

PAPYRUS MODERN FANTASY

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PAPYRUS
파피루스

I Alone Level-Up

Only I Level Up • Solo Leveling • 나 혼자만 레벨업

10 years ago, after “the Gate” that connected the real world with the monster world opened, some of the ordinary, everyday people received the power to hunt monsters within the Gate. They are known as “Hunters”. However, not all Hunters are powerful. My name is Sung Jin-Woo, an E-rank Hunter. I’m someone who has to risk his life in the lowliest of dungeons, the “World’s Weakest”. Having no skills whatsoever to display, I barely earned the required money by fighting in low-leveled dungeons... at least until I found a hidden dungeon with the hardest difficulty within the D-rank dungeons! In the end, as I was accepting death, I suddenly received a strange power, a quest log that only I could see, a secret to leveling up that only I know about! If I trained in accordance with my quests and hunted monsters, my level would rise. Changing from the weakest Hunter to the strongest S-rank Hunter!

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Chapter 1 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

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Part 0: Prologue

[Daily Quest is now available.]

An articulate voice of a young female.

This was definitely not a game. Of course, it wasn't a dream, either.

But, her voice definitely resounded within my head. Hell, I could even see the quest window floating in mid-air, too.

‘Could it be... Even today?’

While fervently praying in my head, I cautiously opened the information window.

Ttiring....

[Daily Quest: Preparations to become strong]

Press-up, 100 times: Incomplete (0/100)

Sit-up, 100 times: Incomplete (0/100)

Squat, 100 times: Incomplete (0/100)

Running, 10 km: Incomplete (0/10)

※Warning: Incompletion of Daily Quests will result in appropriate levels of punishment.

As soon as I got to confirm the contents of the Daily Quest, I began cussing out reflexively.

“Awww... Just how many days has it been already?!”

Part 1: Rank E Hunter

Rank E Hunter, Seong Jin-Woo.

No matter where he went, this title always followed him around.

Jin-Woo's overall strength was almost the same as a regular human being.

With the exception of being a bit stronger and his wounds healing slightly faster, Jin-Woo was about the same as regular people in every other aspect.

It was par for the course then, that he'd always end up getting injured. He nearly died several times, too.

Of course, it wasn't as if Seong Jin-Woo liked being a Hunter.

The work was dangerous, others made fun of him, and to confound the matters even further, the pay was pretty pathetic, as well.

If it weren't for the medical aid paid out by the Hunter Association to the Hunters in their **"payroll"**, he'd have turned in his hunter licence and quit by now, and live his life like a regular person.

Unfortunately, someone like Seong Jin-Woo, in his mid-twenties and lacking in any tangible job skills, there was no other way but to remain as a Hunter if he wanted to pay for his mother's hospital fee of millions of won every month.

Should one say that he had no choice in the matter?

That was why, even though he didn't want to, he simply had to participate in the raid supervised by the Association.

Hunters operating within the same area tended to know each other pretty well. In the event of a Gate opening up, all the Hunters in that district would be asked to come, that's why.

The Hunters who had arrived early sipped on the cups of coffee handed out by the Association's employee and shared cordial greetings with each other.

"Oh, hey. Mister Kim, Over here. Here."

"Oh? Mister Park, what are you doing here? I thought you were giving up on being a Hunter?"

"Well, that... My wife is pregnant with our second child."

"Hahahaha, is that so. Yeah, for a Hunter to earn big in one go, participating in a raid is the best, isn't it."

Mister Kim jovially burst out in laughter. Mister Park followed suit with a sheepish chuckle, before asking Kim.

"By the way, why do I feel like that the Association is calling on us less and less nowadays? Did the number of Gates decrease or something?"

"Eii, of course not. That's only because the Guilds are getting all worked

up over clearing the Gates; it's got nothing to do with the Association. I hear that various Guilds are jumping in with both feet since there is big profit involved in this whole thing."

"Well, in that case, since this raid is being supervised by the Association, it should be safe, no?"

Mister Park took a glance around as if he was getting nervous.

If a Guild was not involved today, that meant there wasn't enough profit to be had, and if there wasn't enough profit to be had, then that could only mean that this particular Gate's difficulty would be low.

Of course, nothing in this world was 100% absolute.

It wasn't just Mister Park; other Hunters were nervously glancing around as well.

"Hmm. I wonder..."

Mister Kim finished the rest of his coffee while avoiding answering his friend, before spotting a certain someone and raised his hand in happiness.

"Uh! He's here. Hey, Mister Seong!! Mister Seong!"

Other Hunters also displayed joy at discovering that young man.

"Ah, hello."

It was none other than Seong Jin-Woo.

Jin-Woo performed a simple nod of the head at the joyous Mister Kim and walked by.

After making sure Jin-Woo was well out of earshot, Mister Kim began sniggering while confidently speaking up.

"So, Jin-Woo showed up. Then it's going to okay today, too."

Mister Park's eyes widened up and he hurriedly asked Kim.

"What was that? Is that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo really strong?"

"Ahh. Right, of course, you wouldn't know who he is. He's a Hunter who started working shortly after you left, you see. However, every Hunter here knows who that kid is by now."

"He's really that strong? Wait, why is he working for the Association, then? Why not for a Guild or as a freelancer?"

Kim sniggered some more before narrowing his eyes.

"You know what that guy's nickname is?"

“How should I know that? C’mon, man. Just tell me already.”

“Humanity’s weakest weapon.”

“...Weakest? Not something like, the ultimate weapon?”

“Dude, that’s the nickname for the rank S Hunter Choi Jong-In. That kid is the ‘weakest weapon’. I’m pretty sure he’s the weakest Hunter in the Republic of Korea.”

“Really?”

Park began frowning deeply.

Why would other Hunters greet this Seong Jin-Woo if he was really that weak? After all, didn’t they need someone to trust their backs if things went south?

Park couldn’t really understand the reactions of other Hunters.

When Park’s head tilted this way and that, Kim chuckled and poked the side of Park with his elbow.

“Eii! The raids Seong Jin-Woo participates in will only have low difficulty because he’s so weak. The Association would never entrust him with a tough job, don’t you get that? They don’t want to see him get killed, right?”

Only then did Park’s expression brightened up.

“R-right. Yeah.”

His wife was deeply worried about him since this would be his first raid in quite a while. Honestly, even he himself was worried, too. However, now that he listened to Kim’s words, he felt like a weight was lifted off his mind.

Kim continued on.

“That guy, there was a rumour not too long ago that said, he got injured participating in a raid of a rank E Gate and spent a week in the hospital.”

“A Hunter got injured by a rank E Gate?”

“That’s right. No one expected to see a Hunter getting injured during a rank E Gate raid, so they didn’t even bring along a Healer, apparently!”

“That’s why he spent a week in a hospital?! Pu-hahaha!”

When Park began guffawing too loudly, Kim hurriedly hushed him.

“Stop it, man. Mister Seong might hear you.”

“Aigoo. I didn’t think of that.”

Park cautiously checked Jin-Woo's reactions as he continued to giggle.

Thankfully, the distance was far enough and the youth didn't seem to have heard them.

Of course, they were mistaken.

'I can hear everything, you geezers.'

A bitter smile formed on Jin-Woo as he tried hard to ignore them. At times like today, he couldn't help but blame his unusually-acute sense of hearing.

It seemed that he arrived too early and the raid was yet to commence.

'Did I arrive too early?'

Jin-Woo looked around to while away the waiting time, spotted the Association employee handing out warm coffee, and walked closer.

"Can I get a cup of coffee as well?"

"Oh. Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim... I'm really sorry, but we ran out of coffee just now."

"....."

The cold Winter breeze brushed past the tip of his nose.

Jin-Woo quietly wiped his nose with his index finger.

What a sad day it was, for the coffee to run out as soon as it was his turn to get one.

"Why do you persist on being a Hunter, Mister Seong Jin-Woo?"

"I'm sorry."

Jin-Woo lowered his head and apologised.

The young, beautiful girl using healing magic in front of Jin-Woo, Yi Ju-Hui showed how unhappy she was with a pouting expression.

"I'm not trying to get you to apologise, you know? I'm only worried about you. If you continue fighting this way, sooner or later you'll be faced with a truly dangerous situation."

Jin-Woo glanced past Yi Ju-Hui's shoulders and took a look at other Hunters fighting over yonder.

When one entered through the Gate, one would arrive at a place called 'dungeon'. The rank of this particular dungeon should be around D.

A dozen-plus Hunters were taking care of the monsters inside this dungeon without so much as breaking a sweat.

Unfortunately, for a rank E, such a feat was nearly impossible.

Normally, the job of healing the injured Hunters from the back fell on the Healers. Since he always got injured during raids, Jin-Woo was rather well-known among the Healers.

Yi Ju-Hui cautiously asked him.

“Perchance, is there a reason why you can’t give up being a Hunter?”

Jin-Woo resolutely shook his head.

He didn’t want to reveal anything personal to other people.

“I’m only doing this as a hobby. If I don’t do this, I’ll probably die of boredom, actually.”

Yi Ju-Hui pouted even more.

“If you continue on with this hobby of yours, soon you’d be raiding a dungeon in the netherworld, you know?”

Jin-Woo was taken off-guard from her remark and ended up chuckling out loudly.

Thanks to that, Yi Ju-Hui’s nagging intensified.

“Ah, ahh!! Don’t laugh! Don’t! Your injuries might get worse!!”

Jin-Woo giggled before asking her.

“Where did you even learn to say stuff like that?”

“What do you mean, where? It’s from Mister Kim waaay over there.”

“Aigoo, that ahjussi really went and did it, didn’t he....”

As they chatted and laughed, his treatment was almost over.

It was already too late by then, though. It seemed that the raid was pretty much over now.

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened.

‘I only killed a single monster today.’

A rank E creature, no less. Seong Jin-Woo began fidgeting with the rank E magic crystal in his hand.

The lowest grade magic crystal from a rank E monster fetched less than hundred thousand won. For something he bet his life to earn, it was a

pathetically small amount. (TL: Just over \$88.)

‘A magic crystal from a rank C monster can sell for over ten million won, though....’ (TL: \$8830+)

Too bad, a rank E Hunter such as himself couldn’t even attempt to kill a monster with a rank as high as C.

Out of the blue, someone shouted out.

“Uh? Hey, there’s another entrance over here.”

The nearby Hunters rushed over there.

“Huh, it’s true.”

“There really is another path?”

Just as that Hunter said, there was an entrance hidden within the dungeon itself.

“A dual dungeon, is it... So, such a thing actually exists for real....”

Mister Song, possessing over ten years’ experience as a Hunter, looked into the hidden entrance and displayed how surprised he was.

The interior of the hidden, cave-like passage was dark and nothing could be seen. Mister Song activated his speciality, flame magic, and tossed it further forward into the passage.

The flame flew forward and illuminated the interior. The passageway seemed to go on forever. Soon enough, the flame lost its forward momentum, fell to the ground and smouldered for a bit before flickering out of existence.

The passage was shrouded in darkness once more.

“Hmm..... Everyone, gather around. Let’s have a meeting.”

The unspoken leader of this raid, Mister Song, called for other Hunters to gather around. Jin-Woo’s treatment was over by then, so he and Yi Ju-Hui also joined in.

Song spoke up while sweeping his gaze over the gathered Hunters.

“As you know very well, a Gate will not close unless the dungeon’s boss is killed. Since the Gate itself is still intact even though we took care of all the monsters here, that can only mean that the boss is beyond that passageway.”

Song pointed towards the hidden entrance.

Hunters exchanged meaningful glances and nodded their heads. No one

could disagree with that notion.

Song continued on.

“Now normally, we’re supposed to relay this information back to the Association and wait for their decision first, but... But, if we do that, we might end up handing over the task of killing the boss to other Hunters, and our takings for today’s raid would decrease by a lot.”

The expressions of the Hunters crumpled.

Park’s face hardened more than anyone else since he needed a lot of cash for his wife’s pregnancy.

‘Postnatal care eats up so much cash nowadays, you know...’

At this rate, there’d be no meaning behind him risking his life to participate in this raid.

“That’s why I’d prefer if we took care of the boss before leaving this dungeon... So, what do you all think?”

Hunters fell into a deep contemplation.

“....”

“....”

The truth was, no one here could figure out the current situation and so, their safety could not be guaranteed. However, the difficulty of this particular dungeon proved to be very low.

So, the hidden dungeon within it couldn’t have been that difficult, either.

“Hmm, hmm.”

Song coughed to draw everyone’s attention to himself.

“Since we have seventeen people here, let’s put this to a vote, shall we? Once the decision has been made, no one complains. So? How about it?”

Others nodded their heads after hearing Song’s suggestion. No one was disagreeing with him.

“I vote for going ahead.”

Song raised his hand.

And then, other Hunters began raising their hands one by one.

“Me too.”

“Count me in as well.”

Park was the first to raise his hand, followed shortly after by Kim and a few other Hunters.

Of course, those disagreeing were plentiful, too.

“Let’s go back.”

“I feel that it’d be better to wait for the Association’s decision.”

The two opposing camps were neck and neck and eventually, the final votes came down to Jin-Woo and Yi Ju-Hui.

“I’m sorry....”

Yi Ju-Hui bowed to Song and added her vote to ‘retreat’ camp.

And so, the vote count for ‘go ahead’ and ‘retreat’ was at 8:8.

A deadlock.

Song asked the hesitant Seong Jin-Woo next.

“And you, Mister Seong?”



Chapter 2 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Everything now depended on Seong Jin-Woo's decision.

Jin-Woo's fingers grasped tight the rank E magic crystal in his hand as he took a glance next to him.

Yi Ju-Hui was shaking her head at him. It looked like she was deeply worried.

Actually, Jin-Woo was worried inwardly as well. Now normally, he would never try to take on any unnecessary risk. Not only did he lack the abilities to do so, but he was also not brave enough, too.

However, Jin-Woo had a younger sister who was about to become a university student in the coming months.

'I've no money saved up....'

Currently, Jin-Woo was twenty-four years old.

He was at an age where he should be concentrating on his academic pursuits, but he gave up on that dream because, well, he had no money. He sure as hell didn't want his little sister to go through the same sacrifice, the same pain as he did.

Right now, every cent was precious to him.

It wasn't only Mister Park who needed a big score today.

Jin-Woo raised his hand up high.

"I vote for going ahead."

It was then, he heard a soft sigh of resignation coming from his side.

Part 2: The Dual Dungeon

The passageway went on and on forever.

In front, Mister Song and other strong Hunters had taken the lead. Song had summoned a small flame on top of his palm to illuminate the way forward.

Mister Kim asked him as he walked alongside Song.

"We've walked really far, haven't we? Shouldn't we consider the time we need to escape from here as well?"

“How long have we been walking?”

Kim looked at his wristwatch.

“Around.... forty minutes.”

“A Gate shuts down completely one hour after the boss is killed, so we have a window of twenty minutes left or so.”

“If we can’t see the boss in the next twenty minutes, I suggest that we should just give up.”

“I guess so.”

Song nodded his head for a while, before pointing to his back with his thumb.

“Mister Kim? It’s dark out in front, so why don’t you position yourself behind me?”

Kim stared at Song’s flames for a second or two, before he wordlessly pulled out his smartphone and switched on the screen.

And then, the passageway got illuminated rather brightly.

“...”

Song alternated his gaze between his flame and the smartphone, before he too wordlessly began searching for his own phone.

The very back of the group was the spot reserved for Seong Jin-Woo, who was injured pretty badly not too long ago, and Yi Ju-Hui, who didn’t possess any combat skills whatsoever.

Jin-Woo scratched the back of his neck.

“Pardon me, I... I’m really sorry.”

“About what?”

“About, you know, dragging you here against your wishes.”

“I’m fine with it, so you don’t need to mind me.”

Jin-Woo cautiously studied Ju-Hui’s expression. She definitely did not look fine at all.

Jin-Woo tilted his head this way and that while trying to read her mood better, before he asked her again, even more cautious than before.

“Are you... really fine?”

That prompted Ju-Hui to shift her gaze towards him.

“Of course I’m not. Are you of a sane mind?! If you were stabbed a couple of inches higher, you’d have a hole in your heart by now! And, what about those injuries on your arms and legs? I worked so hard to heal you somehow, yet you wish to throw yourself into yet another dungeon?? Plus, you don’t even know where we’re going, too!”

She spoke so quickly that Jin-Woo felt like his mind was getting numb from hearing her.

However, she was right about everything.

If it weren’t for the presence of the outstanding Healer ranked B, Yi Ju-Hui, Jin-Woo wouldn’t have been able to carry on living unaffected, never mind working as a Hunter. It was a small wonder why such high ranked and hard-to-find Healers were valued so greatly within the halls of the Association.

‘Wait, now that I think about it, I owe Miss Ju-Hui a lot, don’t I?’

Ju-Hui was a Healer-type Hunter, a rarest of the rare breeds.

Not only that, she was a genius ranked at ‘B’ as well.

The Association always asked her to heal the injured Hunters whenever a Gate opened up. And whenever Jin-Woo participated in a raid, he’d almost always end up sitting down next to her.

“Are you in pain? Please hold on for a little while longer.”

“Haven’t I seen you before....? By any chance, are you the person from the last time?”

“You’re injured again?”

“It’s like, we’re running into each other quite often nowadays, isn’t it?”

“You said that your name is Mister Jin-Woo? Well, that... Is it going to be alright?”

“Maybe, uhm, this life of a Hunter doesn’t really suit you....”

“...You’re here again.”

“Show me your arm. No, not that one. Use bandages on that arm. I meant the other one with the bone fracture.”

At the moment, it was way past the point of Jin-Woo feeling grateful for everything she had done, and firmly into the territory of him being apologetic for inconveniencing her.

“...”

When Jin-Woo looked dispirited, Ju-Hui also felt a bit bad about scolding him just now and her attitude softened up considerably.

“You’re really sorry?”

“Yes, I am.”

Ju-Hui fell into a deep contemplation for a bit, before she began gazing at him with the corner of her eyes and her lips slowly arched up.

“If you’re really sorry, then... how about you buy me dinner sometime?”

Now that was a totally unexpected offer.

Jin-Woo looked at her with an expression of surprise and found a teasing smile etched on her face like a teenage girl.

‘A teen girl, huh.....’

The truth was, Ju-Hui was still a young girl who had barely entered her twenties.

Didn’t she say that she’d be twenty-one next year?

If her long hair was replaced with something shorter, and her current attire was swapped out for a school uniform, she’d completely look like high school senior.

His wandering mind pictured the image of Ju-Hui in a school uniform and his face reddened up somewhat.

When Jin-Woo hesitated with his answer, Ju-Hui’s cheeks began puffing up like a balloon.

“What the... You don’t want to buy me dinner?”

It happened, right then.

Suddenly, it became quite hectic out in front.

“We found it!!”

“It’s the boss chamber!”

Jin-Woo and Ju-Hui’s gazes automatically shifted to the front.

And they saw a huge stone door blocking the passage.

Hunters immediately surrounded this door.

“What is this? Why is there a door at the end of the cavern?”

“Have we ever encountered a boss chamber with a door before?”

“This is definitely the first time, I’m sure of it.”

“This... Doesn’t this feel strangely dangerous?”

Hunters began to express their doubts and fears one at the time.

Since their own lives were on the line here, they had to be cautious and meticulous.

However, if one were to become too cautious, one would end up failing to grasp the heaven-sent opportunity in the first place. Mister Song figured this was one such case.

“Are you all planning to return empty-handed after coming this far?”

Song placed his hands on the door.

“If that’s what you want, knock yourselves out. I’m pushing ahead, even if it means I’ll be going alone.”

Song was a rank C Hunter with ten years of experience.

If it weren’t for his age, which was over sixty, he’d be making a killing in a big Guild by now thanks to his excellent skills.

And when a Hunter like that voiced his opinion with such confidence, others began to feel less anxious than before.

“Wait a minute.”

A couple of Hunters began recalling rumours of dual dungeons.

“I heard that there are incredible treasures hidden within dual dungeons.”

“Yeah, I heard that a certain small to medium Guild found a dual dungeon and grew into a large Guild almost overnight.”

“Monsters inside a dungeon always possess roughly the similar ranks no matter where they are located, so the hunt itself should not be too difficult...”

What if there were incredible treasures hidden with the dual dungeon just as the rumours said, and the monsters beyond this door were about the same difficulty as the rank D, E creatures they fought until now?

‘I can’t let that old man monopolise all the treasure.’

‘No freaking way.’

‘Postnatal care, the school fee for the first born kid, and let’s not forget, this month’s rent is almost due, too....’

The opinions of the Hunters were now on the same page.

Jin-Woo, too, steeled himself.

‘I can’t return home with just a single rank E magic crystal. At a bare minimum, I gotta kill a rank D, no, one more rank E monster!!’

It didn’t even have to be a monster, too.

‘If it’s treasure instead....’

Treasures or rare loot found in a dungeon would normally be divided equally among all the participants in a raid. It was quite a different way of sharing the rewards where one could only take possession of magic crystals one procured by themselves.

‘If we score big today, then things might improve at home for a while.’

Jin-Woo nervously swallowed down his saliva.

Ju-Hui saw his determined expression and asked him.

“Is that how the expression of someone who’s a Hunter as a hobby looks like?”

Jin-Woo shrugged his shoulders.

“Who’d bet their lives in their main line of profession nowadays? Unless it’s a hobby, obviously.”

“.....Eh?”

Just as a dumbfounded expression formed on Ju-Hui’s face, Song pushed the dungeon’s door and it creaked open.

There must’ve been some sort of mechanism installed on the heavy-looking door, since the physical strength of a sixty-year-old man was enough to easily open it.

Slam!

Now that the door was wide open, the huge open interior revealed itself. Hunters hurriedly rushed in.

“Let’s go in as well.”

Jin-Woo feared that he’d fall behind, so he grasped Ju-Hui’s hand and took the lead.

“Ah....”

Ju-Hui’s face reddened slightly as she followed after him.

As soon as Hunters sat foot inside, flames erupted on the numerous torches

packed tightly on the walls all at the same time. Thanks to that, the interior brightened up considerably.

“What’s the heck? The lights came on by themselves?”

“First time seeing a dungeon like this one.”

“Something’s.... different about this place.”

Hunters cautiously studied their surroundings. The overall atmosphere of the place was similar to that of an ancient temple.

Not only that, an old and somewhat decrepit temple, something that might be buried and hidden beneath the ground; moss and weed could be seen sporadically on the floor, walls and the ceiling.

Several Hunters shrunk back and shuddered slightly.

“it’s a bit creepy in here, isn’t it?”

“Doesn’t it feel like we’re being watched by someone?”

Leaving behind the scared Hunters, the three, four strongest of the group went in deeper.

“Tsk! Don’t say something that might jinx us, will ya?”

“Let’s end this quickly and go home.”

The interior was nonsensically huge. The chamber was shaped like a giant dome. It was as large as several Olympic stadiums, the one found in Seoul, were put together – no, maybe it was even bigger than that.

However, one couldn’t help but feel that it was still inadequate.

The reason for that was rather obvious.

“That.... that thing over there....”

“N-no freaking way that thing’s the boss, right?”

In the deepest part of the dome, something so logic-defyingly humongous sat on a throne just as big as itself. It was none other than a huge stone statue of a god!

“Oh, my god....”

“Wow.”

Shocked gasps leaked out from the Hunters.

The first image popping up in Jin-Woo’s head was of the Statue of Liberty in New York. If that statue sat down on a chair, wouldn’t it be as big as that statue of the unknown god?

Well, Liberty was a woman, while the one sitting on the throne was a dude, though.

‘No, hang on. Maybe it’s even bigger than that...’

Hunters began nervously swallowing their saliva near the foot of the god statue. The taut and heavy apprehension and anxiety were clear to see on their faces as they worried about this statue being the dungeon’s boss.

‘.....’

However, the statue did not budge an inch.

What a fortunate thing that was.

“Whew....”

Even Song spat out a sigh of relief.

“Okay, everyone. Spread out.”

Now that they found some leeway, Hunters split among themselves and began searching around the vicinity.

“I don’t think there’s a single monster in here.”

“You think so, too?”

“Never mind a monster, I can’t even see a single bug, too.”

The chamber of the stone god statue might have been massive, yet its actual inner structure was on the simpler side. On the walls, countless torches could be found there. And in front of these walls, more stone statues, slightly taller than a human being, stood tall and unmoving. There were lots of them here as well, found at a certain distance from one another.

“They are all rather beautiful, aren’t they?”

“It’s like, they are works of art, no?”

Objects held by each of the stone statues were varied and different.

Some held weapons, there was one with a book, some carried musical instruments, and even torches.

“It’s as if....”

“They are like statues of a holy temple or something.”

Song finished what Kim wanted to say.

“Mm?”

Then, Song found something beneath his feet.

“This... Isn’t this a magic formation?”

He found a magic formation that he had never seen before located in the middle of this temple.

It was then.

“Excuse me, Mister Song? Ahjussi, something’s written here. Can you come over here and take a look?”

One of the Hunters discovered a statue that was different from others and called out to Song.

Song stopped studying the magic formation and got up from the floor. Other Hunters all gathered around the statue Song was headed off to.

Only this statue featured a pair of wings and carried a stone slate. What the Hunters focused on was the letters carved into this slate. Song took a sweeping look at the slate and muttered to no one in particular.

“It’s Rune alphabet.”

The Rune ‘alphabet’.

Words that could not be found anywhere on Earth, and found only within dungeons; only the Hunters who had ‘awakened’ the magic-related professions could decipher them.

“The laws of the Karutenon temple.”

Song read the very first verse.

With a deeply nervous face, Jin-Woo listened to the contents of the slate, as read out by Mister Song.

However, someone suddenly tugged at his arm.

When he looked back, he spotted Ju-Hui and her deathly-pale complexion.



Chapter 3 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Ju-Hui's complexion was incredibly poor; Seong Jin-Woo was deeply taken aback by this sight.

“What’s wrong? Are you ill somewhere?”

“T-there. Over there.”

Jin-Woo's eyes followed Ju-Hui's trembling pointing finger. She was pointing at the giant god statue. More specifically, she was pointing at the god statue's face.

Jin-Woo could only tilt his head in confusion because it looked pretty much the same as before.

“...?”

Ju-Hui stuttered some words out.

“The, the eyes... The eyes of the god statue moved towards us. Just now.”

“Pardon me?”

Jin-Woo looked again several times, but nothing seemed to have changed. There was no visible change to the god statue.

“Eii... I’m sure you’ve made a mistake.”

However, it seemed like Ju-Hui didn't hear him; her head stayed lowered, and as she held onto Jin-Woo's arm, her entire body trembled even harder.

‘Hang on a sec here.’

Even Jin-Woo picked up on this strange but ominous sensation now. The world was eerily quiet. So much so, it felt just too bizarre.

‘No sounds....?’

Even the sounds of the flames burning on the torches could not be heard anymore.

“First law.”

In the meantime, Song's voice continued on as he read the contents of the slate.

“Worship the god. Second law. Exalt the god. Third law. Prove your piety. Those who do not keep to these laws shall not leave this place alive.”

It was then.

SLAM!!

Everyone was jolted back to their senses at the sudden explosion of noise.

“What, what was that?!”

“Where did that sudden noise come from?!”

The first person to notice the change in the situation was none other than Jin-Woo. Because his senses were running at full tilt already, he could tell where the noise was coming from right away.

“The door!! The door is closed!!”

As soon as Jin-Woo shouted out, everyone shifted their gazes towards the doorway. The door they left open was now firmly shut close.

“God d*mn it! I can’t stand this!”

The Hunter who was the first to oppose the idea of continued exploration of the dungeon began spitting out curses as he took large strides towards the door.

“I’m going home, so you all can have fun with a boss or treasures or whatever.”

That Hunter glared at Song with an expression that contained all of his dissatisfaction before he spun his head around and angrily grabbed the door handle.

It happened, then.

Song’s eyes grew extra large.

“No!!”

Splash!

The area above the Hunter’s neck suddenly vanished. The headless body powerlessly collapsed to the ground.

“K, kkkkyaaachk?!”

“Uwaa?! Uwaak!!”

Hunters began screaming their heads off.

The stone statue that smashed a human’s head apart with a steel mace returned to its original spot next to the door, as if nothing important had

happened, its body completely covered in fresh blood.

“That, that thing can move?!”

“What the hell?? Does that mean every statue in here can move, too?!”

“We gotta fight against these things?”

“I couldn’t even see that d*mn thing swing the mace, so how can I?!”

Unlike others here, though, Jin-Woo knew the truth.

...Their troubles only had just begun.

Didn’t Ju-Hui say it earlier?

“The, the eyes... The eyes of the god statue moved towards us. Just now.”

‘If what she said is true....’

A chill rapidly ran down his spine.

Jin-Woo forced his stiff neck to turn around so he could look behind him.

“...Oh, sh*t.”

The stone statue of the god was looking down at him.

Part 3: Commencement of the attack

It was then, the god statue’s two black eyes changed to red.

Was this the instincts of a Hunter?

No, the instincts of a living being were sending out urgent warning signals.

Something was coming.

Something none of them could contend with!

Jin-Woo turned towards the other Hunters and cried out as loudly as he could.

“Get down!!”

Almost at the same time, red beams of light shot out from the eyes of the god statue. Jin-Woo hugged Ju-Hui and threw their bodies to the floor.

BUZZZ!!

The beam shot right by the spot Jin-Woo had been standing.

A tenth of a second.

No, he survived by one-hundredth of a second.

That was definitely too close for comfort.

Unfortunately, not everyone was as lucky as Jin-Woo.

“Uwaaahk?!”

“Euh-ahahack!!”

Those who were swallowed up by the red light evaporated where they stood. Only the ashes of what used to be human Hunters remained where the beam flew past.

The screams came not from the dead Hunters, but those who witnessed their final moments from the sidelines, actually.

“What the f*ck was that?!”

“Euh, euh-euh...”

“How, how can such a thing even be...”

The remaining Hunters began freaking out.

Out of the seventeen Hunters, only eleven survived.

Not one of them had ever experienced such a powerful attack before in their lives.

‘I barely made it because he told me to get down.’

‘If it wasn’t for Mister Seong’s shouts....’

Hunters stared at Jin-Woo while nervously swallowing their saliva. Jin-Woo turned out to be their unlikely saviour. Without his timely warning, they could only imagine what would’ve happened to them and that thought sent chills down their spines.

“.....”

While still lying prostrate on the ground, Jin-Woo glared at the god statue.

Its eyes were still glowing in red, but it did not attack again.

‘Is the attack... over?’

Jin-Woo looked underneath him. The scared-silly Yi Ju-Hui was trembling in his arms.

This was the reason why she worked for the Association and not for a big Guild, and participated in simple raids like this one, even though she was nominally an excellent Hunter with a rank as high as ‘B’.

Ju-Hui’s breathing was getting rougher by the second.

He couldn’t let her be like this. He had to do something.

Jin-Woo was about to raise his body up, thinking that he gotta do something here, but then, someone grabbed his shoulders and pushed him back down, hard.

“Don’t get up.”

It was Mister Song, somehow next to the youth before anyone had noticed it. Jin-Woo was flustered, but still did as he was told.

Song then shouted at the other Hunters.

“Nobody move! Stay exactly where you are!”

Song looked around before focusing on Jin-Woo.

“Only those that moved got killed. Those who listened to you and got down survived.”

“It seems that way.”

Song tilted his head slightly.

“I thought you warned us because you figured something out?”

“No, well, I just felt something dangerous was coming, so....”

A flash of light brushed past Song’s eyes just then.

‘His instincts are pretty good, in other words. He’s a rank E Hunter? If only his abilities were a bit higher....’

Just as Song stared at Jin-Woo with a rueful expression, Jin-Woo too found a little bit of leeway to check out the older Hunter’s condition.

And the youth’s eyes opened up wider after finding something pretty terrible.

“A-ahjussi, your, your... Your arm?!”

“This is nothing. I can still hold on.”

“But, but, still....”

Jin-Woo swallowed down his saliva.

Song’s other hand that wasn’t pressing down on Jin-Woo’s shoulder, his left arm, was gone.

“...”

Song studied Ju-Hui’s conditions for a bit, before he took off the T-shirt he was wearing, and while not even showing the enormous amount of pain he must be feeling, he wrapped up what was left of his left arm.

“Help me tie up the end, please? It’s difficult to do with only one hand.”

Jin-Woo could only nod his head then.

They were able to somehow stop the bleeding for now.

Rather than a scream or a pained moan, Song let out a long sigh. It was a sigh containing ten years’ worth of experience as a Hunter.

“Fuu.....”

Now that the first-aid was over, Song’s gaze became a level sharper as he studied his surroundings. Although the god statue stopped attacking them, their situation hadn’t improved in the slightest.

And like so, seconds continued to tick by.

“Sob, sob....”

“Just why do we have to suffer like this, this.....”

A few Hunters even began shedding tears now.

“We can’t stay like this forever!!”

The patience of the other Hunters was running out as well. Jin-Woo agreed with that sentiment, though.

‘Right, we can’t stay here forever.’

But, what could he possibly do here? If Song’s suspicion was correct, then the moment they moved, they’d get attacked.

And, even if they got lucky and managed to evade the beams and reach the door, there were the two stone statues guarding the doorway to worry about, as well.

They were a big problem too, actually.

The movements of the doorkeepers were so fast that he couldn’t see it with his eyes. Could he or anyone else open the door and escape before those statues attacked them?

It sounded completely impossible.

Which meant that the annihilation of the Hunters was just a matter of time.

‘Wait..... A matter of time?’

When his thoughts arrived there, a strong sense of disharmony filled him up.

An event that couldn’t have happened, but it happened anyway.

But no one else seemed to have picked up on **“it”** yet.

‘Something... We missed something here.’

Without a doubt, the answer to their salvation hid in that ‘something’.

It was then.

“Don’t move!”

Song shouted at Mister Joo, who was at the far end of the group.

“Shut up! Who knows when that thing will start attacking us again!! But you want me to stay here and wait?!”

Mister Joo was a close-combat type Hunter.

These types of Hunters possessed far, far superior physical abilities than regular human beings. On top of this, Joo was about to sign up with a big Guild after his skills were acknowledged by them not too long ago as well.

“I’ll not die here today.”

While keeping low to the ground, Joo put all his strength down to his legs.

His aim was at the doorway.

The muscles on his legs were swelling up fast.

“D*mn it....”

Song could only mutter out to himself.

Right then, Joo kicked the ground and exploded forward.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo hurriedly turned his head to look at the god statue. Just as he suspected, the eyes of the statue were fixed on the back of mister Joo.

And then, the chilling red ray shot out from those eyes.

BUZZ!!

The beam slammed on the back of Mister Joo.

“Kkyaaahck!!”

The female Hunter screamed at the top of her lungs.

She must’ve developed a leak, because a puddle of yellow liquid formed where she was squatting on the ground.

The expressions of the Hunters froze, hard.

“Oh my god....”

Mister Joo no longer stood where the red beam flew past. Only the pair of ownerless ankles could be seen now.

One of the men with a weaker constitution began emptying the contents of his stomach.

“B-bergh!!”

Jin-Woo’s expression also crumpled as well.

As expected, the god statue could easily finish them off if it felt like it. It’d be easier than stepping on squirming bugs, actually.

‘If that’s the case, then.... Why hadn’t it?’

It could kill them, yet it hadn’t done that.

This was a completely different pattern of behaviour compared to the monsters that attacked as soon as spotting human Hunters in their vicinity.

These statues only moved if certain conditions were met: the doorkeepers that only attacked if someone approached the door; the eyes of the god statue firing that red beam if someone moved.

It was like a game with a set regulation.

‘Hang on... Could there be some kind of rules in this chamber?’

It was here that a piece of puzzle found its place in Jin-Woo’s head. He began recalling the contents of the stone slate Song was reading not too long ago, that was why.

‘The laws of the... Karutenon temple, was it?’

‘Regulation’ was ‘rules’, and ‘rules’ could be ‘laws’ as well.

The key to their safe escape from this chamber had to be buried within those warnings found on the stone slate.

“....Worship the god.”

That was the first law.

“Mm? Did you just say something?”

Song shifted his gaze back to Jin-Woo.

Instead of a reply, Jin-Woo simply placed his index finger on his lips. It was a sign asking for a bit of time to think.

‘If my thoughts are right...’

Jin-Woo slowly rose up.

Song hurriedly tried to stop the youth, but Jin-Woo shook his head while carrying a determined expression.

‘...Doesn’t look like he gave up on living.’

Song nodded his head.

Jin-Woo kept his eyes trained squarely at the god statue and carefully stood up.

Almost right away, the eyes of the statue were fixed on Jin-Woo.

BUZZZ!!

And as expected, the red beam was fired in his direction.

If he got down to the ground a moment slower, it’d be his face melting away, instead of a few strands of hair on top of his head!

Lying face down on the ground, Jin-Woo breathed in and out quite heavily.

“Heok, heok, heok, heok.”

He nearly died just then. The moment the statue’s eyes met his, he thought he was going to die for sure. He somehow did dodge it, but his legs wouldn’t stop shaking from the fear.

‘Still...’

Still, he learned something important just now.

‘It’s not attacking someone who’s moving around.’

As long as he was squatting low to the ground, he could go anywhere he wanted to and the statue’s eyes would remain still.

However, if one stood up, then the red beam would be fired without hesitation.

‘The d*mn thing only attacks if we breach a certain height.’

That was why Jin-Woo bet his life on proving this theory right just now.

And now, he was sure of it.

The meaning behind the first law, that was!



Chapter 4 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Part 4: The Three Laws

Jin-Woo shouted out towards the rest of the Hunters.

“Everyone!”

Their attention shifted towards him in an instant.

Jin-Woo spoke as he met their gazes.

“You must kowtow towards the god statue!”

Hunters began tilting their heads after hearing him.

“Kowtow....?”

“You want us to kowtow to that statue?”

Hunters exchanged glances with each other, before loudly cussing out at Jin-Woo.

“F*ck you! What bullsh*t are you spewing here?!”

“What the hell! How can you say something like that under the current circumstances?!”

“Have you lost your mind, Seong Jin-Woo?!”

Kim’s face became boiling-red as he began snorting like a bull.

“I had no idea you, Mister Seong, would be like this! If I could move, then I’d have punched you in the face already!!”

Jin-Woo bit on his lower lip.

Six of their comrades were killed by the god statue. So, it was rather obvious that the surviving Hunters would cuss him out when he told them to kowtow towards that abominable thing.

It wasn’t hard to understand what these Hunters were feeling at the moment.

‘And, the most important thing is....’

The most important thing was, he had no logical evidence to back his theory up. He only had his gut feelings.

Indeed, that was the only way to describe it.

However...

“I’ll do as you say.”

That voice came from Jin-Woo’s back. Everyone’s eyes immediately shifted there.

It was Mister Song, effectively the leader of this group.

“Mister Song ahjussi?”

“You are going to kowtow to that f*cking statue?”

Just as other Hunters began to freak out, Song looked straight at Jin-Woo.

“Young man. You’ve discovered something, haven’t you?”

Jin-Woo resolutely nodded his head.

“Is it your instinct again?”

“.....Yes. For the time being.”

“I see.”

Just now, eleven people survived thanks to Jin-Woo’s instincts.

Well, with the death of Mister Joo, there were ten now, but still – if it was Jin-Woo’s instincts, then wouldn’t it be worth believing it at least once more?

That’s what Song thought.

When Song knelt down and kowtowed towards the god statue, the mood had become solemn and silent.

“...He’s really doing it.”

Seizing upon this opportunity, Jin-Woo shouted out once more.

“Everyone, I beg of you! Please kneel before the god statue. We might be able to get out of here alive!”

Might live.

Might be able to get out alive.

The impact those simple words carried was quite explosive.

‘We might live?’

‘We can get out of here?’

‘With just one kowtow?!’

The hesitant Hunters began to plop down to the ground, as if they were really kowtowing. The number of them performing the act gradually increased. In the end, even the complaining Kim bowed his head towards the statue.

However, there was no visible change to the god statue. Indeed, those chilling red light still shone from the eyes of the statue.

Jin-Woo felt his heart go cold.

‘Was I wrong?’

It was here that his gaze shifted to Ju-Hui next to him.

No matter how generous one was, it was difficult to describe her posture of squatting on the ground shivering, while holding her head in her hands as her kowtowing.

‘What if....’

Jin-Woo carefully grasped Ju-Hui’s wrist.

She raised her head like a scared cat. Seeing her, Jin-Woo wordlessly nodded his head. Only then did she relax her muscles somewhat.

With that, Jin-Woo was able to slowly change her posture.

‘Done.’

There was only one person remaining now. And that would be him.

Jin-Woo knelt down towards the god statue, placed his hands on the ground, and slowly lowered his head.

Finally, something began to change.

“Huh? Uh, uhh?!”

Hunters who had noticed the change first raised their voices.

“The god statue!! Look at the statue!!”

“It’s eyes!”

The red light buzzing in its eyes was gradually weakening.

“What the hell? Is this really going to work??”

Eventually, the red light completely vanished.

“Oh!! Ohhh!!”

Hunters began rejoicing loudly.

“The red light is gone!!”

“We made it!!”

The excited Hunters began standing up one at the time. Even then, the statue didn't fire the red beam.

Jin-Woo belatedly raised his head and spat out a sigh of relief.

“Whew....”

Just as he suspected – this chamber operated strictly within the set regulations.

‘If that’s the case....’

Then, this game was far from over. Two more ‘laws’ still remained. The second law, exalt the god. And the third law, prove one’s piety.

It was then.

RUMBLE!!

Accompanied by a goosebump-inducing noise, the entire chamber began to shake.

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened immediately.

‘As I thought....’

His suspicions proved to be correct once more.

Things were only getting started.

The humongous god statue was slowly rising up from the stone throne.

“Huh?! Huhhh???”

Hunters were hugging each other while shedding tears of joy until then, but when they realised this turn of events, they all froze up like statues themselves.

“What.... what the hell!! It wasn’t over yet?!”

“This, this can’t be!!”

None of them could articulate what they wanted to say. Despair rapidly dyed their expressions.

“Ah....Ah, ah...”

Soon, the god statue completely stood up from the throne.

The ‘creature’ swept its gaze around once, and began walking towards the Hunters.

THUD!!

Every time the god statue stepped on the ground, the whole world seemed to shake.

THUD!!

It was so tall that its head was almost scraping against the chamber's indescribably high ceiling.

THUD!!

Even when the Hunters were overwhelmed by the statue's sheer size, the thing was gradually closing its distance to them.

“Mister Seong!! Mister Seong Jin-Woo!!”

“What can we do??”

The Hunters who were cussing at Jin-Woo only a short while ago hurriedly began crowding around him.

“Is there a way out of this?”

“Say something!!”

All these adults were forming tearful expressions as if they'd start breaking down in sobs and wails very soon.

Currently, Jin-Woo was their only hope.

Jin-Woo helped the frozen-stiff Ju-Hui up from the ground and began talking about the second law.

“Exalt the god. That's the key.”

“Wait, isn't that...?!”

Kim suddenly butted in as if he knew something others didn't.

“Isn't that what's written on the slate?”

“Correct. Worship the god. Exalt the god. And finally, prove your piety. We need to satisfy all three laws.”

Jin-Woo began speaking faster and faster.

Why? The god statue was already a stone's throw away from them.

THUD!!

Everyone's complexion paled as the gigantic shadow loomed over them.

“Let, let me try something.”

A young male Hunter who usually kept to himself suddenly took a step forward.

“What the?! What are you trying to do?”

“I’ve been in a church choir. I’m confident if it’s about ‘exalting’ something.”

The young Hunter slowly stepped forward towards the statue while disregarding the dissuasion of Kim. He regulated his breathing while looking up at the god statue before he took a large gulp of air.

“I come to you, Lord....”

His clear voice began reverberating within the chamber.

“....Renew my faith once more..... Bless me with your grace, Lord...”

The statue stopped its march in front of the singing Hunter.

“Oh!! Ohhh!!”

Hunters began gasping out in elation. The god statue didn’t move from the spot as if it was absorbed by the singing.

All the other noises in the room vanished. Only the young man’s voice could be heard in the chamber’s interior.

The young Hunter was encouraged by this and carried on.

“All the weakness found in me... Through your love, I shall overcome...”

Among the Hunters, only Jin-Woo was shuddering from this ominous sensation filling him up.

‘This... this is wrong.’

Jin-Woo swallowed up his words several times.

The chamber featured its own set of rules. But the young Hunter was ‘exalting’ the god statue with the ‘rule’ of Christianity, not with the rules of this chamber.

Thankfully, the statue wasn’t moving – but, could singing that hymn qualify as upholding the rules?

Jin-Woo shook his head.

The only reason why he didn’t say anything was solely because he couldn’t think of a better way to stop the god statue himself.

It was right then!

THUD!!

The weighty noise reverberated throughout the chamber.

“K, kkkkyyyyaaahhk!!”

The female Hunter screamed at the top of her lungs.

When the stone statue lifted its leg up, bloody mess of what used to be the young Hunter could be found on the ground as well as on the bottom of its foot.

Other Hunters began screaming in panic and shock, too.

“Ahhhhh?!”

“Uwa, uwaaaahk!!”

The face of the statue, emotionless until then, was now crumpled in pure rage.

“It’s angry!!”

“Run, run away!!”

Hunters dispersed away from the statue in a hurry.

Unfortunately for the female Hunter, she lost her reasoning and stood on the spot while screaming loudly after personally witnessing the death of the young male Hunter.

“K, kyaaachk!!”

‘D*mn it.....’

Jin-Woo was running away while carrying Ju-Hui in his arms, but he turned around so he could go and help that woman out.

But then, Song stopped the youth.

“But, ahjussi...?”

“It’s too late.”

As if slapping a fly down, the god statue slammed its palm down at the female Hunter.

SLAM!!

“Keuk...”

Jin-Woo inadvertently shifted his gaze away. It was a truly gruesome sight and he couldn’t bear to watch it unfold.

“There is no time to waste like this. Are you planning to let this girl die,

too?”

Song’s words sobered Jin-Woo up in an instant.

It was as he said.

THUD!!

“Uwaahk!!”

THUD!

THUD!!!

“Help me!!”

The statue was not walking around anymore.

No, it was actually running around and stepping on the humans it found nearby. Whenever the thing stepped on the ground, the entire chamber shook around, hard.

THUD!! THUD!!

Jin-Woo gritted his teeth and began running again. Ju-Hui squeezed her eyes shut and held onto him for her dear life.

“Let’s split up!”

“Yes!”

Thinking that moving around together was dangerous, Jin-Woo and Song ran in separate directions.

Jin-Woo made sure to run towards the furthest corner from the frenzied god statue. However, there was another Hunter who had arrived there before he did.

It was Mister Park.

Park was running with everything he had.

Tears formed on the edges of his eyes when he recalled his family.

“Sob...”

Back home, a son who resembled him so much and a wife pregnant with their second child was waiting for him. He couldn’t die here, not like this.

Perhaps because he ran with everything he had, he was able to run the furthest away from the statue out of everyone here.

“Pant, pant....”

As Park tried to control his heavy breathing in the corner, his friend Kim

urgently shouted at him.

“Mister Park!!”

Park raised his head after hearing the familiar voice.

“Yeah?”

Kim pointed at the spot behind Park and cried out.

“Your back!! Look behind you!!”

It was then, something sharp gleamed coldly behind Mister Park.

“Uh...?”

Slice!

Park was sliced in half from the top of his head right down to his groin. His cleanly-cut two halves fell to the ground.

“PARK!!”

The stone statue that killed Park with its greatsword returned to its position as if nothing had happened, exactly like how the doorkeeper did before.

Kim began tearing up after witnessing this scene.

“You sons of b*tches....!!”

THUD!!

THUD!!

Behind him, the humongous god statue was stepping on and killing humans one at the time, and if you ran towards the corner in order to avoid it, then the stone statues located there would start attacking you.

“U, uwaaaah!!”

“My arm!! My armmmm!!”

The interior of the chamber swiftly fell into chaos.

“Heok, heok....”

Cold sweat dripped down from Jin-Woo’s forehead.

His legs were getting heavier. His breathing was getting rougher and rougher. However, his head was filled with only one chain of thought.

‘Exalt the god. Exalt the god. Exalt the god....’

The words of the second law circulated in his brain non-stop. The key to unravelling this mystery definitely existed within this chamber.

Something within this chamber that they could use!

However, when the Hunters first entered this place, they had searched every nook and cranny, but didn't find a single contraption nor things that might be some kind of tools.

'No, back then or now, the only things here that can move are the stone statues.'

It was then.

A thought raced past Jin-Woo's brain just then.

'Only things moving in here are the statues?'

D*mn it.

Jin-Woo's eyes widened.

"Why haven't I thought of that before?!"

If the only things that could move were the stone statues, then the only thing he could use had to be them, too.

These statues activated when humans got near them, meaning he had to take advantage of this rule.

'What if....!'

Even though he was running short of breath, Jin-Woo roared out loud enough to shake the entire chamber.

"Run towards the statues holding musical instruments!!"



Chapter 5 Fin

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

All the Hunters still alive heard Jin-Woo's voice.

"!!"

"Instruments?"

A ray of hope found its way into the eyes of the Hunters.

Quite different to back when he told them to kowtow, everyone moved unbelievably quickly. If Jin-Woo was wrong about this, then as soon as arriving near one, they would be killed by the stone statues holding the musical instruments. However, no one here questioned Jin-Woo's words.

Song was the first one to arrive in front of a statue carrying a musical instrument.

"..."

Song controlled his heavy breathing and raised his head to look at the statue. And as if it was a lie, the fingers of the statue moved and strummed on the harp.

Cling, clang...

A beautiful melody flowed out.

"It's working!!"

"Hurry to the statues with instruments!!"

Hunters ran towards the nearest correct statues in hurried footsteps.

The statue with a trumpet began blowing it triumphantly; one with a flute began playing with it; the one holding the lyre strummed on its strings.

"Heok, heok, heok...."

While sensing the approach of his physical limit, Kim somehow arrived in front of the statue that held a buzuka and plopped down to the ground. (TL: I don't know what this buzuka could be. TLed as is from the raw.) (ED: Probably either a Bazooka or a Bouzouki, both from the 1900's.)

Ttiring, ttring....

As soon as the statue began playing the instrument, the god statue stopped

chasing after Kim. He must've been overcome with emotions, because Kim then began shedding tears while he stayed down on his knees.

“Sob.... Sob....”

Meanwhile, the god statue turned around. The ‘creature’ searched around and soon enough, found its next prey.

“God d*mn it.”

Jin-Woo spat out a cuss as his gaze met the god statue’s.

He then began running hard – so hard that his heart might explode. His back was already soaked through in sweat.

‘Why?! Why isn’t it working?!’

Jin-Woo’s resentful glare landed on the stone statue in front of him. The statue holding a drum showed no signs of moving at all.

THUD!! THUD!! THUD!!

The god statue closed in with frightening speed. He was practically on the other side of the chamber from the d*mn thing, yet the distance between the two shortened in no time at all.

Jin-Woo swallowed down his saliva.

‘Could it be that the statue won’t play because there are two people here? Me and Miss Ju-Hui?’

He couldn’t think of anything else. Why? Because, other statues were playing music just fine as soon a Hunter stood in front of it.

‘There is no time to think anymore.’

Jin-Woo put Ju-Hui down and got ready to run to somewhere else.

“M, Mister Jin-Woo....”

Still terrified out of her mind, Ju-Hui clung onto Jin-Woo’s sleeve. Jin-Woo calmly whispered in her ear.

“We’ll both die if we stay together.”

Tears began forming on Ju-Hui’s eyes. Her fingers trembled as they held onto his clothes. Unfortunately, there was no time to explain to her in detail. Jin-Woo carefully pried her hand away and began running in the opposite direction as hard as he could.

Boom, boom, boom....

When he glanced back, the statue behind Ju-Hui began beating its drum in

a slow but steady rhythm.

‘What a relief.’

There was only one thing remaining now: to run to the other statue without getting killed!

Only Jin-Woo hadn’t received the protection of the music-playing statues. Quite obviously, the rage of the god statue was solely directed to Jin-Woo and him alone.

Jin-Woo did his best to avoid the foot of the thing that rivalled a building in size and crossed the room in a hurry.

THUD!

THUD!!

He fell and rolled around but still, he somehow managed to avoid getting flattened by the god statue’s foot.

“Heok, heok.”

He might only have been a rank E, but he was still a close-combat type Hunter so his physique came in handy in situations like this.

‘Just a little bit further!! A bit more!’

Jin-Woo kept an eye out on the god statue’s movements and ran even harder.

His speed increased.

And when the distance remaining between him and the stone statue was mere a dozen feet...

“No, that’s the wrong one!!”

...Mister Song cried out to him.

Jin-Woo had been paying attention to the god statue only; he was stunned by the shout and hurriedly turned his head take a look at his front.

“Ahh!!”

It’s not a statue with an instrument?

He belatedly realised that the thing that looked like a musical instrument from afar was actually a shield, instead. And sure enough, the statue mercilessly stabbed down with its shield.

“Heok!”

Jin-Woo hurriedly threw himself to the side.

“Kkyahhk!!”

Ju-Hui screamed.

Jin-Woo rolled on the ground and when he came to a stop, he raised his head to see the god statue standing right in front of his nose.

“It’s one thing after another....”

His forehead must’ve been torn from him rolling on the ground, because blood was flowing down and blurred his vision. His view was restricted and he couldn’t look too far away.

Jin-Woo quickly searched around his vicinity.

‘An instrument.... an instrument....’

However, no matter how hard he looked, he couldn’t see a single statue holding an instrument nearby.

Meanwhile, the god statue raised its leg over Jin-Woo’s position.

“Heok!”

THUD!!

Jin-Woo threw himself again and somehow avoided the foot of the statue again.

But he had reached his limit.

A powerful dizziness was assaulting him and for some reason, he couldn’t even balance himself.

‘Please....’

If there was a real god, he thought that he’d start praying right about now.

It was then, Jin-Woo spotted a stone statue that held neither a weapon or a musical instrument.

‘Is that...?’

Jin-Woo decided to bet everything on that statue. He crawled on the ground and arrived in front of the statue in question. He then managed to flip his body around and lied down on the ground so he could see the god statue.

He no longer had any energy to move.

“Pant, pant....”

Jin-Woo stared at the approaching god statue and continued to roughly breathe in and out.

The expression of the god statue was far more contorted compared to before as if it got infuriated further by Jin-Woo's continued evasion.

The god statue now stopped in front of Jin-Woo. Seeing a 'creature' as big as a high-rise blocking his entire view, Jin-Woo felt like he couldn't breathe anymore.

“Pant, pant.....”

Did it think he was nothing more than a cornered rat? The god statue simply looked down at him and didn't do anything else.

‘This is the end....’

Jin-Woo sensed his own unavoidable death approaching closer after looking straight into the eyes of the god statue.

However...

Wu-wu-wu....

From somewhere behind him, a beautiful and otherworldly voice came out.

Jin-Woo turned his head around to see what was going on.

Wu-wu, wu-wu-wu....

The lips of the stone statue holding a book moved, and whenever they did, a divine song flowed out and filled the interior of the massive chamber.

Wu-wu-wu, wu....

The crumpled expression of the god statue slowly reverted back to the emotionless state. Soon, all those horrifyingly contorted facial muscles of the stature smoothed out.

When the song of the stone statues came to its eventual end, the god statue turned around. Then, just how other stone statues had done until now, it returned to its throne and settled down as if things that happened until now were nothing but a lie.

THUD!!

The noise of the god statue sitting down on the throne resounded throughout the chamber.

“Pant, pant..... Barely, made, it...”

A thin smile formed on Jin-Woo's lips.

Meanwhile, Ju-Hui began running from her position at the far end of the chamber.

“Mister Jin-Woo!!”

She ran with all her might and knelt down next to him as tears streamed down on her face.

“What can I do.... What am I supposed to....”

She summoned all of her magical energy and activated her healing magic. However, nothing seemed to improve.

The dispersed Hunters gathered around Jin-Woo one by one. Every single one of them carried a dark expression.

“What... Mister Jin-Woo....”

Even then, only Ju-Hui was crying in sorrow.

Why was everyone acting like this?

Jin-Woo’s lips bobbed up and down. He wanted to ask what was going on, but he couldn’t really summon forth his own voice.

Sensing that he had no choice, he tried to prop himself up.

“....?”

Then, he noticed the pool of blood around his lower torso. Only then did he belatedly realise the change to his body.

“Ah.....”

Below his right knee was gone.

Jin-Woo’s eyes reflexively shifted toward the stone statue holding the shield. He then saw the trail of blood clearly visible on the end of the shield.

And the rest of his right leg was just below that.

Drip. Drip.

Drops of blood started falling from Ju-Hui’s nose. That was the sign of her reaching the limits of her physical stamina.

The healing magic from a rank B Healer was unable to recover missing limbs. Meaning, what she was doing was basically pouring water into a broken jug. Her stamina rapidly bottomed out in the end.

“It’s fine now... Miss Ju-Hui. You can stop....”

“I’m going to heal you!! I’ll fix you as good as new!”

Hunters stared at the two of them while forming miserable expressions.

Out of the seventeen who initially entered this chamber only six remained

now. And from this group of six, two of them had suffered horrible, grievous wounds. Song had lost his arm, while Jin-Woo lost his leg.

They might have survived, but none of them felt like rejoicing at the moment. It was then, yet another strange noise rocked the chamber.

RUMBLE....!!

The middle of the temple, where that strange magic formation could be found, suddenly rose up above the ground.

Jin-Woo inwardly thought that it had finally come.

‘Prove your piety, is it....’

He already had a rough idea as to what those words could mean.

Part 5: Final Trial

The circular magic formation in the centre of the temple began rising up noisily and only stopped after reaching the height of a couple of steps.

“An altar...”

Hunters displayed alert reactions as soon as Jin-Woo muttered out.

‘An altar....?’

‘He just said it’s an altar....’

The person who had rescued them from the two preceding crises was not some high ranked Hunter, but rank E Jin-Woo, who used to be the butt of their jokes most of the time.

‘If it weren’t for Mister Seong, all of us would have been....’

Hunters were thinking this exact same thought. Under the current circumstances, Jin-Woo’s words were their lifeline.

And now, that Jin-Woo had muttered out a word ‘altar’.

Kim always was quick on the uptake and so, he caught onto the meaning first before anyone else had the chance to do so.

“I get it now. I see how it is.”

Kim then unsheathed the sword hanging on his hips.

Now originally, this weapon would be used to cut various monsters down. But for now, it’d have to be utilised for a different purpose altogether.

“Even if I’m a dumb b*stard, I can more or less get what you’re trying to say here.”

Hunters nervously swallowed their saliva while looking at the sharp, coldly-gleaming blade.

“Oii, Mister Kim. Why are you pulling your sword out like that?”

“Why don’t we talk about this first? Let’s talk first.”

The highest ranked member among the group, rank C Hunter Song was heavily injured, meaning there was no one here that could potentially stop Kim, who boasted a pretty powerful set of skills himself even within the D rank.

Kim pointed towards the altar with his sword.

“The final law, prove your piety. And there’s an altar appearing out of nowhere in the middle of this place.”

Kim’s gaze then shifted to Jin-Woo.

“So, aren’t we supposed to offer up a sacrifice? Mister Seong?”

Jin-Woo slowly nodded his head. That was what the youth thought as well. One of the surviving six had to act as a sacrifice.

‘That’s what the last law probably meant....’

Jin-Woo came to this conclusion.

He sensed more disturbance and raised his head, and realised that the eyes of Mister Kim as he approached closer did not look friendly at all.

A long sweatdrop glided down Jin-Woo’s forehead.

“Ahjussi... What....?”

“You, young man, don’t say anything and be still!!”

Kim angrily shouted out and pointed his sword at Mister Song, who was squatting next to Jin-Woo in order to check out the youth’s condition.

“Just who was it that dragged us to this place? Wasn’t it this guy? Yes, it was Mister Song! So, don’t you think it’s only right for Mister Song to take the ultimate responsibility?”

“Ahjussi!”

Jin-Woo tried to get up in a fit of anger, but then, Song’s hand that resembled the bark of an aged tree stopped the youth.

Jin-Woo looked at Song in disbelief.

“....”

Song wordlessly shook his head. His eyes were pleading with Jin-Woo,

asking the youth to not say anything else. Of course, Jin-Woo had lots of things to say, but he kept them down for now.

Song slowly raised his body up.

“What Mister Kim said is right. I should take the blame for today.”

“Old man, I guess we are now finally on the same page.”

Kim used the tip of his sword to point towards the altar.

“If you get it now, then let’s get going already. Over ten people died here because of you, old man.”



Chapter 6 Fin

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

One of the dead Hunters today happened to be Mister Park, a personal friend to Mister Kim.

Exploring the dual dungeon was decided with the vote involving everyone, but Kim had already erased that memory off his head after losing much of his reasoning.

Mister Song spoke to Kim.

“I’d like to walk on my own volition, so can you put the sword away?”

Of course, Kim refused right away.

“How can I trust you, old man? Stop wasting time and start moving already.”

Song sighed softly under his breath and walked towards the altar. Kim pointed his sword at the older man’s back and followed on afterwards.

Jin-Woo bit his lower lip while watching the two men walk away.

‘This isn’t the fault of Mister Song.’

More than half of the group agreed to do it together. Just because things had gone south, blaming Song for everything was simply too cowardly, he thought.

‘But, I....’

Jin-Woo unfortunately did not possess enough strength to stop Kim here.

Kim, thought to be one of the best among the rank D, and Seong Jin-Woo, easily the worst of the rank E. The difference in their strengths was all too clear for him to see. Not only that, Jin-Woo had even lost a leg.

If he tried to confront Kim as he was now, there was a chance that him and even Ju-Hui, who had been focusing solely on healing him, could meet with disaster.

“D*mn it.”

Jin-Woo squeezed his eyes shut. He never hated his own powerlessness as much as he did today.

In the meantime, Song had stepped up on the raised altar.

Suddenly, a red flame lit up near the outer perimeter of the altar as soon as he did. Everyone nervously swallowed their saliva and observed the unfolding situation carefully.

However, nothing else happened. Just a single flame came to life, and that was it.

“...?”

They waited for a while but there was no visible change at all. Not only Kim, but everyone else got flustered by this situation.

Kim quickly turned his head and spoke to Jin-Woo.

“Look here, Mister Seong. This wasn’t it?”

Jin-Woo also shook his head.

“Even I...”

He too thought that once a person chosen as the sacrifice stepped up on the altar, the third law of ‘prove one’s piety’ would be completed.

‘It’s not about offering up a sacrifice?’

If so, then it was not necessarily bad news. If the law was not about sacrifices, then it meant Mister Song could still be saved.

Jin-Woo’s expression brightened somewhat.

He sweated bucket-loads as he tried to stand up, and two Hunters nearby quickly lent their assistance.

“Please take me closer to the altar so I can study it.”

“Mister Jin-Woo, your injuries are....”

Ju-Hui also got up from her spot to follow after Jin-Woo. Her complexion was rather pale after expending too much of her magical energy.

But because she had worked so hard, Jin-Woo’s blood loss had been temporarily halted and the pain he felt was reduced to a barely noticeable degree.

‘I gotta hurry up.’

The current condition of Ju-Hui, Kim’s boiling rage, Song’s injuries, and the frightened Hunters – he didn’t have a lot of time here.

Jin-Woo eventually arrived at the altar with the help from other Hunters.

“Let’s climb up on the altar.”

The two Hunters flinched from his statement, but they trusted Jin-Woo and stepped up. Then, three more flames lit up. Right away, Jin-Woo's eyes gleamed brightly.

'It's the same number as the people on the altar.'

Mister Song and Jin-Woo, plus two others who helped the youth – indeed, the flames lit up to match the number of people standing on the altar.

And it kind of looked like that these four flames were drawing a circle outside the altar.

'If I take into consideration the space between the flames, two more will complete the circle.'

It seemed that all the remaining people had to climb up on the altar for something, anything, to get started. Jin-Woo turned his head to ask Song.

"If we wait here, do you think other Hunters will come to rescue us?"

Song shook his head.

"Today is the seventh day since the Gate showed up. These things will start moving first before the help arrives."

"Because it's a Gate ranked D, I see that it's been left alone for far too long."

"Well, that's how the Association operates, isn't it."

A Gate would open up fully after the seventh day. The real meaning of a raid was to kill the dungeon's boss monster and therefore close the Gate before that happened. When failing to do so, the monsters trapped in the dungeons would be set free from the dungeon and they would be able to roam the outside world.

Jin-Woo looked behind him.

The giant god statue was still looking down on them with an overbearing, arrogant expression from its throne.

'If that thing manages to go outside, then....'

The ensuing chaos would be unimaginable. Of course, before that happened, Hunters coming to this chamber to rescue them would all be killed by the statues first.

He was now sure of the fact that they could not wait here forever. Jin-Woo called out to Ju-Hui and Kim.

"Both of you, climb up."

Ju-Hui stepped up on the altar first. The hesitant Kim also followed suit soon afterwards. Two more flames lit up and the circle was now complete.

And then....

Hunters were grandly stunned by what happened next.

“What the hell?!”

“What’s going on here?”

As Jin-Woo had suspected, yet another change took place.

‘It’s coming.’

From the outer most edge of the altar, small blue flames floated upwards and began drawing a circle of their own as well. There looked to be at least thirty of these blue flames, placed real tightly next to each other.

‘34. 35. 36....’

Jin-Woo quickly counted them all as the blue flames completed the circle and he realised that there were 36 of them.

‘The six red flames that lit up to match the number of people. And the 36 blue flames that appeared outside them. What could be the significance behind that number?’

It was then.

CLANG!

Without a warning, the resolutely-shut door suddenly opened up wide. Hunters reflexively flinched.

“Euk...!”

They all wanted so bad to run towards the wide-open doorway, but having seen the final moments of the choirboy Hunter, they found it hard to take the first step. If one tried to be the first, just who knew what might happen to them?

Everyone’s gaze fixed on Jin-Woo as if to demand an answer from him. However, Jin-Woo’s lips remained tightly shut.

“...”

He couldn’t come up with a guess at the moment. He didn’t know whether the open door was a trap, or they were now allowed to go out after they upheld the final law successfully.

Too bad for him, just as everyone was looking at Jin-Woo, a horrifying

noise filled up the entire chamber.

Creak....

Creeeaaaak....

The heads of all six Hunters quickly snapped around to look.

“What was that?!”

“It, it’s coming closer!!”

“Those d*mn things are all moving now!!”

Hunters’ breathing quickened in an instant.

The stone statues that had only moved when a person got near were now several steps closer to the group. Jin-Woo only needed a short moment to figure out what happened, of course.

‘No, the statues didn’t move. It’s the plinths below them that moved.’

That horrifying screech from earlier on most likely came from the plinths beneath the statues grating against the stone floor.

“...They are not moving anymore?”

Kim wiped the droplets of sweat on his forehead as he spoke.

While everyone was still staring at the statues, Jin-Woo’s focus was on the blue flames. They had been going out one by one, and three of them had flickered out of existence already.

Creaaakkkk...

Hearing that screech, someone cried out.

“Wha-what was that?! Where did it come from?”

Jin-Woo quickly raised his head. The noise had come from his general direction. The stone statues facing him had moved a little bit closer.

‘Why only my side....?’

Was it because he looked at somewhere else briefly?

In order to confirm, Jin-Woo closed his eyes.

The noise resounded out again.

Creeaaaakkkk...

As soon as he opened his eyes, the noise stopped.

“What the f*ck is going on here?!”

“What, what are we supposed to do about this?!”

Jin-Woo quickly shouted at others.

“Don’t take your eyes off the statues, no matter what!”

When he thought about it, he realised that the statues first began moving closer to the group when others were busy looking at him.

‘They creep closer when we are not looking at them.’

It was right then, another blue flame disappeared. However, there was still no discernible change to either the group or the statues.

‘Could it be...?’

Cautiously raising his arm, Jin-Woo did his best not to take his eyes off the statues while checking the time with his wristwatch.

‘As I thought.’

At an interval of one minute, a blue flame was being extinguished.

‘The blue flames are the timer.’

It was quite likely that one of the main points of the third law was to stay within the altar until all 36 blue flames died out.

In other words, as long as everyone was keeping close watch on the statues, they’d be safe. It was quite possible that no one had to die at this final huddle.

Wanting to be more accurate about the remaining time, Jin-Woo began recounting the number of blue flames once more.

‘There are thirty remaining....’

They only needed to endure thirty more minutes!

Unfortunately, Jin-Woo made a huge mistake, just then.

While he was counting the number of blue flames, his eyes wandered away for a brief moment, and that resulted in the statues creeping closer...

Creeeakkkk....

“Euuuh, uwaaaahhh!!”

The man standing on the opposite side screamed and ran towards the door. He simply couldn’t hold on any longer as the horrifying screeching noise coming from his back frightened him so much.

As soon as he left the altar, one of the red flames disappeared.

“No!!”

Jin-Woo cried out urgently.

However, the man running as if he had gone crazy escaped through the open doorway without meeting a grizzly fate, which took everyone by surprise.

“What, what the hell?! Mister Seong! What’s going on? That guy made it out alive!”

Kim shouted out, flustered.

Jin-Woo was standing with his back to the doorway so he couldn’t really tell what was going on.

“Did something change?”

“The door.... The door has closed just a little.”

“The door’s closing?”

“No, no. After that guy left, the door moved a little bit, but then stopped.”

Jin-Woo then recalled one of the red flames disappearing as soon as that man left the altar.

‘God d*mn it!!’

He immediately felt his heart go cold.

One of the questions that he couldn’t quite figure out until now as he stood on top of this altar finally had an answer.

How could standing on an altar be a proof of one’s piety?

Indeed, he now had the answer to this quandary.

And that answer was probably the worst one for Jin-Woo, who had only one leg now and needed other’s help just to keep his balance.

That ‘open’ doorway was a trap.

A false hope right in front of one’s eyes!

If people saw the open door and climbed off the altar at the same time, the red flames would’ve gone out and the doorway would be closed shut again. And then, the banquet of raining blood and screams would inevitably follow next.

On the other hand, the ‘altar’ was the proverbial promised land.

If each one did what they had to do in their positions until the timer ran out, then their survival would be guaranteed.

So, it was between the false hope right in front of one's eyes, or the unseen promise of salvation.

The third law was a test to see if one could defend one's position without falling into the sweet temptation over yonder while constantly being under the encroaching threat of death.

However, two flies in the ointment happened in this situation.

The first one was Jin-Woo.

Originally, the remaining group of people would've ran straight for the open door, but they stopped first to listen to what Jin-Woo had to say and that helped them avoid the trap being sprung in the first place.

'We got lucky there.'

Indeed, that had to be the only explanation.

Such a thing was only possible because Jin-Woo managed to figure out the first two laws all by himself and earned the trust of others.

Unfortunately for him, the second fly also happened – something he didn't foresee: a deserter had appeared among their midst.

How would human beings react when there was a hope of survival right in front of their eyes? It was way too obvious.

The man helping Jin-Woo up abandoned the youth and bolted as well. Song hurriedly reached out and propped Jin-Woo up from his back.

Poof.

When that man left the altar, yet another red flame disappeared and as expected, the door closed a little bit more.

Creeaaaakkk...

"Huh?!Uh!!"

Kim dazedly pointed at the second deserter, but just like the first person to abandon them, he too safely escaped past the doorway.

Jin-Woo confirmed the number of remaining red flames and shouted out.

"We must not move! Any more than this, then it'll be the end!"



Chapter 7 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Front, back, left, and right.

In order to secure all four directions, four people were the bare minimum required.

Jin-Woo himself, Ju-Hui, Mister Song and finally, Mister Kim. A single person leaving now would result in a gap within the field of vision.

Kim wiped the sweat off his forehead and asked urgently.

“Mister Seong, just what is going on here? Explain it to me properly.”

“We’ll make it as long as we wait here! Only until all the blue flames are extinguished!”

Jin-Woo spat out everything he had deduced so far. Kim nodded his head as his ears perked up.

Jin-Woo quickly ended his explanation and added one more thing at the end.

“Remember, everyone here can get out of here alive.”

The laws of this chamber always left open a path for one’s survival. The final law would not deviate from that. Jin-Woo was certain of no one else needing to die as long as the remaining people trusted each other.

“....”

Too bad, Kim’s thoughts were quite different from the youth’s. The older Hunter asked hesitantly.

“Look here, Mister Seong... you could be right on this one, but... could the door close shut instead when the timer runs out?”

“...”

Jin-Woo couldn’t answer that one.

He came to his conclusion after considering several variables, but until the result was in, he couldn’t be 100% certain of anything.

However, what Kim wanted was a definite assurance. Rather than an uncertain promise of everyone’s survival, the definite survival of his own self

had proved to be far more alluring in the end.

“I’m sorry about this, but... I don’t think I can stay here anymore.”

“Ahjussi!”

“Sorry.”

With that parting word, Kim stepped down from the altar. He then ignored Jin-Woo’s urgent calling and ran towards the door. He stopped and looked for a brief moment just outside the door, but Kim did not step back inside the chamber again.

Grit.

Jin-Woo gritted his teeth.

“God d*mn it!!”

He had saved the lives of others, but what he got in return was definitely not something like gratefulness or friendship.

His entire body shuddered from the pain of betrayal.

Just as he suspected, as soon as Kim had abandoned them, a gap within the surveillance had been created. It was impossible for three people to guard all four directions.

And so, the statues positioned in the blindspots began creeping closer to the altar.

Creeaaaakkkk...

Creeaakkk...

The encirclement of the stone statue was gradually tightening. Song took a look around and then, spoke to Jin-Woo and Ju-Hui.

“Both of you, you should leave now.”

His voice was full of resignation. Jin-Woo looked at the old man.

“But, ahjussi....?”

“Just as Kim had said, I was the one who dragged us all in here. If someone has to remain behind, then it’d be only right that I’m the one.”

“But, still!!”

“You two with a better future ahead of you should be the ones to survive today.”

Song began smiling, then. He was thinking of these two young people’s hearts as they would have to abandon him here.

“...”

Jin-Woo helplessly nodded his head. He was uncomfortable about this whole thing, but there was no time left to argue back and forth who should remain in here.

Song then tried to ask Ju-Hui to take care of Jin-Woo.

“Miss Ju-Hui, can you help out Mister Seong here for a bit?”

“Y-yes.”

However, just as she was about to prop him up, Ju-Hui plopped down to the floor.

“Ah.....”

Ju-Hui tried to get up, but then, tears began forming around the edges of her eyes.

“My legs... I, I can’t move my legs....”

Both the expressions of Jin-Woo and Mister Song hardened in an instant.

Ju-Hui’s current physical condition did look terrible even from a casual glance. Her lips were in the shade of pale blue, while her entire body continued to tremble ever so imperceptibly.

She was suffering from the side-effects of overusing her magic energy when she was already at her physical limit.

‘Because she tried to heal my leg....’

Jin-Woo felt his chest tighten and couldn’t say anything. However, they really didn’t have any time left now.

Creeeeaaaakkkk.....

The stone statues were relentlessly approaching them without a moment of rest even now.

Jin-Woo shoved Song’s hand away and plopped down to the ground himself. Seeing this, Song’s eyes grew wider.

“Y-young man.....?”

Jin-Woo spoke up with a determined expression on his face.

“Ahjussi, please take Ju-Hui and get out of this place.”

“I told you, I’ll be the one staying behind.”

“In that case, who’s going to help Ju-Hui?”

It was pretty much impossible for him to take Ju-Hui, who couldn't even stand properly, and leave through the door within the time limit.

'Of course....'

There was the other choice of abandoning Ju-Hui behind, as well. However, Ju-Hui had saved his life several times already, and the only reason why she was in this state was because she tried to help him with all her might.

He definitely did not want to suffer the guilty conscience of abandoning such a person behind in this godforsaken place.

"There is no time left. Please leave now."

"..."

Song's expression remained hardened as he helped Ju-Hui up. She shook her head desperately while tears streamed down on her face.

"No, you can't... Mister Jin-Woo can still survive, you know? Let me...."

"I promised to buy you a dinner, didn't I?"

Jin-Woo pulled out the rank E magic crystal from his pocket and placed it in her hand.

"Please, use this and enjoy one on me. When I get out of here, I'll be coming around to collect the change, you see."

A smile formed on Jin-Woo's face, prompting Ju-Hui to cry out in anger.

"How can you crack a joke in this situation, Mister Jin-Woo?!"

It was at this moment that Jin-Woo signalled to Mister Song with a nod. The older man then lightly chopped on the back of Ju-Hui's neck.

"Ah...."

With that, Ju-Hui lost her consciousness. Song picked up the unconscious girl and placed her over his shoulder.

"....I'm really sorry about this."

"This is my choice, so it's fine."

Mister Song bowed his head to Jin-Woo.

With that goodbye, Song quickly left the altar.

Creeaakk....

Creeeeeeaaaaakkkk....

During the time the three of them were chatting, the statues had arrived at

the proverbial stone's throw away.

Jin-Woo got on his knees and took several deep breaths.

“Fuu-woo. Fuu-woo....”

He spotted the sword Kim had left behind next to him. So, he reached out and picked it up.

‘Now that it had come down to this, I’ll take at least one down with me.’

When he looked behind him, Jin-Woo saw Mister Song safely leaving through the doorway with unconscious Ju-Hui still perched upon his shoulder.

What a relief that was.

‘Only I’ll die here now....’

He wasn't doing this because of some noble determination to sacrifice himself or anything like that. No, there certainly was an element of him calculating the best possible outcome in his decision.

Even if he survived and got out of here today, he would have to live as a cripple for the rest of his life.

Obviously, carrying on as a Hunter would be impossible, then. And it was also questionable whether he'd be able to live normally as well. He was only a high-school graduate, and since he didn't have any discernible job skills, he simply didn't have too many options left to put food on the table.

‘Mom’s hospital fees... and my sister’s school fees, too.’

If that were the case, then he might as well make sure his family would receive a better compensation from the Association, even if it was just a single cent more.

‘Was the compensation paid out to the family members 300 million Won or 400, when one dies during a raid?’ (TL: Between \$267,000 and \$356,000)

That was a huge amount for a worthless life of a rank E Hunter.

Creeaakk....

Creeakk...

Clang.

Finally, the statues arrived.

The first one to arrive climbed up on the altar. Jin-Woo glared at it and lifted the sword up.

“Come.”

Unfortunately, the expected attack didn't come from the front, but his back.
Stab!

A long spear penetrated into Jin-Woo's back and exited out of his chest.

“Keok!”

Jin-Woo spat out a mouthful of blood.

An unimaginable amount of pain rushed in like a tsunami wave.

“If you were stabbed a couple of inches higher, you'd have a hole in your heart by now!”

Ju-Hui's nagging he heard only a few hours ago slipped past his mind like a scene from a revolving lantern.

“U, uwaaaahck!!”

The stone statue lifted up the spear. Jin-Woo was lifted up along into the air, still pierced through by that spear. He only got to struggle for a brief moment, though – because the statue slammed him down on the altar.

SLAM!!

“Keok!”

Sounds of bones breaking could be heard from all corners of his body.

He shrunk away from the intense pain.

“Euh..... Euh, euh.....”

As he began trembling, the stone statues slowly surrounded him. They formed a encirclement around him. Jin-Woo raised his head and glared at them, his entire being shuddering non-stop.

‘I... I don't want to die like this.’

Now that he was facing his final moments, tears pooled on his eyes.

He recalled the faces of his family. He even recalled the face of Ju-Hui, her face full of anxiety and worry for his safety...

‘I don't want to die...’

He didn't want to end his short twenty-four years of life in this place.

Step.

The stone statue wielding a sword took a step closer without a hint of emotion. Then, it raised its sword up high.

Even though he was shaking hard, Jin-Woo did not avert his gaze away

from this b*stard.

Finally, the statue's sword slashed down.

Swiiiiishhh....

'Only if, only if I had one more chance!'

Jin-Woo's eyes shot open wider.

It happened then.

SFX for the statue's movements suddenly stopping

As if someone had pressed the 'pause' button, the scarily-fast moving sword suddenly stopped in mid-air.

No, that wasn't actually correct; it hadn't stopped at all. It simply had slowed down so much that he ended up thinking that way.

One millimetre in one minute?

It was very slow, but the sword was still definitely coming down.

'Wha-what's going on here?'

Jin-Woo couldn't hide his astonishment.

It was then, a voice of a female he had never heard of before resounded within his head.

[Completion requirements for the 'Secret Quest: the Courage of the Powerless' has been met.]

Secret quest? Completion requirements were met?

Jin-Woo couldn't understand any of that.

'No, hang on a minute. Besides all that, where did that voice come from?'

Too bad for him, the voice ignored Jin-Woo's questions and continued on regardless.

[You have acquired the rights to become a Player. Will you accept?]

He had acquired a right? Accept what, exactly?

'Sounds like I'll be given something....'

He grew up dirt poor since his childhood, so he had never refused freebies until now. However, that was a story for when he was still alive. What use was there for free stuff when he was dead?

'.....'

When Jin-Woo hesitated and didn't answer, the voice in his head asked again as if to urge him on.

[There is not enough time left for you to make your decision. Your heart will cease functioning precisely 0.02 seconds after you refuse to accept. Will you accept?]

He couldn't tell whether he was hallucinating or not, but he still got to figure out that he was only a moment away from dying for good. He finally spotted countless other weapons headed in his direction, beside that d*mn sword, that was how.

Now that the things had devolved to such a degree, he might as well.

'...If you're giving it to me, then just give it to me already.'

There was no need to utter anything out at all. He simply thought about it in his head. Even then, the voice of the female replied to him immediately.

[Congratulations on becoming a 'Player'.]

FLASH!!

A blinding light suddenly wrapped around Jin-Woo's body – and at the same time, he lost his consciousness.

Part 6: Penalty

He opened his eyes.

He saw a white ceiling, and his nose stung from the odour of disinfectants. He also felt the sensation of a hard mattress against his back.

Jin-Woo immediately recognised where he was.

'A hospital?'

Ever since he met the rank B Healer, Ju-Hui, the frequency of him staying in one had decreased somewhat, but still, hospitals were familiar places for Jin-Woo, just as he'd be with a local convenience store.

So much so that, he even heard a rumour of there being a special seat reserved for himself at the Hunter's hospital, too.

Jin-Woo raised his upper torso up. He then placed his hand on his chest and felt the vibrations coming from there. His heart was beating without a problem.

'I... survived?'

It wasn't only that, though. Unlike before, his entire being felt light and airy. He'd be feeling heavy-headed and fatigued whenever he woke up from a

hospital bed.

But, it was a different story now. No, it was as if he had woken up in his own bed after a night of a good rest.

‘What’s going on....?’

This shouldn’t have been possible when he thought back to the moments before he lost his consciousness.

A sword was falling on his head right before his eyes.

Even if he got lucky and the sword missed, he was still surrounded by countless scary enemies. Those d*mn things were strong enough to give the assault team formed solely from the rank A – no, rank S Hunters a genuinely hard time.

‘But, I came out of that situation alive?’

Was he dreaming things, then?

Fortunately, there was a good way of confirming it for himself.

Jin-Woo pulled away the blanket covering him.

If that situation had been real, then his leg would still be gone, and if he had been dreaming, then his leg would be...

“You’ve finally woken up.”



Chapter 8 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo was surprised by the weighty voice coming from the corner of the hospital room, and hurriedly turned his head to look.

“I apologise if we took you by surprise.”

“Unfortunately, we are unable to wait any longer.”

Two men kitted out in black business suits approached Jin-Woo’s bed. The youth tilted his head and asked them.

“Who.... are you?”

He had never seen these two’s faces before.

One of them with the close-cropped hair like a soldier and wearing a pair of sunglasses presented him with a business card.

“This is who we are.”

Jin-Woo received the business card and read what was written on it.

‘Woo Jin-Cheol, the section chief of the Monitoring Division, the Korean Hunter’s Association?’

The Monitoring Division was the only department in the Hunter’s Association with many strong Hunters in their payroll. Well, since this department was tasked with managing the country’s Hunters so, quite obviously, they would employ many high-class Hunters to facilitate that purpose.

“What does the Monitoring Division want from me?”

Woo Jin-Cheol dragged a chair closer to the bed and sat down. The other man, who must’ve been his subordinate, stood behind him.

The unspoken pressure emanating from the two buff guys staring down in close vicinity was quite heavy. The story they conveyed was rather surprising, though.

“I was unconscious for four days?!”

“By any chance, do you remember what happened before you blacked out?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Please tell us everything you can remember.”

Jin-Woo told them everything truthfully, minus the strange hallucinatory words he heard before he lost his consciousness.

“And that’s when you lost your consciousness... Is that all?”

“Yes. I open my eyes next, and I’m in a hospital.”

Woo Jin-Cheol and his lackey exchanged meaningful glances. For some reason, they seemed to be troubled by Jin-Woo’s lack of knowledge.

Actually, Jin-Woo was the one who wanted to find out what happened the most in this room.

“Just how did I get to this hospital? Did a large Guild participate and kill those d*mn things?”

“Well, actually....”

Woo Jin-Cheol awkwardly opened his mouth.

“By the time the agents of the Monitoring Division and the White Tiger Guild arrived at the scene after being briefed by the survivors....”

The White Tiger Guild was a super-massive Guild and also one of the top five in the country. The Association had recognised the danger, hence they requested the aid of such a huge Guild as the White Tiger Guild in the first place.

Just what did happen back there?

Jin-Woo nervously swallowed a dry spit.

“By the time....?”

“....Everything was ‘gone’. The only thing to be found within that open space was you, Mister Seong Jin-Woo. There was not one trace of the god statue nor the stone statues.”

“Come again?!”

Jin-Woo displayed a shocked, disbelieving face.

“It’s hard for us to believe it as well. If there had been any inconsistencies in the testimonies of the survivors, or if we had failed to find the remains of the victims in the chamber, we might have suspected something fishy was going on.”

Woo Jin-Cheol scratched his chin.

It'd been six years since he got ranked as an 'A' and started working for the Monitoring Division. He could confidently say that he had witnessed and experienced pretty much everything during his tenure. However, this kind of situation was a first even for him.

He had asked other Guilds as well as the Associations in other countries, but the end result was nothing worthy to speak about.

That was why...

“So, this is what we’ve been thinking...”

Woo Jin-Cheol carefully opened his mouth.

“There were powerful creatures in that chamber, without a doubt. But, they were taken care of by an unknown group, or an unknown person. Because, no otherworldly beings escaped from the Gate before it was closed, you see.”

They had to consider all the possibilities. Even if the odds were low, they had to confirm them all. The head honchos of the Association deliberated, and then deliberated for some more, and finally came up with a theory.

Woo Jin-Cheol carefully studied Jin-Woo's reactions as he continued on.

“We... suspect that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo-nim might have gone through another Awakening.”

Another Awakening!

Jin-Woo's eyes shot open wide.

Although extremely rare, there had been instances of a human who had awakened his or her abilities as a Hunter going through yet another Awakening.

Often referred to as 'Re-Awakening', those who undergo this process would normally become extremely powerful compared to before.

Originally, once a Hunter's rank was assigned at the beginning, it rarely changed. A Hunter's abilities were determined the moment one went through an Awakening, that was why.

However, it was a different story for those going through the Re-Awakening process.

Jumping past their own limitations to rise up from, say, rank C to A, or even from B to S, such things had happened before.

Woo Jin-Cheol nervously swallowed his saliva.

‘Seong Jin-Woo.... If he went through a Re-Awakening and became a rank S, no, maybe even exceeding that, then it’s possible for him to kill those monsters all by himself.’

The god statue was said to have melted rank C Hunters with nothing but its eyes, according to the survivors.

If one were able to kill such a creature even while unconscious, just how powerful one could possibly be?

To prepare for this unlikeliest possibility, Woo Jin-Cheol labelled this incident as ‘top secret’ and made sure everyone involved would keep their mouths shut.

This was also the reason why Seong Jin-Woo found himself in a hospital room all alone, as well as being looked after by some of the finest medical practitioners in the nation.

Woo Jin-Cheol’s chest began beating real fast.

‘Could Korea finally have a Hunter on the level of an international powerhouse....?’

There were less than ten people in the entire world that could truly be described as a global powerhouse. But, what if Korea were to possess a powerhouse that were said to rival a nuclear warhead in terms of pure firepower?

Of course, confirming the truth of the Re-Awakening wasn’t difficult at all. Didn’t the wise elders once say to make hay while the sun still shines?

Woo Jin-Cheol signalled to his lackey.

“Bring it here.”

Then, the lackey went to the corner of the room and began rummaging through a briefcase placed there.

“That is...?”

Before Jin-Woo could finish his question, Woo Jin-Cheol explained first.

“It’s the device to measure your magic energy.”

He added that, although this device had been miniaturised, its efficiency or accuracy did not fall short of the actual full-size measuring device located in the Hunter’s Association.

“All you have to do is to place your hand on this magic crystal over here.”

On top of a circular plate, there was a fist-sized magic crystal embedded in the middle. Its colour was pitch-black, as if it was a black hole that wanted to suck him in!

It was one of the highest quality magic crystals that cost as much as a billion won, not to mention that could only be found in monsters ranked A or higher. (TL: Almost \$900,000)

When Jin-Woo stared at the magic crystal without saying anything, Woo Jin-Cheol formed a dignified, serious expression and spoke up.

“This is a necessary step during our investigation, so please, cooperate with us.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

If he indeed had undergone a Re-Awakening, then his life would do a 180 in an instant. And they were going to test it out for him for free, so who was he to refuse?

Jin-Woo placed his hand on top of the black crystal and soon enough, warm rays of light oozed out from it.

Cold sweat drops formed on the foreheads of Woo Jin-Cheol and his lackey.

SFX for a beam of light dissipating

Not too long after then, the light surrounding the crystal dissipated.

Woo Jin-Cheol hurriedly took off his sunglasses and confirmed the numbers.

Right away, a small earthquake rocked Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes.

“How can this be?!”

He rechecked the numbers, but it remained the same.

‘How can....’

How could a person holding a Hunter licence possess the magic energy value of only 10?!

When considering the fact that the lowest average value for rank E – the bottom rank – was around 70 to 100, Seong Jin-Woo was no different from a regular person.

“Is it really a Re-Awakening? If it is, what could be my new rank now?”

Jin-Woo’s hands were soaked in the sweat of anticipation.

Seeing the suspicious reactions of the two Monitoring Division agents, the result must've been somewhat beyond their expectations.

Meanwhile, Woo Jin-Cheol was comparing the existing data on Jin-Woo with the new measurement.

'His first measurement returned the value of 12. Four years later, it's 10. It has decreased by 2, but it is within the margin of error.'

In other words, the magic energy measuring device was working fine. Instead, it was Seong Jin-Woo's magic energy that happened to be just illogically, nonsensically low.

It was a miracle that he had survived until now.

Woo Jin-Cheol rapidly realised that being here was a waste of time, so he got up from his seat.

"Let's go."

"Yes, sir."

Woo Jin-Cheol and his lackey quickly packed up to leave.

"Uhm, excuse me. Can you tell me what is...."

Just as Jin-Woo was about to ask, Woo Jin-Cheol bowed his head slightly.

"Thank you for your cooperation. If you remember anything else, please give us a call anytime."

As if their rear ends were on fire, two men-in-black rapidly left the room as soon as they put away the device.

The hospital room that felt rather small suddenly became quiet and lonely.

"..."

Jin-Woo scratched the back of his neck.

'I guess that was a no, then.'

Well, if he thought about it, besides him feeling refreshed, there didn't seem to be any change to him at all. Even if he did go through a Re-Awakening, it'd still be difficult for him to kill all those statue b*stards, anyways.

'Maybe, you might have a chance against them if you were either the ultimate weapon, Hunter Choi Jong-In, or the rank SS Hunter Goh Gun-Hui.'

Of course, him speculating like this was meaningless, since he had never

seen them in action before. There was always a thick veil of secrecy draped over the Hunters ranked S.

They were more like clouds in the sky to him, actually.

He thought up to here and inadvertently raised his head up. And that's when he saw 'it'.

'Huh?!'

He looked up without thinking, and then, saw 'words' floating in the air.

[You have several unread messages.]

".....?"

He closed his eyes and opened them again.

[You have several unread messages.]

The words remained floating up there without a single change. He shook his head hard a few times and even rubbed his eyes, but they were still there.

Jin-Woo massaged his aching forehead and lowered his head.

'It hadn't been a long time since I started hearing weird things, but now, I'm even seeing them, too....'

Could something in his head really be broken?

There was a condition called PTSD, after all. People who experienced a huge accident or a traumatic event usually suffered from this condition.

It was only a few days ago since he witnessed the deaths of many of his comrades, not to mention he himself nearly died as well, so it would not be so strange to hear or see weird things as a possible side effect.

'However....'

However, there were a couple of things that prevented him from dismissing this out of hand.

Jin-Woo's sight lowered to his leg – the leg that got cut in half by the shield of the stone statue was now all fine and dandy.

The voice he heard out of the blue inside the underground temple hidden within the depths of the dual dungeon; his completely-cured (?) leg; and now, those words floating in front of his eyes.

Too many weird things were happening all at once.

'What if....?'

There was a chance that all these things were not isolated events but linked to one another. When his thoughts arrived here, his aching head felt just a bit clearer.

‘Okay, fine.’

Jin-Woo slowly raised his head.

Once the confusion in his heart died down and he felt calmer, he became quite curious about the contents of those so-called unread messages. There might be answers to his questions found within those messages, after all.

In order to confirm the messages, he reached out towards the words.

And his hand simply went past them.

‘It’s not touch-operated?’

It seemed that he got way too used to how a smartphone worked. He couldn’t think of any other way to access the messages other than tapping on the ‘icon’, though.

While he was deliberating on the means to access the messages, he recalled the memories from the moments before he blacked out.

“Right. That happened.”

Back then, he could only get his intentions across to that unknown voice by ‘talking’ to it.

‘Just like back then, I should either form the words in my head or speak it out loud.’

Thinking that this must be the case, Jin-Woo then began to mutter the potential combination of words one by one.

“Confirm.”

“Messages.”

“Confirm messages.”

“Check messages.”

“Reading.”

“I want to read.”

“I want to look.”

“Hey, show me already, will ya?!”

It was then.

“.....Just what is it that you wish to see that bad?”

He felt a cold, probing stare coming from the side, so he turned his head to look. And, spotted his little sister in her school uniform looking at him from the gap of the half-open door.

“Uhm.....”

Jin-Woo became speechless.

Her oppa, busy glaring at the ceiling while demanding someone to show something to him – he simply didn’t know how to explain this one to her.



Chapter 9 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Maybe, you hurt your head really bad?”

The younger sister stood at a distance away and asked Jin-Woo, prompting him to shake his head vigorously.

“No, that’s not it.”

Even though he denied it, Jin-Woo’s younger sibling, Seong Jin-Ah’s eyes remained suspicious.

“Are you really okay?”

“Yes, I’m telling you the truth.”

Jin-Ah blankly swept her gaze all over Jin-Woo, before she came closer while her breathing became uneven, angry. And then, as soon as Jin-Woo assumed a defensive posture, she began punching him in all the unguarded parts.

“I told you to stop getting hurt!! You have any idea how worried I was?!”

“.....I’m sorry.”

“Other people walk away fine, but how come it’s only you who gets hurt all the time?!”

“....Sorry.”

The strength behind Jin-Ah’s punches gradually seeped away. She soon stopped, and as her head fell, began crying. Jin-Woo slowly patted the back of his sobbing sister.

His own nostrils stung quite a bit then.

‘I was thinking of leaving behind this kid alone and dying, wasn’t I....’

What a relief that he made it out alive.

When he looked back, there had been way too many brushes with death for comfort back then.

It was as if he had experienced one hell of a terrifying nightmare.

Jin-Woo’s gaze shifted ever so slightly towards the words floating in the air.

[You have several unread messages.]

‘It still feels like I haven’t completely woken up from that nightmare just yet, doesn’t it?’

There were so many things he couldn’t understand.

But, so what?

The most important thing was that he came back alive, and he got to see his little sister again.

“Sniff.”

Thankfully, his strong-willed sister stopped crying after a short while. Unfortunately for him, though, her nagging continued on for over one hour afterwards.

“Do you hear me? If you get hurt one more time, I’m going to give up on studying, find a job, and make sure you don’t work as a Hunter ever again.”

Jin-Ah’s sharp glare didn’t really suit her pretty face, but that was a biological trait she had shared with her older brother.

“Okay, okay. I hear you.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head as if he’d given up.

Only after she was able to extract his assurance several times more did she display a hint of satisfaction, and stood up from the seat.

“You going somewhere?”

“Yeah. To school. I got permission to leave so I could check up on you. So I gotta go back.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

“Right, the university entrance exams are next year.”

She might never have received a private tutoring nor did she ever attend extra classes, but she always got ranked within the top ten in her school until now.

Jin-Ah dreamed of becoming a doctor.

Only until a few years ago, she just loved to waste time on video games and stuff like that, but then, after their mother fell ill, she swore to become a doctor and never stopped studying since.

Jin-Woo dearly wished to make her dream come true, no matter what.

Hang on a minute.... playing video games?

Suddenly, Jin-Woo's eyes gleamed a bit dangerously.

"Okay, I'm going now."

Just as Jin-Ah was leaving his room, Jin-Woo urgently called out to her.

"Hey, Jin-Ah?"

"Yeah?"

"When you are playing video games...."

Jin-Ah smirked softly.

"I don't play games anymore. The third year of high school is only a few days away, you know."

"I know, I know. There's something I want to ask you, though."

"Oh, really? Like? I didn't know Oppa played video games, though?"

Jin-Ah suddenly displayed an intense interest as a subject she was deeply intimate with once upon a time was brought up.

Jin-Woo sneaked a glance at the still-floating 'message' in the air and asked her.

"When there are unread messages in a game, what should I do access them?"

"You gotta open the mailbox first."

"I gotta 'open' the mailbox?"

Tti-ring!

As soon as Jin-Woo said the word 'open', a clear beep entered his head and the hidden messages revealed themselves.

[There are two unread messages.]

- Congratulations on becoming a ***[Player]*** (unread)

- ***[Daily Quest: Preparations to become strong]*** is now available. (unread)

Jin-Woo smiled brightly.

'Finally!'

Seeing her older brother's complexion suddenly brighten like that, Jin-Ah felt something was wrong and quickly asked him.

"What's up? What game is it? You need my help?"

Jin-Woo firmly shook his head.

“Nope, no need. I’ll do it alone.”

How would his younger sibling react if he told her what had been happening to him right now?

‘I really don’t want to be labelled as a loon by her.’

Jin-Woo swallowed back the things he wanted to say for the time being.

While pretending to see her out, Jin-Woo confirmed her getting on the elevator, and quickly returned to his room.

‘I can’t repeat the same mistake again.’

Click.

To prevent eyewitnesses intruding on him, he even locked the door. Finishing with his preparations, Jin-Woo sat on the bed and read the titles of the messages available to read.

- Congratulations on becoming a ***[Player]*** (unread)

- ***[Daily Quest: Preparations to become strong]*** is now available. (unread)

He thought that the first message sounded familiar, as if he heard it before from somewhere.

‘Where have I heard it from? I know I have.’

So, the first message, then.

- Congratulations on becoming a ***[Player]*** (unread)

‘Confirm.’

Tti-ring!

[This System will support the growth of the ‘Player.’]

[Failing to comply with the System’s instructions will result in potential penalties.]

[Your rewards have been delivered.]

“Ahh.”

He belatedly remembered this.

He heard those words just before he lost his consciousness.

‘Back then, it was talking about a Player this and that, no?’

Of course, back then or even now, he still couldn't really understand what on earth was going here.

The 'System', 'growth', 'penalties', and finally, 'rewards'.

The words with unknown meanings fell on his lap one after the other.

'Just what will it help grow, and what will it reward me with?'

Seeing the words that could only be found in a video game appearing before his eyes without any prior explanations, only served to confound him even further.

He decided to worry about the confusing words later and calmly opened the next message.

- ***[Daily Quest: Preparations to become strong]*** is now available. (unread)

Gulp.

Jin-Woo unconsciously swallowed his saliva after reading that rather suggestive title. His heart began to beat faster in anticipation.

'Confirm.'

Tti-ring.

[Daily Quest: Preparations to become stronger]

Press-up, 100 times: Incomplete (0/100)

Sit-up, 100 times: Incomplete (0/100)

Squat, 100 times: Incomplete (0/100)

Running, 10 km: Incomplete (0/10)

※Warning: Incompletion of Daily Quests will result in appropriate levels of punishment.

Jin-Woo reflexively spat out a dumbfounded chuckle after confirming the contents of the message.

"Ha, haha..... Seriously, man."

Should this be the feelings of disappointment?

To think, what the grand-sounding Daily Quest, the one titled 'Preparations to become strong', was nothing more than a list of physical exercises to train his body....

Well, for sure, if he did as the quest said, then his body might get a bit tougher.

Was this what that growth and reward thing the System was talking about?

'Now that I think about it....'

He recalled reading a quote of 'a person with an inner problem should pay attention to the inner voice' from some book in the past.

'In other words, one would see what they wanted to see, eventually....'

Just how desperately did he want to become stronger that he ended up seeing this stupid hallucination?

Although it was funny, he also felt a bit lonely inside.

"If anyone could become stronger by doing these exercises, who would be willing to go through that much hardship, then...?"

Jin-Woo shook his head.

He suddenly thought that he was a fool for searching for answers to his many questions from a d*mn hallucination.

'Urgh. I don't care anymore.'

Jin-Woo lied down spread-eagled on the bed. He wordlessly stared at the ceiling.

"....."

He wasn't doing anything important, yet the time continued to tick by.

Just as he began to feel the weight of the stillness filling up his hospital room....

Jin-Woo abruptly raised his torso off the bed.

'But, what if....'

What if something could change?

As his thoughts were filled half with the uncertain expectation and the other half by unconvinced curiosity, he began wondering whether he should at least give 'it' a shot.

'Well, I've got nothing to lose, anyways.'

There would be no reason not to try it out, if he treated as a light workout to stretch his muscles or something, no?

He made up his mind.

'Fine. Let's try it.'

Jin-Woo climbed off the bed and stretched himself for a bit, before leaning

against the corner of the bed and slowly performed the ‘press-up’.

“One, two, three.....”

The count started from ‘one’ and quickly climbed upwards.

“.....97, 98, 99, 100.”

Since he started this thing, he decided to do all 100, but quite different from his expectation, nothing happened when he was finished.

...Other than his arms aching just a little, that was.

“Just what the hell am I doing....”

Jin-Woo smirked helplessly and stood straight up.

- Congratulations on becoming a **[Player]** (read)

- **[Daily Quest: Preparations to become strong]** is now available. (read)

The messages were now marked as ‘read’.

There were no more words of ‘unread messages’ popping up in his view, and he also didn’t feel like humouring this hallucination anymore, either

He had enough of this, in other words.

Jin-Woo closed the mailbox without regret.

“Yawn....”

Jin-Woo yawned out at length and climbed back up on the bed. He felt sleepy as if he had pushed himself too hard.

The sky outside the window was already dyed in the colours of the sunset.

‘It’s already this late, huh.’

The Monitoring Division agents said earlier that his hospital fees would be taken care of by the Association.

He figured that it wouldn’t be too late to leave after receiving a thorough examination of his body and get the all-clear from the doctors first. Jin-Woo laid down comfortably while thinking as such.

‘I’m sure these hallucinations and weird things I hear will eventually go away with time....’

His eyelids slowly closed shut. And Jin-Woo drifted away into a deep slumber.

Tick, tock.

Even when Jin-Woo was softly snoring to himself, the needles of the clock

hanging by the wall continued to tick away.

The needles spun and spun around until they indicated 11:59:57 PM.

Tick, tock, tick.

58, 59, 60....

The needles stopped moving precisely as they touched 12:00:00.

Tti-ring.

[You've failed to complete the Daily Quest. You'll be transferred to the 'Penalty Zone' for a set period of time.]

RUMBLE!!!

Jin-Woo's eyes shot right open from the violent tremor that shook his entire body.

"An earthquake?!"

Jin-Woo sat right up and grabbed the edges of the bed. The shaking was so bad that he couldn't maintain his balance.

RUMBLE!!

The shaking got progressively worse as the seconds ticked by. It happened then.

SFX for things turning into powder and falling to the floor

One of the steel bars on the bed he held on for dear life suddenly broke. No, it didn't break per se, but simply 'disappeared'. Jin-Woo hurriedly looked at his palm. No steel bar there, just grains of sand.

'Sand?!'

SFX for things turning into powder and falling to the floor

The other steel bar also transformed into sand as well.

Meanwhile, the 'earthquake' became even more violent.

RUUUUMBLE!!!

"Uwaaahk!!"

In the end, Jin-Woo was thrown off from the bed. He bounced around all over the hospital room and screamed out. Even when that was happening, items within the room was turning into sand one at the time.

"Uwaaaahhhh!!"

....Plop.

Jin-Woo was flung away and got deposited rather unceremoniously.

He felt something soft against his fingertips. They happened to be ultra-fine grains of sand.

And the accursed earthquake had stopped.

“Ptooi! Ptooi!!”

Jin-Woo spat out the sand in his mouth and hurriedly raised his head up.

“...?!”

His eyes caught the sight on an endless plain of nothing but sand.

Jin-Woo frowned heavily and got up. All the sand that found its way inside his clothes poured out. He dusted the sand caked on his chest while taking a look around him.

Indeed, all he could see was sand. And more sand.

“A desert...?!”

This couldn't be real.

Until a few moments ago, he was sleeping on a bed inside a hospital located in the middle of Seoul. But now, as soon as he opened his eyes, he was in the middle of a massive desert?

Jin-Woo scooped up a handful of sand, and let it slip through his fingers. The fine grains fell straight down to the ground.

‘There is not a single breeze here.’

It wasn't just the breeze, though – when he raised his head up to look, the sky didn't have a sun, a moon, or any stars for that matter.

It was an empty sky, as if it was filled up with black ink and nothing else.

However, for some reason, he had no trouble seeing at all.

“Just where is this place?”



Chapter 10 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

It happened then.

Shururururu.....

Suddenly, the sandy ground next to him caved in and a deep pit formed there.

“Huh? Uh, uh!”

Jin-Woo desperately ran away so he could avoid getting sucked in down there. The sandy pit grew wider and wider, and eventually, Jin-Woo had to crawl on all fours just to pull himself out.

“Pant, pant, pant....”

He plopped down on his butt, panted heavily and stared at the bottom of the pit. Quite bizarrely, he could see that the sand at the bottom was ‘boiling’.

Realising that just one misstep would have resulted in him falling in there sent shivers down his spine.

“Hang on a minute....”

Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“....It’s not actually boiling, is it?”

When he took a closer look, he spotted ‘something’ pretty big wiggling down there.

Jin-Woo instinctively forced himself up. He was getting a really bad premonition right about now.

Sure enough, just as Jin-Woo took a step back, the sand within the pit suddenly exploded upwards.

Phushu-!!

The falling sand emitted the roar of a waterfall.

Jin-Woo’s eyes went extra round in the meantime.

“An... an insect?”

The identity of the thing that exploded out from the sand was a giant

centipede.

Kiiiiieehhk!!

When fully revealed, the d*mn thing's head almost reached the height equaling that of a five-story building.

Jin-Woo anxiously swallowed his saliva.

'This is unreal....'

For sure, the b*stard was unrealistically huge. He had never heard of a centipede this big existing in the world before. But the size of the centipede wasn't the only thing that shocked Jin-Woo.

"Why is there a... name floating on top of that monster?"

Was he dreaming again?

Jin-Woo closed and opened his eyes again, yet nothing had changed. Even now, there were five red words floating on top of the monster's head.

...Just like a monster from a video game might have.

'The Poison-Fanged Giant Desert Centipede.'

Just like its horrendous and bizarre appearance, its name too was something he'd like to avoid at all cost. What drew his attention the most was the two letters ***"poison"*** and ***"fanged"***.

He spotted a pair of fangs as large as a child jutting out just below the b*stard's jaw. It didn't take a genius to figure out what might happen if he got stabbed by those fangs simply from its name alone.

Seeing those large fangs and its jaw constantly opening and closing, it was as if....

"It's busy licking its lips, right?"

It was then, the sound went off in his head again.

Tti-ring.

[Penalty Quest: Survival]

Goal: Please survive until the end of the time limit.

Time limit: 4 hours

Remaining time: 4 hours 0 minutes 0 seconds

'Are you kidding me....?'

However, as soon as the 'remaining time' changed to 3 hours, 59 minutes,

and 59 seconds, the centipede parted sand and rushed towards him as if it couldn't wait any longer.

SFX for sand parting ways

“Wha-what the hell?!”

Jin-Woo hurriedly spun around and ran for his life.

There was no time to deliberate on things.

If he wanted to live, then he had to run!

That was the only thought racing in his head.

However, even before he had taken several steps, another pillar of sand exploded upwards not too far from his position.

Boom!!

“Euh-ahhck?!”

Jin-Woo fell on his rear from the powerful shockwave. He rolled on the sandy ground before urgently getting back up. He swiped the sand off his face before his eyes shot open even wider.

This time, it wasn't just one or two of them.

Boom!!

Boooooom!!

Before he had even noticed it, there were seven sand centipedes jutting out from the sand and they were all glaring at him.

Kiiiiieechhk!!

Kiieeek!!

As the centipedes issued shrill cries, Jin-Woo's complexion changed for the worse. A lot worse.

“God d*mn it....”

Jin-Woo reappeared in the hospital room exactly four hours later.

Plop.

Jin-Woo keeled over on the floor and painfully wheezed out.

“Cough, cough!! Ptooi, ptooi!!”

His mouth felt full with this coarse, grainy taste. His eyes stung badly too,

seemingly like sand particles got in there.

Jin-Woo whimpered and groaned for a long time, before powerlessly falling flat on his back. He didn't have any energy left to lift even a finger.

“Pant.... Pant.... Just.... What was that....?”

Jin-Woo continued to pant heavily when a new message appeared before him.

Tti-ring.

[You've completed the 'Penalty Quest.']

Jin-Woo's expression crumpled into something unsightly.

A 'Penalty Quest'?

Did he do something worthy of being punished?

Jin-Woo carefully retreaded his memories until he recalled the ***[Daily Quest]*** he abandoned mid-way yesterday.

‘Could it be...?’

Now that he thought about it, it definitely said that if the quest was not completed, he'd be hit with a corresponding penalty.

“Pant, pant, that.... That was not a hallucination?!”

Indeed, it was not a hallucination nor was it a dream.

There was no need to pinch his cheeks to confirm whether this was a dream or reality.

When he was running around, the shortness of breath felt so suffocatingly harsh, and the pain he felt when he got grazed by the centipede's leg still felt fresh in his mind.

Everything happened for real.

He nearly died back there.

“This is way too much.... Pant... pant....”

The so-called penalty turned out to be him being thrown into a d*mn execution ground!

At the same time, another ominous premonition rushed into his mind. If this event was indeed caused by the 'Daily Quest' thing, then without a doubt, this would not be the last time.

Sure enough, he got to hear yet another mechanical beep going off in his head.

Tti-ring.

He flinched in surprise, but thankfully, it was not about another quest or anything like that.

[Rewards for completing the Penalty Quest is now available.]

[Would you like to confirm the rewards?] (Y/N)

‘Rewards....?’

The word ‘rewards’ jumped right out. Too bad, the problem was, he currently didn’t have any energy left whatsoever to confirm this and that.

His situation simply didn’t allow that.

‘Never mind giving me rewards or not.... Let me take a break first....’

His sights gradually blurred.

Soon, Jin-Woo fell into a deep slumber akin to a blackout.

“Oh my gosh?! What happened in here?”

morning.

A nurse entered Jin-Woo’s room, only for her eyes to open up wide in surprise.

The patient was lying sprawled on the floor, while sand was everywhere as far as she could see. Not only that, the patient too was full of sand as well.

She threw the medical chart on the bed and urgently pressed the emergency buzzer.

“Please, someone get over here right away!”

Soon, the doctor in charge rushed into the room.

“What happened? What’s the matter with Mister Seong Jin-Woo?”

“I don’t know. Everything was fine until last night, yet this morning....”

“For now, let’s relocate him back on the bed. One, two!”

Two people lifted Jin-Woo off the floor and placed him back on the bed. During the process, the back of Jin-Woo’s hand got scratched by the edge of the medical chart left on the bed and his skin tore just a little, but no one noticed that.

“Let’s take a look.”

The doctor then carefully examined Jin-Woo’s condition. However, he

couldn't find anything wrong with the youth.

“What the heck.... Isn't he just in a deep sleep?”

The doctor spat out a sigh of relief.

The Hunter's Association had requested the hospital to pay a special attention to this particular patient. Understandably, the doctor was scared almost out of his wits while thinking that something bad had happened here.

“For now, let's let him be. Looks like he's in a really deep slumber at the moment.”

The doctor in charge spoke to the nurse and was about to leave, but then, he took a look around the room and scratched the side of his head.

“By the way, this room... might need a thorough cleaning. Miss Yu-Rah, please take care of tidying this place up.”

“Yes. I shall, doctor.”

The doctor left the room and the nurse, Choi Yu-Rah, patted her chest down.

What a relief that it turned out to be nothing to worry about.

Sure, they might not be the patient or the relatives of one themselves, but you wouldn't find a doctor or a nurse who wished ill on those they were in charge of.

The Hunter's hospital especially saw many heavily-injured patients every day. At the bare minimum, she'd like to never see another one of patients she was looking after get worse under her care.

“Whew...”

She had calmed down a little now, and began worrying about where should she start tidying this room up, but then, her eyes spotted drops of blood on the floor.

“Oh my?”

The blood droplets were coming from the tip of patient's hand that fell outside the bed.

She got stunned by this and hurriedly searched for the wound on Jin-Woo's hand, before flipping it around.

“What's going on here....?”

There definitely was a trace of flowing blood, but she could not find a single wound. She wiped the blood clean, yet the expected wound was not

there.

‘Wait.... Could his injury heal in that short time?’

Yu-Rah’s heart began beating faster as she cautiously studied Jin-Woo’s complexion.

He was still submerged in a deep, deep sleep even now.

Part 7: Daily Quest

Tti-ring.

[Daily Quest is now available.]

Jin-Woo’s eyes shot right open.

He quickly raised himself up and the first thing he did was to check the time. The needles of the clock just went past 16:30.

Meaning, there was the leeway of seven hours and thirty minutes before midnight.

‘Good.’

Jin-Woo opened the mailbox.

Tti-ring.

[Daily Quest: Preparations to become strong]

Press-up, 100 times: Incomplete (0/100)

Sit-up, 100 times: Incomplete (0/100)

Squat, 100 times: Incomplete (0/100)

Running, 10 km: Incomplete (0/10)

※Warning: Incompletion of Daily Quests will result in appropriate levels of punishment.

“It’s the same thing, again?!”

He groaned out almost reflexively.

No, perhaps this was for the better. Rather than a quest with impossible or hard-to-understand goals, this was far more preferable, instead.

Well, as long as he had enough time, he’d be able to complete this quest after all, although his body might suffer for a bit. Jin-Woo got down to the floor this time and began the press-up.

“One.”

Obviously, he was not planning on being dragged to yet another suspicious place and get almost killed there.

“Two.”

He got lucky the previous night and survived, but there was no guarantee that would happen tonight as well.

“Three.”

He raised his head a little and confirmed the contents of the quest, and noticed that every time he performed a press-up, it was being recorded in real time as well.

Tti-ring.

[You’ve completed one press-up.]

[Press-up 100 times: Incomplete (7/100)]

Tti-ring.

[You’ve completed one press-up.]

[Press-up 100 times: Incomplete (8/100)]

He wanted to make sure, so he only went down half-way and got back up, but as expected, that didn’t count. Now he finally realised why the so-called press-ups of yesterday didn’t count. He had to perform the proper press-ups or it wouldn’t be counted at all.

‘Huh.... Gimme a break.’

Jin-Woo was dumbfounded, but didn’t stop the exercise.

He still had 50 more press-ups to go.

After that, sit-ups, squats and running were waiting for him.

....And, three hours later.

Press-up, 100 times: Complete (100/100)

Sit-up, 100 times: Complete (100/100)

Squat, 100 times: Complete (100/100)

Running, 10 km: Incomplete (9/10)

“Pant, pant, pant, pant...”

Jin-Woo lapped the outer perimeter of the hospital once and arrived back in front of his room. He was currently bent over and panting out heavily. His heart felt like it might explode at any second, but he couldn’t give up yet.

‘I worked so crazy hard until now, so no way I would....’

He somehow managed to open the door and took a step forward.

When he did that....

Tti-ring.

[Total distance ran: 10 km.]

[You’ve completed Running, 10 km.]

It was finally over.

“Pant.... Pant...”

Jin-Woo fell down to his knees. His breath reeked of something sweet and bitter. His face and back were soaked in sweat.

“Pant.... Pant....”

As Jin-Woo tried to regulate his heavy, rough breathing while thick sweat drops continuously dripped down, a familiar message popped up in front of his eyes.

Tti-ring.

[You’ve completed ‘Daily Quest: Preparations to become strong’.]

[Completion rewards have arrived.]

[Would you like to confirm?] (Y/N)

Jin-Woo momentarily thought about forgetting about everything and simply laying down in defeat, but quickly changed his mind. At least for now, he wanted to confirm what these reward things could actually be with his own eyes first.

“Confirm.”

Tti-ring.

[The following rewards are available.]

Reward 1. Full recovery of the current physical condition

Reward 2. Three additional Stat points

Reward 3. One random box

[Would you like to collect them all?]

‘Why are there so many of them?’

That was the first thought to enter his dazed mind after he took a gander at

the contents of his rewards.

But, when he thought about it a little deeper, one of those rewards seemed rather useful right now, and there was also one that made him curious about what it could actually mean.

For now, he urgently needed the first reward available. He was on the brink of collapsing here.

Since there really was a penalty for failure, the odds of completion rewards being real were pretty d*mn high as well.

Well, trying wouldn't hurt anyways, right?

Seriously, this 'thing' wouldn't throw him back into the penalty zone again after it said it'd give him the rewards, now would it?



Chapter 11 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

As soon as he muttered that out, a gentle blue aura enveloped him.

‘Uh... isn’t this sensation.... that?’

Right away, he recalled Yi Ju-Hui’s face. When he was getting healed by her, he felt the sensation similar to what he was feeling right now.

If he were to put this feeling into words, then it’d be like a refreshing blast of air entering his lungs before leaving again – something like that?

Shu....

He felt the blue aura slowly dissipating. For some reason, he kinda felt a bit rueful.

Jin-Woo got up from the floor and lightly jumped up and down on the spot and stretched his body this way and that.

“How can this be?!”

His heart that felt like it might explode was beating calmly now, and his rough breathing had stabilised as well. He didn’t even feel a speck of fatigue. His body that was on the brink of collapsing, felt refreshed as if he just got up from a night of good rest.

The effect, in other words, was top-notch.

‘Isn’t this really amazing?’

Jin-Woo’s eyes now resembled circles. He wasn’t sure whether this was some kind of magic or not, but this phenomenon could change him in the most astonishing way, without a doubt.

In that case, would those ‘Stat points’ be the same?

When Jin-Woo shifted his gaze around, he spotted a small box resting on top of the bed as well as his own Stat Window floating in the air.

‘I guess that thing over there is the random box....’

The important thing was his Stat Window, though. This window displayed simple information about himself.

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 1

Class: None

Title: None

HP: 100

MP: 10

Tiredness: 0

[Stat]

Strength: 10

Stamina: 10

Agility: 10

Intelligence: 10

Perception: 10

(Available points to distribute: 3)

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max

- Tenacity Lv. 1

Active skills:

- Dash Lv. 1

The stat he saw was quite similar to a starting character from an online game he used to play many moons ago.

‘Is this my current Stat value?’

His current level was 1. All of his stats were also at the bottom of the heap, too.

If he thought about the current reality of what he was like, the one where he was ranked as the weakest even among the rank E Hunters, then there was nothing to be surprised about there.

What he paid attention to was the ‘Skills’ column.

A passive skill called ‘Tenacity’ and an active one called ‘Dash’.

For some reason, he felt rather familiar with them.

“Ah. I remember now. Yesterday....”

Yesterday, or to be more precise, back in the early dawn of this morning, he remembered hearing those words while being chased around by the centipedes in the penalty zone.

It happened probably after three hours of him constantly running for his dear life. He was suddenly greeted by a couple of new messages.

[‘Skill: Dash Lv. 1’ has been learned.]

[‘Skill: Tenacity Lv. 1’ has been learned.]

Back then, he was far too busy running to think about what they could mean, but it was a different story now. Jin-Woo confirmed the explanations available for the skills.

[Skill: Dash Lv. 1]

Active skill.

Mana required to activate: 5

The constant running fortified your legs. When this skill is activated, your movement speed will increase by 30%. During its activation, 1 Mana will be spent every minute.

[Skill: Tenacity Lv. 1]

Passive skill.

Mana required to activate: None.

You possess untiring tenacity. When your stamina drops below 30%, this skill will automatically activate and reduce all damage received by 50%.

‘Did I learn ‘Dash’ and ‘Tenacity’ because I stubbornly ran around like there’s no tomorrow?’

That seemed to be about right.

In other words, if he kept on repeating a certain action over and over again, and happen to meet the requirement conditions, he would be able to learn new skills.

“Holy cow!”

Wasn’t this an incredible advantage?

The thing was, the skills individual Hunters used were acquired when they went through the Awakening process, or learnt through the items called ‘Rune’ Stones that dropped very rarely from monsters ranked A and above.

Understandably, the prices of these Rune Stones would start from the lowest of several hundred thousand Won to dozens of billion Wons at the top end.

At the last auction, the most expensive Rune Stone was sold for around ₩70,000,000,000. (TL: over \$62 million)

Apparently, this Rune Stone contained a skill that could revert many injured people back to their original conditions in one go, and it was snapped up by an anonymous overseas rank S Healer who had reputedly emptied out his entire life savings.

Jin-Woo's heart began beating faster.

A skill that increased his movement speed, as well as another that decreased the amount of damage received.

Sure, they weren't as good as those skills that sold for billions of Won, but they were still amazing to him regardless. And he got to learn those for free, too!

His overall magic energy value was too low, so it'd be hard to use them properly, but still, it was better than not knowing them, wasn't it?

'Besides, the Tenacity skill doesn't even need Mana to activate, too.....'

It seemed that this Mana thing was his magic energy. If that was the case, then even though he didn't have a lot of magic energy, he'd be able to freely use the Tenacity skill. That alone was a huge gain.

"By the way... what could this 'unknown' thing be?"

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max

The 'Unknown' that occupied one whole slot of the passive skills column.

Since it was located in the passive column, that meant it activated automatically, but there was not one explanation or any information on it.

'Not even a single clue, huh.'

The amount of information he could learn was just too limited. Even if he burst his brain trying to figure it out, he knew there wouldn't be any answers. So, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze to elsewhere.

'Stat points, is it....?'

Three additional Stat points he got as a reward remained there, still to be

distributed.

[Stat]

Strength: 10

Stamina: 10

Agility: 10

Intelligence: 10

Perception: 10

(Available points to distribute: 3)

‘I’m sure this means I can increase any one of my Stats by three points, right?’

There were five categories in the list of Stats. Maybe because he was a mere level 1, the values of each stat were ‘simple’, to say the least. However, if he considered how reality operated, he couldn’t take these stats lightly at all.

If his abilities changed for real with a moment’s decision, then who in this world would be able to casually make such choices?

Jin-Woo’s expression became serious.

‘Strength is no doubt talking about my physical power....’

He could more or less figure out what ‘Strength’, ‘Stamina’ and ‘Agility’ could mean. After all, those were the kind of ‘Stats’ one would often encounter in video games.

The question was with the last two Stats, ‘Intelligence’ and ‘Perception’, then. And just like before, the unfriendly System didn’t provide any answers whatsoever.

If he increased ‘Intelligence’ would he get actually smarter, for instance? And, if he increased ‘Perception’, then would he become more sensitive?

Whatever the case may have been, he felt that those two Stats didn’t really seem all that useful to him right now.

He was a melee-type Hunter, to begin with. What he needed was power, speed, or even stamina.

‘If you were to ask me to choose between the three, I’d inevitably go with Strength.’

If he got physically stronger, many things would become that much easier

for him.

Also, he wanted to find out what kind of change would take place with his body once the Stat values had been increased. Since he thought that this change would be much more prominent with the increase in the Strength stat, he ended up investing all three points on it.

“All three points to the Strength stat.”

Tti-ring.

[Stat]

Strength: 13

Stamina: 10

Agility: 10

Intelligence: 10

Perception: 10

(Available points to distribute: 0)

‘Is that... all?’

Indeed, it looked like it.

The only change he could tell was the Strength stat value floating in front of his eyes like hologram projection changing from 10 to 13. Unlike how it was in cartoons or movies, his body didn't feel like it was overflowing with uncontrollable power or anything like that.

“Did anything actually change or not?”

He decided to use his muscles to find out. Jin-Woo stood next to the bed and lifted it. He felt a bit of weight, but he was able to pick it up easier than he thought. However, he found it impossible to tell whether this was because of the bed being light, or his Strength having been improved.

‘I should’ve lifted the bed first before spending the d*mn points....’

Since he had already spent all the points before confirming, it was hard to tell the difference between ‘before’ and ‘after’.

‘Only if I had some more points to spend....’

Jin-Woo licked his lips in regret only for a certain memory to jump out at him.

“The rewards from the Penalty Quest!”

Today wasn't the only time he got to ‘complete’ the Daily Quests. He might

have nearly died, but he sure as hell did complete the Penalty Quest, and he remembered seeing the message about the rewards being available as well.

Jin-Woo hurriedly opened the mailbox.

[Rewards for completing the Penalty Quest is now available.]

[Would you like to confirm the rewards?] (Y/N)

“I knew it!”

Jin-Woo clenched his fists tightly.

Of course, it’s a resounding ***“Yes!”***

[The following rewards are available.]

Reward 1. Three additional Stat points

Reward 2. One random box

[Would you like to collect them all?]

Unlike the Daily Quest rewards, the option of the full status recovery was absent, but well, what he needed right now was the additional Stat points anyways.

He was momentarily worried about there being a huge difference in rewards since they were from a Penalty Quest and all, but he was relieved to find three points waiting for him.

Jin-Woo hummed joyously to himself.

“Add all three points to the Strength stat.”

Tti-ring.

[Stat]

Strength: 16

Stamina: 10

Agility: 10

Intelligence: 10

Perception: 10

(Available points to distribute: 0)

His Strength jumped up from 13 to 16.

Jin-Woo stood next to the bed again and put some strength in his arms. And he was able to lift up the bed a lot easier than before. He could definitely tell

the difference now.

“It’s for real....!!”

His physical strength had really improved.

If he were to consider the change purely through the Stats alone, then the starting value of 10 had increased by 60% so how could he fail to notice the improvement?

Now feeling completely elated, he went around the room and began picking up not just the bed, but everything he could lay his hands on, and generally made a mess of things inside.

Only after the chief nurse passing by heard the commotion and scolded him did he stop his tomfoolery.

“...I’m very sorry.”

As soon as the chief nurse left his room, Jin-Woo spat out a sigh of relief.

“Whew.”

However, he couldn’t calm down at all. His heart was beating like crazy.

Thud, thud. Thud, thud!

As a matter of fact, his chest actually hurt.

The Daily Quest that would continue to show up every day, and the Stat points as the reward!

As long as this unexplainable phenomenon didn’t come to a sudden end, he’d be able to live a completely different life to the one he’d been leading until now.

This was an unbelievable opportunity for him.

Besides that, the Stat Window also showed his ‘level’.

‘Does this mean I can also increase my level, too?’

Eventually, though – Jin-Woo shook his head.

‘Eiii, there’s no way.’

Now that would be too good to be true. He wasn’t hoping that far, anyway. The rewards from the quests alone were plenty enough for him.

He’d use the Stat points to increase his abilities. Every day he’d grow to be stronger – compared to yesterday, he’d be stronger today; compared to today, he’d be stronger tomorrow.

‘Me, getting stronger? The rank E Hunter, and also, always mocked as

the weakest weapon?’

He didn't even think about climbing up as far as the rank S or A. Even the notion of getting to rank C or D, like those Hunters he'd been working with, would surely be seen as a laughable one.

Indeed, they'd disparagingly point their fingers at him and guffaw their heads off.

Seong Jin-Woo was getting stronger? That Seong Jin-Woo, the one and only on this planet?

However, he didn't care if they laughed at him. No, he was already used to being the butt of many jokes. He was just happy that an opportunity had fallen on his lap, that was all.

Suddenly, a question mark floated over his head.

‘Could this be the process of my Re-Awakening?’

Although extremely rare, the cases of bottom-tier Hunters climbing up to the top through Re-Awakening had happened before, for sure.

If so, then could those Hunters who got stronger through Re-Awakening experience a similar sort of situation as he was in?

