel corrected me with a glaring look.

“...Uh, right, don’t scold it too much. I’m going.”

“Un.”

Evandel didn’t pay much attention to me and only focused her attention on Hayang.

I felt a bit disappointed, but I also felt relieved.  
I left the dorm relaxed.

My first destination was Cube's Portal Station.

"To Seoul."

"Yes, cadet Kim Hajin, confirmed."

After arriving in Seoul, I took the Portal connecting Seoul to Torino.

To take an international Portal, you needed a passport and a form of identification. I gave the Portal worker a fake identity and a fake passport, both of which were prepared by the Jeronimo Mercenary.

As expected of fake identification created by Chameleon Troupe, they were extremely effective. The Portal worker didn't give me any suspicious looks, and I managed to arrive in Italy in just 30 minutes.

"...Interesting."

Southern Torino looked completely unfamiliar. It was to be expected since it was a foreign country, and even in reality, Italy was a rather special country. The reason for it was obviously the existence of the Mafia.

Italy's government were anti-Mafia on the surface but the reality was different.

In my setting, Italy's Mafia weren't simple organized crime syndicates.

They cooperated with the government if a monster outbreak occurred, and a few large Mafia families operated publicly, disguised as guilds.

In a way, they were freedom-seekers operating within the boundary of the law.

Of course, there were exceptions every now and then.

In any case, the Mafia formed their headquarters in Torino and Milano, which was faraway from the central government.

Important characters of these regions were the Colaion family and the Fermun brother and sister.

The Colaion family was the biggest Mafia family in Milano and Torino, and the Fermun brother and sister were elite soldiers groomed by them.

In other words, I was currently on my way to kill a member of the Italy's biggest Mafia family...

Ah, no, this mission could have come from the Colaion family itself. After all, my target used his position to sully the family's reputation.

"Little Apprentice, over here."

When I was stealthily moving to the hotel, someone called me. A lethargic yet deep voice. I turned to the direction of the voice.

"...Eh?"

There, I saw Boss. She raised her hand without even a single change in her expression, almost like a child waiting for the traffic light to change.



Same time, Cube's martial arts training room.

"Ah~ I'm so tired."

Chae Nayun let out a sluggish breath and collapsed on the floor. Kim Suho, who was sparring with her until just a moment ago, didn't know where to place his eyes. Because her training uniform became stuck to her skin from sweat, her breast area was being highlighted too much.

However, Chae Nayun didn't pay any attention to it and glanced sideways. Yoo Yeonha was sitting nearby and pondering with a serious face.

"Yoo Yeonha, what are you doing? I even went out of my way to find you a sparring partner."

"..."

Yoo Yeonha averted Chae Nayun's gaze, then replied briefly.

"...I'm just thinking about something."

Currently, Yoo Yeonha was thinking about last night. Why was Kim Hajin with that child, and who was she?

A daughter? No, it was impossible for a 17-year-old to have such a grown up daughter. Then was she his niece? No, an orphan couldn't possibly have a neice. Then could it be

that he's a... lolicon? No way, Kim Hajin wasn't such a person.

"Ehhh? It doesn't look simple~ Is it Shin Jonghak again?"

Yoo Yeonha flinched, hearing Chae Nayun bring up Shin Jonghak.

"W-What about Jonghak?"

"Uh, nothing, I was just wondering if you got rejected."

Yoo Yeonha immediately clenched her teeth. She felt rage suddenly rising up from her heart. Mentioning Shin Jonghak... she was annoyed anyways because he rejected her offer of studying together...

Yoo Yeonha blurted out angrily.

"Oh right, Nayun, Kim Hajin says he doesn't like you anymore."

"What? What are you talking about? Are you crazy?"

"Oh, is that true?"

Suddenly, even Kim Suho showed interested. Yoo Yeonha shrugged.

"Of course. He says he likes Rachel more now. You've heard the rumors, right? I mean, even if I were him, I would like Rachel more than Nayun."

"W-Wha, what? Are you crazy?"

Chae Nayun shot up. However, Yoo Yeonha wasn't intimidated and continued with a bright smile.

"I'm just saying. It's not like it matters, right? You said you don't like him."

"..."

Chae Nayun was at a loss for words. She simply didn't know how to respond. After all, it was true that she said that.

"...Tsk."

Chae Nayun glared at Yoo Yeonha once, then sat down far away from her. Yoo Yeonha didn't look at her either.

