

KW

소설 속 에스트라

지갑송 퓨전 판타지 장편소설



THE NOVEL'S EXTRA

- 소설 속 엑스트라 -

- VOLUME 4 -

-AUTHOR-
Jee Gab Song

[FudgeNouget (Wuxiaworld)]

Goo Yeonka



Chae Nayun



Rachel



Chapter 130

Crossroad (1)

[Yoo Jinwoong's daughter, Yoo Yeonha. Arrogation Scandal... The guild leader's daughter is running the guild?]

Yoo Yeonha bit her fingernails as she watched the news.

Because a monster outbreak occurred in the middle of Seoul when the report first came out, she thought it would be buried under the more important news. However, that wasn't the case.

On the contrary, more news articles regarding Essence of the Strait came out starting from the second day, and even false rumors began to circulate from the third day.

Her smartwatch was on fire because of all the calls and messages she was getting, and she was also getting attacked on her social media account.

She was on the receiving end of all sorts of derisive comments, saying that she was undeserving of her place or that she used her appearance to coax people.

"Auu..."

The amount of stress she was under gave her a strong headache. Yoo Yeonha closed her eyes and pressed her forehead.

She usually noticed such attacks before they happened, but she was caught completely off guard this time. That was how meticulously organized it was.

"I've been too relaxed."

Yoo Yeonha criticized herself with bitterness. She had only used her information guild to watch out for outside threats, letting internal threats go undetected.

"It's not looking good..."

Although most of Yoo Yeonha's money came from her mother, it was still Yoo Yeonha who used the money to invest in various businesses. Although it wasn't illegal in any way, it was true that Essence of the Strait's money was used to invest in her businesses. As Falling Blossom was an information guild that was active in Violet Banquet, she

wouldn't be able to avoid being expelled from Cube once the public found out. That would also have negative impact on the guild as a whole.

However, what worried her the most was how disappointed her mother would be.

"Who is it..."

Yoo Yeonha bit her lips.

Too much of the guild's internal data became public. Clearly, the perpetrator was a member of the guild and likely from the vice-leader's faction. The only problem was that no one from the vice-leader's faction should have so much information on her.

"Argh, my stomach."

Yoo Yeonha's stomach churned from the stress. She buried her head on the desk as she squeezed her stomach.

The timing just wasn't good.

Kim Hajin's past.

Chae Jinyoon's death.

Creator's Sacred Grace's Tower of Miracle campaign...

"Argh, my stomach!"

This time, Yoo Yeonha's stomach hurt for a different reason.

Creator's Sacred Grace was currently in the middle of conquering the Tower of Miracle. If they succeeded, Essence of the Strait would only be chasing after their shadow, but now with this scandal, Essence of the Strait could possibly fall below their rank 2 position.

"Argh, aaang..."

Yoo Yeonha rolled her feet as she cried.

For the past four days, she had trouble sleeping and eating. It wouldn't be strange if she fainted at any moment.

—Excuse me, Young Lady.

Yoo Yeonha raised her head.

"What is it now?"

—Someone has come to see you.

Annoyed, Yoo Yeonha shot up and stomped to the interphone.

“I told you to kick all the reporters out!”

—Ah, well... he’s not a reporter, but a cadet. He keeps saying that he’s Young Lady’s ally.

“...Ally?”

Yoo Yeonha furrowed her brows.

Ally.

There was only one person who could call himself her ally.

“Is it... Kim Hajin?”

—Yes, he says he has something to give you. Should I let him enter?

“Ah... tell him to wait. I’ll go out myself.”

Yoo Yeonha left her room and came out to the lobby of her family mansion.

Although it took some time to get there, it couldn’t be helped considering the sheer size of the mansion.

“Ehew.”

Yoo Yeonha let out a small sigh as she opened the front door.

The outside air rushed in like a tide.

She breathed in fresh air for the first time in a while.

She could see Kim Hajin waiting by the main gate beyond the mansion’s garden.

When Yoo Yeonha gave the sign, the guard opened the gate.

Kim Hajin walked towards her.

“...What’s up?”

Yoo Yeonha asked when Kim Hajin arrived at the front door. Kim Hajin held up a plastic bag.

“You weren’t picking up my calls or responding to my messages, so I came here myself.”

“Ah, well, as you know, things haven’t been going so well... Anyways, what’s that?”

Yoo Yeonha pointed at the plastic bag. Kim Hajin opened it and showed what was inside.

Spicy rice cakes, sundae, fish cakes, hamburger, fried chicken... it was filled with all sorts of food Yoo Yeonha loved.

“I, I told you I don’t like these things.”

Yoo Yeonha almost fell to the temptation, but quickly snapped out of it and reacted sharply.

It was because of her old habit. To not appear weak in such situations, she had to reveal her thorns.

“This is just a present.”

However, Kim Hajin forced the plastic bag onto Yoo Yeonha’s hands.

“Auu, really.”

Although Yoo Yeonha really wanted to refuse, the smell of food rising up from the bag prevented her from doing so.

“...Huu, I’m going to throw them in the trash. I can’t just have them lying out here.”

“Sure, do whatever. By the way, are your parents home?”

“They’re outside dealing with what happened. I don’t know if it will be recoverable though.”

Suddenly, Kim Hajin grinned. After rummaging through his pocket, he pulled out a large envelope.

Yoo Yeonha tilted her head and asked.

“What’s that?”

“Bullets.”

“Bullets...?”

Kim Hajin handed her the envelope.

Though confused, Yoo Yeonha received the envelope and opened it.

[Truth Agency]

- Thank you for using Truth Agency, the center of trust and honesty.
- The information you wanted has been summarized below.
- The following is the list of individuals related to the Yoo Yeonha Arrogation Scandal.

On the first page was a logo of a half-bitten apple with the words ‘Truth Agency’.

“What’s this?”

“Truth Agency. You haven’t heard of them? They’re the hottest information agency right now. I splurged quite a bit of my money.”

Kim Hajin sounded like he was acting.

Dumbfounded, Yoo Yeonha asked again.

“What’s up with the half-bitten apple?”

“It’s their logo, I guess.”

“Why is something like this their logo?”

“I’m sure you’ll get addicted to it if you stare at it long enough.”

“...It looks bad though.”

Yoo Yeonha glanced at it once again.

- The following is the list of individuals related to Yoo Yeonha Arrogation Scandal.

The final line caught her attention especially.

“...It’s fine, I can deal with it on my own. I’m not so shameless as to receive help on such a private matter.”

“Who said it was free?”

“Eh?”

Yoo Yeonha tried to return the envelope, but Kim Hajin snatched it out of her hands before she could do so.

“You make armors too, right?”

“Um, yes, of course.”

“What about armors for beasts?”

“...Why would we make that?”

“Try it.”

He then gave the envelope back. Yoo Yeonha took the envelope as though she was enchanted by a spell.

“And read that carefully.”

With that, Kim Hajin turned around and left.

“...What was that?”

Yoo Yeonha watched him leave with a blank face.

Once he was gone, she remembered the envelope in her hands and peeked inside.

===

[Perpetrators]

[1. Park Sangho]

▷Kept secret records of Yoo Jinwoong’s dealings in his personal database.

▷Greedy for money. Has participated multiple times in the vice-leader’s illegal Dungeon campaigns.

===

Yoo Yeonha widened her eyes. The list inside the envelope didn't just have the names of perpetrators, but also definitive proofs of their wrongdoing.

"W-What is this?"

Yoo Yeonha quickly raised her head. However, Kim Hajin was already driving away on his bike.

Yoo Yeonha's eyes chased him in a daze.



The tide was quick to reverse. Although Yoo Yeonha was at the center of the scandal at first, that quickly changed when the wrongdoings of the vice-leader's faction were brought to light.

Smuggling, illegal hiring of mercenaries, unreported Dungeon conquests and tax evasion...

Of course, as they were still members of Essence of the Strait, it was impossible for the guild to avoid a temporary fall in rank and loss of public trust.

However, only growth and prosperity awaited them with all the rotten roots pulled out.

Yoo Yeonha would undoubtedly lead Essence of the Strait to the world's rank 1 position.

[Thank you so much. Please convey the message to Truth Agency as well.]

[Thanks to you, guild members from the vice-leader's faction are groveling at my feet ^^]

[Oh right, what did you mean by armors for beasts?]

[We've never made them before, but we can make as many as you want of the highest quality. Just give us the details.]

[(emoticon of a squirrel clapping its hands and thanking)]

Today was February 13th.

After replying to Yoo Yeonha's message in detail, I checked the announcement Cube just released.

[Cadet Rankings]

[Kim Hajin: rank 334 → rank 121 (213↑)]

Cadet rankings had changed.

I climbed 213 ranks and was now at rank 121, reaching the top 10% of cadets in my grade. It was a drastic change, considering I was at rank 934 a year ago.

Curious about how people were reacting, I logged onto Cube's cadet community.

—Damn, Kim Hajin;; he's shooting up in the ranks.

—I mean, he's a god in theory. Apparently, he got perfect scores on all PRAII tests. I don't think anyone can deny that he's a genius.

└ I heard the professors say that he can easily win a Nobel Prize if he focuses on theory.

—But isn't there a rumor about him wanting to become a mercenary?

—Why would he do that? Even with his gun-related Gift, many high-intermediate rank guilds are after him.

—Um, I heard he might enter the English Royal Court guild...

└ English Royal Court guild? ㄱ ㄱ ㄱ ㄱ Wait, is this Rachel?

└ No;; I don't know what you mean by that ㄱ ㄱ ;;;

Just as I expected, my name was all around the cadet community. For the record, PRAII was an acronym for Phenomenon Realm Analysis II.

[Congratulations! ★ Rank 100 ★ (◡◡◡)!]

At that moment, Rachel's message arrived.

[Thank you.]

After replying back, I checked Rachel's rank as well.

[Rachel: rank 3 → rank 3 (—)]

She was still at rank 3. It couldn't be helped since Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak were rank 1 and rank 2.

Chae Nayun was also still at rank 4, while Yoo Yeonha had fallen to rank 9. It wasn't too surprising, since I knew she only cared about staying in the top 10.

[Oh right, when will you be coming to England? Winter break is ending soon.]

Rachel must have sent it without much thought, but it made me ponder.

The new school year began a bit late for second-year cadets. Not only would classes be reassigned, cadets had to formulate their own schedules like in colleges. At the moment, I was thinking about dropping out.

[I don't think I'll be able to go. I just don't have the time.]

[Ah... really? That's a shame ㄥ.ㄥ]

Peebeebeep—

“I'm home~”

“Meow~”

At that moment, the door opened, and Evandel and Hayang walked in.

“Oh, welcome back.”

I got up and greeted the two kids.

Recently, Evandel has been going out more frequently. However, I wasn't worried. As I was in a rich neighborhood, there were plenty of safe playgrounds and cafes around.

“Hajin, I went on a slide today!”

“Oh yeah? How was it?”

“It was like a cave! I went down like shooooong~”

“I'm happy you had fun. Now, it's time to study.”

“...”

Evandel put on a sour face.

Although it was great that she was having fun playing outside and making friends, training intelligence was necessary to grow her potential as a witch. After all, Evandel would become a great boon for humanity in the future.

“I'll do it after I eat.”

“Really?”

“Un.”

Evandel jumped out of my embrace and began to text someone on her smartwatch. It was probably the friend she said she made.

“Evandel.”

“Un?”

I wanted to ask her.

“Do you want to keep staying here?”

Even if I didn't drop out, I could ask to commute starting from the second year. Although it would be a bit cumbersome since I'd have to go to Seoul Portal Station every morning, it wasn't a big deal if it was for Evandel.

“...Uun, no.”

But to my surprise, Evandel shook her head.

“Eh? Why?”

“...Hajin, are you leaving?”

Evandel replied to my question with another question. She sounded afraid and worried.

Realizing why, I smiled brightly.

“No, both of us, no... all three of us will stay together as long as you want.”

“With Hajin?”

“Yep.”

“Then yes!”

Evandel happily nodded.



Baekdu Mountain's [Yoo Sihyuk Martial Art School].

As soon as her hellish, 12-hour-long training ended, Chae Nayun ran to the mailroom.

"Ajusshi, is it here today?"

The man at the counter grinned and took out a letter.

"...Here ya go, kid."

"Ah! Thank you!"

Chae Nayun took the letter.

Today was February 13th. Almost two weeks had passed since she last received a letter.

"What is he even busy with?"

Ever since the first letter, Kim Hajin slowed down in replying. From four days to a week, then to two weeks.

But now that she received it, she felt a surge of joy.

Chae Nayun left the mailroom with a big grin on her face.

"Hm? What are you two doing?"

Outside, Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak were waiting.

In truth, Chae Nayun told them what happened. That her older brother died.

"Hello? Can you hear me?"

"...No, it's nothing."

"Yeah, it's nothing."

They both glanced at each other and scratched their cheeks.

'Ehew.' Chae Nayun sighed.

"...If you want to help me, just treat me like you always do. Got it?"

On the outside, Chae Nayun also acted the same way.

But when she was alone, she couldn't hide her sorrow and practically cried herself to sleep every night.

The only reason Chae Nayun put on a strong front was to resist being devoured by sorrow. She knew her Oppa would want the same thing.

"Still..."

Kim Suho sighed with an uncomfortable face.

Shin Jonghak suddenly stepped up.

"Chae Nayun, you can lean on me whenever you want."

"Are you mad? I'm leaving. Also, don't follow me around. It's gross."

Chae Nayun pushed the two away and ran to her room. As soon as she got inside, she slammed the door shut and opened the letter.

[I'm glad that you're doing well.

It's almost time to come back, so make the best out of it.

Don't get hurt.

I've been busy lately, so I won't be able to write often. Sorry.]

"...That's it?"

Chae Nayun murmured in a daze.

Was she being pranked by her masters?

She checked the back of the letter, but there was nothing there.

The letter only had four sentences.

Chae Nayun was confused. She didn't want to believe that this was it.

"...Did I do something wrong?"

Chae Nayun suddenly got a strong urge to leave the mountain.

Chapter 131

Crossroad (2)

In a mansion lit by a dim lamp, a man was sitting on a chair reading a newspaper. Objectively speaking, he was handsome. He had sharp, well-defined facial features that shone beautifully under the light, and his somewhat displeased expression gave him a heavy atmosphere.

“Haa...”

Soon, he dropped his head with a troubled sigh.

At that moment, the door on the opposite side of the room shot open, and a girl wearing a leather jacket stomped in.

“What, did something happen?”

Murmuring mockingly, she sat down next to him and sneered.

“Did you blow all your money on gambling again?”

“...Yeah. Anyways, Sahyuk, now there’s only a little scar on your forehead. It’s barely noticeable.”

The man retorted calmly at the girl’s mocking tone. The girl reacted angrily.

“What?”

“You know, where that kid’s coin hit you? I remember you furiously trying to wash it off.”

The memory of that day flashed by the girl’s eyes.

Although three months had passed since then, fury and humiliation surged within her whenever she thought about it. As disgrace was something she never experienced before, it remained in her mind vividly.

“Don’t make me remember it.”

The girl, Jin Sahyuk, gritted her teeth and admonished the man. However, it seemed the man had no plans to listen to her warning.

“You should have never let it happen. Like I always say, you shouldn’t overestimate yourself.”

Tak. The man put down the newspaper in his hands. Jin Sahyuk glared at the man without paying attention to the crumpling sound of the newspaper.

“Sahyuk, don’t misunderstand. You’re still a rookie, someone I can kill with a flick of a finger.”

Hearing this, Jin Sahyuk’s eyebrows twitched. She forced herself to twist up the corners of her lips and spoke fearlessly.

“Then try it.”

The man’s eyes flickered coldly.
Jin Sahyuk repeated.

“Try killing me.”

“...Hm.”

“Try it.”

As expected, she was reckless.
Without a choice, the man closed his eyes and backed off with a smile.

“Sorry, I was a bit on edge today.”

Hearing his surrender, Jin Sahyuk seemed to have been appeased somewhat, but she soon brought up the topic again.

“...I can win if I fight him again.”

“That’s what you think.”

“I was just underestimating him.”

“So you lost to a single coin?”

“...”

Jin Sahyuk shut her mouth. She couldn't think of any way to refute him.

Three months ago, that bearded man had used only a single coin to push her back and leave a deep mark on her forehead. She still found it hard to believe that a coin could have such destructive power. The mark she received didn't go away for a month, making her too embarrassed to even go outside.

“Bell-ssi.”

“Hm?”

At that moment, a woman came into the room with food.

“Are you not feeling well today?”

“...Ah.”

The woman called the man Bell.

Bell grinned in response.

“I'm just mad at myself. An important matter went awry, but I only just found out. It seems I stayed in Pandemonium for too long.”

He tapped on the newspaper in front of him. The woman stared at the content of the newspaper and murmured.

“Chae Jinyoon's death... what's this?”

“Just a little something-something. He was supposed to be alive, but someone killed him.”

“...”

Jin Sahyuk stared at Bell, then shot up as she pushed her long hair behind her.

“I’m leaving.”

“Where are you going?”

“To the arena.”

“...Pft.”

Bell laughed.

“What, you got a problem with that?”

“No.”

“If you do, then let me fight those guys.”

Ever since she suffered defeat at the hands of that bearded man, Jin Sahyuk has been throwing tantrums about wanting to go fight the two men.

Kim Suho and Kim Hajin.

It seemed she wanted to pay back the humiliation she suffered. However, Bell had no intention of giving her permission. As far as he was concerned, Kim Suho and Kim Hajin were two crucial pieces needed to perfect Jin Sahyuk in the future.

Although he only had Kim Suho in mind at first, another one ended up appearing by pure chance.

“Like I said, I don’t have a problem with it. Go to the arena and have fun. But it won’t be any of my business if you meet Satan’s Servants and get beaten up.”

Satan’s Servants.

They were the rank 1 organization in Pandemonium. All 33 members of their organization were contracted to the infamous devil ‘Satan’. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that Pandemonium’s laws and rules were maintained by their overwhelming strength.

“...”

Jin Sahyuk left the mansion silently.

The world outside was filled with the smell of alcohol and blood and sights of pleasure and entertainment.

Jin Sahyuk walked to the center of Pandemonium.

As she walked, she reminded herself of what happened.

Although it angered her whenever she thought about it, it was something she needed to do to not forget.

KWANG.

The power behind the coin.

KOONG.

The lightning-like force of the coin.

Without a doubt, he was a powerful opponent.

Just like Kim Suho, someone worthy of staying in her mind had appeared.

Wondering how strong he would get in the future, Jin Sahyuk put her hands over her face and shuddered.

“Ah... hahaa...”

I want to fight.

No, I want to kill.

I want to tear his limbs apart and kill him.

Her body shook from a powerful urge.



A peaceful afternoon one week before the start of school.

Essential Armory’s employee personally came to my apartment with a black envelope and a box.

“Hm.”

The box should have the armor I asked for, but I wasn’t sure what the envelope was about.

Once I brought the packages inside, I first opened the envelope.

Inside was a black card.

[Essential Armory Special VIP card]

There was a letter to go along with it.

[If there's anything you need, you can ask the armory directly without going through me. It's the same card that I use so there shouldn't be a limit.

P.S. The card can be used for other businesses owned by Essence of the Strait.]

Yoo Yeonha's handwriting was a work of art.

"...Now isn't this abuse of power?"

I smiled bitterly. Even after suffering from an arrogation scandal, she had only gotten bolder. Did I help her too early?

But well, I couldn't complain about such a nice gift.

I put the card in my wallet and opened the box. As I expected, it had the armor I asked for.

===

[Magic Crystal Armor] [Masterpiece]

[Charged Mana 2000/2000]

—Physical Body Reinforcement

*Increases stamina, vitality, and speed by 0.3 points.

—Intermediate-rank Durability Reinforcement

—Damage Absorption

*Absorbs damage equivalent to charged mana.

—Multirole

*Installed with a body scanner. Can be worn by non-human beings.

===

This wasn't a wearable armor. It was a high-tech armor that projected armor to fit the body. Armors that weren't partial artifacts couldn't compare to it whatsoever. Still, it wasn't perfectly to my liking.

I added a setting.

[The stat increase is tripled when equipped by a non-human target.]

The SP cost was 150. The word 'non-human' was perfect for bringing down the cost. I summoned Fenrir who was sleeping in my chest.

“Graawr.”

When a tiger-sized wolf suddenly appeared out of thin air, Hayang raised her tail and ran away.

“Ah! It’s my wolf. Hehe.”

On the other hand, Evandel smiled brightly and approached the wolf.

“Grrr, grrr.”

The wolf blissfully enjoyed Evandel’s small and soft hands.

“Fenrir, try wearing this.”

I placed the circular armor on the wolf’s chest and infused magic power into it. Immediately, an armor shot up, covering the wolf’s chest and back. He seemed to be satisfied with it, as he growled happily.

It was then.

Woong.

My smartwatch suddenly rang.

It wasn’t just once.

Woong. Woong.

My wrist kept shaking from the repeated buzzing.

[You obtain 144 SP.]

[Magic power of rage and obsession has formed a spell in a distant place. You have been selected as a ‘target’.]

[However, a miraculous luck strikes!]

[A mysterious power reverses the spell!]

[An unknown person’s Gift, ‘Targeting’, has been changed to benefit Kim Hajin!]

[Narrow Escape from Death (4/9) – A special stat, accumulation of luck, becomes partly unlocked!]

“...Huh?”

Why did my SP go up, and what was with this ‘Target’?

Did I come up with a Gift like this?

Although I wasn't sure what was going on, I couldn't complain about my accumulation of luck going up.

"...Ah, is it him?"

Then, I suddenly remembered.

The guy named Heuk Jeon from Dark Moon Society who tried to kill me and Rachel during the final exam.

It seemed he tried to cast some curse on me.

"...I'll tell Boss about it later."



March 13th.

"It's really over..."

Time flew by, and tonight was Chae Nayun's final night on Baekdu Mountain.

As she opened her bag to pack her belongings, Chae Nayun looked around the room she stayed in for two months. Although she didn't bring much with her, there were many precious items in this room.

"..."

They were the photos lined up on the shelf next to her bed.

On one photo, Chae Nayun and Chae Jinyoon were smiling together brightly.

Chae Nayun held up the frame carrying the photo and lightly caressed it.

Then, she suddenly felt something surge within her.

"...This time, I thought you'd stay with me forever."

Murmuring with a trembling voice, she held the frame in her embrace.

Reality still felt like a dream.

She thought multiple times that her older brother would be waiting for her in his hospital bed when she ended her training and came home.

"Sorry, Oppa."

She regretted it every night and faulted herself every night.
She couldn't help but think that he would still be alive if she refused to go to Baekdu Mountain and stayed with him.

"...Sorry."

Even after all this time, she couldn't help but cry.
Chae Nayun quickly wiped the tears off her face.

"Wait just a little bit, Oppa."

Then, she put the frame in her bag.

"I'll get your revenge."

She muttered with a strong determination.



Two days before Cube's 2nd year began, I came back to Cube to pick up my belongings.

"Here you go, Cadet Kim Hajin."

"Thank you."

I received my stuff from the dorm manager. I surprisingly had a lot on me: VR gaming set, shirts, coats, jeans, slacks, etc.

With a big box in my arms, I walked to the Portal.

"Eh? Hajin-ssi?"

Then suddenly, I heard a familiar voice.
Looking up, I saw Rachel.

"Rachel-ssi?"

...After meeting coincidentally, we stopped by the park we often trained in.
The grass still had signs of Rachel trying to call elementals. Rachel smiled bashfully

and hopped to that spot.

“I got hit with lots of bullets here... I can’t believe that was three months ago.”

“I feel the same way.”

I put the box down on the ground.

Only then did Rachel look at me with curious eyes.

“What is that box for?”

“Oh, um...”

I smiled bitterly even at her light question.

I scratched the back of my neck as I muttered.

“I’m going to drop out of Cube.”

“...Eh?”

Rachel widened her eyes.

“W-Why?”

“Well, I’m more comfortable becoming a mercenary.”

“Mer... mercenary?”

Rachel muttered in shock.

“I’ll stay here for the first semester. Ah, well, I guess I’m leaving in the middle. But I should be here until the midterms.”

There was a reason I had to stay in Cube.

The final main story element in Cube. I needed to stay here and watch ‘that incident’ unfold.

“Then, um, Hajin-ssi... about the English Royal Court guild...”

“I won’t be able to go. Sorry.”

“..”

Rachel made a sad face. I never said I’d go to the English Royal Court guild. What was she imagining?

“But who knows? We might work together with something like a mercenary partnership.”

“Yes?”

Mercenary partnership. Simply put, it was a way to get more manpower for conquering Dungeons or Towers.

“Ah... Hajin-ssi is always welcome... but because a partnership is done with the entire mercenary group...”

However, because the number of mercenaries groups that were stronger than a guild could be counted on two hands, even small guilds rarely formed mercenary partnerships.

I could understand why Rachel was hesitant, as the English Royal Court guild was the number one guild in England.

Of course, the name of the mercenary group I was in would change everything. Jeronimo.

This seemingly lame name was always the one choosing guilds.

“You can worry about that when the time comes.”

“Ah, yes, you’re right.”

Rachel smiled bitterly and scratched her cheek. I stared at her for a moment, then took out the cadet handgun I kept in my pocket.

“Since it’s been a while, should I help you train?”

“Yes? Ah, kuum.”

She coughed proudly.

“Yes, let’s do it. I’ll show you how much I improved.”



March 15th.

Springtime arrived with the falling of cherry blossoms.

Currently, I was standing in front of my new classroom. I wasn’t particularly nervous. In fact, I was quite apathetic to the whole thing.

The name of the class was Sacred Flame. Rachel, Yoo Yeonha, and Yi Yeonghan were in my class.

Chae Nayun should be in Kim Suho’s class, and Shin Jonghak should be in a class by himself.

I opened the classroom door.

There were three familiar faces. Well, since one was sleeping, I couldn’t see his face. The sleeping one was Yi Yeonghan. Yoo Yeonha was already surrounded by many cadets. Without Chae Nayun or Kim Suho in her class, Yoo Yeonha would reign as its queen.

“Hm?”

When Yoo Yeonha met my eyes, she smiled and waved her hand. It seemed she didn’t mind interacting with me openly now that my ranking was near the top 100. Along with a greeting, Yoo Yeonha moved her mouth silently.

—Nayun is asking why you aren’t replying.

“..”

I gave her a little smile and sat down at the back of the class.

“Good morning.”

Rachel, who was also sitting in the back, greeted me.

“Good morning.”

I returned her greeting with a smile.

When it became 8:00 exactly, the door shot open, and the instructor walked in.

“It’s great to see you, ladies and gentlemen.”

The enthusiastic instructor released his magic power into the air.

Yi. Yeong. Jin.

His red magic power displayed his name clearly.

“I am Sacred Flame class’ chief instructor, Yi Yeongjin.”

I carefully listened to the male instructor’s excited introduction.

“From second year and onwards, classes will be held a bit differently. I’m sure you all know about it, but I’ll give a brief explanation.”

Cherry blossoms fluttered through the opened windows, and an aromatic scent flowed in.

“Other than the morning class, end-of-the-day class, and the two ‘common classes’, all cadets will be trained according to the schedule they formed.”

I didn’t have many days left in Cube.

There were plenty of painful, sad, and complicated matters, but when I thought back to Cube in the future, I was sure I would be able to say I had fun.

“Our common class is joint stamina training. You will need to get into groups of four for this training.”

Two months.

After this short yet long period, I would disappear from Cube.

Chapter 132

Crossroad (3)

On an afternoon, Chae Nayun was peeking her head into the Sacred Flame class.

“Argh, when is it ending?”

Sacred Flame’s chief instructor, Yi Yeongjin, was rumored to be overly zealous, and it seemed to be right, considering he spent 20 minutes giving the end-of-the-class announcements.

“What, is it still not over?”

“I know, right?”

Kim Suho walked up to her and asked.

Chae Nayun glared at Yi Yeongjin through the window. From the looks of it, he didn’t plan on dismissing the class until the cadets in charge of cleaning duty finished their task.

“Ah, it’s finally over.”

At that moment, the instructor tapped his desk, and the cadets got up at the same time. The classroom’s front door opened, and a huge lump walked out.

It was the over 190 cm tall giant, Yi Yeonghan.

“Oh man, were you guys waiting for me?”

Chae Nayun responded to Yi Yeonghan with her expression.

“...What’s up with that face?”

“Shut up and move.”

Because of Yi Yeonghan’s height, Chae Nayun couldn’t see behind him even when she

tiptoed. However, even when Yi Yeonghan moved over, she couldn't see Kim Hajin in the classroom.

“Geez, why you gotta hurt my feelings like that?”

“Oh please. Where's Kim Hajin?”

Hearing Chae Nayun's question, Yi Yeonghan's face instantly turned to one of schadenfreude. His eyes formed crescent moons and his eyebrows danced up and down.

Chae Nayun held back the urge to smack him.

“What?”

“Ha, so our little Nayun is finally being honest with her feelings~”

Surprisingly, Chae Nayun didn't overreact to Yi Yeonghan's teasing tone.

“Yeah, I am. Do you have a problem with it?”

Because Chae Nayun spoke as though it was the most obvious thing in the world, Yi Yeonghan found himself at a loss for words.

“...Huh? Uh, no... I don't.”

Kim Suho, who was watching Chae Nayun with a smile on his face, cut in.

“So, where's Hajin?”

“Over there. Look, he's coming out now.”

Yi Yeonghan pointed at the back door. Chae Nayun turned her gaze. Kim Hajin was walking out of the classroom.

Was it because she hadn't seen him in two months?

Each of his movements seemed to be in slow motion.

His footsteps were light and inattentive, his clothes and hair were neat and stylish, and he was expressionless like a dead fish.

“Wait, Kim Suho, you're also looking for Kim Hajin? What about me? Am I a livestock

to you guys?”

“I’m leaving.”

Chae Nayun quickly sped away and ran into Kim Hajin. Not expecting Chae Nayun to bump into him, Kim Hajin stopped and lowered his gaze.

Their eyes met. Chae Nayun smiled brightly.

“Hey, Kim Hajin, wanna go out for dinner together?”

As she said that, she stealthily locked her arm with Kim Hajin’s. She felt her heartbeat speeding up from her bold move. However, Kim Hajin didn’t say anything and shook her arm off.

At that moment, Chae Nayun felt another gaze and quickly turned around. A blonde girl walked out of the classroom.

It was Rachel.

“...Oh, Rachel, it’s been a while.”

Chae Nayun waved her hand. Rachel glanced at Chae Nayun and Kim Hajin.

“Yeah.”

With just that one word, she walked past them. Chae Nayun stared at the back of Rachel’s head, then pulled on Kim Hajin’s arm again.

However, Kim Hajin didn’t budge.

“What, you’re not going?”

Kim Hajin smiled bitterly.

“...I don’t have time today.”

“You don’t even have time to eat?”

Chae Nayun pouted. First, he didn’t reply to her letters or messages, and now he was avoiding her? Was he playing hard to get?

“I have work to do, so I’ll be busy around dinner time. But we can eat lunch together tomorrow.”

Lunch.

Although it wasn’t quite what she wanted, she was more than happy with it.

“Okay, then... promise.”

Chae Nayun held up her pinky.

Kim Hajin stared at it fixedly, then put his hand on Chae Nayun’s shoulder.

“See you tomorrow. Lunch will be on me.”

“...Eh?”

Chae Nayun’s cheeks turned red even at such a lighthearted touch. She looked up at Kim Hajin and nodded bashfully.

“U-Un...”



6:00 p.m. I returned home.

Evandel who was listening to an online lecture stopped the video and ran up to me.

“Hajin, I learned subtraction today!”

She spoke proudly.

“That’s great!”

“I can subtract now. Give me a problem~!”

“Hm, then...”

After thinking for a moment, I gave her a problem to solve.

“What’s nine thousand eight hundred fifty-three minus two thousand six hundred fifty-six.”

“...Eh?”

Evandel’s pupils trembled. She tried to count with her fingers, but she didn’t have ten thousand fingers.

Eventually, Evandel muttered with a trembling voice.

“I, I didn’t learn anything like that...”

“Okay, then what’s twenty-eight minus seventeen?”

This time, Evandel didn’t use her fingers and spoke after a little while.

“...Eleven!”

“Good! You’re a quick learner, aren’t you? You must be a genius.”

“Ehehe.”

I gave Evandel a pat on the head and walked into the bedroom.

After changing into my casual clothes from my cadet uniform, I ate with Evandel in the living room. Today’s menu was steak.

When it became 9 p.m. and Evandel was falling asleep, I left the room and went outside.

After walking past the dorm region, I stopped at a park.

There was someone I had to meet today, and this empty park was the meeting place.

“Haa...”

Sitting on a nearby bench, I let out a sigh. Being alone under the darkness, I suddenly felt depressed.

Recently, I’ve been feeling like I wasn’t myself.

It was as if my 7.207 points of perseverance stat was forcefully holding back my mind from crumbling.

Psst—

At that moment, a tree on the right side rustled.

“Are you here?”

I raised my hand and greeted the person I was waiting for.
Hearing my voice, Boss walked out of the darkness.

“Yeah.”

“Did you purchase the place I recommended?”

“I did, but...”

Boss asked me to set up an outpost in Seoul for Jeronimo Mercenary to be based in. I recommended an apartment complex next to mine. It was completely out in the open, which didn't fit Boss' style.

“Try living there.”

“...I asked for an outpost, how did you end up recommending a residential apartment complex? I ended up using money for nothing.”

It seemed Boss was unhappy with how much money it took. To be fair, the apartment complex she bought was a lot more expensive than the one I had. If I remembered correctly, it was at least twice as expensive.

“Let's go buy some clothes later.”

“...Clothes?”

“Yes.”

Boss' fashion sense wasn't as bad as Rachel's. Her 170 cm stature and slender figure made her look good in anything, but the problem was that her choice of clothes was too manly.

“I'll help you pick out clothes.”

However, Boss immediately shook her head.

“I don't need it.”

“Kuhum.”

I felt a bit awkward. I was trying to get her to open up her heart. After all, Boss had yet to even bring out anything about the Chameleon Troupe. It seemed she still wasn't sure how to rate me.

"Boss, you bought a huge amount of Creator's Sacred Grace's stock, right?"

"...Hm?"

Boss twitched faintly.

Although Boss was supposed to be a bit dense, her greed for money was great. She should already be one of Creator's Sacred Grace's shareholders.

"I have a little."

"I think you should start selling it off."

"...What's the reason?"

Boss' eyes narrowed like a hawk.

When it came to money, she was stone cold.

"I don't have a good feeling about it."

However, Boss seemed to have no intention of listening to my advice, as she murmured in a barely audible voice.

"But I only ate 3% so far."

"Don't blame me if you pull out too late and lose all your money."

At my thoughtless remark, Boss frowned.

"...Kim Hajin."

Her voice was cold and chilling.

"Don't be so comfortable around me."

“...Yes?”

“I’m telling you not to be so arrogant. The difference between you and me is like the difference between heaven and earth.”

Her eyes were sharp and her voice was threatening.

I dropped my head quietly.

I shouldn’t have brought up money.

“Anyways, the reason I called you today... was for a proper test.”

“Test?”

“...”

Boss stared at me silently.

I asked again.

“What do you mean by test?”

“...You said you wanted to become an official member of our group.”

“Ah... yes.”

She was right. Winning Chameleon Troupe over was indeed one of my goals. To be more exact, it was to inoculate Chameleon Troupe, who mercilessly killed both Djinn and humans in the original story.

The reason was simple. Chameleon Troupe played an important role in the middle to late stages of the story.

“But to become one of us...”

Boss unleashed her magic power, creating a human-shaped puppet about 200 meters in front of me.

“Your stats will need to meet our standards.”

I knew what she meant. Mercenaries cared more about ‘stats’ than Heroes as they were judged by clients based on things like strength, speed, perception, and others.

“So attack that magic puppet with all you’ve got. I’ll be the judge.”

But unlike most mercenaries, I had to take this show of power a bit more seriously. There was likely something Boss wanted to see. In fact, this could be the final test.

“You want me to attack it with full power?”

“Yes, use a gun, your main weapon.”

Boss put a barrier around us. With a dome shrouding us, I didn’t have to worry about outside eyes.

“But my strongest attack doesn’t use a gun.”

At my words, Boss tilted her head in confusion.

“...In that case, use whatever you need to show this strongest attack you speak of.”

“Yes.”

Putting on a serious face, I transformed Aether into a bow. An elegantly designed black bow appeared in my hands, and Boss widened her eyes.

“A bow...”

Feeling keen interest in her eyes, I formed a magic arrow with Stigma. I infused the attribute of explosion within.

“Could it be... an anti-magic arrow?”

“...”

Because it looked like Boss wanted to see anti-magic, I also added that attribute.

Sssss—

The bow emitted a cold mist as it turned bluish black. This was the color of anti-magic. Although my arrow became a bit small in exchange, I could tell that Boss was extremely satisfied by the expression on her face.

But I wasn’t done yet.

I still had something to add.

[Medicinal effect – External Magic Amplification]

The sixth medicinal effect that my body memorized came out of my skin and seeped into the arrow. Through this doping, my arrow became sharp like a harpoon.

I nocked the arrow burning with anti-magic coloring on my bow. Feeling the fierce energy emanating from it, I pulled the bowstring.

Although I used three streaks of Stigma like the time I fought the Black Ogre, this arrow was on a different league than the one I used before thanks to using a bow formed from Aether and adding the amplification medicinal effect.

“Mmm.”

When Boss nodded in satisfaction.

Chweeeeek—

I fired the arrow at Boss’ puppet.

The arrow shot out like a bolt of lightning, scattering magic power in all directions.

There was no difference in time between release and strike.

Kooooong—!

Not only did the arrow pierce Boss’ puppet, it erupted into a conical explosion that shook the barrier.

KOONG! KOONG!

The entire space rumbled from the giant explosion, and the arrow’s magic power thrashed against the barrier like a rising dragon.

“...”

Realizing the might of the arrow, Boss stepped in. Before the arrow shattered her barrier, she unleashed her magic power.

From her back, a shadow bloomed like a lotus. As the lotus closed its petals, it devoured my arrow completely.

‘Shadow Lotus’.

It was one of Boss’ cheat-like defensive abilities.

“Haha.”

Boss laughed as she approached me.

“It looked like it was about to destroy the barrier so I stopped it.”

As she said that, she put her hand out.

“...Ah, yes.”

“I’m satisfied. As I thought, my eyes weren’t wrong.”

It seemed I passed the final test. I immediately felt dizziness overcoming me, but I mentally braced myself and grabbed her hand.

“Thank you.”

Boss then squeezed my hand and spoke in a serious tone.

“June 1st.”

“...Yes?”

“On June 1st, there will be a planned group meeting.”

I immediately understood what she was implying.

“If you still want to be with me then, if you don’t mind taking on dirty tasks like me, come find me.”

Boss stared at me, and I stared back. By exchanging gazes, I could understand her thoughts.

Soon, Boss let go of my hand.

I replied.

“...Yes.”

“Good.”

The moon peeked out from the clouds, shining down on Boss. She was wearing a beautiful smile.



Second week of school.

Sacred Flame class was currently in the middle of its common theory class.

Sssk, sssk.

Rachel was busily jotting down the contents of the lecture on her notes. On her face was a pair of circular glasses, which had the effect of lessening the burden on one's eyes and doing basic calculations.

"Difficult, isn't it? Let's take a break."

The professor announced a break around the time cadets were scratching their heads. Rachel put her glasses down and leaned back against her chair. As her focus loosened, she could hear the whispering voices of her classmates.

—Hey, didn't Kim Hajin change recently?

—Yeah, and other guys are copying his hairstyle. Though, they look better with it than he does. His face just isn't that good.

—No, I think his face has gotten better too...

—Rather than that, did you hear that he has something going on with Chae Nayun?

—What? Really?

—Yeah, Chae Nayun said it herself.

Kim Hajin was the topic of the conversation.

Rachel turned towards Kim Hajin. He seemed to be focused on his smartwatch.

" ... "

This wasn't the first time she heard the rumor that there was something going on between Kim Hajin and Chae Nayun. It didn't seem like a groundless rumor either. After all, Kim Hajin and Chae Nayun were eating lunch together every day.

'...It has nothing to do with me.'

Rachel told herself that and picked her pen back up. Thinking about it more closely, she might have wanted things to turn out this way. If things went well between Kim Hajin and Chae Nayun, she would be able to treat Kim Hajin more comfortably.

" ... "

However, she couldn't get herself to focus on studying once more. In the end, she glanced at Kim Hajin once again.

He was still on his smartwatch. She couldn't help but wonder what he was doing on his smartwatch that he was that focused.

He seemed to be on it the entire class period. Was he exchanging messages with Chae Nayun? Did he not care about class anymore because he was dropping out?

Rachel pouted and looked back down at her notebook.

Focus.

Focus.

Focus.

Now is the time to focus on studying.

"...Ah, why is this so hard?"

But soon, an annoyed voice came out of Rachel's mouth.



"Hm."

Ever since last night, I was thinking deeply about a Gift.

===

[Dexterity] [Low rank] [Null attribute] [Evolving] [Grade 10]

—Dexterity

*Your hands become flexible and skilled.

===

Dexterity.

Although it didn't look like anything special, it was classified as a Gift rather than an Art.

An ability that applied to everything that used hands, including everyday tasks like cooking, drawing, and writing to combat-oriented tasks like martial arts and swordsmanship.

Currently, I was debating between this passive Gift and another active Gift.

There was one active Gift I had in mind, and it was one that I needed to have five years in the future.

However, active Gifts couldn't be evolving-type Gifts.

As such, it would be acceptable as long as I saved up the 10,000 SP used to create it in time, like when I created Master Sharpshooter.

In other words, it was better to create Dexterity now and create the other Gift in the future when I had enough SP saved up.

The only problem was that I didn't know whether I could save up that much SP.

“Argh, whatever.”

After agonizing over the matter for a long time, I just hit enter.

===

[Dexterity] [Low rank] [Null attribute] [Evolving] [Grade 10]

—Dexterity

*Your hands become flexible and skilled.

===

For a Gift that cost 2000 SP, it was rather simple. No, it was simple because it only cost 2000 SP.

It was as I always said, “simple is best”.

Simpler Gifts meant its usages weren't as limited.

Of course, since it was only grade-10 at the moment, it should only help me with things like cooking and combing.

...However.

[Gifts become linked!]

[With great luck, the link between your Gifts become even more elaborate!]

I suddenly received unexpected alerts on my smartwatch.

[Master Sharpshooter & Dexterity]

[Master Sharpshooter is reclassified as a high-rank Gift and an unawakened ability has been added.]

[Dexterity's proficiency grade improves to grade-8.]

“What's this...?”

An ability was added to Master Sharpshooter, and Dexterity received two proficiency grade boosts even though it was created only a minute ago.

“...Oh, right.”

I remembered writing something about Gifts having synergy with each other.

I didn't expect this to happen, but I couldn't complain.

Synergy between Gifts.

I told myself to remember as I grabbed my pen to test out my new Gift.

Sssk, sssk.

I jotted down a string of words.

Although I didn't have bad handwriting, I couldn't call my handwriting pretty...

“...Wow.”

I was practically Han Seokbong himself.^[1]

Chapter 133

Crossroad (4)

A poor hillside town on the outskirts of North Hamgyeong Province.
In this dilapidated place was an office with a half-broken neon sign.

[Yoo Jinhyuk Office]

Despite there being an office that carried Yoo Jinhyuk's name, only ordinary shops and stores were set up around it. From its location, no one would believe that this office was the home of such a powerful ability user.

In truth, this place was initially a wasteland with nothing but Yoo Jinhyuk's office. Because Yoo Jinhyuk's clients came from Violet Banquet, the location of his office was irrelevant. This hillside town didn't even exist before he arrived.

In other words, the arrival of Yoo Jinhyuk marked the creation of this town.

The monsters Yoo Jinhyuk drove away to found this office, the monsters Yoo Jinhyuk killed because he wanted to have a peaceful night of sleep, and the monsters Yoo Jinhyuk hunted to earn money.

His selfishness transformed the area within a 1 km radius of his office into habitable space. As a result, poor and ignorant people flocked to this place.

At first, Yoo Jinhyuk was apathetic. He didn't care who came to live next to him, nor did he believe he had anything to do with them. Even when monsters invaded the town while he was gone, killing residents and destroying farmland, he believed it was something they had to deal with themselves.

But 3 years, 5 years, 7 years, 10 years, then 12 years went by...

What started as a tiny village came to form a little town. Witnessing the flow of time and seeing familiar faces give birth to new lives, Yoo Jinhyuk couldn't help but admit that he was now bound to the town.

As such, he didn't run away at Chae Joochul's beckoning.

Yoo Jinhyuk the Investigator.

Before he realized, he had become the patriarch of a town.

Wiing—

His helmet vibrated, signaling that he was out of magic power.

Yoo Jinhyuk took off his helmet and got up from the couch he was sitting on.

“What did you find out?”

The secretary asked. Yoo Jinhyuk silently walked up behind her.

On the secretary’s computer screen was a picture of a large tattoo.

Three streaks, two forming a cross and one forming a crescent moon above it.

“...”

Yoo Jinhyuk stared at the tattoo.

Although he figured out the location of the murder, this was the only thing he could find out due to the density of magic power in the area. When the barrier surrounding the area exploded along with a storm of demonic energy, Yoo Jinhyuk shot his eyes open, fully prepared to suffer from magic power deficiency. It was then that he saw it, a brilliant tattoo that was shining on someone’s upper arm.

“...Is it Jesus?”

“Are you mad?”

“I mean, there’s been a monster suspected of being Fenrir, and we’ve even seen a Cyclops. Who says there can’t be Jesus?”

The secretary scowled at Yoo Jinhyuk’s groundless murmuring.

“Stop messing around and just tell me what you saw. This is important.”

“...I found something out, but it’s not related to the culprit.”

Yoo Jinhyuk couldn’t identify the culprit from the tattoo he saw. Since he couldn’t find anything out about the culprit, he decided to trace the victim. He figured he could discover the motive by doing so.

However, even after exploring the past for dozens of days, there were no clues leading to the culprit other than the tattoo, and today he even discovered a more shocking

truth.

“What is it?”

“Chae Jinyoon... became a Djinn.”

“...Huh?”

The secretary’s face stiffened.

“No, I shouldn’t say Djinn. The examiner said what he became was above a Djinn. So... a devil, I suppose?”

“A devil?”

“I’m not sure. But Chae Shinhyuk wanted to hide this fact, and the medical examiner seemed to have accepted his request.”

However, it seemed the examiner couldn’t abandon his conscience and duty, as he didn’t cremate the real corpse and kept it stored in his basement. The body that was cremated was shockingly a fake that was made to look just like the real body.

“Then... what about the culprit?”

“There’s nothing more I can do. There’s not much time left, and finding the culprit is outside my capability. It’s impossible. But this tattoo...”

Tok, tok. Yoo Jinhyuk’s finger poked the computer screen.

Although it wasn’t so unique that only one of such a tattoo would exist in the entire world, it wasn’t an entirely common tattoo either.

“Tell Chae Joochul that this is the only evidence. As for the information we found out about Chae Jinyoon, encrypt it and keep it archived in our Violet Banquet database.”

“W-What if people find out?”

Chae Joochul.

After slowly losing his emotions from a side-effect of his Gift, he became a sociopath who was unlike his old self.

This old man was so frightening that he could terrify even Yoo Jinhyuk's level-headed secretary.

"That's exactly why we should keep it archived. Not even that old man can touch Violet Banquet. Plus, don't you think we should hold on to the only card we have against him?"

"...You want to fight back?"

The secretary asked with a trembling voice.

"No, I wouldn't say I'm fighting back."

In Korea, there were few who could fight Chae Joochul. Only a member of the Nine Stars or Shin Myungchul, who died five years ago, would be capable of doing so.

"If I'm killed, it'll be on you to tell the world. You'll get revenge for me, right?"

Yoo Jinhyuk smirked and looked out the window.

The scenery was outdated, as though he was looking at Seoul in the year 2000. He wondered when this town would catch up to the modern era.

"I... still want to live on. You see, there's still a lot I want to do and see— aak!"

PANG—!

At that moment, a soccer ball suddenly hit the office window.

"...Haha."

Yoo Jinhyuk laughed feebly, then opened the window.

"Hey, you little brats! I made you a playground, so why are you playing soccer here!?"

"Huh? Oh, we got chased out by hyungs."

"...That's none of my problem! Don't play soccer here!"

KWANG. Yoo Jinhyuk slammed the window closed.

But at that instant, a lightbulb went on inside his head.

He could practically hear the electric pulse flickering through his synapses.

“Brats... children... a kid...”

Someone who didn't have a grudge against Chae Jinyoon but had a grudge against Chae Joochul.

There was one such person.

His niece, Yoo Yeonha, had once asked for a background investigation...

“...No way.”

However, he laughed and shook his head. That boy didn't have the ability to cast such a powerful barrier. If he did, he would have attacked Chae Joochul directly. After all, a sociopath like Chae Joochul wouldn't feel much from his grandson's death.

“Oh right, Chief.”

The secretary suddenly spoke up, as though she just remembered something.

“Gangwonland contacted us. The anti-monster system is apparently completed.”

“Oh? Great, tell them I'll be there to pick it up.”

“There goes our money again.”

“We need to pay for it somehow.”

Yoo Jinhyuk let out a deep sigh and looked outside the window once again. How much he was attached to this town was something he had to hide from Chae Joochul no matter what.



Friday's final afternoon training.

[Tactics against Monster Armies]

It was one of the classes I applied for. There wasn't a special reason for it. I just thought it suited me.

“Rachel-ssi, do you want to team up with me today too?”

Of the 40 cadets gathered in the park, the only cadet I knew was Rachel.

“Yes, gladly.”

Rachel smiled brightly and nodded.

Just like that, Rachel and I paired up, and I received envious gazes from the other male cadets.

“Alright, hold your partner’s hand and gather in front of the cave!”

The instructor in charge of the training shouted.

Him telling us to hold our hands was undoubtedly a figure of speech. However, Rachel looked back and forth between her hand and mine.

Seeing that my hand wasn’t moving, she tried to reach out to grab my hand, then hesitated and looked up at me like a puppy.

“Ah, um...”

“We don’t need to hold hands.”

“...I, I see.”

She let out a dry cough.

“Alright, line up! Each team will go in, starting from Team 1!”

Following the instructor’s directive, we entered the cave.

Perhaps because there were only forty cadets in the class, the cave didn’t seem crowded at all.

“Ah, there’s something there.”

After walking for a bit, we arrived at a ten-way crossroad. Next to each road was a sign that read O or X. Ones that read X were likely taken by other teams.

We chose one of the open paths and walked in.

Ssss—

A chilling wind swept over us.

“It looks like we’re up against skeletons.”

“Skeletons?”

“Yes, it looks like there are at least a thousand of them.”

Clack, clack, clack.

The sound of bones clacking.

Sssh, sssh.

The sound of wind blowing through bones.

An army of undead warriors was waiting for us.

“Two against a thousand... it looks like we’ll be graded on how we deal with the situation.”

Rachel quickly came to a conclusion.

“Maybe not. They’re only skeletons. We should be able to take care of them.”

I held up my handgun with one hand and my two knives with the other.

“You’re using two knives?”

“Yes.”

This was the first time I was using two knives with my gun. Using all three weapons was too hard for me previously, but it was different now that I had Dexterity.

“They must have a commander. I’ll crush his head.”

My eyes could clearly see a skeleton commander sitting on a palanquin, surrounded by thirteen skeleton magicians. As long as I dealt with those fourteen, it should be a piece of cake to defeat the rest.

Rachel looked at me fixedly, then smiled bitterly.

“...As I thought, Hajin-ssi is always full of confidence.”

“Yes? Oh... um, I guess that’s why I’m your master.”

“Oh, right.”

Rachel snickered as though she just remembered it and nodded.

“Then let’s go. Wait until I make the first attack.”

I released Stigma’s magic power and infused light attribute into the knives. Then, I threw them in opposite directions.

My first target was the commander.

My attack didn’t need to be strong. Just a simple snap of a wrist was enough.

Whoosh—

After leaving my hand, the two knives drew a huge arc around the left and right area of the cave and flew toward the skeleton commander.

Clack, clack.

As expected, the skeleton commander was nimble. It raised its hands to easily block the knives, but a light attribute bullet was already shooting toward his head.

As all three attacks were simultaneous, there was no way it could have avoided all attacks.

With its head pierced by the bullet, the skeleton commander’s skull cracked in half and crumbled.



After the battle.

“Haa... haa...”

It seemed fighting a thousand opponents took a toll on Rachel’s stamina as she sat on the ground, breathing heavily. Her clothes were disheveled, and her hair was drenched with sweat.

“Are you tired?”

“Yes... haa...”

To be honest, I wasn't. I couldn't possibly be tired when all I did was pull the trigger from the back.

Suddenly, a voice rang out from the speaker phone above us.

—Perfect! Team Rachel and Kim Hajin, perfect score! Collect your breath and come out!

The instructor seemed impressed to say the least.

Rachel was glad to hear it. She widened her eyes and held her arms up.

“Whoo~”

While I was looking at her with a smile, I noticed her disheveled hair.

“Ah, Rachel-ssi, do you have a comb?”

“Eh? N-No, I don't.”

“Mm...”

I still walked up to her. A sudden, unbearable urge sprouted up within me.

“Sorry, your hair is too disheveled...”

“My hair?”

“I'll fix it for you.”

I put my hands on Rachel's hair. Immediately, Rachel froze.

“W-Wait, w-why... aahng, that tickles.”

“Hold on just a minute.”

“Wait, why so suddenly...”

My hands moved by themselves, ignoring Rachel's resistance. I honestly didn't know why I was doing this either.

I just followed my instinct. Soon, Rachel's disheveled hair became cleanly tidied, with a portion of it tied in a pretty ribbon.

"...There."

I showed Rachel a mirror.

When she looked at her hair, she widened her eyes in shock.

"H-How? You didn't even have a comb."

"I'm wondering the same thing."

I looked down at my hands.

"Maybe my hands have a magical touch."



11 p.m.

I walked to an empty park near my apartment and focused. I was training my Stigma usage.

Concentrating Stigma's magic power for instantaneous movement – Dash.

Emitting Stigma's magic power under my feet and leaping up vertically – Jump.

Enveloping myself with Stigma's magic power and teleporting dozens of meters away – Blink.

"...Kuaa."

After using all three Streaks of Stigma trying out different movement abilities, I sprawled out on the ground and collected my breath.

Bzzzz—

At that moment, I received a call on my smartwatch.

The caller was Chae Nayun.

I sighed as soon as I saw her name.

Should I pick it up? Or should I ignore it?

The call ended as I was hesitating, but she called me again immediately.

Bzzzz—

I calmly stared at the smartwatch vibrating on my wrist.
Without a choice, I closed my eyes and picked up the call.

“Hello?”

—Hey, where are you?

That was the first thing she asked.

“I’m home. Why?”

—...I heard you’re commuting.

“Yeah, did you just find out?”

—What? That’s because you never told me! Do you wanna die?

Chae Nayun blurted out angrily and then fell silent.

—You should have told me earlier.

Her voice was full of disappointment.

“What difference would that make?”

—I could live next door.

“...Someone’s already living there.”

—That can be solved with money.

“ ”

—I’m rich, you know.

Chae Nayun quiet laughter flowed into my ears.

—Did you forget? As long as you're with me, you won't have to worry about money.

I let out a slow sigh and looked up at the night sky.

Seoul's sky was no different than any other night. A stifling darkness, a darkness that made me suffocate and tremble.

—...Say something.

"I'm just sleepy. Can I hang up?"

—N-No, wait, don't hang up.

Chae Nayun's hurried voice echoed in my ears.

—Um... not until I fall asleep.

She continued with a frail, trembling voice.

—I-It's not like I'm having trouble sleeping. Just that, um, my room is a bit too big.

Her excuse was Chae Nayun-like. I lowered my gaze silently. An ugly rock was lying on the ground.

—Just, just a little bit longer...

I knew I shouldn't agree to her because of momentary guilt and sympathy. I knew very well that it would only lead to a vicious cycle.

Even so, the reason I couldn't hang up... had to be because of my guilty conscience.

—I want to hear your voice.

A chilling loneliness grazed my body. Goosebumps rose up and my knees trembled.

With forlorn eyes, I looked up at the night sky.

The darkness seemed to be devouring me.

Up above, there were no stars, light, or moon.

—Hey, just so you know, you're a re~al bad boy if you hang up after I said all this.

Chae Nayun's feigned cheeriness was unable to get through me.
I replied quietly.

"I won't hang up."

—...Then reply quicker. You're making me embarrassed for nothing.

"Just talk. I'll at least listen to you."

—Talk about what?

"...Did you hurt your head?"

—No, hahaha.

Chae Nayun laughed. Then, she began to talk about what happened today.
What she ate, what happened during class, etc.
But eventually, she brought up something I didn't expect to hear.

—Oh right, Yeonha's uncle told me something about the murder...

"...Murder?"

Yoo Jinhyuk. Although his name made me nervous, I had a certain degree of certainty about this matter. Even his power should have restrictions.

—...No, it's nothing. I don't want to talk about these things with you.

"What, why, tell me."

—No, I don't want to. I only want to talk about good things with you.

When I heard Chae Nayun's bashful laughter, I couldn't bring myself to ask her any further.

—Oh, I think I'm getting sleepy now. It looks like the sleeping pills I took are working.

"...Don't eat too many of those."

—What, are you worrying about me?

“...Oh please.”

I picked up the water bottle I brought. When I tried to take a sip...

—Hajin.

“...!”

Chae Nayun’s sudden attack almost made me snort water up my nose. As I coughed, Chae Nayun muttered with a relaxed yawn.

—Good night.

“Ah, erm, yeah, good night. I’m going to bed too.”

—...Hey.

Contradicting what she said a moment ago, she continued.

What was it now?

I strained my ears.

—I want to see you.

The words that seemingly came out of nowhere left me speechless.

—Ah, wait, nevermind. I must not be thinking straight because of the sleeping pills. I’m hanging up! Sorry—!

While I was trying to come up with words to say, Chae Nayun quickly hung up first. I could imagine how she was doing on the other side of the call.

“...Why is my face heating up.”

While I was feeling the temperature of my cheeks, I saw a familiar figure walking over.

“Boss?”

“Hm?”

As I thought, it was Boss.

Last week, she spoke like she wasn't going to show herself until June 1st, but she seemed to be enjoying Seoul, as this was the third time I ran into her on the streets.

“Kim Hajin?”

“We're running into each other quite frequently.”

Boss was holding onto a bag of Baskin-Robins ice-cream.
It wasn't just a pint, but a huge bucket.

“Good, I've been wanting to see you.”

Boss hopped over.

“...What, why? Is it another test—?”

“It went up.”

Boss glared at me angrily.

“Went up?”

“Stocks! It's up 2% compared to when I sold them!!”

Then, she blurted out uncharacteristically.

“...Oh, you really sold all those?”

I spoke thoughtlessly. Although I was confident it would plummet soon, nothing about the Tower campaign was finalized at the moment. It was only natural that their stock price was fluctuating.

“...What did you say?”

However, Boss' eyes flickered with true killing intent.

Chapter 134

Farewell (1)

“Auu, Chae Nayun, you crazy idiot...”

Chae Nayun scorned herself as she smacked her head. Because of the words she carelessly muttered, the drowsiness she felt disappeared completely.

“Uuuu... ah, wait.”

While circling around the room in embarrassment, she suddenly remembered something she had to do.

Chae Nayun quickly made a video call to Yoo Yeonha.

Tuuu— Tuuu—

—Yeah, Nayun.

As expected, Yoo Yeonha was quick to pick up. Yoo Yeonha usually only slept three hours a day. Since it was only 1 a.m. at the moment, it was unlikely that she was asleep.

“Hey, Yeonha.”

—Why did you call... why is your face so red?

Yoo Yeonha tilted her head and asked. That was how red Chae Nayun’s face was.

“Ah, it’s, it’s nothing.”

Chae Nayun fanned herself frantically.

“Here, here.”

Pushing her hair back nonchalantly, she sent a file over to Yoo Yeonha.

[Tattoo.jpg]

This evidence was a critical piece of info. Yoo Yeonha opened the file and tilted her head.

—Tattoo...? What is this?

“Evidence.”

—...Evidence?

Chae Nayun’s voice turned serious.

“Yeah, this tattoo was on the murderer’s arm.”

In response, Yoo Yeonha also put on a serious face.

—Hm...

Two lines forming a cross and a crescent arc standing over it like an umbrella. Yoo Yeonha scrutinized the tattoo carefully.

“Is, is it not that useful?”

Chae Nayun asked without confidence.

—It’s not a conclusive piece of evidence, but it’s still better than not having anything at all. First...

Yoo Yeonha began to type on her keyboard like an IT expert. Chae Nayun stared at Yoo Yeonha in awe.

—I’ll look into arrested criminals or active villains and Djinns.

“T-Thanks, Yeonha!... Haam.”

Chae Nayun then yawned. Now that the tension left her body, drowsiness came over her once again.

—Are you sleepy?

“Yeah, I’m going to collapse any moment now.”

—...

Yoo Yeonha grinned.

—Good, then sleep.

“Yeah, you shouldn’t overwork yourself either.”

Chae Nayun waved her hand through the screen as she walked over to her bed.

—Okay.

Although Chae Nayun promptly buried herself in her bed, Yoo Yeonha remained busy on the other side of the call.

Pharmaceutical company management, core technology development, information guild monitoring, dungeon research and resource distribution, and Essence of the Strait’s management reformation.

She still had too many things to take care of.

—Hello? Ah, yes, Yi Jin-Ah-ssi.

At that moment, she received a call.

Of the past vice-leader’s subordinates, she was the sole person Yoo Yeonha reached out to. Although she had a personal conflict with Kim Hajin, Yoo Yeonha decided her talent was too important to be wasted.

—Ah, don’t worry about it. I don’t think you were involved in that incident. No, you don’t need to thank me. Oh, rather than that, I’m going to send you a special tattoo image. I want you to...

Stopping in the middle of her sentence, Yoo Yeonha looked over to the side.