‘Let's find out.’

Feeling genuinely curious now, Jin-Woo settled down in front of a computer located at the corner of the hospital room.

Since he was staying in a VIP room provided free of charge by the Hunter's Association, this computer wasn't the only item of convenience found here.

Taptaptaptap....

Jin-Woo's fingers typed rapidly on the keyboard.

Searching, searching, and then, more searching.....

He visited countless websites.

He even entered those websites that one couldn't even get anywhere near without a Hunter's licence. He even resorted to paying for information and continued to rummage through every document and article he found.

However, rather than finding similar events as his, he couldn't even find a single mention of a precedence, either.

‘It's different....’

His Re-Awakening was completely different from the normal ones, as it

turned out.

Most other Hunters who underwent Re-Awakening process gained their new found strength through roughly the similar process as their first Awakening as a Hunter.

Not one of them had experienced hearing weird voices at the brink of death, nor did they get to increase their strength through Stat values and such.



Chapter 12 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘Still, I can’t be certain, so....’

To be 100% sure, Seong Jin-Woo anonymously opened a thread on the internet forum exclusive to licenced Hunters.

[Title: Something weird has happened to me.]

[Description: I can suddenly see my Stats in numbers like in a video game, and I can even increase their values, too. Is there anyone who has experienced something similar to me?]

Below that OG post, comments figuratively exploded forth.

↳Anon: LOL Why dontcha stop f*cking around, dude.

↳Anon: Isn’t he just a loon?

↳Anon: Lost his d*mn mind.

↳Anon: Maybe you’ve played too many games.....

↳Anon: By any chance, are you a cartoonist?

↳Anon: Go visit the nearest hospital, ‘k?

↳Anon: I’d like to hear the details first.

↳Anon: Stop accepting all sorts of trash just because they hold the Hunter licence; this forum needs to go through a cleansing, seriously now... (TL: I removed all the pure-Korean internet slangs/emojis from the raw. Learned my lesson from my previous novel....)

Dozens of comments all with roughly the similar contents flooded in.

“Eh-whew....”

Jin-Woo spat out a groan.

He had spent a long time looking around but he had nothing to show for his troubles. He got called a loon in the forum and people disparaged him. He did all this, yet seeing that there was no information to gather....

“I guess that my case is really a unique one.”

He was the only one under the heavens.

The most unique Hunter in the whole world!

He still needed some time to figure out how much of a help this strange phenomenon would provide, and just how far he could actually grow through it, but at least, he got a good feeling about this whole thing.

When he took a look outside, the night had deepened quite considerably.

“When did the time get so late....?”

Jin-Woo frowned deeply.

His eyes ached a bit after staring into a computer monitor for so long.

Jin-Woo massaged his forehead and stood up from the chair to loosen his body with a bout of light stretching. He moved his body this way and that for a while. He bent his body 90 degrees and that’s when he discovered two small boxes lying forgotten on the floor.

“...Ah.”

The ‘random boxes’.

Two boxes wrapped in the monotone gift wrappers and topped off with a ribbon – exactly like the ones in video games.

‘They must’ve fallen off from the bed when I was making a mess of the room earlier.’

He had completely forgotten about them after receiving those as his rewards. Jin-Woo picked up the closest box and opened its lid.

“...A band-aid?!”

He dumbfoundedly stared at the ‘thing’ that looked exactly like the regular band-aid for a while, only for the information about it to float up above in green letters.

[Item: Band-Aid]

A regular band-aid. Useful in patching up small wounds. Can be stored inside your Inventory.

“It IS a band-aid....”

He was hopeful that this thing might possess some kind of a special attribute like the treasures found within the dungeons, but he wasn’t so lucky today.

‘Of course, I haven’t heard of someone finding band-aids inside a dungeon, to begin with....’

With his mind half in disappointment and the other half in anticipation, he opened the remaining box.

And he got himself a brand new ball-point pen.

He studied it from all sorts of angles and even clicked on the tip so the ball-point would come out, but it was still your average pen.

[Item: Ball-point pen]

An average ball-point pen. Can be stored inside your Inventory.

It was quite likely that, as its name implied, all sorts of random junk would come out from the random boxes.

“Hmm.....”

Well, it wasn't as if he was left empty-handed anyway.

Sure, he didn't really have any needs for either the band-aid or the pen right now, but thanks to them, he got to learn about the existence of the thing called the 'Inventory'.

Also, seeing that the information on other objects found in the room did not show up, he figured that only the info on the items from the random box could be read.

“Inventory.”

As soon as he called out for his Inventory, a graphical representation of a storage unit with dozens of slots appeared in the air.

As fitting the storage unit of a level 1 user, it was.... not as empty as he thought. He thought there would be nothing in there, but inside the first slot, he found a rather familiar object.

“Isn't that....?”

Jin-Woo took that out immediately.

Tti-ring.

[Item: Kim Sang-Sik's steel longsword]

Attack +10

It was precisely Mister Kim's sword that Jin-Woo picked up back in the underground temple. He assumed that it was left behind inside the Gate, though.

“Hey, nice to see you, too.”

A smile formed on Jin-Woo's face.

He felt happy seeing this thing again, what with both of them having survived that hellish death trap. Besides, it was too wasteful to just be abandoned in a different dimension, wasn't it?

'Didn't Mister Kim ahjussi say he bought this for around ₩3,000,000?' (TL: over \$2,600)

The weapons of Hunters outwardly looked rather plain, but the truth was anything but.

Monsters couldn't be damaged with weapons that did not carry the wielder's magic energy. So, weapons crafted especially for the purpose of dealing with those b*stards would always be quite pricey.

'Looks like I'll have to rely on this guy for a while.'

He had been fighting with his bare hands until now because he couldn't afford to buy a proper weapon.

Although it was a cheap sword, he was still rather grateful for it.

'You're mine now.'

If Mister Kim saw this sword in his hands in the future, he might start foaming at the mouth and angrily demand its return. Well, he was a selfish man who readily discarded the saviour of his life, so it was rather a good possibility.

However, both this sword and this 'opportunity' were given to him in return for sacrificing his life. So, he wasn't planning to give it back that easily.

Jin-Woo's eyes sharpened considerably.

He had learned two things about reality back in that temple.

Firstly, he needed to become far, far stronger.

He was weak and almost died several times as a result.

That wasn't all.

He knew what the results would be, yet he couldn't stop that choirboy Hunter from stepping forward, and also, he knew Mister Kim was in the wrong, but he could not help Mister Song at all.

Because he wanted to survive, he turned his gaze away even though he knew what was right. If he didn't want to be ashamed of himself again, then he simply had to become stronger.

And finally....

'There is no room for unnecessary kindness.'

What he got after his acts of kindness was the betrayal of his comrades.

Three of them abandoned him, who couldn't even move properly, and ran away. He desperately called out to them but none returned to help him.

None of them could remember just who had saved their lives only a few moments ago.

'...Give and take.'

He swore not to take on any unnecessary risk out of some unconditional act of kindness. The most important thing at the end of the day was his own life, after all.

Those were two important life lessons Jin-Woo got to engrave in his heart after experiencing a near-death event.

To become stronger than before, and to become more selfish than before.

"I can do this."

Jin-Woo was one of those types of people who would never forget what he had been taught.

Inside a certain 'pojangmacha'. (TL: the Korean-style covered street stall)

The nurse Choi Yu-Rah was busy chatting to a friend she hadn't seen in a long time as the night wore on.

"Ahh, I almost forgot."

Yu-Rah belatedly recalled that her friend was an employee of the Hunter's Association. The reason for her finding work in the Hunter's hospital was in no small part due to this friend.

"You know a lot about Hunters, right?"

"Well, more than most people, sure. What's up?"

"Is there a Hunter with an ability to heal their own wounds really quickly?"

"Aren't those Healer-type Hunters? One healing spell later, every wound goes bye-bye~!!"

"No, no, not like magic and stuff. I mean, like, unconsciously."

"Like, unconsciously?"

"For example, when the person has lost consciousness, or when... he's in the middle of sleep."

Yu-Rah's friend shook her head.

“Eii~. There's no way. That'd be something like regeneration, and that's an incredible ability, you know? That's a unique trait only the rarest of all top-tier monsters exceeding the ranks of 'A' possess.”

“There's no human who possesses it, though?”

“Ng. I've never heard of a Hunter who has such an ability.”

“R-really?”

Could she have made a mistake, then?

Yu-Rah slowly nodded her head.

It was at this point that her friend spoke again.

“But, then again... I don't know. Maybe it's possible if you're talking about S-ranked Hunters.”

Hearing her friend's words, Yu-Rah raised her head.

“S ranks?”

“There are plenty of freakish monsters within the S-ranked Hunters, and also, not much is known about them, right? What were they saying? Right, the Hunter Baek Yun-Ho from the White Tiger Guild can apparently morph into a real monster.”

However, Seong Jin-Woo was supposedly a Hunter ranked E.

The ranks of the Hunters were publicly viewable on the Association's website, so if anyone were interested, they could take a look. Yu-Rah became curious from the morning's incident and she searched for Seong Jin-Woo's information.

‘His rank is too low for him to possess such a unique abi.... Ah!’

The Re-Awakening of a Hunter!

She then remembered hearing hushed whispers of 'Re-Awakening' coming from Jin-Woo's room when she was walking past it yesterday.

‘Could it be that he had gone through a Re-Awakening?’

For most regular people, it was truly impossible to befriend an S-ranked Hunter, never mind encountering one. Not only were there too few of them, but they also happened to be crazy busy most of the time as well.

So, just what kind of a situation was this? Someone as amazing as that was a patient she was looking after. A guy who just entered the S rank having

moved up from the lowly E.

'If there are only a few people who realise his true value, then....'

If she scored some points with him now, wouldn't it be more likely that she'd be awarded more opportunities later down the line?

A chance to become acquaintances with a rank S Hunter didn't happen every day, after all. They were an existence that people couldn't easily meet even if they were prepared to shell out lots of money.

As her imagination took flight, a bright smile slowly bloomed on Yu-Rah's face.

"Oh my gosh?! You girl, did something nice happen? Why are you suddenly grinning like that out of the blue?"

"Oh, uh, it's nothing, you know. Nothing much."

Yu-Rah continued to shake her head, but the smile on her lips didn't want to go away that easily.

Part 8: Level up!

"Oh my goodness. Look at that guy's physique."

"Was that patient's body that good before?"

Two young female nurses walking in the corridor whispered to each other as soon as they spotted Seong Jin-Woo.

He pretended to have not heard them and quietly returned to his room.

It had been a week since he started taking on the Daily Quests. Several changes took place during this time. One of them happened to be the transformation of his body.

Jin-Woo stood before the mirror mounted on the hospital room's wall by the corner.

"Hmm. Hmm."

He checked out his entire body in front of this full-length mirror.

He got a bit embarrassed by doing something that a female university student would more likely end up doing, and only after clearing his throat twice was he able to stare straight at the mirror.

The thing was, though.... He had definitely changed.

His body was in the middle of a transformation.

'I've got muscles now.'

The most eye-catching change was the drastic increase of his muscles. The normal-looking flabby flesh was gradually disappearing, only to be replaced by hard muscles. Thanks to that, his shoulders had widened more and his overall frame had grown bigger as well.

‘Even then, doesn’t seem heavy and slow.’

Only the necessary amount of muscles in the necessary places. If he were to describe the overall impression his body gave off, then would it be kinda like ‘looking swift and athletic’?

He was a guy and even he found this rather appealing, so it wasn’t such a strange thing for young nurses to whisper about him.

‘And it’s all due to this guy over here.’

Jin-Woo summoned his Stat Window.

Tti-ring.

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 1

Class: None

Title: None

HP: 100

MP: 10

Tiredness: 0

[Stat]

Strength: 31

Stamina: 10

Agility: 10

Intelligence: 10

Perception: 10

(Available points to distribute: 0)

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max

- Tenacity Lv. 1

Active skills:

- Dash Lv. 1

His Strength stat had gone past 30 already.

Since he thought that it'd be hard to tell the kind of effects the increases in other Stats would bring, he ended up investing all the points he earned on the Strength Stat, which seemed to be the easiest way to feel the change taking place within.

Besides, Strength played a key role when fighting monsters, so that was like killing two birds with one stone.

'My body wouldn't have transformed by this much just because I exercised for a few days.'

In that case, there could be only one explanation.

With his Strength value continuously rising up, the muscles were changing their shapes in order to display the maximum amount of effect, too.

He couldn't think of any other reason besides that one.

He was inwardly worried about investing too many points to the Strength Stat, but after seeing his transformed body, he became rather happy and all the worries in his mind were forgotten for now.

'However, it is way too eye-catching, isn't it?'

The number of times he was mentioned by the nurses was constantly on the rise. It was quite likely that, since their job involved looking after human bodies, their levels of discernment could have been higher than most.

Jin-Woo possessed quite a keen sense of hearing, so whenever his name was mentioned in the vicinity, he took note of it.

'I guess it's time for me to leave this hospital, no?'



Chapter 13 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

It was not good to be the centre of attention.

Not only would he feel uncomfortable being placed under the spotlight, but he also didn't want to let others know of this strange phenomenon.

Didn't the old saying go something like, scratching unnecessarily results in more flakes to clean up, or something like that?

He wanted to increase his Stat points as quietly as possible.

'And it shouldn't be a problem for me to leave the hospital now, too.'

Thankfully, tests had shown that he was normal and healthy. Meaning, he could leave at any time he wanted. No, hang on a minute, it kinda felt like that both the hospital and the Association wanted him to leave in the first place.

Well, it'd be a waste to spend that much money as hospital fee on a measly rank E like him.

One of the special privileges the S-ranked Hunters enjoyed was the government paying for all of their health-related expenses. Of course, that was a story happening in another cosmos as far as Jin-Woo was concerned.

So, he figured that it wouldn't be such a bad idea to leave this hospital right about now.

And there was something he wanted to confirm as well.

"Now, where did I put it...?"

Jin-Woo rummaged around his pockets and brought something out. It was a key gleaming in a golden hue. It featured such a simple design that it could be passed off as an accessory at a casual glance.

Jin-Woo observed the key for a long time before he secured it back inside his pocket.

While he was in the middle of being discharged, a certain young female nurse hurriedly ran to where he was.

"Pant, pant!! Mister Seong Jin-Woo, are you getting ready to be discharged today?"

“Pardon? Ah, yes, I am.”

She was the nurse in charge of his care, Choi Yu-Rah.

Yu-Rah formed a rueful expression when she heard his affirmation.

Jin-Woo didn't know why, so he could only stand there looking rather confused. He wondered if he had made a mistake somewhere, but he couldn't think of anything.

Yu-Rah hesitated slightly, before pulling out a small memo pad.

“Will be okay if you give me your contact numbers?”

“My contact numbers?”

“Yes.... Only if you're okay with it.”

Could there be some test results that needed to be sent at a later date or something? Jin-Woo didn't think too much about it and took the memo pad. However, all he got from her was just that, a memo pad and nothing else.

When Jin-Woo stared at her, her face reddened.

“W-what's the matter?”

“Uhm, well.... About a pen....”

“Ah? Ah, please wait.”

She must've forgotten in her rush to get here; Yu-Rah became flustered and hurriedly turned around.

‘Uh? Hang on a minute. A pen, is it....?’

He didn't have to think for long. Before anyone noticed it, he was already holding a pen. The moment he thought about the pen nestled quietly within his Inventory, it automatically appeared in his hand.

Once an item was placed within the Inventory, he could retrieve it freely with his thoughts alone.

What a convenient feature of the Inventory that was.

Confirming the pen in his hand, Jin-Woo called out to Yu-Rah.

“Wait. I looked and luckily enough, I had a pen on me.”

“Oh, really? Whew, what a relief.”

Yu-Rah placed a hand on her chest and sighed out in relief.

Jin-Woo smiled at that and he jotted down his phone number.

This happened all the time now – the items that came out of the random

box always saw some sort of usage pretty soon after he got them.

When a raincoat came out, rain fell the next day. He got a cup the day before the hospital inexplicably ran out of paper cups. Of course, stuff like a band-aid with no clear uses sometimes popped out, but most of the time, they did come in handy.

“Here it is.”

Yu-Rah received the memo pad back from Jin-Woo with an elated expression etched on her face.

She then bowed her head as well.

“Please take care of me from now on.”

“Oh, uh, sure thing. Me too.”

Yu-Rah spun around and hurriedly disappeared to somewhere. Jin-Woo looked at her departing back and tilted his head this way and that.

‘By the way.... how does she expect me to take care of her?’

She was such a cute nurse, to begin with, yet she was even courteous as well. Jin-Woo thought as such and left the hospital with a refreshed, airy mind.

The first place he visited was the HQ of the Hunter’s Association, located in the district of Guro in Seoul.

The smartphones used by the Hunters were designed with special components so, in order to get one, he had to apply for it at the Association.

The Association employee spoke while looking at the computer monitor.

“Looks like your phone will become available only after two weeks, Hunter-nim.”

“Pardon me? Why so long?”

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened up wider.

His old phone was smashed to bits when he was getting chased around by the god statue. However, he now had to wait for two weeks for a new phone to arrive?

“If you need a phone right away, we can loan you one on a temporary basis, but the fee for each usage is ₩50,000.” (TL: Just over \$44)

50,000 Won.... He wasn’t even buying one, just renting it for a little while,

yet it cost that much?

If he thought about his current financial status, that was way too big an expense.

‘Well, it’s not like someone will contact me, anyway.’

If the Association failed to get a hold of someone on his or her smartphone, they’d call the house, instead. So, there was no real reason for him to spend money and get himself a temp phone right now.

Jin-Woo shook his head.

“I’ll just wait.”

“I understand. As soon as your replacement phone arrives, we will send it straight to your residence.”

“Thank you.”

Jin-Woo got up to leave. His business was done here.

He had already completed the Daily Quest that never failed to show up every day, and the application for the new phone at the Association also ended faster than he expected.

Jin-Woo exited from the Association building and pulled the golden key out again.

‘Is it now time to check this little guy out, then?’

The information on the key floated up in green letters.

[Item: Dungeon Key]

Rarity: E (ED: also reflects the difficulty in acquiring the item)

Type: Key

A key that transfers you to an instant dungeon. Can be used at the 3rd exit of the Hapjeong subway station.

He found this key inside one of the random boxes he got as the Daily Quest rewards.

At first, he wondered why a key would come out from there, but once he saw the ‘rarity’ category, he immediately realised that this was no ordinary item.

This was one of the reasons prompting him to get discharged from the hospital as well.

‘An entrance key to the instant dungeon, huh....’

Whether it was called ‘instant’ or not, a dungeon was a dungeon.

If it was about dungeons, then he had plenty of painful memories regarding those.

This one time, he participated in a raid ranked E and ended up getting wounded so badly that he had to stay in the hospital for over a week.

Back then, he was able to survive because of the comrades that went with him, but....

But, if he used this key to enter a dungeon, then it meant that he had to enter it all alone. He deliberated for a long time, before making up his mind.

‘I’m sure there will be no problems as long as I just take a quick peek inside.’

If things looked bad, all he had to do was run away, after all.

He’d been running 10 kilometres every day for a while now, so he was pretty confident of running away, actually.

Annnd, it was his mistake for taking it too lightly.

Slam, slam!

“Is there.... a wall blocking me?”

He pounded on the invisible wall and shouted at the outside, but no one replied back. People continued to carry on with their own lives, that was all.

Sometimes, someone approached the Hapjeong station, but they simply vanished as soon as coming in contact with this invisible ‘wall’. It was quite likely that the place he was in and the outside world were two separate dimensions.

Jin-Woo tried his hardest to force his way out of this place, which prompted a new alert message to pop up.

Tti-ring.

[You can not exit the dungeon. Please defeat the boss first or find the return crystal.]

It was the same message as before.

The key in his possession disappeared as soon as he set foot inside the 3rd exit of the subway station and, by the time Jin-Woo realised things had gone rather awry and hurriedly turned around to leave, it was already too late.

He was thinking of finding a hidden Gate or some kind of a doorway within the 3rd exit that would transport him to a dungeon, but his expectation was completely off the mark. And quite different from the regular dungeons, he couldn't even leave as he pleased, too.

“It’s different from other dungeons....”

Jin-Woo spat out a long groan and looked behind him. What he could see now was the interior of the subway station that had transformed into a jungle.

Walls were thick with twisting vines, and rancid odour akin to rotting corpses assaulted his senses. Hell, he even heard the cries of what sounded like wild beasts from afar every now and then, too.

“....”

It wasn't that there was a hidden entrance somewhere near the entrance of the Hapjeong station, but the entire station had become a dungeon, instead.

Jin-Woo pulled the steel longsword out from his Inventory.

Tti-ring.

[Item: Kim Sang-Sik’s steel longsword]

Attack +10

His back was blocked off, and he had no method of contacting outside, so the only option left was to go forward.

Jin-Woo nervously swallowed his saliva and slowly descended the steps. He held his breath and surveyed his surroundings, but he couldn't sense anything particular.

However, it was truly forbidden to underestimate the dangers in a dungeon.

Among the low-ranked monsters, there were quite a few that knew how to mask and hide their presence very well. No, maybe because they were so low ranked that they had no choice but to hide and wait to ambush their prey.

Past the toilets, he entered deeper and encountered the underground shopping centre.

Shops were worn down and in complete disarray, looking more like a ruin than anything else. Seeing the human-less ruined shells of the shops dimly illuminated by the flickering overhead lamps, something felt rather ominously creepy and sinister.

Flicker, flicker....

A few of the lamps continued to flicker as if their life was nearing the end.

Jin-Woo carefully stepped on the overgrown weeds jutting out from between the cracked floor tiles and continued on forward, but he picked up on a general aura of unease and scanned his surroundings.

“...”

Everything seemed so quiet and still, but he did sense a gaze of something.

And then, there was this smell, too.

A seriously rotten odour of an animal carcass with flies buzzing around was coming from somewhere. For Jin-Woo, who had frequently entered dungeons, this was a rather familiar smell.

‘This smell... An animal-type monster.’

However, he still couldn’t find its whereabouts at all. Just like how a predator would stalk its a prey.

‘Oh, so you want to remain hidden and wait for your chance, is that it?’

In that case, he should give it one.

Jin-Woo deliberately turned around and presented his back. And very slowly, retread the path he had taken until now. An animal would try pounce on the prey as soon as its back was shown. An animal-type monster would be no different.

And so, it happened when he took his third step.

Smash!!

The shop window of a clothing store behind him shattered into pieces and something jumped out. And this something, as soon as it landed on the ground, leapt towards Jin-Woo’s exposed neck in one go.

“Roar!”

Jin-Woo had been getting ready for a sneak attack like this one, so almost immediately, he swung the sword in the direction of the sound.

It was a perfectly-executed instinctive counter!

Swish!

The sharp edge of the blade sliced open the creature’s maw.

The monster spat out a pained cry as it flew away from Jin-Woo and crashed on the ground, rolling around in a heap.

SFX for a dog-type whimpering, repeated

It was a huge wolf with a reddish coat of fur.

The wolf with its maw sliced away wiggled around and threw a seizure-like fit as if it was under a great deal of pain. When he took a closer look, its name also appeared on top of its head, just like the centipedes from the penalty zone.

'Iron-Fanged Lycan.'

However, unlike before, its name was in white letters, not red.

'There is no time to waste here!'

This was the perfect opportunity while the monster could not move from its wound. Jin-Woo threw his body forward.

He ran hard and fast, and chopped down with his sword, separating the creature's head from its body.

"Rawr!"

Lycan spat out the final roar and stopped breathing afterwards.

[You've killed an Iron-Fanged Lycan.]

"Good!"

However, the joy of victory was temporary!

Two more Lycans jumped out from their hiding place from behind the shop's darkness.

'D*mn it, it was in a pack?'

Jin-Woo's eyes grew wider.

They bared their big fangs and closed the distance in an instant.

Jin-Woo's expression crumpled dismally.

He must've chopped down too hard from all the excitement, because the sword was lodged on the ground too deep and it stubbornly refused to come out.

'It's stuck somewhere.'

It was at this moment that one of the Lycans aimed for his face and leapt up.

"D*mn it!!"

Jin-Woo ducked low. The Lycan flew over his head and landed face-first on the ground after failing to stop in time.

Stab!!

When its fangs stabbed into the stone floor, cracks instantly formed on the hard surface.

‘I guess it’s not called Iron-Fanged for nothing, huh.’

Of course, he didn’t have the leeway to stay there and admire this scene. One more monster was still running towards his front at the moment, too. His sword showed no signs of coming free from its earthly prison for the time being.

“Screw this!”

Jin-Woo had no choice but to give up on the sword for now and threw a hard punch at the Lycan closing in.

WHOOSH!!

Accompanied by a bone-chilling sound of wind parting ways, his fist flew straight forward.

POW!!

It took just one hit and the head of the Lycan simply exploded.

The corpse of the now-headless Lycan slammed into the ceiling above and then, powerlessly fell down to the ground.

Thud!

“...??”

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened up very wide and he stared dumbfoundedly at his own fist.

What an unexpected destructive power that was.



Chapter 14 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The sole surviving Lycan, the one that flew over Jin-Woo's head just now, lowered its tail after seeing this scene and began taking faltering steps backwards.

“Huh....?”

Was this the result from him raising his Strength Stat?

The utterly stunned Seong Jin-Woo couldn't close his slack jaw as the headless Lycan's legs shook like a leaf, before its movement stopped for good.

That was when he heard the familiar mechanical beep going off again.

Tti-ring.

[You've killed an Iron-Fanged Lycan.]

[Level up!]

“My level rose up?”

To make sure that he didn't mishear that, Jin-Woo hurriedly accessed his Status Window.

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 2

Class: None

Title: None

HP: 205

MP: 22

Tiredness: 0

[Stat]

Strength: 32

Stamina: 11

Agility: 11

Intelligence: 11

Perception: 11

(Available points to distribute: 0)

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max

- Tenacity Lv. 1

Active skills:

- Dash Lv. 1

His level really did go up.

And when a level went up, a single point was added to all of his Stats.

As it turned out, it wasn't only the quest rewards that could impact the values of his Stats. It was also possible to improve his Stats through levelling up, too.

'To think, I can actually level up!'

He only carried a vague expectation, but it actually became reality. His heart began to beat faster and faster.

'On top of that, I get more additional points from levelling up.'

The Stat points he got from the quest rewards were 3. Meanwhile, he got 5 from levelling up once.

Although he didn't like the fact that he couldn't freely distribute those points the way he liked to, but still, his growth through levelling up was much greater.

Also, there was the thing about quests only being available once per day, but there was a good chance that levelling up wouldn't suffer from such restrictions.

'I only killed two, but my level rose up.'

This was the same as in video games. When his level was low, he could raise it up by a lot during a short space of time.

And currently, Jin-Woo was only a level 2. It was not an exaggeration to say that he was right at the bottom of the pile. However, he was not what one would call a normal low-level player, either. His Strength stat already

exceeded 30.

If the Strength stat rose up by one point every time one levelled up, then the Stat value of Jin-Woo's Strength was equivalent to level 20 or higher.

What if a 'user' possessing level 20's worth of Strength stat hunted in the 'level 1' beginner's hunting area?

'In other words, explosive levelling up....'

As if to prove his guess, the destructive might behind that punch easily exceeded his own expectations.

'The Strength stat might have been multiplied by just over three times, but... The difference in actual, physical strength was well beyond that.'

Jin-Woo's original Strength value was 10.

There was the difference of three times the value between the Strength stat of 10 and 30, but the difference between the actual forces produced was well beyond that.

'Could it be....?'

What if, as the Stat's value rose up, the weight was also added as well? If that was the case, then such a destructive power output could easily be explained away.

Besides that, his movement speed had increased as well.

If it was in the past, there was no way he'd be able to lightly evade the all-out attack of an animal, nor could his punch move fast enough to produce the sound of the air splitting apart.

"Right, the physical strength in my muscles has increased so, obviously my speed would have increased along the way, too."

Simply by raising his Strength stat higher, both his power and speed had gone up. The battle against the Lycans proved this.

So, what would happen if he increased his Agility, instead?

His curiosity was at its peak, but he didn't have any method to find out at the moment. If he wanted to satisfy his burning curiosity, then he simply had to increase his Stats, ASAP.

'Even still....'

He couldn't help but think that investing points he got as quest rewards in the Agility Stat kinda felt a bit wasteful. If he shored up his Strength Stat, both his power and speed would go up anyway, so what was the point of

investing in the Agility Stat?

Since his thoughts were as such, there was only one way to go forward here.

‘I gotta level up lots of times, really fast.’

Indeed, he’d raise the Agility Stat through levelling up. Every little cent saved would eventually net him a buck later down the line. If he increased the values one point at a time, he’d feel the difference sooner or later.

Jin-Woo pried loose the sword off the ground.

‘In that case, shall I get started for real, then?’

There was one more monster he needed to kill, after all.

“By the way.... Where did it disappear to?”

The Lycan that was definitely somewhere nearby had gone with the wind before he had noticed it. Jin-Woo hurriedly scanned his surroundings, but he couldn’t find a single trace of the creature.

Quite likely, it had turned tail and ran away while he was immersed in the Status Windows. Well, he should’ve known something was up when it lowered its tail and cautiously studied his ‘mood’.

“Tsk.”

Jin-Woo smacked his lips, realising that a bundle of experience points had just escaped from his grasp.

‘Hang on, do these things give away things like magic crystals, too?’

The sudden thought popping up in his head stopped him in his tracks.

Monsters appearing within the Gates all possessed one, or sometimes, several, magic crystals in them. If one got lucky, a Rune stone might drop, too.

Magic crystals could be used for a variety of purposes and they alone exchanged hands for princely sums; no need to even mention the Rune stones, which could be used by Hunters to learn brand new skills.

It was not an exaggeration to say that the reasons why Hunters participated in raids was not just because of the promised payment from the related organisations, but also these magic crystals, as well.

Jin-Woo was also a Hunter.

He was successful in killing these monsters, so not being rewarded for his work kind of felt a bit like he was wronged somehow.

Feeling a little rueful, he sliced open the Lycan's stomach, but it turned out to be a waste of time. It seemed that these creatures were fundamentally different from the regular monsters.

The thing was, he had entered quite a few different dungeons in his career so far, but he had never seen these wolf-like monsters before.

Jin-Woo dusted his hands and was about to stand back up, but then....

“Mm?”

He spotted something glittering within the dead Lycan's mouth. So, he opened the creature's maws. One of the Lycan's fangs was emitting a beam of light. When Jin-Woo reached out, a new message popped up before him.

[You found the 'Item: The Canine of a Lycan'. Take it?]

“Sure thing.”

[Item: The Canine of a Lycan]

Rarity: None

Type: Miscellaneous

A large and sharp canine of a Lycan. Can be stored in the Inventory or can be sold at the Store.

Jin-Woo got flustered a bit while staring at the canine tooth.

‘There was a Store, too?!’

Where would you find a System less friendly than the one he was saddled with?!

To think, it was designed in such a way that the end user had to personally experience it with his own body before learning about any of its functions....

Hell, he wasn't given much of an explanation during the penalty quest and he almost died as a result back then.

Jin-Woo gnashed his teeth and tried to summon this 'Store' thing.

“Store.”

He couldn't help but feel his anticipation build up, wondering if a shop with a signboard declaring 'Store' and manned by an NPC merchant, kinda like from video games, might really appear before him.

However, what appeared instead was a bunch of green letters floating in the air like hologram projections, just like when he accessed his mailbox.

And there were only two words there, too.

‘Buy’ and ‘Sell’.

“.....”

What a simple-tastic Store this was.

Jin-Woo selected ‘Buy’.

He didn’t have a single cent in his pockets, but he was still curious about the stuff available within the Store.

Unfortunately for him, the Store turned out to be one cold customer.

[Your level is too low to access the ‘Buy’ function.]

He was already familiar with the cold-shoulder treatment from the places that required him to pay up, so this was fine.

“Sure, sure.”

Jin-Woo didn’t think too much about it and shifted his gaze away to ‘Sell’.

[Will you sell ‘Item: The Canine of a Lycan’?]

“Yup.”

With the clinging sounds of coins, his Inventory appeared next. Right at the bottom of the display, in the column saying ‘Gold’, he could see the number 20 appearing there. That space had been empty yesterday.

‘20 Gold, eh,’

He couldn’t really use that ‘money’ in real life, and he couldn’t even use the Store properly yet, so he had no idea just how much this 20 Gold was actually worth.

‘Oh well. A creature from the rank E dungeon wouldn’t have given me any decent loot, to begin with.’

Even if there was a difference between the dungeons found beyond the Gates and this so-called instant dungeon, it would be the same difference at the end of the day.

Still, Jin-Woo wanted to make sure, so he was about to collect the canine from the other dead Lycan, but he ended up doing a facepalm, instead.

“Ah. I blew away its entire head, didn’t I....”

Jin-Woo felt bitter as he turned around to go somewhere else.

20 Gold and its unknown worth were calling back to him, but he couldn’t waste time searching for a single canine that could’ve flown to pretty much anywhere under this dim lighting.

However, as soon as he turned around, the feelings of bitterness dissipated in an instant.

“Growl!!”

“Grrr....”

“Growl!!”

“Grrr!!!”

Well now, the Lycan he thought had ran way actually came back with a bunch of its friends!

A wonderfully bright smile bloomed on Jin-Woo’s face. Even at a casual glance, there must be over 20 of them here.

“Eureka!!”

Hang on a minute, was that the right word to use in this sort of situation?

Whatever.

It was definitely a word to express one’s joy, anyway.

Jin-Woo tightly grasped the sword and spoke up.

“With the exception of your canines, I’m gonna massacre all of you.”

When the chilling glare of a man who was obsessed about making money landed on the Lycans, they became intimidated and shuddered slightly.

It was at this point that Jin-Woo pounced on them without mercy.

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

As he expected, his levels rose up quite quickly.

Simply from searching every nook and cranny of the first floor and killing all the Lycans he could find, Jin-Woo’s level shot right up to 7.

He had jumped up five flights of stairs, in other words.

“Whimper.....”

When he caught up and killed the very last monster running desperately away from him, a strange message popped up into his view.

Tti-ring.

[You have acquired the ‘Title: Slaughterer of Wolves’.]

“A Title?”

[Title: Slaughterer of Wolves]

A Title given to a hunter skilled in hunting wolves. When facing animal-type monsters, all of your Stats will increase by 40%. (TL: the ‘hunter’ is a lower case here, because that’s what’s in the raw. The ‘Hunters’ until now had been written in English, actually.)

When he opened his Status Window to take a look, the ‘Title’ column indeed had been updated.

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 7

Class: None

Title: Slaughterer of Wolves

HP: 766

MP: 81

Tiredness: 3

[Stat]

Strength: 37

Stamina: 16

Agility: 16

Intelligence: 16

Perception: 16

(Available points to distribute: 0)

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max

- Tenacity Lv. 1

Active skills:

- Dash Lv. 1

A bonus boost to his stats when fighting against animal-type monsters....

Although the effect was a bit restricted, still, having his Stats increase by 40%, now that didn't sound too bad at all.

'There are plenty of animal-type monsters out there, so would this apply to them as well?' (TL: the author had been using the Hanja word for monsters to describe those found in the Gate's dungeons until now, but the creatures found in the instant dungeon are written in the English word, 'monster'. That's why we get this line.)

If that was the case, then he'd be able to easily kill monsters when participating in the future raids.

However, he still earned big time even when disregarding his new Title.

'34 wolf canines, two rusted daggers, a set of traveller's clothes, and one return crystal.'

While killing these wolves, he learned that he could sometimes find loot from their bellies. Of course, none of them was all that useful.

The rusted daggers possessed lower attack power bonus compared to the sword he'd been using until now, and the traveller's clothes were not something he could actually wear, but just some random japtem (ED: 'Vendor Trash', essentially.) that he could hawk off to the Store.

When he sold them all off, he earned just over a thousand Gold.

[Current Gold: 1,060]

'...Even then, I can't really celebrate, can I?'

Well, no matter how much he hoarded this Gold thing, he couldn't use them anyways. At least not for now.

The only thing remaining, besides the Gold, was the return crystal. When he was trying desperately to escape from the dungeon back then, the message said he'd need a return crystal if he wanted to leave. And now, if he wanted to, he could escape at any time.

He found himself on a crossroads.

In front, the stairs leading down to the second floor.

And in his hand, a single return crystal grasped tightly.

'Do I continue on, or do I back out...?'

If it was in the past, he'd not hesitate and choose the latter. That was how he managed to survive all those raids with his pathetic Stats. Everyone said that him surviving until now was a miracle, but well, he was trying to be smart about his choices, actually.

However, the story was different now.

He didn't want to retreat here.

He felt that, if he turned away to leave now, then he'd never be able to take another step forward in his life.

“I've retreated enough times already, right?”

Wouldn't it be okay for him to jump in headlong, at least once in his life?

Jin-Woo pocketed the return crystal. His steps climbing down the steps to the 2nd floor was light.



Chapter 15 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

Unlike the dungeons of the Gates, there was a thing called ‘respawn’ within the instant dungeon. While he was sweeping away every single monster found on the second floor, all the monsters on the first respawned. While he went back upstairs to deal with them, monsters on the second floor respawned. So on and so forth.

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

Jin-Woo hopped between the first and second floor and killed monsters until his level no longer rose up.

‘Who knows when I’ll ever run into another opportunity like this one?’

Along the way, he got so used to this place that he was able to predict from where and how the monsters would try to attack him.

“A monkey, falling from the ceiling....”

He lightly evaded the claws of the monkey-type monster falling from the ceiling and stabbed it in the chest with his sword. And then....

“Kkiiiieeck!!”

“...One cat each from left and right.”

...And then, he orderly sliced the necks of the black panther-like creatures jumping at him from his sides.

“Kyahk!”

“Kkahk!!”

[You’ve killed a ‘Blade-Claw Briga’.]

[You’ve killed a ‘Black-Shadow Razan’.]

[You’ve killed a ‘Black-Shadow Razan’.]

And with these three, he had arrived at the end of the second floor.

He had cleared out the second floor once more. However, his level hadn't been moving from 15 for a long time now. It seemed that reaching that high was the limit for the first two floors.

“Stats.”

[Stat]

Strength: 45

Stamina: 24

Agility: 24

Intelligence: 24

Perception: 24

(Available points to distribute: 0)

With him being level 15, his Stats had risen up by quite a lot. His Agility was now almost at 25. He finally got to feel the difference between the Agility and the Strength Stat when the former hit the value of 20.

The Agility did not increase his speed, but rather, it was as if the opponent's movement had become far slower in his perception, instead.

‘Exactly like watching a slow-motion video.’

The scenes of the monkey falling from the ceiling and panthers pouncing on him played out in slow-motion.

Should he describe it as him being able to manipulate the time flow as he wished? It became easier to evade enemies' attacks, and it also became easier to hit them as well.

As the word implied, he had indeed become more 'agile'.

The so-called speed was wholly dependant on who was looking at it. The higher his Agility Stat, the bigger the difference between him and his enemies would become; from their perspective, he'd look as if he was moving at an unbelievably quick speed.

‘If both the Strength and Agility increase concurrently, their synergy should be pretty incredible.’

That was his final assessment of the Agility Stat.

“Besides all that...”

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze away.

“What should I do now....?”

He was looking at the stairs leading down to the third floor.

There was a reason why he continued to hunt in the first two floors even though there was a way to go even lower.

'It's giving me the creeps.'

With his Perception Stat so much higher, he could sense the aura of something ominous lurking down there far better than before. Without a doubt, something really strong was hiding somewhere down below.

He didn't have to see it to know.

Jin-Woo recalled the message he saw back by the entrance of this instant dungeon.

[You can not exit the dungeon. Please defeat the boss first or find the return crystal.]

The existence of the 'Boss'.

Jin-Woo had been roaming the first two floors in order to raise his levels until he couldn't anymore, all for the purpose of fighting this 'Boss'.

He had prepared himself as much as he could but, when the time to actually go down there came, he was getting all sweaty and nervous.

Jin-Woo lightly slapped both of his cheeks.

'I mean, I've entered a dungeon, so I can't just leave without taking a look at what this boss looks like, now can I?'

A certain amount of tension was a must in order to maintain the peak condition. And this amount was just about right for him.

Jin-Woo gripped the sword tightly with both of his hands slowly descended the steps. Could he have been mistaken when the steps felt unusually longer than before?

He swallowed dried saliva down.

The lighting was worse than the first two floors, but there was no problem with seeing where he was going.

'Is it because of my Perception Stat?'

He couldn't help but feel that his eyesight had improved greatly.

He cautiously climbed lower until eventually spotting the railway tunnel used by the subway trains.

No, he saw where the railway used to be.

The tunnel that should've been used by trains was now filled with jet-black liquid, instead.

'What is this?'

Rather than a subway tunnel, it was.... more like a lake or a river now.

Just as Jin-Woo took one more step forward to take a closer look....

A long log-like object shot out from the surface of the black 'water'.

Swish!!

'It's fast!'

The thing that arrived in front of his nose in the blink of an eye was not a log, but a snake with the thickness rivalling one, actually.

"Heop!!"

Taken by surprise, Jin-Woo could only swing the sword and strike the head of the snake away from him.

Clang!!

Jin-Woo's eyes opened wider.

"What the hell?!"

He did succeed in deviating that direction of the lunging snake, but his trusty steel longsword ended up breaking apart from the impact.

Jin-Woo looked back in surprise.

The snake must've been surprised by his counterattack as well because it didn't try to follow up right away, but instead chose to simply glare at him while coiling itself up a distance away.

'The ruler of the swamp, Poison-Fanged Blue Kasaka.'

Jin-Woo could clearly see the orange-coloured name of the monster.

It was a creature incomparably faster and hardier than those with their names written in white.

'Even then, for a sword reinforced with magic energy to break like that....'

Jin-Woo swallowed nervously and cautiously studied the Boss monster called Kasaka.

Blue scales covering its entire body gleamed in an oily manner. As if it had draped itself with thick armour, those scales had no gaps to speak of.

Sword strikes wouldn't have worked in the first place. It'd be the same story for punches, too.

When Jin-Woo's thoughts arrived there, the Kasaka must've finished its own analysis on its prey, because it finally lunged at him once more.

No matter how one looked at it, it was a frightening turn of speed, that's for sure.

Swwwiiiiish!!

Jin-Woo narrowed his eyes.

'It's coming!'

When he concentrated hard, he could now clearly see the attack of the Kasaka, which was something he couldn't even properly decipher in the beginning. This was all due to the increased Agility Stat.

Just before the Kasaka opened its maws wide and tried to swallow him, Jin-Woo swiftly sidestepped and let the attack brush past him. At the same time, he wrapped his arms around the creature and caught it in a headlock. He then tightened his grip.

SFX for bones breaking

Jin-Woo's Strength Stat was almost at 50.

An unbelievably powerful pressure tightened around the snake's main artery. The snake could not escape from his grip and thrashed around as if it was in pain. Jin-Woo gritted his teeth and strengthened his arms even more.

Slam!! Boom!!

Jin-Woo's body slammed against the walls and on the floor, but he never released his arms.

'If I didn't raise my levels as high as I could before coming here....'

There was literally no end to wondering about 'what-ifs' and 'what could have beens'.

However, all kinds of thoughts still swirled in Jin-Woo's head.

If he didn't raise his level to the limit....

If his Strength Stat wasn't so illogically high....

Then, he'd have gone through incredible hell in order to kill the Kasaka.

No, he might even have died here.

So, his decision not to come down right away proved to be the smart one.

His choice was indeed the right one.

Crack!!

Accompanied by a rather awful noise, the skull of Kasaka gave in and cracked apart.

[You have killed the ruler of the swamp, Poison-Fanged Blue Kasaka.]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

As expected of a boss mob.

His level rose up by 2 after killing the Kasaka.

Jin-Woo tightly clenched his fists.

The level that had been stagnating at 15 had jumped up to 17.

In just a single day, he crazily raised his level from 1 all the way up to 17.

‘However!’

No one hunted boss mobs for experience points!

Indeed, if it was a boss mob, then it’d be all about the loot drops!

When he started checking out the dead snake, two spots of light began gleaming from somewhere within its limp body.

‘Two items, because it was a boss?’

His expression one of elation, Jin-Woo reached out towards the spots of light.

Tti-ring.

[You have discovered ‘Item: Poison Fang of Kasaka’. Take it?]

[You have discovered ‘Item: Poison Sac of Kasaka’. Take it?]

“Take them all.”

As soon as he said those words, a dagger made out of a bone and a small pouch with liquid in it appeared on his palms.

[Item: Poison Fang of Kasaka]

Rarity: C

Type: Dagger

Attack +25

A dagger fashioned from the poison fang of the Kasaka. There are traces of the Kasaka's poison on it, so when attacking, it will cause Paralysis and Bleeding status effects. Can be stored in the Inventory, or can be sold at the Store.

Status effect 'Paralysis': the target will be unable to move. Success rate is fixed.

Status effect 'Bleeding': the target's stamina will be reduced by 1% per second.

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

'A dagger made not out of bone, but from the fang, huh. It's not a bad item with those options, yeah?'

up was the pouch.

[Item: Poison Sac of Kasaka]

Rarity: A

Type: Medicine

A pouch containing the refined poison of the Kasaka. Can be found very rarely when hunting Kasakas. Drinking this poison will give you strong skin, but the toxicity will permanently damage your muscles.

Effect 'The Iron Scales of Kasaka': 20% reduction in physical damage.

Side effect 'Damaged Muscles': Strength -35

Jin-Woo's expression alternated between joy and anguish.

The Poison Fang of Kasaka was a good weapon to replace the broken longsword. Not only did it possess over twice the attack power, but he really liked the two status effects of Paralysis and Bleeding, too.

'However, this poison sac is a bit....'

Initially, he was really pleased to find an item with the 'A' Rarity rating, but when reading the description, he realised this was not something he could feel completely chuffed about.

Of course, that effect of reducing all physical damage taken by 20% was a great option befitting an A-rank item. However, it also carried a fatal penalty of decreasing his Strength Stat by 35.

It'd be a really painful loss for him especially when he invested all of his points on increasing his Strength stat.

Was this the famed double-edged sword, then?

No, the expression of ‘chicken ribs’ suited this item far better, instead. (TL: a Korean idiom. It means something like ‘people not giving up on chicken ribs even though there isn’t all that much meat around there’.)

Maybe, he might be able to use this thing only when his Strength Stat had risen so high that the loss of 35 points wouldn’t affect him in the slightest, which should be in the distant future. It was impossible to drink it right now.

“....For the time being, I should just hold onto it.”

With a rueful expression, he stored both inside his Inventory.

Maybe, if an A rank dagger and a C rank medicine came out, then he might have felt not as bad as he did now. Well, he’d have just gotten rid of the C-rank medicine if it was useless, after all.

It was then, a new message popped up.

[With the death of the Boss, the interior of the dungeon will revert back to its original state.]

Suddenly, his sights blurred for a bit, and then, they were restored back to normal, along with a slight bit of dizziness assaulting his senses. When he took a look around, he found himself inside a normal subway station.

The lights overhead shone brightly, and the black liquid filling up the tunnel was all gone, too.

“....But, where is everyone?”

Not just people, but even trains were strangely absent.

He even checked the time while thinking that the trains had stopped running for the day because it was so late already, but the clock was indicating 10 PM.

He entered the Hapjeong station around the lunch hour, so he had spent over 9 hours inside that dungeon.

‘I was in there for a long time, wasn’t I?’

If it weren’t for his Tiredness Stat being refreshed every time he levelled up, he’d have keeled over from the accumulated fatigue several times by now.

‘Anyway. Isn’t it still too early for the trains to stop running?’

Jin-Woo tilted his head as not one train showed up, no matter how long he stood there waiting. He decided to leave the station for the time being.

While he was trudging towards the exit, he couldn’t spot a single person. But, as he climbed up the steps to get to the surface, someone shouted at Jin-

Woo from above.

“Who goes there?”

Who knew that the voice of another person would sound this welcoming?

Jin-Woo quickly raised his head. He saw a soldier wielding a rifle.

“Who are you? Why are you coming out from there? Haven’t you heard the broadcasts?”

The expression of the soldier was so serious that even Jin-Woo’s own expression hardened in an instant.

“Did something happen?”

“What the? How can you even say that?”

The soldier approached closer, but then, he spotted the broken sword in Jin-Woo’s hand.

After it broke, it could no longer be stored in the Inventory, and Jin-Woo didn’t feel like leaving it behind, so he just carried it outside like this.

Seeing that, the light within the soldier’s eyes changed rapidly. He then carefully studied Jin-Woo’s current appearance.

Now that this soldier had taken a closer look, Jin-Woo’s clothes displayed various hints of the youth participating in many fierce battles recently.

The crumpled expression of the soldier lightened up in an instant.

“Are you a Hunter by any chance?”



Chapter 16 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Yes, I am one, but...”

“Ahh, please forgive me. This way, please. Let me guide you there.”

“Ah.... Sure.”

Sensing that his troubles might get more complicated if he said **“There’s been a misunderstanding here”**, Seong Jin-Woo decided to quietly follow the soldier’s guidance for now.

Jin-Woo then swept his gaze around his vicinity.

‘Now that I see, it’s....’

The surrounding atmosphere felt rather suspicious.

The streets were totally deserted. The only people he could see were the soldiers and the members of the police.

Also, corpses belonging to monsters, destroyed cars, and buildings with cracks running up their walls....

Jin-Woo realised what had happened here.

‘A Gate must’ve opened up nearby.’

Something like that almost never happened nowadays with the well-established Hunter system in place, but sometimes, a Gate would appear in a remote area, and it’d go unnoticed for a while. As a result, no one would come around to close it in time.

When such an event unfolded, soldiers from the nearby bases were dispatched in order to buy some time until Hunters could arrive on the scene.

Of course, the weapons of soldiers didn’t work against the monsters. However, in order to facilitate the evacuation of civilians, someone had to be offered up as sacrifices. In other words, they were to become cannon fodder.

A role someone had no choice but to perform had been saddled on the shoulders of this nation’s youths.

“Thank you.”

The soldier walking up ahead thanked Jin-Woo out of the blue.

“Pardon me?”

“Well, because Hunters such as yourself fight hard, we are able to go home at the end of the day, you see.”

“Oh, uh....”

He said ‘thanks’.

That was something Jin-Woo wanted to say to the soldier, instead.

Soldiers to the Hunters, and Hunters to soldiers.

As befitting those fighting to protect someone, or even something, they were expressing their gratitude against each other.

Beep.

The soldier’s expression brightened after he received the radio transmission.

“I’ve received a word that the monsters in the vicinity have been dealt with, and only the biggest one remains.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

He didn’t need to hear the soldier’s explanation to know.

He could actually sense the presence of a powerful ‘lifeform’ nearby. And he could even sense several auras of Hunters surrounding it, too. The enhanced Perception Stat was transmitting crucial information in the form of sensations and feelings.

And that’s how Jin-Woo got to figure it out almost immediately.

‘That thing is the boss.’

Soon enough, the creature could be seen in the distance. In the empty, open space not too far from him, a dozen or so Hunters were surrounding a giant made out of rock. It was as tall as a telephone pole.

It was a Golem-type monster.

“Heok....”

The soldier spat out a gasp of fear as he took a step backwards.

Perhaps it was his first time seeing one, since the moment he saw it, his entire body had stiffened noticeably. But then again, most people would react in a similar fashion. The difference between seeing a monster for real and seeing it on a TV or a computer monitor was like heaven and earth, after all.

Unlike him, Jin-Woo remained calm and observed the unfolding situation.

“Healers! Concentrate your healing on the Tanker!”

“We’re also doing our best!!”

“Why isn’t it dying already?!”

“What are the damage dealers doing!! It’s not even remotely close enough to dying, is it?!”

“The monster’s defences are too strong! And we just don’t have enough magic-type Hunters in our group!”

Because they had been summoned out here in haste, none of them seemed to be high ranked Hunters. Both their defences and attacks didn’t look that effective at all.

Because of that, Hunters couldn’t avoid being embroiled in the protracted battle of attrition.

BOOM!!

When the Golem slammed its massive stone fist downward, the Hunter acting as the Tanker had no choice but to kneel down just for a brief second.

“Keo-heok!!”

The Tanker vomited out a mouthful of blood.

“N-no!!”

“The Tanker might die at this rate!!”

“What do you want me to do?! My magic energy reserve is completely empty, you know!!”

“Hasn’t the support from high-ranked Hunters arrive yet?!”

These Hunters looked like they had reached their limit.

Jin-Woo’s gaze, as he took all of these in, gleamed quite sharply.

‘If it’s only that much.... I can do this.’

Jin-Woo slowly took several steps back. This Golem-type boss might possess the high defence, but its rank was probably lower than its scary outer appearance might suggest.

Just from the aura it emitted, it was definitely weaker than the boss of the instant dungeon, the Poison-Fanged Blue whatever.

‘So, if I could just render its high defences to nothing....’

What’s needed right now was a powerful strike that could penetrate past that dumb rock giant’s defences.

Jin-Woo got to enough distance away and took a position of throwing something.

The muscles in the arm holding the broken sword began swelling up quite violently out of the blue. Thick, pulsing veins even popped up on the back of his hand, too.

All of his physical strength was concentrated in his right arm.

A short while after that, the arm pulled back taut like the string of a bow was shot forward at the speed of sound.

“Go!”

The view of the rank D Hunter, Lee Hahn-Soo, was turning dark.

He couldn't continue on anymore. His prized shield had begun developing cracks as well. As if their magic energy had been depleted, the amount of healing magic hitting him from the Healers had decreased quite noticeably.

At this rate, every single one of them would die for sure.

Lee Hahn-Soo had to make a decision, now.

The only feasible plan here was for him to buy enough time so the other Hunters could safely escape from here. And at a later time, Hunters with higher ranks show up to kill this Golem.

‘Or, we all die together here.’

Cold sweat drops formed on Lee Hahn-Soo's forehead.

He finally firmed up his resolve. Lee Hahn-Soo shouted out while looking back.

“Leave this to me and you all gotta...!”

It was at this moment that Lee Hahn-Soo saw it.

Something flew towards here as it gleamed coldly in the night air.

Actually, he could only 'sense' that he had seen something, but his eyes couldn't really pick up on anything tangible.

It was that fast.

KWAHANG!!

That 'something' slammed into the Golem's head and it grandly exploded.

“W-what the hell?!”

Lee-Hahn-Soo's eyes opened up super-wide.

The headless Golem began tottering dangerously. The Hunters began roaring out in elation only then. They focused their attacks once more.

“It's working!! Our attacks are working!!”

“It's falling!!”

“A little bit more!! Just a bit more and we'll win!!”

It seemed that none of them had noticed the object flying in from somewhere, because they were too focused on attacking the monster. With the sole exception of Lee Hahn-Soo standing right in front of the Golem, that was!

Rooooaaarr.....

In the end, the Golem toppled over.

Thud!

The heavy body fell down to the ground and kicked up a mighty dust storm.

Waaahhh!!

Hunters all cried out in elation and celebrated their victory.

“We did it!!”

“We killed it!”

Only Lee Hahn-Soo had seen everything unfold, and he slowly shook his head.

‘No, our attacks didn't even work on this guy.’

Lee Hahn-Soo hurriedly searched around the vicinity of the fallen Golem.

“Just what did destroy the head of this rock giant?”

Lee Hahn-Soo thought out aloud and searched around. Eventually, he discovered the remnants of a broken sword. Although there were some traces of magic energy within it, it was basically a cheap, plain steel sword.

‘What? Someone threw something this worthless and destroyed a boss level Golem capable of brushing off the combined attacks of ten plus Hunters?’

Suddenly, he forgot what he wanted to say. Lee Hahn-Soo silently alternated his gaze between the corpse of the Golem and the broken sword, before he ran past the cheering Hunters and in the direction the sword flew in

from.

“Excuse me!!”

He found a dazed soldier standing there.

“Pardon? You talking to me?”

“That’s right, you!”

When a Hunter with a hulking physique hurriedly rushed towards him, the soldier couldn’t help but swallow nervously with a stiff face. That was how great the pressure a Hunter gave off to regular people.

Lee Hahn-Soo displayed the broken sword and asked.

“Did you throw this?”

“Oh, that. It’s actually....”

The soldier looked behind him, only for his eyes to go round in surprise.

“Huh? Uh? But, there was a Hunter standing right behind me, though?”

Of course, there was no one there now.

While the flustered soldier was looking around the vicinity, Lee Hahn-Soo scratched the back of his neck and stared at the broken sword.

‘That power, that destructive power.... Could it have been a high rank Hunter?’

He’d never know, since the protagonist had disappeared already.

Around the same time, Jin-Woo was on his way home. He turned around to leave as soon as the Golem began teetering about.

Indeed, he was the one who brought down the Golem. He was well aware of this fact.

Now originally, the loot and the profit arising from a dead monster belonged solely to the Hunter who managed to kill it. If he wanted to, he could contest for the rights to the Golem.

‘However, it’d become problematic when trying to prove that I am capable of bringing down a Golem like that.’

Who would believe the notion of a giant Golem crashing down because of an attack from a measly little rank E? He didn’t even have a proper evidence to back him up, too.

Jin-Woo figured that neither the broken sword or the soldier standing

beside him would be of a great help in that endeavour.

And that would not be all. More importantly, he'd have to reveal the reason how his abilities had increased by so much that he could fell a Golem like that.

The harder he thought about it, he had more to lose than to gain.

The one and only ability in the entire world to level up.

He couldn't afford to slip up and reveal the existence of this unprecedented ability just for the sake of claiming the remains of a single Golem.

'It's a bit of a waste, but can't be helped.'

Still, it wasn't as if he walked away completely empty-handed, anyway.

No, rather than that, he earned pretty big, actually.

The message he heard the moment that giant Golem fell down....

[Level up!]

His level rose up by one because he had killed the Golem.

'Indeed, my levels will rise if I hunt the monsters from the normal dungeons.'

He had learned some valuable information. That alone was worth it.

An old and decrepit apartment located on the outskirts of the city – Jin-Woo's home was on the eighth floor of this building. (TL: I use the Commonwealth way of counting floors, so for all those who don't, it'd be the ninth floor for you.)

He found the key and entered the premises. It was dark inside.

'Jin-Ah's still studying hard, huh.'

It was quite likely that his little sister was still in the library, studying.

He found a bowl of rice and some soup on the dining table. Mom was in the hospital for a number of years now, and these dishes were from his little sister.

The piece of paper, a memo from her, contained a bunch of cutely written words.

- Don't starve yourself. I'mma check later if you ate them all.

She must've prepared them even though she was busy as a bee, after he told her of his plans to leave the hospital earlier today.

Jin-Woo grinned softly and settled down to eat. However, there was something he wanted to confirm first before doing that.

“Status Window.”

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 18

Class: None

Title: Slaughterer of Wolves

HP: 2220

MP: 350

Tiredness: 2

[Stat]

Strength: 48

Stamina: 27

Agility: 27

Intelligence: 27

Perception: 27

(Available points to distribute: 0)

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max

- Tenacity Lv. 1

Active skills:

- Dash Lv. 1

He thought that today had been a long one.

And thanks to this long day, he was now level 18.

His Strength was approaching 50, and other Stats also had increased significantly as well. He even figured out what the Agility and Perception Stats did, too.

‘On top of this, add to the fact that I found a very useful dagger with good options and all that Gold that I don’t know how to use just yet, then...’

Even if he disregarded the ‘special’ medicine he got, his conquest of the instant dungeon was a resounding success.

Part 9. Geckos

A person stepping outside the house in the early hours of dawn would inevitably be cautious in their movements. Well, they might end up accidentally waking up their family members, after all.

That was why Seong Jin-Ah was silently closing the front door to her home, so that her brother wouldn’t wake up from his sleep, as she was about to leave for school.

But, then....

“You going to school now?”

“Eh?”

She was taken by surprise when a voice came from near her, and she quickly turned around to look. And she saw Jin-Woo jogging towards her.

He was kitted out in tracksuit and sneakers. He had pulled the hood up high and looked as if he’d been on an early morning jog.

Jin-Ah’s eyes opened up real wide in shock.

“What the heck? Oppa, you were up already?”

“Yup, been a while since I was up, you know. Hey, have fun today and be careful on the road.”

“Uh.... Sure.”

Jin-Ah watched her brother’s back as he entered the apartment and tilted her head.

‘Now that is so strange. Oppa actually woke up before I did....’

One would never call Jin-Woo a lazy type, but Jin-Ah was always the first one to start the day until now simply because she was unusually industrious, which was quite unfitting for her age group.

‘Now that I think about it...’

Her older brother’s back seemed broader than before, for some reason.

‘Eii, no way that’s true.’

A human’s body wasn’t made out of some rubber band, so how could it make any sense for him to expand and contract in a space of a few days?

‘I’ve probably made a mistake.’



Chapter 17 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Just as Jin-Ah shook her head, Jin-Woo suddenly pushed forward an umbrella to her.

“Why an umbrella?”

Jin-Ah received it and took a look at the sky. As it was still early dawn, the sky remained dark, but it seemed to be more or less clear and cloudless.

“But, it doesn’t look like it’s going to rain, though?”

“Take it anyway.”

“But, it’s heavy, you know?”

“Take it with you regardless. Besides, it’s a folding type umbrella so it doesn’t even weigh anything. Stop exaggerating, will ya?”

Slam.

Jin-Woo then closed the door.

“Che.... Acting as he feels like.”

Jin-Ah lightly kicked the door a couple of times to express her disgruntlement, folded the umbrella and shoved it inside the empty space in her school bag, and turned around to leave.

‘Hang on....’

Her steps came to an abrupt halt after she remembered the difference in the eye levels between her and her brother. Something was rather odd.

His eye level had definitely risen up higher compared to before.

“Do guys continue to grow taller even in their twenties?”

Eii, there was no way that could be true....

Jin-Ah shook her head again and hurriedly walked towards her school.

*

Click.

Jin-Woo locked the door and summoned his Inventory.

“Storage.”

Storage, ‘inven’, Inventory.

He discovered it through various experimentation and learned that the word used didn’t matter as long they meant the same thing.

It was the same story when accessing the mailbox.

As long as the word spoken meant ‘open’, the desired effect took place without fail. (TL: The author wrote ‘open’ three times in Korean and in English in this sentence. Thus I had to change it somewhat.)

Jin-Woo then shoved the umbrella he just got from the random box inside the ‘digital’ storage in front of his eyes. (TL: This is the direct translation from the raw. I didn’t make a mistake. This is what it really said....)

“It’s no good today again, huh.”

Four days had passed by since he cleared that instant dungeon.

He always remained hopeful whenever he got to open up a random box, praying for another dungeon key to pop out, but unfortunately, he hadn’t been lucky so far. It must’ve been a pretty rare item if it was this hard to get.

‘Well, that’s that, but now....’

Jin-Woo entered his room and sat on the edge of his bed. There was a matter he had resolve right away.

“Stats.”

[Stat]

Strength: 48

Stamina: 27

Agility: 27

Intelligence: 27

Perception: 27

(Available points to distribute: 12)

He had been saving up the Stat points earned from the quests of the past four days. He made sure to complete the daily quest every day. Of course, he also didn’t forget to always check his rewards, too.

However, he hadn’t distributed the points until now.

The issue was....

“....This is tough.”

Indeed, he found it rather difficult to come to a decision.

The ‘Strength’ Stat.

It was a wonderful Stat, that’s for sure. He hadn’t regretted it once, investing all of his points into this one back when he started this thing.

Agility.

This was also a pretty darn good Stat, too. Against weak enemies, it only helped a little, but as the levels of his opponents rose up in the future, no doubt he’d be relying on this Stat more and more.

Well, the ‘speed’ was a relative thing, after all.

And then, Stamina and Perception.

It’d be great if his Stamina was high, obviously. And this Perception turned out to be very useful as well.

Finally, ‘Intelligence’.

.....This was the problem child.

He hadn’t been able to figure out this Stat’s uses yet.

His level had increased by quite a lot, but he didn’t feel any smarter than before. His memories didn’t seem to have improved, nor did his ability to calculate quickly, either.

‘I think, it has to be related to magic....’

This Stat might be something he didn’t really need for the time being. Which left Strength, Stamina, Agility and Perception.

“....Even then, this is really tough.”

Although he now had one less Stat to choose from, he was still in a dilemma here.

He didn’t feel too confident at all.

At least he understood that the synergy between ‘Strength’ and ‘Agility’ was very good. Even if he could deal big damage, it would be meaningless if he couldn’t hit his target. On the flip side, even if he could hit accurately all the time, as long he could not deal enough damage, it’d be a waste of time, too.

In that regard, one could say that Strength and Agility formed a ‘set’.

‘Since my Strength Stat is so high, I should raise Agility up to match it.’

If he decided to raise his Agility Stat, then he had to delay raising Stamina,

instead. Well, the synergy between Agility and Stamina wasn't so good, after all.

The thing was, when Agility was raised, the odds of getting struck by the enemy would decrease. But on the other hand, Stamina was a Stat that only displayed its true worth when the opponent actually damaged him.

'Of course, I do need at least the bare minimum of Stamina....'

But, raising both Agility and Stamina at the same time was a rather inefficient method, at least from his perspective.

After a lengthy deliberation, he decided on the order of priority.

The first one was Agility. The second, Perception. Finally, Stamina.

His Strength was plenty high enough so he'd defer it for now. And as he was planning to raise his Agility, Perception took priority over Stamina.

After deciding so, Jin-Woo spent 2 points on Strength.

Tti-ring.

[Stat]

Strength: 50

Stamina: 27

Agility: 27

Intelligence: 27

Perception: 27

(Available points to distribute: 10)

Well, he wanted to raise Strength to the round and even 50 for the time being. That was how normal human beings behaved, no?

Then, he spent 8 points on Agility.

[Stat]

Strength: 50

Stamina: 27

Agility: 35

Intelligence: 27

Perception: 27

(Available points to distribute: 2)

The reason for that was also not that special.

He just wanted the last number to be a '5'.

'It's far more preferable to see the numbers ending in increments of 5....'

Strength 50, and Agility 35.

Seeing them end in the multiples of 5, he suddenly felt rather pleased with himself for no reason whatsoever.

'And as for the last 2 points....'

Jin-Woo invested them on Perception next.

With this, the points distribution had come to an end.

[Stat]

Strength: 50

Stamina: 27

Agility: 35

Intelligence: 27

Perception: 29

(Available points to distribute: 0)

The only sticking point would be the fact that he couldn't quite bring Perception up to 30.

'Well, I don't have any more points left, so it can't be helped, I guess.'

Other than that, everything was okay. He figured that it'd be fine to raise Stamina and Agility through levelling up.

"So then, I guess that's it."

No matter who you were, you would be hard-pressed to feel 100% satisfied with everything. Since he had thought about his choices for a long while, he was more or less happy with them like this.

It was then, he could hear the telephone ringing from the living room.

Riiing, riiiiing....

'Is the Association calling me?'

In the past, he didn't want to participate in the raids so he did his best to ignore the calls until the last possible moment, but right now, he was raring to go and test out his raised abilities against various monsters.

Jin-Woo quickly snatched up the receiver.

“This is the Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

- ***“Aigoo, you finally picked up the phone.”***

Too bad, it wasn't a call from the Association.

A rueful sigh leaked out of his mouth.

- ***“Learner Jin-Woo, why is it so difficult to get in touch with you lately?”***

The voice coming from the speaker was a familiar one.

It'd been four years already since he graduated from high school and therefore stopped being a 'learner', but the owner of the building always attached that prefix in front of Jin-Woo's name ever since taking in both the Seong siblings when they were still young kids.

“I'm really sorry about that. I was admitted to the hospital because of an incident a few days ago.”

- ***“Tsk, tsk, so that's what happened. I should've known. Well, there's that and, learner Jin-Woo.... The rent for this month hadn't come in yet, so.... what should I do? If it's a bit too tough for you, should I delay it for a month or two?”***

“Oh, no. It's fine. I'll send the money in a bit later.”

- ***“Okay. But, don't force yourself, you hear? Trying to look after your mom and your younger sister, you're going through so much hardship there. I know money is important, but don't forget to take care of your body, too.”***

“Thank you. I won't forget that.”

The call ended there.

Jin-Woo pulled out the bank balance book from one of the drawers. The remaining amount in the account was only around ₩800,000. (TL: Just over \$700.)

“Fuu....”

A groan leaked out from his mouth.

After paying the rent of ₩500,000, he'd have ₩300,000 left for the month's living expenses.

And the rent could be that low only because the apartment building was located on the remote outskirts of the city, as well as it being old and decrepit, plus the owner of the building taking into consideration Jin-Woo's troubles

and not raising the amount for the last couple of years.

There was no way anyone would be able to find an apartment to rent for 500 grand per month nowadays.

And trying to survive on 300 grand for the whole month was even tougher.

“I gotta make some money first.”

Jin-Woo decided to take care of the urgent matters first.

He was no longer the same guy from a few days ago who couldn't even kill a single E-ranked monster and shiver in fear.

How did Hunters make money?

The best way was to kill monsters.

Hunters ranked S or A could get sponsorships, shoot commercials, make appearances in TV shows and the like to hoover up a lot of money, as much as some chaebols made, but their number was exceedingly few. (TL: Chaebols = owners of big corporations basically)

Indeed, there were too few of them.

Excluding those too few ones at the top, the majority of the Hunters had to go to a dungeon in order to make money.

The higher the rank...

The greater the experience....

The earnings would be decided by each individual's own capabilities.

For someone like Jin-Woo, who was ranked E, worked only for the Association, and had no experience in dungeons rated higher than C, such a condition was an incredibly tough one to overcome.

Jin-Woo's expression scrunched up into something unsightly.

‘Disregarding the conditions, for now, if I could just enter an assault team, now that would be great....’

He took a look at the job postings on the Hunter websites' bulletin boards and called a few numbers, but all of them turned out to be a waste of time. No one wanted to work with a Hunter ranked E.

Those Hunters seeking outside help via job postings were freelancers almost all of the time, which meant that they were responsible for preserving their own necks, so understandably, they paid close attention when forming a

raid team or letting someone into theirs.

These people didn't possess enough abilities to enter big Guilds, but their ranks were too high to work for the Association.

They were all kind of stuck in-between a rock and a hard place, but unable to go either way.

'Even then, these Hunters still earn more than ₩10,000,000 a month, as far as I know.' (TL: Around \$8830)

It was the case of 'High Risk, High Reward'.

Since they put their lives on the line, the profit they earned was just as big at the end of the day. It wasn't for nothing that Hunters were the targets of envy from the general populace.

From Jin-Woo's perspective, he could only get impatient, though.

'Should I just take the rank reassignment test and increase my rank right away?'

Eventually, Jin-Woo shook his head.

He knew that was a stupid thing to do, no matter how hard he thought about it.

A Hunter ranked E suddenly became a high-ranked one!

Whether that was A or B, or maybe even C, it didn't matter.

The Re-Awakening would always become a hot topic of conversation.

The masses loved nothing more than a good gossip, and Hunters just so happened to be a good subject to chew on.

The old saying went that, if there were five mouths, then there would be ten eyes. Meaning, the more people talked about you, the more eyes would be focused on you. His Stats would continue to rise up in the future, so it'd be only a matter of time before his 'special' constitution was discovered by the others.

"A Hunter who can raise his abilities up higher?"

"He becomes stronger as time goes by?"

"Who is this Hunter?"

"How can he do something like that?"

"What should we do to become like him?"

Without a doubt, many people would express their interest. After all, there

hadn't been a Hunter like him before. And among those expressing interest, there would be those who try to use him, or reveal their hostile intentions towards him as well.

'If just one of those possesses incredible power, then....'

Just imagining it gave him the chills.

He was far too weak as he was now. Until he possessed enough power to protect himself, he didn't want the world to know of his existence. Meaning, taking the test to reassign his ranks was out of the question.

'But, I still need to make money here....'

However, that didn't mean he could go out and get a part-time job, either. He didn't know when the Association would call him for a raid.

By raiding a dungeon, he'd get to earn both money and experience, so how could he blow that important chance just to scrounge up a few bucks by working in a local store?

While he was seriously deliberating on what he needed to do, he spotted something in the bulletin board that caught his attention.

- Emergency! Searching for a single Hunter, regardless of the rank! Needs to come right away!

Jin-Woo's eyes shot right open. This posting had popped up literally a second ago.

When he hurriedly checked the contents of the posting, it wasn't too far from his home, too.

Jin-Woo quickly picked the phone up. The other side must've been in a hurry as well because he answered the call even before the first ringtone.

- ***"Hello?"***

Jin-Woo stated his reasons for calling as precisely as possible and calmly waited for the answer.

- ***"Oh, you are an E rank?"***

The response from the other side was better than expected.

- ***"It's fine. We just need someone to show up and fill up the headcount, that is all. However, it's a Gate ranked C so it'd be hard for you to hunt there. So, we'll just spilt the profits among ourselves and we just give you ₩2,000,000 in cash. How about it? Can you come right away?"***

₩2,000,000 for a day's work! (TL: Around \$1765)

It was a lot of money for simply being there to make up the numbers.

A rather tempting offer this was.

It was regrettable that he couldn't get to share the dungeon's loot, but he might end up losing out on making 2 million just by trying to be too greedy.

'For now, let's put out the urgent fires first.'

Such an opportunity wouldn't come around every day, after all.

2 million was enough for him and his sister's monthly living expenses.

Jin-Woo said yes to the offer.

"I'll be there in less than 15 minutes."



Chapter 18 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo only needed one minute to get ready, quickly grabbed himself a taxi, and headed off to the meeting point. Nine people were already there, waiting for his arrival.

The man who looked like the leader of the group waved his hand at Jin-Woo.

“Heyyy! Over here.”

It was a bearded man with a fairly big physique. He smiled softly and walked closer while speaking to Jin-Woo.

“Are you Mister Seong Jin-Woo?”

“That’s correct.”

“Aigoo, it’s a relief that you found the right place so quickly. I guess this is fate, so how about we greet each other before we get started?”

The bearded man briefly introduced the members of his team.

The eight of them including himself were regular teammates that worked together all the time, while the remaining guy was someone who also came here to make up the numbers, just like Jin-Woo.

Jin-Woo greeted other team members and studied their countenance carefully. Thanks to his enhanced Perception Stat, he was able to more or less sense everyone’s capabilities.

‘Five with a similar rank. Four with a slightly lower rank than them. Five rank Cs and around four with D or lower.’

There was a regulation when attempting to clear a Gate rated C. The minimum number of a party had to be ten Hunters, and more than half had to be at least ranked C or higher. Only then did the Association issued a permit.

It seemed that them claiming to do all the hunting and he only needed to be there to make up the numbers didn’t sound like an empty boasting after all.

“Now we’re done with introductions, let me briefly explain the important points to remember.”

The bearded man introduced himself as Hwang Dong-Seok, a Tanker rated

C. He displayed a relaxed atmosphere as if he possessed plenty of experience raiding dungeons.

As he began describing the situations one had to keep an eye out for in the middle of a raid, someone came closer to Jin-Woo.

“Excuse me. Looks like we’re both pieces of fluff in this party, huh?”

He was none other than the other Hunter Hwang Dong-Seok had brought along in order to fill up the numbers. He was a young man with a bright expression. However, unlike Jin-Woo, he was actually going to participate in battles. He was ranked D, so he had the right to do so.

His name was Yu Jin-Ho, aged 22.

Jin-Woo lightly nodded his head as Yu Jin-Ho greeted him, before shifting his gaze away. Yu Jin-Ho seemingly wanted to carry on with the conversation, but ended up scratching the back of his head awkwardly. He soon returned to his spot.

“Hyung-nim, let’s stop here and go in already.” (TL: Hyung-nim = big brother, or a male addressing an older male. Used more as an honorific by gangsters to address someone higher up in the hierarchy. Most of the time, anyways.)

“We’ll be the ones to kill them all, so what’s the point of explaining it in detail like that?”

“Right, my ears might get blocked up with wax at this rate.”

When the original team members all raised their voices, Hwang Dong-Seok laughed jovially and clapped his hands.

“Alright, then. Enough with the explanations, let’s get going.”

Everyone got ready to enter the Gate.

“Ah, before we enter, you two, take a look at these.”

Hwang Dong-Seok pushed forward a page of a document to Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho each. It turned out to be a simple contract.

“Write your names on the bottom and sign it, and we’re good to go.”

The contents said, he’d not participate in any hunting, he’d not participate in sharing of the loot, and when the raid was over, he’d be paid 2 million won right away.

The terms were the same as what he heard over the phone. However, they were not the ones to catch his attention.

‘I have to promise not to question them regardless of whatever incident happens inside the dungeon....?’

Unlike the raids organised by the Association, one would not be able to claim for compensation if something happened during a raid organised by the freelancers. One of the reasons why Hunters couldn’t get a life insurance, either.

One had to look after one’s own neck, in other words.

Only now did it feel real that Jin-Woo had entered an assault team.

While confirming the clauses, Jin-Woo sneaked a glance at Yu Jin-Ho’s contract. As expected, his was different; besides the promised 2 million, he was also going to share in the loot, as well.

Before signing the document, Jin-Woo asked Hwang Dong-Seok.

“What am I supposed to do when we’re inside?”

“Nothing too particular. Just follow us and help us carry the luggage, that’s all.”

“Your luggage....?”

Hwang Dong-Seok pointed at the huge backpack one of his ‘dongsaengs’ pulled out from the minivan. (TL: A ***“dongsaeng”*** is a gender-neutral term to denote a younger sibling. Can also be used as an honorific to denote a younger person.)

“You’ll be carrying around lunch boxes to eat when inside, several sets of clothing and equipment, first-aid kits and some other stuff.”

‘Wait, first-aid kits when entering a dungeon?’

Jin-Woo couldn’t help but question this.

“You are not entering with a Healer?”

“I’m sure you already know that it’s not easy to hire a Healer if you’re running your own assault party. Well, we’ve been doing things this way until now, so it’ll be fine.”

Hwang Dong-Seok smiled awkwardly.

To think, this team just barely met the required minimum number of Hunters, one of the additional members mistook a raid as a blind date or something, and the composition of the assault team only happened to feature a Tanker and damage dealers, and not one Healer...

Even after hearing that there was no Healer present, that oblivious

additional member didn't seem too bothered by the revelation. It was the sure proof that he was a newbie.

Jin-Woo smirked inwardly.

'They are a bunch of wannabes.'

However, he still signed on the contract. Not because he needed that 2 million, but because he knew very well that he could protect himself now.

"Here it is."

"I'm done, too!"

Hwang Dong-Seok confirmed the signatures of both men and shouted out in a loud voice as if he was feeling really pleased today.

"Okay!! Let's get going, everyone!"

The party headed straight to the location of the Gate.

It was in the middle of the halted construction site for an apartment complex.

"The economy nowadays isn't so good, but still..."

Hwang Dong-Seok clicked his tongue.

Like large tombstones, unfinished apartment buildings stood still sporadically, imparting a certain sense of foreboding to all who looked at them. Could a cemetery of giants feel this way to observers?

"Did you know?"

Yu Jin-Ho had walked closer to Jin-Woo and whispered softly.

"... That, while the employees and the investors are going through hell at the moment, the CEO of the project ran off to overseas two months ago along with ₩900,000,000,000?"

"..."

Jin-Woo gave the other guy plenty of hints, But it seemed like Yu Jin-Ho didn't want to leave his side at all.

Well, with the exception of Jin-Woo here, all eight of them originally belonged to one team so it'd be hard to get along with them that easily.

"Hyung, are you always this quiet?" (TL: ***"Hyung"*** here is slightly different from ***"Hyung-nim"*** from earlier on. Still means older brother, but without the tough-guy connotation.)

Before anyone had noticed it, the honorific had become ‘hyung’. Jin-Woo couldn’t ignore this kid anymore.

“.....Don’t you know how to take the hint?”

“Well, I’ve never lived while worrying about taking hints, so... Ehehe.”

Was this guy simply a good-natured, or just brainless? Jin-Woo wordlessly scratched the side of his head as he stared at Yu Jin-Ho and that bright smile of his.

‘However, I....’

It was indeed true that Jin-Woo would get unusually nervous when he got nearer a Gate. But, it was par for the course, really.

To other Hunters, raids might come across as a legitimate source of income, but to Jin-Woo, each and every one he participated so far had been a desperate, bitter struggle to make ends meet.

He’d get tense because of all the painful memories stuck forever in his head.

“It’s over here.”

Hwang Dong-Seok’s steps came to an end.

“Oh....”

The Hunters all let out a surprised gasp.

“Hwang hyung, is this really a Gate rated C? But, isn’t it too big?”

“You think the Association was lying to us? They said that investigators came around here twice already.”

A hole in the air, floating like a black hole. People took to calling it a Gate.

Its rank was assigned according to the waves of magical energy emission coming from inside. Folks from the Association would stop by first to assign a rank to each one.

After that, individuals or Guilds wanting to clear the Gate could follow the procedure and apply for a permit.

Gates ranked A or B were, most of the time, left to the big Guilds. Well, they were too difficult for freelancers to clear, after all.

So, assault parties formed by freelancers took care of the Gates ranked lower than that. Which meant that a Gate ranked C was effectively the hardest one for Hunters not affiliated with anyone to clear.

Hwang Dong-Seok stood in front of the Gate and looked back at his team.

“I’ll be entering first. Do your best to keep up, everyone.”

The Tanker entered first, and the other Hunters began entering one by one.

‘You never know, so...’

Jin-Woo lightly stretched himself just in case.

to him, Yu Jin-Ho began pulling out his own equipment from his bag. The sword and the shield coming out from his bag gleamed attractively under the light.

Even a casual glance could tell that they were very expensive. They were definitely not something a newbie Hunter could organise on his own.

‘Hang on, he said that he never had to take hints before, so does that mean he’s from a well-to-do family?’

Jin-Woo formed a surprised expression.

Perhaps sensing Jin-Woo’s gaze on him, Yu Jin-Woo confidently and bravely stood in front.

“Hyung, you said that you’re ranked E, right? Don’t worry, I’ll protect you. Just stick close by me.”

Jin-Woo scratched the back of his head.

Just who would protect who?

“...Okay. Thanks for the sentiment.”

“Let’s go in as well.”

Regardless of how Jin-Woo felt, they still followed in afterwards and safely entered the Gate.

The interior of the dungeon was eerily quiet.

“.....”

Not only that, but it was also completely dark, too.

Hwang Dong-Seok issued his first order.

“Hey, Gyu-Hwan? I need a light.”

“Alright.”

The magic-related Hunter Joh Gyu-Hwan created a ball of a light in mid-air. The surroundings became bright immediately.

Hwang Song-Seok lowered his shield and tilted his head slightly.

“What the hell? Where are all the monsters?”

“I wonder. There is no light in here, either.”

Now normally, there should have been luminous stones found here and there inside cave-like dungeons and emitted some light to illuminate the way forward. However, this dungeon didn't have those.

Yu Jin-Ho whispered to Jin-Woo from the side.

“Hyung, could there be a dungeon without monsters in it?”

“Shush.”

Jin-Woo gestured the younger man to keep quiet. Because, Jin-Woo's ears were twitching. He could hear lots of footsteps coming from the distance.

Jin-Woo spoke up.

“It's not that there aren't any, they just haven't arrived yet.”

Yu Jin-Ho swallowed nervously after hearing that.

Rumble....

Soon, the party could hear what Jin-Woo had heard earlier on.

Only then did Hwang Dong-Seok realise something was amiss here.

A dungeon with no luminous stones could mean.....?

“What moves around in groups, lives in darkness, and rushes towards a source of light?”

“Oh, crap!!”

The complexions of Hwang Dong-Seok and his dongsaengs became ashen all at the same time.

“It's bugs!!”

“Bugs are coming!!”

“F*ck it, man!! Why the hell did it have to be god d*mn bugs!!”

Hwang Dong-Seok cried out.

“Get into your positions!! They are coming! In front!!”

From the other side of this lone passage, 'somethings' were madly rushing towards them in a large group.

“Wait, could this be an ant hill?”

“Don’t say something that might jinx us, okay?”

Out of all the monster types, insects were the most troublesome to deal with. Their shells were quite hardy, they always moved around in large groups, and each individual possessed pretty high combat potential, as well.

And the worst of that lot just so happened to be the ant-types. Countless Hunters made a mistake and entered the ‘ant hills’ only to lose their lives very quickly.

Rumble, rumble!!

The sounds of the insect legs rustling on the ground noisily reverberated throughout the cave. It meant that they had come pretty close now.

Hwang Dong-Seok raised his shield right up below his chin. However, they couldn’t see any insects even then. His dongsaengs began raising a fuss from behind him.

“What’s going on here? Why can’t I see them?”

“But, they are close by, though?”

“Dong-Seok hyung, can you see anything out in front?”

It was at this time that Jin-Woo shouted out.

“Above you!”

‘What?!’

Hwang Dong-Seok reflexively looked up.

Rumble.....!

Huge insects were running towards them on the ceiling.

If they were discovered late even for a single second, those things would’ve jumped down on top of their heads.

When fighting against monsters such as these insect-types that formed large groups, the breaking down of the team’s formation would mean death for everyone involved.

‘If those were discovered too late, then....’

Hwang Dong-Seok felt a chill run down his spine.

The silver lining here was that he couldn’t spot a single ant-like creature among the various insects.

He raised his voice and shouted out.

“Fire!! Fire and bring them down!! Once they are on the ground, I’ll

attract the aggro!”

Swish, pow!!

Boom!!

Kiiieehhk!!

Kiieehh...

When a few monsters fell down after getting struck by the attacks of the Hunters, the rest of them followed suit and landed back on the ground. Without a doubt, they were planning to engage the Hunters.

From here onwards, the capability of the Tanker would prove to be crucial. Hwang Dong-Seok activated his provocation skill to attract the gazes of all the monsters to himself.

And as if they had a prior agreement, monsters all turned their heads to glare at Hwang Dong-Seok at the same time.

“I’m over here, you d*mn bugs!!”

Kiieehhh!!

Dozens upon dozens of monsters rushed towards Hwang Dong-Seok’s position.

Slam!! Clang!!

Clllanng!!

Cling!! Clang!

His shield managed to defend against the attacks of the bugs without fail. The strong jaws and claws couldn’t tear the shield in half. The Tanker Hwang Dong-Seok defended commendably well from the front, all stable and unmoving.

“Standby, get in position, and get ready!!”

Hwang Dong-Seok waited for the right timing.



Chapter 19 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Even when the bugs chomped and bit at him with terrifying intensity, Hwang Dong-Seok remained steadfast and waited for the chance to counter-attack.

...To make sure that the aggro wouldn't deviate from him even if the damage dealers landed a crippling blow to the enemies.

'This should be enough!'

With that thought, the real hunt had finally begun. To hunt, the real reason why the Hunters were called Hunters in the first place!

Hwang Dong-Seok roared out.

"Attack!"

Along with that short but manly shout, all the accumulated firepower of the team poured out on the marauding insect horde.

Kiiieehhk...

Kiieehhkk!!

The pained screams of the monsters rose up from here, there, and everywhere.

Jin-Woo stood at the back and observed this situation as it unfolded. That was the contractual obligation he had to adhere to for this raid.

He inwardly simulated how he'd fight alone as his eyes continued to take in the battle happening in front.

'How frustrating.'

Jin-Woo had to suppress his urges to rush out there several times already. He could see so many open gaps within the ranks of the monsters. And he also spotted the Hunters missing those gaps and continue to commit simple errors.

So, how could he not feel frustrated when he was not allowed to do anything and simply had to stand around?

Even then, the damage to Hwang Dong-Seok's team proved to be surprisingly non-existent. It was all because their teamwork was rather

excellent.

It seemed that the relaxed demeanour of Hwang Dong-Seok before the raid began was not just for a show, after all.

“Jin-Seok-ah! 11 o’clock!”

“Hyung, they are coming from your right, too!”

“Joon-Tae, Seok-Min, Gyu-Hwan!! Take care of the right!”

“Okay!”

“Cheol-Jin, your wrist’s swollen up. Retreat to the rear.”

“Hwang hyung, this ain’t much to fret about.”

“You wanna go back only after sweeping clean the entrance? We don’t know how long this raid will take, so stop being hasty from the get-go. Control your pace, got that?”

“Roger that.”

Perhaps because they’ve been working together for so long, they were able to communicate quite smoothly. Being able to communicate quickly like this would inevitably result in an excellent teamwork as well.

It was a world apart from the ragtag bunch of Hunters brought together by the Association.

‘What’s more surprising is that this kid turns out to be pretty handy, too.’

Jin-Woo’s gaze shifted over to Yu Jin-Ho next.

When a monster bit into his shield, he kicked it away and swung his sword quickly at it. The expensive sword easily separated the monster’s head from its body.

For a newbie rank D Hunter, he was defending himself admirably well.

‘His kick-a*s gear is filling up the hole left behind by his lack of skills and experience, huh.’

Indeed, it was not for nothing that pretty much all Hunters struggled hard to get themselves good equipment.

When their gazes briefly met, Yu Jin-Ho quickly raised his thumb up.

“.....”

Because of his expressions that looked as if he was desperately pleading for a positive response, Jin-Woo was left with no choice but to reciprocate the same gesture as well.

Looking rather satisfied now, Yu Jin-Woo turned around.

Kiiiehhhk....!

Whatever the case may have been, the end of the battle was drawing nearer. Once the coast was more or less clear, Hwang Dong-Seok issued another order to his dongsaengs.

“Don’t forget the magic crystals! We split them exactly nine ways!”

“Yep.”

“This is my favourite part of the raid.”

“Me too.”

Hwang Dong-Seok confirmed his giggling dongsaengs collecting the loot, and walked closer to Jin-Woo.

“Aigoo, we survived all thanks to you.”

“Excuse me?”

“Well, you were the first one to alert us about them monsters coming up from above, weren’t you? How did you know, though?”

“It was.... a gut feeling.”

Jin-Woo came up with a half-cooked story on the spot.

Quite obviously, he couldn’t come out and say that his Perception Stat was high, now could he?

“Oh, really? A gut feeling, huh.... Well, we got lucky today. I don’t even want to imagine what might have happened if we didn’t discover them in time... whew-woo.”

Hwang Dong-Seok patted his chest while speaking up.

It was then.

One of the Hunters rummaging through the carcass of the insect gestured at Hwang Dong-Seok to come closer.

“Hwang hyung, please come over here for a sec.”

The dongsaengs had all gathered in one spot. So, Hwang Dong-Seok went there to join them as well.

“Mm?”

“Something’s a bit off about these crawlies.”

The Hunters parted ways when Hwang Dong-Seok arrived, allowing the

bearded man to squat down and take a look at the surroundings. He couldn't spot anything out of the ordinary, though. No matter where he looked, all he could see was the dead insects.

“What’s off about these?”

Hwang Dong-Seok tilted his head.

One of the dongsaengs pointed at the leg of the insect monster closest to him.

“I’m pretty sure that wound didn’t come from us.”

“.....”

Hwang Dong-Seok’s expression crumpled slightly. He took a closer look before raising his voice.

“Looks like.... something took a big bite out of it, doesn’t it?”

“Right? That’s not the only one with wounds like that, you see. Looky here. This one, that one over there, and over there, too. Looks like that one’s missing a pair of wings as well. Could these creepy crawlies have been beaten down already before fighting us?”

Hwang Dong-Seok’s expression hardened even more.

Now he realised why the battle went off so smoothly when compared to the number of the monsters they had to fight.

“Could it be that.... these things were fighting against something else?”

It was then.

Although it had been for the briefest of all brief moments, Jin-Woo still sensed the gazes of the several members of this team landing on him.

Their eyes shifted away as soon as Jin-Woo displayed a hint of sensing them. With this, he was certain now.

‘As I thought....’

His initial suspicions proved to be correct.

Seeing that their teamwork was so good, they must’ve been fighting together for a long, long time already. And without anyone dying, too.

However, would such a thing be possible without a Healer backing them up?

No matter how good Hunters were, they were still humans at the end of the day. Inevitably, they would slip up sooner or later. Well, only a short while

ago, didn't their formation nearly break apart from the attacks of the bugs?

A bigger picture finally formed inside Jin-Woo's head and a subtle smile formed on his lips.

'Maybe.... I can use them to my advantage.'

As long as they acted within his calculations, that was.

Hwang Dong-Seok smiled and stood back up.

"Well, now. Why don't we go in a little bit deeper? We might be able to clear this dungeon rather quickly if this keeps up."

Hwang Dong-Seok deliberately spoke up with a loud voice.

He didn't do that for the sake of his dongsaengs. Well, the original members of the team were already surrounding him, to begin with.

In the meantime, Yu Jin-Ho smiled brightly and approached closer to Jin-Woo.

"Hyung, did you see it? You saw it, right? With this, I kicked some serious monster a*s today, didn't I?"

Yu Jin-Ho swung the sword around in the air. Seeing this, Jin-Woo quietly asked him.

"Hey, that sword and the shield, they are really expensive, right?"

"Pardon? Ahh, when I told my dad that I'd be participating in my first raid, he got them for me."

"Well, in that case, I think you should keep your wits about you, too."

Jin-Woo lightly patted Yu Jin-Ho on his shoulder and followed after the other Hunters walking deeper inside the dungeon.

"What is he talking about now, out of the blue?"

Yu Jin-Ho tilted his head in confusion before chasing after the departing group.

*

The cave seemed to go on forever. However, bizarrely enough, they hadn't come across a single monster as of yet.

Since the dungeon was shaped like a long cavern, there was no way that they'd miss each other, too.

"Could it be that the crawlies at the entrance were everything?"

"Eii, no way."

“Now that would be really strange.”

“Still, there should be a boss at the end, right?”

“Without one, why would a Gate remain open, then?”

The opinions of the Hunters were shared among themselves as they roam the expansive but empty interior of this big dungeon.

“Hold it.”

Hwang Dong-Seok in the lead suddenly stopped walking. He stopped so abruptly that people behind him ran into his back.

The Hunter whose nose had slammed into the head of the guy in front asked with a sullen expression.

“Ouch, what the heck.... Hwang hyung, what is it?”

“Gyu-Hwan-ah. I need a light over there.”

Joh Gyu-Hwan controlled the ball of light floating up in the air and redirected it further up ahead, exactly where Hwang Dong-Seok had been pointing at.

“Holy sh*t.”

“All these....?”

All the Hunters spat out low groans.

The torn wings, legs, torsos, and even heads of the bugs – remains of the various dead bugs were strewn about everywhere as far as the light shone. The further into the cave the light got to, the greater the amount of the remains they could see. And also, a huge chamber located at the end of it all.

“That’s the boss’s room.”

Someone muttered out softly. Hwang Dong-Seok nodded his head.

“Everyone, get your equipment ready.”

The Hunters quickly armed themselves. Nervousness was evident on the expressions of everyone present.

With Hwang Dong-Seok leading them in, the rest of the Hunters cautiously and silently entered the boss’s ‘room’. However, their silence only lasted for a few seconds afterwards.

“J-Jackpot!!”

The Hunter with a red nose cried out. He was none other than the guy whose nose slammed into someone’s back of the head.

Originally, it was forbidden to shout out too loudly inside a dungeon. Because there was a possibility that a monster they didn't have to fight might hear the noise and run towards where the Hunters were.

However, none of the others scolded the red-nose for his mistake.

“Wowsers.”

“How much could all of these be?”

“It is a real jackpot, innit?”

Everyone was way too busy gasping out in admiration and happiness, that was why.

“Wait a second.”

When Joh Gyu-Hwan fixed the beam of light high up in the middle of the air, the situation within the room became clear for all to see – as well as the jewel-like stones jutting out from one of the walls of the cave.

“They are mana stones!”

“The entire wall is made up of them!”

These mana stones reflected the light attractively and caused the eyes of the Hunters to sparkle brightly in greed as well.

Mana stones!

They were one of the treasures that could be found inside dungeons.

Although each stone possessed a lower amount of magic energy compared to a magic crystal extracted from a monster, they almost always were found in large quantity, so if one were able to mine them, one could earn a substantial profit.

Besides, the mana stone deposit they had discovered was incredibly large. The entire wall of the huge cave was actually filled up with these stones.

“Let's do a quick calculation.”

A Hunter with a mathematical brain began moving his fingers in a hurry.

“If we can mine them all, we could be earning as much as ₩1,000,000,000. Even if we split nine ways, we're looking at a payout of over ₩100,000,000 per head.”

“Ohh, ohh!”

Smiles formed on the faces of the Hunters.

Yu Jin-Ho had been staying at the back until then, and when he heard those

words, he began poking Jin-Woo's side with his elbow.

“Hyung, show me your copy of the contract.”

“Why?”

“Just trust me on this one. I'm pretty knowledgeable when it comes to law, you see.”

Jin-Woo shrugged his shoulders once and handed over the contract as requested. Yu Jin-Ho walked over to Hwang Dong-Seok while carrying that.

“Excuse me, seniors? I wanna ask you about something.”

The eyes of the celebrating Hunters immediately focused on Yu Jin-Ho next. Yu Jin-Ho flapped open Jin-Woo's contract and showed it to them.

“Mister leader, this is Jin-Woo hyung's contract. As you can see, there is no clause about splitting the treasure beside the magic crystals earned from the hunting itself.”

Everyone there caught on to what Yu Jin-Ho was trying to say.

- It's customary to share the treasures or other rare items found in a dungeon equally among all the participants of the raid. The splitting of the profit, in this case, is different from monopolising the magic crystals of the monsters one hunted themselves.

In other words, the mana stones had to be split ten ways, not nine.

The light within the Hunters' eyes changed greatly, but Hwang Dong-Seok simply smiled and took a step forward.

“Of course, we'll be sharing them equally. I know the rules well. We still have some things to take care of before that, though.”

Hwang Dong-Seok raised his index finger and pointed to his front.

Yu Jin-Ho grandly flinched from that. He thought that he was the one being pointed at, actually.

He shuddered slightly and turned his head around to take a look, and finally spotted a spider as huge as a house quietly squatting way over there.

“Heok....!”

Yu Jin-Ho began taking hurried steps backwards and covered his mouth after seeing the spider's appearance. As if it was fast asleep, the huge spider didn't even budge an inch from the spot.

Around the creature, there were empty shells of the dead insects piled up as high as a mountain.

A fair few of them were 'half-eaten', and there were bodily fluids mixed in among them as well, basically resembling a trash pit full of food waste.

"That's the boss, huh."

"Did that thing eat the bugs inside the dungeon?"

"Well, it sure did eat a lot, didn't it?"

Hunters glared at the spider and passed their opinions one at the time.

Hwang Dong-Seok called the others to gather around. Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho, too, stood in front of Hwang Dong-Seok as well.

"As you all know very well, as soon as the boss is killed, the Gate will start closing up. So, before we kill the spider, let's mine the mana stones first."

Everyone nodded their heads.

"Cheol-Jin-ah, did you bring along the equipment for the job?"

The man named Lee Cheol-Jin shook his head.

"No. Who knew we'd find mana stones inside a C-ranked dungeon? All the mining equipment is back in the van."

"Oh, come on now, dude.... Didn't this hyung always tell you to keep it around just in case?"

"My bad, my bad. I'm really sorry about this."

Lee Cheol-Jin grinned brightly and began apologising to Hwang Dong-Seok, the rest of his teammates, and even to Jin-Woo.

Hwang Dong-Seok spoke up while scratching the back of his head.

"Aigoo. What a bother this has become. In that case, why don't you two stay here and wait? We'll go outside and fetch the equipment in the meantime."



Chapter 20 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

When the Hunters tried to leave all at the same time, Yu Jin-Ho formed a confused expression and quickly asked them.

“Are you telling me and Jin-Woo hyung to remain in the boss room?”

Hwang Dong-Seok smiled with his eyes and replied.

“The b*stard is yet to wake up even though we’ve been talking loudly for a while now. So, I’m sure nothing’s going to happen here. Well, there are some things I wanna speak to my boys, too, so we’ll take a short smoke break as well. But, don’t worry, it won’t take long.”

Jin-Woo listened to Hwang Dong-Seok’s rather detailed explanations and smirked inwardly.

‘You’ve finally revealed your true colours, huh. But all of you are leaving at the same time? Aren’t you fools taking us way too lightly?’

They were looking down on him because of his low rank, of course.

As Jin-Woo expected him to, Hwang Dong-Seok finally began to move. It was slightly different from the youth’s expectation, though.

It had been four years since he became a Hunter. During that time, he had met many Hunters. One of them was an ahjussi named Mister Oh.

He had retired from the life of a freelancer, but still showed up now and then to help out with the Association’s work.

“Be careful of geckos.”

Mister Oh used to say that rather often.

When one participated in raids, one would inevitably encounter a dangerous situation.

When such an event happened, some crooked, immoral Hunters would try to sacrifice someone who had been fighting alongside them until then, with some flimsy pretext of them not being in the same team, to begin with, or that the other party was simply weaker than they were.

All just to buy themselves some time for their safe escape.

It was exactly like a gecko cutting off its own tail and running away.

‘Cutting its tail off....’

Mister Oh took to calling those types of Hunters ‘geckos’, and such actions as cutting off one’s tail.

The regulation stated that in order to enter a Gate ranked C, the minimum number of participants had to be ten. Yet, Hwang Dong-Seok’s team only had eight members.

“I’m sure you already know that it’s not easy to hire a Healer if you’re running your own assault party. Well, we’ve been doing things this way until now, so it’ll be fine.”

Indeed, he stuck to only eight members, even though his team had entered countless Gates ranked C – so much so that he could say ‘this way until now’.

‘They obviously have no reason to fill the last two spots.’

They needed a tail that they could cut off at any given moment, after all. There was a reason why they were willing to accept anyone whether it was a Hunter ranked E or a newbie.

And now....

Hwang Dong-Seok had decided to abandon both Seong Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho for a slightly different reason than usual.

‘But, it’s a good thing for me.’

Jin-Woo had figured out Hwang Dong-Seok’s intentions pretty early on, but chose to say nothing. This was what he wanted, actually.

However, unlike Jin-Woo who was full of confidence, Yu Jin-Ho was quite different as he only started his work as a Hunter today.

Yu Jin-Ho spoke with a voice full of worries.

“No, wait a minute. That is just.... Why don’t we leave together?”

It was then, Jin-Woo spotted one of the Hunters at the back raise his hand towards his hips. So, he placed his hand on Yu Jin-Ho’s shoulder and spoke.

“It’ll be fine. We’ll guard this place.”

The Hunter’s hand heading towards his waist stopped.

“Hyung....?”

Yu Jin-Ho was quite surprised and confused, but Jin-Woo simply kept his mouth shut and lightly shook his head. Sure, the kid was noisy and got on his nerves just a tad, but Jin-Woo wasn’t planning to let him die here.

After all, didn't he try to get the fair share for Jin-Woo just now, although that would have ultimately put him in a disadvantageous position?

Hwang Dong-Seok formed a smile as he looked at the two youths.

“Our van isn't parked too far, so it shouldn't take long. Well, then.”

Hwang Dong-Seok and his lackeys quickly escaped from the boss room. And their footsteps rapidly got further and further away.

Yu Jin-Ho turned around and demanded answers from Jin-Woo.

“How could you say those things, hyung? What if that thing wakes up?”

Without a doubt, he was quite scared of that spider.

‘Looks like this kid hasn't grasped the situation quite yet.’

Jin-Woo inwardly clicked his tongue. It was too much of a bother to explain everything, too. Instead of an answer, he began loosening his body once more.

Around the same time, Hwang Dong-Seok turned around towards the boss room. The Hunters following him also came to a stop. They had arrived at a far-enough spot from the boss room now. At this sort of distance, there was no danger of being overheard.

Hwang Dong-Seok smiled deeply and signalled to Joh Gyu-Hwan next to him with his chin.

“Hey, Gyu-Hwan-ah? Block up the entrance to the boss room.”

“Should I blow it up?”

“That's right. But, don't block it up completely, okay? We gotta go in there a bit later, too.

Lee Cheol-Jin then asked him.

“Hwang hyung, is there a reason to beat around the bush like this? Why don't we just kill them now and get started right away?”

Hwang Dong-Seok's expression crumpled and glared at the other guy. There was no need for him to maintain the fake smile now. At least that was one less thing to worry about.

“M-my bad.”

Lee Cheol-Jin averted his gaze in fear. Hwang Dong-Seok tsk, tsked.

“What if we start fighting there and the spider wakes up? How will you

mine those mana stones and carry them out then?”

“I’m sorry.”

Joh Gyu-Hwan butted in.

“Hwang hyung, since we are on that subject... Wouldn’t that thing wake up while we try to mine the mana stones? If so, we might end up losing big, you know.”

That creature was strong enough to prey on those already-scary insect-type monsters. If the team got sneak attacked in the middle of the mining operation, the losses they incur would be enormous.

“That is why....”

Hwang Dong-Seok smirked deeply.

“We’re trying to offer those two up as food, aren’t we?”

“Ahh.....”

Joh Gyu-Hwan nodded his head as if he had finally understood the plan.

Right now, no one knew just when the spider would wake up. It could be 10 hours from now, maybe one hour, or it could be a minute later. That was why they had to wake the spider up now and feed it.

No matter how dull that monster happened to be, it’d still wake up from the impact strong enough to cause the entrance to cave in.

Hwang Dong-Seok continued on.

“We mine the mana stones when the spider goes back to sleep with a full belly.”

The permit they got from the Association would last for five days. They still had over four and a half days of leeway, in other words.

They would wait and if the spider didn’t go back to sleep, they would simply dispose of it and mine as much as they could before the Gate closed shut.

They wouldn’t be able to mine everything within the hour, but with Seong Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho no longer in the picture, they should be able to avoid losing out too much.

Wouldn’t that be far more preferable than working under the constant fear? Their safety was the number one priority, after all.

‘Of course, that’s the worst possible scenario....’

If they were lucky, the profit would be divided eight ways, they mine all the mana stones, and even monopolise the spider, too. As an added bonus, those expensive-looking equipment on Yu Jin-Ho's body would become theirs, too!

'That sword and the shield, they have to be worth at least a few hundred million Won.'

They had nothing to lose from this transaction at all.

The corners of Hwang Dong-Seok's lips arched up.

"Block up the entrance, so we can go and take a smoke break. Quick."

"Yes, hyung."

Joh Gyu-Hwan replied as a blinding light began to gather on the tip of his fingers.

"....."

Yu Jin-Ho's gaze was fixed on the sleeping spider. Even his breathing was cautious. He then asked, his expression rigid with fear.

"That spider b*stard, it's not gonna suddenly wake up on us, right?"

"Who knows."

Jin-Woo remained economical with his words. He had more or less figured out what would happen next, but if he said out aloud his thoughts in full, then Yu Jin-Ho might faint from fear.

'Now that I think about it....'

Those words were the first to come out from Yu Jin-Ho's mouth in the past five minutes or so. It seemed that he was really scared right now. And he used to be so talkative, too.

Then, 'it' happened.

Kaboom!!!

With a loud explosion, the entrance of the boss room suddenly caved in.

"Uh, uh?! Huh!! Ahhh!!"

Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly ran towards the entrance.

Unfortunately for him, the entrance was completely blocked up by the fallen rocks. He pushed on with all his might, but not a single stone budged.

Jin-Woo slowly walked over there in the meantime.

“Groan~! Hyung, help me push this!”

Yu Jin-Ho was still giving his all to push the blockade of stones away.

‘He said his name was Joh Gyu-Hwan, huh.’

Before the explosion, there was a flash of light. A Sorcerer ranked C that controlled ‘light’. This was no doubt that b*stard’s handiwork.

Jin-Woo placed his hand on the fallen rocks.

‘If I want to, I can get out of here at any time.’

He could sense the weight of the stones through his hands. They weren’t as heavy as they looked. When he very slightly pushed, he felt the wall tremble gently. Of course, he wasn’t thinking of leaving at all, anyways.

“Ah!”

Yu Jin-Ho stopped pushing at the stones and cried out as if he had finally figured out the truth. His face now reddened in fury, Yu Jin-Ho shifted his gaze over to Jin-Woo.

“Those sons of b*tches are trying to kill us!! They don’t want to share the mana stones, so they blocked the exit and let the spider devour us!”

‘Wow, you figured that out so quickly, Sherlock.’

Jin-Woo was rolling his eyes in his head, but still played along for the time being.

“Looks that way. This is troublesome.”

“Heok!”

Suddenly, Yu Jin-Ho’s reddened complexion paled in an instant. Would that be the look of someone whose blood had gone cold?

No need to ask him what happened, there – the silhouette of the giant monster was oh-so-clearly reflected in Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes.

Jin-Woo turned around.

“Keurruuuk. Keururuk.”

The spider’s sleep had been interrupted by that loud explosion and it was slowly raising its massive body up.

The body the size of a house.

Dozens upon dozens of eyes.

That horrifying mouth.

Eight long, long legs.

Now that it had begun moving for real, it looked far more terrifying than when it was actually in a deep slumber.

“Euh....”

Yu Jin-Ho leaked out a fearful gasp. His body had frozen stiff like a statue.

On the other hand, Jin-Woo kept his sight firmly locked on the spider as he calmly summoned the ‘Poison Fang of Kasaka’ from his Inventory.

‘You’re mine.’

This was the perfect opportunity to test out his enhanced stats.

The Poison Fang of Kasaka appeared in his right hand....

Swiish.

....As if it had always been there.

Jin-Woo gripped the dagger’s hilt tightly. The reason why a Hunter was called a Hunter! From this moment on was when the true hunt would begin.

“H-hang on a second, hyung!!”

However, Yu Jin-Ho swiftly snatched up Jin-Woo’s sleeve just as the latter took a couple of steps towards the spider.

“Wha, what are you trying to do?!”

Yu Jin-Ho’s hands were shaking pretty bad. Jin-Woo used his left thumb to point over his shoulder.

“Obviously, I’m going to hunt that.”

Jin-Woo had been following around Hwang Dong-Seok’s group until now for that purpose.

....In order to monopolise the remaining monsters in the dungeon as soon as Hwang Dong-Seok cut the tail and ran away. This was a splendid opportunity to swallow whole all the experience points and magic crystals.

‘Well, only if the boss hadn’t devoured every monster in this dungeon, that is.’

If that hadn’t been the case, then he would’ve profited a lot more, though. What a missed opportunity that was.

However, Yu Jin-Ho’s facial expression clearly displayed his disbelief, as he had no idea about Jin-Woo’s special constitution.

‘What is this hyung rambling on about?!’

There was something he'd heard from someone somewhere before.

A person would stop thinking rationally the moment he or she received a mental shock beyond their capability to deal with.

The Hunter ranked E standing right in front said that he'd hunt the boss of a C-rank dungeon. If this was not an act of irrationality, that what else could it be?

Yu Jin-Ho asked again, this time looking rather dumbfounded.

“Hyung, you want to hunt that thing? For real?”

Jin-Woo scratched the top of his head, looking somewhat troubled, before replying back with a question of his own.

“What, you want to hunt it, then?”

Part 10. 'Give and Take'

Jin-Woo turned around even before Yu Jin-Ho had the chance to respond. There was no need to listen to his reply, anyway.

Even now, Yu Jin-Ho was barely managing to stand up straight as his legs continued to shudder.

From the get-go, he didn't expect anything from Yu Jin-Ho. Rather, he was relieved that the kid didn't follow after him while saying he'd lend his aid or some such.

‘He'll just get in my way, anyway.’

Jin-Woo slowly approached the spider.

The spider must've discovered the humans' presence as well, as it was changing its direction towards them while shuffling on its eight legs.

It was coming closer.

As if it found the never-before-seen prey rather strange, the spider didn't immediately rush out. Using its thick and long legs to push down on the ground, it inched closer and closer.

“Fuu-woo.”

As that giant monster slowly filled up his entire view, Jin-Woo's breathing became heavy. His heart began thumping faster and faster, too.

Thump-thump, thump-thump.

Jin-Woo controlled his wayward breathing and did his absolute best to calm himself down. He had to remain focused and steady here.

He recalled the exact feelings he felt when he stood at the end of the second floor of the Hapjeong station's instant dungeon.

He then recalled seeing the Poison-Fanged Blue Kasaka for the first time.

However, this giant spider in front of him didn't emit as much pressure as that snake did. Meaning, he could definitely do this.

From the get-go, if he thought that this boss was impossible to clear alone, he wouldn't even have stayed here.

“Keurururuk.”

They had gotten close enough that his face was now reflecting rather clearly on those smooth, jet-black eyes of the spider.

Jin-Woo's own eyes narrowed to a slit.



Chapter 21

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘The exoskeleton looks pretty tough.... Can my dagger even damage it?’

Quite obviously, a dagger would have a shorter reach than a steel longsword Jin-Woo used before. So, if he wanted to cause a deep wound, he needed to strengthen his attacks.

Jin-Woo held the dagger in the reverse grip. He figured that it’d be easier to hurt the monster by holding the blade in this fashion.

“Keuruk.”

Finally, the spider stood before Jin-Woo. Then, it raised its two front legs up and bent them at an angle.

‘What is it trying to do?’

His curiosity lasted only for a brief moment – Jin-Woo’s eyes shot open wide next.

SLAM!!

If he didn’t instinctively tilt his body out of the way, the spider’s legs would’ve penetrated his chest just now. The spider’s legs stabbed into the ground behind him before rising up in the air, its joints folding back up. And from the ends of its legs, pieces of the rocky ground fell.

Jin-Woo sneaked a glance behind him.

The stone floor now had a pretty substantial hole in it.

‘If I got hit by that, it wouldn’t have ended with me feeling a bit of ache in my chest, huh.’

Jin-Woo’s glare sharpened even more. Now was the time he needed to concentrate even harder.

‘It’s coming!’

Swish!

The spider’s legs that initially resembled bullets being fired could now be captured in his eyes.

Left.

He ducked his head lower to evade the spider's left front leg.

Right.

He tilted his body back and let the spider's right leg brush past him, before he took a step closer.

Right.

He evaded the spider's leg that took aim at his head once more, and took two steps forward this time.

Left, right, right, left, right, right, right, left, left.

Slam! Boom! Kwahng! Kaboom! Slam! Boom! Kwahng! Kaboom!

The spider's legs stabbed and destroyed the ground so loudly that his ears actually felt numb from the pain.

Jin-Woo evaded the spider's attacks one by one and got closer and closer to the monster.

Meanwhile, Yu Jin-Ho couldn't quite believe his own eyes.

"Wha-what the hell is up with this guy?!"

Even though he was watching from afar, those attacks were so ferocious that all the hair on the back of his head was standing up.

However, that man was evading them all while standing right in front of the monster, not to mention he was actually getting closer too.

Seeing that efficient and calm movement, Yu Jin-Woo felt a chill run down his backside.

"And he's supposed to be an E rank?!"

There was no freaking way.

If it was him standing there and not Seong Jin-Woo, then he'd be torn into a rag by now. He didn't have any confidence whatsoever to dodge those attacks even once.

However, Jin-Woo was evading them without making a single mistake.

An E rank doing something that a D rank Hunter such as himself couldn't even dream of doing?

There could only be one explanation for this.

'.....He is a fake registrant!!'

Yu Jin-Ho's expression hardened.

Out of those highly talented Hunters, there were a few who could freely control his or her magical energy. If they felt like it, they could easily fake the results and get a lower ranking.

Hunters who got assigned lower ranks than what they should've got in the first place simply by hiding a portion of their magic energy – such people were labelled as 'fake registrants'.

And perhaps more alarmingly, most of those fake registrants carried around rather sinister motives for doing so.

'Such as, that serial killer whose hobby was to enter low ranked dungeons and murder all the other lower ranked Hunters....'

As only those who were present knew what happened inside a dungeon, there was no better place to commit crimes than the world behind the Gates.

Yu Jin-Ho nervously swallowed his saliva. Suddenly, Jin-Woo seemed far scarier than the spider.

'And just why did I have to insist on coming to this place....?'

Yu Jin-Ho felt like he'd break out in sobs at any moment now.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

In the meantime, the spider's attacks poured down without a break.

Jin-Woo dodged all of those attacks and grew confident of his victory. Having decreased the distance between them little by little, the head of the spider was almost within his reach now.

The attack pattern of the spider was rather simple so he could get close to it pretty easily.

'For now, I'll aim for its eyes.'

It was the basics of all basic rules to attack the monster's weak points. So, he decided to attack the eyes of the spider, which looked to be the weakest point in its defences.

'As soon as I stab my dagger in those eyes....!'

Just as Jin-Woo made up his mind....

He suddenly sensed that the spider's attacks had slowed down for some reason.

Swish! Swish!

Was it because his eyes had adjusted fully to the speed of its attacks?

Boom!! Slam!!

No, that wasn't it.

His eyes might've been misled, but his hearing could not be fooled. The loud noises coming from the exploding ground came to him a beat slower than before, since a few seconds ago.

Jin-Woo was already pretty confident of his rather excellent sense of hearing so he could feel this subtle change.

It was then, a certain ominous premonition flickered past in his brain.

When he took a closer look, the muscles around the vicinity of the spider's mouth were trembling quite imperceptibly.

'Why is it trying to open its mouth now?'

Jin-Woo had been getting ready to jump up three metres and reach the head of the spider, but he sensed something ominous was about to happen. Jin-Woo hurriedly changed the direction of his jump from forward to his rear.

And then....

Splash!!

From the mouth of the spider, dirty and turbid liquid spewed out.

Jin-Woo rolled on the floor for a second before regaining his balance. He quickly took a look behind him. The spot on the floor he had been standing only until a second ago was now emitting smoke as it got scorched black.

Sizzle....

Stones on the floor melted away powerlessly.

Jin-Woo swallowed his saliva after seeing that.

'If I had jumped forward just now....'

It wouldn't have been only the floor that was melting right now.

Perhaps sensing that Jin-Woo had been distracted, the spider rushed towards him in no time.

Rustle!!

Jin-Woo raised his head. By then, the spider was already right in front of his eyes.

Swish!

Jin-Woo jumped up to evade the giant spider's legs.

Slam!!

The b*stard's attacks had recommenced.

“D*mn it!!”

After that, Jin-Woo got near the monster's head several times more. Every time he did that, though, he had no choice but to retreat in order to evade that disgusting digestive juice.

When the spider's attack pattern had become two, it became that much harder to deal with it. If he got closer after evading all those snapping legs, the digestive juice spewed out. Its legs attacked again once he had to retreat to a distance because of the juices.

“Sh*t!”

Feeling frustrated now, he decided to attack the legs with his dagger.

Unfortunately, the legs were also covered in that thick exoskeleton and no matter how many times he cut it, he couldn't even nick it once.

Jin-Woo bit his lower lip.

‘This isn't going to work.’

The spider only needed its two front legs to attack him, but on the other hand, he needed to use his entire body to evade them. It was obvious who would tire out first here.

‘Tiredness.’

[Tiredness: 57]

As he thought, his Tiredness Stat was rapidly rising up.

When this Stat hit 70, his speed would decrease, and when it reaches 90, his breathing would become too heavy and it'd become that much harder to freely move about.

He was running out of time.

‘If I want to get closer to it, then.....’

Speed.

His speed was the issue.

Boom!! Boom!! Boom! Boom!!!

‘Wait. Speed, is it?’

As Jin-Woo continued to barely evade each of the legs raining down, a thought entered his head.

‘Yeah, I had that, didn’t I?’

He indeed possessed a single active skill. He had forgotten all about it because there was no need for him to use it, until now.

‘Dash!’

[You’ve activated ‘Skill: Dash’.]

[Your movement speed has increased by 30%. One Mana will be spent every minute during its activation.]

Along with those messages, Jin-Woo’s body became even faster as if a booster had been activated. Evading the spider’s legs had become even easier as a result.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Boom! Boom! Boom!

He swiftly evaded the spider legs slamming down like lightning bolts and in the blink of an eye, arrived before the monster.

Taken by surprise, the spider hurriedly spewed out its digestive juice.

However, thanks to the increase in his speed, his movement had now this certain composure to it. Jin-Woo easily evaded the digestive juice and pounced towards the spider’s head.

Slash!

His dagger slashed at the spider’s eyes.

[‘Effect: Paralysis’ has been activated.]

[The effect has been cancelled due to the high resistance of the target.]

[‘Effect: Bleeding’ has been activated.]

[The target’s stamina will decrease by 1% per second.]

“Yes!”

One of the two special effects the Poison Fang of Kasaka possessed had activated successfully.

Rooooaaaar!!!

The spider roared out and staggered about.

Jin-Woo didn’t miss this opening.

The moment his two feet landed back on the ground, he jumped up again and climbed on the spider’s body to get to the top of its head.

The spider went crazy and swung its legs all over the place, but Jin-Woo wasn't going to let those blind attacks land on him.

Slam! Boom! Kaboom!

Holes continued to appear on the poor, blameless ground instead.

Now standing on top of the spider's head, Jin-Woo began stabbing the eyes of the spider with his dagger.

Stab! Stab! Staaab!!

ROOOAAARR!!!

Stab! Stab!!

ROOAARR?!!

The spider rampaged around this way and that, but Jin-Woo endured till the end and continued to shove his dagger into the head of the spider.

“Keu, keu-ru-ruk!”

The spider began tottering about dangerously. It was obviously getting damaged now. Seeing this, Jin-Woo's hands picked up speed.

And eventually, the huge body of the spider finally tilted to the side.

THUD!!!

However, Jin-Woo didn't stay his hand. No, he kept going at it, until the spider was dead for sure.

Stab! Stab!! Stab!!!

“Keuruk. Keureureureu....”

Along with the final gasps from the spider, several messages popped up in his view.

[You've killed the owner of this dungeon.]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

“I did it!”

While covered from head to toe in the spider blood, Jin-Woo raised his hands up high. Maybe because it was a boss monster, his level jumped up by three.

“Status Window.”

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 21

Class: None

Title: None

HP: 2,600

MP: 391

Tiredness: 0

[Stat]

Strength: 53

Stamina: 30

Agility: 38

Intelligence: 30

Perception: 32

(Available points to distribute: 0)

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max

- Tenacity Lv. 1

Active skills:

- Dash Lv. 1

From level 18, he had jumped up to reach 21 in one go. And that wasn't even the end. Besides the level up messages, something else also popped up as well.

Tti-ring.

['Store: Buy' function is now available with your level having reached 20.]

'Oh, so I can finally spend those Gold things now, eh?'

That was a nice message, for sure. However, now wasn't the right time to relaxedly browse through the Store.

RUMBLE.....

The cave began to shake just a little.

[With the death of the dungeon's owner, the entrance of the dungeon will be destroyed in one hour.]

[Remaining time: 59 minutes 58 seconds.]

Indeed, he had to get out of this place before the Gate closed on him, after all. Browsing through the Store could be done once he was somewhere safe.

Just as Jin-Woo was about to climb down, he spotted something gleaming brightly in the middle of the spider's head.

'Is that an item?'

However, unlike the monsters from the instant dungeon, there was no message about recovered items, nor could he automatically claim them.

What could it be, then?

Jin-Woo pondered briefly before realising what it was.

'Ah, these things have magic crystals, don't they?'

No matter how busy he was, how could he forget something so valuable like that?

Jin-Woo extracted the magic crystal hidden deep inside the head of the dead spider. This was a C-rank magic crystal extracted from the boss monster, so it should at least go for around ten million Won, easy.

As the trophy for his glamorous victory, this would do very nicely.

Jin-Woo lightly jumped down from the dead spider's head.

Tap.

He landed lightly on the ground and turned around, and well, he discovered more gleaming lights, this time coming from the spider's belly.

Not only that, but several of them, even!

Jin-Woo was now feeling rather surprised.

He heard stories of some monsters possessing two, three magic crystals, but there were simply too many lights to say those could all be magic crystals.

'What could they be, then?'

He used the dagger to slice open the belly and continued on to its stomach, which resulted in half-digested remains of the insect-type monsters to pour out to the ground. And the lights were coming from those.

"No way....?!"

Jin-Woo rummaged through the dead insects one at the time.

And just as he suspected, they all possessed their magic crystals. Sure, a few of them had melted down and become smaller than before, but quite a lot of them had survived and remained as good as new.

When he collected the intact ones, he counted over ten.

“I really hit the jackpot this time!”

He came to earn this month’s rent, but at this rate, he’d be earning way more than that.

“H-hyung-nim.”

When Jin-Woo looked back, he saw Yu Jin-Ho there.

“Please, put them in here.”

Yu Jin-Ho then proceeded to carefully tuck in the magic crystals belonging to Jin-Woo inside his equipment bag. , he reached inside the corner of the same bag and pulled out a Thermos, before pouring the flask’s content on its lid.

“Hyung-nim, you must be feeling thirsty. Please, drink this. It’s water.”

Indeed, it was a cold, refreshing cup of water, filled right up to the edge.

‘Why is this kid doing something no one asked him to?’



Chapter 22 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Since Jin-Woo was feeling thirsty anyway, he took the Thermos lid to drink the water. But, his head never stopped tilting in the meantime.

Gulp, gulp.

The water slid down his throat and refreshed him quite nicely.

“Hyung-nim, did you enjoy it?”

Before he had noticed it, the honorific had changed to ‘hyung-nim’, too.

“Mm.... Yeah, it’s refreshing.”

Jin-Woo spoke his earnest opinion and handed the lid over to Yu Jin-Ho.

“And, the things you saw in here....”

Even before Jin-Woo could finish his sentence, Yu Jin-Ho quickly cut in, as if to say that there’s nothing to worry about.

“Of course! I won’t say anything to anyone and take this secret with me to my grave.”

“No, hang on. No need to take it to your grave....”

“But, of course, I will. It’ll be a promise between hyung-nim and I, after all.”

“Well, in that case..... Okay. If you say so.”

“You don’t have to worry about a thing, hyung-nim.”

It wasn’t as if anyone would believe the claim that a rank E solo’ed the boss of a rank C Gate anyway. Still, the kid was saying he’d voluntarily keep his mouth shut, and that would certainly make his life a bit easier.

‘I thought he didn’t know how to take a hint, but he’s pretty quick on the uptake on things like this, eh?’

“Is there anything else you’d like to tell me, hyung-nim?”

“....No, not particularly.”

Well, that sounded a bit suspect, there. Jin-Woo studied the overly-polite mannerism of Yu Jin-Ho and inwardly questioned his motives, before coming

to a conclusion of his own.

‘Well, yeah. From Yu Jin-Ho’s perspective, I did save his life and all.’

Wasn’t it the most obvious thing in the world that you’d become really courteous and humble towards a person who saved your life?

When looked at that way, his attitude made more sense. The reality of the situation was slightly different from that, though.

Rumble....

The dungeon shook around for a bit again before its tremors stopped. That tremor was the reminder that the Gate would close in a little while.

The tremors would progressively get worse as time went by, and just before the Gate closed, it’d morph into a full-blown earthquake.

“Let’s get out of here.”

“Yes, hyung-nim.”

Jin-Woo began walking towards the entrance.

Before they reached it, though, there was a sudden flash of light, and the rocks blocking up the entrance collapsed.

Boom!

Afterwards, Hwang Dong-Seok and his goons rushed into the boss room. As soon as spotting the dead spider behind Jin-Woo, their expressions became dumbfounded.

“What the hell?! It’s really dead?!”

“Did those two hunt it?”

“That spider must’ve been nothing much, even with that big body and all.”

“Well, if a rank D and a rank E managed to kill it, then....”

“Hwang hyung, what should we do now?”

Hwang Dong-Seok scratched his chin while gazing at Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho.

With the spider dead, the Gate would soon close. It’d be too late to start mining the mana stones now. They hadn’t even finished getting ready, yet the remaining time was now less than an hour.

It was time for the ‘plan b’. So, he loudly called out to Yu Jin-Ho.

“Yu Jin-Ho!!”

Yu Jin-Ho flinched and took a step back. His face was full of nervous tension.

An oily smile floated up on Hwang Dong-Seok's face.

"I thought your gear looked real eye-catching, so we did a background check on ya, and it turns out that you're a son of a real bigshot. The son of the Yujin Construction's owner, Yu Myung-Han, no less."

"S-so what?"

"We'll give you a chance. I've got some stuff to discuss with your old man, you see. However, it'd get real troublesome for us if the matters of this place get out. So, if you wish to live, you better become our accomplice."

"An accomplice?"

Hwang Dong-Seok pointed at Jin-Woo with his chin.

Being on the receiving end of that disgusting stare, Jin-Woo's forehead creased for a second.

"Kill Seong Jin-Woo."

"What?!"

Yu Jin-Ho freaked out. And Hwang Dong-Seok chuckled as if he found that expression rather funny.

The thing was, he used his phone to do an online search and found out that Yu Jin-Ho's father was the owner of the top construction company in the country. Seeing that, a sinister scheme formed in his head.

He'd film the scene of Yu Jin-Ho killing Seong Jin-Woo and then, under the pretext of keeping his mouth shut, blackmail Yu Myung-Han.

'The known wealth of Yu Myung-Han is supposedly around 10 trillion Won, wasn't it? (TL: Almost \$9 billion)

He might be able to reel in several times more money than mining these mana stones if he played his cards right.