An awkward atmosphere descended between the two.

"...Hey, guys, don't be like this. You were getting along until just now. Yoo Yeonha, do you want to spar with me? I'll help. You came here to train too, right? You too, Chae Nayun. Ah, where did Yi Yeonghan go...?"

Kim Suho, who was stuck between the two, muttered helplessly.



Italy, Torino.

I took out my bike in a deserted alley. Boss seemed surprised by the bike that popped out of nowhere, as she rubbed her face filled with curiosity.

I asked her:

"Did you come to help?"

"No, I won't be helping you."

Saying that, she got on my bike. Standing next to it, I tilted my head.

"...What are you doing?"

"Come, Little Apprentice. I want to go driving."

"..."

I was a bit dumbfounded, but I got on in front of her and grabbed the handle. Woong—  
The engine noise was soft.

I left the alley and drove into the road.

"Little Apprentice, let's go around Torino just once. We still have a lot of time."

Boss whispered softly.

"...Sure."

I did as she said.

===

[Horse Saddle] [Antique]

A horse saddle used by a nameless cavalryman 500 years ago.

If you sit on this saddle, you will be able to handle rides better.

===

Driving was easy thanks to the saddle I bought in Clancy Islet. I glanced back when I had the chance. Boss' hair was fluttering in the wind.

"...Tonight at 9, there is a fellowship party planned in Torino's Leolen Mansion."

Boss suddenly spoke while we were still driving.

"Your target will serve as the party host. If you arrive around 8:30, he might be preparing for the party in the mansion's garden. That will be a golden opportunity for your attack."

I carefully listened to Boss' advice.

"There is a forest next to the mansion, and inside that forest is an abandoned church. That church's steeple is the perfect high-ground to snipe a target."

Hearing that, I immediately turned on the bike's navigation system.

I searched for an abandoned church near Leolen Mansion, and the navigation outputted one result.

I set that place as my destination and turned the handle. It didn't take long for me to get there. Although the road disappeared in the middle, my bike drove through the forest without problem.

Just as Boss said, there was a church buried inside the forest.

I stopped the bike near the church. The dilapidated church was covered in moss and vines, but climbing to its steeple did seem like it would grant a direct view to the mansion.

I got off the bike and checked the current time.

[8:10 P.M.]

At that moment, Boss suddenly asked.

“Little Apprentice, can I watch you work?”

My answer was obvious.

“I’d feel uncomfortable.”

“...There’s no need to.”

Boss grumbled and got off the bike. She was about to leave, but suddenly stopped and glanced at my right hand and left arm.

On my right ring finger was a ring, and on my left wrist was an obsidian bracelet. Her gaze was fixed on these two items.

“...Oh right.”

I suddenly remembered. Boss liked pretty equipment regardless of its function. That was her personality. I remember writing that she loved sparkly items to death.

“...”

Then suddenly, Boss raised her head.

Our eyes met.

She gave me a somewhat envious look. When I stared back silently, she smacked her lips and spoke.

“What are those accessories? They look nice.”

“It’s a normal ring and a normal bracelet.”

“I’m okay with the bracelet, but that ring... do you want to—”

“It’s not for sale.”

I gave a stern reply. Boss narrowed her eyes and leered at me.

“I never said I’d buy it. I have many items prettier than that ring in my vault. For example, Persian King Darius’...”

“I’m jealous.”

I cut her off and jumped up to the top of the church’s steeple. As I got used to Parkour, my movements were smooth and nimble even in my eyes.

I looked down from the top of the steeple.

Boss was glaring at me with a somewhat unhappy look.

“You can leave now.”

“...I was planning to.”

Only then did she turn away and leave.

I checked the time with my smartwatch

[8:30 P.M.]

Then, I peered at the mansion using the Thousand-Mile Eyes.

It was about a kilometer away, a distance most Heroes could cover in 30~40 seconds.

Factoring in the time it takes to react to the assassination and figure out my location, I predicted that I had about a minute.

In other words, I had to escape in one minute.

“...Huu.”

I took a deep breath and took out the Desert Eagle.

Fusing with Stigma’s magic power and Aether, the Desert Eagle transformed into a vicious anti-material sniper rifle.

“Scan.”

Random Consolidation System activated three times.

First was on the Desert Eagle, then Aether, then my bullet.

The numbers I got were 25, 31, and 22.