—Hold on, I forgot to hang up a video call.

Yoo Yeonha waved her hand, and soon—

Chweek. The floating hologram screen disappeared.

...

Just like that, all noise disappeared from Chae Nayun’s room.

In this absolute, lonely silence, Chae Nayun fell asleep alone.



In a desolate park brimming with killing intent and clouds of war, I was hard at work trying to convince Boss.

“Calm down, Boss. That’s how stocks work.”

“Ha, that’s how they work?”

Boss laughed mockingly. At the moment, she was seriously angry. I couldn’t blame her as I could only imagine the amount of money she invested. If she used stock market leverage, even a mere 2% increase should have net her hundreds of millions of won.

“It will plummet soon. Trust me.”

“...”

Boss shut her mouth. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath as though to appease her inner fury.

Despite her cold personality, she valued her comrades greatly.

“From now, I don’t think I can trust you deeply. No, I can’t even trust you lightly.”

However, I couldn’t prevent my credibility from falling. If this matter ended this way, my level of trust would probably fall to F from C.

Puuu. Sighing like a kid, Boss turned her back towards me.

“Ah, wait, since you suffered a loss because of me, I’ll make up for it.”

I stopped Boss from leaving.

“I’ll give you some solid information.”

“...Solid information?”

Boss’ interested seemed to be piqued as her ears perked up.

“Yes.”

I nodded confidently. Of course, even I didn't know what would happen in the future economically.

However, I knew a few companies that would rise to the top of the world.

"If you invest a million, you will become a billionaire. If you invest a billion, you will become the ruler of a country."

"..."

After a brief silence, Boss shook her head. Her perked up ears lost their vitality and drooped down once again.

"I've lived my entire life with skepticism as my core belief. I won't believe someone who isn't an expert twice."

"Um, I'm the rank 1 cadet in theory."

"..."

Rank 1 in theory. It was a position impossible to achieve without extraordinary intelligence. However, Boss still looked doubtful.

Without a choice, I showed her my stock portfolio.

"...Eh?"

Boss' mouth immediately opened in shock. That was how much I currently had.

The total value of the various stocks I had in my portfolio reached 2.5 billion. In terms of strict profit rate, it was almost 500%.

Not to mention, these stocks would all multiply by at least 10 times... no, 20 times in the next 5 years.

"You see? Now you believe me? Take a seat."

I sat down on a bench near me and tapped on the empty seat next to me.

"..."

Boss finally seemed to trust me again as she looked around the park and sat down next to me modestly.

“...Right, you have to show me proof to get me to trust you.”

“Makes sense. So, I’ll recommend a few companies you should go for. There’s still one that hasn’t been publicly listed—”

“Wait.”

Boss cut me off, then took out a pen and a notebook from her pocket. After getting ready to take notes, her eyes flashed sharply.

“Go on.”

“...Right.”

I cleared my throat and continued.

“The non-publicly listed company is SH Agency. There’s also Essential Pharmacy, which will go public soon, and Essential Corporation, which is a well-known giant...”

Boss nodded passionately and frantically took notes.



My remaining days in Cube flew by. In the blink of an eye, it became the month of cherry blossoms, May.

During this time, I maintained an appropriate distance from Chae Nayun. Although I could tell that she was annoyed and confused by it, I believed it to be for the best.

That was really the only thing I could do.

Because the feelings Chae Nayun had for me were so clear, I felt like I would give in and accept her feelings otherwise.

...I knew it was an excuse, but I really didn’t have a choice.

The ‘final incident’ in Cube was nearing soon.

“Today, we are going to sculpt using magic power.”

Today’s 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. class was [Advanced Magic Power Application].

There were two familiar faces in this class – Shin Jonghak and Kim Suho.

“You will not be given any tools. Using only your magic power, you must sculpt this bronze.”

50 cadets were given a single lump of bronze. As the instructor explained, we now had to sculpt something using our magic power as carving knives.

“You’re free to make whatever you want. But don’t think of this as a dumb art class. Dexterity plays an important role in magic power application and harmonization. So, do your best to create the most beautiful sculpture. You can take your results home.”

I quite enjoyed this female instructor’s relaxed voice.
I cracked my fingers and began the training.

Forming a carving knife with Stigma’s magic power, I held it in one hand.
Looking down at the carving knife glowing with a half-transparent blue light, I fell into thought.
Who should I use as a model?

“...”

Looking around, someone caught my eyes.
Black and two-block pomade hair that strangely resembled mine. A handsome popular boy who looked like a model. With his clear jawline and facial features, he seemed like the ideal model for sculpting.

‘Alright, I choose you.’

I began to sculpt, sneaking peeks at Shin Jonghak. My fingers moved mysteriously, transforming the lump of bronze into a modern masterpiece.
When it was about halfway finished...

Ding—

It was time for a break. I stealthily moved closer towards Shing Jonghak, who was in the middle of carving something resembling a chimera.

“Wow, an abstract art.”

I muttered subconsciously.

Shin Jonghak immediately turned back and glared at me intimidatingly.

“...Kim Hajin?”

His burning eyes pierced my chest. It was mainly because of the rumors about me and Chae Nayun going around recently.

“Oh, um, I was just curious. Who is this?”

“...Leave.”

Shin Jonghak waved his hand without saying much.

“Is it Chae Nayun?”

When I said that, Shin Jonghak flinched and glared at me again with his hawk-like eyes.

“Tsk.”

However, he only clicked his tongue and went back to sculpting.

“...So it is Chae Nayun.”

“Shut the hell up.”

“Uwaak!”

Shin Jonghak changed his carving knife into an axe.

I quickly ran back to my seat.

Then, I went back to staring at Shin Jonghak.

“It must look like her.”

...He was murmuring in satisfaction and focusing on sculpting.

“...He really did change a lot.”

I was surprised.

The current Shin Jonghak wasn't as bad as the one I wrote.

Many things had changed, and more things were bound to change. Did Chae Jinyoon's death and Yoo Sihyuk's hellish training affect him that much? Though, he still was acting like a haughty young master...

"Well, whatever."

Since Jin Sahyuk got herself a mysterious supporter, having Shin Jonghak become an ally would only make things more balanced.

I unleashed my magic power once again and went back to sculpting. Sssk, sssk. The lump of bronze was nothing more than tofu in front of my knife. After focusing on sculpting for about 30 minutes, I snapped out of my daze. The sculpture was already finished.

"...Oh."

The sculpture in front of me was an unequivocal masterpiece.

"Wow, amazing job. This gets a perfect score, Cadet Hajin."

After getting my grade (although the class still wasn't over), I took the sculpture and walked over to Shin Jonghak.

"Hey."

"..."

Shin Jonghak was focused on his own sculpture.

However, it was already at the point where it was barely recognizable. It certainly couldn't be used as a gift.

I tapped on his arm.

"Hey."

"Argh, what now, you bastard?"

Shin Jonghak spoke harshly and glared at me.

"Do you really wanna die..."

However, he froze when he saw the sculpture in my hand.

I named this piece the Shin Jonghak Bronze Bust.

Although the model was also handsome, the sculpture was even more handsome than the real person. Just look at this jawline and facial features!

In any case, Shin Jonghak loved things like this. Although I didn't make any detailed settings about this, I could make an educated guess from what I knew about his personality.

Seeing Shin Jonghak blankly staring at my sculpture, I spoke briefly.

“You want it?”

But at that moment.

Bzzzz—

A series of messages popped up on my smartwatch.

[‘Devilish Dexterity’ activates by luck.]

[‘Shin Jonghak Bronze Bust’ has been judged to be a low-intermediate rank art. It will receive a fitting special effect.]

[Special effect – why art is needed in life]

—When a person is touched by the beauty of this sculpture, their perseverance will increase by 0.1 point for 24 hours.

—The beauty of the sculpture seems to cleanse the heart.

[Aether reacts to a beautiful object. The perseverance boosting effect has been granted to Aether (24 hours).]

“...Oh right.”

My dexterity was at the level of a Gift. Such ‘effect bestowals’ were an inherent power of my Gift.

In any case, Shin Jonghak looked back and forth between me and my sculpture. He looked like he wanted it...

“You don’t want it?”

“Screw off.”

However, Shin Jonghak always acted differently than his inner feelings.

“Really? Then I guess there’s no choice.”

I had no problem keeping it.

“Sssp, ehem.”

But when I was about to leave with the sculpture, Shin Jonghak grabbed my wrist.

“You can’t. That’s facial rights abuse.”

“...What?”

I couldn’t say I didn’t expect it, but I still laughed because it was so childish.

“Why don’t you just say you want it?”

“...”

Shin Jonghak glared at me and squeezed my wrist but didn’t say anything.

“Fine, I’ll leave it here, so you do what you want.”

Since this sculpture had an effect of cleansing one’s heart, Shin Jonghak seemed to be the suitable owner with his... anger issues.

Ding—

Just at that moment, the bell signaling the end of class rang.

“Hey, Kim Suho, let’s go eat.”

“Huh? Oh, wait a bit, let me get mine graded.”

I left the classroom with Kim Suho.

In Kim Suho’s hand was a sculpture that perfectly resembled Yun Seung-Ah.

“You sculpted Yun Seung-Ah?”

“...Huh? Ah~ yeah, I guess it does look like her. But no, it isn’t.”

“Please, it’s practically a carbon copy.”

“No, no, it’s not.”

“...Fine, it’s not.”

Kim Suho was quite stubborn in his own right.

As I walked through the hallway, I turned back and looked through the walls into the classroom I just came out of. It was purely out of curiosity.

Everyone else had left, and only Shin Jonghak was left remaining.

Whistling to himself, he was loitering around the classroom.

Then suddenly! He snatched the sculpture of himself on the table and ran out the door.

—Uaak!

However, Kim Horak was standing on the other side.

—Jonghak, what were you doing not coming out?... What’s that?

—Ah? What do you mean?

—That. Oh, it looks like you! Someone made it for you!?

—I, I guess...? Ah! It, it must have been a fan of mine. Let’s leave. I’m going to stop by my room first, so I’ll meet you at the training center.

Shin Jonghak gave a half-hearted excuse and began to run away with the sculpture in his embrace.

Looking at him, I snickered.

Chapter 135

Farewell (2)

I went to a restaurant with Kim Suho.

It was time for me to deal with all my personal affairs. There was something I needed to give Kim Suho.

“By the way, why haven’t you been eating with Chae Nayun lately?”

Kim Suho sat down as he looked around the restaurant.

“No reason. I have something to talk about with you.”^[1]

“...”

Kim Suho suddenly made a mischievous face.

“What’s up with that face?”

“Nothing, I thought you sounded like Chae Nayun. I must be mistaken.”

“...Screw off.”

Ignoring his stupid comment, I ordered my food and placed a jar on the table.

“What’s this?”

“You forgot already? It’s the jar we got from fighting that snake.”

This Jar of Greed came with two uses. Although I thought about using both, that would be too greedy. Since I used one to strengthen Aether, it was only proper that Kim Suho uses the second. After all, an amazing greed would inevitably adhere to Misteltein.

“I remember, but I said you could have it...”

“I already used it once.”

I cut off Kim Suho before he could reject my offer.

“Plus, I’m not saying I’ll give it to you for free. I found another Dungeon, you see.”

“Another Dungeon? Do you work part-time at an information guild or something?”

Kim Suho’s eyes widened.

I grinned.

This Dungeon was impossible for me to clear alone, but if I didn’t clear it, the artifact lying within would eventually fall into the Djinn’s hands.

“In exchange for you using this jar, let’s clear this Dungeon. We’ll split the loot 7:3.”

“...You’re 7?”

“Yep.”

Kim Suho looked at me silently, then grinned and pulled the jar closer. It was a silent agreement.

“So how do you use this? Did you get it appraised?”

“Yeah, it’s called the Jar of Greed. You have Misteltein with you, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Then you just have to put it inside for 10 days.”

“...That’s it?”

“This artifact consolidates whatever’s put inside. I’m sure Misteltein will receive a huge boost in power.”

Misteltein would undoubtedly show great synergy with any type of greed. Well, as long as it didn’t receive charm-related greed like Aether.

Kim Suho looked satisfied. If I remembered correctly, Kim Suho’s affection towards Misteltein should be at an all-time high. He should even be sleeping with it.

“...Thanks.”

Kim Suho suddenly put on an apologetic look and spoke softly.

“You’ve only been helping me recently.”

“It’s a give and take.”

“No, even in Busan, it was because of you that...”

Busan. He must be talking about Jin Sahyuk.
I shook my head.

“No, you would have been fine without me.”

“...You’re pretty stubborn, you know that?”

“Like you’re one to speak.”

“Nu-uh, you’re more stubborn.”

“No, you are.”

“No, you are!”

Kim Suho and I both frowned. Our sudden exchange of praises turned into a staring contest. Soon, we laughed and smiled at each other.



That night, I went to Seoul through Cube’s Portal.
The weather was dull and unpleasant.
My chest felt especially heavy today.

“Hey~”

When I was about to leave the Portal Station like usual, a familiar face popped out.

“Kim Hajin~”

It was Chae Nayun.

She linked her arm with mine the moment she appeared.

“Why are you always late?”

“...”

Tonight, I had dinner plans with Chae Nayun.

It was the night I would tell her farewell.

“...Hey.”

I replied without an ounce of emotion in my voice.

Chae Nayun shrunk back slightly but soon smiled brightly.

“Geez, what’s up with that reaction? Anyways, where are we going today?”

“I reserved a restaurant near Seocho District.”

Near my apartment, there was a restaurant Evandel and I frequented.

“Oh~ really?”

“Yeah, follow me.”

“...Ah, wait for me.”

I walked over to a parking lot near the Portal Station.

With my one-year VIP membership, my bike was parked in the best spot.

Chae Nayun was overjoyed when she saw my bike. I drove much more skillfully than before (thanks to Dexterity) and arrived at the restaurant.

I was somewhat nervous that the waiter would notice me, but likely because I always wore sunglasses when I came with Evandel, I didn’t receive any strange looks.

Looking at each other across the table, Chae Nayun asked several questions while we waited for the food to arrive. However, I replied to all of her questions half-heartedly.

“...Hmph.”

In the end, Chae Nayun seemed to have gotten tired of it, as she pouted. Even when the food arrived, I didn't say anything. Chae Nayun snuck glances at me as she quietly ate her food.

In complete silence, we finished our dinner.

“That will be 230,000 won.”

“Hey, I'll pay—”

“No, I'll do it.”

I paid for the food before Chae Nayun could and left the restaurant.

The sky was fairly dark.

I walked underneath this dreary sky, and Chae Nayun followed behind me.

“Hey.”

After a few minutes of silent strolling, we arrived at an empty park. Chae Nayun finally opened her mouth. I stopped and turned around. A faint tinge of tears could be seen on the corner of Chae Nayun's eyes.

Chae Nayun glared at me and clenched her fists.

“Are you tormenting me on purpose?”

“...”

I didn't reply to her.

Chae Nayun's angry voice continued.

“Or are you just ignoring me, fully aware of my feelings?”

Hearing her teary voice, I closed my eyes. In my head, I once again repeated my resolve.

“Or are you really unaware?”

“...”

The only way I could remain in her mind as a good memory. That was to be a ‘bad’ person rather than ‘someone to kill’.

“Sorry.”

I had to end our relationship before it progressed any further.

“...About what?”

Chae Nayun asked with a trembling voice.

“What are you sorry about?”

Looking into her eyes, I spoke resolutely.

“I’m dropping out.”

“...!”

Chae Nayun’s shocked breath flowed through the wind.

“W-Why?”

“I’m going to become a mercenary. I already got a good offer.”

“...Yeah, but why?”

“I don’t want to tell you that.”

Chae Nayun’s eyebrows twitched.

“...Then when are you dropping out?”

“Next week at the earliest.”

Next week.

Hearing these two words, Chae Nayun laughed despondently.

“And when did you decide?”

“Before I became a second-year.”

Hearing that, Chae Nayun clenched her teeth and forcefully curled up the corner of her lips.

“So you decided that long ago? Without telling me anything?”

“Why would I?”

“Ah... r-right, right, right...”

Unable to speak properly, Chae Nayun dropped her head down and smacked herself with her hand. Her hair, which had grown fairly long, shook and covered her face. After a brief moment of silence...

“Fine, I get it.”

She raised her hand and wiped away the tears flowing down from her face.

“You do whatever you want. It’s your business anyways. It has nothing to do with... dammit.”

After cursing silently, she turned around.

Tak, tak.

Only the sound of her lonely footsteps rang out in the empty park.

“...Yeah.”

I also turned around.

Breathing out in bitterness, I began to walk away from her.

However.

Beeeeep— Beep—

My smartwatch suddenly began to buzz crazily.

It wasn’t just mine.

Chae Nayun’s watch and even the watches of people far away from us began to ring loudly.

It was an emergency evacuation alarm.

“Eh?”

Puzzled, I turned on my smartwatch.

There was a breaking news that Creator’s Sacred Grace had failed their Tower campaign.

Since I knew it would happen, I didn’t think much of it.

“...Hey! Kim Hajin!”

However, Chae Nayun suddenly ran into me. Before I could even react, she embraced me and covered me with her body. It was as though she was trying to protect me from something.

In the next moment...

KOONG—!

A giant explosion swept over us.

I didn’t even have time to be confused.

After a quick flash of light, a huge shockwave pressed down on my body.

Then, my consciousness faded away.



Yoo Yeonha was currently in her dorm room, which was smaller than last year’s thanks to her rank dropping.

“Hmm...”

Seeing the report that arrived, Yoo Yeonha sighed.

[We looked into every known criminal in the world, but no one had such a tattoo.]

[Our newest member, Kim Hosup, helped a lot in this investigation.]

The complete investigation only took 3 weeks to finish. As Yoo Yeonha expected it to take at least three months, she was genuinely surprised.

“The new recruit we hired last time must be quite useful.”

Yoo Yeonha wrote back a positive reply talking about a bonus for the new recruit's hard work. Then, she went back to looking at the tattoo.

A common-looking tattoo that wasn't so common. Although the deep color of the tattoo made it look odd, it also made it look all the more natural.

"Where did a tattoo like this come from...?"

While Yoo Yeonha was murmuring with curiosity, another message arrived. This time, it was much more shocking than the previous news.

[Master, Creator's Sacred Grace has failed its Tower of Miracle campaign.]

"What?"

Beeep— Beeep—

At the same time, her smartwatch spat out a loud alarm.

"Kyak!"

Startled by the emergency evacuation alarm, Yoo Yeonha jumped out of her seat.

"W-What is it!?"

However, she soon calmed down and replied to the message she received.

[Are you positive?]

[Yes. The failure of Creator's Sacred Grace caused the Tower of Miracle's magic power to leave the Tower, creating magic power explosions around the area.]

"..."

Yoo Yeonha made a strange face at this revelation.

The failure to conquer a Tower often caused its magic power to clash with the outside world's magic power, causing huge explosions.

This meant one of two possibilities.

Either the nature of the Tower was like that, or the guild that failed to conquer it had been careless.

The Tower of Miracle was located in Umyeon Mountain in Gangnam. If explosions were caused by the conquering guild's carelessness...

"Hm."

That would be the end of Creator's Sacred Grace.

The corners of Yoo Yeonha's mouth curled up subconsciously. However, now wasn't the time to celebrate.

Yoo Yeonha quickly put on a serious face and contacted Essence of the Strait.

"Immediately deploy guild members to regions around the Tower of Miracle. Yes, as many as possible! Our foremost goal is the protection and rescue of civilians."

The downfall of a competitor was an opportunity for growth.

Yoo Yeonha planned to make use of this situation to its fullest.

"Whew..."

After spending about 10 minutes buried in her comfortable chair...

Tiriri—

Her smartwatch rang once again.

She picked up the call without much thought.

"...Yes, hello?"

However, the content of the call was something she couldn't take lightly.



Yoo Yeonha quickly ran to the Gangnam Severance Hospital, where Chae Nayun and Kim Hajin were hospitalized.

Perhaps because of the slow flow of information, Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak were yet to be seen. However, the hospital was still in a state of chaos. Patients were brought in by the minute, and most were severely injured.

"Yoo Yeonha-ssi, over here."

The hospital's chief resident quickly came to greet her.

“Um, where are the two patients you talked about?”

“Ah, neither are seriously injured, so you don’t have to worry too much. They’re currently staying in VIP rooms.”

Yoo Yeonha breathed a sigh of relief. At the same time, she couldn’t help but wonder, why did these things always happen to them?

“What about other civilians?”

“We’ve yet to grasp the complete damage, but with Gangnam being such a rich district, several mana barriers helped reduce the impact of the explosions. The damages should be within acceptable levels.”

“Ah... then can you take me to my friends’ room?”

“Yes, follow me.”

Yoo Yeonha followed her contact. She first visited Chae Nayun.

“It’s here.”

“Thank you.”

[VIP – Chae Nayun]

The nameplate showed that only one person was inside the room.

Yoo Yeonha opened the door and walked in.

“Eh?”

Chae Nayun was still unconscious. What surprised Yoo Yeonha was that her hair was much shorter than it was earlier in the day.

“Her hair is... practically a short-cut.”

“Her hair was burnt protecting the other person, so we had no choice but to cut it.”

“Ah...”

Yoo Yeonha immediately knew that Chae Nayun protected Kim Hajin.

“You know, he would have been fine if you didn’t protect him.”

“Hm?”

When Yoo Yeonha murmured, Chae Nayun slowly opened her eyes. Startled, Yoo Yeonha quickly walked up to her.

“Nayun!”

“...Eh?”

Chae Nayun muttered blankly after seeing the hospital ceiling. Then, she suddenly shot up. Her hands were trembling uncontrollably, and her eyes were filled with terror.

“Nayun, everything’s okay.”

“W-What, what just, uu, uaaah...”

Despite Yoo Yeonha’s warm words, Chae Nayun’s eyes were already tearing up. Seeing her struggling to get up with unspeakable terror, Yoo Yeonha couldn’t help but feel pity.

“Nayun, calm down for now.”

“Ah, uu, Hajin, what happened to, Hajin...”

“Patient Kim Hajin is fine. He’s sleeping next door. He’s in a much better condition than you.”

“...Really?”

“Yes, really.”

Only then did Chae Nayun’s trembling stop. But immediately afterwards, she began to hyperventilate. Then, she fainted. Yoo Yeonha shouted in shock.

“Ah! Is she okay!?”

“Yes, like I said, she has no physical injury. But she keeps showing signs of a panic attack. This is already the third time.”

“...Third time?”

“Yes, I believe she’s suffering from a form of PTSD.”

“T-That’s...”

Yoo Yeonha quietly placed her hand on Chae Nayun’s forehead. It was burning hot.

“Oh right, what about the other patient?”

“Patient Kim Hajin is next door.”

Yoo Yeonha left Chae Nayun’s room and went next door.

Kim Hajin was sleeping on the hospital bed.

Just like what the doctor said, he didn’t seem to have any noticeable injury.

“...He suffered light burns to his legs and arms, but he’s completely fine otherwise.”

“That’s great to hear.”

Yoo Yeonha stared at Kim Hajin, who was sleeping in a patient gown.

He looked relaxed and at peace.

It was almost as though he had fallen asleep, rather than fainting.

Looking at him sleeping like a child, Yoo Yeonha smiled. She also got the urge to poke his puffed cheeks.

...But at that moment, through pure coincidence, something caught her attention.

“Hm?”

Below his right sleeve, a black line was peeking out of his upper arm.

It was a strangely familiar and ominous figure.

Suddenly, an image in Yoo Yeonha’s head overlapped with the line in front of her.

“...What’s... this...?”

Murmuring softly, Yoo Yeonha reached out.
But when her fingers were about to touch his sleeve, her instincts roared.
To stop, to step back, to not go forward any further.

“This...”

However, her hand still moved and pulled up Kim Hajin’s sleeve. Regret only came later.
Half of the tattoo was still covered by his sleeve.
However, Yoo Yeonha didn’t need to see the full thing.
Half of a cross and half of a crescent moon.
It was exactly like the picture of the tattoo she saw.

“E... Eh?”

Murmuring quietly, she let go, and the sleeve fell back down, covering his arm.

“T-This...”

Almost as though she lost her speech, she couldn’t find the words to speak.
She couldn’t think.
She only knew that her head hurt.
Her train of thought seemed to be cutting off, like it was attempting to protect her from stress she couldn’t handle.
Her brain seemed to have stopped functioning.
As a result, the only thing she could do was breathe.

Yoo Yeonha raised her hands in a daze and clenched her head, which seemed to be burning up. Her hair tangled up from cold sweat. But rather than these trivial things...

“Ah...”

It hurt.

“Auuk...”

Her head hurt, like it was about to explode.
That was all she felt.

1. He kind of talks like Chae Nayun here.

Chapter 136

Farewell (3)

Yoo Yeonha stared at the ground blankly. Her heels were spinning in her blurred vision. A mysterious chill strangled her. She couldn't breathe.

"...Haa."

After barely managing to eek out a breath, Yoo Yeonha raised her head. Kim Hajin was still lying in the hospital bed. In Yoo Yeonha's eyes, however, his bed was shaking like it was experiencing an earthquake.

She bit her lips.

No way.

I must have seen it wrong.

That must be it.

Yoo Yeonha raised her smartwatch with her trembling hands.

A clear picture of a tattoo appeared on the smartwatch's screen. It was exactly like the one drawn on Kim Hajin's upper arm.

An indescribable shock pressed down on Yoo Yeonha's temple.

"Uuu..."

"Hiik!"

Kim Hajin moved his body. In that instant, Yoo Yeonha's body shook greatly.

Kim Hajin slowly opened his eyes. He blankly stared at the ceiling for a moment, then slowly turned his head to the side. Just like that, their eyes met.

"Yoo Yeonha?"

Kim Hajin spoke.

Yoo Yeonha swallowed her saliva and struggled to move her stiff tongue.

“...He, hell, hello.”

“What?”

“H-How, how has it been?”

“...Good, I guess?”

Kim Hajin was looking at her. Just this fact made her incapable of maintaining her calm.

However, she refused to lose her mind. She told herself that this was the one time she needed to stay calm and decisive.

First, she collected her breath.

As though she hadn't been breathing for a while, a gush of oxygen flowed into her brain. As a result, her vision turned clear and her discontinued thoughts came back.

“Huu...”

Calm down. Nothing is sure yet.

Everything might just be a huge misunderstanding.

It might be Yoo Jinhyuk's mistake, or someone might have tried to pin the blame on him.

For now, nothing is one-hundred percent certain...

“Oh right, how's Chae Nayun?”

Kim Hajin hurriedly asked. He was worrying about Chae Nayun, worrying about her sincerely. However, his sincerity confused Yoo Yeonha even more.

“Chae Nayun is, is fine. Uh, I, I'm going out for, a minute.”

Yoo Yeonha quickly turned around and left, leaving behind Kim Hajin who was staring at her quizzically.

Although Yoo Yeonha was in a situation where sound judgment and logical thinking were difficult, she knew what she had to do.

Yoo Yeonha messaged her information guild.

[Gangnam Severance Hospital. Patient name, Kim Hajin.]

Because her head was spinning, she found it difficult to type. She felt sick to her stomach. Holding herself back from throwing up, she shot her eyes open.

Most hospitals took written records of their patients' identifying characteristics. Naturally, tattoos were included in them.

As such, all data about Kim Hajin gathered today had to be erased. Before Chae Joochul or Chae Nayun found out, it had to be wiped away from existence.

Kim Hajin's tattoo had to be something only she knew about.

[Delete all data related to Patient Kim Hajin.]

Few doctors and nurses might have seen his tattoo already. However, if no information about the tattoo existed on paper, no one would ask them whether Kim Hajin had a tattoo.

"Um, Yoo Yeonha-ssi?"

The doctor in charge of the VIP rooms walked over.

"Ah, doctor, can you get a jacket for Kim Hajin?"

"A jacket?"

"Yes, he looked like he was cold."

"Ah... yes."

◇ ◇ ◇

"...Argh, my head."

Once Yoo Yeonha left the room, I clutched my head.

My body trembled, and my head felt like it just took an ice bath.

"Auuu."

First, I thought back to what happened before I fainted.

I was trying to get away from Chae Nayun, then... something exploded.

"What was that?"

Although I wasn't certain... I remembered writing something similar. Because it felt a bit out-of-place to have a rank 1 guild fall to rank 7 with a single failed Tower campaign, I added a bigger incident.

But why was it today and why was it in Seocho?

“...”

In any case, I needed more information.

I took a look around. On the shelf was my smartwatch. When I checked the news, there were only articles about Creator's Sacred Grace as I expected.

“...Haa.”

While I was taking in the information, my heart suddenly sank. It was because I remembered Chae Nayun protected me.

Since I lost consciousness, the explosion must have struck me directly. The only reason I was unhurt had to be because of Chae Nayun.

Tok, tok—

At that moment, someone knocked on the door.

“Yes?”

When I answered, a doctor walked in. With a calm expression, he walked up to me.

“Patient Kim Hajin?”

“Yes.”

“Here, you can put this on.”

He gave me a jacket. I put it on without much thought.

“Are you feeling okay?”

I felt my body here and there.

Although I didn't feel any pain, when I checked my smartwatch, I noticed that 90% of

the stat points I amassed with Energy Conversion were gone.
To think all those stats points I collected painstakingly would disappear in an instant...

“...Yes, I’m fine.”

I swallowed my sigh and retorted.

“In that case...”

The doctor let out a dry cough and slowly spoke.
As his somewhat envious voice continued, my face stiffened. I could no longer hold my
sigh back.

“...So.”

What the doctor told me could be simplified in one sentence.
‘Chae Nayun is suffering from a severe trauma.’
After losing someone she loved for the second time, Chae Nayun developed a mental
illness.

“If it’s okay, can you go see her?”

“...”

I got up silently. I couldn’t feel much strength from my legs, but I had no trouble
walking.

Chae Nayun was next door.
After taking a deep breath, I walked in.

“Nurse Kim?”

“Ah, yes.”

The nurse checking Chae Nayun’s pulse stepped back. With a bitter smile, I sat down
next to her.

“I just have to stay here?”

“Yes.”

The doctor checkmarked something on the clipboard he was holding, then glanced at the nurse.

“Let’s leave so they can be alone.”

“Ah, yes, doctor.”

Then, they left.

In the blink of an eye, only Chae Nayun and I were left in the room. I scratched my neck and waited for her to wake up. She seemed to be sleeping peacefully, but I could see a hint of tears around her eyes.

With Stigma’s magic power, I wiped away her tears.

It was then that I noticed something.

“Her hair...”

I knew for a fact that she recently started going to beauty parlors to get her hair done. However, her hair was now cut short.

I touched my hair, wondering if mine was also cut, only to find it perfectly fine.

‘Her hair should have been left intact, even if I had to become bald...’

As I sighed inwardly, Chae Nayun moved.

“Kuuung...”

Her eyelids shook as though she was having a nightmare, and she tightly held her blanket. Worried that she might have a seizure, I quickly worked to wake her up.

“Hey, hey, Chae Nayun.”

Chap, chap. But even after being slapped, she remained asleep. In fact, she looked like she was in greater pain.

Chap, chap, chap. Since I wasn’t sure what to do, I continued slapping her face. However, Chae Nayun still didn’t wake up.

Should I utilize Stigma’s magic power?

For now, I slapped her a bit more.

Chap, chap, chap, chap.

“Kuaaa, aaah...”

“Hey, wake up!”

“Ah...”

As she showed signs of waking up, I hit her strongly one last time.

Chap!

Then suddenly...

“Ah... , it freaking hurts!”

“...”

Her roar filled the room. I quickly pulled my hand back, and Chae Nayun shot up with reddened cheeks.

Her previous cursing must have been subconsciously done as she stared at me with half-clouded eyes.

“Ah...”

But soon, a teardrop fell from her eyes. Her face quickly distorted.

“...Ah, I, I thought you...”

Something warm and soft embraced me. Chae Nayun had jumped into my arms.

“I really, really thought...”

Unable to speak clearly, she only cried.

“...”

I let out a deep sigh.

It seemed I was mistaken.

Chae Nayun wasn't stronger than she was in the original story.

Of course, she might be stronger in terms of might. She changed to a sword quicker, and she even received Yoo Sihyuk's teachings.

“I, I thought you were going to disappear too...”

However, no matter how strong she tried to act, the current Chae Nayun was weaker than the Chae Nayun in the original story.

Her mind was already half-broken.

I couldn't help but worry.

Would she be able to endure everything that would happen in the future? Alone?

“Hng, hnng.”

“...Stop crying, you're always crying. I'm going to call you out for being a crybaby on your social media.”

“Hmph, I'm crying because of you, you bastard.”

By the time Chae Nayun stopped crying...

“Hey, Chae Nayun!”

The VIP room shot open and Kim Suho appeared.



[Creator's Sacred Grace failed in their conquering of the Tower of Miracle, causing a huge magic explosion. Currently, the Hero Association is investigating the members of Creator's Sacred Grace and where the blame falls for this incident.]

“Haa...”

A sigh came out of Kim Suho's mouth.

It wasn't so surprising. Currently on the news was Yun Seung-Ah who had her head down like a criminal under arrest.

In truth, Yun Seung-Ah couldn't be blamed for this failure. In fact, she displayed outstanding leadership as the guild's vice-leader.

Of the 1000 members and 300 mercenaries that participated in the Tower campaign, 75% had returned alive. But without Yun Seung-Ah, that number wouldn't have even reached 50%.

“Hajin, are you okay?”

Kim Suho turned towards me and asked.

“As you can see.”

“I’m glad. It looks like Chae Nayun... is also fine.”

Chae Nayun cried herself to sleep. Her hand was still tightly holding onto mine.

“...You should contact her.”

“Hm?”

“Yun Seung-Ah. Call her, message her, do something.”

“...”

Kim Suho shook his head with a troubled look. At that moment, the door shot open once more.

This time, it was Shin Jonghak.

He stormed into the room and looked down at Chae Nayun. I tried to release my hand, but Chae Nayun didn’t let go. She frowned and murmured in her sleep, holding my hand even tighter.

“...”

Shin Jonghak glared at me silently. His face was filled with rage.

However, he didn’t say anything. He didn’t express his anger or cry out in jealousy. He didn’t even try to separate us. He only softly caressed Chae Nayun’s shortened hair before turning around and leaving.

“...Hajin, I’ll be back soon.”

Kim Suho followed after him.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t do the same. Because Chae Nayun was holding onto my hand, I couldn’t even smoke.

But with my Gift, I could eavesdrop on any conversation.

“...Hey.”

But suddenly, a voice rang out from next to me.

When I turned my head to the side, I saw Chae Nayun staring up at me with narrowed eyes.

“...I knew you weren’t sleeping.”

“Pft.”

Chae Nayun laughed. Then, she moved her mouth without speaking.

—Come, here.

“Speak out loud.”

She still only moved her mouth. She might have been speaking extremely softly, or she might have been cosplaying as a mime.

Without any other choice, I moved my ear closer to her mouth.

It was then.

Chae Nayun’s arms suddenly wrapped around my neck.

“Ah!”

“...Got you.”

We were close enough that our lips were practically touching.

Chae Nayun smiled brightly and lightly bit my nose.

“Ah! Hey, what are you doing!?”

I tried to get away, but it was impossible.

In terms of pure strength, Chae Nayun was miles ahead of me.

After struggling for a bit and failing, I stared into her eyes without a choice. Then, I spoke.

“...Don’t you remember?”

“Remember what?”

“What happened today.”

“I do.”

Since that was the case, I tried to get away from her. However, she didn't let me.

“Hey, can you let me go?”

“...What if I drop out of Cube too?”

I frowned and glared at Chae Nayun seriously.

“Then I'll start hating you for real.”

“Why?”

“Who would like a girl foolish enough to give up her dreams for a man?”

“...”

Chae Nayun seemed to agree as she slightly loosened her arms.

I tried to get away from her using this opportunity... but it still wasn't enough.

Feeling like my pride as a man would be greatly hurt if I struggled any more, I decided to wait until she let go of me.

“But you know...”

Chae Nayun shook her head and continued.

“I thought about it. Even if you drop out and become a mercenary, that doesn't mean we can't see each other.”

“No, that's...”

“What, I can't even see you? That doesn't make any sense at all!”

“...”

I was at a loss for words.

Chae Nayun's face turned serious. I could tell she was speaking from the bottom of her heart.

"We can call each other and meet every once in a while. Then, when I graduate..."

It was then.

Tok, tok.

A knocking sound rang out, along with a deep voice.

—Nayun, it's Dad. I'm coming in.

"Uaat!"

Chae Nayun quickly pushed me away.

Chapter 137

Farewell (4)

With her father's sudden appearance, Chae Nayun looked up at me listlessly.

"...Ah, hey, that's my dad."

"Alright, see you later."

"N-No, you don't have to leave. I, I'm not embarrassed to have you here..."

"I know."

Before we could have a proper talk, the door opened, and a light breeze blew in. Our heads turned to the door.

Tap, tap.

A man in a full suit walked into the hospital room.

I got up from my chair and greeted Chae Nayun's father, Chae Shinhyuk. Although I'd seen him several times in the news, this was the first time I was seeing him in person.

"...Hm?"

He looked similar to Chae Nayun but had a sharper impression.

As he was far taller than me, the way he was looking down at me came off as cold.

Chae Shinhyuk was a man whose appearance and aura couldn't be called ordinary. In truth, however, Chae Shinhyuk wasn't particularly outstanding as a Hero or a businessman. In fact, as someone of average talent, he spent most of his youth in the shadow of his father.

Despite this, he was able to become the Chae clan's successor thanks to his righteous character and endless self-cultivation.

"Who's this?"

Chae Shinhyuk asked.

“Ah, I’m Chae Nayun’s friend. My name is Kim Hajin.”

“Kim Hajin...”

Chae Shinhyuk rubbed his beard and pondered.

“H-He’s just a friend. There’s nothing between us.”

While Chae Nayun was scratching her cheek in embarrassment, Chae Shinhyuk spoke up.

“I’ve heard of your name. You’re quite well-known in Cube. Your weapon is a gun, I believe?”

“Ah, yes.”

“I see.”

Chae Shinhyuk tapped my shoulder.

I forced myself to smile and headed towards the door.

“I’ll let the two of you talk now...”

I wasn’t used to talking to such a bigshot. I spoke as politely as possible, and Chae Shinhyuk returned a big smile.

“Thank you.”

“No problem.”

“B-Bye. I’ll message you later.”

I left the room without replying to Chae Nayun.

As soon as I closed the door behind me, my smartwatch rang.

“Hello?”

—Yes, customer. The items you ordered are ready to be delivered. I've called to ask for your address.

Two weeks ago, I ordered items from Essential Armory using the black card Yoo Yeonha gave me.

“Both of them?”

—No, the drones are still being prepared. They will be delivered next week.

I ordered two drones and 3000 12.7mm heavy machine gun bullets. Just the bullets came out to about 500 million won in total. They were both items I urgently needed for next week.

“Yes, the delivery address is...”

After giving my address, I accessed my laptop with my smartwatch.

There was a setting I needed to create.

I should have about 1532 SP.

With the 2600 SP I gained from killing Chae Jinyoon, 1532 was what remained after creating Dexterity. Right, just by destroying a distorted story, I gained 2600 SP.

Of course, I could have gained more SP by revealing myself as Chae Jinyoon's murderer, but obviously, that wasn't something I wanted.

[Current SP – 1572]

“...Hm?”

But when I checked my SP, I had about 40 SP more than what it was in the morning.

“Oh right.”

I hit my knees.

It must have been because I was named as one of the cadets injured by the magic power explosion.

Without much thought, I walked through the hospital's lobby and sat down on a bench nearby.

“Desert Eagle, heavy machine gun mode.”

Tok, tok.

Tapping on my smartwatch's holographic keyboard, I created a new setting.

===

[Desert Eagle – Heavy Machine Gun Mode]

—Using a small amount of Stigma's magic power, fuse Aether and the Desert Eagle together to form a heavy machine gun.

[With many additional functionalities added onto the Desert Eagle, the amount of SP required increases.]

[1500 SP will be used.]

===

“...That's a lot.”

A heavy machine gun modeled after the M2.

It was larger than an assault rifle and displayed a far greater destructive power. It was a weapon of war, in every sense of the word.

But since it could only be used situationally, it shouldn't be worth 1500 SP...

“Hm.”

After pondering for some time, I tried to increase the amount of Stigma's magic power required for the mode change.

[—Uses 1.5 streaks of Stigma.]

[1100 SP will be used.]

The cost was reduced by a whole 400 SP.

“...This is good enough.”

Next week, I had to conquer a Dungeon with Kim Suho. With the Book of Truth, I found out that its last stage was 'defense'. Both for this Dungeon and for future episodes, I had to get this heavy machine gun.

I hit 'save'.



On the other hand, Yoo Yeonha dragged her exhausted mind to her home in Seoul.

“Oh, my daughter Yeonha! How was your—”

“It was okay. I’m going to bed.”

Leaving behind her father who was looking at her worriedly, Yoo Yeonha buried herself in her blanket.

The thoughts swirling around her head didn’t disappear.

In fact, they only became more chaotic as time went on.

Kim Hajin and Chae Jinyoon.

Chae Nayun and Kim Hajin.

Did Kim Hajin really kill Chae Jinyoon?

If so, why?

And did he kill Chae Jinyoon? Or did he have to kill Chae Jinyoon?

Tok, tok.

A sudden knock on the door interrupted her train of thought.

—Um, Yeonha? Are you hurt?

Her father asked from the other side of the door.

“...I’m fine.”

—Really? I cut some fruits for you...

“It’s okay. I’m full.”

—...

The presence behind the door disappeared.

Soon, when Yoo Yeonha was trying to refocus her thoughts, an uninvited voice rang out.

—Yeonha~ do you want me to make you some ramen~?

“Ah, geez, just leave me alone—!”

—Huk, huuuk...

Yoo Yeonha shouted at the door and dug into her bed.

She could feel Yoo Jinwoong’s disappointment, but as far as she was concerned, it was partly his fault that she was worrying about all this. He had to be punished too.

“...”

After Yoo Jinwoong disappeared completely, Yoo Yeonha recalled everything she saw today.

If Kim Hajin really killed Chae Jinyoon, what would the reason be?

Could it be that he figured out the truth of the Kwang-Oh Incident on his own?

No, that was impossible.

Not even her information guild was able to gather any information on the Kwang-Oh Incident. She was only able to find out the truth because of her father’s diary.

Kim Hajin surely couldn’t have found out the truth on his own...

“Wait, the Truth Agency...?”

Yoo Yeonha shook her head.

There were truths that information guilds could discover and truths that information guilds couldn’t discover. The Kwang-Oh Incident most certainly belonged to the latter. Plus, it just didn’t add up.

If Kim Hajin really knew the truth, there was no way he would treat her so kindly.

From this conceited doubt came a suspicion.

What if he forgave her? What if her efforts(?) appeased his anger?

“...No.”

That still didn’t make sense.

If he forgave her, Chae Nayun, then Chae Jinyoon should have also been forgiven.

“What if there was another reason...?”

If Kim Hajin really murdered Chae Jinyoon and had a motive for it... the only person who might know about it was...

“Yoo Jinhyuk.”

He was also the one who first found out about Kim Hajin’s tattoo. In that case, there was a chance he knew more about it. Yoo Yeonha quickly made a call.

[You are unable to call the receiver because your number has been blocked.]

“...Hah?”

Yoo Yeonha was dumbstruck. With her face red, she murmured in a daze.

“You blocked me?”

I’ll tell Dad!

As she was gritting her teeth in anger, she had a sudden thought.

“Blocked...”

The fact that Yoo Jinhyuk blocked her gave her a sense of assurance.

‘Why would he block me? He doesn’t even know that I saw Kim Hajin’s tattoo...’

As far as she was concerned, Yoo Jinhyuk had to have blocked her because he was trying to hide something from her.”

“...”

Yoo Yeonha thought hard under her blanket.

But soon, the door suddenly shot open.

“Yoo Yeonha, get up.”

A cold voice rang out.

Feeling a chill run down her back, Yoo Yeonha peeked her head out of her blanket. Her mother, Jin Yeojung, was glaring at her sharply.

“M-Mom?”

“What did you do? Your father is drinking soju calling out your name.”

“Eh? No, I didn’t do any—”

“Yeah, right. Come out and apologize.”

“Ah, but I’m in the middle of something impor—”

“Hurry up!”

“...Ah, wait, aah.”

Jin Yeojung dragged Yoo Yeonha out of the room.



Weekend.

I arrived at a nameless Dungeon with Kim Suho. It was a stage-type Dungeon hidden in a swamp, filled with giant alligators.

Because I didn’t know much about this Dungeon, I was worried at first. But now that I had Kim Suho with me and mapped out most of the Dungeon with the Book of Truth, I was fully confident in coming out of this Dungeon unscathed.

Kim Suho and I were a cheat-like combination.

I guess you could say we filled each other’s weaknesses.

Each stage of the Dungeon had dozens of mob monsters and one boss-level monster. I could easily take care of the small fries, letting Kim Suho conserve his stamina for the boss.

With Kim Suho’s Sword Saint magic power, all boss monsters were cut in half like tofu.

“This looks like the final stage.”

Advancing smoothly, we arrived at the final stage, which had a slightly different atmosphere than the previous stages. In front of our eyes was an open field that was silent and full of war clouds.

Kim Suho pulled out Misteltein. Then, a message popped up in front of our eyes.

[Final Stage – survive for 30 minutes against an army of high-intermediate grade-8 monsters.]

“...High-intermediate rank?”

“Whoo!”

Kim Suho frowned, but I cheered. Just like the Book of Truth said, the final stage was a defense stage, which was advantageous for me.

“Surviving for 30 minutes. Does that include...”

“Them?”

Kim Suho and I turned around. Behind us were three high school girls trembling in fear. I asked Kim Suho.

“Do you think they’re NPCs or real people?”

“...I’m not sure.”

“Geez, we’re not NPCs!”

They seemed to have overheard us as one of them shouted courageously.

“We’re cadets from the Agent Military Academy!”

“...Okay, okay.”

NPCs existed in some Dungeons and Towers, which were products of the Otherworld. Naturally, NPCs were generally people of that world, not high school girls from Earth.

“I’ll set up a bunker just in case.”

“A bunker?”

I consumed one streak of Stigma and crafted it into the shape of a bunker. I learned highly precise ways of using Stigma after I obtained Dexterity. Although

Stigma's magic power manifested according to my will, dexterity was needed for me to materialize what I pictured in my head.

"Wow, what's this!?"

The bunker I created resembled the bunker from the famous game, Starcraft.

"Stay inside."

"Yes!"

"Thank you!"

The high school girls quickly scurried inside.

"Wow, that's amazing. How long can it last?"

"It's not that strong. I only used one... er, a little bit of magic power. But it should be enough to protect them from being caught in crossfire."

With the bunker protecting the girls, Kim Suho looked more relaxed.

"Alright, get ready. It looks like they're coming."

Clack, clack.

From the silent field, a countless number of monsters began to appear. Ghouls, zombies, banshees, flesh golems... they were all undead monsters.

"30 minutes."

I took out the Desert Eagle and set an alarm on my smartwatch.

"...Kim Suho, have you played a game like this?"

"Hm?"

"In tower defense games, waves of monsters get stronger as time goes on."

I transformed the Desert Eagle into assault rifle mode.

“I’ll deal with the front, so you deal with the monsters in the back. You can dodge my bullets, right?”

“As long as you aren’t shooting too wildly.”

“Don’t worry.”

I fixed the assault rifle on the ground and infused more of Stigma’s magic power into it.

The assault rifle then grew in size and transformed into a heavy machine gun on a tripod.

“Oh? Isn’t that new?”

“It’s a bit stronger than an assault rifle. Should I shoot first? Or do you want to lead?”

“You can go ahead. I’ll dodge your bullets on my own.”

“Alright, run!”

Paat!

Kim Suho shot forward faster than my bullets.

“...Scan.”

I murmured softly and held the heavy machine gun.

This weapon of mass destruction hindered the movement of its user and prevented precise aiming. However...

Tududududu—!

Its destructive power was more than enough to cover its flaws.

The barrel of the gun flashed white. Bullets shot forward like cannon shells, each striking three to four monsters.

Koooong—!

One magazine carried 300 bullets, and the gun had a firing rate of 1300 bullets per minute.

In other words, it was entirely possible to use up all the bullets I brought in just 3 minutes.

However, I purposely maintained a slow speed. One reason was to avoid hitting Kim Suho, and the other was to hit several enemies with each bullet.

Clang, clang, clang—

Bullet casings rained down on the ground.

Chwiing—!

Then suddenly, a claw shot towards me. The magic power reinforcement seal on my obsidian bracelet easily blocked such weak attacks.

“Kueeek—!”

Next, I caught sight of a quick ghoul running towards me. Because of its unexpectedly quick speed, I activated Bullet Time.

The world slowed down and my consciousness sped up.

Hunter Ghoul. It was an intermediate-rank monster that was quicker than many monsters at its level.

It seemed to have figured out that my attacks were mostly low flying, as it even jumped up cleverly.

However, no matter how smart and quick it was, a mob monster was a mob monster.

In an instant, I twisted the machine gun’s handle at a sharp angle and fired. Two curving bullets shot forward and pierced the Hunter Ghoul’s head.

“Keuk!”

With its head blown up, it fell to the ground.

But as I was focused on the Hunter Ghoul, the progress of battle became messier.

Thankfully, Kim Suho was holding back the stronger monsters in the back.

With Bullet Time still active, I twisted the machine gun’s aim once again.

Fanning the machine gun in a cone, I fired in all directions.

Dudududu—

The enemy lines were in shambles due to my calculated barrage of bullets. A bullet pierced through a ghoul's chest and blew up a zombie's head. Bits and pieces of flesh and brain fluid splattered. The zombie and ghoul fell on their knees without moving more than a single step.

It couldn't be good for the mental health, even for undead monsters.



I used up around a thousand bullets. As planned, I took care of the small fries, and Kim Suho joined the fray and cut down the elites. Then, after 30 minutes of battle, the final stage came to an end.

We approached the bunker behind us.

"Hey, you guys there...?"

However, the high school girls who should have been inside were gone. Kim Suho murmured with a sigh.

"...They were NPCs."

"Yeah."

Modern people who appeared in Dungeons as NPCs. Fully knowing what that meant, we couldn't express our joy of beating the Dungeon.

"...Hajin, look over there."

On the ground where Kim Suho pointed were three beads huddled together like the high school girls.

"Ah."

Those who died in Dungeons sometimes became NPCs. These beads were all that remained of them.

===

[Low-intermediate rank Pink-colored Soul Bead]

—Created by condensed soul of a life killed inside the Dungeon.

===

Soul Beads were used as materials for magic seals and magic enchantments. Even low-intermediate rank beads would easily sell for hundreds of millions in Violet Banquet. I looked at Kim Suho. He was looking at me too. Neither of us seemed too keen on using these beads.

“...What should we do?”

Kim Suho asked.

“We’ll have to give them back. To their family members.”

That was the best solution.

“Right.”

Although we easily came to a decision, we couldn’t be happy. We knew fully well what these beads meant to parents who lost their children.

“Let’s open up that chest first.”

I walked towards the chest sitting in the middle of the open field. Kim Suho soon followed after me.

“Oh, there’s more than one this time!”

There were three items inside.

A bow, a wrist protector, and a leather belt.

They were all sand-colored, as though they formed a set together.

“Ah, this is it.”

“Hm? You know about them?”

“...No, it’s nothing.”

[Blessed Bow of Horus]

[Egyptian Archer’s Wrist Protector]

[Leather Belt for the Strong]

The bow and wrist protector were supposed to become the main equipment of Valerion, an executive of the Djinn group ‘Sin’.

I glanced at Kim Suho who was staring at the contents of the chest. I asked in a cheerful voice.

“How should we split these~?”

“Hm?”

Kim Suho looked at me and smiled.

“I’ll leave it to you. You’re the one who found this place, and it was thanks to you that we beat the final stage.”

“Okay.”

To be honest, Kim Suho didn’t need the bow or the wrist protector. After all, he was a close-range combatant. The only item that suited him was the leather belt, but there was just one problem...

“...You take this leather belt.”

“You’re taking the other two?”

Although I knew Kim Suho didn’t mean anything by it, I couldn’t help but feel a little guilty.

This leather belt was an artifact for training.

===

[Leather Belt for the Strong] [Ancient Artifact]

—When used, a maximum of 1000 jin can be added to the wearer’s body.

—Increases physical growth of its wearer.

===

“Can’t you read the item description?”

Although I was using my Gift, Observation and Reading, to see item descriptions, other people could see item descriptions without relying on Gifts. The only requirement was

to be Enlightened and to have the special stat 'insight'.

"Oh, Enlightenment? I'm bad at these things, so I need to get items appraised."

"I see."

"So, how do you use this leather belt?"

Kim Suho picked up the leather belt while smiling joyfully.
I suddenly felt sorry.

"It's... for training."

"Training?"

But unlike what I expected, Kim Suho's eyes sparkled like he found a treasure.

"Y-Yeah, if you wear it, your body will get heavier. Look over there, you can change the weight too."

"Oooh."

Kim Suho exclaimed in awe. However, my expression darkened. He was only making me feel worse.

"It's kind of like a portable gravitation room... but it's actually a bit better. It's an ancient artifact that speeds up your physical growth."

"R-Really? That's amazing! You're giving this to me?"

"...What I'm taking are better."

To be honest, they were not only better, but incomparably better.

===

[Blessed Bow of Horus] [Ancient Holy] [Ghost attribute]

A bow blessed by Horus, son of the ancient Egyptian god, Osiris.

—Power of Horus

*Arrows shot with this bow are endowed with sacred flames.

*Sacred flames are particularly powerful against evil spirits.

*By imbuing magic power into the bow, you can create an 'arrow of healing'.

—Sun of Horus

*From 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., the user of this bow will receive improved vision.

—Moon of Horus

*From 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., the user of this bow can move with quieter footsteps.

===

An artifact bow with three options.

I carefully picked up the bow. I would have felt bad enough just taking this, but there was an additional unexpected benefit.

[Your Gift, 'Master Sharpshooter', links with 'Sun of Horus' and 'Stigma'.]

[When you activate Sun of Horus while holding the Blessed Bow of Horus, it will fuse with your low-rank Gift 'Thousand-Mile Eyes' and allow you to use 'Eye of Horus' for 5 seconds.]

[Eye of Horus]

—Your vision extends far beyond the horizon, piercing through the feelings of people and laws of the universe.

“...”

While all sorts of jaw-dropping messages were popping up, Kim Suho asked innocently.

“Oh right, Hajin, you're good with bows too, right?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, I am...”

“That's great! You got yourself a bow, and also... a wrist protector, I think?”

He was too pure...

Feeling extremely sorry, I stared at Kim Suho.

Chapter 138

Final Incident (1)

After clearing the Dungeon, I ate dinner with Kim Suho and returned home.

Beep, beep, beep.

I entered the password and opened the front door. However, Evandel didn't come out to greet me like usual. I could hear voices of two kids having fun.

When I walked inside, wondering if Evandel was mad at me for coming home late, I saw an unexpected guest. Evandel was with a girl I've never seen before.

"Hajin~"

Seeing me, Evandel smiled brightly and waved her hand. Curious, I looked back and forth between Evandel and the pretty girl next to her. The girl introduced herself.

"Hello."

"Uh... hi."

I greeted her and looked at Evandel for an explanation.

Evandel smiled and introduced the girl.

"She's my friend~"

"I'm Yun Haeyeon."

The two children bowed at a 90 degree angle. I couldn't help but smile, looking at their adorable gesture.

"H-Hello. You must be the friend Evandel talked about before."

"Un! Haeyeon said her parents are busy tonight, so I told her she could eat dinner at my place!"

"Oh? What did you order?"

“Haeyeon is giving it a go!”

“Giving it a go?”

Evandel giggled, while Haeyeon sheepishly looked down and scratched her cheek.

“Yep, Haeyeon says she never ordered food before.”

“Oh...”

For children, everything was a challenge. Now that I think about it, I had trouble ordering food when I was 5 too.

“But don’t order anything. Since your friend is here, I’ll cook tonight.”

“Wow, really?!”

Evandel’s face turned brighter.

Cooking was one of the skills I acquired with Dexterity. As long as I knew the recipe, I could mimic most of what professional chefs did on TV. Evandel was really surprised when I first showed her.

“Alright, then wait just a bit.”

I opened the fridge. There were more than enough ingredients.

“What do you want to eat?”

“I—”

“I’m asking Haeyeon.”

“...”

Guest first.

Evandel pouted but she quickly went back to smiling when I patted her.

“I’m... fine with anything...”

“Steak please!”

Evandel’s eyes sparkled.

“Haeyeon, are you okay with steak?”

“Yes, I like it.”

“Good.”

I took out four pieces of beef sirloin and some seasoning.

Three of them were for Evandel, and the other was for Haeyeon and Hayang.

“Can I watch you cook?”

“Sure.”

I began to cook under the curious eyes of two children.

Tak, tak, tak— I quickly chopped up some paprika and onions.

Chwiik— I made a 3-star Michelin chef’s steak sauce recipe.

Tzzzz— Then, I plated the garnish and meat, topping them off with the steak sauce.

I presented the completed dish under the awestruck gazes of two children and one cat.

“Here you go.”

“Whoa~”

Evandel and Haeyeon stared at the steak with anticipation. I checked my smartwatch.

[A sense of satisfaction and fatigue recovery effect seeps into your well-cooked dish.]

[8:52 P.M.]

It was almost time for my 9 o’clock appointment.

“Alright, I’m going out for a bit. Let the steak rest for five minutes before you eat.”

“Un!”

“Thank you for the food.”

Leaving behind the two kids who were eagerly waiting to eat, I left my house and arrived at a nearby park.

As I waited, I checked the items I got today.

===

[Egyptian Archer’s Wrist Protector] [Ancient Artifact] [Sand attribute]
[Stored Mana 3000/3000]

—Ancient Archer Proficiency

*Increases your proficiency with bows.

—Blessing of the Desert

*Allows you to cast Sand Barrier using stored mana.

===

Blessed Bow of Horus and Egyptian Archer’s Wrist Protector. These two items, which I called the Egyptian Set, would serve me well at least until the middle stages of the story.

“Hm...”

But now that I had a good bow, I couldn’t help but hesitate between a bow and a gun. At this point, it was hard to say one was better than the other.

My gun wasn’t an ordinary gun. As my main weapon, the Desert Eagle had all sorts of additional options attached to it.

First was an attack power increasing effect for each monster I instakilled. Just this effect alone made my Desert Eagle 2.2 times stronger than other Desert Eagles.

But there was more.

Shotgun mode, anti-material sniper rifle mode, assault rifle mode, heavy machine gun mode. With the Desert Eagle’s modal change function, I could display great firepower in all sorts of situations. The only flaw was that I fused Aether with the gun to change form, making me unable to use Aether for defense.

“I’ll only use a bow as an ultimate ability...”

That seemed to be the right choice.

I stared at the sand-colored bow, then tried attaching Aether to it. Immediately, the

ancient bow transformed, looking more modern and elegant.

“Is it because of Aesthetic Greed? It keeps doing this.”

Ever since Aesthetic Greed was added to Aether, even my guns took on new forms. I couldn't quite describe it well, but simply put, they became more elegant and beautiful.

“Did you get a new weapon?”

After about 10 minutes, the person I was waiting for finally arrived. Boss approached me with a smile on her face.

“You were right. Creator's Sacred Grace failed their Tower campaign. Horribly, at that.”

“...Are you happy?”

“Of course, haha.”

The stock price of Creator's Sacred Grace fell by 30% in just four days. It took a massive dip on the first day and was steadily falling ever since.

“So, what's your request?”

“Will you accept it?”

“As long as it's possible.”

In exchange for giving Boss stock-related information, I requested her help for the upcoming incident.

“Have you heard of Dark Moon Society?”

Dark Moon Society should infiltrate Cube during this episode. This was also the episode where Lancaster made his first real move, and I already confirmed both using the Book of Truth.

“Dark Moon Society? How do you know about them?”

Boss frowned suspiciously.

“Well, you see...”

I scratched my neck and spoke awkwardly.

I didn't have any other option. The co-author would surely make the upcoming incident messier. It was only natural that I have an ally or two to balance it out.

“During the previous final exam, they tried to kill me.”

“...What?”

Boss' face distorted viciously.

As expected of Yasha, she valued her comrades dearly. I felt proud.



May 1st.

Today's class had yet to start, and I was currently looking at Cube's dropout form. Looking at the line asking for the reason I was dropping out, I couldn't help but wonder what I should put down.

After much thought, I wrote only two words—[career change]. Then, I signed the document.

“Good morning! I will announce the randomly created teams. Remember, it's only a 2-person team.”

The morning common class was more or less a walk in the park. Today's training was a VR Dungeon. It was no different than the Mock Dungeon Trial we had last year, except that this one was government sponsored and done in a VR world.

“Team 6, Yoo Yeonha and Kim Hajin.”

Yoo Yeonha, who was sitting in front of the VR capsule, twitched.

She turned head her like a machine, and our eyes met. When I smiled at her, Yoo Yeonha returned a deep sigh.

“Now, sit together with your teammate.”

Yoo Yeonha slowly walked up and sat down next to me.

“...Hello.”

“Hey.”

“Alright, listen up! The visual effects for this Dungeon will be more realistic than the real thing, so stay on your toes! Now~ put on your helmets!”

After the instructor’s enthusiastic introduction ended, I put on my helmet. A vivid scenery spread out in front of me.

—Wow, it’s like I’m in a LAN café.

I murmured.

“...”

However, Yoo Yeonha didn’t say anything. From the looks of it, she wasn’t even logged on.

I took off my helmet and stared at Yoo Yeonha.

With furrowed brows, she was staring fixedly at my right arm. I flicked her forehead.

“Ak.”

“...Ak? What are you doing?”

“N-Nothing. Let’s start.”

Yoo Yeonha put on her helmet, walking on eggshells around me. Thinking that she was up to her usual delusional antics, I ignored her and put on my helmet.

We were placed in a vast cave.

—Where should we go?

—Let’s go straight.

—Okay... kayak!

[A giant bat has appeared!]

—Why are you surprised by just this... oh right, you hate scary things.