"That's the only way you'll leave this place alive. As long as you kill Seong Jin-Woo with your own hands, we'll let you live. If not, we kill both of you."

Hwang Dong-Seok's eyes became very hostile right away.

"What are you hesitating for? No one will know what happens inside a dungeon, anyway. Wait, could it be that you're scared of a rank E, even though you're a rank D?"

Yu Jin-Ho turned his head to his side. Jin-Woo shrugged his shoulders as his answer. He was implying that Yu Jin-Ho should do whatever he felt like.

With a determined expression, Yu Jin-Ho unsheathed the sword on his hips.

‘Finally, he made up his mind, huh.’

A smile formed on Hwang Dong-Seok’s mouth. Unfortunately for him, his expectation was not met. Still holding that sword, Yu Jin-Ho stood alongside Jin-Woo.

“Ho-oh? So, you wanna team up with that guy and fight us, is that right?”

Hwang Dong-Seok muttered softly. A scion of a well-to-do family got lucky and killed a rank C boss, and it looked like his ego had become bloated somewhat as a result.

Joh Gyu-Hwan whispered from the side.

“Hyung, what should we do now?”

Hwang Dong-Seok lowered his voice so both Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho wouldn’t be able to hear him.

“For now, take care of Seong Jin-Woo first. We gotta hold onto that potential moneybag. Our losses today are pretty substantial after all.”

“Okay, will do.”

Joh Guy-Hwan’s hands began emitting bright light next.

Seeing this, Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

‘In the end, they want to have a go, huh.’

This would be his very first time fighting against other Hunters. However, he wasn’t planning to go easy on these b*stards that have aimed for his life several times already.

...But then, this happened.

Tti-ring.

There was that mechanical beep again.

[An Emergency Quest has been generated.]

‘An Emergency Quest?!’

Jin-Woo raised his head.

He didn’t even say anything about wanting to look at the contents, yet the quest window spread out before his eyes without his consent.

Now that was a first.

[Emergency Quest: Kill all the enemies!]

There are lifeforms holding murderous intentions towards the ‘Player’. Kill them all in order to secure your own safety. If you do not follow this instruction, a corresponding penalty will be given.

The number of enemies left to kill: 8

The number of killed enemies: 0

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened wider.

‘In order to complete the quest, Hwang Dong-Seok and his teammates must all die?!’

It was then, a beam of light flashed right before his eyes. The light beams left Joh Gyu-Hwan’s hands and flew straight at Jin-Woo.

Boom!!

Flung away by the explosion, Jin-Woo’s figure flew at a frightening speed and slammed into the cave wall.

Slam!!

A portion of the wall collapsed and fell on top of Jin-Woo.

Tumble...

“Hyung-nim!!”

Yu Jin-Ho froze on the spot from surprise.

“Don’t sweat over the dead guy and why don’t you come over here?”

Hwang Dong-Seok beckoned with his fingers.

Yu Jin-Ho stared at the spot where Jin-Woo was. Just like what Hwang Dong-Seok had implied, Jin-Woo wasn’t moving an inch as he remained buried under the debris.

“You... you murderers...”

Tears pooled around Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes.

Hwang Dong-Seok and his dongsaengs simply giggled at the label of ‘murderers’ thrown at their way. Well, that was the truth, to begin with, anyway. Just how many died by their hands inside many other dungeons?

While they were looking at Yu Jin-Ho and continued to smile, Jin-Woo was under the pile of rubble, doubting his own eyes at the moment.

The contents of the quest were slowly changing, that was why.

[Emergency Quest: Kill all the enemies!]

There are lifeforms holding murderous intentions towards the '&*@##'. Kill them all in order to secure your own safety. If you do not follow this instruction, #\$\$%^%\$#\$%^!&*#\$\$%^\$.

The number of enemies left to kill: 8

The number of killed enemies: 0

A few words suddenly became illegible, before changing their shapes.

[Emergency Quest: Kill all the enemies!]

There are lifeforms holding murderous intentions towards you. Kill them all in order to secure your own safety. If you do not follow this instruction, your heart will cease functioning.

The number of enemies left to kill: 8

The number of killed enemies: 0

What a clear-cut threat that was.

If he didn't finish the quest as intended, 'it' would kill him, instead.

'Kill if I don't want to be killed, is that it?'

The contents were pretty shocking, but Jin-Woo's fluster didn't remain for long.

No, his flustered mind rapidly morphed into one of relief. Even he found it hard to believe, but that was the truth.

There was this fear that always lingered in his mind, starting from the day these quests popped up in front of his eyes alongside Stat values and such.

'What would happen to me if this mysterious phenomenon suddenly stopped?'

What if all these things only happened as a coincidence, and they could end at any given moment?

Such fear always accompanied him.

However, through this Emergency Quest, the truth became clear.

Things happening to him were not a coincidence nor were they some weird goodwill from someone. If the quest was generated by something holding some form of goodwill, then it should've just said "***Overcome this danger***", and not threaten him to kill him as a penalty.

The System had a clear purpose.

It was either ‘Make Seong Jin-Woo strong’ or ‘Need a strong Seong Jin-Woo’.

‘And, depending on the situation, me who could kill other Hunters at the drop of a hat, even....’

He could glean such intentions from the System now. Jin-Woo felt reassured by that revelation.

‘What a relief that....’

....That, it was not a coincidence.

....That, it definitely had a goal.

Whenever he found himself in danger, he yearned to be stronger. He so dearly wished to stop living the life where it was no different from dangling precariously on the edge of a cliff.

But, on that fateful day, during the most dangerous moments of his life, his opportunity came.

The goal of this System and Jin-Woo’s wishes lined up perfectly.

‘The System is using me, and I’m using the System.’

That was all there was to it.

As long as there was an end goal, a purpose, this phenomenon would never suddenly vanish from his eyes.

Jin-Woo slowly got up from the rubble.

[HP: 1360/2600]

As expected of a magic spell shot by a rank C Hunter; it was only a single hit, yet his HP had almost halved. There was no more room left to take it easy now.

Intense malice filled up Jin-Woo’s eyes.

He began walking towards Hwang Dong-Seok.

“What the heck?”

Hwang Dong-Seok and his goons had been surrounding the scared Yu Jin-Ho, so they ended up discovering Jin-Woo rather belatedly.

“What’s going on here? He’s still alive.”

“But, Gyu-Hwan hyung looks like a dead fish, though?”

“What an embarrassment this is. He’s a measly rank E, you know.”

Hwang Dong-Seok scratched his chin.

“Hey, Gyu-Hwan-ah, why didn’t you finish him properly the first time?”

Joh Gyu-Hwan’s face reddened somewhat.

“Yeah.... I should’ve.”

But, this wasn’t right.

He really did pour his all with that shot.

He had spent over a third of his overall magical energy, yet how could this kid stand back up? Could the attack not connect properly? But then, there wouldn’t have been such a loud explosion if that was the case.

Lots of questions formed in his head, but there was no time to ask them.

Because, Jin-Woo opened his mouth first.

“Since you’re playing around with people’s lives....”

The eyes of Hwang Dong-Seok’s group were now fixed to Jin-Woo. He came to a stop in front of them.

Yu Jin-Ho flinched in surprise, but the reactions of other Hunters were rather subdued. Some of them even began smirking in derision.

Jin-Woo spoke with a dry voice.

“...You’ve all sufficiently resolved yourselves, right?”

Hwang Dong-Seok let off a snort after hearing that.

“What the hell is this fool even saying?”

“Hyung-nim, let me handle this kid.”

A Hunter with tiny little eyes approached Jin-Woo and placed his arms around the latter’s neck.

“It looks like you Mister hasn’t really figured the situation out yet, but the thing is.... Eh?”

The expression of the tiny eyes became weirder and weirder as he strengthened his arms.

‘...What the hell? Why can’t I pull him down?’

He tried to perform a headlock with his physical strength, but no matter how hard he pulled, Jin-Woo’s upper body showed no sign of budging.

Wasn’t this b*stard supposed to be only a rank E?!

Cold sweat formed on the forehead of the tiny eyes.

‘How could he be this strong...’

It happened then.

Slice.

The head of the tiny eyes fell to the ground.

Thud.

“J-Joon-Tae!!”

Hwang Dong-Seok’s eyes trembled like an earthquake.

“Wha-what the hell?!”

“That knife, just when did he?!”

“Where did he get that?!”

Hwang Dong-Seok and his goons quickly took several steps back and yanked their weapons out. Jin-Woo’s hand was already holding the ‘Poison Fang of Kasaka’.

Blood dripped from the tip of the blade.

Tti-ring.

[The number of enemies left to kill: 7]

[The number of killed enemies: 1]

‘Seven left.’



Chapter 23 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo swept his gaze at Hwang Dong-Seok and his group like a predator eyeing his prey.

Hwang Dong-Seok swallowed his saliva. He was already pretty surprised by the dagger appearing in that man's hands, but more importantly, Park Joon-Tae's death shook him to the core rather greatly.

'How did an E-rank Hunter kill a D rank in one hit?!'

He had no idea what kind of a trick the other guy used, but from now on, underestimating his opponent was definitely forbidden. No, he had to be very meticulous here. Hwang Dong-Seok gave a signal with his eyes to his side.

'Gyu-Hwan-ah, hit him one more time.'

Joh Gyu-Hwan lightly nodded his head.

This time, he wouldn't make the same mistake again!

Joh Gyu-Hwan told himself such as lights began gathering in his hands again. But, even before the arrows of light could leave his fingertips, Jin-Woo appeared right in front of Joh Gyu-Hwan first.

"Uh? Huh?!"

Joh Gyu-Hwan's jaw hit the floor.

The light in Jin-Woo's eyes gleamed coldly.

'You first, the magic-type Hunter who possesses strong firepower but a weak body.'

Jin-Woo had finished his calculations already.

The dagger stabbed straight through Joh Gyu-Hwan's neck.

Stab!

"Keo-heok!!"

Joh Gyu-Hwan tried to cover the hole in his neck and collapsed to the floor.

Plop.

"Kill him!!"

“Uwaaahhh!!”

With that as a signal, the Hunters around him rushed towards Jin-Woo at once. Jin-Woo raised all his senses to the maximum and calmly focused on the movements of his enemies.

All sounds disappeared and time slowed down. The Agility Stat and its 38 points had begun displaying its worth. He then blocked or evaded swords, spears and arrows being thrust at him from the very short distance.

The eyes of the Hunters became incredibly large.

‘H-how can an E rank move like this?!’

‘Too fast!!’

‘I can’t hit him at all!’

The complexions of the Hunters became ashen.

Indeed, speed was a subjective thing. To their eyes, Jin-Woo’s movement was absurdly fast. Meanwhile, Jin-Woo waded in among the Hunters and calmly cut into their vital spots, one at the time.

[‘Effect: Paralysis’ has been activated.]

[‘Effect: Bleeding’ has been activated.]

[‘Effect: Paralysis’ has been activated.]

The special effects of the Poison Fang of Kasaka continued to activate and the Hunters all fell into a quagmire of confusion.

“I-I can’t move my body!! Uwaah?!”

“Magic?! Was that magic?!”

“You son of a b*tch!!”

[‘Effect: Bleeding’ has been activated.]

[‘Effect: Paralysis’ has been activated.]

[‘Effect: Paralysis’ has been activated.]

“Keok!!”

“Wha-what the hell is this guy’s real identity?!”

“Uwaaahk!!”

Screams resounded out without a break from here and there. Five Hunters surrounding Jin-Woo all crumpled down to the floor in no time at all.

Plop.

Plop.

Tti-ring.

[The number of enemies left to kill: 1]

[The number of killed enemies: 7]

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the last remaining survivor.

And that was none other the big bearded man, Hwang Dong-Seok. He discarded his shield as an expression of determination formed on his face.

He then loudly roared out.

“Uuuhhhhhhaaaa!!”

Hwang Dong-Seok the kicked the ground and rushed forward.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!!!

His mind raced as he ran forward. He was a Tanker, and was considered one of the top even within the C rank.

His opponent most likely was a damage dealer.

Although that man seemed to be very agile, judged from his quick movements, there was no way he'd possess enough power to penetrate past Hwang Dong-Seok's 'Reinforcement' skill.

‘You can't fatally wound me with a measly little dagger!’

The one to be crushed when they collide would be Seong Jin-Woo, instead!

Their distance closed up in the blink of an eye, and Hwang Dong-Seok tackled with his shoulder.

“Reinforcement!!”

But then, his entire world seemed to spin around, and before he realised how, he was staring at the ceiling of the dungeon.

SLAM!!

His brain shook hard and a strong impact force was transmitted into his entire body.

He wanted to get up, but his body didn't listen to his commands. Hwang Dong-Seok tried very hard, but eventually gave up and lay sprawled on the ground.

“Cough!!”

He coughed out a mouthful of blood.

‘Did he... Did he throw me down to the floor?!’

Did Hwang Dong-Seok really lose in the contest of strength?

In a battle of physical strength?!

“How can a measly rank E....”

He was now so sure that something had gone terribly awry somewhere.

Five rank Cs and three rank Ds were knocked down in the blink of an eye. There was no way this b*stard was a rank E.

Jin-Woo stood next to Hwang Dong-Seok.

The bearded man couldn’t even properly move his body. His fate was quite obvious now.

If this was a sports match or a spar, then this battle would’ve ended right here. Too bad for the bearded man, though, Jin-Woo wasn’t planning to stop there.

“W-wait a minute.”

Hwang Dong-Seok raised his hand first.

“Le-let me go! If you, you want m-money, I’ll give it to ya. As long as you spare me....”

“Three times.”

Jin-Woo’s voice remained cold.

“Aren’t you a bit shameless, asking to be spared by someone you tried to kill three times already?”

First, by blocking the exit of the boss room.

Second, ordering Yu Jin-Ho to kill him.

And finally, Joh Gyu-Hwan’s magic.

Hwang Dong-Seok tried to kill Jin-Woo these three times – even after excluding the battle just now.

‘Give and take’.

When he returned alive from the underground temple, Jin-Woo resolved himself to return as much as he had received.

....Whether it was kindness or hostility.

He’d repay the acts of ill intents with an equal amount of malice. There would be no room for negotiation.

Realising that begging for his life wouldn't work, Hwang Dong-Seok's eyes shot wide open and foam bubbled around his mouth.

“You, you!! You think you’ll be okay after you laid your hands on me like this?! Do you have any idea who my younger brother is.....”

Shatter!

Hwang Dong-Seok could no longer continue with his words after his neck was broken.

“Keok.”

The whites of the bearded man's eyes were showing now.

Tti-ring.

[The number of enemies left to kill: 0]

[The number of killed enemies: 8]

Finally, this quest had come to an end.

“Whew-woo....”

Jin-Woo spat out a long sigh containing a myriad of emotions and lifted his hand away from Hwang Dong-Seok's head.

His gaze then stopped on his hands.

He might have one-sidedly bulldozed past his opponents, but for someone who had fought to the death against eight other people, his hands remained remarkably steady.

‘Is it okay to be like this?’

Jin-Woo placed his hand on his chest and felt for his beating heart.

Thump, thump, thump....

His heart was beating as calmly as if he had been taking a stroll.

‘What if.....’

For the first time ever, he began to think that, seeing the System wasn't the only change taking place within him after he returned alive from the underground temple.

However, his musings had to be kept brief. Soon, the familiar beep entered his head.

Tti-ring.

[You have completed ‘Emergency Quest: Kill all the enemies’.]

[Completion rewards are now available.]

[Would you like to confirm the rewards?] (Y/N)

He was half-expecting this to happen, and sure enough, he now had received rewards. Jin-Woo didn't even hesitate and chose 'yes'.

'Confirm.'

Tti-ring.

[The following rewards are available.]

Reward 1. Full recovery of the current physical condition

Reward 2. Ten additional Stat points

Reward 3. Skill: 'Intimidation'

'Not only ten points, but even a skill, too?'

Jin-Woo's eyes widened from the huge amount of available rewards. All those Stat points were one thing, but this new skill stole away almost all of his attention.

'If I didn't possess the Dash skill when fighting that spider.....'

The only reason why he managed to hunt the boss down was because of 'Dash'. There was no need to mention how important a skill was during a battle. It was not for nothing that a Rune stone, with which a person could learn a brand new skill, cost several hundreds of millions of Won.

Jin-Woo immediately checked this skill called 'Intimidation' out.

'Show me the third reward.'

Tti-ring.

[Skill: Intimidation Lv. 1]

Active skill.

Mana required to activate: 100.

Can render a designated target in a state of fear for one minute by using your powerful aura. Multiple targets can be selected.

Effect 'Fear': All Stats -50%

Although it was only active for a short time, it was still a rare skill that could decrease the opponent's Stats by a substantial amount.

Of course, exactly like other effects, if the opponent's resistance was high enough it would fail to activate. But, if it did work, then Jin-Woo thought that

taking care of his enemies, regardless of who it was, would become as easy as pie.

And since it could be used against multiple opponents, the scope of this skill's usefulness seemed limitless, too.

'It's really good, isn't it?'

The rewards were just as good as the potential penalty was as bad.

'Hang on a sec.... Now that I think about it, it's not like that, is it?'

After all, his life was at stake here. And, was that all?

Jin-Woo took a look around him.

He frowned deeply after taking in the gruesome sight.

He had witnessed enough deaths of other Hunters, but even then, he'd never really get used to looking at the corpses of other people.

This was what this quest asked of him, though. But, for a quest that asked for many lives as its completion requirement, the rewards handed out felt rather cheap and not quite enough.

Well, even if it weren't for the quest, he'd still have to fight against Hwang Dong-Seok and his crew in the end, but still.

'And they say, a man's greed knows no bounds....'

Jin-Woo shook his head wryly.

It was then, the cave shook around once more.

RUMBLE.....

The tremor had become stronger than before. It was now the time to get out of the dungeon. But, before he could do that, there was something else he needed to take care of first.

And that happened to be Yu Jin-Ho. Jin-Woo's gaze drifted toward him.

Yu Jin-Ho had been pitifully frozen solid in his spot until then, and flinched rather grandly before hurriedly lowering his gaze to the ground.

'Now, what should I do with this kid....?'

Of course, he wasn't thinking of harming Yu Jin-Ho. There was no need to, nor was there a reason to do so, either.

However, if the events of this place got leaked out to the rest of the world, then there was a good chance that his life would become inconvenienced in a variety of ways.

‘So, I guess I should make sure he doesn’t talk, huh.’

Just as he thought that course of action would be for the best, Yu Jin-Ho rapidly ran towards him, knelt down, and bowed his head.

“Hyung-nim, please spare me!!”

“...”

Suddenly, Jin-Woo felt that the following conversation should unfold a lot more smoothly than his initial expectation.

Yu Jin-Ho was shaking like a wet dog. His complexion was pale, as well. Well, eight people died in the blink of an eye right in front of his face, so that was par for the course, really.

One of the most important tools in dealing with people was this – the ‘fear’. So, Jin-Woo decided to use this situation to his advantage.

“Why should I?”

“Hiiick!!”

Jin-Woo thought that he heard the sound of Yu Jin-Ho’s heart falling to the floor just now.

His guilty conscience that asked, ***“Was that too much?”*** only lasted for a second, though.

“If, if you want money, I can speak to my father, and....”

“Who do you think I am?!”

Jin-Woo’s expression crumpled unpleasantly.

Sure, he did grow up impoverished, but that didn’t mean he was corrupt enough to hold a person’s life hostage and extort money that way.

Wouldn’t he be no different from Hwang Dong-Seok if he did that?

“I-I’m truly sorry.”

If it weren’t for Yu Jin-Ho’s current state being absolutely terrified, Jin-Woo would have smacked the back of the kid’s head or something by now. He was holding back only because it looked like Yu Jin-Ho might keel over from a heart attack if he really did that.

Confirming how displeased Jin-Woo’s expression was, Yu Jin-Ho nervously swallowed some dried saliva.

‘Now that I think about it, even back when Hwang Dong-Seok offered

him money..... Could he have abandoned all material desires and now only walks the path of bloodshed and murder?!'

Jin-Woo's image inside Yu Jin-Ho's head was being solidified in an even weirder direction.

However, it was too early to draw a conclusion yet.

'If that was the case, then why did hyung-nim extract those magic crystals?'

Not too long ago, Jin-Woo personally went and extracted all those magic stones, even going so far to dig through the spider's entrails.

Sure, it was used in a variety of ways, such as a source of high-density energy, as a raw material in manufacturing magic tools, etc. – but, to a Hunter, a magic crystal was simply another word for 'money'.

Yu Jin-Ho's mind spun at a quicker pace.

'So, that's how it was!'

Those crystals were the 'prize of blood'.

They were the deserved prize he earned through staining his hands with blood, and that was why he didn't mind digging through the stomach of a dead monster.

He'd not show a hint of mercy to those enemies who tried to harm him, but he was also the practitioner of the way of the blood. Meaning, he did not want anything to do with the monetary gain that he hadn't earned with his own hands.

'And I tried to buy his benevolence with money, so of course, he'd get p*ssed off at me....'

In that case, what Yu Jin-Ho needed here wasn't 'father's money', but the 'deserved profit' that could be earned if he managed to walk out of here alive.

When he sneaked a glance, Jin-Woo's expression was still distorted somewhat. Yu Jin-Ho quickly continued on with his words.

"Hyung-nim, if you spare me, then I'll hand over all the profit earned in this dungeon to you."

"Mm?"

As expected, Jin-Woo immediately displayed his interest.

"Please, think about it, hyung-nim. If you monopolise the profit meant for ten people after nine others are killed, others would definitely start

questioning you.”

From Yu Jin-Ho’s perspective, Jin-Woo was, without a doubt, a fake registrant. Not only that, a highly-skilled fake registrant who enjoyed murdering people!

Obviously, he’d not want the attention of other folks landing on him.

“So what?”

“On the flip side, if we both walk out of here alive, then according to the contract, all the magic crystals from this dungeon belongs to me. Even if all the other teammates had died, since you don’t get a share in the first place, no one would suspect you.”

Of course, there’s was no way that Yu Jin-Ho would be suspected of foul play here. Well, his father owned one of the country’s top-ranked companies, after all.

The potential profit he’d earn from selling off the magic crystals would be like a pocket change to him.

“This money is something hyung-nim totally deserves. I mean, this is your deserved reward for saving me and getting rid of Hwang Dong-Seok and his lackeys, wouldn’t you agree?”



Chapter 24 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Yu Jin-Ho empathised the words ‘deserved reward’ for some reason.

‘Yeah, for sure.....’

Certainly, that method was the safest way to dispose of the magic crystals.

These crystals no longer had any owners. No matter how avaricious Hwang Dong-Seok was, he still couldn’t take them to his grave. That left just one person, Yu Jin-Ho, as the sole claimant to the rights of these crystals.

However, such a guy was saying that he’d voluntarily offer them up.

Jin-Woo didn’t want anything to do with them if they were to be taken away forcibly, but.....

‘But, there’s no reason for me to refuse things that are willingly entering my pockets, no?’

Without his help, Yu Jin-Ho would either have been killed by now, or get dragged around as a hostage, instead. When looked at that way, the claims of them being ‘deserved reward’ made some sense.

Seeing that Jin-Woo’s expression lighten up, Yu Jin-Ho was now sure of his guesses being on the money.

‘As I thought, the magic crystals are the deserved reward of blood for hunting down Hwang Dong-Seok and his gang, so he’s not going to say no here.’

The meaning of the word ‘deserved’ as imagined by these two men had what you’d call a significant difference, but they had no way of knowing that.

“Okay.”

As soon as Jin-Woo agreed, Yu Jin-Ho’s face brightened up in an instant. Hell, Yu Jin-Ho was even feeling a bit awestruck by how steadfast Jin-Woo was with his personal beliefs.

However, Jin-Woo’s face became emotionless next.

“However, how do I trust you?”

Jin-Woo had recalled his initial goal once more.

He wasn't trying to scare the kid so he could line his pockets in the first place. No, he started this intimidation antics so he could avoid being inconvenienced later down the line.

“How can I betray you, hyung-nim, who saved my neck multiple times already?”

“You could ignore our promise and just yap on to anyone you meet, no?”

Actually, it wouldn't be too big of a hassle if the kid did that. Killing Hwang Dong-Seok and his goons were 100% acts of self-defence, after all.

There were eight of them, not to mention they were fully armed as well. Heck, they even attacked first with a powerful magic spell, too.

Laws had changed ever since the emergence of the Hunters, so Jin-Woo knew that he'd walk away scot-free only with that much justification.

Jin-Woo wanted to let things die down quietly in this manner. And Yu Jin-Ho's help would be needed to facilitate that. There might be a slight 'problem' with how he went about asking for that help, but as far as the end result was concerned, this was the best method available.

“So? Speak up.”

Jin-Woo stared at the other guy with eyes that demanded answers.

Yu Jin-Ho formed a determined, dignified expression.

“I will never do something so cowardly, hyung-nim. Especially for someone who has saved my life.”

‘Hang on a minute....’

Jin-Woo thought that he had seen those determined eyes from somewhere, before realising that they were rather similar to back when Yu Jin-Ho refused the 'suggestion' of Hwang Dong-Seok to become their accomplice not too long ago.

‘This kid.... He's being serious.’

The 'Give and Take'.

When his life was hanging in the balance, Yu Jin-Ho chose to stand with Jin-Woo. He trusted Jin-Woo and tried to go up against eight other Hunters.

That was why Jin-Woo decided to trust Yu Jin-Ho, at least once.

Of course, not right away, and not quite like this.... Maybe, after planting the fear of god into the kid first.

Jin-Woo reached down and picked up Hwang Dong-Seok's discarded

shield.

“Hmm. The back of my head is still aching from Hwang Dong-Seok’s sneak hit, you know.”

Jin-Woo pretended to study the shield from this way and that, before powerfully flinging it towards the wall of the cave.

Kaboom!!!

More than half of the shield got buried deep inside that wall.

Cold sweat drops dripped down Yu Jin-Ho’s face as he nervously swallowed his saliva.

“I hope that ‘my dongsaeng’ isn’t going to disappoint me, too.”

“B-b-but, of course, hyung-nim.”

It happened then; the dungeon began shaking much harder this time.

RUMMMMMBBLLLEEE....

Their time was clearly running out. Jin-Woo never held any thoughts of harming Yu Jin-Ho from the get-go, so he figured that this much would be enough.

So, he ordered Yu Jin-Ho.

“Collect all the magic crystals. We’re leaving.”

“Thank you very much, hyung-nim!!”

Yu Jin-Ho stood back up and bowed his waist 90 degrees. A smile found its way back onto his face, too. While Yu Jin-Ho went around to fill up the bag, Jin-Woo began rummaging through Hwang Dong-Seok’s pockets.

‘I gotta get paid what’s mine, too.’

He was promised 2 million Won for the day’s work. And he couldn’t afford to let a single cent slip by.

Hwang Dong-Seok’s wallet was filled with lots of fifty thousand Won bills. When he counted, there were 45 of them. Just over two million, in other words.

The bearded man promised to pay in cash as soon as the raid was over, so he must’ve had them ready, just in case. Because, well, he wouldn’t have been able to cut the tail all the time.

“Thanks for the pay.”

Jin-Woo said the words of thanks to no one in particular and left the boss

room first.

Yu Jin-Ho was almost finished packing up the magic crystals, but then, belatedly noticed that Jin-Woo had disappeared, and hurriedly began searching for him.

“H-hyung-nim?”

All he found were the rapidly-cooling corpses of the Hunters that lost their lives to Jin-Woo.

“Hiick!!”

Yu Jin-Ho and his deathly-pale complexion hurriedly chased after Jin-Woo as if he was scared of being alone.

The agent from the Association’s Investigation Department swiftly arrived at the location of the Gate.

The procedure to follow when there were casualties during a raid was rather simple. The remaining survivors only had to report the matter to the Association and let the investigators do their job. That was all.

The investigator for today was a strict-looking aunty.

“And your names are?”

“It’s Seong Jin-Woo.”

“My name is Yu Jin-Ho, ma’am.”

Hunters dying inside dungeons happened pretty much every single day so this procedure was more like a formality at this point. To be more precise, it was now more to do with record keeping, actually.

That was, if there were nothing to be suspicious about.

“...So, every rank C Hunter in the raid team was killed, yet how did one rank D and one rank E manage to escape unhurt?”

The investigator questioned the duo while adjusting her glasses. Her glaring eyes narrowed to a slit.

‘Now normally, it’d be the weakest Hunter in the team to die first, most of the time. Yet...’

She intensely scrutinised the two men before discovering something particular and raised her voice.

“Oh my gosh!!”

Her eyes began sparkling as she approached closer.

“Isn’t this the longsword ‘Kalion’ that’s been launched recently by the Maya Company? Oh my gosh, isn’t this one of the Royal Series shields crafted by the one and only master craftsman Gredos?”

Yu Jin-Ho’s face brightened immediately.

“You seemed to be well versed in weapons, ma’am!”

“Eii, it’s nothing to feel proud about, really. No, it’s only on the level of browsing through the catalogues every now and then. Ohohohohoho!”

The price of the longsword was around ₩700,000,000, while the shield was around ₩500,000,000. (TL: \$620,000 and \$443,000, respectively.)

These powerful armaments were crafted with magic crystals costing well over hundreds of millions of Won, as well as other expensive materials, and they were capable of boosting the abilities of a rank D Hunter past that of a rank C.

With this revelation, the agent began imagining the events that had taken place inside the dungeon.

‘With these types of armaments....’

A lone rank D Hunter managing to hunt down the boss monster seemed rather feasible now, even when considering that all the rank C Hunters had been annihilated along the way.

‘And that rank E probably hid in a corner somewhere and barely saved his life.’

Of course, the reality was opposite of that, but....

In any case, she came to a conclusion.

The odds of a man with enough financial wherewithal to purchase such armaments stabbing his comrades in the back for a handful of magic crystals were low at best.

On top of that, it was also impossible for a rank E to do anything to several rank C Hunters too, so the deaths of Hwang Dong-Seok and seven others could only be chalked up to an unfortunate accident.

“I understand what happened now.”

The investigator closed the case file with a satisfied face.

“The investigation will conclude with this, so you may go home now. I’m sure it had been a difficult day so far, so thank you for taking the time out

to aid us with the investigation.”

“Thank you for your hard work.”

Jin-Woo said goodbyes on behalf of both men.

The investigator and her car left just as quickly as they had arrived.

“You also worked hard, hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho bent his waist 90 degrees once more. Even after they had exited the Gate, Yu Jin-Ho’s overly polite attitude didn’t change.

He must’ve been pretty darn scared, even now.

Jin-Woo inwardly clicked his tongue.

“Yeah, you too.”

“Well, I haven’t done much anyway. You did most of the work, hyung-nim. Oh, here are your magic crystals.”

Yu Jin-Ho very courteously handed the bag over to Jin-Woo with two hands. And indeed, the bag was filled to the brim with magic crystals.

The highest price a magic crystal from a rank C Gate could fetch was around ten million Won. Even the smallest ones fetched several millions.

Jin-Woo’s eyes scanned the number of crystals and he inwardly cried out in elation.

‘Just how much will these....?’

He tried so hard to suppress a grin from breaking out on his face.

It was then, a drop of water suddenly fell inside the bag.

Splash, splosh.

Jin-Woo raised his head.

They were raindrops falling from the sky that had been gradually getting darker as the afternoon rolled by.

‘It was a good thing... sending her off with an umbrella.’

Jin-Woo formed a subtle smile while thinking about his little sister.

Later in the evening.

Jin-Woo summoned his Status Window as soon as he arrived back home.

“Stats!!”

[Stats]

Strength: 53

Stamina: 30

Agility: 38

Intelligence: 30

Perception: 32

(Available points to distribute: 10)

The ten points he got as a reward from the emergency quest still remained, waiting. His entire body was itching from the desire to spend them.

If he wanted to earn them through Daily Quests, then he'd have to spend the next three days and still had to find one more point from somewhere, and if he wanted to earn them through levelling up, then he had to raise it by two.

'The priority is with Agility, then Perception next.'

He spent 7 points on Agility, and the rest 3 on Perception.

[Stats]

Strength: 53

Stamina: 30

Agility: 45

Intelligence: 30

Perception: 35

(Available points to distribute: 0)

"Okay."

His Stat values looked more even now.

Agility had almost caught up with Strength, and Perception was already at 35. Once Agility's values got closer to Strength, he was planning to increase Stamina next.

Leaving alone the Stat of Intelligence and its unknown uses, for the time being, he wanted to raise all of his other Stats as uniformly as possible.

"Should I check out today's results?"

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 21

Class: None

Title: Slaughterer of Wolves

HP: 2600

MP: 390

Tiredness: 0

[Stat]

Strength: 53

Stamina: 30

Agility: 45

Intelligence: 30

Perception: 35

(Available points to distribute: 0)

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max
- Tenacity Lv. 1

Active skills:

- Dash Lv. 1
- Intimidation Lv. 1

The level that had risen up by three and the new skill ‘Intimidation’ caught his attention the most. And his Stats also had received a healthy boost from the ten extra points.

These alone would qualify today’s earning as quite spectacular, but there were more, weren’t there?

‘Two million Won I got for today’s work, and....’

And, all those magic crystals filling up the bag, as well.

Jin-Woo counted the number of the crystals once more.

‘11 from the spider, and 38 from Hwang Dong-Seok and his lackeys.’

In total, 49 of them!

If he asked five million for each, he’d still earn well over 200 million Won.

“200 mil from a single day’s hunt!!”

The profit that should’ve been shared by ten people – no, nine, had been swallowed up by him, so the amount had no choice but to balloon up. This was the same thing as the unexpected kiss of lady luck landing squarely on his cheeks.

‘All I have to do now is to sell these things.’

Selling magic crystals wasn’t difficult. Since the demand was so high, when he put them up for sale, they would all sell out pretty quickly.

The question was, though, where he should sell these.

There were several cases of a direct trading between individuals, and Guilds and corporations also bought them in large quantities, as well.

For his case, since there were so many of them, he figured that it’d be for the better to seek out the help of professionals, rather than try his hands on dealing with individuals or sell them online.

‘Can’t I just sell them to a store or something?’

It’d be so much more convenient for him if the Store bought his crystals at their retail value, as it would with the japtem.

While thinking this and that, Jin-Woo pushed the bag full of magic crystals to the corner of the room.

And then, he abruptly recalled one last fruit of today’s labour.

‘Right, the System said that I can start buying stuff from the Store.’

Jin-Woo immediately summoned the Store.

Although it wasn’t much, all the Gold he had saved up from the Hapjeong Station’s instant dungeon still waited for their turn inside his Inventory until now.

“Buy.”

Tti-ring.

Accompanied by the familiar beep, the list of purchasable items popped up in his view, and they continued to do so quite literally without an end.

Everything from cheap potions and trinkets, all the way up to absurdly expensive defensive items and eye-catching weapons could be found here. There were so, so many items that could be bought with Gold.

It was pretty obvious, but the more expensive an item was, the better its ‘options’ got. One of the best items available even cost as much as 10 billion

Gold.

“Whoa..... 10 billion, is it?”

His current Gold was just over 112 thousand. It was way too short to buy anything truly useful. But, there was no need for him to fret here.

Why? Because, he had plenty of time on hand.

‘I can buy any of these, as long as I have enough Gold, right?’

Jin-Woo hummed to himself and continued to browse through the list of really expensive items.

There was one more reason to seek out instant dungeons now.

Already, he couldn't wait to receive the prize of the Daily Quest for tomorrow, the random box.



Chapter 25 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Part 11. Arrangement

Three days passed by since the incident of the C-ranked Gate.

Jin-Ah came home early from school as it was Saturday today. As soon as entering the apartment, she began sniffing the air and hurriedly removed her shoes.

“Oppa? What’s going on here? Did you order fried chicken?”

“Yeah, I ordered some takeaway to make sure it’d get here just in time for you.”

“Wow, really?!”

Jin-Woo beckoned her while sitting by the dining table, causing Jin-Ah’s eyes to open wider. She immediately ran towards him.

“Hiya~, what’s going on here? And you’re a serial Scrooge, too. Did something good happen lately?”

“Hey now. Put down your schoolbag first, will you? Why is a girl so hot-headed?”

“It’s fine. This bag ain’t that heavy, you know.”

And she was complaining not too long ago about her bag being too heavy and that she didn’t want to carry an umbrella around.... Jin-Woo tsk, tsked, but couldn’t really hide the smile creeping up on his face.

‘Asking me if there was anything good happening lately?’

Of course, there was.

The family’s bank balance had swelled up from 800 thousand Won all the way to ₩180,300,000 earlier today. (TL: Just under \$160,000)

180 million was from the sale of the magic crystals, and 500 grand was used for the month’s rent.

Still, 180 million!

Just one raid and he was able to get his hands on an absurd amount of money, totalling 180 million.

He had been one for a while now, but this was the first time he felt like a real Hunter. Well, this was the era where a casual mention of Hunters instantly brought up the images of wealth, so that couldn't be helped.

Also, the face of the employee at the magic crystal exchange when Jin-Woo went there with his stash was still so vivid in his memories, too.

“D-did you hunt all these monsters?!”

“Things happened, and so, it’s something like that.”

“Holy moly.... How incredible.”

49 C-rank magic crystals.

The initial estimated price for the whole lot was just over 300 million Won.

But who knew that taxation would be so heartless?

“I gotta pay 40% as tax?!”

“Yes. When an individual is selling the crystals, 40% is taken as tax. However, when a Guild is selling them, it’s only 10%.”

“Is there a reason why there’s a reduction in tax for the Guilds?”

“Well, unlike freelancers and their teams, Guilds must cooperate without question when they are ordered to mobilise, you see.”

Indeed, when he searched through his memories, he remembered hearing about both the agents from the Monitoring Division of the Association and the White Tiger Guild coming to the location of the dual dungeon incident.

Because they were receiving special treatments, Guilds had to cooperate with the government and the Association when they asked for help.

The high tax rates caused Jin-Woo to ponder his choices for a little bit.

‘Should I just hold onto the crystals and sell them off after I enter a Guild?’

But, he made up his mind soon afterwards. By the time he entered a Guild and started working for them, the main objects of conquest would be Gates rated A and B. The magic crystals coming out from those Gates would incomparably be more valuable than those from a Gate ranked C.

And right now, he needed every cent he could get his hands.

‘Besides, I can’t just sign on with any ol’ Guild out there just to decrease tax, now can I?’

“Okay, fine. I will sell them.”

*

That's how he got his hands on 180 million.

Just as Jin-Ah had implied with her question, the chicken-and-beer meal was to celebrate the big earnings sitting pretty in the family bank account right at this moment.

“Thank you for this meal.”

Jin-Ah sneakily reached towards the beer can, but then, Jin-Woo's finger powerfully flicked her forehead.

“Ouch!!”

“For you, this.”

He then placed a can of cola in front of her.

“Hiing.... I was only joking, you know....”

Not minding Jin-Ah and her hands busy rubbing her reddened forehead, Jin-Woo popped the lid open on the refreshingly cold can of beer and poured the contents down his throat.

But then, this happened.

Tti-ring.

Jin-Woo couldn't help but react nervously when he heard the familiar beep.

‘Why a System message, all of a sudden?’

[Harmful substances have been detected.]

[Effects of ‘Buff: Detox’ will now commence.]

[3, 2, 1.... Detoxification has been completed.]

‘You detoxed harmful substances? Are you talking about alcohol?’

Jin-Woo drank up the remaining beer in the can, and popped open another just to make sure.

Gulp, gulp.

[Harmful substances have been detected.]

[Effects of ‘Buff: Detox’ will now commence.]

[3, 2, 1.... Detoxification has been completed.]

And the exact same messages appeared again.

He had drank up two cans of beer in one go, but he couldn't feel one hint of

drunkenness come over.

Whatever this 'Buff' thing was, it was definitely working as intended.

'What's this?'

Jin-Woo tilted his head.

He had yet to meet a single Hunter capable of throwing Buffs around. Most of the Hunters possessing such specialised skill sets all worked for large Guilds.

As he was affiliated with the Association, there hadn't been a single opportunity for him to meet one so far.

'Even if someone sneaked a Buff on me, surely the System would've notified me of it.'

In that case, there could only be two possibilities.

Either he received the Buff while he was unconscious, or got it before the System was active.

Personally, he was more inclined towards the latter.

"Oppa? What's wrong? Is it indigestion? You should've been more careful, you know."

When Jin-Woo's expression became serious, Jin-Ah asked him with a worried voice.

"Nah, it's just that I remembered something pretty urgent, that's all. Eat without me while I take care of this, okay?"

Jin-Woo headed back into his room. He then began rummaging through every nook and cranny of his memories, trying to figure out if he had missed anything, even if it was small.

'Ah.'

Suddenly, he recalled something.

'Every quest has rewards, even penalty quests. But, there was one quest that I never got around to confirming the rewards, no?'

Jin-Woo hurriedly opened the mailbox.

At the time, he had no clue what the System was nor what rewards could mean, so glossed over them, but he definitely remembered reading the message that said he had met the conditions to clear the quest.

His heart began beating faster and faster.

Jin-Woo eventually discovered the messages sitting right at the bottom of the mailbox.

[Congratulations on becoming a ‘Player’.] (read)

Jin-Woo’s voice trembled as he spoke softly.

“Confirm.”

Tti-ring.

[This System will support the growth of the ‘Player.’]

[Failing to comply with the System’s instructions will result in potential penalties.]

[Your rewards have been delivered.]

As he thought.

There was the mention of rewards.

The voice he heard back inside the underground temple clearly said these words.

[Completion requirements for the ‘Secret Quest: the Courage of the Powerless’ has been met.]

A secret quest or not, it was still a quest, wasn’t it?

However, he hadn’t checked what kind of rewards he had received until now. Back then, he thought that it was all a hallucination, didn’t he?

[...will result in potential penalties.]

[Your rewards have been delivered.]

[Would you like to confirm your rewards?] (Y/N)

‘Yes.’

Tti-ring.

[Rewards for the ‘Secret Quest: the Courage of the Powerless’]

The blessings from the Grand Sorcerer, Kandiaru

The Grand Sorcerer Kandiaru has been deeply moved by your courage, and has gifted you with a special spell. When accompanied by the blessings of Kandiaru, you’ll get to enjoy a healthy and fulfilling life every day.

[“Let there be a bright future laying in wait for the challenger.”]

- One-time effect ‘Will to Recover’: All your damaged body parts will be recovered to their original state.

- Continuous effect 'Good Health and Long Life': You'll be immune to all types of diseases, poisonous substances, as well as all forms of status debuffs. During sleep, your recovery rate will increase exponentially.

Only now puzzle pieces fell to their places.

'That's why my leg was....'

It was all due to the quest reward that his sliced-off leg had reverted back to how it was before. Same thing for why he couldn't get drunk from a couple of cans of beer.

'Hang on. I'm immune to all types of poison, too?'

Jin-Woo's eyes abruptly shot open real wide.

If that was the case, then could it be....?

Jin-Woo hurriedly extracted a certain item out from his Inventory.

[Item: Poison Sac of Kasaka]

Rarity: A

Type: Medicine

A pouch containing the refined poison of the Kasaka. Can be found very rarely when hunting Kasakas. Drinking this poison will give you strong skin, but the toxicity will permanently damage your muscles.

Effect 'The Iron Scales of Kasaka': 20% reduction in physical damage.

Side effect 'Damaged Muscles': Strength -35

'My muscles are supposed to get damaged because of the toxin, but wouldn't this detox buff resist that?'

There was only one way to find out. Jin-Woo squeezed his eyes shut and drank the liquid contained within the pouch.

Gulp, gulp.

Sticky, yucky liquid slid down his throat.

The taste was oily and terrible, but he endured it.

'And they say what's good for you usually tastes bitter....'

When he finished drinking all of the poisoned liquid, messages popped up in his view.

[Harmful substances have been detected.]

[Effects of 'Buff: Detox' will now commence.]

[3, 2, 1.... Detoxification has been completed.]

[Side effect 'Damaged Muscles' has been nullified.]

"Yes!!"

Jin-Woo clenched his fists real tightly.

Still, he couldn't celebrate just yet so he quickly summoned his Status Window.

[Stats]

Strength: 53

Stamina: 30

Agility: 53

Intelligence: 30

Perception: 36

(Available points to distribute: 0)

Reduction in physical damage: 20%

As he expected, there was no decrease in his Strength Stat.

It still remained as 53 points, and then, he saw the new Stat called 'Reduction in physical damage', too

Sure, it might be limited in the category, but it still was a marvellous Stat that reduced all physical damage by 20%.

"Nice!!"

Just as Jin-Woo began celebrating the emergence of this new Stat, Jin-Ah called out to him from the living room.

"Oppa? You know a guy called Yu Jin-Ho? He's looking for you."

"No way, he can't be the same Yu Jin-Ho...."

Jin-Woo quickly went to the living room and snatched the phone's receiver off his little sister.

"Hello?"

- ***"Hyung-nim, it's me. Yu Jin-Ho."***

Really now?

The voice coming from the other side sounded way too familiar.

"....How did you get this number?"

- ***“There was a person I know working for the Association, you see. You didn’t want to answer your smartphone, so I had no choice but to call you at home like this.”***

“Details only.”

- ***“Ahh! Oops, my bad, hyung-nim. But, it’s not something we can discuss over the phone... May we meet up somewhere so I can tell you in person?”***

Jin-Woo tilted his head slightly.

‘He still wants to meet me after going through such an ordeal?’

- ***“Hyung-nim, I really, really gotta ask you for this favour. Please.”***

What a weird kid this guy was.

Jin-Woo eventually agreed to spare one hour after Yu Jin-Ho earnestly pleaded with him.

The meeting place was a franchise cafe located not too far from Jin-Woo’s home.

Even though it was a weekday, there were quite a few people inside the cafe, perhaps because they chose to meet right after the lunch hour.

“Hyung-nim, over here!”

Yu Jin-Ho greeted him rather enthusiastically.

Before entering the cafe, Jin-Woo focused his Perception to the max but he couldn’t sense any other Hunters inside the shop.

At the bare minimum, this meeting wasn’t for the purpose of revenge, it seemed. Although Jin-Woo couldn’t really remember doing anything that warranted such an ill will towards him and requiring a swift retribution.

Jin-Woo sat down on the other side of the table.

“Didn’t think we’d meet again.”

There was a half-eaten ice cream on top of the table belonging to Yu Jin-Ho.

Yu Jin-Ho spoke as he stood up.

“What would you like to order? Should I go and get you some coffee?”

“No, it’s fine.”

Yu Jin-Ho looked a bit crestfallen for some reason as he sat back down.

Jin-Woo opened his mouth first.

“So, what do you want?”

It was then.

“I’m telling you, this guy did it for real back then! It was so crazy, really!!”

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to his side.

The table next to his was occupied by three burly students with rather thuggish faces hailing from some local athletic club or the other, and they were busy chatting to three girls.

Jin-Woo tried to get back to his own conversation.

“As I was saying, what do you.....”

“And when did I ever do that?! Will you listen to this b*stard, busy inventing rubbish because we’re in front of girls?!”

“...Want from me....”

“But, you said it, didn’t you?! Wow, should I show you the pics, man? Should I like, release the evidence to the rest of the world or something?!”

The voices of the male students got louder and louder, and the laughter of the girls was just as loud as well.

“.....”

When the noise became too loud to carry on his own conversation, Jin-Woo was left with no choice but to stand up and silently walk over to the table next to his.

The eyes of the male students all focused on Jin-Woo.

“Will you please keep it down? There are other people in here, too.”

One of the male students scratched the back of his head and pretended to apologise a couple of times.

“Yes, yes. We’ll keep it down. Very sorry about this.”

Girls began giggling hoarsely from that sight.

“.....”

Jin-Woo quietly stared at them for a while, before turning around. But when he did, something flew in and tapped him in the back of his head. A rolled-up paper serviette fell to the floor.

“Puhahahahaha!”

“Kekeke!!”

“Hey, you shouldn’t do that.”

Male students began guffawing real hard, while girls pretended to scold the boys, even though mocking grins formed on their faces.

Witnessing this scene, Yu Jin-Ho’s expression gradually froze up.

“Hyu.... Hyung-nim....”

Jin-Woo picked up one of the unused spoons next to Yu Jin-Woo’s ice cream and walked over to the counter.

“Ohh, look, look. He’s going to tell on his mommy.”

“Mommy, they are making noise. Stop them ple~ase. Fuhut!”

In the meantime, those kids kept running their mouths off.

Jin-Woo asked the nervous-looking female employee behind the counter with a deadpan face.

“How much for this spoon?”

“M-my apologies, dear customer. We don’t sell spoons separately, you see....”

“It’s not more than ten thousand Won, yes?”

“Pardon? Ah, uh, uhm, I guess so.....?”

Jin-Woo placed a ten thousand Won bill on the counter and turned around.

“Dear customer? E, excuse me, customer?”

Jin-Woo ignored the calls of the female employee and headed straight to the table where the male students from some athletic club were.

When they noticed that Jin-Woo was displaying a suspicious behaviour, the three students slowly stood up from their seats.

“What you want now? What?”

The attention of everyone inside the cafe was now focused on this table.

Jin-Woo showed the students his spoon.

‘.....?’

‘.....??’

Just as question marks floated on the expressions of these hapless kids, Jin-Woo began squashing the spoon in his hand. And the poor thing easily lost its shape right in front of their eyes.

The complexions of the male students grew paler and paler.

Jin-Woo then placed the 'spoon' on their table.

But, what was left there could no longer be called a spoon anymore.

No, it was just a piece of folded metal, roughly shaped like a ball.

“Heok!”

The male students nervously swallowed their saliva.

‘That, that’s not a human’s strength.’

‘This guy, he’s a H-Hunter.’

The male students signalled to each other before the kid who threw the serviette at him bowed and apologised for real.

“I-I’m really sorry.”

The rest of his friends then started apologising as well.

“I’m sorry.”

“It was our fault. Forgive us.”

The male students bowed several times with pale complexions, before making their hasty retreat from the cafe while dragging the girls out as well.

“Hooray-!!”

The customers surrounding that noisy table sent gazes filled with appreciation towards Jin-Woo.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo returned to his seat and settled back down.

Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes sparkled as he spoke up.

“As expected of you, hyung-nim!”

“Enough.”

Jin-Woo got back on topic at hand.

“Why did you ask me for a meeting?”

“Well, that.... Hyung-nim. I gave this matter a lot of thought. I mean, lots and lots of thought, you know? But, I think I really, seriously, must ask you.”

Jin-Woo tilted his head.

“What are you talking about now?”

“Hyung-nim, actually....”

Yu Jin-Ho's face reddened as if he was embarrassed about something, before he summoned up his courage and spoke up.

“Actually, I was thinking of forming my own tea....”

Jin-Woo didn't even hesitate one second and replied.

“I'm not interested.”



Chapter 26 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Part 1. Transaction

Yu Jin-Ho's expression became dumbfounded.

“Already, hyung-nim?!”

“I don't need to hear the rest to figure it out.”

Jin-Woo was quite decisive in saying no.

This wasn't because he didn't like Yu Jin-Ho or something like that.

Although he seemed a bit off in the head, his attitude remained courteous and he came across as someone who'd always keep his word. He was quite different from other scions of 'chaebols' often seen in mass media. (TL: 'chaebols': Wealthy owners/families of corporations)

However, Jin-Woo was not interested in becoming a playmate of the son of a wealthy family during the boy's 'Hunter' phase.

“If there's nothing else, I'm leaving.”

“Hyu, hyung-nim!!”

Just as Jin-Woo got up to leave, Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly reached out and held onto him.

“Hyung-nim, only for 20! No, wait, please partner up with me for the next 19 times!!”

“For what? To clear dungeons?”

“Yes!! I'll definitely compensate you properly!!”

Yu Jin-Ho's voice sounded rather desperate.

Jin-Woo tilted his head slightly.

There were two reasons why people became Hunters. Either it was for money, or for their sense of duty.

But, Yu Jin-Ho didn't belong to either camp. Maybe, it was possible that he thought of being a Hunter was a slightly more dangerous form of extreme sports or some such.

That was what Jin-Woo had been believing until now.

True, he was taken aback slightly when the kid declared that he wanted to form his own private raid team, even after going through that ordeal the last time.

‘There are all sorts of people in this world, that’s for sure.’

It wouldn’t be too strange to find a scion of a wealthy family who had become numb to the safe environment he had grown up in. However, Yu Jin-Ho’s expression seemed far too serious and determined at the moment for that kind of an explanation.

‘Could there be a different reason?’

Rather than the promise of ‘proper compensation’, Jin-Woo’s curiosity was being tugged by the idea of raiding dungeons ‘19’ more times.

Jin-Woo’s brain quickly kicked into gear.

‘Hang on.... Let’s say that last time was his first raid. And when he completes 19 more raids, then....’

Could this kid be aiming for.....?

It didn’t take long for Jin-Woo to realise the truth. His expression became dumbfounded, instead.

“You, are you perhaps thinking of getting the Guild Master licence?”

“That’s correct, hyung-nim!!”

What a smart decision it was not to order coffee.

Otherwise, he might have sprayed the bitter liquid all over the table by now while trying to drink it.

“You wanna become a Guild Master?!”

“Well, uh, the story’s a bit complicated there, hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho’s face reddened considerably compared to before as he spoke.

“Hyung-nim. Please listen to my story.”

“....”

Jin-Woo was in a slight dilemma, wondering what he should do now, but in the end, he was defeated by his curiosity, so he sat back down.

“Fine, I’ll listen.”

Well, the promised hour had not ended yet, so there was that, too. It wouldn’t be a problem to listen to the kid’s story anyways.

Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly parked his butt back down as well.

“As you’ve correctly guessed, I want to acquire the Guild Master licence.”

Acquiring that licence was not that difficult, actually. You had to be a Hunter who participated in at least 20 raids. As long as you met this base requirement, all you had to do was to pass a written test and you’d get the licence.

Of course, nobody would join the Guild created by a rubbish Hunter, and if a Guild failed to maintain the minimum number of members, it’d be disbanded as well.

Yu Jin-Ho continued on.

“It’s not public knowledge yet, but actually, my father is trying to establish a Guild of his own.”

“A Guild created by Yujin Construction?”

“Yes.”

Yujin Construction was one of the biggest corporations in South Korea.

It had expanded its business well beyond the fields of construction and into other sectors and had been making a killing there. Jin-Woo had heard that recently, they reaped huge profit after jumping into the Hunter-related businesses as well.

‘And they want to form a Guild of their own?’

When Jin-Woo displayed a hint of interest, Yu Jin-Ho became excited and added more explanations.

“He’d scout strong Hunters and build a massive Guild, and place all our Hunter-related business interests under it. That’s his plan.”

If a corporation wished to partake in Hunter-related businesses, then it was a necessity to work together with a Guild. Well, you’d need the strength of a large Guild if you ever wanted to get your hands on magic crystals and remains of the monsters, or treasures such as mana stones found in Gates ranked A or B.

“And so, you wish to become a self-sustaining entity. Is that it?”

“That is absolutely correct, hyung-nim!”

With the financial wherewithal of Yujin Construction, creating a Guild wouldn’t even pose a problem. No, the real issue would be with just who gets to run it.

“My father is thinking of hiring an S-ranked Hunter as the Guild Master and placing my older brother as the Vice-Master, and run the Guild that way, but....”

Jin-Woo immediately caught onto what Yu Jin-Woo was implying here. If things were done that way, then a source of worry would be created along the way.

The power of authority the Guild Master wielded was simply far too great. Even if it was the Vice-Master who had hired the Master, in case of a conflict arising between the two, there was a very good chance that the latter would end up completely overtaking the entire Guild.

In order to prevent that, there was only one way. All you had to do was to hire a Master who'd never ever betray the one who hired him or her.

For instance, brothers – or, even a son.

And the chairman of Yujin Construction, Yu Myung-Hwan, had a son called Yu Jin-Ho.

“However, my older brother’s business experience is far too good for me to simply take over the position of the Guild Master. It was his idea to enter the field of Hunter-related business, you see. We gained huge profit in that sector because of him.”

His older brother had become a successful entrepreneur by the age of 31. Compared to him, Yu Jin-Ho was only a 22-year old university student, even if he possessed a unique plus point of being a rank D Hunter.

Naturally, the chairman was thinking of entrusting the Guild over to the eldest son.

The eldest couldn't become a Master since he was not a Hunter, but he still knew a lot about the Hunter-related businesses, and also managed to achieve great success in the sector, too.

Meaning, even if there was an element of a risk, the chairman would still take the chance.

“And you wish to change your father’s mind by acquiring the Master licence, yeah?”

“That’s right, hyung-nim.”

And so, Jin-Woo figured out why Yu Jin-Ho was here, trying desperately to reel him in.

Even if the kid hired a high-ranked Hunter and acquired the licence that way, it'd be no different from buying it with cash. However, what if the kid

succeeded in 20 raids with low-ranked Hunters, such as Jin-Woo, and acquired the licence that way?

Yu Jin-Ho would be able to persuade his father.

Simply him being able to lead a group of Hunters would be enough to get his approval. That was what Yu Jin-Ho was counting on.

If Yu Jin-Ho became the Guild Master, they would get an S rank as the Vice-Master and scout all the talented Hunters.

Well, others would only feel secure and join them if one or both Master and Vice-Master spots were filled by someone with powerful abilities.

If this plan were to come to fruition, then completing those 20 raids was an absolute must.

“Hyung-nim, please help me! I have no one but you, hyung-nim!”

Yu Jin-Ho bowed his head.

If it weren't for Jin-Woo, the kid would've died during his very first raid. By the giant spider, or at the hands of Hwang Dong-Seok. Two times.

Yu Jin-Ho needed a trustworthy ally here.

‘I can definitely trust hyung-nim.’

He might be a cold-hearted person who would not bat an eyelid when killing his enemies, but he also happened to be a righteous man who'd not treat lightly the lives of those weaker than him, and just as important, he didn't care about getting his hands on ill-gotten gains, as well.

Jin-Woo was the perfect candidate.

However, Jin-Woo didn't need Yu Jin-Ho. That was why he asked the kid.

“What would I get in return, then?”

Yu Jin-Ho raised his head, his expression one of joy, as he quickly produced an envelope he had prepared earlier on. And a blueprint of a building came out from there. Jin-Woo took a look at it.

“This is the Guild office building we're constructing at the moment. The expected retail price of the building is around ₩30 billion, but it'll definitely rise up in the future.”

Although the Association was doing their best to manage them, there would always be that fear of monsters escaping from the dungeons. That was why the land price near the Association headquarters or around large Guilds always rose up higher as time went by.

Well, there would be no more precious wealth than one's own life, after all.

Even if it was a small Guild, being near one almost guaranteed your safety. However, if it was a building occupied by a large Guild?

There was no need to mention it.

“If I become the Master, then for exactly one year, I’ll use it until the Guild has been stabilised. And then, hand over the deeds to you, hyung-nim. Of course, I’ll make sure all the paperwork are in order so there wouldn’t be any unnecessary complications later down the line.”

A 30 billion building, for raiding rank C Gates 19 more times....

Jin-Woo smirked slightly.

“As long as you become the Master, it’ll all be worth it, is that right?”

“That’s correct, hyung-nim.”

On that fateful day, Yu Jin-Ho got to learn the valuable lesson of ***“Anything goes inside a dungeon.”***

Hiring any ol’ Hunters could lead to him getting killed.

On the flip side, hiring famous Hunters would mean Yu Jin-Ho would lose the ability to persuade his father.

However, Jin-Woo was different.

He was nominally a rank E Hunter, yet he was strong enough to solo a C-ranked boss, as well as eight C-ranked Hunters without getting hurt.

‘Hyung-nim could be at least a B-ranked.... Or, someone far stronger than that.’

With Jin-Woo was around, raiding 19 C-rank Gates would not pose any problems at all.

So, yes – if he could become the Guild Master, 30 billion sounded rather cheap in comparison.

The only thing remaining was Jin-Woo agreeing to do so.

‘He wouldn’t say no with this sort of terms on offer, right?’

Yu Jin-Ho nervously studied Jin-Woo’s reactions.

‘What should I do?’

In the meantime, Jin-Woo was in a serious dilemma.

30 billion Won.

That was a huge amount of money.

If one considered the fact that the winning prize of the local lottery was 1.5 billion Won, he'd have to get lucky 20 times in a row to earn that amount.

Not only that, the value of the building would only continue to rise up.

If it were any other normal Hunter, they would jump in with both feet and sign up right away – that's how tempting this offer was.

However, Jin-Woo was as far removed from being normal as anyone could ever hope to get.

The one and only under the heavens; he was the only Hunter who could grow stronger.

If he continued on with quests and levelled up over and over again, he'd reach the S rank sooner or later, or even something surpassing that.

'If I can surpass the S rank, then 30 billion would be nothing.'

The contract fee for S rank Hunters went for several dozen billions already.

No matter how famous a celebrity or a sports star was, they would never even come close to the worth of an S-ranked Hunter.

This was the era where the number of high-ranked Hunters signified the strength of a nation. As a result, the treatment S ranks received exceeded one's imaginations.

Considering that, what Jin-Woo needed to prioritise here was not money, but his growth.

And in order to grow, it'd be more convenient to be alone.

'Yeah, it'd be better to minimise the risks of unexpected events.'

If he hunted along with other people, the experience points received could decrease too, and because of all those eyes watching him, making a move would become rather cumbersome as well.

Not to forget, in order to avoid anything troublesome happening down the line, he had to threaten Yu Jin-Ho back then, something he didn't want to do in the first place.

And finally, he'd have to match his schedule to that of the assault team from now on. The efficiency of his growth would only decrease, one way or the other.

'I can always make money later on.'

Although it was unfortunate, he had to decline this offer. Just as he thought

like this....

'Hang on a sec.'

Suddenly, he came up with a pretty good way to catch two birds called money and growth with a single stone.

'If it's in this manner....'

When he finally raised his head, he spotted Yu Jin-Ho and his nervous face. Jin-Woo slowly opened his mouth.

"I only have one condition."

Yu Jin-Ho's expression brightened up instantly.

"Whatever it is, please tell me, hyung-nim!!

'I wonder, would you be able to smile even after I told you what it is?'

Jin-Woo smiled inwardly and spoke up.

"You and I. Only two of us will enter the dungeons."

"Pardon?!"

Yu Jin-Ho gasped out in pure shock.

"Hyu-hyung-nim.... If I didn't make a mistake here, then.... Are you saying that hyung-nim and I, just us two, will clear C-ranked Gates? Only us two?"

"You didn't make a mistake, then."

Yu Jin-Ho's face was drained of all colour, just then.



Chapter 27 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Sure, Jin-Woo was able to defeat the spider boss all by himself, so he'd be able to do something similar to other bosses as well.

But, when imagining only the two of them against the horde of monsters, just like back in that dungeon's entrance with those insects, Yu Jin-Woo suddenly found himself unable to breathe.

“.....”

Yu Jin-Ho became completely speechless, while Jin-Woo formed an expression that said, ***“I knew it.”***

‘However, this is the best way.’

...The best, in order to catch both birds.

It'd be very hard to enter any freelancer-run raid teams as a Hunter ranked E. From the very first day he made up his mind to start making money in this profession, he was constantly reminded of this harsh reality.

Either he had to give up entering dungeons with his qualifications, or he had to create his own raid team. However, this kid was volunteering to form one for him. Wasn't this a great opportunity, in other words?

“B-b-but, hyung-nim! You need at least ten people if we want to enter a C-ra.....”

“I'm pretty sure you'd find plenty of willing people when you say you'd pay them just for showing up to fill up the head count.”

Time to put to good use what he had learned from Hwang Dong-Seok, then.

If there were Hunters who didn't want to fight with their lives on the line, but were in urgent need of cash, they would surely jump in with both feet at this golden opportunity.

Yu Jin-Ho's expression became one of a scared cat, though.

“Wait.... Surely, you are not suggesting that us two will kill every single monster inside a dungeon, all the way up to the boss, are you?”

...In truth, it'd be only one person doing that, though.

“You got it.”

With this arrangement, Jin-Woo would be able to prevent the potential worst-case scenario of someone stealing his experience points, and the only person next to him would be Yu Jin-Ho, so he wouldn't even need to worry about other people watching him all the time as well.

‘If it’s like that, then I’ll get to enjoy some serious power levelling, won’t I?’

On top of that, after all the raids were done and dusted, he'd get a nice little bonus of a wonderful building rolling right onto his lap. The only thing remaining now was him persuading Yu Jin-Ho.

And as expected, Yu Jin-Ho was very, very scared at the moment.

“Is-isn’t that way too dangerous, hyung-nim?!”

“You’re only looking at it from one way and not the other.”

“Eh?”

Jin-Woo beckoned the kid to come closer, so Yu Jin-Ho leaned forward.

“If no one else participates in hunting besides us, doesn’t that also mean no one will get hurt, as long as we’re okay?”

“O-of course.”

“For the first raid, you were like a third wheel being dragged along, so you couldn’t do anything about the incident that had happened, but think about for the moment the ramifications of your own raid team finishing up all 19 raids without a single casualty.”

Yu Jin-Ho's eyes shot open right up.

If that's the case....!!

If that was the case, then persuading his father would become one level easier.

Not only he'd be a D-rank Hunter, but the record of being the leader of a team that successfully performed 19 raids without a single incident would be added on top as well.

It'd be the definite proof of him being qualified to become the Guild Master. Nothing would be a better advertisement for himself than this, wouldn't it?

Jin-Woo studied Yu Jin-Ho's expression and smiled in satisfaction.

‘This kid.... He’s convinced now.’

From the word go, the person in need was Yu Jin-Ho.

As for Jin-Woo, he didn't really need to go on a raid with Yu Jin-Ho, but still could enter dungeons via the Association giving him a call, or through the random boxes.

Yu Jin-Ho's was thinking now.

Although it was a bit scary, if he succeeded in pulling this off, then just as Jin-Woo had implied, there would be so much he'd get in return.

When recalling the sight of Jin-Woo displaying his absolutely overwhelming might in battles from last time, Yu Jin-Woo realised that maybe, there wasn't much to fret over at all.

Yu Jin-Ho finally made his mind up, albeit after some serious internal struggle.

“We'll do it your way, hyung-nim. In that case, I'll search for suitable teammates.”

“Very good.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

They had come to an understanding.

Since he was still in front of Jin-Woo, Yu Jin-Ho stopped feeling nervous and tight-chested, and displayed a bright smile.

‘I've managed to finally get hyung-nim on my side.’

For some reason, he was not feeling too scared of the upcoming raids.

A trustworthy comrade named Jin-Woo had joined him, and it'd be a bit easier to form a raid team now, too. As Jin-Woo had said, with the terms on offer, many would queue up in line just for a chance to participate.

‘With this, I'm one step closer to becoming the Master.’

Jin-Woo also smiled brightly as well.

‘Clean up as many C ranked dungeons by myself, and level up as quickly as possible.’

The two men exited the cafe with satisfied expressions.

After going their separate ways, Jin-Woo ran back home.

Well, he didn't know when the Association would give him a call, after all. It had been over ten days since he was discharged from the hospital, so it'd

not be so strange to hear about a Gate opening up in the vicinity.

The Association normally summoned Hunters two, three times a month to clear dungeons that appeared within this area.

One of the main reason why he only gave one hour to Yu Jin-Ho was that the call from the Association could come at any time.

‘For the time being, I can’t afford to miss even a rank E dungeon....’

He wanted to kill lots of monsters and raise his levels quickly.

How inconvenient it was not to have his smartphone around. What a relief that the new one should arrive in a few days’ time....

Jin-Woo pushed open the front door and entered.

‘.....’

The apartment was quiet.

It was in the middle of the week, so his little sister was still at school.

After confirming that there was no one at home, Jin-Woo opened the window displaying the Daily Quest.

‘I should get today’s rewards.’

Before he went out to meet up with Yu Jin-Ho, he had finished the day’s Daily Quest already. But there were too many eyes watching, so he had no choice but to delay receiving his rewards.

Well, he couldn’t really show off the sight of a blue light wrapping around his body as well as a box suddenly popping out from nowhere in the middle of the street, now could he?

Tti-ring!

[Daily Quest: Preparations to become strong]

Press-up, 100 times: complete (100/100)

Sit-up, 100 times: complete (100/100)

Squat, 100 times: complete (100/100)

Running, 10 km: complete (11/10)

[You’ve completed ‘Daily Quest: Preparations to become strong’.]

[Completion rewards have arrived.]

[Would you like to confirm?] (Y/N)

“Yeah.... Oh, hold up. Wait.”

Just like usual, Jin-Woo was about to receive his rewards, only to spot something strange and hurriedly stopped himself. His gaze stopped dead and remained fixed to the column of 'Running'.

Running, 10 km: complete (11/10)

At first, he thought that he ran one kilometre more than necessary. However, the longer he thought about it, the stranger it seemed to him.

'I've filled up my quota, so why did it keep recording the extra distance?'

Jin-Woo's gaze became sharper.

Was this really nothing more than coincidence?

Jin-Woo got down to the floor and supported his weight on his arms. And then, his body rose up and down without a break.

However, his sight was fixed to the seemingly-empty air in front.

Tti-ring!

[You've completed one press-up.]

[Press-up 100 times: complete (111/100)]

Tti-ring!

[You've completed one press-up.]

[Press-up 100 times: complete (112/100)]

'As I thought....'

'Running' wasn't the only category that reflected the extra number of exercises performed. The count for 'Press-up' also kept climbing up.

Suddenly, he became rather curious just how much higher the numbers would count to.

Veins bulged on Jin-Woo's arms.

Thanks to his enhanced Stats. He couldn't feel his weight. Actually, his body felt as light as fuzzy hair.

Before long, the number hovering near the hundred mark climbed to 200.

Tti-ring!

[You've completed one press-up.]

[Press-up 100 times: complete (200/100)]

Tti-ring!

[You've completed one press-up.]

[Press-up 100 times: complete (200/100)]

The count stopped for sure at the 200 mark. He performed a few more press-ups just in case, but it didn't want to go up any higher.

Both the sit-up and the squat also stopped counting at the 200 mark.

Press-up, 100 times: complete (200/100)

Sit-up, 100 times: complete (200/100)

Squat, 100 times: complete (200/100)

Running, 10 km: complete (11/10)

200, no more and no less.

It wasn't just climbing up without an end, and no, it wasn't as if the 100 mark was the end. There definitely was something here. His gut feeling was declaring as such.

What if there was another result waiting for him once he completed all the 'over-counting'?

'Let's make sure.'

With much faster steps than usual, Jin-Woo exited the apartment.

The next 9 kilometres for the 'Running' column were filled up really quickly. When Jin-Woo arrived before his home once more, a new message popped up in his view.

Tti-ring!

[You've completed 'Hidden Quest: Preparations to become strong'.]

[Completion rewards have arrived.]

[Would you like to confirm?] (Y/N)

The title of the quest hadn't changed, but the type of the quest had changed to 'Hidden Quest' now.

His suspicion was proved to be correct.

Jin-Woo swallowed his saliva.

'.....Confirm.'

Tti-ring!

[The following rewards are available.]

Reward 1. Full recovery of the current physical condition

Reward 2. All Stats +3

Reward 3.

1) Blessed random box

Or

2) Cursed random box

[Would you like to collect them all?]

‘All Stats raised by 3!!’

His eyes shot open wide.

The rewards from the hidden quest proved to be really exceptional.

With all the Stats getting a three point boost, it was the same thing as his level rising up by three.

No, wait – his Stats might have risen, but since his level stayed the same, he had gained even more. Because, with higher Stats, raising his level would become that much easier.

But at the same time, he felt a bit fearful as well.

On one hand, he couldn't help but hold a vague hope that, from today onwards, all the Daily Quest coming his way could be converted to Hidden Quests, instead.

‘However, if the rewards are this big....’

Then, the odds of the Daily Quests coming to an end were incredibly high as well.

Also, if the Hidden Quest was something only available for just this once, then that meant he had to be extra careful when choosing the third reward.

Reward 3.

1) Blessed random box

Or

2) Cursed random box

This would be his first time having to choose his reward.

If he chose one, then he'd lose the other one.

‘So, I wouldn't be able to see one of the two forever, is that about right?’

Just taking a single look at their names, it was rather obvious which one he needed to select, but...

But, this also could be a trap, as well.

“Collect the third reward.”

Tti-ring!

[You must choose between one of the two available random boxes.]

[Blessed random box]

Presents the player with the item he wants.

[Cursed random box]

Presents the player with the item he needs.

[Which one will you choose?]

Their explanations were exceedingly simple. And that made choosing even harder.

If there were no explanations to begin with, he'd have chosen the 'blessed' random box in a heartbeat. But now that he had read the dang explanations, it felt like he'd still end up missing out regardless of which one he chose.

‘A thing that I want and a thing that I need...’

Just from those explanations, both of them sounded like a good deal.

‘But, there’s definitely a trap here.’

The thing he 'wanted' would be something he wanted because he recognised its usefulness to his current situation.

However, the thing he 'needed' might not necessarily be like that. Something that he may need but didn't want could come out, instead.

For instance, when needing a powerful weapon, he might end up getting a horrifying bomb that could completely blow himself and all his teammates into smithereens in one go.

‘That’s why it’s called the cursed random box, right?’

So, he'd go with the lower risk selection.

In situations where the end results of a choice weren't known, this would be the wisest way to minimise the amount of regret felt later on.

Jin-Woo finally made his decision after a cool-headed weighing of pros and cons.

“Blessed random box.”

A small box slowly materialised in front of his feet.

Jin-Woo picked it up.

‘Could it be....?’



Chapter 28 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

His heart began beating faster and faster. Because, the size of the box was rather familiar to him. His hands ripping open the box became far more urgent.

‘As I thought!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes grew wider. There was a golden key inside the box.

Indeed, it was the key to an instant dungeon, the one he’d been anxiously waiting for.

The information on the key appeared soon afterwards.

Tti-ring!

[Item: Key of the Demon’s Castle]

Rarity: S

Category: Key

A key that will let you enter the ‘Dungeon: Demon’s Castle’. Can be used at the Daesung Tower located in Songpa-gu, Seoul.

“It’s an S?”

Jin-Woo raised his voice in surprise.

Of course, there was no guarantee that the rarity ranking had any bearings on the difficulty of the dungeon. But, he couldn’t think of it any other way.

The rarity ‘E’ key opened a dungeon that was on par with a Gate ranked E, after all.

What would he do if the difficulty of the instant dungeon turned out to be ‘S’, then?

Even with a raid team consisting solely of S-ranked Hunters, there was no definite guarantee that such a dungeon would be cleared.

The odds were around 50:50?

The difficulty of a Gate exploded upwards past the rank B, and even when looking through the entire world, there had been too few cases of S-rank Gates opening up in the world.

‘One of them appeared on Jeju Island, though.’

Afterwards, the island of Jeju became an abandoned hellhole where no humans could exist.

Jin-Woo stared at the key in his hand for a long while.

‘This is what I really wanted?’

If there was one silver lining to be found here, then that would be the explanation saying he’d be able to ‘enter’ the dungeon with this key, unlike the previous one which said he’d be ‘transferred’ instead.

The implication being that he could escape at any time if he felt like it.

Even if the key suddenly vanished from him, he still had the return stone from the last dungeon waiting to be used inside his Inventory as well. He was no longer worried about getting trapped behind an invisible wall like the last time.

‘I’ve worked hard to earn this chance, so I can’t throw it away like that now, can I?’

He simply had to confirm right away with his own two eyes whether this was what he really wanted or not.

Part 2. Demon’s Castle

In front of the Daesung Tower.

A super-tall skyscraper over a hundred floors tall was standing straight as if to pierce the heavens above. Indeed, this was what the modern skyscraper should look like. Just looking up at it made him feel extremely dizzy.

There were only a few people walking around as it was already late evening now. The streets with not one soul on it gave off an eerie vibe.

‘Still, I can’t be sure, so....’

Jin-Woo took a good look around him, before pulling up the hood attached to his top to hide his face.

If someone saw a person disappearing and appearing again in thin air without a Gate around, that might cause a bit of ruckus. Not only that, there were several CCTV cameras installed here and there in the near vicinity, so it wasn’t such a bad idea to avoid being too conspicuous.

....Actually, there was someone busy eyeing Jin-Woo right at that moment.

‘Who could that kid be?’

To think, there would be a straggler wearing a hoodie busy loitering around

the building at this time of the night....

The security guard watching on from inside the building found Jin-Woo's behaviour rather suspicious and stood up from his chair.

However, as this guard walked towards the door, he couldn't help but come to an abrupt stop and his eyes opened up real wider.

“Wha-what the heck?!”

The security guard gasped out in a surprise and hurriedly ran outside.

The man was definitely walking towards here, yet he had vanished from the view, just like that. Utterly without a trace.

The security guard searched around his vicinity, but he couldn't even spot an ant here.

He tilted his head this way and that, before turning around.

“Well, I'll be.... What a baffling thing that was.”

The security guard was about to go back inside the building, but then, caught something in the corner of his eyes, and turned his head to see what it could be without thinking.

“U-uwaaahhk?!”

He cried out in shock as he fell hard on his butt.

“What, what, what the heck is going on here?!”

The security guard cried out with a pale face.

A person's disembodied hand floating in the air then vanished once more.

*

Jin-Woo retracted his hand.

‘It's connected to the outside world.’

Unlike the last time, there was no invisible wall blocking his exit. The key also didn't disappear and remained tucked inside his pocket. If he wanted to, he could get out of here at any time, in other words.

‘Now that I'm finished with confirming the escape route...’

Since he didn't know whether the rarity of the key equated to the difficulty of the dungeon, he was far more cautious than usual.

Jin-Woo pulled the hood back and took a look behind him.

“...”

It was a sight shocking enough to make him groan. Just now, when he was taking a few steps towards the Daesung Tower, the world in front of his eyes transformed in an instant.

Could this place even be called a dungeon anymore?

A completely different world was waiting for him.

Instead of the vanished Daesung Tower, a massive tower-like structure stood there.

‘Wait, is that really a tower, or should I call it a castle, instead?’

A tower rising up high into the air without an end, wrapped in reddish black flames. It was as if the tower wasn’t burning, but it was spewing out billowing flames, instead.

“A burning tower, huh.”

Rather than the name of ‘Demon’s Castle’, maybe that nickname suited it better. Jin-Woo slowly walked towards this burning tower.

Crackle! Pop!

The closer he got, the louder the noises of flames rampaging around grew.

‘Can I even enter this thing in the first place?’

However, even if he did, there was yet another problem to consider.

Just like the last instant dungeon that was based off on the subway station, there was a good chance that, since this dungeon was based off on the Daesung Tower, he’d have to climb up 100 floors to clear it completely.

He couldn’t even begin to imagine just how long that would take.

‘Mm?’

Jin-Woo’s steps came to a halt. He sensed a strong aura near the entrance.

He slowly surveyed the surroundings and spotted a black lifeform the size of a bull huddled in slumber right in front of the doorway.

Jin-Woo carefully summoned the Poison Fang of Kasaka.

Tti-ring.

[Item: Poison Fang of Kasaka]

Rarity: C

Type: Dagger

Attack +25

A dagger fashioned from the poison fang of the Kasaka. There are traces of the Kasaka's poison on it, so when attacking, it will cause Paralysis and Bleeding status effects. Can be stored in the Inventory, or can be sold at the Store.

Status effect 'Paralysis': the target will be unable to move. Success rate is fixed.

Status effect 'Bleeding': the target's stamina will be reduced by 1% per second.

Its attack power wasn't all that high, but the greatness of its added effects was proven in real battles time and time again.

'It'd be nice if the Paralysis works and I get to kill it easily.'

Jin-Woo walked as quietly as possible while approaching that creature. However, it was impossible to fool the olfactory senses of a monster. Soon enough, the creature sniffed the air and raised its body up.

'Che.'

Jin-Woo clicked his tongue.

The creature stood up completely and all three of its heads turned in Jin-Woo's direction.

[Hell's Gatekeeper, Cerberus]

It was a huge dog possessing three heads. The name written in red letters floating on top of its heads immediately drew his attention. It was proof that the monster's 'level' was very high.

'Since it's red, does that mean it's around the same level as those centipedes from the penalty zone?'

Back then, he managed to barely run away from the centipedes. Well, he was only a level 1 back then, so it couldn't be helped.

'But, it's different this time.'

He had grown stronger quite quickly during the short space of time.

Without a doubt, that black creature was strong, but still, it didn't come across as truly overwhelming. His enhanced, alert Perception was telling him that he could do this.

It wasn't for nothing that he raised his Perception Stat. He kept on investing points to this Stat so he could easily tell whether he should fight or take flight in cases like this.

“Growl!”

The Cerberus sensed the enemy and bared its fangs to threaten him.’

Jin-Woo’s gaze then wandered off to the creature’s tail. It kind of resembled a whip, and its end was enveloped in flames as well.

Jin-Woo’s eyes sharpened in an instant.

‘Fangs and a tail. At the bare minimum, two methods of attack, huh.’

Jin-Woo swallowed his dry saliva.

The Cerberus slowly closed the distance before stopping right in front of him and began studying him for some reason.

‘Is it... looking for an opening?’

Just as he thought that....

The monster attacked him.

“Rowr!!”

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened much, much wider.

‘Too fast!!’

Jin-Woo barely evaded the Cerberus’s fangs by sliding underneath the leaping monster.

The Cerberus landed back on the ground and spun around, before began biting at him with its three heads.

“Woof!! Bark!! Rowr!!”

The sharp fangs gleamed coldly in between the biting snouts.

Tti-ring!

[‘Title: Slaughterer of Wolves’ buff effect has activated.]

[Title: Slaughterer of Wolves]

A Title given to a hunter skilled in hunting wolves. When facing animal-type monsters, all of your Stats will increase by 40%. (TL: Again, the ‘hunter’ is a lower case here, because it literally means someone who hunts, while the ‘Hunters’ up until now had been written in English and is a specific job title of those who hunt monsters from dungeons.)

He sensed his body getting lighter.

‘Nice!’

Jin-Woo quickly retreated and wielded his dagger at the Cerberus as it

continued to stick close to him.

Swish!! Swish, swish, swish!!

Clang!! Cling, clang!! Claaang!!

The dagger collided with the fangs and issued loud noises.

The blade moved at a blinding pace, yet all he could do at the moment was to deflect the Cerberus's attacks and nothing else.

'Even after I buffed up, it's still this strong?!'

The Cerberus's Agility had easily exceeded his imaginations.

In order to overturn this situation, Jin-Woo activated his 'Intimidation' skill.

['Skill: Intimidation' has been activated.]

[The effect has been cancelled due to the high resistance of the target.]

Jin-Woo's eyes widened.

'It didn't work?!'

It was at that moment that the long tail of Cerberus flew in like a whip.

Whooooosh-!!

Jin-Woo reflexively ducked his head lower and evaded the tail. But that caused his legs to stop moving for a second. And the monster didn't miss this opportunity.

One of its heads powerfully bit into Jin-Woo's left shoulder.

"Uwaaahck!!"

Jin-Woo summoned all of his strength and stabbed the dagger into the middle of the biting head.

STAB!!

['Effect: Paralysis' has been activated.]

[The effect has been cancelled due to the high resistance of the target.]

['Effect: Bleeding' has been activated.]

[The effect has been cancelled due to the high resistance of the target.]

"Whimper!!"

The Cerberus cried out and let go of him.

Thankfully, he was able to minimise the damage done before other heads

had the chance to join in on the attack, but his left shoulder was now in tatters.

What a scary biting power that was.

He tried to move his left arm, but it didn't want to budge. Jin-Woo's expression crumpled unsightly.

He managed to wound the Cerberus, but when comparing the severity of their injuries, then it was clear that he came off far worse in that exchange.

'If either of Paralysis or Bleeding worked, the situation would've been different by now....'

Jin-Woo glared at the Cerberus and clicked his tongue.

Then, something else happened.

'Huh?'

The eyes of the Cerberus were being dyed in a crimson colour all of a sudden.

"Grooowl."

Inexplicably, Jin-Woo sensed something ominous was about to happen.

'What could it be?'

[Hell's Gatekeeper Cerberus is using 'Skill: Rage'.]

[Its state of rage will persist for the next three minutes.]

[All of Cerberus's Stats will be increased by 100%.]

[Cerberus will no longer feel pain.]

Jin-Woo cried out.

"What did you just say?!"

A monster just used a skill!!

In that instant, the Cerberus leaped off the ground.

'F*ck!!'

Even before he could react, the Cerberus appeared right before his eyes. He hurriedly swung his dagger, but it only managed to graze the side of one of its heads.

And all three heads bit into Jin-Woo simultaneously.

Kwajeek!!

“Euheuheuhk!!”

Jin-Woo gritted his teeth. His neck, waist and thigh all got bitten.

The Cerberus ran at its top speed and slammed Jin-Woo against the castle’s gate.

SLAM!!

Jin-Woo’s HP hit the rock bottom in an instant.

“Keo-heok!!”

[HP: 411/3,602]

Tti-ring!

[Your HP has decreased below 30% and ‘Skill: Tenacity’ has been activated.]

[All damage received will be reduced by 50%.]

Thanks to the damage reduction and the Tenacity passive, he was able to avoid getting killed in one hit.

“Keuh....”

Jin-Woo’s eyebrows shot up in anger.



Chapter 29 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

It'd be easy to go mad from pain and wildly thrash about, but he'd lose this great opportunity, which would most likely never happen again. Losing his consciousness now would mean his end.

'...178, 179, 180!'

Jin-Woo had been bitterly waiting for the end of the three-minute duration and finally, revealed his hidden trump card.

'The first reward, give it to me now!'

He immediately collected the first reward from the Daily Quest he had saved up until now.

[*'Reward 1: Full recovery of the current physical condition' has been applied.*]

Suwhhooosh!

A blue light enveloped him and all depleted health reverted back to full.

[HP: 3,602/3,602]

Even his tattered left arm was healed as good as new in the blink of an eye.

'This is my chance!'

Jin-Woo's eyes gleamed coldly. In such close proximity, no matter how agile this monster was, it'd not be able to dodge his attacks.

Jin-Woo rapidly caught one of Cerberus's necks with his left arm, and stabbed the 'Poison Fang of Kasaka' in the middle of that neck.

Stab! Stab! Stab!!

The rage state had ended by now, and the Cerberus began to violently thrash about trying to escape from Jin-Woo's embrace.

"Whimper!! Whine!"

However, Jin-Woo did not let go and held on with his powerful arms. The harder the Cerberus struggled, the stronger he gripped the neck of the monster.

In the meantime, his dagger continued to stab into the creature's neck.

Stab, stab, stab!!

“Whimper-!!”

The Cerberus bit into Jin-Woo as it struggled to the bitter end, but the battle had already been decided by then.

Stab! Stab!!

“Whimper...! Whine...”

The Poison Fang of Kasaka now travelled lower down from the neck and stabbed the Cerberus’s chest.

Stab! Stab! Stab!!

Soon enough, the monster’s resistance became noticeably weaker and weaker.

“Whimper....”

In the end, the heads of the Cerberus fell to the side, lifeless.

Tti-ring!

[You have defeated ‘Hell’s Gatekeeper, Cerberus’.]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

In one breath, his level rose up by 4. That was how difficult this battle was.

Jin-Woo only let go of the Cerberus’s neck after confirming its body going limp with his own eyes. The heavy body sprawled to the floor without any resistance whatsoever.

Plop.

Jin-Woo rested his hands on his knees.

“Ha-ah....”

Only now could he breathe a sigh of relief.

A monster that could use a skill – if he didn’t prepare a hidden trump card, then he’d have been killed for sure. A chill crawled down his spine just from thinking about it.

‘Oh, I almost forgot.... Items.’

Would there be as many rewards befitting his life-or-death struggle to bring down this monster?

After calming himself down, Jin-Woo reached out towards the Cerberus.

Tti-ring!

[You have discovered 'Item: Gatekeeper's Necklace'. Take it?]

[You have discovered 'Item: Key to the Castle's Gate'. Take it?]

[You have discovered 'Item: Cerberus's Molar, x3'. Take it?]

'Take them all.'

A steel necklace originally found around one of the Cerberus's necks, a grey key, and three molars of a monster appeared in his hand.

[Item: Gatekeeper's Necklace]

Rarity: A

Type: Necklace

Agility +20, Perception +20

[Item: Key to the Castle's Gate]

Rarity: A

Type: Key

The key to unlock the gates of the Demon's Castle. Can only be acquired after killing the Gatekeeper.

[Item: Cerberus's Molar]

Rarity: None

Type: Miscellaneous

"Ohh."

Jin-Woo's eyes went round.

'This necklace can boost both my Agility and Perception by 20 points?'

A necklace with eye-spinningly good options came out. Its rarity was also ranked A. Out of all the items he'd seen so far, this one featured the highest rarity ranking yet.

'Well, I had to go through so much to kill it, so....'

Indeed, there was no way that its rarity would be low.

However, when it came to actually putting the necklace on, he couldn't

help but to hesitate big time.

The thing was, it was shaped like a roundish metallic choker with spikes spouting out in regular intervals, so no matter what it said on the cover, it was undoubtedly... a dog collar.

“Mm...”

Jin-Woo closed his eyes and deliberated on his choices for a long time, before deciding to try it on at least once, and brought the necklace closer to his neck.

Then, a message popped up.

Tti-ring!

[Will you wear ‘Item: Gatekeeper’s Necklace?]

Jin-Woo fell into yet another bout of dilemma for a second, before helplessly muttering out his answer.

“....Sure thing.”

It was then, the necklace slowly disappeared from his view.

[You’re now wearing ‘Item: Gatekeeper’s Necklace.]

“Huh?”

Jin-Woo hurriedly summoned his Status Window.

[Stats]

Strength: 60

Stamina: 39

Agility: 80

Intelligence: 37

Perception: 67

(Available points to distribute: 0)

Reduction in physical damage: 20%

“Holy sh*t!”

Both his Agility and Perception were increased by 20 for real. The option was now in effect, in other words.

It seemed like that he didn’t have to worry about walking around displaying the ‘items’ he wore. The fact that he didn’t have to be seen with a dog collar on his neck brought him a huge sense of relief.

‘ up are the molars.’

Jin-Woo summoned the Store next.

He sold the japtem ‘Cerberus’s Molar’ and got 150 thousand Gold for each. He sold all three off right away.

Soon, 450 thousand Gold entered his hands.

[Current Gold: 562,362]

‘What kind of japtem is this expensive??’

It was a rather nice baseline to judge the overall difficulty of this dungeon. In other words, the difficulty of clearing the Demon’s Castle would be incredibly high.

However, it wasn’t all necessarily bad news.

He only hunted a single monster, yet he got to earn over four times the amount of Gold compared to the whole day spent inside the Hapjeong station’s instant dungeon.

If he saved up Gold in this fashion, it wouldn’t be too far from now when he’d get to purchase all those items that cost millions upon millions in the Store.

‘That is, as long as I get to clear this dungeon....’

Jin-Woo stared up at the burning tower.

Crackle! Pop!

The very top of the structure was completely shrouded in some kind of blurry fog. He had to actually enter the tower if he wanted to see what was going on inside.

But, Jin-Woo shook his head.

‘Now’s not the time.’

He only barely managed to hunt down a single sentry standing guard by the door, even with his Title buffing him up and resorting to using up the quest reward, too.

He couldn’t even guess just what kind of danger would be waiting for him beyond that gate. So, now was the time for him to back off.

Still, he was certain of one thing.

Just as the explanation said, this key to the Demon’s Castle was indeed something he wanted. The name ‘Blessed random box’ wasn’t wrong.

Levelling up quickly, valuable items, and plenty of Gold, too. This place had it all.

And one day, he'd get to claim them all as his.

Only that, today wasn't that day.

Although he was slightly unwilling, he stored the grey key inside his Inventory.

'I'll return.'

Definitely, very soon.

Jin-Woo smiled as he turned around to leave.

Part 3. Coincidence

A few days went by without any incident.

Yu Jin-Ho called Jin-Woo almost daily and reported on the progress. From the day after their meeting, he had called Jin-Woo precisely three times.

- ***"Hyung-nim!! It's me, Yu Jin-Ho."***

"Details only."

- ***"Yes, hyung-nim."***

It seemed that the job of finding other teammates was going rather smoothly. Yu Jin-Ho repeatedly emphasized that the formation of the raid team would end soon, and that Jin-Woo should wait just a little while longer.

'Looks like he's really scared of me dropping out, huh.'

However, Jin-Woo couldn't just wait and do nothing while waiting for the team to form. So, he accessed the website for Hunters today as well.

He asked around all the time for the past few days, but no freelancer-run raid teams wanted to work together with an E-rank Hunter.

He simply had gotten lucky on that day. Sure, Hwang Dong-Seok had been scheming some nefarious things, but in any case, Jin-Woo still ended up being a part of a raid team, didn't he?

'Thanks to that, I made lots of money, my levels went up, and even got me a new skill, too.'

Should he feel grateful to Hwang Dong-Seok, in that case?

Jin-Woo let off a smirk.

Well, as he was now, he wouldn't mind meeting up with other selfish Hunters acting like geckos at the moment.

No raid teams wanted him, the Association wasn't calling him, and keys to instant dungeons didn't want to show up, too.

Basically, he was doing nothing but suck on his fingers for the past couple of days.

SFX for an empty stomach rumbling

'Is it time to eat already?'

Jin-Woo felt hungry as he spent hours roaming the online job postings, so he headed to the kitchen.

But, when he opened the fridge's door, it was completely empty inside.

'.....'

This was the inevitable result of not going shopping for the past few days. His excuse being that his mind had been preoccupied with several urgent matters until now.

'Should I go shopping, then?'

Jin-Woo yawned out slightly and closed the fridge's door.

*

One of the few advantages the apartment he was living in had, was its close proximity to a large supermarket.

Wearing simple, easy-to-move clothes, Jin-Woo left his home. A ten-minute walk later, he had arrived at his destination already.

As soon as he stepped in through the door, the wide-open expanse of the supermarket's interior entered his view. Maybe because there wasn't some sort of promotion going on, it was quieter than usual in the aisles.

Jin-Woo picked up a basket and slowly walked around.

Ever since his mother was confined to the hospital, Jin-Woo had been acting as the head of the family, and now, he grew to be more or less familiar with chores of the household, such as shopping for groceries.

'There isn't anything catching my eyes today, though...'

While he was deeply staring at the displayed produce, trying to think about what to prepare for dinner....

"Pardon me, young man. I see that you're feeling much better now."

A rather friendly voice came from behind him and Jin-Woo turned around to look who it was.

‘Who is he?’

Because of his high Perception Stat, he knew that there was a Hunter nearby. But, this was a supermarket where lots of people came and went, and Hunters also had to go shopping too, so he didn’t dwell on the matter for long.

However, he didn’t expect that Hunter to engage him in conversation.

Not only that, a Hunter he actually knew, too.

“Mister Song ahjussi??”

Jin-Woo’s expression brightened in an instant.

Mister Song – Song Chi-Yeol looked at Seong Jin-Woo with an expression half in disbelief and the other half in delight.

“I did hear the news that you were fine, but I still can’t believe it, even after running into you like this.”

Song Chi-Yeol formed a deeply moved expression next. Jin-Woo felt kinda embarrassed by the emotional eyes of Song Chi-Yeol and sheepishly scratched the side of his temple.

Meanwhile, Song Chi-Yeol continued on.

“I should’ve gone to visit you at the hospital, but for some reason, the folks at the Association all tightly shut their mouths and I couldn’t hear any concrete information on you until now. Did you know that Miss Ju-Hui is also anxiously waiting for your news?”

“Miss Ju-Hui? Really?”

“That’s right. She said that she’d give up being a Hunter, but still, she stopped by at last week’s raid location just to look for you.”

“Last week....?”

After listening to Mister Song’s story, it turned out that, rather coincidentally, there was a raid organised by the Association on the very same day he entered Hwang Dong-Seok’s team.

‘That was why there hadn’t been any word from the Association until now.’

It was not that there hadn’t been any calls from the Association, but more like he missed it when it did come. A small mystery got resolved pretty easily, just like that.

Song Chi-Yeol studied Seong Jin-Woo’s appearance here and there, still mystified by what he was seeing.

‘By the way, was Mister Seong this tall before? And, with his bad leg and all, too....’

Song Chi-Yeol’s gaze naturally headed lower.

And then, his eyes grew extra wide in shock.

“Your.... Your leg?!”



Chapter 30 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo calmly made his reply.

“When I came to, my leg had been all healed up. Even I’m not sure what happened to me.”

Song Chi-Yeol nodded his head.

Ever since Gates appeared for the first time ten years ago, many illogical things continued to transpire to this day. The people called Hunters who had ‘Awakened’ their abilities were a prime example of this.

A healer ranked S could reputedly heal a person who was ripped to shreds back to normal, as long as the victim was still alive.

What if, a high-ranking healer healed Jin-Woo’s injuries while he was unconscious? If that was the case, then his severed leg being reattached didn’t even qualify as a miracle.

“It’d do no good to see a young man such as yourself become disabled like that. What a relief this is. What a relief.”

Song Chi-Yeol lightly patted his chest as if a big weight of his had been lifted off his shoulders now.

It was then, Jin-Woo’s gaze drifted towards Song Chi-Yeol’s left arm. The older man’s sleeve was empty.

Song Chi-Yeol chuckled and massaged his left shoulder.

“Don’t you worry about it. A Hunter getting injured during a raid is a normal occurrence, after all. No, I’ve been lucky for not running into an accident until then.”

Song Chi-Yeol spoke as if it wasn’t much to fret over, but the gazes of other people walking by weren’t like that.

“Oh, my gosh, he’s.....”

“What a regrettable thing, that..... Did a monster do that?”

Aunties out shopping and students walking by whispered to each other after spotting Song Chi-Yeol’s empty sleeve. Hell, there was even this one guy who quite openly stared on as well while looking rather mystified and all.

Jin-Woo quickly spoke up.

“Should we go somewhere else?”

There were far too many people walking by here, right by the butchery aisle. Song Chi-Yeol had been feeling uncomfortable by all the stares, so he nodded his head quickly. He still had few more things to say to Jin-Woo, too.

“That would be a good idea.”

The two of them hurriedly walked away in order to find a quiet spot to chat.

But, as they walked, Song Chi-Yeol sensed that something was rather odd here.

‘The sounds of Mister Seong’s steps are....’

Jin-Woo’s steps were just too soft. The youth was walking right beside Song Chi-Yeol, yet it was hard to detect his presence.

Why was that?

The older man even felt that, were they to start fighting here, he’d be unable to even touch a hair on Jin-Woo’s body.

Even though he was rank C, and Jin-Woo was ranked E.

‘Just what am I even thinking about....’

Song Chi-Yeol shook his head. That wasn’t the important thing right now.

There was something he badly wanted to say to Mister Seong. No, he simply had to say it.

Song Chi-Yeol came to a stop where it was quiet and isolated. Jin-Woo also stopped there.

Song Chi-Yeol turned to look at Jin-Woo and before the youth could stop him, bowed his head 90 degrees.

“Mister Seong. Thank you.”

When a man who was old enough to be his dad lowered his head like that, Jin-Woo couldn’t help but feel solemn as well.

Jin-Woo, of course, tried to dissuade Song Chi-Yeol, but the older man didn’t listen and instead, carried on with what he wanted to say.

“If you say 11 people died because of me, then you are responsible for saving six lives that day. My share of the blame in that matter is the biggest, so on the behalf of all the Hunters who were there, let me say thank you.”

Song Chi-Yeol meant every word he spoke. And Jin-Woo could feel the older man's sincerity as well.

The situation had become somewhat awkward, but it didn't feel so bad. How should he go about describing it? He was feeling proud?

Of course, that didn't mean he should let an elder remain in that bowing position.

“Ahjussi, thanks, so please stand back up. Please.”

Just as Jin-Woo tried to persuade Song Chi-Yeol to stand up straight, the latter's phone went off.

Song Chi-Yeol asked for Jin-Woo's understanding and pulled out the smartphone tucked inside his inner pocket.

“Hello?”

Song Chi-Yeol's face gradually hardened as he answered the call.

“I understand. I'll be there soon.”

Song Chi-Yeol ended the call and spoke to Jin-Woo next.

“Looks like I need to get going.”

He was implying that there was a private matter he had to attend to.

However, Jin-Woo was able to listen in on the contents of the conversation. His hearing had been improved by a great deal after his Perception Stat rose up dramatically.

That call just now was from the Association, asking for a cooperation in clearing a Gate nearby.

Song Chi-Yeol was actually hiding the truth, because he was worried that Jin-Woo would want to tag along, that Jin-Woo might want to participate in the raid even though it hadn't been long since his discharge from the hospital.

Jin-Woo asked the older man.

“That was from the Association, yes?”

Song Chi-Yeol hesitated slightly, before making his reply.

“That... Did you hear everything?”

When an Association formed a raid team, it'd summon every Hunter affiliated with the organisation who lived in the vicinity. If Song Chi-Yeol received the call, that meant Jin-Woo's house had been called as well.

It was the order to mobilise, the one Jin-Woo had been waiting for.

Jin-Woo cut to the chase.

“I’ll go with you.”

“But you, Mister Seong....”

A look of uncertainty floated up on Song Chi-Yeol’s face as he stared at Jin-Woo.

The two men arrived at the meeting place.

The Gate had formed in the middle of the road pretty close to residential areas, so the police officers called in to control the access to the location.

However, there were almost no onlookers present here, to begin with.

The majority of Gates the Association took on were those dangerous ones that had been left alone for too long after their initial discovery; besides, even if one were to stick around a Gate, one would still not get to see how Hunters fought, anyway.

It was only a couple of curious, naughty kids loitering around who got chased away by the officers every now and then.

With a thud, the door to the taxi was closed shut.

Jin-Woo and Song Chi-Yeol had exited from the taxi and made their way towards the location where the other Hunters had been gathered, only for the cops to stop them.

“Please show me your IDs.”

Song Chi-Yeol pulled out his wallet and displayed his licence.

“I’m Song Chi-Yeol, a rank C Hunter. This is my colleague, Seong Jin-Woo.”

The cops compared the photo on the licence to Song Chi-Yeol’s face before returning it and parted ways.

“Sorry for the inconvenience, Hunters.”

“Keep up the good work.”

Song Chi-Yeol performed a slight nod to the policemen and continued on. Jin-Woo followed right behind him.

The employee from the Association was waiting in front of the Gate. It was a young woman wearing a round-rimmed pair of glasses.

She approached the two men after spotting them from a distance.

“Song Chi-Yeol Hunter-nim! Uh? How did you get here, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim? You weren’t answering your phone until now.”

Song Chi-Yeol replied instead.

“We were in the same location, and came here together after you guys called me.”

“Ahh, is that so? I thought that Seong Hin-Woo Hunter-nim was avoiding answering our calls again.”

The Association employee chuckled and cracked a joke.

Well, that indeed had been true in the past.

A long time ago, Jin-Woo got injured badly during a raid, and he grew fearful of going to dungeons, which led to him switching off his phone for a while.

In the end, he had to return to raiding dungeons, since not answering the call three times in a row meant he’d be chased out from the Association.

Recalling his past, Jin-Woo could only smile in bitterness.

“Oh, right. Other Hunters are waiting for you. Why don’t you two head over there and greet them?”

There were other Hunters who had arrived earlier where the Association employee was pointing at.

Well, there were only two other Hunters there, however. The number of those willing to come had decreased sharply after that ‘huge incident’. Jin-Woo heard from Song Chi-Yeol on their way here that, besides those who died, many other Hunters decided to quit this life from the shock of that underground temple incident.

‘One of them happens to be Miss Ju-Hui...’

Jin-Woo took a look around, but he couldn’t see her.

When Jin-Woo and Song Chi-Yeol approached closer, the two Hunters awkwardly averted their gazes.

Jin-Woo narrowed his eyes.

‘But, of course.’

These two happened to be Kim Sang-Sik, who ran off trying to save only himself, and the other male Hunter who had discarded the injured Jin-Woo.

Of course, they would find it rather awkward to face him.

“Uhm, excuse me, Mister Seong....”

Kim Sang-Sik was thinking of at least greeting the youth, but when he was subjected to Jin-Woo’s cold glare, he eventually shifted his gaze away.

“....”

Kim Sang-Sik shut his mouth, studied the mood for a bit, before shuffling further away from there. He stopped at a bit of distance away and sneaked a glance at Jin-Woo, before he tilted his head in confusion.

‘Is he really the Seong Jin-Woo that I know? I mean, his eyes are as fierce as a monster, man. Like a real monster....’

Kim Sang-Sik shuddered deeply. As he thought, his arm was covered in goosebumps.

Jin-Woo withdrew his glare filled with hostilities.

Thankfully, quite unlike Yu Jin-Ho, Kim Sang-Sik was quick on the uptake. After locking eyes once, he didn’t even try to come near Jin-Woo’s vicinity.

He sincerely hoped that this arrangement would remain for the rest of the raid.

“Mister Seong.”

Song Chi-Yeol, standing next to Jin-Woo, shifted his gaze in a direction and smiled gently.

“There she is.”

Jin-Woo also turned his head in the direction Song Chi-Yeol was looking at. But, before he had the chance to completely turn around to look....

“Mister Jin-Woo!!”

Something rather soft suddenly hugged him tightly.

“Miss Ju-Hui??”

While Jin-Woo was getting flustered, Ju-Hui was too busy making sure he was fine with a tearful face.

“Are you alright? You are not hurt anywhere, right? Uh, your leg?! Mister Jin-Woo, how come your leg is....?”

Ju-Hui’s eyes went extra round as she alternated her gaze between his face and his leg.

There was a bit of difference in how extreme it was, but nevertheless, her reaction was more or less the same with Song Chi-Yeol’s.

“Oh, that....”

Just as Jin-Woo was about to reply....

“How steamy, eh! It’s steamy, I say!!”

Both the gazes of Jin-Woo and Ju-Hui shifted over in the direction of that voice.

From afar, an unknown man was whistling loudly at them.

More importantly, though, he was wearing the blue-coloured prison overall.

‘Is there a film shoot going on around nearby or something?’

While Jin-Woo was tilting his head in confusion, a man wearing a business suit climbed down from the front seat of a certain minivan.

He then threw out a measured warning at the prison overall guy.

“Shut your mouth.”

The prison overall guy pretended to not know anything by staring at the distance. However, he quickly threw an oily wink at Ju-Hui when the business suit looked back inside the van.

Immediately, Jin-Woo’s expression crumpled.

Two more people climbed out of the van right away.

Both of them were men. And particularly worthy of note was the fact that they all wore prison overalls and had been cuffed as well.

The business suit led the three prison overalls towards the Association’s employee. And she welcomed him with a bright expression.

“You’ve finally arrived.”

“Please forgive us for our tardiness. There was traffic on the road.”

The business suit then proceeded to sign on each of the documents the Association employee presented to him.

In the meantime, the employee called for the Hunters to gather around.

“These folks are the ‘replacement’ convicts who will participate in the raid alongside you, Hunters.”

And so, the expressions of the Hunters hardened considerably.

Kim Sang-Sik was the first to step forward.

“What? ‘Replacement’ convicts?! Are you telling us to go on a raid along with a bunch of criminals?!”

Hunters who had committed crimes had two choices.

Either spend their allotted time behind the bars, or cooperate with the Association and reduce their sentences.

Most chose the latter option, and they were referred to as the ‘replacement’ convicts.

The Association employee repeatedly lowered her head.

“I’m really sorry about this. It’s only because the number of Hunters active in our district has declined so much that the Association has no choice but to do this. However, they will be accompanied by a Hunter from the Monitoring Division, so you don’t have to worry too much.”

Kim Sang-Sik asked, still full of suspicion.

“A Hunter from the Monitoring Division, you say?”



Chapter 31 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Yes. All the convicts are rank Cs, but the Hunter from the Monitoring Division is actually a rank B, so there is nothing for you to worry about.”

Kim Sang-Sik nodded his head.

The popular opinion stated that you’d need around ten C-rank Hunters in order to contend against a single Hunter ranked B.

Well, a B-rank was personally coming to monitor the troublemakers, not to mention participating in the raid itself, so there was no reason to say no here.

‘One rank B and three rank Cs, huh.....’

Jin-Woo quietly studied the faces of the Monitoring Division’s agent as well as the three replacement convicts, before tilting his head slightly.

‘Something’s off here.’

He could sense a minute trace of murderous intent flowing between those four.

Was this also one of the facets of the enhanced Perception Stat? Or was he simply being overly cautious?

In any case, he was overcome with this unexplainable anxiety all of a sudden.

So, Jin-Woo whispered in Ju-Hui’s ear.

“Miss Ju-Hui, please don’t participate in this raid.”

Ju-Hui looked up at Jin-Woo’s eyes and asked back.

“What about you, Mister Jin-Woo?”

Rather than answering her, he too asked back.

“If I say I’ll be going?”

“Well, in that case, I’m going too.”

She looked like she’d follow him, no matter what.

‘I’m sure she’s only doing this because she’s concerned about me. And....’

And, he learned through prior experience that, whenever Ju-Hui's face was forming that expression, she'd suddenly become a very stubborn young lady and she'd never change her mind, no matter what.

‘There shouldn't be a problem with me around, right?’

After all, he had experienced dealing with Hwang Dong-Seok's gang, which contained five rank Cs in their midst.

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

“In that case, okay.”

The agent from the Monitoring Division finished signing on all of the documents, and then came to speak to the gathered Hunters.

“My name is Kahng Tae-Sik from the Monitoring Division. I believe you've been informed of the situation. I'll keep a very close eye on those three, so you can rest easy.”

Kahng Tae-Sik then beckoned the three convicts to come closer. They all trudged towards him and presented their hands. With a practised hand of his own, Kahng Tae-Sik swiftly undid their cuffs.

“Wowzers. I thought I was gonna die from the stuffiness just now.”

“We ain't even slaves, so isn't it against our rights for you to drag us around here and there like this?”

The convicts massaged their freed wrists and continued to pile on their complaints.

Kahng Tae-Sik roundly ignored them and returned his gaze back to the Hunters.

“Who will be taking the lead today?”

Song Chi-Yeol, having led raids before, raised his hand about half way up. Kahng Tae-Sik nodded his head.

“Understood.”

With Song Chi-Yeol in the lead, Hunters entered the Gate one by one.

“Let's get going as well.”

Jin-Woo and Ju-Hui also entered the Gate, albeit at the same time.

Perhaps the trauma from the last incident remained with her, because she ever so slightly held onto Jin-Woo's sleeve.

Goblins were the main enemies for this dungeon. They were the weakest of all man-type monsters out there. So, clearing the dungeon itself wasn't hard at all.

“Kiiieehhk!!”

“Kiehhk!!”

These strange-looking creatures were weak enough for Jin-Woo to fight evenly one on one even before he got his power boost. Still, Jin-Woo did his utmost best to carefully hunt Goblins with his bare hands.

“Kiehhck!!”

“Kahk!!”

When Jin-Woo displayed the combat prowess that easily exceeded their imaginations, both Ju-Hui and Song Chi-Yeol's eyes became extra round in surprise.

“Wow.”

He was hiding most of his true power, yet the result of each fight was still remarkably different compared to the past. Ju-Hui approached him and carefully asked him.

“Have you been working out lately?”

“Well... I, uh, I've been jogging every day.”

“Jogging??”

Ju-Hui tilted her head, but well, he wasn't technically lying here, so....

‘But besides all that... I'm not earning any experience points here.’

“Kiiieehhck!!”

[The enemy's level is too low, and your experience points did not rise.]

“Kah-gahk!!”

[The enemy's level is too low, and your experience points did not rise.]

Jin-Woo formed a disappointed expression.

The message of Goblins being too weak and him not getting any experience points kept repeating itself.

‘This isn't going to work....’

On top of this, the magic crystals from the Goblins were also the worst grade there could be.

Jin-Woo took a look around him.

The C-ranked convicts must've been really excited by the taste of freedom because they were wildly swinging their weapons and energetically ripped Goblins to shreds.

“Kkkiiiiiehhkk!!”

“Kehk! Kehk!!”

From that scene alone, it was difficult to tell apart just who were the monsters and who were the humans there.

‘I guess there’s no reason for me to break a sweat today.’

Well, he wasn't earning any experience points, nor was he making lots of money today, either. A certain thought popped up in his head next.

‘If it’s going to be like this from now on, wouldn’t it be better to quit the Association?’

Pretty much the majority of jobs coming to the Association’s way were clearing the Gates ranked D and E. However, if his level wasn't going to increase from entering those types of Gates, then there was no need to participate in Association’s raids anymore.

‘I can easily earn mom’s hospital fees by myself now, too.’

He could quit the Association at any time he felt like it.

This was why having money was always for the better. As soon as he had some, his selection had widened. While thinking of this and that, the raid team entered deeper into the dungeon.

“Uh?”

“Mm.....”

And soon, a forked road with three paths appeared before them.

Kahng Tae-Sik made a suggestion to Song Chi-Yeol.

“Since the difficulty of the dungeon is low, how about splitting up from here onwards?”

“Yes, let’s do that.”

Song Chi-Yeol readily agreed to that idea.

Jin-Woo closed his eyes and extended his Perception to the max.

‘Now, which path leads to the boss?’

He was hoping that maybe the boss would give him a few experience

points, at the very least.

Soon enough, he could pick up on the auras of all living creatures inside the dungeon.

Jin-Woo opened his eyes and spoke to Song Chi-Yeol.

“Ahjussi, let’s go left.”

“Okay.”

Jin-Woo, Song Chi-Yeol, and Ju-Hui chose the left pathway, Kahng Tae-Sik and the three convicts the right one, and the remaining two went down the middle one.

Jin-Woo’s heart began beating a little bit faster.

‘The boss is at the end of this passage.’

Although it couldn’t be described as strong, a unique and different aura from that of a Goblin was leaking out from the end of this cavern-like passageway.

He wanted to quickly kill the boss.

However, groups of Goblins kept jumping out at him every couple of steps he took, and this hindered their progress.

“Kek, kek, kek,”

“Keeriick.”

“Keeiick.”

And this time, there were around ten of them or so.

One carried a wooden club. One held a wooden sword, one even held a long wooden shaft with a stone shard crudely tied around the tip....

They had armed themselves to the best of their abilities, but.... None of them managed to threaten him.

‘Haven’t you guys had enough yet?’

Jin-Woo frowned really deeply. It proved to be a such a bother, these b*stards that were worth nothing yet moved around in large groups like this.

“There are ten of them this time....”

“What should we do, ahjussi? Should we come back after finding the others?”

However, Jin-Woo’s two companions were getting rather sombre about the current predicament they were in.

“Still, there are only Goblins here, so maybe we should try fighting them first.”

“Okay.”

Flames formed on the tip of Song Chi-Yeol’s fingers, while Ju-Hui got ready to cast her healing magic as well.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo was scratching the back of his head.

‘Now that I think about it, I’m not feeling nervous at all even though I’m inside a dungeon.’

Was it because he had become incomparably stronger than before? Only now did he grow a little bit more conscious of the changes that had taken place inside him.

Song Chi-Yeol asked Jin-Woo.

“Mister Seong, are you ready?”

“Oh, uh, yes. I am.”

Jin-Woo matched the timing with the rest of his teammates and slowly hunted each Goblin down.

And so, as they steadily cleared the dungeon....

Out of the blue, screams reverberated throughout the dungeon from somewhere, one after the other.

“Uwwaahhk!!”

“Uwahhkk!!”

Those weren’t from the Goblins. No, they definitely belonged to humans.

Jin-Woo, Song Chi-Yeol, and Yi Ju-Hui exchanged glances.

They thought the things had calmed down, only for yet another desperate scream to enter their ears.

“Uwaahhh!!”

Song Chi-Yeol’s expression hardened.

“Let’s go take a look.”

The three of them quickly ran to where the screams came from.

Jin-Woo could’ve run faster than his two companions, but for the sake of their safety, matched their speeds.

....Just how long did they have to run?

Ju-Hui cried out in alarm after finding a person.

“There’s a person there....!”

And it just so happened to be the Hunter from the Monitoring Division, Kahng Tae-Sik. He was kneeling on the ground, covered completely in blood.

Kahng Tae-Sik shouted out at them.

“Be, be careful! I don’t know where they could be right now!”

Kahng Tae-Sik spat those words out with great difficulty before collapsing on the ground in pain.

“Euh-heuk....”

Ju-Hui couldn’t watch on anymore and hurriedly ran towards Kahng Tae-Sik.

“Hold on, I’ll heal you right now!”

Ju-Hui was thinking like this; regardless of where the enemies were hiding, she was still a Healer ranked B. Meaning, the speed of her healing magic was very fast.

So, she thought that before enemies attacked them, it’d be more advantageous for her to quickly heal Kahng Tae-Sik.

“Please hold on for a little while longer.”

Ju-Hui stood in front of Kahng Tae-Sik and reached out with both of her hands.

Gentle rays of light gathered near the ends of her hands.

It happened then.

Kahng Tae-Sik rapidly raised his upper body up and took aim at the centre of Ju-Hui’s neck with his hand full of magical energy.

Swish!!

Just before his fingertip could touch Ju-Hui’s Adam’s apple, someone managed to grab Kahng Tae-Sik’s wrist just in time.

Snap!

“Ahh...!!”

The stunned Ju-Hui stumbled backwards before falling on her rear.

Plop.

Kahng Tae-Sik’s expression became one of shocked amazement.

‘He stopped my attack in that short space of time?’

It was not a hard job for a high-ranked Hunter to deal with a handful of lower-ranked Hunters.

The only thorn in his side today happened to a female Hunter ranked B, the same rank as he was. The silver lining about this thorn was that she was not a combat-related Hunter. She didn't possess any abilities to protect herself, so as long as he succeeded in sneak attacking her, everything would end quite easily.

However... to think, his sneak attack would end up missing.

With things like this, there was no reward for all that great acting he had put on.

Kahng Tae-Sik's gaze followed the hand grabbing his wrist and to its owner. And Jin-Woo's face was at the end.

Jin-Woo's eyes were emitting a very strong light of murderous intent.

Kahng Tae-Sik frowned deeply.

“How dare you, a f*cking Association bottom-feeder!!”

Swish!

Kahng Tae-Sik's other fist flew towards Jin-Woo's face. However, Jin-Woo simply tilted his head out of the way and let the fist fly by.

‘What?!’

Kahng Tae-Sik hurriedly yanked his arm loose from Jin-Woo's grasp.

“Huh?”

Jin-Woo displayed his shock next. As expected from a high-ranked Hunter and his power.

Now that both of his hands were freed, Kahng Tae-Sik began pouring out attacks without a rest.

However, Jin-Woo also moved at the speed that didn't lose out to Kahng Tae-Sik's and went on the offensive of his own, too.

Pow-pow-pabababahat!!

Fists and arms belonging two men endlessly collided and traded countless blows.

None of them showed any signs of backing off.

Seizing this opportunity, Song Chi-Yeol quickly dragged Ju-Hui away from

the area.

“Ah-ahjussi....”

Ju-Hui couldn't finish what she wanted to say because of the sheer shock from seeing what was happening right now.

However, there was one person here who was even more shocked than Ju-Hui, and that was none other than Song Chi-Yeol.

‘Just how on earth is this possible.....?’

This fierce battle unfolding at a scarcely believable speed – he was having a hard time trying to follow with his eyes.

Something like that was expected of a high-ranked Hunter, so that was fine, but then, the Seong Jin-Woo fighting that man couldn't have been the same person from Song Chi-Yeol's memories. The youth was definitely not losing out against a rank-B Hunter at all.

‘I'm a C-rank, and even I can't follow his movements with my eyes!’

Indeed, his gut feeling proved to be right.

The Jin-Woo in front of his eyes right now was not the same youth from his memories, an E-rank who was weak but possessing a good head on his shoulders.

In the blink of an eye, the two traded hundreds of blows and they quickly stepped back while trying to catch their breaths.

Jin-Woo glared at Kahng Tae-Sik and frowned.

“The blood on your clothes... I'm guessing it's not yours.”

Kahng Tae-Sik loosened his wrist and answered back.

“That's right, it belongs to those b*stards. Besides all that, I never expected to run into a Hunter of your calibre in this sh*tty place.”

Honestly speaking, Kahng Tae-Sik was really impressed.

He hadn't heard of any information regarding a high-ranking Hunter slumming it out along with those bottom-feeders working for the Association.

‘This is going to cost me big time.’

He thought that today would be the best time to act, so he did his deeds, but quite unexpectedly, he ran into a pretty steep hurdle here.

Kahng Tae-Sik couldn't control his curiosity and asked out aloud.

“Who the hell are you? What rank are you?”

Jin-Woo summoned the Poison Fang of Kasaka, and while grasping it tightly in his hand, replied rather curtly.

“Seong Jin-Woo. I’m rank E.”



Chapter 32 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Part 4. Rank B Kahng Tae-Sik

Kahng Tae-Sik felt like someone had hit him in the back of his head.

A b*stard that displayed the movement equal to his own speed, which was unmatched within the rank B, introduced himself as a measly rank E just now.

'Is he trying to make fun of me?'

Kahng Tae-Sik gnashed his teeth.

'No, hang on....'

Indeed, there was something odd here.

'If he's really a high-rank Hunter, there is no reason for him to be here, isn't it?'

The jobs these bottom-feeder Association Hunters did were quite obvious. Their main role was to clear those Gates that Guilds and freelancers gave up on because of their low monetary values.

Their earnings were pathetically small compared to other Hunters, and they were not widely acknowledged by other Hunters, either. In other words, there was a very good chance that this b*stard really was an E-rank.

Only that, his abilities were anything but.

'Still, a fake registrant wouldn't brazenly work under the Association like this, so...'

Kahng Tae-Sik eventually arrived at the only logical conclusion.

'...He's a Re-Awakened.'

When he thought about it, he remembered the upper echelons of the Association getting a bit noisier with a rumour of someone going through a Re-Awakening somewhere nearby this location.

'And, that person was supposedly a Hunter affiliated with the Association....'

He should've memorised that name back then.

As that matter happened only a couple of weeks ago, if this b*stard had

been delaying getting a re-assignment test for some reason until now, it was very much possible for him to remain as an E-rank and assist the Association with their work.

Who could've guessed that such a guy would show up today?

Kahng Tae-Sik had made sure to perform thorough background checks on the Hunters participating in today's raid, but he had missed the existence of this one.

'I really have terrible luck, don't I?'

That's the only conclusion he could arrive at.

'I should've asked for more money, if things turned out this way....'

Kahng Tae-Sik recalled the events of a few days ago while licking his dried lips.

A few days ago....

A cafe near the headquarters of the Association.

Kahng Tae-Sik asked the moment he settled down in his seat.

"What business do you have with me?"

The middle-aged man sitting his opposite side seemed rather haggard for some reason.

'He said that he's an owner of some company, didn't he?'

Kahng Tae-Sik definitely did not know who this man was. However, he still decided to free up some time after this man continued to call him on the phone, sounding quite desperate and all.

The middle-aged man muttered as if he was speaking to himself.

"I've heard that no one knows what happens exactly inside dungeons."

The man's voice was so soft that Kahng Tae-Sik had to ask again.

"What did you say?"

"This is every cent I have in my name.'

The man suddenly presented his bank account book.

Kahng Tae-Sik alternated his gaze between the book and the man's face, before confirming the bank balance printed on the book's pages.

There was a substantial amount of ₩2,000,000,000 printed there.

“And why are you showing me this?”

When Kahng Tae-Sik formed a questioning expression, the middle-aged man’s head dropped lower.

“Among the criminals you’re in charge of, there is one who had hurt my little girl. Because of that, she took her own life, and my wife is still in the hospital from the shock.”

The middle-aged man’s voice became tearful.

“Yet, such a b*stard will be able to roam the streets again in a few years’ time.... You think I’ll be able to rest easy knowing that?”

The man raised his sorrow and rage-filled face.

“I’m sure you can already tell what I’m implying here.”

The man lowered his head again.

“I beg of you, Hunter-nim!!”

A deafening silence descended between these two men.

Kahng Tae-Sik leaned against the back of his chair and fell into a deep contemplation.

Only after a long while passed by did he open his mouth again.

“Can you guess why I chose to work for the Association’s Monitoring Division?”

“Pardon me?”

The middle-aged man raised his head.

Kahng Tae-Sik explained himself.

“As a B-rank Hunter, I’m considered as one of the higher ranked Hunters. Large Guilds continue to send their scouting offers in my direction all the time. Yet, can you guess why I persist in doing this job while getting a pittance in return?”

“I... I don’t know.”

The corners of Kahng Tae-Sik’s lips arched up.

“You see, I... I find it more enjoyable to fight against people rather than monsters.”

In that sense, the Monitoring Division was like the heaven-sent job for Kahng Tae-Sik.

Well, he could beat up other Hunters in the name of the law, after all. And

he'd end up killing one or two due to unavoidable circumstances, too.

'Due to unavoidable circumstances..... Eh.'

Kahng Tae-Sik inwardly smiled and spoke.

"Stepping on that insect you told me about isn't going to be difficult at all. However, there will be other Hunters inside the dungeon besides the insect, as well. I might view that b*stard as an insect, but will other Hunters think that way, I wonder?"

The middle-aged man formed a disappointed expression after hearing Kahng Tae-Sik's rather pessimistic-sounding words.

And here he was, thinking that he'd finally get to avenge the death of his little girl. It felt like the heavens were crashing down on top of him.

However, Kahng Tae-Sik formed a sinister smile as if to mock the other man.

"This money, plus one billion Won on top of that, to deal with the other Hunters as well. Can you do it?"

However, if a Re-Awakened Hunter was among those 'other Hunters', then the amount of 3 billion Won was not quite enough. Well, his own life was on the line, after all.

The self-proclaimed rank E Hunter was still emitting a sharp, observant air even now. He looked as if he'd seize any slight opening there was.

Kahng Tae-Sik swallowed his saliva.

'I can't take him lightly.'

Kahng Tae-Sik was confident of winning here. He had never lost a single one-on-one fight even before he underwent the Awakening process.

However, even though he could win, it would not be an easy victory at all.

Right now, he had to revise his plans ever so slightly.

With a nice timing, the rank E Hunters asked a question.

"Those convicts... Why did you kill them?"

"The father of a girl who was raped by those b*stards came to ask me for the favour. Those b*stards were animals worthy of getting killed. And I simply took care of animals that hurt other people, that was all."

The rank E Hunter was listening without saying anything. It seemed quite

likely that talking might work here. Kahng Tae-Sik went straight to persuading the other man.

“Although the matter had come down to this, I don’t wish to hurt you. How about ignoring today’s matter altogether? As long as we make this deal here, I promise I won’t try anything to you and your group.”

Of course, he couldn’t let a potential source of trouble fester.

That was why Kahng Tae-Sik was thinking. There was a chance that a head-on fight would result in him getting badly injured, so he’d get out of here first, wait for an opportune moment, and dispose of all the witnesses one at the time.

However, the rank E Hunter snorted derisively.

“You should’ve said those things before you tried your little tricks. You want us to ignore everything just because you failed your sneak attack?”

That man didn’t say anything wrong there.

Kahng Tae-Sik smirked in dumbfoundedness.

‘In the end, you want to have a go, is that it?’

Well, in that case, he’d have to go all out, then.

The light shimmering in Kahng Tae-Sik’s eyes became colder. His sharp glare quickly swept across the rank E Hunter top to bottom. And his forehead creased up for a second.

‘Where did he get his dagger from?’

Since before he had noticed it, the E-rank Hunter was holding a dagger.

‘Well... It shouldn’t be too important, is it?’

It didn’t matter where that weapon came from, indeed. What’s important here, though, was the type of the weapon.

Kahng Tae-Sik’s quickly concluded his assessment.

The class that used daggers and utilised quick movements; his opponent was a super-close type damage dealer.

Most likely, his speciality was ‘assassination’.

What a coincidence that their specialities happened to be the same.

However, this guy only underwent his Re-Awakening not too long ago. The difference in experience should be absolutely massive. He might not even be able to properly utilise the skills at his disposal.

“Let me teach you a thing or two as your senior.”

Kahng Tae-Sik extracted a knife from his hips and smirked derisively at the rank E Hunter.

“Can you do something like this?”

And then, Kahng Tae-Sik activated his ‘Stealth’ skill, thereby disappearing from the spot.

That caused the rank E Hunter to get flustered and he hurriedly looked around his vicinity. Kahng Tae-Sik could see his naked panic and confusion quite clearly.

‘But, that’s so obvious.’

The ‘Stealth’ skill didn’t only make one’s body go transparent.

The body, the sound, and even the smell!

The skill that cloaked everything about the person activating it!

That was the ‘Stealth’ skill in a nutshell.

There were only a handful of assassin-type Hunters who could use this skill in the entire world.

Utterly unrelated to one’s ranks, you just had to be a lucky few who unlocked this skill when going through the Awakening process.

‘Let’s end this in one hit!’

Kahng Tae-Sik swiftly moved to the rear of the E-rank Hunter. His back was wide open, unguarded.