“...Today’s luck isn’t that good, huh.”

Even with a slightly lacking luck, I was using a modified bullet. To erase the evidence that would be left behind on the corpse, I added a property to the bullet that made it vaporize after penetration. Since I also planned to use an ample amount of Stigma's magic power, a single bullet should be able to finish the job.

[8:35 P.M.]

I covered my face with the mask I brought and peered at the faraway mansion with the Thousand-Mile Eyes

All kinds of preparations were done in the garden: waiters, champagne bottles, food, music...

Among them was my target.

“ ... ”

I held my breath and raised my gun.

I checked my target's face from a kilometer away. The target was a Caucasian man with a handsome beard and well-defined facial lines. Currently, he was shouting at a group of waiters.

—Andiamo! È una mossa veloce, bug!

I didn't understand what he was saying.

But I had to kill him before the fellowship party began and the number of eyes watching increased.

I placed the man's figure in my eyes and put my finger on the trigger.

---

1. Hayang means white.

---

## **FudgeNouget's Thoughts**

Author's note: used a machine translator for the Italian sentence. It is supposed to mean, "Let's go! Move faster, you bugs!"

# Chapter 97

## Initiation (4)

Paolo Bettina Fermun and Vanessa Jeriel Fermun.

The two Fermun brother and sister were looking out of the window in Leolen Mansion's hallway. They could see Siemens yelling at waiters in the garden below.

"...I hope it'll go well."

In truth, Venessa Fermun was the one who requested the Jeronimo Mercenary to assassinate Siemens. She did not want a dirty cockroach like him tarnishing the honor of their godfather.

"I'm sure it will. They're the Jeronimo after all."

"No... I think we provided too little compensation. What if they do things halfheartedly?"

To the infamous Jeronimo Mercenary, killing a member of the Italian Mafia was a trivial matter. Venessa Fermun didn't offer that great of a reward either.

Of course, Venessa and Paolo Fermun considered taking the matter into their own hands, but they quickly changed their mind when they realized how big of a risk it entailed.

To the Mafia, killing a member of one's own family was the most heinous crime. It was looked down upon even if it was through proper procedures, and Siemens was even an individual who gained the trust of the branch chief.

"What does Uncle Ezio see in that man?"

Venessa muttered with her teeth clenched. It was then.

She met eyes with Siemens through the window. Siemens looked at Vanessa with a lustful smile. The way his serpentine eyes scanned her grossed Vanessa out.

"Tsk... I hope the Jeronimo will show no mercy."

Vanessa prayed inwardly.

“May he burn to ashes.”



“...”

I didn't pull the trigger. It was because I saw a faint blue light surrounding the garden. If my eyes were correct, that should be a mana barrier, a defensive mechanism that blocked attacks from the outside.

Of course, it would have been stranger if there wasn't any security for a Mafia family's fellowship party.

Breaking that barrier... seemed possible. It didn't look particularly strong.

Since the party hasn't started yet, they probably had the intensity lowered to save mana.

The anti-magic attribute should be able to easily penetrate a mana barrier of that degree.

“Haa...”

I poured almost all of Stigma's remaining magic power into the bullet, giving it the property of anti-magic.

Then, I took a deep breath.

Once I pulled the trigger, there would be no going back.

With my hands, I would be killing someone who I didn't know to be human or Djinn.

However, it was a resolve I needed to make.

I needed to stay in this world for at least the next ten years.

During that time, I would need to kill many people. These murders would be by necessity.

As such, I needed to be more bold. My emotions needed to be worn down even more.

I hoped today's experience would serve as the trigger.

I clenched my teeth and placed the target in my eyes. Was he a human or a Djinn?

I hoped he was a Djinn.

But if that was the case, what was the difference between a Djinn and a human? Were

Djinns deserving of death? What about humans? Was I supposed to hesitate to kill them? Also, was I trying to kill a character in a novel, or was I trying to kill a living, breathing human being?

All sorts of thoughts emerged in my head, and my mind became chaotic.

I closed my eyes, then reopened them. I cooled my heated head.

I couldn't come to a conclusion to a problem without answer. I also didn't have time to distinguish between reality and imagination, and question my morals.

I put my finger on the trigger and pulled it slowly. The trigger was pushed softly, then was hooked to the end with a click.

I pushed the trigger through.

There wasn't a loud noise, only the sound of the forest's leaves rustling at the raging wind pressure.