From ghosts to jump scares, Yoo Yeonha hated all scary things.

—...N-No, I don't.

—Anyways, how should we kill it?

—...Attack its ears.

Yoo Yeonha murmured softly. I did as she said. I shot twice, striking its ears and instantly killing it.

—Next up is a zombie. Its weakness?

—Head.

—Got it.

Progressing smoothly, we quickly reached the end of the Dungeon. What should have been a 30-minute course only took us 20 minutes to complete.

“...Um.”

“Hm?”

Yoo Yeonha asked carefully in a soft voice.

“I... I heard you were dropping out.”

“...Did Chae Nayun tell you?”

Yoo Yeonha nodded.

“She's quite a blabbermou—”

“She was crying.”

“What?”

Yoo Yeonha’s voice became heavier.

“She was crying?”

“Yes, she said she didn’t want you to leave.”

“Uh...”

As I was choosing my words, I felt a mysterious gaze fall on me. I turned to the side. There, my eyes met Rachel’s. However, she quickly averted her gaze. She seemed to have overheard what we just talked about.

“...Anyways, it’s not something I have a say in. I believe that you’ll deal with it properly.”

Yoo Yeonha murmured then got up.

“Team 6 just finished.”



After the morning class came lunch time. I came to Cube’s cafeteria to eat alone. However, Rachel was also at the cafeteria. But because there was a female agent disguised as a cadet standing next to her, we only exchanged a brief eye contact as a greeting.

“I’ll take the special set.”

“Alrighty~”

When I sat down with my food, someone sat down next to me. It was Chae Nayun.

“H-Hi.”

She waved her hand awkwardly. I looked at her plate and asked.

“You can eat cafeteria food?”

“O-Of course.”

Chae Nayun courageously put a sausage in her mouth.

Nom, nom...

However, her chewing speed only slowed down as time went on.

“So, um... when are you leaving?”

She asked without swallowing the food in her mouth.

“This week.”

Kuhuk.

She coughed loudly, almost choking on her food. Luckily, she managed to swallow it before anything that she would regret happened.

Chae Nayun looked down at her plate with dejected eyes, then clenched her fists and hit the table.

“Hey.”

“...What.”

“Can’t you stay?”

I could only shake my head in response.

“Ah, okay, well, if you have to go, you should. I can... I can also find someone else to be my boyfriend.”

She mumbled as she glanced at me.

“Yeah, go ahead.”

“...I’m kidding. I won’t date anyone else.”

“You should.”

Immediately, Chae Nayun frowned heavily.

However, I quickly finished my food and got up. Chae Nayun ran after me.

After returning my plate, I left the cafeteria and walked to a nearby park.

There, a second battle began between me and Chae Nayun.

“Uuuu, it’s infuriating the more I think about it! Don’t you know how to be tactful? You know, lip service?”

“...What?”

“I mean, didn’t you like me at first!?”

“What are you talking about—”

Shooooong—

In the middle of our conversation full of misunderstandings, a strange undulation of magic power suddenly rang out.

I immediately froze. Swirling near the ground was a sharp yet light aura. In the air was an ominous magic power that seemed to interfere with the foundation of earth.

Chae Nayun and I looked at each other simultaneously.

“Hey, what was that?”

Chae Nayun asked. I let out a small sigh. I couldn’t find out about the specific date because I didn’t have enough magic power.

...It seemed it was finally here.

“It should be a magic phenomenon.”

What was happening now was an extremely rare magic phenomenon. A natural magic disaster that happened when the dragon race that lived in the depths of the East Sea touched the ocean’s magic power keystone. Although this phenomenon normally happened as a pure coincidence, this incident was orchestrated by Djinns.

“Magic phenomenon? Ah, hey, look over there.”

Chae Nayun pointed in one direction.

Cube's scenery was changing.

The green leaves were changing color, and the cool breeze turned hot. Additionally, Cube's state-of-the-art buildings disappeared, leaving only a single dilapidated building and a wooded forest.

"Follow me."

"O-Okay. Ah, your hand..."

I grabbed Chae Nayun's wrist and quickly ran into the sole dilapidated building in the center of Cube.

"W-What's happening?"

"Don't let go of my hand!"

Because she kept twisting her wrist, I shouted.

"S-Sorry, but you should explain what's going on..."

"The space got distorted."

"What?"

"We learned about it in class, remember? It's the broken mirror phenomenon."

Broken mirror phenomenon. It was a magic phenomenon where space was cut into pieces like a broken mirror.

This magic disaster was something I created using random interesting theories I heard about. Technically, this phenomenon was a form of barrier created when a dragon interfered with mana clouds that rose up through convection currents.

To find incarnation bodies for devils, Djinn had provoked a dragon and invaded Cube.

This invasion was carefully organized by Djinn. That was the reason I couldn't stop it. Even if I was willing to give up on the growth Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak would experience, there was simply no way for me to stop the Djinn's plan, which would require me to kill a dragon.

"What? Then..."

“Space might split at any moment, so stay sharp. You see that building in the center? We need to get there as quickly as possible... Uk!”

The space distorted once again.

My hand was forced to let go of Chae Nayun’s wrist, and the scenery changed once again.

Now, the world looked like it was half-day and half-night.

This time, the air was filled with the smell of blood.

I turned to the direction of the smell. Then, I ran without a shred of hesitation.

As soon as I discovered the source of the smell, I shouted loudly.

“HEY!”

12 pairs of eyes fell on me.

There, Rachel was surrounded by ten or so Djinns.

“...Hajin-ssi!”

While a thick smell of blood flowed out, Rachel’s face became faintly brighter. I first checked her condition. Thankfully, she didn’t seem to be the one bleeding. Rather, the blood came from the Djinns she cut down.

“Oh~? What a coincidence~ we meet again. It’s been a while.”

A somewhat familiar man clapped his hands and revealed himself.

I knew very well who he was.

He was Heuk Jeon, the assassin who interfered in the final exam.

“Yeah, it’s been a while.”

As expected, Lancaster and Dark Moon Society were involved in this incident.

“Yes, yes, it really has been such a long time.”

Heuk Jeon unleashed a vicious killing intent as he spread his daggers out into the shape of a fan.

However, I tilted my head.

Did he not hear the news yet?

“Hajin-ssi, run away. There are too many of them for just the two of us to fight. I’ll hold them back, so you should go look for reinforcements—”

Ignoring Rachel who was saying something seriously, I faced Heuk Jeon.

“Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin. Ever since the day you humiliated me, I’ve been waiting for this day...”

“...You haven’t heard the news?”

“...News?”

I pointed at the walkie-talkie hanging on his belt. The Djinnns attacking Cube all had walkie-talkies that worked in this distorted space.

However, that was the same for me.

“Hold on.”

Using a magical device I prepared for today, I sent Boss a message.

[Boss, those guys are bothering me again...]

It was a similar device as the magic letters the Yoo Sihyuk School used.

“What are you doing? I advise you to take out your weapon...”

It was then.

—Heuk Jeon! Where are you, you son of a bitch!?

Harsh words came out of Heuk Jeon’s walkie-talkie. Heuk Jeon and the Djinnns surrounding him were all befuddled.

“Eh? I’m in the middle of the miss—”

—What? You motherfucker, I told you not to do that!

Sweating profusely, Heuk Jeon lowered the walkie-talkie’s volume. He clearly didn’t want to embarrass himself.

“...Um, Hwarang-nim, I thought we already finished our talk with the Lancasters.”

—Do you think I give a shit about Lancaster right now!? *That* person contacted me just now. If something goes wrong because of you, I will kill you myself!

That was the end of this brief radio message.

—I’m not kidding, I will really kill you! I’ll tear your limbs apart and feed you to the highest rank monster I can find!!

The walkie-talkie then came back on with a final warning.

Heuk Jeon stared at the walkie-talkie in his trembling hands, then put it back down. Sweating even more profusely, he asked carefully.

“Um, Kim, Kim Hajin-ssi? C-Can you please explain what is going on...?”

I couldn’t tell whether he was slow or just shocked.

“Well, think about it this way. I make money on the side by investing in stocks. One of my clients happens to know about you. So I asked them for a favor. Who knew one of my clients would have such a tight relationship with you?”

“...”

Heuk Jeon looked like his soul was sucked out. He seemed to be saying, ‘I’m being humiliated because of mere stocks?’ but considering Boss’ personality, it was quite a good excuse.

“So, what are you doing?”

I pointed at a rock nearby.

It was the perfect place to kowtow.

“If I were you, my head would be kissing the ground right about now.”

Chapter 139

Final Incident (2)

“...Um, what happened?”

Rachel whispered. Without answering her, I looked back at Heuk Jeon and his crew who were following us.

Putting his pride and status into consideration, I said I would let him off even if he didn't kowtow to me, but he decided to follow me like an attendant anyways.

“Who knows?”

“...”

Rachel put on a suspicious look at my vague reply.

“Well, it's like I said before. I trade stocks on the side. That's it.”

“Stocks?”

It really wasn't easy to come up with a good explanation. After all, I didn't want to look like someone who was related to Djinnns.

“Yes, I gave one of my clients a valuable piece of information. That client just happened to be extremely influential around people like them.”

“Eh? Then is your client also a Djinn...?”

“No. It's all about money. That's why they're here too.”

I wasn't lying. Boss really was a money-loving fool... well, maybe calling her a fool was too harsh. She was focused on making money because the Chameleon Troupe was relatively free, but once their involvement in the main story kicked in, she would undoubtedly show why she was called the Yasha.

“...”

Rachel didn't seem to believe me one hundred percent, but she didn't ask further questions.

“Stocks... stocks...”

She mumbled to herself, then suddenly her eyes shot open.

“Ah, Ha, Hajin-ssi.”

“Yes?”

She called my name while stuttering.

“Then did you make a lot of profit with stocks?”

“Uh... my nickname is the Invisible Hand.”

When I said that, Rachel's cheeks flushed red with anticipation.

I could easily see what that meant.

At the moment, the English Royal Court guild was in a financial crisis. Because of last year's incident on Clancy Islet, they were suffering from lack of investors.

“I see... it makes sense since you're rank 1 in theory. You must be good at analyzing charts and data...”

However, she seemed to be too embarrassed to ask for a favor outright, as she fiddled with her fingers.

“I guess you could say that.”

I acted oblivious.

“Ah... right.”

After hesitating to voice her thoughts, Rachel finally worked up the courage to speak.

“So, um, I heard guilds have recently started investing in stocks to make money...”

“Oh~ is that so?”

Seeing her embarrassed yet full of hope, I felt the urge to tease her. It was all thanks to Boss that I could be so relaxed in this situation.

“Y-Yes... and um, the English Royal Court guild is looking to start a business at the moment...”

“Oh right.”

I cut her off. This time, it was to give her a more meaningful piece of information.

“If the space distorts while we’re walking, stay calm and head over to that building.”

“You don’t have to worry about that.”

Suddenly, Heuk Jeon interrupted me. I turned around. Heuk Jeon flinched at my gaze, then took out a palm-sized orb from his pocket.

“...Hajin-ssi doesn’t have to worry about that. We have a pathfinder orb.”

Pathfinder orb? That must be what they used to find Rachel.

“Give it here then.”

I put my hand out towards the black orb.

“...”

Heuk Jeon scratched his neck but didn’t express any refusal. Instead, he pleaded.

“Um, about this matter...”

“I know, I know. How many times do I have to tell you?”

I wasn’t interested in using my power to order him around. As it's a common trope in novels, I’ve read it several times and even used it a few times myself. In the end, I got bored of it.

“Y-Yes, thank you.”

“...He interrupted us in the middle of our conversation.”

Rachel pouted unhappily. I grinned and went back to the topic at hand.

“So, Rachel-ssi, do you want me to give you a recommendation?”

“Yes? Ah, well, you see...”

Quickly livening up, she began to list all the business plans the English Royal Court guild had. Although it was lacking compared to what Yoo Yeonha was capable of, I could see that the guild was passionate and hardworking.

“It’s going to be difficult to take all of that on with just taxes. It’s a long-term plan, and with the economy being so bad recently...”

We walked together, talking about the English Royal Court, and before we noticed, we arrived at the central building.

It looked like a small abandoned school found in a rural town.

“We’ll talk about this later. Now isn’t a good time.”

“Ah, yes.”

Rachel nodded and looked up at the worn-down building.

“Where are we...?”

“It should be a building in Cube.”

To be exact, it was a lighthouse that went obsolete when Cube introduced Portals. Because of the spatial distortion, the building that was normally in the deepest corner of Cube was dragged here.

“Let’s go in.”

Rachel and I walked in, and Heuk Jeon stopped in front of the entrance.

I turned around and looked at Heuk Jeon and his crew.

“We will go back here, but Lancaster will not give up.”

Heuk Jeon prepared for departure as he gave us a warning. I didn't stop him since I didn't want people misunderstanding and spreading rumors of me having Djinns as subordinates.

“But we will stay in the area and stop Lancaster's subordinates if we see them.”

Yesterday's friend is today's enemy.

To Djinns, the concept of loyalty was certainly thin.

“Thanks.”

Strictly in terms of strength, Heuk Jeon was a trustworthy guy. Since he brought many subordinates with him, he should be able to deal with Lancaster's Djinns somewhat evenly.

“By the way, you don't need this pathfinder orb?”

“No, we have another one.”

“Good, then see you.”

I waved my hand.

Soon after Heuk Jeon and his crew left, an alarming sound rumbled out from a nearby bush.

“...!”

Rachel and I glared in that direction and stood with caution.

However, the person that soon popped out of the bush was someone Rachel and I were familiar with.

“Ah, Kim Hajin!”

Chae Nayun shouted my name and ran up to me.

“Hey! Geez, I was so surprised. You suddenly disappeared...”

Chae Nayun was about to run into my embrace but stopped when she saw Rachel.

“...What.”

“Are you okay? You’re not hurt, are you?”

“I’m fine. But why are you with her?”

“...That’s not important. Anyways, follow me. We have something to do. You too, Rachel-ssi.”

“Yes.”

“Ah, what is it?”

Chae Nayun, Rachel, and I walked into the building and walked up the stairs. Our destination was the broadcasting room on the highest floor.

“Aah, aah.”

I fiddled with the broadcasting room’s microphone and tested out the sound. Using this, I had to gather the cadets and instructors to this building. Although this was supposed to be Kim Suho’s job, it was better to do it sooner rather than later.

“Will everyone hear us if we speak into it?”

Chae Nayun asked.

“Yeah, probably.”

There were at least 10,000 people in Cube.

However, to be pulled into this broken mirror phenomenon, one needed to have enough internal magic power to resonate with the magic. As a result, only about 3000 people, including instructors, should be caught up in this phenomenon.

As for how someone like me who couldn’t wield magic power was brought into this place, I could confidently say it was because Stigma’s magic power resonated with the magic. Ever since I was pulled into this phenomenon, my arm's been throbbing

constantly.

“Aaah, testing, testing, one two three.”

I turned the microphone on and spoke into it. As expected, the speaker was working properly.

“This is an announcement to all cadets and instructors who might be panicking. I repeat, this is an announcement to all cadets and instructors who might be panicking.”

After grabbing everyone’s attention, I cut straight to the chase.

“Space has been distorted due to the broken mirror phenomenon.”

I paused for a moment to choose my next words.

“...If you are a cadet, do not panic. Head to the building you see in the center of the island. Even if you get lost, continue heading towards the building. I repeat, even if you get lost, continue heading towards the building.”

After repeating the same thing a few times, I put the microphone down.



About 30 minutes after my announcement, people began to arrive at the central building.

Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, Yi Yeonghan, and several other cadets all came at the same time.

Next was our instructor from last year, Kim Soohyuk, who quickly ran over. After an hour, first-year cadets began to arrive.

Unfortunately, they weren’t in good shape.

“Instructor! Some strange people in robes kidnapped Hyunsuk!”

“What?!”

The Djinn’s goal in this incident was kidnapping cadets who had the potential of becoming incarnations of devils.

This invasion wasn’t only happening in Cube. As one of the largest planned attacks on

humanity, the same thing should be happening in several Hero Academies across the world.

“...Ah, what should we do?”

Kim Suho stomped his feet and glared into the forest.

He probably wanted to go save his comrades and juniors but couldn't in fear of getting lost.

“Hey, Kim Suho, do you want to go?”

“Hm?”

Kim Suho's current strength was far beyond that of any other cadet. He should even be stronger than he was at this point in the original story. With Misteltein strengthened as well, he should be able to join the rescue team without problem.

“But if I go into the forest...”

“Here.”

I threw the pathfinder orb to Kim Suho.

Kim Suho caught the orb and tilted his head quizzically.

“That's a pathfinder orb. With it, the space shouldn't suddenly distort. Go together with the instructor.”

“...Really?”

“Are you doubting me?”

“Of course not. Thank you, Hajin!”

“Pathfinder what?”

Kim Soohyuk, who was listening in on our conversation, cut in.

“Pathfinder orb. If you have it around, you won't get lost. Oh, Shin Jonghak, do you want to go too?”

I also asked Shin Jonghak, who was standing guard with his spear like a sentry. His eyebrows twisted up. It didn't look like he was going to listen to me.

"Let's go, Shin Jonghak."

Kim Suho also chimed in.

Shin Jonghak glared at me and Kim Suho unhappily.

"I guess Yoo Yeonha isn't here yet."

However, he soon joined in.

"I, I'll help too."

However, an unexpected individual hopped in.

"You want to go too, Rachel-ssi?"

It was Rachel.

"Yes, I want to help rescue them too."

Rachel spoke resolutely with her hands cupped over her heart.

"Mm..."

Since her trauma had to do with a rescue effort, I understood where she was coming from. But because of Lancaster... no.

Objectively speaking, she was probably safer around Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, and Kim Soohyuk.

"Ah, then I wanna join in too~"

Yi Yeonghan also raised his hand.

From the usual group, only Chae Nayun and I were not taking part.

Kim Suho spoke with a grin.

"Hajin, you stay here and protect the other cadets."

“...Like I’m strong enough for that.”

Of course, even though I said that, I planned to do exactly that. Now was supposed to be Kim Suho’s time to shine.

Thankfully, there were other high-ranking cadets here to protect the place with me. For example, Samurai Yohei and Supporter Yi Jiyoong.

“Don’t worry about us.”

“Yeah, be safe!”

Chae Nayun also waved her hands at them from the side.

“You aren’t going with us, Chae Nayun?”

At that moment, Shin Jonghak asked her, pretending like he wasn’t concerned. In the original story, Chae Nayun would have followed them even if it cost her life. However, the current Chae Nayun wasn’t even hesitating.

“You’re all going, so it’ll be a waste of resources if I go too.”

“...I see.”

Shin Jonghak let out a small sigh and turned around. As he stomped forward, Kim Suho followed after him.

“Ah, hey! You have to stay close to the pathfinder orb!”

“Everyone, make sure you stay in this building!”

A rescue team centered around the instructor Kim Soohyuk was formed. After they left, Chae Nayun and I climbed to the roof of the building to watch for any Djinnns that might ambush us.

“Wow, look what we got ourselves into this time.”

As always, it was better to maintain the high ground over the enemies. Chae Nayun looked out into the horizon and mumbled.

“First, Creator’s Sacred Grace. Now, this. These things keep happening to us, huh?”

“Yeah. After today, many things will change...”

This incident was an important turning point. Even in the original story, the main cast’s life in Cube was skipped after this incident.

“Yeah, you’ll be leaving too.”

“...That has nothing to do with it.”

Chwaaa—

My hair blew up from a cool breeze.

“At least the wind is nice.”

“I guess so...”

While we were talking leisurely, the gentle breeze suddenly turned fierce. Like a storm, it slapped my face sharply and strongly.

From the East Sea in the far distance, a waterspout rose up.

“...What’s that?”

A tornado that seemed to contain powerful energy. Its fierce air current shook Cube’s land.

Seeing this supernatural phenomenon, I couldn’t help but frown.

“Ah, hey, look at that!”

Chae Nayun jumped in surprise, but I remained calm.

Waterspout.

Seeing this monstrous phenomenon, a chill went down my back.

At the same time, my smartwatch buzzed.

[Criticism – It doesn’t make sense that Djinn, who are known to be vile and brutal, would only slightly provoke the Azure Dragon.]

“...But that doesn’t mean you can do this.”

You son of a bitch, how can you send a dragon after cadets!?

I quickly raised my head and looked out into the distance.

Then, I became speechless.

In the horizon far away, a single creature appeared.

Looking at its proud and noble figure, I fell into a daze.

A soft, beautiful azure body that resembled the clouds.

A face that seemed to be the mix of a snake and a tiger.

Two sacred horns that protruded out behind its ears.

All this described the one creature, the Master of the East Sea, a creature that was too noble to be called a monster.

The Azure Dragon, one of the Cardinal Guardians, was exactly as it was described in the legends.

“ ... ”

This legendary member of the dragon race was beautiful enough to make me forget the gravity of the situation.

However, the Azure Dragon wasn’t so kind.

Krrrrr!

Glaring in this direction, the Azure Dragon snorted. His snort transformed into a huge wave that swept through the entire land.

“...Kyak!”

However, I was unaffected by this snort. Chae Nayun, on the other hand, screamed in pain and collapsed.

“Ah, hey!”

I quickly ran towards her.

“Uuu, uuuaa...”

Her veins were protruding out from her neck to her face.

It was ‘magic convulsion’.

“God dammit.”

The Azure Dragon was a Cardinal Guardian that was especially skilled in handling magic power. However, Chae Nayun was directly exposed to such a being’s breath. Flowing into her body, the Azure Dragon’s breath must have suppressed her magic power, leading to this convulsion.

This theory also explained why I was unhurt. I was fine because I didn’t have any magic power inside my body.

“Uuugh, huaa, huaaa...”

“Calm down. Don’t panic and collect your breath.”

“Hu, huu, huuuu...”

“BREATHE!”

Well, fuck.

That was all I could think. A creature that could do this to Chae Nayun with just its breath... such a monstrous creature opened its mouth.

Its rage wasn’t directed at us.

What the Azure Dragon was doing now should only be an annoyed tantrum thrown at those who awakened it from its sleep.

However, just its tantrum was a matter of life and death to us.

My sense of time slowed down. From the Azure Dragon’s mouth, blue magic power began to coalesce.

There was no way for me to dodge it. This magic power bomb would surely be catastrophic.

I looked down at Chae Nayun, who was unconscious in my arms.

I didn’t need to think much.

This time, it was my turn to be the protector.

Still holding her in my arms, I released the magic power reinforcement seal of my obsidian bracelet. Then, I added the Egyptian Archer’s Sand Barrier on top of it. With that I was under two layers of protection.

However, I wasn’t done yet.

Gritting my teeth, I began to pour out every ounce of Stigma’s magic power.

Immediately, the Stigma on my upper arm shone brilliantly, emitting light through my

clothes.

I squeezed out everything without saving a single drop. The pain on my arm grew sharper and sharper, but I clenched my teeth and held on.

Once the third layer of barrier set in, the dragon's tantrum descended.

"...Uk!"

A mere tantrum, something that couldn't be compared to a full-on dragonbreath, made it feel like my body was bending in half.

"..."

Enduring this attack, I looked down at Chae Nayun.

She was looking up at me.

To be exact, she was staring at the white symbol of light shining through my clothes. Her eyes were hollow and out of focus.

Chapter 140

Final Incident (3)

Whish—!

Kim Suho swung Misteltein, which suddenly twisted up at an odd angle. It was a new technique Kim Suho developed after watching Kim Hajin's curving bullets. With this elegant sword technique, Kim Suho cut down the final Djinn.

"Whew, they just keep coming."

Kim Suho sighed and wiped off his sweat.

"Yeonha, are you okay?"

After fighting with a group of Djinns, Shin Jonghak asked Yoo Yeonha as he nonchalantly cleaned his spear.

"...Yeah, thanks to you~"

Yoo Yeonha looked a bit tired but she smiled sweetly.

"I'm glad."

Kim Suho smiled.

Including Yoo Yeonha, they already rescued 15 cadets with the pathfinder orb. Although there were many more to be saved, their current priority was to guide the rescued cadets to a safe place.

"Everyone!"

Kim Suho clapped and gathered the cadets' attention.

"We will guide you to a safe place so just follow us."

“...Why are you talking like they’re a bunch of children? They’re cadets just like you.”

Yoo Yeonha narrowed her eyes.

“Huh? Oh, sorry, it’s because I’ve been playing with my nephews recently.”

“Cadets, stay on your guard and follow us to the central building!”

Kim Soohyuk shouted gallantly.

“See? It’s the instructor’s job to say those words.”

“...Yeah, yeah.”

In any case, as cadets began to walk towards the central building...

“E-Eh? Look over there!”

Someone pointed at the sky and immediately,

KOOOONG—!

The breath of a divine existence swept the island.

From the massive shockwave, trees fell, and a cloud of dirt rose up. Kim Suho kept his eyes open and watched the devastation.

The point of impact of the attack was the central building, which was now crumbling down.

“...!”

It happened too quickly. Before Kim Suho’s thoughts could catch up to the situation, his body moved. He began to run towards the central building but stopped after a brief second. It was because of the pathfinder orb.

“Hurry up, everyone!”

Kim Suho urged the others on.

By the time he came back to the central building with the dozens of cadets...

“...T-This.”

Only a devastating scene was left.

The building was toppled, and many cadets were collapsed on the ground unconscious.

However, there was one person standing in the middle of this horrific scene.

“Hm?”

This mysterious man wore a half-broken mask, and he looked at Kim Suho with a happy smile.

“Who are you?”

Kim Suho gritted his teeth and asked.

However, the man only gave an ominous smile through his strange mask.

Kim Soohyuk, who was standing next to him, stepped up.

“Fall back, Kim Suho. He’s not someone you can handle.”

“Ah, so you’re Kim Suho.”

The mysterious man muttered, his voice changing as he spoke. For one phrase, he sounded like a woman, then he sounded like a man for another, then he sounded like a child for the next.

This voice immediately caused Kim Suho to frown.

“...What Djinn are you?”

This time, Kim Soohyuk asked.

A deep smile emerged on the man’s face.

“That’s an interesting question. *What* Djinn? Are you asking for my name? Unfortunately, I don’t have one.”

As he said that, he grabbed the neck of one of the cadets on the ground.

“But I hear you guys call me Destruction.”

Destruction.

This title caused everyone’s eyes to widen.

Seemingly satisfied at this reaction, Destruction snickered and stared at the cadets who just arrived.

“There are many of you I want to take with me, but unfortunately I’m about out of time. I’ll just have to take this child.”

Destruction created a bundle with his magic power and put an unconscious cadet in it.

At that moment, a crescent sword slash and a spear beam shot towards Destruction. Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak had attacked him while his guard was down.

“Huaa.”

Destruction breathed, unleashing a wave of magic power that scattered their attacks. Then, Destruction leisurely laughed.

“Unfortunately, you’re too weak to do anything against—”

Before Destruction could finish his sentence, Kim Soohyuk charged forward. In the blink of an eye, Kim Soohyuk was within an arm’s reach of Destruction.

Then, Kim Soohyuk reached out towards Destruction’s face, and Destruction put his hand on Kim Soohyuk’s neck without any defensive maneuver.

Next, a magic power blast shot out of Kim Soohyuk’s palm that struck Destruction’s head.

KOONG—!

The ground rumbled.

Even so, Destruction only laughed.

“Your courage, I praise it.”

It was an ominous laugh.

Although Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak quickly charged forward...

PUAK—

The claws that shot out of Destruction’s fingers pierced Kim Soohyuk’s chest.

Kim Soohyuk coughed up blood and collapsed. It was only then that Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak arrived.

Destruction closed his eyes and shook his head.

“How unfortunate.”

With a single wave of his hand, Destruction snapped Shin Jonghak's spear and pushed Kim Suho back. The difference in their power was too overwhelming.

"I said I would let you live. What makes you so eager to die...?"

Looking down at the weaklings, Destruction muttered arrogantly.

It was then.

Kiiiiik—

The sound of lightning and wind rang out in all directions.

"Hm?"

The eyes of everyone in the area went up. Soon, a lump of magic power appeared in the middle of the sky.

Like a shooting star, the lump of magic power landed in the middle of Cube.

KWANG—!

Along with an overbearing destructive force, the shooting star descended onto the ground. The shockwave from its landing caused the ground to rumble and a cloud of dirt to rise up.

Pzzzt— Pzzzt—

In the middle of a big crater, electricity crackled.

"..."

A brief silence descended in the area from this unexpected phenomenon.

Whiish... A slow-blowing wind lifted the cloud of dirt.

When the obstacle disappeared, a single man could be seen in the middle of the crater.

"D-Dad!"

Someone shouted in surprise.

It was Yoo Yeonha.

Naturally, everyone guessed the identity of their savior.

"..."

Yoo Yeonha's father, Yoo Jinwoong.
He glanced at Yoo Yeonha, then let out a sigh of relief.

"You're... Yoo Jinwoong...!"

Destruction and Yoo Jinwoong seemed to know each other as the former glared at the latter with eyes full of hatred.

Yoo Jinwoong muttered nonchalantly.

"It's been a while, Changdong."

"..."

Destruction's face immediately distorted.

"I thought I told you never to call me by that name again."

"Mm... did you?"

Yoo Jinwoong smiled.

"But you know..."

However, his smile quickly disappeared, and crimson electricity began to fiercely crackle around him. Yoo Jinwoong the Berserker tried his best to suppress the rage he felt inside him and spoke.

"It's none of your business what I call you, you motherfucker."

Yoo Jinwoong the Berserker.

The side-effect of his extraordinary Gift was 'rage'.

It was something Yoo Yeonha and her mother were quite embarrassed of. However, there was one man who was watching him with respect.

"...I can't believe it."

That man was Shin Jonghak.



The rooftop shook, and the entire building crumbled down. I floated in the air for a brief moment before plummeting. At the same time, steel and concrete rained down from the sky. The Azure Dragon's breath had caused complete chaos.

Koogoogoong—

The building collapsed almost instantaneously, and I found myself buried under pieces of the building in the blink of an eye.

Unhindered by darkness, I looked down at Chae Nayun who was in my arms.

She was sleeping with her eyes tightly shut.

“...”

Soon, everything became silent.

Buried under all the debris, I was surrounded by complete darkness.

But using my Thousand-Mile Eyes, I peered through the debris.

“Whew.”

I wanted to see what the Azure Dragon was doing. Thankfully, its anger seemed to have subsided with the previous attack, as it was wagging its tail and returning into the ocean.

“Auuu.”

My head was spinning.

I couldn't feel my right arm.

Thankfully, my barrier was still active. Of course, most of it was burnt and tattered, with the obsidian bracelet about to break, but what was left was protecting us from the debris.

“...Hey.”

I poked Chae Nayun's cheeks. However, she was passed out completely. Her magic convulsion seemed to have subsided, so why did she suddenly faint?

“This is a bit dangerous...”

I wasn't sure how long my barrier could last. In fact, I wasn't sure how long I could last. Yi Yeonghan or Kim Horak might have dug through the debris with their body, but for me...

"...Haa."

The oxygen was running low, and my blood was boiling because of my Stigma expenditure. Even when I used my body's recovery potion medicinal effect, nothing changed.

My vision grew blurry. Just when my consciousness was about to cut off...
Something big shot out of my chest.

"Grrrrr."

It was the wolf I named Fenrir.

Fenrir moved quickly. He opened his mouth and gathered magic power. Then, he blasted it forward and cleared a pathway for us.

I was genuinely surprised.

He knew how to do long-ranged attacks too?

"Krrrrr."

Fenrir put me and Chae Nayun on his back. Then, he began to walk towards the light on the other side of the tunnel.



On the other hand, at Jain's mansion located near London.

"Ah, I'm so happy~"

Jain was staring at the items she stole last night with an ecstatic smile. She had taken the shiniest and most expensive jewels from Pandemonium's notoriously rich Djinn.

"You guys are so pretty~"

Each of these jewels contained pure and high-quality mana, which gave them the effect of making whoever laid their eyes on them feel good.

“I wonder what it feels like to live buried under jewels? Ah, my goal will be to make a swimming pool filled with jewels!”

Jain grinned happily as she rubbed the jewels on her face.

“Jain.”

At that moment, a young boy called her name. It was Droon, who was watching an anime in the same room.

“Yeah~?”

“I’m curious, why did you do it?”

“What do you mean~?”

Jain retorted half-heartedly. Although she found it annoying to deal with a 13-year-old kid, she felt like she could listen to any of his requests today.

“I saw it. You showing them.”

“...”

Hearing this, Jain’s expression stiffened slightly.

“Mm~ what do you mean~? Showing who what?”

“You know what I’m talking about.”

During Chae Jinyoon’s murder, Droon was in charge of the barrier. Although Boss only told him to set up a barrier in a designated place, Droon was smart enough to understand what it was that he was doing.

“I saw everything.”

“Ah~ that~?”

Jain grinned as though she just remembered it.

“It’s nothing much. It’s just that I’m quite fond of that child too.”

The silver bullet that can kill that man.

Jain stood shoulder to shoulder with Boss when it came to her hatred for Chameleon Troupe’s traitor. If possible, she wanted to tear his limbs apart with her own hands.

“Eh?”

“You heard me~”

If Chae Jinyoon died, it was obvious that Chae Joochul would employ Yoo Jinhyuk. However, Droon’s Mimyo^[1] was a unique lifeform that Yoo Jinhyuk couldn’t see through. This lifeform existed only in the present, and not in the past or the future. As such, Yoo Jinhyuk shouldn’t have been able to see anything from that day.

“If you’re fond of him, why did you do that? That doesn’t make sense.”

“Mm~ that’s because you’re still too young to understand.”

However, Jain purposefully left behind evidence. Since revealing Kim Hajin’s face would ruin the trust between them, she had only left a piece of minor evidence, but one that could surely connect the incident with Kim Hajin.

Thankfully, Kim Hajin had a special characteristic.

“You can only perfectly possess a person when he has nowhere to return to. That way, he won’t betray us like that man.”

In truth, when Kim Hajin was hospitalized from the recent magic power explosion, Jain thought he would be found out. Although she thought it was a bit too fast, she figured it didn’t pose much of a problem.

However, an unexpected ally ended up helping him out.

“But Droon, didn’t you also know about this? We thought for sure that your rabbit would eat the corpse, but it didn’t.”

“...It’s not that it didn’t. It just couldn’t.”

Immediately, a small rabbit shot up eerily from Droon’s back.
Red eyes and black fur.

Just looking at this terrifying existence caused one to shiver.
Jain waved her hand to apologize.

“Sorry, Mimyo. I didn’t know.”

“...”

The rabbit then returned to Droon’s body.

“Mimyo sure is pretty... anyways, why couldn’t it eat him?”

“I don’t know. Mimyo didn’t tell me when I asked, and we didn’t have time to properly investigate.”

Surprised by the explosion of demonic energy that occurred after Chae Jinyoon died, dozens of Heroes came over to the spot of his death. As a result, Droon and Khalifa only barely made it out after cleaning up the area.

Tzzzzzt—

Suddenly, the anime Droon was watching turned off.

“W-What happened!?”

An emergency announcement was shown on TV.

“Oh, what’s happening now?”

[Emergency! Djinnns have simultaneously invaded Hero Academies all over the world...]

“Aaah, I was just at the good part!”

“So they finally went mad...”

Unlike Droon, Jain had a big smile on her face.



With Yoo Jinwoong’s appearance, the situation was quickly taken care of.
After receiving the pathfinder orb from Kim Suho, Yoo Jinwoong ran around the island

like a bolt of lightning and rescued every single cadet.

When news reporters asking how he could arrive so quickly, Yoo Jinwoong answered:

—I learned that Cube wasn't a trustworthy organization. I have to protect my daughter with my own hands.

[...The United Nations and the Hero Association have condemned Djinns for today's attack and have declared that they can no longer tolerate Djinns' tyranny. As the clouds of war are filling the skies across the globe...]

Most news agencies were reporting the same thing.

With the Djinns' attack on various Hero Academies and their provocation of the Azure Dragon, which was considered the guardian of the Korean Peninsula, the aftermath of the incident was on a completely different scale than many of the previous incidents involving Djinns.

Currently, the president of Korea was personally directing meetings with the Hero Association.

“...Hm.”

As a storm was brewing in the outside world, many of Cube's cadets were now hospitalized in Gangnam's Severance Hospital.

Kiiik—

Yoo Yeonha carefully opened the door to Chae Nayun's hospital room.

“Um... Nayun, are you feeling better?”

“...”

Chae Nayun was silently staring at the window. Her usually lively eyes looked especially withered today.

“Nayun?”

“...Ah.”

Chae Nayun responded only when Yoo Yeonha called her a second time.

“You’re here, Yeonha?”

Staring at Yoo Yeonha, Chae Nayun spoke with a feeble voice.

“Yeah, but why do you sound so weak? You don’t sound like the Chae Nayun I know.”

Yoo Yeonha slowly walked in and sat down on the chair next to the bed.

“Weak, huh...”

Chae Nayun muttered and let out a sigh.

“...Yeonha.”

“Hm?”

Chae Nayun’s hollow gaze lost focus. She fiddled with her fingers and thought about what to say.

“A-About the tattoo I told you about last time...”

When Chae Nayun brought up the tattoo, Yoo Yeonha suddenly felt stifled for breath.

“Y-Yeah?”

“Do, do you think it’s real?”

“W-What do you mean?”

Yoo Yeonha wanted to maintain her composure as much as possible, but her damned voice kept trembling.

“Haa... you see.”

With a deep sigh, Chae Nayun murmured softly.

“Do you think... it’s the real proof of the culprit? Can I trust it?”

Yoo Yeonha didn't answer Chae Nayun. She only swallowed her saliva and calmed her trembling heart.

"...Why are you saying this all of a sudden?"

Chae Nayun then raised her head. Her dry gaze seemed to pierce Yoo Yeonha's heart.

"I think I had a strange dream today."

"...Dream?"

"Yeah, but it's a bit vivid."

Chae Nayun placed her left hand on her right upper arm. Just this simple motion caused Yoo Yeonha's heart to sink.

"Kim Hajin. It's about Kim Hajin. On his upper arm, there's a tattoo..."

Chae Nayun smirked then stopped talking. It was almost as if she couldn't believe what she was saying.

"No, I think I'm misremembering things. I must have had a strange dream because of my obsession over it."

Unlike Chae Nayun, Yoo Yeonha didn't doubt what Chae Nayun saw. In fact, it looked like Chae Nayun was still only suspicious.

"...It's too vivid to be a dream, but it doesn't make sense. Why would Hajin..."

Chae Nayun mumbled to herself and dug into her blanket.

"Yeonha, I'm going to sleep now. I'm tired."

"...Y-Yeah, s-sleep. I'm going outside for a bit."

"Un."

Yoo Yeonha walked out of Chae Nayun's room in a daze. However, she quickly snapped out of it and moved her legs. Her destination was that person's hospital room.

—Tok, tok.

She knocked on his door. However, there was no reply.

“...Hello? Are you okay?”

Tok, tok. Yoo Yeonha knocked once again. However, she couldn't hear the presence of anyone inside. With a sudden sense of apprehension, she shot through the door.

“...Waah?”

There was no one inside the room.
On the table was a single document envelope.
Yoo Yeonha grabbed the envelope.

===

[Dropout Form]
Cadet – Kim Hajin

===

“What...!”

She quickly ran out.

“E-Excuse me!”

She grabbed a nurse and asked where the patient went. When the nurse tilted her head, Yoo Yeonha immediately went to look for another nurse.
Yoo Yeonha clenched her teeth.

‘No matter what the situation may be, with everything we've gone through together, you can't just disappear without a farewell...!’

1. Mimyo (name) means Beautiful Rabbit.

Chapter 141

Truth (1)

I forced myself to lie down, but I couldn't sleep. My stomach churned, and my head spun.

"Haa..."

Without any other choice, I opened my eyes in a daze.

Vivid memories flashed before my eyes.

Kim Hajin who was holding me in his arms, and the tattoo that was shining on his arm. That was... undoubtedly proof of the murderer.

But why did Kim Hajin have that tattoo?

And that white shining symbol... was it really a tattoo?

"Ah."

I kicked the blanket and got up. Then, I threw the window open. Because my body was burning, I couldn't sleep. I could barely withstand the pain.

"...?"

However, an acrid smoke flowed in from the window.

The smell of cigarette was coming down from the roof.

Immediately, my eyes shot open.

It was a familiar smell.

Ever since that day, I had to constantly smell it to be near that person.

I turned around and faced the door.

I had to check if what I saw was real or a hallucination.

The only way I would find out was if I asked him.

And only then would I be able to live on.



I climbed up the stairs to the roof of the hospital. Although the door was locked, I could easily pick it using Dexterity.

There was only one reason I came all the way to the roof – to smoke.

Of course, there were smoking zones inside the hospital, but I was a cadet. Even though I was going to drop out soon, I didn't want to smoke in front of so many instructors and cadets.

“Huu.”

After a sigh, I lit a cigarette and put it in my mouth. An acrid smoke filled up my lungs.

“...Haa.”

Leaning on the guardrail, I exhaled and looked down at the ground.

I could see a panoramic view of the hospital's entrance.

The scene could only be described as chaos.

A total of 3583 people were pulled into the broken mirror phenomenon.

Of these 3583 people, 44 were killed, 66 were kidnapped, and the instructor who was attacked by Destruction, Kim Soohyuk, was undergoing a surgery while in critical condition.

“In the original story...”

Chak!

I slapped my mouth.

Original story, the damned original story.

I kept describing it as a story.

But what else should I call it?

...Fate?

“Ehew.”

In any case, 66 people were kidnapped just like in the original story.

However, Destruction's appearance was completely unexpected. He was a boss-level character who easily ranked in the top 500 strongest of this world.

As for Yoo Jinwoong who drove him away... I expected him to come.

Speaking of which, I received a message from the helper who called Yoo Jinwoong.

[Hajin-chan! I saw the news! Are you okay?]

[Yeah, thanks to you, the losses were minimal.]

[Hehehe, I got praised for it too!!]

With my smartwatch being linked to my laptop, I could send messages unhindered by electrical signals. As soon as I realized Destruction was here, I sent my exact coordinates to Kim Hosup. There was simply no way Kim Suho could fight Destruction now.

Thankfully, Kim Hosup was quick to act. He even hacked into Yoo Jinwoong's smartwatch to relay my coordinates to him.

[Thanks once again. Message me if you need anything in the future.]

[Got it!]

After that, I turned off my smartwatch.

Then, I saw three familiar faces talking to each other in the hospital's garden.

It was Kim Suho, Rachel, and Shin Jonghak.

They seemed to have gotten close in the short period of time they were rescuing other cadets, as they were talking about a rather serious topic.

—I couldn't move at all. When I heard the name Destruction, my body froze...

Rachel was criticizing herself. In truth, Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak were the strange ones for being able to attack Destruction in that situation.

...At that moment.

Tak, tak.

The sound of footsteps struck my ears. To be exact, it was the sound of someone climbing up the stairs.

The sound was growing closer.

I put out the cigarette I was smoking and waited for the person who was walking up to the roof.

The moonlight touched my shoulders.

The footsteps stopped nearby.

She seemed to be hesitating.

“...Haa.”

A sigh rang out, followed by a familiar voice.

“...Hey.”

She called me. In response, I turned around.

In front of the rooftop door, she was staring at me.

Chae Nayun.

She didn't look good. Her complexion was pale, and I could see that she was mentally exhausted.

“Kim Hajin.”

She called my name.

“...How did you know I was here?”

I didn't know what else to say.

“The smell of your cigarette came into my room through the window.”

“Oh, sorry.”

“...”

Chae Nayun trudged up to me silently. Then, she leaned against the guardrail. She didn't show me her eyes. Her fluttering hair was covering them.

Chae Nayun spoke.

“Hey.”

“...Hm?”

Her voice was heavy.

Chae Nayun looked up at the night sky and continued.

“Remember what I asked you a long time ago?”

“What.”

“I... I asked if you had a tattoo.”

“Did you?”

“Yeah, I remember it vaguely. When we went to Norway, I overheard you talking about it in front of our cabin.”

I recalled our trip to Norway. I vaguely remembered it.

—So you used to smoke? A real delinquent, huh. Do you also have tattoos?

Almost a year ago, when I went to Norway as part of the hunting club, Chae Nayun overheard me saying that I quit smoking. It seemed Homer’s Ring really improved my memory. Or was the memory etched in my mind because I was surprised?

“...Yeah, I remember.”

As I replied, I felt bitterness inside. I couldn’t help but think that if I could go back to that time, I could do things better. I once again understood why there were so many novels where the main character went back in time. In the present, things barely went my way.

“...So.”

Chae Nayun interrupted my useless thoughts.

“I want to ask again.”

She wasn’t looking at me.

“If I don’t, I think I’m going to die.”

I couldn’t understand what she was talking about.

“If I don’t confirm that it’s false, I don’t think I can live.”

Chae Nayun shook her head slightly. Something glistening scattered in the wind... tears.

“Kim Hajin... do you have a tattoo on your arm?”

“...”

The grave atmosphere and her strange question caused me to hesitate. I needed more time to analyze the situation.

“Answer me.”

However, Chae Nayun didn't give me any time. She looked at me straight in the eye and spoke.

“Answer me.”

“...”

It was only then that I could see her eyes. When I saw her trembling pupils, I couldn't speak. It was as though my body was frozen.

“Why won't you answer me?”

Chae Nayun asked again.

“...Why? You just have to say you don't have one... hic.”

Chae Nayun suddenly sniffled. She dropped her head, and tears began to fall onto the concrete.

“...Why, just why.”

“You should explain what's going on fir— uuuk!”

Chae Nayun suddenly ran into me. Her sudden charge made me fall on my back, and Chae Nayun jumped on top of me. She grabbed the hem of my clothes, clearly trying to rip my clothes apart.

“Ah, hey! What are you doing!?”

Shocked, I wondered if she was having a psychotic episode. I couldn't think calmly and could only try to get her off with my weak strength.

But without Stigma's magic power, I was easily overwhelmed by her physical strength.

“H-Hey! Are you crazy!?”

“Yeah, I'm crazy, so stay still—!”

She moved quickly. Shouting loudly, she grabbed my shirt with her hands and easily ripped it apart with her strength.

“...”

Immediately afterwards, Chae Nayun's gaze fell on my upper arm, where Stigma was placed. I quickly covered it with my torn shirt.

“Ah...”

However, it was too late.

Chae Nayun dropped her head with a dazed voice. Then, she clutched her head and glared up at me with teary eyes.

“...Hey.”

“...”

“What tattoo is that?”

Chae Nayun clenched her teeth. Many words came out of her mouth, but none of them connected to a sentence.

“Some, some organization tattoo? Secret society? Some, something like that?”

When I didn't answer, Chae Nayun's eyes shook fiercely.

“What is it!? I'm asking what that is!! What is it—!?”

It was only then that I began to grasp what was going on.

“Tell me—!”

Chae Nayun shouted.

However, I couldn't say or do anything. Almost as if my brain stopped working, I could only stare at her blankly.

“...No, no.”

Chae Nayun's face distorted. She grabbed my shoulders strong enough to crush them and hit my chest with her head.

“Why... why would you kill Oppa...”

Immediately, my heart sank.

How did Chae Nayun know about Stigma? And how did she connect it to the murder?

“Right? It's not you, right?”

Chae Nayun muttered as she cried.

I could only listen to her desperate voice.

“...”

‘It's not me. I didn't do it.’ That's what Chae Nayun wanted to hear from me.

“Someone... someone might have framed you. In the first place, you have no motive... why would you...”

However, I couldn't lie.

A lie that could easily be proven wrong, a lie that she already knew was wrong, I just couldn't bring myself to say it.

“But why... why aren't you saying anything?”

Chae Nayun tightened her grip on my shoulders. Her pupils were already empty.

“Just say it. Just say that you didn't do it!”

Sharp pain struck my shoulders. My shoulders were broken.
However, that was it for both me and Chae Nayun.

Tak.

Chae Nayun's head touched my chest.

Overwhelmed with great shock, she had fainted. Her feeble body was now lying on my chest.

I didn't move.

Like a puppet with its strings cut, I just stayed on the ground.

"...Kim Hajin."

However, the situation advanced faster and faster.

From the rooftop entrance, another voice rang out.

A familiar face was looking down at me and Chae Nayun.

"..."

It was Yoo Yeonha.

She slowly walked up to me.

I wasn't sure how to deal with this situation. My hands were trembling, my head was throbbing, and it felt like I was in a dream. If possible, I just wanted to faint and escape this reality.

"You don't have to panic."

However, Yoo Yeonha calmly detached Chae Nayun from me.

"I already knew about it."

"..."

Hearing her, my heart ached.

Where? Just where did I go wrong?

"...Sorry."

Yoo Yeonha slowly picked Chae Nayun up.

“I should have been here first.”

Hearing her speak, I looked up at her in a daze.
Yoo Yeonha made a bitter smile.

“After tonight, you’ll be long gone, right?”

“ .. ”

“I’ll make sure Nayun rests well.”

Her voice was warm.

“To be completely honest, I hoped she wouldn’t find out.”

Her relaxed voice and eyes of sympathy pained me more.

“I didn’t believe it either. No, I couldn’t believe it. That you killed him. How you killed him, whether you had accomplices or did it alone, I just didn’t have any information. And to my knowledge, killing Chae Jinyoon was impossible for just one person to accomplish.”

Yoo Yeonha lightly bit her lip.

“But looking at you now... it must be true.”

Coldness enveloped my body, and I got goosebumps on my skin.
Looking down at me, Yoo Yeonha asked.

“Why did you do it?”

I didn’t answer her.
I couldn’t.

“Why did you kill him?”

“ .. ”

“...Was it for revenge?”

Yoo Yeonha seemed to be frustrated at me, who was sitting on the ground in a daze.

“You’re looking really pathetic right now... but unfortunately, I have no right to insult you.”

Yoo Yeonha turned around. Her footsteps were slow.

Almost as if she wanted me to stop her, she walked ever so slowly.

Looking at her, I pondered.

She was someone who treated her allies truthfully and sincerely. So why can’t I tell her the truth?

It was a weak thought.

...However.

Yoo Yeonha opened her mouth first.

“Sunshine Hotel.”

Hearing her, I flinched.

“It’s the hotel my guild runs. I’ll be waiting on the penthouse floor.”

Yoo Yeonha continued with her back still pointing toward me.

“I still think of you as my ally. Just like how you thought of me as yours.”

Her voice was soft and gentle.

“Setting aside what happened, I want to believe you. I want to help you.”

“...”

“Because that’s all I can...”

However, she didn’t finish her sentence.

“...Haa. Anyways, I’ll be waiting.”

Tak, tak.

Like a fool, I watched her walk down the stairs.

Chapter 142

Truth (2)

Yoo Yeonha returned Chae Nayun to her hospital bed. Chae Nayun's complexion was pale, and her body was cold. The traces of tears around her eyes made her all the more pitiful.

“ ... ”

Looking down at Chae Nayun, Yoo Yeonha had an idle thought.

Just a year ago, she wasn't that close with Chae Nayun.

If it wasn't for the relationship between their families, she might have cut off contact with her entirely.

But before she realized, things had changed.

Many things had changed, so much so that her heart ached looking at the state Chae Nayun was in.

It was all because of that person.

Although she barely knew him when school started last year, he came to take up an important spot in her heart and made her change.

“...I'll be back.”

Yoo Yeonha stroked Chae Nayun's hair and murmured. Feeling the cold sweat that got on her hand, Yoo Yeonha turned around and left.

“Eh?”

When she came out into the hallway, she saw familiar faces.

Kim Suho and Rachel.

The two of them were peeking into Kim Hajin's hospital room like meerkats.

“Ah, Yeonha, how's Chae Nayun? Is she doing okay?”

Kim Suho spotted her and asked.

“Yeah.”

“That’s great. Do you know where Hajin is? He’s not in his room.”

“..”

Yoo Yeonha shook her head silently.

“I don’t know. I didn’t see him either.”

At that moment, Rachel caught her eye. Rachel was staring at her with pure, innocent eyes.

“You really didn’t see him? I have something to talk about with him.”

“No, sorry.”

“Ah...”

“Anyways, I have to go now.”

“Okay, see you later.”

Yoo Yeonha walked past them and left the hospital.

Using a limousine that was prepared for her, she left for Sunshine Hotel.

15 minutes was enough.

The hotel owner seemed to have heard that she was coming as he was waiting for her at the back door of the hotel.

Yoo Yeonha showed him a picture of Kim Hajin.

“If he comes to the hotel, let him in. Don’t forget to keep it a secret from Father.”

“Of course.”

The hotel owner gave a wink. He seemed to have misunderstood, but Yoo Yeonha didn’t bother to correct him.

“He might not come.”

“Of course, of course, I will make sure that no one knows.”

“..”

Yoo Yeonha smacked her lips unsatisfactorily, then went up the elevator.

Ding—

The elevator stopped on the 88th floor, and the VIP penthouse floor revealed itself. A well-decorated bar was the first thing that caught Yoo Yeonha’s attention.

“...Does he drink?”

She suddenly wondered.

It was possible for him to not come. In fact, there was a higher chance that he wouldn’t. Still, Yoo Yeonha considered opening a bottle beforehand. Since he smoked cigarettes, alcohol shouldn’t be a problem.

Yoo Yeonha went up to the counter and looked at the different types of alcohol available.

Whiskey, brandy, vodka, scotch...

“But I don’t drink alcohol...”

Yoo Yeonha took pride in not drinking or smoking. A part of the reason was that her mother, Jin Yeojung, detested alcohol.

“Hmm...”

However, that made her all the more curious.

Wondering what alcohol tasted like, she picked up a random bottle and opened it.

Sniff, sniff. She smelled it carefully.

Immediately, the alcohol’s strong smell stabbed her nose.

“Uuk! Ueeek—!”

Yoo Yeonha backed off, feeling queasy.

“Uek, ueek... auu, w-what is... ueek.”

‘Dad drinks this every night?’ Yoo Yeonha pinched her nose. Because of her sensitivity to smell, her nose hurt even more.

“Hmph, I’ll throw all of these away later...”

It was then.

She was notified of a guest.

—Young Miss, the man you talked about just arrived.

“!”

Yoo Yeonha quickly turned around. She grabbed the bottle of alcohol she was about to throw away and placed it on a nearby table. Then, she picked up two glasses from the bar’s cupboard and headed back to the table.

“L-Let him in— kyak!”

However, she tripped on the high-heels she was wearing.

CLANG.

Crack.

Along with one of her heels, the two glasses she was holding broke, and the bottle fell off the table, falling on her head.

“...”

Yoo Yeonha’s eyes dried up as she looked at the mess she caused.

—Yes, he’s just been let in.

“Ah, wa... it.”

However, the elevator was already going up.

1st floor, 2nd floor... 33rd floor. It was almost as if it was moving at light speed.

Yoo Yeonha quickly unleashed her magic power.



“Over here.”

“Thank you.”

Following the hotel owner, I stood in front of the VIP elevator. The inside of elevator was just as luxurious as the presidential suite I used before.

With a deep breath, I got on.

The hotel owner kindly explained.

“You don’t have to press any button.”

“...Ah, yes.”

“Did you bring everything you need? If not...”

“No.”

I shook my head. I wasn’t in the mood for any chitchat.

The hotel owner made an awkward expression and scratched his neck.

“Well, I hope you enjoy your stay.”

“Thank you.”

Koong.

The elevator door closed.

Then, the elevator moved up at a scary pace.

“W-What?”

Ding—

By the time I blinked five times, I was on the 88th floor. Soon, the elevator door slowly opened.

I wasn’t given any time to collect my thoughts.

Holding back my beating heart, I walked past the elevator door.

“Hm?”

The penthouse floor was quiet and empty. In front of the wall-sized windows that showed a full view of Seoul, a huge swimming pool was present.

“Y-You’re here.”

A voice rang out in the silence.
I turned to the direction of the voice.
There, I saw Yoo Yeonha.

“...?”

However, something was strange.

First, the chair.

There was a broken heel under the chair, and Yoo Yeonha was sitting on it barefooted.

Next, the table.

There were two glasses and a bottle of liquor on the table, but one of the glasses was already filled.

Lastly, Yoo Yeonha.

For some reason, her hair was wet, and her cheeks were red.

I couldn't help but ask.

“...What were you doing?”

“...”

Yoo Yeonha observed my expression for a moment.

“Erm...”

After about 30 seconds, she made a relaxed smile, swung her glass gently, and kicked the high-heels under the chair with her feet.

“A-As you can see, I already had a sip.”

“...You drank that?”

“Y-Yes. Anyways, come sit.”

I pretended to ignore her actions and sat down in front of her.

“I didn't think you'd come. I thought you would need a couple of days to collect your thoughts.”

“I took some helpful drugs.”

“...Drugs?”

I wasn't sure how sane I was at the moment.

[Perseverance 7.207 (+1.200)]

I could tell just by looking at my perseverance stat, which was amplified to a whopping 8.4.

I used the 'sedative' medicinal effect which my body had memorized, then used the Random Consolidation System to amplify a cigarette's perseverance-increase effect by 40%.

As a result... I was insanely sane.

“But it won't last long.”

“...Huu.”

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha finished cleaning up her high-heels.

“Well, I guess it doesn't matter.”

“So, why aren't you wearing any shoes?”

“Because we're indoors.”

With a well-planned excuse, she crossed her legs. Although she looked pretty and especially seductive in this posture, none of it entered my eyes.

“...”

I checked the information of the liquor on the table.

===

[Alcatraz Booze] [Liquor]

—Aesthetics of Alcohol

*Decreases 'intelligence' stat by 0.5~5 points depending on the amount consumed.

*Increases 'strength' and 'vitality' stats by up to 3 points depending on the amount

consumed. However, overconsumption decreases them by up to 6 points.

—Quality Liquor

*This alcohol can make superhumans drunk.

*This alcohol cannot cause hangovers.

===

A liquor with 64% alcohol and 1% mana concentration. By the looks of it, it was expensive and strong. Yoo Yeonha drank this?

I looked at her suspiciously.

“Do you want to try it? It’s quite bitter.”

“..”

Yoo Yeonha casually handed me the empty glass.

I looked at the glass for a moment. Feeling like I needed the help of alcohol, I took it.

Yoo Yeonha poured the liquor into my glass as naturally as possible.

“Thanks. By the way, do you have any ice?”

“...Ice?”

“No, nevermind.”

Yoo Yeonha didn’t even have ice prepared, but now wasn’t the time to be picky.

I gulped down the entire glass.

As the bitter liquor entered my body, I felt a burning sensation in my throat.

I closed my eyes. I clenched my teeth and endured the pain.

“Huu.”

Then, I opened my eyes with a sigh.

The first thing I saw was Yoo Yeonha’s shocked expression.

“..”

“...What?”

“N-Nothing. I just didn’t think you would chug it.”

Yoo Yeonha looked down at the glass in front of her with a complex expression. Sneaking a peek at me, she slowly grabbed her glass.

However, I wasn't concerned about her. I was only focused on picking and organizing the countless words that popped up in my head.

Soon, Yoo Yeonha raised her glass.

After much hesitation, she brought the glass to her mouth.

Slurp.

She barely took a sip.

“...”

Slurp.

Glancing at me once again, she drank a bit more.

“Kuhum, it's good. Cough. Ah, I'm coughing because it's cold.”

“I see.”

“...Yes, cough, so, by the way.”

Yoo Yeonha straightened her neck and looked into my eyes. Her cheeks were flushed red.

“I have many questions I want to ask.”

“Go ahead. I came here to answer them.”

I leaned against the chair.

After a moment of pondering, Yoo Yeonha cut straight to the chase.

“...Did you really kill Chae Jinyoon?”

I nodded.

Yoo Yeonha's expression immediately darkened.

“And the reason... ah, I guess I shouldn't ask. You probably won't tell me.”

Yoo Yeonha swapped her crossed legs and scoffed at me.

I sighed.

Until now, I thought about everything on my own. At first, I thought that was my duty. I thought I had to carry all the burden by myself.

But now...

“No, I’ll tell you.”

“...Yes?”

Yoo Yeonha’s eyes widened. It must have been quite a shock as her nostrils were widening too.

“W-Why?”

“Mm...”

I stared at Yoo Yeonha.

As her creator, I knew what kind of a person she was, how she had lived, and how she would change.

However, I didn’t come to this decision based on this superficial knowledge.

The attitude and sincerity Yoo Yeonha showed me as a person.

That’s what I decided to believe in.

“I just thought I wanted to be with you until the end.”

“...Yes?”

Yoo Yeonha seemingly fell into a daze.

As though her soul left her body, she blinked repeatedly and stared at me blankly.

Then, when she realized what I meant, she made a complicated expression.

She looked embarrassed, but remembering something, her expression soon turned to that of sadness.

“Then—”

“...But, I have conditions.”

“Conditions?”

“Yeah.”

I raised my index finger.

“First, don’t ask questions. To be precise, don’t ask ‘how’ I found out. I can tell you everything else.”

Hearing this, Yoo Yeonha nodded without complaints.

I raised a second finger.

“Second, don’t tell anyone. Not even Chae Nayun.”

“...What? But—”

“I know. But it’s already too late.”

The reason I killed Chae Jinyoon.

Even if Chae Nayun found out and understood why I had to do it, nothing would change.

“No matter the reason, I killed Chae Jinyoon.”

“But still...”

“Plus, it might be better for Chae Nayun to not know.”

I remembered writing this sentence.

「Chae Nayun’s nourishment was always despair, loss, and rage.」

“No, it’s definitely better.”

The one thing that Chae Nayun would hold onto after losing everything. That would be the anger she felt towards me.

Even if I told her the truth and even if she believed me, Chae Nayun would just break. The child who looked at her older brother and wanted to become a hero would not be able to endure the fact that he became a devil.

“It will be better for you too.”

“...Then what about you?”

Yoo Yeonha asked, putting me at a loss for words.
But soon, I shook my head and retorted with a grin.

“It doesn’t matter.”

“...What do you mean.”

“Nevermind that. Now...”

I took a deep breath.

Where should I start?

Suddenly, I felt a surge of regret.

If I didn’t already kill Chae Jinyoon.

If I thought more about it or consulted with someone who would believe my crazy talk.

Would things be better now?