‘This is the end.’

He was expecting to engage in a bitter battle, but it turned out to be a rather simple fight in the end. If the opponent was getting ready to counter the Stealth skill, then it’d not be this easy at all.

As expected, the difference in experience decided the victor today.

‘Die!’

Kahng Tae-Sik’s knife aimed at the spot just below the E-rank Hunter’s ribs and powerfully stabbed forward.

However!!

Clang!!

Two daggers collided in the air and sparks flew off.

With his Stealth skill deactivated, one could now see Kahng Tae-Sik's wide open eyes.

“What?! But how!!”

The E-rank Hunter's dagger had accurately blocked off his own dagger.

Unable to hide his shock, Kahng Tae-Sik raised his eyes and looked up at the E-rank Hunter's face.

And that Hunter opened his mouth with a totally unimpressed face.

“Oh, so now you decide to pop up.”

“Wha-what did you say?”

Unable to understand the words of this rank E Hunter, Kahng Tae-Sik suddenly felt this inexplicable fear in his heart.

Tti-ring!

[Emergency Quest: Kill all the enemies!]

There are lifeforms holding murderous intentions towards the 'Player'. Kill them all in order to secure your own safety. If you do not follow this instruction, a corresponding penalty will be given.

The number of enemies left to kill: 1

The number of killed enemies: 0

Jin-Woo confirmed the Emergency Quest message and breathed a sigh of relief.

‘It wasn't a waste of time.’

He was kinda worried, that if Kahng Tae-Sik didn't take the initiative, Jin-Woo wouldn't receive the Emergency Quest notification. It was quite unlike how it was with Hwang Dong-Seok and his gang back then.

That was why he tested the System out, and it was as he expected.

The moment Kahng Tae-Sik revealed his murderous intent, the message popped up.

He wasn't just mindlessly chatting with the guy, or revealing his 'panic', or showing off openings for nothing until now.

‘I really didn't know he could use Stealth, though....’

Actually, when Kahng Tae-Sik did disappear in front of his eyes, Jin-Woo was slightly taken aback.

Well, 'Stealth' was a pretty rare skill, after all.

But, when he concentrated a bit harder, he easily and accurately sensed Kahng Tae-Sik's every movement. So much so that he could close his eyes and still find his target with no problem.

This was the effect of his enhanced Perception Stat.

He continued to invest on this Stat just so he could tell whether he should fight or flight, but today, he learned of a new use for it.

'I got lucky.'

Thanks to that, Kahng Tae-Sik was getting shocked out of his mind as if he had seen the ghosts of his ancestors.

"But, how?!"

And now, when Jin-Woo takes care of this murdering b*stard, he'd be able to enjoy the quest's delicious rewards.

'If I'm going to fight anyway, then I might as well get everything I'm supposed to, no?'

It was his turn now.

From now on, he'd start attacking for real.

The two daggers locked in a deadly embrace continued to push against each other.

It seemed that their strength was about the same.

It was here when Jin-Woo's eyes gleamed dangerously.

'In that case, should I find an opening somewhere else?'

Jin-Woo's leg moved in an instant, and he stomped on Kahng Tae-Sik's foot.

STOMP!!

"Uwaahk?!"



Chapter 33 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Kahng Tae-Sik had been paying attention only to the daggers, so he got really stunned by the pain shooting up from his foot, causing him to hurriedly step back.

Jin-Woo didn't miss this opportunity.

'Dash!'

['Skill: Dash' has been activated.]

[Your movement speed has increased by 30%. One Mana will be spent every minute during its activation.]

Jin-Woo rapidly got closer to his target.

Kahng Tae-Sik's eyes grew wider still.

'He got faster?!'

Jin-Woo had been displaying an already high level of agile movements, but now that he had gotten even faster, Kahng Tae-Sik found it quite disorientating.

Jin-Woo closed the distance in the blink of an eye and sank his Poison Fang of Kasaka down on Kahng Tae-Sik's thigh.

"Kuwahhkhk!!"

He aimed there precisely because Kahng Tae-Sik was focused on defending his upper body only.

['Effect: Paralysis' has been activated.]

[The effect has been cancelled due to the high resistance of the target.]

['Effect: Bleeding' has been activated.]

[The target's stamina will decrease by 1% per second.]

'Nice!'

The added effects of the Kasaka dagger kicked in as well. It was a bit regretful that the 'Paralysis' didn't work, but still, this fight had become just a tad easier now.

However, Kahng Tae-Sik was a high-ranked Hunter himself! So, his resistance was nothing to scoff about. His dagger aimed at Jin-Woo's vitals and continued to fly in.

Swish, swish!

Jin-Woo evaded the blade with only a hair's breadth and also attacked Kahng Tae-Sik's vital spots.

Even though his thigh was badly damaged, Kahng Tae-Sik calmly defended against Jin-Woo's attacks, as befitting an experienced Hunter.

Clang! Cling!

Cold sweat drops formed on the foreheads of both men.

'Our speeds are about the same!'

'We're moving at the same speed!'

Two men were inwardly admiring each other's agile movements and continued to clash in a dazzling display of super-close proximity knife fighting.

Several powerful attacks, each one capable of ending this fight if hit, were exchanged without rest.

Swish, swish, swiiish, swish, swish, swish!!

It was a truly scary and gripping battle that caused the onlooker's blood to go cold.

'I gotta break this stalemate somehow.'

Jin-Woo gathered strength in his eyes.

['Skill: Intimidation' has been activated.]

The moment his eyes met Jin-Woo's, Kahng Tae-Sik flinched slightly for some reason.

'What was that?'

['Effect: Fear' has been activated.]

['The target's (All) Stats will decrease by 50% for one minute.]

'It worked!'

Jin-Woo knew that he had won now.

On the other hand, a small earthquake erupted in Kahng Tae-Sik's eyes.

'How come my body is.....?'

After he had met Jin-Woo's gaze, his body felt as heavy as if he was floundering in deep water or some such. His trusty speed began decreasing as well.

Swish! Swiiish!!

Wounds on Kahng Tae-Sik's body increased quickly one by one.

'This, this isn't possible!'

Kahng Tae-Sik's thoughts became confused and messy.

This was, without a doubt, a debuffing effect. But, he had never, ever heard of a case where an assassin class was able to use a debuff magic.

'Assassination was not his speciality, then?'

If that was the case, then what was up with his crazy speed?

However, Kahng Tae-Sik had stopped his train of thoughts there. His confusion had rapidly morphed into panic, instead. Because... he had spotted Jin-Woo abruptly rushing in closer.

Kahng Tae-Sik hurriedly took aim at Jin-Woo's eyes.

Swish!!

Jin-Woo quickly tilted his head out of the way, but the dagger still managed to graze his cheek.

Of course, he knew he'd get hurt, at least by this much, or even worse. In order to get that decisive strike in, he decided to take the risk.

Kahng Tae-Sik's expression crumpled.

'F*ck.'

Jin-Woo succeeded in getting close to Kahng Tae-Sik's chest and stabbed down on the latter with the Poison Fang of Kasaka.

Stab.

"Keo-heok!!"

Kahng Tae-Sik's eyes shot open wider.

Both men knew right away at that moment. The victor had been truly decided with that one move.

Crimson-red blood pooled in Kahng Tae-Sik's mouth. It was gushing up from his chest. As blood leaked out from the side of his lips, Kahng Tae-Sik formed a smirk.

To actually run into a Re-Awakened Hunter inside a lowly rank D

dungeon....

'Me and my seriously rotten.....'

The dagger in Kahng Tae-Sik's hand fell to the floor.

He continued to pant heavily as he leaned his head closer and whispered something in Jin-Woo's ear.

"....."

Jin-Woo silently listened to those last words, before pulling the dagger out from Kahng Tae-Sik's chest.

Just like a dress slipping off a clothes hanger, Kahng Tae-Sik crumpled to the floor, lifeless.

Plop.

Tti-ring!

[You have completed 'Emergency Quest: Kill all the enemies'.]

The expected messages did pop up, but Jin-Woo's expression wasn't so good. Just like the last time, the aftertaste of killing someone remained bitter and nothing to feel too happy about. Even though the other guy attacked first and initiated this fight....

[Completion rewards are now available.]

[Would you like to confirm the rewards?] (Y/N)

If there were no rewards, then this would be one hell of a loss-loss situation, that.

Jin-Woo consoled himself with that line of thought and confirmed the rewards.

Tti-ring!

[The following rewards are available.]

Reward 1. Five additional Stat points

'Huh?'

Jin-Woo formed a confused expression.

The reward on offer was far, far less than when compared to fighting Hwang Dong-Seok and his goons.

'But, it was a far harder opponent this time, though?'

Did this mean the number of enemies was more important than the skills of

the opponent? Or, was there something else he hadn't figured out yet?

Jin-Woo tilted his head slightly.

It was here that Jin-Woo lowered his gaze and ended up spotting something rather odd. There was a spot of flickering light about as big as a coin gleaming on the corpse of Kahng Tae-Sik.

Jin-Woo's eyes grew wider and wider.

'No way, could it be....?'

Although he could hardly believe it, that light seemed far too similar to the one emitted by the loot found on the dead monsters from the instant dungeons.

That light also indicated the position of the magic crystal inside a monster from the Gates. But now, the dead Kahng Tae-Sik was emitting this light.

'What does this mean?'

Jin-Woo calmed his trembling heart and quietly reached out towards the chest area of Kahng Tae-Sik where that flickering light was coming from.

Tti-ring.

Indeed, he wasn't seeing things just now.

[You've discovered 'Rune Stone: Stealth'. Take it?]

'A Rune Stone?! Are you talking about THAT Rune Stone....??'

His heart began pounding even harder than before.

The skill Kahng Tae-Sik used had now become a Rune Stone and was waiting to be discovered on his body.

'Stealth' was a rare skill that only a select few Hunters could use. If this message was indeed talking about the Rune Stones he knew, then....

'Acquire it.'

Suddenly, a small rock with mysterious runic letters carved on the surface appeared in his hand.

[Rune Stone: Stealth]

You can absorb the skill by breaking this Rune Stone.

....Absorbing skills by breaking the stone.

As the description said, this rock was definitely a Rune Stone.

By breaking it, he'd be able to use Stealth from now on.

He had not heard of a Rune Stone that taught one to use Stealth being put up for sale until now. So, it was impossible to estimate just how much this little Rune Stone would go for in the marketplace.

It was then, he heard the voices of two people coming from his rear.

“Mister Seong, are you alright?!”

“Mister Jin-Woo!!”

Jin-Woo hid the Rune Stone inside his pocket and turned around.

And he found Song Chi-Yeol and Yi Ju-Hui busy gawking at him with eyes filled with disbelief.

The rank E Hunter Jin-Woo, who used to struggle like there’s no tomorrow in a rank D dungeon, just defeated a rank B Hunter Kahng Tae-Sik.

As a non-combatant class, Yi Ju-Hui didn’t know this, but the rank C Song Chi-Yeol knew very well how incredibly crazy that notion was.

Jin-Woo checked out his own appearance.

“Well, yeah, I’m okay.”

From a casual glance, he was totally fine. He wasn’t feeling any pain, either. But, when he turned his head a bit, the blood pooling around his chin dribbled down. He reflexively touched his cheek and found that the cut he got earlier was bleeding now.

“Oh.”

“Let me heal that for you.”

For a second or two, a blue light danced around Ju-Hui’s fingertips, before that little cut disappeared from the view.

That was the confirmation; a rank E had successfully defeated a rank B without a single injury.

For the two people here that knew Jin-Woo, rather than the fact of a rank B Hunter trying to kill them, it was the fact of the youth before them defeating said Hunter that shocked them the most.

“How can you be able to.....”

Song Chi-Yeol couldn’t finish his sentence.

Jin-Woo, of course, knew what Song Chi-Yeol and Ju-Hui wanted to say here. That was why he opened his mouth first.

“I’m really sorry. When the right time comes, I’ll tell you both

everything, so please, don't ask me anything for the time being."

When Jin-Woo made a request in a grave voice, Ju-Hui nodded her head first. Eventually, Song Chi-Yeol nodded, as well.

"If you're saying that, then you must have your reasons. I understand, young man."

Jin-Woo then turned his head in the direction where the boss was. Although the situation had become complicated somewhat, his plan of killing the boss hadn't changed.

He wanted to kill the boss by himself if possible. Also, there was another thing he had to, meaning these two couldn't be here.

Jin-Woo looked back at Song Chi-Yeol.

"With what has happened here, I think it's impossible to continue on with this raid anymore. For the time being, you two should leave the dungeon and contact the Association. I'll remain here and search for other survivors."

Song Chi-Yeol instantly realised what Jin-Woo was trying to do.

'He's going to close the Gate all by himself.'

Even from the older man's perspective, doing that would ensure the least amount of suspicion.

"That would be a good idea. Miss Ju-Hui, let's go ahead first."

Ju-Hui hesitated after hearing Song Chi-Yeol's recommendation, but then, she quickly ran at Jin-Woo.

"You haven't forgotten about our dinner date, right?"

Jin-Woo smiled gently.

"I haven't. I still need to ask you for my change, remember?"

"In that case, you honour that promise, okay? I'll be waiting on the outside."

Jin-Woo nodded his head, and that must have relaxed her a lot since she took a step back without saying anything else.

Even as she was escaping from the dungeon, she continued to look behind her several times.

Jin-Woo only let out a sigh once the shadows of the two people were gone for good.

“Fuu-woo.”

And he really wanted to hide for as long as possible, but....

In the end, he got discovered.

There were two eyewitnesses, so it was impossible to talk his way out of this one now.

‘It’s not like I can threaten Ju-Hui or Mister Song ahjussi, either.’

Killing the rank B should be seen as self-defence. He had two eyewitnesses, so no worries there. The real issue would be with how a rank E managed to kill a rank B.

‘I guess being a Re-Awakened is the most plausible excuse there is, huh.’

He decided to go with that one, then.

He’d reveal himself to be a Re-Awakened Hunter and get himself a re-assignment test.

No one would believe him even if he told them about the System or levelling up and all the other stuff. There was also no reason for him to reveal that information voluntarily, anyway.

After he decided to go through with the re-assignment test, he kind of felt relieved on one hand, and a bit wistful on the other.

‘And here I was, hoping to do the test only after I got even stronger....’

But, since when did the world move as one wished?

There was nothing he could do about it now.

‘I wonder, how high will my new rank be?’

Since he fought on equal footing with Kahng Tae-Sik, was he slightly stronger than a rank B Hunter at this moment?

He thought that he had gotten really strong now, but as it turned out, those high ranking Hunters, starting from B all the way up to S, were indeed all freakish existences far surpassing his imaginations.

‘Oh well, let’s think about the future once I get out of here.’

For the time being, he had to get rid of the boss first.

The dungeon that emitted magical energy waves equalling a rank D only had a bunch of rank E Goblins inside. In that case, there was a good chance that the magical energy wave was actually coming solely from the boss.

A boss like that should give him enough experience points for a level up.

‘But before I do that...’

There was something else he had better confirm first.

Jin-Woo pushed his Perception to the limit and carefully combed over all auras present within the dungeon.

“Found you.”

Jin-Woo began waking to his new destination.

On the way, he discovered the cold corpses of Kim Sang-Sik and the other Hunter.

This was the power of a high ranked Hunter; if such a Hunter really wanted to, then killing a few lower ranked Hunters could be done in the blink of an eye.

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened as he walked past them.



Chapter 34 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

A short while later.

“Euph, euph, euph!!”

Jin-Woo discovered a lone convict struggling on the ground not too far from him. His arms and legs were all tied up with a rope, and there was a gag placed in his mouth.

It was as Kahng Tae-Sik said, just before his final breath.

“I’ve tied up the rapist not too far from here. I was thinking of disposing of him last, after the victim’s father asked me to make him suffer for a bit.”

Kahng Tae-Sik stopped breathing after those words.

The convict began to struggle even harder after seeing Jin-Woo. It was as if he was asking to be freed as soon as possible.

“Euph! Euph! Euph!”

Now that Jin-Woo took a closer look, it was none other than the same guy who threw a dirty wink at Ju-Hui earlier on.

As soon as Jin-Woo pulled the gag off the convict’s mouth, he breathed in and out heavily and widened his eyes.

“Pant, pant, pant!! That, that crazy b*stard, Kahng Tae-Sik killed everyone! He killed everyone!! What the f*ck happened?? Did he leave? There’s blood on your clothes?! Did you get done in by him, too??”

Jin-Woo didn’t reply and simply raised his head to stare straight ahead.

...Towards where the boss was.

The convict’s words poured out in great urgency.

“Untie me first. Hurry! We gotta escape before Kahng Tae-Sik shows up! God d*mn it!! There’s some sort of magic energy flowing in the ropes and I can’t tear them apart! You have some sort of a weapon with you, right? Why aren’t you saying anything? Can’t you hear me??”

When a bottom-feeder Hunter from the Association continued to ignore him, the convict forgot about the position he was in and began frowning in dissatisfaction.

Remaining expressionless until then, Jin-Woo finally opened his mouth.

“The boss should be just up ahead.”

“What?”

A confused, questioning expression floated up on the face of the convict.

“Feels like it’s a bit stronger than a regular rank D dungeon boss, too. I’m getting really curious about its attack patterns, you see.”

The convict listened to those words and lost his cool, roaring out at the top of his voice.

“What the f*ck are you even talking about?!”

Jin-Woo calmly continued on with what he wanted to say.

“Before all that, though, I gotta ask you about something. You remember the girl you raped before?”

“What? Which one are you talking about? You a family member of the victim?”

Jin-Woo’s brows quivered.

Just now, this man asked ‘which one’, rather than answering with yes or no. Meaning, he had hurt well more than one or two girls.

Hunters possessed extraordinary strength, so if they wanted to, they could become a horrifying monster at any time. And this b*stard used that strength to violate women until now.

With that, Jin-Woo’s mind was made up.

He coldly stared down at the convict and spoke.

“Now I know, so there’s that.”

“What?! Euph? Euph!!”

Before the convict uttered out more rubbish, Jin-Woo swiftly gagged the b*stard again. Then, he began slowly dragging the convict by the ankles towards the boss room.

“Euph! Euph!! Eeuuuph!!!”

The convict struggled even more desperately as he got dragged along. Both of his wide-open eyes were now completely bloodshot.

Not even slightly fazed by the criminal’s desperate struggle, Jin-Woo successfully dragged him into the boss room.

“Euph! Euphhh!!”

And inside the boss room, there was a large group of Hobgoblins waiting for their arrival. These monsters reputedly enjoyed snacking on human entrails. Apparently.

“Euph! Euph!! Euphhh!!”

The convict finally realised what Jin-Woo was planning to do here.

He cried out and shook his head around wildly after seeing the group of Hobgoblins. The blue convict’s pants began dyeing in a yellow colour, as well.

“Fuu-woo.”

Jin-Woo took a deep breath, and he chucked the convict among the waiting Hobgoblins.

“Eeuuuph-!!”

“Kiiiigiik.”

“Kiihit.”

“Kiiiieekk!”

Picking up on the smell of a fresh, living prey, Hobgoblins pounced on the convict all at once and began tearing into his stomach.

“Eeeuupph!! Euph! Euphhh!!”

As the convict desperately struggled on and thrashed about, the vessels in his eyes burst open one by one, dyeing his eyes utterly crimson red.

“Eeeupphhh..... Euh, euh.....”

Even though the convict gradually lost his consciousness, Hobgoblins greedily and restlessly tore into him.

Just what would it feel like to be devoured alive by the disgusting monsters?

Jin-Woo frowned deeply as he quickly scanned the interior of the room, searching for the boss.

‘There it is.’

A huge Hobgoblin, definitely the boss of this dungeon, sat arrogantly over yonder on the other side of the boss room.

With its subordinates all too preoccupied with the fresh prey, there was not one guard around the boss itself, which meant that this was the perfect opportunity.

‘Dash!’

Jin-Woo immediately dashed past the Hobgoblins in the blink of an eye and arrived before the boss.

“Kkieehk?!”

The surprised Hobgoblin boss quickly stood up, but before it could complete the action, its head fell and rolled on the ground.

Plop.

Tumble, tumble.

Tti-ring!

[You’ve killed the owner of this dungeon.]

[Level up!]

‘Ah, hang on a sec.’

Only after he had sliced the boss’s head off did Jin-Woo remember the existence of the Rune Stone.

‘There was no need to lure them out with a bait, was there? I could’ve just learned the Stealth skill and sneaked closer, couldn’t I?’

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to what little remained of the convict and clicked his tongue.

Of course, he wasn’t feeling any sympathy for the b*stard there.

‘Well, whatever.....’

In any case, his plan was a success.

Part 5. Cogwheel

It wasn’t difficult to deal with the group of confused and leaderless Hobgoblins.

“Kiiiiek!!”

“kiiiiaahhk!!!”

“Kyahk!!”

The Hobgoblins ran around trying to escape from Jin-Woo, but were all hunted down soon afterwards.

“Kkyaaahkk!”

When he killed the very last one, another feel-good message popped into his view.

[Level up!]

'It rose up again?'

His expression brightened up after this rather unexpected reward of the day's labour fell into his lap.

Jin-Woo cleaned all the blood off the Poison Fang of Kasaka, and along with all the magic crystals extracted from the Hobgoblins, stored them inside his Inventory, before summoning his Status Window.

Tti-ring!

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 27

Class: None

Title: Slaughterer of Wolves

HP: 5,114

MP: 548

Tiredness: 0

[Stats]

Strength: 72

Stamina: 43

Agility: 82

Intelligence: 39

Perception: 69

(Available points to distribute: 5)

Physical damage reduction: 20%

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max

- Tenacity Lv. 1

Active skills:

- Dash Lv. 1

- Intimidation Lv. 1

[Equipped items]

Gatekeeper's Necklace (A)

Before he knew it, his level was almost near the '30' mark.

Jin-Woo wasn't expecting much from this dungeon at the time of hunting down the weak Goblins by the entrance. But, well, he got a level up by killing the Hobgoblin boss, and then another one from hunting down every single one of the Hobgoblin underlings, as well. His level rose up by two in such a short time.

What a lucky day it was for him, every single strong monster being in the boss room and all.

'No, hang on a bit here. It's a bit too much to call this good luck, huh.'

Three diverging pathways, and the difficulty of the boss room....

If the low-ranked Hunters got too conceited after hunting down weak Goblins and arrogantly stepped into the boss room, then they might have met with a serious accident from the appearance of all these Hobgoblins.

Unlike the Goblins, Hobgoblins were pretty tough monsters to contend with.

'There are some instances of Hobgoblins appearing in dungeons full of Goblins, but...'

Well, it was still very rare to see such a big group of Hobgoblins in a single location as it was in the case of this dungeon.

Really now, it was utterly impossible to predict what might happen inside a dungeon. Someone's lucky day might turn into someone else's worst nightmare.

The only protection one had in this place was the one's own power.

That was why Jin-Woo wanted to get stronger. Surviving inside a dungeon was one thing, but what if there was a dungeon break near the hospital where his mother was staying?

What if, he got sneak-attacked by a monster while out walking on the street?

No, the monsters wouldn't be the only problems to worry about, either.

Hunters were also dangerous existences, just as much as the monsters themselves. Even if various organisations were trying to manage them, there would always be a limit.

Indeed, he needed to possess the necessary strength to protect himself.

‘There are limits to how powerful a Hunter could become.’

However, there was no such thing for himself.

Theoretically, he could grow stronger indefinitely as long as his Stats increased and he found the right type of equipment to wear.

And today, one more method of getting stronger had been added to his arsenal. It was none other than the Rune Stones!

Jin-Woo pulled out the Rune Stone from his pocket.

Just like with other items, the information on the stone floated up like a hologram projection.

[Rune Stone: Stealth]

You can absorb the skill by breaking this Rune Stone.

To those who didn't know, this thing would've come across as a small pebble with weird letters carved on the surface, but if you were a Hunter, you'd be salivating like crazy regardless of what your rank was.

High-ranked Hunters would've used it for themselves, while the lower-ranked ones would've sold it to the higher ranked Hunters.

And a Rune Stone containing rare skills, such as this one with the 'Stealth' skill, would've especially fetched a large amount of money. When placed in an auction, this particular stone should fetch at least a few billion Won, and when sold through the black market, several times more than that.

There was only one reason why it would be more expensive in the black market. Because, there would be no official record of who bought what with how much money, that was why.

Having a hidden skill was the same thing as possessing one more powerful weapon.

‘...Just like how Kahng Tae-Sik had been hiding his Stealth skill.’

If it weren't for his high Perception Stat, Jin-Woo would've been killed for sure. Thinking about that sent chills down his spine.

‘Let's forget about selling this. I can always make money later on.’

He'd not fall for the monetary temptation right now. His current priority was to become stronger than ever before, after all.

There was no need to even mention just how useful this rare 'Stealth' skill would prove to be in the future.

“And to think, this little stone is worth several houses, no, several buildings, even.”

Still, Jin-Woo quickly did something he’d never have dreamed of doing in the past.

When he squeezed his hand tightly, the Rune Stone shattered into pieces without much resistance.

Crack.

A reddish aura seeped out from the cracks of the Rune Stone and slowly wrapped around his body.

It was almost the same as when receiving the effects of the healing magic. Only the colour was wrong, being red and not blue.

In any case, it wasn’t a bad sensation.

The reddish aura circling around him smoothly entered through his nose and was absorbed into his lungs. Right away, he could sense an unknown power well up inside of him.

A familiar mechanical beep went off shortly afterwards, too.

Tti-ring!

[You’ve learned ‘Skill: Stealth’.]

[You can now use ‘Skill: Stealth’.]

‘Nice!’

He managed to successfully absorb the skill.

He was feeling rather nervous since this would be his first time using a Rune Stone to learn a skill, but the whole process turned out to be unexpectedly quick and simple.

‘So, does this mean that I can use Stealth now?’

His heart began pounding harder from the sense of accomplishment after learning a rare skill.

Well, the wise elders, they said that seeing was believing, so....

Jin-Woo activated his new skill right away.

‘Stealth.’

Just as he finished thinking about activating it, his body vanished from his own view. From the tips of his fingers right down to his toes, every part of him became transparent.

What a strange feeling it was, unable to see his own hands right in front of his eyes.

‘What would happen if I do this?’

Since he thought about it, Jin-Woo quickly summoned his dagger from the Inventory to confirm.

Then, he sensed gripping something in his hand. Rather mystifyingly, though, he could sense it but couldn't see it.

‘As expected....’

Just like the knife that Kahng Tae-Sik had been carrying around, the ‘Stealth’ skill was also applied to his Poison Fang of Kasaka.

As he thought, it wasn't that Kahng Tae-Sik's weapon was strange, it was simply the power of this skill, instead.

‘I wonder, just how far does this skill cover?’



Chapter 35 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo picked a pebble up from the ground, and it too disappeared from the sight.

‘Can I do that with this, too?’

He got even more curious, so he reached out and touched the shoulder of the dead Hobgoblin, but nothing happened next. It seemed that there definitely was a limit to this skill.

At least, he was now sure of the clothes he wore and the objects held in his hand being affected by the skill.

It happened right then.

[You’ve exhausted all of your Mana and ‘Skill: Stealth’ will be deactivated.]

“Eh?”

Suddenly, ‘Stealth’ came undone.

‘But, it has been only a few seconds, though??’

Jin-Woo had been moving his body this way and that, trying to familiarise himself with the state of being cloaked, but after the skill came undone all by itself, he hurriedly summoned the skill list and confirmed the details with a flustered look on his face.

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max
- Tenacity Lv. 1

Active skills:

- Dash Lv. 1
- Intimidation Lv. 1
- Stealth Lv. 1

What he sought was the information on the Stealth skill.

The relevant words quickly floated up before his eyes.

Tti-ring!

[Skill: Stealth Lv. 1]

Active skill.

Mana required to activate: 200

Simultaneously cloaks the body and hides all traces of the skill holder. During its activation, 10 Mana will be spent every second.

He needed 200 Mana to activate, and further 10 would be spent every bloody second?!

“Hah....”

No wonder his MP couldn't hold up.

[MP: 7/548]

His remaining Mana of 7 looked rather pitiful to his eyes.

‘It’s really all spent up, huh.’

Currently, the maximum amount of Mana he could store was around 550. If he were to activate the Stealth skill once, he'd be able to maintain the cloaked state for around 35 seconds.

But, if he were to use other skills, then he'd not even get the full 35 seconds, either.

‘Now that I think about it, even Kahng Tae-Sik cancelled his Stealth pretty quickly, didn't he?’

He didn't do that accidentally, as it turned out.

If a high-ranking Hunter like Kahng Tae-Sik couldn't keep the skill going for long, then it meant that lower-ranked Hunters wouldn't even be able to use it.

“....My Mana is the issue here, huh.”

Until now, he had invested all his Stat points on every Stat other than Intelligence, and not even once did his MP value rise up from doing that.

In other words, he now needed to raise the Intelligence Stat as well....

‘I guess it's about time I did that.’

Still, it kind of felt like a waste investing his hard-earned Stat points on a non-combat related Stat just so he could use a skill for a few seconds longer.

‘Compared to other Stats, Intelligence just has too low of an efficiency.’

Strength, Stamina, Agility, and Perception.

He had personally felt the effects of those four Stats increasing. As they increased in value, he became physically stronger and stronger.

The only Stat that he couldn't sense any tangible change taking place inside him was this Intelligence, although it had climbed up a bit now.

‘I mean, it's now almost four times the value compared to when I was a level 1.’

If he were to really dig around and find the difference, then it'd be his increased MP value. That was all, really.

So, to invest his points on this Stat based only on a single result like that.....

‘It's just too wasteful.’

Those points would become his flesh and blood if he were to invest them elsewhere. The only conclusion he could draw here was to continue on with his levelling up until he no longer had to worry about his MP.

Meanwhile, he'd spend his precious Stat points on other, better Stats....

‘My Stat points....’

He abruptly recalled that he still had five extra points he got as the reward from the emergency quest.

He pondered for a second or two on whether he should invest that on ‘Intelligence’, but in the end, he spent 3 points on Strength and the other 2 on Stamina.

[Stats]

Strength: 75

Stamina: 45

Agility: 82

Intelligence: 39

Perception: 69

(Available points to distribute: 0)

Reduction in physical damage: 20%

‘As I thought, numbers ending in 5s are the best.’

As a satisfied smile formed on Jin-Woo's face...

RUMBLE....

The earthquake inside the interior of the dungeon became too severe for him to ignore.

'Is it the one hour mark already?'

There was no more time to waste here.

Jin-Woo closed his Status Window. He had been deliberately wasting time, waiting for the Gate to nearly close, but if he stayed here for a second longer, he might get trapped inside, unable to leave forever.

Before leaving, Jin-Woo turned around and swept his gaze around the boss room one more time.

'I extracted all the magic crystals, and...'

Well, it looked like he hadn't missed a thing.

After confirming this fact, he rapidly disappeared down the exit.

RUMBLE...

As if to warn those still inside that the Gate was about to close, the dungeon began shaking even harder than before.

With excellent timing, agents from the Association's Investigation Department arrived in front of the Gate. Their eyes grew real round after spotting Jin-Woo leisurely exiting from the Gate as it gradually closed behind him.

"H-Hunter-nim!! Are there any other survivors besides you?"

"No. No one else."

"Euh!!"

The expressions of the agents hardened in an instant.

Nine people entered it, yet only three walked out alive. This undoubtedly qualified as a huge incident.

What with several similarly bad incidents occurring within a single district, it was little wonder why these Association agents felt like they had stepped on an almighty pile of dog poo at this very moment.

They wanted to make sure there were no other survivors, but the Gate closed on them so that was no longer possible, too.

This was precisely the reason why Jin-Woo waited around until the time limit was almost up, however.

‘Well, I can’t let them know that there indeed was a survivor, now can I?’

With this, the testimonies of the three survivors would have to suffice. One of the agents spoke with a complicated tone of voice.

“Just now, the Investigation Department has received a telephone call from the chairman of the Geumgang Industries, wishing to hand himself over.”

It was here that Song Chi-Yeol entered into the conversation.

“The chairman of the Geumgang Industries, you say?”

“He’s the father of the victim, and he allegedly has paid off the Hunter Kahng Tae-Sik from the Monitoring Division to murder the convicts.”

“Oh....”

The chairman had confessed to everything after he heard that Kahng Tae-Sik was indeed successful in killing the rapist.

‘Although, it wasn’t Kahng Tae-Sik but me....’

Cops headed there, and the Association came here, it seemed.

Jin-Woo listened quietly before asking a question.

“If that’s the case, there is no problem on this side, isn’t that right?”

At Jin-Woo’s question, the agents formed troubled expressions.

“Yes, basically.”

There was a clear evidence of Kahng Tae-Sik’s crimes, and these three people fought Kahng Tae-Sik in order to survive. Just as Jin-Woo asked, there was nothing here that could be seen as problematic.

...Except for one thing.

One of the agents asked the part that felt the most suspicious to him.

“Just who delivered the final killing blow to Mister Kahng Tae-Sik, who was a rank B Hunter?”

The agents had only arrived at the scene not too long ago, and they were not briefed on the minute details of the situation yet.

‘Oh, well. The distance from here to the Association headquarters is really far, so it can’t be helped, huh. It’s already quite commendable that they had arrived here before the Gate actually closed.’

They surely had to leave the HQ and drive super fast to get here in time as soon as receiving the call.

Hints of fatigue were clearly visible on the faces of the agents.

Just before Jin-Woo was about to speak the truth, he recalled the face of Yu Jin-Ho.

‘What a missed opportunity this is, but looks like I won’t be helping that kid out with his raid quota after all.’

By making an excuse of him being a Re-Awakened Hunter, and going ahead with the re-assignment test, he’d not be able to humour Yu Jin-Ho’s plan anymore.

What Yu Jin-Ho looked for was a low-ranked Hunter that possessed incredible skills. As soon as Jin-Woo’s ranking was re-assigned and it dramatically rose up, everything would’ve been for nothing.

However, what was up here?

When Jin-Woo imagined the dejected, depressed face of Yu Jin-Ho, he found that sight rather humorous, instead of feeling apologetic.

Sure, Jin-Woo was kind of bummed out about the promised building, but, oh well.

‘Well, naught I can do here now.’

Jin-Woo thought as such and was about to open his mouth, but then....

“It was me.”

...His head naturally swivelled towards the source of that voice. And he saw Yi Ju-Hui, her wide-open eyes full of surprise, staring at Song Chi-Yeol.

“But, ahjussi....?”

Before Jin-Woo could ask what his intentions were, Song Chi-Yeol took the initiative and walked closer to the agents.

“I’m the one who killed Kahng Tae-Sik.”

The questioning agent still didn’t look convinced, however.

“Song Chi-Yeol Hunter-nim, are you saying that you brought down Kahng Tae-Sik Hunter-nim?”

His suspicions had merit; not only was Song Chi-Yeol a rank C Hunter, but he also had lost his left arm as well. On the other hand, wasn’t Kahng Tae-Sik often referred to as a high-ranked Hunter, someone who was ranked B?

The power of high ranked Hunters easily exceeded one's imaginations. The accepted norm was that the difference in strength between a rank B and a rank C was far, far wider than that between a rank C and a rank D.

It was here that Song Chi-Yeol began chuckling amiably.

“Have you all forgotten just who is behind me?”

“...Ah!”

Just as the gazes of everyone focused on her, Yi Ju-Hui's face reddened and she quickly lowered her head.

Yi Ju-Hui was a B-ranked Hunter. She hadn't been mentioned until now because her class was not combat-related, but when looking only at her rank, then she was a high-ranked Hunter, just like Kahng Tae-Sik had been.

Why wouldn't a rank C Hunter be able to defeat a rank B Hunter, when a rank B Healer was lending her aid from the side?

The agents finally formed expressions of understanding.

Taking the opportunity born from the momentary confusion, Jin-Woo stood real close to Song Chi-Yeol and whispered to the older man.

“Why are you lying to them, ahjussi?”

Song Chi-Yeol replied back in a whisper as well.

“I thought that there must be a good reason why you were trying to conceal your abilities. Did I overstep my boundaries?”

Of course, he didn't. Thanks to him, Jin-Woo would get to avoid dealing with many inconvenient matters. This was the reason why one could never discount wisdom formed from years of experience.

“No, you didn't.”

“I've received a lot of your help until now, so I'm glad to hear that I was able to help out you now, even if it's just a small thing,”

Meanwhile, one of the agents walked closer to the two men.

“Mister Song Chi-Yeol, why don't you come with us? Help us for a minute or two with writing up the report.”

“Alright. Let's get going, then.”

Song Chi-Yeol left for the Association along with the agents, and before anyone knew it, only Jin-Woo and Yi Ju-Hui remained on the scene.

The sun had set a long time ago.

Ju-Hui must've found Jin-Woo and the somewhat altered aura he emitted a bit foreign, because she hesitated greatly before cautiously approaching him.

“Would you like to walk with me for a little while?”

‘Is she talking about that dinner date?’

He was starving after moving around for a bit today, so he found her suggestion to his liking.

Jin-Woo agreed with a welcoming expression.

“Okay, let’s.”

As if they had made a promise earlier, the two young people began quietly walking side by side under the soft lights of the street lamps.

“...”

Ju-Hui’s eyes remained fixed to her toes.

Because, if she tried to raise her head, her gaze automatically drifted towards to her side. She tried very hard not to think about it, but it was of no use.

In the past, she found him comfortable to talk to, but now, the current Jin-Woo was overflowing with this certain sense of power. She found it much harder to talk to him now as a result.

‘Just what happened....?’

He was strong enough to subdue a rank B Hunter without too much trouble. He had changed so drastically.

Since he requested her to keep it a secret, she wasn’t planning to pry, but his amazing transformation kept tugging at the corner of her mind.



Chapter 36 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘I wish he’d at least talk to me.’

Ju-Hui kind of felt that Jin-Woo was being rather cold-hearted here, not saying a single word until now.

In the end, Ju-Hui stopped walking first and with some difficulty, broke the ice.

“Actually... I think it’ll be impossible for me to eat anything today. Let me return this to you in the meantime.”

Ju-Hui handed over a magic crystal to Jin-Woo. It was none other than the same crystal he entrusted to her back in the underground temple.

The tips of Ju-Hui’s fingers were trembling as she handed over the crystal.

‘That incident had been only a few days ago.... And she had to go through another one today.’

Ju-Hui was the type of person to get scared quite easily. He could easily figure out what she meant by being unable to eat anything.

“But, today isn’t the only day, you know? There’s no need to return this to me now.”

Ju-Hui shook her head slowly.

“I’m going back home next week.”

He heard that she was quitting the life of a Hunter, but now, it seemed that she was leaving the city altogether. Jin-Woo formed a rueful expression.

“Is it because of... that incident back then?”

“Well, it’s not simply because of that, but.....”

Perhaps she ended up recalling the events of that day, Ju-Hui’s complexion darkened. Jin-Woo quickly changed the topic of their conversation.

“Where is your family home, exactly?”

“It’s in Busan.Actually, Mister Jin-Woo?”

Suddenly, Ju-Hui’s expression became quite serious.

“Y-yes?”

Sensing that the mood had become sombre, Jin-Woo quickly wiped the smile off his face and formed a serious expression as well.

Ju-Hui slowly, carefully combed over Jin-Woo’s face.

Back then, when everyone else was trembling from despair, only Jin-Woo’s eyes burned fiercely with a strong resolve. Ju-Hui was nearest to him, so she got to see those eyes.

‘It was like, they were shouting out to the rest of the world so they can hear his will to survive.’

And the faint traces of hope those eyes captured managed to save not only her, but many others as well, from that place multiple times.

No one could imitate what he pulled off back there.

Thump, thump....

When she recalled the events of that day, her heart began beating faster and faster.

‘No, I can’t....’

She had no regrets over quitting the life of a Hunter, since it didn’t even suit her personality, to begin with.

However, she couldn’t help but feel really bad after realising that it’d be tough to meet Jin-Woo ever again.

‘Will he think of me as a weird person, if I ask him about meeting each other again....?’

It was rather unfortunate, but there were some things in this world that she couldn’t really do anything about. Having any regrets over such matters would only end up tormenting her.

In the end, Ju-Hui simply formed a disarming smile and lightly shook her head.

“Nah, it’s nothing, really. If you come down to Busan one day, please give me a call. I’ll buy you really good sushi.”

“Sounds good.”

When Jin-Woo formed a smile, Ju-Hui smiled back at him.

And so, Ju-Hui didn’t get to say the words she truly wanted to say. She simply performed a short goodbye and turned around to leave.

‘.....’

The way back home never felt this long to her before.

After sending Ju-Hui home, Jin-Woo also returned to his place.

An old, decrepit apartment building, visible even from a distance – his place was on the eighth floor. (TL: Ninth floor for all of you North American readers)

As he walked past the parked cars to enter the building itself, the voice of an old man stopped him in his tracks.

“Young man from 902.”

It was coming from the old security guard ahjussi. He’d been around this place for a very long time; Jin-Woo was familiar with the older man, so he greeted without hesitation.

“You haven’t gone home yet, ahjussi?”

“I’m on the night watch duty today.”

“Aha.”

Jin-Woo lightly nodded his head.

The old security guard immediately brought out a parcel from the guard post.

“Jin-Woo, this came for you today.”

“Ahh. Thank you so much.”

The sender written on the slip was the Association.

‘Oh, so it was today, eh?’

The day that his replacement phone from the Association was supposed to arrive, that was.

Jin-Woo took out his brand new phone from the box; it glittered softly under the light.

He remembered hearing not too long ago that, due to the continued extreme level of interest towards everything related to Hunters, the number of non-Awakened people trying to get their hands on one of these phones was on the explosive rise.

‘Never mind those who wish to buy one, just what are those idiot Hunters thinking, trying to pilfer a few and selling them off?’

The old saying went that it's not the country that lacked money, but that there were way too many crooks, instead.

Whether it was inside the Association or in the military, or any place where people gathered in some numbers, corruption would always cause problems.

Because of corruption, money would leak out, and the promised financial support would decrease as much as the amount of leaked money, which would make the overall situation even worse.

This would eventually mean that those who were supposed to benefit from the system in a rightful manner got screwed royally in the a*s.

'That was why I got worried, but....'

Fortunately enough, there were seemingly no problems with his new phone.

While waiting for the elevator to arrive, he had nothing else to do so he switched the phone on.

And well, there was a mountain of unanswered messages and missed calls.

'Will I even be able to check all these out??'

Funnily enough, two numbers kept popping up as he took a look at the screen. Both of them seemed unfamiliar to him. One called him a lot, while the other sent a ton of text messages.

'But, I don't know anybody who might call me this many times, though?'

Jin-Woo tilted his head slightly, before deciding to check the text messages out first.

[Hello, I'm from that hospital....]

[If you have free time this week....]

[Was I bothering you? I just thought we could chat for a....]

He belatedly remembered a certain person's face. Indeed, it was the face of that pretty nurse from the hospital, the one asking for his number back then.

'Was her name Choi Yu-Rah?'

He couldn't say that she was bothering him, but he got this feeling that the moment he replied back to her, his life might get really and unnecessarily complicated in a heartbeat.

'Okay, so. I'll pass....'

up, the number that called him repeatedly.

Jin-Woo pressed the call button. A fairly new and catchy pop song noisily greeted him as the ringtone.

Hearing that, Jin-Woo could more or less guess who this number belonged to.

The call was connected pretty quickly.

- ***“Hello?”***

Yup, indeed it was him.

Jin-Woo leaked a wry chuckle after his guess was proven correct.

“It’s me. From today onwards, call me only on this number.”

- ***“Ah! You finally got your phone, hyung-nim!”***

Of course, it was none other than Yu Jin-Ho.

Jin-Woo did write down the boy’s contact number somewhere but he had never called it before, so it was a little wonder why he failed to recognise it.

Yu Jin-Ho spoke with a rather excited tone of voice.

- ***“I was actually thinking of giving you a call just now, hyung-nim. I’ve finished recruiting the team members, so I’ll be coming around tomorrow morning to fetch you!”***

Just from hearing that voice, Jin-Woo could picture Yu Jin-Ho’s happy face. Jin-Woo also chuckled lightly.

“Alright. See you tomorrow, then.”

Click.

As Jin-Woo ended the call, the elevator arrived on the ground floor and its doors slid open.

Tting.

Finally, the raid would start for real from tomorrow onwards.

His heart beat faster just from thinking about it.

‘Let’s level up as quickly as I can.’

He’d raise his levels, enhance all his Stats, and become stronger than everyone out there.

Once he became a truly powerful Hunter, he’d be able to get his hands on money, fame, and influence.

And tomorrow would be his first step towards that goal.

The East of the United States.

Late at night.

Hwang Dong-Su was the main Hunter of the Guild, 'Scavenger', one of the top Guilds in the entire USA. Not only that, but he was also an S-rank as well. And just before he went to sleep, he received a phone call informing him of a shocking matter.

".....My older brother is dead?? I want you to speak slowly, and tell me everything in detail. Got that?"

The name of his older brother was Hwang Dong-Seok. Apparently, he entered a C-ranked Gate and lost his life.

"....My older brother and his eight teammates all died, and only two others escaped unhurt?"

And the two who survived were only a rank D and a bloody E??

Something smelled fishy here.

The older brother Hwang Dong-Su knew would never sacrifice his own life for a far weaker teammate. Also, what if that said teammate happened to be a temp?

There was no need to even mention it.

However, only the ranks D and E walked away alive, while his older brother and other C-ranked Hunters all perished in that dungeon.

'There's something going here....'

Hwang Dong-Su's eyes became incredibly sharp.

Right now, he was in a far-off foreign nation after being scouted away by one of America's top Guilds, but back when he was still in Korea, his brother did everything possible to look after him and be a good brother.

He might not have been a good human being, but he was a great, precious brother.....

'I was planning to invite him here once I've secured my foothold, but now....'

To think, he'd meet an accident before that happened.

Hwang Dong-Su bit his lower lip.

"Fax me all the information on the two surviving members. My number

is....” (TL: Yup, it said ‘fax’ in the raw. Uhm, so, no emails in this world, then?)

Hwang Dong-Su ended the phone call and then called his manager next. The call got through pretty quickly.

- *“Mister Hwang. You’re calling me quite late. What’s going on?”*

“Laura. What would happen if I were to kill some people in Korea?”

- *“Do you really mean that?”*

“Yes.”

There was a bout of silence before the woman’s voice continued on.

- *“....The States have yet to sign an agreement to exchange Hunter criminals with South Korea. Mister Hwang, you are now an American citizen, so you’ll get a hearing in a US court instead. If we have a chat with the relevant government officials, then your overall sentence should be pretty light.”*

“Good to hear that. Looks like I’ll have to make a trip to Korea for a while. Something happened there. Can you clear up my schedule for a bit?”

- *“However, Mister Hwang, if you leave so suddenly like this, the operations in the Guild will grind to a halt. Can you inform me of the nature of this ‘something’?”*

“It’s a personal matter. Of course, I’m not going to harm the Guild in any shape or form. Tell me just how far my schedule’s been booked for.”

- *“You’re fully booked out for the next two months.”*

“Two months, is it... fine. After that, I will need some free time, so don’t schedule anything. I don’t need a long time, either. Just two weeks. I’ll only need two weeks to pop in and out of Korea.”

- *“.....Understood. What should I tell the upper management?”*

“Tell them, I’m going to my brother’s funeral. Also, going on a trip to cheer myself up, as well.”

- *“Okay. Will do. By the way, Mister Hwang... If there is anything I can assist you with.....”*

Click!

Hwang Dong-Su abruptly ended the call.

Didn’t matter whether it was some cheering up or an advice.... He was not in the mood to hear either of those at the moment.

Whirrrr-!!

It was then, the fax had arrived. Hwang Dong-Su took a look at the documents arriving one by one.

On the white pages, photos of two Hunters, their names, and their brief bio could be seen.

“The rank D Hunter, Yu Jin-Ho, and a rank E, Seong Jin-Woo.”

Hwang Dong-Su alternated his gaze on the two men’s photos and gritted his teeth in determination.

‘I’m sure I’ll get some answers from either one if I asked them personally.’

And, if he found anything even remotely suspicious, then....

“You will regret coming out of that place alive. I’ll make sure of it.”

The edges of Hwang Dong-Su’s eyes reddened slightly.

Part 6. Strange raids

morning.

Jin-Woo went downstairs after receiving the phone call, only to find a huge van parked outside.

“.....??”

Even before he could say, ***“Who the hell do you think you are to block someone else’s exit”***, the driver’s window rolled down automatically. And the brightly smiling face peeking out from behind belonged to... Yu Jin-Ho.

“Hyung-nim, get in!”

Yu Jin-Ho stuck his hand out the open window and slapped the side of the van.

Since the kid was excitedly declaring his intentions to come and fetch him last night, Jin-Woo half-expected to see a Benz or something, but....

No matter how much he looked, it was a normal-looking passenger van.

Sure, it was on the biggish side, but still.

“Didn’t you say you’re the second born of a chaebol?”

“I thought it’d be too eye-catching if we used my car. I bought this guy not too long ago to use during our raids.”

Only now did Jin-Woo understand the reason for all this shininess coming from the van itself.

‘It’s brand spanking new, that’s why.’

From his sincerity, as seen from the boy arriving at Jin-Woo’s place the first thing in the morning, to his cautiousness as seen from the kid purchasing a new van just to avoid being too conspicuous....

Yu Jin-Ho was doing his best to make sure that everything was going smoothly.

It also demonstrated that his hopes and expectations riding on these upcoming raids were absolutely huge.

Yu Jin-Ho misunderstood the reason why Jin-Woo was taking his time to check out the new van, and worriedly asked.

“By any chance, don’t you like this type of vehicle, hyung-nim?”

“Not at all.”

Jin-Woo declared as so and climbed into the front passenger seat.

“Okay, we’re setting off now, hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho must’ve been feeling really excited because he kept humming to himself while twirling the steering wheel this way and that.

They drove for a while, before coming to a stop in an empty lot.

Screech.

“Hyung-nim, we’ve arrived.”

There were eight people waiting for the duo in this meeting place.



Chapter 37 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The Gate seen behind the waiting group seemed a bit too small for a C rank.

After Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho exited from the van, the waiting Hunters quickly gathered around them. For some reason, there was almost no ‘normal’ person in this group.

Most of them seemed to have some difficulty with their mobility, there was one person who looked to be suffering from an illness, while another was clearly an alcoholic.

Not only that, there was an underage girl too, someone that neither the Association nor the Guild would admit to their ranks. From a casual glance, she looked to be a high-schooler.

“Is it okay to bring a child here?”

“I asked for a professional advice, and apparently, there is no problem according to the law, hyung-nim. Actually, the only reason why people don’t hire underage Hunters is that there would be hell to pay if something went sideways.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

‘In that case, it should be fine.’

Really now, only Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho were going to enter the Gates anyway, so the odds of something going wrong were as good as 0%.

Indeed, these people were only here to make up the numbers. In order to get the permit to clear a C-rank Gate, one needed at least ten Hunters, after all.

That was why eight extra people had to be recruited.

And sure enough, these eight understood very well why they were here, too.

These people all possessed the Hunter licence, but couldn’t act as one due to their circumstances. Most who answered the call to gather were suffering from the hardships of life in various ways.

Yu Jin-Ho took a step forward.

“My name is Yu Jin-Ho, and I’ll be taking the lead in this operation. And this gentleman beside me is Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim who will accompany me to the dungeons. Everyone, your role is to wait outside the Gates until we return.”

One of the Hunters cautiously raised his hand.

“Excuse me... If we really do that, we can get 3 million Won?”

No need to participate in any huntings.

No actual need to even enter the dungeon itself.

3 million Won per raid.

For a payment of simply lending one’s name so they would be permitted to enter the Gates, it sounded just too good to be true.

This man named Yu Jin-Ho didn’t even look like that Seon-Dal character who sold the Taedong River, but the terms on offer were so good that the gathered Hunters couldn’t help but be anxious. (TL: Kim Seon-Dal is a main character of an ancient Korean novel; he is a pro swindler and manages to ‘sell’ a river to the wealthiest man in Korea.)

“I guarantee you that the terms offered are for real.”

Yu Jin-Ho stood stiffly, looking rather serious now. Even his expression had become grave.

“However, you are not to discuss any facet of the events that’ll take place here with anyone. Do not forget that the moment you break the vow of secrecy, you’ll be forced to pay back ten times the money you were paid, as per the contract you all signed.”

Chatter, chatter....

Hunters murmured to each other in hushed whispers.

Just what were these two young Hunters planning to do inside the Gate that they offered up such enticing terms?

They were curious, but no one came out and asked.

That was also the part of the vow of secrecy clause within the contract.

- Absolutely no questioning what happens inside dungeons.

Jin-Woo didn’t want anyone to know of his special constitution, and Yu Jin-Ho wanted to become the Master of a Guild, so there was a serious need to make sure that none of their teammates blabbered their mouth to someone else.

‘.....’

Instead of asking questions, the Hunters began whispering to each other now.

“Still, can those two survive a rank C Dungeon all by themselves?”

“But, they don’t look that strong, don’t they?”

“If these two are capable enough to clear a rank C dungeon, wouldn’t it be better to enter a large Guild and get access to higher ranked dungeons?”

“You’re so right about that.”

They all spoke in a suspicious tone of voice, but not one person said they were quitting.

That was par for the course, really – the terms were too good to give up from their perspective. Even Jin-Woo got hooked by the promise of the two million Won, after all.

The reason for the extra one million Won, compared to what Hwang Dong-Seok had offered, was because of the clause on the participants maintaining their secrecy.

While the explanations carried on, the time was being wasted somewhat.

Jin-Woo confirmed with his watch and spoke to Yu Jin-Ho.

“We should get started.”

“Understood, hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho answered right away and clapped his hands in order to draw the attention to himself.

“Well, that will be all for the explanations. I won’t force you to participate. So, is there anyone among you who’d like to quit now?”

“.....”

“.....”

Of course, no one raised their hands.

Just before the duo tried to enter the Gate....

“Ah! Hyung-nim, hold on for a moment.”

Recalling something he had completely forgotten about until now, Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly ran back to the van.

He then put several things on the entirety of his body and walked back to the Gate in an unsteady and difficult fashion.

“What.... is that?”

“It’s a full-set of reinforced armour, crafted by a famous Guild of master craftsmen in Italy. Hyung-nim, don’t you think we need at least this type of equipment if we were to clear a dungeon by ourselves?”

Jin-Woo slowly facepalmed.

“...”

Simply staring at that hunk of steel covering the kid from the tip of his toes all the way up to the crown of his head, Jin-Woo felt like his own breathing was getting all choked up and the like.

“What’s the matter, hyung-nim?”

Unable to watch on any longer, Jin-Woo reached out, yanked loose the longsword attached to Yu Jin-Ho’s waist, and dropped it on the ground.

“Uh, uh??”

Yu Jin-Ho tried to bend down in order to pick up the sword only to lose his balance, and he toppled over ungracefully.

Plop.

Jin-Woo did his best to suppress the rising tides of anger and spoke with great difficulty.

“While I’m still being civil, take them off.”

“.....Yes.”

However, after struggling for a bit to stand back up, Yu Jin-Ho called out to Jin-Woo.

“H-hyung-nim....”

“What now?”

“Please help me. I can’t stand up.”

Jin-Woo spat out a long sigh while looking at Yu Jin-Ho reaching out to him.

*

“Will this be fine, hyung-nim?”

“Yeah.”

In the end, they agreed on the kid wearing a helmet, and nothing else.

With a satisfied face, Yu Jin-Ho jumped inside the Gate. Jin-Woo followed

in right after without saying anything else.

As soon as the two men walked into the dungeon one by one, the remaining Hunters all slowly shuffled towards the Gate.

One of them piped up with a worried voice.

“Judging from the way they acted, they looked like a couple of amateurs....”

Another agreed, while staring at the Gate’s surface.

“You’re right.”

The two people’s conversation opened the floodgate of words from the remaining Hunters. Everyone began speaking their minds now.

“What will happen if those two get killed inside the dungeon?”

“Well, we all got paid the contract signing fee already, so....”

“Yeah, well. That’s true, too.”

“Wait, what were the names of those two again?”

“Hold on. So, it was....”

A man whose leg was in a plaster quickly pulled his phone out and searched the two’s names online.

“Yu Jin-Ho, Seong Jin-Woo....”

Another Hunter helped the man in crutches to stand straight while peeking into the phone as well. Whether he felt the ‘crutches’ needed help, or was just too impatient to find out the result of the online search, no one could tell.

“What the hell? The raid leader is only a rank D???”

Hearing that, everyone else stiffened up from the shock. However, what shocked them even more was the following search result.

“The dude next to the rank D is only a measly E???”

“Isn’t it way too dangerous for a rank E to enter a rank C Gate?”

“One D and an E wants to clear a rank C dungeon?!”

“How can that even be possible???”

“Also, the raid team leader has no record of leading a team before!”

“What the heck....? Why would these two young men....?”

Wasn’t this no different than committing suicide?

It was not for nothing that the Association had set a strict rule of one needing ten people, with five rank C Hunters, as the bare minimum if one wanted to enter a rank C Gate.

“Tsk, tsk...”

A male Hunter sporting a smattering of white hair pulled a cigarette out and lit it up.

“The arrogance of youth tends to catch many young people unawares.”

The cigarette smoke slowly rose up.

“....”

“....”

The Hunters all fell silent. They couldn't help but feel awkward and bad, thinking that they were now a part of someone else's suicide attempt.

Even if they were total strangers, no one liked seeing another person getting killed right in front of their eyes, or in this case, inside the Gate right in front of them.

Was that all?

What about the rest of the money?

They may have received the contract fee upfront, but they would've made a lot more by following the two young men around for the next 18 raids.

Regrettably, though – the odds of two young people coming back alive were simply too low.

“This.... Shouldn't we report this to the Association, even if it's now?”

“I wonder. Yeah, what if we get blamed for this?”

Then, this happened.

Buzz....

Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly emerged from the Gate.

“Pant, pant, pant....”

Yu Jin-Ho was panting laboriously. Steam slowly rose up from the bodies of two young men carrying tired expressions.

“Oh, ohh...”

“They managed to escape unhurt!”

“What a relief.”

Hunters welcomed the two with happy expressions.

They were all thinking that these two only roamed around the entrance of the dungeon like a pair of lost kids, because the time between them entering and leaving was fairly short.

However, what was going on here?

The expressions of the Hunters gradually changed.

Because, they all heard someone crying out in alarm, that was why.

“The, the Gate is closing!!”

What??

Everyone hurriedly shifted their gaze over to the Gate.

“Oh my gosh!”

“Look, look!!”

“They killed the b-boss??”

The Gate is turning blurry and illusory, just as it would when the boss of the dungeon was killed.

While the Hunters couldn't hide their shocked disbelief, Jin-Woo utterly disregarded their gazes and quietly asked Yu Jin-Ho.

“Where is the next one?”

“It's about an hour's drive from here, hyung-nim.”

“Okay, let's go.”

Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho headed straight to the van.

Meanwhile, the eight Hunters stared at the duo's backs with completely dumbfounded faces.

Realising that they weren't following him, Yu Jin-Ho turned his head and called out to them.

“Let's hurry up, everyone. We barely have enough time to go to two more Gates today.”

The jaws of the Hunters all dropped to the floor from that declaration.

Drop.

The middle-aged Hunter with the smattering of white hair, Yun Gwi-Won, was so stunned that he failed to realise his cigarette slipping out from his lips and falling to the ground.

‘Those two managed to clear a rank C dungeon, and they are going for another raid, too??’

It wasn't only Yun Gwi-Won, though.

Everyone present was thinking the exact same thing.

‘Just who are these people???’

The first day.

Grrrooar....

A group of zombies rushed at the duo.

“Hyung-nim, they are coming!”

“Okay.”

Jin-Woo smoothly glided among the rushing zombies. Whenever he brushed past one, the head of an undead creature fell and rolled on the ground.

The number of zombies decreased quite rapidly.

Soon, only one remained.

Stab!

“Kkkroooarr!!”

When Jin-Woo stabbed his dagger deep into the last monster's chest, a familiar mechanical beep rang inside his head.

Tti-ring!

[Level up!]

Yu Jin-Ho, who had been standing at the far back, gasped in admiration and clapped his hands enthusiastically.

“Hyung-nim, you're so cool!!!”

“Magic crystals.”

“Ah. Okay.”

Yu Jin-Ho quickly pulled the bag out and began collecting the magic crystals.

It was around at this point.

The mechanical beeps didn't end with the level up message and continued

on.

Tti-ring!

[You've acquired 'Skill: High-Grade Dagger Technique Lv. 1']

Tti-ring!

[You've acquired 'Skill: Vital Points Targetting Lv. 1']

Tti-ring!

['Skill: Dash' has levelled up!]

Jin-Woo's expression brightened in an instant.

'I've got new skills?'

Been a long time too, hasn't it?

Feeling rather chuffed with himself, Jin-Woo quickly summoned his Skill Window.

[Skills]

Passive skills:

- (Unknown) Lv. Max
- Tenacity Lv. 1
- High-Grade Dagger Technique Lv. 1

Active skills:

- Dash Lv. 2
- Intimidation Lv. 1
- Stealth Lv. 1
- Vital Points Targetting Lv. 1

The Dash skill had levelled up after he constantly used it.

Also, in the passive and the active columns, High-Grade Dagger Technique and Vital Points Targetting had been added as well.



Chapter 38 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

[Skill: Dash Lv. 2]

Active skill.

Mana required to activate: 5

When this skill is activated, your movement speed will increase by 40%. During its activation, 1 Mana will be spent every minute.

‘My movement speed has increased.’

The rate had climbed up from 30 to 40%.

The difference in 10% was huge. Well, the levelling up of the skill seemed appropriate, since he used the Dash skill quite often.

[Skill: High-Grade Dagger Technique Lv. 1]

Passive skill.

Mana required to activate: None

Exclusive to daggers.

You used daggers for a long time. And now, you are able to wield daggers more proficiently.

33% additional damage will be applied when using daggers.

Additional damage effect when using daggers!!

A dagger-specific skill had been created as the result of him continuously sticking to daggers, it seemed.

‘I guess wielding other types of weapons will be inefficient for me now, huh.’

Of course, it also meant that the effect when using only the daggers would be even greater.

Besides, he was already well used to using daggers. He also had grown fond of the Poison Fang of Kasaka and wasn't planning to switch to another weapon any time soon, so this was a huge boon for him.

‘And finally....’

Jin-Woo's eyes gleamed in great anticipation as he checked out the details of the last new skill that appeared.

[Skill: Vital Points Targetting Lv. 1]

Active skill.

Mana required to activate: 70

Exclusive to daggers.

You've learned the most optimum way to attack with your daggers. This skill will search for the enemy's vital points and inflict fatal damage.

This skill was also exclusive to daggers.

'The most optimum way to attack....'

Now that he thought about it, the attack he used to land the final blow to Kahng Tae-Sik and on that last zombie felt roughly the similar to him.

Should he say he definitely felt it in his bones? The moment the dagger pierced through, he knew instinctively that the battle was over.

'Ah, so that was me aiming at the vital points, huh.'

To think, something he did as an accident would become an actual skill, and he'd get to use it whenever he felt like it!

His heart was now beating like crazy.

To Jin-Woo, who had no other method to attack other than to swing his dagger around this way and that, this attack skill 'Vital Points Targetting' was like the sweet, sweet rain falling at the end of a long drought.

'Very nice!'

He levelled up and got new skills.

It'd only been the first day, yet things were going really smoothly already.

The second day.

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

With the addition of an attack skill, the speed of hunting had increased rather noticeably.

[Level up!]

Yu Jin-Ho's eyes could only grow wider and wider as he watched countless

monsters fall one after the other when Jin-Woo accurately attacked their weak points.

‘Hyung-nim has been hiding such a mad skill until now?!’

Just how far did the set of hyung-nim’s mysterious skills extend to?

He couldn’t help but admire Jin-Woo even more.

‘Seeing that he was able to easily defeat several rank C Hunters, he’s definitely a rank B or higher.....’

He could only spectate from the sidelines, his jaw slack, since he couldn’t guarantee his own fate if he unwisely tried to probe Jin-Woo for answers.

However, there was a distinct disadvantage associated with the increase in the hunting speed, as it turned out.

[You can’t use your skills because of a lack of Mana.]

[You can’t use your skills because of a lack of Mana.]

Jin-Woo frowned quite deeply.

‘Again??’

In order to fill up his depleted MP, Jin-Woo summoned a vial of ‘potion’ he bought from the Store right away.

“What is that, hyung-nim?”

Yu Jin-Ho expressed a great interest.

Being next to Jin-Woo meant that Yu Jin-Ho would get to experience many unbelievable things, of course. And now, he became way too curious about the identity of the blue liquid Jin-Woo kept drinking every now and then.

“What, this?”

Jin-Woo delayed answering and read the information on the potion first.

[Item: MP Potion]

Rarity: E

Type: Consumable

A liquid medicine that will restore your Mana. Once consumed, it will restore 500 points of MP. Can be stored in your Inventory, but it can’t be handed over to someone else.

The explanation said that the potion couldn’t be handed over to another person.

‘What will happen if I try to give it to someone else?’

It was now Jin-Woo’s turn to become curious. So, he handed the vial of the MP potion over to Yu Jin-Ho.

But, the potion bottle quietly disappeared from the view when placed in Yu Jin-Ho’s hand, just like when it appeared the first time.

“Is, is this magic, hyung-nim??”

‘So, this is why it can’t be handed over, huh.’

He learned something new today.

An item that could not be handed over would disappear when touched by someone else. If so, what would happen when no hands were involved?

Jin-Woo accessed the Store and purchased a new potion.

However, it was not the same MP potion that he bought all the time, but a vial of HP potion containing reddish liquid.

As soon as he completed the transaction, the potion automatically appeared in Jin-Woo’s hand.

“H-hyung-nim!! That’s amazing! The liquid’s colour changed to red!”

Yu Jin-Ho was thinking that the MP potion disappearing and being replaced by an HP potion was some kind of a fancy magic trick.

Actually, there was a good reason why Jin-Woo changed the type of potion.

‘Let’s find out if these potions have an effect on other people.’

Jin-Woo told Yu Jin-Ho’s to lower his posture.

“Open your mouth and look up.”

“L-like this, hyung-nim?”

“Alright. Stay in that position and don’t move.”

Jin-Woo tilted the vial of HP potion. The reddish liquid slid down Yu Jin-Ho’s mouth.

Gulp.

Suddenly, Yu Jin-Ho opened his eyes wider.

“Uh? What’s going on, hyung-nim? Why do I feel reinvigorated again?”

After playing the role of the luggage carrier for a long time, Yu Jin-Ho had been looking rather fatigued, but now, his complexion improved in the blink of an eye.

Jin-Woo smiled in satisfaction.

'So, giving it away in this manner works.'

He got to learn something else just as good again.

He should be able to heal a nearby injured person, even if there were no Healers present. This would certainly help him out a good deal in the future, no doubt.

"Just tell me if you're feeling tired, okay? I can spare a ton of this drink, you see."

Of course, Jin-Woo wasn't doing this out of charity.

If the porter got too tired and his movement speed decreased, then that would mean the overall hunting speed would decrease as well, so basically, he'd be the one losing out in the end.

His actions were born out of such a chain of thoughts, but Yu Jin-Ho didn't know that.

"H-hyung-nim...."

"Let's go."

Yu Jin-Ho became very moved after being subjected to Jin-Woo caring about him. Not to mention, he was awed by Jin-Woo's amazing abilities too. Wiping away his tears, Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly chased after the departing back of Jin-Woo.

The third day.

"Oh, right. Take this, hyung-nim."

Yu Jin-Ho rummaged through the equipment bag and then, presented a bank balance book with a stamp sealed in together.

"What's this?"

"It's the money from selling the magic crystals we got during the last two days, hyung-nim."

Jin-Woo got slightly irritated by the fact that Yu Jin-Ho had forgotten this and only decided to give it to him inside a dungeon full of dangerous monsters, but that irritation disappeared almost right away.

'₩600,000,000?!' (TL: Around \$535,500)

When he took a look at the amount written on the book, Jin-Woo found

quite a substantial amount staring back at him.

“Are you giving me every cent from the sales of the magic crystals?”

Yu Jin-Ho nodded his head.

“Yes, hyung-nim. I’m not doing these raids because I need the money, and besides, you’ve killed all of the monsters anyways. So, how can I ask you for a share like a shameless fool here?”

Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes were sparkling like a little kid waiting to be praised.

‘Ohh, really... Would you look at this kid now?’

Jin-Woo sensed the change in Yu Jin-Ho’s attitude after they spent the last couple of days together.

Not too long ago, the feeling of the kid forcing himself to come even though he was sh*t-scared was pretty strong, but now, he was acting more like a little brother who couldn’t stop worshipping a cool older brother or something.

‘He’s got a pretty adorable side to him, no?’

Jin-Woo smirked.

“Can I really have it, then?”

“Do I, the one and only Yu Jin-Ho, look like someone who’d go back on his word, hyung-nim?”

Jin-Woo smiled brightly and patted the bank balance book.

“Okay, thanks. I’m really grateful for this.”

“No, thank you instead, hyung-nim!!”

Yu Jin-Ho bent his back 90 degrees right away.

This was one confusing sight where it was pretty difficult to tell just who was giving who money here.

At the same time, outside the dungeon....

The waiting ‘teammates’ also had developed a routine of sorts to while away the time.

As soon as the raid leader Yu Jin-Ho and his assistant (?) Seong Jin-Woo entered the Gate, the remaining Hunters gathered around, placed a couple of picnic clothes on the ground, and proceeded to do their own things.

The most popular activity, of course, was gambling.

Five people were sitting around in one group, gambling and chatting away.

“How many raids did we ‘participate’ in so far?”

“Let’s see... The day before, it was three. Yesterday, it was two, and this is the second dungeon today, so it’s seven in total so far.”

“Will it be fine for those two to keep clearing dungeons at this breakneck pace? I mean, it’s normal to take a week off after clearing one dungeon, no?”

“Aigoo. Don’t you worry about those two, now. Can’t you see that they literally haven’t even broken a sweat every time they come out of a Gate? Besides, we get 3 mil every raid, so it’s simply an excellent bit of news for us. Oh, it’s your turn, my man. Hurry up and deal.”

“Ah, sure.”

Indeed, both Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho displayed not one hint of getting fatigued from keeping up with this seemingly-exhausting schedule.

Of course, these people had no idea, but such a feat was only possible thanks to the miraculous effects of the potions.

The duo got to clear over one-third of the planned 19 raids in such a short amount of time precisely because of the potions.

A short while later, the Gate’s black-ish surface wavered unsteadily and two people emerged from there.

“Oh, the raid leader is out.”

“Okay, let’s pack this up.”

Hunters began getting ready to leave without being ordered to.

“Hey, there. Take care of that luggage over there.”

“Wake that person up. Please make sure we aren’t forgetting anything here.”

Hunters moved in perfect sync. Even the sleeping Hunter woke up and quickly finished getting ready to move to the new location.

“Okay, let’s get going!”

Everyone was getting more or less used to this rather insane manner of clearing dungeons.

Inside the offices of the White Tiger Guild, located in the same district.

The Chief of the 2nd Division, Ahn Sahng-Min, found himself shouting at

the top of his voice early in the morning.

“Mister Hyun!! What are you trying to do here?! Tomorrow’s the day for the new recruits to start training, yet how could you have failed to book a single Gate until now?! Answer me, Mister Vice Chief!!”

The Vice Chief Hyun Ki-Cheol lowered his head in embarrassment.

“M-My apologies, Chief. The thing is, there is a raid team that quickly bids for every Gate ranked C opening up in our jurisdiction.”

“What?! Well then, why don’t you just get them back with higher bids? Does our Guild lack funds or personnel? Just what’s the problem here?”

“I tried to do as you said, but....”

“Uh-huh!! How dare you answer back as if you did something nice??”

From the thunderous roar of Ahn Sahng-Min, the entirety of the 2nd Division had fallen into silence.

It sure had been a long time since Ahn Sahng-Min blew his top to this extent.

Just what kind of a place was the White Tiger Guild?

It was called one of the top five Guilds in South Korea. For that reason alone, every single employee working within its halls was, without exception, excellent individuals.

The Vice Chief Hyun Ki-Cheol too was a talented, sharp individual who performed his role well and admirably, having never committed a single error ever since he was hired by the Guild.

But to think, he failed to book a single Gate when the new recruits were supposed to begin their training soon!

This no doubt qualified as a big error.

The 2nd Division that Ahn Sahng-Min was in charge of did the roles of recruiting new Hunters and training them, while the First Division took care of managing the schedules of the Guild’s main Hunters.

“P-Please! Take a look at this first, Chief!”

The near-tearful Hyun Ki-Cheol pushed forward a notebook PC to his superior officer.

“What the hell?!”

Ahn Sahng-Min was about to explode once more, only for his jaw to drop to the floor after checking out a certain number appearing on the notebook’s

screen.

“T-Two hundred fifty million Won?!?! There is a crazy b*stard who spent 250 million Won on a single rank C Gate????”



Chapter 39 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Ahn Sahng-Min became utterly speechless.

The best anyone could hope for, in terms of financial return from a Gate ranked C, was only around 200 million Won.

Paying 250 million won was, simply put, being a hopeless moron who paid way too much.

“Originally, the bidding price of this Gate was only around 70 million. But, when I raised the bid to 100 million, these b*stards suddenly upped it all the way to 250 million, Chief.”

The upper limit for a single C-rank Gate set by the White Tiger Guild was 100 million Won. One could now clearly see why Hyun Ki-Cheol was feeling rather aggrieved at the moment.

‘Who are these b*stards?!’

Tap, tap, tap, tap....

Ahn Sahng-Min’s hands typed on the keyboard quite rapidly. And soon, the search results filled up the computer screen.

Just as Hyun Ki-Cheol had said, one raid team was snapping up all the rank C Gates appearing in this district with nonsensical speed while paying an equally gobsmacking amount of money.

“What the hell, who are these crazy b*stards....?”

This area was the White Tiger’s backyard, their jurisdiction.

At first, Ahn Sahng-Min thought of the possibility that other Guilds were possibly interfering with their work.

‘No, hang on. That’s not possible, is it?’

There was no large Guild stupid enough to start something with White Tiger openly in this fashion.

Even if it was one of the five top Guilds in South Korea, it would have to risk getting destroyed in return by clashing against the White Tiger.

‘So, it’s not a Guild, then.....’

In that case, who and why?

Ahn Sahng-Min swallowed his saliva and accessed the information on this strange raid team and its members.

The leader's name was apparently 'Yu Jin-Ho'.

"First time I hear that name."

It was Ahn Sahng-Min's job to scout new recruits for the Guild. That was why he had remembered the names of freelancer Hunters who had at least displayed a modicum of excellence in the past.

However, this 'Yu Jin-Ho' really was someone he didn't know.

"Okay, I'll come back to you later."

He then proceeded to slowly scroll down the list of the team's members, hoping to spot any familiar names on it.

And then, there was one.

One name kind of stood out.

"Seong Jin-Woo? Seong Jin-Woo..... Where have I heard this name before?"

Ahn Sahng-Min did his best to dig through his memory, until he finally recalled the incident of the dual dungeon from two months ago that had been the topic of a rather lively discussion among those who went there.

Indeed, it was none other than the White Tiger Guild that went to assist the Association during that event.

"Hey, Ki-Cheol-ah, do you remember that dual dungeon incident two months ago? The one where our Hunters had to go and take a look?"

"Yes, Chief. I remember. When we got there, we couldn't find any monsters and there was only one survivor."

"What was the name of that survivor? You remember it?"

Hyun Ki-Cheol possessed a pretty solid brain.

No, it wasn't to the extent of other people praising him as a genius, but as far as his ability to remember things was concerned, he was really rather exceptional.

There wasn't even any real need to go through a search process here. Because Hyun Ki-Cheol replied right away.

"It's Seong Jin-Woo, a rank E Hunter."

'I knew it!'

He wasn't sure of it, but well, he was proven right once more.

Ahn Sahng-Min instinctively realised it; there was something fishy going on here.

Not once did his instincts that activated only in these sorts of situation let him down. Never.

Ahn Sahng-Min shouted out an order to the rest of the employees in the Second Division.

"Everyone, stop what you're doing, and get me every single data and information on the Hunters Yu Jin-Ho, ranked D, and Seong Jin-Woo, ranked E!! Right now!"

The responses from these excellent employees, when facing a dangerous situation regarding their own survival, simply exceeded one's imaginations.

It wasn't for nothing that they were called the elites of all elites!

Reports came in one after the other, fast.

As it turned out, Yu Jin-Ho didn't possess any particularly noteworthy background that required an immediate attention. Disregarding the fact that he was the second son of Yujin Constructions' owner, he could be described as ordinary, even.

However, Seong Jin-Woo was quite a different story altogether.

"Since that dual dungeon incident, he's been involved in three more incidents, and he walked away from all of them unscathed?"

When Ahn Sahng-Min spoke in a questioning tone of voice, Hyun Ki-Cheol quickly followed up.

"Not only that, he's a rank E Hunter too, Chief."

The first time Seong Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho met was when the latter went for his very first raid. Only the two of them walked away alive.

And now, these two had formed a raid team and were going around like a pair of madmen, clearing two, three dungeons in a single day.

"This definitely stinks...."

"What could they possibly be doing in the dungeons?"

"I wonder.... hold on. I remember now. There was a rumour about a really influential owner of a big company busy wooing S-ranked Hunters in private doing the rounds, wasn't there?"

“Yes, there was a rumour like that.”

“And that Yu Jin-Ho is the son of a really influential owner of a company....”

Indeed, Yu Myung-Hwan, Yu Jin-Ho’s father, showed some movements of wanting to create a Guild of his own.

It was one of the most tightly guarded secrets only a few in the world of Hunters were privileged enough to know.

If that was the case, then what Yu Jin-Ho was doing right now wouldn’t be completely unrelated to that.

“...Could it be?!”

A single puzzle piece fell to its place inside Ahn Sahng-Min’s head.

If his guess was right, then it made sense!

Seeing that rapid change in his superior officer’s expression, Hyun Ki-Cheol nervously swallowed his saliva.

Ahn Sahng-Min spoke with more than enough confidence in his voice.

“This guy.... he’s definitely a Re-Awakened Hunter!!”

“A Re-Awakened Hunter, you say??”

Hyun Ki-Cheol’s eyes became round dots resembling a rabbit’s eyes.

But, Ahn Sahng-Min was sure of it.

“That’s right.”

A rank E Hunter was no different from a regular person. If there was an incident, then such Hunters were as good as dead.

However, this Seong Jin-Woo kept surviving, totally unhurt to boot, from several large-scale incidents that killed most of the participating Hunters.

‘Of course, he could be lucky. Sure. However....’

However, the third and last incident....

The situation with this particular incident caused by the agent of the Monitoring Division, Kahng Tae-Sik, was rather different from the rest.

The record said that a rank C Mage combined strength with a rank B Healer to defeat Kahng Tae-Sik. (TL: I’ve changed Sorcerer to Mage.)

‘Bullsh*t. Hunters in the Monitoring Division all specialise in combat.’

If Kahng Tae-Sik wasn’t a moron, he’d try to dispose of the highest ranked

Hunter with the low combat potential, the rank B Healer first.

‘You telling me that a rank C Mage-type Hunter managed to stop him by himself?’

The thing was, the Mage-type Hunters were weak against close-combat type Hunters, even more so against the ‘Assassin’ types.

Unless Kahng Tae-Sik underestimated his opponents and ignored the presence of the rank B Healer, it might be possible, but..... But, the Hunter with three years of experience in the Monitoring Division wouldn’t make such a blunder, thought Ahn Sahng-Min.

‘The one who stopped Kahng Tae-Sik wasn’t this rank C Song Chi-Yeol, but someone else accompanying them.’

There was no physical evidence, but he was getting more and more sure of his guesses being right.

Seong Jin-Woo now possessed abilities matching that of a high-ranking Hunter after going through a Re-Awakening process.

Yu Jin-Ho coincidentally took part in the raid and saw the abilities of Seong Jin-Woo. And now, Yu Jin-Ho was testing out this and that in preparation to scout Seong Jin-Woo to his father’s new Guild.

When he thought like that, everything seemed to click.

‘This is a huge piece of news.’

If Seong Jin-Woo was indeed a Re-Awakened Hunter, then there would only be a few people, including Yu Jin-Ho, who knew his true worth.

Just who was Yu Myung-Hwan? He wouldn’t want to accept any wannabes and idiots. Definitely not. Not only that, as one of the founding members of the Guild, too.

This could be an excellent chance to snatch away a wonderful individual marked by none other than Yu Myung-Hwan.

‘If he fought and defeated rank B Kahng Tae-Sik, then his abilities should be at least B, no?’

The priority now was to snatch this talent before other Guilds, no, Yu Myung-Hwan, managed to scout him.

Well, after the inevitable re-assignment test, the competition would become really hectic, after all.

Besides all that – even if Seong Jin-Woo wasn’t as strong as he suspected, it didn’t really matter.

There were only a few Re-Awakened Hunters in the entire world, so the media's attention would no doubt be directed to this guy. And that would precisely be the kind of public exposure that no amount of money could buy.

Whatever the case may be, Ahn Sahng-Min couldn't afford to let this guy slip through his fingers.

'I wouldn't be able to do anything if he already signed a contract with Yu Myung-Hwan, though...'

However, the odds of that was low.

The proof was all those tests taking place in the C-ranked dungeons.

'There is a good chance that they haven't decided on anything yet.'

Which meant, the White Tiger Guild had a real shot here as well.

'I shouldn't be wasting time here.'

Ahn Sahng-Min picked up his coat hanging on the back of his chair and quickly put it on.

"Ki-Cheol-ah, let's go."

He also didn't forget to mobilise his right-hand man, of course.

Ahn Sahng-Min was strict with Hyun Ki-Cheol all the time simply because the former believed that no one was more suitable to take over from him than his current deputy.

Meanwhile, Hyun Ki-Cheol's eyes opened wider.

"Pardon me? Where are we going, Chief?"

"What do you mean, where? We're going to scout a new talent, that's what."

"And you have to personally go to scout this new guy??"

"Why not? Is there a law against doing that?"

Ahn Sahng-Min retorted and hurriedly left the office, causing Hyun Ki-Cheol to tilt his head this way and that, but still, he chased after the senior officer.

'Now this is so strange....'

It'd been over two years since he became the Vice Chief, yet it was his first time seeing Ahn Sahng-Min personally go out on a job.

Part 7. Premonition of a huge jackpot

The dungeons Yu Jin-Ho's team booked for the day were two. And the

distance between the two Gates was fairly substantial.

In order to confirm their suspicions with their own eyes, Ahn Sahng-Min and Hyun Ki-Cheol separated and went to different Gates each. They constantly called each other and waited for Yu Jin-Ho's team to show up.

'It's still pretty chilly out, isn't it?'

Ahn Sahng-Min bought a cup of instant coffee from a vending machine near the Gate's location.

It had already been one solid hour of waiting for Yu Jin-Ho's team to show up. For some reason, though, he was feeling more expectant than bored right now.

Been a long time, but his heart was beating fast in pure anticipation.

'If my guesses are right, then that man will be a huge scoop that has appeared in a really long time. Not only that, a very special scoop, too!'

Ahn Sahng-Min became a Division Chief at a really young age. All thanks to his instincts, actually. His instincts played a crucial role in the White Tiger becoming the large Guild of today.

And that instinct was telling him this right now.

That there was a real chance that this Seong Jin-Woo would lift the White Tiger Guild up even higher than ever before.

'Other people would say that I've lost my mind.'

Well, Seong Jin-Woo was still officially a rank E, after all.

However, things visible to one's eyes didn't tell the whole story. If that was the case, then he wouldn't even be here right now.

And so, as he glared at the Gate with hawk-like eyes from afar, when....

Ring... Ring....

Hyun Ki-Cheol gave him a call.

"Yes, Ki-Cheol-ah. Any news?"

- ***"Chief, Yu Jin-Ho and his team have arrived on sight."***

"Alright. Don't get too excited and keep your eyes on them. And report back to me every single little thing that happens there."

- ***"Yes, Chief.... Uh? Eh? C-Chief!!"***

The voice coming out of the phone's receiver sounded rather weird all of a sudden.

'Did this idiot get discovered or something?'

Ahn Sahng-Min became urgent too and hurriedly called out.

"What happened? Speak up, will ya?"

- ***"Chief, you were right!!"***

"What?"

Ahn Sahng-Min's heart began beating faster and faster.

- ***"I can see that only Yu Jin-Ho and Seong Jin-Woo are entering the Gate, no one else."***

"Of course. Seong Jin-Woo is being tested, after all!"

As he thought!

His guesses were correct. Not once did his gut feeling let him down in situations like this.

'Good!'

Ahn Sahng-Min clenched his fist real tightly.

'While you people remain unconvinced and unsure, we will make the move first. The White Tiger Guild will definitely take Seong Jin-Woo away from you.'

Why? Because the White Tiger had Ahn Sahng-Min, Chief of the Second Division, that's why.

As Ahn Sahng-Min bathed in the ecstasy of victory, Hyun Ki-Cheol's voice continued to travel through the airwaves and came out from the phone once more.

- ***"What should I do now? Should I go over to you, Chief?"***

"No. Remain there and observe for a while longer."

- ***"Pardon? But, Isn't Chief's suspicions more or less confirmed with this?"***

"I'm kind of curious just how long they will take to clear the dungeon, that's all. How many hours will they need to clear a rank C dungeon?"

- ***"A rank A Hunter would need at least two hours to solo a rank C dungeon, Chief."***

"So what? You can't wait that long?"

- ***"How can that be, Chief? No, I'm just worried about you being all alone and lonely over there, that's why I'm asking you."***

What a faster-than-light change in his attitude that was.

This was why Ahn Sahng-Min could never dislike Hyun Ki-Cheol.

“Stop worrying about me and make sure to keep your eyes wide open to see when they are coming out, okay?”



Chapter 40 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

- ***“I’m sure nothing weird will happen here.”***

“I’ll be right next to my phone, so if something does happen, give me a call right away.”

- ***“Got it, Chief.”***

Ahn Sahng-Min ended the call only after making sure his right-hand man fully heard his ‘request’. It was at this point that he felt his starvation kick in.

Rumble...

‘I’ve been paying way too much attention on this matter....’

The lunch hour had flown by some time ago, but well, he’d been waiting with bated breaths for Seong Jin-Woo’s arrival and completely forgot to fill up in the meantime.

The thing was, he didn’t know when Yu Jin-Ho’s team would show up here and so, couldn’t leave his position to buy something to eat.

Now that he found himself some leeway, Ahn Sahng-Min looked around his vicinity to find a place to eat, before eventually settling on the local convenience store.

‘I’m not trying to skimp on food expenses, though....’

No one was around here to make fun out of him, yet he couldn’t help but think that it was a bit uncool to enter a restaurant or a diner all alone. So, after a lengthy deliberation, he chose the cup ramen from the convenience store, instead.

He poured the boiling water provided from the store in the cup and waited for three minutes before getting his wooden chopsticks ready, but then....

Ring....

“Eii! I’m trying to eat here, so who dares to call me now?!”

When he took a look at the phone’s screen, a familiar name showed up.

[Right arm]

‘Hyun Ki-Cheol, you dumba*s....’

Ahn Sahng-Min answered the call, full of irritation.

“Why are you calling me already?”

- ***“Chief, that’s not it....”***

“What do you mean, that’s not it?? If you’re calling me over nothing, you will be eating nothing but cup ramen as your lunch for the whole of next week!!”

- ***“That’s not it, Chief!! Those two came out of the Gate already!!”***

Just like a paused frame of a movie, Ahn Sahng-Min’s hand froze in the mid-air, just before it could deliver chopsticks full of noodles to his mouth.

“What did you say??”

- ***“Just now, Yu Jin-Ho and Seong Jin-Woo came out from the Gate, Chief! And they are getting ready to leave along with the rest of the team!”***

Indeed, he didn’t hear that wrong.

Ahn Sahng-Min hurriedly checked his watch.

“But, it hasn’t even been 30 minutes yet! Did they give up on the raid midway?”

- ***“No, Chief. The Gate is shaking right now.”***

What nonsense was this?!

Even if the difficulty between different C-ranked dungeons varied somewhat, there was simply no way that someone could solo one of those in less than 30 minutes!!

“Check again!! Is the Gate closing for real?”

- ***“Yes, Chief. Should I record some footage and send it to you?”***

“...No, no need.”

Ahn Sahng-Min ended the call and dazedly stared the empty air.

Clearing a C-ranked dungeon in 30 minutes when normally, a rank A Hunter would need two hours to do so?

What a funny notion that was, that man being only a rank B....

Using only the objective information available to make his educated guess, then at the bare minimum....

“He’s above rank A....”

Now, this was an unimaginably huge jackpot.

Outside the Gate....

“Hyung-nim. Is there some other business you need to attend to later?”

“No, not really. Why do you ask?”

“I haven’t seen you hurrying up this much with hunting before.”

Yu Jin-Ho was feeling truly astonished today.

He already knew very well that Jin-Woo was strong, but today, he seemed to be on another dimension altogether.

But, that was par for the course, really.

Jin-Woo inwardly laughed out.

‘Well, monsters in this dungeon were Werewolves, after all.’

[Title: Slaughterer of Wolves]

A Title given to a hunter skilled in hunting wolves. When facing animal-type monsters, all of your Stats will increase by 40%.

The buff given by the title ‘Slaughterer of Wolves’ of course came into effect against the Werewolves as well.

How could the monsters from a rank C dungeon contend with him, when his level was already so high to begin with, never mind the effect of that buff helping him out, too?

Thanks to that, Yu Jin-Ho had been kept real busy while trying to extract all those magic crystals from the dead monsters. He even had to drink five vials of the HP potion, too.

He shook his head several times, complaining that he wouldn’t be able to eat lunch now, after the potions filled him up completely.

‘That’s that, but...’

Jin-Woo slowly raised his head.

He had been sensing someone’s gaze coming from somewhere.

‘I don’t sense any magical energy, so he can’t be a Hunter.’

He took a look around, but couldn’t spot anyone suspicious.

If he got serious about discovering who it was, then he should be able to find the person; but then, as the target didn’t emit any killing intent or hostile intentions, it’d take a really long time to track the culprit down.

‘.....’

It might be nothing, too.

Perhaps inevitably, the gaze disappeared before long.

“Hyung-nim, is everything alright?”

“...It’s nothing. Let’s get going.”

There was no time to waste here.

Jin-Woo took one last look around and climbed into the van.

*

He couldn’t sense anyone looking at him by the second Gate’s location.

...Both the times when he entered, and also when exiting the Gate.

‘Was I being overly cautious?’

What a relief it was, knowing that it wasn’t something serious.

Meanwhile, Yu Jin-Ho walked over and apologetically lowered his head.

“Hyung-nim, I’m really sorry about this. This is the last Gate for the day. Other ones were just too far from here.”

“Don’t worry about it. That’s not something you should apologise for, anyway.”

The sun was still pretty high up in the sky, but thanks to the duo’s antics, just about every Gate that appeared in the district had been taken care of, so their day had to come to an end here.

“Thank you all for working hard, everyone.”

“What do you mean, working hard. It’s you, the raid leader, who worked hardest.”

“See you tomorrow.”

“Take it easy now.”

After sending everyone away, the remaining two men climbed aboard the driver’s and the passenger’s seats of the van.

“Let me take you home, hyung-nim.”

Before anyone had noticed it, Yu Jin-Ho had become a trusty chauffeur. Him sitting behind the wheel looked perfectly normal now.

Jin-Woo looked Yu Jin-Ho with pitying eyes.

‘Just because he wants a shot at the position of the Guild Master, a scion of a wealthy family now has to work as a chauffeur....’

Yu Jin-Ho had been smiling brightly while pressing on the accelerator, before realising that Jin-Woo was staring at him and asked with an equally bright voice.

“Eh? Is there something on my face, hyung-nim?”

“.....Nope. Never mind.”

Jin-Woo pretended to know nothing, before suddenly recalling something else rather important, and he pulled out his phone to check the time.

‘Right now, it’s.... 16:46.’

Indeed, it was still too early to go home. How fortunate that he still had one thing he could do.

‘I’m sure it was around here, right?’

According to his memories, at least.

Jin-Woo spoke up quickly.

“Hey, Jin-Ho.”

“Yes, hyung-nim?”

Yu Jin-Ho replied while professionally turning the steering wheel. The van the two of them were riding on smoothly went around the curve on the road.

“Head to the Mirae department store.”

“Mirae department store?”

Yu Jin-Ho formed a confused expression.

“Yeah. Let’s go there.”

“Well, yes. It’s just around the corner from here, but.... I did notice it back during the hunting, so like, is there really nothing going on, hyung-nim?”

“....For some reason, you’ve been talking a lot more than necessary lately.”

That prompted Yu Jin-Ho’s head to rigidly stare forward and nowhere else.

“I shall get us there at the speed of light, hyung-nim. Please hold on tight.”

Yu Jin-Ho quickly changed his attitude and drove the van like a stuntman, never once touching his brake pedal.

The distance to cover wasn't a lot, so they arrived at the destination pretty quickly.

The van came to a screeching halt in front of the building. The overall vibe given off by the Mirae department store located smack dab in the city of Seoul's CBD was quite something to behold.

When Jin-Woo climbed off the van, Yu Jin-Ho followed suit.

“Hyung-nim, our Guild's gotta use this kind of a building as our headquarters in the future. What do you think?”

Yu Jin-Ho stared up at the department store building and threw half a joke.

However, there was no reply. Sensing that something was weird here, Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly took a look next to him.

“Ehh?”

Jin-Woo was no longer standing there.

“Hyung-nim?”

No matter how hard he looked around, Jin-Woo was gone without a trace.

“H-hyung-nim??”

[With the death of the Boss, the interior of the dungeon will revert back to its original state.]

‘I levelled up again twice in the department store instant dungeon.’

The steps taking Jin-Woo home were light and cheery.

It had been a while, but the key to the instant dungeon had finally come out of the random box recently. And that key was supposed to be ‘used’ at the Mirae department store.

He was wondering when to go, but decided to visit the place today since he found himself with enough free time.

[“H-hyung-nim??”]

Jin-Woo recalled the dazed face of Yu Jin-Ho as the kid searched for him, and couldn't help but chuckle.

His phone suddenly went off, then.

Before answering it, he checked the number on the phone's screen, but he couldn't recognise it.

‘Who could it be?’

Back when he was still in high school, he was too busy trying to be a mother to his little sister, and after graduation, he started right away as a Hunter so one could say that Jin-Woo's circle of acquaintances was fairly small.

'I shouldn't be getting calls from unknown numbers....'

He tilted his head only for a second or two. For the time being, he decided to answer it.

"Hello."

- ***"Hello. Is this Mister Seong Jin-Woo speaking?"***

It was an open and friendly-sounding voice of a man.

Jin-Woo hung up the moment he heard that.

Click!

'Well, from my experience, this kinda call is 99% someone trying to sell me stuff, or trying to entice me to get a loan, anyway.'

Just as he was about to put his phone back in the pocket, it rang again.

Buzz...

And it was the exact same number.

'What the? It wasn't someone selling stuff?'

Normally, these salespeople would call whoever just so they could meet their sales target, which meant that they would almost never call him back this quickly as soon as the connection was dropped.

Why? They were quick-witted enough to realise that this would be a waste of time, that's why.

'Which means, the guy on the other side really has some kind of business with me....'

So, he answered the call properly this time.

"Hello, this is Seong Jin-Woo."

- ***"Ahh, so it was the right number. I thought I called the wrong one because the call got cut off so quickly. Ahaha."***

"..."

Jin-Woo deliberated for the whole of 2 seconds on whether to apologise or not with an excuse of him thinking that the call was about selling insurance or some such, because the man's voice sounded a bit...

But, in the end, he decided not to.

'It feels like me apologising now would only make it worse.'

A short bout of silence later, the salesman, no, the man with a salesman's voice, made his belated introduction.

- "Ah, where are my manners. My bad for the late introduction. My name is Ahn Sahng-Min, and I work for the White Tiger Guild."

Jin-Woo's steps came to an abrupt halt.

'Why is the White Tiger calling me?'

He couldn't think of a reason why such a big Guild as the White Tiger would call him out of the blue.

The only thing he could think of, though, was that this Guild assisted him back in that dual dungeon incident, but....

'But, I'm sure they aren't calling me to investigate that day's matters after so much time has passed by already.'

Well, he couldn't stand not knowing, so before Ahn Sahng-Min had the chance to continue, Jin-Woo asked first.

"Why is the White Tiger Guild giving me a call?"

- "The matter is a bit sensitive to discuss over the phone, so may I come to you and have a chat face to face?"

The man was saying that he'd come to see him, not asking Jin-Woo to show up, so there was no real reason to refuse here.

Besides, he had nothing much to do the day after tomorrow, anyway.

'Didn't Yu Jin-Ho say he had some kind of an event back home?'

Yu Jin-Ho 'begged' for his understanding while saying that there was a big family event happening on that day and everyone simply had to show up, meaning he couldn't go on any raids.

'A big family event, eh....'

Just from thinking about a chaebol's family event, Jin-Woo could only imagine luxurious, elaborate parties being held in a five-star hotel's reception hall. Should he blame TV dramas for that now?

In any case, it'd be easy to set a date for that day.

"I have some free time on Thursday."

- "Well, the thing is... Will it be fine if we meet right now?"

Right now?

Jin-Woo checked the time.

The time on the phone's screen indicated eight in the evening.

“But, it’s already eight.”

- ***“Don’t worry. I’m waiting for you nearby. I just wish to speak to you for a little while only.”***

“Nearby, as in?”

- ***“I’m in a cafe near you.”***

Ahn Sahng-Min spoke the name of the cafe.

Jin-Woo was quite familiar with the place.

It was near his home so he went past it often, and not only that, but he also used it as the meeting place with Yu Jin-Ho as well.

Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

‘This guy knows where I live.’



Chapter 41 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

One couldn't find the addresses of Hunters on the Association's website. The only things appearing there were the names of Hunters and their ranks.

A Hunter could provide the relevant information themselves, but Jin-Woo didn't even leave behind his contact number there.

But, not only had this guy known his phone number, he was waiting near Jin-Woo's home, so without a doubt, he must've gathered enough information before showing up here.

'Ah, now that I think about it...'

He abruptly remembered something.

"I sensed a gaze on me earlier today, so I'm guessing that belonged to one of your people?"

Jin-Woo's voice became a level colder.

The guy on the phone apologised with a polite tone of voice.

Jin-Woo pondered for a while, before speaking up.

".....I'll be there shortly."

"The Hunters, the Reapers, the Knight Order, the Shining Star, and then us, the White Tiger. I'm sure you've heard of these names before."

Ahn Sahng-Min read off the names of the top 5 Guilds in South Korea, one by one.

The number one Guild was the Hunters.

However, the Hunters didn't start its life as the number one from the get-go. No, it was the Reapers who used to be the top dog.

However, after White Tiger separated itself from the Reapers, the number one spot changed hands.

Was this the case of the student becoming the master?

After going independent, the White Tiger leapfrogged the Reapers a long time ago. And they were aiming for the number one spot that, originally, belonged to the Reapers.

Ahn Sahng-Min was completely sure of it now.

He was sure of the fact that the man sitting across him, Seong Jin-Woo, would become an important piece of the puzzle and help the White Tiger 'reclaim' the glory of the past once more.

Ahn Sahng-Min presented his business card.

[Ahn Sahng-Min, Section Chief, Second Division, White Tiger Guild]

“My name is Ahn Sahng-Min, and I’m in charge of the Second Division of the White Tiger Guild, one of the top five in the country. Our role is to scout talented Hunters and manage them.”

If Seong Jin-Woo was any other Hunter, he'd have lowered his head 90 degrees before a business card was even brought out, and only then get to the main topic.

Unless one was an S-rank or an A, pretty much all Hunters dreamed of entering the White Tiger.

Honestly, Ahn Sahng-Min was hoping for that kind of reaction as well.

Unfortunately, Jin-Woo was different.

Not showing much reaction at all, he calmly asked what he wanted to ask first.

“Why does an officer of the White Tiger Guild perform background checks on someone like me?”

Ahn Sahng-Min inwardly flinched.

‘He’s not pressured even after hearing the name of the White Tiger?’

They haven't spoken for long, but for some reason, Ahn Sahng-Min sensed that it'd be rather challenging to scout Seong Jin-Woo.

On the other hand, that only made him even more desperate to bring Seong Jin-Woo into his guild now.

Well, it wouldn't be a bad thing for a newbie to be rather confident about himself, now would it?

‘Right, you gotta have at least balls as big as this, so we can start throwing you into whatever assignment that comes our way.’

Ahn Sahng-Min firmed his resolve once more.

“Let me get straight to the point. We wish to scout you, Mister Seong Jin-Woo. We promise to offer you double the amount of terms as offered by the Yujin Construction, no strings attached.”

Ahn Sahng-Min smiled deeply.

Yujin Construction was still in the middle of testing Seong Jin-Woo out.

‘They are being stupid.’

The speed at which he could clear a rank C dungeon, the publicity value of a Re-Awakened Hunter, and the calmness he was displaying in the current situation, etc....

No matter which side it was, there was no need to test this man out at all.

‘There’s no way that they have offered anything good, since they wouldn’t have figured out what his true worth is.’

That was why Ahn Sahng-Min was confident of doubling whatever terms Yujin offered this man. No, he was confident of offering something even better.

However, Jin-Woo’s stare became even colder.

“How did you know?”

“P-pardon me?”

Being on the receiving end of a reaction utterly contrary to his expectations, Ahn Sahng-Min ended up stuttering slightly, which was quite unbecoming of an experienced headhunter working for a large Guild.

“How did you find out about me?”

If Seong Jin-Woo’s voice actually had any physical weight, then that sentence would’ve crushed him to death, thought Ahn Sahng-Min.

‘What is this? This incredible pressure....?’

It was almost as if the other party was considering him as an enemy. Well, it was true that he had Jin-Woo followed, and one-sidedly demanded to meet like this.

From Jin-Woo’s perspective, it would be perfectly reasonable to consider Ahn Sahng-Min as his enemy.

Ahn Sahng-Min hurriedly explained himself.

“Ah, ah! It wasn’t our original intention to pry into your private affairs. We received information that someone was clearing rank C dungeons in our district at an alarming rate so we were investigating that. And that led us to find out about you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

“....”

Jin-Woo retracted his gaze.

'So, that's what happened.'

Contrary to his thoughts, the other side didn't seem to have begun their investigation while knowing that something didn't add up about him. Simply by clearing dungeons far too quickly, he ended up being noticed instead.

'And he doesn't seem to be carrying any hostile intentions, either.'

Jin-Woo's expression softened slightly. And as a result, the taut tension between the two men eased a little.

'Whew-woo....'

Ahn Sahng-Min patted his chest down.

Their conversation still hadn't advanced forward, though. From here onwards, he had to get on Seong Jin-Woo's good books.

'And nothing's better than the sharing of privileged information to get on someone's good books.'

Ahn Sahng-Min was THE specialist when it came to scouting after all!

He quickly wiped the flustered expression off his face and formed a smile instead.

"Although it is a top secret, we know that the Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan is planning to establish a Guild of his own."

"....."

Jin-Woo neither denied it or confirmed it.

So, Ahn Sahng-Min continued on.

"And that's how we were able to figure it out when that person's son, Mister Yu Jin-Ho made contact with you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim. And that is, they wish to bring you, a Re-Awakened Hunter, into their new Guild."

Indeed, Ahn Sahng-Min thought that Jin-Woo was a Re-Awakened.

'Well, I'm relieved that you think that way.'

Jin-Woo wouldn't need to cook up another story here, in other words.

Ahn Sahng-Min quickly carried on.

"I thought that we need to talk to you before you signed up with Yujin, and that's the only reason for my one-sided attempt to get in touch with you. Allow me to apologise once more if you've been greatly inconvenienced."

“It’s fine.”

Unless the other party approached him with evil intentions, there was no reason for Jin-Woo to get angry, especially when Ahn Sahng-Min was apologising this earnestly.

‘Besides, what’s more important here is that...’

Indeed, how should he go about dealing with this now?

While Jin-Woo pondered on what he should do here, Ahn Sahng-Min took the initiative and asked him a question.

“Have you finished negotiating with Yujin Construction already?”

He must’ve thought like this, because Jin-Woo was hesitating slightly with his replies.

Jin-Woo shook his head.

Ahn Sahng-Min’s expression immediately reverted from one that displayed a hint of anxiety, to a blooming smile.

‘Yes! That means he’s still a free agent!’

This was the perfect chance to catch the talented Hunter who could solo a rank C dungeon in 30 minutes.

To be more specific, a rank D Hunter also accompanied him, but to someone who possessed abilities exceeding a rank B, such a person would no longer provide any help but would only serve as a luggage carrier, instead.

‘If Seong Jin-Woo enters the White Tiger, and is ranked A after his re-assignment test, then...!’

An even bigger smile threatened to break out of his face, so Ahn Sahng-Min was having a hard time trying to regulate his expressions.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo was slowly scratching his chin.

‘This guy, why does it feel like he’s counting his chickens way before they hatch?’

Well, truthfully speaking, a Guild like White Tiger was not a bad choice. Not only was it one of the top five, but it also possessed enough potential to aim for the number one spot.

However, Jin-Woo wasn’t planning to enter a Guild any time soon.

‘Because, the higher my level is, the better the treatment I’d get.’

Also, even though it might be a story in the distant future, or maybe even

something completely improbable, but....

‘Just like how I’ve been clearing the rank C dungeons, what if I can clear rank B and A dungeons solo?’

The profit earned from high-ranked dungeons exceeded one’s imaginations.

They were the sole reason why large Guilds could grow powerful enough to rival many large corporations now.

Expensive magic crystals, corpses of the monsters, rare materials from the dungeons themselves, and even things like Rune stones and other artefacts, too.

An astronomical amount of money changed hands every day.

He could potentially hog them all for himself, so was there a reason for him to share them with a Guild?

‘As long as this level up thing doesn’t stop, it’s not an impossible dream.’

So, at this point in time, entering a Guild was way too premature.

The corners of Jin-Woo’s lips slowly arched up.

Ahn Sahng-Min thought that was a sign of an incoming positive answer, and smiled along as well.

“Have you made up your mind?”

“You promised to double the amount offered, yes?”

“Yes, that’s correct. If you find my offer not to your liking, then I’m prepared to offer you more.”

“In that case, how much is the building the White Tiger calls home?”

Ahn Sahng-Min’s face froze for a second there.

‘Is he questioning the financial muscle of the White Tiger?’

But, there was no need to get worked up here. Indeed, this was a great opportunity to advertise his Guild. There was nothing to hide, and absolutely no reason why he couldn’t talk, either.

This was for the better, he thought.

“The estimated price is around 50 billion Won. Also, although there are different businesses using the building aside from us, it still belongs to the White Tiger Guild.” (TL: Around \$45 million)

Ahn Sahng-Min proudly spoke.

In the beginning, the Guild was renting some space in that building. But

once they stabilised and found their footing, they simply bought it outright.

It took only one year to do so, too.

It was one of the easiest ways to learn just how much large Guilds made in a year.

If the other side wanted, Ahn Sahng-Min was willing to disclose the annual profit and the overall revenue, too. But then, after hearing a single sentence uttered by Jin-Woo, he became completely speechless.

“Can you hand over that building to me, then?”

“I beg your pardon?”

Ahn Sahng-Min’s eyes opened up real wide.

He doubted his own hearing, so he asked back.

“C-can you explain what you mean by that?”

Jin-Woo calmly explained himself.

“You see, Yujin has promised to hand over a building worth around 30 billion Won. If the White Tiger’s building is indeed around 50 billion, well, it’s not exactly the double the price, but I can overlook such things.”

“T-thirty billion??”

Ahn Sahng-Min couldn’t close his slack jaw.

Seong Jin-Woo’s career spanned four years.

However, most of those were spent as a rank E.

And it hadn’t been long since he got noticed by someone. In other words, he must’ve gone through his Re-Awakening process not too long ago.

Yet, just how incredible was his ability that someone like Yu Myung-Hwan, famous for his wily business smarts, promised the huge amount of 30 billion Won?

Not only that, even before Seong Jin-Woo had gone through with the re-assignment test, too?!

‘W-wait. Could he be lying here, because I won’t be able to confirm if this is true or not?’

Ahn Sahng-Min narrowed his eyes, feeling suspicious.

As if he had read Ahn Sahng-Min’s thoughts, Jin-Woo pulled out his phone and quickly dialled a number.

Ring.... ring....

Click.

It was in the evenings and the interior of the cafe was quiet. Still, Jin-Woo put the phone on speaker and raised the volume to the maximum.

“Hey, Jin-Ho. I wanted to ask you about something.”

Jin-Ho? Was this Yu Jin-Ho?

Ahn Sahng-Min nervously swallowed his saliva.

‘Could he be thinking of telling Yu Jin-Ho what we’ve been discussing just now??’

Too bad, Ahn Sahng-Min’s expectation was a bit off the mark.

Jin-Woo spoke about something else.

“That building you wanted to give to me, how much did you say it was?”



Chapter 42 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Hold on.”

Jin-Woo covered the mouthpiece of the phone with his hand and asked Ahn Sahng-Min.

“If you still can’t believe it, why don’t you speak to him personally?”

Ahn Sahng-Min wiped the cold sweat forming on his forehead and shook his head.

“Hey, Jin-Ho? It’s fine. Thanks. I’m hanging up now.”

After ending the call, Jin-Woo noticed that the look on Ahn Sahng-Min’s face had changed completely now.

Indeed, Ahn Sahng-Min’s eyes were trembling non-stop.

‘Even before their Guild is established, Yujin has promised 30 billion as the contract signing fee?? And then, the second son of Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan continues to use honorifics, too?’

Ahn Sahng-Min was now deeply mired in uncertainty and confusion.

“That, that, that is... I, I should say that, such a big amount is, well, uh, well beyond my ability to... If you just give me some time, I can speak to the higher-ups in the Guild and then....”

Jin-Woo abruptly cut him off.

“In that case, our discussion ends here.”

Ahn Sahng-Min became speechless.

His head drooped slightly, as his head was quickly filled with the reason for this failure.

‘In the end, we simply didn’t have enough information.’

Being too hasty brought about this failure.

After he picked up on the scent of this huge jackpot, he got too excited and forgot to move in a more cautious and prepared manner.

If he had learned of what Yujin’s offer was like, get the full backing of his Guild, and go about his business step by step, then.....

‘For now, I need to report this to the Guild Master.’

If he was a Hunter that Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan was willing to put forward 30 billion, then perhaps his value could be over 50 billion, no, 100 billion, instead.

It was not too late.

‘If I get the promise of the Guild’s full backing, dig out all the information on Seong Jin-Woo, and come out swinging even harder, then...’

It was at this point that Jin-Woo’s voice could be heard.

“I want to ask you about something.”

Ahn Sahng-Min raised his head.

Jin-Woo was no longer smiling.

The weather had warmed up nicely with the hint of Spring nowadays, yet for some reason, the surrounding air felt chillier than usual.

Gulp.

Just as Ahn Sahng-Min swallowed some dry saliva, Jin-Woo asked him a question with a low, heavy voice.

“How many people know about me?”

“It’s... It’s only me for the time being. I was too anxious to scout you so I didn’t even stop to report to my superiors yet.”

Actually, there was one more person. Hyun Ki-Cheol, his subordinate but also his right-hand man.

Ahn Sahng-Min concealed the presence of Hyun Ki-Cheol for the time being. He was worried that Jin-Woo might get real unhappy if he learned that there were two people instead of one.

However, Jin-Woo voice became even colder and threatening than before.

“For the sake of trust, let’s not lie to each other, shall we?”

Ahn Sahng-Min began panicking visibly now.

‘What is this? Did he obtain some information on us before coming here?’

If that were the case, then things might get worse if he continued to argue that he was the only one. He didn’t even want to imagine what would happen next.

'I gotta be honest here.'

The relationship between a Hunter and a Guild was pretty similar to that of an entertainer and the talent agency.

They might not be able to sign a contract right now, but by maintaining a good relationship, anything could happen in the future.

At the bare minimum, he should not cause friction with another Hunter. That was one of the iron-clad rules of the Second Division.

Ahn Sahng-Min quickly opened his mouth.

"Actually, one of my subordinates also knows about this matter. I'm telling you the honest truth."

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

'Indeed....'

It was as he suspected.

All these things, there were too many for one person to handle – investigating him, observing him, and calling him, too.

Most importantly, what made Jin-Woo sure of this fact was the timing of the phone call. As soon as he was near his place, Ahn Sahng-Min called him with such excellent timing.

'Meaning, someone was waiting near my home and called him as soon as I showed up.'

This man wanted to meet Jin-Woo as soon as possible but it'd be bad if Yu Jin-Ho found out in the process, after all.

'Still, it's not the whole White Tiger Guild.'

He could tell from that earlier reaction, back when he was talking about 50 billion Won. Ahn Sahng-Min was so openly flustered when an amount of money he couldn't handle was brought up.

If he was being ordered around by the upper management, then he'd at least try giving them a call after hearing that amount, didn't matter whether that amount was even feasible or not.

That was why Jin-Woo suspected that a small team consisting of two, maybe three, people were involved here, and lo and behold, the person in charge confessed to it being only two.

'What a relief.'

Jin-Woo definitely didn't want to complicate the matter any further than

necessary. Two people were within his ability to control.

If he left them alone like this, no doubt they would continue to harass him down the line. That was why there was a definite need to warn the other party, back off him for good.

Jin-Woo opened his mouth.

“Actually, I also refused Yujin’s offers.”

Jin-Woo’s explosive, unexpected revelation!!

Ahn Sahng-Min was even more shocked than before.

“Pardon me?!”

It was right at this moment, Jin-Woo suddenly vanished from the spot.

“What?!”

Ahn Sahng-Min hurriedly stood up from his chair.

He quickly scanned the interior of the cafe, but couldn’t spot Jin-Woo anywhere.

‘What was that?? Could he have moved faster than the eye can see?!’

Ahn Sahng-Min was too flustered and realised that someone had grabbed his shoulder from the side quite belatedly.

“Heok.”

All the hair on his back stood up at once.

“Don’t turn around.”

A cold voice came from his side.

Jin-Woo, who had been sitting across him until then, had vanished without making a sound and was now standing right next to him, still not visible to the naked eye.

‘S-Stealth??’

Cold sweat drops formed on Ahn Sahng-Min’s forehead.

‘Could.... could he be.... angry at me....?’

Hunters were, in general, monsters.

He knew this well, because he got to observe them from a close vantage point every single day.

That was why he was always super-respectful towards them.

‘Did me spying on him and following him around cause an issue here? Should I have requested protection from the Guild before coming here? No, hang on, no one knows what his ranking is, so how can I request protection, then....?’

His thoughts became messy and his heart pounded relentlessly. Even the sound of him swallowing his saliva echoed around too loudly in his ears.

Jin-Woo spoke, almost in a hushed whisper.

“Sit down slowly. I don’t want to scare you.”

Ahn Sahng-Min slowly nodded his head.

‘But, you’re plenty scary enough already...’

He then slowly sat back down on his chair. Jin-Woo revealed himself and settled down right next to him.

‘Right...’

Jin-Woo’s words of not wanting to scare Ahn Sahng-Min sounded about right. His eyes when he said he wanted to ask something, were cold enough to chill the surrounding air.

If Ahn Sahng-Min had to stare into those eyes while listening to Jin-Woo’s words, then he might have experienced what his heart falling to the pit of his stomach felt like.

‘You’re being considerate towards me, is that it?’

Of course, he couldn’t get the thoughts of Jin-Woo being a very scary guy out of his head.

In the meantime, Jin-Woo opened his mouth.

“The reason why I refused Yujin’s offers is simple. I’m not planning to join any Guilds at the moment.”

Two men conversed while staring forward, never locking their eyes once.

“S-so that’s how it was.”

“Also....”

Jin-Woo took a second before continuing on.

“I don’t want to see the number of people who know about me increase.”

What he wanted here was rather simple.

He didn’t want to join a Guild, and he didn’t want anyone talking about him.

Ahn Sahng-Min quickly understood those points.

However, there was one thing he was still curious about.

“T-then, why are you still being accompanied by Mister Yu Jin-Ho?”

“He’s helping me out on some personal matters. He’s the only one who knows about my Re-Awakening. Also, I believe he’s a friend that I can trust. That’s why I asked him for a favour. And so....”

Jin-Woo’s voice became heavier still.

“So, if I start hearing things about me, can I assume that it came from you, Chief Ahn Sang-Min, or your subordinate?”

It’d been a while since Jin-Woo stopped grabbing his shoulder, yet Ahn Sahng-Min felt like he was being crushed by the younger man’s words.

‘He’s not putting on airs, either.’

Why did he feel this way?

Ahn Sahng-Min was so sure of the fact that Jin-Woo was fully capable of harming him.

‘My gut instinct when evaluating people is almost always right.’

Jin-Woo survived several devastating, horrifying incidents.

Wasn’t there a saying about burying the matters of the dungeon inside a dungeon? No one knew just what kind of things Jin-Woo did inside those dungeons.

‘On top of that, this man possesses the Stealth skill, too.....’

Dealing with the Stealth skill was incredibly tough. If the skill holder decided to commit a crime, he’d be able to off anyone without so much as leaving behind a single clue.

Things like CCTV, security guards and alarm system would all become utterly useless against such a person.

A thick strand of cold sweat rolled down the side of Ahn Sahng-Min’s forehead.

‘Who knew he could use Stealth....?’

Excellent abilities, and even a rare skill, too.

It was not for nothing that Yujin came up with an offer of 30 billion.

‘They aren’t ones to start a losing business deal, indeed.’

Thump, thump.

Ahn Sahng-Min's heart continued to beat in excitement even though he was trembling in fear. His lips parted with great difficulty.

“I-I’ll never talk about this matter ever again. I’ll make sure that Ki-Cheol... No, my subordinate will keep his mouth shut as well.”

Keeping everything hush-hush was something Ahn Sahng-Min also wanted, too. Heck, he probably would've requested it himself first!

An excellent Hunter not affiliated with anyone!

There was no reason to increase the competition by spreading the rumour around, nor did Ahn Sahng-Min want to share the glory and recognition by telling other people, either.

‘Honestly, though, the biggest reason being I’m too scared of him and don’t want him as my enemy....’

“I’ll trust you, Chief Ahn.”

With those words, the presence beside Ahn Sahng-Min disappeared completely. He quickly took a look around.

It was as if Ahn Sahng-Min fell out of a different dimension, since the atmosphere inside the cafe was rather serene.

“Huh.....”

Ahn Sahng-Min remained speechless. He could only pat his pounding chest down.

It was here that Hyun Ki-Cheol ran into the cafe.

He'd been staring at the two men through the window from the outside, and as soon as Jin-Woo completely disappeared from the view, hurriedly entered the cafe to check up on his superior officer.

“Chief!”

Ahn Sahng-Min's complexion was poor. Hyun Ki-Cheol asked, his voice full of worry.

“What happened? Did it not work out with Seong Jin-Woo?”

Ahn Sahng-Min's trembling hands managed to pull out a cigarette. While sliding it between his lips, he made his reply.

“Hey, Ki-Cheol-ah... I think, we just ran into a far bigger jackpot than our initial estimates.”

He definitely had to scout that man.

That was the only line of thought in his head. Thankfully, there was still a chance.

It was then, Hyun Ki-Cheol lightly grasped Ahn Sahng-Min's wrist.

"Uhm.... Pardon me, Chief."

Ahn Sahng-Min raised his head just before he could light the cigarette up.

"Yeah?"

Hyun Ki-Cheol took a look around, then cautiously whispered.

"This is a no smoking zone."

Ahn Sahng-Min slowly crushed the cigarette.

"You dumba*s....."

As soon as he got home, Jin-Woo summoned his Status Window.

Tti-ring!

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 39

Class: None

Title: Slaughterer of Wolves

HP: 7,220

MP: 683

Tiredness: 0

[Stats]

Strength: 97

Stamina: 59

Agility: 97

Intelligence: 51

Perception: 81

(Available points to distribute: 0)

Reduction in physical damage: 20%

[Skills]

Passive skills:

Active skills:

[Equipped items]

‘Well, no wonder people are beginning to notice me.’



Chapter 43 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

From 27 to 39. His level had jumped up by 12.

This would be the first time that his level saw such an explosive rise since he entered the Hapjeong instant dungeon back when he was still a level one. He came out of there as level 17.

Back then, his level was low, so the levelling speed was high. But now, that wasn't strictly true.

This just went to show how many dungeons he cleared in a short space of time.

'It's been four days since I started clearing dungeons with Yu Jin-Ho. And we conquered nine of them in only four days....'

Not only that, they were nine C-ranked dungeons, too.

Rank C dungeons were the highest difficulty a freelancer team could clear on their own.

What a crazy clearing speed this was.

This was the worst possible situation, a catastrophe, for other Hunters found in this area that needed rank C dungeons to make a living.

Yu Jin-Ho, the only witness to the proceedings, was getting more and more astonished by how faster Jin-Woo was clearing each dungeon.

Well, the higher his level was, the easier it got to clear a dungeon, after all.

Nine dungeons cleared and 12 level ups. Clearing one dungeon was almost as good as levelling up more than once.

And he still had 10 more raids to go.

By the time he finished all 19 raids, as he had agreed with Yu Jin-Ho, his level should shoot past 45.

He won against a rank B Hunter back when his level was in the mid-twenties. He couldn't even begin to fathom just how strong he was now.

'My heart... it's beating really fast.'

Jin-Woo placed his hand on his chest, near his heart. He sensed it pounding

real fast in excitement.

Thump, thump!

The sensation of getting stronger every day was one heck of an enjoyable ride.

He would've never imagined such a thing happening to him in the past.

...Things like, entering the Gates and clearing the dungeons would be this much fun.

'Well, I can sense myself getting stronger all the time, after all.'

As his level went up...

As his Stat values rose up....

He could directly feel how much he had changed through hunting monsters.

'Hunting monsters, is it....'

He felt like a real Hunter now. The word 'hunting' no longer sounded like a foreign concept to him.

Wasn't there a certain saying that went something like 'finding the next place to hunt is just as important to a hunter as the moment he hunts?' (TL: Again, 'hunter' with a lower case 'h'. It's the literal hunter, not monster-hunting Hunters.)

His next goal was already set.

'....The Demonic Castle dungeon.'

He was a level 21 back then, wasn't he?

He had grown by nearly 20 levels since the day he first set foot in that mysterious tower-like dungeon.

He thought that perhaps now, he was ready to tackle that place once more. However, just from recalling that gatekeeper monster, Cerberus, he grew very cautious about taking another step in that place.

'What if some crazy monsters that I can't handle jump out in droves as soon as I enter?'

Goosebumps broke out all over his skin.

If he could get away from there using the 'Stealth' skill, that would be great, but still, he had to consider the possibility of failing to do so.

Even if he got lucky ten times, just a single mistake could cost him his life;

that was the life of a Hunter.

So, he needed to be sure.

He needed to be sure of being strong enough to handle a group of monsters as strong as Cerberus.

‘Cerberus’s name was in red letters, right?’

He now knew that the difficulty of killing a monster was reflected in the colour of its name.

With the exception of the Demonic Castle, he had yet to run into a monster with a red name.

The instant dungeons he’d been to with the random box keys were all populated with low-ranked monsters most of the time.

It was the same story with the Mirae department store, too.

But, what was going on here?

‘What is this?’

When he thought that he hadn’t encountered a single monster with a red name besides the one in the Demonic Castle, he kind of felt like he overlooked something just now. It was as if he had forgotten something crucial.

‘Does this mean I have run into other red-name monsters besides the Cerberus?’

But, how could that be?

He fought the Cerberus when he was level 21 and nearly died. So, if he fought another one before that, then he should’ve been pushed to the brink of death, too....

“.....Ah!”

A loud gasp leaked out from his mouth.

Indeed, there was one event where he did run into red-name monsters and almost died.

‘The penalty quest!’

The centipedes he saw back in that nameless desert all had red names.

[Poison-Fanged Giant Desert Centipede]

It’d been a while ago, and he ran into them rather unexpectedly, so his mind was not really thinking of them as monsters at this point.

That was why it took some time for him to remember.

'If I can kill those centipedes with ease, then....!'

Then, he'd be sure of conquering the Demon's Castle as well.

Since there was more than one centipede there, he should be able to find out whether it was okay for him to fight against many at the same time, too.

The obvious issue was how to go back to that place....

'Is there no other way besides not doing the Daily Quest?'

The amount of Stat points he got as rewards was the same regardless of it being a Penalty Quest or a Daily Quest.

Which meant that he wouldn't lose out too much at the end of the day.

'Let's go to the Penalty Zone tomorrow.'

To think, he'd deliberately not do the Daily Quest just so he could enter the Penalty Zone....

It was a rather funny thing when he thought about how close to death he was the first time he ran into those centipedes.

"I wonder, will they give me experience points and loot when I kill them?"

A smile automatically spread on his lips.

It was then.

Jin-Woo's senses picked up on the presence of a person climbing out from the elevator stopping at the end of the hallway, followed by the light footsteps of a female.

He was well familiar with them.

'It's Jin-Ah.'

Currently, it was 11 PM. About the time his little sister came home.

Jin-Woo got up from his seat and headed to the door before Jin-Ah could rummage through her pockets to find her keys.

Click.

"Oh~~."

Jin-Ah playfully exclaimed out in admiration.

She used to get so surprised every time he opened the door without a warning but now, she didn't even pretend to get shocked anymore.

Well, a human was supposed to be a very adaptable creature, and here was the irrefutable proof.

“I’m home~.”

“Welcome back.”

Jin-Ah greeted him with a bright smile and trotted to her room. Jin-Woo closed the door and locked it, before turning around to hear....

“...Oppa.”

Jin-Ah peeked her head out from the doorway to her room.

“Do you have free time this week?”

“What’s up?”

“My homeroom teacher is doing one of those parent-teacher meeting things. If you can’t make it, well, it’s fine too.”

Jin-Ah looked kind of anxious, as if her homeroom teacher had ‘asked her nicely’ or some such.

‘The parent-teacher meeting, huh....’

Jin-Ah was already a high-school senior, meaning that school life should be getting pretty hectic right now. Jin-Woo had half a mind to come up with an excuse and say he didn’t have time to go, but what an unfortunate timing this was, there was this one day where he had nothing scheduled.

‘D*mn you, Yu Jin-Ho. Utterly useless....’

Jin-Woo deliberated for a while, before answering her.

“Thursday.”

“Really? Thanks, oppa!”

Jin-Ah’s expression brightened up in an instant. She looked as if she’d run to him for a bear hug, so Jin-Woo hurriedly waved his hands around.

“Che.”

Jin-Ah glared cutely at him and closed the door behind her.

Soon, a soft groan escaped from Jin-Woo’s mouth.

“Fuu....”

From going on raids without a break to visiting the penalty zone, and now, a parent-teacher meeting the day after tomorrow, too.

It seemed that the rest of his week would remain quite busy.

Part 8. Class Change Quest

Jin-Woo left home early in the morning.

His schedule for the day was packed, to say the least.

Yu Jin-Ho had booked four Gates for the day, thinking that they should do tomorrow's quota today instead.

'Well, if we consider the speed of clearing a dungeon....'

...It'd not be too hard to clear four or five dungeons in a single day.

Of course, it was pretty rare to see that many rank C Gates opening up at the same time in the same district. So, they were rather fortunate today.

With light, airy steps, he arrived at the entrance of the apartment building. However, he couldn't spot Yu Jin-Ho's van waiting for him in the usual spot, the front of the entrance.

Also, Jin-Woo sensed a suspicious presence as well.

"Tsk."

He might have dismissed it offhand were it not for the events of the night before. So, he wasn't going to overlook this.

'And I clearly warned him, too.....'

Jin-Woo immediately discovered a man in a business suit hiding around the corner of the building. The man was busy looking into his watch and didn't seem to have sensed Jin-Woo's approach.

Jin-Woo addressed the man right in front of his nose.

"Excuse me."

The man flinched grandly and jumped up really high.

"Seo-Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!!"

He looked like he'd seen a ghost or something.

'Well, I hid my presence for that purpose, anyway.'

Jin-Woo tutted inwardly and spoke up.

"You're from the White Tiger Guild, yes?"

"Pardon me? Ahh, yes, I am. My name is Hyun Ki-Cheol from the Second Division of the White Tiger Guild."

The Chief calling himself Ahn Sahng-Min or some such said last night that he was working with a subordinate and this guy must've been him.

“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Hunter-nim.”

Hyun Ki-Cheol studied Jin-Woo’s mood while cautiously extending his right hand.