The bullet that flew out of a muzzle shot through the air at an incredible speed.

There was a tiny gap between the firing of the bullet and its impact. However, the target couldn't escape during that time.

The bullet's anti-magic attribute crushed through the mana barrier, and the target who was standing in the garden... was shot dead with his eyes still open.



Boss watched the scene from afar. Kim Hajin's bullet shattered the mana barrier and pierced the target's head. The shattered crumbs of the mana barrier fell down on the collapsed target like snow.

A white bullet, blue glass-like fragments, and crimson blood. The harmony of the three drew a beautiful picture, and Boss quietly closed her eyes.

Crimson blood.

Hot blood.

The target wasn't a Djinn.

Bodyguards in the scene quickly rushed up to the target. They guessed the position of the sniper through the target's collapsed posture and began racing forward.

Boss opened her notebook. Kim Hajin's location was being displayed in real time. Currently, he was in the middle of running away. He quickly reached the city streets, then slowed down when he reached a certain point. It seemed he got off his bike.

Boss began to run to where he stopped.

One minute was enough.

He was sitting on the terrace of a coffee shop wearing a pair of sunglasses and a suitcase on one side.

“...”

Boss felt a bit proud. Was that the attitude of a person who just killed a man?

However, she soon realized she was wrong. His hands were shaking, and his forehead was dripping with cold sweat.

Boss approached him slowly.

“Little Apprentice.”

When she called him, his shoulders shook. Boss sat down in front of him and stared at him. His eyes were hidden beneath his sunglasses.

“You did well.”

“...Did I?”

“Yes.”

Kim Hajin stared at her for a long time without a word, then spoke in a shaking voice.

“That’s... good.”

Boss didn’t have anything to say to him. At that moment, a staff brought over a cup of Americano coffee. Kim Hajin picked it up with shaking hands, and...

“Aak! Fuck, that’s hot!”

“...”

He stuck out his tongue as if to cool it off, then carefully blew on the surface before taking another sip.

He looked fine from the outside, but it seemed his mental state was all over the place. Boss gave him a compassionate look.

“Kuhum. Ah~ damn it. I ordered an ice coffee too...”

Embarrassed, Kim Hajin let out a dry cough. Boss nodded and asked back.

“How was it?”

“...People say there’s a first time for everything. That was it.”

“Right, it’s not easy to make money.”

Boss held the coffee cup Kim Hajin put down. Then, she unleashed her magic power and blew away the heat.

“But Little Apprentice, money is the only thing you can trust, especially for people like us.”

“...Us?”

Kim Hajin tilted his head, looking confused.

“We don’t have a family. We grew up without ever having a family.”

“...”

Kim Hajin seemed to fall in thought at Boss’ words. He then nodded and replied with a grin.

“Well, I guess so.”

Boss liked his answer. She liked him the more she got to know him.

Today was especially so.

His bullet broke the mana barrier and killed the target. What broke the mana barrier was undoubtedly the power of anti-magic.

‘My eyes weren’t wrong. Kim Hajin will certainly become the silver bullet that will kill him.’ Boss thought joyfully.

“Oh right, can you give me the reward as an item?”

Kim Hajin suddenly spoke.

“Item?”

“Yes, item.”

Kim Hajin knew Boss had many precious and valuable items. Since Boss didn't know much about their market price, he knew that choosing an 'item worth 300 million won' would net him a rarer and more expensive product.

Simply put, Boss was bit of a pushover. Kim Hajin was also aware of the incredible luck he had.

Boss, who didn't know about Kim Hajin's thoughts, nodded after a little bit of thinking.

“Understood. I will prepare your reward myself.”

“Great. Then since I'm done with the mission, I'll go back now. Have a nice day, Li Xiaopeng-ssi.”

'If I knew it would end so quickly, I wouldn't have bought that cat...' Kim Hajin got up as he muttered incomprehensible things.

However, Boss grabbed his sleeve before he took off.

“Wait.”

“...Yes?”

“From now, don't call me Li Xiaopeng.”

Boss raised her head and looked at Kim Hajin.

“Call me Boss instead.”

“..”

In that instant, a cool breeze blew past them. Boss' hair fluttered in the air, and Kim Hajin stared into her eyes.

After swallowing hard, he slowly moved his mouth.

“I don't want to.”

“Good... Huh?”