...However, regret was late no matter how fast it came.

“I won’t say it twice, so listen carefully.”



At the same time, in Chameleon Troupe’s cave hideout covered in spiderwebs, Boss was thinking about the strange message she received today from Kim Hajin.

[I was found out.]

When she saw his message, she immediately summoned the Chameleon Troupe. To be exact, she summoned the members who were involved in Chae Jinyoon’s murder.

“Mm... it must have been Yoo Jinhyuk. Looks like he improved too.”

Jain spoke.

However, Boss remained silent.

Khalifa took off his sunglasses and looked at Jain with eyes full of suspicion.

“What? Isn’t that the case? Everyone knows that Chae Joochul called Yoo Jinhyuk... ah, was it a mistake to leave Yoo Jinhyuk alive?”

“ .. ”

“Boss?”

Seemingly annoyed by her incessant talking, Boss glared at Jain.
However, Jain received Boss' gaze leisurely and even smiled.

“Boss, now that things became like this, shouldn't we get his revenge~?”

“ .. ”

“Yoo Jinhyuk helped us out a lot, but...”

“Shut it.”

Boss interrupted Jain.
Jain shrugged without complaints.

“Well, I think it's okay for now. It doesn't look like Chae Joochul got a hold of the news yet.”

“I'll come to a decision after hearing what Kim Hajin has to say. So Jain...”

Boss' magic power erupted in all directions.
A soul-crushing pressure descended onto Jain.

“You better stay shut until then.”

◇ ◇ ◇

...I told her the truth.

The concept of 'devils' and the 'seed' that gave birth to a devil; that this Devil's Seed was stuck inside Chae Jinyoon's head.

That because there was no way to cure him of it (I couldn't find anything out even with the Book of truth), I killed him.

“ .. ”

After listening to the entire story, Yoo Yeonha remained silent.

I picked up my glass.

However, there was nothing in it. Because I kept drinking in the middle of talking, the bottle of booze Yoo Yeonha prepared was already empty.

“T-That...”

After not saying anything for 10 minutes, Yoo Yeonha finally opened her mouth.

“You want me to believe that?”

“...”

I shook my head.

I wasn't that naïve.

After all, I had no evidence.

“If you can't believe me, you don't have to. Just don't deny it.”

Hearing this, Yoo Yeonha dropped her head silently.

“Haaa...”

Soon, a deep sigh rang out.

Yoo Yeonha rubbed her chin, seemingly in thought. As if that wasn't enough, she began to rumple her hair.

Tik, tok.

After another 15 minutes...

“Ah!”

Yoo Yeonha suddenly shot up. Then, she began to walk towards the elevator.

“Ah, hey, where are you going?”

“To Uncle.”

“...Uncle?”

“Yes, he's the one who told me about your tattoo.”

“...Ah.”

So it was Yoo Jinhyuk who found out about Stigma?

I thought he wouldn't be able to find out. Did his Gift go through a second awakening?

“Huu...”

I grabbed the back of my neck. This is exactly why I wanted to quit relying on the original story.

“I don't think Yoo Jinhyuk knows what I just told you. There's no way he does. So talking to him won't help—”

“How do you know that without talking to him?”

“...”

“Anyways, I won't be back tonight, so don't wait for me. Also... if you had any strange ideas because we were in a hotel, put that aside too.”

“Do I look that crazy?”

Yoo Yeonha smiled as the elevator door closed.

However, the elevator immediately opened again.

With a curious expression, I looked at Yoo Yeonha.

“Just so you know, don't misunderstand.”

Through the opened door, I could see a thin smile.

“I'm going to him not because I don't want to believe you but because I do want to believe you.”

Chapter 143

Truth (3)

“...Go to North Hamgyeong Province.”

Yoo Yeonha spoke as soon as she entered her limousine.

“...North Hamgyeong Province?”

“Yes.”

“...”

However, the driver felt uncomfortable.

Less than 10% of North Hamgyeong Province was habitable, and half of that 10% was an intermediate rank danger zone. In that sense, it was surprising that North Hamgyeong Province had a population of 200,000.

“W-Won’t it be dangerous?”

It was a place where mercenaries and hunters looking for a quick way to get rich stayed. The driver didn’t want to drive to such a dangerous place.

“Don’t worry, I sent in a message.”

Yoo Yeonha had one-sidedly texted her father and uncle.

To Yoo Jinhyuk, she wrote, [I’m coming to meet you. I told Father too, so don’t worry about it.]

To Yoo Jinwoong, she wrote, [I’m going to go meet Uncle.]

Yoo Jinhyuk was afraid of Yoo Jinwoong.

As such, he should come out to greet her.

“Step on the gas.”

“Y-Yes.”

The driver stepped on the accelerator. The limousine drove forward smoothly. Looking at the outside scenery, Yoo Yeonha fell into deep thought. She couldn't quite organize her worries with mere words.

Soon, the urban scenery disappeared, and an empty road to North Hamgyeong Province filled her vision.



...Four days passed since then.

Chae Nayun still hasn't woken up. She was still in her hospital bed, sleeping for unknown reasons. Chae Shinhyuk stayed up all night watching over her, and Chae Joochul appeared on TV with a somber expression.

[...Despite everything that happened, Daehyun will fight and march forward! We will not forget our values! Just like how we arrived at our current glory, we will fight back lawlessness and violence!]

Using the tragedy his family suffered and the recent organized attacks by Djinn, Chae Joochul put on a show to glorify the name of Daehyun.

"Hmm..."

The world thus began to turn, but the May sky was still peaceful, clear, and warm.

"Haa..."

Today, I visited Cube's administrative office. It was to submit my dropout form. Cube's administrative chief glanced at the dropout form and let out a deep sigh.

"You're dropping out after working hard to climb to the top 100? Is there a reason?"

"..."

I silently nodded.

"Because of your special Gift, the Hero Association already prepared a title for you. The sole gun-using Hero, Gunner. If you graduate, you'll be able to live as a celebrity."

A Hero with a life of a celebrity. I held myself back from laughing.

“Plus, several guilds are already eyeing you. Even Essence of the Strait showed interest in you. Do you still want to drop out?”

“Yes.”

“...There will be no turning back. Will you not regret it?”

“Yes.”

I nodded strongly.

There was no reason for me to stay in Cube anymore.

There was nothing to learn or obtain here.

“I see.”

Koong.

The administrative chief stamped a red seal on the dropout form.

I stared at it for a moment, then left my seat.

As I left the room, I could hear a faint prayer ring out.

“May this poor child’s future be full of blessings...”

It seemed the administrative chief was a good person.

I closed the door. Then, I left the building and began walking towards Cube’s Portal.

Then, as I was walking past a garden, somebody blocked my path.

“Hajin-ssi.”

“...Ah, Rachel-ssi.”

Rachel was looking at me sadly.

Then, she approached me and put something in my hand.

It was a small box.

“This. It’s a present.”

“Ah... thank you.”

“Open it later.”

“Yes.”

I tried to walk past her, but Rachel blocked my path once again. With a thin smile, she spoke.

“In England, we hug to say goodbyes.”

“...Gladly.”

With a smile, I hugged her warm and cozy body.
After about 3 seconds, we separated. Rachel spoke first.

“See you later then.”

“Yes.”

“...Oh.”

Rachel grabbed my wrist as I started walking past her.

“P-Promise.”

“...Of course. Next time, we’ll meet in England.”

I retorted with a smile and pulled my arm out of her hand.

“I’m going now.”

“...Yes, goodbye.”

I began to walk towards the Portal Station again.
I could feel Rachel’s gaze behind my back, but I didn’t turn around.
It was then.

“Kim Hajin!”

Someone loudly shouted my name and ran up to me.
It was Kim Suho.

“...Hey! You bastard!”

Hearing him shout for a second time, I couldn't help but stop.
Wasn't it class time right now? Oh right, cadets had free periods because of the recent invasion incident.

“What?”

“What do you mean ‘what’?”

Kim Suho looked angry.

“Why didn't you tell me that you were dropping out?”

“...Well, we'll be seeing each other often, so I didn't really see the need to tell you.”

“...Eh?”

“What, you were going to stop seeing me? Are you discriminating against non-Heroes?”

“N-No, not at all...”

Kim Suho still didn't loosen his expression.

“Then where are you going? Chae Nayun is still unconscious. Shouldn't you wait until she wakes up?”

“That's my business to take care of. Also, Chae Nayun will wake up soon.”

I asked the Book of Truth when Chae Nayun would wake up, and it answered, ‘soon’.

“By the way, when Chae Nayun wakes up, don't talk to her about me.”

“...”

Kim Suho frowned.

“Did you guys break up?”

We weren't even in a relationship...

Kim Suho was just too dense. I guess you could say it was a basic passive skill of handsome main characters.

“...We never dated.”

I didn't know how my relationship with Kim Suho would change. If Chae Nayun exposed the truth, I wouldn't be able to properly stand in front of Kim Suho.

“Then why—”

“I don't have time. I'll see you later.”

I put my hand out. Kim Suho grabbed it subconsciously, but soon, he widened his eyes as though he remembered something.

“Oh right! So I used the jar you gave me...”

Kim Suho took off the branch hanging on his back.

“It might not be the best time to ask... but I'm dying to know. Can you appraise this for me?”

“Of course. You can ask me whenever you want.”

“Sorry, I think I fell in love with this sword.”

“I know, I know.”

I gladly appraised Misteltein.

===

[Greed of Accomplishment]

The desire to overcome difficult situations has adhered to Misteltein.

—Misteltein's functionality will be strengthened each time a difficulty is overcome.

—Misteltein will now change form to reflect its user's character.

—Current direction: [Righteousness 99%]

===

A smile emerged on my face.

“...It suits you perfectly.”

I handed the sword back to him.

“Really?”

“Yeah. Every time you overcome difficult situations, Misteltein will get stronger. Also, its form will change depending on your character.”

“Um...”

Kim Suho looked like he didn't quite understand.

“What that means is it can become a demonic sword or a holy sword depending on how you use it.”

“Ah~ then for me—”

“It will be a holy sword.”

Kim Suho and I exchanged glances.

Immediately afterwards, Kim Suho burst into laughter.

“Thank you.”

This time, Kim Suho put out his hand first.

“No, I should be the one thanking you.”

I took his hand gladly.

Under the warm sunlight, Kim Suho's expression was blindingly wholesome.



After officially dropping out of Cube, I went to an empty park in Seoul's Seocho District for an appointment.

I turned on my smartwatch while waiting for Boss.

[Yoo Yeonha – (0)]

Yoo Yeonha didn't contact me today either.

Did she leave after being disappointed with me? Or was she still trying to confirm the truth?

When I was passing time sighing...

Tak, tak.

Boss' footsteps woke me up.

"You're here."

"...Sorry."

Boss apologized as soon as she saw me. From her face, I could tell how sincere she was.

"Don't be, it's too late now anyways. It's not entirely your fault either."

Without Chameleon Troupe's help, I would have never been able to murder Chae Jinyoon.

"...I see."

However, Boss was still sullen. Her usually perky ears were drooping.

Despite the situation being what it is, I found this side of Boss cute.

"Cheer up. It's not like I can slap Boss because of it, right?"

I already decided to enter Chameleon Troupe. I wouldn't leave because things didn't perfectly go my way.

I couldn't go back to Cube, and I couldn't become a Hero. In this situation, becoming a member of Chameleon Troupe was the best way to interfere with the story.

“..”

However, Boss suddenly turned around and pointed the side of her face towards me.

“What are you doing?”

“If you want, hit me. This is my fault.”

“...Eh?”

“Hit me. As much as you want.”

‘I can take a slap to the face—’ is what she seemed to be saying.
I scratched my neck for a moment, then pretended to slap her.

“Uuu.”

When my hand touched her, Boss shut her eyes close and shuddered.

“...I can't. How could I?”

I decided to ignore what happened.
Boss opened her eyes and coughed.

“Good, your respect for your boss is excellent.”

I was actually making fun of her though.
Boss spoke excitedly.

“Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Good, then follow me. Khalifa is waiting for you.”

Boss pointed behind me.
There, a familiar black man was waving his hand at me.



Using Khalifa's Portal, I arrived at a dark cave of some sorts.

"...Where are we?"

"Our hideout. It's in England."

"...Ah."

It was likely their new main hideout.

Currently, I had a grand goal.

That was to influence Chameleon Troupe to become my core ally.

"...I don't think anyone would think this place is a hideout."

"Exactly. No one can find this place, and there's nothing here."

Boss nodded in satisfaction, but I didn't mean to praise the hideout.

"Mm..."

Even though this cave was only a hideout, it was just too bad. I could see bats everywhere and mysterious insects crawling in crevices. It was even hard to stand properly with so many sharp protrusions on the ground.

"I always sleep here."

"...Eh?"

I jumped in surprise at Boss' words.

"Don't you have a large mansion? Why don't you sleep there?"

"That mansion is a place to stay. I only need to sleep 5 hours a week, and it's also the time I'm the most vulnerable. I don't want to let my guard down for even a second."

"...I see."

I looked around the cave carefully.
I just couldn't see where she could possibly sleep.

"Oh right. Hold on a second."

I turned on my smartwatch and checked this area's description.

===

[Chameleon Troupe's Hideout] [Disaster]

—The Worst Place

You will become tired the more you stay in this area.

*Staying here for more than 8 hours increases the chance of catching a disease.

*Staying here for more than 24 hours decreases your stats by up to 5 points.

*Staying here for more than 96 hours increases your chance of death.

—Is There a Demon Here?

People cannot stay in this place for long.

*Staying here for more than 8 hours will mentally exhaust you.

*Staying here for more than 96 hours will cause you to be wrought with all sorts of mental illnesses.

===

Environmental Setting Description.

It was a new functionality I recently discovered on my laptop.

However, I still couldn't 'change' the setting. Since changing the environment can have great benefits, it was likely that the laptop would eventually learn to do it in future updates.

"What kind of a place is this?"

Chameleon Troupe's hideout was rotten to say the least. It was a hellish place that made you weaker by staying here.

Reading the description of this place, I got goosebumps on my skin.

"...Oh right!"

I suddenly thought of something.

With Dexterity, I had sculpted Shin Jonghak out of bronze.

This cave was half the size of a soccer field.

Wasn't this the perfect opportunity to raise Dexterity's proficiency? Not to mention,

these cave walls even carried mana (though it was more like demonic energy).

“...Um, Boss, do you mind if I refurbish this place a bit?”

“Refurbish?”

Boss tilted her head and looked up at me.

“Yes. That way, Boss and other members can rest easily when they’re here.”

“...I don’t mind, but how? As you know, outsiders are strictly prohibited from entering this place.”

“That’s fine. I’ll do everything myself. Like this.”

I unleashed Stigma’s magic power. I didn’t even need to form a tool. The magic power moved on its own and smoothed the sharp protrusions on the ground.

Using two streaks of Stigma and about three minutes, I made about a tenth of the cave’s ground into a smooth surface.

“...Oh?”

Boss exclaimed in surprise. She squatted down and began to rub the floor.

“You refined magic power and... no, you emitted magic power... no, that’s not it either. Little Apprentice, the property of the ground changed too. How did you do it?”

“...I don’t know.”

I smiled and looked around the absurdly large cave. It was indeed the perfect place to practice Dexterity.

Although I wasn’t an architect or a designer, all sorts of thoughts popped up in my head. Of course, it would take a long time to realize everything. Thankfully, time was something I had a lot of.

“So, is it okay for me to do this?”

“Sure.”

Boss agreed heartily. At that moment, the surroundings turned noisy. With widened eyes, I faced forward. A group of nine people were approaching me and Boss.

“Kim Hajin.”

Boss called my name.

“...Yes?”

“I told you I would tell you about Jeronimo, right?”

“Ah... yes.”

“We are filthier, dirtier, and more unforgivable than you think.”

I nodded.

Chameleon Troupe.

They were designed to be this world’s worst lawbreaking organization.

“Is that fine with you?”

However, that was a judgement from the original story, and it wouldn’t be until three years later that the world would dub them as such.

In addition, I was certain.

I was certain that I would be able to change the Chameleon Troupe.

“Of course. I’m a murderer too.”

I’ve already killed many people, and I planned to kill even more.

I was no longer tied down by such vanity.

“...”

Boss nodded and pointed in front of me.

I followed her gaze.

The other members all entered my vision. They all looked exactly as I described them.

Seat of Red, Cheok Jungyeong.

Seat of Yellow, Jain.

Seat of Blue, Khalifa.

Seat of Green, Jin Yohan.

Seat of Violet, Droon.

Seat of Indigo, Yoo Kyunghwan.

Seat of Silver, Kaita.

Seat of Turquoise, Setryn.

Seat of Brown, Hirano Arashi.

And finally... the Seat of White, Boss.

Although she was clad in black from top to bottom, Boss was the Seat of White.

Ah, I guess her skin is really white.

“It’s been a while—!”

Cheok Jungyeong’s loud shouting shook the cave’s walls.

Boss stared at me with an embarrassed expression.

“Little Apprentice, I heard you two have met before.”

“...Yes, he tried to kill me.”

“I heard that too. I scolded him for you.”

“Aha.”

“Huhuhuhu.”

Cheok Jungyeong laughed with his teeth revealed. He resembled a small ogre.

“Is he also one of us?”

I pretended to be oblivious and asked.

“Yes.”

Boss replied, glancing up at me.

“...Despite how he looks, he’s not all that evil.”

“I know, he just looks stupid.”

“Oh, looks like the newbie has good eyes.”

“What are you talking about?”

Before I noticed, the other members came closer.
Boss let out a dry cough, then began her introduction.

“This is our newest member, Kim Hajin.”

I faced the nine members.

“I know, I’ve seen videos of you. You have quite an interesting Gift.”

Setryn. The Egyptian assassin looked at me and smiled.

“Of course, didn’t I tell you all? This guy didn’t flinch at all in front of my fist! Uhahaha, he sure has guts.”

This hearty laugh belonged to Cheok Jungyeong.
Afterwards, the nine colors each gave me a look. Apathy, interest, dissatisfaction, they all had their own opinions.

“I heard you use a gun. Take it out!”

“No, rather than that, show us that coin throw again!”

“Coin throw? What’s that?”

Standing in front of such powerful figures... I felt like a gazelle stuck between a lion, elephant, hippo, giraffe, and others.

Chapter 144

Chameleon Troupe (1)

In a deteriorated cave, ten members of the Chameleon Troupe, including Boss, were present.

All of them were at least at the high-rank level and were powerful figures who had the ability to interfere in any major incident. As a result, the cave was being filled with their aura and magic power.

Most cadets would faint under this pressure, but I was lucky. Because I didn't have any magic power in my body, I was unaffected by the enormous amount of magic power they had in their bodies.

In other words, I was unaffected by 'magic power resonance', a phenomenon that occurred when there was a huge difference in the level of magic power between two or more people.

"Oi! Now that we have all 11 members, why don't we have a ranking tournament!?"

Cheok Jungyeong shouted as he cracked his neck and knuckles. He might not have meant to shout, but his voice was just naturally loud.

"I'm down."

A gentle-faced man spoke. He was Chameleon Troupe's spear user, the Seat of Green, Jin Yohan. If I remembered correctly, his current weapon should be the Serpent Spear. As the spear used by Zhang Fei of the Three Kingdoms, it was a historical artifact. Its unique ability should be 'limitless weight adjustment'.

"Then do it outside. Don't destroy this place."

"I'm out."

Setryn and Jain each spoke. Setryn was an Egyptian woman wearing all sorts of jewelry. As one might expect, she was modeled after Cleopatra. Her beauty should easily rank in the top 10 of this world.

“Are you joining in, Newbie?”

Cheok Jungyeong looked at me and grinned.

I immediately felt a chill run down my back, but I managed to ignore him and talk to Boss.

“Can I begin refurbishing this place now?”

Boss didn't order me and only blinked her large eyes.

“Shouldn't we give Newbie more time? He's still too young.”

Jain came to my rescue. Just like she said, I still needed time. A lot of time.

...Though, I may still be dead last compared to them even in 10 years.

“It's fine~ I'll go easy. Kids are supposed to grow by getting beat up~”

Jin Yohan took out his Serpent Spear. At the same time, beads of sweat began to form on my forehead.

“What do you think?”

Setryn licked her finger and stared at me seductively.

“Hey—! I told you, he might look like a weakling, but he's actually—!”

“Jungyeong, didn't I tell you not to shout? Want me to stitch your lips shut?”

“...Haha, bitch finally went crazy.”

Thankfully, Cheok Jungyeong and Setryn got into a fight.

In any case, there were only four talkative members. The rest only stared at me silently or were yawning out of boredom.

“Come outside, I'll crush your head. I won't go easy just because you're a woman.”

“Oh, our Jungyeong's finally going to have his neck slashed~”

“...Haha, why don't we just do that tournament then?”

“Quiet.”

A single word from Boss cooled the heated atmosphere.

“There's something I need to give you.”

Boss rummaged through her pocket and took something out. It was a piece of crumpled paper.

“Take this.”

“...?”

Puzzled, I took the paper.

“What is this?”

“A grade-1 magic contract.”

I checked the paper's description with my smartwatch.

===

[Grade-1 Magic Contract] [High-rank magic item]

—Contract Seal

*Contract seal recognizes each party's identity.

*Those tied together by contract seals must keep the content of the contract.

===

It was a higher ranked magic contract than the ones I usually saw.

I checked the content of the contract.

+++

[Contract]

Clause 1. Kim Hajin cannot betray me.

Clause 2. As long as Kim Hajin does not betray me, I will do my duty to him as the boss.

Clause 3. Whoever breaks the contract will suffer a magic power deviation.

(Duration – 6 years)

+++

There were only three childish clauses written on the contract.

“...Um, Boss.”

“What.”

I thought about how to explain it.

Of course, a magic power contract didn't need to be as detailed as a real contract, but loose wording could always lead to loopholes.

“...Hm.”

However, Boss must have misunderstood my hesitation, as she shot back curtly.

“Are you afraid of joining us?”

Immediately, ten pairs of eyes fell on me.

Although they were only curious gazes, a chill went down my back. The aura given off by each of the members was terrifying to say the least.

“Of course not. I just thought that these clauses were too loose.”

“Ah, you don't have to worry about that. It's an expensive contract, so it's quite intelligent.”

“...I see.”

An intelligent contract. That was indeed interesting.

I infused Stigma's magic power into the contract. In truth, this contract was unlikely to work on me, as Stigma's magic power wasn't inside my body.

In a way, it was a bit of a cheat.

“Will this do?”

Stigma's magic power seeped into the contract.

“Oh? What's this? Your magic power is unbelievably pure!”

When Cheok Jungyeong saw my magic power, he exclaimed in awe and expressed his interest once again.

“Look, Boss, it’s so clear and blue. It’s the first time I’ve seen such a thing.”

As Cheok Jungyeong said, Stigma’s magic power should be the purest form of magic power. Although I wasn’t sure exactly what it was or how it worked, it was, after all, the ‘Authority of the Creator’.

“Wow, this kid sure is a treasure. Argh, I can’t hold it back anymore. Come out and spar with me—!”

“...I’ll watch too.”

“Quiet, both of you.”

Even Jain was starting to show interest in watching me fight, but Boss was thankfully here to hold them back.

Next, Boss infused her magic power into the contract.

“There, the contract is done.”

Then, she carefully folded the contract and put it back in her pocket.

“Little Apprentice, here’s a gift.”

With that, Boss handed me an accessory.

It was the necklace of the Seat of Black.

The completely jet-black necklace that was the proof of Chameleon Troupe’s ‘Black’ color.

===

[Necklace of Black] [Artifact] [Unawakened]

—Increases all variable stats by 1 point.

—Invisibility

*This necklace can become invisible.

—??? (item must be awakened)

===

Each member of the Chameleon Troupe had a symbolic item given to them. The item of the Seat of Black was a simple yet powerful item with the effect of raising every stat by 1 point.

“Oh~ looks like that thing finally found an owner. Now, let’s go spar to celebrate.”

Cheok Jungyeong suggested once again. Why was this guy so interested in me?

“...Sorry, there’s something I need to do now.”

“Do it later.”

No, I couldn’t do it later. There wasn’t a single member of the Chameleon Troupe I could win against. In fact, I wouldn’t last more than 10 seconds against anyone. I turned towards Boss.

“I have a mission I have to do.”

At that moment, someone grabbed my sleeve.

“Hyung, Hyung, can you show me your gun?”

A young boy who had yet to go through puberty.

I turned towards the direction of Droon’s cute voice.

Droon was a Caucasian boy who was only 11 to 13 years old.

However, he couldn’t be underestimated because of his young age.

Frankly, there was no problem classifying Droon as the world’s strongest. Though, to be exact, it was that thing that was stuck to Droon that was strong.

“...My real weapon isn’t my gun.”

I gave some half-hearted excuse as I didn’t want to show him my Desert Eagle.

“Eh!? Really? Really!? You use an even more amazing weapon than that cowardly weapon!?”

Cheok Jungyeong shouted once again.

What was I supposed to do about this numbskull?

“Haha~ I knew it this whole time.”

“Um, I still want to see it.”

Seeing Droon’s pleading eyes, I gave in and took out my gun. There was nothing to lose by being nice to Droon.

“...Do you want to touch it?”

“Yes!”

I gave Droon the Desert Eagle. Droon began to touch my gun with eyes full of interest. At that moment, ‘that thing’ shot up from Droon’s back.

A fat, shadowy rabbit flashed its crimson eyes and stared at my gun.

Soon, a smile emerged on the rabbit’s face.

Droon also smiled and gave the gun back to me.

“It’s a good weapon~”

Droon also had the role of Chameleon Troupe’s appraiser.

Since Droon praised my weapon, I could be proud with all the options I added to the gun.

“...Thanks.”

“If you’re done with your introductions, focus.”

Boss gathered everyone’s attention.

“The reason I summoned everyone today isn’t just to greet a new member.”

Boss put on a serious smile and clenched her fists.

“2 weeks later, we will begin our ‘activities’ for real.”

Immediately, the atmosphere in the cave changed. Cheok Jungyeong’s expression was particularly noteworthy.

Grinning from ear to ear, he was full of excitement for Boss’ upcoming words.



Clear sunlight shone down on a beautiful morning.

“...Haa.”

Yoo Jinhyuk got up from his couch with a sigh. Despite the beautiful weather, he wasn't feeling so good.

“Tsk.”

He clicked his tongue and opened the door to his office bedroom.

Drrk—

Beyond the sliding door, a girl was lying on his bed like a vampire sleeping in its coffin.

“...When is she going to go back?”

Today was the fifth, no, sixth day.

Yoo Yeonha declared that she wouldn't go back until he told her the 'truth'.

“Ehew.”

When she first came to see him, he thought she would leave after a day or two at most. However, his stubborn niece didn't give up. In fact, she bugged him more and more every day.

It would have been one thing if she just stayed holed up in his office, but she was also constantly looking around the town, looking for anything of 'business value'.

As a result, Yoo Yeonha became famous in the shanty town Yoo Jinhyuk was in.

“Will you finally tell me the truth now?”

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha's voice rang out. Startled, Yoo Jinhyuk swallowed his saliva.

Yoo Yeonha continued, still lying on the bed.

“Tell me.”

“...No, I really don't know anything.”

Yoo Yeonha got up. Her flawless beauty made it hard to believe she just woke up.

“That’s fine. I’ll just stay until you do.”

“You...”

Yoo Jinhyuk asked Yoo Jinwoong to take back his daughter. However, Yoo Jinwoong surprisingly asked him to have her stay, saying that being with him was safer for her than being in Cube. Of course, he didn’t forget to mention that he would kill Yoo Jinhyuk if he laid even a finger on Yoo Yeonha.

“...Plus, I already know some things.”

“Oh yeah? Like what?”

Yoo Yeonha hesitated momentarily, then sighed.

“I guess I have no choice. If neither of us tells each other anything, it doesn’t look like we’ll get anywhere. But just know that I can’t tell you where I got this information from.”

“...Sure.”

Yoo Jinhyuk answered half-heartedly. As far as he was concerned, whatever information Yoo Yeonha had had to be a groundless rumor.

“The information I have is simple. Kuhum.”

After a cough, Yoo Yeonha continued.

“Chae Jinyoon... became a devil.”

Yoo Yeonha muttered as though it was the truth.

Immediately, Yoo Jinhyuk’s hair stood on end. However, he maintained his commanding appearance and did not show his agitation outwards.

“Devil? Like Satan and all those devils from the Bible?”

“No, you know what I’m talking about. The existences above Djinn. The evil gods who

give power to Djinnns.”

“What...”

Yoo Jinhyuk was about to blow off the conversation, but he suddenly remembered a voice he heard with his ability.

The voice belonged to the medical examiner who was speaking in front of Chae Jinyoon’s corpse.

—This is even more elaborate than the Djinnns’ Devil Transformation. You can see that it is persisting even after his death.”

Something that was even more elaborate than the Devil Transformation...

The pieces of the puzzle fell in.

“...So you do know something. Maybe I should have told you earlier.”

Yoo Jinhyuk’s expression revealed his brief thought, and Yoo Yeonha didn’t forget to point it out.

In the end, Yoo Jinhyuk sighed.

“...Ehew, just so you know, I’ve been staying quiet to protect you. If handled wrong, even your mom and dad might end up being killed.”

“...Eh?”

“So wouldn’t it be better that I be the only one who might die?”

Yoo Yeonha stared at him silently, then added.

“Are we that weak?”

“...What?”

“Are we so weak that our entire family will be killed because we defied one person?”

Yoo Jinhyuk became speechless. He couldn’t think of any way to respond.

“If so, I’ll make us stronger.”

Yoo Yeonha spoke daringly.

However, that was impossible to achieve. The Yoo clan was the Chae clan's hunting dog from birth. As a clan that grew by performing the Chae clan's dirty work, it was at the mercy of Chae Joochul's hands...

"So trust me."

Yoo Yeonha's naïve words cut off Yoo Jinhyuk's thoughts. Looking at his niece, Yoo Jinhyuk smiled.

A kid that always acted like a grown-up had finally become an adult. He couldn't help but be amazed.



[Mission Commencement. D-10]

Four days passed since then. With Khalifa's help, I went back and forth between Chameleon Troupe's hideout and my apartment house while continuing my [Chameleon Troupe Hideout Renovation and Dexterity Level-up Project].

During the past four days, I realized that Dexterity was quite a difficult Gift to level-up to the point that I couldn't be more grateful to Master Sharpshooter for helping it become grade-7.

Jiiing—

The first thing I did was create a small workshop in the cave. Currently, I was working on a couch. Dexterity's proficiency went up more when I crafted bigger objects but because crafting items took Stigma's magic power, I couldn't make anything bigger than a couch.

The process for creating the couch was as follows.

First was coming up with a design with the help of Aether's Aesthetic Greed. Next was buying expensive materials and creating the couch's frame with Stigma's magic power. Lastly, I had to stuff the couch with the highest grade fillings, then cover everything up with monster alligator skin.

Although it was easy to describe, the whole process took nine hours to complete.

“Whew.”

Now, it was finally over.

I clutched my head and fell on my chair.

[Dexterity’s proficiency increases by 1.5%!]

“1.5% for all that work...”

It was too stingy, but I also had more than enough time.

===

[Through luck, Devilish Dexterity activates.]

[‘Alligator Skin Couch’ has been judged to be a high-rank furniture. A special effect will be granted to fit its status.]

[Special effect – Significance of Rest]

*This couch will quickly burn off any exhaustion.

*Whoever sleeps on this couch will wake up refreshed.

===

I couldn’t make furniture that gave temporary stat bonuses, but this was more than praiseworthy for a piece of furniture.

“Hm.”

I picked up the couch I built. With my superhuman strength stat, lifting heavy objects stopped being a problem.

“Here’s a couch~”

I came out of the workshop and announced my creation.

Boss was the first member to see me.

“...You built another one?”

Boss woke up from her sleep (surprisingly, she slept standing), and murmured apathetically. Around her were other pieces of furniture such as a table, TV drawer, etc.

“Little Apprentice, don’t you think you’re changing this place too quickly? I think I need time to adjust.”

For the past four days, I’ve been slowly changing Chameleon Troupe’s hideout.

I first created a resting place for Boss.

I set aside a 160 square meter space and turned it into a modern room by smoothing out the walls, ceiling, and floor, then painted it white.

“You have to at least live like a person. Also, why don’t you watch TV? There are many good variety shows.”

“I’m not interested in those.”

“Just try it.”

I put the couch at an appropriate distance away from the TV.

“Try sitting down.”

“...”

However, Boss shook her head.

“I’ve never sit down to rest. I like standing.”

“...Then I’m going back to the workshop.”

I returned to the workshop.

After closing the door, I peered through the door and observed Boss.

—...why is it so big?

Boss glanced at the couch, then poked it here and there with her foot. However, it didn’t look like she planned on sitting down.

“That’s a bit sad.”

Would she sit down if I made her a better one?

Unfortunately, because making furniture expended Stigma’s magic power, making

more than one was a waste.

Now, I needed to do my next task. Training.

I needed to wield a more threatening weapon than a gun. Not to mention, having more options was better for battles.

Shoo—

“Start.”

I held ten knives I created in my hands and initiated a training program.

At the same time, holographic targets shot up 300 meters away. As though they were besieging me, eleven targets were equally spaced around me.

I threw my knives at them.

Chweeek—

These knives would undoubtedly strike all eleven targets.

However, I wanted more.

The moment I threw the knives, I took out the bow hanging behind my back and...

“Uwoah!”

My neck got caught on the bowstring, and I fell forward.

“...Argh, I almost died.”

I almost killed myself.

“My neck...”

It was indeed too difficult.

Because of Dexterity’s low proficiency level, using knives, a bow, and a gun simultaneously was a bit difficult. Unless I had another arm...

Wait.

Another arm?

I immediately thought of Stigma.

Even Stigma wouldn’t be able to create another arm, but I should be able to utilize it to make it seem like I did.

Of course, this had to be tested later.

I’d already used 2.5 streaks of Stigma on building my couch.

“I’ll try it tomorrow.”

Then, I looked outside the workshop without much thought.

“...Eh?”

A small grin emerged on my face.

Boss was sitting on the couch. As if that wasn’t enough, she was bouncing on the couch cushion as though she was surprised by its softness and coziness.

—...Swamp Alligator skin? It’s true that their skins are known to be great.

After giving the couch a review, she turned her attention to the small couch chair I made a couple days ago. After glancing at my workshop for a second, she brought the couch chair over and put her feet on top of it.

She looked extremely comfy.

—Mmm~

Boss closed her eyes with a satisfied hum.

Then, as though she was missing something, she reached out and grabbed the TV remote on the couch.

—Hiik!

Startled by the loud volume, she hurriedly lowered it.

“...How cute.”

Right, that was how people changed.

My first goal, ‘making Boss watch TV’, was a success.

“Then I guess I’ll go back to practicing...”

I smiled and picked up the knives I threw.

I couldn’t stay down just because of one failure.

For now, I had to give my best on whatever I did.

...But, one cigarette first.



After practicing for three hours, I went outside.

“Hm?”

When I was thinking about going out to buy a cigarette, I heard a faint breathing sound. I tilted my head and looked over in that direction.

“...Is she sleeping?”

Boss was lying on the couch, sleeping with her arms out. It wasn't too long ago that she said she liked to sleep standing up.

I grinned and took out my smartwatch.

This was the perfect chance for a photo.

I muted the phone and took pictures of Boss sleeping.

Boss still didn't show any signs of waking up. Was my couch that good?

While I was being satisfied with myself, I suddenly received a message.

[I confirmed the truth. Nayun is also awake.]

Yoo Yeonha had finally messaged me after a week of silence.

I tried to reply to her gladly. However...

“.....!”

A pang of pain suddenly struck my arm.

An agonizing pain akin to my arm being ripped off.

The feeling of another streak of Stigma being added to my arm.

I knew what this meant. However...

“Fuck...”

It's just too painful.

I used the painkiller medicinal effect I prepared for moments like this, but the pain only got clearer.

I clenched my teeth.

Forcing my eyes open, I confirmed the alerts popping up on my smartwatch.

===

[A fourth streak of Stigma is added.]

[From the fifth, Stigma will require more total SP gained.]

[Your laptop is updating.]

—Adding Functionalities...

===

However, my consciousness faded away under the continued pain, and soon, my vision turned dark.

Chapter 145

Chameleon Troupe (2)

Today's Seoul was cloudy. The sky was filled with grey clouds as though it would rain at any moment.

"Hm..."

Yoo Yeonha stared at the scenery outside her limousine and sighed.

"I think Hamgyeong had better air and weather. Don't you think so?"

"...Pardon?"

Her driver was taken aback. During the week Yoo Yeonha spent in Hamgyeong Province, the driver also had to stay there. It was because he didn't want to risk going back alone and facing an accident.

"Y-Yes, you're right."

"If it wasn't for the Shudderwock, Hamgyeong Province would have developed a lot."

Hamgyeong Province's mountains were deep and secluded. Pure magic power filled the atmosphere, and the morning air was especially refreshing due to the mountains' vital energy and life energy.

If it wasn't for the dokkaebi, 'Shudderwock', that lived in Hamgyeong Province's mountains, Yoo Yeonha would have loved to come by more often.

"Y-You're right."

The driver agreed reluctantly.

"...Hm, I'll have to look into the price of the land around here."

Yoo Yeonha solidified her desire to buy Hamgyeong Province's land. Afraid that Yoo

Yeonha would want to go back, the driver stepped on the accelerator.

“We’re here.”

The limousine quickly drove off and soon, it reached Daehyun Hospital’s VIP hospital. Chae Nayun was moved here from the Gangnam Severance Hospital four days ago, and today, she finally woke up.

“You can go ahead. I’ll call you when I’m leaving.”

“Understood.”

Yoo Yeonha got off the limousine with nervousness in her heart.

“Ah, it’s Yeonha!”

In front of the VIP hospital’s entrance were Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, and Yi Yeonghan.

“You’re here, Yeonha.”

“Un.”

Yoo Yeonha smiled at Shin Jonghak.

“You were waiting for me?”

“No.”

“...Then why are you standing here?”

“No reason.”

“...Whatever, let’s go in.”

Yoo Yeonha went into the hospital with the others.

After walking past the VIP hospital’s beautifully cultivated garden, she reached Chae Nayun’s room.

The four of them drew in a deep breath.

“You can go in. She’s fine.”

Encouraged by a nurse’s soft voice, Kim Suho turned the doorknob.

Kiik.

The door slowly opened.

First, they were greeted with a soft breeze from the opened window in the room. Chae Nayun was standing in front of the window, looking out silently.

Kim Suho and the others hesitated a bit before going in, but Chae Nayun didn’t pay attention to them whatsoever.

“Nayun, your friends are here.”

Chae Shinhyuk, who was already in the room, spoke. It was only then that Chae Nayun turned around.

“...Hey guys.”

Chae Nayun slowly approached the group. Yoo Yeonha felt her heart beat. She couldn’t look straight into Chae Nayun’s eyes.

“I heard I slept for a week.”

However, she laughed like usual as though nothing happened.

Yoo Yeonha worked up the courage to speak.

“Y-Yeah.”

“Are you feeling okay?”

Kim Suho asked.

“Yeah, I wouldn’t be standing otherwise.”

Chae Nayun even stretched to show that she was fine. Shin Jonghak gave her a warm smile.

“I wouldn’t expect anything less from you.”

“Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, do you guys have time today?”

“Hm?”

“I do, but...”

Chae Nayun spoke to Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak.

“Help me train. I slept for a whole week, so I need to regain my dulled senses.”

“Shouldn’t you rest for today?”

“No, I don’t have the time.”

“Time?”

“Yeah.”

Chae Nayun smiled and muttered.

“There’s someone I want to kill, so I have to work hard.”

She sounded indifferent, yet resolute and full of hatred.

When Yoo Yeonha heard her, her heart sank.

“K-Kill?”

Kim Suho asked in surprise.

“So? Are you going to help me or not? If you’re not available, I’ll just train with Shin Jonghak.”

“Um, what about me, Yi Yeonghan? I’m here too, you know.”

“...I can help you train, but I don’t think you should... kill someone.”

“Shut it and follow me out. Oh, Yeonha, are you coming too?”

Yoo Yeonha shook her head. Unable to maintain her composure in this situation, she left the room first. She could hear Chae Nayun’s voice behind her. However, she couldn’t distinguish her words.



I opened my eyes and stared at the ceiling blankly. It was the white color I painted. I felt comfortable on the alligator skin couch I made. The boundary between reality and dream was faint, but what woke me up was the sharp pain on my upper arm.

“Uuu.”

I couldn't move my arm. The aftereffect was much worse than when I got the third streak of Stigma. Did Stigma put more burden on my body as it grew in capacity? Unable to move, I sighed.

“Haa... I have to go home.”

Evandel was waiting for me. Though, she seemed too busy lately playing with her friend to pay attention to me. She might even be happy that I wasn't there to nag her.

“...”

Feeling wronged, I clenched my teeth and forced myself up. My eyelids trembled from the intense pain that followed my movement.

“You're up?”

At that moment, a voice rang out. It wasn't Boss'. This heavy and deep voice... was Khalifa's.

“...?”

“Do you remember my name?”

“Of course, Khalifa-ssi.”

I figured out how to address each member on the first day.

“Um, how long was I asleep?”

“At least 24 hours.”

Khalifa tapped on the ground with the back of his foot. A pathway of magic power spread out from that point.

It was a Portal.

“Boss asked me to stay, since you wouldn’t be able to go back without me.”

“Ah... thank you.”

“You don’t need to thank me. But...”

Khalifa paused for a moment and looked around the cave that looked significantly different than five days ago.

“...I’d like to be next.”

“Next?... Oh.”

He was likely talking about the next color’s room.

“Of course, I don’t intend to take it for free.”

Khalifa threw something the size of a baseball.

“It’s a blue rockstone. It looks like you love making things. You can use that as a material.”

Blue rockstone, a gem containing magic power. As it was quite an expensive item, I received it gladly and put it away.

“Then I’ll make your room next.”

“Thanks. So, what do you think about the mission?”

“...Oh, that?”

Four days ago, Boss made an announcement in front of all members. That she would annihilate past traitors who scorned and ridiculed the Chameleon Troupe when they were down.

She called the operation ‘Old Revenge’.

Although most of our targets were Djinnns from Pandemonium, there were some Heroes and businessmen too.

“So, are you confident?”

“..”

I looked at the Stigma on my upper arm.

Four streaks.

A circle was now surrounding a cross.

“I am.”

I retorted.



Using Khalifa’s Portal, I returned to Seoul and quickly ran home where Evandel was waiting.

Beebeebep—

I pressed the password. Immediately, tiny footsteps rang out, and by the time the door was half-opened, Evandel and Hayang were right in front of the door.

“Hajin~”

“Meow~”

“Sorry, I’m late.”

I picked them both up. They didn’t blame me for not coming home every once in a while, but I still felt like I had to apologize. When I went to the living room, I found someone else there.

“Hello~”

“Oh, hey.”

Evandel’s friend, Yun Haeyeon, was here.

Judging by all the Lego pieces lying on the ground, it seemed they were playing together.

I put Evandel and Hayang down, then patted Haeyeon's head.

"Hajin Hajin, where were you?"

"Hm? Oh, I just had something to do. Anyways, did you eat dinner?"

"Un~ we ordered food."

"Chicken again? Good job. Ah, hold on a second."

There was something I had to check.

When I got my fourth streak of Stigma, I remembered being alerted about a laptop update.

===

[Laptop Update]

...(Currently in progress) Remaining time: 3y 13d...

===

What? It's still not over? And what's 3y 13d? Don't tell me it's 3 years and 13 days!?

Ding—

Suddenly, the doorbell rang.

I turned around and shouted.

"Who is it?"

—Ah, I'm Haeyeon's aunt... I heard she was here, so I came to pick her up.

"Ah, no... I want to stay and play more..."

Haeyeon reacted cutely at the voice outside.

Haeyeon hid behind Evandel and Evandel announced 'I'll protect you' seriously.

"Ah, yes, hold on."

I opened the door without much thought.

Click—

“...Eh?”

I couldn't help but doubt my eyes.

“...Hm?”

In front of door was... Yun Seung-Ah.



Under the dark 9 p.m. sky, I came to a nearby park with Yun Seung-Ah. As expected of a rich neighborhood, there were all sorts of recreational equipment. However, Yun Seung-Ah and I went straight to the swings as though we almost promised to sit and talk there.

“...”

“...”

Neither of us said much.

Since we knew each other and Haeyeon wanted to play more, we came out to give them more time, but there wasn't much to talk about.

After riding the swing for about five minutes, I started the conversation.

“...Kuhum, I didn't know vice-leader had a niece.”

“I also didn't think Cadet Hajin had a... um, she's not your daughter, right?”

“Of course not. She's my... niece. Also, you don't have to talk so politely.”

“...Ah, okay.”

Yun Seung-Ah didn't ask any further. Because of everything that happened recently, she seemed exhausted and weak.

“Do you live here? I never knew.”

“Me? No, I used to have a mansion elsewhere, but I sold it. I’m living with my older brother right now.”

“ ... ”

I ended up poking her where it hurt. The reason she sold her mansion had to be to pay off the class action lawsuit among other things.

“Rather than that, I didn’t know you lived in such a nice place, Hajin.”

“I do stock trading on the side. I made a lot of money with it.”

“I see. I wouldn’t expect any less from someone ranked 1st in theory.”

That was the end of our first conversation.

Yun Seung-Ah looked up at the crescent moon in the sky and fell silent. I didn’t say anything either. It was just too awkward.

Should I have just let her leave with Haeyeon?

“...Cube’s cadets. Are they disappointed?”

Yun Seung-Ah muttered.

“Disappointed? No, not really—”

“I’m thinking of dropping everything and going to the Association.”

“...The Hero Association?”

“Yeah. The Temple of Justice apparently has an empty seat.”

“Eh?”

Temple of Justice.

Even among Hero Association’s numerous departments, the Temple of Justice was the strongest. They were similar to the United Stations’ Peacekeeping Corps. Well, no, I guess they weren’t that similar. After all, the Temple of Justice only had 13 members.

“Aileen-ssi is also in that group, right?”

“Yeah.”

Yun Seung-Ah snickered.

“You didn’t care much about me, but it seems that’s not the case with Aileen Unni.”

“...She’s the human dragon. I’d be an idiot if I didn’t know her.”

Aileen, the Hero who uses Spirit Speech.

She was one of the most overpowered Heroes I wrote about.

“Heh, she’s too small to be a dragon. Her official height is 153 cm, but she’s actually shorter.”

“Eh?”

“I’m not kidding, she’s tiny. If you look down, all you’ll see is her head. Ah, but don’t do that. She gets mad when you look down at her head, even though that’s not something you can control... ehew.”

Yun Seung-Ah mumbled randomly, then suddenly became sad and dropped her head. It seemed she had depression like me. Maybe I should tell her to also smoke like me.

“...Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that. It’s just that I haven’t talked to anyone for a while.”

“No, it’s fine.”

Although the public and the media were talking about Cube’s Djinn invasion incident, the amount of attention Creator’s Sacred Grace received before that was astronomical. Yoo Yeonha surely had something to do with it too, as she was merciless when it came to exploiting her opponent’s weakness.

“Why don’t you try aiming for the guild leader position?”

“...Guild leader?”

“I mean, it’s not your fault that you guys failed the Tower campaign. It was the guild leader’s fault for pushing for the campaign. I think this is the best opportunity.”

I tried bringing up this topic. Yun Seung-Ah should be voting to fire the guild leader in the board meeting soon.

“...You think like a kid.”

“Because I am a kid.”

“I guess you are. Well, I’ll think about it.”

“Sure. To be honest, Creator’s Sacred Grace doesn’t feel right without Yun Seung-Ah.”

I grinned and got up.

“Pft, yeah, I think so too. Are you leaving?”

“Yep. Oh right, Haeyeon said she wanted to sleep over. What should we do?”

“...It’s fine. I’ll tell Oppa about it.”

“Got it. Good night, vice-leader... Oh, also...”

Suddenly remembering something, I turned towards Yun Seung-Ah.

“Suho is waiting for you to call him.”

Yun Seung-Ah’s face immediately lit up.

“H-Hm? W-What are you talking about?”

“You don’t have to feign ignorance. All of our close friends know about it anyways.”

“A-About what? I’m too old compared to Suho...”

Although Yun Seung-Ah was 9~10 years older than Suho on paper, that wasn’t really the case. Suho was actually 3~4 years older than his official age.

“Don’t worry, he’s into older women.”

“Older women?”

“Yep, only older women.”

“Only... ah, no, I keep telling you, that’s not it!”

I grinned seeing Yun Seung-Ah’s girlish side.

“Ah, Hajin-ssi! It’s really not like that! D-Don’t you spread that rumor!”

I ignored the shouting behind my back.



...10 days quickly went by and the Chameleon Troupe’s mission day arrived. Currently, I was standing on the outskirts of Pandemonium for my first mission as a member of the Chameleon Troupe.

—Can you see that tower in the distance, Hyung?

Droon’s voice rang out in my ears.

“Hold on.”

I took a look around and discovered a tall clocktower. It was easily 200 meters tall, but I headed towards it without hesitation.

With Parkour, 30 seconds was enough for me to reach its peak.

“Whew.”

I stood on the support fixture and looked into the distance from a lofty height. My clothes fluttered in the breeze mixed with demonic energy and blood.

Pandemonium, a city governed by Djinn, had many buildings and people.

“Yeah, I see it.”

My target was particularly eye-catching even in the bustling city.

—yep, that’s the one.

A 10-floor tower with a sleek design. The giant obsidian on its rooftop made it look like a Magic Tower. This building was 'their' base.

—That building apparently took 50 billion won to make. Let's crush it! Crush, crush!

"...Yeah."

Today's target was one of Pandemonium's private organizations, 'Hatred's End'. To be more precise, it was to destroy the new base they completed.

—By the way, your clothes are cool, Hyung.

"Thanks."

—Did you put in special care for your first mission?

"No."

I was wearing clothes I made. It's not that I designed it with special care, it was just that anything I made turned pretty or cool because of Aether.

The cape I created to conceal myself became the 'Assassin's Hooded Cape', which looked like a main character's equipment, and the mask I created to cover my face was given a chrome decoration and became the 'Mastermind's Mask'.

—It must be because of all the black color. Can you make me something similar later?

Droon was quite talkative.

But since he was a kid, I forgave him.

...It definitely wasn't because I was afraid of him.

—Hyung, Hyung, will you be fine? That tower should be really sturdy.

"I don't have much choice. I'm the only one here."

—You don't have to do it alone.

"...Really?"

I pondered.

Blessed Bow of Horus, magic amplification medicinal effect, Master Sharpshooter, Random Consolidation System, and finally, four streaks of Stigma.

A small smile emerged on my face.

With all these, blowing up a tower should be a piece of cake.

“No, I think I can do it.”

—Ooh~ are you going to use a bow?

“Yep.”

I couldn't use guns in Chameleon Troupe's missions. The entire world knew that I was the only gun-using Hero.

That was why I brought a bow.

—Okay, when you succeed, I'll leave the mark.

“Mark?”

—Yep. The mark of a new Black.

“...Do you have to?”

—Of course. We're attacking as a warning, to tell them we're back.

“...Okay, okay.”

—Un!

I took a deep breath.

“Scan.”

Murmuring softly, I pulled out the bow hanging on my back. Its wooden frame clacked enjoyably.

Sssss—

Aether adhered to Horus' Bow and strengthened it.

I held the bow in one hand and concentrated Stigma's magic power with the other...

—Take this! Invisible Sword!

“...Don’t say weird things.”

—Ah, I forgot to turn off the radio. Sorry, Hyung.

I reset my focus, willing Stigma to transform.

Form, arrow.

Property, explosion.

Goal, destruction.

Color, black.

Just in case, I only used 3.6 streaks of Stigma.

Shooooong—

Stigma’s magic power danced and compressed down to an arrow, forming what looked more like a javelin than anything else. I added an ‘external magic power amplification’ medicinal effect on top of this arrow.

“I’m ready.”

Radiating with black light, the arrow was shining destructively.

I nocked the arrow.

“I’m shooting.”

—Count down.

Wasn’t he supposed to turn off the radio?

I counted down.

Three.

Two.

One.

Chweeeek—

The arrow shot through the sky, drawing a beautiful, straight line.

Without even a bit of error or shaking, it hurled towards its target which was at least 1.5 km away.

However, the arrow reached its target in the blink of an eye.

KWANG—!

The moment my arrow touched the tower, a huge explosion erupted. A fierce gale blew, sucking in air from all directions. Next, a thunderous sound roared out.

It took only a second for total destruction.

Where their tower proudly stood was now covered in dust. Soon, I could see pieces of the obsidian raining down.

“...Is that good enough?”

—Wow~ it’s perfect, Hyung.

“Then I’m leaving.”

I turned around without hesitation.

—So cool~

Hearing Droon’s praise, I put my hand in my pocket.

Although my arm was throbbing from draining Stigma’s magic power, I endured the pain and took out a cigarette.

Putting it in my mouth, I lit it with Stigma. It tasted bitter.

Chapter 146

Chameleon Troupe (3)

From the sky, bits and pieces of obsidian and concrete rained down.

Koong. Koong.

As the fragments of the broken tower struck the ground, large vibrations rang out and dirty smoke rose up.

“...Haha.”

In this chaos, Cheok Jungyeong and Jin Yohan let out a subdued laugh.

A tower that was standing just three seconds ago was now destroyed. To top it off, it was only a single arrow that caused this catastrophe.

The two of them couldn't be more satisfied.

“Looks like we made the right choice.”

“See, I told you, my eyes are never wrong.”

They had achieved their first goal.

Now, it was up to them. Cheok Jungyeong equipped his gauntlet and Jin Yohan held up his spear.

Then, they walked into the chaos of the destroyed tower.

“Don't forget, we're only killing the executives. Boss is watching.”

“...I know. Oh look, there's one there.”

Cheok Jungyeong quickly found a person to kill.

He had jumped down from the crumbling building and landed lightly.

Cheok Jungyeong wasn't sure who he was, but his gut feeling told him that the man was an executive.

Cheok Jungyeong gathered strength around his feet.

His muscles bulked up, and he shot forward.

“Huup!”

As he kicked off the ground, a small crater appeared on the ground where he was standing. His leap was like the firing of a cannon.

“What!?”

“Caught you—!”

Cheok Jungyeong grabbed the man’s head and slammed it onto the ground. The man’s bones were instantly broken as his head was crushed by the sheer strength of Cheok Jungyeong’s smash.

Immediately after his first kill, Cheok Jungyeong raised his body and flashed his fierce eyes. He was like a predator looking for prey.

It didn’t take long.

Cheok Jungyeong shot towards someone running away.

KOONG!

“...Are you sure you’re not a beast?”

Jin Yohan mumbled as he shook his head. Meanwhile, Cheok Jungyeong was charging at another enemy. He was really like a dexterous ogre.

“Fuck! Who is he!?”

At that moment, a man’s shouting entered Jin Yohan’s ears. Jin Yohan turned to the direction of the sound, where he saw a Caucasian man in his early 30s pointing his fingers at Cheok Jungyeong. Jin Yohan recognized the man.

Hatred’s End, executive number three, Slavan.

Soon, Slavan also discovered Jin Yohan. Then Jin Yohan smiled brightly as he pointed his spear at Slavan. Then, he shot forward.

“Dammit!”

Slavan took out the sword hanging by his waist. His sharp blade met Jin Yohan’s seemingly simple spear strikes.

Crack—

Although it seemed like a light clash, the result was overwhelmingly one-sided. Jin Yohan's spear crushed Slavan's body and sword.

Instantly changing to a weight of 10 tons, Jin Yohan's Serpent Spear had crushed Slavan with its weight alone.

"I got one."

Jin Yohan reported with a smile.



I contacted Khalifa as soon as I finished my duty. Khalifa appeared quickly and made a Portal, and I returned to Chameleon Troupe's hideout.

The hideout looked a lot different than when I first arrived. Of course, only two weeks had passed since I started the remodeling process, so I wasn't even done with 10% of the project. However, just the fact that the cave was separated into rooms made it much better.

To put it simply, I turned the cave into a dome-like structure with a central lobby. The dome then had doors that led to each member's room, a workshop, a research lab, and others.

"I'm back."

"Good work."

Boss was sitting on the only couch in the lobby.

"You did well. The other members will take care of the rest."

Boss smiled as she spoke, and I smiled back. Then, Boss suddenly made a shooing gesture with her hand.

"Now move."

"Pardon?"

Behind me, Droon's video was being projected. Inside, Jin Yohan and Cheok Jungyeong were in the middle of a battle.

"Ah, yes."

It didn't feel right sitting next to Boss, so I went behind the couch. Boss' head was right in front of me.

"..."

Looking from the distance, I noticed that Boss' hair was quite disheveled. There were a few spiky splits as well.

An unbearable urge rose up in my heart. It was the side effect of Aether's Aesthetic Greed.

"B-Boss, do you want me to comb your hair a bit?"

"Hm?"

Boss tilted her head and turned around.

"Hair?"

"Yes."

"...No."

"It'll feel good."

"I'm fine."

"...But I'm not."

I transformed Aether into a comb and pulled Boss' long hair back. Before she could resist, I put the comb on her hair.

"Didn't I tell you... I don't... need... nyaa."

Boss stopped talking and hummed joyfully. She should be feeling pleasure that was hard to resist. Not only was the Aether comb a hundred times better than most combs, but my Dexterity Gift let me know exactly how I should move my hands to make her feel good.

“...Mmmm.”

Boss let out a satisfied hum.

I smiled.

Soon, Boss was totally relaxed and twitching her eyelids whenever she felt a strong pleasure.

After combing her hair for about five minutes, I tied it up into a ponytail.

“There.”

“..”

Boss opened her eyes. She looked at me somewhat unsatisfied, then let out a dry cough.

“Kuhum, you don’t have to do this to show me your loyalty.”

“No, I’m doing this because I want to.”

“..”

Boss caressed her hair silently.

“What is this hair?”

“Oh, I thought you’d look good in it. Do you need a mirror?”

“No.”

Knowing Boss, I still formed a mirror with Aether. Boss carefully looked at herself in the mirror, turning her head here and there, and stared at her wagging ponytail as though she found it interesting.

Then, she suddenly twisted her head back.

“Oh, Little Apprentice, when will you officially enter Jeronimo Mercenary?”

“Oh right.”

For my disguise, I requested to become a member of Jeronimo Mercenary. The official reason for me dropping out of Cube was to become a mercenary. Plus, doing missions as a member of Jeronimo Mercenary would surely help me gain SP as well.

“Mm... let’s set the date to March next year.”

“Alright, I’ll let Jain know.”

“Thank you.”

Soon, ‘Fenrir’ would join Jeronimo.

He would be a gunner, and his specialty would be Djinn assassination and monster slaughter.

Anything else... Jain would surely take care of it.



The international organization in charge of Heroes affairs, the Hero Association. The Hero Tower, their headquarters located in Gwanghwamun, Seoul, was the tallest building in the world at 900 meters.

[Temple of Justice Meeting Room]

The Hero Association, which was called the foundation of modern human civilization, was separated into 15 departments. Among them, the one tasked with the most dangerous and important duties was the Temple of Justice.

“I’m here... geez.”

Naturally, only the most elite members of the Association could become a member. Today, a round-table meeting was planned for the group.

“Where is everyone!?”

Aileen, one of the members of the Temple of Justice, grumbled with her arms crossed. No one could blame her. Even at a round-table meeting, only four other members had

shown up. The other eight were busy with their own missions.

“Good morning, Aileen-ssi.”

The 31-year-old Yi Yongha greeted Aileen. He was a high-rank Hero who was also the youngest member of the group.

“Good morning? Where is everyone!?”

“Didn’t you hear what happened in Southwest Asia? They’re busy running around and putting out the fire.”

The chairman, Park Hanho, pacified Aileen with a tired expression.

“But shouldn’t they at least attend the meeting!?”

“Give them a break. They’ll be notified of what we talk about anyways.”

“Hmph, they live in Seoul anyways. Also... why couldn’t they send me there instead? I’d only need a week to solve everything!”

Aileen had a lot to complain about. She was displeased with what she was doing as a Hero.

In moderately dangerous incidents, she was kept out, being told that the Hero Association needed a trump card. In not-so-dangerous situations, she was kept out, being told that a guillotine shouldn’t be used to behead a chicken.

Although everyone agreed that she was one of the strongest members of the Hero Association, she has only been deployed five times in the past five years.

“Like we always say, you’re our ultimate weapon... Wait, Aileen, did you get taller?”

“...E-Eh?”

Park Hanho tried to appease Aileen with his sweet talk.

“...You’re doing this again! I’m 31 years old now, you know?”

“No, no, I’m not making it up. Maybe your bones just got longer.”

“B-Bones? Mm... maybe...? N-No!”

Park Hanho tensed up with nervousness. So the day finally came, where telling her that she got taller didn't work...!

“Maybe it's because it's morning. You know, they say you're taller 2~3 centimeters in the morning~”

However, Aileen's expression was honest. Her trembling lips were declaring to the world that she was extremely pleased at the moment.

“No, I think your bones really got longer. Didn't you say you stopped wearing high-heels recently? Maybe that's why.”

“...Do you think I'm stupid?”

“Haha, I'm pretty sure you really did, so get it checked out later.”

Clearly looking appeased, Aileen sat down without complaining.

“Now, let's start the meeting.”

“Yes!”

Hearing Yi Yongha enthusiastic shout, the fourth Hero in the room, Nicholas, woke up from his sleep.

“Uun~”

“Why are you always sleeping?”

Aileen blurted out in disappointment, but Nicholas only laughed leisurely.

“Maybe that's why I'm tall.”

“...”

Aileen gritted her teeth without replying.

“Now, now, quiet down. Yesterday, around 8 p.m., terror incidents simultaneously broke out in Pandemonium.”

Holographic pictures shot up from the round table, showing destroyed buildings and corpses.

“As you can see, an entire tower was obliterated, and a hideout was destroyed.”

“Isn’t it good that they’re fighting among themselves?”

“No.”

Park Hanho shook his head at Aileen’s words. Then, he played a video taken last night in Pandemonium.