It seemed like that he wanted a handshake, but obviously, Jin-Woo wasn’t interested. When Jin-Woo simply glared at the man without saying anything, Hyun Ki-Cheol withdrew his hand with a slightly reddened face.

“Didn’t I clearly say last night that I’m not planning to join any Guild for the time being?”

Hyun Ki-Cheol hurriedly waved his hand around.

“Oh, no. I’m not here because of that.”

He then presented a tumbler held in his other hand.

“What’s this?”

Jin-Woo asked while studying the colourful liquid contained within the semi-transparent tumbler. Hyun Ki-Cheol pushed his chest forward and proudly spoke.

“It’s vegetable juice. I’ve prepared it personally, so you don’t have to worry about its quality!”

“.....”

Hyun Ki-Cheol’s hand continued to push the tumbler forward. Jin-Woo had no choice but to accept the tumbler and asked again.

“So, like, have you been waiting since the early dawn just to give me this juice?”

“Yes. Well, even if you’re a Hunter, you should still look after your health, you know!”

Jin-Woo’s puzzlement over why would the White Tiger Guild be worried about his health lasted only for a couple of seconds.

Because, Hyun Ki-Cheol bowed his head deeply and with a bright smile, quickly walked away.

“See you again another time, Hunter-nim!”

Jin-Woo slowly shook the tumbler at Hyun Ki-Cheol as the latter waved his hand.

“.....What a funny guy.”

After Hyun Ki-Cheol had disappeared from the view, Jin-Woo looked at the

tumbler.

He once heard stories about a certain ‘Insurance King’ who gave out bottles of yoghurt to his customers and bought their goodwill that way, but well, that man Hyun Ki-Cheol should be the very first Guild employee ever to personally make veggie juice and deliver it.

‘Well, I did accept it so I can’t even throw it away now, can I?’

That man wouldn’t have been stupid enough to try it, but if he did pour some kind of poison in the juice, Jin-Woo’s detox buff should take care of that, so no worries there.

Should he at least give it a go and have a taste, then?

Slurp.

He used a straw stuck in the tumbler and took a long sip, before his eyes opened wider.

‘Hey, it’s tasty.’

It was here that he heard a familiar voice calling out to him.

“Hyung-nim!”

He turned around to see Yu Jin-Ho walking towards him.

Yu Jin-Ho still had that bright face as usual, but he was also pointing in the direction where Hyun Ki-Cheol disappeared to with his chin.

“Hyung-nim, who was that just now? He’d been standing here for a while, you know?”

Jin-Woo’s reply was pretty simple.

“An insurance salesman.”

“Aha.”

Being a positive-minded guy, Yu Jin-Ho accepted that explanation right away. Jin-Woo looked around the vicinity and asked.

“Where’s your van?”

If he saw Hyun Ki-Cheol standing here, that meant Yu Jin-Ho had arrived quite a while ago, too. But strangely enough, the kid’s favourite van was nowhere to be seen.

“I parked it way over there, hyung-nim.”

“But, why?”

“Well, you know there’s been a series of unsolved homicides taking place

around these parts, yes? I'm not from around here and people were beginning to suspect me and stuff, so...."

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Those murders were brought up frequently on the local news lately.

The victims were mostly young women. There had been two murders this month already.

And then, there was an unknown black van parked right out in front of the apartment building. Of course, the residents would become fearful and anxious.

Slurp, slurp....

It was here that the veggie juice was finally finished. Jin-Woo lightly shook around the empty tumbler before walking towards where the van was supposedly parked.

"Let's go."

"Okay, hyung-nim!"

Lizardmen came out in this dungeon.

As their 'name' indicated, they were literally bipedal lizards. They walked on two legs, wielded weapons, and even resorted to flinging around magic attacks, too.

The number of Lizardman Mages was low, though. However, they were rather cumbersome to deal with in return.

For instance...

Two balls of flames erupted near the tips of the Lizardman Mage's hands.

'Magic?'

When Jin-Woo tried to get closer, the two Lizardmen protecting the Mage stabbed their spears at him.

Indeed, what quick reflexes befitting reptiles.

Jin-Woo jumped rearward and barely missed the speartips.

Right away, the balls of flame flew at him.

Swish-!

Swoosh!!

"Hyung-nim, watch out!!"

Yu Jin-Ho cried out from his position a lot of distance away.

Kwaboom!!!

Along with a huge explosion, the narrow cavern-like dungeon shook around noticeably.



Chapter 44 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The choking smoke filled up the interior of the dungeon.

“Cough, cough.”

Yu Jin-Ho covered his nose with the back of his wrist and loudly coughed out. However, he was far more worried about Jin-Woo at the moment. The firepower of the Lizardman Mage was that strong.

Fortunately, Jin-Woo rapidly emerged from the smoke completely unscathed, meaning there was no need to worry in the first place.

Yu Jin-Ho inwardly exclaimed out in admiration.

‘As expected of hyung-nim!’

Jin-Woo was able to evade the attacks of the Lizardmen, reputedly the hardest monsters to deal with in dungeons ranked C, without getting a single hair disturbed. Not only that, from a Mage, too!

From Yu Jin-Ho’s perspective, it was as if Jin-Woo was getting faster every day.

‘.....I must be imagining things, right?’

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo spat out pieces of rubble that somehow found their way inside his mouth.

“Ptooi.”

The colour of his saliva landing on the ground was black.

‘These b*stards....’

He became really p*ssed off by the fact that he had to breathe in unhealthy smoke because of a lone lizard and its cheap tricks. And his dissatisfaction could be seen clearly in his expression.

Jin-Woo was frowning deeply now.

[You’ve used ‘Skill: Intimidation’.]

His angrily glaring eyes ‘shot’ out powerful murderous intent.

[‘Effect: Fear’ has been activated.]

[All Stats of the targets will be reduced by 50% for one minute.]

The Lizardmen began panicking grandly after being exposed to his powerful murderous intent.

“Kuehh??”

“Kurururuka??”

Jin-Woo didn't miss this chance and threw the Poison Fang of Kasaka with everything he had. The dagger flew in a dead-straight line and splendidly pierced the forehead of one of the Lizard spearmen.

Stab!!

The speed of Jin-Woo's flying dagger was too fast for a weakened monster to evade.

“Tsururuka!!”

The remaining spearman roared out in anger after witnessing the death of its comrade. However, Jin-Woo was no longer standing where the creature's spear was pointing at.

“Tsurukahnaka!”

The Lizardman Mage cried out nervously.

“Tsurukahnaka!”

When the Mage repeated the same 'words' as before, the spearman turned around to face the Mage and roared out.

“Tsuruka!!”

The spearman bared its fangs and approached the Mage in a threatening manner. However, the Mage didn't back down, either.

“Tsuruaeek!”

It happened then.

“Kak!!”

Suddenly, the spearman's chest burst open.

The Mage's face was now covered in blood; it cried out in alarm and hurriedly took several steps back.

“Tsuruakk??”

The 'Stealth' slowly came undone and the spear stabbing through the chest of the Lizard spearman revealed itself.

The man holding that spear was, of course, Jin-Woo.

When he let go of the shaft, both the spear and the Lizardman that got skewered by it crashed to the ground simultaneously.

Thud!

In the meantime, Jin-Woo rapidly recovered his Poison Fang of Kasaka from the head of the other Lizard spearman.

“Tsuruaaarik!!”

Red beams of light appeared again in the hands of the Lizardman Mage. However, Jin-Woo didn't give it time to complete its actions.

‘Dash!’

The distance between Jin-Woo and the Mage disappeared in an instant. The Mage's repulsive-looking reptilian eyes grew really wide.

Pushuheee-

Jin-Woo ducked and avoided the flames erupting out from the Mage, slid to the monster's rear, and stabbed his dagger near the target's spinal area.

‘Vital Points Targetting!’

Stab!

The Mage cried out in pain.

“Kiaahhahk!!”

But, when Jin-Woo stabbed again, the following scream wasn't as lengthy as the previous one.

Stab!

“Kak!”

The Lizardman Mage spat out a mouthful of blood and collapsed forward.

Plop.

Jin-Woo inwardly punched the air. No matter who judged it, that was an excellent victory for sure.

‘Veeery nice!’

And as if to congratulate him on his victory, he could hear the System's crisp mechanical beep ring inside his head.

Tt-ring.

[Level up!]

[‘Player’ has reached the required level.]

A strange message followed right after the familiar one.

‘Required level?’

Having only heard this simple message, he couldn’t figure out what was going on here.

But by the time the following mechanical beep rang, Jin-Woo ended up expending a huge amount of willpower just to calm his heart that beat so hard to the point of causing him pain.

Tti-ring.

[Class Change Quest is now available.]

[Will you take on the Class Change Quest now?] (Y/N)

‘C...Class Change Quest..??’

He was so focused on raising his levels and his Stats that he had been forgetting all about a certain column in his Status Window.

[Name: Seong Jin-Woo]

[Level: 40]

[Class: None]

Indeed, that would be the third column in his Status Window, the ‘Class’. And now, he was given an opportunity to replace that ‘None’ with another word.

He’d be given a Class.

In most video games, a character would receive many benefits after getting a Class. It’d be no different with the System, since it operated almost the same as a game.

Thump, thump.

His heart was beating harder and faster now.

When he realised that he’d be one step closer to the goal of being strong after going through with this quest, he simply could not calm himself down anymore.

[Will you take on the Class Change Quest now?] (Y/N)

‘Yes’ and ‘No’ continued to flicker in front of his eyes.

‘Of course, I would....’

What kind of an idiot would refuse such an opportunity??

Jin-Woo was about to choose yes and take on the quest to change his Class. However, he stopped almost instinctively.

‘No. Hang on a sec.’

Who knew just what kind of a quest might show up here?

Following right after the notice from his instincts, the warning bells from his brain rang true and clear inside his head.

‘I’m inside a dungeon.’

A dungeon was one of the most dangerous places in the world. Even though he was fully accustomed to the rank C dungeons by now, a dungeon was still a dungeon after all. There was no reason for him to increase the risk even more.

Besides, Yu Jin-Ho was standing next to him as well.

It wasn’t as if he didn’t trust the kid, no. Still, he didn’t have any particular reason to let the kid in on the existence of the System, or explain the weird phenomenon that might occur when he changed his Class.

Things would get too complicated in this way.

‘And also, the content of the quest might end up hurting Yu Jin-Ho, too.’

What if strong monsters suddenly appeared out of thin air?

‘Well, that would be more preferable, actually.’

Because, he’d only have to kill those monsters and that would be the end. But, a quest asking for something more than that could show up. For instance, something similar to those two emergency quests he had to complete in the past.

‘Yeah, the goal of the quest could be to eliminate the nearest Hunters.’

It was a distinct possibility. Sure, it was nothing but speculation at this point in time, but still.

Still possessing an excellent sense of timing, Yu Jin-Ho walked over and called out to him.

“Hyung-nim!”

The magic the Lizardman Mage flung about must’ve landed pretty close to him, because he was covered from top to bottom in dust.

“Just how did you do that? Disappearing and reappearing again?? Did you have a skill like that before?”

Yu Jin-Ho's eyes sparkled brightly as he spoke. He looked really pumped up, too. He must've found the rare skill 'Stealth' really mystifying or some such.

'Well, I find your appearance far more mystifying, kid.'

Instead of a reply, Jin-Woo pulled out a handkerchief from his Inventory. He got this as a reward from the Daily Quest.

"H-hyung-nim?"

Jin-Woo used that cloth to mercilessly rub Yu Jin-Ho's face.

"Wooeuph!! Phu-heup!!"

The previously-white handkerchief was now dyed jet black. Yu Jin-Ho took a look at the fabric and only then realised what the state of his face was like.

He embarrassedly retreated to a corner and carefully wiped his face clean.

"Hey, Jin-Ho?"

"Yes, hyung-nim?"

"Something urgent just came up."

Yu Jin-Ho quickly raised his head.

"Are you planning to leave now?"

"After we finish up here."

"Okay, understood. Then, I'll cancel our bookings for the remaining Gates."

Yu Jin-Ho couldn't show it in front of Jin-Woo, but he was feeling rather pained about the three Gates that had been booked by him.

'My funds are running out quickly, too.'

Yu Jin-Ho didn't have any method to earn money, so the allowances he got were basically everything he had. He was doing this without his father's knowledge, so the amount of cash he could shift around was limited.

If he had to cancel the bookings, then he wouldn't get refunds on the booking fees he paid in advance. It was the same as him throwing money away.

So, how could he not feel pained about this?

Also, because of this 'unusual' method of clearing Gates, he ended up spending more than usual for today's raids.

But now, he had to throw away his investment, just like that. Yu Jin-Ho's

shoulders couldn't help but droop real low, almost instinctively.

However, Jin-Woo replied with an unmoved expression.

“Why are you cancelling our bookings and wasting money like that?”

Yu Jin-Ho tilted his head.

“Pardon? If we don't enter a Gate within two days of booking it, our permit will be automatically rescinded, hyung-nim.”

Of course, Jin-Woo already knew something like that.

“Leave them to me. I'll sort them out.”

Did Jin-Woo think of a good way to resolve this?

Yu Jin-Ho was curious, but at the same time, he felt relieved as well.

Inside the headquarters of the White Tiger Guild.

“Chief Ahn!! Just what on earth were you thinking?!”

A loud roar reverberated within the offices of the Second Division.

The owner of that roar was Baek Yun-Ho.

He was none other than the Master of the White Tiger Guild, and its CEO as well. It could never be a good thing if a CEO-level character made his way down to the lower floors to make his ire known to his staff members.

“What the, how can any of this make sense?? How can there be no Gates to train our new recruits?? Don't you realise that you've delayed the training schedule by four days already?!”

All the employees within the Second Division lowered their heads. They all looked anxious, wondering if they would also end up in the crosshair.

Chief Ahn Sahng-Min too lowered his head as Baek Yun-Ho continued to point and shout at him.

“...”

Ahn Sahng-Min wasn't dumb or inexperienced enough to p*ss off his superior officer even further by replying to every little thing being said, in the way Hyun Ki-Cheol would have done.

In cases like this, keeping his mouth shut was for the best.

Whether the boss man knew Ahn Sahng-Min's thoughts or not....

Baek Yun-Ho angrily shook around the report from the Second Division that showed up on his desk this morning.

“You’re using this as an excuse?! The other team paid far higher bids so we can’t book a single Gate? Are you saying our Guild lacks enough funds? Or is the other party being supported by a bloody billionaire or something?!”

Ahn Sahng-Min’s lips twitched real hard just then, but he endured like a champ and didn’t say anything.

He made a promise to Jin-Woo, after all.

‘If I open my mouth now, I’d end up blabbering about Yu Jin-Ho and Seong Jin-Woo.’

Not knowing the pained inner thoughts of Ahn Sahng-Min, Baek Yun-Ho continued to roar at the top of his lungs, loud enough to shake the entire office.

“I don’t care whether it’s a hundred million, two hundred – just book the d*mn Gates! Do you understand me?!”

It happened, then.

Suddenly, Ahn Sahng-Min’s phone began ringing loudly.

[Ah! I’m sorry I couldn’t answer you earlier, I was meeting a friend, shy, shy, shy ~♪]

When he sneaked a glance at his phone to confirm who the caller was, Ahn Sahng-Min’s eyes grew real wide.

“Sir, I need to answer this call.”

“.....”

The Second Division’s main role was to recruit new talents, and nothing was more important to them than good timing!

And, Ahn Sahng-Min was the Chief of that Second Division.

Even if Ahn Sahng-Min had made a big blunder, no matter how angry Baek Yun-Ho got, stopping him from answering that call was not a smart thing to do.

“What are you doing, Chief Ahn? Answer it quickly.”

Baek Yun-Ho consented to it with an unhappy voice.

Ahn Sahng-Min bowed his head slightly, asking Baek Yun-Ho for his understanding, and he quickly answered the call.

“Hello, Ahn Sahng-Min from the White Tiger Guild speaking.”

While Ahn Sahng-Min was answering the call, Baek Yun-Ho crossed his arms and waited for it to end.

“Yes, yes. I understand. If you’re waiting for us by the ground floor cafe, I shall go there right away. Yes, see you then.”

Ahn Sahng-Min ended the call and quickly spoke up.

“Sir, looks like I’ll have to go downstairs for a moment.”

Ahn Sahng-Min was the ace of the Second Division. If such a man was getting ready to rush downstairs with only one phone call, even when he was facing his boss’s fury...

“By any chance, was that call related to scouting someone?”

“Yes, sir.”

Seeing that confident, assured face of Ahn Sahng-Min, Baek Yun-Ho realised that something major was going on here.

‘Chief Ahn is personally trying to scout this person?’

Which could only mean that the other guy was someone extraordinary, right?

Baek Yun-Ho’s angrily-crumpled visage reverted back to a smiling one in an instant.

“How can I stand in the way of our scouting specialist trying to do his job? Don’t worry about the matters up here and do your best downstairs.”



Chapter 45 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Ahn Sahng-Min lowered his head again. And then, he hurriedly issued an order to Hyun Ki-Cheol.

“Vice Chief Hyun, get the contract documents ready.”

“Yes, Chief!”

Their preparation was done in the blink of an eye.

After the duo hurriedly left the offices, Baek Yun-Ho sneaked in a question to a male employee next to him.

“What’s going on here? Just what kind of an assignment could make Chief Ahn roll his sleeves up and jump in personally like this?”

The male employee sent a pleading look to a female colleague next to him, asking silently for any form of assistance. Unfortunately, even she shook her head.

‘I also don’t know,’ said her eyes.

‘Dang it....’

The male employee hesitated for a bit before he finally gave in and answered with great difficulty while scratching the back of his head.

“Well, sir... The thing is, none of us....”

He expected the boss to throw an almighty hissy fit, but then....

Quite unexpectedly, the boss didn’t say anything else.

‘So, he’s involved in something so secretive that he can’t even tell his own people, is that it?’

Baek Yun-Ho slowly rubbed his chin.

The person who had contributed a great deal in building up the White Tiger Guild to its current size and power was none other than Chief Ahn Sahng-Min.

If someone like that was throwing all his focus on this matter, then....

‘Will our Chief Ahn once more reel in a huge fish?’

A huge smile slowly bloomed on Baek Yun-Ho's face.

'Why the hell is this coffee so bitter?!'

Jin-Woo frowned deeply.

He was thinking of the vending machine coffee's taste when ordering a cup of Espresso at the cafe. But hell, rather than calling this coffee, it was much more fitting to label it as a really bitter traditional medicine, instead.

And it cost way too much for what it was.

'Man, ₩6,000 can buy me several canned coffee, you know....'

He began wondering just how many sticks of sugar he needed to pour into this bitter b*stard in order to make it taste about the same as the canned coffee. But then...

Cling.

The door to the cafe opened, and the duo of Ahn Sahng-Min and Hyun Ki-Cheol rushed inside.

"Over here."

Jin-Woo raised his hand.

Ahn Sahng-Min and Hyun Ki-Cheol quickly took a sweeping look around the cafe, and when they discovered Jin-Woo, their complexions brightened in an instant. Their expressions resembled that of 'Heungbu' seeing the gourd brought by the swallow. (TL: 'Heungbu' is the main character of an old Korean novel 'Heungbu and Nolbu'. There is a dedicated page in Wikipedia for this folk tale if you're interested.)

"We honestly didn't expect to see you again so soon."

Ahn Sahng-Min greeted like so and sat opposite to Jin-Woo, while Hyun Ki-Cheol made a quick greeting with a nod and settled down next to his superior officer.

Jin-Woo also nodded his head lightly as his greeting.

The old saying went 'make hay while the sun still shines'. So, Ahn Sahng-Min pulled out the contract as soon as settling down.

"For the terms we can offer you, we can negotiate....."

His ardent desire to get the contract signed quickly was quite easy to see.

Unfortunately for him, Jin-Woo cut him off rather decisively.

"I didn't come here today to talk about signing with you folks."

Ahn Sahng-Min's hands froze in mid-action of pulling out the contract. Hyun Ki-Cheol also looked quite confused as well.

Ahn Sahng-Min asked in the frozen position as if someone had pressed the pause the button.

“Well then, what brings you to our White Tiger Guild....?”

His expectation had been great, and so was the ensuing disappointment.

The biggest find of the year walked into the Guild with his own two feet, but he refused to sign the contract the moment he clapped his eyes on it.

Could he have changed his mind in the meantime?

As the duo's confusion grew, Jin-Woo calmly spoke to them.

“I came here to help you two.”

“Pardon me?”

“Excuse me?”

The reactions of Ahn Sahng-Min and Hyun Ki-Cheol were roughly the same. Two men exchanged glances, before shifting their gaze over to Jin-Woo. In a complete contrast to their flustered state, Jin-Woo remained utterly calm.

“I remember you mentioning your troubles regarding the training of your new recruits, because my raid team swept away all the available rank C dungeons in the area.”

“T-that's correct. Well, we can't really take the newbies to a high ranked dungeon just because we couldn't book a rank C Gate, after all.”

“That's why I'm here today.”

Ahn Sahng-Min tilted his head slightly.

“Forgive me, but I can't seem to....”

Jin-Woo thought this was enough of him beating around the bush, so he got to the main topic.

“I want to sell the raid permits for three of the rank C gates my raid team acquired.”

“Ah.”

Hyun Ki-Cheol let off a short gasp.

The two men from the White Tiger Guild finally figured out what Jin-Woo really wanted from them.

“If you really wanted to help us out, then wouldn’t it be simpler just to not book Gates anymore?”

Jin-Woo shook his head.

“Unfortunately, I have some matters that require the continued clearing of rank C Gates for the time being.”

“Well then, why today....?”

Jin-Woo smiled refreshingly.

“I’m here because I wanted to help you out of your troubles.”

Should the duo believe those words at their face value?

Just before the calculator inside Ahn Sahng-Min’s head could start crunching some numbers, Jin-Woo continued on with his explanations.

“Of course, I’m being considerate only for today. We also can’t delay our operations as well, you see. If you miss this chance, I’m pretty sure that it’ll only get harder to book rank C Gates for the foreseeable future.”

For some reason, he came across as a host of a home shopping channel alerting his viewers to the looming end of the discount period.

‘Hmm.....’

Ahn Sahng-Min fell into a dilemma.

Gates didn’t just appear in and around the capital city only.

If they couldn’t book one around here, there was an option of going to the countryside and training the rookies there. However, there was a good chance of earning the ire of the local Guilds and the raid teams by doing that.

That wasn’t all, either.

Doing that would be like giving ammunition to large Guilds located in the countryside, like the Shining Star located in Honam, or the Knight Order in Youngnam, to ridicule the White Tiger.

In other words, his Guild could be saddled with the ignoble reputation of a poorly-run organisation that couldn’t even train their rookies in their own backyard.

‘Hmm.... Can we claim that it’s an undeserved reputation, even?’

Because, it was clearly true, after all.

Whatever the case may be, which rookie would want to join a Guild that was being roundly ridiculed by other famous Guilds?

This was one of the reasons why the Guild's public image was really important.

“Okay.”

After a lengthy deliberation, Ahn Sahng-Min came to a conclusion.

“Please sell us the permits. Three rank C Gates should be enough for our needs. How much are you thinking of for all three of them?”

The White Tiger Guild had a really deep pocket.

However, nothing good would come out of trying to compare their financial muscle with Yujin Construction's, and just as importantly, he feared souring the relationship with Jin-Woo the most, so he'd not even try to compete at the end of the day.

But now, Jin-Woo was actually volunteering to hand over the Gates, so shouldn't this be something to be grateful about?

Unfortunately, he couldn't be grateful for the proposed prices, though.

“300 million Won per gate, so 900 million for all three.”

“Keok!!”

Both Ahn Sahng-Min and Hyun Ki-Cheol spat out pained, shocked gasps at the same time.

“That's too much.”

Hyun Ki-Cheol tried to interject, but Ahn Sahng-Min quickly stopped him.

Something like this also happened the last time they met.

Jin-Woo ended the talks without an ounce of hesitation once his price couldn't be met.

In a way, this was a great opportunity that rolled on to their laps.

If they failed to grasp this chance, then either they only get to book a rank C Gate a really long time from now or, in the worst case scenario, go to the countryside to train their rookies.

‘Well, at least I should try negotiating properly today.’

Ending the talks this quickly would only leave the bitter taste in his mouth.

Still, a Gate priced 300 million each was just too expensive.

Yu Jin-Ho's bid for the raid permits averaged around 100 million Won lately. Asking three times that amount was just being too unreasonable.

Surely, Jin-Woo would know this, too.

‘I’m sure he’s thinking of starting at a high enough number and gradually come down.’

Now that he thought about it, he recalled the words Baek Yun-Ho had said before they left the office.

[“I don’t care whether it’s a hundred million, two hundred – just book the d*mn Gates! Do you understand me?!”]

This was the same thing as the CEO giving his consent.

Plus, every employee working in the Second Division heard those words, so Baek Yun-Ho wouldn’t be able to pretend his way out of this one, either.

Ahn Sahng-Min swallowed his saliva and put up his counteroffer.

“300 million is too large an amount even for us, so how about 200 million ins....”

“I accept.”

Even before Ahn Sahng-Min could finish his sentence, Jin-Woo reached out with his right hand. With a slightly dazed face, Ahn Sahng-Min reached out as well and shook the offered hand.

“This..... Are you okay with this?”

“Yes. 200 million Won for each rank C Gate. Please deposit the money into this bank account.”

It kind of felt like the situation got resolved way too fast, but well, from Ahn Sahng-Min’s perspective, this should count as a fortunate thing indeed.

Ahn Sahng-Min lightly shook Jin-Woo’s hand and bowed his head as well.

“I’m grateful for this. Thank you.”

“You’re being too kind.”

Jin-Woo also formed a bright smile.

Ahn Sahng-Min inwardly thought that he’d be able to breathe a little bit easier now. For the time being, he was able to resolve the situation with training the new recruits, and his relationship with Jin-Woo had improved, ever so slightly, as well.

‘Trust is the foundation of all negotiations and dealings, after all.’

Indeed.

Just like this, their relationship would evolve for the better bit by bit. Sooner or later, he’d be able to reel in his catch.

No one would spit at a smiling face, and no one would pretend to not notice when someone gave you a present.

Ahn Sahng-Min inwardly clenched his fist.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo stood up from his seat first.

“Now that’s been sorted, I should get going. I’ll see you around. Oh, and here.”

Jin-Woo handed over a shopping bag containing an empty tumbler to its original owner.

“Thanks for the drink. I really enjoyed it.”

“I’m happy to hear that you liked it, Mister Seong.”

With a slightly reddened face, Hyun Ki-Cheol accepted the shopping bag.

With that, Jin-Woo exited from the cafe.

After he got to a far enough distance away from Ahn Sahng-Min and Hyun Ki-Cheol, Jin-Woo gave Yu Jin-Ho a call.

A short bout of poppy music ringtone later....

Yu Jin-Ho’s clearly excited voice came out from the speaker.

“...”

Jin-Woo quietly smiled in satisfaction.

This transaction was a resounding success.

He managed to sell off raid permits at double the price of what they paid for, before they became useless junk. This was a huge profit for them.

Yu Jin-Ho asked him in a mystified voice.

“That’s my trade secret.”

“Enjoy your break, and see you in two days’ time.”

While Yu Jin-Ho was getting flustered on the other side, Jin-Woo simply ended the call.

Click.

Later, on the same day.

The Second Division’s office.

Hyun Ki-Cheol was urgently seeking out Ahn Sahng-Min.

“Chief! Chief!!”

“What’s wrong?”

Ahn Sahng-Min tore his eyes away from his computer monitor. Hyun Ki-Cheol pointed to his phone’s screen with an urgent expression on his face.

“You gotta take a look at this, Chief!”

“What’s going on now?”

Ahn Sahng-Min looked at the screen and his eyes narrowed to a slit.

‘Isn’t this.....?’

The screen showed the section of the Hunter Association’s website that only the Hunters had access to.

To be more precise, the screen showed the page which notified everyone of where the reported Gates were located at, as well as allowing anyone to buy the raid permits for those Gates.

“What’s this?! Why are there so many rank C dungeons in our district?!”

“Not only that, each one is going for less than 10 million Won at the moment, as well!”

“No way.....”

Ahn Sahng-Min realised that something was terribly awry here.

“....Yu Jin-Ho’s team hasn’t booked a single Gate for tomorrow.”

Hearing Hyun Ki-Cheol’s words, Ahn Sahng-Min immediately recalled what Seong Jin-Woo told him over the phone.

[“I have some free time on Thursday.”]

And tomorrow was Thursday. Yu Jin-Ho’s team had no plans to go on a raid tomorrow. He didn’t even know that and bought those permits at a huge premium.

“Huh...”

An amused chuckle leaked out from Ahn Sahng-Min’s mouth.

There were enough hints, but it was too late by the time he had pieced them together. This was his mistake. Well, he did succeed in cooling the anger of the CEO in the end, so it wasn’t all bad.

“Looks like we’ve been had, Chief.”

It was then, a text message arrived in Ahn Sahng-Min’s phone.

Ding-dong.

It was from Seong Jin-Woo.

[With this, we're even now. I will consider your people spying on me as something that never happened.]

'I can't take this fellow lightly, can I?'

Ahn Sahng-Min inwardly chuckled.

If the sole sticking point between Jin-Woo and the White Tiger could be resolved in this manner, as implied by the youth, then this wouldn't necessarily be a bad trade for the Guild at the end of the day.

Their final aim was to scout Jin-Woo, after all.

Besides, the amount they spent today wasn't all that much, anyway.

"Let's think of it as us investing in Seong Jin-Woo."

It'd be nice if they were able to earn back as much as they have invested, though.

Ahn Sahng-Min stopped looking at his phone and with a smile on his face, closed the mailbox.

After sending the text, Jin-Woo took one more look around his vicinity.

There was absolutely no one here.

Only the dense forest greeted his searching eyes.

In order to make sure he'd get to 'enjoy' a relatively-safe quest, he searched for a mountainside with almost no human presence and found the most suitable candidate.

The current time was 17:44.

There shouldn't be any hikers in this in-between hour, plus his current location was an empty spot of land far, far removed from any hiking trails.

'Time to get started.'

Jin-Woo accessed his mailbox.

[Will you take on the Class Change Quest now?] (Y/N)

The message popped up in his view as if it'd been patiently waiting for him.



Chapter 46 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Gulp.

Jin-Woo's Adam's apple bobbed up and down. Indeed, it was rather scary not knowing what kind of quest would pop up.

However, his anticipation was even greater than his fears.

While he was looking for a suitable location to start the quest, he used his phone to search for topics related to changing one's class online.

....Etc, etc.

They were all from video games, sure; but, the accepted norm was that changing one's class would result in many benefits.

'And level 40 was when I could get my Class.'

Of course, it wasn't all good news, either. He often spotted ominous sounding thread titles as he browsed through online forums.

....Well, these were also related to video games, anyways.

He certainly had far less to worry about here since he only used daggers as his main weapon until now. All the skills he had acquired leaned towards the profession of 'assassin'.

'Right, I've got dagger techniques and Stealth as my skills.'

Not only that, he invested mainly in raising the Stats of Strength and Agility, so it was kind of hard to imagine getting another class other than 'Assassin'.

As his thoughts arrived here, Jin-Woo summoned the 'Poison Fang of Kasaka' from his Inventory.

Shush....

This feeling of the hilt falling so perfectly in his hand....

'Yeah, this for me is the most comfortable.'

He nodded his head like a wise old sage.

While gripping the dagger tightly, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze towards the message floating in the air.

‘Well, then....’

Now that he was all done with getting ready for any unexpected events, he firmed his resolve and answered the message.

[Will you take on the Class Change Quest now?] (Y/N)

‘Yes, I’m taking it on.’

The moment he thought of taking on the quest, another message popped into his view.

Tti-ring.

[You’re now partaking in the Class Change Quest.]

[A new dungeon will be generated for this quest.]

‘Generating... a new dungeon?’

Before he had the chance to interpret what that message was saying, a change took place before him really fast.

Wuuonng—

A black ‘hole’ formed right in front of his eyes. That was merely the beginning, too.

Wuonng, wuuonngg.....

The black hole the size of a bean expanded to the size of a coin, then to that of a volleyball, and eventually, it grew large enough for a person to walk through.

‘Isn’t this....?’

Jin-Woo’s eyes grew wider.

He was expecting to see a new message with the contents of the quest pop up in front of his eyes, but this....

What appeared before him was, without a doubt, a Gate.

‘To think, a Gate would show up here....’

This one didn’t seem any different from the others he was familiar with. Only that, it was a bit smaller than usual.

The System sent him a new message as if to urge him on.

[Please enter the dungeon through the Gate.]

‘I need to calm down.’

Jin-Woo quickly collected himself.

Right...

If he thought about it, there wasn't much of a difference whether he used a key or a Gate to enter a dungeon. Indeed, he was simply taken aback just now by the sight of a Gate forming 'artificially' like this.

Also, this would be his first time seeing a Gate form. He always just walked into one that was already there, so...

When the chain of his thoughts stopped there, a new question popped into his mind.

'Hang on... can other Hunters enter this Gate as well?'

Too bad, he had no method to experiment on this one today.

Well, there were no Hunters nearby that he could call for 'assistance', nor did he have anyone who would rush over here because he gave them a call.

He momentarily recalled Yu Jin-Ho's face, but slowly shook his head.

'How will I take care of the aftermath if I called him and something bad happens?'

It was then.

As if to urge him on again, the message blinked.

Tti-ring.

[Please enter the dungeon through the Gate.]

The mechanical beep brought him back to his senses. He slapped his cheeks a couple of times to wake himself up.

'This is no time to daydream.'

If he succeeded, then a new class and all the rewards that followed would be his. And if he failed, then he couldn't even tell what might happen to him.

So, he needed to focus here.

"Fuu-woo...."

After taking a deep breath....

Jin-Woo held the Poison Fang of Kasaka in reverse grip and entered the Gate.

[You have entered the dungeon.]

'Eh?'

He entered in a state of taut tension, but to his surprise, there was nothing

here.

He was greeted by the sight of an ordinary cave-like dungeon.

“Isn’t this exactly the same as the others....?”

He heard that high-ranking dungeons were often linked to ‘other worlds’ so he was kind of worried about such a thing happening to him, but thankfully, he was spared from that.

Instead, a strange message popped up into his view.

Tti-ring.

[The current location forbids the usage of potions as well as the functions of the Store, and your physical state will not recover even if you level up.]

Jin-Woo confirmed that there was no presence of monsters nearby and put away his dagger. Then, his head began tilting this way and that.

‘.....This isn’t going to be easy, is it?’

Maybe because his class change was up for grabs, there were quite a few restrictions here to contend with.

The most important one was that he couldn’t replenish his spent energy or stamina, and couldn’t heal himself using potions or level ups.

‘The damage will stack, in other words.’

If he got injured, then that would spell his doom.

Since he couldn’t heal himself, he had no choice but to be thorough and cautious with every action he took.

‘Meaning, I gotta keep my wits about me.’

Jin-Woo closed the message.

And as he’d do every time when entering a dungeon, he confirmed the presence of the exit.

[You can’t leave until the Class Change process has been concluded.]

A message popped up as soon as he touched the surface of the Gate. He put some strength behind his hand, but it didn’t even budge.

“....”

Jin-Woo retracted his hand.

‘The exit is blocked off.’

An unknown grade, impossible to heal himself, and no exit; this dungeon

was a pretty risky proposition. Even a Hunter with balls of steel wouldn't want to tread in a place like this one.

'However, high risk doesn't always equate to bad things, does it?'

Indeed, the higher the risk, the higher the reward. He learned that through experience.

If clearing this place was difficult because of all the restrictions, then didn't that also mean there was an amazing opportunity waiting for him at the end?

There was only one way to find out.

'I'll know once I get there.'

Jin-Woo took his first step forward.

His eyes gazed far forward, and all he could see was the cavern-like passageway with seemingly no end. And there were no monsters nearby.

'Wait, since this is still within the System's influence, should I call them monsters, and not monsters?' (TL: Well, sorry about this line. The author had been using the Hanja word for monsters to describe those found in the regular Gates/dungeons, while using the romanised English word 'monster' to describe those found in instant dungeons. They mean the same thing, obviously, but well, wordplay and all that....)

Even though they both meant the same thing.

In any case, that wasn't the only difference to consider. There were lit torches lining up at a fixed interval along the cavern walls as well.

'Instead of luminous stones, I got torches, huh.'

Unfortunately, the light from the torches was not an effective source of illumination.

No matter how many there were, they were still not enough to light up the entire passageway. So, there were plenty of hidden shadows.

With the deafening silence being accompanied by the gloomy shadows, this place came off far more eerie and ominous than a regular dungeon.

'I can see no problem, but still....'

Should he say it's down to the atmosphere of this place?

Jin-Woo pulled out the nearest torch and held it. His front brightened ever so slightly with the torch in his hand.

'Yeah, this is better.'

Jin-Woo formed a satisfied smile.

He took one last glance behind him and slowly made his way forward, the torch lighting the way.

Just how long did he walk?

When he walked for a long, long time, he finally got to a bend in the passageway. And just beyond it, he sensed multiple presences.

‘Are they finally here?’

Jin-Woo carefully placed the torch on the ground and stood back up.

Shurururu...

His right hand was now holding his favourite dagger instead.

He briefly entertained the idea of using ‘Stealth’ to quickly deal with his enemies, but gave up on that after remembering the crazy expenditure of his Mana. Well, he wouldn’t be able to use potions to replenish the spent Mana in this place, after all.

If he carelessly spent Mana here, then he might be unable to use the necessary Skills when he really needed to.

‘...It’s coming this way.’

Jin-Woo pressed tightly against the wall and waited for the enemy to show up around the bend.

Clank, clank....

Whenever this thing took a step, the metallic clang reverberated loudly in the passageway.

The noises were getting closer.

Clank, clank....

Hearing that strange noise, Jin-Woo tilted his head.

‘Could it be carrying some kind of chained weapons?’

He was curious, but there was no need to get anxious. He’d get his answers soon enough.

‘5, 4, 3.’

Jin-Woo tightly held the dagger in the reverse grip and stopped breathing. It was to prevent the opponent from hearing the sound of his breathes.

‘2, 1.’

Clank, clank.

Finally, the enemy's shadow could be seen.

'.....0.'

When his countdown hit 0, the enemy revealed itself.

Jin-Woo aimed for the side of its neck.

Clang!!

But, he got to hear metal hitting metal instead.

The blade didn't go in.

'Metal armour?!'

Jin-Woo's eyes widened.

Finally confirming the identity of his opponent, Jin-Woo quickly took several steps back.

"It's a human?!"

He was now facing a knight decked out fully in a suit of armour. Its face was hidden behind the helmet and he couldn't see what they looked like.

Jin-Woo called out to it while thinking to himself, 'Could it be....?'

"Oii!"

However, the knight didn't even utter a word and simply lunged in Jin-Woo's direction.

Thud, thud, thud!!

The knight rushed forward like a raging bull and tried to shoulder tackle him, but Jin-Woo lightly tilted out of the way and evaded the attack.

The knight couldn't win against the momentum and continued to run forward for a bit longer, before somehow bringing itself to a stop.

'Maybe, it's not a human?'

He was able to take a quick peek at a close distance and he could tell something was off. He couldn't sense the beating heart that a normal person should possess.

So, most likely, it was not a human.

He was now facing off against a type of monster he'd never even heard of before.

....A monster that armed itself from head to toe, no less.

'It's like....'

Wasn't this like he was actually fighting against another person?

Swururung!

The knight turned around and unsheathed the sword mounted on its hips. Just as Jin-Woo had done, this 'knight' probably didn't plan on letting him go alive.

After sensing its intense hostility, Jin-Woo's glare became a level sharper.

'Dash!'

[Your movement speed has increased by 40%.]

The first one to strike, wins!

Before the enemy made its move, Jin-Woo dashed in first.

Swish!

Jin-Woo evaded the hurried swing of the knight's longsword and stabbed his dagger at various points in its armour.

Clang! Clang!!

Unfortunately, he couldn't damage it.

'The armour's too thick.'

Not only was it thick, the surface was smooth as well, so when he landed a straight blow, the blade didn't go in but simply slid off to the side.

It was at this point that the knight swung its sword in a huge arc.

SWISH!!!

Jin-Woo ducked lower and evaded it. The blade swung past Jin-Woo's head by a hair's breadth. A big move like this would inevitably expose a big opening.

Another chance had come by!

Jin-Woo lunged in closer to the knight and gathered his strength in his dagger-holding arm.

'Vital Points Targetting!'

Crack!

The tip of the dagger penetrated past the armour.

'Did it work?'

However, it must've not suffered any damage, since it swung its sword down vertically with great force, not caring at all about the dagger stuck to its side.

Swish!

Jin-Woo rapidly threw himself back.

Clang!

The blade slammed into the ground and sparks flew everywhere.

“...”

Jin-Woo took several steps back and corrected his posture. His dagger remained stuck to the knight's side.

'Tsk.'

Jin-Woo clicked his tongue.

'It's not really that strong, is it?'

That was his earnest assessment.

Probably because of all that heavy armour, its movement was dull, and its attack pattern was also rather simple, too. Only that, its defence against bladed weapons was truly exceptional.

Jin-Woo rolled up his sleeves.

'Well, I've already fought against an enemy with thick armour that blades can't penetrate.'

His relaxed demeanour came from previous experience.

The boss monster, 'Poison-Fanged Blue Kasaka' that broke a steel sword infused with magical energy in one hit – he had experienced killing such a snake before.

'Compared to the Kasaka, that thing is nothing....'

A thin smile slowly formed on Jin-Woo's lips, since that was a pretty good memory to recall.

Thud, thud, thud!

The knight stupidly charged in again, perhaps trusting the protection provided by its armour.

'I knew it. It's a really simple creature.'

Jin-Woo easily evaded the knight's attack aimed at his shoulder, slid to its back, and caught it in a headlock.

Craaack!

Since its neck area was also protected by armour, it'd not choke to death, but....

Crack, crumple!

Jin-Woo's arm muscles expanded and veins bulged. Jin-Woo wasn't planning to choke the knight, to begin with.

He gritted his teeth, his eyes shooting up wide open.

And when that happened...

CRACK!

Along with a pretty sickening noise, the helmet was ripped off.

This was the moment when his Strength Stat exceeding 100 points had begun shining ever so brightly.

'I did it!'

The knight lifelessly knelt down on the ground once its head was separated from the body.

Thud!

[You defeated the knight.]

A simple but concise message announcing the end of the battle popped up.

A flickering light indicating the presence of loot came from somewhere on the armour, but Jin-Woo's attention was elsewhere.

'What the heck? There's nothing inside?'

The helmet he held in his hands was totally empty.

He quickly checked inside the armour to make sure, but it was the same story: empty.

'Does that mean I was fighting against a suit of armour that was moving by itself?'

Just as he arrived at his conclusion, two more knights rushed into view from around the bend. It seemed that they had belatedly sensed the unfolding battle.

Clank, clank!

The knights discovered Jin-Woo, and as if they had made a prior arrangement, they unsheathed their longswords in unison.

Jin-Woo tossed the empty helmet away and loosened the muscles on his neck and shoulders.

He now knew how to fight these things.

‘So, this is the real beginning, huh.’

Thud, thud, thud, thud!!

Jin-Woo’s lips formed a slight grin as he stared at the knights rushing towards him.

His first step in clearing this dungeon proved to be on the right track.



Chapter 47 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Was it because of all the restrictions?

The loot drop rate turned out to be rather excellent.

Jin-Woo only defeated three knights, yet two of them dropped an item each. As far as percentages go, that was 66.6%.

It was an unimaginably high drop rate compared to other instant dungeons.

Especially considering the fact that, when all he got after clearing a floor of an instant dungeon several times in a row would be a few japtem and stuff he had no use for other than to sell them off at the Store.

['Item: Superior Knight's Breastplate' has been found. Take it?]

'Of course I'm taking it.'

Just a thought, and the breastplate of the now-headless knight kneeling and unmoving on the ground disappeared and reappeared right before his feet. And its information popped up in his view.

[Item: Superior Knight's Breastplate]

Rarity: B

Type: Armour

Reduction in physical damage: +7%

(Your movement will slow down if your Strength is below 80.)

7% increase in physical damage reduction!

When added to what he had already, the physical damage reduction would be 27%!

'If this number reaches 100%, does that mean I become completely impervious to all physical damage?'

He briefly wondered about that, before realising that a defensive item ranked 'B' in rarity only added 7% to the overall value, and his thoughts rapidly changed.

Even if he found himself an item with a rarity of 'A', the reduction may not go above 30-40%.

So, maybe it was impossible to add up to 100%?

‘Still, every little bit helps, so.....’

He was sure of benefiting greatly if he continued to increase that Stat bit by bit.

He already had witnessed the power of good items through Yu Jin-Ho, after all.

‘So, I do it like this, right?’

Jin-Woo picked up the breastplate. As expected, a message regarding equipping the armour popped up in his view.

[Will you equip ‘Item: Superior Knight’s Breastplate’?]

No matter who looked at it, this breastplate’s design was rather clunky and embarrassing, and he’d never wear it in public.

If he didn’t have prior experience with the ‘Gatekeeper’s Necklace’, he might’ve hesitated a great deal before reluctantly agreeing to put it on, but now...

It was a different story now.

‘Yes.’

Tti-ring.

[‘Item: Superior Knight’s Breastplate’ has been equipped.]

....The breastplate disappeared from the view.

Jin-Woo summoned the Status Window and confirmed his Stats.

[Reduction in physical damage: 27%]

‘So, it really went up.’

Jin-Woo felt around his chest area. He couldn’t feel anything weird. He moved his body around this way and that, but didn’t feel anything strange or out of place.

It was exactly the same as when he equipped the Gatekeeper’s necklace for the first time.

‘Nice.’

, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the unmoving knight stuck in the distant corner.

It was bent and crumpled so badly that nothing looked salvageable, but still, the flickering light indicating the loot’s presence could be seen on it

quite clearly.

['Item: Leather Pouch' has been found. Take it?]

Of course, he was the one responsible for that, but even he had to concede that he had gone a bit overboard there. He fought barehanded and well, it was really hard to control his strength, that was why....

‘.....’

With a solemn expression on his face, Jin-Woo walked closer and reached out to take the loot away.

‘Acquire it.’

['Item: Leather Pouch' has been opened.]

[30,000 Gold is inside.]

[30,000 Gold has been acquired.]

‘Huh?!’

Nothing entered his hands yet he got a message declaring that he acquired some Gold, instead.

Was it a bit different from regular items?

Jin-Woo remained somewhat mystified as he accessed his Inventory, and sure enough, his Gold amount had really increased by 30,000.

[Current Gold: 863,400]

‘I got 30,000 Gold in one go?’

Was it because knights were supposed to be wealthy or some such?

He abruptly remembered that most humanoid-type monsters usually gave out more loot than any other types in video games.

Now that he thought about it some more, not finding a greater number of useful items on a human being, when compared to an animal or an insect, didn’t make a whole lot of sense, now did it?

He couldn’t be sure if this dungeon followed that principal or not, though.

In any case, it could only be good news to him.

He was planning to save up more Gold and buy a few items from the Store, and if Gold kept showing up as loot in this fashion, then his planned shopping day would arrive much sooner than his initial estimation.

‘Is there anything else that I can take with me?’

Well, human greed supposedly knew no limits, so....

Jin-Woo momentarily forgot about his true goal of wandering in this dungeon and greedily searched around his vicinity.

The armour worn by the knights were all pretty much mangled beyond recover from the fight just now so, it was a no....

Eventually, Jin-Woo's eyes found the knights' swords.

'They kinda look useful, don't they?'

Those longswords must've been brand new, looking all shiny and slick like that.

Although he couldn't use them properly since they weren't daggers, he could either sell them in the Store or if he couldn't, he could try hawking them off to other Hunters at a later date.

Jin-Woo picked up a sword.

However, as soon as he did, the sword rapidly rusted up and dissolved into a pile of dust, before scattering away.

"What the hell....?"

This process happened in only a couple of seconds.

'Is it because I'm not supposed to touch them?'

What a regrettable thing this was, but naught he could do about it now.

Jin-Woo dusted his hands off and picked up the torch he left on the ground.

When he walked around the bend where the knights showed up from, yet another passage with no end in sight greeted him.

"..."

It looked like there was still a long way to go.

These battles felt like he was revisiting school work.

The notion sounded funny, but that's what Jin-Woo ended up thinking, totally out of the blue.

During the past two hours of hunting inside the dungeon, he met four different types of monsters.

Knights, Mages, Assassins, and Archers.

"Is it Stealth this time?"

An assassin-type suddenly vanished from his senses.

Jin-Woo didn't panic and extended his Perception to its fullest. And soon enough, picked up on the presence sneaking up on him from behind.

Swish!

Jin-Woo powerfully smacked away the assassin's dagger with his trusty Poison Fang of Kasaka, and seizing the opening created as the monster was pushed back, stabbed forward in a deadly and accurate attack of his own.

The Poison Fang accurately landed in the middle of the target's chest.

Stab!

[You defeated the assassin.]

[Level up!]

The assassin received a fatal wound and turned into a wisp of black smoke before disappearing from his view with nary a scream.

Plop.

And where it once stood, only the leather clothes it used to wear remained.

'Why are they all humanoid-type monsters, anyway?'

Every time he 'killed' them, he felt as if....

Jin-Woo slowly shook his head.

One nice thing here was that he couldn't see the monsters' faces; knights wore helmets, assassins and archers used deep hoods, and mages used hats attached to their robes to hide most of their faces.

Jin-Woo turned around to continue on his journey.

But then!

A flash of blinding light exploded right in front of his eyes. A mage had hidden itself and quietly completed a light magic spell.

Kaboom!!

An ear-splitting explosion occurred next.

However, Jin-Woo was already well behind the mage by the time that happened.

".....!!"

The mage sensed his presence behind it and flinched grandly as he hurriedly recited another chant. Too bad, Jin-Woo didn't miss this opening and swung his dagger diagonally.

The mage, too, turned into a wisp of smoke and disappeared.

Plop.

Jin-Woo glared down at the ownerless robe on the ground and stored the dagger back in the Inventory.

‘I got hit by one of those, way back when I got too careless.’

The thing was, he was already ready to react as soon as he began sensing Mana gathering around in a single point.

Joh Gyu-Hwan’s Light magic – Jin-Woo wasn’t dumb enough to get hit by a similar magic to that dead guy’s.

This was one of the reasons why he thought that all these battles were like him studying and revisiting his past fights.

‘That’s not all, is it?’

In order to defeat different types of monsters, he needed different Stats.

For knights, it was Strength. For assassins, Perception. Archers, Agility. And finally, for mages, it was Stamina.

The whole thing was set up in a way that if any of the corresponding Stats weren’t high enough, he’d have a real hard time trying to deal with the individual monsters.

If his Strength was lacking, then he wouldn’t have been able to cause enough damage to the knights, and if his Perception was too low, he’d have gone through hell in order to locate the assassins.

‘Me raising Stats evenly has really paid off dividends here.’

His Intelligence Stat was still on the low side, but all he had to do there was to economise his MP usage. That was all.

[‘Item: Leather Pouch’ has been opened.]

[‘20,000 Gold’, and ‘Canteen Containing Lukewarm Water’ are inside.]

[‘20,000 Gold’, and ‘Canteen Containing Lukewarm Water’ have been acquired.]

Jin-Woo summoned that canteen as soon as it showed up in his Inventory and took several gulps.

“Fuu....”

His fatigue was piling up noticeably now.

‘Just how far am I supposed to go here?’

Could there be no end to this place?

Jin-Woo put the empty canteen down on the ground and placed his hands on his hips. It had been over three hours already since he entered this dungeon. Both his body and mind were getting fatigued now.

‘...Should I take a short break?’

Jin-Woo sat down and leaned against the cave wall.

‘Status Window.’

Tti-ring.

[Tiredness: 66]

The ‘Tiredness’ Stat had sneaked up to a dangerous level; above 70, his body and mind would start to get negatively affected.

He needed to take a short nap and decrease that Stat right away.

Jin-Woo leaned his head against the wall.

Sleepiness came over him almost instantly.

He was so tired that, even when in an environment as dangerous as this place, he didn’t need a lot of effort to fall asleep.

However...

Swish-!

He heard the sharp whistle of air parting ways!

Time slowed down, and Jin-Woo accurately snatched the flying arrow with his hand.

Grab!

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened up.

He saw an archer nocking another arrow from some distance away.

‘So, it’s still too early to fall asleep, is it?’

Jin-Woo summoned the Poison Fang of Kasaka once more and stood back up.

Crunch!

One single punch caused the knight’s breastplate to crack and cave in; the lifeless monster slowly slid to the ground in between Jin-Woo’s stretched fist and the wall.

It didn’t move again as it lay sprawled on the ground.

Tti-ring.

[You defeated the knight.]

[Level up!]

Although it was quite unfortunate that his condition didn't recover, his levels continued to rise up steadily as he fought more and more battles.

Jin-Woo looked down on his slightly-skinned fist and clicked his tongue.

Only a short break would've taken care of such a small wound by now.

However, these abominable monsters didn't give him a moment to rest.

Still, he earned quite a lot in the meantime.

[Equipped items]

Gatekeeper's Necklace (A)

Superior Knight's Breastplate (B)

Intermediate Assassin's Shoes (B)

Inferior archer's Gloves (C)

Superior Mage's Ring (B)

Other useful things he found along the way were now all safely tucked away in his Inventory.

'It'd been nicer if I found a weapon, though....'

What an unfortunate thing it was – the daggers used by the assassins featured similar levels of attack damage bonus as the Poison Fang of Kasaka, but none of them possessed additional effects, so they were deemed not as good compared to his current weapon.

'What would this guy give me now?'

Jin-Woo reached out towards the fallen knight and the flickering light coming off from it.

Tti-ring.

[Item: Superior Knight's Gauntlet]

Rarity: B

Type: Armour

Reduction in physical damage: +3%

Additional effects: ents injuries to wearer's hands.

(Your movement will slow down if your Strength is below 80.)

'Ohhh....'

With a bright smile, Jin-Woo quickly 'acquired' the Superior Knight's Gauntlet and equipped it immediately.

Just like with all the other items, these metallic gloves didn't affect him in the slightest and he could freely move his fingers.

'Nice.'

Jin-Woo moved his fingers around for a bit, before raising his head to look at the far side of the passageway.

Finally.

The torchlight revealed the end of the road.

And that end was blocked off by a huge castle gate.

It was quite rare to see the boss room with a door like that. Naturally, he recalled the dual dungeon. No one was adequately prepared back then, and because of that, the losses incurred were great.

However, it was different now.

Jin-Woo took a look behind him, at the passage he had been walking on to get here.

'It took me six hours to get here, too....'

His level was now 45, and he was kitted out in some good armour as well.

He was ready.

He wouldn't have minded taking a small break and recover some of his spent stamina, but whenever he tried to do that, monsters always managed to appear with the perfect sense of timing to disrupt his sleep.

He couldn't afford to summon more monsters and waste his energy that way.

[HP: 4511/8330]

[MP: 660/790]

[Tiredness: 43]

'I gotta win with this.'

Finishing up with confirming his condition for the last time, Jin-Woo reached out and grasped the handles of the doors.

Creak, creaaaakkk-!

The heavy-looking doors slid open rather smoothly, as if there was some sort of an unseen mechanism.



Chapter 48 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Rumble-! Boom!

The door to the boss room finally opened.

The interior was completely shrouded in darkness.

Even with Jin-Woo's eyesight, greatly enhanced by his Perception Stat, he found it hard to see one inch in front of him. All he could see clearly was the ground beneath his feet.

The floor was covered in stone tiles.

The ash-coloured tiles, laid with no visible gaps in between, gave off this feeling of heaviness and barren chill.

As soon as he set foot on this floor....

Whoosh!

Countless torches lining up the walls lit up all at once and illuminated the interior.

'As I thought... it's almost the same as back in that underground temple.'

Jin-Woo maintained his vigilance. He scanned his vicinity and cautiously stepped forward.

Several giant stone pillars stood erect to his left and right; at the far end of this 'room', he could see a tall throne.

'It's as if....'

This place reminded him of the king's audience chamber from a fantasy movie. Of course, the scale was noticeably larger, though.

A few steps later, the door issued a loud bang and closed shut behind him.

SLAM!!

Jin-Woo glanced back, but he didn't panic. He already expected something like that to happen. Jin-Woo resumed his careful march forward.

'...I can sense a powerful presence.'

He kind of got this really strong gut feeling that, in order to conclude his

class quest, he had to arrive before that throne.

Just as important, his gut feelings on matters such as this one were on the money, most of the time.

It was then.

From the gap between stone pillars, which couldn't have been more than ten steps, a 'doll' walked out from its hiding spot and stood before him, blocking his path forward.

The 'thing' stopped its walk and turned around to face him.

Gulp.

Jin-Woo swallowed his dry saliva.

He only had to take one look at the creature's red name floating just above its head to know that the boss had finally made its entrance.

[The Captain of the Knights, Igrit the Crimson]

It was a knight wearing a suit of blood-red armour.

The way it was kitted out from head to toe in metal armour was similar to other knights he fought so far, but quite unlike those that looked dull and slow, this thing looked incredibly agile.

What caught his eyes next was its helm.

The red-coloured mane extending rearwards from the top of the helm reminded him of a stallion's tail and it left a rather deep impression.

While he studied its helm, Jin-Woo discovered one more difference between it and the other knights.

'This guy.... has eyes?'

But, were they eyes, or irises?

Whatever the case may be, the pair of silvery lights oozed out from where one's eyes should be. They felt so cold and uncaring, utterly mechanical and lifeless.

Those cold eyes were now fixed on him.

The hair on the back of his neck stood up.

'So, the aura of the really powerful enemy was coming from this guy, huh.....'

The goal of the class quest could be to defeat this knight, for all he knew. If that was the case, he needed to be doubly cautious.

Jin-Woo observed the movements of this Igrit while slowly raising his clenched fists.

‘My dagger won’t work on it anyway.’

What was needed in defeating a knight was blunt force. He needed Strength to overwhelm him.

‘.....’

Igrit quietly observed Jin-Woo for a while, before it abruptly took off its red cape.

Plop.

The cape fell to the floor.

‘What’s it doing?’

The b*stard’s strange actions didn’t end there.

It proceeded to take off the longsword on its hips, and the two daggers hidden behind its back, and dropped them all to the ground.

Not only that, it showed them to him, before dropping them one at a time.

Clang, clang...

The interior of the boss room had been quiet until then; the loud clangs of the metal hitting the stone tiles reverberated noisily throughout this vast chamber.

Igrit finished discarding all of its weapons, and as if to imitate Jin-Woo, clenched its fists and got into a fighting stance.

Jin-Woo’s eyes grew wider.

‘Could this b*stard be thinking of....?’

Was this thing going to fight him bare-handed because he was also bare-handed?

Jin-Woo bit his lower lip.

‘....It’s looking down on me.’

The monsters’ provocation that really wasn’t one only served to rapidly cool his head. The hotter his emotions boiled, the colder his head got.

On the contrary to his heart beating faster and faster, Jin-Woo’s eyes became sharper and calculating.

‘Come.’

Perhaps reading his mind, Igrit made a beeline towards him.

Tap, tap, tap, tap!

The speed it produced was so fast that he found it hard to believe it was wearing a suit of armour.

‘The speed penalty of the armours only comes into effect when the Strength Stat is lower than 80, right?’

Meaning, this thing’s Strength was at least 80!

Judging from its nimble movement, its Agility would also rival some of the highest-ranked Hunters out there.

Igrit closed the distance in the blink of an eye, and leapt up into the air. Once flying, the thing stuck its knee out and aimed at Jin-Woo’s face.

‘It’s fast!!’

However, Jin-Woo had been ready as well, his own movement speed pushed to the extreme. He bent his back almost 90 degrees and let Igrit’s attack brush past him.

Jin-Woo then rapidly stood back up.

Quite unlike other knights that needed some distance to stop after their tackle had failed, Igrit simply landed on the ground without much fanfare.

Kung!!

There was no time to admire that perfect landing, though.

Jin-Woo rushed in and before Igrit could turn around all the way, he diagonally kicked its head.

Shockingly enough, the thing still could move its arm accurately even when its posture was unstable.

Slam!

Jin-Woo’s right leg was easily blocked by Igrit’s left hand.

‘How can this be?!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened wider.

While one of his legs was blocked, Igrit’s other fist flew in at his face.

Swish!

He raised both of his arms instinctively to guard himself, but the impact force still got transmitted to the rest of his body.

Boom!!

His guard broke and his entire body became airborne.

“What?!”

A shocked gasp escaped from his mouth.

But soon, it turned into a groan.

“.....?!”

Because, Igrit had already appeared right in front of his eyes.

Even before he had the chance to do something about it, Igrit’s left fist powerfully slammed into Jin-Woo’s left cheek.

Slam!!

He slammed into the floor and bounced up from the impact, before continuing to roll away. He only managed to force himself back up after a while.

BUZZ!!

The inside of his ears rang noisily.

Jin-Woo shook his head around a couple of times. Only then did the loud ringing die down somewhat.

However, the much bigger problem than that was coming closer to him. His blurry sight captured Igrit as it walked towards him.

Step, step....

Jin-Woo opened his eyes wider and got ready.

Eventually, Igrit arrived right before Jin-Woo’s nose.

And so, a bloody dogfight erupted between the two.

Igrit didn’t even try to dodge Jin-Woo’s punches. No, it simply took on the hits and counter-attacked right away.

Pow!

Igrit’s head was forced slightly to the side.

But, even before Jin-Woo could correct his posture, a sharp and accurate counterpunch flew at him.

POW!

Jin-Woo tottered about like a drunken man.

Pow!

This time, Igrit took a step back.

POW!

After his stomach was kicked in, Jin-Woo's body bent forward 90 degrees.

“Keok!”

Blood welled up in his mouth.

‘What is this nonsensical bullsh*t....?!’

Currently, Jin-Woo's physical damage reduction Stat had exceeded 30%.

However, each of Igrit's attacks hurt like crazy, as if he was being pounded on by a hammer. On the other hand, his attacks almost didn't inflict any damage to the enemy.

Their exchange didn't last for long afterwards.

POW!

Jin-Woo teetered about unsteadily, before falling to his knees.

Plop.

He tried to stand back up, but his legs didn't want to listen.

Plop.

“Euh-euk...”

Igrit stood before Jin-Woo, but stopped attacking him. It wordlessly stared down at him for a while.

‘.....?’

Then, while ignoring Jin-Woo's question-filled gaze directed at it, Igrit extended its hand out towards the sword discarded to the ground some distance away.

Then, the sword was automatically reeled in.

Igrit grasped the sword in both of its hands and walked to the side of Jin-Woo.

Soon, the tip of the blade was pointing to the sky.

‘You want to execute me, is that it?’

This b*stard certainly lived up to its title as the captain of the knights.

When it looked like Jin-Woo wasn't going to resist his final moments, Igrit

went ahead with the execution.

Of course, Jin-Woo wasn't going to let that happen without a fight.

The sword fell down in a straight line.

Swish-!

However, Jin-Woo reached up with his left hand and blocked the descending blade.

CLANG!

The noise of metal hitting metal!

The gauntlet he found just before entering here protected his hand.

Flinch!

He sensed Igrit being taken back just now. Jin-Woo didn't miss this chance and threw a punch with his right hand.

As expected, Igrit didn't try to dodge.

'You're thinking of countering me again, right?'

It had probably calculated that getting hit once while countering that was far more productive. Too bad, it failed to take something important into its calculation.

'Poison Fang of Kasaka!'

Shururu....

The Poison Fang of Kasaka was summoned instantly into his hand.

And Jin-Woo stabbed the dagger in the creature's eye.

Stab!

Kuwoooooaar!!

A scream that couldn't have come from a human being exploded out.

At the same time, a fierce light poured out from the eye with the dagger sticking out.

Jin-Woo hurriedly stood back up.

'Now what?'

Just damaging one eye wouldn't be able to determine the winner of this battle. He needed an attack even more powerful than that if he wanted to win.

It was then, a thought entered his mind.

The horrifying attack that almost pushed him to the brink of death the other day! He wanted to let Igrit taste that attack, too.

Before he could finish thinking that, his body moved first.

Jin-Woo bent down and bear-hugged Igrit's midriff.

And then... he began running.

Kuooaark!!

Igrit thrashed about in pain and managed to land several solid blows on Jin-Woo's back. However, he gritted his teeth and didn't let Igrit go.

No, he increased his speed instead.

“Dash!!”

[Your movement speed has increased by 40%.]

Jin-Woo's legs were now moving so much faster. He felt the electrifying speed sending chills down his entire body.

‘Yes, this is it. And now...’

And now, he'd slam this b*stard!

While gripping the midriff of Igrit even harder, he dashed towards the nearest wall with every ounce of energy he had.

Of course, if they collided against the wall at this speed, the impact his own body received would be substantial as well. However, Jin-Woo had a hidden trump card in the form of a certain passive skill.

The distance closed in the blink of an eye!

The wall was right behind them.

Kaboom!!

Along with the huge explosion, Igrit crashed into the wall.

At the same time, a message from the System popped up.

Tti-ring!

[Your HP has dropped below 30% and ‘Skill: Tenacity’ has been activated.]

[All damage received will be reduced by 50%.]

The impact force was great enough for the entire boss room to tremble momentarily.

“Keu-euk.”

Jin-Woo took a step back.

Igrit was buried half-way into the wall, yet it was still alive. The ‘flame’ of life burning under the helm was still flickering visibly.

‘...I need to finish this.’

Jin-Woo yanked the Poison Fang of Kasaka, still buried in its eye, loose.

That caused Igrit’s body to quiver once.

Jin-Woo held the dagger in a reverse grip, and stabbed hard at the b*stard’s neck.

‘Vital Points Targetting!’

Clang!!

The attack failed to work.

One more time.

‘Vital Points Targetting!’

Clang!!

Sparks flew off from the tip of the dagger.

A small nick formed on the metal covering the monster’s neck.

One more time.

‘Vital Points Targetting!’

Clang!

One more!

Clang!

One more!

Clang!!!

And finally...

‘Vital Points Targetting!!’

Crack!!

The Poison Fang of Kasaka broke past the protective metal and dug deep into its neck.

[You defeated the Captain of the Knights, Igrit the Crimson.]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

Jin-Woo raised both of his hands up high into the sky.

He took several steps back, before losing all strength in his legs and faltered to the floor.

“Pant, pant....!”

Jin-Woo spat out the heavy breaths he’d been holding in until now.

He won, somehow.

It was an incredibly close fight.

‘However... wasn’t this the end of the quest?’

Jin-Woo collected his breaths for a long time, before painfully raising his body up.

He expected the class quest to end once he killed this guy, but not one message popped up in his view. He looked around, but he failed to spot anything different in the boss room.

No, there was one thing that was different from before.

Several strands of light began flickering on Igrit’s body. Meaning, his loot was now ready.

‘For the time being, let’s grab those.’

After all, he couldn’t tell what else might happen here.

Grabbing things that he could grab when there was a chance was the smartest move one could make, wasn’t it?

Jin-Woo reached out towards those lights.

[‘Item: Red Knight’s Helm’ has been found. Take it?]

[‘Rune Stone: Ruler’s Reach’ has been found. Take it?]

[‘Item: Leather Pouch’ has been found. Take it?]

[‘Item: Immediate Return Stone’ has been found. Take it?]

Why were there so many?

Jin-Woo felt rather puzzled, but still, he couldn’t hide his elation, either.

‘Acquire them all.’

The first thing to enter his Inventory was the Leather Pouch.

[‘Item: Leather Pouch’ has been opened.]

[1,500,000 Gold is inside.]

[1,500,000 Gold has been acquired.]

Jin-Woo's eyes went extra round.

'The level of reward is on another scale altogether!'

It definitely was worth it, defeating it after going through so much crap.

He wasn't expecting all that much, to begin with, yet the leather pouch spat out an unbelievable amount of 1,500,000 Gold.

With this amount, he'd be able to buy something useful from the Store now.

However, Jin-Woo's attention was directed elsewhere at the moment.

If the leather pouch he didn't even hold high hopes for managed to produce such wealth, then just how high was the value of the helm or the Rune Stone?

Jin-Woo tried very hard to calm his heart and brought up the information on the helm.

Tti-ring.

[Item: Red Knight's Helm]

Rarity: S

Type: Armour

Reduction in physical damage: +15%

Stamina +20, Strength +20

"It's an S!!"

Jin-Woo cried out in elation.



Chapter 49 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

For the first time ever, an item with a rarity ranking of ‘S’ showed up.

Just the effect of 15% reduction in physical damage alone would’ve made it a top-tier item, yet it even possessed two more remarkable additional attributes of raising the Stamina and Strength Stats by 20 points each.

Just seeing those options alone made his heart palpitate so much faster.

‘The rarity A items can’t even compare to it!’

He had acquired two A-ranked items up until now.

The first was the Poison Sac of Kasaka, the one he got after he defeated the snake ‘Blue Kasaka’; the second one being the Gatekeeper’s Necklace after he defeated the Cerberus.

Those two items were already quite excellent.

The poison sac had the terrible penalty of stealing 35 points from his Strength Stat, but its effect also decreased the physical damage taken by 20%.

What about the Gatekeeper’s Necklace, then?

It was one of the best items out there that increased both Agility and Perception Stats by 20 each – two Stats he now knew the importance of.

But the Red Knight’s Helm possessed the kind of buffing effect that combined both of those items. And without any penalty, to boot.

‘No need to mention it. It’s the best.’

He was fully aware of the fact that he was standing in the middle of the dungeon’s boss room, yet the smile on his face didn’t want to go away.

And if he were to add in one more unnecessary point here, he even liked the helm’s design.

‘It’s a bit of a pity to hide this thing, though.’

The crimson helm that immediately reminded all onlookers of the flowing blood, and the mane connected to the helm itself, made him feel like he was holding an artistic masterpiece.

It was only for a brief moment, but he even felt compelled to put on the full

set of this armour if it existed somewhere.

However...

‘What a waste....’

Igrit’s other armour pieces weren’t considered to be loot, as there were no lights coming off from them. Only the helm could be taken away.

Jin-Woo forced back a rueful smile and cautiously put on the helm.

Poof.

Just as always, the helm disappeared from the view immediately.

Although he couldn’t show off his new look, his Stats had gained a huge boost thanks to his new headwear.

[Stats]

Strength: 128 (+20)

Stamina: 87 (+20)

Agility: 107

Intelligence: 66

Perception: 89

Reduction in physical damage: 46% (+15%)

The numbers appearing in brackets were the increases in his Stats from the helm itself. Not only the Strength and Stamina Stats, but the hard-to-increase damage reduction Stat all enjoyed massive boosts.

He was completely and utterly satisfied now.

Having confirmed the increase with his own two eyes, his heart began beating even faster.

‘No, no, no.’

Jin-Woo quickly shook his head.

‘The quest isn’t over yet, so let’s calm down.’

Besides, he still had other items to sort out, too.

With the trace of excitement still lingering in his mind, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze to the other two items.

[Rune Stone: Ruler’s Reach]

[Item: Immediate Return Stone]

Two pieces of stones.

Out of the two walnut-sized stones, the first one to grab his curious gaze was the Immediate Return Stone.

'I know what is a Rune Stone, but this....'

Just what could this Immediate Return Stone do?

His curiosity got resolved pretty quickly, however. The information on the Immediate Return Stone floated up right away.

Tti-ring.

[Item: Immediate Return Stone]

Rarity: ??

Type: Consumable

An item exclusive to this Class Change Quest. When destroyed, you'll be transported outside the dungeon immediately. However, once the Class Change Quest has been concluded, it will automatically be destroyed.

Can't be stored in the Inventory.

The way to use it was similar to a Rune Stone.

However, to think that its effect wasn't about absorbing a new skill, but to escape from this dungeon....

'Hang on a sec. The Class Change Quest isn't over yet?!'

If that were the case, then this particular item should've been destroyed already.

Since it hadn't, that could only mean...

For some reason, he felt a creeping chill slowly caress his spine.

What an odd sensation that was.

He had received one of the best items out there that could help him make his escape from this dungeon, yet why was he getting this incredibly bad premonition right now?

If this stone could be used in regular dungeons, and not only inside the System-generated ones, then just about everyone alive would try to buy this thing.

Seriously, this stone would be the same as having a sure-fire way to save their lives, so no one should be foolish enough to pinch pennies when trying to get their hands on one.

It was the same with Jin-Woo, too. Just this item alone should decrease the burden of this quest by a great deal.

'If I so choose....'

...He'd be able to escape at any time.

However, the ominous feeling taking root in the corner of his mind didn't want to go away, no matter what.

And, sure enough!

The warning beep from the System went off in his head as if it was waiting for this moment.

Tti-ring.

['Player' has acquired the Immediate Return Stone.]

[The 'Class Change Quest' will now commence.]

Son of a b*tch!

So, this was the item to start the quest for real!

He nearly fainted on the spot. He felt like he had stepped on something he shouldn't have in the first place.

'If I knew this might happen, I'd have taken a short break first!'

What would regret do for him now?

No matter how much one relied on one's experience and knowledge to predict the future, one would never be able to correctly guess the tricks of fate.

A strand of cold sweat dripped down from Jin-Woo's forehead.

Jin-Woo summoned the Status Window inwardly and confirmed the remaining HP and his fatigue level.

[HP: 4161/10270]

[MP: 390/850]

[Tiredness: 61]

'The Tiredness Stat is a bit on the high side, but I can still do this.'

The helm's added effects enhanced his Stamina Stat by a lot, which meant that his overall endurance had increased greatly as well, and his remaining HP had risen up as an added bonus, too.

What a relief that was.

As if to encourage himself, Jin-Woo continued to tell himself that...

'I can still do this. It's not impossible.'

Of course, his life should not be in any imminent danger. Because, he held the Immediate Return Stone, after all.

However, no matter how hard he thought about it, this Immediate Return Stone sounded awfully like an item that signified him giving up on the quest.

If that was not the case, then it shouldn't have been the quest-starting item, to begin with.

'If I give up on this quest....'

Wouldn't it be the same as him giving up on this chance to get his class?

The cold sweat on his forehead rolled past his temple and down to his chin, before dripping down.

Gulp.

Just as he swallowed a bit of dry spit and his Adam's apple bobbed up and down, the System's new message popped up in his view.

Tti-ring.

[In ten seconds, dimensional doorways will be randomly generated.]

'Dimensional doorways?'

Even before his question could be cleared up, huge numbers appeared up in the middle of the air.

[00:00:10]

He could easily tell what that was.

It most likely was signifying the countdown.

Meanwhile, the messages continued on.

['Player' has a choice.]

[You can escape from the dungeon by using the Immediate Return Stone, or....]

.....8, 7, 6.

The timer continued to tick down to 0.

[Or, endure as long as you can and earn as many advancement points as possible in order to access the higher ranked classes.]

"Endure?! Endure what exactly?"

He ended up shouting out loudly as his frustration mounted. However, Jin-Woo was already holding the Poison Fang of Kasaka summoned from his Inventory.

He stored the Rune Stone inside the Inventory, while the Immediate Return Stone was placed inside the back of his pocket since it couldn't be stored there.

Even though his heart beat fast and hard enough to nearly explode, he didn't forget to get ready for the battle that was about to come.

That was how Seong Jin-Woo operated.

[The Class Change Quest will soon commence.]

....4, 3, 2.

Jin-Woo anxiously glared at the time and quickly scanned his surroundings.

His head and eyes darted around quickly, over here and over there.

Something ominous was clearly getting ready to begin; the space around him was separating and twisting visibly to his eyes.

[00:00:01]

[I wish you the best of luck.]

What?

For the first time ever, the System expressed 'emotion'.

Too bad, he had no time to stew inside his shock. The moment the timer hit 0, several Gates began forming all around him.

Buzzz...

Wuuooong....

Not just one or two, either.

He first spotted six around him. The number continued to climb up even higher, however.

And at the same time, the timer began ticking upwards.

[00:00:02]

The 'countdown' began again.

The time would become his so-called advancement points. He hadn't understood everything the System said, but still, he did figure out some parts of it.

‘The longer I endure, the stronger I will get.’

No, more specifically, he’d instead get a powerful class.

There was no way he’d throw away a golden opportunity like this. He also had some wiggle room left with his HP and MP.

‘Let’s endure as long as I can.’

[00:00:03]

When the timer hit exactly three seconds, weapon-less knights poured out from the nearest Gate.

Thud, thud, thud, thud....

When the knights decked out in full armour formed silver-coloured waves, the ground couldn’t help but tremor from the weight.

The momentum these things displayed would have been enough to overwhelm most people, but there was a smile floating up onto Jin-Woo’s lips, instead.

‘If it’s these guys, I can definitely fight them!’

In a way, he was oh-so-glad to see them as his opponents.

If the monsters coming out from the Gates happened to be as strong as Igrit, then he wouldn’t even be able to last a couple of seconds.

‘Stealth!’

Jin-Woo used some part of the remaining MP and activated the skill ‘Stealth’.

‘For the time being, I should observe what’s happening here first.’

Jin-Woo’s form blurred and slowly disappeared. As expected, the knights rushing towards him all came to an abrupt halt.

However...

[The mage has used ‘Skill: Eyes of Detection’.]

The crisp ‘titi-ring’ of the warning beep resounded in his head. Jin-Woo’s head snapped in the direction of the beep.

‘What was that?’

He spotted a mage that had just emerged from the Gate chanting a spell. That’s also when Jin-Woo discovered an ‘eye’ like symbol floating above the head of the mage.

The moment that eye flashed...!

In that moment, Jin-Woo's Stealth was cancelled.

'F*ck!'

From the get-go, his calculation proved to be way off the mark.

Snap.

Snap.

The knights that stood around like telephone poles snapped their heads all at once towards Jin-Woo's direction. It was a scene straight out of a horror movie.

And soon enough, the silver waves pounced on him.

Jin-Woo's eyes opened wider and he gritted his teeth.

BOOM!!

His punch blew away the head of the incoming knight.

That guy died where it stood.

[You defeated the knight.]

Crazed lights shone in Jin-Woo's eyes.

'Intimidation!'

['Skill: Intimidation' has been activated.]

['Effect: Fear' has been activated.]

['The targets' (All) Stats will decrease by 50% for one minute.]

The movements of the monsters became much duller through the effects of 'Fear', but his Mana fell down to 90 points.

The Intimidation required 100 MP in order to activate.

He wouldn't be able to use it the second time.

'However, I just bought myself a minute.'

Intending to use this precious minute to the best of his abilities as the monsters were noticeably weakened, Jin-Woo began wailing on them with everything he had.

Boom!

Crack!

Kaboom!

Slam!

With a terrifying momentum, he proceeded to utterly dismantle the knights.
Boom! Slam! Crack!!

Too bad, the speed of him defeating knights was far inferior to the rate of the replacement knights popping out from the Gates.

Rumble—!!

Even in the midst of the maddened battle, Jin-Woo sneaked a glance at the timer.

[00:03:19]

It'd only been three minutes and 19 seconds.

If that was converted into points, how much would he get?

Wouldn't it be fine for him to leave this place now?

However, he didn't have any leeway to dwell on that matter.

Even while he was thinking to himself, knights were continuously pouring out from the Gates like unstoppable waves.

He managed to destroy countless Knights, yet he simply couldn't deal with so many of them.

“U-uwaaaahh-?!”

In the end, Jin-Woo was buried in the sea of knights.

[Passive skill, ‘Tenacity’ has been activated.]

[Passive skill, ‘Tenacity’ has been activated.]

His HP was in a freefall now and eventually, it hit rock bottom.

[HP: 1036/10270]

‘The time is....?’

[00:05:08]

Five minutes and eight seconds.

He had endured enough, hadn't he?

‘.....Let's get out of here.’

Now completely entrapped among the knights, Jin-Woo flailed about helplessly in this silver prison and dug through his back pocket.

However...

Drop.

The Immediate Return Stone slipped out from his grasp and fell to the floor.

And the roundish stone hit the sole of one of the knights and rolled away far from him.

“NOOO!!”

Jin-Woo hurriedly reached out towards the stone, but the knights blocked him.

Soon, knights piled up on top of him, too.

It became almost impossible to breathe in an instant.

[Passive skill, ‘Tenacity’ has been activated.]

[Passive skill, ‘Tenacity’ has been activated.]

His consciousness began to blur.

Pow, pow!!

He continuously got struck by the knights while trapped below them, and as his mind began to grow dimmer, he thought he heard a snarky cackle coming from somewhere.

‘.....’

‘.....’

‘.....**Shut up.**’

Shut the hell up!!

Kwaboom!!

The knights surrounding and pressing down on Jin-Woo were suddenly all blown away.

Even though he somehow managed to crawl out from death, his eyes were burning with life. As a matter of fact, his eyes were burning with a stubborn will and sheer malice.

‘I won’t let it end like this!!’

He earned this opportunity after going through so much. So, how could he let it end like this? Never.

Because he was stuck at the very bottom for so long, he yearned to be on top more than anyone else. He knew the sorrow of the weak better than anyone. He tried everything to survive, and when he did survive, others kept pointing fingers at him.

So, how could he simply watch and do nothing, when a ladder that could take him to the very top was put in front of his eyes?

What a rubbish notion that was.

‘...I remember now.’

That voice ringing around his head just now.

That voice belonged to those b*stards.

The voice that always yapped on and on from behind his back.

‘Fine, laugh all you want.

‘I’ll struggle on until the bitter end.

‘It’s fine if my HP drops to ten, no, 1. I’ll struggle and struggle on like crazy, right until the end. I’ll fight until I won’t be able to move anymore.’

“Uwaaahh!!!”

Jin-Woo threw his body forward.

Crack!

He thrust forward another punch.

A knight’s breastplate caved in and the monster flew away. Other knights collided with it and they all fell on their butts.

But then, more knights rushed in again.

Jin-Woo’s movements became a step more violent in response.

Crack! Boom!! Slam!!

Without an exception, knights colliding with Jin-Woo’s body parts, be that his fist, elbow, knee, feet, were all destroyed like a bunch of paper dolls.

[Tiredness has exceeded 70 points.]

[Your movement is being restricted.]

Just as the warning message said, his movements became duller. However, the malice and anger in Jin-Woo’s eyes didn’t weaken in the slightest.

One by one, the knights he couldn’t defeat in one hit slammed into him. Jin-Woo resorted to hitting them three, four times and made sure to destroy them.

[.....8, 7, 6, 5.]

In the meantime, a strange countdown was silently ticking down. He was too focused on the battle so he failed to notice it before the timer had reached

the single digit.

‘What’s this? Is the quest coming to an end?’

A small ray of hope blossomed in his head for a brief moment, but it turned out to be nothing but a useless dream.

[00:06:27]

The quest timer was still ticking up as it supposed to. No, something separate from this timer was counting down one second at a time.

[4, 3, 2.]

‘Is it to show me the time of my death?’

Indeed, the System did tell him this way back then; it told him that, if he didn’t accept becoming a Player, he’d die 0.02 seconds later.

‘Fine.’

Jin-Woo glared fiercely.

‘I’ll gladly use up every moment, right down to the final second!’

Slam!! Crack!!

Two more knights were destroyed in the meantime.

Unlike Jin-Woo’s unyielding stubbornness, though, his entire body was now riddled with all sorts of wounds. It progressively much harder to lift his arms.

His weakened fist wasn’t enough to stop the knights’ tackles and charges anymore.

From the front, one; from the back, another one.

Slam!!

Jin-Woo was sandwiched powerfully by the two knights slamming into him from the front and back, and he spat out a pained groan.

“Keok!”

Other knights pounced on him as if they didn’t want to miss this chance.

In the blink of an eye, Jin-Woo was buried under the masses of knights and couldn’t even lift a finger.

Rumble-!

Even during that, more knights continued to pile on top of Jin-Woo. The silver waves had transformed into a silver mountain, instead.

Jin-Woo's breathing became incredibly harsh.

“Pant, pant....!!”

At this rate, he'd be asphyxiated to death first.

Jin-Woo's hand somehow broke out from the gaps of the knights and helplessly pointed towards the sky.

[HP: 93/10270]

He was in a truly desperate situation. Even then, Jin-Woo did not give up, though.

‘No, not yet. I can still go on....’

Just as Jin-Woo managed to clench the hand pointing at the sky, the mysterious countdown ticking down finally announced its conclusion.

[.....1, 0.]

[You've failed to complete the Daily Quest.]

[You'll be transferred to the 'Penalty Zone'.]



Chapter 50 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo doubted his own hearing just then.

‘...Penalty Zone?!’

Ah!

He then remembered it; he didn't do the daily quest for today.

He was planning on confirming the results of his constant levelling up, and to help him decide whether he was ready to tackle the Demon's Castle or not.

Who could've guessed that things might unfold in this manner?

RUUUUMBLE-!!

Just like back in the hospital, everything began to violently shake.

Plop.

Plop.

The knights piling on top of Jin-Woo turned into figures of sand one by one.

The world surrounding him was changing.

‘Ha.... hahaha....’

Jin-Woo soundlessly laughed to himself.

For some reason, the words the System spoke to him before the beginning of the quest circled around inside his head.

[I wish you the best of luck.]

Was it trying to imply that the quest itself was unimaginably hard, to the point that he needed luck to complete it?

Or, was it implying that it'd cheer him on, as he resorted to borrowing the power of luck and earn a ton of advancement points that way?

Luck, coincidence, whatever it was called, he didn't care. No matter what it was, his chance had come.

The important thing was how he'd go about utilising that.

RUMBLE-!!

The tremor was getting worse.

Rather than wasting time trying to stabilise himself Jin-Woo entrusted his body to the tremor and closed his eyes.

‘Let’s not get agitated here....’

When he did that, he felt airborne and weightless, and all sound vanished from his hearing.

When he reopened his eyes, he found himself in the middle of the endless sea of sand.

Jin-Woo plopped down, face first.

“Ker-heo-eok.... Pant, pant, pant...”

His fingers dug into the desert sand as the held-up breaths exploded out of his mouth. Fresh air entered and flowed into every corner of his body via his lungs.

Finally...

“....I feel alive.”

The sense of relief wrapped Jin-Woo up tightly, as he rolled onto his back.

He could see the black sky above with nothing in it. The endless expanse of the pitch-black ceiling was the only thing his eyes could capture.

This place looked exactly the same as the penalty zone from his memories.

‘Wait, I shouldn’t be wasting time like this.’

He had forgotten that this place was not a safe zone either, since he just made a miraculous escape from a comparably far worse area.

But, Jin-Woo couldn’t be ar*ed into standing up any time soon, so while lying on his back, he summoned the Status Window.

[HP: 104/10270]

[MP: 202/850]

[Tiredness: 91]

He was wondering why it was so difficult to move his body, but as it turned out, the d*mn ‘Tiredness’ Stat was over 90.

‘This is probably my first time that Stat has gone past 90, right?’

He really didn’t want to even lift a finger here.

His health was one thing, but he figured that lowering his fatigue took

priority.

“Store.”

Tti-ring.

Two words, ‘Buy’ and ‘Sell’ popped up in the air.

Although the layout of this Store imparted not one hint of sincerity, no matter how kind he looked at it, he found it such a welcoming sight right now.

He picked out the most expensive healing potion on sale.

As soon as he confirmed the purchase...

Shurururu...

A glass bottle containing red liquid appeared on his wide-open palm.

Jin-Woo laboriously popped the cork open and poured the potion down his mouth.

Gulp, gulp.

The red liquid travelled down his throat and entered deep into his body.

[Your fatigue is recovering.]

[Your fatigue is recovering.]

[Your fatigue is recovering.]

Maybe because it was the most expensive potion, just one bottle was enough to lower the Tiredness value at a visible rate.

However, for some reason, his HP value didn’t change at all.

[HP: 106/10270]

[MP: 204/850]

[Tiredness: 0]

Even after he finished the whole bottle, his HP didn’t recover. It was such a noticeable contrast to his Tiredness Stat hitting 0.

‘Why is it doing this?’

Only after he completely drained the bottle did he finally get to understand the reason for this anomaly.

Tti-ring.

[When your remaining HP is less than 10%, it is impossible to heal yourself with healing potions.]

What a simple reason, that – his remaining HP was too low.

‘Of course....’

Even healing magic had its limitations.

It was not a foreign concept to him.

Just as a Healer’s ranking determined the scope of their healing capabilities, potions too couldn’t heal past a certain limit.

‘And that limit is 10%, huh....’

He learned something important today. He might have landed in really hot water during a critical moment by believing potions could solve everything.

This was why experiencing it first hand was important.

Well, there was an old saying, wasn’t there?

Things that couldn’t kill him would make him stronger?

That perfectly illustrated the usefulness of personal experience.

And thankfully, Jin-Woo possessed experience regarding the Penalty Zone.

‘I’m sure they should pop up right about now....’

And just as he expected...

He sensed the presence of lifeforms beneath the surface.

Jin-Woo tightly shrunk his body for a second, before springing up to his feet.

His entire body felt as light as feather. His strength had returned in full, thanks to the potion.

Standing straight on his feet, Jin-Woo turned around and took a look.

Just as he expected, the spot he was lying on a second ago began caving in and a crater formed there.

‘Back then, I thought I’d die if I slipped and fell in there.’

But now, he had so much leeway that he was actually spectating on the whole process with some leisure.

At the very bottom of the sandy crater, the ground began to ‘boil’ and tremble about, before....

Pushiiii-!!

The sand exploded up like a pillar and the huge centipede revealed itself.

“Kiieehhk!!”

Everything matched up to his memories so far.

‘And I found this thing so terrifying to look at back then, too....’

But now, he couldn't help feeling like he was looking at some video footage being played in slow-motion.

Jin-Woo raised his eyes a bit higher.

And he got to clearly confirm those red letters floating above the centipede's head.

[Poison-Fanged Giant Desert Centipede]

Its name was in red letters, the same colour as the Cerberus from the Demon's Castle.

It was then, the quest message appeared before his eyes.

Tti-ring!

[Penalty Quest: Survival]

Goal: Please survive until the end of the time limit.

Time limit: 4 hours

Remaining time: 4 hours 0 minutes 0 seconds

Confirming the details of the message, Jin-Woo clenched his fist tightly.

‘I can buy myself time with this.’

Since he hadn't used the immediate return stone to escape from the dungeon, he still had a shot here.

‘I'm pretty sure that, as soon as the Penalty Quest is over, I will be sent back to that place.’

What if time spent inside the Penalty Zone was acknowledged as the time he endured during the quest? His advancement points tally would be enormous.

He couldn't even imagine just what kind of an impact that would have.

‘However....’

However, when he thought back to how the System affected him every day, he was sure of this becoming something absolutely huge.

‘Four hours!’

He couldn't even endure ten minutes and tried to use the immediate return

stone, yet simply by transferring into the penalty zone, he now got himself four hours for free.

There was one issue he still had to resolve first, however.

And that would be whether he could get out of this place unscathed with only 100 or so HP remaining.

As it was impossible to heal himself using potions, he had to do his best to cautiously kill these centipedes until he levelled up.

It was kind of like a new mission for him.

‘...Let’s do this.’

Jin-Woo summoned the Poison Fang of Kasaka.

And then...

[Remaining time: 03:59:59]

...Then, as soon as the penalty quest began, he dashed forward, even before the centipede had the chance to move.

Jin-Woo closed the distance in the blink of an eye and lightly leapt up right in front of the centipede.

Paht!

He landed on one of the legs near the midpoint of the centipede and, as he made his way up, Jin-Woo proceeded to inflict several injuries on the body of the monster.

Stab! Staaab! Stab!

On all the spots the reverse-gripped Poison Fang of Kasaka brushed past, flesh split open and bodily fluid poured out.

Kiieehhkk!!

The centipede roared out and thrashed about as if each wound inflicted was too painful to bear.

‘Dash!’

Jin-Woo’s sprinting legs became even faster.

Step, step, step, step!

Jin-Woo deftly treaded on the centipede’s body and arrived at the top of its head only a second later. He gripped the dagger with both of his hands and raised it up high.

And then...

‘Vital Points Targetting!’

He used his skill and stabbed down on the centipede’s head with every ounce of his power.

The downward pointing blade dug deep into the flesh of the centipede’s head.

Crack!!

[‘Skill: Vital Points Targetting’ has levelled up!]

‘Niiice!’

What a wonderful piece of news to show up in such a long time!

The damage from the levelled-up Vital Points Targetting must’ve been pretty substantial, because the centipede shook its head around quite violently and thrashed about in great pain.

Kieeeeck!! Kiieeeeck!

Jin-Woo didn’t stop there.

He stepped away from its head and moved to its back. Because he saw a completely unguarded body part to attack.

STAB!!

Jin-Woo stabbed the dagger deep into the monster’s back flesh, and by using gravity, he fell to the ground while holding onto his weapon.

SFX for centipede’s back splitting up

The power from the Strength Stat exceeding 120 points, as well as the helping hand of gravity added on top as he fell from the height of a five-story building, caused the centipede’s back to split open quite splendidly.

Tap.

Jin-Woo landed on the ground without any trouble.

Kiieehhk!! Kiieehhh!

The centipede spewed out its bodily fluids everywhere. Its giant body thrashed and quivered before it slowly crashed on the ground.

Boom!!

The huge body of the centipede landed and kicked up the dust cloud.

Tti-ring.

[You defeated the Poison-Fanged Giant Desert Centipede.]

Jin-Woo dusted himself off while checking out the remaining time.

[Remaining time: 03:59:42]

'I spent 17 seconds.'

He didn't even need 20 seconds to kill a single centipede.

It was a complete contrast to when he was fighting the Cerberus, ostensibly on the same level as this centipede.

He had become unbelievably strong now.

'Well, yeah. I've levelled up so many times since then, and just how many items did I get my hands on, in the meantime?'

It was a rather obvious conclusion.

He now felt confident of hunting other centipedes down without getting hurt if these monsters posed such a little threat.

'Now then. My problem would be the number of monsters in this place that I can hunt to reach my next level....'

That would be the only way to raise his odds of his victory when he got thrown back into the class quest.

If he went back without having recovered his HP, only a dog's death would be waiting for him there.

It was at this point when....

More sand pillars began erupting out from the ground.

Pushhuiii-!!

Pushuuueeiii!!

It seemed that quite a lot of centipedes rushed over here after picking up on the scent of the blood from its dead kin.

Kiieehhk!

Kiieehhhhk-

Almost immediately, Jin-Woo's expression brightened.

'Just how many are here?'

Seeing all those centipedes poking their heads out from the sandy surface, Jin-Woo could no longer suppress the wide smile from blooming on his face.

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

As the result of wrestling around with these centipedes for the past four hours, his level rose up four times and now it sat at 51.

Before he knew it, the penalty quest was coming to an end.

[Penalty Quest: Survival]

Goal: Please survive until the end of the time limit.

Time limit: 4 hours

Remaining time: 0 hours 3 minutes 19 seconds

Soon, he'd have to go back.

Jin-Woo took a sweeping look around him. The corpses of centipedes filled up his view everywhere he looked. Thanks to them, he got to recover his HP back to full.

'It's a bit of waste that these things don't give any loot or Gold....'

Well, it'd be strange that loot would come out when he was supposed to get punished in this place...

He stopped worrying about that and got ready, instead.

'Store.'

[Current Gold: 3,115,629]

Humanoid-type monsters dropped the Gold-containing leather pouch really often, and also, Igrit also gave him 1.5 million Gold in one go.

So, he now had enough funds to spend.

Jin-Woo spent all that Gold to buy one single weapon.

As a matter of fact, there was this one dagger that caught his eye.

[Item: Knight Killer]

Rarity: B

Type: Dagger

Attack: +75

A sharp and sturdy dagger designed to cut through the armour worn by the knights. The edges of the blade are shaped like the teeth of a saw blade, thus it won't slide off the armour's surface easily.

Effect ‘Killing Knights’: +25% additional damage when attacking heavily armoured opponents.

It was a specially crafted weapon to deal with armour-wearing enemies. And it cost 2.8 million Gold.

He had to spend almost every Gold he had in reserve to buy this weapon, but he didn’t have any leeway to shed a tear over it.

‘It’s not like I can take the Gold with me to the grave, anyway.’

He didn’t hesitate and bought the dagger.

[You have purchased ‘Knight Killer’.]

[You have purchased ‘Bandages’.]

Along with the Knight Killer, Jin-Woo also bought a roll of bandages.

He held the dagger with a rather scary-looking sawblade-like cutting edge in his right hand, and wrapped them both tightly with the bandage.

Swish! Swish!!

When he swung the Knight Killer around a couple of times, it felt like the dagger had become a part of his limb now.

‘At a bare minimum, I shouldn’t drop it accidentally.’

He thought about tying the Poison Fang of Kasaka to his left hand too, but he decided not to.

It’d be too cumbersome when he couldn’t use both of hands.

He figured that at least one of his hands still retaining its mobility would make his life more flexible.

While he was putting away the leftover bandage into Inventory, he spotted the Rune Stone from Igrit.

‘Ah. There was this thing, too.’

[Rune Stone: Ruler’s Reach]

You can absorb the skill by breaking this Rune Stone.

Right now, he needed to grasp at everything, even if that was a piece of straw. Whether that was an item or a skill, he needed to obtain whatever that could become his combat strength.

Jin-Woo didn’t hesitate and broke the Rune Stone.

[You’ve acquired ‘Skill: Ruler’s Reach’.]

[Skill: Ruler's Reach Lv. 1]

Active skill.

Required Mana to activate: None.

Even without touching, you can physically influence an object.

'Ah...'

As soon as he read that description, he recalled a certain scene.

It was when Igrit extended its hand towards its longsword that was discarded on the floor, far away.

'So, this is the skill that made the sword move back then.'

A skill that could move objects around from a distance with nothing but his will! On top of that, he didn't even have to spend any Mana, either!

'If I am able to move any object I see just like the description says, then this would be one hell of a skill to possess.'

Jin-Woo immediately tried to experiment with the skill on the corpse of the centipede next to him.

[Your proficiency is too low and the target can't be moved.]

[Your proficiency is too low and the target can't be moved.]

If he wanted to move something heavy, then it was likely that his proficiency with the skill had to be much higher.

'How about this, then?'

Jin-Woo dropped the Poison Fang of Kasaka to the floor. And he extended his hand towards the dagger.

Then, the dagger quickly rose up.

Grab!

'Ohhhh.'

Jin-Woo snatched the Poison Fang's hilt and stared at it with totally mystified eyes.

'Nice. This will come in handy.'

And with that, he was as prepared as he could get.

When he raised his head to confirm, the required time was almost up.

[Remaining time: 00:00:04]

When the timer changed from 4 to 3, a new message from the System popped up in his view.

Tti-ring.

[Penalty Quest will conclude shortly.]

And another message followed after that one.

Tti-ring.

[As you have tried to hunt inside the Penalty Zone, the difficulty of the next Penalty Quest will be adjusted to a higher level.]

The difficulty would be adjusted higher.

Meaning, it'd make the hunting so much harder that the 'Penalty Quest' would actually serve its purpose as proper punishment again.

But, then again, would there be the next time?

Jin-Woo anxiously swallowed his saliva.

'From here onwards, it's back to the Class Change Quest.'

Inside that boss room, hundreds of monsters were waiting for his return.

Or, the number could be even higher now.

If he was being kind here, he was returning to that place, but truthfully, it was more like him being thrown back in there.

HP, MP, Tiredness, equipment, and even a new skill.

And his renewed resolve.

His current condition was so much better than when he first set foot in that place, but when he thought about going back there, he couldn't help but get tense and nervous.

Thump, thump, thump....

His heart beat so hard that it actually hurt.

Jin-Woo closed his eyes. He tried to maintain his calm.

Soon, the familiar mechanical beep went off in his head.

Tti-ring.

[Penalty Quest has concluded.]

'This is my last chance....'

When Jin-Woo opened his eyes again...

His vision was filled with the silver-coloured knights all snapping their heads in his direction at once.

However, they weren't important right now.

Right away, Jin-Woo narrowed his eyes and searched for something.

'I gotta find the mages first!!'



Chapter 51 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The reason for searching for the mages was quite simple.

‘If my thoughts are correct...’

And that was to confirm whether the supposition he made back in the Penalty Zone was correct or not.

Meanwhile, the knights all began rushing violently towards him.

Jin-Woo calmly jumped and stepped on the shoulder of the knight closest to him, and leapt up into the air. That allowed him to take in the interior of the boss room in one go.

‘Where are the mages?’

.....Found one!

Not too far from him, he spotted a lone mage.

‘As I thought!’

What he witnessed back then was right.

Indeed, he didn’t see wrong.

Back then, when he was being squeezed tight by the group of knights and only his arm could flail about helplessly, Jin-Woo spotted something through the narrow gaps he couldn’t quite understand at the time.

‘.....’

And that was a mage continuously chanting a spell.

A mage busy chanting a spell... at a casual glance, that wouldn’t be something out of place. However, Jin-Woo still felt a strong sense of discord from that.

‘If that’s the case, then how come....’

How come he saw not one single spell flying at him?

Every attack he received came from the knights. Mages continued to chant, yet not once did they complete their spells and display their might.

No, there was that one time.

Back when one of them used something called Eyes of Detection and undid his Stealth. And when that was happening, for some reason, all the knights nearby stopped moving.

At first, he thought they only stopped because they had lost their target.

However, while he was hunting down the giant centipedes in the Penalty Zone, he belatedly realised something quite important.

Was it around the eighth centipede he killed? The level up message popped up and he clenched his fist tightly.

[Level up!]

His spent HP and MP were restored to full. After the short period of elation, a weird incongruency rushed in right afterwards.

‘My level can rise this easily, yet why didn’t I level up once in that place?’

The System said that his health wouldn’t recover through level up, but crucially, it said nothing about him being unable to level up.

Indeed, his level rose up by 5 on his way towards the boss room, too. However, only during the Class Change Quest, he didn’t level up once. Even though he endured for over six minutes and killed a hundred plus knights.

Mages busy chanting but not casting any spells.

Knights that apparently didn’t give out any experience points.

When he took these actions of the two separate groups that puzzled him so much and combined them into one singular puzzle....

A new possibility formed in Jin-Woo’s head.

‘It could be....’

It was possible that all of the knights there were fake.

The reason why all those knights stopped moving when the mage used Eyes of Detection could be that... it wasn’t because he had vanished, but because the mage had stopped casting.

‘If my guess is correct...!!’

He needed to confirm it right now.

Jin-Woo ignored the knights reaching out to grab him and ran towards the mage while using their shoulders and heads as his footholds.

‘....!’

He sensed the mage panicking after spotting his approach. And its casting

speed had increased. Suddenly, the knights no longer attacked him without a plan and tried to gather around the mage to protect it.

With that, Jin-Woo was convinced now.

Tap!

He landed in front of the mage. Without a moment of hesitation, the dagger held in his right hand accurately pierced the mage's heart.

'Vital Points Targetting!'

Stab!

The mage soundlessly turned into a wisp of black smoke and disappeared from the view.

[You defeated a mage.]

And at the same time-!

Tumble!!!

Hundreds of knights rushing in to attack Jin-Woo all collapsed at the same time. It was as if they were puppets with their strings cut.

The knights collapsed on the floor were now, more or less, empty suits of armour.

'This was my answer!'

Jin-Woo cried out inwardly in elation.

He had to go through several near-death situations just to get to this conclusion.

Knights were nothing to worry about. No, it was the mages that controlled these knights.

The real goal was to kill them, instead.

'The first target my Knight Killer killed was a mage.....'

Jin-Woo couldn't help but chuckle as he looked down at the empty robe discarded on the floor. He had that much leeway now.

Of course, he couldn't continue to stand around doing nothing forever. After all, his quest hadn't ended yet.

Rumble...

The ground shook again.

Jin-Woo turned around and saw that the knights had him surrounded from

almost all sides with no gaps to speak of.

Meaning, there were other mages controlling these batches of knights hidden somewhere.

Knights pounced on him. Jin-Woo's right hand moved so fast that naked eyes couldn't even see its shape.

Slice!!

The knights standing in front of him all got cut in half.

Jin-Woo's eyes opened real wide after witnessing that.

'Wow!'

It was worth investing 2.8 million Gold on this dagger. The blade of his Knight Killer pierced and sliced open the knights' armour as if they were made of paper.

It didn't seem that the saw-like blade was the only reason for this.

Just as the item description, 'dagger designed for use against knights' said, he could sense a strong magic-like power emanating from this Knight Killer.

'A weapon from the Store is actually pretty good, isn't it?'

There was a slight deviation from the accepted norm here. Normally, most people would think of weapons sold in stores as something one would use in a pinch when there was no better alternative.

'I shouldn't be dismissing Gold from now, huh....?'

At a bare minimum, this dagger seemed a lot more useful than weapons designed for a Hunter. He even thought that, if he sold weapons from the Store to other Hunters, he would become rich in no time at all.

Well, he didn't see any restrictions on the weapon descriptions that he couldn't give one to someone else, which was different from 'consumable' type items.

'Concentrate, man. Concentrate!'

Now wasn't the time to get distracted. Knights were still tirelessly rushing at him.

Swish! Slice!!

Jin-Woo dodged this way and that while cutting them down.

However....

'This will go on forever.'

When he shifted his gaze away just for a brief moment, far more knights than he had cut down appeared out of seemingly nowhere to fill the gap.

Slice!!

One more knight lost its head.

'I gotta find the mages.'

Jin-Woo utilised the shoulders of the headless knight and leapt up before the creature collapsed to the floor.

'Stealth!'

Jin-Woo's form blurred in an instant. Of course, he wasn't trying to hide via Stealth. What he was aiming for was....

[The mage has used 'Skill: Eyes of Detection'.]

[The mage has used 'Skill: Eyes of Detection'.]

[The mage has used 'Skill: Eyes of Detection'.]

....The ear-piercing mechanical beeps rang out from several directions.

Jin-Woo ran on top of the knights and quickly confirmed the positions of the eye-like symbols.

'There are a total of five mages!'

Jin-Woo targetted the closest mage to him.

'.....!'

The mage hurriedly gathered knights around it the moment Jin-Woo turned to stare at it, but....

Swish-!!

The Poison Fang of Kasaka flew out of his left hand in a straight line and stabbed accurately in the middle of the mage's forehead.

Stab!

[You've acquired 'Skill: Dagger Throw'.]

[You defeated the mage.]

Tumble...

Once more, hundreds of knights tumbled to the ground.

'Four more left!'

Jin-Woo stepped on the knights' heads and moved towards his next target.

Meanwhile, he sneaked a glance towards the ‘Poison Fang of Kasaka’ he hadn’t recovered yet. It was time to use his new skill.

‘Ruler’s Reach!’

Jin-Woo extended his left hand towards the dagger, and as if a magnet was pulling it in, the weapon flew back in.

‘Yes!’

Jin-Woo snatched the dagger off the air.

Now that he didn’t have to personally retrieve his dagger, he could take the most efficient route to his target. In the next second, he arrived before the next mage, and...

‘.....!’

Even before the knights could try anything, he cut the b*stard up in half.

[You defeated the mage.]

More knights collapsed again. With that, not even half of the original number of knights remained.

The initiative was clearly with him now.

Jin-Woo’s glare became harsher.

‘There are three left.’

Perhaps sensing the threat, the remaining mages all gathered in one spot. It wasn’t only them, either. The knights they controlled also gathered around them.

And then, the mages all chanted a certain spell together. Their ominous and creepy voices reverberated throughout the boss room and soon, they finished their spell.

Crack, creak.

The knights guarding the mages were suddenly pulled into one lump and got compressed as if they were thrown into an industrial crusher. And then, they were reborn as one huge metal Golem which began glaring at Jin-Woo right away.

Wuooo-!

‘Wow, this is no joke, huh?’

Jin-Woo leaked out a gasp of pure admiration after sensing the overwhelming pressure emitted from this giant monster.

However, he wasn't scared by its appearance at all.

Perhaps because he had encountered several life-or-death situations already, he was feeling expectant rather than nervous.

Thud, thud, thud!!

Whenever the large Golem took steps, the ground shook.

What a fearsome presence it possessed.

Swoooosh-!

Jin-Woo ducked lower and dodged the Golem's fist.

Kaboom!

The stone pillar behind Jin-Woo shattered into pieces after its metallic fist grazed it.

'Well, that is pretty serious power.....'

Jin-Woo grinned slyly.

If he hadn't yet figured out what was going on here, he would've been wracking his brain trying to figure out how to deal with this monster. However, there was no need for him to worry about that now. No need at all.

Kuooooaarr!!

Just as the Golem locked its hands together and raised them high to smash down...

Jin-Woo didn't back away, but used his skill, 'Dash', and pounced forward. And then, he slid on the floor.

In the blink of an eye, he had slid in-between the legs of the Golem and shot right past it.

While the lumbering Golem was hastily turning around, Jin-Woo had already arrived before the three completely defenceless mages, still busy chanting their spell.

'...!'

'...!'

The shoulders of the panicking mages grandly shuddered.

'Checkmate!'

A smile of contentment formed on Jin-Woo's face.

The old saying went something like, by being together, you'd be safe and

that separating from one another would mean death. Too bad for them, that was not the case this time around. It was far easier to kill them off because they had gathered in one place.

Jin-Woo freely swung his daggers about, and....

[You defeated the mage.]

[You defeated the mage.]

[You defeated the mage.]

The remaining three mages also became smoke and joined their already-departed comrades. And the Golem that was trying to hurriedly grab Jin-Woo shattered into pieces of armour and scattered all over the place.

Jin-Woo didn't let his guard down, however.

'Is this the end? Or, is there something more?'

He remained alert and ready just in case something else might happen, but then, the familiar beep went off in his head.

Tti-ring.

Jin-Woo swallowed his saliva.

Perhaps to laugh at his unnecessary worries, the System announced the end of the quest, instead.

[The Class Change Quest has been concluded as all monsters inside the examination chamber have been defeated.]

[Your Class will be determined shortly.]

[Depending on the amount of advancement points accumulated, it will be possible to change your Class to a high-ranking one.]

Only now...

Only now could Jin-Woo spit out a sigh of relief.

"Fuu...."

What a difficult battle this had been.

If he remained fixated on the Immediate Return Stone, he'd never have figured out how to counter the Class Change Quest monsters.

'Yeah, I'd probably have been thinking about escaping all the time.'

He got unlucky – or perhaps got really lucky, instead – and lost the Immediate Return Stone. And that forced him to focus solely on surviving this battle. The end result was an unbridled success.

And now, it was time to receive his rewards.

Jin-Woo's gaze drifted towards the timer.

[04:29:16]

The numbers on the timer had stopped moving. He had 'endured' for almost four and a half hours. And that wasn't all.

In a quest that could be cleared simply by enduring the combined assault of the countless enemies for a while, he actually managed to kill them all.

Just from wondering about how many points he got to accumulate and what kind of a class he'd earn from that, his heart began trembling in anticipation.

[The suitable Class will be bestowed upon the Player after your past actions have been thoroughly analysed.]

'Yup, that sounds good.'

If his past actions were used as the basis for the selection of his Class, then the odds of him ending up with something weird and struggling in the future would be close to zero now.

It was probably the most welcoming thing he'd heard in a while.

[The places where the Player stands are dyed with the hidden breaths of an assassin. Corpses fill the paths the Player has walked past, and the scent of blood is thick and strong.]

...He thought that this description was a bit too heartless and cold, but after looking back, he couldn't come up with anything to rebut those words.

'I only did those in order to raise my level, though....'

After entering an instant dungeon, he kept hunting monsters down until his level would not rise any more. And while inside a regular dungeon, he made sure to find every single hidden monster there and slew them all, too.

Also, although it wasn't his intention, he ended up fighting other Hunters a couple of times, too.

'Assassin', 'corpses', and the 'scent of blood....'

'No matter how you look at it....'

Just as he suspected from the beginning, it seemed that his Class would be set at 'Assassin' now.

[Also, the Player thirsts for power, never relies on his comrades, and paves the new path for himself with his own strength.]

Nod, nod.

Jin-Woo nodded his head in agreement with the System's assessment.

'Well, it's not like I had any trustworthy comrades, to begin with.'

However, he couldn't understand why those points were being addressed during the selection of his Class. The System's explanation continued on.

[Your thirst for strong power is intense enough to summon the spirits of the departed, and the army of the deceased that unquestioningly follows all of your commands will pave the road only for you, without anyone's aid.]

'.....The army of the deceased?!'

Only now had Jin-Woo realised something had gone awry here.

Too bad, though.

"No, wait!!"

Even before he had any chance to raise his objections....

The System read off the result of the selection in its usual dry and humourless voice.

[Your Class has been set as 'Necromancer'.]

".....What the f*ck?"



Chapter 52 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

What was the meaning of this sudden slap to the back of his head?

Everything was going well, so why did ‘Necromancer’ pop out instead of the expected ‘Assassin’??

Jin-Woo dazedly stared at the message. He even rubbed his eyes several times, but nothing changed.

[Your Class has been set as ‘Necromancer’.]

The message still floated up there, unchanging.

He couldn’t believe it at first, then he became really angry next.

‘I’ve never even touched the Intelligence Stat, so what the hell?!’

Just how did he end up with a rare class not even found among countless Mage-type Hunters in the world??

From the moment Jin-Woo awoke as a rank E Hunter, he was always a close-quarters fighter. With the exception of the steel longsword, he always used daggers, and the skills he got until now were perfectly suited for the role of an assassin.

That was why he hadn’t even thought of the possibility that his class would end up belonging to a different type altogether.

It was a magic-type, no less... No, more than that, a Necromancer!!

His knowledge of different classes came from video games, but even then, he knew enough about what being a Necromancer entailed.

A gloomy-looking mage, and an army of undead following that dude.

No matter how much he thought about it, that image just didn’t correlate to him whatsoever.

Jin-Woo frowned deeply and shook his head.

‘...Let’s calm down, first.’

Even if his thoughts were complicated, his responses should be calm.

Being calm and cool-headed were Jin-Woo’s ultimate weapons. He controlled his rage and regained his cool head soon afterwards.

'Hang on, isn't this....'

Denial, then rage.

He suddenly felt like he was acting like a patient who just heard the diagnosis of terminal illness, and was going through the so-called five stages of grief.

'Rage... then, it's supposed to be negotiation, is it? Or was it compromise?'

Of course, there was no way he'd be allowed to negotiate or come to a compromise with the System.

If he were to think about the advantages of being a Necromancer, then.... just as the System alluded to, he could create his own army? About that much?

'Well, the problem here is that army will consist of skeletons and rotting corpses.'

If he walked around with such an army, the whole world would be up in arms in no time.

Hunters were already the objects of aspiration and fear, yet he was being asked to become a Hunter who could lead around an army of the departed....

Never mind the question of this class being suitable to him or not, he wasn't even confident of handling the fallout from that.

Tti-ring.

[Will you accept this Class?]

The System demanded his answer.

What a relief that was.

'I can still say yes or no.....'

Jin-Woo spat out a sigh.

If the Class wasn't forced down his throat, then that meant there was another opportunity for him. If he still had another shot, then there was no reason to sweat so much right now.

Jin-Woo gladly (?) refused the suggestion.

"No way."

When he did that, the message asked him again.

[The 'Necromancer' is a hidden class. Will you still refuse?]

Although it was asking the same thing for the second time, he found himself unable to quickly answer back.

He was now hesitating.

‘A hidden class... is it?’

That term might sound like something straight out of a video game, but still, there were Hunters with rare and strange abilities even in reality.

Such as, Hunters who could create ‘Shields’, or buff others. Or, even...

‘...The Master of White Tiger Guild can apparently transform into a monster, too, according to the rumours.’

All those Hunters with rare and strange abilities were now enjoying a great deal of special treatment after being scouted by the biggest Guilds out there.

‘Could this hidden class thing be the same thing as the special abilities those Hunters possess?’

If that were the case....

‘This could be an opportunity, instead.’

Suddenly, such a thought popped into his head. The System did say something about this just now.

‘I thirst for power, and that’s why it’s recommending the Class of Necromancer to me.’

In other words, the Class of Necromancer had the potential to be truly powerful.

When considering the fact that most of the Hunters with rare skills happen to belong to ‘support type’, this could be seen as quite an encouraging thing for him, indeed.

A Hunter with a rare skill that could directly enter any battle.

His heart began beating just a little bit faster just from thinking about that.

‘If I could only get to experience the Class of Necromancer just for a bit, I wouldn’t even need to weigh my options this much.’

However, would anything in this world be that easy?

There was no way the matters of this world would revolve according to his wishes, and worse still, he had never heard of anyone possessing an ability similar to that of a necromancer.

The thing was, one wouldn’t be able to find a mage who commanded its

own army, to begin with.

Just as his thoughts ended there...

‘.....Oh.’

Jin-Woo took a sweeping look at all the broken remnants of the knights strewn about this place.

‘Those mages!’

One could say that those mages in the Class Change Quest were using roughly the same ability as a Necromancer.

These knights were their army, in other words.

‘For sure....’

It was certainly very difficult to fight all those knights who attacked him with complete disregard for their own lives.

If he failed to figure out how to fight them until the end, or if the mages possessed very high close-quarters combat abilities, then....

‘The one lying on the floor right now would be me instead of these scrap metal bits.’

Jin-Woo stopped looking at the knights and raised his head.

A certain look of determination flashed by in his eyes.

‘I already possess the close-quarters combat ability.’

Meaning, he was different from those mages.

What if there was a mage possessing excellent hand-to-hand combat skills who also happened to command an army? Wouldn't that be the worst of all worst possible nightmares for his enemies?

‘What if....’

Something he could only think about but couldn't do – wouldn't it be possible for him to enter a dungeon rated B or higher alone and clear it now?

Jin-Woo silently swallowed his saliva.

If he were allowed to continue raising his Stat values after becoming a Necromancer, then obviously, the army under his command would also grow even more powerful than before.

He couldn't even begin to imagine the effect of that.

‘It'll no longer be only me levelling up.’

His own army would be levelling up, too.

‘Wait. Could this be....?’

Suddenly, a chill ran down his spine. Jin-Woo raised his head and looked at the floating message. It was still patiently waiting for his decision.

[The ‘Necromancer’ is a hidden class. Will you still refuse?]

Unlike how it was usually, the System wasn’t urging him on. Jin-Woo couldn’t help question its motives in his mind.

‘Is this what you wanted from me?’

Of course, no replies came to him.

After a lengthy deliberation, Jin-Woo made up his mind.

If it was giving him power, then he’d accept it with open arms.

He no longer hesitated.

[Will you accept this Class?]

“I will.”

As if it was waiting, the System immediately displayed the following messages.

Tti-ring.

[Your Class has been set.]

[You will now be given the opportunity to change to a higher ranked version of this Class through the amount of advancement points accumulated.]

[Calculations have begun.]

[Tallying up your advancement points....]

While that was going on, Jin-Woo unwrapped the bandages from his right hand.

He’d been holding the dagger so tightly that his palm had swollen up rather painfully.

“Well, I’m gonna get blisters now.”

He lightly clicked his tongue.

Such a wound would’ve been taken care of with a drop from the healing potion, but not being able to use one was proving to be rather inconvenient in various ways.

He finished unwrapping the bandages and was about to store the Knight Killer back in his Inventory, when he heard yet another mechanical beep.

Tti-ring.

Jin-Woo reflexively raised his head.

[You've exceeded the expected time limit!]

[Bonus points will be granted.]

Bonus points, it said. But, that was rather obvious, wasn't it?

'Not sure how long was the expected time, but well, I did endure for quite a long time, didn't I?'

He began smirking in satisfaction, then all of a sudden, several messages inundated his vision.

[You did not use Immediate Return Stone!]

[Bonus points will be granted.]

[Your remaining HP is over 50%!]

[Bonus points will be granted.]

[You eliminated all the enemies!]

[Bonus points will be granted.]

[Total advancement points tally has exceeded the Class-specific point limit.]

[According to the Contract, you will be given a special reward.]

Tti-ring, tti-ring, tti-ring.

'What's this?'

His ears hurt from all the beepings, but Jin-Woo's focus was fixed elsewhere and didn't care anymore. As a matter of fact, he couldn't even hear those beeps now.

'A special reward?'

Those words jumped right up at him.

A reward.

Not only that, it was 'special', too.

Jin-Woo stopped trying to store the Knight Killer in his Inventory and concentrated on the message.

His stares were now firmly fixed on it.

Soon, follow-up messages popped up.

Tti-ring.

[Your Class has been upgraded from ‘Necromancer’ to ‘Shadow Sovereign’.]

[You have acquired Class-specific skills.]

[You have acquired bonus Stats.]

[You have acquired the title, ‘The One Who Overcame the Adversity’.]
‘Shadow Sovereign?’

Hearing that strange term, Jin-Woo hurriedly summoned his Status Window.

[Name: Seong Jin-Woo]

[Level: 51]

[Class: Shadow Sovereign]

Indeed, there was a new term added to his Class column.

‘It’s not a Necromancer anymore?’

The System definitely said that he’d be able to get a higher ranked version of his Class according to the amount of advancement points he had earned. And also, it mentioned that the point tally had exceeded the limits of the Class itself, too.

The end result from all that was this ‘Shadow Sovereign’.

“So, is this....”

....The special reward the System was talking about?

The thing was, though, Jin-Woo couldn’t continue on with what he wanted to say.

‘.....??’

Right in front of his disbelieving eyes, a truly bizarre and hard-to-explain phenomenon began unfolding.

Behind the hologram-like messages....

Unknown black smoke was slowly and eerily leaking out from the knights strewn about on the floor like scrap metal.

No such thing happened prior to him getting his Class.

These bits of scrap metal were nothing more than ownerless junk, only until a minute ago.

However.

Jin-Woo closed the Status Window and swept his gaze around the interior of the boss room once. It wasn't just one or two now.

That black smoke was rising up from every single knight on the ground.

[It is possible to perform Shadow Extraction on the selected target.]

[It is possible to perform Shadow Extraction on the selected target.]

[It is possible to perform Shadow Extraction on the selected target.]

Whenever his eyes landed on 'targets' with black smoke oozing out from them, the words with hard-to-fathom meanings 'possible to perform extraction' popped up into his view.

'Shadow extraction?'

He couldn't understand why, but to Jin-Woo, those rising smokes looked like they were writhing in pain.

As a matter of fact, it felt like they were reaching out to him, begging him to save them.

Would it be strange if he said that.... he could hear their screams?

'But.....'

He was sure of one thing.

He was sure of him being able to free them from their pain.

'Shadow Extraction.'

[Please set the command phrase to activate the Shadow Extraction skill.]

'I gotta set a separate activation phrase for this skill?'

Jin-Woo pondered for a bit, before muttering out almost instinctively.

"Rise up."

When he did....

Wuuuaahhhh....

Thick, heavy moans resounded out from somewhere and at the same time, the shadows of the fallen knights began wiggling as if they were still alive.

Jin-Woo scanned his surroundings once more.

All the shadows found near him were beginning to move.

Soon enough, a black hand rose up from one of the shadows. It pressed down on the ground hard, and slowly, the arm attached to it rose up.

'Oh my god!'

Jin-Woo's eyes opened wider and wider.

Those things were.... people.

No, soldiers possessing the outer appearance of a person!

Soldiers kitted out head to toe in jet-black armour climbed out of the shadows one by one.

'This is my new skill??'

By the time Jin-Woo recovered his wits, there were a couple dozen soldiers standing by his side, waiting.

[Shadow Extraction was a success.]

Tens of soldiers were now surrounding him.

'What the hell is this....?'

Jin-Woo approached the nearest soldier.

The first thing he did was to touch it. When he placed his hand on it, he felt something metallic.

As it turned out, the metal-looking armours weren't just for show.

Indeed, these guys were all outfitted in real black armour and real weapons.

'At first glance, they look like people, don't they?'

However, they weren't people. He couldn't sense any signs of life from them. They didn't breathe, and there were no heartbeats he could hear.

On top of this....

"..."

Jin-Woo swallowed down his shocked gasp.

He sneaked a glance inside the helmet through the eye holes and found nothing but pure darkness in there. Jin-Woo slowly took several steps back after feeling like he was being sucked in.

'These things came out from the shadows??'

He immediately checked his Skill Window.

Just as the System informed him, new Class-specific skills could be found there now.

[Class-specific skills]

Active skills

He checked the details of the first skill.

[Skill: Shadow Extraction Lv. 1]

Class-specific skill.

Required Mana to activate: None

Creates a shadow soldier by extracting Mana from the recently deceased lifeform.

The odds of extraction failure will rise higher depending on the target's original Stat values, as well as the length of time since its death.

Number of shadows that can be extracted: 30/30

Only after reading the explanation on the Skill did he realise the identity of these black soldiers.

'.....They are all undead.'

Shadow soldiers – monsters, pulled out from the shadows of the dead.

Jin-Woo swallowed down his saliva.

'If these things are really my soldiers, then....'

Jin-Woo raised his arm and pointed to his right.

And the soldiers all uniformly shifted their bodies to right.

The end of his hand slowly moved to his front.

And the soldiers too followed after his hand and slowly faced their front.

Jin-Woo stood in the middle of them.

He did his best to calm his pounding heart and lowered his hand.

And at the same time....

Every single soldier knelt down before him.

They were moving according to his will.

"Hah....."

Jin-Woo let out a soft gasp of admiration as the ends of his lips arched up.

'Isn't this so cool?'



Chapter 53 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘Oops!’

A thought flashed by in Jin-Woo’s head.

‘I shouldn’t be wasting time like this.’

He had witnessed the power of his new skill. He could now turn the defeated monsters into his soldiers.

If that was the case, then wasn’t there a monster nearby that he just had to turn into his lackey right away?

Jin-Woo climbed up the pile of armours that once used to be the giant Iron Golem and stood on top. By being so high up, he could take in the entirety of the boss room.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo searched around as his glare became sharper.

Found it!

Confirming the direction, Jin-Woo immediately ran over there. Perhaps he was feeling really psyched, he arrived there in the blink of an eye even though he didn’t use the Dash skill.

Gulp.

Jin-Woo looked the ‘corpse’ of the monster that he was planning to extract the shadow from, and swallowed dry saliva.

The creature remained in the exact same spot where he had killed it.

‘.....Igrit the Crimson.’

The sight of the red-armoured headless knight half-buried in the thick, sturdy wall told how desperate his situation was back then.

Jin-Woo stood before Igrit.

It might have been a fearsome enemy that threatened to kill him only a few hours ago, but now, it was probably the best ingredient he could find. Fortunately enough, he saw the black smoke slowly oozing out from Igrit, just like how it was with other fallen knights.

[It is possible to perform Shadow Extraction on the selected target.]

Jin-Woo's expression brightened.

'Nice.'

He already knew the drill. Jin-Woo took a short but deep breath and spoke out the command phrase.

"Rise up."

He spoke the activation phrase for the skill, Shadow Extraction. However, the skill didn't activate.

'.....??'

Jin-Woo tilted his head this way and that way, and was about to say the command phrase again. But then, following a 'titi-ring', several warning messages popped up.

[You have exceeded the number of shadows that can be extracted.]

[If you wish to perform Shadow Extraction, you must return a portion, or all, of your soldiers back to the world of nothingness via 'Extraction Cancellation'.]

[Once returned to nothingness, the shadow soldiers can't be summoned back.]

'Oh, yeah. There was something like that, wasn't there?'

At the end of the skill's explanation, there was something he should've taken note of.

[Number of shadows that can be extracted: 30/30]

The maximum number of extractions he could perform was 30. Which meant the number of his soldiers was currently 30....

Jin-Woo looked behind him.

The shadow soldiers had followed him even before he had noticed it and they were standing in attention.

'When did they?'

Perhaps fitting their title of 'shadow soldiers', they seemed to move around without making a single sound.

Whatever the case might have been, if he wanted to extract Igrit's shadow, he had to get rid of one of these guys, just as the System had alluded to.

'But....'

It had only been a short while, yet when he thought about them being his soldiers, he kind of didn't want to dismiss any one of them.

Did he get attached to them already?

With a rueful, unwilling expression, Jin-Woo slowly scanned each and every one of his shadow soldiers. As his eyes swept past the soldiers, their names and levels appeared before his view.

[Shadow Infantryman Lv. 1]

Regular grade

[Shadow Infantryman Lv. 1]

Regular grade

Everyone possessed the same name and level.

'Oh well, their origins were exactly the same, so...'

But then, he discovered three somewhat different-coloured soldiers right at the back of the infantrymen.

'Are those....?'

Unlike the regular infantrymen, these guys were wearing robes.

[Shadow Magic Soldier Lv. 1]

Elite grade

"Oh."

He quickly figured out what they were.

The three mages that were controlling the Iron Golem must've been revived as undeads as well when he gave out his 'Rise up' command just now.

'So, 27 infantrymen and three mages, eh?'

This was why being 'rare' was a good thing. He excluded the low-numbered mages and selected the closest infantryman from him to cancel the extraction.

...And he was really sorry about this.

"Extraction Cancellation."

Phush...

The soldier turned into black smoke and scattered in the air. Not even a trace remained of it.