Boss, who was full of confidence, suddenly fell into a daze.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I haven’t decided yet.”

“...What?”

Boss frowned.

However, Kim Hajin wasn’t fazed in the slightest and even spoke more daringly.

“It’s up to me to decide where I belong. Now is too early to decide, so... hahaha.”



Late night.

I returned to Cube. I felt drowsy, but the sensation of the trigger and the image of fresh blood shooting up into the air were still vivid in my mind.

Feeling somewhat dirty, I walked along the dark road blankly.

“Huu.”

Before I noticed, I was inside my dorm, standing in front of my room.

When I opened the door using the fingerprint scanner, I saw Evandel and Hayang sleeping on the couch in each other’s embrace.

I walked up to them and stroked Evandel’s sleeping head.

“...?”

Evandel opened her eyes narrowly. With a face full of drowsiness, she smiled sweetly. I held her in my arms. Evandel rubbed her cheek on my shoulder and asked.

“Did you bring yummy food...?”

“Ah.”

I had forgotten. I should have brought some Italian food.

“Uun?”

“Tomorrow. We can eat it tomorrow. It’s late now, so you should sleep.”

I went into the bedroom and put her on the bed. As the bed was Evandel’s sleeping place, I slept on the living room couch.

“You’re up too?”

When I went back to the couch, Hayang was sitting straight and yawning. I smiled and lied down on the couch. Hayang looked at me for a moment, then hopped onto my stomach. After taking a big yawn, she curled herself into a ball.

“...Hayang’s surprisingly cute.”

I stroked Hayang’s back and slowly fell asleep.



The midterms began. However, Cube’s second semester midterm period was more bleak and desolate than the first midterm period. It was because entrees of reporters and family members were prohibited due to the trouble that happened during the last midterm.

There were even rumors that Cube was planning to get rid of midterms entirely.

Although things were going a bit differently than in the original story, I didn’t care too much. Even in my novel, I glimpsed over the second semester, so I didn’t know much of what would happen in the first place.

—Today’s test was way too hard.

—Yeah, what was up with that hell-mode difficulty? Shouldn’t we sue the professor?

After the end of the first written exam, I could hear many cadets complaining.

They were saying how the exam was unfair, but for a first place cadet like me, written exams were just days where classes ended early.

“Hey, Kim Hajin.”

At that moment, someone ran past me and blocked my path.

It was Chae Nayun.

I tilted my head silently.

It seemed Chae Nayun didn't know what to say after her grand appearance as she fiddled with her fingers and glanced at me. After a little while, she finally spoke.

“...Are you going to the library?”

“No, I'm going back to my room.”

Then, Chae Nayun's eyes narrowed.

“What, you're not going to study?”

“Nope.”

I retorted bluntly and began walking once more. Chae Nayun followed after me.

“Then um, you don't have study guides or anything?”

“No.”

Chae Nayun's shoulders flinched. In the next moment, she blocked my path again and stared into my eyes. Her eyes were a bit pitiful.

“...Can you help me out? I bombed today's exam too.”

“Now? It's the middle of the exam week.”

“I can stay up and cram. Apparently just having key points memorized will boost your score by 10 points.”

“I think you're better off asking Yoo Yeonha for something like that.”

“But I... had a fight with Yoo Yeonha.”

At that moment, I received a message on my smartwatch.

It was from Kim Hosup.

[Hajin-chan! I found out who Agus Benjamin is!]

Immediately, my eyes widened.

Agus Benjamin, or his real name Fernin Jesus.

Tomer's father had finally been located.

[Where is he?]

I quickly sent a reply.

[Nowhere. He already passed away.]

"...Huh?"

[What do you mean? Can you explain in more detail?]

[He was living in a Korean retirement center until 4 years ago, which was when he passed away. Who would have thought? What a twist, what a twist.]

"..."

I finally understood why the Book of Truth couldn't locate Fernin Jesus.

It was because he was already dead.

[Got it. Thanks.]

[By the way, Hajin, I decided to quit my job. I put in my resume at the place you recommended.]

[That's a good idea. For now, can you tell me the location of that retirement center?]

After sending this message, I checked today's date.

September 7th.

The next main story was coming up. If I could deal with Tomer before then, that would be a great burden off my back.

"Come on, I'll buy you something delici—"

Ignoring Chae Nayun who was murmuring to herself, I ran to the Portal Station.



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