Shooooong—

An arrow flew across the sky like a shooting star. The sheer strength of the arrow warped the atmosphere it was passing through.

KWANG—!

A single shot.

A single shot obliterated a tower.

Yi Yonghan dropped his jaw in awe, and Nicholas widened his eyes slightly.

“Wow~ amazing~ amazing~”

Aileen applauded. However, she was clearly being sarcastic. If it was Aileen, she could obliterate a building even with her eyes closed.

“This isn’t the important thing. Look at this picture.”

Inside the picture shown by Park Sangho, a man was standing on the top of Pandemonium’s clocktower.

“...Is he an assassin?”

The man was clad in black, wearing a hooded cape that resembled an eagle and a mask

that covered his mouth. In his hands was an elegant, black bow.

“It looks like he’s a new member of ‘that group’.”

Aileen’s face stiffened.

Even the Hero Association only knew this mysterious group as ‘that’ group. Park Sangho, the chairman of the Temple of Justice, had been chasing them since he was 20 years old, and even Aileen had a history with them.

“A new member?”

“Yep, you’ve seen this before, right?”

Park Hanho put up another picture.

A black symbol was engraved on the ground. Aileen indeed knew what this ‘lotus’ symbol was.

“...Yeah, seven years ago. But I don’t think they’re the same person.”

The person Aileen met back then wasn’t someone who used a bow.

“That’s why he’s a new member.”

“Mm...”

Click.

Aileen suddenly snapped her finger.

“Okay, leave the investigation to me. I’ll look into them.”

“Hm? No, you don’t really need to do it yourself...”

“No, I have to. We drew the last time we fought.”

“...What?”

“I met him before. About 8 to 9 years ago.”

“What?”

Park Hanho pressed his forehead and sighed.

“Why haven’t you said anything until now... Well, it looks like he’s a different person anyways.”

“Even if he’s not the same person, if he’s the old one’s replacement, he should be just as strong, right?”

Aileen grinned and spoke with magic power infused in her voice.

“So give me those files.”

“...Didn’t I tell you not to use that on me?”

Park Hanho’s arm was moved by Aileen’s Spirit Speech. Park Hanho didn’t resist it. He could if he wanted to, but that would only make things more exhausting.

“Thank you~”

“Ehew. Whatever... ah, wait! Where are you going!? The meeting isn’t over yet!”

As soon as she got what she wanted, Aileen scurried out of the meeting room, whistling.



In the blink of an eye, July came around. Under the blazing sun, springtime long evaporated.

Chirp— chirp—

Birds chirped, and a clear sky and hot breeze signaled the start of summer.

Cube had just finished its first semester, and cadets were full of energy thanks to finals being over.

Many things had happened in the past few months. First, most of Cube’s executives were pressured to resign after the previous Djinn invasion incident, and a few were even put on trial.

Second, active Heroes began to patrol Cube as part of its increased security measure, and midterms were abolished, leaving only the character assessment and the final exam to determine cadets’ rankings.

Ding—

Cube's most popular coffee shop, Angel in Earth.
Chae Nayun entered this coffee shop and took a look around.

"Yo, Chae Nayun~"

A familiar voice called her. It was Yi Yeonghan.

Chae Nayun approached him thoughtlessly but realized halfway that there was an unusual member present.

Kim Suho, Yi Yeonghan, Yoo Yeonha, and Rachel.

Rachel?

For now, Chae Nayun sat down.

"How'd you do on your exam?"

Yi Yeonghan asked.

"So-so."

Replying half-heartedly, Chae Nayun staring fixedly at Rachel.

Rachel was sitting next to Yoo Yeonha. Chae Nayun couldn't understand why.

"...Oh, we're in the same class. We got close while talking about our guilds."

Yoo Yeonha noticed Chae Nayun's curious gaze and explained.

"Yep."

Rachel smiled and nodded.

"I see."

Chae Nayun slurped the coffee in front of her without saying much.

Sniff, sniff.

Then suddenly, Yi Yeonghan began to sniff the air.

"Mm, I smell something weird. Chae Nayun, did you—"

“What.”

Chae Nayun’s glared at Yi Yeonghan fiercely. Faced against her killing intent, Yi Yeonghan didn’t continue his sentence.

“N-No, nothing.”

“You better not mess with me... Oh right.”

Chae Nayun put down the coffee mug and spoke.

“I’m going to Baekdu Mountain over break. Do you want to come with me, Kim Suho?”

“...Hm?”

Kim Suho widened his eyes.

“That’s pretty sudden.”

“Shin Jonghak’s coming too.”

“Aah, no, Suho can’t go.”

Yi Yeonghan bravely cut in.

“Suho has a little something-something going on with that person. He has to spend time with her.”

“W-What are you talking about?”

Kim Suho quickly covered Yi Yeonghan’s snickering mouth. However, Chae Nayun only stared at them emotionlessly.

Feeling awkward, Yi Yeonghan and Kim Suho scratched their necks.

“W-What?”

“Having fun?”

“...”

“So? Are you coming or not?”

“I...”

Kim Suho hesitated. Yun Seung-Ah had called him last week, and they’ve been frequently talking since then...

“If I can, then I will. It’s a good opportunity.”

“Okay, good.”

That was all Chae Nayun had to say. She gulped down her coffee and shot up. Yoo Yeonha quickly held her back.

“Are you leaving already, Nayun?”

“Yeah, I have a sparring appointment with some guy named Yohei. I’ll see you later.”

Chae Nayun quickly rejected Yoo Yeonha’s gesture and left.

“You should stay a bit more...”

Murmuring meekly, Yoo Yeonha watched Chae Nayun leave sadly.

Tiriring~

At that moment, she received a message. Yoo Yeonha’s gaze fell on her watch.

[Jeronimo’s apprentice will become their official member in March.]

“...Oh?”

It was interesting news.

When Yoo Yeonha turned off her watch and looked up, she saw Rachel reading the text on her smartwatch.

“Oho.”

Then, just like Yoo Yeonha, she exclaimed in interest and raised her head.

Chapter 147

3 Years (1)

“Auu.”

Thud.

I sat down on the chair I made. I was drenched with sweat, and my fingers were numb from firing too many arrows.

“Hm? Are you tired already?”

I was in Chameleon Troupe’s training room, which was only 10% finished. From about 300 meters away, Boss’ voice rang out. Looking at her, I grinned.

“...No, not yet.”

Boss was currently helping me train.

Well, it was more accurate to say she was helping me ‘grind’. I was grinding to raise Master Sharpshooter’s grade, which was still stuck at grade-5. Trying to raise a growth-type Gift’s grade was hell itself.

“But you look tired.”

“I just have to change my weapon.”

I put my bow and quiver down.

Strength was much more important than speed and dexterity when it came to using a bow. To shoot an arrow far away with accuracy, a fair amount of strength was required.

“To a gun?”

“Yes.”

However, a gun wasn’t a bow. As I always say, guns were the best in that all I had to do was pull the trigger.

I took out my gun from Stigma and transformed it into its assault rifle mode.

“Try to dodge it if you can.”

“Sounds fun.”

Boss stretched leisurely.

As I prepared the magazines, I checked my proficiency EXP.

[Master Sharpshooter – proficiency EXP: 90%]

I was only 10% away from leveling up. In a few weeks, I should be able to get to grade-4, especially with Boss being my practice target.

“I’m starting.”

“Okay.”

Seeing Boss laugh, I pulled the trigger.

Blue magic power shot out of my gun.

The time it took me to empty the 45-round clip couldn’t be more than a second.

All bullets simultaneously shot out, hurling towards one target.

I couldn’t predict Boss’ movements. As such, I fired at places that had the highest chance to hit her.

However, Boss was quicker than the bullets. Her body weaved through the bullets like wind.

I continued to fire up to 400 bullets, but only four managed to graze her clothes.

“Haha, well done.”

Boss was still satisfied with my performance as she praised me with a hearty laugh.

I sat back down on the chair. Although pulling the trigger wasn’t difficult, I was dizzy from using Bullet Time as well.

“I’ll rest for a bit.”

“We should stop here for today.”

“...No, I’m almost at grade 4.”

“I don’t have time.”

“Ah, yes.”

I nodded and checked my smartwatch.

There were many messages I had yet to reply to.

[It’s been a month since summer break started ^_^ Oh right, I met the elemental, Shin Yeohwa-nim. You’ve heard of her too, right? She said she would take me in as her disciple!]

[Come visit England later~]

[Hajin-ssi?]

These were messages Rachel sent a week ago.

[Kim Hajin, I’m going to Baekdu Mountain, so you won’t be able to get in touch with me during summer break.]

And this was from Kim Suho.

I didn’t reply to any of them.

I was afraid.

I didn’t know if I would have to become their enemies one day.

“...Huu.”

Frustrated, I took out a cigarette.

Tzzz.

Since I used up Stigma’s magic power, I lit it with a lighter.

Boss, who was looking at me with interest, asked.

“Why do you keep smoking?”

“...Pardon?”

“That. Cigarette.”

“Uh... am I the only member who smokes?”

Boss nodded.

It made sense. They probably enjoyed drinking more than smoking.

“But there was one person who used to smoke.”

“Oh?”

I tilted my head.

‘Used to smoke.’

In truth, I didn’t know much about the Chameleon Troupe. Because I only listed out their members, I didn’t know their history.

“Is he a previous member?”

“Yeah, he said it was a habit from before he got strong.”

“Ah, it’s the same for me.”

I went with the explanation Boss gave. Boss then looked at me for a moment and murmured softly.

—You sure have many similarities.

Then, she let out a deep sigh.

“Pardon?”

“Nothing. I’m going back to my mansion now.”

“Ah, yes, take care... Oh right, Boss.”

Suddenly remembering the furniture I made yesterday, I held Boss back.

“What is it?”

“I put a bed in your room.”

“...I don’t need it. I’m not fond of beds.”

However, Boss firmly declined and left the training room.

Koong—

The door shut heavily.

“Hm, let’s see...”

I peered through the closed door.

Boss was heading to the Portal, but she slowed down little by little until she stopped in front of the Portal. After glancing back at the training room’s door, she stealthily changed course.

Her destination was a room signed Boss’ Room.

Boss made it look like she went inside the Portal, then...

Shashashak—

She entered her room and jumped on her bed.

With a satisfied expression, she rolled around on the soft bedsheet.

“Pft.”

I canceled the Thousand-Mile Eyes’ vision. Then, I turned on my smartwatch to see what was happening around the world.

===

[Trending]

1. Kim Hwanho.
2. Yi Hyojin.
3. Yun Seung-Ah.

===

“...Yun Seung-Ah?”

A name caught my attention.

[Yun Seung-Ah appointed as the guild leader of Creator’s Sacred Grace. “I will give my all for the benefit of the guild and the world”.]

“Mm.”

As expected of Yun Seung-Ah, she chose to charge through the obstacle directly. I read the article about her appointment with a smile.



...2026, August 21st.

Even at night, Baekdu Mountain's sky was lit up with numerous stars.

At the same time, tens of thousands of magic spheres were lighting up the surroundings like fireflies.

"Auu, that felt great..."

In this picturesque scenery, Kim Suho walked outside after taking a bath. Although he looked at his wrist out of habit, smartwatches didn't function in this place. Kim Suho smacked his lips and headed back to his room.

"...?"

But suddenly, a strange odor came down on his head.

Followed by an acrid, grey smoke.

Kim Suho slowly raised his head.

"...Huh?"

On the balcony of the girls' lodging, he saw a girl smoking a cigarette. She was looking up at the sky with melancholic eyes while letting out puffs of smoke.

The girl was Chae Nayun.

Caught off guard by this unexpected sight, Kim Suho only stared at her in a daze. Then, while Chae Nayun was flicking the ashes off her cigarette, their eyes met.

"What are you doing here, Kim Suho?"

"Me? Uh, well... anyways, since when have you been smoking?"

"Ah?... You don't need to know that."

"...It's not good for you. It doesn't look good either."

“I only smoke three a day anyways.”

“Then why don’t you just quit?”

Suddenly, Chae Nayun frowned.

“Shut up if you don’t know anything.”

“What? Is that something you should say to a caring friend?”

“Shut up. I’m angry that you beat me up today too.”

“..”

Kim Suho scratched his head. In today’s duel, Kim Suho thoroughly crushed Chae Nayun. He thought that would be better for her.

“Just how the hell am I supposed to beat you... huu.”

With a deep sigh, Chae Nayun put her cigarette out and threw it into a portable ashtray.

‘At least she doesn’t litter’. Kim Suho smirked.

But then Chae Nayun frowned and shot back.

“Hey.”

“What?”

“Fight me tomorrow too.”

“Sure.”

“Don’t go easy either.”

“Of course.”

Seemingly satisfied, Chae Nayun smiled.

“Then I’m heading back.”

“Yeah, good night.”

“Yeah.”

She waved her hand and walked back into her room.
But even after she left, Kim Suho remained standing in the same spot.

“...Ehew.”

Eventually, he let out a deep sigh. Feeling frustrated, he looked up at the sky. Baekdu Mountain’s sky was full of stars.

“They must have broken up for real...”

That was Kim Suho’s best guess.



...2026, December 17th.

Time flew by, and the final day of Cube’s second year arrived.
All cadets were gathered at the auditorium for the closing ceremony.
In Cube, the second year was the last year in which cadets received training. Starting from March, once their rankings were finalized today, they would be participating in real-life field training.

“Whew, I made it into the top 10.”

Yoo Yeonha let out a sigh of relief. She had already received her ranking, which would soon be announced with the rest of the cadets’ rankings.

“...Huua~”

Now, she no longer had anything to worry about.
Stretching her arms, she glanced at the seat next to her.
Beep, beep—
Chae Nayun was busy playing a mobile game. Since it looked like she wasn’t interested in talking to anyone, Yoo Yeonha strained her ears to eavesdrop on other nearby cadets.

“Ah, I’m so jealous. You’re going to Desolate Moon?”

“Yep, I’m going to work my ass off.”

Field training was structured as such.

First, guilds from across the world would select up to 10 cadets (excluding magician cadets). Then, cadets would choose one from the guilds that selected them. This field training would continue for six months, giving cadets a chance to be in two guilds. After a year, the Hero Association would appoint them as Heroes, and cadets would go on to become official Heroes in guilds or other groups.

“...Jiyoona, didn’t Essence of the Strait contact you?”

Yoo Yeonha’s ears perked up.

With Creator’s Sacred Grace falling, Essence of the Strait was the unrivaled... well, perhaps not yet. Essence of the Strait was still vying for the first place along with ‘Desolate Moon’ and ‘Cradle of Glory’.

“Yeah, I’m glad. Essence of the Strait was always my first choice.”

“Oh right, I heard Kim Suho is going to Creator’s Sacred Grace.”

“...Tsk.”

Hearing this, Yoo Yeonha suddenly felt displeased.

Kim Suho chose to go to Creator’s Sacred Grace. It was likely because of his relationship with their guild leader, Yun Seung-Ah. However, Yoo Yeonha wasn’t too upset. Although Kim Suho was certainly desirable, he was also a tiring person as well.

“Oh right, why did you choose Essence of the Strait?”

Yoo Yeonha turned around and looked at the girl sitting next to her, Rachel.

“Yes?”

“Why didn’t you choose the English Royal Court guild?”

“Oh, it’s to learn. Guilds in Korea are more advanced, so I’m hoping to learn a thing or two for the English Royal Court guild to adopt.”

Rachel gave a simple explanation.

“I see. Well, there is a lot to learn from our guild.”

Although Rachel was saying she wouldn't stick around after graduation, Yoo Yeonha no longer minded it too much. In a way, she was a lot more generous than she was freshman year.

At that moment, a deep voice rang out from the speaker.

—Kuhum. We will now announce the final rankings and commence the closing ceremony.

Every cadet faced the stage.

On a huge projector screen, the rankings of cadets popped up.

===

[Rank 1. Kim Suho]

[Rank 2. Shin Jonghak]

[Rank 3. Rachel]

[Rank 4. Chae Nayun]

[Rank 5. Yohei]

[Rank 6. Shen Yu'an]

[Rank 7. Yoo Yeonha]

[Rank 8. Yi Yeonghan]

...

[Rank 13. Yi Jiyeon]

[Rank 14. Kim Horak]

...

[Rank 33. Hazuki]

[Rank 48. Jin Hoseung]

...

...

===

“...God dammit, I'm rank 4 again because of theory.”

Chae Nayun immediately grumbled.

Although Rachel was a rank above her, Chae Nayun showed tremendous growth in the second semester. Looking only at combat training results, she rivaled Kim Suho.

Yoo Yeonha stared at Chae Nayun and carefully asked.

“...Nayun, I heard you’re going to Baekdu Mountain again.”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, sorry. I won’t be going to Essence of the Strait.”

Chae Nayun decided to go to Baekdu Mountain rather than participating in the practical field training. A special exception had been made thanks to Yoo Sihyuk’s recommendation letter.

“Don’t overwork yourself.”

“I won’t. Once I go, I won’t come down for 2, maybe 3 years. So save me a seat.”

“...You’re coming to our guild?”

“Yep.”

Yoo Yeonha should be happy, but she couldn’t smile. It was because she thought of that person every time she looked at Chae Nayun and because the truth about Chae Jinyoon tormented her.

“...Okay.”

That’s all Yoo Yeonha said.



...2027, March 1st.

It was the day Cube’s third-year students were going to work under the title of Apprentice Hero.

Yoo Yeonha stood in front of Essence of the Strait’s guild building with Rachel, Yi Jiyeon, Yohei, Hazuki, and Rose. Yoo Yeonha was proud of Essence of the Strait’s guild building, which had gotten a lot fancier than it was only two years ago.

“Young Miss, Essence of the Strait only chose us five?”

Yohei kept asking stupid questions. Yoo Yeonha frowned and glared at him.

“There are three magicians too. Rather than that, stop calling me Young Miss.”

“Haha, I apologize.”

“...Tsk. Let’s go in first.”

Yoo Yeonha entered the building with everyone else.

“Oh~ welcome~”

The person who greeted them at the lobby was Essence of the Strait’s new vice-leader, Yi Jin-Ah. Yoo Yeonha gave her a big smile, to which Yi Jin-Ah returned the same.

“I’m sure you all know me. I also looked at your profiles and specs, so let's skip over the introduction. Since it’s the first day, I’ll give you a tour around the guild. Follow me.”

Yi Jin-Ah walked to the elevator with the apprentice heroes following her like ducklings.

[Lounge]

They first stopped at the second-floor lounge.

There were 30 of the most recent virtual reality gaming capsules, 50 supercomputers, and over 100 tablets containing tens of thousands of books, and all sorts of training equipment and sports equipment.

Yi Jin-Ah proudly opened the door to this world-class lounge.

“This is the lounge we’re proud of... erm, why are there so many people here?”

However, there were more people inside than usual.

At least 50 people were crowded around a single computer monitor.

“Hey! It’s working hours, you know...”

“Ah, vice-leader! Come here, a new mercenary joined Jeronimo.”

“Jeronimo? Really?”

Yi Jin-Ah’s eyes widened, and she quickly joined the crowd. Jeronimo was a mercenary

guild that even top-ranking guilds had interest in.

“...Mm.”

“...What do we do?”

Having lost their guardian, the apprentices exchanged worried glances and stealthily walked closer towards Yoo Yeonha.

“...Ehew.”

Yoo Yeonha led the ducklings to Yi Jin-Ah. Then, she looked at the monitor with everyone else.

===

[Jeronimo's New Mercenary]

—Are you troubled by a large number of monsters? Then call this mercenary. With satisfactory speed and assertive power, he will slaughter the monsters.

Code name – Fenrir.

He is a wolf that devours monsters.

===

“Fenrir? Is this the Fenrir that I know?”

“I think so. But vice-leader, why can't we see anything more even with our guild IP?”

“Huh? Oh, that's because we aren't partnered. If you want to see the extended introduction, pay for it yourself.”

“You know that costs 100 million won.”

Jeronimo's special website required money for even the tiniest information.

Without a membership, one couldn't even access the website, and Jeronimo's membership wasn't something one could buy with just money. And even with a membership, one had to pay money to individual mercenaries to view their information.

Although Essence of the Strait purchased a membership, because they didn't purchase the 'individual information listing', they couldn't view detailed information on Jeronimo's members without paying for it.

“Hmm.”

Yoo Yeonha sneaked away to the back of the crowd and turned on her smartwatch. After accessing Jeronimo’s website and quickly paying 100 million won, she opened the cinematic trailer showing the new mercenary’s specialty and strong points.

“...Eh?”

What was shown on the video was a beautiful and artistic rain of bullets. As she had seen it before, Yoo Yeonha’s eyes widened. At that moment, she received a message.

[Hit me up if you want to employ me.]

It was from Kim Hajin.

Chapter 148

3 Years (2)

The introductory cinematic trailer was conceptually simple.

With imposing music in the background, a desolate wasteland appeared on screen.

Tap, tap.

Soon, clear footsteps rang out, and a man stood on top of a desert hill. Although his face was covered, his jet-black armor and cigarette left a powerful impression.

Next, the man spat out his cigarette and held up an assault rifle.

The camera angle then changed, showing several hundred monsters of all ranks and types rushing towards him.

Click—

A magazine clicked into the assault rifle, and the man aimed his gun forward.

From the horizon, hundreds of monsters were running towards him like a tidal wave.

However, the man faced them with a single gun.

Tudududu—

Light flashed from the assault rifle.

The bullets he fired took a mysterious course. Almost as if they were alive, they curved in all directions despite being fired in a straight line.

The man fired mercilessly. Metallic sound rang out from all the bullet casings hitting the ground, yet the man took not even a second to empty a clip and reload. The thunderous gunshot sounds never ceased.

Tudududu—

Leaving behind white trails of light, hundreds of bullets shot forward like shooting stars. This barrage of bullets completely decimated the fierce tidal wave of roaring monsters.

...Soon, the desert turned silent.

The video ended with the man sighing and looking at the camera. Shown behind him

were corpses of monsters stacked up like a mountain.

“ ... ”

Seeing the powerful ending of the video, Yoo Yeonha got goosebumps on her skin. As expected of the world's greatest mercenary group, their marketing tactic was just as spectacular.

...Of course, she had to admit that it was cringy.

But when it came to PR videos, being cringy was better than lacking.

[I just saw the cinematic trailer. My fingers and toes are curled in.]

Although the man's face was completely covered, Yoo Yeonha could tell that he was Kim Hajin.

Kim Hajin quickly replied to the message she sent.

[⇨ ⇨ I just did what I was told. By the way, that's not scripted. We actually went to Africa to take it.]

[Africa?]

[Yep.]

More than half of Africa was dominated by monsters.

Although Northern Saharan countries like Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt were still under humanity's control, Southern and sub-Saharan Africa were 'human extinction zones'.

The lands there belonged to monsters with only the law of the jungle prevailing.

[Was it Northern or Southern Sahara Desert?]

[Northern, obviously. Monsters in the South are all strong.]

[I guess you're right. Ah, have you met the Monster Lord?]

Yoo Yeonha asked jokingly.

All sorts of monstrous tales came from Southern and sub-Saharan Africa. The most famous tale was the existence of a [Monster Lord].

According to this tale, there existed a Monster Lord with an intelligence rivaling that

of a humans' with subordinates of equally capable intelligence. Supposedly, they would gather up Africa's monsters and attack humanity.

[No, but you'll be able to see the Monster Lord yourself in ten years.]

[But how did you know about the Monster Lord?]

"Pft."

Yoo Yeonha laughed. Kim Hajin sounded serious, but he had to be kidding, right? She changed the subject without much thought.

[Oh right, thank you for the ginseng you sent recently.]

[Sent? You mean sold.]

[It's the same thing. Thanks to you, we're almost ready to announce our new potion. It'll be Essential Pharmacy's official debut item. I'm sure it will turn the field upside down.]

[Congrats, that means the stocks I have will go up. Oh right, call me when you're doing testing for that potion. I'll do it for free.]

[Hm? No, it's fine...]

When Yoo Yeonha was texting excitedly to the point that other apprentices were starting to get suspicious, Yi Jin-Ah came back.

"Ah, sorry, I got distracted for a moment."

With that, she made a bitter smile.

Yoo Yeonha wrapped up her conversation with Kim Hajin and turned her smartwatch off.

"So uh... where were we? Oh yeah, guys! Say hi to our new apprentices."

Yi Jin-Ah turned around and yelled at the Heroes staring at the computer.

"Oh~? They're pretty cute. Good luck, kids."

“Hit us up if you need any help.”

“You know that we’re rank 1, right? You have to work hard if you want to survive here~”

They each sent encouraging words to the apprentices.

Of course, they didn’t forget to bow secretly when they met Yoo Yeonha’s eyes.

“Alright, let’s leave. It looks like the lounge is going to be packed today. Let’s see... ah, let’s go to my office.”

Yi Jin-Ah led the apprentices out.



On the other hand, Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan were standing in front of Creator’s Sacred Grace’s entrance.

Whish—

Cold wind sent dry leaves blowing across the entrance.

“You should really treat me well.”

Yi Yeonghan spoke as he nudged Kim Suho.

Justifiably, Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan were the only cadets who chose Creator’s Sacred Grace. If it wasn’t for Kim Suho persuading him, Yi Yeonghan would have chosen Essence of the Strait too.

“When did I ever not treat you well? You got rank 8 all thanks to me. Because I helped you train.”

“Oh please, you ran away to Baekdu Mountain for summer break.”

“...Still.”

At one point, Creator’s Sacred Grace had fallen all the way down to rank 20. Now, with the new leader Yun Seung-Ah’s reforms and successful Dungeon campaigns, they had climbed back up to rank 13.

Even so, cadets didn’t choose Creator’s Sacred Grace. Although Creator’s Sacred Grace

threw away their pride and selected cadets under rank 100, none of the cadets chose them.

In a way, cadets couldn't be blamed. There was simply no reason for them to choose Creator's Sacred Grace, which was still under the scrutiny of the public, while there were fancier, more stable choices.

"Let's go in."

"Ah~ my future is going to be ruined because of you."

"Oh please, what matters is what kind of a Hero you become. Is it really important what guild you're in?"

"Of course it is, you bastard..."

While Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan were arguing...

"Kim Suho-ssi, Yi Yeonghan-ssi."

A soft voice shook their ears.

They immediately stopped arguing and turned around.

There, they saw the guild leader Yun Seung-Ah.

"Thank you for choosing Creator's Sacred Grace."

Even with her status as the guild leader, she had come out to greet apprentice heroes. Ssss—

At that moment, a gentle breeze softly blew. Yun Seung-Ah's long hair fluttered in the air, a sweet scent spread out, and a blooming smile emerged on her face.

The two men found themselves frozen by her blinding beauty.

"...To think the guild leader would come out to greet us. This is quite nice."

After murmuring quietly, Yi Yeonghan ran up to Yun Seung-Ah.

"Guild leader Yun Seung-Ah~! I'm a big fan of yours—!"



...2027, August 10th.

Chameleon Troupe's hideout remodeling was 30% done.

After finishing today's workload, I came out to the lobby, wiping my sweat.

"Oh, Newbie, what did you make today?"

This friendly voice belonged to the Seat of Turquoise, Setryn.

Seeing her smiling at me, I retorted with a smile.

"Who knows?"

After more than a year of remodeling, the hideout became fancier and fancier, and after hearing the news, Chameleon Troupe's members often came by to hang out.

"Anything interesting?"

"No, I wouldn't say interesting."

Currently, only Boss, Khalifa, Jain, and Setryn's rooms were finished. But other than individual rooms, I also made a workshop, a training room (work in progress), a gaming room, and a bathroom.

For the individual rooms, I received sufficient payment from each member. Khalifa gave me a blue rockstone, Jain gave me a bracelet for improving energy circulation, and Setryn gave me a medicine that improved... stamina, let's say.

"I'm working on a hot spring."

"Hot spring?"

Setryn shot up with an excited smile.

"How did you know I love hot springs?"

Although I didn't plan on making one, I found an underground water reservoir, so I changed my plan.

“Um, it’s not ready yet. It won’t be finished for at least a week.”

“Is it mixed bathing?”

She licked her lips, which was a rather seductive habit of hers.
I shook my head.

“No, it’s separated.”

“...But we can still go in the same bath, right?”

Kiik—

Suddenly, the door to the biggest room in the cave opened and Boss came out. She seemed to have just woken up as she looked drowsy.

“Boss is up. I’ll leave then. Tell me when the hot spring is done~”

Setryn smiled and returned to the room.

“Haam.”

Boss rubbed her eyes and trudged up to the couch before lying down with disheveled hair. For the record, she was wearing black, silk pajamas.
No one asked her to wear pajamas, and no one gifted them to her either.
But perhaps about two months ago, Boss came back with those pajamas in her hands. When I asked about them, she called them ‘precious items for wonderful sleep’ with a pleased face.

“What happened to only needing 5 hours of sleep per week?”

“...”

Boss suddenly raised her head and looked at me.

“Was that directed at me?”

“No.”

“I see... huaam.”

Then, she yawned and buried herself in the couch.

As demonstrated, Boss was obsessed with my furniture. I couldn't blame her as the furniture I made were far better than I initially anticipated.

===

[Boss' Bed] [Superior grade] [Contains 3% magic power]

—Allure of Magic Power

*While resting in this bed, both mental and physical exhaustion will be washed away.

*Waking up in the morning on this bed will increase your perseverance by 0.3 point.

—Artistic Design

*This bed's beauty will make you want to lie down.

「Creator: Kim Hajin」

===

With Dexterity growing by the day, I was now able to make furniture containing magic power.

In a way, it was to be expected.

Since I transformed Stigma's magic power into tools and refined magic power itself into furniture, it was only natural that they contain magic power.

The result was that the furniture I made were masterpieces.

Look at those brilliant effects!

Sleeping in that bed for just a day would wash a week's worth of exhaustion clean!

But what was more important was the final line, [Creator: Kim Hajin].

This meant that the world had acknowledged my furniture making skills. If I continued to make good items, my name itself would get items to receive beneficial effects.

Though of course, there was the caveat that I would have to work hard for at least three years.

“Newbie.”

Boss called me with her eyes still closed.

“Yes?”

“My hair is itchy.”

She was clearly expressing her desire to have her hair combed.

“...You should wait until you wash your hair first—”

“It’s itchy.”

Boss bobbed her head up and down.

“It’s itchy, it’s itchy.”

Seeing me still hesitating, she began to throw a tantrum, bouncing up and down on the couch.

“It’s itchy~”

“...Alright.”

I walked up and began to comb her hair.

Boss’ hair was cleaner than I expected. If it wasn’t for the fact that I just saw her, I wouldn’t believe that she just woke up.

“Hm? You’re combing her hair again?”

At that moment, Jain walked out of the room. It seemed that she was just reading, as she was wearing a pair of round Harry Potter glasses.

“Ah, yes, she was asking for it.”

“Pft, look at Boss slumped on the couch. So cute~ Oh yeah, Newbie, have you read Violet Times?”

“Violet Times? The newspaper?”

“Yep, you’re on it as part of their top 10 rookies to watch out for. It doesn’t matter whether you’re a Djinn or a Hero, but you have to have debuted within the past 3 years to be on it.”

Jain opened a copy of Violet Times and showed it to me.

===

[Top 10 Rookies to Watch]

TOP1 – Pandemonium Arena’s Rising Star, ‘Red Death’

TOP2 – Korea’s Hero, ‘Kim Suho’

TOP3 – Jeronimo Mercenary’s Black Wolf, ‘Fenrir’

TOP4 – Descendant of the Past Era’s Savior, ‘Shin Jonghak’

...

...

...

===

“Congrats, you’re third place.”

“Oh, this is the newspaper Violet Banquet puts out.”

“Yep. Wait, don’t tell me... you still don’t have a Violet Banquet ID?”

“No, I do. It’s just that you have to be above a certain rank to receive these. It’s expensive too.”

Violet Times, the newspaper published every week by Violet Banquet.

You had to be at least at the ‘Red Ruby’ rank to subscribe, and I also heard it cost 3 million points per month.

“Still, take a look. It’s fun. Lots of countries have been asking for you recently, especially America and China.”

“Mm... those two countries are big, so they naturally have more monsters to worry about.”

My specialty was slaughtering monsters. Given that the condition was right, I could decimate over a thousand monsters under intermediate-rank grade-1 without any help. There wouldn’t be any friendly fire either with my extreme accuracy.

In fact, just a month ago, I went to China’s Guangdong Province and slaughtered hundreds of invading monsters in a single day. I don’t mean to brag, but I was treated as a hero afterwards.

The most important aspect here was 'time'.

The source of my fame came from the fact that I cleaned up the region in just a 'single' day, without any civilian casualty.

"I'm going to rest this month. I've been out too much this last month."

"Sure, just make sure you accept at least one mission a month."

As she said that, Jain put down a stack of documents on the couch.

"Pick one from here and tell me."

"Got it."

"Okay, I have something to do, so I'm leaving. Take care of Boss~ byebye~"

Jain disappeared into the Portal.

I picked up the documents with one hand and continued to comb Boss' hair.

"Mmm~"

Ignoring Boss who was humming in joy, I turned the page with Stigma's magic power.

"Eh?"

As I was glancing through them, one document caught my attention. I stopped combing Boss' hair and focused on the document's content.

"...Newbie?"

"..."

"Newbie?"

Kong, kong, kong.

But because I stopped for too long, Boss began to unhappily bounce up and down.

Kong, kong, kong.

"Alright, alright, stop bouncing. Your hair is going to get disheveled."

I put the documents down and began combing Boss' hair again.

"But like always, I'll only do it for 15 minutes a day."

I spoke firmly.

"...Just 5 minutes more."

"No."

"...Hmph."



...2027, August 14th.

On a blazingly hot summer afternoon, Essence of the Strait's apprentice heroes were out on a dispatch mission. Dispatch missions came from local governments, but they were one of the duties guilds had to perform by the central government's directive.

"Dispatch missions are rare. Guilds are only required to perform six of them a year, so it's easier to think of them as a once-every-other-month thing."

A total of eight guild members were taking part in today's dispatch mission. Of the eight, three were apprentices and five were active Heroes.

"Today's mission is a bit easy too."

The mission given to them by the local government was to destroy a goblin settlement. But because goblins weren't necessarily the easiest targets and because apprentices were participating in the mission, a high-intermediate rank grade-6 Hero was present as the leader.

"Don't underestimate them just because they're goblins."

The team leader, Im Joongjin, spoke.

The three apprentices, Rachel, Yohei, and Rose, nodded with serious faces.

"But don't be too tense either."

“Also, the most important thing in urban battles is to prevent civilian casualties. Be careful so that your magic power doesn’t fly off somewhere.”

The vice-leader, Jeon Yohwa, added. The goblins they were subjugating today built their base in a run-down building in Incheon’s outskirts. As far as she was concerned, it was quite daring for mere goblins to come so close to a human habitat.

“Alright, let’s wait for 30 minutes for the police to finish blocking the roads. Then, us active Heroes will go in first. You apprentices can follow us slowly.”

“Yes!”

“Understood!”

Rachel replied firmly with her back straight.

Chapter 149

3 Years (3)

Essence of the Strait's dispatch mission team slowly entered the building used as a goblin settlement.

...Cough, cough.

The acrid fog inside the abandoned building made Rachel's throat sting whenever she breathed. Without any other choice, Rachel covered her face with magic power.

"How long has this building been abandoned to be in such a poor state?"^[1]

Yohei asked as he cut the fog apart with his katana. His archaic manner of speech was a bit annoying, but Rachel was wondering the same thing.

They were in Incheon, even if only its outskirts. With residential districts and shopping districts tightly packed only 2 km away, how could goblins have settled in this building?

"The settlement was reported two weeks ago. By the looks of it, someone's been doing 'goblin business' here. Since the military is concentrated around the coastal area, it must have been easy for the culprit to avoid guilds' eyes."

Im Joongjin murmured with a low sigh. He didn't seem happy with how things looked.

"...Goblin business?"

"Yeah. Goblins are specialized in crafting. If they're managed properly, they can be used to obtain all sorts of items and materials. But by the looks of it..."

Im Joongjin pulled his hair back roughly and kicked a human corpse that was lying on the ground. Mushrooms and spores were already growing on the body.

"They must not have thought that goblins could trick them instead. What a bunch of fools."

Rachel finally understood what happened.

The human corpses lying inside the building must have belonged to people who reared goblins but ended up being killed by them instead. There were many such instances recorded in Cube's textbooks. As the saying went, human greed had no bounds.

—Air, here, bad.

At that moment, her elemental whispered. Rachel glanced at her shoulder. A winged, slime-like elemental was coughing.

—I want to leave.

“...”

After painstaking effort, Rachel finally learned to talk to elementals. Although she even gave a pretty name like 'Sunday' to this cute wind elemental, she had one complaint. That was that Sunday talked in Korean. It didn't make much sense to Rachel who was a native-English speaker.

“Hang in there.”

Rachel spoke in English.

—What, was, that?

However, the elemental couldn't understand her. Was it because her master, Shin Yeohwa, was Korean?

“...Just hang in there.”

“According to the local patrol force, there are about 200~300 goblins in this building.”

Im Joongjin stopped in front of the abandoned building's entrance and gave a quick briefing. A goblin settlement with a population of 200~300 was similar to the ones that naturally occurred in the wild.

“There are mercenaries waiting outside, but it'll be troublesome if goblins escape to the city. Like I said before, we'll split into two teams with Team 1 going right and Team 2 going left. Don't forget, our priority is to prevent goblins from escaping.”

Then, the eight members separated into two teams. Rachel and Rose were in Im Joongjin's Team 1, while Yohei was in vice-leader Jeon Yohwa's Team 2.

"In the case of an emergency, send a signal immediately."

"Yes, sir."

Each team wished each other good luck before splitting.

Rachel headed to the right side of the building with Im Joongjin.

Although the first floor's goblins were easily taken care of with light attacks, a problem arose as soon as they entered the second floor.

—Krrk.

—Keeek.

As though they were waiting in ambush, dozens of goblins suddenly rushed in and surrounded them.

"Front and flank! I'll handle the front!"

Along with Im Joongjin's quick order, a battle began. Im Joongjin took out his greatsword and sent sword waves flying out. Ten or so goblins were instantly cut apart by his attack.

However, the trouble was on the other side, where a group of goblins were using their most threatening weapon, poisonous darts.

"...Sunday."

However, Rachel remained calm. No matter how threatening they were, they were only blow darts in Rachel's mind.

—Un.

Sunday unleashed a blast of wind that changed the course of the darts. As the darts they shot flew back to them, the goblins panicked greatly. Without missing this opening, Rachel stormed forward and cut them down.

"...Right side is done."

“Left is done too. Thank you for taking care of the darts.”

The other apprentice hero, Rose, spoke.

The two girls smiled at each other. Perhaps because they were both from England, they became close friends.

“Good, well done.”

With Im Joongjin’s praise, their first battle came to an end.

Afterwards, they continued to sweep through the goblins on the second floor’s hallway.

Although the building was full of all sorts of traps, Rachel’s earth elemental, Okja, easily saw through them.

After smoothly clearing the second floor, the group went up the stairs to the third floor.

“...Eh?”

Then suddenly, the ground rumbled. At the same time, Rachel’s earth elemental conveyed its thought to her, that a huge explosion was rising up from the basement. Rachel could feel it as well.

“Everyone, jump outside!”

Rachel quickly alerted everyone else and ordered her elementals through thought. The numerous elementals under her control flew towards other members and formed barriers.

KWANG—!

Soon, a huge explosion rang out and the concrete floor crumbled down. The entire building was collapsing.

But as expected of Heroes, everyone was quick.

They jumped out of the building before the explosion erupted and safely landed on the ground.

“...Team leader!”

Team 2 seemed to have escaped as well, as the other four members soon appeared.

“Are you guys okay?”

“Yes, all thanks to Yohei’s sixth sense.”

“Haha, thank you for compli... eh?”

“W-What is that!?”

Destroying the entire building was their plan B. It was also why they weren’t as surprised when the building suddenly collapsed.

However, an incredulous scene was playing from the rubble of the building. All members of the dispatch team gawked at the building.

“...Well, I’ll be damned.”

The team leader, Im Joongjin, smirked.

Goblins were climbing out of the rubble. Digging through the solid ground, an army of goblins was rising.

There were too many of them to count.

“Would you look at that, they even have a goblin warrior.”

—Krrr...

One particular goblin stood out from the masses. With a vicious club in one hand, it was breathing out puffs of smoke from its nose.

A goblin warrior. Even among the various species of goblins, a goblin warrior was the strongest, boasting an intermediate-rank grade-3 rating. As far as grades went, grade-1 was the strongest with grade-9 being the weakest.

To make matters worse, there wasn’t just one goblin warrior. A total of 15 goblin warriors stood in front of the army, leading smaller groups of goblins as though they were centurions.

Koong, koong, koong.

Their tiny footsteps came together to cause a huge rumbling sound.

“Team leader, it looks like this settlement was made a long time ago.”

“...I already sent a request for reinforcement. Don’t be afraid and just prevent them

from reaching the city. We'll only have to hold out for 5 minutes, or 10 at most."

—Krrrk!

—Kueeeek!

There weren't just 200~300 goblins. No matter how one looked at it, there had to be thousands. In terms of number, the dispatch mission team was completely dominated. However, they didn't give up and got into a formation that was most efficient for taking on many enemies. They stood with a decent distance between them and prevented the goblins from heading to the city.

—Kueeeek!

As expected, goblin warriors led the charge.

An especially strong goblin warrior rushed towards Rachel. It was a troll-sized goblin that was emanating a red aura from its body.

Rachel's rapier started an exchange with its club.

KWANG!

As soon as they made contact, Rachel was thunderstruck. The difference in power between them was too great.

"Be careful!"

Team leader Im Joongjin shouted before it was too late. He was fighting four goblin warriors by himself.

"The warriors are using drugs!"

The red aura emanating from their bodies was proof of the potions the goblins made.

—Kuoooo!

The goblin warrior fighting Rachel swung its club once again.

"Kuuk!"

In an instant, a weight of several dozen tons pressed down on Rachel through her rapier.

For now, Rachel took a huge leap back.

Close combat didn't seem like a good idea.

Goblins were null-attribute monsters. She planned to unleash the power of elementals inside her weapon, Galatyn.

...However, she didn't have time.

The goblins practically threw their bodies at her. Not only goblin warriors, but even tiny goblins jumped on her legs, hindering her from movement. To make matters worse, there were archer goblins shooting poisonous darts from the back.

Even at a glance, Rachel could tell that these goblins were well-organized for battle.

“Huup!”

Rachel unleashed her magic power in all directions, blowing off the goblins sticking to her body.

—Kuoooo!

The goblin warrior didn't miss this opening and swung its huge club down at her. Rachel held up Galatyn.

However, the impact she was expecting never arrived.

“...?”

Instead, she could see strange flashes of light from the sky. A blue streak of light struck the goblin warriors' head.

KOONG!

Instantly, the goblin warrior froze.

It was bleeding from all of its orifices, but it glared at Rachel without dying. Even as its hands trembled, it tried to swing its club down at Rachel.

It didn't matter who the reinforcement was. Rachel swung Galatyn and beheaded the goblin warrior.

Now that the biggest threat was down, she turned to help others fight.

—Kueek!

—Krrrk!

—Kuoooo!

However, the other goblins fell before they could reach her.

The causes were streaks of light similar to the one that struck the goblin warrior.

Rachel put Galatyn down and fell in a daze.

“...What’s going on?”

Sssss—

From the sky, blue raindrops began to fall.

Thick streaks of light dyed the sky blue as they rained down. Almost like shooting stars, they left behind a trail of light as they struck thousands of goblins.

The goblins’ dull weapons were incapable of blocking the streaks of light.

“Ho?”

“...Wow.”

Seeing the mysterious reinforcement, all eight members of the dispatch team stopped battling. Almost as if they promised, they all turned around at the same time.

Immediately, they became speechless.

“...Ha.”

Hundreds of blue streaks of light were falling from the sky. It was as though the stars in the sky were falling down or as though a heavy rain was pouring down.

They only targeted goblins.

None could escape their reach.

“Um, team leader, this is...”

“It must be magic. So pretty...”

Unbefitting of the situation, the shooting stars shining down from a lofty height were beautiful and mystical, like they just came out of a fairytale.

“It must be the reinforcement team. Let’s go, we can’t just sit around. Looks like goblin warriors can withstand this attack. We have to deal the finishing blow.”

Seeing the overwhelming firepower of their reinforcements, the group regained their smiles.

Rachel was the only one with a serious face. She had an idea as to who the reinforcement was.

Feeling a bit of nostalgia, Rachel turned to the direction the shooting stars were coming from.

“...A helicopter?”

...In the distance, a helicopter was flying in the sky.



Chuf, chuf, chuf—

The spinning propeller roared, and my clothes fluttered from the sweeping wind. Sitting on the edge of a helicopter 2000 ft in the air, I aimed my anti-material sniper rifle at the goblin warrior in front of Rachel.

Click.

I immediately pulled the trigger. The recoil pushed my shoulder back, and the fired bullet pierced through the goblin warrior’s head. However, it didn’t die instantly, making Rachel deal the finishing blow.

“Mm, I guess not all goblins are weak.”

A six-year-old settlement was surely enough to produce some monstrosities. Still, they were irregulars. A goblin settlement rarely lasted for more than a year before they were destroyed by guilds or other monsters. However, this one managed to grow with the help of humans.

===

[We were rearing goblins and screwed up!]

—I’ve been rearing goblins in an abandoned building in Incheon’s outskirts. I must have been in this line of work for 7 years. At first, I was wary of everyone and cautious about everything, but as I gained more experience, I got more and more careless. I made over a billion won from the business, which only hindered my judgement...

...

...

The damned goblins were too clever. Without any of us noticing, they dug a tunnel underground and expanded their settlement! My employees and I found out about a month ago, but the goblins immediately killed everyone. I was the only one who escaped.

I'm afraid of dying to goblins, but I was even more afraid of being arrested. In the end, I ran away without reporting to the police...

...

...

I am writing this request with what little conscience is left of me.

I am offering 3 million Violet Banquet points.

Please destroy the goblin settlement in Yotongho's abandoned building.

===

This was the request I recently received.

In truth, this was one of the episodes I quickly glossed over without detail.

"I didn't expect this..."

I changed the Desert Eagle into its assault rifle form. I didn't feel anything in particular from the goblin army. Looking at the ground with my Thousand-Mile Eyes, I simply pulled the trigger. Hundreds of bullets clearly shot forward in the sunset.

Tudududu—

I could say with utmost certainty that my firing speed exceeded even the standard of superhumans.

===

[Rapid Fire]

*The ability to shoot something quickly.

*Using a portion of Stigma's magic power, your weapon exceeds its structural and mechanical limits.

===

This was one of the low-rank Gifts I obtained with Master Sharpshooter and Dexterity's linking. Although it only had the first effect when I got it, I added the second line with quite a bit of SP.

As a result, I could now empty two clips in 1~2 seconds.

"...There."

When I snapped out of my daze, the army was cleaned up.

Elapsed time: 4 minutes.

Used magazines: 48.

I thoroughly slaughtered every goblin, even the ones trying to escape the settlement. Goblin warriors, which were a bit more difficult to kill with the assault rifle, were taken care of by the other Heroes.

“About 1300 bullets.”

Purely in terms of profit, I didn't gain anything from this mission. Cost was also the reason that I didn't use the machine gun form. I used 1320 bullets to kill about 4000 goblins... assuming that each bullet was 100,000 won, that was still 132 million won. I wouldn't be surprised if Yoo Yeonha was starting to regret giving me a black card. After all, I was using close to 500 million won per month in just the cost of bullets.

—Oi, Hajin, is this stone tablet the item you wanted?

At that moment, Khalifa's voice rang out from the transceiver in my ear.

“Stone tablet? Can you video call me?”

Khalifa was helping me today in exchange for expanding his room and setting up a pool table.

—Okay, take a look.

I put the Desert Eagle down and looked at my smartwatch.

“Ah, yes, that must be it.”

—There are other things too. I'm grabbing whatever I can get my hands on.

“Just make sure you leave some behind. It'll be weird if there's nothing in the settlement.”

—OK.

Immediately afterwards, a Portal appeared behind me. Soon, Khalifa walked out with the stone tablet I asked for, along with a cane, urn, bottles of potions, a magician's hat, and others.

“So what does this do? I can see what the other items are for, but this is the only one I

can't grasp."

Khalifa muttered as he examined the stone tablet.

"You know how goblins like to do ceremonies and rituals? This is a ritual item they created."

The goblins in this settlement dreamed of a rebellion. Although they started out by being reared by humans, they secretly dug an underground tunnel and almost achieved an unachievable dream.

This stone tablet contained their grand dream.

That dream should have been... Incheon conquest.

They were too ambitious, and their opponent was none other than the Korean government. They simply stood no chance.

In any case, I was happy since I got to obtain this unique stone tablet.

"I see."

Khalifa gave the stone tablet to me without further questions.

"Anyways..."

Then, he stared at me with interest.

"You sure took care of them quickly. I can see why you're a specialist for mass slaughter."

"...You don't need to praise me. Even without me, those high-intermediate rank Heroes would have been fine."

Though, they would have taken more time, with some goblins running off to the city or hiding nearby.

However, I slaughtered them without leaving a single one behind.

That was the one thing I was good at.

"Anyways, don't forget your promise."

"Of course not."

"Great."

Khalifa smiled and waved his hand before disappearing.

I looked down at the ground once again.

At that moment, my eyes met Rachel's. No, I was the only one who saw her. Rachel shouldn't be able to see me from this distance.

Seeing her after such a long time, my heart beat slightly.

"...Haa."

A sigh came out.

Was this caused by luck too? Something came up, and I had to bring a helicopter here as well. My original plan was to take care of it quietly with just Khalifa...

"Hmm."

Well now that it was over, there was no reason to stay. I should go home and look at the items I obtained.

I sat down on the driver seat of my super helicopter, which had a 43% boost from Random Consolidation System.

For the record, piloting a helicopter was easy.

===

[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.

===

The saddle I bought in Clancy Islet applied to every rideable object. A helicopter, of course, was one of them.

1. Yohei has an archaic manner of speech, like samurais from historical drama.

Chapter 150

3 Years (4)

After returning my helicopter to Essential Armory, I returned home. Standing in front of the door, I checked my dimensional pouch once again. Of the items Khalifa brought back, I chose to keep some of the useful ones.

===

[Ceremonial Magic Hat] [Low-intermediate rank magic item]
Improves spirit-wielding abilities, including rituals and ceremonies.

===

[Ceremonial Ritual Wand] [Low-intermediate rank magic item]
Improves spirit-wielding abilities, including rituals and ceremonies.

===

These two items were especially noteworthy as there weren't many items that were related to spirits.

However, these weren't suitable for me. I planned to give them to a cute girl who was much better than me at wielding spirits and would look much better with them.

Luckily, I knew someone who fit the bill.

Beebeebep—

I inputted the password and opened the door.

—Four apples grow from a tree, and there are eight trees. Suppose apples are distributed among 16 people...

As soon as I entered, I heard an internet lecture. So this was why she didn't come out to greet me.

A warm smile emerged on my face.

I sneaked into the living room and glanced at the desk in the middle.

"Four apples and eight trees... so then you multiply four by eight..."

Evandel was wriggling her fingers and working on a math problem. Hayang was sprawled next to her and sleeping like a human.

I sneaked behind Evandel who was glancing back and forth between the internet lecture and the problem set.

“...Evandel?”

Then, I whispered her name. Startled, Evandel jumped slightly and turned around. When she saw me, she smiled.

—I’m studying.

She whispered proudly with a shrug.

Was she talking quietly because she was in class?

I decided to wait for now.

Tiring—

At that moment, I received a message.

[Hajin, payment from China just came. Take a look.]

The sender was Park Soohyuk, the ‘CEO’ of SH Agency.

[Got it.]

Park Soohyuk was probably the one who grew the most in recent years. The SH Agency he founded four years ago was growing at a rapid pace.

His company’s motto, ‘clear-headed honesty’, attracted many hunters and mercenaries, and the way his company handled its work earned it great trust. With Yoo Yeonha’s full support and their management of the monsters I killed, SH Agency came to put their name on the top 20 ranking of its field.

[Oh right, have you tried contacting Kim Suho?]

[I did, but it’s not easy to persuade him.]

Even without Kim Suho, SH Agency should continue to grow. However, Kim Suho without SH Agency didn’t feel right. Though, I wasn’t too worried with Yun Seung-Ah beside him.

[Tell Creator’s Sacred Grace that you would provide them with information on Dungeons.]

Park Soohyuk had a Gift too.

His Gift was called 'Search' and had the ability to discover 4~5 Dungeons a year.

[Yeah, good idea.]

—Well done~ now it's time to do more practice~

Evandel's online lecture also ended.

"Aang~"

Evandel stretched and jumped into my arms.

"Hajin~"

She rubbed her face on my chest. I stroked her hair and told her.

"Evandel, I brought you presents."

"Presents?!"

Evandel's eyes widened.

"Yep, here you go."

Tada—

I handed her the magician's hat and wand.

Evandel's mouth opened wide.

"Oooh~ what is this~?"

"Try wearing it. It will help you wield your um... power better."

I put the magician's hat on Evandel's small head and made her hold the wand. She looked like a little witch. Now she only needed a cape.

"Wow, you're so cute."

“Hehe, really?”

Evandel jumped out of my arms and ran to a mirror.

“Hmm.”

Looking at her, I fell in thought. Soon, a space for Evandel to practice spirit magic would be finished. I wanted to make her train for at least three hours a day...

“Hayang, look. It’s so pretty~”

She wouldn’t hate it, right? For Evandel, spirit magic should be like playing with Legos...

I should ask her later.



...2027, October 3rd.

As autumn trees were changing color, I installed the stone tablet in Chameleon Troupe’s hideout.

“What’s that?”

After watching me with interest for a while, Boss finally asked.

“Our new employees.”

“...Employees?”

“Yep.”

Goblin Tablet. This was the main item I wanted to get from Incheon’s goblin settlement.

===

[Goblin Tablet] [Magic Vessel] [Flame attribute]

A stone tablet containing the life-long wish of goblins. Has the ability to permanently summon goblins.

—Summonable Count

*Goblin Shaman – 1

*Goblin (normal) – 3

—Growth

*Goblins can rank up and become specialized with experience. The number of summonable goblins will also increase.

===

I wasn't sure if it was Aileen or Nicholas, but in the original story, the Goblin Tablet was used by an extremely lazy high-rank Hero. Although this item was extremely practical, it didn't have much use inside my house, so I brought it to Chameleon Troupe's hideout instead.

“Employees? This thing?”

Boss stared at the stone tablet curiously.

“Yep.”

“Hm, my only flaw is with appraisal... to me, this just looks like a stone tablet with a goblin drawn on it.”

“You're not wrong. I got it from the goblin settlement in Incheon.”

“Mn, I saw the news too.”

“I see.”

I scratched my head.

The goblin settlement incident from a month ago was reported worldwide. As it happened in Korea, it caught the attention of many. The videos taken by the mercenaries who ran away only made the matter worse.

As a result, the name of Jeronimo's Fenrir spread rapidly, netting me a decent amount of SP. But because it wasn't impactful to the main story, it wasn't all that much.

“Boss, you like coffee, right?”

“...What do you mean?”

Boss slowly shook her head.

“I don’t like anything, especially when it comes to food.”

“...You’re lying again.”

“Lying? Ehem, you’re doubting your boss too much recently.”

Boss frowned and glared at me.

I had no choice but to nod.

“Alright, if you say so. Anyways, I’m planning on making a mini-coffee shop too.”

“Coffee shop?”

“Yep, one of these guys will operate it. They’ll be in charge of the hot spring too.”

“...”

Boss tilted her head, still unable to understand.

“I’ll just show you.”

I infused magic power into the stone tablet. Then, the stone tablet shone and spat out four lumps of light which transformed into goblins.

“Oho?”

Boss’ eyes widened.

—Krrk.

—Krrr.

“Nice to meet you, I’m your owner.”

—Krrk?

—Krr?

“Be quiet. I’m going to assign you your jobs.”

I pointed at the smallest and seemingly quickest goblin.

“You’re in charge of cleaning.”

Then I pointed at the goblin with the prettiest fingers.

“You’re the barista.”

—Krrk.

“You’ll be making coffee. I’ll show you how to do it later.”

I was better at brewing coffee with my Dexterity skill, but frankly, it was too annoying. Once Boss tasted my coffee, she would surely get addicted to it as well.

“Next, you’re in charge of the hot spring.”

The third goblin was in charge of taking care of the hot spring.

“And you’re... a shaman.”

—Keruru.

The last goblin was holding a wand unlike the others.

“Alright, you’ll be the overseer for the other goblins.”

Since they were summoned creatures, they wouldn’t rebel or go against my orders. Still, it didn’t feel right to give a ‘shaman’ the same level of work as normal goblins.

—Kererere.

The goblin shaman seemed to be happy as it laughed.

“Oh right, if a magician comes by, help him.”

—Keru.

Chameleon Troupe had a magician too. Hirano Arashi, the Seat of Brown. He was a master of destruction magic and stronghold creation.

“Oho, this is interesting.”

Boss muttered, watching the scene with interest.

“Can I order them around too?”

“Of course. I’m their owner, but they should listen to Boss as well.”

Tiriring—

At that moment, I got a call from Yoo Yeonha.

“Um, let me take this.”

“Sure. Oi, you, come here.”

—Krrrk.

“...Mm, this is fun.”

Leaving Boss behind to play with the goblins, I entered my room.

“Hello?”

—Hello?

Yoo Yeonha sounded a bit thorny.

“Ah, what’s up?”

—Mm~ well, you see, I just saw your statement for this month.

I felt a pang of guilt.

—6000 bullets and 3 drones... you used close to a billion won this month.

It was more than I thought.

But I didn’t have any other choice. To create magic bullets, an expensive material called ‘mana crystals’ were needed. Since I used hundreds of bullets per day on average, the

cost could only be astronomical.

“I thought you said I could use however much I wanted.”

—Well... that’s true. To be honest, I don’t mind too much.

“Then why did you call me?”

—I just had a good idea. Do you mind if I use Fenrir’s name for marketing?

“Marketing?”

—Yep.

“...Quite greedy, aren’t you? How big are you trying to get? Isn’t your pharmaceutical company going public soon too?”

—I’m still far from being satisfied~

Essence of the Strait was growing bigger by the day. No, Yoo Yeonha was getting bigger by the day, and not in the bad sense. Essential Pharmacy’s debut potion blew up, and the other businesses Yoo Yeonha started were also showing great promise.

“So, what marketing?”

—Nothing much. We’ll just use your name for advertisement. You know, like saying ‘bullets used by Fenrir’ and so on.

“Will that even be effective?”

—Of course! Mercenaries surprisingly have clear role models. Once they pick someone as their idol, they have the tendency to use everything he does.

“I see... have your sales been bad recently?”

—No, it’s the opposite. Our bullet-making technology is improving by the day, and the gun business is always profitable.

Guns were the only weapon that ordinary people could use to fight monsters.

Of course, no one was able to reach my firepower with guns. I could add Aether to my Desert Eagle, which was already amplified significantly through effects added with Setting Intervention.

“Well, go ahead.”

—Thank you.

“No problem.”

I was about to hang up when Yoo Yeonha quickly added.

—Oh right, I saw the video of you fighting in Incheon. You looked amazing.

“...I’m hanging up.”

Even if it earned me SP, I felt uncomfortable being a hot topic.

—Don’t worry, Nayun is in Baekdu Mountain, so she won’t be able to see it.

I flinched.

“No, it’s not that...”

—Ah, I’m hanging up now. I have to go somewhere.

“...Alright, have fun.”

—You too.

Tk.

Yoo Yeonha hung up first.

I stared at my smartwatch for a moment, then jumped into my bed.



...2028, January 1st.

A new year’s sun rose up.

As is tradition, all sorts of celebrations were being held across the globe.

Pandemonium also had an exciting event planned for this holiday.
'Fight Club'.

For this event, Pandemonium's famous Ten-Thousand Demon Arena was completely open to the public.

"I'm surprised you're sitting here so peacefully."

As things were being torn apart, crushed, and obliterated on the ground level, the waiting room of the arena's Demon rank warrior was completely peaceful.

"Hello? Are you going to just ignore me?"

Bell asked Jin Sahyuk who was lying on her bed and reading a newspaper.

"...What point is there in going down anyways. They're all going to be trash."

Jin Sahyuk muttered apathetically.

"Ehew."

Bell scratched his head and sat down on the couch.

He suddenly thought back to a year ago. That was when Jin Sahyuk first announced her debut in the arena.

At the time, Bell hoped for her to get crushed. He wanted her to learn humility and modesty.

However, his wish didn't come true. In fact, it was the opposite. Jin Sahyuk crushed her way through the arena until she gained over 40 victories and obtained a personal waiting room and the title 'Demon'.

"Wait, you're reading a newspaper?"

Bell suddenly got curious. Although Jin Sahyuk liked reading books, she never liked reading newspapers.

"If you're curious, take a look."

Jin Sahyuk opened this week's issue of Violet Times.

Bell widened his eyes and read its content.

===

[Top 10 Rookies to Watch (New Year vers.)]

TOP1 – Demon of the Arena, ‘Red Death’

TOP2 – Follower of Michael, ‘Kim Suho’

TOP3 – Slaughter Wolf, ‘Fenrir’

...

...

===

It was the Violet Banquet’s ranking of rookies. As all candidates were judged strictly and rankings were renewed monthly, it was quite a meaningful list.

“Top 10 Rookies. You’ve been first ever since you debuted.”

Jin Sahyuk smiled as she stared at the newspaper.

“Kim Suho’s second.”

Then, when Bell mentioned the second ranked rookie, her face contorted with rage.

“Kim Suho, Kim Suho...”

She began to murmur his name angrily.

“By the way, can’t you see the name below that?”

“What.”

“Below Kim Suho.”

Bell pointed at the name below Kim Suho.

TOP3, Fenrir.

“Fenrir? Is he a werewolf?”

Jin Sahyuk tilted her head.

“...No.”

Bell couldn't blame her. He knew she was weak in that field.

"This is him. The coin dude."

"...It's him?"

Immediately, Jin Sahyuk's face distorted viciously.