'.....'

Jin-Woo gazed at the spot of the disappeared soldier for a little while with an apologetic expression, before shifting his attention back to Igrit.

His preparation was complete.

He even had to sacrifice one of his wonderful soldiers just so he could turn Igrit into a shadow. So, he simply had to see some results here.

Time to act while the sun still shone.

Jin-Woo tried the extraction right away.

“Rise up.”

When he did that, the shadow cast beneath Igrit began to wiggle as if it came to life. It was the same reaction as when he extracted the shadows from the knights just now.

‘Okay, good!’

Jin-Woo clenched his fists tightly. He had a good feeling about this.

[Shadow Extraction has commenced.]

[Attempting to extract....]

What would Igrit look like after its extraction? Jin-Woo’s hands became slick with the sweat of anticipation.

Unfortunately...

Ting!

A mechanical beep akin to a metal plate breaking in half rang inside his head.

[Shadow Extraction has failed.]

“What?!”

[Two more attempts remaining.]

“Whew-woo....”

Hearing that he still had more chances remaining, Jin-Woo spat out a long sigh of relief.

‘Hang on, now that I think about it....’

The skill’s explanation definitely said that the odds of extraction failure would rise up depending on the target’s Stat values.

But having experienced it personally, he couldn’t help but be dumbfounded. It felt like he got slapped in the back of his head, this taste of

his first failure.

Not only that, there was a restriction on the number of attempts he could try, too.

‘So, I have two more attempts remaining....’

If he failed in both attempts, then did that mean Igrit’s shadow would disappear into that ‘nothingness’, just as the sacrificed infantryman did?

Imagining the worst possible scenario, he felt dizzy for a second. Jin-Woo quickly shook his head to clear his mind.

‘Let’s stop thinking negatively about this.’

Indeed, only positive thoughts...

Didn’t someone say that if you believed earnestly enough, the universe would find a way to help you out?

While stewing inside anxiety and anticipation, Jin-Woo attempted the extraction for the second time.

“Rise up.”

Too bad, his expectation was shot down grandly once more.

Ting!

[Shadow Extraction has failed.]

[One more attempt remaining]

‘.....’

This guy gave him so much trouble while it was still alive, and even in death, it was managing to give him some serious headaches.

And here he was, hoping against hope.

Now that he had failed twice in a row, his vision seemed to have blurred, everything looking a bit bleak.

“Fuu.....”

Jin-Woo deeply inhaled and exhaled his breath.

There were no more attempts remaining after this. He had only one more shot left. Jin-Woo closed his eyes and reorganised his thoughts.

‘Well, it could be nothing more than percentages and odds, but....’

But, it was possible that his desire to possess Igrit’s shadow wasn’t earnest or strong enough.

Jin-Woo slowly reopened his eyes.

He sensed the black smoke rising up from Igrit reaching out to him, pleading with him to save it. Jin-Woo became a lot more serious than before.

And he reached out with his right hand as if to grab that pleading hand of the smoke.

“Rise up.”

He didn't do it deliberately; he himself didn't quite realise it then, but Jin-Woo's voice sounded much heavier and graver than ever before and it reverberated throughout the boss room.

It was then!

Uwaaahhh-!!

A deep scream could be heard coming from somewhere, and chilling, eerie wind swept by the boss room.

‘Isn't this it...?’

Jin-Woo's expression brightened.

He remembered encountering a similar situation like this one before.

...Back when his infantrymen first popped out from the shadows.

Aaaaah-!

Just as he hoped for, as the lengthy scream came to an end, a long black hand emerged out from the shadow. And when that hand pressed down on the ground, a new message popped up in his view.

[Shadow Extraction was a success.]

Jin-Woo let out a cry of happiness.

“Yes!!”

He tightly clenched his fists. The taste of success was so much sweeter since he had to go through two failures to get here.

However, the good news didn't end there.

[The sovereign's voice had awakened the departed's fighting spirit.]

[You have succeeded in strengthening your shadow soldier.]

[The shadow's level will now start at 7.]

‘I succeeded in strengthening? What?’

A shadow's starting level could be higher than 1?

Jin-Woo's eyes widened once more. Just as the message said, the black knight emerging from the shadow carried 'level 7' in its status.

"Mm!!"

Jin-Woo spat out a short gasp.

The newly-emerged shadow looked exactly as it was in his memories.

The mane attached to the helm; the highly-fashionable armour wrapped around its entire body; that noble, dignified cape.

The only difference being that the blood-like armour now sported a pitch-black colour, instead. Everything else was exactly the same.

He'd have probably believed it if someone told him that Igrit had returned to life just now.

However...

'.....'

The newly-born Igrit didn't display a single hint of animosity towards him. No, it just stood there quietly, waiting for Jin-Woo to give it a new order.

Thump, thump.

Hin-Woo's heart began pounding in excitement as he stared at Igrit. And there was a big grin etched on his face. Even though his heart was palpitating, there was something he was curious about.

Jin-Woo's gaze shifted just above Igrit's head.

'Why doesn't this guy have a name?'

[?? Lv. 7]

Knight grade

For some strange reason, there was a couple of question marks instead of its name.

'And its grade is also different.'

He understood that its level was high because of that strengthening thing, but still, this guy exhibited quite a few differences from the regular infantrymen.

Perhaps it read Jin-Woo's mind, because the System sent him a new message with excellent timing.

Tti-ring.

[You can bestow a name to a knight grade soldier.]

[The bestowed name will be maintained until the shadow soldier is dismissed.]

[Please set the soldier's name.]

'A name, is it?'

At first, he was at a loss with this unexpected demand, but soon enough, he recalled that this 'guy' already had a name and a smile crept up on his face. There should be no problem calling it by its original name, no?

[Please set the soldier's name.]

The message blinked as if to urge him on with the naming already.

Jin-Woo opened his mouth.

"Igrit the Cri...."

No, hang on a minute.

When the System asked him to set the name, it meant that he'd have to use that name to call this guy from here onwards. So, didn't that also mean that he'd have to call it Igrit the blah-blah all the time from now on?

Just thinking about that gave him a nasty case of goosebumps.

'.....That's way too cringey.'

In the end, he decided to shorten the name somewhat.

"Igrit."

[Will you set the name as 'Igrit'?]

"That's right."

As soon as Jin-Woo spoke, the question marks on the guy's head disappeared and the name Igrit appeared there.

[Igrit Lv. 7]

Knight grade

All he did was to simply give it its original name, yet Jin-Woo still felt like he had accomplished something pretty amazing. He was filled with contentment, knowing that this guy was his loyal soldier now.

'My own loyal soldier, eh....'

Jin-Woo took a look behind him.

29 shadow soldiers were still there, waiting for his orders.

For now, the number was too small.

‘Only 30, huh....’

Either this was because the skill level of ‘Shadow Extraction’ was too low, or because his Intelligence Stat hadn’t been raised high enough yet.

But, he was sure of one thing, and that was the number of his soldiers would gradually swell up.

‘Yup, I really have myself a new army.’

Not only that, they weren’t some skeletons and corpses, but an army of shadows.

Now, there was only one problem remaining.

And that was how he’d walk around with these guys. Now that gave him a bit of a headache.

‘Doesn’t matter skeletons or shadows....’

It’d be way too eye-catching if these guys freely walked around in the streets.

Would that be all?

This skill was already way past regular people accepting it as one of the many awakened abilities a Hunter could possess.

Either he’d be under the constant surveillance, or worse, someone might even demand him to dismiss the summoning, too.

‘Woo Jin-Cheol, the section chief of the Monitoring Division, the Korean Hunter’s Association....’

Thinking about how stuffy-looking guys like that man would come around every day and annoy him to no end in the future, Jin-Woo felt like he’d die from frustration already.

That was precisely why the next skill existed, probably.

‘Skills.’

Jin-Woo summoned his Skill Window.

[Class-specific skills]

Active skills:

The skill he only checked its name and nothing else until now.

The ‘Shadow Storage’.

That name alone made him think that this skill would help him out in these sorts of situations.



Chapter 54

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

[Skill: Shadow Storage Lv. 1]

Class-specific skill.

Mana required to activate: None.

Stores the shadow soldiers inside the summoner's shadow.

The stored soldiers can be summoned back into the open or absorbed back at any time the summoner chooses to.

Number of stored shadow soldiers: 0/20

'I knew it.'

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Since the skill's name had the word 'storage' in it, he expected it to have something to do with storing away the soldiers. Unfortunately, there was a part that proved to be completely out of his expectations.

'How come the number is....'

The number of soldiers he could store was noticeably lower than those he could create.

Indeed, he could create 30, yet he could only store 20. Meaning, he had to unsummon 10 more.

'Now this sucks.'

Just which finger out of the ten in your hands wouldn't hurt when you bite them? Just discarding one made his heart bleed, but now, he had to discard ten??

'Hmm....'

Jin-Woo stared at the soldiers with a rather lonely expression on his face.

Obviously, the knight-grade Igrit was excluded.

Three 'magic soldiers' were also excluded, since they would be harder to replace and also fewer in numbers.

At the end of the day, the most disposable remained the infantrymen. Last

time, he chose the one closest to him, so this time, he chose the ten that were furthest away from him and cancelled their summoning.

‘Sorry.’

He prayed for their happiness in the afterlife, and then....

Poof...

In the blink, those ten soldiers turned into dust and disappeared from this world.

Thankfully, his heart didn't ache as badly as the first time. Did the wise old 'they' mean this by saying that the first time was always the hardest?

In any case...

Jin-Woo took one last look at the soldiers and activated the Shadow Storage.

When he did that, all the shadow soldiers, including Igrit, all returned to being shadows, as if they were melting like an ice cube caught in extremely high temperatures. Those shadows all gathered beneath his feet next.

‘So, this is that absorbing into my shadow thing....!’

It was as the label said; the shadows were absorbed into Jin-Woo's shadow. It happened so quickly, too.

All of his soldiers disappeared without a trace in less than a blink of an eye.

‘...I'm the one who did it, yet I can hardly believe it myself.’

Utterly amazed now, Jin-Woo continued to stare at his own shadow.

It was then.

As if it was waiting for this, the mechanical beeps resounded out one after the other.

Tti-ring.

[You have experimented with all the class-specific skills.]

[Class Change has been now concluded.]

[Exit Gate will now be generated.]

‘So, it's finally over, huh....’

What a long and difficult road this was.

Jin-Woo scanned the interior of the boss room, his eyes full of reminiscence. The evidence of fierce battle could be seen everywhere.

Broken-down knights; walls with cracks on them; a shattered stone pillar. And the Iron Golem responsible for shattering that very pillar, now nothing more than a scrap heap.

However, as the compensation for his struggles, he was now walking away with so much profit.

A new Class and skills, several other important things besides those, as well as powerful new allies.

A wide grin naturally floated up on his lips.

Without hesitation, Jin-Woo turned around. The Gate connecting to the outside world was quietly waiting for him as if to congratulate him on his successful adventure.

When he took a step outside, the surroundings changed in an instant. And he was back in the empty lot of the local mountainside. It was none other than the very spot where he initiated his Class Change Quest.

The time indicated was five in the morning. It was already time for the sunrise.

‘Oops.’

Jin-Woo clicked his tongue while confirming the time.

‘If I knew the quest would end up taking this long to complete, I should’ve left a message for Jin-Ah earlier.’

What a relief then, that he’d often come home late from raids taking longer than expected, back when he was working for the Association.

Jin-Woo took one last look behind him. But the Gate he exited from just now was already gone without a trace.

‘Huh....’

When looking at the spot where the Gate used to be, it kind of felt like he had woken up from a long dream.

Was it a dream?

No, that wasn’t possible.

Jin-Woo scanned his immediate vicinity.

The soldiers decked out in pitch-black armours – as soon as he thought about them, they rapidly emerged from his shadow.

‘.....’

At first, he simply thought of them as nothing more than monsters.

The shadow soldiers...

The monsters that stepped out from the shadows of the dead after they were summoned by him.

However, if these things were monsters, then just what should the guy who could freely control them be called now?

Jin-Woo smirked softly.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter one way or the other....’

Jin-Woo stored the soldiers back into his shadow.

He noticed that his steps going down the mountain were rather light and cheery.

Jin-Woo slept until late in the day. But, that couldn’t be helped. By the time he got back home, the sun had risen up pretty high already.

Ring~ ring~

Jin-Woo’s sweet slumber was eventually disrupted by the ringtone from his smartphone. His hand fumbled around near his head and with some difficulty, located his phone.

“H-Hello?”

His voice cracked up from his dry throat.

Jin-Ah’s shocked voice came out from the speaker. So, he asked her back.

“Okay, what time is it now?”

“Eh? What?”

He glanced at the time on the phone’s screen with half-open eyes. She was telling the truth.

Her voice sounded anxious.

Jin-Woo finally raised his upper body, albeit very slowly.

“What time should I get there at the latest?”

“I won’t be late, so don’t worry.”

Jin-Ah switched on her charm attack and ended the call soon afterwards.

Scratch, scratch....

Jin-Woo scratched his unkempt hair for a bit before slowly getting up from the bed. He didn’t have a lot of time left if he were to get ready.

‘Well, I’m going to meet my sister’s homeroom teacher after all.’

Not only that, this teacher would be in charge of her third year in high school, one of the most important periods in a person’s life.

‘So, I can’t just wear whatever now, right?’

He opened the closet and rummaged through the clothes in there. However, he was greeted by a rather dusty, mouldy odour.

Of course, it was not something pleasant to smell at all.

Jin-Woo’s frown deepened.

He continued to dig around, but all he could find was an old business suit he wore once during his own high school graduation.

‘Will it even fit me now?’

He was hoping against hoping but well, as expected – the clothes were too snug and he couldn’t even move his arms.

‘Yup, my body has grown much bigger lately.’

Putting on the old clothes painted a stark picture of his current reality. The suit was nearly bursting at the seams, literally.

...What should he do now?

Jin-Woo was pondering what to do, but then he spotted the bank book that Yu Jin-Ho gave him a day before. It was for the account filled with the proceeds from selling off all those magic crystals.

He alternated his gaze between his nearly-torn clothes and the bank book with its new stamp still sealed together, before a smile formed on his lips.

‘Been a while, but should I go on a shopping spree, then?’

Before that, though, there was this small thing he had to confirm first.

Actually, it was a bit bigger than that, but still.

Jin-Woo took off the old business suit and while sitting on the edge of the bed, summoned his Status Window.

‘Stats.’

With that, a long board full of letters and numbers appeared before his eyes.

Tti-ring.

[Name: Seong Jin-Woo]

[Level: 51]

[Class: Shadow Sovereign]

[Title: Slaughterer of Wolves (extra 1)]

[HP: 11035]

[MP: 1022]

[Tiredness: 0]

[Stats]

Strength: 132

Stamina: 91

Agility: 111

Intelligence: 70

Perception: 93

(Available points to distribute: 10)

Reduction in physical damage: 46%

[Skills]

Passive skills:

Active skills:

[Class-specific skills]

Active skills:

[Equipped items]

(TL note: the author forgot to put ‘Ruler’s Reach’ in the Skills column. I left it as is.)

“Huh...”

Jin-Woo could only chuckle wryly as his Status Window seemed to go on forever and ever.

‘It was only a short while ago that there was nothing on this section over here.’

Indeed, there had been a time like that once. But now, just from looking at his skills and equipped items, his head grew fuzzy.

Even then, his Class still managed to snag his attention for sure.

[Class: Shadow Sovereign]

This column used to be ‘None’ only yesterday.

To be honest, he was kind of bothered by that word whenever he had to look at his Status Window. The reason for that was, naturally, the word that came before that ‘None’ being his ‘Class’.

If a Hunter was not participating in a raid, he’d be no different than a jobless bum. That’s what most others would think, anyway.

But then, he had to keep looking at the ‘No job’ in the Status Window where his Stat values were recorded, so how could he not feel bothered by it? (TL note at the end)

They said that once you got shocked by a turtle, you’d keep getting frightened by the pot lids; whenever he took a look at his Class column in the past, he couldn’t help but feel a bit frustrated.

He knew that it didn’t really mean his job status, but he still felt quite bothered by it. However, from today onwards, he didn’t have to mind such things anymore.

“Hahaha!”

Jin-Woo chuckled out uncontrollably.

‘Yup, this must be what they call an inferiority complex, isn’t it?’

If he made lots of money like other Hunters, he wouldn’t have really cared about what others thought of his life outside of raiding dungeons.

But he couldn’t do that.

He couldn’t confidently reveal his status as a Hunter to anyone. Because, he was a measly rank E who could barely protect his own life, that was why.

‘I’m a rank E Hunter.’

Whenever he said those words....

Anyone with some knowledge of Hunters would always say that he was doing something very difficult for everyone’s sakes, but they would start mocking him when his back was turned.

That was why he ended up minding it even more than necessary.

But now, he was the possessor of a really cool job – no, a really special trait. His job still remained as a Hunter, of course.

If he were to describe it, then.... well, it’d be more correct to say that he now possessed a special trait of ‘Shadow Sovereign’.

‘Although this wasn’t the career path I was looking for....’

But, he had no regrets. No, rather than regrets, he was completely and utterly satisfied by how things had turned out.

If this wasn’t his room, he’d have summoned Igrit and the other soldiers right away. He really wanted to confirm the combat capabilities of his summons with his own eyes.

What if these guys were able to display 100% of their combat prowess while they were still alive?

‘I’m sure that won’t be the case, though.’

Still, just imagining it made his heart race.

Thump, thump...

Jin-Woo felt his heart beating roughly as he ran several simulations of future raids in his head.

Suddenly, he became really curious about how Yu Jin-Ho would react.

Smirk.

When Jin-Woo imagined seeing Yu Jin-Ho’s round, stunned eyes and his slack jaw falling to the floor, a chuckle automatically leaked out of his mouth.

‘Wait, now that I think about it....’

If he could transform any dead lifeforms into his soldiers, and if the targets weren’t restricted to only monsters, then....

‘Does that mean I can extract shadows from the dead Hunters, too?’

It was quite obvious, but he didn’t want to picture such a situation since he was talking about another human being here.

An undead soldier, emerging from the shadow of a dead person after hearing his call....

Just thinking about it gave him chills.

Even then... even still....

‘What if I extract the shadow of an A or an S rank Hunter?’

The combat potential of the resulting shadow soldier would simply be out of this world.

Even if a shadow soldier could only exhibit 50% of its original strength, it’d be eminently possible to solo high-ranked dungeons, as long as he had his shadows to back him up.

His beating heart picked up its pace really quick.

Thump, thump, thump!!

Still, Jin-Woo shook his head.

‘Even if that’s the case, turning a person into an undead is a bit...’

...Now that was something only a villain would do.

His combat potential might improve that way, but he didn’t want to go that far. Unless a really evil b*stard showed up that was worthy of such a treatment, he’d definitely not go down that route.

‘However, it’s not like opportunities to fight other dirty Hunters would come around every day, right?’

And, even if he did find that elusive opportunity, there would be many hurdles to overcome first. Well, a human wasn’t a monster, to begin with, after all.

Indeed.

For the time being, he had to be satisfied with the current soldiers.

‘Besides, I have Igrit and he used to be a boss, so that’s something.’

The level 7 knight-grade shadow soldier.

Just how good would its abilities be?

Jin-Woo couldn’t wait for the next raid.



Chapter 55 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo lowered his gaze slightly while feeling rather pleased with himself, then he spotted something else in the Status Window.

[Title: Slaughterer of Wolves (extra 1)]

‘.....There was another one?’

....Oh.

Now that he thought about it, he did earn a new ‘Title’ as well during the Class Change Quest, didn’t he?

Jin-Woo checked out the hidden title’s description.

[Title: The One Who Overcame the Adversity]

A Title only given to those who have splendidly overcome their adversity. Your Stat values will rise as your HP decreases. (1% of lost HP = 1% gain in Stats)

‘Hell yeah!’

It was a truly wonderful buff where his Stats would rise up as his HP was decreased.

The Title ‘Slaughterer of Wolves’ was a wonderful Title as well that would give him a 40% Stats increase against any and all beast-type monsters. However, because there was a strict activation condition attached to it, he often had to do without receiving the Stat buff.

‘It’s the same thing as not having a Title if I’m not fighting against beast-type monsters.’

But now, he had gotten a new Title with a wonderful effect. After reading the description, he thought that this Title’s effect would match up quite nicely with his passive, ‘Tenacity’.

Without wasting any more time, Jin-Woo changed his Title.

[Title: The one who overcame the adversity (extra 1)]

The Title he didn’t set would be hidden, and if he needed it, he could swap them at any time, too.

‘ up, it’s my Stats.’

The rewards he got for exceeding the point limits of his Class yesterday were three.

One, his Class changed to a higher-grade version; two, a new Title; finally, bonus Stat points.

[Stats]

Strength: 132

Stamina: 91

Agility: 111

Intelligence: 70

Perception: 93

(Available points to distribute: 10)

Reduction in physical damage: 46%

He still had ten points yet to be allocated. If it was in the past, he’d have spent them all in Agility or Perception, but things were different now.

Jin-Woo dumped all ten points in Intelligence, instead.

Even then, his Intelligence value only reached 80.

Tti-ring.

[Stats]

Strength: 132

Stamina: 91

Agility: 111

Intelligence: 80

Perception: 93

(Available points to distribute: 0)

Reduction in physical damage: 46%

Compared to Strength or Agility, it simply fell way, way behind. As a matter of fact, it even fell behind Stamina, the Stat he decided to put on the back burner while raising his Agility first.

It was clear proof that he had been looking down on the Intelligence Stat until now.

‘Well, I never guessed that I’d somehow end up using magic, so it’s understandable.’

For the time being, he decided to invest every single bonus Stat point he earned into Intelligence. He wasn’t planning to change how he fought in the meantime, though.

‘I mean, the new skills I got are assassination type skills, after all.’

A new skill he acquired during the fierce battle – the dagger throw. He didn’t even have to take a gander at the skill description to know that it was a dagger-exclusive skill.

[Skill: Dagger Throw Lv. 1]

Active skill.

Required Mana to activate: 30

Exclusive to daggers.

Causes damage by throwing your dagger. The higher the level, the greater the damage inflicted, as well as the accuracy.

‘Yup. I knew it.’

He had been fighting his battles as a close-quarter melee fighter. He wouldn’t change his current fighting style, just because he got himself a new Class and a couple of new skills related to that.

So, he was planning to use the shadow skills as his back-up, while the dagger would remain as his primary means of attack.

‘Well, at least until I manage to raise my Intelligence Stat to a somewhat more useful level, that is.’

Excellent combat abilities. And soldiers able to support him from behind.

The plan he formed in his head as he got his new Class hadn’t changed.

‘But, if there is one difference from my initial expectations, then that would be....’

That would be his soldiers potentially being a lot more useful than he thought. Who could’ve guessed that he was able to turn boss-level monsters into his underlings?

‘...Still.’

He felt that it’d be a bit of waste not to utilise his proficiency with daggers and the skills related to that if he were to rely solely on his shadows to fight.

Also, he bought the Knight Killer only a few hours ago, too.

'If I knew I'd end up as a mage-type, maybe I should've bought a magic staff or something.'

Of course, if he did that, he wouldn't have cleared the quest and ended up being buried under the knights, instead.

Jin-Woo closed the Status Window. With that done, he pretty much had confirmed every change that occurred to him.

'Wait a sec. What's the time now?'

While he was doing his thing, 20 minutes had flown by. Jin-Woo scratched the side of his head.

'I guess I should hurry up, huh.'

The corners of Jin-Woo's lips arched up.

The power of his enhanced Stats didn't prove to be effective only when fighting against monsters.

When he concentrated, time slowed down. To be more precise, it was Jin-Woo who had gotten quicker, however.

He opened the door and left his room.

He entered the bathroom and took a quick shower.

He swiftly wiped the water off of him.

He put on whatever clothing he could find and stood before the mirror.

All this, and he only needed three minutes.

He could've moved faster, but he figured that this old, decrepit apartment would fall apart if he did.

'My hair hasn't completely dried out yet, but...'

The end result was him saving over 20 minutes, so there was no need to rush now.

Time to leave, then.

Jin-Woo was about to step out of his room, but discovered something and stopped in his tracks. He found the key for the apartment. It was sitting on top of his desk.

In the past, he'd have felt a bit lazy and unwilling, but still turned back to grab the key; however, he simply extended his hand instead of walking over there.

‘I mean, if I don’t use it in times like this, just when will I ever get to use this skill?’

The Ruler’s Reach!

The key crept forward bit by bit, before flying into his open palm as if a strong magnet was reeling it in.

Grab!

Jin-Woo snatched the key and grinned refreshingly.

Having gotten ready to leave in the proverbial blink of an eye, Jin-Woo closed the door to his room, a whistle escaping from his lips.

Jin-Woo’s first stop was at the bank.

He was wondering just how much cash from the sales of the magic crystals had accumulated in his new bank account.

‘I couldn’t come earlier because I’ve been so busy until now.’

As the raid team leader, Yu Jin-Ho was in charge of managing the magic crystals.

From what he told Jin-Woo, that kid had been selling all the magic crystals at the end of each day and deposited every single cent into this account.

He didn’t mention in detail how much the money would be, though.

‘That Jin-Ho. He reports to me every little thing that happens, but he doesn’t really mention much about money issues.’

Was it because he wasn’t really interested all that much? Perhaps because he grew up lacking nothing, Yu Jin-Ho’s interests were quite far removed from the matters involving money.

No, they tended to be along the lines of celebrity gossip, stories of raids, songs or movies he liked – those kinds of things.

Even if it was nominally a conversation, it’d be Yu Jin-Ho who yapped on and on all by himself, though. And Jin-Woo would simply listen quietly on the side and provide appropriate responses every now and then.

‘Ah, now that I think about it...’

A chatterbox guy like him also didn’t say anything about his family situation until now.

Now that was pretty strange. Jin-Woo combed through his memories starting from when they met for the first time, but he couldn’t remember a single instance of him mentioning his family.

While thinking that it was pretty bizarre, he had arrived at the bank.

‘Well now, that’s some crappy timing, isn’t it?’

All of the ATMs were currently under maintenance.

He was left with little choice, so Jin-Woo walked inside the bank branch. He got his number in the queue, waited for his turn, before eventually sitting down in front of a bank teller.

“Hello there.”

A female teller with a bob-cut hair reaching just below her ears and a refreshing smile asked him politely.

“How may I be of service today?”

“I’d like to see the amount currently in the bank account, please.”

“I understand.”

With a smile, the female teller took the bank book Jin-Woo presented to her.

While waiting for her to do her thing, Jin-Woo scanned the inside of the bank. It was a normal Thursday afternoon, yet there were quite a large number of people inside.

As he continued to look at the crowd, the female teller got to confirm the amount resting in Jin-Woo’s account and her eyes shot open super-wide.

‘Heok!!’

[Remaining amount: ₩1,482,920,000] (TL: Just over \$1.315 mil)

She checked the number of digits again, but without a doubt, it started from a billion.

Not only that, he hadn’t even accumulated this amount over a long period of time.

For the past week or so, the records showed that over 100 million Won had been deposited every single day.

‘He looks so young, so how could he?’

The female teller initially took Jin-Woo as a university student who came to the local bank to get the bank book newly printed on because his mother asked him to. But, her expression had changed quite a bit now.

The female teller asked him, her voice containing just a sliver of ulterior motive.

“Oh, my goodness. May I ask, what you do for a living?”

Perhaps she herself was embarrassed by her own ulterior motive, the female bank teller’s cheeks blushed softly as she cautiously studied Jin-Woo’s reactions.

He replied as if it was nothing.

“I’m a Hunter.”

“Ah....”

The female teller slowly nodded her head almost instinctively.

The popular rumour she heard was indeed true.

‘I heard that Hunters made lots of money, but....’

But to think, it’d be on this level....

All of a sudden, her life as a normal working-class employee came across as rather pathetic.

Only until a minute ago, this man was a regular customer, just like everyone else. But now, Jin-Woo looked like a person from another galaxy altogether.

‘He must be a pretty high ranked Hunter, right?’

This amount wasn’t something an average Hunter with average skills could ever hope to touch.

This would be her first time meeting a truly high-ranked Hunter, then.

The unexpectedness of this situation caused her heart to palpitate just a bit faster.

Thump, thump....

Her heart was indeed beating a bit quicker now.

A young customer possessing well over a billion Won in cash would certainly be a VIP in the eyes of the bank. And well, that customer was a Hunter, so he should be treated as a VVIP, instead.

And so, in order to ensure that this VVIP wouldn’t slip through the bank’s fingers, the female employee began advertising several of the bank’s financial products.

“Our bank has launched brand new products and services especially catered for VIP customers such as yourself.”

Her smile was no longer the business one, but a real one, too. The female

bank teller's gaze was now firmly fixed on Jin-Woo.

'Oh, my. He's....'

Seeing his current appearance, the one where he must have thrown on some clothes lying around, and that slightly dishevelled hair, her heart began beating faster than ever before. She realised that he must've been a very busy man who managed to find some free time to stop by the bank today.

"This product has proven really popular with our customers lately, so how about taking a closer look at the benefits it offers, sir?"

Too bad for her, Jin-Woo refused right away.

"No, thank you. I'm fine."

"Ah.... is that so?"

The female bank teller's voice was thickly laden with regrets over missed chances.

Sensing that this chat might get drawn out if he said something wrong here, Jin-Woo quickly took the bank book and stood up from the seat.

"Thank you for your help. Have a nice day."

He made his quick getaway from the bank as the hot stares from the female bank teller continued to bear down on his back.

As soon as the bank's door closed behind him...

"Fuu...."

Jin-Woo spat out a sigh of relief.

He picked up on the change in the bank teller's expression the moment he revealed his job as a Hunter.

Attentions of strangers, and their interests.

It would probably be something normal for other Hunters, but it was still something new to Jin-Woo.

'Well, I better get used to it now.'

The attention on him would get even worse than this, once he's gone through with the re-assignment test and gets a super-high rank.

He heard that there were quite a few reporters and fans following around particular Hunters as well.

He raised his head slightly and saw a large electronic billboard displaying a cold drink advert featuring a famous Hunter, attached to the side of a

skyscraper.

Before Gates appeared in the world, one would've found top sports stars or popular idols occupying that position.

That's right.

This was the age where a Hunter would be at the receiving end of more attention and adulation than a celebrity. Even Jin-Woo wouldn't be an exception now.

The only person who didn't like Hunters nowadays were probably employees of various insurance companies.

'Besides all that.'

Only after he made his escape from the bank did he get to confirm the amount in the account. And his eyes grew real wide afterwards.

'1.48 billion....?!'

The total amount of money he earned after participating in nine raids was almost 1.5 billion Won. Meaning, each rank C dungeon netted him almost 160 million Won.

He got around 180 million from the dungeon he raided with Hwang Dong-Seok and Co. So, the average amount per rank C Gate he got was somewhere between 150 and 200 million each raid.

'Yup, that's why that bank teller was so shocked, wasn't it....'



Chapter 56 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Now that he was done confirming his financial status....

Jin-Woo splurged on a nice-looking business suit at a department store. He still found himself with more than enough free time, so he stopped by a hair salon nearby and got a much-needed haircut as well.

“Hmm.”

He had transformed into someone completely different compared to when leaving the apartment.

‘This is why having money is way better than not having any.’

And they said that good clothes would become one’s wings, too

Jin-Woo stopped by the front of a shop’s window on the street and checked out his reflection for a bit, before shrugging his shoulders.

His preparation was as perfect as it could get.

‘I’m sure I won’t leave behind a bad first impression.’

He adjusted his clothes for a bit, before confirming the time through his phone. It said 16:20.

‘I’m supposed to get there before five, right?’

If he got going now, he should arrive on time.

“Taxi!”

Jin-Woo grabbed a taxi and arrived in front of Jin-Ah’s school, with enough time to spare. And as luck would have it, he spotted Jin-Ah standing by the school’s front gate.

“Seong Jin-Ah-!”

Discovering her older brother belatedly, she gasped out in pure shock.

“Oppa??”

Jin-Ah’s eyes became extra round like a rabbit’s as she asked cautiously.

“Are.... are you really Mister Seong Jin-Woo?”

“Can’t you recognise your own brother?!”

Jin-Ah swept her gaze all over Jin-Woo with a stunned expression still etched on her face, her voice naturally rising higher.

“It’s because you’ve changed so much, you know!”

“What, so you wanted me to show up in my tracksuit and slippers when meeting your new homeroom teacher?”

“Wow....”

Jin-Ah still couldn’t close her slack jaw.

“Hey, your chin might fall off at this rate. Anyways, I’m going ahead. Okay?”

Since his sister didn’t show any sign of guiding the way, Jin-Woo simply took the lead. Five years ago, Jin-Woo too was a student in this very school. He already knew its layout like the back of his hand.

Now normally, if teachers wanted to speak to the parents, then the meeting place would either be the staff room or at the counselling office. But today’s matter involved Jin-Ah’s future career path, so he should head to the counselling office.

And so, Jin-Woo’s steps quickened.

“O-Oppa! Wait for me!”

Jin-Ah hurriedly ran after her older brother.

“Hello there, teacher-nim.”

“Yes? Oh, uh, hello to you too.”

While on his way, Jin-Woo greeted several teachers he ran into. All of them stopped in their tracks without exception, and took a look behind them, at the departing back of Jin-Woo.

‘Who was that?’

‘Is he a graduate from this school? But, there’s no way I’d have forgotten about such an eye-catching student like that.’

‘Is he a new teacher?’

It wasn’t only the teachers who were looking at him, though.

“Wow, he’s good-looking, isn’t he?”

“Who is he?”

“Wait, isn’t that Jin-Ah next to him?”

“He must be Jin-Ah’s oppa. Wow, he’s pretty cool.”

A well-built frame and a stylish business suit – although his facial features were on the plain side, the synergy between those two points were powerful enough to attract the attention of the female students.

Too bad, the guy in question wasn't interested at all, though.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo simply let the girls' whisperings slip in one ear and slide right out the other. The one to get really psyched up was Jin-Ah, actually.

She perked her ears up and listened to the assessment of her brother coming from the surroundings in a fit of happy giggles. She then sneaked closer to Jin-Woo's side and lightly poked him on his waist with her elbow.

“Hiya~, oppa, you’re proving to be really popular today, wouldn’t you agree?”

He ignored this.

“Wait, now that I think about it, oppa, you still haven’t found a girlfriend yet, right?”

He also ignored this one.

“Should I, your trusty little sister, introduce you to a cute high school girl?”

And with that, Jin-Woo began pinching her cheeks with an emotionless face.

“Stop being cute, okay?”

“I’m... I’m sowwy....”

Jin-Woo eventually released her cheeks. Jin-Ah rubbed her reddened cheeks and pouted unhappily.

“Che. I know you also like the attention, though....”

Walking while lightly bickering amongst each other, they had arrived at the destination already. Jin-Ah ran past Jin-Woo and spun around in front of the counselling office.

“Oppa, we’re here.”

Just before entering the office, Jin-Woo looked at his sister. She wasn't budging from her spot.

“What about you?”

“Today’s the teacher and parents only. I’m going back to my class as

soon as you go inside.”

“Oh.”

Listening to Jin-Ah, he remembered something similar happening back when he was still a high-school senior. Back then, no one came, though.

‘It was around the time when it got harder and harder for mom to move around, right?’

His mother began to frequent the hospital right around then.

He feared that she might push herself too hard, so he didn’t tell her about the teacher-parent meeting. And he got to suffer from his homeroom teacher’s lectures for quite a while because of that.

When recalling those moments, he could understand the reason for Jin-Ah being so anxious today. Jin-Woo smiled gently and asked her.

“You having the night class today as well?”

“Ng. Oppa, don’t wait for me and go home first.”

“Okay.”

Jin-Woo sneak attacked her and rubbed her hair all out of shape.

“Study hard, okay? I’ll see you later.”

“Ah! Stop it!”

“See you later at home.”

Jin-Woo grinned and disappeared into the counselling office.

Jin-Ah’s cheeks puffed up as she smoothed her hair.

“Still treating me like a little kid....”

Of course, she didn’t display any hint of disliking that.

Maybe someone saw the whole thing? Jin-Ah quickly scanned her surroundings and confirmed that there was no one around her. She sighed in relief and trotted away to her class.

If he were to put into words the first impression he got from Jin-Ah’s homeroom teacher?

‘Mm....’

She kind of looked ‘generous’.

“You must be Jin-Ah’s oppa.”

She was a middle-aged teacher with a wizened look about her. The overall

impression she gave off was someone who could make other people feel better with a gentle and warm smile on her face.

She perhaps knew his story, because she wasn't surprised in the slightest to see Jin-Woo being here as Jin-Ah's guardian.

“How do you do? I'm Jin-Ah's homeroom teacher. I didn't quite expect Jin-Ah to be hiding someone this cool as her brother, to be honest. Ohoho.”

Having received her outgoing and welcoming words, Jin-Woo bowed his head politely as well.

‘I haven't seen her before.’

She must've started teaching after he graduated from this school.

Didn't someone say that a person's impression would be decided upon the first meeting? After sharing their greetings, he did feel a bit more relaxed.

‘Well, she's using polite speech to someone who's many years her junior, too.’

It seemed that his little sister's third year in high school wouldn't be that traumatic after all, since she was lucky enough to run into a pretty nice homeroom teacher.

“Please, take a seat over here.”

She showed him to a chair. Jin-Woo settled down on the opposite side to Jin-Ah's homeroom teacher across a large desk.

“We can rest easy about Jin-Ah now.”

They conversed for a while with typical topics that a homeroom teacher and parents would normally share, the atmosphere remaining cordial and rather cheery throughout the chat.

Since Jin-Ah was a model student, there was no reason for either Jin-Woo or the teacher to raise their voices at each other.

“Are you aware that Jin-Ah has set her sights on entering a medical school?”

“Yes, I am.”

The lady teacher began reading the prepared information.

“Her scores in the mock test are excellent. And her regular grades are very good as well, so she should get in without too much problem. Still, please make sure that you don't pressure her too much at home.”

Jin-Woo silently nodded his head.

From the teacher's excited face, one could easily spy her high expectations of Jin-Ah's future.

The thing was, the homeroom teachers tasked with looking after high school seniors were also under a tremendous level of stress as well. Since it involved the rest of these third-year students' lives, how could they not get stressed out?

'That's why I heard that most try to avoid being a senior class's homeroom teacher, though.'

Jin-Woo also heard that there were plenty of cases where male teachers simply dumped the responsibilities to their female counterparts. When considering that, then he could say that Jin-Ah's homeroom teacher was full of drive and passion for her students.

As Jin-Ah's guardian, Jin-Woo could only be grateful for that. Because drive and passion would mean she'd hold great 'interest' in the future of her students.

Maybe 15 minutes had passed by? The meeting was coming to a smooth end.

"Well then, if that's all...."

Jin-Woo studied the mood and was getting ready to leave, but then, the teacher cautiously spoke to him.

"I heard that you are a Hunter."

Suddenly, the teacher became quite serious.

There was something going on here. Jin-Woo immediately sensed it.

"Yes, I am."

"If.... If Jin-Ah is adjudged to be an Awakened, will you let her do Hunter's work as well?"

"Never."

He'd never allow her.

Jin-Woo decisively stated his position. There was no need to even reconsider this.

Exactly as he had suspected, there was something here and as proof, the teacher's expression became heavier still.

"As I thought...."

When Jin-Woo looked at her with a puzzled expression, the teacher spoke

in a determined tone of voice.

“If it’s not too much trouble, may I ask you for a favour?”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

“As long as it’s within my powers....”

He decided to hear her out first.

Well, she was his little sister’s homeroom teacher, so if he refused her outright without even listening to her once, he might leave behind a bad impression here.

Worried that Jin-Woo might change his mind, the teacher quickly opened her mouth.

“One of my students is thinking of quitting school to become a Hunter full time after she went through the Awakening process. She’s not even coming to school anymore, as a matter of fact.”

‘Aha.’

Such things were fairly common.

There would be cases where a few newly Awakened, having never experienced what real Hunters did, thought of themselves as someone special, a chosen, a cut above the rest, etc., without having the faintest idea how cruel reality could be.

...Even though there weren’t that many Awakened who went on to become famous Hunters and made lots of money in the world, though.

The teacher let off a long sigh.

“If she continues to miss school this way, then the management won’t have any choice but to act, you see? Even if she wishes to become a Hunter, wouldn’t it be better if she at least graduated from a high school first?”

Jin-Woo nodded his head in agreement. At his positive response, the teacher’s complexion brightened just a bit.

“Can you help me persuade that child so she gets to graduate safe and sound?”

The teacher did her best to smile.

Jin-Woo was curious about one thing here.

“That student... what was her Awakened rank?”

“From what I hear... it’s the lowest rank....”

In other words, a rank E.

‘...She won’t get to live long, then.’

Jin-Woo inwardly clicked his tongue.

That was the rank where one had to be especially careful about entering a dungeon.

If one entered with an overly-hyped mindset and without much preparation to boot, then one would become a cripple or dead almost without an exception.

Such a thing happening to a kid around the same age as his little sister was a sad thing. Unfortunately, at the end of the day, that choice was that girl’s to make. No one could say otherwise.

It was a rather lamentable thing indeed, but he didn’t feel like taking time out of his busy schedule to interfere in someone’s else life choices.

‘Besides, I’m not confident about persuading her, too.’

Surely, most of what he would say wouldn’t come across as nice things to hear, after all.

Jin-Woo was thinking of refusing the teacher and leaving.

However....

“Jin-Ah would recognise the child, because her name is...”

When the girl’s name came out from the teacher’s mouth, Jin-Woo realised that he couldn’t easily get up from his spot now.

Jin-Woo confirmed the girl’s name one more time.

“Teacher-nim. What was the name of the student again?”

“It’s... By any chance, you know who she is?” (TL: the girl’s name is omitted in the raw.)

“.....”

Yup, the Republic of Korea was indeed a tiny place.

‘Huh.’

Jin-Woo became rather speechless.

At the same time.

The private residence of Yu Myung-Hwan, the owner of Yujin Construction.

From early in the morning, countless expensive luxury vehicles continued to stream in.

There was only one reason for that.

It was for the ancestral rites ceremony for the first president of the Yujin Group, Yu Byung-Cheol, to be held later in the evening.

Yu Myung-Hwan was the number one in Korea's financial sector. And Yu Byung-Cheol was his father.

The eldest son, Yu Myung-Hwan made sure to perform the ceremony every single year, no matter how busy he was. And what with his influence being so great, every single relative found in the Yu family register had to gather in this place, without fail.

Every single guest happened to be a heavy hitter. And their children all happened to be the elites of the elite, too. With the sole exception of one.

And that exception had excused himself to the quiet and far removed corner of the proceedings, even though no one asked him to.

And he was none other than Yu Jin-Ho.

'I'm bored.'

He wished that time would move faster.

Going around raiding dungeons with his 'hyung-nim' was a hundred times, a thousand times more enjoyable than this.

What would hyung-nim be doing right about now?

Now that he thought about it for a second, he couldn't even begin to imagine just what hyung-nim would do during his off days.

And so... while thinking about useless stuff in a corner, out of everyone's gazes and throwing back blameless refreshments all the time....

...He heard a voice he didn't particularly want to hear today.

"Oii."

Well, sure enough.

A perfect model of how an upper-class elite of society should behave was standing behind Yu Jin-Ho. Anyone could see that he was utterly capable of pretty much anything, too.

A pair of expensive glasses; a tall, manly physique. He was none other than Yu Jin-Ho's biological older brother, Yu Jin-Seong.

The heir apparent who'd inherit Yujin Construction after Yu Myung-Hwan decides to step down in the future.

Yu Jin-Seong walked real close to Yu Jin-Ho and looked down on his younger brother.

“Relatives have come, so you should be out there greeting them. How long are you planning to act like a little kid?”

“...Whatever.”

“Do remember that your childish actions only paint our father’s reputation with dishonour.”

Yu Jin-Seong’s tone of voice did not contain a single trace of brotherly affection. No, it was rather openly dismissive.

Of course, Yu Jin-Ho didn’t like his older brother, but still, he lacked any courage to retort back here.

“...”

It couldn’t be helped, really.

Yu Jin-Seong was a genius among geniuses who managed to stand on the top of every subject he took on back in school. And it wasn’t just his excellent grades, either.

After graduating from school, he helped Yu Myung-Hwan in various business ventures and achieved incredible success in everything he touched.

Compared to him, Yu Jin-Ho didn’t have anything to show for. He barely managed to enter the university, for instance.

Whenever his older brother stood next to him, Yu Jin-Ho naturally grew small and insignificant.

“...”

“Still as pathetic as you can get. Tsk, tsk.”

Yu Jin-Seong frowned deeply while staring at Yu Jin-Ho’s lowered head, before changing his expression and walking away in hurried steps.

“Uncle!”

“Oh, Jin-Seong, is that you?”

Only after Yu Jin-Seong had gone away did Yu Jin-Ho raise his head back up. This was one of the reasons why he didn’t want to come home.

Only if there was no stupid ancestral rites ceremony thing....

Yu Jin-Ho spat out a lengthy groan, and that was when he heard a sexy but also rather sharp voice coming from right behind him.

“Wowers. What a jerk. Sucks the fun out of this place, that guy.”

Yu Jin-Ho looked behind him.

And he found his cousin/older sister by one year, Yu Soo-Hyun, standing there.



Chapter 57 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Did you hear what he just said? What a total jerk-face.”

Yu Soo-Hyun approached closer, before Yu Jin-Ho could react, and lightly tapped him on the shoulder.

Yu Soo-Hyun’s forehead creased up rather prettily.

“Look at you. C’mon now. Seriously? Tsk, tsk. Still so pathetic. Tsk, tsk.”

Yu Jin-Ho couldn’t suppress his laughter after seeing her imitate his older brother.

“Fuhup. Keuk. Stop that. I don’t feel like cracking jokes with you right now, you know.”

“Still so~~ pathetic. Tsk, tsk.”

“Keuh, hehehe.... Keuk! Argh, I’m telling you, stop it!”

Their ages were almost the same, so their relationship was more like that of really close friends.

Yu Soo-Hyun stood right in front of Yu Jin-Ho.

“Why do you keep acting like this, though?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, c’mon. You’re an Awakened now, right? Don’t tell me, you still can’t win against a regular person?”

“So what if I am? You think I’m gonna start throwing punches at my older brother or something?”

“Well, not really, no. But....”

Yu Soo-Hyun bit on her rather shapely lower lip.

Imagining the kind of punishment the patriarch of the family might saddle the poor Yu Jin-Ho with, if the latter did throw a knuckle sandwich to his much more successful older brother....

The prospect of that alone was quite terrifying, to say the least.

It wasn’t as if she didn’t understand Yu Jin-Ho’s inner thoughts while he

had to remain on the receiving end of the ridicule. Yu Soo-Hyun narrowed her eyes and glared in the direction that Yu Jin-Seong had disappeared to.

“Whatever. He’s still a stuck-up, no fun jerkoff, that guy.”

She too disliked Yu Jin-Seong as much as Yu Jin-Ho did. She just so happened to be one of the few people who knew what Yu Jin-Seong’s real personality was like, hidden beneath that fakey, smiley facade.

However, Yu Jin-Ho didn’t agree with her. It wasn’t because that guy was his older brother, no.

No, he simply wanted to win against his older brother in an upfront manner, not badmouth him from behind like this.

When Yu Jin-Ho kept his mouth shut, Yu Soo-Hyun cautiously asked him.

“Hey, so... that plan, is it still ongoing?”

“Mm?”

“You know, you said you’d become a Guild Master. At that guy’s expense.”

Instead of a reply, Yu Jin-Ho simply smiled.

Who’d believe him even if he said that out loud? It’d be a relief if no one mocked him or something. Him and his brother battling like that?

However, now that he held the huge ace called ‘hyung-nim’, the odds of his victory had risen up by quite a lot.

‘If I manage to get the Master licence....’

It’d be possible to duke it out with his older brother, then.

He might even win.

Yu Soo-Hyun saw the determination burning in Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes and spoke in no uncertain terms while placing her hands on her hips.

“I’d rather kill myself instead of working for that man. So, you do everything you can, okay? Cuz I don’t wanna fight your old man over this.”

“...Thanks.”

This was how Yu Soo-Hyun would usually cheer him on.

She was actually a rank A Hunter who started her career as a famous child actor.

Even with her background of being a lady or a chaebol was not taken into account, many Guilds still tried their darnedest to scout her because of her

rank and fame.

For some reason, though, she had refused all of their offers and continued to act as a model every now and then.

However, a new offer that she couldn't really refuse had arrived at her doorstep recently.

And that was to become one of the founding members of the soon-to-launch Yujin Guild. It was a direct order from the chairman himself, Yu Myung-Hwan.

She couldn't outright ignore the orders of the family patriarch, but she also didn't want to work for Yu Jin-Seong, either.

Yu Soo-Hyun herself had a lot to worry about now.

Although the kid was not all that trustworthy, she had little choice but to place her faith in Yu Jin-Ho.

Brrrr.... Brrr....

Hearing the sound of a phone vibrating coming from Yu Jin-Ho's pocket, Yu Soo-Hyun asked him.

"Aren't you going to answer that?"

"...Oh."

He was daydreaming about something else just then; he hurriedly pulled his phone out after it had been ringing for a while. The number appearing on the phone's screen was a familiar one.

[Hyung-nim]

Yu Jin-Ho's expression brightened up immediately after realising who it was.

"Hello, hyung-nim!"

He answered the call with an energetic voice.

"Yes? Yes, hyung-nim. No, I can be there, no problem. Yes. I'll be there shortly, hyung-nim."

Yu Jin-Ho ended the call there.

Yu Soo-Hyun displayed her interest after sensing Yu Jin-Ho's moods doing a 180.

"What the heck? Who was that?"

Too bad for her, this was absolutely not the time for him to stand around

leisurely explaining the situation to her. After all, didn't hyung-nim ask him for a favour just now?

And with the desire to escape from this place added on top, his mind could only think about leaving as soon as possible, even if it was only a second faster.

“Let’s talk later!”

Watching Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly run away, Yu Soo-Hyun's head tilted from side to side.

“And why is he so pumped up like that now?”

Every time he participated in a family meeting of some sort, Yu Jin-Ho always walked around with slumped shoulders, but it was a different story today.

“....How odd.”

Yu Soo-Hyun told herself to definitely interrogate the kid later.

While that was happening, Yu Jin-Ho was searching for his father.

It'd soon be dinner time. And Yu Jin-Ho couldn't be excused from the family gathering without his father's approval, especially when every single family member and relatives were present.

Yu Jin-Ho scanned his surroundings. And eventually, spotted his father over in the distance, conversing with some people.

He had a countenance of a tiger. His personality was just as strict, him never cracking a smile with matters he thought were insignificant.

For someone like Yu Jin-Ho, his father was a very difficult person to talk to.

‘And I haven’t even started yet....’

Yet, he was already getting nervous. But, he needed to be courageous here.

‘Yeah, well. I made a promise.’

Yu Jin-Ho took a couple of deep breaths and slowly walked to where his father was.

He almost turned around several times on his way, though. However, he held the urges back.

And finally, Yu Jin-Ho managed to arrive before his father, Yu Myung-Hwan.

“Father....?”

Their distance was a bit too far for a relationship between a father and a son, though.

Yu Myung-Hwan shifted his gaze over to Yu Jin-Ho.

“What do you want?”

Sensing the uncertain air, the people around Yu Myung-Hwan distanced themselves all at the same time as if they had a prior agreement.

“Father, will it be okay if I went out for a little while?”

Yu Jin-Ho’s voice lacked any discernible energy as he spoke to his father.

“I, I will return before dinner.”

“.....”

Yu Myung-Hwan stood there with an expression of someone getting ready to scold his disappointing son, but then, he let off a sigh and gave his permission, albeit quite unwillingly so.

“.....Fine. Go, but return on time.”

Yu Jin-Ho’s expression brightened and bowed his head.

“Thank you, father.”

He then ran out of there like a streak of lightning.

Yu Myung-Hwan stood there and looked at the back of Yu Jin-Ho with a stiff face. Meanwhile, his wife walked closer to him.

“Dear? I just got a call from Vienna.”

That was one of the messages he’d been eagerly waiting for. Yu Myung-Hwan immediately shifted his attention over to his wife.

“And the results of the concours are?”

“She won, of course. She’s our daughter, so it’s expected, really.”

A subtle smile formed on Yu Myung-Hwan’s face. But it disappeared without a trace before anyone had the chance to see it.

“Hmm. When will she be returning to Korea, then?”

“She says that she’s far too busy during the semester, but will come around once it ends.”

Yu Myung-Hwan frowned deeply.

“I told her to attend her grandfather’s ancestral ceremony regardless of

how busy she was.”

“Dear. Children nowadays don’t place much importance on such matters anymore.”

“Tsk, tsk.”

The madam of the Yu family carefully fixed Yu Myung-Hwan’s slightly out of shape tie and spoke to him intimately.

“Also, dear.... how about paying more attention to Jin-Ho?”

“You’re speaking about that again... A tiger is supposed to rear tiger cubs, not kittens.”

“Whether he’s a tiger or a kitten, he’s still my child. And your child, too.”

“Hmm.....”

“Did you notice? After his graduation from middle school, it was Jin-Ho’s first time smiling in front of you.”

Did he do that?

Yu Myung-Hwan fixed his gaze in the direction Yu Jin-Ho had disappeared to, his expression showing just the slightest hint of puzzlement.

But, that lasted only for a brief second.

Yu Myung-Hwan spoke dismissively.

“Maybe he found himself a girlfriend. Anyway, others must be waiting for us now. Let us go back inside.”

Inside the Hunter Association’s HQ, located in Seoul’s Guro-gu.

One of the Association’s employees was checking various equipment located within the building and came to a sudden stop in front of a miniature magic energy measuring equipment.

“What the hell? What’s wrong with this guy?”

The number on the display panel should’ve stayed ‘0’, yet the value was climbing up and down continuously. It was as if it had lost its mind.

However, this employee didn’t think too much about it. As these measuring equipments were very sensitive, they broke down more often than not.

“Hey, Kim Gun-Ah.”

“Yes, sir?”

A subordinate quickly jogged closer.

“How many Gates has this guy measured recently?”

“What is its serial number, sir?”

“It’s N-1744B.”

The subordinate scanned through the log, and nodded his head.

“Seven Gates, a couple of days ago.”

“A couple of days ago? Let me see.”

Indeed, it was the truth. Two days ago, this equipment measured the ranks of seven Gates, and out of them, four had been closed by the Hunters already.

“Were there any problems with the Gates this guy measured?”

“No, sir. I didn’t hear anything.”

“Oh, really?”

The senior employee slowly scratched the stubble on his chin.

Now normally, when magic measuring equipment like this one was found to be malfunctioning, the raid permits issued for all the Gates the faulty device had measured would be rescinded immediately.

It was an obvious thing if one thought about it; what would happen to Hunters who entered a Gate thinking that it was only a rank C, but it turned out to be A or B?

None of them would return alive and in one piece.

High ranked dungeons were such places.

Just as the boundary between lower ranked Hunters and higher ranked ones were crystal-clear and impossible to bridge, the differences between the higher ranked dungeons and lower ranked ones were also quite humongous.

It was not for nothing that high ranked dungeons were all dealt with exclusively by the large Guilds until now.

‘Should I send out notices now?’

Letting others know wasn’t all that difficult.

However, never mind the discontent voices of anger coming from the teams that paid for the permits, taking more time to measure the Gates again could mean that a dungeon break might occur in the meantime. And if that happened, the Association wouldn’t be able to dodge the pointed criticism flying in their way.

Hell, if things went wrong somewhere, he might even lose his job.

'I worked so hard to get to this position, too.'

The Hunter Association received similar levels of treatment to state-run public enterprises. If one wanted to enter this organisation, one had to put in as much effort as passing the bar exam, for instance. Just thinking about losing this job, he almost blacked out right there and then.

'No freaking way. Nope.'

He shook his head.

The subordinate also more or less knew what the superior's dilemma was. That was why he asked rather cautiously.

"This.... What should we do now?"

"Hmm."

It'd been two days already.

If there were problems, shouldn't he have heard about it by now?

"....Let it be."

"W-will it be fine that way?"

"Well, I'm sure nothing much will happen. It's been two days already, right?"

"Well, that is true."

The subordinate nodded his head.

"On the report, write that N-1744B was working fine until yesterday, but developed a fault earlier today. Okay?"

"Okay, sir."

The private residence of the Chief of the White Tiger Guild's Second Division, Ahn Sahng-Min.

He stopped cutting the spring onion and straightened his back, and his bones issued a loud complaint.

Crackle....

"Aigoo...."

Today dinner: doenjang stew.

As befitting a bachelor going on eight years strong, he had mastered the art of cooking a fair number of dishes already.

It all happened five years ago.

Back then, he filled himself up all the time with instant foods, until he realised that his health was rapidly deteriorating, and reflected on his stupidity. He made up his mind to learn cooking, and now, he was at the level of almost replicating a dish that appeared on the TV in passing.

However...

Didn't they say that end of tuning is pure love? (TL: not sure what this line is supposed to mean, but I TLED it as it appears in the raw.)

As his skill grew, the types of dishes that he prepared for himself became simple side dishes.

Such as today's doenjang stew.

“Kyah, now this is what I'm talking about!”

Ahn Sahng-Min tasted his own creation and nodded his head as if he was truly amazed by his own skills.

Too bad, only one person could taste this wonderful stew, though. He really felt sorry about that.

‘Should I invite someone over for a meal?’

He immediately thought of a certain subordinate, but soon, shook his head.

He was already sick and tired of being called an old bachelor, yet just what kind of a misunderstanding would he arouse if he invited a fellow male employee?

‘I wonder if he's properly doing the job I gave him.’

That guy was quite attentive and smart most of the time, yet there was this part of him that was undeniably sloppy, too.

‘Eii, why am I worried about work even though I'm at home, relaxing?’

Time to eat his dinner, then.

Ahn Sahng-Min placed the doenjang stew on the coffee table by the living room while humming to himself.

It was now a normal thing for him to watch TV in the living room while eating dinner alone. The dining table in the kitchen was far too big and lonesome for a bachelor to have a meal alone there.

Click.

He switched the TV on with the remote and settled down on the couch.

A news broadcast came on.

[Today's breaking news.]

One of the main advantages of being a bachelor was that he'd never have to fight someone else for the TV remote.

When he turned that boobtube on, it'd always be on the channel he preferred.

Ahn Sahng-Min watched the large flat screen TV mounted on the wall with the corner of his eyes while he scooped up a spoonful of rice.

[...The entirety of the United States of America is in deep shock after an unexplainable explosion took place in the American Hunter's Association headquarters in Washington D.C. A rumour is rising among some experts, that the explosion was due to a new rising talent causing irreparable friction among S-ranked Hunters....]

"Uh-huh.... What is this world coming to, huh. Really now."

Ahn Sahng-Min clicked his tongue with a rueful expression, but still didn't forget to carefully choose the side dish that would signal the beginning of his dinner.

Well, there weren't that many side dishes to choose from, anyway.

'Well, it just has to be kimchi, no?'

[...This is the CCTV footage recorded near the American Monitoring Division's building. Cracks suddenly formed on the walls of the building, and....]

Not really caring what the news bulletin was saying, the steamy rice resting on top of his spoon now acted as a home for a cold piece of kimchi he took out from the separate kimchi refrigerator.

And just as Ahn Sahng-Min was bringing the pair to his mouth, his phone suddenly issued a loud ring.

'Argh! Who the heck is it this time??'

Ahn Sahng-Min inwardly complained and picked up the smartphone. But he hurriedly answered the phone after discovering who was calling him.

"Hello, this is Ahn Sahng-Min speaking."

The one calling him was, of course, Seong Jin-Woo.

Ahn Sahng-Min's expression was bright as he answered the call.

However...

While listening to Jin-Woo's story, Ahn Sahng-Min's expression

progressively became puzzled.

“Pardon me? You were wondering if you could tag along during the training of our new recruits?”



Chapter 58 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

'It's done.'

Jin-Woo ended the call.

Initially, Chief Ahn Sahng-Min was confused by the sudden request, but once he heard Jin-Woo's reasons, he gave his okay rather easily. And now, Jin-Woo would be able to check out White Tiger's method of training their new recruits.

'And I also managed to borrow the van, too.'

Even though the kid was busy, Yu Jin-Ho still showed up.

Jin-Woo couldn't help but think that the kid should be praised wholeheartedly; Yu Jin-Ho came running even though he was tied up with something, and didn't even forget to greet him properly, too.

And so, the preparations were complete.

Right now, Jin-Woo was standing in front of the apartment building that the problematic female student lived in.

'It's really close to my own place, isn't it?'

It only took two minutes of walking to get here. It was the proverbial stone's throw away.

He took a look around his vicinity. And he was still in the familiar district, too tiny and cramped, with lots of old apartment buildings standing close to one another.

Meaning, this girl's family circumstances weren't that good, just how his used to be not too long ago.

He could understand where she was coming from, now that she was nominally a Hunter. Well, Jin-Woo was also like that once upon a time.

'Too bad, those people die the quickest.'

Didn't he get injured every single time?

Just how many times did he come close to getting killed? If it weren't for his mom suffering from the d*mn rare illness, he'd have quit this crap a long time ago.

For a rank E Hunter, a dungeon was a horrible place to be in.

If left alone, this girl would definitely grow to regret ever being a Hunter. No, it'd be more likely that she'd die long before she had the chance to regret making that decision.

'Of course, that happens all the time, unfortunately.'

The incidents of Hunters dying or getting gravely injured happened dozens of times in a single day, after all.

It was impossible to talk all these people out of going on a raid, nor was there any reason to do so. Well, they made their choices so they had to bear the responsibilities of their decisions accordingly.

'However....'

If he didn't know the girl in question, he wouldn't have cared. But now that he knew who she was, he couldn't just ignore this one.

Indeed, Jin-Woo was rather familiar with this girl.

He sensed the presence of a person and raised his head, and spotted the problem child walking towards him.

Her hair rolled up into a bun above her head; slightly rough and tired eyes – she was definitely someone he knew.

"Uh?"

The female student discovered Jin-Woo there and tilted her head.

"What are you doing here, ahjussi?"

Just as Jin-Woo did, the female student also recognised him right away.

'Yup, this world is indeed too dang small.'

Jin-Woo scratched the side of his head.

The female student who declared that she'd become a Hunter; she was none other than the underage kid, the lone female in the 'raiding team' Yu Jin-Ho had assembled. The one that briefly caused Jin-Woo to worry slightly since she was still so young and all.

'...Hahn Song-Yi.'

When he heard that name from Jin-Ah's homeroom teacher, a flood of emotions briefly inundated him. So, he just had to confirm it for himself.

And sure enough, the date Hahn Song-Yi began missing school coincided with the day Yu Jin-Ho's team began its raiding 'missions'.

With that, it kinda became a bit harder to think of this matter as someone else's mess.

In a way, he felt responsible for it.

As a matter of fact, he couldn't help but wonder if he was the cause of this mess, to begin with, after letting a kid who didn't know how the world really operated taste some easy cash, and give her false impressions that she was capable of doing anything now.

'At least, one thing's for sure.'

No matter when it might be, he'd feel really bad if he heard of Hahn Song-Yi perishing inside a dungeon. He had done nothing wrong, so he shouldn't suffer through a couple of nights' sleep, lost through guilty consciousness, no?

And so, he decided to make time for this evening and sort this mess out. It wasn't that difficult, to begin with, anyway.

"What's going on?"

Hahn Song-Yi's eyes opened wider as she stared up at Jin-Woo. And then, her expression became rather unimpressed.

"Wait, could it be that the Hunter my teacher wanted to introduce me to was you, ahjussi??"

Her continuously calling him ahjussi got on his nerves a bit, but Jin-Woo maintained his smile and nodded his head.

But then....

"I don't know what my teacher told you, but I'm not interested in going back to school anymore. And I'm definitely not gonna give up being a Hunter."

Hahn Song-Yi curtly stated her position.

She seemed to be a quiet kid when she was with the raid team, but, her attitude definitely changed when the story involved her.

She was definitely one of those headstrong modern kids who thought they knew how to draw the line on where their opinions and viewpoints lied.

'Well, the thing is, there's a girl back in my house who's exactly like you, you know?'

Jin-Woo grinned slightly.

Hahn Song-Yi thought that she had managed to come across tough and

intimidating, but seeing that Jin-Woo's response was completely out of her expectations, she began to get flustered somewhat.

Jin-Woo spoke to her in an even tone of voice.

“I wasn't planning to tell you to quit being a Hunter.”

Hahn Song-Yi's eyes widened further.

“I'm sorry?”

Kids like her would always act completely opposite to what you tell them to do. So, he wasn't even planning to talk her out of it. No, all he had to was to show her what the reality was like, just once.

‘That's what happened to me, anyway.’

He realised the truth after participating in his first raid.

And that was... reality was far crueller and heartless than his imagination had been.

Hahn Song-Yi did her very best to hide her fluster and asked him.

“T-then, what brings you here?”

Jin-Woo took a step closer.

Hahn Song-Yi flinched noticeably and was about to retreat a step back, but upon realising that such an action would make her look weak, she forcibly stopped her body from moving.

Jin-Woo now stood before Hahn Song-Yi.

Although he didn't mean to, and no one would understand the meaning behind it, an ominous smile still found its way to Jin-Woo's lips.

“I'm here to mould you into a better Hunter.”

There was no need to persuade her to accompany him to a dungeon.

She said ***“Okay, I'm coming!”*** as soon as he told her that she now had an indelible opportunity to witness how the White Tiger Guild conducted its new recruit training exercise.

She didn't even suspect that Jin-Woo had any ulterior motives.

As they walked to the van, Hahn Song-Yi asked him how he knew her teacher, and he simply showed her the photo of him and Jin-Ah stored on the phone.

“Ahjussi, you were Jin-Ah's oppa??”

“....”

For a while now, a certain word was really getting on his nerves, but since everything was going according to his plan, he endured it and let it slide.

“Get in.”

“Thanks!”

Jin-Woo drove Hahn Song-Yi to the location where the White Tiger Guild was holding its evening training. Since he was told that the training exercise would only commence at 9 PM, there were still plenty of time left.

Vrroom....

The van that was clearly too big for only two people glided across the road.

Was this because both his Agility and Perception had been enhanced a great deal? He had never driven a car after getting his driver’s licence some time ago, yet the actual driving proved to be rather easy.

When he concentrated a bit harder, all the other cars on the road looked as slow as worms to him.

‘Yup, Stats really come in handy in all sorts of things, don’t they?’

Meanwhile, Hahn Song-Yi asked him from the passenger seat.

“Does Jin-Ah really study the whole day even back home? I mean, I heard rumours that she actually plastered pages of a dictionary on her walls so she can memorise them even when she falls asleep.”

There was a such a rumour about Jin-Ah?

But, she was such a fried chicken-loving sleepyhead when she was at home....

“Jin-Ah’s just like you, you know. When she’s home, all she does is play games, eat, and sleep.”

Well, it was mostly sleeping, but still.

“Eii.... That must be a lie. How come her grades are so amazing, then?”

“I can hardly believe it myself. She used to frequent arcades with me back when she was still in middle school, you know?”

They chatted about this and that, and eventually arrived near the vicinity of the Gate. Jin-Woo stopped the van.

Screech...

The area they were in was designated as a location where Gates frequently appeared. Almost no human beings dared to live around here anymore, so it

was quite convenient to park the van.

From what he heard, almost 80% of houses here were deserted. The story went that, once the remaining populace moved out, the whole district would be shut down.

Jin-Woo and Hahn Song-Yi exited from the van.

He scanned the surroundings, and immediately picked up on the overflowing amount of eerie, creepy chill in the air.

Vrrrr.....

For some reason, he thought that he could hear loud cheering coming from the shadow beneath his feet. He was probably imagining it, though.

Hahn Song-Yi got a bit scared by the eerie atmosphere of the place, but after spotting the group of Hunters in the distance, regained most of her self confidence back.

The way her eyes sparkled, it was as if she had just ran into a super celebrity or something.

‘Oh well. They are Hunters from the super Guild, White Tiger, so it can’t be helped.’

To a high schooler who yearned to become a real Hunter, those people would be no different than actual celebrities, no?

Also, such a thought process wasn’t so strange, to begin with, when considering how mass media packaged these Hunters on the TV and such.

“Oh, so you really came.”

Hyun Ki-Cheol quickly ran over to Jin-Woo after discovering him.

“Do you still remember me?”

Jin-Woo lightly nodded his head.

Sensing that Hyun Ki-Cheol’s smile wasn’t the fakey business one but the real thing, a smile also formed naturally on Jin-Woo’s face as well.

They haven’t met too many times before, but this Hyun Ki-Cheol character seemed to be someone good-natured and easy to talk to.

“I heard it from the Chief. Ah, so this young woman is her?”

“Hello there.”

Hahn Song-Yi lowered her head in greeting.

While they were saying hellos in this fashion, a big muscular guy sauntered

over and spoke in an irked tone of voice.

“Let’s stop with useless chatter and get started already. We didn’t come here for a picnic, and it’s almost 9 PM.”

The muscular guy didn’t even wait for the response and walked back towards the Gate. Something didn’t feel quite right with that guy, so Jin-Woo asked Hyun Ki-Cheol.

“Who was that?”

“Oh. He’s one of our new recruit. He’s ranked A, actually. He must be feeling a bit unhappy after I asked him for his understanding earlier. He even asked me if I thought that going to a dungeon was a fun pastime or some such.”

“He’s a rank A?”

Hyun Ki-Cheol nodded his head, thinking that such a reaction was reasonable, coming from a proud rank A Hunter like that guy.

Jin-Woo asked again.

“What are the ranks of today’s raid team members?”

“One rank A, seven rank Bs, and four rank Cs, for the total of 12 members.”

“A rank A and several Bs, just for a rank C dungeon....?”

“Well, their ranks might be high, sure, but they are still newbies, you see. We’re trying to help them earn first-hand experience inside an easier dungeon.”

Hyun Ki-Cheol spoke with some pride in his voice.

He then added quickly that after today, these guys would immediately be inserted into high ranked dungeons. Meaning, they could definitely be counted as a proper combat force.

‘Still, one A and seven Bs, huh...’

Jin-Woo’s expression subtly changed.

Actually, this was the reason why Chief Ahn Sahng-Min gave his permission. He was thinking of convincing Jin-Woo with the mighty display from the White Tiger Guild’s new, talented recruits.

However, quite contrary to Ahn Sahng-Min’s and Hyun Ki-Cheol’s expectations, Jin-Woo could only look on at the Gate with a disappointed expression.

The Gate was rated at C.

Compared to that, the members of the raiding team were simply too brilliant to the point that they were even blinding the onlookers with their auras.

‘If the raid is too easy, the shock factor will lessen, though...’

That was what his main worry was about.

But, he slowly shook his head.

‘No, wait. If she sees it with her own eyes, she should still be able to feel it.’

....Feel how weak and powerless a rank E would become inside a dungeon, that was. That alone would be sufficient.

“When can we enter?”

Still utterly oblivious to Jin-Woo’s real intentions, Hahn Song-Yi began whining already. When Jin-Woo took a look at her, her expression showed how pumped up she was.

‘Let’s see how long you can keep that up.’

Jin-Woo inwardly swallowed his laughter and spoke to Hyun Ki-Cheol.

“We’ll be on our way now.”

“Ah, yes. Wait, hold up for a second, please.”

Hyun Ki-Cheol sneaked a glance around him, and then whispered something to Jin-Woo’s ears.

“Uhm, excuse me, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim. If you decide to step in, today’s raid will become too easy, so please, refrain from doing anything in there. Please?”

Since Jin-Woo’s purpose today was to simply observe, obviously he wouldn’t enter the fray.

“I won’t step in.”

He’d be going around other rank C dungeons with Yu Jin-Ho from tomorrow onwards, so what point was there for him to disrupt the White Tiger’s training exercise?

Of course, he’d use his shadow soldiers to conquer those dungeons. For that reason alone, he had to bring Hahn Song-Yi over here.

‘Besides, I don’t feel like revealing my shadow soldiers with a matter this

simple, either.'

If he showed how easy it was to clear a dungeon with his shadows busy beating monsters to bloody messes, there was a real danger that Hahn Song-Yi's delusions of grandeur might get inflated, instead.

And so, Jin-Woo and Hahn Song-Yi approached the Gate. Unlike that rank A Hunter, there were some people who welcomed the duo rather happily.

"Hello."

"Nice to meet you."

Since they weren't here to make money, the higher the headcount, the better it would be for everyone. As it was customary, they introduced each other.

But when it was the turn of the rank A Hunter....

"I don't care."

He simply walked inside the Gate.

"Well, let us get going as well."

The new recruits of the White Tiger also began entering the Gate one by one.

Before Hahn Song-Yi entered, she turned her head to look at Jin-Woo.

"What about you, ahjussi?"

Jin-Woo crossed his arms and replied to her.

"After I see you enter first."

Hahn Song-Yi's face was stiff with nervousness, but she still resolutely nodded her head and jumped into the Gate.

'Hmm....'

Jin-Woo took a quick breath and stood before the Gate.

He sensed someone looking at him, so turned around to confirm, only to spot Hyun Ki-Cheol over yonder, waving at him and cheering him on.

'.....'

He reverted his gaze back to the Gate.

However.....

'...??'

The surface of the Gate continued to ripple softly non-stop.

‘But, shouldn’t the surface return to being a solid black barrier once a person goes through it?’

Right now, it was continuously rippling about like the surface of water.

Something was off here.

Jin-Woo placed the tip of his hand against the surface.

And it reacted like a sticky liquid, clinging to his fingers and following him as he lifted his hand away.

‘Could this be....??’

Jin-Woo quickly spun his head around and met Hyun Ki-Cheol’s gaze.

At this point, even Hyun Ki-Cheol had sensed something was very wrong.

Jin-Woo loudly shouted at him.

“Call your main raid team!! Hurry!”

As soon as he finished shouting, Jin-Woo was automatically sucked into the Gate.

“W-what the hell was that?!”

“V-Vice Chief Hyun?!”

Hyun Ki-Cheol hurriedly ran towards the Gate.

The three remaining employees of White Tiger Guild also hurriedly followed after him.

Once he got to the Gate, though, Hyun Ki-Cheol began freaking out.

“This... this can’t be!!”

Hunters weren’t the only newbies today; the new employees were also brought along in order to train them as well. So, none of the newbies had experienced anything remotely like this.

The trio of new employees looked at Hyun Ki-Cheol with completely stunned expressions.

“V-Vice Chief!! The Gate’s surface!! It’s changing to a red colour!!”

As if a drop of blood had fallen in it, the surface of the once-black Gate was now slowly changing to the crimson-red colour.

Hyun Ki-Cheol ignored the confused employees and hurriedly called someone.

Click.

“Chief!! It’s the Red Gate!! The Gate our people just walked into changed to a Red Gate!!”

Ahn Sahng-Min’s voice became urgent, shocked.

Hyun Ki-Cheol raised his head and stared at the Gate, now dyed completely in the colour of blood.

The ripples on the surface had stopped now, too.

Hyun Ki-Chole nervously swallowed his dried saliva.

“I don’t know how... but it’s definitely a Red Gate, Chief.”



Chapter 59 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“A Red Gate?! Just what on earth is going on here!!”

The CEO of the White Tiger Guild, Baek Yun-Ho, ran straight to the Gate’s location as soon as he received the urgent call.

The complexion of Hyun Ki-Cheol could only be described as ashen.

“Well, sir.....”

“I’m going to see for myself first.”

Baek Yun-Ho walked past the Guild employees who looked like they were in the middle of a funeral.

‘It really is a Red Gate!!’

Baek Yun-Ho’s own complexion hardened instantly after checking out the Gate’s colour.

What was a Red Gate?

It was a terrifying phenomenon where the dungeon beyond it would actually connect to a whole new world, not some underground cavern. And in order to escape from it, either you had to kill the boss of the area, or wait for the dungeon break to occur.

In other words, once you stepped inside, it’d be the end.

Once the Gate changed its colour to red, all external influences would be completely cut off. Escaping from it, and trying to enter it – both of these activities were now impossible.

Baek Yun-Ho pressed his hand against the Gate’s surface. As he thought, it was hard, impossible to enter.

‘God d*mn it.’

From here onwards, there was no way to lend aid to those trapped inside.

Baek Yun-Ho asked Hyun Ki-Cheol.

“I thought this was supposed to be a rank C Gate?”

“Sir, it was a rank C.”

“Did you call the Association to confirm it?”

“Yes, sir. However..... The Association is insisting that it’s still a rank C Gate....”

“Those god dmn sons of btches!!”

Baek Yun-Ho angrily cursed out.

A Red Gate would only occur when the dungeon itself was ranked very high, to begin with.

There was a whole new world on the other side of the Gate, yet the leaking magical energy only equalled that of a rank C dungeon? That crap wouldn’t fly anywhere.

Even from a casual glance, he could tell this thing should’ve been ranked B, at the bare minimum. If unlucky, rank A. Or worse, something even higher than that.

However, the only reason why the Association still had the audacity to insist they were not wrong?

“Sir, should we use our own equipment to measure the magic energy?”

When Hyun Ki-Cheol asked him, Baek Yun-Ho shook his head.

“No magic energy leaks out from a Red Gate, so it’s impossible to measure it now.”

...Because, it would be almost impossible to take another measurement, that was why.

There was no concrete way to find out what the problematic Gate’s actual rank was at this point in time.

And besides, the rank of this d*mn Gate wasn’t important anymore.

“How many of our people went in there?”

“Total of 12, sir.”

“How many are high ranked Hunters?”

“As the leader, rank A Kim Cheol Hunter-nim, and there are also seven rank B Hunters, as well.”

“One rank A and seven rank Bs....”

“The new recruits.... Will they be alright?”

Baek Yun-Ho slowly shook his head.

“We don’t have a choice but to think of them as all KIA. If lucky, the

rank A, and two, three rank Bs might make out alive.”

...Only if those trapped inside enjoy lady luck’s blessing, that was.

That was how lacking these numbers were. With the current composition of the raid team, they should only be enough to barely conquer the weakest of rank B dungeons.

Anything tougher than that, and you’d be asking for way too much.

Without some kind of a miracle, the odds of their new recruits returning alive was as good as none.

Baek Yun-Ho’s complexion darkened even further.

Hyun Ki-Cheol studied the mood of his boss and cautiously opened his mouth.

“Sir, actually... there was someone else who also entered the Gate along with our recruits.”

Baek Yun-Ho shifted his gaze to his subordinate, his expression changing slightly.

Could it be that a high-ranking Hunter was in the vicinity and entered along with the team after getting curious about the training process?

What else could qualify as a miracle?

This would certainly be it!

Baek Yun-Ho’s voice rose up.

“Who was that person?”

“He’s the Hunter I’ve been trying to scout for the last few days, sir.”

The reply came from behind, instead.

When Baek Yun-Ho and Hyun Ki-Cheol looked over to confirm who it was, they spotted Ahn Sahng-Min, soaked in his own sweat and breathing roughly.

“Apologies for being late, sir. The traffic was unexpectedly heavy.”

Ahn Sahng-Min’s home was furthest from everyone here so he ended up arriving last.

Ahn Sahng-Min shifted his gaze over to the Gate. The Red Gate reminded him of the entrance to an impregnable fortress. Just looking at it made it harder to breathe.

‘However, if it’s Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, then.....’

A man who overcame several ‘incidents’ already unscathed could potentially create a new miracle all by himself.

That’s what he thought.

Baek Yun-Ho hurriedly approached Ahn Sahng-Min.

“Are you saying that the Hunter you’ve been keeping an eye on is in there, too? Is that it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Ah!”

Baek Yun-Ho suddenly recalled something.

‘Now that I think about it....’

Chief Ahn had been rather busy lately. And as it so happened, there was a Hunter he had been trying to scout to the Guild.

Chief Ahn’s instincts were almost always never wrong.

‘What if....’

A spark of hope was lit in Baek Yun-Ho’s heart.

“What is his rank? Is it A? Or maybe, a B?”

If this Hunter was ranked S, then Baek Yun-Ho would’ve known the identity of this mystery Hunter. There were less than 10 rank S Hunters in the whole of South Korea, after all.

However, Ahn Sahng-Min was shaking his head!

‘Oh my god!’

Baek Yun-Ho’s hardened face finally brightened up considerably.

“Are you saying that a rank S Hunter also went in there?!”

Ahn Sahng-Min calmly replied.

“No, sir. He’s a rank E.”

Almost right away, Baek Yun-Ho’s expression crumpled to a man who accidentally chewed on bugs.

Jin-Woo couldn’t help but get flustered here.

‘Could this be the Gate that supposedly takes you to another world?’

It’d be his first time experiencing one, but he had read all about it online, from the testimonies of those who managed to survive it. And they all said the same thing – that it felt like they were being sucked in.

Jin-Woo had to agree with that assessment, too.

As soon as the Gate sucked him in, a deep darkness swallowed him, and a little while later, he felt like he was being slid across something slick and smooth.

‘Heok!’

When he opened his eyes, he was standing in the middle of a wintry forest, completely covered in white snow.

“What is this place?!”

“This doesn’t look like the interior of a dungeon, does it?!”

“Hey, look! The Gate’s disappeared, too!”

Other Hunters were looking around in confusion, unable to hide their panic as well.

While they were getting more and more flustered, Jin-Woo calmed himself down, narrowed his eyes, and scanned the surrounding area.

‘I don’t sense anything suspicious.’

Thanks to the System repeatedly sending him to weird places, Jin-Woo had gotten used to being in an unexpected foreign environment, which also meant that he could gain his calmness quickly.

The first thing that entered his view was a huge tree.

Not just one, but countless coniferous trees, the kind never seen before on Korean soil, were shooting up straight to the sky with nary a visible gap in between them.

As he scanned his surroundings, his eyes ran into someone else’s. And it was the rank A Hunter Kim Cheol, who was also cautiously scanning the vicinity like him.

‘.....’

‘.....’

The two of them glared at each other for a little while, before looking away.

Hahn Song-Yi had approached him and began tugging at his clothes in the meantime.

“Uhm, excuse me... something bad happened just now, right?”

She looked really scared. Her previous self-confidence was nowhere to be found.

But then... Jin-Woo's hand suddenly shot out towards Hahn Song-Yi's face.

'.....?!'

Hahn Song-Yi's eyes opened super wide.

Grab!

The arrow caught in Jin-Woo's hand trembled continuously as if it lamented missing its target. And that would be the middle of Hahn Song-Yi's forehead.

"Ahh?! Ah...!"

Finally realising what just happened, her face paled in an instant. However, the expected scream came from somewhere else.

"Kyaaaahhk!!"

"Uwa, uwaaahk!!"

Plop.

A male Hunter fell to the snowy ground with blood bubbling out of his mouth, an arrow lodged deep in his temple.

The snowy ground was soon dyed in his blood.

"Euh, euh...."

Hunters began gasping out in shock.

Two arrows flew in at the same time, one aimed at Hahn Song-Yi, while the other one hit its mark. Because of that, though – no one saw Jin-Woo catching the other arrow.

"Over there!"

"It's those b*stards!!"

One of the rank B Hunters pointed towards the top of a tree located far away.

But, even before he had begun pointing his finger, both the gazes of Jin-Woo and Kim Cheol were fixed there.

They could see two lifeforms standing over there, on the snow-covered branches.

'Two people? No, I should say two creatures, huh.'

Long white hair, icy-white skin, and silver eyes.

And the race-specific trait of pointy ears.

These ‘monsters’ were famed for their particularly beautiful countenances, as well as for their rarity, as they could only be encountered in high ranked dungeons.

‘Ice Elves.’

...Also known as ‘White Phantoms’. (TL: The author used pun here. The Korean letter for ‘phantom’ can also mean ‘ear’.)

Those who had never encountered one referred to them as Ice Elves, but the Hunters who did encounter them and fought with them, all took to calling them White Phantoms, instead. While also adding that a pretty name like ‘Elf’ shouldn’t be mixed together with these abominable creatures.

Jin-Woo could immediately guess why the Hunters before him all gnashed their teeth at the mere mention of the White Phantoms.

‘...They are laughing at us, huh.’

The two archers had lowered their bows and disgusting smiles were clearly visible on their faces. It was as if they were staring at a table full of delicacies and couldn’t decide which one to start eating.

‘And you decided on this, huh?’

Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

One arrow to the far left. And another one to the far right. That was no coincidence.

The Hunter with an arrow stuck in his head was a thirty-something who had gone through the Awakening process only recently. With the exception of Hahn Song-Yi, he’d be the weakest of the group.

As for the other arrow....

‘It was aimed at Hahn Song-Yi.’

Indeed, the arrows were meant for the two weakest members of the team.

‘If it weren’t for the System, I’d be the one with an arrow stuck in my head, instead.’

The cheap tactic of the White Phantoms certainly managed to bring out Jin-Woo’s ire. He raised the caught arrow so the creatures could see, and broke it in half.

Crack!

Perhaps taking that as a challenge, the White Phantom who shot that arrow

pointed at Jin-Woo and drew a line under his chin.

Seeing that, Jin-Woo simply smirked. However, his eyes were definitely not laughing.

‘...I’ll kill you with my own hands.’

Receiving the trivial provocation of the monster, Jin-Woo simply glared coldly as his reply.

Soon, the pair of White Phantoms disappeared below the tree.

“Looks like this is their way of welcoming us.”

Finally, Kim Cheol opened his mouth.

The lone rank A of the group opened his mouth, prompting everyone to focus their gazes on him as if they had made an agreement prior to coming here.

Actually, he was the leader of this raid team, so that might have been it, though.

“I’m sure some of you have realised it by now. This is inside the Red Gate.”

Kim Cheol spoke as if it was the most obvious thing in the whole world. Of course, no one complained about that.

“Which means, no one will be able to enter here after us, until either we all die, or there is a dungeon break.”

The group all gasped out softly.

“M-mm....”

“Euh....”

The fact that they could no longer hope for a rescue came across as a big mental shock.

Meanwhile, Kim Cheol continued on.

“If we remain here, we’ll all die from this freezing cold, or from those b*stards ambushing us. However, I’m going to clear this place and get out of here, by myself if necessary. Are there any of you who wish to join me?”

Kim Cheol’s powerful, confident stare and his broad shoulders imparted a certain sense of trust.

Hunters glanced at each other for a bit, before unanimously voicing their desire to travel together with him.

“Let us move together.”

“I’d like to join you.”

“Let’s go back together, alive.”

“I want to help, too!”

However, Kim Cheol shoved away the chest of the male Hunter who said he wanted to help.

“Keok!”

Even though he controlled his physical strength, at the end of the day, he was still a rank A. The male Hunter retreated several steps back, a deep frown etched on his face from the immense pain coming from his chest.

“Excluding you.”

“Excuse me?”

“And also, you, you, you, and you.”

Kim Cheol pointed to a few more others, not just that male Hunter. Of course, both Jin-Woo and Hahn Song-Yi were included in that.

It was here that Jin-Woo’s own forehead creased up ever so slightly.

All in all, five people in total. They were all either rank C, or lower.

“It’s unfortunate, but I won’t be taking you along.”

“What did you say?!”

“Do you know anything about Red Gates?”

The male Hunter shook his head at Kim Cheol’s question.

“In here, one day equates to one hour outside. The worst case scenario, it’ll take several months for the dungeon break to occur, or I kill the boss. Under that kind of situation, I can’t walk around with baggage like you.”

“We’re baggage to you?!”

The Hunters who were pointed out by Kim Cheol got all riled up, but once the rank A Hunter glared at them, they all shut their mouths close.

Kim Cheol continued on, now sounding as if he was being considerate and all.

“Don’t feel too bad, however. If all of you manage to survive until we kill the boss, then all of you will go back home alive, too.”

“Even still....”

The singled-out Hunters sent out desperate, pleading stares to the Hunters near Kim Cheol, but not a single one stepped forward.

No, they were far too busy avoiding meeting the gazes.

It was then....

“Excuse me.”

A rank B female Hunter from Kim Cheol’s group raised her hand. Kim Cheol turned to look at her, and she pointed at Jin-Woo.

“It’s fine to go over there from here, right?”

“....Do what you want.”

She didn’t even look back once and walked straight to Jin-Woo’s side.

Kim Cheol alternated his gaze between the woman and Jin-Woo, and smirked derisively, before declaring out loudly.

“We’ve got an opening this side, so I’ll accept one more person!”

“Me, me!!”

The male Hunter who got shoved away by Kim Cheol just now hurriedly ran over, fearing that the lone rank A in the group, and the leader, might change his mind.

Well, that was how it should be. Jin-Woo thought as much.

‘Yup, this woman is the strange one here.’

Jin-Woo stared at the woman now standing next to him with a puzzled expression on his face. Her gaze met with Jin-Woo’s, and she whispered in a low voice so no one else could hear.

“That man Kim Cheol? Well, he couldn’t see the arrow flying in, you see.”

Even if one was a high ranked Hunter, there was no way every Stat of his would be developed equally. For instance, he might be a rank A, but his Agility could be low. Jin-Woo knew how Stats worked, so he didn’t think too much about that.

“So, what are you saying?”

Then, the woman smiled refreshingly.

“I’m guessing you’re not a rank E. Am I right?”



Chapter 60 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

In front of the Red Gate.

Baek Yun-Ho's expression remained gloomy. Ahn Sahng-Min provided a short summary on who Seong Jin-Woo was, but his anxiety level hadn't decreased by one bit.

“In the end, that’s all speculation, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir. You’re right.”

Ahn Sahng-Min readily accepted that assessment. It was true that he didn't know anything about Seong Jin-Woo, after all.

‘But, if the boss checked Hunter Seong Jin-Woo out with his own eyes, he’d have changed his mind right away.’

There was something different about Seong Jin-Woo.

And the fact that he couldn't adequately describe that with words frustrated Ahn Sahng-Min to no end.

Baek Yun-Ho's gaze shifted back to the Red Gate.

“In the end, the only person I can believe in is Kim Cheol....”

It was then.

“Sir, there won’t be any problems with Hunter Kim Cheol, I assure you.”

One more person butted in among the group of Baek Yun-Ho, Ahn Sahng-Min, and Hyun Ki-Cheol. The gazes of three men automatically shifted in that direction simultaneously.

It was Ju Seong-Chan, Chief of the First Division of the White Tiger Guild.

He scanned the three people in front and spoke in a proud voice.

“I’ve been training Hunter Kim Cheol quite strictly, so he could be ready for all contingencies.”

Originally, the initial training of new recruits was left to the Second Division, but the First Division would be in charge of the Awakened ranked A or higher.

Those promising individuals who were scheduled to enter the ranks of the

main combat force soon got to enjoy a different starting point from everyone else.

Seeing Ju Seong-Chan's confidence, Baek Yun-Ho's expression softened slightly.

"How were Hunter Kim Cheol's grades?"

"They are excellent, sir. Just his combat capabilities alone, he'd not fall behind anyone from the current members of the Guild's main combat force."

"Is that so?"

A smile managed to return to Baek Yun-Ho's lips.

Kim Cheol was a rank A. Even among high ranked Hunters, he was a talent that must be held on to.

If, as the leader of this raid team, he commanded the rank B Hunters well and managed to clear this Gate...!

There would be some losses among the rank C Hunters, but from the White Tiger's perspective, the survival of high ranked Hunters came first.

'It's a relief that Hunter Kim Cheol's abilities are top-notch....'

The weakened sparks of hope regained some life again.

Ju Seong-Chan managed to calm the boss man down and narrowed his eyes at Ahn Sahng-Min, clearly in derision.

"From what I heard just now... A rank E Hunter who might have gone through a Re-Awakening process, was it? You were saying something about that...."

Ju Seong-Chan snorted dismissively.

"My Hunter Kim Cheol should prove to be more effective than someone like that, a Hunter with no proven qualities."

Ahn Sahng-Min's expression hardened. He was being looked down on here. However, he didn't raise his voice and let anger take over him.

'Let's just wait and see who's correct at the end of the day....'

The four men shifted their gazes at the same time over to the Red Gate that had trapped their Hunters.

Wuwuwu...

The crimson light oozing from the Gate seemed especially more ominous

than ever before.

“I’m guessing you’re not a rank E. Am I right?”

The female Hunter asked Jin-Woo quite openly.

Jin-Woo opened his mouth in response.

“Well, then. Let me ask you something as well.”

“Of course.”

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to Kim Cheol and the Hunters gathering around him. They were busy planning their next move before they got going.

“You guys, you’re supposed to be new recruits, yet how can you be this calm?”

“The first thing we’ve been taught is that ‘Anything can happen inside a dungeon’, you see.”

....Anything could happen inside a dungeon, she said.

Jin-Woo knew this fact better than anyone here, actually.

“Every one of us has been trained properly. Especially that Kim Cheol over there. He even received a special training regime, too. He’s scheduled to join up with the White Tiger’s main combat force.”

They didn’t fear dungeons, because they had received prior training.

Jin-Woo could only be flabbergasted by that revelation. And then, almost right away, he realised that all of these people were no different from Hahn Song-Yi.

She said that they had been sufficiently trained or whatever, but just what kind of uses would that have here? They were simply showing off without realising how terrifying a dungeon could become.

‘Knowing something and experiencing it are two different things.’

More so, when your fragile belief of you knowing everything about dungeons develops just a tiny little crack – it’d all come crashing down like a dam with a hole getting swept away by the deluge of water.

Building up one’s confidence took a long time, but breaking it down only took a single moment. He could see the fate in store for Kim Cheol’s team already.

They might look okay from the outside, but in the end, they were all helpless noobs.

“You still haven’t answered me, though.”

“Excuse me?”

After hearing that, Jin-Woo’s gaze shifted back to the strange woman.

“My question. You haven’t answered it yet.”

The question about whether he was a rank E or not.

She seemed to be a rather tenacious customer, this woman.

“Why should I tell you that?”

He replied in a blunt and a bit curt manner, but the female Hunter, Park Hui-Jin, was now crying out in elation and clenched her fist. Inwardly, of course.

Park Hui-Jin had met many people in her life and she immediately knew what Jin-Woo’s response meant.

And that would be his unbridled confidence.

‘Yes, I didn’t see it wrong!’

There was another thing that gave her even more assurance; while she was being trained back in the White Tiger Guild, she had often witnessed the movements of many high-ranked Hunters.

However, Jin-Woo’s hand just now....

She had never seen anyone move as quickly as Jin-Woo’s hand catching that arrow.

‘I mean, all I could do was to barely confirm what just happened, even with my eyesight!’

She used to be a top-tier athlete before becoming a melee-type Hunter through her Awakening, so she was pretty confident of her dynamic vision.

Park Hui-Jin’s eyes began sparkling.

‘This guy, he’s at least rank A.’

Or, even higher than that....

In order to ascertain a more definite answer, Park Hui-Jin asked him again.

“Don’t be like that now. Can’t you tell me, please?”

“Don’t feel like it.”

That was the end of their conversation. Jin-Woo turned his head away.

He definitely didn’t feel like being in the receiving end of endless stream of

questions, and also, Kim Cheol was walking closer to them as well.

Jin-Woo's eyes and Kim Cheol's met.

"We will...."

Kim Cheol's voice was harsh, low. Didn't matter what he was trying to convey here, he sounded threatening and menacing.

"...Be using the road."

He didn't saunter over here just to declare which path they would be using, though. No, Kim Cheol's eyes were asking what Jin-Woo's group would do. Along with the hidden threat of 'Don't you dare follow us'.

'.....'

Jin-Woo scanned his surroundings once more, before reverting his gaze back to Kim Cheol.

"And we will be going through the forest."

"...I'll wish you luck."

'Well, you guys will be the ones needing that luck later on, though...'

Jin-Woo didn't mouth his inner thoughts, however.

"Sure thing. You too."

With that, Jin-Woo's group headed towards the forest.

After ensuring that the group had completely disappeared into the forest, Kim Cheol began guffawing out uncontrollably.

"What a bunch of idiots."

"Excuse me?"

"Look over there."

Kim Cheol uncrossed his arms and pointed towards some trees.

Not just one or two, either – everywhere he pointed at, trees bore the scars that suspiciously looked like claw marks of potentially gigantic creatures.

"That.... isn't that?!"

"It's a bear."

"An Ice Bear?!"

A bear-type monster, infamous among all the beast-type monsters as the most ferocious! Those claw marks were them marking their territory.

The Hunters in Kim Cheol's group saw those and clicked their tongues.

"Tsk, tsk...."

"It'd been better if they stayed put here and waited till the end...."

"Looks like innocent people will die because of a rank E taking the lead."

"I mean, would that rank E have received any prior training like us?"

Kim Cheol stared at the forest and chuckled derisively.

'That's to be expected from a measly rank E.'

.....Wait.

Suddenly, Kim Cheol's smile disappeared.

'Most of that group is rank Cs, and there is a rank B among them too, so how come.....?'

How come he thought Jin-Woo was that group's leader? Indeed, he hadn't felt that anything was amiss, right up until he realised this weird incongruity by himself.

Still, Kim Cheol shook his head.

'...Well, it doesn't matter.'

They were all going to die soon, anyway. Worrying about themselves took precedence over what would happen to the weaklings who wouldn't last for long, to begin with.

There was nothing he could do about the dead, but well, shouldn't the ones that were supposed to live, live on?

Kim Cheol turned towards the road and spoke up.

"Let's depart."

Jin-Woo took the lead and walked up ahead.

But before long, Park Hui-Jin stood in front of him.

"What is it?"

"Have you lost your mind?"

Jin-Woo crossed his arms and displayed how unhappy he was to hear that. Meaning, she'd have to be careful with her follow-up.

Perhaps she understood Jin-Woo's warning, Park Hui-Jin's voice had softened somewhat.

"I'm sorry. But I need to say this."

Park Hui-Jin's finger pointed towards one of the surrounding trees.

“Can you see that?”

There was a huge claw mark on the tree's bark.

“Over there, too! And there!”

Almost every single tree had their barks greatly damaged and it was hard to find one that was still intact.

“This entire place is full of the bear's territorial markings, you know?! This entire forest is the bear type monster's habitat!”

Dogs or apes were weaker than tigers or lions. Such logic also applied to monsters as well. The tiger or lion type monsters were much more difficult to fight against when compared to dog or ape type monsters.

So, what about a bear-type, then?

A bear, a polar bear no less, was seen as one of the strongest carnivorous land animals out there. And right now, Jin-Woo's group had entered a forest where monsters based on such animals were residing.

Of course, Park Hui-Jin would get angry.

“We need to go back right now! Before the monsters show up!”

“Tsk, tsk.”

Jin-Woo clicked his tongue.

‘What's this?’

Park Hui-Jin thought that Jin-Woo would show one of the three responses – get angry, get stunned, or accept what she told him.

Unfortunately for her, her expectation was wide off the mark.

She was the one advising him against the irrational and hasty decision here, yet it was Jin-Woo looking at her as if she was the idiot.

‘Why... why is he looking at me like that?!’

Park Hui-Jin's face reddened up from anger.

“W-what is it?”

Her voice rose up again.

Jin-Woo spat out a long sigh and opened his mouth.

“It's difficult to find a tree without the territorial markings, which means that there are more than one or two Ice Bears here, yes?”

“T-tthat is why we much go ba.....”

“That is precisely why we’re moving through the forest.”

“Eh?”

Park Hui-Jin’s eyes went round in confusion.

‘She still doesn’t get it even with that massive hint?’

Jin-Woo had little choice but to tell it straight to her.

“When we’re moving through the forest, we only have to worry about Ice Bears.”

“...Ah!”

Only then did Park Hui-Jin understood Jin-Woo’s intention.

The meaning behind lots of Ice Bears was simple – that there were no other monsters strong enough to hunt Ice Bears in this forest.

To be more precise, the group didn’t have to worry about fighting monsters stronger than Ice Bears here.

‘Why haven’t I thought about that....?’

Park Hui-Jin became ashamed about shouting at Jin-Woo just now.

Her head dropped low, even the skin of her neck reddening up from embarrassment.

Jin-Woo continued to click his tongue.

The whole reason why a dungeon was a scary place was that no one knew what might pop out when you were inside. Well, you wouldn’t be able to come up with a plan if you didn’t know what kind of enemies were waiting for you there.

However, didn’t the enemies of this place graciously reveal themselves already?

‘...Bear-type monsters, is it?’

Jin-Woo didn’t know how strong these Ice Bears were, but he was sure of them being weaker than those two White Phantom archers. They were wearing clothing that looked to be made out of bear felt.

That was why had chosen the forest route.

He was thinking of traversing the forest and increasing his level, and at the same time, keep an eye out on Kim Cheol’s group and the movements of the White Phantoms while waiting for his chance to act.

That was the safest way available.

‘.....??’

Abruptly, Jin-Woo became rather puzzled by what he saw.

“...Why is your face still so red?”

Park Hui-Jin’s face was far too red to be normal. She couldn’t raise her head and managed to squeeze out a voice that was smaller than a buzzing mosquito.

“It... it’s because... too cold....”

“Fuu....”

Jin-Woo spat out a long groan and summoned his Store. He quickly browsed through the items for sale and spotted thick fur coats and shoes designed for Winter.

Tti-ring.

[Item: Warm fur coat]

Rarity: None

Type: Miscellaneous

Warms up the wearer’s body.

Price: 10 Gold

[Item: Warm boots]

Rarity: None

Type: Miscellaneous

Once worn, provides warmth to wearer’s feet.

Price: 10 Gold

‘Fur coat and the shoes cost 10 Gold each....’

Unlike items with added effects, regular items didn’t cost a lot to buy. No, compared to the amount of Gold in his possession, they were oh-so-cheap.

[Remaining Gold: 431,930]

‘Still, I’d never have guessed that I have to buy japtem with my Gold....’

Jin-Woo chose ‘Buy’ for all of them.

Since he couldn’t just give to some and ignore others, Jin-Woo spent 100 Gold and bought the articles of clothing for all five people.

Poof.

Five coats and five pairs of boots suddenly popped up in front of his eyes. And of course, the eyes of all four people, excluding Jin-Woo, all grew super-wide.

“Heok?!”

“W-what the heck?! Was that separate space magic?!”

Park Hui-Jin was taken aback, too, and she hurriedly raised her head to look at Jin-Woo.

Not caring whether they were shocked or not, Jin-Woo spoke to them disinterestedly.

“Put them on.”

He finished speaking and reached down to grab the closest fur coat, but then, Hahn Song-Yi suddenly grasped his sleeve.

‘.....?’

When their gazes met, Hahn Song-Yi asked him while looking rather scared and confused.

“A-ahjussi, just what’s going on with you? You managed to catch that arrow, and now, you used some strange magic to take these clothes out, too.”

Frowns formed on the forehead of Jin-Woo. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that, at this rate, he’d be swarmed by the endless streams of questions and get irritated to no end.

‘Right, let’s use this chance to clearly draw the line.’

Jin-Woo raised his voice and spoke in a firm voice.

“Hahn Song-Yi, I brought you here with me, so I will take full responsibility and protect you. However...”

Jin-Woo’s voice became colder next.

“...Don’t ask me about anything.”

Jin-Woo then swept his gaze against Park Hui-Jin as well as other Hunters tagging along.

“The same goes for the rest of you. Do not ask me anything, and do not demand anything from me.”

He didn’t stop there, though.

“If you don’t like it, then you can just leave now. I won’t stop you.”

The two male Hunters originally didn’t choose to follow Jin-Woo, but only tagged along because of the rank B Park Hui-Jin. They alternated their gazes between the fur coats and Jin-Woo, before hurriedly shaking their heads.



Chapter 61 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

There was one more thing – one more reason why Jin-Woo chose the forest route.

‘Status window.’

[Name: Seong Jin-Woo]

[Level: 51]

[Class: Shadow Sovereign]

[Title: The one who overcame the adversity (extra 1)]

Jin-Woo silently summoned his Status window and swapped his current Title from ‘the one who overcame the adversity’ to that of the ‘Slaughterer of Wolves’.

[Title: Slaughterer of Wolves (extra 1)]

A Title given to a hunter skilled in hunting wolves. When facing animal-type monsters, all of your Stats will increase by 40%.

A chance to abuse this plainly-cheating buff had fallen on his laps, so why should he go anywhere else now?

Tti-ring.

[An animal-type monster has appeared.]

[The effect of the current Title will activate.]

A smile crept up on Jin-Woo’s face after he confirmed his Stat values shooting up.

‘Nice.’

It was then.

The Hunters all began screaming out, loudly.

“It, it’s the bear!”

“It’s the Ice Bear!”

An Ice Bear that had picked up on the scents of humans was slowly trudging towards the group.

These humans were its enemies that had invaded its territory. Obviously, it'd not look too kindly towards the intruders.

Growl....

The Ice Bear bared its fangs, transparent-like-ice, and slowly raised its massive frame on its hind legs. It's huge and hulking figure completely filled up the Hunters' vision!

“Ah....”

The creature did resemble a polar bear, but it was almost twice the size, and the magic crystal, the symbol of all monsters, could be seen in the middle of its chest area as if it was some kind of a proud emblem.

ROAR!!

It roared out furiously, the ground seemingly quaking under its might!

All the Hunters, excluding Jin-Woo, all froze stiff on the spot after hearing the ice Bear's roar.

Park Hui-Jin's expression crumpled unsightly.

‘Oh, so we only need to be mindful of Ice Bears, was it?!’

How could anyone say that sort of nonsense after seeing that monster?!

She almost fell for Seong Jin-Woo's pretty convincing argument. But, upon seeing an Ice Bear, she was certain of one thing.

‘We definitely shouldn't have chosen the forest route!’

Sensing the approaching danger to the group, Park Hui-Jin stepped out in front of the group and shouted out.

“I'll draw its attention towards me, so everyone must... Kyah?!”

The scruff of Park Hui-Jin's neck was yanked back by a considerable force, and she had to back step several times to make sure that she didn't end up on her butt.

After somehow regaining her balance, she raised her head only to find Jin-Woo standing before her.

“Hey, what was that all about?!” Jin-Woo pointed at Park Hui-Jin. **“I'm telling you this right now. I'll be killing all the monsters from now on.”**

Obviously, he couldn't let anyone steal his experience points, now could he?

For Jin-Woo, these bears were perfect health tonics to buff him up for his

inevitable showdown with the true enemies of this place, the White Phantoms.

“Hah?!”

Park Hui-Jin couldn't hide her astonishment.

‘Did he just yank me back because he wants to monopolise the monster?’

The other two male Hunters, who so happened to be Mage-types, also stopped casting their spells in sheer dumbfoundedness.

“No matter how strong you think you are, that thing is a monster of a high-rank dungeon!”

Completely ignoring Park Hui-Jin's furious voice coming from behind him, Jin-Woo walked right towards the Ice Bear.

‘Well, it's not going to be okay to use daggers for this one.’

The blood splatter would make a mess of things, wouldn't it?

Jin-Woo had already summoned his two daggers almost out of reflex, but stored them back in his Inventory. Instead, he clenched his fists tightly.

‘Well, I promised to just observe, but this is an emergency, so I'm sure they'll understand. Right?’

Jin-Woo's glare collided mid-air with the Ice Bear's.

Roar!

The Ice Bear swung its telephone-pole-thick front arm towards Jin-Woo like a streak of lightning.

Swish-!!

However, the attack only swiped at the empty air.

‘Why is it so fast compared to its size?’

Jin-Woo was already above the Ice Bear's head. It was here that he kind of understood the reason for this monster's infamy.

“Even then....”

He also sensed that all his level ups until now weren't in vain.

Before the Ice Bear could lift its head up, Jin-Woo punched with all his might right in the middle of the monster's forehead.

Kaboom!!

The head of the Ice Bear slammed down on the snowy ground with an explosive force.

Its skull was completely obliterated; with its limp tongue hanging outside the slack maw, the Ice Bear stopped moving completely.

[Level up!]

'Hell yeah!'

He was thinking that his level up was just around the corner, and now, he was glad to have stopped Park Hui-Jin from taking any action.

"You... you, just what are you??"

Jin-Woo heard that trembling voice and looked behind him, only to spot four speechless faces staring back at him.

Jin-Woo sheepishly scratched the side of his head.

'I warned them earlier because I didn't want to run into this sort of situation....'

It seemed that a person would become rather forgetful whenever he or she witnessed something utterly beyond their capacity to understand.

Left with little choice, Jin-Woo had to state his position once more.

"I told you, I'll not tolerate anyone asking me questions. If you're unhappy with my methods, then...." Jin-Woo pointed his finger in the direction of Kim Cheol's team. ***"You can always go that way."***

Only then did Park Hui-Jin regain her senses, and her facial expression changed.

"You think I'll leave your side after seeing how you one-punched that Ice Bear??"

Honestly, Park Hui-Jin was now overflowing with joy.

She only chose to follow this youth because her gut feeling said he'd be a better option than Kim Cheol, but holy cow, she quickly discovered that she had quite literally stumbled onto an unexpected jackpot here.

She was blessed with a quick head, so it was easy to come to a conclusion. If she really wanted to get out of this place alive, then she had to follow Seong Jin-Woo.

She feared that Seong Jin-Woo might suggest they go their separate ways, so she hurriedly made a suggestion first, her heart beating anxiously.

"Mister Jin-Woo, please take over the leader's position. We'll definitely follow every one of your commands from now on."

'...Well, I did say I wouldn't humour their demands at all, but....'

Jin-Woo pondered for a bit, before nodding his head. Thinking about the near future, it seemed that this arrangement would prove to be convenient for him.

Park Hui-Jin looked behind her.

The student named Hahn Song-Yi was someone Seong Jin-Woo brought along, so there was no need to ask her. So, that left the two male Hunters.

“I’m sure you two also agree with my suggestion, yes?”

The two Hunters, now being on the receiving end of the unexpected stare, alternated their gazes between the corpse of the Ice Bear and Jin-Woo, before hurriedly nodding their heads.

Once more, in front of the Red Gate.

Hyun Ki-Cheol used his handkerchief to wipe away the cold sweat from his brows, his eyes locked on his watch.

Baek Yun-Ho asked him.

“How long has it been?”

“It’s been about three hours now, sir.”

“Three hours.... Meaning, it’s almost been three days inside.”

Baek Yun-Ho’s voice sounded grave. Out of four people gathered here, only he had personally experienced entering a Red Gate before.

One of the S-ranked Hunters representing South Korea – Baek Yun-Ho.

Even to someone like him, a Red Gate was a challenging place to survive.

With a complicated expression, Baek Yun-Ho recalled his experiences.

“The most terrifying aspect of the Red Gate is that... you’re thrown into a completely different world.”

This was a rare recollection of the past as told by an S-rank Hunter. Naturally, the attention of Ahn Sahng-Min, Joo Sung-Chan, and Hyun Ki-Cheol focused on him.

Baek Yun-Ho continued on.

“Once you cross the Gate, the place you end up could be a desert with temperatures soaring past 60 degrees Celsius, or it could be a dense jungle full of poisonous insects and snakes. Or, it could be the middle of a snow-covered field where it’s so cold that you’d immediately develop frost bites.”

Gulp.

The three men simultaneously swallowed their dry saliva.

“Until you actually enter it, no one knows what awaits them beyond the Red Gate. So, how can anyone prepare for something like this?”

It was the same story as today. The Gate that looked plain and normal immediately changed its colour to red as soon as Hunters entered it.

“Your skin is burning under the hot glares of the sun, or you’re tormented by poisonous insects throughout the day, or your flesh rots from the skin-peeling cold.... And so, the weakest of your group would start dying first.”

“Oh, my god....”

Hyun Ki-Cheol spat out a gasp as if he could hardly calm himself down.

“But, even when you’re in such a perilous situation, you still have to fight monsters as well.”

Just from listening to his explanations, they could understand the hopelessness of the current situation. However, the explanation didn’t end there.

“Okay, then. Let’s say that you’ve somehow adapted to your new environments. From then on, you will have to procure food.”

Indeed, one would have to secure enough food to last a few weeks at a minimum, or at worst, for several months. Now that would be a huge challenge in and of itself.

“While stuck in the unforgiving surroundings and suffering from constant hunger, all you can trust is your magic energy compass.”

The magic energy compass always pointed towards the source of a powerful magic energy emission.

The only ways to escape from a Red Gate were to follow the needle of the magic energy compass, locate the boss and kill it, or wait until the dungeon break occurs.

“Now, think about waiting for days, weeks, or even months while only staring at that compass. How can anyone not go mad from that?”

The three men nodded their heads. These three knew that normal people like them would not last one day in places as hostile as those.

“I said that it’s been three days already, didn’t I?”

“Yes.”

After hearing Hyun Ki-Cheol's reply, Baek Yun-Ho formed a distressed expression.

"Most likely, all Hunters ranked C and below have died by now."

Kim Cheol was ranked 'A'. However, no matter how good his skills were, it was impossible for a rank A to protect everyone. Unless it was a rank S Hunter standing by their side....

Which meant....

"All we can pray for now is the safe return of the higher ranked Hunters."

This was the conclusion derived from his personal experience.

In Baek Yun-Ho's mind, the Hunters ranked C and below were already as good as dead by now.

Evening.

Large chunks of meat were nicely sizzling on top of a campfire.

"You know, this bear meat, it's a bit chewy but not as bad as I thought."

"Would you like some more?"

"Aigoo, thank you kindly."

Goh Myung-Hwan expertly sliced the meat of the Ice Bear and placed them on a plate pushed forward by Yun Ki-Joong. These two men were the rank C Hunters following Jin-Woo.

Both Park Hui-Jin and Hahn Song-Yi were also slowly chewing on the bear meat, although their portions weren't as large as the men's.

"Unni, please pass me the pepper."

"What about salt?"

"Mm, the seasoning's just about fine, so it's okay."

They all looked to, more or less, have adapted to the living conditions of the dungeon. From the campfire, to the blankets wrapped around them, and the tents all set up, too...

They didn't seem to be in trouble at all.

Heck, from a certain perspective, one could say that they looked rather comfy, instead.

Goh Myung-Hwan scanned the vicinity and spoke up.

"Don't you think the attacks of the Ice Bears have lessened lately?"

Park Hui-Jin replied to that question.

“Well, that’s because the team leader has annihilated their numbers, that’s why.”

“That man, it’s like he has some sort of unresolved vendetta against these bears from his previous life or something. His eyes go all crazy when he spots an Ice Bear. He’s so scary whenever he does that. Really, really scary.”

By now, Jin-Woo’s title had been set as the team leader.

Park Hui-Jin felt Jin-Woo’s absence and craned her neck a little to scan the surroundings herself.

“Now that I think about it, where did the team leader disappear to?”

Yun Ki-Joong had his head almost buried in the plate as he chomped down on the meat, but still, raised his head to make his reply.

“He went out a little while ago, saying that he’s going to take a look around here.”

“Huh.” Park Hui-Jin formed a helpless expression. ***“Roaming inside a high ranked dungeon all alone..... Isn’t he scared at all?”***

Yun Ki-Joong formed a sly grin.

“If it’s him, it’s not going to be a problem.”

“Oh, well. He’s strong enough to kill Ice Bears, high-rank monsters, with his bare hands, after all.”

Goh Myung-Hwan followed up to Yun Ki-Joong’s words and continued on.

“But, by the way.... since we’re discussing this and all.... Just how high must your rank be, if you can beat up a nonsensically huge monster like that?”

Stop.

Everyone suddenly became utterly silent.

They were all curious about the same thing as well. But, they dared not say anything, fearful of being kicked out of this place.

“....Let’s just finish out meals first.”

Everyone nodded their heads at Park Hui-Jin’s suggestion.

Jin-Woo searched through the forest, and made his exit as he brushed past some thickets.

‘It must be somewhere nearby....’

He could sense the presences of multiple Ice Bears coming from somewhere. From last night, he had been carefully tracking the Ice Bears.

This was all because he had finally realised that Ice Bears were coming from the same direction.

Jin-Woo continued to search, before his eyes began glittering dangerously.

‘Found you!’

He spotted dozens of caverns on a cliff-like wall, lying beyond some bushes. And he sensed presences of more than one lifeform coming from each of the caves.

Hell, he didn’t even have to expand his Perception here; his eyes could clearly see many Ice Bears lazily moving in and out of several caves.

Just a quick head count and he found over 30 bears.

In other words, this was literally a bear farm.

The corners of Jin-Woo’s lips arched up.

He deliberately came here alone to eliminate the possibility of eyewitnesses. This would be the perfect opportunity to utilise his shadow soldiers.

Indeed, he had been waiting for a moment like this.

‘Come out.’

When he inwardly called out, the soldiers wearing black armour soundlessly materialised and surrounded him.

“You all understand that this is your first sortie, right?”

What he meant by that was, just as one’s impression was decided upon through the first encounter, these guys would have to impress him with their first battle, too.

‘.....’

‘.....’

The shadow soldiers stood at attention in eerie silence, with nary a hint of disorder.

‘Nice.’

Jin-Woo smirked deeply, seeing them like that.

Sniff, sniff....

Meanwhile, more and more Ice Bears began emerging from the caves after detecting Jin-Woo's scent.

'Looks like the other side is done preparing, too.'

Jin-Woo pointed at the Ice Bears.

"Go."

As soon as his order was issued, the shadow soldiers rushed forward as if they were sliding on ice.



Chapter 62 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The shadow soldiers rapidly closed in on their targets. Unfortunately, the angry swipes of the Ice Bears' front paws were faster than their movements.

Swing!

Kwajeek!!

A single hit, and one shadow soldier was obliterated.

If it wasn't a 'shadow' underneath the armours but an actual human being, that attack would surely have ripped him apart into several pieces.

'Hmm...'

Jin-Woo frowned deeply.

'As I thought, did I ask for too much?'

Whether it was their physical strength or their body sizes, these Ice Bears were difficult enemies for the shadow soldiers to fight against.

However, something quite surprising happened next.

'Heok!'

Jin-Woo's eyes opened wider.

The soldier with its chest torn open by the Ice Bear's attack suddenly transformed into a clump of black smoke just before it fell to the ground.

Poof!

The black smoke coagulated in a spot a couple of steps away and it reverted back to its original appearance.

'Very good!'

Jin-Woo's expression brightened up.

The 'undeads' – he remembered this crucial fact that he had unwittingly forgotten about until now.

The Ice Bear became even more agitated than before after realising its attack was all for nothing, and it roared out loudly.

ROOOAR!!

And so, as the infantrymen bought time out in front, the magic soldiers standing at the back had completed their spells.

Boom!!

Kaboom!!

The balls of flames leaving the ends of the magic soldiers' hands exploded here, there, and everywhere. The shadow soldiers swept up in the explosions regenerated right away, but on the other hand, the Ice Bears could only roll around screaming in sheer pain and agony, as their bodies caught on fire.

Rooooar!!

Growl!!

Meanwhile, the shadow soldiers didn't waste time and swiftly approached the defenceless Bears, before stabbing down on them with their blades.

Stab!!

Staaaaab!!!

One by one, the triumphant and arrogant Ice Bears were falling at the cooperative tactics of the shadow infantrymen and the magic soldiers.

'Hiya....'

Jin-Woo continued to spectate on the proceedings with an expression filled with great interest and happiness.

The infantrymen and their quick regenerative abilities; the magic soldiers and their superb firepower.

The overall combat prowess of the shadow soldiers had far exceeded his initial expectations.

Soon, the Ice Bears were forced into retreat by the might of the shadow soldiers and were pushed back towards the entrance of the caves.

He was thinking that the end of the battle was drawing near, but then....

ROOOOAR!!

Accompanied by the eardrum-shaking roar, a huge shadow slowly emerged from one of the caves.

"Isn't that...."

Even Jin-Woo's eyes grew extra round and super-large.

The bear that came out was at least a head taller and double the body size compared to others around it.

Roar!!

Just a single swipe from this huge bear, and multiple soldiers were blown away.

SWOOOSH-!!

Kabboooooom!!

The regeneration rate of the soldiers could not keep up with the huge Ice Bear's relentless attacks.

Kwajeeeck!!

Slam!!

Jin-Woo could only leak out a groan after seeing that.

“So, it's the leader of the pack, is it....?”

He kind of suspected that, since there was a pack, there should be a leader leading it, too. However, the b*stard turned out to be much bigger and stronger than he had anticipated.

“Krooaar!!”

The huge Ice Bear leader obliterated all the shadow soldiers appearing before it, and approached Jin-Woo at a frightening speed.

It was at this point that a message popped up in his view.

Tti-ring.

[Your Mana has been depleted and shadow soldiers cannot regenerate anymore.]

[Your Mana has been depleted and shadow soldiers cannot regenerate anymore.]

‘What??’

He hurriedly checked his MP value, and just as the System had warned him, it was totally gone.

[MP: 0/1860]

Once his MP had been drained. The obliterated shadow soldiers didn't regenerate and simply entered back into Jin-Woo's shadow.

In other words, in order to regenerate the lost soldiers, he needed lots more Mana.

‘That d*mn Mana....’

One more reason to enhance his Intelligence Stat, then.

Jin-Woo scratched the side of his head. With the appearance of the Ice Bear leader, the flow of the battle had reversed completely.

However, Jin-Woo still had plenty of leeway.

‘Since their boss has shown up, this side should also step up.’

Jin-Woo, still standing there with his arms crossed, summoned the ‘boss’ of the shadow soldiers.

“Igrit!!”

One more shadow escaped from Jin-Woo’s shadow.

And from that shadow, a knight wearing a helm with decorative mane rose up soundlessly.

Jin-Woo pointed forward with his chin.

Igrit bowed to Jin-Woo, before rushing towards the Ice Bear leader.

Tap, tap, tap, tap!

Igrit lightly evaded the Ice Bear leader’s front paw, and slid between its hind legs. It brushed past the hind legs again, pulled out a dagger and cut the Bear’s tendon.

“Roar?!”

That was the beginning.

Igrit unsheathed his longsword and deftly evaded the Bear’s enraged attacks, all the while shaving away at the giant monster’s body with his blade.

Tendons, claws, front paw, legs, torso – bits and chunks of meat from various areas of the monster sheared off and fell to the ground piece by piece.

“Huh....”

Jin-Woo could only gasp out in admiration at Igrit’s crafty and elaborate movements.

The last place Igrit hit was the bear’s head.

Slice!

The giant Ice Bear’s head separated from its body and flew away. Before it landed on the ground, though, Igrit easily snatched it. He trod proudly towards Jin-Woo, and knelt before him.

Plop.

And then, he placed the dead bear's head before Jin-Woo's feet. It was as if the knight was presenting the spoils of victory to his sovereign.

Jin-Woo swallowed dry saliva and gazed at the kneeling Igrit and his bowed head.

'If Igrit decided to use his sword from the beginning, would I have been able to defeat him?'

The Ice Bears, without their leader present, lost all semblance of order and became utterly confused, before they were cleanly swept away by the remaining shadow soldiers. That brought about the end to the battles.

The result was truly satisfying.

[Shadow Infantryman Lv. 2]

[Shadow Infantryman Lv. 3]

[Shadow Infantryman Lv. 2]

[Shadow magic soldier Lv. 2]

The levels of the soldiers had risen up nicely. Also, as these shadow soldiers were seen as a part of his skill, even Jin-Woo's level had risen up by 3.

Most of all, there was another point he found much to his liking.

"Rise up."

[Shadow extraction was a success.]

[Shadow extraction was a success.]

[Shadow extraction was a success.]

....And that point would be the fact that he could recruit new 'friends' now.

Roooarr....

From the shadows of several Ice Bears that Jin-Woo had selected, which obviously included the boss bear, black shapes began to slowly rise up.

'And I thought that armour-wearing bears would pop up....'

His expectation turned out to be far off the mark, unfortunately.

These creatures came with the name tag that said 'shadow beast soldier'; at a casual glance, they kind of resembled bears, but it was still difficult to tell whether these monsters were actually corporeal or not.

The creatures continued to pant as the black steam-like fog rose up from their backs.

‘Well, uh, they might not look that great but, they are definitely the shadows of the Ice Bears.’

That explosive strength, that destructive power!! Without a doubt, they would prove to be useful.

It happened then.

Rooaarr...

Jin-Woo’s ears twitched after hearing the roars of bears coming from the distance. There were several of them, as a matter of fact.

‘Meaning, this isn’t the only bear farm, huh?’

It was already getting too late today, so should he pay a visit there tomorrow?

A bright smile formed on Jin-Woo’s face.

“Uwaaahk!!”

“Keo-heok!!”

His comrades screamed in despair.

Kim Cheol’s bloodshot eyes shot open wide.

‘No, this can’t be!!’

How can I....

How can this Kim Cheol fail?!

He was supposed to become the elite of the White Tiger Guild. They even trained him with the special program so he’d enter the Guild’s main combat force right away.

However, to fail like this?

He could not acknowledge it.

While enduring against the biting cold and starvation, they fought off against a group of snowmen. Then, they encountered snow giants. They lost two of their numbers, but in the end, emerged victorious against the giants. He thought that the conquest of this ‘dungeon’ was going according to plan.

However....

However!!

As soon as the desperate struggle against the snow giants ended, the White Phantoms sneak attacked from the rear as if they were waiting for this chance.

These wicked, treacherous b*stards had been in hiding, waiting for the raid team to exhaust all their stamina first.

What happened next was a one-sided massacre. In the blink of an eye, the Hunters were annihilated.

“C-captain!!”

A fallen Hunter reached out towards Kim Cheol with his bloodied hand.

Kim Cheol could only retreat in faltering steps.

Suddenly, a White Phantom appeared on top of this fallen Hunter. It pulled out a dagger and swiped it under the Hunter’s neck.

“K-keogeok?!”

The White Phantom smiled as it sliced the neck off and raised its head to look at Kim Cheol.

Kim Cheol could only scream in terror.

“U, uwaaaaaah!!”

And then, not even taking one look behind him, he ran straight into the forest.

There were Ice Bears in the forest?

Compared to snowmen, snow giants, and the White Phantoms that appeared before him, those unseen Ice Bears came across as laughable existences right now.

Kim Cheol summoned every ounce of his energy and ran, and then ran even harder.

The White Phantoms glared at the departing back of fleeing Kim Cheol and raised their bow. Just as they took aim and got ready to fire....

A White Phantom with white hair extending all the way down to its waist raised its arm and stopped the attack.

The White Phantoms lowered their bows.

‘.....’

When the long-haired ‘Elf’ signalled the others to follow Kim Cheol, the White Phantoms began disappearing from where they stood one by one.

Kim Cheol ran out of the thick bushes.

“Pant, pant, pant....”

He couldn’t catch his breaths at all. Still, when he recalled the derisive

smirks on the White Phantoms' faces as they massacred the Hunters, he felt like peeing himself from fear.

His gaze inexplicably lowered to his hands.

He couldn't feel much from his frozen hands now. He had lost all feelings in his feet a long time ago.

In his current condition, he couldn't even fight properly.

'If it weren't for this d*mn cold.... No, if we weren't starving for several days, we wouldn't have been annihilated like that.'

In the end, Kim Cheol couldn't acknowledge the failure of the raid team... no, his own failure.

Muttering to himself, Kim Cheol raised his head.

'By the way, where am I? How deep in the forest is this?'

Kim Cheol began scanning the surroundings. Then, he picked up on a faint smell coming from a distance.

Kim Cheol began following that smell.

It wasn't that far.

Once he walked past the trees and escaped out into an open area, he was greeted by an unbelievable spectacle.

'But, how can this be?!'

He found over twenty dead Ice Bears surrounding a cave entrance.

And he thought it was odd to not see a single Ice Bear when every single tree was marked by them!

"What is going on here?"

Kim Cheol investigated the conditions of the carcasses. They all showed sword-inflicted wounds. Some of them even had signs of being burnt alive.

Almost immediately, Kim Cheol thought about Seong Jin-Woo and the Hunters following him.

"Could they have....? Did they do this to these Ice Bears?"

No, it couldn't be.

Kim Cheol shook his head.

The wounds on Ice Bears were inflicted with long swords. As far as he knew, none of the Hunters that went into the forest used a sword.

‘Besides, the two rank E Hunters didn’t even wield any weapons.’

If he were to look at the situation objectively, then there was no chance that those people were still alive. In that case, there could be only one explanation.

‘There are White Phantoms nearby!’

His heart fell to the pit of his stomach.

Here he was, thinking that he had finally lost those d*mnable White Phantoms, yet they were actually residing close by!

Scared stiff now, Kim Cheol held his breath and hurriedly returned to the forest.

A little bit further away, and a little bit faster than before...

He wanted to escape from the territory of the White Phantoms as soon as possible.

Around the same time.

“Krrooaar....”

An Ice Bear cried out and fell to the ground.

Shadow soldiers pounced on it and made sure it was no longer able to draw breath.

[Level up!]

“Very nice....”

Jin-Woo was standing at another ‘bear farm’.

It had been five days since his arrival in this snowy world. He had already cleaned up three bear farms in the meantime.

‘Looks like I’ve killed most of the bears in this forest.’