Jin Sahyuk stared at the name fixedly.

"Coin, coin..."

It seemed she didn't know his real name as she began to mutter something about coins. Her voice contained the same level of rage as when she muttered Kim Suho's name.

"...What an idiot."

Bell sighed.

However, he didn't mind Jin Sahyuk gritting her teeth. Her rage would surely serve as a foundation for her growth.

"I think he'll come find me."

At that moment, Jin Sahyuk suddenly spoke with a somewhat serious expression. Bell sneered.

"Pft, and why do you think that?"

"I heard there's going to be a huge event in the arena next year. I think we'll meet then."

This was something Bell had heard about as well.

The owner of Pandemonium Arena announced that he would host a huge competition over an item in 2029.

"I see, then you might be right~"

Bell grinned.

"...Do you have to always sound like an ass? Screw off before I kick you out."

Jin Sahyuk had not changed.



...2028, March 1st.

Third-year cadets finished their apprenticeships.

Rachel stood in front of Essence of the Strait's entrance. She was saying goodbye to her comrades who had laughed, cried, and sweated with her for the past year.

“Haa...”

Although she steeled her heart before the day began, now that it was time to leave, Rachel couldn't help but sigh.

Many people she got to know were in front of her.

Team leader Im Joongjin and vice-team leader Jeon Yohwa who guided her for a year. Her past classmates, Rose, Yi Jiyeon, and Yohei, who were now official members of Essence of the Strait.

And finally... Yoo Yeonha.

Rachel was filled with regret and sadness.

Before she realized, she had gotten close to everyone.

Coming to terms with this revelation, Rachel smiled bitterly and straightened her posture.

“Thank you for everything.”

Then, she bowed respectfully as was taught by the royal court.

“Goodbye.”

“See you~”

“I'll come visit~”

Yoo Yeonha and everyone else waved their hands at her. Rachel replied with a smile and turned around.

A limousine had come to pick her up.

Feeling like she would burst into tears if she hesitated any longer, she quickly got into

the limousine.

“Where should we go, Princess?”

Jeremy Bond, the agent who was watching her from the shadows for the past year, asked in her mother language.

Rachel replied with a trembling voice.

“To the English Royal Court guild, obviously.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

The limousine drove off.

Rachel looked outside the window and captured the moving scenery.

‘I’m finally leaving Korea.’

Feeling sentimental, Rachel took out her smartwatch to play a game and get her mind off of things.

“...Eh?”

However, one mercenary’s trending name caught her attention.

Jerónimo’s mercenary, Fenrir, had defeated yet another army of monsters.

“...I’m hearing a lot about him recently.”

Rachel whispered to herself.

Kim Hajin had chosen to become a mercenary.

Showing shocking results, he had already become famous throughout the world. Of course, more people knew him by his title, Fenrir, than his real name, which had not been released officially.

“...He never contacted me.”

‘He said we would meet often. That he’d come visit me in England. Was everything a lie?’

Rachel pouted but soon acquiesced.

'He must have been busy. Unlike me who was an apprentice, he must have been fighting much more difficult enemies in much fiercer places. He must be sleeping in places where his life is in danger every moment. That must be the life of a high-rank mercenary... probably.'

"Huu..."

After a deep sigh, Rachel tapped on her smartwatch and left a positive comment on an article about Fenrir.

Chapter 151

3 years (5)

Creator's Sacred Grace, guild leader's office.

Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan were sitting in front of Yun Seung-Ah. However, all three parties present seemed to have their own worries as their expressions weren't good.

"Here, it's the official application form."

Yun Seung-Ah initiated the conversation as she put two application forms on the table. Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan picked up the forms simultaneously.

[Creator's Sacred Grace Application Form]

Starting salary of 400 million won plus performance-based benefits.

Compared to the 150~200 million won salary average Cube graduates received, it was a hefty amount, especially considering Creator's Sacred Grace's current situation.

"Oh?"

Yi Yeonghan's expression brightened. He seemed to have had monetary worries.

However, Kim Suho was the opposite. He looked more worried than anything at the high salary he was offered.

Creator's Sacred Grace has been in the red for a while. This was something most of the public knew because of the numerous articles that popped up daily. Creator's Sacred Grace suffered astronomical punitive damage in lawsuits and settlements to wounded or killed victims of their failed Tower campaign. To make up for their losses, they had to conquer at least 30 small Dungeons.

"...It might not be enough, but this is the best we can do."

Yun Seung-Ah misunderstood Kim Suho's expression.

In truth, Creator's Sacred Grace's budget was at its limit. Not only could they not afford to give out any more, some of the amount that was offered also came out of Yun Seung-Ah's pocket.

“No, it’s fine.”

“I’m happy too with this amount.”

Kim Suho didn’t say anything in consideration of Yun Seung-Ah’s pride, and Yi Yeonghan signed the form satisfied.

“Great... then you can go take a look at your assigned offices.”

“Yes!”

“...Yes.”

Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan left, and Yun Seung-Ah was left alone in her office.

“Haa.”

She let out a deep sigh.

Money. Money. Money.

This word continued to haunt her from all directions. She never thought money would be a problem she had to face, but the amount of debt she incurred in the past two years was 5 billion won.

“My net worth used to be 5 billion won...”

Yun Seung-Ah laughed self-mockingly and picked up her phone. She no longer hesitated to make calls to borrow money. Her pride was long gone from all the bank trips she had to make in the past two years. Rather than worrying about today, she was more concerned with figuring out how to survive the next day.

Tiriring—

—Hello?

“...Hello? Unni?”

—Oh, what’s up?

“It’s me, Yun Seung-Ah.”

—I know.

“Ha, haha, right.”

Yun Seung-Ah laughed awkwardly.

After hesitating for a bit, she chose the easy way out.

“How have you been doing lately?”

—Hah? Anyways, do you want to reconsider? We still have seats open.

Aileen quickly made a counteroffer. Taken aback, Yun Seung-Ah was at a loss for words.

—Why do you care so much about that guild anyways? Do you want to be a guild leader that much? Even when you have to go through so much? Last time I checked, your guild was still at rank 20.

“...It’s rank 13 now. We recovered a bit. Plus, it’s been my dream to become Creator’s Sacred Grace’s guild leader ever since I was young. I achieved my dream, so um... Unni.”

—What.

Thanks to what Aileen said, Yun Seung-Ah’s tension loosened.

She decided to be a bit more shameless.

“Can you lend me some money?”



...2028, June.

Because of the ‘Silver Moon’ phenomenon, monsters all over the world began to go wild. Governments began to issue a state of emergency and ordered guilds to destroy monster habitats.

Creator’s Sacred Grace’s Hero, Kim Suho, showed fantastic results. He destroyed a settlement of ‘Blood Bears’ located in Suwon’s mountain range and became the youngest intermediate-rank Hero as a result.

Soon afterwards, Shin Jonghak achieved a similar result and also became an intermediate-rank Hero.

...2028, August.

Essence of the Strait's businesses, 'Monster Corpse Dismemberment and Refinement' and 'Mana Crystal Refinery', were founded. Even in Korea, these two factories contained state-of-the-art mana technology.

"We'll start the ribbon cutting ceremony~"

The opening ceremony was grand. Essence of the Strait's guild leader, Yoo Jinwoong, its vice-leader, Yi Jin-Ah, SH Agency's CEO, Park Soohyuk, the mayor of Uijeongbu, and Yoo Yeonha were all present.

Clap, clap, clap—

Along with a roaring applause, the ribbon cutting ceremony ended.

"Good work."

Yoo Yeonha shook hands with Park Soohyuk. These two factories were made possible thanks to Essence of the Strait's partnership with SH Agency. SH Agency's numerous hunters provided them with monster corpses, making the cost of production much cheaper.

"So from now on, we should transfer all the monsters Fenrir kills to this place?"

"Yes, but in front of me, you can just call him Kim Hajin."

"Ah... yes, understood."

"Then I'll take my leave."

"Yes, see you later."

After giving Park Soohyuk a warm smile, she approached Yoo Jinwoong who was waiting for her by the limousine.

...2028, October.

The number of aerial and oceanic monsters exploded. Because of this sudden increase,

island countries like Japan and England were greatly impacted. A portion of England's islands and Japan's Kyushu island were immediately designated as intermediate-rank danger zones.

...2028, December.

Japan requested assistance from Korea and the Hero Association, while England put out mercenary recruitment ads to deal with the situation themselves.

Frankly, their decision was met with ridicule from the rest of the world.

Then...

2029, February.

On Baekdu Mountain's summit, where fierce wind blew...

"Ready."

A battle was about to take place.

Strangely, even the spectators were clad in qi reinforcement. This was because Baekdu Mountain's mana-infused wind was different from ordinary wind. As today's wind carried especially threatening energy, it was no different than knives that could cut skin.

"..."

Amidst this iron wind that would have cut apart ordinary people's flesh, Chae Nayun was glaring at a man. Her muscles were tense, and nervousness cooled her head.

"Start."

As soon as the start of battle was signaled, Chae Nayun pulled out a 1.8-meter longsword. Highlander's Claymore. It was a historical-grade artifact gifted by Chae Shinhyuk.

On the other hand, her opponent only had an ordinary sabre.

"Come."

Chae Nayun didn't rush forward. Instead, she swung her sword from a distance. Her longsword instantly transformed into a 20-meter-long beam.

However, her opponent was no slack. He calmly blocked her sword and rushed

towards her.

Woong—

As the man's sabre shot towards her, Chae Nayun jumped high enough to touch the clouds.

From the sky, she changed to a reverse-grip. She was clearly trying to strike down with her sword, an ultimate technique she learned secretly.

"...Haaaaap—!"

With a roar, she descended.

Objectively speaking, what Chae Nayun did was only a simple jump-and-strike attack. Her opponent easily dodged her attack. The simple nature of the attack made him suspicious.

However, the 'real' attack was what came next.

Chae Nayun twisted her sword, which was still stabbed into the ground, in a 90-degree angle.

Magic power instantly erupted from the ground.

"What!?"

The man didn't have a chance to react.

A thunderous roar rang out. As though a volcano was erupting, cracks appeared throughout the entire arena, and terrifying pillars of magic power shot out. Looking closely, one could see that the pillars all had the image of swords.

Swept by the wave of giant sword pillars, the man flew backwards helplessly.

"..."

Their battle ended in only three breaths.

"...Chae Nayun wins."

The judge pronounced the victor.

"Thank you for the lesson."

Chae Nayun sheathed her sword and bowed.

The man who was sent flying raised his upper body and gave her a thumbs up. The spectators watching the battle broke out into cheers and applause.

“Heh.”

Yoo Sihyuk stared at Chae Nayun with a satisfied smile.

Chae Nayun wiped off the sweat on her forehead and bowed to Yoo Sihyuk.

“You’ve grown a lot.”

Yoo Sihyuk was genuinely impressed.

Chae Nayun was only 21. Only two years had passed since she began to train in Baekdu Mountain.

However, she grew faster than anyone else who trained in Baekdu Mountain. She poured every second of her free time into sword and magic power practice, allowing her to achieve victory over the instructor who taught her for the past two years.

At the same time, Yoo Sihyuk felt a bit sad.

“...Like you said, you’re more than ready to return to the secular world.”

Today was the day Chae Nayun was leaving Baekdu Mountain. She still had an old grudge to resolve and old debts to repay.

As her master, Yoo Sihyuk wanted to hold her back. Although she grew in might, he knew her heart was still wavering.

However, Chae Nayun was firm in her conviction.

KWANG!

After putting her sheathed sword down, she bowed.

“Thank you for everything.”

Yoo Sihyuk stared at her with a somewhat dissatisfied look. Then, he decided to ask her one last question.

“Do you really plan on joining a guild?”

With Yoo Sihyuk’s recommendation, Chae Nayun was able to become a Hero without going through an apprenticeship. However, Yoo Sihyuk knew Chae Nayun well. For the work she wanted to do, being a mercenary was more suited than being a Hero.

“Yes.”

Even so, Chae Nayun nodded firmly. The twisted smile on her face bothered Yoo Sihyuk slightly.

“If you want, I can introduce you to the Vast Expanse.”

“I will have to decline that offer.”

“Why?”

“...You sure have many questions.”

“What’d you say?”

Heh. Chae Nayun smirked.

“It’s been my dream to become a Hero, so it’s only obvious. I don’t want to give up on it with lame excuses.”

She remembered hearing about it. That it was foolish to give up on a dream because of a man.

She agreed with it one hundred percent.

Out of spite, out of refusal to lose, she planned to become a Hero.

“...Fine, then pack your belongings and leave. I assume you can go down by yourself.”

“Of course.”

“...”

Yoo Sihyuk turned around to hide his hurt expression. Chae Nayun remained bowing as Yoo Sihyuk walked away.

Koong.

Chae Nayun didn’t raise her head until her master’s office door closed shut.

“You’re the best, Unni!”

“That was amazing, Noona~!”

After waving her hand at the younger disciples who looked at her like an idol, she returned to her room. Living here for the past two years, she had grown quite accustomed to this place.

“Let’s see, what do I need to pack...”

After opening her suitcase, she looked around the room for things to pack. But because she didn’t bring much to begin with, there wasn’t much to pack. Then suddenly, she saw a pack of cigarettes sitting on her desk.

“...How many did I smoke today?”

She tilted her head as she put one in her mouth. When she lit it, cigarette smoke entered her mouth.

“Cough. Auu, so bitter.”

She couldn’t get used to this acrid smell no matter how many times she smoked. It was likely that her body just wasn’t suited to smoking. Even so, she still smoked three times a day. She felt it was her duty. So that she doesn’t forget. So that it doesn’t weather from time. So that she doesn’t forgive subconsciously. For these reasons, she took on this hated smell three times a day.

“...Eh?”

While she was looking around the room smoking, she caught sight of a gaming helmet sitting in the corner of her drawer. A bitter laugh came out. She remembered often playing with it four years ago. To reminisce the past, she picked up the helmet.

“...Hmm.”

She put her cigarette out and lied down on the bed.
Tok, tok.
She pressed the button on the helmet and found that it still worked.

“Should I give it a try?”

She put the helmet on for the first time in years.
The helmet's iris scanner activated as the world around her turned dark.

[Iris scan has been completed.]
[Nayunjajangman-ssi, welcome back.]

“Yeah, hi.”

She didn't plan on playing anything. She only wanted to reminisce.
But when she logged in, there was an alert in front of her.

[Today is the last day of service for 'Gladiator of the Century'. We would like to give a warm thanks to all the support you have given us over the years.]

“Eh?”

The game she used to enjoy that once dominated the gaming scene had met its end. It seemed it couldn't withstand the test of time.
Feeling somewhat bitter, Chae Nayun logged into Gladiator of the Century.

—I logged in one last time T.T
—Me too~ I used to love this game.
—Is anyone from the Hero clan~?

The lobby was full of people who came to reminisce like her.

“Should I play it one last time?”

Wondering if there was anyone to play with, Chae Nayun looked through her friend list.

“...Ah.”

There, she found someone who was more like a memory than a friend.

[Extra7 (currently online)]

A smile emerged on her face. She opened the private message window, but seeing the

conversation she had with him before, her face stiffened. She was embarrassed and annoyed at the same time.

“Auu, you crazy idiot loser.”

Chae Nayun was about to wipe the message log but stopped. Although she couldn't bear to watch her younger self's immature conversation... she knew they would disappear once the service ended.

‘They’ll disappear even if I don’t erase them.’ Telling herself so, she slowly typed on the message window.

[Um, Hyung-nim. Are you... awake?]



I was lying in bed.

Recently, there hasn't been much to do. The laptop update was still underway, and there was a while to go before the start of the next episode I knew.

As a result, training and playing around was all I've been doing lately. I've gotten quite used to this lifestyle thanks to finding a few dramas and variety shows to watch.

“...Ehew.”

The most painful part was going to bed. I had trouble falling asleep as all sorts of thoughts constantly plagued me.

Insomnia. It was a chronic condition I suffered from.

“Oh right.”

I suddenly caught sight of the VR helmet by my bed. Thinking I could put on a sleep-inducing video, I put it on.

As soon as I entered the lobby, an alert popped up.

[Today is the last day of service for ‘Gladiator of the Century’. We would like to give a warm thanks to all the support you have given us over the years.]

“Ah, so this is disappearing too.”

I suddenly realized how much time went by. I remembered playing this game a lot in the past. I even made a friend.

I never said goodbye as I naturally stopped playing the game when I got busy. Curious, I logged in.

“A lot changed, huh.”

I was put into a waiting room which didn't exist in the past. It seemed the game developers did everything they could to not fall behind.

“Hm.”

Looking around here and there, I reminisced on the old features and observed the new ones.

[Um, Hyung-nim. Are you... awake?]

Ding— Suddenly, I received a message.

The sender was Nayunjajangman.

I immediately recalled the past.

To be honest, I was happy to the point my drowsiness washed away.

[Yeah, I'm awake. It's been a while, man. ㄹ ㄹ]

[I think so too.]

“Oh?”

After four years, the way he talked seemed to have changed. It was more... mature. It made sense. After all, he had to be an adult now.

[Do you want to play a match?]

Nayunjajangman asked.

[Match?]

[Yep.]

[Sure.]

Since the game was closing soon, I felt more than happy to play one last time. In the middle of pressing buttons to host a room, I suddenly stopped. I used to be his master, so I didn't want to lose to him so easily.

[Let me relog real quick.]

I took off my helmet.

—Scan.

Then, I logged back in after consolidating my helmet.

◇ ◇ ◇

Extra7: [Go?]

[Go.]

The match began after a brief exchange.

I had a sabre and a shield while my old master, Extra7, had an axe and a shield.

The control felt a bit weird as I hadn't played for a while, but my sharper senses and experience were more than enough to cover it. At least, that's what I thought.

“Uuk!”

Boom. Extra7's axe struck my shield, pushing my character back against the wall. I quickly rolled to the side and dodged his follow-up attack.

“Iik!”

Koong. This time, he attacked my face with his shield.

“Ah, dammit!”

I tried to counterattack after barely dodging his attack.

Whoosh—

However, my character shot up into the air from his sudden summersault.

That was it.

I was hit and killed with a 108-hit combo in the air.

The first set was a complete loss.

“Ha, what the hell was that combo? Jesus.”

An astounded laugh came out. It seemed my old master was still worthy of being my master.

“...He’s so good.”

As soon as my murmuring ended, the second set began.

This time, I took the fight more seriously.

I changed my weapon to a longsword.



[Victory]

“...I almost lost.”

Nayunjajangman was much better than before. Or maybe I got worse. In any case, his sharp and reckless counterattacks were hard to deal with.

[Thank you for the match. I see that you’re just as good as before.]

As soon as the match ended, Nayunjajangman messaged me.

[You improved a lot. Did you continue playing?]

[No, what about you?]

[I didn’t play either. I just logged in after hearing that the service was ending soon.]

[Wow, then you must be super talented. I’m impressed, Hyung-nim.]

“...Pft.”

The way he talked made me laugh.

The kid who used to ask me for dating advice was now a full-fledged adult.

[Ah, Hyung-nim, you're currently active, right?]

Jajangman suddenly asked a strange question.
Active? This word had many meanings in this world.

[Well, I guess you could say that. What about you?]

Did he also become a mercenary?

[I'm not active yet ㄹㄹ but I will be soon.]

[Oh? Are you a trainee?]

[Something like that.]

I see, so that's why he became so serious.

[Good luck.]

[Thank you. Ah, don't you think we'll meet one day? ㄹㄹ]

I smiled. 'Regardless of whether you're an apprentice hero or an apprentice mercenary, I'm no longer someone you can meet so easily.'

[Maybe, if you continue to work hard.]

[I see. Ah, apparently the service is ending soon.]

[ㄹㄹ kk.]

I received an alert too.
—The service will end in 30 seconds.
I smiled bitterly and slowly typed my goodbye.

[Good luck. Be happy.]

Jajangman's reply came instantly.

[It's too late for me, but be happy too, Hyung-nim.]

I wanted to reply to him.

I didn't know what happened, but I couldn't bear to watch a kid be so hopeless. However, before I could type anything, my surroundings changed.

[The service has ended.]

[We offer our greatest gratitude to all users who supported Gladiator of the Century.]

[Goodbye.]

Only the game developers' final messages were left in front of me.

Chapter 152

3 Years (6)

2029, April 3rd.

In Chameleon Troupe's secret hideout located in England's Bristol Channel, I was fully relaxed and reading a newspaper on the couch. Next to me, Boss was playing a game.

[English Royal Court guild partners with mercenary groups...]

[English Channel's high-intermediate rank monster, Megalodon, has been defeated by English Royal Court guild's Team 1. Rachel, the guild's youngest team leader, shows her exceptional skills...]

[Princess Rachel appointed as the Royal Court guild's youngest vice leader.]

[Trust in England at an all-time low.]

Currently, popularity of England's leadership was steadily going downhill. Ordinary newspapers and even the Violet Times predicted a grim future for the country.

"Hm..."

Looking at the headline, I sighed and put down the newspaper. The news I was hoping to see was nowhere to be found.

The news about 'entrance tickets' should be popping up soon. How much longer was I supposed to wait?

"Knng~"

Feeling a bit sore, I stood up and stretched. Then, I looked around Chameleon Troupe's hideout which was about 65% complete.

A lot had changed in the past 3 years. In a way, it was quite dramatic.

To be honest, I was proud of the changes I brought.

The dome ceiling above had crystal chandeliers and gem-like lights beautifully hanging down. The red, vintage-style walls were full of art Boss brought back from her secret stash.

It wasn't just the interior I was proud about. The hideout had many convenient

facilities.

The goblin coffee shop in the corner of the lobby provided highest-grade coffee, and many of my magical furniture pieces were also placed around the hideout.

In the center... what was that again?

A ginormous mana crystal that was almost as big as Cheok Jungyeong's thigh was purifying the air inside the cave.

For the record, that almond-shaped crystal was something I took from Boss' secret vault. I remembered Boss throwing a tantrum about not wanting to keep it. She reluctantly agreed when I threatened that I wouldn't comb her hair ever again.

However, that was still only the tip of the iceberg. What I just described was only the hideout's lobby.

Outside the lobby, there was a hot spring, a shooting range, a training room, a library, a game room, a cafeteria, etc...

"Kuhaha—!"

The door to the lobby suddenly shot open, and a giant stormed in. Boss, who was playing a game on the couch, looked up with a frown.

"It's crazy out there, Boss!"

"...Did something happen outside?"

"Oh, Newbie! You're here too?"

Cheok Jungyeong smiled brightly as he held something up. It was a sea monster twice the size of his body.

"Monsters underwater are going crazy!"

"...Gyeong, what is that."

"A sea monster. This blind bastard kept bumping into me, so I hooked it up. It's a blue ocean fish."

Blue ocean fish. It was a delicious species of fish that was classified as a fish rather than a monster.

Hearing these three words, Boss smacked her lips. Then, she glanced up at me.

She was clearly telling me to cook it for her.

“Blue ocean fish, huh.”

I started cooking for Boss three months ago, mostly because controlling her with just combing her hair could get difficult.

Like how the monkey in the story of the ‘monkey’s flower sandal’ grew too used to wearing sandals, my strategy was to slowly get Boss addicted to things I provided until she couldn’t live without me.

Not that Boss was a monkey, of course.

“You know about it?”

Cheok Jungyeong laughed and threw the blue ocean fish down.

For the record, other members didn’t know I was good at cooking. Because I was too lazy to cook for everyone, I only revealed it to Boss. She considered it special treatment and enjoyed it.

“You can keep this guy in the fridge and eat it later.”

Hearing his kind offer, I looked down at the blue ocean fish. I wasn’t sure if it was still alive or spasming out after death, but the way it violently flopped around was scary.

“Boss, come out if you’re bored. It’s really fun.”

“...I’m fine. You can enjoy it alone.”

“Hehe, don’t regret it later.”

Cheok Jungyeong’s latest hobby was fishing. Because having to use the Portal was too troublesome, I created a secret pathway connecting the hideout to the ocean (obviously, it was covered with an illusion magic and a fortress-grade seal to prevent outsiders from recognizing it). Ever since Cheok Jungyeon took a liking to it, he’s been using it once a week to go fight sea monsters. I remembered him saying something about wanting to overcome the restraint of the ocean.

“Anyways, I’m going back out!”

Cheok Jungyeong left the lobby.

KOONG!

He should really stop slamming the door close.

“Oh right—!”

Cheok Jungyeong quickly came back in.

“I almost forgot. Oi, Bling, give me an americano.”

The barista goblin quickly reacted to Cheok Jungyeong’s command. As expected of a barista with a year’s worth of experience, the goblin named Bling made an americano in the blink of an eye.

“Perfect.”

Gulp, gulp—

Cheok Jungyeong emptied the 2-liter cup in only three seconds before leaving.

“Guys.”

When I clapped, the six normal goblins gathered around the blue ocean fish.

—Krrk.

—Kururu.

The goblins discussed which part of the fish to grab then ended up equally putting it on their shoulder.

“...Newbie?”

Boss, who was watching from the couch silently, suddenly asked. For some reason, she was already drooling.

“Yes?”

“When is breakfast?”

Boss was honest when it came to food.

In fact, most strong people were like that. They could rein in their sexual desire or

desire to sleep, but they couldn't withstand hunger because of their bodies' high metabolism.

"30 minutes later."

"...I see, ssp."

Boss nodded with a look of anticipation.

I grinned and turned on my smartwatch. Just in case, I checked Violet Banquet for any news on 'entrance tickets', but the only thing that popped up were tickets to amusement parks. Disappointed, I checked the trending topics.

[Fenrir unseen for six months! Was he just another seasonal mercenary?]

There was another article about Fenrir. When I was active, they criticized me for using my Gift for money, but now that I wasn't, they were berating for a different reason. I skipped the article and checked the comments.

[Rachel0418]

Then what, you expect a mercenary to work for free? -.- I'm sure Fenrir is taking a rest because people like you keep bothering him. -.-

"Pft."

As I expected, there was another comment from Rachel. Was she looking at online articles all the time?

Click.

I liked the comment without much thought.

Then suddenly, a lightbulb went on in my head.

"...Oh right."

The Royal Court guild was fated to obtain 'entrance tickets' faster than other guilds. When it came to entrance tickets, their 'rank' was the most important. Still, it was nice to have extra tickets. Since I was also worried about England's situation which was worse than what I predicted...

"Boss."

“Mm?”

“I have an idea.”

Staring at Boss’ eyes, I began to choose words for a negotiation.

But regardless of what my idea was, Boss was likely to agree with the blue ocean fish being my negotiation tool.



April.

The Royal Court guild greeted its new apprentice heroes. In any other year, England should be booming with tourists who would come to enjoy its beautiful spring.

“...Haa.”

The weather was great, but the Royal Court guild’s vice-leader Rachel was sighing.

“I didn’t learn any of this in Cube...”

She became the youngest vice-leader because the previous vice-leader was scouted by a guild in Korea. As the position was practically pushed onto her, she didn’t know what to do with the heavy responsibility she now had. England and the Royal Court guild’s situation was that bad. Rachel didn’t blame the vice-leader who ran away either.

“...Ehew.”

Rachel scrolled through the emails on her computer screen and sighed.

[Thank you for contacting Desolate Moon. We received the Royal Court guild’s request for aid, but military negotiations should be done through the Association...]

The Royal Court guild’s requests for aid were all declined. Of course, as the above example showed, not all were flat-out rejections. In fact, most advised to request aid from the Hero Association.

However, Rachel knew all too well what that meant. Once the Association was brought in, the Royal Court guild would lose too much influence and control. Just like how Roton Corporation schemed to take control over Clancy Islet, the Association was

likely to ask England something similar.

England couldn't afford to set its house on fire to catch a flea.

...Though, the flea was absurdly big.

"Sylvie, how many representatives are we scheduled to meet today?"

Rachel called her personal secretary.

—13 in total. 11 of them are already waiting in the building.

When the number of monsters exploded, the Royal Court guild decided to partner with mercenary groups. It only made sense as they were separate from the Association's influence.

"So most of them are here."

Of course, as the number of monsters in England increased, the Royal Court guild and its Heroes would gain more experience. Then, their guild ranking would naturally go up and they would have more monster corpses to use for research and development. However, the question was whether England had the power to overcome the odds.

—Shall I send them in?

"Yes, one at a time."



England, London outskirts.

Ordinary citizens were full of tension as they walked around the streets. Nowadays, they didn't feel safe even in their country's capital. The monsters living in River Thames were too ferocious.

"I'm going to leave the country for a while."

"Where are you going?"

"Korea. My older brother has residency there. He's not in Seoul, but it should still be safer than here."

“Ah, I’m jealous.”

They didn’t sound too hopeful either as they worried about their country’s future and their loved ones’ safety.

Almost as if to confirm their worries...

Wiing—

Wiing—

The siren suddenly went off, alerting that monsters had invaded.

At the same time, a manhole in the middle of the street shot open and monsters began to climb up. Sea Moles, Greed Toads, Giant Catfish, etc. They were all low-rank ~ low-intermediate rank monsters, but not only were they too much for ordinary civilians to deal with, there also were just too many of them.

“Uu, uwaak!”

Monsters that popped out of the manhole quickly took over the streets. Flashing their bloodthirsty eyes, they chased people who were running away.

The civilians did all they could to avoid being devoured.

However, without guns, even low-rank monsters were too much for ordinary people to handle.

—Ribbit!

A Greed Toad jumped on top of a woman.

“L-Let me go!”

She punched the toad’s face, but it was futile. The toad opened its mouth with a cheeky smile.

...It was then.

BOOM!

The toad’s head suddenly exploded.

“Uu, uuu...”

A mysterious attack saved the woman. Suddenly being covered with the fluids of a monster, the woman was unable to properly assess the situation. But knowing that

she was saved, she began to escape.

At that moment, another monster jumped towards her. This time, it was a Sea Mole.

—Grrr...

“Ah...”

However, the Sea Mole’s head exploded before it could even touch her. Seeing this, the woman finally realized that something was off. Other people who were running away had also stopped to stare behind her.

The woman followed their line of sight and turned around.

“...”

Streaks of light were raining down from the sky.

It was a scene she had seen before in a YouTube video.

Tudududu—

Bullets that obliterated monsters. This terrifying barrage of bullets was lighting up the sky as it annihilated hundreds of monsters.

From the onset to the end, only three minutes passed by.

The screams of chaos ringing out from the streets were long gone.

“...Wow.”

“My god...”

The civilians were all staring at a single man who was sitting on a bike. Because of his helmet, no one could see his face.

Vroom—

His bike roared.

While everyone stared at him in awe, he quickly disappeared.

“T-That, that must have been Fen, Fenrir!”

A motorcycle-enthusiast who loved to slaughter monsters with a mystical gun.

He was a mercenary who was famous even among ordinary people.



Vice-leader's office of the English Royal Court guild.

Rachel was currently in a meeting with representatives of mercenary groups.

"As you know, we achieved rank 10 in the most recent mercenary group rankings."

Her first meeting was with the Skid Row Mercenary Group.

The group's leader initiated the negotiation with a haughty attitude and tone. Albeit reluctant, this was something Rachel could accept. But because he was asking for too much, she instantly rejected him despite the Royal Court guild's current situation.

"Ha, I'm speechless."

"You can speak."

"How can you be so beautiful?"

"...Pardon?"

Her next meeting was with the Great Tiger Mercenary Group, which was around rank 14.

Its leader was a man in his mid-30s, and he was interested in Rachel's appearance above anything else. Although he made it seem like the meeting was a blind date, the conditions he offered were reasonable.

"England is in a bad spot, right? Of aerial, land, and sea monsters, sea monsters are accepted as the most difficult to deal with. Why don't you just ask the Association for help?"

"That's our own business."

"...Are you looking down on mercenaries? You think we wouldn't understand just because we're uneducated?"

"No..."

Just like that, Rachel continued her meetings.

Many of the leaders were arrogant or stupid. Leaders from the higher ranked

mercenary groups were especially so.

The leader of the world's rank 5 mercenary group was particularly distasteful. The way he ogled her with his lustful eyes made Rachel want to pull out her weapon.

"Huu."

After a long time, all 13 meetings came to an end. She didn't feel that it was a waste of time. Rank 14 and rank 9 seemed to be reasonable.

—Um, vice-leader.

At that moment, her secretary suddenly called her.

"Yes, what is it?"

—Um, someone from another mercenary group just showed up.

"...Weren't we done?"

—We were, but this one claimed to be a mercenary and asked to meet vice-leader.

'Then why don't you just kick him out?'

Rachel pressed her forehead.

—I wanted to send him back, but he seems to be someone famous.

"Oh... I see."

'Do mercenaries get more arrogant with more fame? I didn't want to be biased for the sake of that person...'

"If he didn't contact us before... ehew, just let him in."

'It's not like I'll lose anything by seeing another person.'

—Understood.

The secretary replied.

Rachel let out a deep sigh as she tapped on her desk.

After about five minutes...

Tok, tok—

Someone knocked on her door.

“Come in.”

Rachel spoke with an exhausted voice.

Kiik—

The door slowly opened and heavy footsteps rang out.

Rachel slowly raised her head. She saw the mercenary that just entered.

It was a man clad entirely in black. His hair was in a clean pomade-style and his well-kempt beard made him particularly handsome.

As soon as Rachel saw him, her eyes widened.

It was only natural. Despite the slightly different aura he had, Rachel was too familiar with him.

“It’s nice to meet you.”

The man greeted her casually with a charming baritone voice.

Then, he sat down in front of her naturally, exuding a pleasant scent.

“Ah...”

Because of their sudden reunion, Rachel was at a loss for words. Her voice didn’t come out. Her five senses seemed to have frozen.

“I’m Jeronimo’s Fenrir.”

Rachel was unable to tell whether the man knew of her plight. However, she saw the warm smile he had on his face.

Chapter 153

3 Years (7)

Tower of Hero's 101st floor.

In an office created solely for Aileen, her office workers were staring at a pile of documents.

“Hnng...”

After painstaking effort, they had summarized countless number of documents to only 30 pages. These documents were all related to a mysterious entity designated as Black Lotus.

“This is all we have on him?”

Aileen asked as she glanced at the summarized documents.

Black Lotus, the new black color of ‘that’ group and the one who caught Aileen’s attention. He was responsible for eleven terror incidents that happened in Pandemonium.

“Yes, we picked out the core information gathered from our informants who live in Pandemonium.”

“...Ah~ really~ it sure is flawless~”

Aileen tried her best to sound sarcastic, and no one blamed her for it. None of the documents had anything that might identify Black Lotus’ identity and only contained records of his achievements.

To make matters worse, Aileen already knew all these records, which were as simple as [destruction completed with a single arrow], [black lotus symbol engraved on the ground], etc.

“Er, he always disappears immediately afterwards, so there’s really no information about him. He might have a Gift related to teleportation...”

“Yeah~ yeah~”

Aileen didn't pay attention to their excuses.

“It's my fault for expecting anything use... huh? Wait a minute.”

Suddenly, a lightbulb went on in her head, and she got goosebumps on her skin. She widened her eyes and stared at her employees.

“He always leaves after a single arrow... Then... could he... no, could she be the Divine Archer?”

“...Pardon?”

“Divine Archer. You know, Jin Seyeon the Divine Archer.”

It was a ridiculous claim. However, the office workers had trouble discerning whether Aileen was serious. After staring at her expression for a while, they shook their heads.

“There's no way it can be Jin Seyeon-ssi.”

“She should be busy doing volunteer work...”

“...Right? I was kidding too.”

Aileen quickly changed her tone.

Jin Seyeon the Divine Archer. She was a Master rank Hero titled the 'god of the bow'. It was worth noting that she was only rank 70, putting her on the bubble when it came to Master rank territory. Furthermore, she had retired from active duty and only showed up every once in a while in North Africa.

“By the way, why is she even doing volunteer work?”

“...”

“...”

The office workers saved their breath. Jin Seyeon was an idol to people in their early 20s to 30s. Her kind heart and righteous deeds melted the hearts of men, and her

upright personality and popularity made her a Master rank Hero.

“I just don’t understand. Why did the Association put her in the Master rank class?”

Aileen expressed her displeasure. Members of the Temple of Justice were excluded from the Association’s ranking system, but Jin Seyeon’s Master rank designation was always a point of contention. Aileen acknowledged that Jin Seyeon was the best archer. The question was why Jin Seyeon was a Master rank Hero rather than Yoo Jinwoong.

“I’d win If I fought her too.”

Grumbling unhappily, Aileen suddenly got curious.

Like asking which side would win in a fight between a tiger and a lion, it was akin to an instinctive curiosity that any human would have.

“Hmm...”

Given all the same conditions, who would win between Jin Seyeon and Black Lotus? After mulling over the question for a while, Aileen turned her gaze to the office workers.

“Girls, how strong do you think he is~?”

“Erm, I’m not sure... Can you elaborate?”

“Mm~ you know, try estimating his rank. How do you think he fares compared to Jin Seyeon?”

Hearing Aileen’s explanation, the four office workers fell in thought. Although they were elites who graduated from top ranking universities and passed the Association’s difficult tests, they were still incapable of answering whether a lion or a tiger would win in a fight.

“Um, Black Lotus probably didn’t use 100% of his strength, right?”

The youngest office worker asked.

It was a sharp question.

Aileen rubbed her chin and mulled it over.

Black Lotus’ arrow was undoubtedly powerful. There wasn’t a single target he couldn’t

destroy with a single arrow.

“Let me think...”

In reality, archers had difficulty amplifying the power of a single arrow. At the same time, it was what they desired the most as archers wanted to finish off their enemies in one blow. Otherwise, their location would be found out. Without a warrior to protect them, they would then be in great danger.

There was a reason archers had trouble doing this. Pouring too much magic power into a magic arrow made its form fainter and harder to control. In order to properly control their magic arrows, archers had to limit their power.

“40%...”

However, Black Lotus always managed to obliterate his target with one arrow. This meant that his control over his arrow was superb, which also meant that he didn't use his full power.

“Maybe it's only 20~30%.”

“Eh? That small?”

The surprised office worker voiced her doubt. For Black Lotus to have only used 20~30% of his power, the results he showed were too brilliant.

He had destroyed a tower that could have withstood most explosions and a hideout with a high-rank barrier surrounding it. He had even assassinated an executive of Pandemonium's rank 10 private organization.

“If you're going to doubt me, don't ask in the first place.”

Aileen looked down at their doubts. As far as she was concerned, they were bookworms who rarely saw the world outside.

“...K-Kuhum, no, I apologize. Hey, you! Continue with what you were saying before!”

The flustered office worker quickly retracted her words and yelled at the youngest office worker who talked before.

“Ah, yes. So assuming that we’ve only seen 25% of Black Lotus’ full strength...”

The youngest office worker furiously typed on her laptop, performing complex calculations. When she arrived at the answer, her expression turned pale.

“This...”

“What? Hurry up and say it.”

“Well... in terms of numbers... he’s at the level of a Master rank Hero.”

“Eh? Really?”

Everyone in the office was surprised.

“Yes, the estimated value of the magic power explosion he caused is similar to Divine Archer Jin Seyeon-nim’s crystal arrow, which she used to defeat the Basilisk three years ago.”

“Oooh.”

Where did she learn how to do this? Aileen smiled.

“That’s interesting.”

“Remember that this is only theory.”

“Still, it’s interesting.”

Aileen was suddenly filled with anticipation.

Two archers aiming their bows at each other, letting go of their bowstrings in high tension, two arrows shining in different colors and flying towards each other, and the final clash...

Frankly, she hoped Jin Seyeon would lose.

Aileen didn’t like women who always acted kind, noble, and refined.

“Alright, that’s it for today. You can all go home.”

“Yes!”

“Thank you~”

“See you tomorrow!”

The office workers smiled brightly and bowed.

“Yeah~ yeah~ see ya~”

Aileen was certainly a boss with many complaints and outbursts.

However, she was still popular with her subordinates because she let them go home early.



Rachel had changed a lot in three years.

She now had a perfect V-line after losing her baby fat, and her innocent eyes looked more mature. Was it because of all the troubles she faced? She had a thin dark circle under both eyes, but even that looked charming on her.

“It... it’s been a while.”

Rachel stuttered. Although many things had changed, her voice was still the same.

“Yeah.”

I replied simply. Then, I purposely stayed silent. I was curious how she would react.

“...Mm, mmn.”

Her fidgeting hands were toying with her computer mouse. Seeing this awkward side of her, I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Why aren’t you talking? Is it because I came too late?”

“Y-Yes? Ah, no, that’s not it...”

Rachel suddenly froze and looked straight at me. Meeting her eyes, I waited for her next words.

“Your beard... you grew it out.”

However, what came out of her mouth was something I didn't expect.

"Oh, this?"

I rubbed my chin. I had a cool nickname like Fenrir, but because Aether kept making me look younger, I grew out my beard. In a way, I looked like Western movie stars. Oh and for the record, it wasn't a goatee.

"A famous barber trimmed it for me. Does it look weird?"

I found the son of the master barber I met in the past. Although he wasn't as skilled as his father, he was also working as a barber.

"No, it looks great."

"That's nice to hear."

Thanks to him, I was under a 0.4-point charm buff. Since I was meeting Rachel for the first time in years, I put in some extra effort.

"But I'll shave it off soon."

"Eh? N-No, it really looks nice on you. Really."

Rachel waved her hands, and I smiled.

Sometimes when I saw myself in the mirror, I arrogantly thought I looked like Jake Gyllenhaal. But because Evandel didn't like it, I planned to cut it off soon.

"...Anyways, I heard you were taking a break from mercenary work..."

Rachel carefully changed the subject.

"I've been busy with other things."

For the past six months, I was focused on the Chameleon Troupe's missions. Robbing a rich Djinn, hunting a Jewel Whale in the deep Pacific, destroying hideouts of Pandemonium's organizations, etc.

I tried to make the Chameleon Troupe attack Djinns as much as possible.

“Well, we can catch up on personal matters later. For now, let’s talk about our partnership.”

“Ah, yes... wait, partnership?”

Rachel’s eyes widened.

“Of course. That’s why I’m here.”

I smiled.

“Don’t you remember? I said we’d probably work together through a mercenary partnership.”

“...Ah, r-right~ I remember~”

It didn’t look like she remembered, but she nodded excitedly anyways.

“It’s coming back to me. It was... really sunny that day.”

“...It was raining.”

I narrowed my eyes and glared at her.

“R-Right, it was raining. I got confused for a moment...”

“I’m kidding, it was sunny.”

“...Sunny—”

“Or maybe I’m remembering wrong.”

“...”

In the end, Rachel closed her mouth and glared at me while pouting.

“Haha, I’m just joking. Here are our conditions. Take a look.”

I took out the contract I brought and gave it to her. Rachel picked it up respectfully.

Jeronimo Mercenary's conditions were as follows.

===

1. The Royal Court guild is not to interfere in Jeronimo's business.
2. England is to provide information on all Dungeons within its territory. If the Royal Court guild conquers a Dungeon, all acquired loot is to be revealed to Jeronimo Mercenary.
3. Jeronimo Mercenary is to have first priority in purchasing loot acquired from Dungeons.

4...

===

There were only six clauses in total. After carefully reading each clause, Rachel looked up.

"If you agree to these terms, we can help England deal with its monster crisis. We'll be forming an official partnership."

"Partnership!"

Rachel's eyes immediately lit up.



[Royal Court guild forms partnership with Jeronimo Mercenary!]

[How did England move Jeronimo?]

[Fenrir slaughters thousands of sea monsters in one hour.]

As soon as the news went out that the Royal Court guild partnered with Jeronimo, the international community blew up.

Headlines all over the world reported on England and Jeronimo's new relationship, and the Royal Court guild's stocks skyrocketed. The prime minister even invited Jeronimo's mercenary leader (Jain in disguise) to a banquet.

Additionally, Rachel was appointed as the successor to the guild leader for her achievement in this negotiation.

Of course, there was also a fair amount of negative rumors, particularly about sexual favors.

In any case, a month flew by.

England's situation had mostly calmed down, but it was hard to say it was all thanks to Jeronimo Mercenary. Jeronimo Mercenary only had 24 members. Even then, they were all fake identities, and there were only 5~6 active members.

However, the goal of this partnership was to destroy the monsters' habitats. Once the habitats were destroyed, monsters would naturally stop reproducing, and over time, the increased monster count would naturally dwindle.

In only a month, Jeronimo destroyed six habitats of sea monsters, a feat Cheok Jungyeong achieved alone. I only had to tell him where a monster habitat was located, and Cheok Jungyeong would run over and destroy everything in sight. As an ally, Cheok Jungyeong couldn't be more reliable.

"I'm glad it was resolved without any civilian casualties."

Currently, I was walking with Rachel along the English Channel's beach.

"I agree."

We arrived here just ten minutes ago after a report that a large number of carnivorous tunas appeared.

"By the way, I'm going to make you pay for my bullets."

Using the heavy machine gun mode, I took care of everything in just seven minutes. Since we had time left over, we went on a stroll along the beach.

"..."

Rachel was still reticent. She strolled silently as she watched the waves glistening under the sun with a relaxed smile on her face. Feeling a bit bored, I put my finger up to my face.

It was then.

"Oh right."

Poke.

Rachel suddenly turned around, making my finger poke her cheek.

“...”

Rachel froze and stared at my finger. Then, she stared at me asking for an explanation.

“...Er, anyways, Rachel-ssi. Or rather, vice-leader.”

I pulled my finger back and asked as if nothing happened.

“The Royal Court guild conquered several Dungeons in the past few months. Have you gotten any paper as loot?”

“...Paper?”

“Yes, something that looks like an entrance ticket.”

A piece of paper that looked like a ticket and shone in different colors. This was not an ordinary piece of paper nor was it a ticket to an amusement park. It was the entrance ticket to the Tower of Wish, the next major episode.

“Mm... I don't think so.”

Rachel replied after mulling over it for a moment, and I shook my head regrettably. Then, we went back to strolling.

Vrrr—

Suddenly, my smartwatch rang. It was loud enough for Rachel to hear as well. I quickly looked down at my watch.

[The laptop update has been completed.]

Chapter 154

Entrance Ticket (1)

===

[The laptop update has been completed.]

[Stigma recovery rate has been increased.]

[You receive 3 Points.]

*A few functionalities have been added.

[Overclocking]

—Using your vitality as cost, you can temporarily boost Stigma's power.

—The boosted amount will depend on the amount of vitality used. Note, you can die from using all of your vitality.

[Device Link]

—You can link electronic devices to the laptop (max: 4).

—Linked devices cannot be used by anyone else. You can operate linked devices with your will.

[Spatial Modification]

—You can now modify environmental settings.

—However, the specified environment must be limited in scope.

[1000 SP has been consumed for the update.]

[Current SP: 3053]

.....

▷Variable Stats 「Usable Points: 3」

[Strength 6.4 (+6.000)]

[Stamina 6.435 (+6.000)]

[Speed 8.655 (+6.000)]

[Perception 9.235 (+6.000)]

[Vitality 6.105 (+6.000)]

[Magic power 3]

*Stat increase from 'Magic Dysfunction Physique' has reached its limit (+6.000).

▷Invariable Stats

[Intelligence – 4.470 / 10]

[Perseverance – 7.207 (+0.5) / 10]

[Luck – 9.100 / 10]

[Charm – 5.535 (+0.4) / 10]

▷Gift

1. 「Master Sharpshooter」 [Intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [Evolving] [Grade 4 – Proficiency EXP: 87%]
2. 「Random Consolidation System」 [Low-intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [3-stage consolidation]
3. 「Dexterity」 [Low-intermediate rank] [Null attribute] [Evolving] [Grade 5 – Proficiency EXP: 51%]

▷Physique (2/3)

1. 「Magic Dysfunction Physique」
2. 「Medicinal Memory Physique」

▷Art (2/3)

1. 「Parkour」
2. 「Charming Voice」

===

The information I've been dying to know popped up.

For the three years that the laptop was updating, I was still able to modify settings of objects and see their information, but I wasn't able to see my status (other than my Gift).

In other words, I was seeing my stats for the first time in three years.

“The heck.”

My charm stat was only 5.535?

Aesthetic Greed raised by charm by 0.002 points every 24 hours up to a maximum of 1 point. I also made sure to use Random Consolidation System on Aether every day, so

my charm increase should have been much bigger.

...Well, I guess that's how it got to 5.535.

Since it was originally around 4.1, assuming I was getting an average of 40% on each consolidation, 5.535 points came out exactly. Oh, for the record, I used 1500 SP one year ago to raise Random Consolidation System's maximum limit to 54%.

But even with all that and the charm buff I got from the barber, my charm stat was only at 5.935.

"Mm."

For some reason, I felt a bit bitter.

Jake Gyllenhaal... you're too far away!

...Of course, I wasn't being all that serious. It was just a little self-evaluation that everyone did once in their lifetime.

"What's wrong?"

Seeing that I was staring at my smartwatch in a daze, Rachel asked.

I replied with a smile.

"Let's go back now."

Rachel tilted her head, not knowing what happened. Meanwhile, I tried using one of the laptop's new functions.

I clicked on the 'Device Link' button that was newly placed in my smartwatch. After scrolling through the list of available devices that I owned, I clicked on a picture of a motorcycle.

[Kim Hajin's 'Agusta Vigilante' has been found...]

[Device Link complete.]

[Agusta Vigilante will now move according to Kim Hajin's will.]

I tried to send a thought.

'Come to me. Come to me.'

After about a minute, the parked motorcycle drove up to me with a cool engine sound.

Interesting.

Without much thought, I got on.

"Wait!"

Then suddenly, a powerful hand grabbed my hand.

“...?”

Obviously, it was Rachel.

“What’s wrong?”

“Hajin-ssi, wait a minute.”

“Huh?”

Rachel pointed at my bike as she shuddered slightly.

“Didn’t you park your motorcycle by the road?”

“Uh, I did, but...”

“Who is it—!”

As soon as I said a few words, Rachel pulled out Galatyn.

“...Hello?”

“Sh, I think it’s an assassin. That motorcycle just drove here on its own.”

She murmured in shock as she held her sword up. Her sword then shone in a golden light.

“Show yourself.”

Her voice carried a hint of killing intent.

But obviously, no one answered her.

Rachel then repeated the same words in English.

“...Show yourself.”

“...”

“Stop hiding like a coward.”

Rachel was shadow-boxing with an invisible enemy, but it felt like she was sure of her suspicion. From the looks of it, she must have experienced similar situations many times before.

Just how many assassination attempts did she go through to react like this?

I couldn't help but feel sorry. However, I just continued on and got on my motorcycle.

“Hajin-ssi! That motorcycle is dangerous!”

“Don't worry, it's a self-driving vehicle.”

“...?”

“Look.”

I willed the motorcycle to move. At the same time, I voiced out my command for Rachel.

“Make a circle around us.”

Vroom, vroom.

The motorcycle began to run through the sand at a frightening speed.

On the other hand, Rachel was staring at the motorcycle in a daze. Her pupils were suffering from miniature earthquakes.

“Ah...”

“I understand. Technology has improved a lot in the recent years. Just don't try to fall behind the times too much.”

“...Ah, uaah.”

Rachel was at a loss for words from embarrassment. She covered her face with her hands and shook her head fiercely. What saved her from her embarrassment was a sudden call.

Tiriri—

“W-Wait one moment. I need to take this... Hello?”

Rachel walked away, using the call as an excuse.

The call didn't last long, and she quickly came back with a serious face.

“Hajin-ssi.”

“Yes?”

“Apparently, strange papers came out of the Dungeon we conquered.”



One week later.

[May Guild Rankings... The English Royal Court guild on the rise. Essence of the Strait maintaining rank 1 for three consecutive months.]

[Creator's Sacred Grace on the verge of revival. Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan, the world of Heroes is watching them.]

Inside a luxury limousine, Yoo Yeonha was reading the Violet Times along with an ordinary newspaper.

“...Hnn.”

For some reason, Yoo Yeonha was pouting.

She was jealous. The English Royal Court guild entered the top 20 with the help of Jeronimo, but this partnership was something Yoo Yeonha wanted for Essence of the Strait. It was just that she never had the chance to bring it up with Kim Hajin.

“We're here.”

The limousine stopped. Yoo Yeonha glanced outside the window. She could see a luxury cruise ship anchored to Han River's dock.

Today, she had planned a gathering for Noble Society.

“...Thank you.”

Noble Society. It was the name of a friend group Yoo Yeonha made.

She had started it as a fun project before she entered Cube, but starting from her second year, she began to expand the group proactively.

First, she invited high-ranking officials with the help of her father. Then, she donated to universities and charities under Noble Society's name. Afterwards, she began to snatch up promising cadets with good family backgrounds.

Now, Noble Society had over 200 members.

All 200 of them were undoubtedly Korea's future leaders.

"I will be waiting nearby."

"Alright~"

Yoo Yeonha got off.

Tak, tak.

Walking with high-heels that she was used to wearing by now, she arrived at the entrance to the cruise ship. The ship's guards recognized her and let her in without verifying her identity.

Yoo Yeonha then walked onboard.

"...Hm?"

She scanned the deck and quickly noticed a guest who had arrived early.

This guest was leaning on the deck's railing and staring intently at something. Yoo Yeonha held her bitter heart and slowly walked up to her.

"...Nayun?"

"Uwaah!"

Startled, the guest turned off her smartwatch.

The girl unnaturally leaning against the railing was Chae Nayun.

"O-Oh, hi."

"...What were you doing?"

Yoo Yeonha glanced at Chae Nayun's smartwatch.

"N-Nothing."

Although that was what Chae Nayun said, Yoo Yeonha quickly found out about it through her own smartwatch.

[Master, a user by the nickname 'imgosu' requested for a background check on Kim Hajin as well as his current whereabouts.]

[For now, we've put the request on hold.]

Yoo Yeonha read the message she received and looked back up at Chae Nayun.

"...hui, hui~"

She was whistling with a cold sweat.

Yoo Yeonha forced herself to smile.

She had already heard rumors that Chae Nayun was looking to investigate Kim Hajin. She also knew that Chae Nayun was scammed a dozen times because of her low Violet Banquet rank.

"Do you want to come inside? I prepared a private room."

"Y-Yeah."

Yoo Yeonha led Chae Nayun to a private room she prepared for her close friends.

"What is this place for?"

"We can hang out here. You don't like parties anyways, right? The other guys will come soon."

"...I see."

Pool, VR, bowling, darts. The room was full of games.

Chae Nayun sat down on the couch without much thought.

"Oh right, what's this on my nametag?"

Then, she asked Yoo Yeonha.

"Nametag?"

“Yeah. Over here, it says ‘executor’. Shouldn’t it say low-intermediate rank hero?”

[Essence of the Strait’s Hero, Chae Nayun]

「Executor」

“Oh~ that?”

Executor was a new title Yoo Yeonha created for Chae Nayun. Although Chae Nayun easily surpassed low-intermediate rank Heroes in power, she couldn’t be promoted due to a lack of results.

“The Association classifies Heroes based on a rank and a grade, but I don’t plan on following their system indefinitely. I tried creating one myself.”

In reality, not many people were happy with the Association’s rank and grade system. Thus, Yoo Yeonha created new titles to match Heroes’ diverse characteristics. For now, she had five titles: Executor, Destroyer, Guardian, etc. Of these, the Executor title was the highest.

“Yep, that would be the rank most team leaders are in.”

“Oh? That’s surprisingly good.”

Tok, tok—

At that moment, a knock rang out from the door.

—Guests have arrived.

“Looks like they’re here.”

Yoo Yeonha smiled at Chae Nayun.

“Yeah.”

Chae Nayun nodded nonchalantly.

“Come in.”

With Yoo Yeonha's invitation, the door opened, and three familiar faces walked in. Shin Jonghak, Kim Suho, and Yi Yeonghan.

They were three superstars who had risen to fame at only 21 years old.

"Hey~ it's been a while~"

Kim Suho waved his hand with a bright smile.

"Move it."

"Whoa!"

Shin Jonghak pushed Kim Suho aside and stood in front of Chae Nayun.

"...How have you been?"

His voice was wistful and emotional. Yoo Yeonha shook her head as she watched Shin Jonghak.

"So-so. What about you? You look even more creepy now."

"...Hahaha, that's a funny way to say I'm handsome."

"You crazy?"

"Ah, I'm so tired."

Yi Yeonghan ignored Chae Nayun and Shin Jonghak and trudged up to the couch. After jumping down on his back, he wriggled around like a giant cockroach and murmured.

"Ah~ Creator's Sacred Grace is too cut-throat. They're sending me to three Dungeons a month~"

"...Didn't you say you wanted to go? You said you wanted to buy that Lambo something"

Feeling guilty, Kim Suho poked Yi Yeonghan's back as he muttered back.

"It's Lamborghini. Oi, Team Leader Kim, you think you'll be safe if I report you to the Association for overworking me?"

“Oh please, you got what you wanted, right?”

“...I did put in an order.”

Kim Suho had already become a team leader. Yi Yeonghan was a member of his team. When there was a big difference in rank between two people who joined a company or guild at the same time, there were often minor tensions that broke out between them. However, there was nothing of the sort between Yi Yeonghan and Kim Suho.

“Chae Nayun, do you want to spar later?”

“Sure, but I’m letting you know, you might lose.”

“...We’ll see.”

While Chae Nayun and Shin Jonghak were planning a spar, Yi Yeonghan turned on the huge flat-screen TV on the wall.

—...Emergency report.

“Hm?”

“What’s up?”

“There’s apparently an emergency.”

The sudden news report grabbed the party’s attention.

—A mysterious Tower has appeared in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. This Tower of unprecedented size seems to have risen from the depths of the ocean. Nearby sea monsters are also reported to be acting more violent...



The same time. After hearing about the emergency report, Yun Seung-Ah quickly turned on the TV.

—A mysterious Tower has appeared in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean...

A newly discovered Tower was being shown on TV.

“...What the hell?”

Yun Seung-Ah was almost shocked to the point of fainting. Just 10 minutes ago, Violet Banquet had no reports about a new Tower. The fact that there was little delay between the release of information to the public and Violet Banquet indicated that this was sudden and completely unexpected.

—There is currently nothing known about this Tower. It seems to have risen from the deep-sea earthquake that occurred eight minutes ago.

“...”

Yun Seung-Ah stared at the Tower in a daze.

She could only think about one thing.

That was the only scenario in which Creator’s Sacred Grace’s can revive perfectly, the only way for Creator’s Sacred Grace to reclaim the coveted rank 1 spot.



===

[Chameleon Troupe’s Hideout] [Comfortable]

—Comfortable Space

You will become rejuvenated the more you stay in this area.

*Staying here for more than 8 hours will cleanse your mind.

*Staying here for more than 24 hours will make you happy.

*Staying here for more than 96 hours will increase all stats by up to 0.5 points.

—What a Great Air.

The area’s high mana density keeps the air fresh.

*Staying here for more than 8 hours will cure light illnesses.

===

As shown above, Chameleon Troupe’s hideout was turned from hell to heaven. Four members of the troupe, Setryn, Jain, Boss, and Cheok Jungyeong, were now living here as well.

Sitting on the couch I made, I was watching TV.

—There is currently nothing known about this Tower. It seems to have risen from the deep-sea earthquake that occurred eight minutes ago.

—The Hero Association has already deployed investigators, but because of how deep the Tower reaches, it is thought to be impossible to enter the Tower in a normal way...

The Tower of Wish.

A Tower that was huge as though it contained all of humanity's hopes, wishes, and resentments.

"Oh? What's that?"

Setryn, who was in the middle of receiving a back massage from the goblins, asked.

"Newbie, is the entrance ticket you were talking about..."

On the other hand, Jain turned to me with widened eyes. She really had sharp senses.

"Yep."

I nodded.

Currently, I had an entrance ticket in hand.

It was the ticket into the Tower of Wish.

The entrance ticket I had was an orange-tier ticket.

"...Let me see."

Jain took the entrance ticket.

"What is it? Let me take a look too."

Boss woke up from her nap and glanced up at the entrance ticket.

Jain read the words written on the back of the ticket.

"By having this ticket in your possession, you can enter a designated place on a promised date. The promised date is..."

July 1st.

After July 1st, all entrance tickets will disappear, and new tickets will be issued. The next promised date will be September 1st.

*Note – participants entering this place will undergo a small ‘balance change’ to even the playing field.

“Oh? This sounds fun. Little Apprentice, are you going to use this?”

“No.”

Entrance tickets had different tiers. Although the orange-tier was above average, it wasn’t the one I wanted.

“Why not?”

“This color isn’t the one I want.”

“...Color?”

“Yep.”

Entrance tickets had the following tiers.

White.

There was no benefit to having a white ticket. Consequently, white tickets were even rarer than red tickets.

Green.

Green ticket owners could choose the difficulty level of the Tower’s tutorial.

Yellow.

In addition to green ticket’s benefits, yellow ticket owners were also given an additional tutorial-only food supply.

Orange.

In addition to yellow ticket’s benefits, orange ticket owners could receive a basic weapon.

Red.

In addition to orange ticket’s benefits, red ticket owners could choose one companion to enter together. Of course, they could enter alone if they wished.

“I’m looking for a black ticket.”

The entrance ticket I wanted was black.

Without the black ticket, there was no reason to enter the Tower early.

“Black?”

Boss asked.

“Yes, black.”

The black ticket worked a bit differently than other tickets. Black ticket owners didn’t receive benefits from the previous tier tickets. In fact, they could only choose the highest difficulty tutorial. In this sense, they were at a disadvantage.

However, the black ticket had a benefit that far outweighed its disadvantages.

‘Skill’.

The concept of ‘skills’ didn’t exist in this world.

However, it existed in the Tower of Wish.

If used properly, you could win against someone you normally would never beat and achieve a goal that would be impossible in the real world.

That was why it was called the Tower of Wish.

In a way, this Tower was a chance for those abandoned by heaven to shine.

In that regard, the black ticket was the VVIP ticket.

By entering the Tower of Wish with a black ticket, I would obtain a ‘bonus skill’ at no cost.

“Black ticket?”

“Yep.”

“Do color of tickets matter? How do you know that in the first place?”

“I have a good source of information. That said, I don’t know too much about it either.”

The distribution of entrance tickets had already begun.

They could appear anywhere: sandboxes children played in, corpses of monsters killed by hunters, treasure chests found in Dungeons.

And on the promised date, these tickets would become Portals linked to the Tower of Wish.

“Even if you have a good source of information, it’s only been... no, nevermind, I won’t nitpick.”

“Thank you.”

“It’s my policy to not nag.”

“I see... so, did we hear anything from Pandemonium?”

Because of the series of terror incidents, there were many organizations in Pandemonium who were fearful of the Chameleon Troupe. Using this to my advantage, I made an open declaration that I would reconsider attacking them if they offered any entrance tickets they found.

“Nothing so far...”

The moment Jain shook her head...

Woong—

Her smartwatch suddenly rang.

Jain looked down at her watch without a change in her expression.

“Hm?”

I could tell that my luck was working in full.

“I just received a message. Apparently these guys found a ticket...”

Jiing—

Jain projected the picture of the entrance ticket someone sent.

“...Haha.”

A smile emerged on my face.

The black ticket inside the hologram was just as beautiful as I thought.

Chapter 155

Entrance Ticket (2)

Pandemonium's 30th ranked private organization, 'Hounds of the Demon Realm'. Its executive, Kim Goohwan, was walking in stifling nervousness. He was in a daze so much so that he didn't even know where he was. He was solely focused on following the puppet in front of him and not straying off course.

After about 30 minutes...

Clunk.

The puppet stopped and pointed deep into a desolate alleyway. Kim Goohwan nodded as he took a deep breath.

The puppet soon disappeared, and Kim Goohwan walked into the alleyway. There, he found a Portal created through magic power.

"...Gulp."

He swallowed hard. *They* were beyond this Portal. The ones who shook the whole of Pandemonium were waiting for him.

His stomach churned from nervousness. He was starting to regret coming forward. However, Kim Goohwan clenched his fists and stepped into the Portal courageously.

He could feel himself traveling through space.

Chwaaa...

Was it the sound of leaves rustling? Or was it the sound of waves crashing? He opened his eyes in an unknown place.

"You're here?"

In a completely dark space, an excited voice rang out from a dilapidated staircase. Kim Goohwan looked up and saw an Eastern woman with white hair.

The mysterious woman greeted him.

"Hi."

“Y-Yes, it’s an honor to meet you. My name is Kim Goohwan.”

He tried to maintain his composure as much as possible. However, he was sweating profusely, and his breathing was starting to get rough.

“Where’s the item?”

“H-Here.”

He felt dizzy as though he was going to faint at any moment. Thankfully, he had practiced what to say and what to do over a hundred times. Kim Goohwan reached into his pocket and took out a ticket. Even while maintaining respect, he wasn’t showing any weakness or submissiveness.

“No.”

“...Pardon?”

However, the woman didn’t take the ticket.

“I won’t be taking it. There’s someone else who wants it.”

Although Kim Goohwan didn’t expect this situation, he quickly adapted to it.

“Yes, understood.”

He backed off and waited.

“...Oh, there he is.”

Tap, tap.

Footsteps echoed out in the empty space.

Kim Goohwan turned his gaze to the direction of the sound.

At first, he thought a shadow was walking towards him. But he soon realized that it was a man dressed entirely in black.

Kim Goohwan stared at the man calmly.

Unlike the woman, he didn’t give off any imposing aura or pressure.

However...

“I heard you guys call him Lotus.”

The woman’s next sentence caused his body to freeze cold.

Kim Goohwan stared at the man walking towards him.

He couldn’t breathe as though he was being choked.

A ghastly aura seemed to be emanating from the man’s slow footsteps. Of course, it was only a hallucination.

Black Lotus. The man who destroyed several towers and hideouts with a single attack, and even assassinated an executive of Blood Poison, Pandemonium’s rank 10 organization.

This man was currently standing only a foot away.

Kim Goohwan felt a chill run down his body.

He had to introduce himself, but his mouth refused to move.

Although the man was covering his face with a black mask and hoodie, his eyes seemed to pierce through everything.

“What’s wrong? He’s waiting.”

“...Ah, y-yes, here, here you go.”

Kim Goohwan snapped out of his daze and gave the item to the man clad in black.

The man stared fixedly at the ticket, then took it off of Kim Goohwan’s hands.

Kim Goohwan gulped and waited for the man’s next move.

Suddenly, the man raised his hand.

Was he unhappy with something?

Kim Goohwan couldn’t bring himself to close his eyes.

He simply stood in terror, waiting for the man’s hand to behead him...

Tak.

The man put his hand on his shoulder.

Tak, tak.

Then, he lightly hit him a couple of times. It was almost as though the man was giving a compliment.

For a moment, Kim Goohwan forgot who he was, where he was, and what he was doing.

After barely holding onto his consciousness for a long time...

Thud.

Kim Goohwan fainted and fell on the ground.

“...What, what happened?”

The person most confused by this was the man who praised Kim Goohwan.
Kim Hajin.



After the exchange, I returned to Chameleon Troupe’s hideout.

“Is that what you wanted?”

Jain canceled her disguise and asked.

“Yes, but...”

I thought about the man I just met who fainted from a single praise.
Jain seemed to understand my worries as she smiled playfully.

“You can add that to your resume.”

“ ... ”

To be honest, my notoriety in Pandemonium was too much.
People began to be fearful especially after I killed Blood Poison’s executive. In my defense, that executive wasn’t physically powerful. Although he was decent with magic, the reason he became an executive was his unusual craftiness and cleverness.

“Oh, by the way, can I enter the Tower too if I have a ticket?”

Jain sounded interested.

“Yep. You can use the orange ticket that we have.”

It didn’t hurt to have extra tickets as they could be used in many ways.
The most obvious way was to sell them to others. You could also give it to someone in exchange for them becoming an ally inside the Tower. Furthermore, the scant amount

of available tickets made them all the more valuable.

200 whites, 1000 greens, 800 yellows, 500 oranges, 300 reds, 5 blacks. The total number of people who could enter the Tower was at most 3105 people every two months (each red ticket counted as 2 people). Considering the size of the Tower of Wish, 3105 was tiny.

“Will we see each other once we’re inside?”

“Probably. I don’t know for sure though.”

“This sounds fun~”

It seemed Jain was interested in going.

I took off my hoodie and put the black ticket in my pocket.

“Then I’m leaving now.”

“You’re going home?”

“Yes.”

“Alright~ I’ll take a nap then.”

Jain returned to her room, and I came back to Seoul through Khalifa’s Portal.

However, I didn’t go home. Instead, I headed to an underground facility located in the Seocho District.

This huge, 650-square-meter space with high-rank mana density was a training room I created for Evandel. It was an underground bunker I purchased from some rich guy.

“Let’s see... ah, there she is.”

It was hard to see Evandel since she was so small compared to the size of the space.

“Hiyaap~ hiyaap~!”

Wearing a magician’s hat and holding a wand, she was seemingly performing a rhythmical dance routine.

There was also a small army of ghosts following her guidance. A horse, a tiger, a

crocodile... wait, is that a unicorn? And that's... a velociraptor!?

"...Yep, that's talent alright."

I was planning on bringing her home, but she had a new 'friend' every time I visited. Perhaps this was why it was good to expose children to movies and fairytales.

"Wave of Honor~"

Evandel was working hard on her own right. Ever since she started watching PreCure, she started adding names to her moves as well.

"Spinning Swirl~"

"..."

"Shoooot—!"

It seemed I needed to ask exactly what she watched.

"Evandel?"

I called her name as I approached her. Evandel stopped training and turned towards me. Her eyes curled into crescent moons, and she hopped over to me.

"Hajin~"

"Did you have fun?"

"Un!"

"Then you must be tired."

It was time to go home.

"It's still okay."

"Really?"

“Un!”

Evandel smiled brightly and nodded.
It seemed she liked training more than I thought.
But I was also pressed on time...
Then, I remembered the wolf sleeping in my chest.

“You can play with Fenrir for ten minutes. We can leave afterwards.”

I called Fenrir out.

“Grrrr—”

Fenrir ran out excitedly and licked Evandel’s leg.

“My wolf!”

As expected of Evandel’s first Servant, Fenrir grew a lot over the past three years.

===

「Ghost Wolf」

[Servant] [High-intermediate rank]

—The first Servant created by the witch, Evandel.

▷Basic Stats

[Strength 9.950]

[Bite force 10.850]

[Stamina 6.535]

[Speed 11.550]

[Perception 11.605]

[Vitality 6.750]

[Magic power 7.850]

===

As you could guess from his incredible stats, he didn’t lose to most low-intermediate ~ intermediate rank Heroes.

“Ebebebe, ebebebe.”

“Krrrrr, rrrrrr.”

But in front of Evandel, Fenrir was only a gentle puppy. Seeing them playing around together, I laughed bitterly. Once I entered the Tower of Wish, I wouldn't be able to see Evandel for at least a month and a half. Though, I should be able to come back for 2~3 days once the tutorial ended...

“Evandel.”

I called Evandel's name in a slightly more serious tone.

“Hnn?”

“...I need to tell you something.”

I already asked Haeyeon's parents if they could take care of Evandel for 1~2 months, and they happily agreed.

“From July 1st, I'm going to be away for a month.”

“...”

Evandel froze.

“But it's nothing dangerous. I'll come back soon.”

“...”

Evandel didn't say anything.

I was worried that Evandel would cry for the first time in 4 years. After a long period of silence, Evandel asked instead of crying.

“...A month? 30 days?”

“Yeah.”

“...I can't go?”

I shook my head silently.

“ .. ”

Evandel bit her lips.

Her eyes watered, and her lips trembled. Still, she didn't cry.

“I'll come back soon. You can think of it as a month-long break. Meanwhile, you can have fun with Hayang and Haeyeon. You can sleep in or watch TV late into the night.”

I consoled Evandel. I even picked her up and gave her a peck on the cheek. Or at least, I tried to.

“No beard!”

“ .. ”

Evandel rejected me. Turning away with a pout, she refused to look at my face.

“I'll shave tomorrow, no, today.”

“ .. ”

Evandel looked back at me with watery eyes.

The only thing I could do now was smile.



2029, middle of May.

The biggest Tower in the history of mankind had been given the name ‘Tower of Wish’. At the same time, information about ‘entrance tickets’ began to spread quickly. Many ordinary people were posting comments online stating that they picked up an entrance ticket.

The Association wanted to establish a system to control the tickets ordinary people found, but it was too late. It didn't take long for people to find out about the tickets' value, and they began to sell them online.

“...Hm.”

Currently, inside Essence of the Strait’s team leader office, Yoo Yeonha was staring at a computer monitor in thought.

Entrance ticket.

Although she wasn’t sure how it worked, she knew she had to obtain as many as possible.

“Why do something so risky?”

Frustrated, she muttered with a sigh.

Many people who posted about tickets online had gone missing. They were most likely attacked by Djinns.

“13 might be enough...”

Thanks to the Falling Blossom guild, Yoo Yeonha already purchased 13 entrance tickets. What she wanted now was information about the Tower. She didn’t want to lose precious members of her guild to an unknown Tower.

—*Tok, tok.*

At that moment, someone knocked on the door.

“Who is it?”

—Team Leader Yoo Yeonha, a package arrived.

“...Come in.”

The door opened, and a guild employee walked in with a mysterious piece of furniture.

“What’s this?”

“Um, a chair.”

It indeed looked like a chair, albeit a bit futuristic and strange. First, it had two legs instead of the standard four, and the back of the chair looked like a tidal wave.

“Who sent this?”

“It’s from uh... Kim Hajin-ssi.”

“Kim Hajin...? Oh right, it’s my birthday present, right?”

“Ah, yes, that’s what it says here.”

A week ago, Yoo Yeonha had received a text message from Kim Hajin saying that he would send a birthday present.

“He sent a chair as a birthday present?”

‘A bit weird, not that I have any problems with it.’

“Thank you. You can go back.”

“Yes.”

Yoo Yeonha put the chair down and tried sitting on it.

“It’s not like I’m lacking chairs in my...”

She paused in the middle of talking. No, she couldn’t speak.

Feeling a strange sensation, she leaned against the chair. A strange, indescribable comfort wrapped around her body. It was as if the chair was hugging her tightly.

Kwang, Kwang!

“Hey!”

At that moment, someone kicked open the office door.

“Hey, Yoo Yeonha!”

It was Chae Nayun.

Startled, Yoo Yeonha quickly shot up.

“A-Ah, geez, I’m a team leader, you know!”

Yoo Yeonha shouted at Chae Nayun who didn't give her any face as a team leader.

"Oh, sorry, I was just in a hurry."

Chae Nayun smiled wryly as she scratched her head.

"Geez... huu. So, what's up?"

"Send me there!"

"...Where?"

"The Tower! The Tower of Wish. I heard you have tickets. The guild can keep whatever I bring back, so just let me go."

"Oh, it's about that."

Yoo Yeonha knew Chae Nayun would want to go.

"Let's talk about that."

"Oh, what's up with this chair? It looks so weird."

At that moment, Chae Nayun sat down on the chair she got as a birthday present. Yoo Yeonha blinked a few times and stared at Chae Nayun.

"It looks... weird... but, wow... this is... amazing..."

Seeing Chae Nayun looking comfortable and happy, Yoo Yeonha felt an unknown anxiousness.

"...Hey, get up. That's mine."

"Eh? It's not for guests?"

"N-No. It's a su~per precious chair I got for my birthday."

"Oh."

“Can’t you tell just by looking at it. Now, get up.”

“...Alright, alright.”

As soon as Chae Nayun got up, Yoo Yeonha changed the chair she has been using with the one Kim Hajin gifted. She didn’t want to put it off and have to worry about Chae Nayun asking for it.



2029, early June.

Guilds like Essence of the Strait, Desolate Moon, Frost Sanctuary, and Creator’s Sacred Grace managed to obtain entrance tickets and began to meet for discussions.

Meanwhile, the English Royal Court guild was also in a meeting.

The topic of their meeting was also the newly discovered Tower, but compared to other guilds, they were in a much better position.

“We have a total of seven tickets.”

The English Royal Court guild was lucky enough to obtain 10 tickets: eight greens, one orange, and one red.

However, they sold their two off-color tickets and one green ticket to Jeronimo Mercenary, and only had seven green tickets left.

The purpose of today’s meeting was obviously to decide who would use the entrance tickets.

Although there were many ideas, no one actively came forward.

Everyone was secretly afraid of what was lying inside such a giant Tower.

The entrance ticket stated, ‘participants can freely exit once the tutorial is over’, but there was no information about this ‘tutorial’.

“I’ll go.”

Someone volunteered resolutely. Immediately, everyone in the room stood up.

“N-No!”

“If something happens to vice-leader...”

“There’s little chance that guild master will agree.”

However, the Royal Court guild’s vice-leader, Rachel, made her decision clear.

“No, I’m going. And you don’t need to worry...”

She hesitated slightly before continuing.

“Um, Jeronimo’s Fenrir will be entering as well.”

“Ah~”

“In that case, I’m sure it’s fine.”

The atmosphere changed instantly. That was how much Fenrir was loved in England (although England didn’t know, Cheok Jungyeong’s achievements were all changed to Fenrir’s).

“Ah, could it be!? Did Fenrir say he would protect you!?”

“...Pardon?”

“I’m curious too. Did he say he’d protect you!?”

The meeting suddenly transformed into a press conference.

“I can tell that you’re flustered~”

“F-Flustered? N-No! Everyone be quiet!”

“Now you’re angry~”

“No, I’m not! We need to proceed with the meeting...”

The young, 21-year-old vice-leader was an easy target for the other, more experienced members in the room. As many of them knew Rachel from when she was young, the English Royal Court guild had become quite like a family.



2029, July 1st.

The promised date arrived.

Currently, I was inside Chameleon Troupe's hideout, waiting for the Portal to open.

"Huaam~ I'm so bored. Newbie, when is the Portal opening?"

Cheok Jungyeong asked.

"Just wait a bit."

Other than me, Jain, Cheok Jungyeong, and Boss had tickets.

Other members showed interest, but they were either busy or didn't mind waiting for the second round of tickets.

"Ah, I'm itching with excitement. Jain, you're following me as my companion?"

"...You're *my* companion, idiot."

Jain glared at Cheok Jungyeong uncomfortably. Jain obtained a red ticket, and Cheok Jungyeong annoyed her until she agreed to let him accompany her.

"Everyone be quiet and wait."

Boss spoke. At that moment...

Ssssss—

Our entrance tickets glowed with magic power.

We threw down our tickets on the ground. Immediately, the tickets sucked in nearby magic power and created three pillars of light.

Orange, red, black.

The three pillars all had different colors.

"So we just walk in?"

Cheok Jungyeong asked as he smacked his lips.

“Yes.”

“Alright, I’ll see you inside, Newbie.”

“Ah, before you go, I think you should choose the lowest difficulty level for the tutorial. We want to meet up as soon as possible.”

“I don’t mind... but I doubt this idiot will do that.”

Jain smiled wryly while Cheok Jungyeong agreed.

“Obviously I’m going for the highest difficulty.”

“...Then Boss, at least you should—”

I turned to Boss.

“Hm?”

Recently, Boss’ trust in me had greatly risen.

“...Oh, o-okay, then I will go with the, um, lowest difficulty.”

But by the looks of it, she was planning on doing what she wanted.

“Alright, I’m going in.”

Without hesitation, I walked into the black Portal. Immediately...

“Uwoah!”

The world flipped upside down, and I landed on my back.

“Uuu... what the heck.”

A cold ground, chilly wind, an unusual sensation.

Even my voice was coming out staticky, like a broken television.

Although it was exactly like how I described it in my novel, it still felt strange

experiencing firsthand.

I quickly got up and took a look around. I was in a pitch-black space.

“I wonder when it’s going to start.”

After waiting for about five minutes, blue words popped up in front of me.

[Welcome to the Tower.]

It was a more realistic 3D text than what was shown in VR games.

[Before you start, please choose your nickname.]

Nickname.

The Tower seemed to have the same setting as the one I created.

“Nickname, huh...”

I already knew what nickname everyone would use.

Kim Suho should be MasterHolysword, Shin Jonghak should be YoungFly, Jin Sahyuk should be StrongestWill^[1], and Chae Nayun should be ImGosu.

After thinking for a moment...

“I guess I’ll go with this.”

[Extra7]

I decided on my nickname.

[Extra7-nim, welcome.]

[Your nickname will replace your name in the Tower's Community.]

1. "Will" in this instance is the same word as "dick". A fun, little pun here by the author...

Chapter 156

Tutorial (1)

—...Members of Essence of the Strait, Desolate Moon, Frost Sanctuary, and other top-ranking guilds have entered the Tower of Wish. The Hero Association is worried that the Tower campaign will become too much of a free-for-all race, but they acknowledged that what happens is out of their control...

“...”

Pandemonium Arena, Demon rank fighter Jin Sahyuk's waiting room.

The arena's hottest star, Jin Sahyuk, was currently staring at the TV with sunken eyes.

—Entrance tickets will transform into Portals on specified dates. This mechanism, which cannot be explained with our understanding of science and magic, shocked researchers all over the world...

On TV, Heroes were walking into the Portals that spawned from the entrance tickets. Seeing this, Jin Sahyuk's eyes were filled with sadness, regret, and rage.

“That son of a bitch...”

Gritting her teeth, she spat out her resentment.

As far as she was concerned, she should have been inside the Tower of Wish by now. Rather than sitting in this empty waiting room and watching TV, she should have been beyond that Portal.

“I'll kill him. I'll tear his limbs apart and grind them up into bits and pieces...”

Jin Sahyuk's anger was driving her insane.

In truth, Jin Sahyuk had obtained a ticket (given to her by a fan) and was leisurely waiting for July 1st. She even bragged about it to Bell and others who couldn't find any. She thought she would be the one having fun while the others were sitting at home, bored.

But yesterday, once she was packing her stuff while whistling with excitement, she noticed that her entrance ticket was gone.

She ransacked her room trying to find it, but it wasn't anywhere.

After about six hours, she suddenly thought of Bell.

She hadn't heard from that son of a bitch in a while.

With trembling hands, she called him. As she expected, he didn't pick up.

Clearly, he had run off with her entrance ticket.

—The eyes of the public are now on the first wave of challengers...

“Just wait two months, you motherfucker...”

Jin Sahyuk mumbled in her blood-boiling rage.



Tower of Wish, tutorial waiting room.

[After taking off all equipment and clothes, please put on the tutorial uniform.]

“Got it.”

Following the directions of the messages being shown, I undressed and put on the tutorial uniform, a leather armor that looked rather shabby but was rather tightly woven.

“Done.”

[Confirmed. Now, please put all your belongings into the storage. Items from the outside world cannot be taken inside the Tower.]

A black storage box appeared in front of me.

I put everything I had inside. Of course, I had my way around it. My smartwatch, Desert Eagle, and Aether were hidden inside Stigma.

“Done.”

[Please put all your belongings into the storage. Items from the outside world cannot be taken inside the Tower.]

“I did.”

[Please put all your belongings into the storage. Items from the outside world cannot be taken inside the Tower.]

“...”

It seemed I couldn't avoid the eyes of 'that existence'.

Without any other choice, I took the items hidden inside Stigma out and put them into the storage box.

“Will they be given back?”

[‘Black Entrance Ticket’ has been confirmed. You will have the chance to take some of them once the tutorial ends.]

“That's good.”

The Desert Eagle was one thing, but Aether was a necessity.

[Player Scanning will now commence.]

A handprint scanner appeared in front of me.

I put my hand on it.

[Scanning in progress... 33%]

I felt a strange sensation of magic power running through my body.

“Auu.”

[66%... 99%... completed.]

[Player Kim Hajin has been confirmed.]

===

[Kim Hajin]

▷Variable Stats

...

▷Invariable Stats

...

▷Traits

- 「Master Sharpshooter」 [Intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [Evolving] [Grade 4 – Proficiency EXP: 89%]
- 「Random Consolidation System」 [Low-intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [3-stage consolidation]
- 「Dexterity」 [Low-intermediate rank] [Null attribute] [Evolving] [Grade 5 – Proficiency EXP: 55%]
- 「Magic Dysfunction Physique」
- 「Medicinal Memory Physique」

===

[During the tutorial, your variable stats will decrease by 65%.]

[5 Traits have been detected.]

[All Traits are sealed inside the Tower. As a Player, you may choose one Trait to use.]

[Please make your choice.]

“...Huu.”

It was finally time for the ‘balance patch’.

In this Tower, Traits included both Gifts and Physiques. Of the five Traits that I had, I could only choose one to bring with me (Arts are not included as they are considered as acquired abilities).

However, this wasn’t too disadvantageous for me.

The same restriction applied to other challengers of the Tower, and I even knew about a ‘hidden piece’.

“I’ll go with Master Sharpshooter.”

This hidden piece would let me acquire a second Trait.

I didn’t need to think much about the first Trait. Master Sharpshooter was practically my identity at this point.

[Will you choose the Trait ‘Master Sharpshooter’?]

“Yes.”

[For the sake of balance, the Trait 'Master Sharpshooter' has fallen to grade-7.]

"Understood."

I wasn't happy with it, but it was better to treat the system politely.

['Black Entrance Ticket' has been confirmed.]

[You've been assigned to the highest difficulty level.]

[In exchange, you will receive a bonus skill.]

"Thank you very much."

It was finally time.

This benefit was practically a cheat code. This was because the number of skills you could acquire from the Tower was limited.

1 unique skill, 3 normal skills, 2 special skills, and 1 ultimate skill.

Players could only learn 7 skills in total. In this sense, it was easy to see the advantage of having an extra skill.

[You may choose one bonus skill from this catalog.]

"Thank you."

Players who performed well could return to the outside world with half of the skills they acquired.

However, my goal was grander, to keep all 8 skills.

Recently, my stats have stopped rising. I planned to use this Tower as a foundation to force myself up.

===

▷Vitality Recovery

*You can instantly recover 30% of lost vitality.

*One charge is restored every 24 hours. Can be used twice a day.

▷Rage Gauge

*Rage builds up as you strike and destroy. This rage...

...

...

===

I scrolled through the list with nothing catching my attention.
Then, I found one.

===

▷Blink

*You can teleport to a point within a 15-meter radius.

*One charge is restored every 8 hours. Can be used three times a day.

===

This would be the skill Kim Suho chooses in two months when he enters the Tower of Wish with a black ticket. Although it was an excellent skill, it didn't suit me.

“Pass~”

After scrolling some more...

===

▷Random Dice

*You obtain one dice every 9 hours.

*Random Dice will transform into a raw material or a completed item once rolled. The chance of obtaining a completed item is much lower.

*You may select a 'category' as you roll the dice.

===

“This is it. Um, I'll take this.”

Random Dice.

A bonus skill that utilized my luck and synergized with Dexterity.

I chose this skill without hesitation.

[‘Random Dice’ has been chosen as a bonus skill.]

[You may now say the words ‘status window’ to open Extra7’s status.]

[The tutorial will begin in one minute.]

[You will enter the highest difficulty tutorial.]



One minute later:

After a burst of bright light, I was sent to an unknown place.

Looking around, I found myself in an open field dyed in the sunset. Dirt, rocks, leaves, and weeds filled the area.

[This tutorial will allow you to estimate your basic battle prowess.]

The first tutorial was simple. Like in most tutorials, you just had to beat up monsters.

“...Damn.”

But there was just one problem. The monsters I had to beat up were a bit special.

“...How am I supposed to kill them without a weapon?”

I was up against goblins. That was fine in and of itself, but the problem was that these goblins came with descriptors.

—Kerrek.

—Krrrrk.

A goblin shaman and a goblin warrior.

Like Nunu and Willump^[1], the goblin shaman was sitting on the goblin warrior's shoulder.

“Ehew.”

I was confident before coming in, but now that I couldn't use my Desert Eagle, my future was looking bleak.

[You spotted a goblin warrior and a goblin shaman.]

[Their information has been recorded in the 'Player Encyclopedia'.]

Player Encyclopedia. As one of the Tower of Wish's support systems, it stored all information discovered or experienced by Players.

“Open Player Encyclopedia.”

Information was usually key in situations like this.
I stopped what I was doing and read up on the two goblins.

===

Monster Encyclopedia

[Goblin Warrior] [Intermediate-rank Grade-7]

[Goblin Shaman] [Intermediate-rank Grade-8]

===

“...That’s it?”

Well, it’s true that the encyclopedia only had cursory information. It was enough to know that they were weaker than the ones I fought in Incheon.

“Hm...”

For now, let’s think.

How did Kim Suho get through this situation in the original story?

...Right, they were slaughtered by the metal attribute magic power of Sword Saint. Being able to only bring one Gift in was too advantageous for Kim Suho.

Let’s think again.

I’m different than Kim Suho.

—Krrk.

Thankfully, the goblins were talking to themselves and had not yet noticed my existence.

“...”

In that case, it was probably right to search for this stage’s hidden piece first. Narrowing my eyes, I used Stigma’s magic power...

[Warning! The activation of an unnatural power has been detected. This power may not be used in the tutorial!]

[Ignoring this warning may result in grave consequences!]

...or not.

By the looks of it, I would have to search for it directly.

I lowered my body and walked silently. Thanks to my mercenary work over the past three years, I was used to sneaking around.

I walked up to the closest boulder and flipped it over.

Thud.

There was nothing under it. It looked like it might have something, but I had a feeling I was only being baited.

I began to walk again.

Crack.

“...Huup.”

I accidentally stepped on a branch.

I anxiously turned around.

—Krrrk.

—Guoooo.

Thankfully, they seemed to be busy arguing about something.

“Whew.”

Letting out a sigh of relief, I continued onward.

Because of how slow and carefully I was moving, walking half of the length of a soccer field took about one or two hours.

“...!”

Then, I found a leaf on the ground.

Of course, there were other leaves on the ground as well. But the one I was looking at was clearly special. It was glowing and practically shouting that it was special.

I quickly ran up.

As soon as I held it up, a window popped up.

[Yggdrasil Leaf]

I found it.

I held my breath to prevent an excited yelp from coming out.

[The Yggdrasil Leaf blesses you with calmness and adventurous courage.]

[Hidden Piece – you may choose one of the following three blessings.]

—Acquire an additional Trait.

—Restore 10% of lost stats.

—Cradle of Wisdom.

It had to be the first option. The second option was for stat monsters like Boss and Kim Suho, and the Cradle of Wisdom was crap. As I created the Tower of Wish in detail, I knew exactly what it was.

—You can acquire an additional Trait.

...But I was at a loss for what to choose between Medicinal Memory Physique and Dexterity.

The Tower should have all sorts of precious medicine I've never seen before. If Medicinal Memory Physique remembers just one of them, my future should be much easier.

“Medicinal... no.”

However, there was too much risk in choosing Medicinal Memory Physique. I didn't know how much of a medicine I would have to consume to remember it.

“...Dexterity, I'll go with Dexterity.”

With Dexterity, I could just make items without having to buy them. Since I knew another way to acquire an additional trait (though it was a lot more difficult), going with Dexterity seemed to be the right choice.

[Yggdrasil's blessing has unsealed your Trait, Dexterity.]

“Whew.”

Now, I could finally fight.

I turned to Nunu and Willump, or no, the goblin warrior and shaman.

At that moment, I received a system message.

[You can store the Yggdrasil Leaf inside your inventory.]

I almost forgot.

“Ah, thank you~ Inventory!”

Inventory, the highest-quality extradimensional space only available inside the Tower. I stored the Yggdrasil Leaf inside it and took out the Random Dice that was also inside.

“Huu.”

I held the dice which had a question mark on each side. An unbelievable nervousness filled my body.

If I were to defeat those goblins, I needed this dice to turn into a weapon.

“...Blade. Give me something with a blade, please.”

I rolled the dice as I prayed in my head.

Drrr—

As soon as the dice disappeared, a primitive dagger appeared.

“YES!”

Holding the precious dagger, I thought of my next move.

This dagger looked too dull to kill the goblin warrior.

However, it should be possible to kill the goblin shaman as long as I hit its head.

“...Wait a minute.”

Then suddenly, I had a different idea. A method to kill both the warrior and the shaman at the same time.

“...”

Holding the dagger, I began to dig a hole. It had to be deep enough for the 2.5-meter tall goblin warrior to be stuck.

Like a mole, I dug a trap quietly.

[Warning! You have two hours remaining.]

After digging for dozens of minutes, by the time I was covered in sweat and the goblin shaman and warrior were moving separately...

“Done...”

I finished digging up a huge hole. It was large enough that even the goblin warrior would have no way out.

I covered the trap up with leaves and branches, then got up with my dagger.

—Kieeek!

Immediately, I caught the attention of the goblins.

I threw my dagger at the shaman, promptly piercing its head and killing it.

—Kieek...

The shaman staggered for a moment before collapsing. An intermediate rank goblin shaman was still a shaman. Its defensive power couldn't even compare to a low-rank monster.

—...

The shaman was out of the picture, and now it was time to deal with the warrior. The goblin warrior was staring blankly at the corpse of the shaman.

“You're not gonna move—?”

—Kuooo!

Then suddenly, the goblin warrior roared and madly charged forward.

I simply stood still without moving.

The clever goblin shaman would have noticed something was strange, but the goblin warrior was in a fit of rage after losing its friend.

—Kerek?!

Soon, the goblin warrior stepped on the trap, and its 2.5-meter body fell into the hole.

—Guooo!

As it struggled inside the hole, I quickly ran up to the shaman and retrieved my dagger. Then, I stabbed down at the goblin warrior stuck in the hole.

Die, please just die.

After about two hours, an alert finally popped up.

[You have cleared the first stage, 'Basic Battle Prowess Assessment'.]

[You will be moved to your private waiting room.]

[After 12 hours of rest, you will be sent to the second stage, 'Way of Survival'.]

“...Argh, I’m exhausted.”

[Rest well.]

“...Thank you.”

I told myself to treat the system politely no matter how difficult things got. This was the ironclad rule of the Tower of Wish, which only I knew about. In truth, it was designed with Kim Suho’s righteous personality in mind. After all, who else other than Kim Suho would talk to a system so politely?



The private waiting room was a personal space that every Player in the Tower of Wish possessed.

[Player Extra7’s waiting room]

Waiting rooms could be modified or decorated however its owner wished. Once the tutorial ended, Players could invite other Players to their waiting room as well. Using ‘Points’, they could expand the size of the room or purchase furniture as well.

“It’s so empty.”

Of course, for now, there was nothing but a single wooden board.

...In the past, I didn’t think the waiting room mattered all that much, but now that I

think about it, the waiting room was quite important.

As 'Waiting Room Return' could be used once every four days, it could be used to escape enemies or death.

"For now... let's sleep."

No matter, I was too tired to think properly.

I decided to sleep until I gained another Random Dice.

"Huu."

I lied down on the hard wooden board.

...Just like that, seven hours went by.

"Argh, my back."

My body felt sore after sleeping on a hard surface. It was a sensation I haven't felt for a long time due to my high stats.

Frowning deeply, I checked my inventory.

[Random Dice]

[Yggdrasil Leaf]

"Haa."

I took the dice out and immediately rolled it.

As I did, I thought to myself, 'ore, ore, give me an ore so I can make a fishing rod and a weapon.'

Plop!

The dice stopped and an ore popped out.

"...Oh?"

A translucent, red-colored ore. When I laid my eyes on it, I became speechless.

"This is..."

===

[Red Crystal]

A crystal formed from compressing fire attribute magic power.

*A crystal specialized for crafting equipment.

===

It was a low-intermediate ~ intermediate rank crystal that was sold at a hefty price in the real world. In this situation, it was even more valuable.

“Ooh...”

If I had to choose one thing I did right after being sent to this world, it would have to be raising my luck to 9.1.

“Ah, I have things to do now...”

Private waiting rooms didn't count as part of the tutorial.

Stigma's magic power couldn't be used during the tutorial, so I had to use this opportunity to craft items.

“Huhu.”

Even the Tower's system couldn't have known I would craft items in the waiting room.

[One of the administrators has detected the activation of an unnatural power.]

But unfortunately, the administrators' eyes were better than I imagined.

One of the administrators. It was most likely the mythical existence with the ability to see everything, the divinity in charge of the third-floor residential area, Heimdall.

“I'll use just a little bit.”

I tried to bargain. After all, it was true that the waiting room wasn't the tutorial.

“Hello?”

The system didn't reply.

But seeing that I wasn't getting any more messages to halt...

I began to use little bits of Stigma's magic power to make crafting tools.

Ssk, ssk.

Then, I began to handle the red crystal while walking on eggshells.

1. League of Legends reference.

Chapter 157

Tutorial (2)

With the red crystal, I worked on making equipment to use in the next tutorial stage. Using a tenth of Stigma's magic power, I separated the red crystal into three equal parts. The sharp crystal was for a spear, the wide crystal was for an axe, and the remaining was for a fishing line.

The spear, axe, and fishing rod were simple. I just had to take apart the waiting room's wooden board, trim it, and put the crystal on the tip.

The problem was the fishing line. I wasn't sure what to do at first, but it ended up being easy using Stigma's magic power. As soon as I infused the red crystal with it, the crystal transformed into a squishy, semisolid substance. After some tinkering, the substance became a long, sturdy fishing line.

"...Hm."

I looked at the spear, axe, and fishing rod I made.

With my Dexterity's proficiency grade being so low and with Aether being absent, they didn't look all that aesthetically pleasing. Still, they were most likely better than most mass-produced goods. At the very least, they were good enough to be used in the tutorial.

At that moment, a system window popped up.

[You obtained the technique, 'Lv.1 Crafting'.]

"Oh right."

The Tower had a technique system as well.

===

[Crafting Lv.1]

*You can easily craft Lv.0 items.

===

The Tower of Wish was kind of like an RPG game. Performing certain actions awarded Players with ‘unrealistic’ bonuses. The Crafting technique should let me craft items instantly, skipping all the intermediate steps. This also included a leveling system like most RPG’s...

[There are 10 minutes remaining until the second tutorial begins.]

[Try accessing the Community.]

While I was practicing swinging my axe and spear, the system gave me another recommendation.

I thought about one of the Tower’s most important systems, the ‘Community’.

===

[Tower Community]

「Public Forum」

「Auction House」

「Group Creation」

...

...

「Messenger」

「Player Profile」

===

As expected, the Tower Community had many functions.

The auction house was exactly as what it sounded like, and group creation was for creating parties. The player profile was similar to Facebook but far superior.

「Player Profile」

Players could create two profile pages, one using their nickname and one anonymously. Each Player had full control over how to decorate their profiles.

They could turn it into a shop by putting up items for sale or use it to buy and sell information.

I tried clicking on each function.

[Player Profile can be used after the tutorial.]

[Auction House can be used after the tutorial.]

[Messenger can be...]

As I thought, the public forum was the only function that was currently available.

「Public Forum」

=

[Am I the first poster? (3)]

[Wow, this is interesting. Someone comment on this thread! I need to know if anyone else is alive. (6)]

[Has anyone cleared the tutorial yet? (2)]

=

There were only three posts on it. It seemed everyone was busy trying to clear the tutorial.

I created a post as well.

[Let's share information.]

The view count went up as soon as I posted it, and someone commented on the post.

—?? Extra7-nim? Why are you here? Wait, are you the Extra7 I know?

“...How does this guy know me?”

I tilted my head and checked the commenter's nickname.

The commenter's nickname was... 'Nayunjajangman'.

The 'Nayun' part of the name made me a bit uncomfortable, but because I was so familiar with it, I was surprised more than anything else.

“He's here too?”

[The second tutorial stage, 'Way of Survival', will begin at any moment.]

[Please get ready.]

I tried to comment, but another system alert popped up.

I turned the Community off and got up with all the equipment I made.

“I'm ready.”

[You will now be transferred to the second tutorial stage.]

“Yes.”

Along with the system alert, a burst of white light erupted. I closed my eyes. I could feel the warmth from the particles of light enveloping my body, as well as a strange sensation as though I was floating in the air.

Tssss.

Soon, I could feel that I landed on a soft surface.

I opened my eyes.

“I’m here.”

Chwaaa...

The sound of a serene wave rang out.

Standing still, I looked in front of me. A boundless ocean was spread out across the horizon.

I was standing on a sandy beach. Behind me, numerous palm trees were forming a dense forest.

This place was a tiny uninhabited island.

[Tutorial Goal – survive for 14 days.]

[From the second tutorial, you will be ranked based on your performance and will be rewarded accordingly.]

The goal of the second tutorial was survival.

To stay alive in this boundless area for 14 days.

However, it was worth risking more danger in this tutorial. Its ‘performance-based reward’ was something that surpassed the standard of a tutorial.

[Try thinking or shouting ‘Status Window’.]

Another system alert popped up.

I did as it said.

“Status window.”

===

[Nickname – Extra7]

○Vitality – 43/100

○Magic Power – 30/30

○Skill Count – [1]

○Skill – Bonus Skill 「Random Dice」

===

My vitality and magic power, effectively my HP and MP, were numericized. My magic power wasn't 0 most likely because I lost my Magic Dysfunction Physique. But why did the system want me to see this?

[Vitality is affected not only by damage but also hunger and fatigue.]

[When your vitality reaches 0, Player Extra7 will die. Players who die in the tutorial cannot revive.]

I see, so it was telling me to eat something. It must have been worried about me, a kind, polite... kuum.

“Thank you.”

I answered energetically and took a look around.

Although I was standing on land, there wasn't anything to eat in the highest difficulty island. In other words, I had to find food in the ocean.

That was the reason I crafted a fishing rod and an axe. To fish and to craft a boat.

Growl—

My stomach growled. I was starting to get hungry.

Before creating a boat to set out onto the ocean, I took out the fishing rod from my inventory. Since I could use coconuts from the palm trees as my source of water, finding food was my first priority.

“Let me think...”

I stared at the fishing rod in my hand, then held it with both hands.

Before coming into the Tower, I practiced fishing for this exact purpose.

“...Huup!”

I swung the fishing rod with a big motion.

Whish—

The fishing line drew an arc in the air.

It felt more natural than I thought. It was partly because I practiced fishing beforehand, but it probably had more to do with the fact that Dexterity and Master Sharpshooter helped with fishing.

Plop!

The hook sank into the ocean.

...Time passed in silence. I was getting hungrier, but the fishing rod remained unmoving.

I didn't use any bait, but because the hook was made with the red crystal, I didn't need one. Sea monsters should smell the scent of magic power and come.

“...Haam.”

I continued to wait. I had a firm belief in my luck.

After about 30 minutes, the surface of the water showed a hint of change.

“Ah!”

The fishing line tensed up. Something had clearly bit it.

Whatever it was, it was incredibly powerful. The wooden fishing rod was bending.

“...”

After repeatedly trying to reel the fish in, I picked up my spear. With my vitality low, doing this was a waste of time. In the end, killing it then reeling it up was the same as reeling it up then killing it.

Holding my spear firmly, I calmly observed the fish moving underwater.

Then...

Chweek!

I threw the spear.

Although my strength stat was 65% sealed, it was still above 2 points. Struck with the spear, the fish stopped moving, and I easily reeled it in.

[You obtained the technique, 'Lv1. Fishing'.]

*You have an increased chance of fish biting your hook.

[You spotted a glossy seafish. Its information has been recorded in the Player Encyclopedia.]

“...A sea monster.”

○Monster Encyclopedia

[Glossy Seafish] [Low-rank grade-7 sea monster]

—A sea monster that tastes like a mackerel.

I retrieved the spear sticking out of the fish’s back then started a campfire. Starting the fire was easy. I only had to rub some wood I collected with the red crystal axe. Once the fire was up, I strung the glossy seafish over it.

Tssss.

The glossy seafish dripped with delicious fish oil as it was cooked.



Same time.

Boss, who cleared the first stage of the hardest difficulty tutorial in the blink of an eye, was sitting on a sandy beach in meditation.

“...”

Repeating deep breaths, she tried to move her shadow to the water. However, the shadow didn’t stretch far, only swirling around her before disappearing. It was because of the 93% stat restriction she was under.

“...Huu.”

She tried over a dozen times but failed each time.

In the end, she gave up on trying to fish with magic power.

Growl.

She pondered, ‘I’m hungry. I have to eat something. Should I have saved the orange ticket’s emergency food supply?’

She got up and began to walk around. Soon, she found a large boulder. She immediately hoped to find some crabs underneath it.

She slowly approached the boulder. Then, she picked the rock up and threw it aside. There was a startled hermit crab underneath it. Boss quickly moved and grabbed the

hermit crab.

“...”

Now, she needed to cook.

She opened her inventory. Although she already ate all the food that came with her ticket, she still had the burner and frying pan that came as a set.

Tak, tak.

She turned the burner on and put the hermit crab on the frying pan.

“...ssp.”

Food.

Food.

Food.

As she mumbled, the sun began to set.

◇ ◇ ◇

18 hours passed since the start of the second tutorial.

Koong, koong, koong.

I was striking down a tree with my axe. As the red crystal axe was a fire attribute weapon, the tree didn't last all that long.

Kiiik—

With just five swings, the tree fell.

“That should be enough...”

That was the thirtieth tree. They were all used to craft a boat.

The highest difficulty island had no food, and from the second tutorial, there was a performance-based ranking system.

How far I adventured, how many sea monsters I hunted. These things all contributed to the ranking, so leaving the island was a must.

“Inventory.”

My inventory was currently filled with useful materials, like bones and skins of sea

monsters.

I took out an item labeled by the system as 'Red Fish's Tough Skin'.

"Craft."

Then, I used Crafting to make a string.

[Red Fish's Tough Skin has been used to produce a twine.]

[Trait 'Dexterity' applies to crafting.]

[You crafted a Lv.1 Tough Twine.]

Using Crafting, I could skip intermediate steps of crafting like in a real game.

"Whew."

Now that that was done, I picked up my axe and went to where all the logs were gathered.

Ssk, ssk.

With Dexterity's help, I began to shave the surface of the logs. To create a proper sailboat, I needed to make the surface of the logs as smooth as possible.

Sssk, sssk.

After about an hour of hard work...

[Yggdrasil Leaf is impressed by your effort.]

I received another system alert.

[Try checking the Yggdrasil Leaf.]

"Ah, hold on a bit."

I immediately put everything down and opened my inventory.

===

[Yggdrasil Leaf]

—Blessing of Adventure

*Your body becomes lighter while you have this item in your inventory. (minor improvement to your physical ability)

*You can grant small blessings to items. Blessings will get stronger the more they have

to do with adventures.

===

Just like the system said, Yggdrasil Leaf had a new effect.

“Nice.”

Although the first effect gave a ‘minor’ improvement, I liked how it had a wide range of applying to my entire physical ability.

The second effect just seemed good since it said ‘blessing’.

“Thank you.”

I closed the inventory and went back to working on the boat.

Ssk, ssk.

The sound of logs being cut.

Chwaak, chwaak.

The sound of logs being tied together with a string.

“...Uuu!”

After three hours of hard work, I was finally done.

I got up and stretched. I felt a bit lightheaded.

“Next up is...”

Coconuts.

I began to throw coconuts on my boat to use as water.

One, two, three, four, five... twenty-three. Almost half the boat was filled with coconuts.

[Try granting the vehicle a small blessing.]

“...Oh right.”

I almost forgot.

This was why it was nice to be friendly to the system. There was a high chance that the Yggdrasil Leaf got a new effect because I’ve been so polite to the system.

I took out the Yggdrasil Leaf from my inventory and waved it over my sailboat.

[Yggdrasil's Blessing envelopes the sailboat.]

[The surface of the sailboat becomes coated with magic power.]

[You will now have a smoother adventure.]

“Status window.”

I opened up the status window and checked out the sailboat's specs.

===

[Lv1. Sturdy Sailboat with Lv.2 Yggdrasil's Blessing]

—Lv.1 Sturdy Sailboat

○Durability Lv.1

○Speed Lv.1

○Safety Lv.1

—Lv.2 Yggdrasil's Small Blessing

Increases all effects of the Sturdy Sailboat by one level.

===

“...Oh?”

Levels were an important aspect of equipment. Yggdrasil's Blessing raised items' levels? This wasn't a small blessing at all!

“Thank you ve~ry much.”

‘I won't forget this gratitude. Until I conquer this Tower, that is.’

Now, it was time to set sail.

I pushed the sailboat into the water. Then, I hopped up with a paddle. A pleasant breeze blew over me.

I paddled forward.

The sailboat began to press forward.

My goal for the second tutorial was simple.

Going as far out as possible and killing as many sea monsters as possible.

Although things might get a bit dangerous, that would only serve to increase my ranking.

“...Huh?”

But after about 30 minutes of paddling, I caught a glimpse of another island.
That wasn't the problem.
There was a silhouette of a person on the beach.

"Am I seeing this correctly...?"

Narrowing my eyes, I focused on the distant island.
Instantly, my vision expanded, and the view of the island became clear.

Chapter 158

Tutorial (3)

“Who is it...?”

There was someone on the island. He didn't look too unfamiliar. Although I couldn't remember his name, he was likely a high-intermediate rank Hero who often appeared on variety shows.

“Wait...”

Could it be that all Players in the highest difficulty level shared the same sea? It was something I never thought about when writing my setting.

—...O-Oi! Oiii!

The man seemed to have discovered my boat as he waved his hand.

I sailed forward. Although I had no intention of letting him on board, I was willing to give out some of the food I was overflowing with.

“...Must be a green ticket.”

The man didn't have anything with him, not even the basic weapon and food supply provided by the tutorial.

In reality, choosing the hardest difficulty with a green ticket was akin to committing suicide. The system should have warned him about it as well, but it seemed he wasn't the type to listen.

—Here! Here! Uhaha! Over here!

The man jumped excitedly. I took out a glossy seafish from my inventory.

It was then.

A dark shadow was cast underneath the island.

I didn't have much time to think about what it was or why it was here.

Puaaaa—

Suddenly, the mouth of a giant fish shot up from the water. There were two sharp fangs growing on each side of its jaw, which promptly swallowed the island whole.

[You spotted an Island Devourer.]

===

○Monster Encyclopedia

[Island Devourer] [Tutorial-only Monster]

—This monster hates those who stay on one island. However, who it seeks is solely dependent on luck.

===

A system alert popped up.

“Whoa, whoa.”

I broke out into cold sweat and stood a bit dazed.

However, I didn't have time to sit still. The shadow that swallowed an island whole was now creeping up on me.

I quickly began to paddle away. However, the shadow was only getting closer. I couldn't do anything against it with a mere paddle.

I quickly opened my inventory.

[Inventory]

[Random Dice x3]

I could keep a maximum of five Random Dice. Since it could become anything depending on my desire, I was saving them up to use in emergency situations.

I picked up a dice and thought hard.

‘Please become something that can save me from that thing.’

Something like an engine that can be attached to my boat...

Drrr—

I rolled the dice with my dearest wish.

“...What?”

However, the dice mercilessly betrayed my wish and became a strange mango. At first, I didn't even know it was a mango. It was yellowish-orange but was as big as a watermelon.

[Lv.3 Big and Juicy Mango]

If it wasn't for the status window, I would have thought it was some exotic fruit.

“The hell is this?”

I checked the item description just in case.

===

[Lv.3 Big and Juicy Mango]

—A big, juicy mango. It is a very precious fruit that is sometimes used as medicine.

○Lv.2 Vitality Recovery

○Lv.4 Satiability

===

A Lv.3 item!

As most items in the tutorial were only lv.0~lv.2, this mango was certainly a good item. The problem was that it was useless in this situation. What would filling up my belly do when I was about to enter a belly myself?

—Drrk.

“Shit...”

The Island Devourer's fin grazed my boat. I had a strong hunch that it wanted to eat me.

My heart thumped violently, but I was used to it by now. As a mercenary, I had lived through much more dangerous situations...

Now, I didn't even have time to throw another dice.

I racked my brain frantically.

Mango.

A delicious, juicy mango.

A lightbulb went on in my head.

“...H-Hey! Eat this instead of me!”

I held the mango forward and wafted it back and forth. The shadow slowed down, or at least, that's what it looked like.

"This is a precious food you can never taste in the tutorial."

As I said before, Lv.3 items could not be found inside the tutorial.

"So... take it!"

I threw the mango as far away as I could.

Whiiish—

With Master Sharpshooter's support, the mango drew a beautiful arc and landed 400~500 meters away.

Plop!

Water splashed on my face. The giant creature underneath my boat changed course and began to swim towards the mango.

"...Whew."

The giant shadow was getting farther away.

Thud.

I fell on my butt. Although I didn't do much, I was out of energy.

I most certainly didn't put such a creature in my tutorial.

"...I knew this would happen."

But I wasn't too surprised.

In the original story, I often had comments saying, 'isn't the highest difficulty tutorial too easy?'

My excuse was always, 'it's not that the tutorial is easy. Kim Suho's Gift is just broken.'

"Haa..."

In any case, I just barely avoided death.

The scene of an entire island being swallowed still lingered in my mind.

“Mango, mango, mango...”

I murmured the same word in a daze.



“...Auu, I’m getting seasick.”

Six days had passed since then. Today, the waves were fiercer than usual.

The past few days have been quite spectacular and dynamic. I almost fell overboard from a sudden storm, and I was almost eaten by an intermediate-rank grade-8 sea monster.

Both times, I barely managed to survive using my red crystal weapons and Random Dice’s power.

===

[Lv.2 Sea Tiger’s Oil]

—An oil that drives away sea monsters.

○Lv.1 low-intermediate rank or lower monster repellent

○Lv.1 Shock absorbent, waterproof coating

[Lv.2 Magical Repair Ointment]

—A mystical ointment that works on items.

○Restores durability of items under Lv.1

===

These two items were especially helpful in my journey.

“I want to be on land.”

After staying on a boat for six days, I was starting to miss land.

[Your Sailing technique improves to Lv.2]

—You can now cross waters more easily.

—Your sense of direction on sea improves.

No, please just give me a land of some sort!

I widened my eyes and peered out into the distance.

In the distance, I caught a glimpse of a small island.

“...Nice.”

With my new destination discovered, I began to paddle towards it. Sploosh. Perhaps because of my improved Sailing technique, the boat seemed a bit faster than before.

After about 20 minutes of paddling, I could finally see a portion of the island.

“Eh?”

When I saw the island, I exclaimed in shock. There was a familiar face on the island. I shot up and shouted.

“Boss!”



Seoul, Essence of the Strait’s team leader office. Yoo Yeonha was chatting with Yoo Jinhyuk.

[Why are you so curious about this?]

[I’m not curious, I just want to know the truth.]

Yoo Yeonha shared what she knew about the Kwang-Oh Incident with Yoo Jinhyuk. However, Yoo Jinhyuk still kept some matters secret, which Yoo Yeonha was now in the process of investigating.

Under the assumption that Kim Hajin was really the survivor of the Kwang-Oh Incident, Yoo Yeonha wanted to know why Chae Joochul’s assassin didn’t kill him and who the assassin was.

[To be completely honest, I don’t know.]

“...He’s lying again.”

Yoo Yeonha frowned.

[You're lying.]

[No, I'm serious.]

[You said you saw him being admitted to the orphanage.]

As she typed, Yoo Yeonha suddenly wondered.

How would Kim Hajin have looked like as a baby? She found it a bit difficult to imagine his face on a baby's.

[Yeah, some kid left him there.]

[Kid?]

[Yeah, 5~7 years old or 8 at most. Black hair... er, actually maybe it was covered with a hijab or something.]

[Do you have dementia?]

[Heh, I'm getting old. Time travel isn't like what it used to be.]

As inaccurate information introduced needless bias and noise, having more information wasn't always better.

[Anyways, it was a young girl.]

[...Okay, thank you. Ah, by the way, have you thought about my offer?]

[No.]

"...Tsk."

Yoo Yeonha suggested Yoo Jinhyuk to enter her information guild, Falling Blossom. As far as she was concerned, he was lazing around most of the time in his office.

[Think about it, I'm already being watched by Chae Joochul. What would he think if he sees you so close to me?]

[I get it.]

[Good, then send me some assault rifles.]

[...What do you need those for?]

[I decided to form a small militia. You know how to go about it without being discovered, right?]

[Yeah, no.]

[What? Oi, Niece, you—]

Yoo Yeonha left the chat and leaned against her chair.

Ssss—

Her eyes closed automatically.

“...It really is amazing.”

If she were to describe this sensation, she would say it was like leaning on an angel’s wings or sleeping peacefully in Noah’s Ark while the world was crumbling down. As she spent 16 hours a day in her office, her new chair was the best gift she’d ever received.

“Hnnng...”

Buried in the chair, Yoo Yeonha thought about many things.

Her guild members who were in the Tower of Wish, the high-intermediate rank monsters, the Dungeons her guild was planning to conquer, a cup ramen... hamburger... ssp.

She began to drool.



Boss seemed to have gotten skinnier since the last time I saw her. I wanted to give her a big hug out of joy, but we were both too dirty from staying in the wild for several days.

“It’s been a while.”

Boss smiled leisurely as she said that. However, she didn't look to be in all that good a shape.

"Boss, did you eat?"

"I did."

She nodded affirmatively, but I was a bit suspicious.

"What's your vitality right now?"

"Vitality?"

"Yes."

She looked at the air blankly. She was probably checking her status window.

"...90."

"90?"

"...Yes."

Boss nodded.

"Are you sure it isn't just 9?"

"...Pft, as if."

Her unnatural smirk confirmed it. Her vitality was definitely 9. In fact, it couldn't be anything but 9. Boss' stat restriction had to be incredibly high. Kim Suho received an 80% stat restriction, so Boss' should easily surpass 90%.

"It was hard at first, but I got used to it."

"You've been here the whole time?"

"No, I went back and forth to find food."

“Ah...”

Thankfully, it seemed she wasn't targeted by the Island Devourer.

“Then let's eat something first.”

“...Okay.”

I opened my inventory to take out a seafish. But before that, Boss moved first.

“Follow me.”

With a kind smile, she turned around and began to walk into the forest.

“Boss? Where are you going?”

“I thought this might happen, so I kept some emergency food supply.”

“Ah... okay.”

I followed her for now.

Boss walked to the middle of the forest and stopped in front of a giant palm tree engraved with an X mark. She moved the leaves underneath it and took out the tutorial-only food supply bag.

“Here.”

Boss opened the bag proudly.

Inside, there were all sorts of seafood: clams, sea pineapples, crabs, snails, and two small fish. They were certainly good enough for a meal.

“Wow.”

I was genuinely surprised. Boss' main stat was 'magic power'. This stat displayed exponential power as it grew but unless it surpassed a certain point, it was more or less useless.

In other words, Boss had fished all these up without any tools, using only her physical abilities.

“There’s a lot.”

“Of course. Thanks to this place, I got to relive the old days of training.”

Boss stuck her chest out proudly.

Since she kept the food inside the tutorial bag instead of her inventory, she clearly had a good survival sense. Unlike the inventory, the tutorial bag kept food fresh.

“You must be hungry since you paddled all the way here. Wait.”

Boss seemed to be worrying about me as she quickly took out a burner and frying pan and began to cook the seafood.

Tsss.

I stared at Boss who was watching her food cooking on the frying pan. After flipping them a couple times, she turned the burner off and gave the frying pan to me.

“It’s done. You can eat.”

“...What about you, Boss?”

“Ehem, like I said, my vitality is at 90.”

She was saying she didn’t need it.

“...”

At that moment, I felt something warm rush into my heart.

Was this why she was the boss?

Was this the duty of a boss?

Feeling a surge of emotion that was hard to put into words...

“Aren’t you going to...”

I took out a fish from my inventory.

“...eat?”

It was a large glossy seafish.

Boss’ eyes lost focus as she glanced back and forth between the frying pan and my

glossy seafish.

On the frying pan were tiny seafood gathered together. On the other hand, the glossy seafish was too big to fit in the frying pan.

Boss' face turned red.



30 minutes later.

We ate all the glossy seafish in my inventory.

[Cooperation is an important factor in climbing the Tower.]

While I was sitting on the ground digesting my food, the system messaged me.

"Alright, let's start moving."

"...Moving?"

"Yes."

The second tutorial's performance-based points used both an absolute and relative evaluation. In other words, even if you achieved first place overall, you had to surpass a certain threshold to receive the reward.

"Let's set sail. It's dangerous to stay on the same island."

"Sail?"

"Yes, there's a monster called Island Devourer. It attacks you if you stay on the same island."

"I don't quite understand but sure."

Boss and I went back to the beach where my boat was.

"...Hmm."

But now that I looked at my boat, it seemed too small.

“We’re going to ride that thing?”

Boss had doubts as well.

“Mm... hold on.”

I took out a Random Dice. Since I had five, it was fine to use one.

“...I don’t know if this will work though.”

I thought as I rolled the dice, ‘a boat or materials to build a new one.’

Tk.

The dice became stuck in the sand without rolling. It seemed my wish was too big as the first dice turned into a wooden plank.

“Oh? What was that dice?”

“Uh... hold on.”

I rolled another one.

Tk.

It got stuck in the sand once again. But this time, the dice was shaking strangely. Then, the dice grew in size...

“Oh?”

And it transformed into a boat. Although it was only half as big as my sailboat, it was shaped like an actual boat.

“What is this mysterious thing?”

“...”

“Newbie?”

“...”

Newbie?”

I couldn't reply to Boss' question.

I just felt... betrayed.

Why did I cut down trees, shave them, tie them together, and repeat tiring tasks? All I had to do was roll the dice a couple times...



After tying my old sailboat to the new boat, Boss and I set sail.

Voyaging became more fun with someone to talk to. I obtained food by fishing, and Boss focused on training her magic power.

“Ah, my magic power stat just rose by 0.3 points.”

After about 6 hours of sailing, Boss spoke with a bright face.

“Wow, it's increasing fast. When do you think you'll be able to hunt sea monsters?”

“Now.”

“What is it at?”

“2.3”

“...Let's just eat.”

“Okay.”

While Boss continued to meditate, I began to cook.

Today's menu was seafish sashimi. Although sashimi was low in calories, eating it had a chance of increasing magic power.

While I was cutting up the fish...

Pssssh—

A large waterspout shot up from the ocean. At the same time, the surface of the water split, and a house-sized fish shot up.

It had fierce eyes that took up half of its face and a mouth that protruded out sharply.

The ugly fish blocked our boat as it stared down at us.

[You spotted a giant fish. Its information has been recorded in the Player Encyclopedia.]

===

○Monster Encyclopedia

[Giant Fish] [Intermediate-rank grade-9]

===

“Boss?”

“Don’t worry.”

Boss stood up and reached out to the fish blocking our way.

Gueeee— The fish opened its mouth with a strange roar. It was clearly trying to swallow us, but trying to fight Boss from a close range was foolish no matter how much her stats were restricted.

—Pervading Shadow.

Along with a soft whisper, black magic power shot out of Boss’ fingers, entering the fish’s mouth. Soon, the fish’s body began to distort as though something was trying to dig its way out.

Gueeee—

A different scream rang out.

The fish was in pain. However, the pain didn’t last long as black thorns pierced out from inside its body.

“...”

Boss sat down on the boat with a peaceful look.

I pulled the giant fish’s corpse near. I checked to see if it had any useful materials, but there was nothing.



[The second tutorial will end in 10 minutes.]

[Good work surviving until now.]

A system alert notified the end of the 14-day tutorial. Boss spoke from next to me.

“The tutorial is ending soon.”

“I heard.”

Boss looked at me and smiled.

“Good job.”

“Thank you. But Boss is just dead weight here.”

“Dead weight... is too harsh. Didn't I kill all the sea monsters?”

“That's because I kept us fed. You were starving every time you used your magic power.”

Boss narrowed her eyes. She seemed to be glaring at me, but it wasn't scary at all.

“I'm kidding. Good work.”

“You too, Newbie...”

We smiled while looking into each other's eyes.

[You cleared the second tutorial.]

[Player Extra7 obtained 2008 performance points.]

[You are currently ranked first out of the 78 Players who cleared the hardest difficulty tutorial.]

[You are the only Player who surpassed 2000 points – you will be given the second tutorial's reward of honor.]

[You will be transferred to your waiting room in three minutes.]

Chapter 159

The First City (1)

[You will now be given 24 hours to rest.]
[Prepare for the final tutorial.]

A warm light enveloped my body, and I closed my eyes. After a brief moment of feeling afloat, my feet touched hard surface once again.

I opened my eyes and saw my waiting room. Seeing the empty white room, I smirked and sat down on the floor.