His level had risen up quite a bit during this time. It was the same story for his soldiers, too. Initially, they had to attack a bear in a pair to kill it, but now, they could eke out a victory in a one-on-one fight.

This was very satisfying.

Once the Stats of the soldiers rose up, Jin-Woo assigned them different roles.

He could store 30 shadows now. 28 soldiers participated in battles, one went around picking up magic crystals, while the remaining one secured the bear meat.

He didn’t even have to move a finger but still ended up with loot from the

Hunts, so this was proving to be oh-so-convenient for him.

‘I can’t sense the presence of other monsters around here anymore.’

It seemed that he had more or less took care of all the monsters inside the forest.

In that case....

‘Should I think about killing the boss?’

It could be at least a month, or in the worst case scenario, several months before the dungeon break occurs. He couldn’t just sit here and wait for a Gate that who knows when it’d open up.

‘And, I still need to kill that insolent little Elf b*stard, too....’

That measly monster that dared to provoke Hunters. Its cocky grin still remained etched in his memory.

The scent of meat coming was from somewhere.

Sniff, sniff....

Kim Cheol sniffed the air with his nose, now super-perceptive due to his extreme hunger.

The only food he ate since his imprisonment behind the Red Gate was a single rabbit. Picking up on the smell of food, he reflexively swallowed down his ravenous saliva.

‘Gulp.’

Perhaps, the White Phantoms were having a meal nearby.

‘Still, if their numbers are low, then....’

Then, he could subdue them and snatch away their food. His hunger was extreme enough for him to arrive at such a conclusion.

‘Let’s go and take a look.’

Kim Cheol walked as silently as possible and cautiously approached the source of the smell.

And eventually....

He hid inside the bush, and discovered the Hunters who had left along with Jin-Woo. Kim Cheol’s eyes grew wider from the revelation.

‘What the hell??’

The smell of meat was coming from the campfire they had raised.

‘How can they still be alive?!’

Kim Cheol began glaring.

He couldn’t find one rank E Hunter among their midst.

‘He must’ve been killed first after taking the lead like a fool.’

That would be an obvious thing, wasn’t it?

However, there was a not-so-obvious spectacle unfolding before his eyes. So, how should he go about explaining this situation, then?

Something didn’t add up.

‘Wait, hold up. Their attire....?!’

Clothes and blankets designed to keep warm, tents and several pieces of equipment could be seen. They were obviously well prepared.

‘Just how can this be?!’

Kim Cheol was getting flustered even more, but then, his gaze had stopped by at a certain place.

It was a piece of bread sitting next to sizzling meat.

Meaning, these people even had food ready.

His confusion immediately morphed into a rage.

‘These b*stards....!!’

Grit.

Kim Cheol began gritting his teeth.

They had enough supplies to ensure their continued survival, yet they wanted to hog them all for themselves?!

‘If my hands hadn’t frozen up, no, if only I wasn’t starving, I’d have easily dealt with those Ice Elves!!’

Realising that these b*stards had snatched away the crucial supplies that should’ve been shared among the rest of the team, he couldn’t hold back his fury anymore.

Kim Cheol angrily ran out of the bush.

“You sons of b*tches!!”

Park Hui-Jin quickly shot up from her spot, clearly surprised.

“Kim Cheol? How did you get here??”

She found it rather difficult to lie here and say it was good to see him again. Because... Kim Cheol's glare was full of murderous intent.

Indeed, he didn't even bother to mask his hostility.

“My raid team failed to conquer this dungeon because of the lack of supplies, yet how can all of you find yourselves with this much food and this type of equipment?!”

“That is.....”

Park Hui-Jin couldn't continue on. If she mentioned Jin-Woo here, then Kim Cheol's rage would be directed towards the youth. To her, Jin-Woo was her saviour.

‘Also, that man always looked at Jin-Woo in a suspicious manner.’

Park Hui-Jin shut her mouth immediately.

That prompted Kim Cheol's eyes to open even wider in anger.

“Even I don't think all of you were complicit in this crime. So, who had hidden these?! Tell me the truth, and I will ignore everything else.”

A thick vein popped up on Kim Cheol's neck.

“Tell me who monopolised all the gear and drove his comrades to death!!”

His angry roar reverberated throughout the forest.

Kim Cheol was planning to shed blood here if it would appease the sin of betraying his comrades.

“I'll count to three. If you don't reveal who it was by then, I'll take it as the sign of all of you being complicit in this matter.”

Hahn Song-Yi tugged at Park Hui-Jin's sleeve.

“U-unni....”

Park Hui-Jin hugged Hahn Song-Yi. Both Goh Myung-Hwan and Yun Ki-Joong swallowed their saliva as cold sweat soaked their backs.

Kim Cheol was a rank A. Even if everyone present worked together, they wouldn't be able to win against him. However, none of them still mentioned Jin-Woo's name.

“One.”

Kim Cheol yanked loose his sword from the scabbard attached to his waist.

“Two!”

Even then, the lower ranked Hunters showed not one sign of opening their mouths.

How dare lower ranked Hunters ignore his order?

That point alone stoked the flames of Kim Cheol's anger even higher.

'Just what these b*stards think of me as....?'

Murderous intent burned brightly in his eyes.

He'd kill that woman first.

He'd kill Park Hui-Jin before anyone else, the one who betrayed the raid team and left along with these lower ranked Hunters.

'That's right, she left the raid team because she must've been scheming something.'

He could only think that way.

Kim Cheol stood before Park Hui-Jin and spat out the last countdown.

"Three."

Park Hui-Jin squeezed her eyes shut.

It was then.

"Four."

POW!

Kim Cheol was struck super-hard by something in the back of his head and kissed the ground as his entire body slid across the snowy ground for several metres.

The eyes of the Hunters grew wider.

"Team leader!!"

Jin-Woo had hit Kim Cheol so hard that steam was still rising up from his palm.

Jin-Woo spoke in a dumbfounded voice.

"How dare you speak rubbish when it was you who drove your friends to death?!"



Chapter 63 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Jin-Woo oppa!”

Hahn Song-Yi displayed her happiness as tears formed in her eyes.

“Team leader!”

It wasn't as much as Hahn Song-Yi, but still, the two male Hunters' expressions also brightened up considerably. Park Hui-Jin also breathed a sigh of relief after confirming Jin-Woo's face.

Unfortunately, Jin-Woo didn't have much leeway to respond to their welcomes.

“Ssh!”

Jin-Woo placed his finger on his lips and gestured them to keep quiet. The four people, seemingly getting ready to embrace Jin-Woo at any moment now, all froze up like ice statues.

Park Hui-Jin cautiously asked.

“W-what's the matter?”

Jin-Woo glared at the fainted Kim Cheol, the dumb b*stard who deserved to be beaten up, before turning around.

“Looks like Kim Cheol brought along unwanted visitors.”

He sensed countless presences hiding in the forest. Right now wasn't the time to worry about Kim Cheol or Go Cheol or whatever. The real problem lay elsewhere, after all.

Shururu...

After sensing Jin-Woo's glare, the White Phantoms undid their stealth and revealed themselves one by one. At a quick count, there were around 20 of them.

And among them...

Jin-Woo's glare was fixed on a long-haired White Phantom riding on horseback.

‘...That has to be the boss.’

An overwhelmingly mighty aura was coming from that creature, incomparably heavier than any Ice bears and the White Phantoms near it.

If that guy wasn't the boss of this dungeon, then just who else could be?

For the first time in a long while, Jin-Woo's skin broke out in goosebumps.

Just as Jin-Woo was shivering ever so softly from its powerful aura, the boss also recognised Jin-Woo's strength in one go.

“So, there really was one. A truly worthy being among all the human trash.”

“...What did you just say?”

“...?”

When Jin-Woo spat out a response purely out of reflex, the boss displayed an expression of pure surprise.

“You, can you understand our language?”

Jin-Woo was also taken aback.

‘How is it possible to converse with this guy?!’

Not only could he understand what a monster was saying, but he could also actually converse with it, too.

A language he couldn't even remember learning before fluently rolled out of his mouth as if it was his mother tongue.

“You.... You know how to speak the language of the monsters?!”

Park Hui-Jin's expression said her shock was so extreme that she didn't know what to do now. Seeing that, Jin-Woo realised that only he could understand what that boss was saying here.

‘Is this because of the System?’

Like, an automatic translation feature?

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze back to the boss. The boss returned the gaze with great interest.

“To be able to converse.... Very good. There is someone I wanted to introduce to you.”

The boss pointed at one of the White Phantoms standing behind it.

“I'm sure you're familiar with him already.”

Jin-Woo's glare sharpened instantly. Indeed, he recognised that particular White Phantom.

‘That guy is....’

That guy was none other than the bastard that fired an arrow at Hahn Song-Yi before breaking out in a mocking grin. How could he forget that arrogant bastard’s face?

That exact same smile was still etched on the monster’s face.

“This friend informed me of a truly strong being among the humans. And this friend wishes to challenge you to a duel, so how ab.....”

Even before the boss finished his words, the ‘Knight Killer’ Jin-Woo threw flew in a straight line.

Stab!!

And the dagger landed right in the middle of the grinning White Phantom’s face.

“Heok!”

The shocked cry came from the Hunters, though, Yun Ki-Joong hurriedly covered his mouth to stifle the cry he let loose inadvertently just now.

Plop.

The White Phantom collapsed on the ground.

Jin-Woo extended his hand out, and the ‘Knight Killer’ buried in the dead Elf’s face shook around a little before it got pulled out and flew back to him. Jin-Woo grasped the returned ‘Knight Killer’ in reverse grip and lowered his posture.

“Anything else you want to say?”

The boss spoke up in admiration.

“....You are indeed very strong.”

Then, it climbed off the horse. However, as if it wasn’t planning to fight yet, it didn’t draw its weapons nor showed any willingness to engage in battles.

“However, you know this already, don’t you?”

The boss maintained a leisurely expression and continued to engage him.

“....That you can’t fight this number all by yourself.”

There were over twenty Ice Elves here.

However, their number wasn’t important. No, the real danger came from the fact that there was the boss monster among them.

The rest of the White Phantoms were no match for Jin-Woo, who had raised his level as much as he could by hunting every single Ice bear in this forest.

...Exactly like the fool who got killed with a dagger to its face.

‘So, how should I go about killing the boss?’

While Jin-Woo began kicking his brain into gear, the boss continued on.

“So, I shall make a simple suggestion.”

“A suggestion?”

“That’s right. It won’t be such a bad suggestion for yourself.”

“....”

Jin-Woo was inwardly surprised.

It was a well-known fact that humanoid type monsters possessed intelligence. But he never expected to see a monster trying to negotiate with a human. So, he couldn’t help but get curious here.

“...I’ll hear it.”

The boss smiled as if it had expected that answer and opened its mouth.

“Before that, I want to ask you something.”

“.....?”

“Why are you among these humans, when you’re not one of them?”

Jin-Woo’s expression crumpled deeply.

“What nonsense are you talking about?”

“Ahaha. It seems that you have no idea.”

The boss guffawed out loudly, before pointing to its temple.

“Every one of us can hear a certain voice repeating itself in our heads. It tells us to kill humans. However, I can’t hear that voice when I’m looking at you.”

‘Ah.’

That’s what this guy meant?

In that case, Jin-Woo could think of a reason for that.

‘When the boss says humans, it’s probably talking about Hunters.’

The thing was, he had changed to this strange something called ‘Player’

through the System, during his ordeal in the underground temple. Technically speaking, he was slightly different from other Hunters – meaning, other Awakened human beings.

‘That’s why that guy thinks I’m not a human.’

That made perfect sense.

When Jin-Woo’s expression slowly changed to that of an understanding, the boss nodded its head.

“There is no need for us to fight each other. And our side does not wish to see needless casualties, as well.”

The boss finally got to the main topic.

“Hand over the humans behind you. Then, we will guarantee your life. How does my suggestion sound to you?”

Before he answered, Jin-Woo asked back.

“I want to ask you something, too.”

“Fine. Go ahead.”

“Just who are you? Where did you come from, and why do you wish to kill humans?”

“We are....”

It happened then.

The smiling face of the boss suddenly froze stiff. But, that odd state lasted only for a brief moment. The boss regained its original expression and continued on.

“There is no need for us to fight each other. And our side does not wish to see needless casualties, as well.”

‘What the hell was that?’

Jin-Woo frowned deeply.

The boss repeated itself like an NPC from a game that was asked a question that was not in the script, or one that it was not permitted to answer, to begin with.

“Hand over the humans behind you. Then, we will guarantee your life. How does my suggestion sound to you?”

Its expression showed how relaxed it was. In other words, it had not recognised how odd its own actions were. The White Phantoms standing

behind didn't display any reaction towards the boss's strange behaviour, either.

'.....'

Jin-Woo continued to wordlessly observe then, prompting the boss to begin urging him.

"Will you accept my suggestion or not?"

Jin-Woo wanted to find out more about the monsters' origins and their true intentions, but as it turned out, it was all a waste of time.

"In that case...."

The only thing remaining was to choose. But then again, he had made up his mind already a long time ago.

"I refuse."

The corner's of Jin-Woo's lips arched up.

"You see, you possess a far too tempting shadow for me to let go."

He was planning to kill the boss and take away its shadow. And there was no way he'd change his mind now when he was constantly thinking about how to carry the plan out ever since the boss made its entrance.

"Are you planning to fight my soldiers all by yourself? Do you truly believe that you can overcome the disadvantages in numbers all alone?"

Jin-Woo smirked derisively.

'Soldiers', was it?

"You think you're the only one? I've got them too."

He summoned his shadows. According to his wishes, the soldiers hiding in Jin-Woo's shadow all revealed themselves in the blink of an eye right behind him.

"Uwa?! Uwaaak!"

Again, the cry came from the Hunters this time as well.

Yun Ki-Joong cried out in fright as the shadow of the Ice Bear, the shadow beast soldier, suddenly materialised right next to him and he fell hard on his a*s.

"Ah, ahh...."

When Jin-Woo took a glance at the pale faces of the surviving raid team, he felt that it was a bit regretful, but this was an emergency situation. There was

no time to explain things to them here.

‘Well, I wouldn’t explain things to them even if this wasn’t an emergency, though.’

After summoning 29 shadow soldiers, Jin-Woo stood before them and glared at the boss.

“So, who’s disadvantaged now?”

Finally, the boss displayed its hostility.

“...You seem to know some petty tricks, don’t you? Fine. If it’s your wish, I shall grant your death.”

The boss unsheathed two daggers from his sides.

This was what Jin-Woo wanted, as well. He grasped the ‘Knight Killer’ in his right hand, while the left grasped the ‘Poison Fang of Kasaka’ as he got ready for battle.

‘Petty tricks, is it?’

The boss had a point there. Jin-Woo might hold an advantage in numbers, but his ‘army’ was slightly lacking if he wanted to hunt the boss down.

Jin-Woo knew this very well.

The boss’s self-confidence could have come from this fact.

Indeed, he now needed more comrades. Powerful comrades.

‘If it’s a powerful comrade, then....’

There was one candidate here.

Jin-Woo sneaked a glance to his side. The still-unconscious Kim Cheol was lying there, unmoving.

“Attack!”

When the boss issued the order, the White Phantoms pulled on their bowstrings.

“Bears!”

Jin-Woo placed the beast soldiers at the front.

Stab! Stab! Stab! Stab!

Kkrrrooar!!

The beast soldiers, with arrows sticking out of their bodies, all roared out in anger.

Before the White Phantoms could nock the next volley of arrows, the infantrymen rushed forward. The magic soldiers also began chanting their spells.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo's eyes gleamed dangerously.

'You're mine!'

Jin-Woo deliberately pushed Kim Cheol's longsword towards its owner with his heel, before pouncing forward himself as well.

His sight was fixed solely on the boss of the White Phantoms. The boss too was waiting for Jin-Woo's arrival.

Soon, sparks endlessly flew as the four daggers wielded by two creatures clashed in mid-air.

Clang! Clang!! Clillaang!!

At the same time, the shadow soldiers and White Phantoms also slammed into each other as well.

Goh Myung-Hwan looked at Park Hui-Jin next to him.

"Uhm.... So, like, shouldn't we lend assistance here?"

Park Hui-Jin shook her head.

"This isn't a fight where we can butt in, you know."

This was a battle where huge black monsters were swinging their giant claws; the destroyed black soldiers were regenerating to their original state in the blink of an eye; and the gleaming blades and the arrows fired from the upper-rank monsters, White Phantoms, were chaotically flying around in the snowy field.

'So, what can a rank B or C do in this place?'

Indeed, the only thing they were permitted to do here was to pray. Park Hui-Jin could only stare at Jin-Woo with a tight chest as he fought the long-haired White Phantom.

"Keu-heuk!"

Jin-Woo gasped out.

As expected of a boss from the high-ranking dungeon!

The fight looked to be even from the side, but Jin-Woo was getting cut and sliced constantly all over his body. Would he be able to last three minutes at this rate?

His MP was also rapidly depleting away as his soldiers constantly regenerated.

Finally, the magic soldiers managed to finish their chants. A ball of flames larger than a volleyball flew in the midst of the White Phantoms.

KABOOM–!!

That was the power of the levelled-up magic soldiers in full display.

Awakened by the resounding eardrum-shaking explosion, Kim Cheol regained his consciousness and opened his eyes.

“M-mm.....”

Kim Cheol raised his head to look.

Clang! Clang!! Pow-!!

His blurry vision picked up on the sight of White Phantoms fighting against the unknown black soldiers.

‘What the... hell is going on here?’

He couldn’t figure out what happened while he blacked out, but at least, he knew very well why he was lying on the ground like this.

The hand that slapped him in the back of his head!!

And the voice that came from behind him!

‘That voice definitely belonged to Seong Jin-Woo!!’

Now that he had regained his bearing, the sense of shame and rage bubbled over like crazy and the ends of his fingertips trembled.

How fortunate that he could feel the hilt of his sword.

If he was surrounded by the White Phantoms, then he’d not get out of here alive. In that case, he must....

‘I’ll kill that b*stard Seong Jin-Woo with my own hands.’

His maddened eyes finally spotted the back of Seong Jin-Woo.

.....There he was!

He was too busy fighting a White Phantom and wasn’t paying any attention to his rear.

This was his chance.

Kim Cheol stood up right away. And then, ran.

“Uwaaaahhhh!!!”

After sensing Kim Cheol running towards him, Jin-Woo laughed out inwardly in elation.

‘Right, if it’s you....’

Kim Cheol ran with all his might and after taking aim at Jin-Woo’s neck, swung the sword, hard.

“Die!!”

In front, the boss. From behind, Kim Cheol.

Even though he was stuck in a seemingly dangerous situation, Jin-Woo still managed to shout out.

“Igrit!!”

As if he’d been waiting for that call, Igrit jumped out from his shadow immediately and easily deflected Kim Cheol’s sword.

Clang!!

“No!”

Kim Cheol’s bloodshot eyes opened wider.

However, even before he could say anything, Igrit’s sword pierced deeply into his chest.

Stab!!

The blade ran straight through his chest and emerged from his back.

“Keo-heok!!”

Jin-Woo quickly took several steps back.

‘I knew Kim Cheol would act this way.’

This fool was someone who didn’t think about anything in depth, and only acted according to his emotions. They had been together only for a short while, but that was enough for Jin-Woo to figure this guy out.

Kim Cheol glared at Jin-Woo.

“You.... You....!”

And with that, Kim Cheol breathed his last.

As Igrit stepped up to delay the boss, Jin-Woo issued an order to the shadow of the dead Kim Cheol.

“Rise up!!”

When that happened....

Uwaaaahhh-!!

Accompanied by a heavy, sombre cry, a huge hand emerged from the shadow.



Chapter 64 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

[Shadow Extraction was a success.]

'There you go!'

Jin-Woo clenched his fist tightly. The final piece of this puzzle called the boss raid had fallen into its place.

The black knight that emerged from Kim Cheol's shadow was far bigger and sturdier than the original version. And it even carried a huge war hammer in one hand as well.

The other hand held a shield as tall as a grown man, and the overall impression this guy gave off was truly oppressive and threatening.

'Kim Cheol was a muscular man, but this shadow is just too over-the-top....'

Even though it was an urgent situation, Jin-Woo couldn't help but leak out a gasp of admiration.

[Please set the soldier's name.]

'Ah, right. The name.'

Jin-Woo sneaked a glance to his side.

Perhaps finding the battle quite tough, Igrit was having a hard time right now, being pushed around by the boss. Currently, he was barely buying enough time by relying on his cheat-like regenerative ability.

Slice!

Igrit's arm was sliced off, then.

'I don't have much time to waste here.'

A name, was it?

Should he go with whatever? Maybe, Kim Cheol?

Jin-Woo immediately shook his head.

To call an undead with a name it used while it was still alive... That just didn't sit well with him.

‘Right, his name was Kim Cheol. Cheol, so Iron, it is!’ (TL: ‘cheol’ is a Korean word for ‘iron’)

The name had been decided.

As soon as Jin-Woo thought of that name, it was bestowed on the newly-birthed shadow knight.

[Iron Lv. 1]

Knight grade.

A knight grade!

It was the same grade as Igrit, but again, there was no time to celebrate.

‘I can’t waste any more time than this!’

Jin-Woo pointed to the boss.

“Iron!!”

Iron’s large frame lumbered forward quite heavily like a mountain.

Thud, thud, thud!!

Jin-Woo really liked the new guy’s huge frame, but he couldn’t help but worry whether that lumbering speed could even catch up to the agile boss or not. Fortunately, such a worry was put to bed really fast.

Iron leaned back and roared out loudly.

WUOOOAAARRR!!

‘What was that?!’

Just as Jin-Woo was getting flustered, several messages popped up in his view.

Tti-ring.

[Iron has used ‘Skill: Shout of Provocation’.]

[The owner of the dungeon has fallen into an ‘aggro’ed’ state.]

“An aggro skill!”

Kim Cheol was actually a rank A Tanker.

So, quite obviously, he possessed a high-level aggro skill, and the shadow knight extracted from his shadow, Iron, had retained that skill in full and was able to use it no problem.

The head of the boss swivelled towards Iron.

Although it could've chosen to finish Igrit off right in front of its eyes, the boss simply pounced on Iron as if it had been hypnotised by a ghost or some such.

Iron used the skill 'Reinforcement' and endured the sharp dagger attacks of the boss digging into his body.

'Nice!'

Jin-Woo nodded his head in approval.

In the meantime, Igrit's sliced arm regenerated to full.

Shurururu...

The black smoke began oozing out from the stump and coagulated to form a new arm.

Meanwhile, the boss was still preoccupied with Iron.

And seizing this chance, Jin-Woo and Igrit's combined assault began on the boss.

'.....'

Park Hui-Jin became utterly speechless as the unbelievable spectacle unfolded right before her eyes.

What she was seeing right now proved to be too unrealistic, too outlandish. She didn't even want to ask for clarification. Not anymore.

From her side, Hahn Song-Yi asked her with a timid voice.

"Unni...."

Park Hui-Jin responded belatedly to her.

"Uh, ng?"

"Do all fights of Hunters look like that?"

She must've been frightened silly, because Hahn Song-Yi's voice was trembling noticeably. Park Hui-Jin replied to her, sounding helpless as well.

"....If that were the case, then I'd never have earned my licence, you know."

Goh Myung-Hwan asked next, looking utterly dazed out of his mind.

"Could it be.... that we are dreaming right now?"

If this was indeed a dream, then it must've been a nightmare, instead.

Park Hui-Jin looked back at the battlefield where the monsters and the

black ‘somethings’ were having a chaotic throwdown, and spat out a long sigh.

At the same time, a new worry formed in her head.

‘When we get out of here, without a doubt...’

There was no doubt that, as a survivor, she’d be asked several uncomfortable questions. How should she go about explaining what she was seeing here, then?

Park Hui-Jin couldn’t even begin to fathom just where she’d start her explanations on what happened inside the Red Gate, and in particular, the man named Seong Jin-Woo.

After she raised that point to everyone....

“But, still...”

Yun Ki-Joong, sitting on the ground and shaking like a leaf, spoke with some difficulty.

“Isn’t it an incredible thing that we can actually worry about what’ll happen to us once we get out of here?”

The Hunters all nodded their heads in unison.

This was an upper-rank dungeon. Not only that, a Red Gate, too.

Even though they found themselves in such a dangerous area, they were now worrying about the matters that would take place outside.

This was all due to the power of one man.

Park Hui-Jin’s gaze was directed to Jin-Woo.

‘Mister Seong Jin-Woo, you’re...’

Her feelings had moved way past shock and gratefulness, and she was beginning to feel a sense of awe towards him now.

Stab!

The ‘Poison Fang of Kasaka’ stabbed into the boss’s shoulder.

[‘Effect: Paralysis’ has been activated.]

[The effect has been cancelled due to the high resistance of the target.]

[‘Effect: Bleeding’ has been activated.]

[The effect has been cancelled due to the high resistance of the target.]

With the increased levels of the enemies he’d been facing lately, the

additional effects of the 'Poison Fang of Kasaka' failed to activate properly more often than not.

Still, inflicting injuries was a good thing in a fight.

'Nice!'

The boss's agile movements were being hampered gradually due to the increasing number of wounds being inflicted on its body.

"Keuahahahk!!"

The smile had disappeared from the boss's face a long time ago.

The boss had been dodging the combined attacks of Jin-Woo, Igrit and Iron rather freely until then, but now, it was quite obviously running out of breath.

'Just a little bit more!'

Iron suddenly bear-hugged the boss.

"Now!!"

When Jin-Woo gave the signal, Igrit rapidly retreated. Jin-Woo too quickly stepped back. The boss's eyes widened in confusion.

"What are you tryin.....?"

Before he could finish, the magic soldiers completed the explosion spells and they rained down on Iron's position.

KWABOOOM!!

BOOM!!

"Keo-heok!!"

For the first time ever, the boss spat out a sharp cry of pain. The b*stard twisted its body around, and Iron's arms fell off.

Grit!

The boss's enraged, murderous eyes were now firmly fixed on Jin-Woo.

"Keuahahahahk-!!"

Seeing this, Jin-Woo could only feel admiration towards the boss once more.

'Even with such a heavy wound, it can still exhibit that much strength!'

As expected of a high-level dungeon's boss. Unfortunately for it, the scale had tilted away from it some time ago.

'Dagger Throw!'

Just like what he did to that arrogant White Phantom, Jin-Woo threw the ‘Knight Killer’ at the boss, and added even more momentum by using the Ruler’s Reach.

Shukk-!!

The dagger flew to its target in the blink of an eye.

‘Keuk!’

The boss realised that it was difficult to dodge the throw, so it used its own dagger to deflect Jin-Woo’s blade.

Crack!

The ‘Knight Killer’ flew at such a frightening speed that the boss’s dagger actually cracked from the impact force.

And at the same time....

Jin-Woo used ‘Stealth’ and ‘Dash’ skills to close the distance to the boss, and stabbed the ‘Poison Fang of Kasaka’ deeply into the b*stard’s waist.

Stab!!

The boss’s eyes widened considerably.

“Keo-heok!!”

However, the boss still managed to grab Jin-Woo’s wrist even in the midst of all this. It was not that hard to see the boss’s desire to not go down without a fight from its crazed eyes.

“Kuwaahhk!!”

Just as the boss raised its dagger above its head to stab at Jin-Woo....

Jin-Woo simply smirked. At the same time, a huge war hammer slammed into the head of the boss.

SLAM!!

The boss’s face crashed into the snowy ground.

Behind the boss, Iron was raising his hammer up high again, both of his arms already fully regenerated.

The huge hammer flew down again.

Swoooooosh-!!

Splat!!

Igrit was getting ready to attack, but then, sheathed his sword back into the

scabbard attached to his waist.

Jin-Woo also stored his daggers back inside the Inventory.

And the expected messages popped up right away.

Tti-ring.

[You've killed the owner of this dungeon.]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

'Whew, it's finally over.'

Jin-Woo sighed grandly in relief.

What a hard-fought victory this was.

He was about to take a breather, but then, saw Iron and his eyes went extra round in surprise.

"Hey, hey! You can stop now."

Jin-Woo hurriedly stopped Iron.

He was about to smash down with his hammer again, but finally stayed his hands. Perhaps it resembled the original too much, because the guy turned out to be a bit simple in the head like the original.

Meanwhile, the boss's corpse had been pummelled into a meat paste already.

'However, its shadow isn't affected, so it's fine.'

Jin-Woo smirked deeply.

Finally, the reward for this incredibly hard battle, the one he'd been salivating over, was right by his feet, waiting to be taken.

Jin-Woo issued his order.

"Rise up."

It was now 3 AM.

The facial expressions of four men waiting around the Red Gate were, as expected, not so good.

Unable to endure any longer, Hyun Ki-Cheol finally opened his mouth.

"Guild Master, we'll remain here and wait, so how about going home first, sir?"

“My Guild members are trapped in there, so how can I even think about going home to relax now?”

Baek Yun-Ho was resolute in his decision. Indeed, that wasn't something the leader of a large Guild, not to mention as a currently-active rank S Hunter, should entertain under this sort of situation.

It was here that Ahn Sahng-Min's eyes widened.

“Huh? Look, the Red Gate!!”

Hyun Ki-Cheol and Joo Sung-Chan also discovered an oddity with the Red Gate.

“The, the Red Gate is opening up!!”

“The dungeon's been cleared!”

“There are... there are people coming out!!”

Baek Yun-Ho clenched his fists tightly.

‘That Kim Cheol!! Did he manage to pull it off?’

Everyone waiting there hurriedly rushed towards the front of the Gate.

Baek Yun-Ho, unable to hide his excitement, began searching for the leader of this team, Kim Cheol.

However.... even though all of the survivors came out, the big guy couldn't be seen.

‘Uh? Huh? This can't be right.’

The one who had been insisting on believing in Kim Cheol, Joo Sung-Chan's previously confident attitude was gone now, and his expression was getting warped as well.

“Park Hui-Jin Hunter-nim!! Goh Myung-Hwan, Yun Ki-Joong Hunter-nim!!”

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!!”

After spotting Jin-Woo walking along with Hahn Song-Yi right behind the others, Ahn Sahng-Min's face was quickly filled up with a huge smile.

‘I thought as much!’

It was such a noticeable contrast from the face of Joo Sung-Chan.

However, his smile also faded away quickly. When five people, including Seong Jin-Woo, walked out from the Gate, the portal to another world slowly disappeared from their view.

“It can’t be.... Is this everyone?”

Jin-Woo nodded his head, looking rather exhausted.

Hyun Ki-Cheol had asked that question, and after getting that silent answer, his expression hardened instantly.

‘How can this be....?’

Hyun Ki-Cheol’s eyes teared up, and he reluctantly began crossing out the names of the deceased off the member list. This was a terrible job, but it had to be done regardless.

Baek Yun-Ho had been staring at this in a daze, before gasping out in sheer shock and disbelief.

‘Only the lower ranked Hunters returned?! Never mind the A rank, only a single rank B survived?!’

Such a thing should not happen. Just what on earth happened inside that dungeon?

“Let’s go. I’ll take you home.”

Jin-Woo was about to lead Hahn Song-Yi and leave the location, but Baek Yun-Ho reached out and grabbed his wrist first.

“Excuse me. Wait.”

Slap!

Jin-Woo fiercely shook off that hand. Baek Yun-Ho’s eyes sharpened immediately.

“We need to talk for a second here.”

Jin-Woo turned around.

“I’m too tired. If you have questions, you should ask your own Guild members.”

Baek Yun-Ho couldn’t hold back and revealed his identity.

“I’m Baek Yun-Ho, the Guild Master of the White Tiger.”

Jin-Woo’s eyes remained cold, however.

“So what?”

Being on the receiving end of Jin-Woo cold response, Baek Yun-Ho’s eyes suddenly transformed to that of a monster’s. No, they completely resembled a beast now, instead.

“We lost nine Guild members through this incident. As the Master, I have

the right to ask you a couple of questions regarding this matter.”

This was no longer a request.

It was an order.

Or, even a threat.

Didn't matter what anyone thought of his words, he was not planning to let Jin-Woo go that easily here.

But then, Jin-Woo too angrily glared back.

He was not being cowered by the intense hostile aura oozing out in full force from the rank S Hunter, Baek Yun-Ho.

“I rescued three of your people. If you're really their leader, shouldn't you be saying thanks to me first?”

It was Baek Yun-Ho who had to withdraw his threatening aura first, as he was bombarded with this incredible pressure emanating from Jin-Woo.

Besides that, what he said was logical, as well. Baek Yun-Ho couldn't argue against the point raised.

“...I apologise.”

Baek Yun-Ho lowered his head. Seeing this, Jin-Woo turned around once more to leave.

“Hahn Song-Yi, let's get going.”

“Okay.”

Hahn Song-Yi carefully studied the mood of this place and followed after Jin-Woo. The two of them got on the van and not too long after, left the location.

‘This doesn't make any sense....’

Baek Yun-Ho's thoughts were now in complete disarray. He quickly ran towards the sole surviving upper-rank Hunter, Park Hui-Jin.

“Excuse me, Miss Park Hui-Jin.”

She had been trying to warm herself up with the cup of hot tea Hyun Ki-Cheol had handed over. She raised her head to meet Baek Yun-Ho's gaze.

“What is the matter with that guy? Why was he so downbeat like that?”

Indeed, that man had probably gone through an unimaginable hell and finally managed to escape from the Red Gate, yet why was his attitude so murderous?

Park Hui-Jin shook her head, displaying her own confusion.

“I also don’t know, sir. After killing the boss, he stood in front of the dead body and shouted something out three times, and after that, he’s been like that....”

“He was okay until then?”

Park Hui-Jin looked at Goh Myung-Hwan and Yun Ki-Joong. The two men nodded their heads simultaneously.

“What a strange man....”

Baek Yun-Ho muttered to himself as he stared helplessly at the street Jin-Woo had disappeared in.

Ahn Sahng-Min saw the state his boss was in, and became incredibly nervous as if he had done something wrong instead.

“My apologies, Guild Master. I’m sure he’s like that because he’s just exhausted. He’s not a bad person, I assure you. At least, I believe he’s not.”

“No.... That’s not the problem.”

“Pardon me?”

Baek Yun-Ho turned around to stare squarely at Ahn Sahng-Min.

“Why haven’t you scouted that man already?”

“Ehhh?”

Ahn Sahng-Min couldn’t hide his fluster. But, it wasn’t strong enough to best the fluster Baek Yun-Ho had felt just now.

‘Against me....’

Baek Yun-Ho recalled Jin-Woo’s fierce glare and could only nervously swallow his dry saliva.

Gulp.

Abruptly, he thought that, were he to fight that man, he’d have to resolve himself to lose an arm or two.

‘Maybe, even worse than that....’

Quickly figuring out what Baek Yun-Ho meant, Ahn Sahng-Min hurriedly replied.

“We’re doing our very best, sir.”

“That is clearly not enough.”

Baek Yun-Ho's eyes began to sparkle rather dangerously.

Seong Jin-Woo.

Indeed, Chief Ahn's discerning eyes were on the money again.

“From today onwards, you'll receive all the resources you need. You must bring that man into our Guild, no matter what.”



Chapter 65 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

On the way home.

Vroom....

Jin-Woo was busy licking his lips in unhappiness as he drove the van.

'Tsk....'

Was it because the gap between his Stat values and the extraction target's were too great? What a disappointment it was, but his extraction attempts ended in failure.

'What a waste, but there's nothing I can do now.'

He'd still be able to kill a boss from a high ranking dungeon in the future. What's important now was to quickly raise his skill levels high enough so that he'd not miss out on another chance.

Levelling up. Now that was something Jin-Woo excelled in.

And also....

Jin-Woo's hand left the steering wheel for a little while, as a dagger with an elegant, flowing, arched blade appeared in his grip.

[Item: Baruka's Dagger]

Rarity: A

Type: Dagger

A dagger used by the great warrior 'Baruka'. Weight reduction magic has been applied to it, allowing the wielder's movements to become even more agile than before.

Attack: +110

Agility: +10

Well, he didn't walk away completely empty-handed; this was the dagger the boss had been using. There were two, but one of them was broken, so he threw that away and took the remaining dagger.

'The Baruka's Dagger, eh?'

Not only did it feature high attacking power, but it also raised his Agility, too.

On that front alone, there was no need to compare it to ‘Knight Killer’, a dagger ranked ‘B’ he paid handsomely for, never mind the rank C ‘Poison Fang of Kasaka’.

Its rarity alone was at A, too!

This was probably one of the best weapons to replace the Poison Fang of Kasaka that had been losing its effectiveness lately.

‘I like the way it feels in my hand, too.’

While he was mulling over the things that happened inside the Red Gate, they had arrived before Hahn Song-Yi’s home.

Screech.

She had been sitting in the passenger seat without saying a word as if she wasn’t even there in the first place. As soon as the van came to a stop, she climbed out of the seat and bowed her head.

“Drive safely.”

“I will. Good night.”

Hahn Song-Yi turned around to leave.

Seeing her slumped shoulders and powerless gait, it seemed that the original goal of this trip had been met, one way or the other.

‘Well, although things did get a lot complicated, I was trying to change her mind anyway....’

It was rather likely that she wouldn’t try to become a Hunter in the future. It’d be the same story for anybody if their first dungeon experience just so happened to be a Red Gate.

He nodded his head in satisfaction and was about to start the van again, but then, the passenger side door was abruptly opened from the outside.

‘.....?’

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze. Hahn Song-Yi had returned to the van and was holding on to the door.

‘What’s the matter with her?’

His curiosity only lasted for a little while.

Hahn Song-Yi bowed her head deeply again, this time looking much

calmer than before.

“Thank you for everything, oppa.”

He only now realised that, from some time ago, the honorific she used to address him changed from ‘ahjussi’ to ‘oppa’.

“Uh, sure thing. Don’t mention it.”

“Uhm, excuse me....”

“Mm?”

“Tomorrow.... No, see you later.”

Later?

Before he could ask her for clarification, Hahn Song-Yi hurriedly ran away. After her back disappeared from his view did he realise what she was talking about.

‘Aha.’

From today onwards, he’d be teaming up with Yu Jin-Ho again to mop up the rest of the raids. Hahn Song-Yi was a raid team member, so of course, they’d see each other again later on.

‘Ah, so she meant that, huh.’

What a relief that was, though.

His plan would’ve been affected pretty badly if Hahn Song-Yi refused to come out of her house because of the trauma from this incident.

‘This worked out for the best.’

And now, he would use his shadow soldiers to clear out the rank C dungeons even faster than before. He felt utterly confident of clearing up the remaining raids in the shortest time possible.

Also, he couldn’t wait to see how Yu Jin-Ho would react after witnessing his shadow soldiers in action, too.

‘The reactions of that man Yun Ki-Joong were really priceless, weren’t they?’

Jin-Woo chuckled softly and leisurely turned the steering wheel.

The next morning.

“Yawn~.”

Jin-Woo yawned grandly as he stepped out of the apartment’s foyer. He only closed his eyes for a bit, but hell, it was time to meet up with Yu Jin-Ho

already.

“Hyung-nim, good morning!”

He heard the familiar energetic voice greeting him. Yu Jin-Ho was already here, waiting.

“You don’t even have a car, so how did you get here?”

The raid team’s favourite ride, ‘Mister Van’ had been commandeered by Jin-Woo last night and was currently parked neatly in the apartment’s parking lot nearby.

“I caught a taxi, hyung-nim.”

“Ah, a taxi.”

And here he was, thinking of going to fetch the kid instead....

“Oh no, it’s fine, hyung-nim. I’m the one asking for your help, so it’s only right that I’m the one driving you around, at least.”

Yu Jin-Ho grinned happily and replied.

This morning started like any other.

However....

“Uh?”

Yu Jin-Ho discovered something new. And that was a cylindrical something held in Jin-Woo’s hand. Yu Jin-Ho’s curiosity peeked in an instant.

“Hyung-nim, what is that?”

“Ah, this?”

Jin-Woo grinned mysteriously.

“I’m going to use it inside the dungeon today.”

“Heok!”

Suddenly, the chill invaded Yu Jin-Ho’s back.

‘Is it a weapon he’s going to use inside the dungeon?’

Hyung-nim had already displayed many extraordinary things before; just what kind of a horrifying weapon was he bringing to a dungeon today, then?

Yu Jin-Ho was getting pretty psyched up already.

Gulp.

Yu Jin-Ho swallowed his dry saliva and raised his head after finally settling

his mind.

“Hyung-nim, let’s get going.”

“Hold on.”

Jin-Woo pulled out his phone and dialled someone.

“There’s someone we should take along, as well.”

“Excuse me? Who?”

“Hey, Song-Yi. It’s me. Meet us at the parking lot. We’ll go to the Gate together.”

Song-Yi.... Could it be that Song-Yi?

As soon as Jin-Woo ended the call, Yu Jin-Ho asked him.

“Hyung-nim, the person you want to take with us, is she that high-schooler in our team?”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Hahn Song-Yi lived near here, and their destination was the same, so there wasn’t any reason to go there separately, now was there?

Unfortunately, Yu Jin-Ho didn’t see it that way.

Hahn Song-Yi....

The rather-cute high school girl with her hair tied up in a bun.

‘He already knows her number, and can talk to her in such a friendly manner, too.... Could hyung-nim and her have formed a much deeper relationship than meets the eye?’

For sure, hyung-nim was a cool guy even from another man’s perspective.

‘Especially when he uses nothing but a dagger to totally rip apart a monster....’

While hyung-nim wouldn’t be interested at all, it’d not be a strange thing for an impressionable school girl to fall for a man like that.

Yu Jin-Ho nodded his head. If this was the case, then there was something he had to make sure right away.

“Hyung-nim. Should I call Miss Hahn sister-in-law from now on?”

‘....Did this guy fall off the bed and hit his head or something??’

Jin-Woo’s crumpled expression was implicitly implying that. Even if Yu Jin-Ho was not too quick on the uptake, he should still be able to figure that

one out pretty easily.

“Uhm.... You two aren’t dating?”

“She’s a friend of my little sister.”

“Oh. Ahhh....”

So, that’s what happened. Yu Jin-Ho finally understood the situation. He didn’t even know what was going on, yet he was thinking of calling that girl his sister-in-law....

His face reddened up considerably.

Soon enough, Hahn Song-Yi came to the parking lot.

Not only that, she was noticeably better dressed than how she was usually.

Seeing this, Yu Jin-Ho grinned slightly.

‘Yup, she’s definitely a teen girl, wanting to look nice in front of the brother of her friend and all.’

As the leader of the raid team, he was thinking of praising the fellow raid team member’s choice of wardrobe, but then, Jin-Woo greeted her first.

“Did you get some sleep?”

In that instant, Yu Jin-Ho’s expression froze stiff.

‘.....’

Hahn Song-Yi smiled and shook her head.

“I couldn’t catch a wink.”

“I’m sure you’re still exhausted, so get some rest in the van.”

Listening to the two young people’s conversation, the thought process of Yu Jin-Ho became more and more messed up.

‘Uh? Uhhh??’

Hahn Song-Yi asked Jin-Woo this time.

“What about you, oppa? Did you get some sleep?”

“Well, only for a little bit. It was already 4 AM by the time I got back home, anyway.”

“Well, true that....”

Night? Couldn’t catch a wink? Still exhausted? 4 AM by the time he got back home????

Just as Yu Jin-Ho's panicked state was morphing into a full-blown freak-out, Jin-Woo stopped walking towards the van and looked back at him.

"What are you doing, Yu Jin-Ho?"

"Uhm..... Well, uh, hyung-nim?"

".....?"

"Well, the thing is.... Miss Hahn Song-Yi is still a minor, hyung-nim."

"Okay. So?"

".....Never mind, hyung-nim."

Truly now, hyung-nim was a man among man.

Yu Jin-Ho was deeply impressed by Jin-Woo who didn't care about the glares of the public and thought that....

'Indeed, he's extraordinary.'

He also began to reflect on his foolish ways of trying to apply the standards of the regular people on hyung-nim.

Around the same time.

Inside the private conference room of the White Tiger Guild.

"That's everything I saw."

Park Hui-Jin finished her report.

Although Baek Yun-Ho tried to dissuade her, saying that she should rest up first, she readily agreed to participate in the debriefing right away.

She added that her stay over there was comfortable (?), comparatively speaking.

"..."

"..."

The two men who sat through the debriefing, the Guild Master Baek Yun-Ho and the section chief Ahn Sahng-Min, were left utterly speechless.

The agent in charge of yesterday's disastrous training, Hyun Ki-Cheol was not present, currently in the Hunter's Association to discuss how to handle the fallout from this incident.

So, there were only three people inside this conference room.

Ahn Sahng-Min was the first one to break the silence.

"Everything you told us, are they all true?"

“You can speak to Goh Myung-Hwan and Yun Ki-Joong. They will corroborate everything I’ve said.”

Those two Hunters went home right away, saying they missed their families. Park Hui-Jin was 100% certain that her testimony and theirs would not be any different.

‘Well, I only described the things I saw, after all.’

Such as, when that man wasn’t around, she’d hear the pitiful screams of Ice Bears every now and then coming from the forest some distance away, or such as, when he’d suddenly wake up in the middle of the night to perform push-ups while everyone was fast asleep.

She didn’t bother to talk about things other Hunters might have experienced, those that she didn’t get to see.

“Huh.....”

Ahn Sahng-Min spat out a gasp that could either be a sigh or a groan.

Seong Jin-Woo knocked out cold a rank A Hunter in one hit, he could use separate space magic freely, and most important of all, he controlled dozens of summoned creatures.

Every one of those were unbelievable things to swallow.

And even more shocking news than that was....

“He had cleared the upper-rank dungeon almost all by himself.”

Baek Yun-Ho broke his silence and said that sentence, word by word, syllable by syllable. He was qualified to say that, because he was an S rank.

“Now that is the most unbelievable thing out of all of them.”

Sure, the summoned creatures fought alongside him, but then again, those summons weren’t his comrades, to begin with. No, they were simply a part of Seong Jin-Woo Hunter’s skill.

In other words, it was pretty much the same thing as Seong Jin-Woo clearing the dungeon alone.

“Even if you’re a really high-ranked Hunter, clearing an upper-rank dungeon by yourself is incredibly difficult.”

Not only that, it was a Red Gate, to boot.

What if it was Baek Yun-Ho?

Perhaps, he might be able to solo a rank B Red Gate, albeit just barely.

This feat was only achievable because Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was capable of summoning and controlling dozens of summons.

Ahn Sahng-Min remained stupefied as he spoke up.

“There’s no doubt that he’s a Re-Awakened possessing an extremely rare skill.”

Baek Yun-Ho agreed.

“It is already rare to see a Hunter controlling a summoned creature, but he can control several tens of them....”

While working as the S-rank Hunter, Baek Yun-Ho had met countless other capable Hunters, and had talked to a lot of them, too. But he had never, ever heard of such a skill before.

“A Re-Awakened possessing a rare skill that’s on another dimension compared to every other rare skill....”

Baek Yun-Ho expressed his admiration once more.

It was here that Ahn Sahng-Min thought of a question.

“If we were to evaluate Mister Seong Jin-Woo’s ability in monetary terms, how much could it possibly be?”

“.....”

Even Baek Yun-Ho couldn’t answer that.

However, without a doubt, it didn’t matter what Seong Jin-Woo’s current value was – as soon as he went through the re-assignment test, his value would shoot up several times more.

They needed to sign him up before that happened.

The White Tiger Guild had already lost a rank A and several rank Bs through this incident. If they failed to secure the winning lottery ticket called Seong Jin-Woo at this time, then the losses incurred would be rather too severe to just write them off.

“I shall place my full trust in you, Chief Ahn.”

Baek Yun-Ho’s eyes gleamed in the light of faith. Ahn Sahng-Min formed a dignified expression.

It was then.

“Mm?”

The gazes of Baek Yun-Ho and Ahn Sahng-Min were directed to Park Hui-

Jin. She had her hand raised slightly.

Baek Yun-Ho asked her.

“Is there something you’d like to ask us?”

Succeeding in her mission to draw the attention of the two men, she lowered her hand and spoke.

“Please, allow me to participate.”

“In what?”

“The recruiting of the raid team leader... No, I mean, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

Baek Yun-Ho and Ahn Sahng-Min exchanged glances for a bit, before looking back at her.

The person in charge of scouting and recruitment, Ahn Sahng-Min, tilted his head.

“But, why would Park Hui-Jin Hunter-nim....?”

“I’ve spent the most amount of time with Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim out of everyone in the White Tiger Guild, so surely, my familiarity with him would prove to be useful in reeling him in.”

It had been six hours in reality. But, inside the Red Gate, it was almost a week. Park Hui-Jin’s suggestion sounded logical from Baek Yun-Ho’s and Ahn Sahng-Min’s point of view.

On top of this, Park Hui-Jin was a beauty as well.

One could say that the power of a beautiful face was absolute when seducing another person.

Sensing that the thoughts of the Guild Master and the section chief had been swayed, Park Hui-Jin finally got to the main topic.

“However, I have a condition.”

Baek Yun-Ho asked her.

“And what could that be?”

“When Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim signs up with our Guild, please place me in his raid team, no questions asked.”



Chapter 66 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Park Hui-Jin had realised something back then.

And that would be the level of terror an upper-ranked dungeon could possess, and how powerless she was in front of such overwhelming odds.

‘It’s like, I’m the one who ended up learning what Mister Seong Jin-Woo wanted to teach Hahn Song-Yi....’

It was kind of embarrassing, but what could she do? Pretending that terrifying things weren’t terrifying was an exercise in foolhardiness and stupidity.

The experiences she had back in the Red Gate were enough to make her skin crawl. However...

However, just because of her fear, she couldn’t give up on all the sweet treatment and the status enjoyed by a rank B Hunter.

The sky-high annual salary!

The plentiful societal benefits!!

And finally, the public recognition!

If one disregarded the inherent danger, then being a Hunter was pretty much the perfect career. Precisely because of the high-risk factor, the return on ‘investment’ was equally huge.

But now, Park Hui-Jin had figured out a sure-fire way to decrease the risk associated with her job.

‘And that is to go on a raid together with the team leader Seong Jin-Woo.’

The one person Park Hui-Jin was utterly envious of back in the Red Gate dungeon was none other than Hahn Song-Yi. There was only one reason for that.

And that would be the promise Seong Jin-Woo made towards Hahn Song-Yi.

If you analyse those words in a different way, then he was trying to say that he had no reason whatsoever to protect other team members besides Hahn

Song-Yi. No, they were just baggage.

So, she was constantly worried that those two folks would abandon the group and sneak away unnoticed.

But on the sixth day....

Seong Jin-Woo really did clear the upper-rank dungeon all by himself and took Hahn Song-Yi home, safe and sound.

He had kept his promise.

Seeing that, Park Hui-Jin became sure of one thing. And that would be...

As long as she was working for him during the raids, she'd never find herself in danger.

The moment she realised this, her heart began pounding uncontrollably. And the level of her excitement hadn't cooled off even until now.

His calm and cold decision making.

His excellent abilities.

And not only that, his sense of responsibility, too.

She really wanted to go on a raid together with Seong Jin-Woo. That was why she came up with that term of hers.

'They must put me in the team leader Seong Jin-Woo's raid team, no questions asked.'

Baek Yun-Ho and Ahn Sahng-Min chatted to each other. And a little bit later....

"We accept your terms."

Baek Yun-Ho smiled genially.

"In that case, Miss Park Hui-Jin, act together with Chief Ahn for the time being."

"Thank you very much, sir."

However, she was well aware that scouting that man wouldn't be easy. Seong Jin-Woo was more than well aware of his own true worth, after all.

'Even during the Red Gate, he was always so full of confidence.'

indeed, making him 'move' would be one hell of a challenge.

'Still...'

She now had another chance to meet him again. An imperceptible smile

formed on Park Hui-Jin's lips.

Baek Yun-Ho was pondering something until then, before opening his lips in some difficulty.

“Chief Ahn.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I'd like to know Mister Seong Jin-Woo's contact details.”

“Guild Master, that is....”

Ahn Sahng-Min decided to tell everything regarding on why he had to conceal the matters regarding Jin-Woo until now.

Baek Yun-Ho wordlessly listened to it and gravely nodded his head.

“It's understandable that he wishes to remain anonymous, what with him possessing such incredible abilities. After all, there are enough people in this world who wish to stay out of the limelight, too.”

But then, such a guy did reveal his powers in front of quite a few eyewitnesses. Sure, the situation back then might have been urgent, but it was also likely that he felt more or less okay about letting the world know of his powers.

“As long as the matter isn't blown out of proportion, I'm sure Mister Seong Jin-Woo won't blame you, Chief Ahn.”

Ahn Sahng-Min nodded his head.

Of course, no one present in this room wished to leak this story beyond these walls. Never mind for Seong Jin-Woo, it would not be a good thing for both the Association and the White Tiger, as well.

“That's that, but....”

Ahn Sahng-Min was worried about something else, though.

And that would be his boss rushing things and ending up screwing everything up because he didn't know of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's rather decisive character.

He dearly wanted to prevent that, at least.

“Sir. I think... you directly contacting him is a bit....”

Baek Yun-Ho quickly figured out what Ahn Sahng-Min was trying to say here.

“Ahh, don't worry. I'm not trying to contact him in regards to the

recruitment.”

“Pardon me? But then, why....?”

“It’s as Mister Seong Jin-Woo said last night.”

Baek Yun-Ho realised something after listening to Park Hui-Jin’s debriefing. Seong Jin-Woo was the White Tiger Guild’s benefactor.

He had saved three new recruits of the Guild. Not only that, but he also took care of the Red Gate, thereby ensuring that the honour of the White Tiger wasn’t tarnished.

Even though the Association’s people made the blunder, just how bad would the impact on the Guild’s public image have been if this news got out, and everyone learned of them losing almost all of their new recruits?

Just imagining it gave Baek Yun-Ho nightmares – enough to have a total freak out, almost, right here.

‘And there I was, trying to stop that person no matter what just to get to the bottom of the incident....’

He could now understand the reason why the youth was feeling quite grumpy at that time.

If he didn’t know the circumstances, fine, but now that he knew, he simply had to do a certain thing as a living, breathing human being.

“As the representative of the White Tiger Guild, I’d like to officially express my gratitude to Mister Seong Jin-Woo. And to properly apologise for yesterday’s incident, as well.”

‘Ahh, if that’s what he means, then....’

Ahn Sahng-Min could understand now.

With Baek Yun-Ho’s straight-forward, no-nonsense personality, he wouldn’t bother Seong Jin-Woo with the matters of recruitment under the pretext of thanking the youth.

And well, he also wanted to convey his gratitude as well.

“I understand.”

Ahn Sahng-Min pulled his phone out and found Seong Jin-Woo’s numbers rather quickly.

“What is his number?”

Baek Yun-Ho also pulled his own phone out to save the contact number.

It was then.

“His number is....”

Just as Ahn Sahng-Min was about to read the phone number, he felt something was off, and turned his head to his side.

“Uhm, excuse me. What are you doing, Park Hui-Jin Hunter-nim?”

“Ah, well, I....”

With an awkward smile on her face, Park Hui-Jin sneakily hid her phone away, its screen still displaying ***“Add new contacts”***.

Inside the number one Guild in Korea, the Hunters.

A rather interesting piece of news found its way to the owner of the Hunters and the currently-active rank S Hunter, Choi Jong-In.

“This... has this been confirmed?”

Would anyone knock on their bosses' doors with unconfirmed information?

Chief of the recruitment department, Joh Myoung-Ki, nodded his head.

“Yes, Sir. We received this info earlier today from the Association.”

Every major Guild had one or two informants inside the Association.

It might not be a kosher thing to do, but this was the only way to stay one step ahead of the competition, contacting an exciting new talent first if one were to emerge out of nowhere.

However, earlier today, the Hunters' informant had leaked a pretty strange story. And after lengthy deliberation, Joh Myoung-Ki decided to come to his boss's office with this news.

‘Why? Because, the White Tiger Guild is on a roll nowadays, and they are large enough to threaten us, the Hunters.’

So, he figured that this information was worth reporting to the boss man. Exactly as Joh Myoung-Ki had suspected, Choi Jong-In displayed great interest in the matter right away.

“From a Red Gate that killed one rank A and six rank Bs, two rank Cs returned alive? Not only that, they managed to clear the dungeon, too? That is pure nonsense.”

....Even if there was one rank B among them, there was no way that this was true.

Choi Jong-In shook his head as he continued to read the memo.

“Without a doubt, there was someone else helping them out. Someone not mentioned in here.”

Choi Jong-In was certain of this. His extensive experiences in raiding dungeons told him as so.

Joh Myoung-Ki replied.

“Looks like the Association also suspects that, Sir. However....”

“However?”

“It seems that the White Tiger isn’t saying anything.”

“So, is the Association planning to overlook it, then?”

“I heard that they don’t want to conflate the matters any further, since their fault in this incident is already too significant, Sir.”

“H-mm....”

Choi Jong-In rested his hand against his chin. It was a habit of his whenever he fell into deep thought.

It was understandable from the Association’s point of view, but why was the White Tiger keeping quiet on this matter? There could be only one reason.

“The White Tiger must’ve received help from someone they don’t want others to know about.”

“I also thought the same thing, sir.”

The opinions of the two people present matched.

Choi Jong-In’s brain rapidly kicked into gear.

‘A nameless helper who can rescue lower ranked Hunters from a dungeon that’s difficult enough to kill most of the higher ranked Hunters....’

He could barely hold himself back from the curiosity now.

‘A newbie who hasn’t gone through the rank assignment test? Or, maybe a convict whose identity can’t be revealed?’

Either case was okay with him.

If it was a newbie, then the Hunters must bring that person to their fold. If it was a convict, on the other hand, then he’d be able to throw some mud in the White Tiger’s direction.

Choi Jong-In’s eyes began sparkling.

“Looks like we need to find out who was there.”

“Have you thought of a good way, sir?”

“If you want to catch a hidden racoon, you have to set the racoon’s hole on fire first.”

Joh Myoung-Ki’s eyes grew extra round.

“Are you planning to set the White Tiger Guild on fire?!”

“You think I’m crazy?? Why should I set someone else’s perfectly fine organisation on fire??”

“Ahh, my apologies, Sir. Since you are such an excellent magic-type Hunter and all, I, uh.....”

His nickname wouldn’t be ‘the ultimate weapon’ for no reason, now would it? If Choi Jong-In got serious and used his powers in full, then blowing up a building would be as easy as pie.

In any case, Choi Jong-In continued on.

“Not that. We just have to create a hot mess.”

“So, it was fire.....”

When Choi Jong-In began glaring at his underling, Joh Myoung-Ki hurriedly shut his mouth.

“We leak this to the media.”

‘That is...!’

Joh Myoung-Ki’s eyes widened.

“The big mistake of the Hunters’ Association, a massacre of the large Guild’s members, and finally, the ensuing mystery that got buried underfoot. The media just loves that kind of stuff. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Joh Myoung-Ki’s head automatically went up and down in a nod.

Choi Jong-In chuckled slyly.

“Once they get bombarded by the non-stop barrage from the media, the White Tiger will grow too fed up and in the end, reveal the identity of this mystery helper.”

“So, there was a method like that!”

Joh Myoung-Ki also began smiling as well.

This was a great chance to sucker-punch the persistent White Tiger that dared to chase after the Hunters Guild.

The ends of Choi Jong-In’s lips arched up.

“Call the reporters right away.”

[You have entered a dungeon.]

As soon as he stepped foot inside the dungeon, Jin-Woo took in a deep breath.

‘Hmm.’

After being ‘confined’ to an open-field type dungeon for a few days, the air inside the cavern-type dungeon felt new and refreshing.

Yu Jin-Ho followed him into the dungeon soon afterwards.

“Hyung-nim, I wonder just what kind of monsters would come out in this dungeon.”

“Yeah, me too.”

‘I can sense their presence close by, though.’

Indeed, they were quite close, but they couldn’t spot any.

But, when Jin-Woo took one step forward...

The floor of the cave began rising up here, there, and everywhere.

Crumble...

Rumble....

Humanoid monsters with skins made out of rocks appeared. Yu Jin-Ho quickly recalled their name.

“Hyung-nim, it’s the Stonemen.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

These b*stards were known to possess the toughest exterior out of all the monsters that appeared within lower ranked dungeons. Common sense was to use magic when one was to hunt down a Stoneman, but....

“Hold this for me, will ya?”

Jin-Woo entrusted the cylindrical vinyl package to Yu Jin-Ho and walked towards the monsters.

‘Heok!!’

Yu Jin-Ho flinched grandly, thinking that the content was a weapon, but nothing particularly noteworthy happened.

‘It wasn’t a weapon?’

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo stood before the Stonemen and summoned both the

‘Baruka’s dagger’ and ‘Knight Killer’.

Slice!

In the blink of an eye, the head of the Stoneman in front of the pack rolled to the ground.

Jin-Woo looked at the ‘Baruka’s dagger’ and smiled in satisfaction.

‘It’s pretty good.’

Then, suddenly, the smiling Jin-Woo disappeared from the spot.

Tab.

Just as Jin-Woo reappeared past the group of the Stonemen, all ten-plus of them collapsed to the ground.

Rumble – crash!

‘My body has gotten a step lighter and faster after the Red Gate thing, hasn’t it?’

But, of course it would have.

His current level was 60. His level had risen up by nine from 51 after killing all those Ice Bears and White Phantoms. And now, the rank C monsters felt like those Goblins from the rank E dungeon to him.

‘At this rate, I don’t even need to use my weapons.’

Now that he had warmed up nicely....

‘Should I increase the hunting speed, then?’

Time to summon his shadow soldiers.

With an excellent timing, another group of Stonemen was slowly lumbering towards his position from the deeper part of the cave.

‘Summon.’

As soon as he issued an order, the soldiers confined to Jin-Woo’s shadow rapidly revealed themselves behind him.

And sure enough, there was a loud scream accompanying that, too.

“Uwaaaak!!”

Oopsie.

Jin-Woo facepalmed and turned around.

‘I forgot he was here with me.’

He got way too excited and completely forgot about Yu Jin-Ho for a moment there.

“H-hyu-hyung-nim!!”

While plopped on his a*s, Yu Jin-Ho pointed his trembling finger at the shadow soldiers standing right in front of him.

“W-w-what are these??”

“It’s a bit complicated to explain... well, it’s my skill.”

“You, you can summon these things as your, your s-skill?”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Yu Jin-Ho’s jaw remained slack and didn’t want to close.

“Ahh...”

Him and hyung-nim had entered dungeons together eleven times already. He thought that he wouldn’t get shocked anymore, but he was proven wrong once more.

As expected, hyung-nim was an existence that easily exceeded one’s imagination.

Gulp.

Yu Jin-Ho laboriously swallowed his saliva as his eyes took on the black-armoured soldiers emitting a blood-chilling aura.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze away. The lumbering Stonemen had already arrived near their vicinity.

Jin-Woo pointed at them with his chin.

“Go.”

As if they were waiting for that, the soldiers silently rushed forward.

Rumble!!

The floor of the cave shook hard as the forty-odd armoured soldiers all ran at the same time. For sure, with the addition of Iron and the beast soldiers, the overall weight of the group had increased by a lot.

‘It’s like I’m looking at a fleet of tanks, isn’t it?’

Jin-Woo formed a very satisfied expression.

What with the shadow soldiers sweeping through everything, the dungeon got cleared in the proverbial blink of an eye.

The only things remaining on the floor were the scattered and broken bits of Stonemen that resembled cookies made out of dirt.

A rank C dungeon was destroyed in no time at all, in other words.

“Hoh...”

Jin-Woo exclaimed in admiration.

‘At this rate, we might get to mop up the rest of the raids pretty quickly, no?’

It seemed that the remaining eight raids would not take that long to finish up.

As soon as the battle ended, the shadow soldiers retrieved the magic crystals and stood before Jin-Woo in orderly columns. Igrit and Iron stood in front of them.

The two knights stepped to the front and knelt down.

Once the soldiers stopped moving, Yu Jin-Ho finally sneaked in closer to Jin-Woo’s side.

“Hyung-nim, here....”

He then returned the mystery vinyl package back to Jin-Woo.

Jin-Woo wordlessly took out the tumbler contained with the vinyl pack and began sucking on the straw.

“Hyung-nim, what is that?”

“It’s veggie juice.”

“Oh....”

“I kinda like its taste, actually.”

Slurp, slurp....

After he almost completely drained the tumbler, Jin-Woo asked Yu Jin-Ho.

“Hey, Jin-Ho. How many Gates did you book today?”

Yu Jin-Ho was in the middle of cautiously reaching out to touch the fur of one of the beast soldiers, but he quickly pulled his hand back and turned back to Jin-Woo.

“Four Gates, hyung-nim.”

With four today, only five would remain. He didn’t see any reason to waste any more time on this.

“In that case, let’s finish up everything by tomorrow. It doesn’t matter if a Gate is a bit far away, anyway.”

“You mean, tomorrow?”

Inexplicably, Yu Jin-Ho took a look around him. Seeing all the broken wreckage of Stonemen littering the floor, he couldn’t help but slowly nod his head.

‘For sure, with this kind of speed....’

“Understood, hyung-nim. By the way....”

Yu Jin-Ho hesitated slightly, before opening his mouth with some difficulty.

“Can I be the one to retrieve the magic stones?”

“....Why?”

“I’m kinda upset because it feels like my role’s been stolen by these guys, hyung-nim.”

Jin-Woo burst out into a soft chuckle.

‘Yup, this kid really is a weird one.’

And a day later....

Jin-Woo finished the 19 raids he had promised Yu Jin-Ho.



Chapter 67 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Hyung-nim! Now that the raids are over, how about we celebrate with a hearty meal?”

As they were driving back home, Yu Jin-Ho cautiously asked.

“Celebrate? But, there’s no one with us, though?”

The raid team was disbanded as soon as the last raid was completed. Even Hahn Song-Yi said that she had someplace she had to stop by, so there were only Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho in the van.

Yu Jin-Ho spoke as if he was embarrassed by something.

“I’ve been receiving your help all this time, hyung-nim, so like, I just wanted to treat you to a good meal, at least.”

Why was he having so much trouble saying the words ***“Let’s have a meal together?”***

Jin-Woo chuckled wryly.

Since the kid was implying that he wanted to splurge on a grand feast, there was no reason for Jin-Woo to refuse the invitation, now was there?

“Alright.”

Yu Jin-Ho’s expression brightened considerably as soon as Jin-Woo said okay.

“Hyung-nim! Should I take you to this restaurant in a certain hotel that I know? They know how to make a mean steak, you see.”

“No, not something like that.”

Unless such dishes came out in public engagements he simply had to attend, Jin-Woo would rather prefer to eat a simpler meal in peace with Yu Jin-Ho in an easy-going, relaxed atmosphere.

What a good timing it was, since he spotted one such place that fit the criteria.

The tip of Jin-Woo’s pointing finger pressed on the van’s window.

“How about that place over there?”

“Ahh, you wanted to enjoy ‘han-wu’, hyung-nim?” (TL: han-wu – Korean beef. Much more expensive than imported beef.)

“No, the place next to that one.”

Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

A restaurant next to that one.... He could only see a common diner there.

[Day of Flower Blooming on Pork Belly – thinly-sliced pork belly specialists]

“By any chance, are you talking about that pork belly place, hyung-nim?”

“What, you don’t like pork?”

Yu Jin-Ho grinned refreshingly.

“Not at all. I also love pork belly, hyung-nim.”

They parked the van in the nearby parking lot and went inside the diner, only to find the place was packed to the brim with patrons, as well as part-time workers busy moving around without a moment of rest.

Right now, it was seven in the evening. No wonder the diner was so full.

“Welcome. How may I help you?”

One of the part-time workers walked over with a smile and engaged the two men.

“How many customers will we be serving this evening?”

“Us two.”

“Please follow me.”

After hearing Yu Jin-Ho’s answer, the part-time worker guided the two men to a spot in a secluded corner.

However...

“Hold on for a second.”

Yu Jin-Ho took a look around, and pointed towards the empty table by the windows.

“Can’t we sit over there?”

“I’m sorry, sir. That table has been booked already....”

A large group must’ve made a booking, because several tables had been brought together. Currently, they were all empty.

Yu Jin-Ho stared at the empty tables with a rueful expression and shook his head. In the end, the two of them had to occupy the most secluded, out of the way spot in the diner.

Yu Jin-Ho lowered his head in shame.

“I’m sorry, hyung-nim.”

“There’s nothing for you to apologise for. I was the one who suggested that we come here, anyway.”

“Even still, I should’ve taken you to a bit better spot than this one.”

Jin-Woo smirked and lightly patted Yu Jin-Ho on the shoulder.

“Don’t sweat over such things and enjoy the food, okay?”

Actually, Jin-Woo was inwardly worried about a scion of a chaebol finding the taste of such cheap meat to his liking or not.

‘Also, even though I didn’t say anything, but well...’

Jin-Woo scanned his surroundings.

He could see people, and then, more people.

He spent quite a lot of his time in a silent apartment with no one in it, so he kind of enjoyed this hustle and bustle.

“Here are your orders of three portions of pork belly, and two bottles of soju.” (TL: Soju – Korean distilled spirit.)

Soon, the part-time worker brought out their orders.

Sizzle–

The thinly-sliced portions of pork sizzled enticingly on the heating plate. And sure enough, pieces of meat began disappearing real fast. Fortunately enough, Yu Jin-Ho seemed to like it.

“Well, the thing is, me and my friends frequent pork belly diners whenever we have the chance, hyung-nim.”

“Oh, really? Friends from the university?”

“Yes, hyung-nim. It’s just that, I seem to mix better with friends from my university rather than the classmates from the expensive private schools I went to.”

Jin-Woo smirked slightly and nodded his head. If it was Yu Jin-Ho, then that sounded about right.

“Here, let me pour you a glass, hyung-nim.”

“Yeah, you too.”

Gulp, gulp, gulp.

They filled their glasses with soju, clinked them a little and one-shotted them.

“Kyaha.”

Unlike Yu Jin-Ho, who was immensely enjoying the bitter taste of soju, Jin-Woo could only frown deeply in unhappiness.

“Mm? Hyung-nim, is something wrong?”

“No, it’s nothing....”

Jin-Woo could only stare at the empty glass with a bitter expression on his face. He had forgotten one crucial fact about his body, what with him being so busy lately and all.

Tti-ring.

[Harmful substances have been detected.]

[Effects of ‘Buff: Detox’ will now commence.]

[3, 2, 1.... Detoxification has been completed.]

‘I forgot that I can’t get drunk anymore. D*mn....’

It was the same story regardless of how many glasses he knocked back.

Tti-ring, tti-ring, tti-ring.....

As long as the buff ‘Good health and Long Life’ was in effect, soju would remain as only slightly bitter-tasting water and nothing more. Jin-Woo angrily spat out a cuss in his mind.

‘God d*mn it.’

Rather than drinking bitter water like an idiot, he decided that it’d be infinitely better to order a soda, instead.

“Excuse me.”

A part-time worker hurriedly came over to their table.

“I want to order two more portions of pork belly, as well as a bottle of Sprite, please.” (TL note at the end.)

“Okay, please wait for a moment.”

After the waiter left, Yu Jin-Ho began tilting his head.

“Hyung-nim? Why didn’t you order more alcohol?”

“I’m not that good with alcohol, you see.”

Jin-Woo replied, his expression not even changing slightly, but as usual, Yu Jin-Ho didn’t quite catch that. Instead, a loose smile crept up on his alcohol-tinged reddened face.

‘Hyung-nim still has a humane side, like this one....’

Yu Jin-Ho kept on giving him a strange but meaningful look, but Jin-Woo simply ignored him outright.

‘It’s not as if he started acting strange all of a sudden just today or anything....’

Actually, he was getting curious about something else here.

“What are you planning to do from now on?”

When Jin-Woo asked in a serious voice, Yu Jin-Ho sat upright like a job seeker waiting for his job interview to start.

“As soon as I complete a simple written test at the Hunter’s Association, they should issue my Guild Master licence right away, hyung-nim. I’m planning to negotiate with my father with that licence in hand.”

Determination flooded in Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes. He had invested a lot of his own moolah for this purpose, and there was no room to retreat now.

‘Besides, I also made a promise with hyung-nim, too.’

The Guild building he promised to Jin-Woo. That part of the bargain could be upheld only after Yu Jin-Ho successfully persuades his father, Yu Myung-Hwan, to install him as the new Guild Master.

On the other hand, Jin-Woo was feeling rather liberated.

‘Sure, it’d be nice to get my hands on that 30 billion Won building.’

But well, that would only be an added bonus to him. His real purpose had always been levelling up. While entering all those rank C Gates, he had reached a far higher level than he initially bargained for.

In other words, he had achieved his goal.

And the results of his frantic levelling up spree?

One punch from him, and the rank A Hunter with a guaranteed annual salary of billions of Won, Kim Cheol, lost his consciousness. Just like that.

‘At the bare minimum, I can make more money than that guy now.’

If one possessed excellent abilities, wealth was sure to follow. There was

no need to feel nervous at all. And his relaxed mindset could clearly be seen on his demeanor.

Jin-Woo began reminiscing about the last few days and smiled to himself. It was at this moment that Yu Jin-Ho asked him a question.

“What are your own plans now, hyung-nim?”

“Oh, me?”

Did I ask something that I shouldn't?

Yu Jin-Ho thought like this and flinched slightly. But he breathed a sigh of relief after spotting Jin-Woo's relaxed expression.

“I'll be out of reach for a while, actually. There's this place I have to go to, you see.”

That one sentence caused Yu Jin-Ho's face to harden visibly. After forming an expression of an abandoned puppy, Yu Jin-Ho emptied the soju glass in one go.

Tap.

He then placed the empty glass on the table, filling it up back to the brim. After knocking back another glass, he began to open his mouth with some difficulty.

“Hyung-nim. Please tell me straight if I've been bothering you. If that's been the case, I shall make sure never to bother you again in the future.”

‘This idiot....’

The moment Jin-Woo said that he'd be out of reach, this idiot must've misunderstood his words again.

Jin-Woo scratched the side of his head and asked a question instead of a proper reply.

“Hey, Jin-Ho.”

“Yes, hyung-nim?”

“What do you think of me as?”

“Well, I....”

Yu Jin-Ho's eyes rolled around this way and that as if he couldn't come up with a good enough answer, before he raised his head.

“Hyung-nim, I have a brother who's over ten years older than me.”

Jin-Woo remembered hearing that from somewhere.

The firstborn son of Yu Myung-Hwan, Yu Jin-Seong.

“My brother doesn’t really like me, so I think, the time I spent with him is far shorter than what I’ve spent with you, hyung-nim. Compared to him, you have saved my life, helped me out with my dream, and....”

Yu Jin-Ho stared straight at Jin-Woo.

“To me, you’re more like my real brother than him, hyung-nim.”

He was still a bit scared of Jin-Woo, though.

Still, he’d never, ever forget these past few days following around Jin-Woo for the rest of his life. Indeed, his respect was far greater than fear of Jin-Woo at this point.

“If you see me as your brother, then....”

Jin-Woo smiled deeply.

“I’ll think of you as my younger brother as well.”

“Hyu..... Hyung-nim....”

The tip of Yu Jin-Ho’s nose reddened and he began to get teary-eyed all of a sudden. If that was all, it’d have been fine, but then, he tried to get closer to Jin-Woo out of nowhere.

“Hyung-nim! I want to give you a big hug! It’s fine, right?”

“Hey, hey!! You’re drunk, dude!! Stop it!”

“No, that’s not true! Hyung-nim, I’ve never been this clear-minded in my life before! Hyung-niiiiim!”

“Say that with your eyes open, will ya?!”

“Waaaail~~!”

Either he was far too moved by his emotions, or he just was a bad drunk, Yu Jin-Ho collapsed over the table and began crying his eyes out, prompting Jin-Woo to pat him on the shoulder.

Soon enough, Yu Jin-Ho fell asleep and the table had quietened down now.

“Hah-ah... what a helpless kid....”

Jin-Woo leaned back on his seat and lightly clicked his tongue.

Yu Jin-Ho.

He was a troublesome kid in many ways, but for some reason, Jin-Woo didn’t find him dislikeable at all.

Jin-Woo heard that voice and shifted his gaze over to its source.

A TV mounted on the wall of the diner was showing a news bulletin.

‘Is it nine in the evening already?’

He thought like that and stared the screen, only to spot someone rather familiar appearing there.

‘Huh?’

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened.

It was none other than Baek Yun-Ho, and he was being bombarded with an unending stream of questions from the reporters as he exited from the White Tiger’s headquarters.

“Is it true that there was a huge incident during the training of your new recruits?”

“Is it also true that only the lower ranked Hunters returned alive while all the higher ranked ones had perished?”

“What do you think about the rumour of a mystery person allegedly aiding the survivors during this incident?”

Baek Yun-Ho was doing his best to ignore the reporters, but in the end, he had no choice but to respond.

“This incident has been investigated by the Association already. It was true that there was an incident, but there was no mystery helper at the scene. No, the White Tiger Guild’s proud Hunters combined their powers and managed to clear the upper-rank dungeon. And many Hunters lost their lives or got injured during the process. That is all.”

Another reporter quickly fired in a follow-up question.

“If that’s the case, why are you forbidding us from interviewing the survivors?”

“Those folks managed to avoid death’s doorstep by a hair’s breadth. So, why do you wish to speak to those people regarding this deeply traumatic event? That’s as far as I’m prepared to answer you people.”

Baek Yun-Ho made a quick getaway from there after climbing into a car.

Jin-Woo’s eyes remained wide-open.

‘They were talking about me, right?’

A little while ago, somewhere in the Eastern United States of America.

A shrill scream exploded out inside a certain dungeon.

“Uwaaaahhk?!”

A Hunter named ‘James’ plopped down on his butt.

His legs had lost all strength and he could only crawl on the floor to run away. But when he realised that he only managed to corner himself against a wall, despair quickly dyed his expression.

“Oh, dear god!”

The rank for this dungeon was estimated to be ‘A’. And in order to clear this Gate, suitable Hunters were recruited to form a raid team.

However, every single one of them was annihilated. Technically speaking, they weren’t dead, but unconscious on the floor, though.

‘I can’t believe this!’

James leaned against the wall and breathed heavily before roughly shaking his head around several times.

Today had been a series of truly unbelievable events.

When the raid team entered the dungeon, they could not find a single monster. Because there was seemingly no monster inside.

A dungeon without monsters?

Can such a thing even exist?

If that was the case, where did the magic power emission that the measuring equipment had picked up outside the Gate, come from?

The Hunters came up with all sorts of theories by themselves.

This was already a hard-to-believe phenomenon, yet something even more shocking was waiting for them by the boss room.

When they entered it, they did find a single ‘monster’.

And it looked exactly like a human being.

Indeed, there was only one, but....

From that monster’s single attack, every raid team member lost their consciousness. This creature proved to be far, far too powerful for them.

Only James had somehow escaped from the boss room.

‘Wait, could it be that all the magic energy emission detected on the outside of the dungeon is coming from that thing alone??’

The measurement took place far away, from outside the Gate itself, yet its magic power was already exceeding the level of a rank A?

James shook his head again.

‘That’s just f*cking impossible!’

But then....

“Hah.... This, really now.”

That lone ‘monster’ walked out from the darkness and stepped into the light.

James began screaming once more after he saw the approaching creature.

“U, uwaaaahk?!!”

“Uh-whew. That hurts my ears, you know.”

The monster – no, an Oriental man with long, unkempt hair and a bushy beard roughly scratched the top of his head.

“Ah, aaaah....”

James no longer screamed but began leaking out scared gasps instead.

The mystery Oriental man stood before James and placed his hands on his waist.

“What the hell?! So, who told you to attack first without warning?! I told you that I’m not a monster, but a human being. I’m a human!”

Unfortunately, James could not understand a single word of this strange language. Naturally, his complexion progressively worsened.

The Oriental man stared at the terrified American Hunter with a troubled expression on his face.

Eventually, he spat out a long, long sigh.

“Dang it. What a pain, trying to talk to these big-nosed foreigners....”

In any case, he tried to initiate another conversation one more time.

He squatted down low enough to match the American’s eye level and did his best to sound as friendly and non-threatening as possible.

“Hey, hey, man.”

He could recall a few English words. With such a poor grasp in that language, he couldn’t really tell if he was making any sense at all, grammar-wise.

“I, am, a, Korean.”

So, he tried to enunciate every word to the best of his ability.

“I, want, to, go, home.”

(TL: Originally, the raw said our MC ordered ***“cider”***, but the thing is, in Korea, all non-alcoholic soda-like beverages with clear colouring, like Sprite, are colloquially referred to as ‘cider’. Not sure how that came about, though. So, if you hear/read about someone ordering cider in other forms of Korean media, such as Kdramas or other KR novels, don’t be surprised, as there is no alcohol involved.)

(TL: In case you haven’t noticed it yet, the mystery Korean man had been speaking in Korean, while ***“James”*** was speaking/thinking in English.)



Chapter 68 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

An event of an unprecedented scale!

A trapped person walked out of a dungeon, alive!

The US Hunter Bureau went into overdrive right away.

The deputy director of the Bureau personally came down to the interview room after hearing this news. Beyond the one-way mirror, he could see an Oriental man quietly sitting on a chair, with a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

“Is he that man?”

“That’s correct, sir.”

“He looks like a regular civilian, doesn’t he?”

“Yes, sir.”

It was as he said; once that man’s unkempt hair and the messy beard were taken care of, his facial features would be that of an average middle-aged Oriental male commonly found everywhere.

“Have you found out his identity yet?”

“He has repeatedly stated that he’s a Korean Hunter.”

“South Korea?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How can a South Korean Hunter come out of a dungeon on the other side of the world?”

“He says that he was trapped inside the dungeon for the past ten years after the Gate closed on him.”

“And when he reopened his eyes, he’s in America? Is that it?”

“That’s what he’d been saying until now, sir.”

The deputy director massaged his forehead. How was he to explain this to the director? He felt a migraine beginning its vicious assault on his head.

“If that’s the case, then what are you guys waiting for? Why aren’t you in there, trying to get more information out of him?”

Never mind his director, the deputy was worried about having to report directly to someone even higher than that. Or worse, someone much, much higher up the food chain.

In other words, there was no time to wait around sucking on thumbs like this.

Too bad, the section chief in charge of information did not share his sentiment.

“Sir, we’re currently focusing on the possibility of this man being a monster who possesses a human’s memories, instead.”

“Okay, so?”

“If it suddenly reveals its true intentions during the interview process, the entirety of Washington could be in danger.”

That made sense.

A raid team consisting of several rank A Hunters proved to be utterly helpless against that man, after all. They could not afford to be careless here.

“Looks like we’ll have to get a powerful Hunter to continue on with the investigation, then.”

Preferably, a rank S, too.

The section chief nodded his head in agreement.

“There is a rank S Hunter who can converse in Korean residing nearby.”

The deputy director’s expression brightened.

He was none other than the deputy director of the Hunter Bureau. He had memorised back to front the list of all rank S Hunters living in the States already.

“Mister Hwang! Is he coming here?”

“Yes, sir.”

One of the main Hunters of the Scavenger Guild, Hwang Dong-Su.

Just how much effort did the Hunter Bureau have to put in, in order to bring that man here and naturalise him as an American citizen?

‘If it’s him....’

Even if something bad did happen, it’d not be too much of a big problem. The deputy director smiled deeply.

“Oh, right. I almost forgot.”

A question belatedly formed in his head. If he were to make a report to the higher-ups, he at least needed to know the subject's name.

“What was the name of that man?”

It was a difficult-to-pronounce name, that's for sure.

The section chief confirmed it on the report submitted to him by one of his underlings and spoke up.

“His name is Seong Il-Hwan, a Hunter from South Korea.”

Hwang Dong-Su had no time for such things as mercy. Especially if it was against monsters.

He lost his parents to a dungeon break many years ago and grew up with only his older brother as the sole surviving family member. That was why when he Awakened as a rank S, he knew this was his heaven-sent opportunity.

‘The opportunity to rip apart and kill as many monsters as I can!’

Perhaps that was the reason why the glare of Hwang Dong-Su as he entered the interview room was icier than usual.

A man who came out from a dungeon – even the magic energy wavelength this man emitted apparently had a similar pattern to that of a monster.

‘If a monster is pretending to be a human....’

Then, he'd kill this abominable creature right here, right now.

His glare met the man's gaze.

‘.....’

‘.....’

They silently exchanged their gazes.

Hwang Dong-Su put the file with this man's information down on the table, pulled the chair out to sit, and opened his mouth.

“It'll be better for you to cooperate with me. One word from me will determine how others will see you: a human or a monster. Got that?”

“Understood.”

Before he got started, though, a deeply personal question floated up in Hwang Dong-Su's head.

His older brother who died inside the dungeon – was there any possibility that Hwang Dong-Seok could return alive?

He wanted to know about that first.

“Is there any chance of other Hunters returning from a dungeon, just as you have?”

The man shook his head.

Hwang Dong-Su’s brows quivered just then.

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because... I’m well aware of the reason why I came back.”

“The reason? What is it?”

“Let me ask you something before I answer that.”

“...I’ll be the one asking questions here.”

Hwang Dong-Su’s eyes narrowed to a slit. However, the man continued on with what he wanted to say regardless.

“The Gates, monsters, and dungeon breaks. How much do you know about them?”

“...”

If this man had asked a stupid question, Hwang Dong-Su might’ve used force to shut this man up right away. But, he couldn’t do that right now.

Because that question was something that countless tried to answer ever since the first Gate opened and Awakened people began appearing ten years ago.

This very moment could be when the answer finally revealed itself.

“Deputy director....”

“Shush.”

The agents of the Hunter Bureau all nervously swallowed their saliva as they stared into the one-way mirror.

Hwang Dong-Su asked.

“Are you saying that you know?”

“Dungeons, Gates, monsters... all these are merely preludes to a true war about to happen soon. And recently, a being that will become the greatest calamity ever seen has opened its eyes.”

“So, the reason why you returned here is...?”

“In order to stop that calamity.”

“And what is, or who is, this ‘greatest calamity ever seen’?”

“.....That, I can’t tell you.”

Hwang Dong-Su smirked derisively.

“A man who came here to stop a calamity can’t talk about what it is? I don’t know what that thing could be, but surely, rather than trying to stop it all by yourself, wouldn’t it be better to work together with others?”

The man shook his head.

“The number of people means nothing when facing this being. Doesn’t matter whether lots of amateurs decide to work together or not, they will only become its prey and become its pawns, instead.”

“So, you are saying that only you can stop it?”

The man nodded his head.

Hwang Dong-Su inwardly clicked his tongue.

‘This guy’s gone off the deep end.’

It wasn’t that hard to understand, though, if this man had been truly trapped inside a dungeon for ten years.

Or, alternatively, there had been some kind of an error, a mistake, during the process of the monster trying to copy a human’s memories and consequently, its brain had melted somewhat.

In any case, Hwang Dong-Su decided to humour the other party for the time being, and see where this thing would go.

“You must be awfully confident of your skills, then.”

“Let’s just say that, besides my skills, I’ve other factors in my favour.”

“Well... if you say so.”

Just what kind of information could he even extract from a madman?

Hwang Dong-Su decided to stop the questioning here.

Instead, he opened the man’s case file, thinking of finishing up the Bureau’s request, which was to investigate the man’s background.

“Your name is Seong Il-Hwan.....”

The photo supplied certainly matched the man’s face.

‘Rather than ten years, though, it’s like only a couple of weeks, maybe months, have passed by, instead.’

However, Hwang Dong-Su decided not to mind it. He heard that high-ranked Hunters could even skirt past the ageing process.

“Your records as a Hunter look pretty good. You could have earned quite a lot of money these days.”

Seong Il-Hwan didn't respond to that.

Back then, there was no proper system of Hunters in place. Hell, there wasn't a ranking system for Hunters, even!

Hwang Dong-Su began reading the file.

“Your spouse, Park Gyung-Hye. Two children. The son's name is....”

As he read down the names of the children with no emotion on his face, Hwang Dong-Su's eyes opened up slightly wider for a moment.

‘....Seong Jin-Woo?’

But, it only lasted for a truly brief second. Hwang Dong-Su did his best to remain calm and continued on.

“....Seong Jin-Woo. And the name of your daughter is?”

“Seong Jin-Ah.”

“Okay. .”

It happened, then.

“Wait.”

Before Hwang Dong-Su could flip to the next page, Seong Il-Hwan stopped him.

Hwang Dong-Su raised his head. And he found Seong Il-Hwan's glare had become as cold as his own.

“Why did you emit a murderous intent when mentioning the name of my son?”

“...”

Hwang Dong-Su placed the file on the desk between them. And then, killed the mic feed to the outside of this room.

“I told you that I'll be the one asking questions.”

“I'll have to hear your answer, first.”

“What if I'm not interested in answering you?”

“I'll use force, if necessary.”

Seong Il-Hwan's eyes began gleaming coldly. He didn't even show any hints of backing down. Which prompted Hwang Dong-Su to smirk deeply.

“I got it. So, you were a monster, then.”

How dare a measly little monster threaten a Hunter?

An intense hostility directed to him – now that was enough of an evidence to label this man as a monster.

‘No, wait. This could be my second heaven-sent opportunity.’

Hwang Dong-Su decided as such, and switched the mic on again.

Click, beep.

“Deputy director? This guy is a monster. Evacuate immediately, because he might start attacking very soon.”

Beep.

People panicking beyond the one-way mirror quickly ran out of the room. And soon, a loud wail of a siren resounded within the building.

Meanwhile, a silver light began emanating from Hwang Dong-Su’s hands.

“I’m planning to visit South Korea soon.”

After getting ready, Hwang Dong-Su threw an insidious smile at Seong Il-Hwan.

“So, what last words from his father should I deliver to your son?”

The TV was still talking about the Red Gate incident.

Jin-Woo scratched the back of his head.

‘This thing is getting out of hand.’

Still, he didn’t feel all that troubled. It was like, he felt a bit weird, instead?

He found it rather odd that some people who didn’t even know anything about him were trying their darnedest to find more about him. Especially when he wasn’t even there....

But, what if they find out about him?

Didn’t matter, really.

‘Well, I’ve already levelled up to the point I was aiming for, anyway.’

The reason why he decided to keep his abilities hidden in the beginning was that he had a lingering fear that he might end up being used by some unscrupulous b*stards.

But now, the story was different.

Even when the Guild Master of the White Tiger, as well as a rank S Hunter,

Baek Yun-Ho had grabbed his arm, Jin-Woo could yank his arm free without a problem.

He wouldn't have even dreamed of achieving such a feat in the past.

'Surely, I'd have wet myself just from meeting eyes with that man.'

An imperceptible smile formed on Jin-Woo's lips. In times like this, he should've been enjoying the drunken bliss, with reminiscence serving as the perfect side dish, but then....

Tti-ring.

[Harmful substances have been detected.]

[Effects of 'Buff: Detox' will now commence.]

[3, 2, 1.... Detoxification has been completed.]

What a regretful thing it was, his wish couldn't be granted.

Jin-Woo smiled rather ruefully. But, his facial expression became serious and determined, more than ever before as he put the soju glass down.

'I don't have any plans to stop here, though.'

Jin-Woo summoned his Status Window.

Tti-ring.

[Name: Seong Jin-Woo]

[Level: 61]

[Class: Shadow Sovereign]

[Title: The One Who Overcame the Adversity (extra 1)]

[HP: 13,001]

[MP: 1,677]

[Tiredness: 0]

[Stats]

Strength: 142

Endurance: 101

Agility: 121

Intelligence: 89

Perception: 103

(Available Stat points to distribute: 0)

Reduction in physical damage: 46%

His level was 61.

Thanks to investing all of the points he earned via Daily Quests in Intelligence, that stat was getting ever closer to the '100' mark.

'I've got a long road ahead of me, though....'

But, he knew he could climb even higher. To an even higher place.

To a place that possibly no one else could get to. That possibility made his heart palpitate.

And the beginning of this climb would be at the Demon's Castle.

'The System definitely said that's the one item I wanted more than anything else.'

He recalled the time he got the blessed random box.

[Blessed random box]

Presents the Player with the item he wants.

And he got the key to the instant dungeon, Demon's Castle, from it.

The monster he ran into had a high level, and the rewards were top-notch, too. He had confirmed these two facts before exiting from there.

He had no idea what might come out on the higher floors, but it'd not deviate too much.

And so, it was now the time to go and reap his rewards. He was planning to enter there and spend a good few days inside.

Jin-Woo's only worry was...

'Once I'm inside, I won't be able to contact the outside.'

What should he tell his little sister, then?

Deciding to come up with a suitable excuse on his way back home, Jin-Woo got up from his seat.

Tap, tap.

"Hey, Jin-Ho."

Tap, tap.

"Yu Jin-Ho."

“Slurrrp~.”

Jin-Woo shook and lightly tapped Yu Jin-Ho, but the kid had completely blacked out. What should he do now?

‘And he’s supposed to go to the Association tomorrow to take the written test, too....’

Well, taking a test was one thing, but the most urgent thing to worry about right now was sending him home safely from here.

Jin-Woo pulled out Yu Jin-Ho’s phone.

“Obviously, I can’t call either the Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan or Yu Jin-Seong....”

Just who should he call here that would inflict the least amount of harm on Yu Jin-Ho? Jin-Woo pondered his choices, before spotting a name on the contact list.

‘Yu Soo-Hyun?’

Unlike with his father or his older brother, Yu Jin-Ho had exchanged quite a few messages with this person.

It had to be a woman, judging from the name....

Jin-Woo deliberated for a while on whether to call this woman or not, before putting the phone down.

‘Wait a minute.’

He quickly confirmed his Store just in case.

And sure enough, there was a certain item he was thinking of.

He found it!

[Item: Status recovery potion]

Rarity: E

Type: Consumable

A liquid potion that can recover one’s status. Once consumed, undesirable status ailments will be cured. Can be stored in your Inventory, but it can’t be handed over to someone else.

As soon as he confirmed the purchase, a yellow potion vial suddenly materialised on the top of the diner’s table. It was of a noticeably brighter colour than the healing potion’s deep red colour or the blue of the MP recovery potion.

Jin-Woo took a look around him to make sure no one was looking before he quickly tipped Yu Jin-Ho's head over and poured the status recovery potion down the kid's throat.

It was then.

Yu Jin-Ho's eyes snapped open.

“Hyung-nim?!”

“Are you awake now?”

Yu Jin-Ho's head was tipped backwards. And hyung-nim was staring down at him from above.

“...Hyung-nim, what are you doing there?”

“....”

Jin-Woo couldn't come up with a good enough explanation right away. In times like these, pretending that nothing had happened was for the best.

“Let's go.”

“Oh. Yes, hyung-nim!”

Yu Jin-Ho stood right up from his seat, before tilting his head slightly.

‘Uh? Why do I feel so refreshed?’

Yu Jin-Ho moved his body this way and that, before a refreshing smile formed on his face as he followed after Jin-Woo.

And as they left the diner, the news continued on.

[This is next item on the bulletin. The American government has continuously delayed releasing any official statement on the mysterious explosion that rocked the headquarters of the American Hunter Bureau....]



Chapter 69 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

On the first light of the day, Jin-Woo headed to the Daesung Tower.

‘It sure is really big.’

Trying to look up at the top of this 100-floor-tall skyscraper from nearby made his neck hurt.

‘But, why are there so many people around here?’

Unlike the last time, there were way too many people coming in and out of the Tower. The difference in foot traffic between the nighttime and daytime was far too huge.

Not only the building’s entrance but the streets surrounding it was packed full as well.

‘It’ll probably get real noisy if a person suddenly vanishes in a place with so many people in it, right?’

Not only that, the media was casting a spotlight on this mystery helper or whatever, so there wasn’t any reason for him to go out of his way and draw attention to himself, was there?

‘Obviously not.’

Jin-Woo wasn’t someone who enjoyed the attention, to begin with.

He made his way to an area with not much foot traffic and pulled out the key to the Demon’s Castle from his Inventory.

It was a long, slender, golden key. At a casual glance, it even resembled a fancy decorative item.

‘No one’s around me, right?’

After scanning his surroundings, Jin-Woo nodded his head.

‘Let’s enter from here.’

Jin-Woo activated his ‘Stealth’ skill.

Shururuk...

After vanishing from view, he returned to the main street and walked closer to the Tower while brushing past the countless passersby.

Tap.

Tap.

As befitting the busy street in the middle of the city – and during the daytime, no less – the distance he had to walk wasn't far but he still ended up bumping into quite a few shoulders as he blended in with the crowd.

However, not one person noticed it.

'If I were to abuse this Stealth skill, I can do pretty much anything, no?'

He even thought that this had to be the reason why high-ranking Hunters possessing the Stealth skill were closely monitored at all times.

His aimlessly wandering mind didn't stay like that for long. Just like the first time he came here, the surrounding view suddenly transformed as soon as he stepped across the invisible boundary.

Rumble....

'I can already hear the sounds of flames burning from this far away, so just how hot is it in there?'

The giant tower enveloped in flames – the Demon's Castle, replacing the Daesung Tower, filled up his entire view.

The thing was, though, humans were supposedly capable of quickly adapting to their situations.

'Well, it's not as bad as the first time.'

For sure, he didn't feel as nervous as the first time he saw the Demon's Castle.

No, maybe...

'Maybe, it's because I have levelled up sufficiently enough.'

Jin-Woo stored the key to the Demon's Castle in his Inventory, and summoned an ash-coloured key, instead.

[Item: Key to the Castle's Gate]

Rarity: A

Type: Key

The key to unlock the gates of the Demon's Castle. Can be acquired only after killing the Gatekeeper.

It was the key he got after killing the gatekeeper, the Cerberus. Back then, he didn't even dare to use it after getting almost bitten to death by the

Cerberus, but now, he could use it.

Shururuk...

up, he summoned his weapon.

On his left hand, the key; and on his right hand, the Baruka's Dagger. Jin-Woo cautiously approached the front gate of the Tower.

He couldn't see the Cerberus.

'Could it be that monsters don't respawn in the Demon's Castle?'

He couldn't be sure, but there was some possibility that it might be, just like with the Cerberus.

'In that case....'

In that case, the layout of this dungeon could be very different from other instant dungeons where monsters always respawned.

Jin-Woo expanded his Perception to the limit.

Thump, thump, thump!

By expanding his Perception Stat that had broke past the 100 mark, he could even hear his own heart beating as loudly as thunderclaps.

'However, I'm not scared at all.'

Unlike before, he was certainly feeling a lot more confident, knowing how strong he was currently. Maintaining his vigilance and shivering from fear were two very different stories, after all.

Tti-ring.

When he stood before the castle's gate, a new message popped up.

[Will you use the Key to the Castle's Gate to enter?] (Y/N)

'...You think I'm going back home after coming this far?'

Jin-Woo snorted at this nonsensical question and chose 'Yes'.

Creeaaaak....

He didn't even do anything, yet the huge pair of doors began moving as the hinges issued loud creaks.

Slam!

'Huh....?'

Jin-Woo was flustered next.

He had had his Perception expanded to the max, yet he couldn't sense a single presence of monsters from beyond the castle gates.

'There are no monsters??'

Jin-Woo had been worried about precisely the opposite situation happening to him.

He had even thought about going through a special training by deliberately entering the penalty zone to fight against those desert centipedes or whatever, in case monsters crazily rushed out as soon as the castle gate opened up.

'But, what the hell....'

What the hell was the meaning of this?

All his effort so far seemed to be in vain.

The interior was utterly devoid of any life.

'Huh.... Well, this is....'

Feeling somewhat dumbfounded, Jin-Woo stored 'Baruka's Dagger' back to his Inventory and entered the Demon's Castle.

It happened, then.

Tti-ring.

As soon as a mechanical beep rang inside his head, he immediately summoned both of his daggers. But, that beep was nothing more than an alert to let him know that a new message had arrived.

'Uh?'

[A new quest is available.]

'A new quest, is it?'

It wasn't a Daily Quest?

Well, it'd be strange if it was, since Jin-Woo made sure to complete the Daily Quest and pocketed the rewards before coming here. Meaning, this had to be a regular quest....

And that would be his first, ever.

'Well, yeah, I've been getting only the Hidden Quests or Emergency Quests until now, so....'

Excluding the Daily Quests that showed up every day regardless of how he felt, of course.

Jin-Woo tilted his head slightly and confirmed the contents of the message.

‘Confirm.’

Then, the information on the quest appeared before him.

Tti-ring.

[Normal Quest: Collect the Souls of Demons! (1)]

Demons are everywhere within the Demon’s Castle. Kill the demons and collect their souls to receive special rewards.

One soul can be collected from a single demon, but on higher floors, there are demons with multiple souls.

Quest generation condition:

Quest clear condition:

Rewards:

20 bonus Stat points!

That was the very first thing that attracted Jin-Woo’s attention – the Stat points.

‘I can raise my Intelligence by 20 points!’

A smile instinctively formed on his face.

He’d been feeling his lack of MP for quite some time now.

‘I need lots of Mana if the shadow soldiers need to regenerate.’

And, was Mana his only problem? He had already confirmed that the number of shadows he could extract, as well as the number of soldiers he could store, increased when his Intelligence Stat also improved.

So, for him, increasing the ‘Intelligence’ Stat was a must.

‘There always has been a limit to increasing that Stat through level-ups and Daily Quests, but now....’

If he could get his hands on that 20 points via the completion of this quest, then his problems would be solved in one fell swoop.

Gulp.

He was salivating already.

‘Not only that....’

Jin-Woo’s gaze landed on other rewards.

[Rewards]

He was feeling grateful for the bonus Stat points, but now, he could even choose one item from the Store, too?

‘Can I really choose anything?’

Jin-Woo recalled those ultra-expensive items he saw in the Store’s menu.

‘I definitely saw....’

There were some S-rarity items that cost billions, hell, even tens of billions there. Well, those billions weren’t the real-world currency but Gold that only existed within the System, though.

Still, just how amazing was this?

The ‘Knight Killer’ he’d been using so nicely until now cost only three million Gold.

‘A three million B-rarity item already possesses this high quality and attack power, so just what will those costing billions be like?’

His curiosity had been stoked for sure.

Never mind the mystery third reward, just from looking at those two rewards alone, he knew right away that he couldn’t let this quest slip through his fingers.

‘For this kind of rewards, killing one or two monsters is a walk in the park.’

Jin-Woo was genuinely elated now and thought about finishing this quest real fast to receive those rewards, only for his eyes to bulge out after confirming the quest clear condition.

“Ten thousand?!”

He gasped out in sheer shock.

This was already far beyond the notion of killing one or two monsters.

‘What the hell, what kind of slave labour is this?!’

He had no idea what kind of a monster these demons could be, but hell, ten thousand was a scary-high number, indeed.

Still, a smile crept up on Jin-Woo’s face.

‘Well, that would have been, if I was alone.’

Currently, the number of shadow soldiers he possessed was 50.

If each one killed 200, this quest would be cleared. If he pushed his soldiers to work hard, surely this sort of quest would prove to be nothing but a

cakewalk.

[Will you accept the 'Normal Quest: Collect the Souls of Demons! (1)'?]

'Of course.'

He had no reason to refuse.

[You have accepted the quest.]

The penalty for failing this quest would be him wasting a bit of time, that'd be all.

'Compared to other quests, uh-whew.....'

Without a doubt, this was truly a wonderful quest when compared to the Class Change Quest or Emergency Quests where his life was on the line.

Jin-Woo raised his head.

'I wonder, is that thing supposed to display my progress from now on?'

As soon as he accepted the quest, a counter he hadn't seen before appeared in the air, just above his line of sight.

[Collected souls of demons: 0/10,000]

'Ten thousand... so far away....'

A bitter chuckle leaked out of his mouth once he got to physically confirm the number that had been floating inside his head as nothing but a vague notion until now.

It was then that he discovered a different counter to the left of that one.

'Huh?'

[Exp. needed for the next level up: 60,000]

There it was, sixty thousand clearly displayed via the holographic display.

As soon as he met that, he'd level up, or at least that's what was written there.

'Even my experience points are being displayed now?'

However, he had never seen anything like that prior to his entry into the Demon's Castle.

'Maybe....'

To make sure, Jin-Woo took a step backwards and left the Demon's Castle.

Sure enough, both the counter for souls and experience points disappeared. When he stepped back inside, they showed up again as if they had never

disappeared in the first place.

‘Yeah, they only show up inside the Demon’s Castle.’

Although it was unfortunate that he couldn’t see them outside the castle, but at the least, it’d be quite convenient to have them inside, that’s for sure.

If he looked at it from another perspective....

‘Does this mean that it’ll take a long, long time for me to conquer this place?’

That was a distinct possibility.

Jin-Woo carefully read through the quest details one more time and closed the message windows.

‘That should be enough preparation, I think.’

Finally, he had some leeway to take a closer look at the interior of the Demon’s Castle.

‘Heok?!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened immediately once he did.

Wuuuuu-....

Inside of the castle was.... a ruined city. Quite unexpectedly, it was a field-type dungeon.

‘What is this place? Is this Seoul?’

If everyone in Seoul died and a hundred years had passed by, would the city look like this?

Within this lifeless, ash-grey cityscape, only the lonesome street lights flickered as if they were having a seizure.

‘I never expected it to be a field-type dungeon, though....’

Not only that, a dungeon created to look like the metropolis of Seoul.

This was the kind of scale that utterly disallowed any comparison to other instant dungeons that were based around a special location such as subway stations or department stores.

Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

‘So, like, where should I go now?’

Where should be his destination?

Jin-Woo’s gaze scanned the surroundings and the distant horizon.

Thankfully, his dilemma didn't last for long.

In the far-off distance, in the direction where the famed Namsan Tower should have been, there stood a massive pillar of light stretching beyond the sky.

'Let's head over there.'

Jin-Woo began walking in that direction. He also made sure to memorise the surrounding area of the castle's gates in case he got lost on the way, too.

However....

His steps had to come to a stop not long after.

"Kekeke."

"Kekekek."

Monsters with smallish physical sizes began creeping out from the gaps of ruined buildings, one by one.

[Low-Ranked Demon]

Jin-Woo immediately recognised what they were from the dark-red name floating above their heads.

'They look like....'

These creatures reminded him of Gargoyles, but without wings. There were a total of eight of them.

Seeing them, the corners of Jin-Woo's lips arched up.

'Well, for starters, I got myself eight souls.'

Right away....

Kwajeeck!

The 'Baruka's Dagger' pierced deeply into the forehead of one of the demons.

[You killed a Low-Ranked Demon.]

[You have earned 100 experience points.]

[You have collected (1) Soul of Demons.]

"Kiaahk?"

"Kiiehk?"

The moment the demons' attention had shifted to the one with the dagger stuck to its forehead, Jin-Woo rapidly approached another one to separate its

head from its body.

Slice!

[You killed a Low-Ranked Demon.]

[You have earned 100 experience points.]

[You have collected (1) Soul of Demons.]

This one also gave him 100 EXP.

‘And I need sixty thousand experience points....’

If he hunted down 600 Low-Ranked Demons, then he’d get to raise his level.

The remaining demons were taken care of in the blink of an eye.

“Kiiiihhk?!”

“Khek!!”

He had collected eight souls, and the experience points earned were eight hundred.

‘Hey, this is not too bad.’

And they said that the journey of a thousand miles started with the first step – Jin-Woo’s eyes began sparkling brightly as he began searching for his next prey.

Inside the office of the White Tiger Guild’s Guild Master.

Baek Yun-Ho was browsing through several documents he had been neglecting in the past few days because of his busy schedule.

Beep-!

He picked the phone up after hearing that beep.

“Let him through.”

A short while later, a familiar voice came from the phone’s speaker.

Baek Yun-Ho spat out a long sigh.

“Because of the d*mn reporters. I was thinking of being out of the public’s eye until this whole thing dies down.”

“Stop riling me up, man. I’m not in the mood to kid around. If I find out just who leaked it to the media, I’m gonna...”

“Big news, is it? From Japan?”

“What happened?”

About a week ago, the Japanese Hunter’s Association secretly contacted several of Korea’s large Guilds. They said that they needed advice from the Korean Hunters.

And so, two days after that, a few of Korea’s elite Hunters travelled to Japan. The Hunter Min Byung-Gu was one of them.

Baek Yun-Ho had been curious about that matter for a while now.

“Stop building up the suspense and tell me what happened already. This was the first time the Japs have asked for advice from us. What made them do that? What did those prideful b*stards want?”

Four years ago, a rank S Gate opened up on the island of Jeju. Ants came out of there.

There had been three separate subjugation operations since then, and all of them ended in failure.

In the end, the Korean government gave up on the island, and it was now a barren land ruled by monsters.

“How could I forget? I nearly died back then.”

“A mutation, is it? But, what does it matter to us? Aren’t they just going to fight among themselves while being confined to that island?”

The voice coming from the phone sounded rather troubled.



Chapter 70 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

[You killed a Low-Ranked Demon.]

[You have earned 100 experience points.]

[You have collected (1) Soul of Demons.]

.....

.....

[You have earned 100 experience points.]

[You have collected (1) Soul of Demons.]

For the next two hours, he madly hunted down every Low-Ranked Demon he could find.

Afterwards, Jin-Woo confirmed the number of souls he managed to collect.

[Collected Souls of Demons: 309/10,000]

He had now completed about 3% of the quest. If he could continue hunting at this speed, then according to his calculations, he could level up in another two hours.

His current level was 61.

In the past, he needed experience points from nine rank C dungeons in order to level up from 60 to 61. And the time spent was around two days, too.

But here, he could already think about levelling up only after four hours?

‘This is crazy.’

A thick smile formed on Jin-Woo’s lips.

Just how long had it been since he could hunt this enthusiastically?

‘Is this the first time since then?’

He couldn’t really remember ever being in a similar situation since he went to the Hapjeong subway station and repeatedly cleared the first two underground floors until his level didn’t want to rise anymore.

“Kkiiieehk!”

Whenever Jin-Woo’s dagger flashed, one Low-Ranked Demon fell without

exception.

“Kiaahk!”

“Kiehk.”

“Keehhgehk, khek!”

Sometimes, even several of them, too.

In the blink of an eye, Jin-Woo killed twenty more Low-Ranked Demons.

‘This is a gold mine.’

Both his experience points and the number of souls continued to rise as he continued to hunt down the demons. Not only that, there was the added bonus of loot drops, too.

A bright smile formed on Jin-Woo’s face as he collected the loot.

‘Their horns come out almost all the time, don’t they?’

[Item: Low-Ranked Demon’s Horns]

Rarity: None

Type: Miscellaneous

Two horns attached to the head of a Low-Ranked Demon. Demon’s horns are used as base ingredients for high-grade magic spells and therefore can be sold at a high price.

The japtem ‘demon’s horns’ – selling it in the Store would net him two hundred thousand Gold.

‘Each of those fangs of Cerberus or whatever got me 150 grand each, but this... well, monsters of the Demon’s Castle are really generous, aren’t they?’

After experiencing the usefulness of the Store multiple times recently, these japtems no longer remained japtems in Jin-Woo’s eyes. All the Gold earned through here would eventually become his flesh and blood later.

‘I can’t throw anything away.’

Feeling really chuffed, Jin-Woo sold off what could be sold and stored what should be stored as he rummaged through the remains of the demons.

In the midst of this...

‘What’s this?’

He found an item he hadn’t seen before. And the thing with its end poking out from the busted gut of a demon was....

[Item: Entry Permit]

Rarity: ??

Type: ??

A permit allowing you to enter the 2nd floor of the Demon's Castle. Can only be used on the 1st-floor floor-transfer magic circle. (TL: I'll use the North American way of counting floors from here onwards.)

...It was a document scroll, tightly rolled up.

'An entry permit?'

When he unfurled it and took a look, he found all sorts of undecipherable drawings and letters adorning its surface. In the end, the only thing that helped him understand its purpose was the item explanation.

'An item that lets me go up from the first floor to the second, is it....?'

Could it be?

Jin-Woo took a look around.

This place was inside the Demon's Castle, but at the same time, he was also inside the Daesung Tower. If the Demon's Castle was also divided into floors like the Tower, then he'd be on the first floor.

'Since this place looked like a field-type dungeon, I didn't expect there to be different floors....'

Could it be that, just like the Daesung Tower, there were 100 floors here, too? Jin-Woo was left agape by the sheer scale of this particular dungeon.

'...It can't really be 100 floors, can it?!'

There was only one way to confirm this. And that would be to locate that transfer magic circle and see for himself.

'Now, where would this floor-transfer magic circle thing be in this place....?'

Jin-Woo's wandering gaze stopped at the pillar of light piercing the sky.

'Well, that has to be it.'

Getting there was his initial goal, but his attention got robbed by the hunting of the Low-Ranked Demons and before he knew it, he had moved further away from his destination than before.

'Should I head there now?'

He thought that this might be a good time to think about heading there.

Also, he had hunted down all of the Low-Ranked Demons nearby, too.

Jin-Woo grinned brightly.

'Summon.'

The shadow soldiers stored inside his shadows via the Shadow Storage skill didn't require any chanting or whatever to summon them, unlike when he was trying to extract shadows.

Shururuk....

In front of Jin-Woo, the giant beast soldier extracted from the leader of the Ice Bear pack appeared silently.

"Growl...."

And it was a giant monster-ish bear standing on its hind legs. It was as large as a house. But to Jin-Woo, it was not much different from a mild-mannered lovable puppy.

"Get down."

"Growl."

When the shadow beast soldier laid down on the ground, Jin-Woo lightly jumped on top of its back.

"Giddy up!"

As soon as Jin-Woo lightly tapped the side of the beast with his leg, the shadow creature rushed towards the pillar of light with a frightening turn of speed.

Thud, thud, thud, thud!!

The massive creature also possessed incredible agility as well, and before long, the distance between him and the destination rapidly closed up.

Of course, they still encountered obstructions every now and then.

"Kiireek!"

"Keek, keek!!"

Roar!!

One thunderous swipe from the beast soldier, and the situation normalised right away.

"Ho-oh."

Jin-Woo formed a deeply impressed expression.

‘I only decided to ride it for fun, but isn’t this actually pretty cool?’

Thinking that he should utilise this means of transportation often from now on, he even named his new ride right there and then.

“From now on, your name shall be Tank.”

“Roar!!”

The beast soldier, no, Tank, roared out while raising its head high up.

Was it trying to say it liked it, or hated it?

What with its incredibly powerful vocal cord, Jin-Woo couldn’t really tell which was which.

In the meantime, the light pillar got closer and closer. Tank gradually slowed down and eventually, stopped before the light pillar.

“Nice work.”

Jin-Woo got down to the ground and patted Tank once, before storing the big guy back into his shadow. Then, he turned around to face the magic circle. The familiar mechanical beep rang inside his head as soon as he did.

Tti-ring.

[You have discovered floor-transfer magic circle.]

There was a magic circle carved on the ground. The light shooting out from it was reaching into the sky. Without hesitation, Jin-Woo stepped inside.

‘.....’

...Nothing happened.

Jin-Woo tilted his head this way and that, before taking a few more steps to stand in the middle of the circle.

Only then another message popped up in his view.

[No floors have been opened.]

[Which floor would you like to transfer to?]

“How many floors are there?”

Of course, there was no reply.

‘Is there no other way to find out how many floors are there, except for finding out for myself?’

Jin-Woo pondered for a moment.

There wasn’t that much left for the experience points, so should he stay and

raise his level before going up, or should he just go up and level up there?

‘Unlike other instant dungeons, there is no monster respawn in this place, so staying on one floor will be inefficient in the long run.’

Besides, the System said that demons with more souls existed on upper floors as well. He concluded that, for both his experience points and to clear the quest, it could be more advantageous to get to higher floors as quickly as possible.

‘Fine.’

Let’s go up, then.

Jin-Woo spoke up.

“Second floor.”

[You need the entry permit.]

Jin-Woo summoned the scroll as per the instruction. As soon as it appeared, it dissolved into the light.

[The second floor of the Demon’s Castle has been unlocked.]

[You are transferring to the second floor.]

Buzz.....

An even stronger ray of light began rising up from the magic circle. At the same time, Jin-Woo realised something.

‘Ah.... So that’s how it works.’

As it turned out, this whole thing was just an elevator.

The moment he realised what this pillar of light actually was, Jin-Woo was immediately transferred to the second floor, along with the blinding explosion of light.

Second floor, third, fourth... and eventually, the 27th floor. That was the result of grinding for two days straight.

He told Jin-Ah, his little sister, that he’d be on a week-long trip.

‘I have five more days.’

Considering his gradually-increasing clearing speed, he began to think that it might be doable to get to what he assumed to be the last floor, the 100th floor, within the next five days. Maybe even sooner than that.

Jin-Woo took a look at his surroundings. It was still a ruined city.

‘I can’t tell which city this floor is based on anymore.’

Every floor was modelled off on a different city.

However, the higher he climbed, the state of destruction the city was in got worse and worse, and on this 27th floor, he found it hard to tell whether this place used to be a city or not.

Would a city look like this after having experienced a concentrated carpet bombing?

Jin-Woo quickly threw away useless thoughts and shook his head.

‘I shouldn’t be wasting time like this.’

He checked the time with his wristwatch, and it was already 11 in the evening.

There was no daytime or night inside this dungeon. So he needed to rely on his watch to keep time. 11 would be a good time to get some shut-eye if he wanted to continue clearing this dungeon tomorrow with a refreshed body and mind.

But before that....

‘Should I check the result of my hard work first?’

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the quest progress window.

[Collected souls of demons: 2,116/10,000]

‘Over 2,100, is it...’

Meaning, he had hunted down over a thousand demons in a day.

He had killed quite a lot during the last two days, that’s for sure.

It was still a long way off from the goal of ten thousand souls, but he was betting on the demons of the upper floors that allegedly possessed multiple souls.

‘Right, getting to higher floors should remain as my priority.’

up, his level.

“Heok!!”

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened wider.

[Level: 67]

His level had climbed to 67 even before he had noticed it.

He’d been hunting Low-Ranked Demons worth 100 EXP for a while, but then, his levelling up speed exploded upwards after he began hunting Mid-Ranked Demons that gave out 300 EXP each.

‘My level is climbing up real nicely, too.’

Lots of monsters, rich experience points, and the perfect level of difficulty.

The Demon’s Castle was the best level-up zone one could ever hope for.

His level wasn’t the only thing experiencing a rise, either. Jin-Woo’s proficiency with his various skills was also rising up, as well.

Currently, the ‘Knight Killer’ was floating above Jin-Woo’s palm. He was using the skill ‘Ruler’s Reach’. The power that allowed him to physically manipulate objects without actually touching them.

Even when he was doing nothing, like right now, he devoted himself to increasing his proficiency with the skill.

‘Well, this Ruler’s Reach skill doesn’t require any Mana, to begin with.’

It was a bit tiring mentally because he had to constantly focus on the skill, but compared to the potential uses this skill had, a small little headache was a cheap price to pay.

With a nice timing, a good piece of news arrived before his eyes.

[The level of the skill, ‘Ruler’s Reach’ has increased!]

‘Nice!’

Jin-Woo grinned brightly and leaned against a wall. He felt safer and more content as he became stronger bit by bit. His eyelids slowly closed.

‘Now that I think about it, the Guild Master licence must’ve been issued by now.’

Was Yu Jin-Ho doing well?

Perhaps because it had been a while since he acted alone, he couldn’t help but recall the mug of Yu Jin-Ho who used to follow him around.

The successful first-born who had become an excellent entrepreneur, and the second born with the qualification to become a Master, but who was still a university student. The fight between them would not be easy.

‘Do your best, Yu Jin-Ho.’

After cheering Yu Jin-Ho on in his mind, Jin-Woo slowly drifted off to a deep slumber.

Yu Jin-Ho entered a luxurious traditional Korean restaurant with a determined face. He chose this place after taking into account his father’s taste.

“Has the Chairman arrived yet?”

“Yes, he’s waiting for you.”

Yu Jin-Ho swallowed his saliva after hearing the maître d’hôtel.

“Please, this way.”

He was guided to the private room where his father, Yu Myung-Han, was waiting for him.

The traditional sliding paper door was opened and immediately, Yu Jin-Ho’s nervousness increased by several folds after seeing his father’s face.

He wondered if he was getting weak-kneed again, but Yu Jin-Ho hardened his resolve and settled down on the opposite side of his father.

“What’s the occasion? You even called me first for this meeting.”

“Father, before I begin, I’d like you to take a look at this first.”

“And this is....?”

“This is my Guild Master licence, as well as the records of the raids I’ve been in so far.”

“Your Master.... licence? Yours?”

When Yu Myung-Han formed a disbelieving face, Yu Jin-Ho nodded his head with a smile.

“Yes, Father.”

Yu Myung-Han wordlessly took a look at the documents his son had handed over. And then, a certain light began gleaming in his eyes.

“....”

While his father maintained a weighty silence, Yu Jin-Ho’s heart was beating so madly that he found it hard to even breathe properly.

“And so....”

Yu Myung-Han carefully placed the documents on the table and continued on.

“....You wish to run the Yujin Guild, is that right?”

“That’s correct.”

“H-mm....”

It was at this point that a hint of a dilemma, alongside the emotion of shock, appeared on Yu Myung-Han’s face.

‘To think that father is pondering between me and my older brother....’

Yu Jin-Ho was genuinely moved inside. The fact that his father was thinking about this matter was a big win for Yu Jin-Ho.

If it was in the past, he’d be satisfied with this much. However, he had no desire whatsoever to back off now.

“As you know already, Father, giving the position of the Guild Master to an outsider carries too much risk....”

“Enough.”

Yu Myung-Han raised his hand.

At the same time, Yu Jin-Ho’s mouth stopped moving.

Father’s ‘Enough’ was one of the most absolute commands that no one in the Yu household could go against.

“There is someone I want you to meet.”

“Pardon me?”

Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes went round at that. He was the one who called and asked for this meeting, yet, his father wanted to introduce him to someone?

Who could it be?

Just as Yu Jin-Ho’s curiosity peaked, the door opposite to the one he used to enter the room slid open.

“Ah.... Hello, there.”

Was he in the late twenties? Or early thirties? A man around that age group awkwardly greeted Yu Jin-Ho as he entered the room.

Who was this man?

Yu Jin-Ho couldn’t recognise this man at all.

When Yu Myung-Han signalled with his chin, this unknown man settled down next to him.

“This here is... Hunter Goh Myung-Hwan.”

‘Goh Myung-Hwan?’

Yu Jin-Ho tilted his head.

He had never heard of this name before.

Father nodded his head as if he had expected this already, and continued on.

“He is one of the survivors from the White Tiger Guild’s Red Gate incident, the one that’s been making so much noise lately.”



Chapter 71 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Yu Jin-Ho was taken by surprise.

‘...The Red Gate?’

Why was the story of the Red Gate brought up here, out of the blue?

Since the incident had been talked about non-stop in mass media, even Yu Jin-Ho knew what had happened. But, this timing was suspiciously coincidental and so, he found it difficult to figure out where his father was going with this.

‘And this man here...’

A man who was supposed to be a survivor of that incident.

Why did the survivor that the media was madly scrambling over to find appear here? Yu Jin-Ho’s curiosity continued to balloon greatly.

After staring at his son for a little while, Yu Myung-Han slowly opened his mouth.

“Looks like you haven’t heard of it yet.”

“Pardon me?”

Yu Myung-Han disregarded the still-confused Yu Jin-Ho for the time being and shifted his gaze over to Goh Myung-Hwan, sitting there in nervousness.

“Mister Hunter.”

“Yes, Chairman.”

“Please inform my son who was there besides the White Tiger Guild’s new recruits on that day.”

“Understood.”

Goh Myung-Hwan’s stare now was directed to Yu Jin-Ho.

Unintentionally, Yu Jin-Ho met Goh Myung-Hwan’s gaze, and a question mark floated up on his face.

Goh Myung-Hwan opened his mouth.

“There was a young female Hunter who looked to be a high schooler,

and.....”

‘A young female Hunter?’

Even then, Yu Jin-Ho couldn't imagine just whose name would pop out from Goh Myung-Hwan's lips.

“....And, Mister Seong Jin-Woo.”

Tumble.

Yu Jin-Ho thought that he could hear his own heart fall to the pit of his stomach.

‘H-hyung-nim was there at the Red Gate incident?’

What was going on here?

He was already feeling quite confused, but now, his thought process devolved into an even more complicated mess. In the middle of his confusion, he suddenly remembered something.

‘Wait. Now that I think about it, a few days ago....’

....Hyung-nim was conversing with such familiarity with Hahn Song-Yi, someone whom he didn't even share a casual greeting before that day.

“Do you still remember the name of that female Hunter, by any chance?”

“It was Miss Hahn Song-Yi.”

How can this be?

Yu Jin-Ho's jaw dropped to the floor.

To think, there was such a secret to the mysterious relationship between those two people.....

‘Wait, if that's the case, then...?’

Then, the identity of the potential helper the news outlets were talking about was....

As if he knew what Yu Jin-Ho was about to ask, Goh Myung-Hwan quickly confirmed the truth.

“We, the members of the White Tiger Guild and Miss Hahn Song-Yi, could escape from the Red Gate all safe and sound thanks to Mister Seong Jin-Woo.”

‘Hah, haha, ha...’

....Hyung-nim, just what did you do in there?

Yu Jin-Ho formed an expression comprised of half surprise and half joy. He even forgot that he was in front of his father, and asked out loud.

“What happened inside the Red Gate?”

Goh Myung-Hwan glanced to his side, to the head of the dining table.

Yu Myung-Han nodded his head.

Goh Myung-Hwan carried a face of a man dying to open his mouth until then, and as soon as the permission was given, he began to tell his story with great relish.

“So, what happened was....”

Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes twinkled as he listened.

“At first, everyone was taken back somewhat, after learning that a pair of rank E Hunters were coming to observe the new recruit training process. But then....”

Goh Myung-Hwan began describing what happened that day with a hyped-up voice reminiscent of a little kid proudly showing off to a friend the brand new toy he got as a gift.

However....

“He did what to a rank A Hunter??”

Goh Myung-Hwan wasn’t the only over-excited person in the room.

“Exactly!! With his palm, he went like, Pah!! He smacked the back of Kim Cheol’s head, and....”

“Huh....”

As he listened to the exploits of hyung-nim, Yu Jin-Ho’s heart beat faster as if he was there, experiencing everything personally.

‘As expected of hyung-nim....’

To him, hunting down high-ranked monsters was nothing. Well, he could knock out a rank A Hunter with a single slap, after all.

Yu Jin-Ho felt so moved and proud at the same time after realising that such an incredible person had been standing by his side until now.

Meanwhile, Goh Myung-Hwan continued on with his story.

“....I really thought that we’d die for sure when dozens of Ice Elves showed up. But then again....”

Was he paying too close an attention to the story? Time flew by really

quickly. The definitely-not-short story of that day's events was finally coming to its end.

The excited Goh Myung-Hwan's voice became louder.

“So, what I’m saying is, this whole thing is just too unfair. Mister Seong Jin-Woo saved our a*s*es back there. He’s my life’s saviour.”

Yu Jin-Ho unconsciously nodded his head in agreement. He could understand where Goh Myung-Hwan was coming from. He also had received similar help before, too.

“But then, I’m not supposed to reveal the existence of Mister Seong Jin-Woo? I find it difficult to accept the decision of the White Tiger Guild. However, Chairman Yu has given me a call out of the blue, and so, here I am.”

It was at this point that Yu Myung-Han stopped Goh Myung-Hwan in a dignified manner.

“Goh Myung-Hwan Hunter-nim.”

“Yes?”

“I believe that should be sufficient.”

“Ah. My apologies, sir. I got carried away.”

Goh Myung-Hwan embarrassedly lowered his head.

Yu Myung-Han's stare then shifted over to his son, Yu Jin-Ho.

“In the process of investigating more about Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, a name that I never expected to hear popped up.”

At the ends of Yu Myung-Han's pointing finger....

His index finger pointed to a piece of paper with Yu Jin-Ho's name written on it. And it was none other than the raid records Yu Jin-Ho handed over to his father.

His index finger pointed lower and stopped at the three words 'Seong Jin-Woo' next.

The raid leader, Yu Jin-Ho. The raid member, Seong Jin-Woo.

This was irrefutable evidence.

‘...I’m busted.’

The truth about hyung-nim helping him out during the process of acquiring his Guild Master licence was now out in the open. Yu Jin-Ho's expression

hardened.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo aided you greatly during your attempt to earn the Guild Master licence. Do you acknowledge this fact?”

“....Yes, Father.”

“Is there anything else you want to add?”

“...”

Yu Jin-Ho’s vision darkened.

Now that the matter of hyung-nim lending aid was out in the open, it was impossible to convince his father that he was the right person to take on the position of the Yujin Guild’s new Master.

‘.....’

He sensed his father’s strict eyes bearing down on him. In the past, being subjected to that withering glare, Yu Jin-Ho would lose all strength in his legs.

‘However!’

He couldn’t give up like this. For the first time ever, Yu Jin-Ho summoned his courage in front of his father.

He lowered his head and raised his voice.