[First place reward – you obtained a tutorial reward box.]
[You obtained 1000 TP (Tower Point)]

Although all I did was continue to adventure, because the first wave of challengers had no information on how the Tower worked, I obtained first place easily. The competition would get much harder than now from the third wave onwards, since Kim Suho was destined to get first place in the second wave.

[TP is a currency useable in all floors of the Tower.]
[Try opening the Lv.1 Player Shop.]

“Yes, thank you.”

I thanked the system.

The Player Shop was exactly what it sounded like, a shop useable only by Players. This shop sold special items like the Tower Re-entrance Ticket and the Earth Return Ticket. Of course, neither of them could be used during the tutorial.

“Player Shop.”

As soon as I voiced the phrase, a shop window popped up.

===

[Lv.1 Player Shop]

—Physical Ability

—Magic Power Development

—Faith

—Consumable

—Special Items

[TP: 1000]

===

The Lv.1 here didn't refer to my level. Players didn't have levels, but everything else in the Tower did: equipment, technique, skills, NPCs, the Player Shop, and even the 'system' that I was talking to so politely.

I clicked on the 'physical ability' category.

[Muscle Growth Catalyst]

...

...

[Vitality Boost Pill]

The shop was selling items that increased 0.05~0.10 stat points for 1000 TP. It was the same for the 'magic power development' and 'faith' categories.

With my 1000 TP, I could only buy a few consumable herbs.

[Blue Herb 30TP]

[Luminescence Herb 50TP]

...

...

[Magic Power Clover 100TP]

“There's nothing but herbs.”

I remembered putting vitality and magic power recovery potions even in level 1 Player Shops, but it seemed that was modified as well.

In fact, all of the items listed here weren't cost effective. As TP was a shared currency within the Tower of Wish, it was likely better to buy items from NPCs through NPC shops or from other players through the auction house. Ah, of course, crafting items personally was the cheapest option.

[Earth Return Ticket – 1000TP]

“This got more expensive too.”

Even the return ticket was 1000 TP and that wasn't even taking into account the 1000 TP needed for the re-entrance ticket.

In total, going back and forth between the Tower and Earth was four times more expensive than in the original story.

“...Looks like I won't make it back in a month.”

TP was important especially in earlier floors of the Tower. I promised Evandel I'd come back in a month, but it looked like I needed at least two months.

Next, I checked the reward box.

===

[Tutorial Performance Reward Box]

You will obtain three random upgrade scrolls.

(This box will disappear unless opened within 12 hours)

===

My luck probably didn't apply to this box as it contained similar level scrolls.

I opened the box without hesitation.

Three scrolls immediately popped out.

[Skill Upgrade Scroll]

[Item Upgrade Scroll]

[Upgrade Scroll]

[All scrolls must be used within 12 hours.]

All three scrolls were rare scrolls that were hard to find even after the end of the tutorial.

“...They're different, huh.”

They were different than the scrolls Kim Suho would obtain. The only common scroll was the skill upgrade scroll.

This scroll obviously had to be used on Random Dice. I wanted to save it if possible, but it would disappear in 12 hours if I didn't use it.

First, I ripped the skill upgrade scroll in half.

[Would you like to upgrade your bonus skill Random Dice?]

“Yes.”

===

[Choose the direction of the upgrade.]

[Lv.1 Efficiency]

*Decreases Random Dice’s recharge time.

[Lv.1 Limit Increase]

*The rank of the items you can obtain from the Random Dice increases.

[Lv.1 Intelligence]

*Random Dice will recognize your intentions better.

===

Three upgrade directions popped up in front of me.

I clicked on ‘limit increase’ without thinking for too long.

Thunk. The sound of a metallic bar closing rang out.

[Random Dice can now transform into Lv.4 items. In exchange, its recharge time increases by 30 minutes.]

The upgrade was over.

Next was the item upgrade scroll.

“What item do I have anyways...?”

I opened my inventory.

[Random Dice] [Lv.1 Fleshfish’s Skin] [Lv.2 Black Horn Octopus’ Heart] [Lv.1 Red Crystal Spear] [Lv.1 Red Crystal Axe] [Lv.1 Red Crystal Fishing Rod] [Lv.2 Yggdrasil Leaf] [Glossy Seafish’s Tough Skin]

My inventory was full with only eight items. It couldn’t be helped since my inventory was only level 0.

“Hm.”

I pondered. None of the items from the tutorial were worth keeping forever. Upgrading the red crystal spear seemed too... wait.

“Yggdrasil Leaf.”

Was it upgradeable?

I tried rubbing the scroll on the leaf.

[Would you like to use the item upgrade scroll on Lv.2 Yggdrasil Leaf?]

“It works?”

I confirmed it immediately.

[Lv.2 Yggdrasil Leaf becomes Lv. 3]

—The effectiveness of ‘Yggdrasil’s Blessing’ increases.

—Yggdrasil Leaf’s physical ability increase improves.

*Your strength, vitality, stamina, and speed stats increase by an additional 0.1 point.

“Alright, that does it for items...”

Now, it was time for the ‘upgrade scroll’. This scroll didn’t have a prefix as if to say it could be used on anything. I immediately decided how to use the scroll.

“I’d like to upgrade the system.”

With that, I ripped the scroll in half.

One second.

Two seconds.

Three seconds.

The system, which always responded immediately, popped up three seconds later.

[Are you sure you want to upgrade ‘Lv.0 Extra7’s System’?]

The system seemed to be taken aback. Perhaps, it was even happy.

“Of course.”

I smiled and nodded.

[‘Lv.0 Extra7’s System’ becomes ‘Lv.1 Extra7’s System’.]

[Your personal waiting room becomes bigger.]

[Your inventory becomes Lv.1]

[The Community...]

A string of system alerts let me know that my decision was correct.

By upgrading the system, my inventory space increased and with a rumbling noise, my waiting room also got bigger.

“Great.”

I looked around the waiting room.

I would be coming here often from now. I planned to bring my friends here as well.

Of course, the Tower had an incredibly large floor called the ‘Residential Area’, which was almost the size of Korea, but in other floors, this personal waiting room was the only place I could go to rest in peace.

“Now let’s make some furniture.”

This was part of my training as making things should help increase my stats and Dexterity’s proficiency.

First, I needed some material.

I took out a Random Dice from my inventory and threw it on the ground.

[Well-cut Oak Tree]

Not having a level actually meant that it was Lv.0.

In other words, it was a bust, a trash that could only be used for drawers or floor tiles.

So, I rolled another one.

[Lv.3 High-quality Black Wood]

“Sweet.”

A large log popped out. With this, I should be able to make a bed.

I created a tool with Stigma’s magic power and started working.

“Huup.”

...12 hours quickly went by.

[Trait 'Dexterity' improves to grade-8.]

[Crafting technique improves to Lv.2]

—Adds finishing touches to handmade equipment.

—Automatic crafting becomes more elaborate.

—You obtain 'Blueprint-seeing Eyes'.

[Your strength increases by 0.1 point.]

[Your stamina increases by 0.1 point.]

[Your vitality increases by 0.1 point.]

...

After falling to grade-9, Dexterity was restored to grade-8, and my physical stats increased by 0.1 points.

===

[Lv.3 Comfy Bed]

○Lv.3 Recovery

*Completely restores vitality in 6 hours.

○Lv.3 Comfiness

*Clears your mind.

===

I built an amazing single-sized bed.

Now, I had 12 hours remaining.

Unfortunately, I didn't have time to rest.

The reason I was working so hard was to bully that bastard... or I guess that bitch 'Jin Sahyuk' as much as possible. I had to get stronger faster than her.

"Argh, I'm sore all over."

My shoulders felt like they were going to pop off, but I still had many things to do.

Next, I had to make 'equipment'. I was thinking of a mask and hoodie to hide my face, and I also wanted a simple armor.

I rolled another Random Dice to get more material.



In 9 hours, I crafted three more equipment.

===

[Lv.3 Black Hooded Robe]

○Lv.2 Temperature Control

○Lv.3 Auto-fit

○Lv.1 Sound Muffling

===

[Lv.2 Black Eagle Mask]

○Lv.2 Air Purifier

○Lv.2 Face Protection

===

[Lv.3 Leather Armor]

○Lv.3 Defense

○Lv.3 Durability

○Lv.3 Ease of Movement

===

“Auu, I’m so tired.”

Thankfully, Stigma’s magic power worked well, and they all ended up with effects I wanted. There was little chance that someone else in the tutorial had better equipment than me.

[You acquired the technique, ‘Lv.1 Magic Power Infusion.’]

—The effect of magic power infused into items improves.

[The final tutorial will begin in one hour.]

Looking at the system alert, I pondered.

The final tutorial wasn’t that hard.

The first tutorial’s concept was ‘battle’, the second tutorial’s concept was ‘survival’, and the final tutorial’s concept was ‘society’.

Before the final tutorial began, I entered the Community.

「Public Forum」

[Read this if you are Extra7.]

“Huh?”

While I was scrolling through the public forum, I found a post looking for me. I could tell who created the post before even reading it.

[Read this if you are Extra7.]

「Nayunjajangman」

—Are you still alive? If so, answer me.

He must have thought I died because I suddenly stopped responding last time. I laughed and typed my reply.

—What, you finished your tutorial?

He seemed to have received an alert as he quickly responded.

↳ As expected, you're still alive, Hyung-nim ㅋㅋ I'm waiting for the final tutorial.

↳ What difficulty are you in.

↳ You first, Hyung-nim.

↳ I'm in the highest.

↳ Wow... Hyung-nim must really be someone amazing... so scary.

[Soon, the final tutorial will begin.]

“Ah, I don't have time to talk.”

I didn't have enough time. It wasn't possible to enter the Community during the tutorial.

↳ Hey, I'm starting the final tutorial. Don't die and follow me properly.

↳ ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ Yes Hyung-nim!

“Hm.”

The long string of ㅋㅋs made it sound like he was looking down on me, but I didn't bother to reply.

[Final tutorial – Maintaining Profit]
[You will now be moved to ‘Tutorial Town’.]

Light burst out like a thick fog. Feeling the warmth of the light, I closed my eyes.



[You are in the highest difficulty level’s Tutorial Town.]
[For ten days, obtain as much TP as you can in the tutorial’s society.]
[At the end of ten days, you must possess more than 1000 TP to clear the final tutorial.]
[All TP earned by Players will be theirs to keep.]
[Lv.??? Mercenary’s Pub]

When I opened my eyes, I saw a flurry of system alerts along with the status window of the building in front of me.

“...It’s practically a city.”

I looked around.

Behind me were houses built with yellow bricks and medieval-style shops. In front of me was a pub made entirely out of wood. The whole scene looked like it came out of a fantasy novel.

For the first time in my life, I entered a pub.

Kiiik—

After opening the stiff wooden door, I walked on the creaking wooden floor.

“Uhahaha.”

“Hahahaha.”

“Kuhahaha.”

As soon as I entered, rowdy laughter rang out.

First, I took a good look around the place. Many muscular NPCs were talking and having fun.

For the record, it was hard to distinguish between NPCs and Players in the Tower. As such, it was better to pretend to be an NPC as much as possible.

I lifted up the hood on my robe and sat down at the counter.

“What can I get ya?”

The owner asked.

I glanced at the menu in front of me and ordered fluently.

“One gin.”

“That’ll be 50TP.”

[You can take out 50TP from your inventory.]

“It shouldn’t be that expensive.”

“...20TP.”

The owner lowered the price by over 50%. However, 20TP was still too expensive.

I pretended to reach into my pocket and took out five 1TP coins.

The owner poured gin into a glass without saying anything.

===

[Lv.1 Gin]

○Lv.1 Alcohol

===

It seemed the drink wasn’t drugged.

I chugged the glass.

It was then.

Kiik—

The wooden door I just used opened once again.

I turned around instinctively.

Immediately, my eyes widened in shock.

Standing at the door was a man and a woman.

The woman was Caucasian and short.

Her white hair was noticeable even from a distance, and her puppy-like eyes shone like jewels. Anyone looking at her would wonder how such a small face could contain such beauty.

Next to the woman was a well-built Asian man. His appearance was just as praiseworthy as the woman's.

“Where is this? How mysterious.”

They were Heroes from the honored Temple of Justice, the strongest members the Hero Association had to offer.

‘Aileen the Spirit Speech Master’ and ‘Hellfire Yi Yongha’.

Chapter 160

The First City (2)

According to the system, there were 78 people who passed the second tutorial in the highest difficulty level. The size of the Tutorial Town was about the size of Yeouido, and all 78 highest difficulty challengers were now in this town.

Even among those 78, the two Heroes closest to the Master rank status were here. Hiding my nervousness, I observed them.

“Where is this? How mysterious.”

They walked into the pub, and I pulled my hood over my head.

“This is the Mercenary Pub it says. Look, there are missions on the bulletin board there.”

“Ah~ so we have to make money by completing missions~”

Aileen nodded her head at Yi Yongha’s words. At a glance, they looked like an uncle-niece pair.

“Looks like it.”

“How much do we need to make again?”

“1000 each in ten days.”

“That should be easy~”

The third tutorial’s goal was simple. To make TP.

Players who possess more than 1000 TP at the end would move on to the real Tower, but those who didn’t would have to stay here until the start of the next tutorial on November 1st.

“Destroying a goblin settlement, wiping out a group of bandits, dismantling an illegal gambling house...”

Yi Yongha read the missions on the bulletin board.

“We can probably complete them all today.”

Aileen spoke impatiently.

“...Please, you’re going to be dead tired by the end of a single mission.”

“What? Are you underestimating me?”

“I’m being realistic. Your magic power is restricted right now.”

Since Aileen was Yi Yongha’s superior and they arrived together, Aileen must have entered the tower with a red ticket with Yi Yongha being her companion.

Kiik—

At that moment, the door creaked open once again. Yi Yongha and Aileen turned to the door, and so did I.

“Where the hell is this? The last tutorial was more interesting...”

“Can you be quiet?”

I could tell who they were just from their voices.

A giant and a seductive Western woman.

It was Cheok Jungyeong and Jain.

“How the hell are we supposed to make... eh?”

“...Oh?”

They found Aileen and Yi Yongha who were standing in front of the bulletin board.

Aileen and Yi Yongha also saw them and received their gazes.

2 vs 2.

Four sets of eyes glared at each other. None of them said anything, but the atmosphere was filled with hostility.

“Owner, give me two of your strongest alcohol.”

I ordered two drinks from the owner, paying 20TP. The owner took the two silver coins and handed me two highly concentrated alcohol.

I pulled my mask up and held the glasses up.

“You two know me, right?”

Aileen was the first one to break the tension, speaking as she glared at Cheok Jungyeong and Jain.

“Haha, that’s right, kid. We’ve seen you once before.”

Cheok Jungyeong replied.

“...Kid?”

“Maybe it’s more appropriate to call you a brat.”

“...Ha, haha, I dare you to say that again.”

Aileen’s face turned red from Cheok Jungyeong’s clear provocation. However, now wasn’t the time to fight.

“Both of you, come...”

Aileen’s power, Spirit Speech, neared the level of an Authority.

I quickly twisted my wrist. Vodka shot out of the glasses I was holding and flew into Aileen’s mouth in a beautiful arc. Yi Yongha tried to block it with his body, but I prepared two glasses for this exact situation.

“Here— kek!”

Yi Yongha blocked one stream of vodka, but the other stream entered Aileen’s mouth. With hard liquor suddenly ending up in her throat, Aileen coughed but was unable to spit it out.

“Aak! Neck, m-my neck is... burning... haak...”

Spirit Speech was useless if you couldn’t speak. As Aileen was weak with alcohol to begin with, she started picking up and drinking other NPCs’ drinks.

“Ptui! Ah, this is also alcohol! W-Water—!”

“Um, Aileen-ssi, calm down. Take a deep breath...”

“You think I can calm down!?!?”

Normally, Aileen would have quickly recovered using her magic power that rivaled Boss'. No, normally, she wouldn't have been affected by alcohol at all. However, her stats were restricted at the moment, making her all the more vulnerable.

“What the hell's up with that brat?”

“Cheok Jungyeong.”

I walked up to Cheok Jungyeong and Jain and whispered.

“Huh?”

Cheok Jungyeong's eyes widened.

I held my index finger up to my mouth, signaling Cheok Jungyeong to keep his mouth shut. Then, I dragged them outside and ran for five minutes straight.

“O-Oi!”

Cheok Jungyeong shook off my hand once we arrived at an alleyway. Now that we were far away from the pub, I let him go free.

“The hell's wrong with you? Why'd you drag me here?”

“It looked like you were about to start a fight, so I brought you outside.”

“What, I can't fight?”

“...”

I looked at Jain who was standing next to Cheok Jungyeong. I wanted her to do something about this muscle-brained fool, but Jain only shrugged.

“Their stats are restricted like the rest of us, right? I want to beat up that brat Aileen too.”

“...You’ll be arrested if you fight inside the town. Haven’t you seen the town’s vigilante group?”

I looked around carefully. Thankfully, there weren’t any Players watching.

“By the way, where is Boss?”

“Who knows? We just arrived here too... Oh wait, there she is.”

Jain pointed to the middle of the street.

I turned to where she was pointing.

“...She really is there.”

Boss was tilting her head in front of a street vendor who was selling candies and chocolates.

“Looks like Boss wants sweets.”

Just like Jain said, Boss smacked her lips and began to rummage through her pockets.

“I guess so. She does like chocolate.”

“Oi, Newbie, what’s up with your clothes?”

“Oh yeah, where did you get that?”

Cheok Jungyeong and Jain seemed interested in my clothes.

“I made them.”

“Oh! Make one for me too.”

“Me too, me too.”

“Sure, if you’re paying.”

“...Then nevermind.”

Jain backed down as expected, but Cheok Jungyeong was different.

“How much? I have 300 won right now.”

“300TP?”

“Yeah.”

I stared at Cheok Jungyeong and carefully spoke.

“...For all of what you have.”

“Hahaha, brat, do I look like a pushover?”

“...”

Despite looking and acting like an idiot, he wasn't that stupid.

I let out a dry cough and changed the subject.

“Kuhum, let's go to Boss first.”

Boss seemed to have figured out how to take out TP, as she pulled out a gold coin. Gold coins were worth 100TP each, and the one she had was likely gained as a reward from the second tutorial.

Boss stared at the street vendor with the gold coin in hand. The vendor's face was full of greed.

“...She's going to get scammed at this rate.”

Tutorial Town.

Although it sounded kind and helpful, close to 70% of its residents were scammers.

I went to Boss with Cheok Jungyeong and Jain.

“Oi, Boss!”

Cheok Jungyeong called her, and Boss turned around just as she was about to give the

vendor her gold coin.

“Oh, it’s Gyeong. Jain and Newbie are here too.”

Boss greeted us expressionlessly as Cheok Jungyeong practically stomped towards her. I also approached her quickly and took away the gold coin in her hand.

“Hm? Newbie, why are you taking my money?”

Boss frowned.

“I’ll give it back to you later.”

I faced the candy vendor instead of Boss.

“This chocolate, how much is it?”

“Pardon? Uh...”

I could practically hear him racking his brain. However, NPCs thought the same way as humans. Seeing Cheok Jungyeong towering over behind me...

“They’re 10TP each.”

“...”

Wow, he’s trying to scam me in front of Cheok Jungyeong.

“Give me one, no, two.”

Boss spoke up. Because she hasn’t eaten chocolate in over a month, she seemed pretty desperate.

“No.”

“W-Why? I have 20TP...”

“I know, but that’s enough to buy ten chocolates.”

Leaving the struggling Boss to Cheok Jungyeong, I faced the candy vendor once again.



With 20TP, I bought 20 chocolates and 20 candies.

Now that that was taken care of, we headed to an inn.

While Boss was happily eating junk food, we arrived at a nearby inn.

“Let’s see, four people... that will be 300TP per night.”

Even the innkeeper was a scammer.

But knowing the real price, I only took out six silver coins.

“Let’s make it 60TP.”

“Ehey, that won’t do at all. Go somewhere else.”

“I’ve been to all the inns in town. It only got cheaper each time. This is the last place.”

I glanced at Cheok Jungyeong as I said that. Cheok Jungyeong noticed my eye signal and began to glare at the innkeeper.

“...150, let’s do 150TP per night.”

“60TP.”

“60TP for a 4-person room? That’s impossible...”

“60TP, but we won’t ask for food. You only have to provide us with the room.”

“...”

“Let’s not make it difficult.”

The innkeeper was silent for a long time.

I also kept quiet.

After about three minutes of dead silence, system alerts let me know that my haggling was a success.

[You acquired the technique, 'Lv.1 Haggling']

—You can see the rough estimate of the minimum price desired by NPCs with low-level Haggling.

['Lv.1 Haggling' links with your 'Charming Voice']

—Extra7's voice will now contain 'Minute Persuasion'.

'So Charming Voice can be used like this...' I grinned and looked at the innkeeper.

"F-Fine, 70TP!"

...He still wanted 10TP more.

I threw 60TP on the counter and took the key. I brought Boss, Jain, and Cheok Jungyeong upstairs and entered a large 4-person room.

"So, what are you going to do now?"

Jain sat down on the edge of the bed and asked.

"I'm planning to go steal something. I'm sure you're going to go off and do your own thing. The problem is..."

Jain looked at Boss and Cheok Jungyeong.

"These two with low social experience."

"I'll take Cheok Jungyeong with me. You should take care of Boss."

"What? You? You're going to take me with you? Ahahaha, you've gotten funnier, kid."

Cheok Jungyeong laughed as he hit my shoulder. My bones would have been broken if this was the outside world, but thanks to the balance patch in this world, I was unexpectedly okay.

"Also, invest all the money you have on me."

Jain's eyebrows twitched.

"...What for?"

“Gambling.”

“What? Are you crazy?”

The Tutorial Town also had a gambling house. The problem was that over half of the gamblers were scammers, making victory or loss not completely luck-dependent.

“Ah~ is that why you bought a pack of cards before coming here?”

Cheok Jungyeong asked.

“Yes.”

On our way to the inn, I stopped and bought a pack of cards. To make money in a room full of scammers, you just had to be the best scammer in the room.

“Are you confident?”

Jain asked doubtfully.

“Of course, would I ask Jain-ssi for money if I wasn’t?”

Money was life to Jain. Stealing money from Jain was no different than declaring war on her.

“...Really?”

“Of course.”

Before coming into the Tower, I studied and practiced cheating with cards. Double dealing, hand mucking, base dealing, sleight-of-hand, etc. Thanks to my Gift, Dexterity, I was practically a professional scammer.



One hour later.

I arrived at a gambling house with Cheok Jungyeong, asking NPCs nearby for direction.

—Threes full of fives.

—Fucking hell, you cheated, didn't you?

—Oh please.

The gambling house was loud and full of the acrid smell of smoke. I went to an empty table and sat down.

A scammer who was smoking and looking bored flashed his eyes.

“Oh~ are you two new here?”

“Yes.”

“Oho~ a bodybuilder and a skinny boy... what a strange combination. Are you two friends?”

I smiled without answering him. Cheok Jungyeong also grinned.

“It's true, this guy is skinny.”

“Anyways, welcome. I'll treat you two well.”

I could tell that he was a scammer as soon as I saw him.

Since I was going to cheat as well, I didn't care all that much.

“Alright, why don't we begin?”

The man picked up a pack of cards.

I simply smiled.



Two hours.

It only took two hours for me to win most of the money in the gambling house.

I cheated when I was playing against scammers and relied purely on luck when playing ordinary people. Of course, scammers caused a scene knowing that I was cheating somehow, but Cheok Jungyeong was there to stop them every time.

“How boring. All cowards.”

NPCs who were only good at scamming shrunk in front of Cheok Jungyeong's muscles. It was quite funny to see.

"Now let's run away."

"Eh? Why? We can still make more."

"No, look over there."

I pointed at the fierce-looking man who I just felt. He was glaring at me as he chewed on a cigarette.

"He should be a scammer hired by the owner of this gambling house."

"...So?"

"The owner will come soon with hired hands. Let's exchange money and leave before then."

There was no reason to fight NPCs.

I brought Cheok Jungyeong to the exchange place.

"10200 chips, confirmed. Hold on a minute."

The employee working at the currency exchange confirmed the number of chips I made.

300TP from Cheok Jungyeong, 200TP each from Boss and Jain and 1000TP that I originally had brought my starting total to 1700TP. In two hours, I had more than quintupled it.

"Here you go, 10200TP."

The employee gave me ten 1000TP banknotes and two gold coins.

"How much do I get?"

Without answering Cheok Jungyeong, I put everything in my inventory.

Ssss—

The two gold coins and some of the banknotes transformed into dust and entered my

inventory.

Right, 'some'. There were still five banknotes in my hand.

"These are fake."

I stared at Cheok Jungyeong.

"What? Really?"

"Yeah, that's why they don't go in the inventory."

Cheok Jungyeong's face immediately contorted and turned red with rage. His muscles also bulked up, and...

KWANG—!

A thunderous sound rang out.

"You son of a bitch!"

"Hiik!"

"Do I look like a pushover? I dare you to try that again, you...! Mother... father...!"

He began to spit out all sorts of curses I couldn't describe with words.

◇ ◇ ◇

With 10200TP, I returned to the inn.

Boss was working out, and Jain was preparing to go steal something in disguise.

"Oh, you're back? Where's my money? If you lost it all..."

"Don't worry. First, take a seat."

I gave Boss, Jain, and Cheok Jungyeong their money back and an additional 1000TP.

"Whew... good."

"Just by keeping the 1000TP I just gave you, you'll be able to go up to the next floor."

“Well, that was easy. Is this it for this floor?”

“No, stay on your guard. There are pickpockets all over the town. They can even steal money that’s inside your inventory.”

Although it was easy for us, this place was still the highest difficulty Tutorial Town. There was no way anyone could know that most of the people in this town were scammers. Even a great sage would have no choice but to be tricked once.

“Do we get a performance-based reward like the last tutorial if we get the most money?”

“Probably not. The system would have told us about it if that were the case.”

The third tutorial reward was simple.

“The TP we earn in this place should be our reward.”



On the other hand, in a goblin settlement some distance away from the Tutorial Town.

“What? You said it was 700TP!”

Someone’s angry voice rang out. Birds sitting on branches flew away and squirrels fell from the trees in surprise.

“Agh, do you need to be so loud?”

Aileen glared at the mercenary leader who hired her.

“You think I can be quiet? Huh?! You said it was 700TP before!”

“As I said, that’s if we didn’t suffer any damage. Look at the state these guys are in.”

“What?”

Aileen looked around her surroundings. There were mercenaries who were clearly suffering from great pain. She bit her lips silently.

“It’s written in the contract. That the amount paid might change depending on other mercenaries’ condition.”

“...But I don’t think it’s right to not even give us half the listed amount.”

This time, Yi Yongha spoke up. The mercenary leader was unreasonably saying he would lower the 700TP mission completion reward to 300TP.

“No, no, that’s just how it is.”

“At least give us half.”

“I can’t. If we consider how much it’ll take to get these guys treatment, we can’t spare even a single TP.”

“You—”

“Fine! I don’t need your dirty money!”

Aileen shouted sharply and snatched the three gold coins in the mercenary leader’s hands. She wanted to use Spirit Speech to have things her way, but because she used up most of her magic power fighting, she couldn’t do anything about it.

“You better pray we don’t see each other again. If we do, I’ll kill you for real.”

“I-I’m just going with what’s written on the contract. You don’t have to be so mad.”

“What, you son of a bitch—!”

“...Stop Aileen-ssi. We won’t gain anything from fighting.”

“B-But this bastard is...!”

Yi Yongha dragged Aileen back as she struggled with her short legs.

...After separating from the mercenary group, they began to walk back to the town.

“Forget about today. Let’s just buy some potions on our way back.”

Yi Yongha spoke as he wiped his sweat.

“But the Player Shop doesn’t sell potions...”

Aileen’s voice was especially meek today. She was lively even on an uninhabited island, but a few people had managed to make her depressed. Yi Yongha made a bitter smile.

“No, not the Player Shop. I’ve seen potion shops around. Ah, there’s one right there.”

Yi Yongha pointed at a potion shop nearby.

“Aileen-ssi is low on magic power, right? Let’s go and buy some magic power potions.”

“Yeah, good idea.”

The two of them ran to the potion shop.

...Then.

“100... 100TP?”

“Yes, magic power potions got expensive recently.”

“...Still, there’s no way they can be that expensive.”

“It’s true. It should be the same everywhere else. Though, I don’t think many shops are open because it’s so late.”

“Ha...”

Although the price was hard to believe, the shopkeeper looked too honest and righteous to be lying. Even Yi Yongha had no choice but to believe her.

He looked at Aileen who was looking dejected and sad. It easy to see how unhappy she was with the whole situation.

“Haa.”

Yi Yongha sighed. Suddenly, he had a great desire to see his wife back home. But since Aileen overused her magic power today, she needed a magic power potion if she were to regain enough energy for tomorrow.

“...I guess it can't be helped. We'll take one.”

“Ah, yes, sorry about that...”

“No, it's not your fault at all.”

“Next time you come, I'll add in some additional bonuses.”

“Ah, thank you.”

In the end, Yi Yongha used up his money to buy a magic power potion.

“Here you go, Aileen-ssi.”

“Ah, thanks.”

Aileen took the magic power potion and put it inside her inventory.

===

[Poor Magic Power Potion]

○Lv.0 Magic Power Recovery. Restores 10 magic power upon consumption.

○Lv.1 Food Poisoning. Increases your chance of getting food poisoning upon consumption.

===

The item description was a bit weird, but because magic power potions were normally expensive, Aileen didn't think much of it.

“Then let's find an inn.”

“Un!”

...10 minutes later, they found an inn to stay in.

However, the innkeeper glanced at them and delivered another shocking news.

“Let's see, two people... that'll be 150TP per night.”

“...Pardon?”

As soon as they heard the innkeeper, they felt as though their souls left their bodies.

Chapter 161

The First City (3)

[Highest Difficulty Tutorial Town]

A new morning arrived.

As soon as I woke up, I left the inn and began to do my morning stretch. Then suddenly, a loud, ringing voice struck my ears.

“Oi, what are you doing?”

I turned around and saw Cheok Jungyeong who was topless. He seemed to have been working out as his body was red and his muscles were bulked up.

“Just some morning workout.”

“Workout? Ha, you call that a workout?”

Cheok Jungyeong approached me as he sneered.

“Listen, Newbie, doing push-ups is for kids.”

“...Pardon?”

“When it comes to training your body, breathing is the most important thing. Got it? To breathe properly...”

Cheok Jungyeong suddenly began to lecture about breathing.

I was half-ignoring him, but suddenly my mind became clearer. Cheok Jungyeong pushed his face closer.

“Listen, breathing isn’t just done with your body, it’s done with your mind.”

The man who was standing in front of me was the famous ‘Cheok Jungyeong’ of the Goryeo era. As the most powerful general in the history of the Korean Peninsula, his

understanding of martial arts was something no one could argue against.

“Look, this is what’s known as inner core breathing.”

Ssp, haa...

Cheok Jungyeong began to breathe. It might look like normal breathing, but it was different. I carefully observed his body. As he inhaled and exhaled, his muscles moved along with him.

“I’m moving the muscles in my body by breathing. Get it? We’re on a completely different level of breathing!”

Cheok Jungyeong stood proudly after finishing his demonstration. I watched Cheok Jungyeong’s muscles for a bit, then muttered with doubt.

“I don’t think I’ll ever be able to do this.”

“It’ll be hard for sure. There are lots of rookies swinging their swords around claiming they’ve achieved the ‘one with the sword’ realm, but they are unaware that becoming one with your mind and body is the hardest thing in the world. But I can do it. Do you know why?”

No...

I gave him an apathetic look, but Cheok Jungyeong continued on without minding my disinterest.

“The strongest man in all of Goryeo, the martial god who could uproot trees with his bare hands and change the fate of countries alone.”

Cheok Jungyeong hit his chest proudly.

“It’s because that’s who I am.”

He smiled and faced me. His expression contained an ineffable pride and self-conviction. I stared at him silently. Cheok Jungyeong’s smile turned into a big grin.

“Are you starting to respect me now?”

“...No, I’m just cringing. Isn’t that your past life anyway?”

“What? Say that again, I dare you.”

In any case, I obtained a good hint.

Breathing through the entire body. Although it was impossible for my current self, I should be able to imitate it using Stigma’s magic power.

“Hajin~”

At that moment, Jain peeked her head out of the third-floor window.

“Yes?”

“Do you know how to cook? I think Boss is hungry from all the training she did last night. She wants you to cook for her.”

—Jain! W-When did I say that!?

“Boss says you’re a good cook. She wants bulgogi rice.”

—Jain! Y-You!

I could hear Boss’ voice as well. I chuckled and looked at Cheok Jungyeong.

“Let’s go shopping, Cheok Jungyeong-ssi.”

“Cheok Jungyeong-ssi? Just call me Cheok Jungyeong.”

“Alright, Cheok Jungyeong.”

“...You wanna die?”

Cheok Jungyeong and I went out to the busy streets.

“Isn’t it interesting?”

“What is.”

“The scenery here.”

This place looked exactly like a town from a fantasy novel. Most houses were built with bricks or wood, the only form of transportation were horses and carriages, and there were shops that sold potions and magic supplies.

“I guess so.”

Eventually, Cheok Jungyeong and I arrived at the town’s market district, a long stretch of alleyways filled with street vendors that sold food. After picking the freshest ingredients, I looked up at the vendor.

[Lower limit – 30TP]

“How much for all this?”

“Let’s see. Onions, mushrooms, pork... It should be about 100TP.”

“I think 35TP should be enough.”

In this town, talking politely was the same thing as announcing that you were a pushover.

“35TP? That’s a bit...”

“Make it 35TP.”

“Then you can go elsewhere. I doubt you’ll find any place that’ll sell at such a dirt-cheap price.”

The vendor tried to refuse, but he was an NPC with a low haggling level. It didn’t take long for me to crack him.

“Ehew, fine, take it.”

Using the intimidating aura Cheok Jungyeong was giving off, I succeeded in haggling down the price.

“Are you done?”

“Yes, let’s go back now.”

Afterward, I returned to the inn with Cheok Jungyeong. Seeing our hands full with bags of ingredients, Boss and Jain welcomed us. Before I even started to cook, Boss sat down at the table.

“Wait just a bit.”

Grade-8 Dexterity was more than enough for cooking.
Using a recipe I had memorized, I quickly made a 4-person meal.

“Wow.”

“Oh~ You’re a good cook, Newbie—!”

Cheok Jungyeong and Jain expressed their surprise, while Boss quickly ate like a vacuum machine.



After our meal, the four of us stared blankly at the ceiling of our room.

“Oi, Newbie, what are you doing next? Gambling?”

“No, we went yesterday.”

I already beat the casino hard. Since they knew my face, I should be on a blacklist, preventing me from entering. If not, I would be kidnapped the moment I entered.

“Then what are you going to do?”

“I’m going to open up a street stall.”

“Street stall?”

Jain’s eyes widened.

“Yes.”

The Tutorial Town’s NPCs had a lot of money. Of course, as this town was part of the

tutorial, there weren't any Lv.3 equipment or items. On the other hand, NPCs were Lv.2 or Lv.3 at the very least, and the captain of the vigilante corps could potentially be Lv.10 or more.

That was because 'Tutorial Town' was located in the basement of the Tower of Wish. In other words, it was one of the first floors created. All NPCs in this place should have lived here for at least 5 years.

"Why a street stall? Aren't you just going to get scammed?"

"No, as long as you sell above the lowest price, opening a street stall is actually the easiest way of making money. There's no way for NPCs to force you to sell something."

"Mm, then what are you going to sell?"

"This."

I took out my red crystal axe and red crystal spear. Although they came in handy during the second tutorial, I no longer had any use for them.

"I'm also going to make more."

With the materials in my inventory and materials I could gain from rolling Random Dice, I planned to make more items. Although I wouldn't be able to use Stigma's magic power under the watchful eye of the administrator, I could make up for it with this special leaf.

===

[Lv.3 Yggdrasil Leaf]

—Lv.3 Blessing of Adventure

*Your body becomes lighter while you have this item in your inventory. (improvements to your physical abilities)

*You can grant small blessings to items. Blessings will get stronger the more they have to do with adventures.

===

"And actually, there's something I need you to do, Jain-ssi."

"...Me?"

“Yes.”

“Really? What is it?”

Jain tilted head as she pointed her finger at herself.



At the end of a street leading to the inn, where not too many but not too few people passed by, I set up a stall. In case I ran into other Players, I made sure to have my mask and hooded robe on.

[General Store]

[From weapons to armors to herbs to fruits, we sell everything and anything.]

I put my sign down and sat down on the ground.

Before I could even put down a piece of cloth to put my items on...

“Hey, who are you?”

Thugs who were in a union with the street vendors of the same street approached me. I was surrounded by five thugs, but I maintained my composure.

“I got permission to sell here.”

“What? Whose permission...”

“Mine.”

A deep voice rang out at just the right moment. The five thugs turned around simultaneously.

“Ah, Boss!”

At the same time, the five NPCs bowed at a 90-degree angle.

Tak, tak. Along with imposing footsteps, the man who the NPCs called ‘Boss’ stood in front of me.

“I gave this person permission.”

“Ah, our apologies, we didn’t know...”

“It’s fine.”

The boss frowned heavily. His eyes of contempt were clearly showing that he didn’t want to bother himself with trifling matters. As expected, ‘her’ acting was superb.

“I’m not the one you should be apologizing to in the first place. Why don’t you buy something from him.”

“Y-Yes, understood!”

With a single command from the man, the five NPCs faced me once again.

“This looks nice. How much is...”

The first NPC pointed at an armor I put out without much thought. However, in the next moment, his eyes widened.

“Whoa, h-hey, isn’t this a Lv.3 armor?”

“Lv. 3?”

“Ha, as if that’s possible.”

Their attention all fell on the armor.

“This is Lv.3?”

“I think so.”

Although NPCs couldn’t check item descriptions like Players, they had discerning eyes that could appraise the level of most items.

“But there aren’t any Lv.3s in our time!”

Even so, they displayed doubt and suspicion. I spoke.

“This isn’t a Lv.3 armor.”

===

[Lv.3 Leather Armor with Lv.3 Yggdrasil’s Blessing]

○Lv.3 Defense

○Lv.3 Durability

○Lv.3 Easy of Movement

—Lv.3 Yggdrasil’s Small Blessing

○Increases all effects of the Leather Armor by 1 level.

○This blessing will disappear after 24 hours. However, the owner of the Yggdrasil Leaf can choose up to five armor to receive permanent blessings.

===

“See, he says it isn’t. I’ve never seen a Lv.3 equipment before in my life.”

“It’s almost Lv.4.”

“Exactly, it’s only... what? Lv.4?”

“Yes, you should be able to tell if you look close enough.”

This was an armor I made in the waiting room using Stigma’s magic power. Although it felt a bit wasteful to sell it now, TP was much more important at the moment.

“Here, let me see.”

“Ah, let me see too.”

The five NPCs took turns looking at the armor.

“Ah, fuck, stop being so selfish!”

“You don’t even have money!”

“I do, you fuck!”

They even began to fight amongst themselves. I looked beyond their shoulders at the boss of the group of thugs. The boss, Jain, mouthed silently.

—Hajin, don’t forget to give me 5%.

I nodded.

“This, I’ll buy this! How much is it?”

“Mm... it’s going to be a bit expensive.”

“How’s 500TP?”

“8! I can do 800TP!”

“1400!”

The sudden auction caught the attention of others in the street. More people began to wander over in curiosity, and after hearing that a Lv.4 item was being sold...

“3000!”

“3000. Is that the final bid?”

“...”

“Good, 3000 it is.”

The leather armor I made was sold for 3000TP. The NPC who bought it seemed to be quite wealthy.

After checking that the TP I got wasn’t fake, I gave him the armor, and the NPC returned with a happy expression.

However, the other customers seemed to have no plans to leave.

They began to ask all sorts of questions on other items I had out for sale, some of which were Lv.3 items.

The fools who tried to sneak off with my items were caught by Cheok Jungyeong and taught a lesson of love.

...While I was busy dealing with the influx of customers, all of a sudden, a familiar voice rang out along with a gentle breeze.

“...What’s going on here?”

This faint voice set aside the booming voice of all the other customers and landed in my ears.

My eyes immediately shot open, and my head turned to the direction the voice came from.

There, I saw a girl on her tiptoes, trying to peek at what was being sold.

“A general store...?”

She was someone I knew well. Her face was one that I could never forget, to the point that my heart stopped a beat when I saw her.

She was... Chae Nayun.

“Argh, move over if you’re not buying!”

Chae Nayun worked her way in front of me.

I couldn’t say anything. I thanked the mask and hooded robe I was wearing and lowered my head further.

“...Red crystal spear? Um, do you have a red crystal sword?”

I shook my head at Chae Nayun’s question. Her voice was still the same as ever.

“I see... then how much is this spear?”

I was put into a situation where I had no choice but to speak. I cleared my throat and changed my voice.

“250TP.”

“250TP?”

“I’ll give you a bonus too.”

“Uh...”

Chae Nayun fell in thought. It seemed she didn’t find anything suspicious with my voice. I thanked my ‘Charming Voice’ once again.

“Hm... I really want this, but I only have 200... or no, 150TP.”

“ .. ”

“I-It’s true. I understand if that’s too little. I can just go to another shop.”

Her haggling made no sense. There was no logic, technique, or emotion behind it. But I pretended to be tricked.

“Then you can take it for 150TP. Here, have this too.”

On top of the red crystal spear Chae Nayun wanted, I threw in a money pouch which also had a bento box I made for lunch.

“Oh, I don’t need the bonus... How about you shave off another 50TP instead?”

“...You crazy?”

She made an absurd offer.

“...I’m kidding. Thank you, have a nice day.”

Chae Nayun turned around with the red crystal spear in one hand and the leather pouch in the other.

Just like that, she walked away. Her steps were light. She must be thinking that it was her haggling technique that cut down the price.

I watched her leave for a long time.

Her hair was still short and was dyed black.

I grabbed my chest. My heart was still beating violently, refusing to calm down.

...It was then.

“Oi, answer me.”

Some man walked in front of me and blocked my line of sight. His face was oily and generally unpleasant.

“How much is this?”

He pointed at the red crystal axe and asked.

I retorted briefly.

“1500TP.”

“What? You just sold the spear to that girl for—”

“1600TP.”

“What? Why did it go up by—”

“1700TP.”

“You...”



Five minutes later.

Chae Nayun ran to a nearby bench and sat down.

“Let’s see... Oh? It even has a blessing.”

===

[Lv.2 Red Crystal Spear with Lv.3 Yggdrasil’s Blessing]

○Lv.2 Burn Damage

○Lv.2 Fire-attribute Power

—Lv.3 Yggdrasil’s Small Blessing

○Increases all effects of the red crystal spear by 1 level.

===

“Huhuhu...”

‘What’s this, I bought a half-Lv.3 item for 150TP?’

Chae Nayun smiled happily as she read the item description.

“Looks like NPCs can’t read item descriptions. Should I sell it? No, why would I sell such a good item?”

Chae Nayun tightly hugged the red crystal spear.

“...Oh right.”

Then, she suddenly remembered the leather pouch she got from the street vendor NPC. Chae Nayun opened the pouch without much thought. Inside, she found a warm bento box.

“...Bento box?”

She checked the item description first. Thankfully, it wasn't poisoned. Feeling hungry, Chae Nayun smiled and took the bento box out.

“Oh?”

However, there were things she didn't buy placed inside the pouch.

Five gold coins.

Right, the pouch contained 500TP.

“ ... ”

Chae Nayun stared at the coins blankly.

Thinking about it for a moment, she quickly came to an explanation. The street vendor NPC must have placed the sales from today in it. Clearly, he gave the pouch to her mistakenly.

However, looking at the shining gold coins, a flame of greed rose up from Chae Nayun's heart.

Five gold coins.

500TP.

She only had 150TP on her...

“N-No.”

‘It's only right to give it back. You already got such a great item for 150TP. Don't lose your conscience, Nayun.’

Chae Nayun shot up and went back the way she came from.

“...There he is.”

Thankfully, the street vendor was still there.

Chae Nayun worked her way through the crowd once again and gave the gold coins to the vendor.

“Um, here, you left 500TP inside the leather pouch.”

“...What?”

“I came to give it back. Take it.”

However, the NPC refused to take the coins and instead glanced at the giant man standing behind the stall.

“Oi.”

A giant walked in front of her.

While Chae Nayun was confused, the man shot back intimidatingly.

“Screw off if you’re going to argue with what you got.”

“N-No, I’m not arguing with what I got. I got five gold coins with it. These are yours.”

“...Hm?”

The giant glanced at the street vendor NPC.

Chae Nayun couldn’t hear what the vendor said, but the giant sneered and shot back.

“Screw off, idiot.”

“What? Idiot? Say that again!”

“Just leave, little brat.”

The giant man raised his arm and threatened Chae Nayun.

He must have thought that he could intimidate her away but in reality...

“What? Are you crazy!?”

Chae Nayun kicked the man’s leg without cowering down.

Kwak! Her foot dug into his calf.

“...Uk!”

A sharp pain coursed through the giant's body, causing him to fall on one knee. Chae Nayun quickly ran away.

"Y-You crazy bitch—!"

"Hmph, I was doing you a favor!"

She stuck up her middle finger at the giant's threat.

"I, I'll remember your face! You little—!"

Only Cheok Jungyeong's angry roar rang out in the streets.

Chapter 162

The First City (4)

By the time Chae Nayun completed a mission, the sky was already dark. She trudged back to the inn she stayed in the night before. Although she completed a 500TP mission, she only received 200TP, and after paying for her lodging, she was only left with 125TP.

“Hey, you need to pay another 75TP.”

“Ask my companion for the other half.”

“...Hm, fine.”

“Alright, then I’m going back to my room.”

After walking past the greedy innkeeper, she returned to her room.

Lying on the empty bed, Chae Nayun stared at the ceiling.

She was tired, but she couldn’t fall asleep. In an empty room, she was all alone.

Suddenly, her heart rate slowed down, and her mood turned sour. Lonely thoughts began to distract her.

Tk, tk, tk.

Rain began to fall.

“...It’s raining.”

She opened the door, thinking that she was perhaps hearing things, but it really was raining.

She let out a small sigh.

Thinking about it now, the first two tutorials were much easier. Back then, she was so physically exhausted that her brain didn’t have the time to function.

But now that she had idle time... in complete solitude, everything began to come alive once more. Fragments of her memory swept through her head.

Her mental illness had gotten worse ever since she entered the Tower. Was it because she wasn’t eating her pills? Her breathing became rough and her head hurt.

“...Uk!”

An unbearable headache struck her. She clutched her head. Beeeeep— A ringing noise buzzed in her ears. She felt like the strange sound was making her surroundings quake.

“Ah... fuck...”

Blood dripped down from the lip she was biting. Things she couldn't understand flashed before her eyes. The conversation from that day rose up in her foggy consciousness. She still had many questions left unanswered.

“Argh...”

If it really was him that did it or if he was making up an absurd lie.

And if it really was him who murdered her brother...

Why, why, why?

Just why did he do it?

Her questions repeatedly rattled her mind. Resentment and sadness came together and formed a restrictive chain that bound her.

Click—

At that moment, a clear clicking sound rang out.

The door to her room slowly opened. Chae Nayun raised her upper body slightly. She could see a man with disheveled hair trudging in. His face was that man's face.

Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin.

The face she could never forget... was now in front of her.

She stealthily reached towards the spear standing next to her bed.

“You're already back?”

However, her hallucination scattered away with a single sentence from the man.

With a sigh, Chae Nayun closed her eyes before opening them back up.

She now saw who the man really was.

“Why you are sitting in bed like a ghost?”

Shin Jonghak asked. Chae Nayun scrutinized his clothes. As though he spent his day rolling in mud, there was dirt all over his body.

“...Did you make some money?”

“Pft, is that the first thing you ask? Is this what it feels like to have a nagging wife?”

“Shut up.”

Chae Nayun encountered Shin Jonghak purely through coincidence. When she was looking for a mission to take on in the mercenary’s pub, he had suddenly appeared with a stupid smile.

Although Chae Nayun was freaked out at first, she decided to share a room with him to save money.

“What’s this bento box?”

Shin Jonghak pointed at the bento box sitting on the bed.

“Oh, this? It came with an item I bought...”

Chae Nayun glanced at the half-empty bento box.

“I didn’t finish it though.”

“Why? Is something wrong with it?”

“No, it’s actually pretty well made according to the status window.”

“Then why didn’t you finish it?”

“No reason. It just wasn’t to my taste... Why do you keep asking anyways? For the record, I didn’t leave it behind for you.”

The truth was that she couldn’t taste it.

After ‘that’ incident, Chae Nayun lost her sense of taste. Ironically, she had overcome her picky taste by losing her sense of taste entirely. For the current Chae Nayun, food was only a method of obtaining sustenance.

“Also, you bought an item? Are you sure you didn’t get scammed?”

“...Please, if anything, I’m the one who scammed the seller.”

Chae Nayun held up the red crystal spear proudly.

“...Is it good?”

“Yep. I think it should be worth at least 1500TP, but I bought it for a tenth of that price!”

Huhuhu— Chae Nayun made a big smile.

“I went on a mission with this thing. It cut through goblins like butter!”

“..”

However, Shin Jonghak didn’t react. Seeing his serious expression, Chae Nayun smiled awkwardly.

“Don’t force yourself to smile.”

“...What?”

“It hurts me to see you like this.”

“What are you blabbering on about.”

Chae Nayun brandished her spear in front of Shin Jonghak who promptly raised his hands and backed away.

“I’m kidding. Anyways, doesn’t that mean you used TP?”

“Yeah, but I ended up making money from it.”

“What?”

Shin Jonghak frowned. He clearly had doubts. Seeing this, Chae Nayun took out five gold coins from her inventory and told him about the lucky incident she had today.

“...I was going to give it back, but they chased me out while calling me an idiot.”

“ ... ”

Shin Jonghak normally would have made a snarky comment, but he stayed quiet. Chae Nayun caught him looking at the coins with a complicated expression.

“So, how much do you have?”

“...H, Huh?”

As expected, he was flustered. Chae Nayun sneered.

“Pft, I bet you’re poorer than me.”

“...Pft, as if. Of course I have more than you. Who do you think I am? I’m the man who will become the world’s youngest high-intermediate rank Hero, Shin Jong—”

“Then show me.”

“...I’m getting sleepy all of a sudden.”

When Chae Nayun put her hands out demanding him to show his money, Shin Jonghak pretended to be drowsy and collapsed on the ground. Chae Nayun snickered and looked down at Shin Jonghak.

“Oh right.”

Suddenly remembering something, she nudged his shoulder with her foot.

“If you’re going to sleep, stay on the floor. If you try to put a leg over the bed like last night...”

“...I’ll give it my best, but my only flaw is my bad sleeping habit.”

“Try it if you want to break your leg.”

“ ... ”

“Actually, since I slept on the bed last night, I’ll sleep on the floor tonight.”

“What? You don’t need to—”

“Hurry up and move.”

Despite Shin Jonghak’s resistance, Chae Nayun dragged him onto the bed.



Tk, Tk.

Late night with drizzling rain.

I closed the stall. Cheok Jungyeong left to drink with the TP he had left, but I returned to the inn. Feeling like someone threw a huge rock in my mind, I couldn’t bring myself to stay outside.

“Ssp... huu.”

Boss was the only one inside the room. She was sitting cross-legged and was focused on regaining her lost stats.

“...”

For some reason, her attire was more daring than usual. Wearing only a black tank top and hotpants, her well-developed muscles were being outlined every time she breathed.

I quickly walked past her and lied down on the bed.

“Did something happen?”

Boss asked with her eyes still closed.

“...No, nothing.”

“Did the stall not go as well as you expected?”

“No, I sold everything. I made a lot.”

“Then did you get scammed?”

I shook my head. Before going to sleep, I took out two Random Dice for my daily routine. Thinking 'good items to sell', I rolled the two dice.

[Lv.4 Krill Dragon Leather]

[Lv.3 Big and Juicy Mango]

A good material and a nostalgic fruit from the second tutorial.

With these, I had things to sell tomorrow.

“..”

Then, feeling a laser-like stare, I turned around. Boss was staring at me intently. Heh. I grinned.

“Are you hungry, Boss?”

“No.”

Boss furrowed her brows with a pout.

“Do you think I'm a glutton?”

“No, it's just that you were staring at this mango.”

“...That's a mango?”

She showed interest in the mango. Her eyes were clearly flashing with greed. However, Boss soon retracted her gaze and got up with a dry cough.

“Kuhum, it's not that. You don't look so good today, Newbie.”

“...I just get a bit depressed on rainy days.”

Things that made me angry, things that made me sad, things that made me apologetic... For a long time, I've been burying my emotions deep inside my heart. Otherwise, I would only be in pain every day.

But when these emotions were subconsciously pulled out, they always came with great distress.

...Just like now.

“Anyways, Boss.”

“Hm?”

“How are your stats looking like right now?”

To be honest, Boss was currently a NEET. After I gave her 1000TP, she stayed indoors all day without doing any work. She spent all of her free time either eating or training. Since that was the case, she surely must have seen some improvements to her stats.

“My magic power is at 3.5. Other stats entered the 2-point range too.”

“Oh?”

Even while considering the increased stat gain inside the Tower, her growth speed was incredible. This was why division of labor was important.

“You’re like a max-level NEET.”

“...What’s that?”

Boss narrowed her eyes.

Max-level NEET. It meant she was a bum who played around all day without working but could easily dominate whatever she set out to do.

“It’s a good thing.”

“I don’t believe you... I’m hurt. I think I need to eat that mango to feel better. Give it here.”

Boss reached for the mango, but I stopped her by putting the mango in my inventory.



For the ten-day duration of the third tutorial, I continued to make new equipment and sold them at my street stall.

Because I spent all my time either crafting or selling items, I couldn’t increase my stats

by much. However, the most important aspect of the third tutorial was money. Since I now had over 20000 TP, I was more than satisfied.

“I should be able to buy it now.”

Today was the last day of the third tutorial.

I stood in front of a dilapidated shop in the outskirts of the town. The pouch in my pocket was overflowing with money.

[Miscellaneous Item Shop]

Although it looked like the town didn't sell anything special, there was actually a shop that sold rather unique items. As the shop that only existed in the highest difficulty tutorial, it could be said that this shop was what made the highest difficulty tutorial worth the trouble.

Kiiik—

With a trembling heart, I walked into the shop. The moment I passed through the door, an aged smell of wood and dust spread out.

“Uh...”

The shop was quite battered, and the shopkeeper was reading a newspaper without even looking at his customer.

First, I took a good look around.

“You have quite the collection of items here.”

“...”

The shopkeeper NPC didn't say anything. However, his silence made him more trustworthy. After all, being talkative was one of the key characteristics of a scammer. I pretended to look around the shop once again.

[Lv.2 Magic Contract]

[Lv.2 Illness Cure Potion]

[Lv.2 Speedwell Grass]

[Lv.2 Sprite Shield]

[Lv.2 Kim Joonghon's Claymore]

...

...

There were all sorts of items in the shop.

However, the real specialty of the shop was on the counter.

I walked up to the counter and pointed at the egg sitting on it.

"Is this egg for sale too?"

[???

An egg with question marks as its item description.

The shopkeeper finally reacted.

"That egg is the egg of a special bird that only lives in this town. It's not something a nobody like you can buy."

The man spoke with a husky voice that wasn't hospitable in the slightest.

I retorted with a smile.

"Who else would buy it if not me?"

"...That's 40000TP, kid."

40000TP.

Even if someone knew about this before coming into the Tower, 40000TP was an impossible amount to acquire in only ten days.

However, this egg was certainly worth every TP.

This egg was laid by Muninn, a raven that belonged to the god Odin. In other words, this egg was Muninn's descendant. Since Muninn was the pet of a god, this egg would surely be...

Well, I actually didn't know the real answer.

This egg was introduced as an Easter egg and was something that not even Kim Suho could buy in the original story. Instead, the shop NPC would see through his sense of justice and righteousness and gift him a different item.

Of course, since I didn't have Kim Suho's disposition, I had to make do with money.

"How about half of that amount? 20000TP?"

“...”

The shopkeeper gave me an odd look.

“Isn’t that reasonable? I don’t have any more than that, and this egg isn’t an item you can sell here anyways.”

There was no way a 40000TP item would be sold. Not even a business god like Yoo Yeonha would be capable of earning that much money in only ten days.

“You mean to say you have 20000TP?”

“Of course.”

I took out twenty 1000TP banknotes from my inventory and showed it to the shopkeeper.

His eyes flickered conspicuously.

“...Why don’t you take that hood off first? It’s rude, don’t you think?”

“Ah, yes, sorry.”

As one of the only polite customers he would have met in this town full of scammers, I was surely seen in a favorable light.

I quickly pulled my hood down.

“So, do you know what this is?”

“...Yes, I do.”

“What is it?”

“The egg of an eagle, I think?”

The shopkeeper’s eyes widened.

As I said before, Muninn was a raven. But when I was writing my novel, I thought it was an eagle and wrote it as such.

Of course, there were commenters who pointed out my mistake, but because it was

too late to make edits, I remembered saying something like, 'an eagle sounds cooler'.

"You have good eyes. You're right, it's the egg of an eagle. But most people won't be able to raise this beast. In fact, they won't even be able to hatch it."

"Ah... but you see, I'm not really an ordinary person."

"..."

The shopkeeper gave me a meaningful look.

"Otherwise, how would I have made 20000TP?"

I received the shopkeeper's gaze and spoke with ease.

◇◇◇

[In three hours, the third tutorial will end.]

On the other hand, in the forest near the outskirts of the town, a wooden tent was barely standing in front of a campfire.

"This dumb, stupid town."

One of the owners of the tent, Aileen, had a haggard and impoverished face after only ten days.

"Everyone in this town is trash, every single one of them!"

The humiliation she suffered all this time flashed before her eyes.

Having to eat a restaurant's leftover food, her money being pickpocketed out of her inventory, accidentally spilling a juice she worked so hard to buy on a noble's clothes and having to kneel and beg for his forgiveness...

They were all things she never would have faced on earth.

"But we managed to get enough TP somehow."

Yi Yongha was in a similar circumstance, but precisely because of all the trouble they went through, the sense of accomplishment they currently felt was overwhelming.

They slept outside, skipped meals, and gave up on living like decent human beings to scrape together 2000TP.

“...I know, hic...”

Aileen began to tear up.

“Are you crying?”

“Uun... they’re tears of joy.”

Aileen was proud of herself. She was so proud of herself for being able to gather 2000TP while her stats were restricted that she wanted to shower herself with kisses.

“...Oh, by the way, they’re them, right?”

“Them?”

“You know, the people we met on the first day at the pub.”

“Ah, yes, they should be members of the group Aileen-ssi is chasing.”

Aileen didn’t know their names. However, she was familiar with their faces. She met them before in an artifact scramble. With an impeccable strategy, she had almost arrested them both.

“Wasn’t there someone else?”

However, there was someone else in the pub other than the two people they saw.

“You know, the person who made me drink alcohol.”

“I’m not sure, but only one person comes to mind when I think of a mask and hood.”

“I agree.”

Aileen nodded. In truth, she was quite confident.

Black Lotus.

That he entered this Tower too.

[The third tutorial has ended.]

“...Finally, this damn tutorial is over.”

“I’ll bet my honor that less than half gathered more than 1000TP.”

Exhausted and enervated, Aileen and Yi Yongha leaned on a tree and read through the system alerts popping up.

[Of 78 challengers, 50 currently possess more than 1000TP in their inventory.]
[Congratulations. You managed to protect your profit from pickpockets, robbers, thugs, and scammers.]

Aileen turned towards Yi Yongha. He laughed awkwardly.

“...There’s a bit over half, haha.”

However, the system alerts weren’t finished yet.

[Hidden Reward – Profit Master]
[The profit of victorious challengers will be revealed along with their nicknames (expenses excluded).]
[Top 5 challengers will be given 100% of the profit they gained as a bonus.]
[Rank 1 – Extra7, 21,300TP.]
[Rank 2 – PhantomThief, 7,800TP]
[Rank 3 – ...]

“...Eh?”

“...What?”

Aileen and Yi Yongha became speechless. The difference was too overwhelming.

“It’s not 2,130TP but...”

“21,300TP? How the fuck is that possible!?”

Aileen cursed inadvertently, mixing Korean and English together.

“Who is it!?”

Aileen felt wronged.

She suffered through one humiliation after another to scrape together 2000TP, but someone had earned 21300... He had to have used a cowardly method!

“Who’s Extra7!?”



Three hours later.

A burst of light brought me back to my waiting room. I didn’t say goodbye to Jain, Cheok Jungyeong, and Boss, since we should be able to contact each other soon through the messenger system.

[Congratulations on achieving first place.]

[21,300TP has been deposited.]

“Ah, thank you, thank you~ you did well too, System-nim~”

I bought Muninn’s egg with 20000TP. Although I was left with only 3,000TP because of it, with the hidden reward, I obtained 100% of the profit I made, making me rich once again.

It was a setting change I didn’t expect. I thought the co-author only made things harder, but it seemed I was wrong. A little bonus wasn’t so bad every once in a while.

“...Ah.”

I took out Muninn’s egg from the inventory as quickly as possible.

It was a 20,000TP egg.

Huu, huu.

I blew on it just in case it was cold and carefully placed it inside my bed.

Wondering what cute eagle would pop out of this egg, I pulled my blanket over it.

However, that wasn’t the end of the good news.

[Your black entrance ticket has been confirmed.]

[As the tutorial has ended, you may take out three items you deposited.]

It was the alert I'd been waiting for.

Equipment that could make up for the stat gain I neglected while crafting and selling items.

I kneeled respectfully.

I decided long ago what items to retrieve.

Aether, Desert Eagle, and my laptop-linked smartwatch.

[Soon, your equipment storage will be transferred over.]

[Come to a decision within one hour.]

Of course, the Desert Eagle had limited use because of bullets. But there was a reason I was choosing it despite its disadvantages.

"...Jin Sahyuk."

Killing Jin Sahyuk.

That was the only reason.



PDF by: traitorAZEN