“Can you entrust the Yujin Guild to me, Father?”

“I will.”

“Eh?”

At that refreshingly simple answer, Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly raised his head.

“I shall entrust the Yujin Guild to you.”

“But, why....?”

“Didn’t you say it yourself? It is too risky to entrust the Guild to an outsider. With you here, is there a reason to take on that risk now?”

“B-but, I tried to deceive you, father.”

“You thought I’d scold you and kick you out because of that?”

What was going on here?

Yu Jin-Ho thought that his father was smiling, for some reason. But, Yu Myung-Han’s lips would always remain in a straight line, no matter what the occasion was. So, how come?

“If you entered the dungeons without any plans whatsoever, then I’d

have done just that. Because I don't remember raising an idiot son like that."

Yu Jin-Ho's face became hot at that moment.

'If I hadn't met hyung-nim, then I'd be getting scolded by father right about now....'

No, wait – he'd be dead long before that.

Yu Jin-Ho spat out a sigh of relief inwardly.

"However, I have a condition."

"Yes, Father."

"This Hunter Seong Jin-Woo... can you bring him over to Yujin?"

Yu Jin-Ho's eyes opened wider.

"You mean, hyung-nim??"

'...Hyung-nim?'

The light within Yu Myung-Han's eyes flickered a little just then. But that didn't last for long.

"That's correct."

Yu Jin-Ho became speechless, then.

'Groan...'

Even a snot-nosed brat would know that now was the right time to confidently say something in order to leave behind a positive impression. However, the one they were talking about was none other than hyung-nim.

Yu Jin-Ho could ask, sure, but he wasn't confident of anything else besides. So, he replied honestly.

"I can't be certain."

"Very good. There is no meaning if the challenge is too easy for you."

The Chairman Yu Myung-Han took a sip of water and lightly wiped the corners of his lips with a handkerchief.

"If you fail, I shall hand over the Guild to your brother. So, how about it? Will you accept?"

Yu Jin-Ho's expression became grave.

'This is the shot I struggled so hard to get....'

If he backed out now, then he wouldn't be able to show himself in front of

hyung-nim, who helped him right until the end for this opportunity.

Yu Jin-Ho became deeply earnest as he replied.

“I accept, Father.”

“Good.”

With that reply, the negotiation between a father and a son had come to a conclusion. Yu Myung-Han wordlessly nodded his head, and Yu Jin-Ho stood up, bowed his waist, and left the room.

Yu Myung-Han took the handkerchief away from his lips. It was getting harder to suppress the smile trying to form on his lips.

‘This kid....’

This boy wanted Yujin Guild.

He suspected something was up when they agreed to meet today, but he didn’t expect his son to be this daring.

‘Indeed, a tiger’s cub is still a tiger at the end of the day.’

The smile finally began to spread on Yu Myung-Han’s lips.

‘...That famous Chairman Yu Myung-Han is actually smiling!!’

Goh Myung-Hwan’s eyes were growing large as he witnessed everything.

The widely-known nickname of Chairman Yu Myung-Han was ‘Pokerface’. He was famed for never showing any emotion whatsoever, whether it be a joyful occasion or a sorrowful one.

When Goh Myung-Hwan continued to stare utterly mystified, Chairman Yu Myung-Han turned to him and asked.

“Hunter-nim. Was there anything you wanted to add?”

Suddenly finding himself on the receiving end of that stare, Goh Myung-Hwan got flustered and hurriedly shook his head.

“N-no. Not at all.”

...47, 48, 49, 50.

With a frightening clearing speed, Jin-Woo climbed up the floors.

[You have killed the Mid-Ranked Demon.]

[You have earned 300 experience points.]

[You have acquired (1) Soul of Demons.]

...

....

.....

[You have killed the Mid-Ranked Demon.]

[You have killed the Mid-Ranked Demon.]

He didn't feel tired at all when looking at the total experience points and the accumulated number of souls climbing up higher every time he hunted a monster down.

[Collected Number of Souls: 4,388/10,000]

'It's not even at the halfway mark yet, huh.'

He had been endlessly hunting demons down ever since entering this place, but as expected, the wall of ten thousand souls was indeed high, and difficult to overcome.

However, what about his level?

[Level: 69]

In the space of one day, it had risen by another two.

The levelling up speed had slowed down compared to the beginning, but it could still be considered as blistering when looking at the rate of collecting the required souls. Even now, the experience points were quietly piling up.

"Kiieehk!"

[...Killed the Mid-Ranked Demon.]

[You have earned 300 experience points.]

[You have collected (1) Soul of....]

"Whew!"

After finishing off the last demon still standing before his eyes, Jin-Woo stretched his back and scanned his surroundings. Beneath the confidence-inspiring shadow soldiers standing around him, the countless corpses of mid-ranked demons could be seen littering the ground.

Clap!

Jin-Woo smiled deeply and clapped his hands.

"Nice work."

The soldiers who fought hard for him all returned to his shadow in an instant. The magic crystal could be collected by them, sure, but loot had to be manually collected by Jin-Woo.

[Will you take.....]

Well, he had to manually click ‘yes’ on every System message that popped into his view, that was why.

‘This is a bit cumbersome, isn’t it.’

So, that was why when there weren’t that many demons, he took care of them himself real fast. And, when there were in a big group like this time, he fought together with his soldiers.

As soon as the battle was over, he’d start collecting the loot right away.

‘Just what’s so fun about this that Yu Jin-Ho insisted on doing it?’

Jin-Woo extracted a piece of loot from the dead demon and smirked to himself.

There was one more cumbersome thing about this place; it was impossible to extract shadows inside the Demon’s Castle.

Didn’t matter whether it was a mid-ranked or low-ranked, the black fog-like thing that denoted if he could perform the shadow extraction or not didn’t rise up from the demon’s corpses.

‘Even when I’m staring at the remains, too.’

[This Mana is tainted.]

[It’s impossible to perform shadow extraction.]

Nope, he only got some messages saying that he couldn’t extract shadows because Mana was supposedly tainted.

‘Is there anything I can do about this?’

Just as Jin-Woo scanned the remains of the demons with a helpless expression on his face, a new message popped into his view.

Tti-ring.

[You have discovered 29 ‘Item: Horns of Mid-Ranked Demon’.]

[Will you take them all?]

Jin-Woo grinned brightly.

‘Of course!’

Jin-Woo quickly shook away the regret he felt over the shadow extraction problem, with the help from the abundant loot falling on his lap.

‘Nothing I can use directly among the pile, eh.’

In that case, sell them all!

As soon as he sold off all the japtem, more Gold got neatly deposited into his bank balance.

[Current Gold: 914,690,772]

‘Heok!!’

Jin-Woo checked his Inventory without thinking too much, only for his eyes to shot open real wide. The amount of Gold sitting pretty in there had shot past 900 million already.

‘Well, each pair of demon’s horns are worth about 200,000, and I hunted down well over 4000, so....’

Not to forget, he also sold off other unnecessary japtem on his way here as well, so it was understandable that Gold would accumulate at a frightening pace.

‘Should I buy a rarity S weapon or armour?’

Before long, though, Jin-Woo shook his head.

He wasn’t in a need for one, so no real need to force himself to spend money just because he had some.

‘Right, there will come a time when I need to splurge on something.’

Jin-Woo closed the Inventory window and lightly dusted his hands.

He was done with cleaning up his surroundings.

He had procured the important entry permit for the 51st floor a long time ago. So, the only thing remaining was to get to the floor-transfer magic circle and go upstairs, but....

Jin-Woo’s sight shifted towards the pillar of light. More specifically, a short distance in front of that pillar.

And a massive demon, plus scores of high-ranked demons, were standing there, waiting.

Jin-Woo raised his sight up higher.

And he could see the giant demon’s name, floating in the air in a deep crimson hue.

[The Sovereign of the Lower Floors, The Avaricious Vulcan]

That thing consisted of a huge mess of fatty flesh that must’ve weighed dozens of tons. No, maybe even several hundred, instead. And then, the

massive club this thing was holding in hand looked rather horrifying as well.

However, a smile was etched on Jin-Woo's face.

'So, that's the mid-boss of this place, huh?'

He held only the nicest memories of the bosses found inside the instant dungeons. They all gave him plenty of experience points as well as wonderful items.

Compared to the boss-level monsters found in regular dungeons that required lots of hard work to kill but little reward to show for it, these boss monsters of instant dungeons were more like boxes of gifts, all nicely wrapped up.

So, then. What items would that guy cough up?

Gulp.

Jin-Woo smiled brightly and began drooling.



Chapter 72 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘Should I get started, then?’

Shadow soldiers were summoned behind Jin-Woo. Not just the regular foot soldiers, but also the magic soldiers, the beast soldiers, as well as the two knights, too.

And in front of them stood Jin-Woo.

The two knights strode forward and stood on either side of him. Jin-Woo took a glance at Igrit to his right, and Iron to his left, and a grin formed on his lips.

‘Feels so reassuring.’

Even though this was his own skill, the fact that he had comrades watching his back helped greatly to calm his mind.

However....

‘Still, it’s a bit too much to go with a frontal assault, isn’t it?’

The whole thing looked kinda dangerous. And that was all thanks to that wooden-looking club held tight in Vulcan’s grip.

‘It’s just unbelievable that a tree that big actually existed, right?’

He guessed from the size of Vulcan and the wooden club that one swing from the demon would be enough to wipe away his entire platoon.

‘It’s fine if they get swept away, but....’

The real problem would be the MP required to regenerate the fallen soldiers. Without a doubt, continuously regenerating his soldiers that got repeatedly obliterated by that thick blunt weapon would bottom out his MP in no time at all.

In that case, there was only one way to do this.

‘I’ll have to take care of the boss.’

In other words, he’d let his boys deal with Vulcan’s underlings, while he himself would fight the boss.

This was the best plan he could think of.

‘Well, all I have to do is hunt it without getting hit.’

Unlike with his soldiers, Jin-Woo was confident of dodging Vulcan’s attacks. In order for his plan to work, though, he had to separate Vulcan from his underlings first.

Jin-Woo ordered his magic soldiers to initiate the assault first.

‘Use the ranged attacks to summon Vulcan’s lackeys over here first, and I’ll fight that big guy lumbering along at the rear.’

It was a simple enough plan to carry out.

‘Now.’

When Jin-Woo gave his signal, flames flew out from the hands of the magic soldiers.

Swiiiiish...

Swiiiiish....!

Kaboom!!

The flames exploded near the subordinates of Vulcan, signalling the beginning of the operation.

Tti-ring!

[The Sovereign of the Lower Floors, the Avaricious Vulcan has discovered the intruder!]

[Vulcan’s loyal guard has discovered....]

[Vulcan’s loyal guard has discovered....]

Tti-ring, tti-ring, tti-ring!!

The warning beeps resounded out in his head at a frightening pace. And at the same time, Vulcan and its lackeys all turned their heads towards Jin-Woo and his army.

‘Alright...’

He succeeded in drawing their attention.

In order to hit Vulcan coming up from the lackeys’ rear without getting discovered, Jin-Woo activated ‘Stealth’ and hid himself.

Shururu...

Everything seemed to be unfolding according to plan.

That’s what he thought, but then....

Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud, thud!!!

‘.....?!?!’

Vulcan broke his expectation and bolted forward like a streak of lightning.

‘What the hell?? What is up with that movement? It’s like I’m looking at video footage sped up several times!’

Quite literally, in the blink of an eye! Vulcan had ran past its lackeys and arrived before the shadow soldiers.

‘Oh, crap!!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened considerably.

This demon with a huge, mountain-sized body mass managed to exceed his imaginations.

“M-mm!”

Vulcan lifted the club up high.

Just before the club pointing to the sky fell down on the defenceless magic soldiers, Iron jumped out of nowhere and raised his black shield.

Whoosh-!!

Kwajeeck!!

The attack was defended against somehow, but.... Both arms of Iron were shattered into pieces. The sturdiest, toughest among the shadow soldiers couldn’t withstand a single attack and was rendered unable to fight any further.

Scatter....

The shattered pieces of Iron’s arms fell to the ground and scattered away.

“M-mm? M-mm?”

Perhaps finding its previous attack not to its liking, Vulcan tilted its head this way and that, while staring deeply at its club. But that was only for a brief period.

The b*stard slammed down with the club once more.

“M-mm!!”

Kwajeeck!!

Iron, who had lost all means to defend himself, as well as the magic soldiers behind him, were crushed to oblivion next.

Crack.

Witnessing that event unfold, something inside Jin-Woo loudly snapped into two.

‘This son of a b*tch dares to....’

Jin-Woo bit his lower lip.

What he did next wasn’t because his head told him to do it.

Paht!

When he regained his senses, he was already in mid-air, leaping towards Vulcan.

His target was already set. And that would be that surprisingly beady little head attached atop the mountainous body.

Jin-Woo twisted his body in mid-air. The muscles of his shoulder and the arm cocked rearward ballooned up. When he focused all his might on his clenched right fist, ‘Stealth’ came undone automatically.

“M-mm??”

Belatedly, Vulcan discovered Jin-Woo.

Too bad, Jin-Woo’s fist was not slow enough for the giant monster to dodge when it was already near its nose.

Swiiiiick!!

His fist punched out like a bullet and slammed into the side of Vulcan’s face.

KWABOOM

Vulcan was flung away. The giant demon rolled away on the ground for a long, long time, before crashing into the skeletal remains of a building and came to a stop.

Rumble, crash!!

Then, the barely-standing remains all tumbled on top of Vulcan, burying the demon underneath.

Tap.

Jin-Woo lightly landed back on the ground, his eyes quite wide open.

‘Why did it fly away that easily??’

Unable to comprehend what just happened, he stared at his own fist in disbelief. He couldn’t even spot a single nick or a scratch on his fist that

managed to blow away such a huge creature.

Then, he suddenly recalled something.

‘Ahh... now that I think about it....’

Jin-Woo raised his head. He summoned the Stat Window, and it quickly floated up there.

[Stats]

Strength: 150

Endurance: 109

Agility: 139

Intelligence: 109

Perception: 111

‘...That’s how it was.’

He may have learned several assassin-related skills, and his Class was set as a magic type, so he had been forgetting about a crucial part until now.

[Strength: 150]

‘.....’

He had been using up all the spare bonus Stat points on Intelligence, yet Strength was still ahead by 1.5 times.

‘Well, uh, I really did invest in Strength blindly, didn’t I?’

On top of this, his level had increased explosively, as well.

Just from checking out each of his Stats, he could definitely feel the results of all that grinding. One of those results was this.

Jin-Woo stared at Vulcan, still buried underneath the rubble with a dumbfounded face, before a wry chuckle left his lips.

“Huh.....”

It was hard to feel it when he was busy massacring the ‘regular’ monsters, the Low-Ranked and Mid-Ranked Demons. But, after punching the boss-level creature, he was certain of it now.

‘I’ve definitely.... become stronger.’

Clench!

He felt strength flowing into his clenched fists. Heightened excitement filled every inch of his body.

It was then.

The familiar mechanical bleep rang inside his head.

Tti-ring.

‘What was that?’

Jin-Woo raised his head.

“M-mm? M-mm??”

The fallen Vulcan used the club to prop itself and stood up from the rubble.

‘Did the warning chime go off because the monster is getting up?’

Was his System that friendly, to begin with? As Jin-Woo tilted his head, the culprit for that beep popped up in front of his eyes.

[The Sovereign of the Lower Floors, the Avaricious Vulcan, has activated ‘Skill: Rage’.]

‘Uh??’

Tti-ring, tti-ring, tti-ring.

The warning chime went in his head one after the other.

[The ‘Rage’ state will be continuously maintained.]

[All of Vulcan’s Stats will be increased by 50%.]

[Vulcan will feel less pain.]

‘Isn’t that skill from...?’

Even before Jin-Woo managed to recall the memories of Cerberus, Vulcan, with its two reddened eyes, rushed towards him like an unstoppable tidal wave.

Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud, thud!!

The ground rumbled, accompanied with the loud rumbling footsteps.

Jin-Woo sneaked a glance behind him. Vulcan’s lackeys were currently engaged in a bitter battle with the shadow soldiers there.

“Krooar!!”

“Kiiehhck!!”

In the midst of this confusing melee, Jin-Woo still could locate Iron. The impact force must’ve been too great, because Iron was still in the middle of regeneration.

“Iron!”

Jin-Woo called out.

Iron quickly threw his shield to Jin-Woo.

After catching the shield, Jin-Woo shifted his glance away to find Vulcan standing right before him.

‘If I back off here, my soldiers will get wiped away.’

Without his soldiers, it’d become far too difficult to hunt down Vulcan and its subordinates. So, Jin-Woo chose the method that could ensure the safety of his soldiers.

He raised the shield, and his arm muscles tensed up.

“M-mm!!”

Shortly thereafter, Vulcan slammed down with its club.

Slam!!

Kwang!!

Boom!!

Fearsome attacks that rocked the earth landed several times in a row without rest, but Jin-Woo patiently endured them all. His high physical defence and Endurance Stat allowed him to block these attacks.

“Mm? Mm??”

When its attacks did not work, Vulcan became even more frenzied and pounded away with that massive club.

Slam!! Kwang!! Boom!! Kaboom!!

However, Jin-Woo was steadfast and his knees buckled not even once.

‘Still...’

Still, standing around like this blocking all the time wouldn’t let him hunt the boss down.

Deep frowns formed on Jin-Woo’s forehead.

The thing was, unlike how it was with Cerberus, Vulcan’s ‘Rage’ skill didn’t have a time limit, the trade-off being the skill not as overpowered as the gatekeeper’s version.

Meaning, he couldn’t remain passively defending forever like this.

Slam!! Boom!!

Jin-Woo gritted his teeth.

‘Constantly getting pounded on isn’t my thing, either....’

Kwang!!

Just as the club bounced off of the shield for the last time....

Jin-Woo had been getting ready to counter-attack and took the opening to leap towards Vulcan’s head.

However, he wasn’t the only one waiting for an opening.

“Mm!!”

Matching the timing of Jin-Woo’s jump, Vulcan quickly leaned its upper torso back.

‘What?!’

And then, the club flew in towards him from the side while drawing an arc in the air.

‘....He got me.’

If there were places where his hands or feet could touch, the story might have been different, but there was no way he’d be able to dodge the attack in the middle of air.

And, even if he managed to block it, who knew just where he would end up from the rebound?

Swoosh-!!

As the time slowed down in his perception, Jin-Woo stared at the club approaching ever closer and leaked out a groan.

‘A way.... There must be a way!’

If he could move his body, then surely, he’d be able to dodge this no problem.

When his thoughts arrived at this point....

‘Moving my body?’

An idea suddenly popped up in his head.

There was no time to think about this. As soon as the idea formed in his head, Jin-Woo activated the skill ‘Ruler’s Reach’ and pushed at Vulcan.

“M-mm?”

Of course, the power behind the skill ‘Ruler’s Reach’ was far too low to

move the massive body of Vulcan. However, the rebound meant that it was Jin-Woo who was pushed back, instead.

Whooooosh!!

The tip of the club missed him by a hair's breadth.

'I did it!'

Jin-Woo was flung away some distance and rolled on the ground a few times, but compared to what might have happened when hit by that club, his landing this time should be seen as far, far gentler.

"Whew-!"

Jin-Woo managed to find his balance and sighed in relief.

"M-mm?"

On the other hand, Vulcan's expression had crumpled quite unsightly. It attacked, feeling proud and all, but in the end, it was all for nothing. That fact caused its fury to reach the peak.

"M-mm!! M-mm!!"

Jin-Woo scratched the side of his head while staring at Vulcan's reddened face.

'Now what should I do about this?'

If he jumped to its front, the d*mn thing would evade him with not much difficulty.

But then, attacking other body parts instead of its head didn't look like he'd be able to critically wound it, what with all those layers of flesh getting in the way.

'Is there a way to make it impossible to dodge?'

It was at this point that yet another, and an arguably excellent, idea popped up in his head.

The corners of Jin-Woo's lips arched up.

Suddenly, he turned around and ran. Vulcan mistook this action as him trying to escape, and hurriedly chased after him.

Rumble, thud, thud, thud!!

Jin-Woo moderated his running speed so Vulcan could chase after him. As soon as he discovered a suitable remnant of a building, his eyes began gleaming brightly.

‘That one.’

On the other hand...

“M-mm!!”

When the distance between Vulcan and Jin-Woo closed up, the giant demon lifted its club high up in the air behind it.

To squash this bug-like creature!

Finally, the chance to crush this annoying pest once and for all was here!

A disgusting smile formed on Vulcan’s face.

And so, as the club came down with a whoosh...

The insect-like creature suddenly sped up and ran up on the outer wall of the destroyed building.

“M-mm??”

Something felt wrong here, but it was too late for the demon to slow down the descent of the club.

“M-mm?? M-mm??”

In an instant, the insect had run up high enough to be at the demon’s eye line, before he powerfully kicked the wall.

Crack!

As the spiderweb-like cracks spread on the wall, something shot towards this demon with never-before-seen speed.

It was none other than that insect.

“M-mm!!”

Vulcan’s eyes grew wider.

A smile spread on Jin-Woo’s face as he looked into those large eyes.

The ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ gripped tightly in his right hand sliced past the bulging artery of Vulcan’s neck.

Slice!!

From the blood vessel as thick as a grown man, blood spurted out like an overflowing fountain.

“M-mm?! M-mm!!”

Vulcan hurriedly discarded the club and tried to stem the loss of blood with both of its hands.

“M-mm!!”

Unfortunately, it was insufficient to block the overflowing of blood.

At that moment, there was a visible tremor shaking Vulcan’s eyes.

“M, m-mm??”

Before it had the time to notice it, Jin-Woo had climbed up the demon’s back, and buried the blades of his daggers deeply into that thick neck.

‘I guess, once isn’t enough, huh?’

Jin-Woo tilted his head and pulled the daggers out, before activating his skill once more.

‘Vital Points Targetting!’

Two daggers stabbed deeply into Vulcan’s neck again.

Stab!!

Stab!!

Only then did the messages he was waiting for pop up.

Tti-ring.

[You have killed the Sovereign of the Lower Floors, the Avaricious Vulcan.]

[You have earned 150,000 experience points.]

[The souls of demons trapped inside Vulcan’s stomach have been released.]

[You have acquired (72) Soul of Demons.]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]



Chapter 73 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

THUD!!

Vulcan fell to the ground, hard. Jin-Woo relaxedly walked out from the thick, ash-grey dust clouds rising up, and took a look around him.

He was thinking of assisting the Shadow Soldiers right away, but even they seemed to be getting close to finishing up, as well.

“Kiiechk!!”

“Khekeck!!”

“Kheeck!”

As the shadow soldiers hacked away with their swords, the number of Vulcan’s underlings rapidly decreased.

‘Status.’

Jin-Woo studied his Status Window. Since he had levelled up only a moment ago, both his HP and MP were full.

‘I’ve plenty of Mana, so I don’t really need to help out, huh.’

As long as there was sufficient Mana, shadow soldiers would be exactly like immortals. Now that was the true power of an undead army.

Leaving the mop-up of the remnants to his trusty soldiers, Jin-Woo turned around in order to collect the loot.

“Hmm.”

Was this feeling similar to unwrapping a gift? Seeing that dead body of Vulcan, a smile automatically formed on his lips.

‘I wonder what’ll come out this time?’

He could spy several lights sparkling on the body. Just like before, Jin-Woo extended his hand towards the lights. Then, item acquisition messages popped up in his view.

Tti-ring!

[You have discovered ‘Item: Demon Sovereign’s Earrings.’ Will you take it?]

[You have discovered ‘Item: Bead of Avarice’. Will you take it?]

[You have discovered ‘Item: Vulcan’s Horns’ x2. Will you take it?]

[You have discovered ‘Material Item: Fragment of the World Tree’. Will you take it?]

He had been feeling rather optimistic about fighting Vulcan, even before the battle started. And as he expected, items were quite literally pouring out from the dead demon.

Having checked the list only once, Jin-Woo’s face was brightening up considerably already.

‘I can pretty much tell that Vulcan’s Horns should be japtem.’

From its name to the total number he found, it wasn’t that hard to guess that ‘Vulcan’s Horns’ were japtem only good for additional Gold, just like the Demon’s Horns he got after killing various demons.

Which meant the remaining three were the ‘real’ items....

And there was this one item that attracted his attention more than the others.

[You have discovered ‘Material Item: Fragment of the World Tree’. Will you take it?]

‘What is this Material Item thing?’

What could he possibly make with something like that? Or, was the System trying to imply that it might be something related to a quest?

Jin-Woo’s curiosity roused from its slumber after reading about a type of item he hadn’t heard of before. If he wanted to read the explanations on the items, he had to acquire them first. So, he chose ‘yes’ on all the item acquisition messages.

“Take them all.”

The lights glittering from different parts of Vulcan all morphed into items and appeared near his feet as soon as he said that.

A pair of earrings, a red marble-like object, and timber as big as a grown woman. He could immediately tell which one was the ‘Fragment of the World Tree’ among them.

Jin-Woo looked at the timber. When he did, the information on the item popped up.

[Material Item: Fragment of the World Tree]

Rarity: ??

Type: Material

Remaining part of ‘Vulcan’s Club’, originally fashioned out of a branch of the World Tree, after the contaminated portion had been removed. Timber from the World Tree possess extraordinary magical energy, and is seen as top material for the crafting of the very best magic tools available.

‘Top material for the very best magic tool, is it?’

He was curious about just what could be made from this piece of wood, but too bad, that wasn’t disclosed. Still, there was no doubt this thing was no ordinary item. Simply by standing near it, he could sense a powerful aura coming off of it.

‘This timber... I think it’ll come in handy later.’

Instead of selling off this ‘Fragment of World Tree’ to the Store, he decided to store it in his Inventory.

After he finished doing that, Jin-Woo confirmed the details on the other loot as well.

[Item: Demon Sovereign’s Earrings]

Rarity: S

Type: Accessory

Endurance +20, Stamina +20

When worn together with ‘Demon Sovereign’s Necklace’ and ‘Demon Sovereign’s Ring’, set bonuses will be unlocked.

Set bonus effect 1. (locked)

Set bonus effect 2. (locked)

‘This one has hidden set bonuses?’

If only its additional Stat boosts were concerned, then it was not that different from the ‘Gatekeeper’s Necklace’ in terms of usefulness, but this ‘Demon Sovereign’s Earrings’ had hidden set bonus effects as well.

Even if those set bonuses were ignored, the item itself was still quite brilliant. Both his Endurance and Stamina got a boost of 20 points, which was considerable.

‘Every level up gives me 5 Stat points, so....’

He’d need to level up 8 times to get that many Stat points, in other words.

Feeling genuinely pleased now, Jin-Woo picked the earrings up.

[Will you equip 'Item: Demon Sovereign's Earrings']?

'Equip.'

Just like with other items, earrings disappeared from the view, but their options still activated with no problem. A satisfied smile formed on Jin-Woo's face after confirming the rise in his Stats.

So, the accessory set of a demon sovereign, then.

'Other accessories should be around here somewhere. Right?'

What with the word 'demon' in their names, he could easily guess that those items must be somewhere inside the Demon's Castle.

Just what kind of set bonuses would be unlocked if he managed to find the other two? He had found only one part of the set, but there was nothing he could do about his anticipation soaring higher.

However, Jin-Woo's smile didn't last for long.

'What is this now....?'

[Item: Bead of Avarice]

Rarity: A

Type: Magic Tool

Bead created by solidifying superior demon Vulcan's blood. Will strengthen all magical effects and cause greater damage.

Effect 'Appetite for Destruction': x2 magic damage

It was a spherical red object the size of a billiard ball.

Jin-Woo tightly grasped the 'Bead of Avarice'. But, there was no change to his Stats.

He then summoned and checked the Class-related skill windows, since those were the only things that could be called 'magic' in his repertoire, but he saw no change to the number of shadows he could extract nor the number that could be stored.

'Maybe it's not something I can use?'

Jin-Woo's head tilted this way and that.

An increase of 100% in magic damage. That kind of performance was quite incredible, indeed.

Now originally, tools that boosted magic cost an arm and a leg, so only a

few mage-type Hunters could afford to use them. Even then, Jin-Woo had never heard of an item that could double the power of magic among all those uber-expensive artefacts.

If there were, then it'd been utter chaos, with headlines and special reports and whatnot. So, there was no way he'd be unaware of one until now.

However, this 'Bead of Avarice' or whatever could supposedly double the amount of magic damage.

'But, so what? It doesn't really help me, anyway.'

Jin-Woo licked his lips.

An item that doubled magic damage but did nothing else, would not have any effect on him. Both his 'shadow extraction' and 'shadow storage' had nothing to do with damaging something, to begin with. And the rest of his skills weren't magic-related, either.

At this point, he'd rather prefer to have an item that raised his Intelligence Stat, instead.

'Tsk.'

Jin-Woo formed a wistful expression and lightly tossed the Bead of Avarice up and down in the air. Meanwhile, his soldiers arrived near him one by one after taking down Vulcan's remaining underlings. The first one to arrive was Igrit.

In the right hand, three, and another three in the left; he carried a total of six demon heads and placed them before Jin-Woo.

"....."

Jin-Woo looked at Igrit kneeling before him and scratched the side of his head.

"Uhm, hey man. Can't you stop doing that?"

Of course, Igrit and his gravely-lowered head didn't reply.

"Because of you...."

Jin-Woo's gaze slowly shifted over to Iron.

Nobody could tell just when he did it, but Iron had cut Vulcan's head off and dragged it all the way to Jin-Woo, before kneeling on the ground

"....This guy is starting to imitate you, you know."

More importantly, Jin-Woo hunted Vulcan down, not Iron!

Jin-Woo spat out a long groan while keeping his stare fixed to Iron. It was at this point that an amusing idea popped up in his head.

‘Just like how I used Iron’s shield, maybe should I try and let these guys use this Bead of Avarice?’

What a good timing it was, since he spotted the magic soldiers slowly walking behind the regular infantrymen. They were far slower compared to normal shadow soldiers, never mind the two knights.

Jin-Woo summoned the first of the three magic soldiers to arrive in the vicinity.

When he beckoned with his hand, the magic soldier decked out in the black robe hurriedly walked towards him.

‘...Maybe I should go there myself.’

Jin-Woo lightly shook his head and took large strides towards the magic soldier, before handing over the Bead of Avarice. And then, pointed at the remnant of the building he used to run up during his battle against Vulcan.

Since all shadow soldiers could be controlled via his will, he didn’t really need to issue any particular commands here. Jin-Woo simply gave the signal.

“Fire.”

Right at that moment, a ball of flames that was double the size of the usual attack suddenly materialised at the tip of the magic soldier’s raised hand.

‘Heok?!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened super-wide. Without giving him enough time to get shocked, the ball of flames quickly flew out from the magic soldier’s hand.

Swoooooosh—!!

KWABOOM!!

“Huh?!”

Jin-Woo’s jaw dropped to the floor.

The building was swept up in the grand explosion and collapsed like a house of cards. And the ferocity of the burning flames didn’t show any signs of weakening at all afterwards.

Jin-Woo stared in pure shock at the roaring flames, before he hurriedly took the Bead of Avarice back from the magic soldier. He then quickly checked the item information once more.

‘It’s not there. It’s definitely not there.’

He went through the explanation several times to make sure, but without a doubt, there was nothing about him being prevented from lending this ‘Bead of Avarice’ to someone else.

Didn’t this mean he could potentially sell this item?

Gulp.

Jin-Woo swallowed his dry saliva, before his gaze shifted back to the burning building.

Rumble! Crackle!!

Yet another part of the still-burning building issued a loud rumble and collapsed to the ground. Seeing that, the corners of Jin-Woo’s lips began quivering uncontrollably.

‘Well now. This is...’

Mage-type Hunters would definitely go mad with greed over this thing.

His previous wistful look was long gone by now, replaced by the expression of anticipation slowly filling up his face.

In the middle of a sunny afternoon.

“The young man from the apartment 902, you say?”

An auntie tilted her head and replied a short while later.

“Hmm, I’m not sure. I haven’t seen him lately.”

“Ah, is that so? Thank you for your help.”

Hyun Ki-Cheol lowered his head and said thanks.

It had been four days since he began waiting for Hunter Seong Jin-Woo near the youth’s old apartment building. However, he hadn’t run into his target until now.

At this point, Hyun Ki-Cheol was beginning to feel that making veggie juice every morning was a bit of waste now. He let out a helpless sigh and pulled his phone out.

Ring.... ring....

Shortly afterwards, the recipient answered the call.

“Section Chief.”

The recipient was, of course, the Section Chief Ah Sahng-Min.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim is nowhere to be seen. Residents of the building say they haven’t seen him lately, either.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Understood.”

Click.

Ahn Sahng-Min ended the call and tilted his head.

Just where did Hunter Seong Jin-Woo go to?

No one could contact him for the past few days now. Wondering if he was avoiding phone calls for the time being, Ahn Sahng-Min had dispatched Hyun Ki-Cheol over to where Seong Jin-Woo lived, but the news wasn't good. No one had seen the young Hunter for a while.

Ahn Sahng-Min couldn't help but wonder if something had strange happened.

‘I can't figure out why I should be worried about him, though.’

In any case, this kind of felt rather weird to him.

Tap, tap.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder, and when he turned around to look, he found Hunter Park Hui-Jin standing to his side. She opened her mouth first.

“Apparently, he told his little sister that he'd be going on a trip with his friend for a week or so.”

“You mean, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim said that?”

“Yes.”

“In that case... he's probably not on Earth anymore.”

“Pardon?”

Park Hui-Jin's eyes opened wide. Ahn Sahng-Min quickly explained himself.

“We haven't found any evidence of him going overseas. And there is no record of him drawing money from his bank or using his credit card, either.”

“You can even find out things like that?”

“Well, it's our job to follow around various Hunters, after all.”

“...Oh, my god.”

“Anyways. On top of this, according to the Association's last known location records, the communication with his phone was cut off in the

middle of the city, as well. And that happened about five days ago. Doesn't all this sound too mysterious to you?"

"He couldn't have been kidnapped, right?"

Park Hui-Jin inadvertently voiced her worry in the ensuing confusion. However, the gazes of the two people soon met, and they began chuckling almost at the same time. It was hard to tell who started first.

Seriously now. Just who was Seong Jin-Woo?

He was none other than a Hunter who soloed a high-ranking dungeon. Not only that, a Red Gate, to boot.

Ahn Sahng-Min scratched his cheek and spoke up.

"If you want to kidnap Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, well, you'd need at least the rumoured Chinese special forces to show up. You know, the one supposedly made up entirely of high-ranking Hunters."

Park Hui-Jin nodded her head in agreement.

Ahn Sahng-Min continued to grin, but then, found something rather odd and asked her.

"By the way, how did you find out about him going on a trip?"

"Ah, that. It's from Hahn Song-Yi. I talk to her often, you see. She goes to the same school with Mister Seong Jin-Woo's little sister, so I asked her for a favour."

"Aha...."

With Ahn Sahng-Min's reply, their conversation came to an abrupt end.

And then, they began thinking the exact same thing.

'Just where did that guy disappear to?'



Chapter 74 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘The upper floors are altogether on a different level, aren’t they?’

Jin-Woo began recalling the first – and so far, the only – boss-level monster he had encountered since he set foot inside the Demon’s Castle, Vulcan.

That guy’s title was ‘the Sovereign of the Lower Floors’.

As soon as he went past the fiftieth floor that demon resided in, the difficulty curve suddenly spiked up.

Before this, he’d climb up over ten floors in a day. As much as 20, even. But his clearing speed had decreased so much so that he found it hard to even clear 7 or 8 floors in a day now.

He was currently standing on the 74th floor.

The High-Ranked Demons now appeared as regular mobs now, and along with the infrequently-spotted Superior Demons, these two types of monsters displayed sizes and abilities that were worlds apart from those found on the lower floors.

Stab!

A High-Ranked Demon the size of a two-story building slowly collapsed on the ground with a dagger stuck to its chest.

SLAM!

[You have defeated a High-Ranked Demon.]

[You have earned 1,700 experience points.]

[You have acquired (1) Soul of Demons.]

Jin-Woo pulled the ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ out from the dead demon’s chest.

This one was the last. Yet another battle had come to an end. The victorious shadow soldiers crowded around Jin-Woo as well.

Jin-Woo surveyed their conditions.

There was no way that this was true for an undead army, but for some reason, he thought they all kind of looked exhausted.

Indeed, that was how strong the monsters had been on the upper floors.

Actually, this last battle happened to be on the easier side, simply because no Superior Demons showed up.

‘Each one of those guys is on the level of a boss.’

This wasn’t some random guess he just cooked up without any evidence, either.

The ‘Bead of Avarice’ he got after killing Vulcan. The explanation attached to this marble-like item said that it was created from condensing and solidifying the Superior Demon Vulcan’s blood.

If those words ‘Superior Demon’ denoted Vulcan’s grade, then it was about on the same level as regular monsters found on the upper floors. Because, since the 70th floor, Superior Demons appeared far more often than not.

‘Well, it’d been fine if it were only the monsters’ levels that had increased, but....’

No, there was another problem here, as well.

The surroundings began changing gradually the higher he climbed. From the 51st floor onwards, the ruined cityscapes were burning in flames. And the higher the floor, the fiercer the flames got.

When he finally went past the 70th floor, the surroundings had gotten so hot that, simply from standing still, he lost Stamina like sweat drops pouring out of his pores. Just from moving for a tiny bit, his Tiredness Stat shot up.

This place was no ‘Demon’s Castle’, but more like the ‘Burning Tower’.

The feeling he got before entering this dungeon was proven to be correct.

‘...Let’s get out of here.’

This was as far as he could go, this time. He urgently needed to find a way to block out the flames first.

‘Looks like I’ll have to find an artefact that can defend against fire-type magic.’

Equipment used by high-ranked Hunters was ruinously expensive. And, there was no need to even mention the cost of an item imbued with defensive magic, as well. He remembered hearing that a really expensive item could go for several tens of billions of Won from a news program in the past.

He managed to earn a fair amount of coin while clearing dungeons with Yu Jin-Ho, but even then, he couldn’t help but worry a bit about whether he’d be able to afford an artefact like that or not.

That was why he needed insurance.

‘Selling this guy should be more than enough.’

Jin-Woo smiled while looking at the ‘Bead of Avarice’ he oh-so-carefully tucked inside his Inventory. Any mage-type Hunter would drool non-stop at this item.

How much would this bead of avarice go for if he put it up for auction?

He guessed that, as long as he could properly demonstrate its effect, high-ranking Hunters would form a long queue in order to buy it.

Jin-Woo unsummoned the Inventory window.

The goal for entering this instant dungeon, to level up lots, had been successfully met. That was why he didn’t feel too bad about delaying the clearing of the dungeon to another time.

However, one thing did make him hesitate a little.

Jin-Woo’s gaze drifted upwards.

[Collected Souls of Demons: 9,624/10,000]

‘Less than 400 souls remaining....’

If he could collect a little more of these Souls of Demons, then he’d be able to clear this quest.

And today just so happened to be the sixth day. One more day should be enough to clear this quest.

One of the advantages of the upper floors was that killing a single demon netted him multiple souls. Meaning, collecting 400 should be a cinch.

‘I’ll go home after clearing the quest.’

Making up his mind, Jin-Woo turned around.

Maybe because he had a clear goal now, his steps felt doubly energetic.

[Floors 1 to 74 have been opened.]

[Which floor would you like to transfer to?]

Jin-Woo stood in the middle of the magic elevator, no, floor-transfer magic circle, and spoke up.

“75th floor.”

What kind of good fortune was this?

A smile spread on Jin-Woo’s face as he stared at the monster guarding the distant floor-transfer magic circle.

[The Guide of the Departed Souls, Metus]

Just from looking at that name alone, he could tell that the monster was a boss.

Also, that guy was very eye-catching, what with it wearing a jet-black robe and a shiny silver necklace.

‘I’m sure that is the Demon Sovereign’s Necklace.’

He originally was thinking of completing the quest, but at this rate, he should get to collect another part of the set equipment, too.

However, that item wasn’t the only thing making Jin-Woo smile here.

Even if it was a monster that would cough up some great loot, it’d be meaningless if he couldn’t hunt it.

Jin-Woo grasped his two daggers tightly. And then, he ran forward.

Soon enough, the skeletal mage decked out in the black robe discovered Jin-Woo’s presence.

Tti-ring!

[The Guide of the Departed Souls, Metus, has discovered the intruder!]

Fitting for a boss-level monster, it instantly finished chanting its magic spell. As soon as a crimson magic circle formed beneath its feet, an ominous aura rushed all around it.

[The Guide of the Departed Souls, Metus has activated ‘Skill: Accursed Voice’.]

Heeding Metus’s call, an army of undead suddenly rose up from the ground. And they numbered several thousand!!

A normal person would’ve been left breathless by the sight of this horrifying army, but when he found himself surrounded by so many enemies, Jin-Woo didn’t even panic for a second.

‘As I thought....’

Just as he expected.

There were endless streams of black smoke rising up all around the boss monster. Seeing that, it wasn’t all that difficult to guess what kind of monster this Metus happened to be.

‘The Guide of the Departed Souls, is it?’

And the monster’s title only helped to further confirm his suspicion.

Sure enough, Metus summoned a powerful undead army.

Too bad, Jin-Woo just so happened to possess the best type of Class within this field.

“Rise up!!”

Uwaaaaahhhhh-!!

Accompanied by painful screams, soldiers began rising up from the shadows of the undead. Their numbers were in the several hundreds!

Compared to Metus’s army, this number seemed completely ill-matched, but it was actually more than enough for him.

Because the real deal was somewhere else, that was why.

“Create a path for me!”

Soldiers emerged from Jin-Woo’s shadow. These guys were the real deal.

While the hundreds of soldiers created from the skill ‘Shadow Extraction’ bought them time, Jin-Woo’s direct subordinates, the ones he paid careful attention to levelling up ever since his entrance into the Demon’s Castle, carved out a path for him.

His destination was obvious!

Igrit and Iron took the lead and with frightening speed and destroyed the opposing undead creatures.

The distance to the boss, Metus had closed up in an instant.

‘This should be enough.’

Jin-Woo quickly shoved past and rushed out into the front.

‘Dash!’

[Skill level of ‘Dash’ has increased!]

Thanks to him running around all over the huge Demon’s Castle, the ‘Dash’ skill had risen up a level.

‘Nice.’

A grin formed on Jin-Woo’s face.

Jin-Woo escaped from the undead army’s siege and stood before Metus in an instant. Their gazes collided mid-air.

‘You didn’t expect this to happen, did you?’

Jin-Woo’s gaze was filled with victor’s leisure, and Metus could only flinch

from that. No, he thought that the monster flinched.

‘Do monsters feel fear?’

Such a thought only lingered for a second, before Jin-Woo’s daggers left behind dozens of afterimages.

Plop.

The boss-level monster weakly fell to the ground.

He already knew through experience that mage-type monsters relying on controlling others to fight were very weak when the battle became one on one.

The moment he saw Metus in the distance, he had envisioned this end.

Jin-Woo returned the daggers to his Inventory.

Soon, the expected message popped up.

Tti-ring.

[You have defeated the ‘Guide of the Departed Souls, Metus’.]

[You have earned 200,000 experience points.]

[You have discovered Souls of Demons sealed within Metus’s pendant.]

[You have acquired (220) Souls of Demons.]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

Jin-Woo clenched his fists tightly.

220 souls in one go.

Now that was an unexpected windfall.

[Collected souls of demons: 9,971/10,000]

A thick smile floated up on Jin-Woo’s lips.

‘Not much remaining now.’

He only needed to collect less than 30 now. It was a small enough amount to quickly fill up by hunting down a handful more demons.

Jin-Woo really wanted to quickly finish this quest and so, he hurriedly retrieved all the loot and entered the floor-transfer magic circle.

[Which floor would you like to transfer to?]

“76th.”

The Eastern United States.

Hwang Dong-Su writhed this way and that as if he was having a nightmare, before he shot up from the bed.

‘.....??’

The first thing he saw was the white ceiling.

Hwang Dong-Su tilted his head at these unfamiliar surroundings.

“Is this.... a hospital?”

...It wasn’t...

...It wasn’t a dream?

Hwang Dong-Su wiped the strand of cold sweat travelling down to his chin. It was at this point that he discovered the patient gown he wore, and the IV needle stuck to his arm.

Hwang Dong-Su’s expression hardened in fury.

And then, he spoke in a cold voice.

“If you have something to say, hurry up and say it, and leave.”

The deputy director of the Hunter Bureau was there with him in the room. A middle-aged Caucasian man, with more white than black on his head, slowly approached Hwang Dong-Su’s bed.

“There is something I wanted to ask you personally, so I waited for you to come around.”

What did he want to ask?

Hwang Dong-Su raised his head.

The deputy director held his gaze without backing down and asked.

“That man named Seong Il-Hwan... was he really a monster?”

“Do you think I’d attack someone who was a human?”

“I’m not saying that I don’t trust you. Only that, I wish to confirm what I saw with my own eyes.”

The deputy director pushed forward his phone towards Hwang Dong-Su.

A certain video footage was playing on its screen.

“And this is....?”

“Footage captured by CCTV cameras nearby on that day.”

In the footage, one could see an Oriental man rescuing employees from the collapsing Hunter Bureau building.

There was no need to ask who that man was. How could Hwang Dong-Su forget? That face was the last thing he saw before he blacked out.

That man was Seong Il-Hwan.

The deputy director's complexion darkened.

“I... have never heard of a monster rescuing humans before. Is there no change to your opinion that this man is a monster?”

“...He's definitely a monster.”

“...Understood.”

The deputy director pocketed the phone.

“Once you're discharged from here, stop by the Bureau. There are a couple of documents you need to sign.”

Hwang Dong-Su asked the deputy director as the latter was about to turn around and leave.

“What happened to that man?”

“He disappeared after fighting you. We're in the midst of tracking him down, but he's powerful enough to knock you down easily, so whether he could be caught or not is, well....”

Just before he stepped out of the hospital room, the deputy director opened his mouth again, sounding more troubled than before.

“By any chance, do you have any idea where that man might head off to?”

“.....”

Seeing Hwang Dong-Su resolutely keep his mouth shut as if he had nothing more to say, the deputy director quietly left the room.

But, once he was gone, Hwang Dong-Su furiously yanked the IV needle out of his arm.

“F*ck!!!”

What a humiliating defeat that was.

Even before he could figure out what happened, he found his neck trampled on by Seong Il-Hwan. Not only that, shamefully cowering on the floor, too!

Just as he began gasping for air, Seong Il-Hwan spoke to him.

And that's where his memory ended. Once he regained his consciousness, he found himself here.

'Can't close my eyes even in death?'

What did he mean by that?

Was that a threat to kill Hwang Dong-Su in such a brutal way that he'd be unable to close his eyes?

'How dare he.... threaten me?!'

Hwang Dong-Su's clenched fists began shuddering in rage. Not only did he lose to a 'monster', but that man also managed to inflict an unforgettable disgrace on Hwang Dong-Su, as well.

'I know where he will go to.'

Hwang Dong-Su would do anything to catch that man.

But, how?

Didn't matter whether that b*stard's identity was a monster or not, there was no denying the fact that he was strong.

'I need better equipment if I want to kill him.'

Thankfully, it wouldn't be hard getting his hands on that equipment.

'I should call my Guild.'

The Guild Hwang Dong-Su was a part of, Scavenger, was one of the very best in the world.

Hell, there was even a joke doing the rounds that, if one were to tally up the value of all the artefacts in possession of the Scavenger Guild, it'd easily exceed the annual budget of a small nation.

'If I get my hands on some artefacts, there shouldn't be a problem.'

Madness burned bright within Hwang Dong-Su's eyes.

To South Korea.

That was Hwang Dong-Su's next destination.

[You have defeated a Superior Demon.]

[You have earned 2,200 experience points.]

[You have acquired (1) Souls of Demons.]

[You have acquired (3) Souls of Slave Demons.]

'I did it!!'

Jin-Woo couldn't hide his elation.

His luck was good, and he acquired four souls from the very last demon he killed. With that, he was able to meet the quest clear goal.

[Collected Souls of Demons: 10,001]

Tti-ring.

[You have completed 'Normal Quest: Collect the Souls of Demons! (1)']

[Your rewards are now available.]

[Will you confirm the rewards?] (Y/N)

'Obviously.'

Once he made his reply, the list of rewards popped up in his view.

Tti-ring.

[The following rewards are now available.]

[Will you accept them all?]

Other rewards did catch his eye, but right now, the first one on the list demanded the most of his attention. It wouldn't be much of an exaggeration to say that he completed this quest solely for the first reward, too.

'Accept the first reward.'

Tti-ring!

[You can choose from any of the items available from the System.]

[Is there an item you want?]

An item he wanted, was it?

Of course, there was one.

From the moment he saw the details of this quest, Jin-Woo was thinking of a certain item.

What kind of a result would be facing him now if he chose differently back then? He was curious about this ever since that fateful day.

However, he didn't know whether that thing was treated as an item or not. Still, it didn't hurt to try, at least.

[You can choose from any of the items available from the System.]

[Is there an item you want?]

The System asked him again, as if to urge him on.

After a short deliberation, Jin-Woo made his reply.

“The Cursed random box.”



Chapter 75 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Back when he found himself standing on a crossroad, Jin-Woo chose the ‘Blessed random box’ instead of the ‘Cursed random box’.

And the result of that decision was the key to the Demon’s Castle.

Thanks to that, he gained entry to this instant dungeon and earned a lot. His level had risen up greatly, he acquired lots of items, and as for Gold... Well, it was overflowing to such an extent that he was beginning to think he should start spending some very soon.

‘Even if I was given a chance to do-over, I’d have chosen the same.’

However....

However, just because he chose to take this path, that didn’t mean he was not curious about the potential result of choosing a different path.

The ‘Blessed random box’, supposed to give him what he wanted, and the ‘Cursed random box’ that was supposed to give him what he needed.

Just what could be inside the latter?

‘I did get what I wanted from the Blessed random box, that’s for sure.’

And so, the perfect chance to satisfy that curiosity once and for all had landed in his lap.

‘.....’

His heart began beating a little bit faster than before; Jin-Woo quietly waited for the System’s answer. He thought that its reply was slower than usual.

Tti-ring!

His anxiety turned out to be groundless, though, because the System did reply pretty soon afterwards.

[You have chosen ‘Item: Cursed random box’.]

[The chosen item is now available.]

Shururu....

A small box slowly materialised in front of his feet.

‘Yes!!’

His heart beating much quicker now, Jin-Woo hurriedly picked the box up. However, he was suddenly overcome with this feeling that the weight of this box was rather familiar to him.

Could it be?

He quickly ripped the lid open and confirmed what was inside, only for his eyes to grow very large.

“.....Isn’t this...?!”

Upon exiting the Demon’s Castle, Jin-Woo headed home right away.

He just wanted to take a shower and clean himself.

While he was stuck inside the dungeon, he didn’t even get to wash his face once. He could buy all the water he needed from the Store, sure, but there was no space or time to wash inside the dungeon.

‘I mean, there are monsters everywhere in that place, so just where would I find the leeway to take a shower....?’

Pshuooooosh.....

Arriving home, he immediately entrusted himself to the cascading warm water. Only then did the fact that he left the dungeon feel like reality.

‘Yup, being home is the best.’

Changing to a new set of clothes, Jin-Woo left the towel on his wet hair and settled down on the edge of his bed. It was now time to get some things organised.

First of all, he summoned his Stat window.

‘Status.’

Tti-ring.

A long, long wall of text that managed to almost disorient him popped up in front of his view. Jin-Woo’s gaze stopped at the Status column.

[Stat points available to distribute: 20]

The additional Stat points he earned as the quest completion reward were still waiting for him. And of course, he put them all in Intelligence.

Tti-ring.

[Stats]

Strength: 178

Endurance: 137

Agility: 147

Intelligence: 149

Perception: 119

Finally, Intelligence had exceeded other Stats.

It was still some ways off Strength, but when considering the fact that he didn't even pay attention to the Intelligence Stat until recently, this growth could only be called lightning fast.

Strength, Endurance, Agility, Intelligence, and Perception. A good balance between them had been established now.

'Not one of these Stats are useless to me.'

As it so happened, he had gone through stages of seriously investing in each of his Stats. And now, he knew full well the effects and advantages each Stat brought to the table.

'Hold on....'

Now that things had come to this, how about him raising all of his Stats equally from now on, instead of focusing only on one?

An All-Stat Player.

Suddenly, the desire to become one gripped him tightly.

What a happy dilemma to have this was, something only possible because it felt like not one of his Stats was lagging behind others now.

'Once Intelligence rises past Strength, I should start slowly raising the others, too.'

Making up his mind, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze to the Skill window next.

That's where he discovered the third reward.

[Reward 3: Unknown reward]

He thought that the first reward 'the item he wanted' and the second reward 'bonus Stat points' were more than enough, so he didn't pay all that much attention to the third reward.

Maybe, he was just mildly curious? Was that about it?

But well, he already got the reward, so no need to be shy now, was there?

[Reward 3 has been made available.]

Along with that message, a scroll similar in size to the ‘entry permit’ appeared in his hands.

‘What’s this?’

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened wider at this unexpected type of reward, and he unfurled the scroll right away.

[Recipe: Divine Water of Life]

You can learn the crafting methods of ‘Divine Water of Life’.

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened even further.

‘I can craft an item... with this?’

And here he was, thinking that only those who had Awakened as mage-types could craft weapons containing magical energy... Now that he thought about it, though, he was also a mage-type, wasn’t he?

‘Still, to think, there was a way to craft something with just a recipe like this....’

Jin-Woo heart began palpitating. But, a question formed in his head at the same time. Just what could he make here, anyway?

‘What is this Divine Water of Life?’

Jin-Woo read the information on this ‘Divine Water of Life’ written inside the recipe.

[Item: Divine Water of Life]

Rarity: S

Type: Consumable

A mysterious liquid medicine that cures any and all illnesses through the powerful magic contained within. The effect will only manifest after one whole bottle has been consumed.

‘Cures.... any and all illnesses?’

The moment he read that information, he thought about his mother, still confined to the hospital.

He had already confirmed through Yu Jin-Ho multiple times that effects of various potions still worked on other people. If he could truly make this ‘Divine Water of Life’, then it meant that he’d be able to save his mother.

His hands holding the scroll trembled from excitement.

The ingredients were also on the simpler side, so to speak.

‘Fragment of the World Tree.’

He earned that after killing Vulcan on the 50th floor.

‘Spring Water from the Forest of Echoes.’

He got that after killing Metus the necromancer on the 75th floor.

And finally....

‘.....Purified Blood of the Demon King.’

This item hadn’t shown up, yet.

However, thinking back to the two ingredients that had come out so far, he could easily guess where he might find some of this ‘Purified Blood of the Demon King’ from.

The upper floors.

‘I’m sure it’s with the final boss of the Demon’s Castle, probably on the top floor.’

In other words, simply by clearing the Demon’s Castle dungeon, the ingredients to craft the ‘Divine Water of Life’ would fall into his lap one by one.

It happened, then.

“....Ah.”

A gasp of epiphany leaked out of his mouth, completely unbeknownst to him. That’s how surprised Jin-Woo was.

Could it be that... the item he wanted as per description on the Blessed random box said – could that be this Divine Water of Life?

‘Mom....’

Thinking about the possibility that he’d get to see his mother again all healthy, his eyes began welling up with emotions.

Then, a new message popped up.

Tti-ring.

[You can learn Crafting Skill via ‘Recipe: Divine Water of Life’.]

[Will you learn this Crafting Skill?]

The mechanical beep brought him back to his senses, fast.

In order to craft this Divine Water of Life, he needed to clear the Demon’s Castle first. Meaning, he had quickly get himself prepared and return to that

place. He had no time to waste on sentimentality like this.

“....I’m learning it.”

[You have acquired Crafting Skill for ‘Item: Divine Water of Life’.]

‘I’m not dreaming, right?’

As if to imply that his memories were functioning fine, a new column called ***[Crafting Skill]*** appeared on the Skills window.

[Crafting Skill]

Consumable: Divine Water of Life (2/3)

The numbers behind the name probably indicated the two ingredients he already possessed – the ‘Fragment of the World Tree’, and the ‘Spring Water from the Forest of Echoes’.

‘Ah, right. up....’

Jin-Woo summoned his Inventory and retrieved an item stored right next to the spring water. It was a necklace, seemingly carved out from skulls of various small creatures.

[Item: Demon Sovereign’s Necklace]

Rarity: S

Type: Accessory

Agility +20, Intelligence +20

When worn together with ‘Demon Sovereign’s Earrings’ and ‘Demon Sovereign’s Ring’, set bonus effects will be unlocked.

Set effect 1: (locked)

Set effect 2: (locked)

The ‘Spring Water from the Forest of Echoes’ wasn’t the only loot he got from killing the Guide of the Departed Souls, Metus. Indeed, this rather vile-looking necklace also came out, too.

‘Why are the designs of all the necklaces I found so crappy....?’

Jin-Woo frowned deeply while recalling the appearance of the dog collar he was currently wearing. He slowly brought the ‘Demon Sovereign’s Necklace’ closer to his neck.

Tti-ring.

[Will you replace ‘Gatekeeper’s Necklace’ with ‘Demon Sovereign’s Necklace’?]

Both necklaces boasted rather similar additional effects. Both raised two of his Stats by 20 points each. However, the demon sovereign's also had the set effect to consider, as well.

'Replace.'

Shururuk...

[You have equipped 'Item: Demon Sovereign's Necklace'.]

The skull necklace disappeared from his hands, only to be replaced by a dog collar.

He quickly shoved that dog collar inside his Inventory, and checked the newly unlocked set effect of the 'demon sovereign's accessory set'.

[Item: Demon Sovereign's Necklace]

Set effect 1: All Stats +5

Set effect 2: (locked)

'All of my Stats rose up by 5 points.'

He only managed to unlock one set effect, yet he received a boost similar to levelling up five times. And then, he still had one more unknown effect to go, the one he'd receive after gathering all the accessories.

'The Demon Sovereign's Ring....'

When considering the possibility that the last unlocked set effect from all three accessories being in one place should be even greater than the individual parts on their own, this really was already an amazing performance.

However, acquiring accessories rated at S was only a part of the harvest he enjoyed after entering the Demon's Castle. The real profit was his level jumping up so high.

Jin-Woo stared at his level that had climbed up to 77 and smiled in content.

'I levelled up 16 times inside a week.'

Such a levelling up speed was unthinkable when entering rank C dungeons. He had definitely extracted suitable compensation for going through hell (?) for seven days.

He still had some unfinished matters there, but well, this week's conquest of the Demon's Castle should be called a roaring success, regardless of what.

'Just that....'

Except for one – there was one thing he couldn't really figure out yet.

Jin-Woo let the light from the lamp fall on the object that came out of the cursed random box.

‘Just what the hell is this thing?’

It was a pitch-black key that seemed to absorb all light. No information popped up in his view, either.

‘This is the first time seeing an item with absolutely no information...’

The keys to instant dungeons could be seen as pretty common, since he got them from random boxes every now and then. But this guy here, he had never seen anything quite like it.

‘Where am I supposed to use this?’

Perhaps because it came out of a box named Cursed random this-and-that, he couldn’t help but think that there was this ominous aura circling around the key.

He acquired this key through so much hard work, so he couldn’t even throw it away.

‘Well, I’m sure I’ll get to use it sooner or later.’

The Cursed random box was supposed to give him something that he needed, after all.

Jin-Woo stored the mystery key back inside his Inventory and got up from the bed.

He needed to purchase a few artefacts if he wanted to completely conquer the Demon’s Castle.

‘And, I’ve got something to sell, too.’

However, there was a problem. And that was – things would become quite complicated if a rank E Hunter wanted to buy and sell high-ranked artefacts.

Who wouldn’t suspect something was off when a low-ranked Hunter – no, someone right at the bottom – tried to sell an item that even the top Hunters found hard to acquire?

It was the same story if he wanted to buy something.

As long as the title of rank E followed him around, there would always be questions regarding the sources of his income.

‘And, it’ll be hard to answer when someone asks me about what I’m planning to do with expensive artefacts, too.’

Several troublesome situations would unfold at this rate.

“Which means, I should....”

Time to stop pretending to be a rank E, then.

Time... to get the rank reassignment test.

It was now time to get the rank that matched his current set of abilities.

Jin-Woo’s expression became serious.

‘With my current level, surely I won’t get jerked around by someone else.’

That was his original aim, to begin with.

In order to avoid situations where he was being under the thumb of someone stronger, he continued to act as a rank E, while taking on all the inconvenience that came along with it.

However, what about now?

He didn’t even falter slightly when Baek Yun-Ho, the Guild Master of the White Tiger, stood in front of him. Hell, he was pretty confident of not cowering no matter who stood in front of him now, be that Baek Yun-Ho or anyone else.

He saw no reason to hide his powers anymore.

Thump, thump, thump....

When he made up his mind to finally get rid of that irksome rank E tag for good, his heart began beating faster and faster.

‘...But, before that....’

There was something he had to confirm first.

Jin-Woo switched on his Hunter-only smartphone. It was his first time powering the device on in a week, so naturally, there were quite a lot of missed calls and messages waiting for him.

The majority of those numbers he failed to recognise. It was an unfortunate thing for those callers, but well, he didn’t have the time to manually check each and every one out.

‘If they are in a hurry, I’m sure they’ll contact me again.’

Thinking coolly like that, Jin-Woo scrolled down the list of contacts and eventually located the number he wanted. He dialled this number.

[Lalala~♪♪]

The bright, energetic pop song didn’t even get to play for a second longer,

before the other side hurriedly answered the call.

....Maybe, Jin-Woo stayed inside the dungeon for far too long?

Because he was surprised by how nice it felt to hear the kid's voice again. A smile spread on Jin-Woo's lips as he spoke.

“Did the talk with your father go well?”

‘Oho?’

Now that was a good piece of news to hear.

Jin-Woo made this call to confirm, because he couldn't go ahead and do the rank reassignment test if Yu Jin-Ho hadn't made a deal with his father yet.

However, if the matters of that side were taken care of, then there really was nothing holding him back at this point.

He guessed the good news just from hearing the kid's excited tone of voice, but now that he got the confirmation from the horse's mouth, Jin-Woo was feeling really happy as well.

Click.

‘...What was that?’

The phone call abruptly came to an end, and when he checked, the battery in his phone was flat.

‘Oh, right..... Even before entering the Demon's Castle, it didn't have much charge left, didn't it?’

Well, at least he got to confirm what he wanted to confirm, so that was a relief.

Jin-Woo fixed his clothes and prepared to leave.

The main building of the Hunter's Association wasn't too far from here. He should be able to go through the reassignment test pretty quickly.

“Oh, hang on a second....”

Jin-Woo was just about to leave the apartment, but he hurriedly came back inside. He had forgotten all about his little sister.

Since she might get worried if her oppa left home again without saying anything, he scribbled a simple memo and placed it on the dining table. Well, he only came back home after a whole week of absence, after all.

With a satisfied smile on his face, Jin-Woo turned around to leave.

It really had been a while since Jin-Woo last came to the Awakened rank

evaluation application kiosk.

'Has it been four years already?'

Or, maybe it was close to five now?

Jin-Woo's expression was full of reminiscence as he stood in front of the employee manning the reception kiosk.

The employee didn't even bother to look at him and spoke.

"Please jot down your identification and contact details, and give them to me."

Jin-Woo still remembered most of the process so he had prepared them before coming here. He readily presented both his identification and the contact details.

'Mm?'

The employee's head tilted this way and that after taking one look at Jin-Woo's choice of identification.

"Isn't this a Hunter licence?"

"It is."

Employee formed a confused expression.

"If you are unhappy with your assigned rank, you should head over to another depar...."

"No, it's not that. I wish to take the reassignment test."

"Ehhh?"

The employee continued to alternate his gaze between the Hunter licence and Jin-Woo's face, before raising a trembling finger in the air.

"P-please, wait for me here."

The employee then quickly ran over to a middle-aged man with a scowl on his face sitting somewhere behind him.

"Manager? A Hunter-nim wishes to take a reassignment test."

"A reassignment test? What's that person's rank?"

"It's an E."

The manager craned his neck out and took a look at the waiting Jin-Woo's face over by the reception desk. He then reverted back to his previous posture.

"There are guys like that every now and then. Hunters who are not

satisfied by the reality of their situation, and swim inside daydreams, before coming back here hoping against hope.”

“So, is that guy also....?”

The manager nodded his head.

“Reawakened, my foot.... Others are busy raking in the dough as Hunters, getting famous and all that, but well, he drew the short straw and he ended up as a nobody. So, he’s just trying to escape from reality.”

“Aha.”

“Dealing with guys like that will only tire you out. So, just tell him that he’ll be paying the fee for the test and send him on his way to the measurement room.”

“Roger that.”

The employee no longer looked like he was suffering from abdominal pain, and returned to his seat.

Meanwhile, the manager alternated his gaze between the employee and Jin-Woo, clicked his tongue, before shifting his attention back to the computer monitor in front of him.

However....

The fingers of the manager stopped typing on the keyboard.

The name written on the Hunter licence... why did it feel like he had heard of that name before from somewhere?

‘Where was it?’

Once the young Hunter left for the building with the measurement room in it, the manager sneaked in closer to the employee and asked him.

“That rank E Hunter just now, what was his name again?”

“It’s Seong Jin-Woo. Do you know who he is?”

“No, it’s not that. But....”

But, he just couldn’t get over this feeling that he had heard of that name before, for sure. The manager did his absolute best to jog his memories, and then, his eyes widened as something did enter his mind.

‘....Ahh!!’

‘That man’ asked for a favour, didn’t he?

‘That man’ asked the manager to give him a call if a Hunter named Seong

Jin-Woo ever showed up here. Why couldn't he remember that sooner?

The manager sought out a deserted corner and hurriedly pulled out his phone.

Ring.... ring....

“Ah, hello there, Chairman Baek. I’m calling you because of the Hunter you spoke about the last time, the man named Seong Jin-Woo. He really came here today. But, how did you know that he might appear here?”

“Yes. He was here just now, applying to get a reassignment test.”

The conversation came to an abrupt halt and an awkward silence pervaded the line. However, only a short while later, an urgent voice came out from the phone's speaker.

The manager began tilting his head.

Did he just mishear that?

The Master of the one-and-only White Tiger Guild was speaking with an anxious voice?

‘Well, I’ll be.’

Besides all that, though – the evaluation process was out of his hands, already. The manager could only sheepishly reply while scratching the side of his head.

“That man must’ve entered the measurement building by now.”



Chapter 76 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘Wait a minute. This, just what on earth is....’

What happened just now?

Manager Jeong Ki-Soo ended the call with Baek Yun-Ho and tilted his head.

It was already a pretty surprising thing that a rank E Hunter stepped forward to get re-evaluated, yet the Master of the White Tiger Guild wanted to find out about the result of that test right away as well.

‘Maybe, there is something going on for real here...’

It wasn't just anyone but that Baek Yun-Ho. And he was being quite serious, so Jeong Ki-Soo couldn't help but wonder if something big was about to happen.

But soon, he shook his head dismissively.

‘Eii.... There's no way.’

The phenomenon of ‘Re-Awakening’ was a very rare occurrence.

How many months had it been?

There was this incident a few months ago when the whole Association had been in an uproar over a potential candidate who had gone through a Re-Awakening. Of course, it was all a big fat nothing.

That just served to illustrate how rare the real thing was, and plenty of so-called ‘Re-Awakening’ all turned out to be nothing more than just simple misunderstandings.

‘I mean, it's not just one or two kids who come here mistakenly believing that they had gone through a Re-Awakening, only to walk out of here after paying the cost for the test out of their pocket....’

Perhaps the White Tiger Guild was seriously mistaken about something here. Still, considering Jeong Ki-Soo's ‘relationship’ with that Guild, he just couldn't refuse outright to humour the Guild Master Baek Yun-Ho's request.

“Hey, listen. I have to go somewhere for a little while.”

“Pardon me? Where are you going, Manager Jeong?”

“I just remembered this little thing I gotta take care of in the Block B.”

The term ‘Block B’ was a sort of code word used by the Association employees to refer to the building where the magic power evaluation took place.

“Okay, I understand.”

“If something happens, call me right away.”

“Yes, Manager.”

Even though Jeong Ki-Soo was thinking ‘Re-Awakening, my a*s’, he nevertheless headed towards Block B while picturing the face of Baek Yun-Ho, who should’ve left the Guild offices by now.

Jin-Woo parked his butt on the very last spot available of the waiting room’s bench. Currently, there were three people waiting for their turn here.

All of them looked quite tense, nervous.

Jin-Woo could sympathise with what these people were going through inwardly at this moment.

‘Well, the directions of their lives would be decided with the results of today’s evaluation, after all.’

The first time Jin-Woo came here, he was thinking about the exact same things as these people.

...What if I was a rank A, no, even a rank B – or, could it be, I’m a rank S?

Swimming in a happy daydream, only to be shocked to the core after receiving the evaluation of rank E.

Thinking back to that day four years ago, Jin-Woo couldn’t help but smirk slightly.

‘What is he smiling about?’

‘How can you even think about smiling here?’

Others waiting around sent him weird looks, but Jin-Woo didn’t pay them any mind.

‘Was he born with a steely heart or something?’

‘Maybe, he’s not feeling nervous at all.’

Seeing Jin-Woo’s undaunted attitude, others became a bit sheepish and tilted their heads this way and that, before shifting their gazes away.

‘Nothing much has changed since then.’

Jin-Woo also remembered something similar happening back then.

Back then, he started paying attention to the person sitting next to him for no reason, and he also became curious about what other people's evaluation was going to be like.

Jin-Woo continued to smile while slowly studying the interior of the waiting area. Just like the people waiting inside, the building didn't change much, either.

The Hunter Association itself was established less than ten years ago, so perhaps unsurprisingly, the building was still clean and neat as if it opened its doors only yesterday.

The interior layout was pretty much the same as back then, too.

If there was one thing different, then it'd be....

'Those people over there.'

When Jin-Woo quietly stared at a contingent of men and women decked out in clean-cut business suits across from where he was, an ahjussi sitting next to him opened his mouth. (TL: ahjussi = 'uncle', or older man)

"They are all from various Guilds, apparently."

"Various Guilds, is it?"

"Yes. Well, Hunters don't usually seek out smaller Guilds, so they resorted to sending people over here and set up camp, just so they can sweet-talk Awakened like us after we're done with the evaluation."

Indeed, there was a certain chilly, unfriendly and competitive air circulating among those folks.

'And, the way they are looking in this direction is pretty predatory, too.'

Well, there was a reason for that, of course.

"I'm telling you this because it might help you, but you see, it's better not to sign up with Guilds like theirs."

"Why not?"

"From what I hear, smaller Guilds take on lots of dangerous raids, and their Hunter fatality rate is far higher than average, too."

Jin-Woo nodded his head in agreement.

At the end of the day, the circumstances of smaller Guilds would always remain a bit ambiguous.

Unlike privately-organised freelancer-led raid parties, clearing low ranked dungeons wouldn't satisfy them financially, but then again, the skills of the Hunters signed up with them wasn't quite good enough to clear higher ranked dungeons.

So, 'accidents' happened frequently during their raids.

'Which means, recruiting new Hunters becomes doubly important for them.'

And so, they arrived at a point where they had to follow the potential newbies right into the Association building and prey on them.

"Ah, right."

Ahjussi dabbed the sweat drops away from his wide-open forehead with a handkerchief, and cautiously extended his hand towards Jin-Woo.

"Well, it's fate that we meet like this, so how about we introduce each other? My name is Yun Jeong-Hoon."

"I'm Seong Jin-Woo."

Their introduction was kept to a minimum, and they quietly waited for their turns.

“, please.”

Since the location for the evaluation itself was wide open, one could easily read the expressions on those who finished the test, as well as the employees performing the said test.

And the expression of the guy who had taken his test just now didn't look so good.

'I guess, it's either a D or an E....'

Those folks from the smaller Guilds must've thought about the same thing as Jin-Woo, because they showed no interest whatsoever even when an Awakened walked right past them.

Wasn't that too honest a reaction from them?

Jin-Woo even began wondering if there was another, more discreet way to find out one's evaluation result or not.

” up, please.”

Yet another result came out.

This one also must not have been so good. The steps of the Awakened walking out of the building seemed heavy. But, that was par for the course,

really.

‘Well, if high-ranked Hunters appeared frequently, they wouldn’t be paid big bucks, anyway.’

For regular citizens, even being a rank C would be a huge jackpot.

One could still earn a fair bit of money by entering freelancer raid parties, or if one’s luck was good, then entering large Guilds was a viable option, too.

Indeed, there were four rank Cs among the White Tiger Guild’s new recruits, weren’t there?

If one successfully managed to enter a large Guild, then it was pretty much guaranteed that you’d earn an annual salary similar to what doctors or lawyers made.

Ahjussi next to Jin-Woo spoke again.

“I heard that you’d get a ton of money upfront when signing with a large Guild.”

Ahjussi’s hand, still holding the handkerchief, trembled softly.

“Actually, I... I owe some money, you see. Because of that, I had to separate from my little girl and must live alone for the time being. Maybe it’s because of that, but I... I’m feeling really nervous.”

Ahjussi mumbled to himself, before flinching grandly and bowed his head to Jin-Woo in a hurry.

“Aigoo.... Saying something unnecessary to a stranger I’ve just met.... I’m a bit of disgrace, isn’t it? I end up talking a lot when I’m nervous, you see.”

“No, it’s fine.”

Jin-Woo smiled gently and lowered his head, as well.

Ahjussi continued to take deep breaths, as if to reinforce the notion that his earlier declaration of feeling nervous wasn’t an exaggeration.

Meanwhile, another Awakened walked out, and....

” up, please come this way.”

...And, it was the turn of ahjussi.

However, ahjussi cautiously shook Jin-Woo’s sleeve, his face full of cold sweat. Could he be feeling ill somewhere, thought Jin-Woo.

“Are you feeling okay?”

Jin-Woo asked, his voice sounding worried.

Ahjussi shook his head.

“No, no. It’s not that, but.... Uhm, do you mind going ahead first? I’m, I’m too tense right now, you see.....”

Ahjussi looked really desperate.

Was there a reason to refuse when someone wished to give up his spot in the queue? Jin-Woo quickly accepted the proposal.

Anyone would be feeling nervous if these few minutes determined the rest of their lives.

Jin-Woo stood up instead of ahjussi and walked over to the Association employee.

The employee spoke in a business-like manner.

“What is your name?”

“It’s Seong Jin-Woo.”

“Mister Seong Jin-Woo.... Right. Please place your hand on the black-coloured panel over there and wait for a little while.”

Following the instruction, Jin-Woo walked over to the measuring device and placed his hand on the black panel.

‘...Uh? This guy’s already been evaluated as an Awakened ranked E?’

The employee took a look at the documentation and glanced at Jin-Woo with a mystified expression. Just why were almost all the Hunters coming here to retake tests all rank E?

The employee’s expression changed to that of apathy, as he activated the measuring device.

SFX for a button being pressed

Bzzzz.....

The magic energy measuring device buzzed noisily, and a short while later, it stopped its operation. The results appeared on the display monitor.

‘Huh? What’s going on here?’

The employee tilted his head this way and that, before speaking to Jin-Woo, as the latter was about to take his hand off the panel.

“Hold up, please.”

“Yes?”

“I’d like to run the test one more time.”

“Okay.”

Jin-Woo placed his hand back on the panel.

SFX for a button being pressed

‘HUH?’

But, something like this never happened before?

The expression of the employee gradually hardened. Why was the measuring device malfunctioning all of a sudden?

The employee asked for Jin-Woo’s cooperation once more.

“I’m truly sorry. But, one more time, please.”

“.....”

Even before he was asked to take the test again, Jin-Woo had already decided to wait and thus didn’t bother to lift his hand away from the panel.

SFX for a button being pressed, repeated

‘W-why is the device behaving like this?!’

Cold sweat drops formed on the employee’s forehead.

Murmur, murmur....

People observing from the waiting room gradually grew aware of the fact that something weird was going down right now.

‘What’s going on? Did something happen?’

‘How many times did he activate the measuring device just now?’

‘Kinda looks like there’s a problem here, doesn’t it?’

When everyone’s gazes focused on him, the employee became completely soaked in cold sweat.

SFX for a button being pressed

‘Argh, c’mon now!! What do you want from me?’

Just as the employee was becoming a nervous wreck....

“What now? Where is Chang-Sik? Why are you alone here?”

The employee quickly looked behind him. And he found Manager Jeong Ki-Soo from the rank evaluation application department standing there.

“Manager Jeong!!”

Relief formed on the employee's face after an unexpected reinforcement made his entrance.

"The senior officer went to the bathroom just now."

"That fool, how dare he vacate his position in the middle of office hou....?"

Jeong Ki-Soo couldn't bring himself to finish that sentence.

'...Huh, I'm the same, isn't it?'

Hmm, hmm.

Whatever the case may have been, he did arrive at the perfect time. The poor newbie employee was sweating out buckets while the senior was nowhere to be seen. Perfect, indeed.

Time for a veteran to step forward, then.

"Okay, so what's going on?"

Jeong Ki-Soo displayed a bit of interest and took a step forward.

"The measuring device is acting a little weird."

"The device is what now?"

"Please, take a look. This error message keeps popping up."

Once the employee took a step back, Jeong Ki-Soo stood in his stead in front of the monitor that displayed the result of Jin-Woo's measurement.

And right away, Jeong Ki-Soo's expression froze up.

".....How long have you been working here?"

"It's been around six months, sir. Did I press the wrong button?"

"Nope. Just call Chang-Sik and tell him to get over here right now."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm saying, his toilet break or whatever isn't important anymore, so tell him to get his a*s over here right away!"

Jeong Ki-Soo raised his voice.

The employee flinched and asked.

"W-what's the matter, Manager?"

"This isn't an error message, but it's saying 'impossible to measure'! Don't you understand what that means?"

“Ehhhh?! But, that wasn’t an error message?”

Why was every single newbie employee such a dumba*s?

Jeong Ki-Soo’s gaze left the employee and landed on the person taking the evaluation test.

‘How can such a thing....’

Seong Jin-Woo.

The Master of the White Tiger Guild wanted to know about this man’s reassignment evaluation results.

Jeong Ki-Soo’s gaze remained locked on Seong Jin-Woo as he opened his mouth to speak to the newbie employee.

“You idiot. This message means that this device can’t measure that person’s magic power.”

“Excuse me? B-b-but, but, doesn’t that mean....?”

Did this newbie say it had been around six months since he started working here?

Forget about six months, something like this had not happened in the past two years, so of course, it wasn’t surprising at all to see a newbie employee being completely oblivious.

Jeong Ki-Soo’s voice trembled as he replied.

“Right.... He’s a rank S.”

Rank ‘S’ – ‘Special’.

This rank had been in wide use so people mistook it for an actual official rank, but in reality, this rank simply existed to group those Awakened who couldn’t be measured by any device.

“That’s why, call Chang-Sik right away. Hurry.”

“I’ll call him immediately!”

A short while later, Kim Chang-Sik ran over in a fluster after receiving the call. His breathing was heavy and fast, and he was even trying to fix his falling pants.

“Pant, pant! Okay, let me see.”

After confirming the monitor, Kim Chang-Sik’s complexion paled immediately. And then, when he looked at Jin-Woo, Kim Chang-Sik’s eyes quaked powerfully.

‘This man is the tenth in South Korea....’

Kim Chang-Sik quickly walked over to Jin-Woo.

It was only at this point that Jin-Woo withdrew his hand away from the black penal.

“Excuse me.... Mister Seong Jin-Woo, with the current device.....”

Kim Chang-Sik immediately remembered that Jin-Woo was already a Hunter, so he changed the way he addressed the youth.

“No, wait. Allow me to start over. It’s impossible to measure your magical energy output with this device, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim. We need to ask for permission from the higher-ups if we want to use the precision measuring device, so would you mind if you come and visit us again in three days’ time?”

Kim Chang-Sik followed protocol and spoke the official line. He couldn’t even remember properly the last time he said those words. Jin-Woo was an experienced Hunter himself too, and he immediately figured out what those words meant.

‘Fine.’

Postponing the evaluation.

Or, in other words, once the test result of ‘impossible to measure’ also pops up in the precision device three days later, then he’d definitely be ranked as an ‘S’.

‘This is for the better.’

If he was judged to be a rank A now, then he’d have to raise his Stats again and come back here again.

However, being a Re-Awakened was already an incredibly rare thing, so what would happen if he were to say that he Awakened once more on top of that?

People would see his ‘Re-Awakening’ as luck, but if something like that were to happen again, he’d no doubt receive gazes of suspicion. He definitely wanted to avoid getting mired in annoying complications and waste his valuable time.

‘Whew....’

Jin-Woo sighed in relief inwardly after seeing this rather fortunate turn of events. And then, when he turned around to leave....

“...Huh?”

Everyone present inside the building was looking at him weirdly.

“Aigoo, I know that you’re an extremely busy man, so it’d be fine even if you didn’t come personally to visit me, you know?”

“Eii~. Even then, you’re the one and only Chief Park of the Hunter Association, so how could I dare to use a mere phone to speak to you? It’s only correct and proper that I come to see you personally.”

Choi Jong-In smiled with his eyes and buttered up to the other guy, 40-something Chief Park, causing the latter to let out a gentle chuckle.

Just who was this man in front of Park?

He was none other than man leading South Korea’s top Guild, ‘Hunters’.

Also known as the ‘Ultimate Weapon’, Choi Jong-In. Just one word from him, and the country’s most powerful raid team would mobilise like a slick, well-oiled machine.

A man like that was fawning over you, so how could anyone feel bad about that?

Choi Jong-In pulled out a cigarette and asked.

“Will it be fine if I light one up?”

“Oh. Please, go ahead.”

“What about you, Chief Park?”

“I’m fine, thank you.”

Choi Jong-In, relaxedly sucking in the cigarette, exuded the air of a man who had achieved everything there was to achieve pretty early on in his life.

‘Is this that elusive thing called charisma?’

As the Chief Park stared at him as if he was bewitched, Choi Jong-In threw out a question.

“By the way, it sounds like Block B is a bit noisier than usual today.”

“Block B, you say?”

Chief Park looked out the window and at Block B.

Truth be told, Chief Park couldn’t hear anything at all.

However, Choi Jong-In was a rank S Hunter. His five senses should never be compared to that of a regular person’s. If Choi Jong-In said it was getting rowdier down there, then something must’ve happened for real.

An honourable guest had come to visit, so what a shameful blunder this

was. Chief Park frowned slightly and spoke up.

“Let me go and find out what’s happening.”

“No, wait.”

Choi Jong-In discarded the cigarette and killed it with his foot.

“I’m also getting curious, so....”

Choi Jong-In raised his head, and a mysterious flash of light could be seen in his eyes for a moment. And an equally mysterious smile formed on his lips.

“Why don’t we go together?”



Chapter 77 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The entirety of the Block B had become deathly silent.

‘J-just now, definitely, impossible to measure....’

‘D-does that mean, that guy’s a rank S?’

‘I’ve only ever heard of it, but seeing an impossible to measure rank with my own eyes is....’

Gulp.

The recruitment agents dispatched by various smaller Guilds were busy swallowing dry saliva as they stared at Jin-Woo turning in their direction.

However, none of them tried to talk to him.

“.....”

“.....”

If he was a rank C, then they would’ve started a war of nerves trying to sign him up to their respective Guilds. They would have formed the proverbial queue just for a chance to talk to him.

What about a rank B, then?

They would pounce on him like crazy while throwing around quite attractive-sounding offers, such as ‘guaranteed spot as a high-ranking officer in the Guild’, or ‘shares in the Guild’, etc., etc.

Onlookers would probably see it as an all-out war or something.

Well, it was not such a weird thing when considering the value of a Hunter ranked B, or the fact that they would receive a fat bonus by luring a high-ranked Awakened like that to their Guilds.

There were enough rank Bs who fell for the sweet-talk, after all; they would rather prefer to be the head of a snake, instead of the tail of a dragon.

However, the story changed when it came to a rank A. A rank A would be showered with a crap ton of special privileges by entering large Guilds, never mind small-to-medium Guilds.

Being selected as a member of the main raid team was a given, and since

the main raid team only targetted high-ranked dungeons, the financial reward would be quite enormous as well.

Was that all?

If the offers of the Guilds weren't to your liking, you could just establish your own Guild and become its Master.

You could just make a small or a medium Guild by yourself, so was there a real reason to sign with one?

Indeed, rank As were that kind of existence.

However....

This man, who got his magic energy measured just now, was supposedly a rank S.

Not an 'A', but an 'S'.

It might be an easy thing to say, but the truth was, that single letter was only used to denote the very best Awakened in the country, with only nine of them existing in South Korea.

'With that man included, it'll be ten, isn't it?'

'The tenth rank S Hunter.....'

This youth was not someone these headhunters from the various small Guilds could even attempt to talk to.

Gulp....

Nope, all they could do now was to silently swallow their saliva. He was literally a pie in the sky to them.

But, it was then.

'Wait a minute.....'

'This, couldn't this be my opportunity?'

A handful of quick-witted scouts suddenly had this remarkable idea: How about acting as a middleman, guide this new rank S Awakened to a large Guild, and get paid handsomely for their efforts?

The contract signing fee for a rank S would easily exceed tens of billions of Won, at the least. Just one percent of that fee as their commission would prove to be a good enough incentive to quit their current Guilds.

And, if one got lucky and got on the good books of that youth to become his personal agent, then hell, you'd be set for life.

Didn't a personal agent of some rank S Hunter get a Po*sche as a birthday present or something?!

'...Should I try it?'

'My silver tongue won't lose to anyone, anywhere, so, like....'

'Should I just man up and jump in?'

Within a blink of time, all sorts of thoughts entered and exited the minds of the scouts. The ridicule of the failure would only last for a short while, but the sweetness of success would last forever.

Just as the scouts sneakily glanced at their peers and began inching forward....

Someone suddenly pointed towards the entrance of the Block B.

"Huh? Isn't that....?"

Was it because everyone was so tense already?

No one could tell who did it first – everyone seemingly shifted their gazes over in the direction the first man to open his mouth pointed at. The eyes of the scouts widened immediately.

"Heok!"

A man wearing a stylish business suit was entering Block B. There wasn't a single person present who didn't know that man's name.

"Choi.... Choi Jong-In?!"

"Why, why is the leader of the 'Hunters' here?"

Sure enough....

Choi Jong-In felt the gazes of the crowd and lightly tidied up his suit, before walking straight towards Jin-Woo.

'But, isn't this too fast for him to get here after receiving an alert?'

'No, wait a minute. Did he already sign up with the Hunters?'

'Did the Hunters know about him? Well, the top Guild sure operates on another level, no?'

'Yup, as expected....'

Scouts present all readily accepted the inevitable conclusion to come.

Perhaps, it was a relief that none of them stepped forward and tried to chat up the youth. How embarrassing would it have been, when one of them started yapping on and ended up running into Choi Jong-In, instead?

Only now did they realise the direction this situation had taken.

‘Well, with Choi Jong-In’s entrance, the picture is complete.’

‘Hiya~. This is so cool.’

‘To think that the leader of the Hunters Guild has personally stepped up.... Indeed, treatments for S ranks are totally different from the rest, no?’

Although the scouts did feel a bit rueful, they nevertheless witnessed this scene of the leader of the South Korea’s top Guild meeting with the Awakened blessed with the highest rank there was, with warm expressions on their faces.

On the other hand....

Jin-Woo was breathing a sigh of relief at the grand entrance of Choi Jong-In.

‘What a relief.’

He was pondering what to do next after being stared at by so many pairs of eyes. But what a wonderful timing it was, that man walking in and dividing the attention.

Jin-Woo inwardly thanked Choi Jong-In for providing some unexpected help, and simply walked past the latter. And Choi Jong-In’s eyes widened in surprise.

‘Huh? This can’t be right.’

Choi Jong-In hurriedly called out to Jin-Woo.

“Excuse me, can you stop for a second?”

Jin-Woo stopped walking away and turned around to look.

“.....?”

Choi Jong-In’s eyes gleamed brightly as he stared into Jin-Woo’s face.

‘This man’s the tenth....’

Choi Jong-In beat around the bush with Chief Park about checking out the situation together or some such, but the truth was, he already had sensed what was happening before coming here.

‘I mean, they’ve been yapping on so loudly about impossible to measure this and device error that, so how can I not hear them?’

Thanks to that, though, he was given a huge opportunity here.

This guy was a rank S. A rank S!!

By signing this man, the Hunters Guild would then boast the services of three S ranks, and be able to brush shoulders with the best Guilds in the world, never mind those found in South Korea.

How could he not salivate over that prospect?

‘There’s no need to borrow a measuring device, either.’

Just a short meeting of their gazes and he immediately sensed the depths of the youth’s strength. Without a doubt, this guy was the highest-grade Hunter there was. Hell, Choi Jong-In saw absolutely no reason to wait for three, four days at all.

“Hmm, hmm.”

Choi Jong-In cleared his throat and formed his trademark smile.

“I’m Choi Jong-In, the leader of the Hunters Guild.”

Of course, Jin-Woo knew that already. Well, that man’s face could be seen frequently enough whenever a TV was turned on, after all.

Jin-Woo wondered briefly why such a famous man was trying to talk to him after coming all the way to the Association, but well, he didn’t have the leeway to ask for the clarification.

Jin-Woo sneaked a glance at the clock mounted on one of the walls.

‘It’s already ten to six....’

If he thought about the time he needed to go ‘there’, then he was cutting it pretty close.

When Jin-Woo formed an expression that implied ‘Okay, you’re done with your introduction, so hurry up with what you want to say’, Choi Jong-In became a bit flustered as he continued on.

“Ah, well, actually.... I’m aware that you just had your Awakened rank evaluation.”

“Yes.”

“By any chance, have you thought of a Guild to join?”

“No.”

A bright smile formed on Choi Jong-In’s face when he heard that reply.

‘Yup, it’s done.’

One of the top three Guilds in the world – ‘Hunters’.

What a sweet title that was. From today onwards, it’d not be a simple

daydream anymore.

'You're mine.'

Choi Jong-In's chest puffed up from happiness, and spoke the line that might be recorded in the annals of history.

"I'd like to speak to you regarding that issue, so can you spare a minute to talk, please?"

"Sorry, but don't have the time."

Jin-Woo quickly voiced his refusal and hurriedly left the Block B building.

"....."

It happened so fast that Choi Jong-In didn't even have the chance to think about stopping the youth from leaving. Meanwhile, the Association employees and the scouts from other Guilds belatedly realised what had transpired and began freaking out.

"What the hell??"

"Wait, did Choi Jong-In get kicked to the curve?!"

"No matter who sees it, he was ignored!"

Mutter, mutter.....

The waiting room became very noisy all of a sudden. Choi Jong-In did his best to maintain his calm and looked to his side.

"Chief Park?"

"Yes?"

Chief Park replied with an awkward look on his face.

"Did I make a mistake during my introduction?"

"W-well, I..... I wonder. I'm not sure."

Obviously, Chief Park heard everything as he was standing to the side. Still, this wasn't the right time to say that out loud, no?

When Chief Park shut his mouth, Choi Jong-In sheepishly scratched the side of his head.

'Was I too careless with my approach....?'

Still, there was no reason to feel disappointed here. Without a doubt, he was one step ahead of other Guilds.

'I'm the only one who knows about the appearance of the new rank S.'

The re-measurement was scheduled for three days later. There was still some time left until the official announcement.

‘Before that, though, I gotta find another opportunity to talk to him, no matter what....’

Wasn’t there a good way?

While Choi Jong-In began pondering his options, he spotted someone else hurriedly running towards the building.

‘.....Wait, isn’t he...?’

Now that was definitely a familiar face.

When that man pushed open the glass door and entered, Choi Jong-In spoke up with a surprised expression on his face.

“Chairman Baek? What are you.....?”

Baek Yun-Ho’s eyes also widened after recognising Choi Jong-In.

“Master Choi?”

Choi Jong-In quickly deciphered Baek Yun-Ho’s expression.

‘It’s like, he knows he’s been busted....’

It was not very likely that he came running after an informant rang him up just now. No, the time of his arrival didn’t make sense if that was the case.

‘I mean, the distance between the White Tiger Guild offices and the Hunter Association is great, so....’

That’s right – Baek Yun-Ho knew from the get-go.

....He had prior knowledge regarding what would happen here.

‘Meaning, he knows about the existence of that man already?’

But, that couldn’t be. If so, he’d never let that man go through the reassignment test in this fashion.

‘If it were me, I’d make him sign the contract first and then let him take the test.’

It was here that the scattered puzzle pieces in Choi Jong-In’s head began falling into their respective places.

‘.....No way. Could it be?’

The White Tiger Guild. The incident during their training. The Red Gate. The mystery helper. And then, the newly-appeared rank S Awakened.

Now everything made sense.

.....Found him.

'So, it was that man, huh.'

Baek Yun-Ho was completely out of breath. He must've ran really hard and fast to get here. Most likely, he had not left that man to his own devices. No, the Master of the White Tiger Guild actually couldn't stop the youth even if he wanted to.

Choi Jong-In stared at Baek Yun-Ho and formed a knowing smile.

'You let him slip through your fingers.'

Because, he wasn't the same as Baek Yun-Ho.....

'Thanks for the opportunity.'

Choi Jong-In didn't say anything else and relaxedly walked past Baek Yun-Ho.

Meanwhile, Baek Yun-Ho took a look around. He couldn't spot Jin-Woo anywhere.

'Am I too late?'

Baek Yun-Ho could only look on at the distancing back of Choi Jong-In and softly sigh.

"Fuu-woo...."

Who knew that the Master of Hunters Guild would be at the Hunters Association?

Baek Yun-Ho scratched the back of his head and muttered to himself.

"Things just got complicated...."

The visiting hours of the Seoul's Ilshin hospital ended at eight in the evening.

"Are you the guardian of the patient Park Kyoung-Hye?"

"That's correct."

"You can go and see her. Are you aware of the visiting hours cut-off time?"

"Yes, I'm aware."

Finishing his chat by the nursing station, Jin-Woo quickly walked to the patient ward his mother was in. Thanks to his hurried steps, he arrived there not too long afterwards.

Clang...

Jin-Woo opened the door and entered the ward, and quietly sat down on the chair next to the bed his mother was lying in. She seemed to be in a deep slumber.

‘With her like this, it’s like she’d wake up at any moment now....’

A slumber that no one could wake up from; it was a new type of illness that appeared with the advent of the Gates.

‘I heard from someone that this hospital alone has over ten patients suffering the same illness....’

Jin-Woo gently held his mother’s hand.

“Mom....”

Thankfully, the life support machines using the magic crystals as fuel managed to stop mom and her hand from wasting away, even though she had been in a coma for many years now.

However, magic crystals were expensive. The magic crystals to fuel the life-support machines for a month cost over five million Won.

A youth in his early twenties would never have been able to afford such a fee, if it weren’t for him working for the Hunters Association and was qualified to receive their medical aid scheme.

Because he’d been working his a*s off until now, he was able to hold his mom’s hand like this. However, everything would change soon.

He would no longer simply be satisfied with her still breathing like this, and actually be able to cure her outright.

The Divine Water of Life – the cure-all the System had gifted him with.

Whether it’d work or not was something to worry about later. Right now, crafting it was his first priority.

“I’ll save you.”

Mom did her best to stabilise the family when his father went missing, even though she never enjoyed robust health. Not too long from now, he’d get to see her up on her two feet again.

‘Please, just wait a little while longer.’

How long did he sit there by her side?

Jin-Woo finally pushed himself up after a lengthy vigil.

Ending his definitely-not short visit, Jin-Woo wordlessly walked out of the ward and carefully closed the door behind him. And when he turned around to leave, he got to spot a familiar face standing in the corridor.

“On that day... it was you who killed the monsters in the dual dungeon, wasn't it?”

A low and thick, manly voice.

Sharp, scary eyebrows.

He was none other than Woo Jin-Cheol from the Monitoring Division.

Jin-Woo didn't reply. There was no reason to, nor did he particularly feel like it, either. Instead, there was something else he wanted to ask.

“How did you find out that I was here?”

“I tried to guess the places you might head off to. I called the hospital and they informed me of your presence here.”

The Association was paying for mom's hospital fees, after all.

‘Well, that's going to change soon.’

It was possible that Woo Jin-Cheol checked the hospital first, before anywhere else. Should he chalk that up to the swift nature befitting the Monitoring Division?

Jin-Woo let a smirk form on his face.

“Did you seek me out just to ask me about that day's events?”

“No, I did not.”

“Well, then. How can I help you?”

“There is someone who'd like to speak to you. Would you mind accompanying me for a little while?”

The infamous Monitoring Division of the Hunters Association.

The main role the Monitoring Division performed was to watch and manage those high-risk Hunters, as well to punish those who broke the law. From a Hunter's perspective, they weren't really a welcoming presence.

Of course, Jin-Woo's gaze wasn't too friendly, either.

“Is that an order?”

“No.”

Woo Jin-Cheol took his sunglasses off. He then deeply bowed his head, his voice sounding much more serious than before.

“I’d like to ask you for this favour.”

“.....”

Jin-Woo didn’t expect Woo Jin-Cheol, with his fearsome countenance and all, to assume that kind of attitude.

Jin-Woo pondered a little, before deciding to find out who wanted to meet him first.

“Who wants to talk to me?”

Woo Jin-Cheol raised his head only then.

“It’s the President of the Hunters Association, Goh Gun-Hui.”

Woo Jin-Cheol then pointed towards the corner behind him and spoke.

“The Association President is currently here.”



Chapter 78 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The office of the President of the Hunters Association.

The facial expression of the doctor examining Goh Gun-Hui wasn't so good. He removed the stethoscope from Goh Gun-Hui's chest.

"...President."

"No need to say it. I can already tell from the look on your face."

Goh Gun-Hui chuckled gently as he buttoned up his shirt.

The doctor couldn't bring himself to say anything.

'President Goh Gun-Hui... What with the state of your health, you walking around like this is a miracle in itself already.....'

Even then, the President of the Association did not show any signs of slowing down. He actually didn't even have the time to stop by at the hospital, and had his personal doctor come to see him at the office, instead!

"Actually...."

President Goh Gun-Hui slid his arm in the sleeve of the jacket and spoke.

"Back when the Healers began appearing here and there, and healing magic was discovered, I thought that for sure I'd be able to regain my youth, and that I would be saying bye bye to this terribly inconvenient old and decrepit body of mine."

Goh Gun-Hui then chuckled again.

"However, the truth didn't work out that way."

"There was no improvement from the treatment, sir?"

"It seems that this thing called 'age' is beyond the capability of the high-ranking Hunters and their magic."

If the Healer-type Hunters could heal any and all types of sickness with magic, then without a doubt, every single hospital in the land would've closed up, and doctors would've ended up on the street, begging for food.

But fortunately, or perhaps, unfortunately, such an event didn't occur.

Only speeding up the regeneration.

The healing magic was limited only to healing the external injuries.

Although magic could miraculously cause the amputated arm to grow back, it could not lower the temperature of a child sick with the flu.

‘Well, thanks to that, I managed to not end up as unemployed, though.....’

The doctor stared at the President of Association getting ready to leave the office.

‘If only I could borrow magical power as great as the President’s and cure him in full....’

However, both the healing magic and the modern medicine couldn’t do much at this stage. All this doctor could do was to offer his advice.

“You need to maintain calm no matter what, sir. Also, you need to take a regular break, even if it’s for a little while.”

“I wish I could do that, as well.”

Unfortunately, if he did take a break, then just what would happen to the Hunters Association? Goh Gun-Hui used his gentle laughter as a replacement for his words.

‘An Association without Goh Gun-Hui, is it?’

The large Guilds were spending huge sums of money to grow ever larger even at this very moment. Their might already equalled that of some nations’ military forces.

The only reason why the Association could still flex its muscle among these Guilds was because of the presence of Goh Gun-Hui as its President, not because the government was backing the Association.

The moment the Association lost its true trump card, the Hunters would become rein-less wild horses and run amok.

‘Not just yet.... Yes, not just yet.’

Indeed, he couldn’t retire just yet.

The Association was the only rope that could rein them in.

With no viable alternative in place, how could he even think about leaving the scene?

‘In order to show how robust and healthy the Association is, I must stay.’

The rank S above all the other S ranks.

Indeed, the name of Goh Gun-Hui was a must-have.

So, until that time, he must....

“M-mm!”

A pained moan leaked out of Goh Gun-Hui. He grabbed his chest and the tidy shirt crumpled under his grip.

“President, take this....”

The doctor brought along a pill of painkiller and a glass of water.

“Thank you.”

He could just barely regain his bearings after ingesting the painkiller.

It was then.

‘Mm?’

His phone issued a ring.

But, he ordered no one to disturb him when his doctor was here.

Goh Gun-Hui frowned slightly and picked the phone up.

“I’m with my doctor at the moment.”

It was at this point that the urgent voice of his male PA came from the phone’s speaker.

“Did the Japanese call again?”

Goh Gun-Hui’s brows quivered slightly.

‘A bigger problem than the ants of the Jeju island?’

Just what could it be?

“Tell me what’s going on.”

Before the patience of Goh Gun-Hui had the chance to run out, the PA replied in the nick of time.

“From the Evaluation Division? Why?”

The role of the Evaluation Division was to assign ranks to various Gates as well as to newly Awakened. Such a department wouldn’t be a likely candidate to cause much trouble.

‘Or, could it be....?’

Did they make another blunder with assigning a Gate’s rank?

Thinking back to the debt he had to owe the White Tiger Guild not too long

ago, Goh Gun-Hui's expression crumpled a little. But his unhappiness lasted only for a short while.

The news conveyed by the PA easily exceeded the scope of 'problem' Goh Gun-Hui had been expecting.

"The President of the Hunters Association, Goh Gun-Hui??"

Did I hear that right?

Jin-Woo doubted his own hearing just then.

A man often referred to as the most powerful Hunter in South Korea wanted to talk to him and chased him all the way to this hospital??

'That must be some kind of joke....'

Just as Jin-Woo stood there not wholly convinced, Woo Jin-Cheol pointed behind him, further driving the point home.

"Yes, the Association President is here."

Woo Jin-Cheol looked a bit anxious as he waited for Jin-Woo's reply.

The current atmosphere definitely didn't come off as suitable for throwing around dumb jokes at all.

'.....He must be telling the truth.'

Why was someone like Goh Gun-Hui looking for him? A powerful curiosity suddenly invaded Jin-Woo's mind. The only thing he could think of was the result of the rank reassignment test he took.....

'Is it to lure me into signing with the Association?'

However, the Association was a non-profit organisation. Its President wouldn't necessarily show up with the top agent from the Monitoring Division in tow just to headhunt a lone Hunter.

Besides, Jin-Woo hadn't even finished with his evaluation yet.

The more he thought about it, the more curious he became regarding the President's reasons.

"Okay, I will."

Jin-Woo finally agreed.

Woo Jin-Cheol formed such a bright expression that the anxiety of a second ago seemed like a lie long forgotten.

"Thank you very much!!"

His voice sounded incredibly earnest just then.

‘This ahjussi with that stonewall of a face can also form such expressions, huh.’

Jin-Woo was inwardly surprised as he followed after Woo Jin-Cheol.

When they walked past the corner, he could see an old man sitting in one of the waiting room’s chairs.

‘So, that must be....’

Jin-Woo swallowed his saliva.

The heaven above heaven.

The S rank Hunter Goh Gun-Hui, also known as the sky above the sky.

After discovering Jin-Woo, Goh Gun-Hui stood up from the seat.

“You must be Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

He might be over 80 years old, but his physique was still quite amazing. Indeed, his size reminded one of either a retired pro wrestler or a traditional grappler.

However, he didn’t emit any of the overbearing aura one might expect from someone like that.

‘That’s surprising.’

Judged from his appearance or his station, Jin-Woo expected him to be a bit of douche, a stuck-up of sorts, yet the entourage accompanying that man carried scarier expressions instead.

“Yes, I’m Seong Jin-Woo.”

Jin-Woo replied.

Goh Gun-Hui extended his hand for a shake with a bright face.

“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I’m Goh Gun-Hui.”

The two men shared a short handshake. Goh Gun-Hui pointed towards the chairs in the waiting area, already rearranged in a way that those sitting there would look at each other.

“Why don’t we have a chat after taking seats?”

“Thank you.”

Jin-Woo sat down first, and Goh Gun-Hui too parked himself on the opposite chair.

Jin-Woo inadvertently caught the glimpse of a golden badge pinned to Goh Gun-Hui’s jacket. This man currently served as a member of the National

Assembly, and at the same time, as the President of the Association as well.

‘And a rank S Awakened on top of that, too.’

Goh Gun-Hui wasn't someone anyone could meet just because they wanted to. One couldn't even count the number of people who wanted to speak to this man, be that the giants of the financial and political world as well as bigshots from other countries.

That was why Jin-Woo was getting even more curious now. Why was someone like Goh Gun-Hui seeking him out so urgently?

And, now that he thought about it....

‘After Choi Jong-In, it's the turn of Goh Gun-Hui, isn't it?’

Just in one day, he ran into two men who could proudly boast the title of the 'best' in a row.

...Even though he wasn't officially confirmed as a rank S yet.

Goh Gun-Hui began speaking.

“I'd like to congratulate you on becoming the newest rank S Hunter.”

Jin-Woo tilted his head.

“But, the result of the reassignment test hasn't come out yet.”

Goh Gun-Hui shook his head immediately.

“Actually, the test itself does not have much of a meaning.”

“Excuse me?”

While Jin-Woo formed a confused expression, Goh Gun-Hui was forming a gentle smile.

“The truth is, the so-called precision measuring device is used to draw a finer line on the level of one's powers. It's not designed to sense something that already has exceeded the scope of other device's measuring capability.”

“Then, how come....”

“Do you wish to ask me why we created another process called re-evaluation?”

Indeed, he did want to ask that. If the end results were going to be the same, then why go through yet another cumbersome process?

Goh Gun-Hui answered in rather a straightforward manner.

“It's because we were looking for a grace period.”

‘A grace period...?’

Even before Jin-Woo could ask what he meant by that, Goh Gun-Hui spoke up first, looking somewhat embarrassed.

“It’s to create an opportunity where we can meet and speak to someone like you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

“...Ah.”

Listening to the Association President, Jin-Woo finally figured it out.

“As you may well know, there aren’t that many excellent Hunters in the Association, like Division Chief Woo Jin-Cheol here, compared to our size.”

That was because of large Guilds.

“And that’s because of the large Guilds.”

But, of course.

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

“Signing up with a large Guild guarantees you fat salaries and fame, so who would want to come and work for the Association?”

The salaries for the Association’s Hunters weren’t small by any means. But then again, when compared to what one could potentially be earning by working for large Guilds, the salary was pitifully pathetic.

It was the same story regarding fame, too.

“There are some people who can recite the names of every member of a large Guild’s main raid teams. But, you will have a very hard time trying to find someone who knows the name of our Division Chief Woo Jin-Cheol.”

Hearing the term ‘members of the main raid team’, Jin-Woo recalled the rank A Hunter Kim Cheol.

His Perception Stat allowed him to grasp another’s capability. From Jin-Woo’s perspective, Woo Jin-Cheol was definitely a level higher than Kim Cheol.

‘They both might be rank As, but the gap in their skills are pretty obvious.’

Jin-Woo took a deeper look at Woo Jin-Cheol.

Perhaps finding the praise of the Association President and the gaze of Jin-Woo burdensome, Woo Jin-Cheol lowered his head, looking a little flushed.

‘But, then....’

If Kim Cheol had made his debut as a Hunter without meeting that ‘accident’, then he’d have made a lot more money and become much more famous than Woo Jin-Cheol.

That was the difference between a Hunter working for the Association and someone signed to a large Guild.

“And so, we came up with a plan in case a truly exceptional Awakened decides to visit the Association.”

So, that would be the re-evaluation test, then?

‘Well, sure.....’

If the result of the evaluation was publicly made available and was spread everywhere, would the Association have the chance to make an approach like this? It certainly made sense.

“I won’t beat around the bush and get to the point.”

Before anyone had noticed it, that warm smile was no longer visible on the face of the Association’s President.

“We’re not a corporation, so we can’t promise you lots of money. However....”

Goh Gun-Hui touched his chest area, before extending his fist that was gripping onto something.

“However, we can help you in a different way.”

“I don’t quite understand.....?”

“What I’m saying here is that we can help guide you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, down a very different direction.”

His clenched fist slowly unfurled. On Goh Gun-Hui’s palm, a golden badge gleamed brightly.

‘Political power..... Is it?’

Even after that, Jin-Woo maintained a suspicious expression.

“I still don’t quite understand.”

“Pardon?”

“Is there a reason for you to go this far for me?”

That was a valid question. A certain glint flickered in Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes as he continued to gaze at Jin-Woo.

‘To think, this young man can still calmly ask what’s on his mind,

without being scared by my background, nor influenced by potential benefit right in front of his eyes....'

...Was I in a too much of a rush?

Didn't someone once say this?

'Patience decreases with age.'

That concept certainly wasn't wrong.

Goh Gun-Hui suppressed his smile and continued on.

"You know about the five Guilds, yes?"

How could anyone not know of them? Jin-Woo silently nodded his head.

"Currently, you'll find that in South Korea, the heads of five large dragons are locked in a delicate balance."

Around the capital, the Hunters, the White Tiger, and the Reapers.

And in the countryside, the Shining Star and the Knight Order.

"If you decide to enter one of the five Guilds, doesn't matter which one, the delicate balance will shatter and everything will change."

Even now, the status and authority of large Guilds were soaring into high heavens. However, what if one of them managed to sign up another rank S Hunter, and used that as the springboard to soar even higher?

Would they listen to the Association anymore?

The Association's sole role was to remain as the centre of the balance among the Hunters by using power.

"It is simply far too inadequate to control and tie down Hunters with laws and regulations and the threat of prosecution."

Jin-Woo too thought like that before. Monsters found in dungeons weren't the only 'monsters' out there. Hunters were also, in a way, 'monsters'.

If one were to look only at the 'strength' aspect, then Hunters were far more dangerous 'monsters' than regular monsters found in dungeons.

"That is why the Association exists."

Goh Gun-Hui's expression became far more grave.

"And the Association needs your help, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim."

...The help from someone like you, who possessed great power.

Gou Gun-Hui's gaze became sharper.

‘Sure, I’ll have to keep an eye on him and find out what he’s like, but....’

But, as long as Seong Jin-Woo gave his OK here, the Association would support him to the utmost fullest.

A rank S was certainly worthy of such an investment, after all.

‘This should be enough of an explanation.’

That was why....

For the first time in a long, long while, Goh Gun-Hui was feeling nervous and expectant at the same time, as he asked the next question in a soft but firm voice.

“What will you choose, Hunter-nim?”



Chapter 79 . Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

That wasn't a bad suggestion.

If Goh Gun-Hui were to lend his support, then even the most average guy would be on the fast track to success.

The National Assembly, the government, the Hunters Association, and even the mass media, too – it'd be very hard to find a sector that Goh Gun-Hui's reach did not extend to.

Not only that, if the person receiving that support just so happened to a rank S Hunter?

'I can't even imagine how far a person like that would climb up.'

All of a sudden, Jin-Woo pictured himself sitting right next to the member of National Assembly Goh Gun-Hui while kitted out in a super-dope designer business suit.

His heart palpitated ever so slightly.

'Such an opportunity wouldn't come knocking every day, right?'

Even if one wanted to walk down on this 'different path' Goh Gun-Hui had suggested, not everyone was qualified to step on this road, after all.

However....

There was one important thing missing from that scenario.

'If I sign up with the Association, I won't be able to increase my level.'

The higher ranked Hunters working for the Association never participated in raids at all. Their main role was to deal with other Hunters, not to hunt down and kill monsters.

And, even if he managed to get permission and participate in raids organised by the Association....

'Dungeons the Association deals with are rank Ds and Es, those that the Guilds aren't interested in.'

Could he continue on by hunting down low-level mobs that didn't even give him any experience points? No, of course not.

Jin-Woo strongly balked at the idea.

'I wish to become even stronger.'

To a higher place.....

He wanted to climb up as high as he could.

Unless it was impossible, or there was no certainty, why should he give up on something he was fully capable of achieving?

What a nonsensical notion that was.

'As long as I keep levelling up, I will get stronger and stronger.'

Thump.

Thump.

Imagining that caused his heart to thump way harder and faster than imagining himself being next to the Association President Goh Gun-Hui.

Goh Gun-Hui too sensed the change in Jin-Woo.

'His breathing has suddenly picked up. Did he finally make up his mind?'

He could only hope that the decision was a good one.

'No, it simply has to be a good one.'

...If he thought about his remaining time.

His own anticipation no less than that of Jin-Woo's, Goh Gun-Hui waited for the answer. Each passing second felt like a minute.

Jin-Woo eventually opened his mouth.

'I'm sorry.'

Goh Gun-Hui's expression hardened immediately.

'I thought I saw determination fill up his face just now.... Was I mistaken?'

He couldn't hide the disappointment in his face.

'In the end, the ambition of the man named Seong Jin-Woo was only about this much....'

Goh Gun-Hui wasn't lying about lending support for the 'other path'. Actually, he was thinking of something even greater.

'A new rank S to appear in two years....'

Goh Gun-Hui was thinking of keeping this youth close and teaching him the ropes, and if the kid showed promise, groom him to become the next successor.

Because, a powerful figure was needed to support the Association when he was gone. Meaning, Goh Gun-Hui was planning to hand over everything he had.

However, for the result to be like this....

‘How laughable I am.’

Goh Gun-Hui took away the golden badge and asked in a dejected voice.

“Is it... because of money?”

Jin-Woo replied right away.

“No, it is not.”

Goh Gun-Hui snorted inwardly.

‘They all sound righteous, of course.’

However, they were all the same inside. In the end, it was all about the money. And, the accompanying fame would be like icing on cake.

‘Then again....’

Chasing after material wealth was an innate instinct found in all human beings, so Goh Gun-Hui didn’t have any thoughts of faulting the youth for that.

Only that, he found it utterly laughable that people couldn’t be honest with themselves.

“In that case, why did you say no?”

Goh Gun-Hui asked, even though he already knew the answer. He just wanted to see the youth’s response.

However.....

“I want to fight.”

Jin-Woo’s unhesitating reply smacked the back of Goh Gun-Hui’s head.

‘What did he say??’

It definitely felt like he got sucker-punched just now.

“That... Did you mean that you want to fight against the monsters?”

“That’s correct.”

Jin-Woo didn't bother with unnecessary explanations and spoke frankly.

"I want to enter Gates and hunt down monsters. I believe the place I belong is inside dungeons."

'How can this be?'

Goh Gun-Hui's eyes widened.

A man like him standing on top of many others knew whether someone was telling the truth or lying through their teeth simply from the light emitting from their eyes.

The position he occupied could only be reached by possessing such a skill, after all. That was why Goh Gun-Hui knew it.

'Those eyes.... He's being dead serious.'

Goh Gun-Hui's own eyes staring at Jin-Woo did a 180.

'How long has it been since I felt this?'

By the time Goh Gun-Hui had 'Awakened', his body was already too old. That was why, instead of fighting against monsters, he looked for other things he could do, instead.

By using the money he got from selling his company, he established the Korean Hunters Association, gathered Hunters, and with his fame serving as the foundation, he marched straight into the National Assembly, and even had a hand in creating laws that governed Hunters.

However, there was this lingering regret in his heart that would never go away, even though he worked tirelessly all this time.

'If only I was younger by 20, no, 10 years, I'd been.... With these young people, I.....!'

Thump, thump, thump....

Goh Gun-Hui pressed his hand on his chest. His heart that threatened to quit at any time was pounding quickly, rather noticeably, now.

'My heart can still make a noise like this?'

The rhythmic beating of the heart felt good.

On the other hand, Jin-Woo was tilting his head.

'Isn't this strange?'

He refused the suggestion of Goh Gun-Hui, fully preparing himself to be at odds with the Association in the process, yet the President seemed to be

happy about something, instead.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter one way or the other....’

He had said what he wanted to, so Jin-Woo got up from his seat.

“My younger sister is watching the house alone, so I should get going now.”

“Thank you for your time.”

Goh Gun-Hui got up along with Jin-Woo and pulled something out from his inner pocket.

“And, please take this.”

It was a business card.

‘.....?’

“If you require my assistance, don’t hesitate and give me a call.”

Goh Gun-Hui was smiling brightly.

What Jin-Woo said was right. Powerful Hunters belonged in dungeons.

Although he had failed in recruiting Jin-Woo, as the President of the Association, or perhaps as a fellow Hunter, Goh Gun-Hui wished to help Jin-Woo out however he could.

If he were to be more honest, then....

‘This young man, I like him.’

That was why he needed to offer advice, as well. Nagging would only come from someone holding interest towards you, after all.

“It’s impossible to enter high-ranked dungeons by yourself. Please, give it a careful consideration when choosing a Guild to join.”

‘Your choice would change the status quo by a great deal.’

After hearing Goh Gun-Hui’s earnest advice, Jin-Woo briefly formed a mysterious smile.

“Thank you.”

Jin-Woo pocketed the business card in his wallet, lightly bowed towards Goh Gun-Hui and Woo Jin-Cheol, and left the waiting area.

“Fuu....”

While letting out a sigh, Goh Gun-Hui plopped down on the chair.

“Are you alright, sir?”

Woo Jin-Cheol guessed that Goh Gun-Hui wasn't feeling good, and quickly approached his boss. However, Goh Gun-Hui smiled and waved his hand away.

"No, I'm fine."

Actually, he was beyond fine.

What an enjoyable meeting this had been, a first in such a long while.

Goh Gun-Hui sat there smiling for a long time, before turning to his PA and handed out an order.

"Clear the schedule for the rest of the day."

"But, sir. The meeting with the Ministers...."

"Cancel them all."

Goh Gun-Hui chuckled to himself.

"I do not wish to waste this good feeling on those small-minded idiots."

He wished to retain this lingering feel-good attitude for today, at least.

Suddenly, Goh Gun-Hui shifted his gaze over to Woo Jin-Cheol. Seeing that rarely-seen smile on the President's face, even Woo Jin-Cheol began feeling a bit hyped up, as well.

"Is there something you need, sir?"

"No, well. It's nothing serious but, my man....."

Goh Gun-Hui took his time as he scratched below his chin.

"How about having a drink with me today?"

At this quite unexpected suggestion, Woo Jin-Cheol could only form an awkward smile.

"I'm not very good with holding my liquor, sir.... Will that be fine with you?"

"Uh-huh. I didn't take you for a person like that."

Goh Gun-Hui playfully clicked his tongue.

"Haven't you heard of the old saying about the cup size of a man's drink determining the extent of the world he can make his own?"

"My apologies, sir."

Woo Jin-Cheol's face reddened in embarrassment and scratched the back of his head.

“I was just kidding with you. I’m feeling rather good right now, and jokes just seem to come out on their own.”

Also, the one he wanted to share drinks with was someone else.

Goh Gun-Hui’s gaze shifted towards the end of the corridor that Jin-Woo had disappeared to.

‘Hunter Seong Jin-Woo....’

How well would he be able to hold his liquor?

Thinking that he’d like to find out someday, a thin smile formed on Goh Gun-Hui’s lips.

Screech....

Clunk.

Jin-Woo stepped down from the bus that came to a noisy stop.

‘Well, I did escape from there with my sister as an excuse, but....’

When he took a look at his watch, it was still too early for her to be home. Jin-Woo slowly walked towards his home.

Tick, tick.

Hearing an unfamiliar noise, he turned his head to look, and spotted a street lamp that was definitely malfunctioning.

‘Now that I think about it....’

He realised that the street was far too dark.

What with this district being so derelict, to begin with, just from walking a bit away from the main street one would find themselves in a dark and isolated location like this one.

It was at this point that a certain news item entered his mind.

‘The case of serial murders that have been happening around here lately.’

Weren’t the victims supposedly all women?

His little sister frequented this road, as well. Not only that, late at night, too.

‘Since her school’s nearby, we can’t just move house willy-nilly, either.’

He began to get worried now.

Apprehending the criminal wouldn’t be difficult at all as long as the

murdering b*stard had been found, but he couldn't really stand around here every night because of his worries.

Wasn't there a better way?

He stood there thinking with his arms crossed, before a smile crept up on Jin-Woo's lips.

'Well, all I have to do is leave someone else here as a lookout, right?'

Didn't he possess the perfect candidates for that task?

"Come out."

At Jin-Woo's call, shadow soldiers popped up.

'Five should be enough.'

These guys had levelled up quite nicely during their conquest of the Demon's Castle. Just looking at them gave him lots of confidence.

"From today onwards, you guys will serve as this district's watchmen. Start your patrol."

As soon as he finished speaking, the soldiers melted into the shadow-like state. And then, they began moving while weaving in and out of the shades found between various buildings.

'That's right. Move around like that avoid being spotted by other people.'

Holy wowsers, what wonderful little kids they were turning out to be!

Unless that serial murderer was a high-ranked Hunter, he'd never be able to win against a shadow soldier. And even if that murdering b*stard did somehow win against his soldiers, Jin-Woo would know right away.

He was an S rank Hunter, after all.

'No, hang on. Since I don't have my revised licence yet, should I say that I'm an S rank Awakened, instead?'

Well, what did it matter anyway?

A suburb being protected by a rank S, didn't matter whether he was a Hunter or an Awakened.

If the truth of a free security system being deployed in this area for 24 hours became known, wouldn't the land price jump up overnight?

A smirk leaked out of his mouth.

'Very good.'

With this, he felt more relaxed.

Jin-Woo scanned his surroundings once more and turned around to leave while looking much more satisfied than before.

“I came running because you said you’d buy me a meal, but it’s just some measly pork belly??”

“Huh?! Are you looking down on the mighty pork belly now??”

“.....”

“This place is where my great memory of me and my hyung-nim was created, you know!!”

Yu Jin-Ho and his deeply-reddened face put the empty shot glass of alcohol down on the table and snorted out in drunkenness.

“Okay, so why did you bring me to this place of such a ‘wonderful’ memory?”

Yu Soo-Hyun formed a flabbergasted expression.

She was getting ready to sleep, but then, Yu Jin-Ho called her out of the blue.

She found his tearful whimpering rather desperate and pitiful, so she hurriedly came out to meet him, but to think, the place he brought her to was a diner....

It was only obvious for Yu Soo-Hyun to be less than impressed by her current situation, when considering the fact that she grew up as a refined lady of a chaebol’s family, and also from the fact that she was working as a top model nowadays.

Glance, glance....

Because she was in a hurry, she threw on whatever and even wore a baseball cap on top of that too, yet the glances from the surrounding men were still flying towards her non-stop.

“What’s going on? Will you just speak up?”

Yu Soo-Hyun asked while pouring more soju in Yu Jin-Ho’s empty shot glass.

“Look, look at this. This is the phone number of my dear hyung-nim. Right?”

Still sounding tearful, Yu Jin-Ho pushed forward his smartphone. On the screen, one could see the lengthy list of calls.

One successful call, and four failed attempts.

Even then, the first one that got through was apparently cut short in the middle, too.

“Wait. Did you call me out here because you couldn’t reach someone you know on the phone?!”

Nod, nod.

Yu Jin-Ho’s head bobbed up and down.

“Ha-ah...”

Yu Soo-Hyun could hardly believe this crap. She snatched Yu Jin-Ho’s phone away.

“Gimme that.”

She quickly tapped on the ‘Call’ icon.

Ringgg....

The ringtone got cut off a short while later. When that happened, Yu Soo-Hyun began glaring at him.

“Hey, you dumba*s.”

“Eh?”

Yu Jin-Ho raised his head from the table.

“The ringtone cuts out after 15 seconds. That guy’s not avoiding answering you, it’s just that his phone’s been switched off. And if the call got cut out in the middle, his battery must’ve run out.”

“...Really?”

“If you don’t believe me, call again.”

Ringgg....

Just as she said, the signal got cut off after 15 seconds.

“Hey, it’s for real?!”

Yu Jin-Ho’s expression brightened instantly.

“It’s sorted now, right? I’m going home.”

Yu Soo-Hyun was about to leave without a shred of hesitation, but Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly latched onto her sleeve.

“Nooona~. Please hang around until I finish this bottle, at least!”

“Am I a noona only on occasions like this one, ah?”

And this fool usually called her ‘You’ this and ‘Hey you’ that all the time, too!

In the end, though, Yu Soo-Hyun settled back down on the chair.

“Huh? Noona, you also want a drink?”

“You wanted me to wait until you finish the bottle, right? It’s going to take a long time before you solo that bottle and I can’t wait around until you manage that.”

“As expected, there can only be one noona!”

“Stop it, please?”

Even though she replied like that, they began emptying the shot glasses in a fun, relaxed atmosphere.

“By the way, just who is this ‘hyung-nim’ guy?”

“You’ll find out soon enough.”

After signing up with the Yujin Guild, that is.

Yu Jin-Ho was about to say those words out loud, but then, his eyes widened slightly after seeing the footage being shown on the TV mounted high up on the diner’s wall.

“Uh? Isn’t that guy....?”

Yu Soo-Hyun also turned her gaze towards the TV.

The screen showed a news broadcast, and it carried the news regarding a top celebrity named Rhee Min-Seong, who had gone through the Awakening process recently.

Standing in front of the huge throngs of reporters, Rhee Min-Seong spoke as if he was abashed by the attention.

The ticker tape on the bottom of the screen said that Rhee Min-Seong was planning to stop by the Hunters Association soon and take his rank assignment test.

“Wowsers. As expected of the star of the Korean Wave, Rhee Min-Seong! Look at the number of reporters there. Aren’t those guys from the Chinese media?”

Yu Jin-Ho sighed in admiration.

However, Yu Soo-Hyun simply frowned.

“How can that guy lie so boldly in front of so many people?!”

“Eh?”

“Everyone who’s in the know all know it already. That’s all just a show. He already has been ranked A, you know? He’s just playing it up for the cameras because he wants to be the talk of the town!”

“He’s putting on an act? But, that symbol of modesty Rhee Min-Seong is?!”

Yu Soo-Hyun clicked her tongue in annoyance.

Tsk, tsk.

‘How come no one has got any clue?’

This kinda felt like she was badmouthing someone behind his back, but within the circle of those who knew Rhee Min-Seong personally, that man’s reputation was the absolute worst.

The difference in his personality between when the cameras were around and when they were not was, as the kids liked to say nowadays, the 4th dimensional wall that no one could cross. (TL: It’s a Korean slang.)

That was the type of person Yu Soo-Hyun detested the most.

If he was just two-faced, then she might have overlooked his faults, but then again, that b*stard was notorious for his flirtatious ways, too.

Not too long ago, he called her up totally out of the blue and started his shtick while saying something about being a Hunter like her. She had to go through a wringer trying to end that call.

‘What an unpleasant b*stard....’

Even before he had Awakened, he was infamous for his incredible arrogance, but now that he was about to become a rank A Hunter, how bad would it get now?

Not only that, it looked like that the occasion of him being labelled as a rank A would be broadcast live nationwide, too.

‘He’s really good at using his head for stuff like this, isn’t he?’

Yu Soo-Hyun shook her head and slammed back the remaining soju in her shot glass.



Chapter 80 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Excuse me? What are you even talking about?”

“President Goh Gun-Hui said that? But, he has never done anything like that before, so why now?”

“....”

“....I’ll call you again at a later date.”

Click.

And that’s how the phone call ended.

The expression of Im Tae-Gyu, the Master of the Reapers Guild, wasn’t good at all.

‘What on earth is happening here....?’

When the leader of this large Guild heard the news that, after two long years, a super-powerful rookie had appeared, he immediately called his contact in the Association.

However, he didn’t expect to hear this type of answer at all.

Taking responsibility after getting fired?

Who would be stupid enough to hire an ex-Association employee that got personally fired by none other than the Association President Goh Gun-Hui himself?

There was no guarantee the recruitment of the mystery rookie would be successful just because his identity was discovered, too.

‘Finding out the guilty ones by any means necessary and punishing them, is it....’

Coming from Goh Gun-Hui’s mouth, that sounded plausible.

‘But then, why is the geezer doing something he has never done before? Maybe, he’s finally gone senile?’

What had gotten into him?

To forbid everyone from leaking the identity of the mystery Awakened like this....

This was unprecedented.

Thanks to that, the Guild Master of the Reapers had no choice but to suck on his thumb and wait for the official announcement.

That wasn't the only thing he felt wronged about, though.

'Then, how did Choi Jong-In and Baek Yun-Ho find out and go there yesterday?'

Was it the difference in their spy networks?

Was this the sign of the Reapers influence waning even further?

If that powerful rookie appearing yesterday signed up with either the Hunters or the White Tiger, the already-widening gap between them and the Reapers would become impossible to bridge.

That was the current situation, yet that inexplicable gag order was blocking the Reaper's path.

'Could that geezer have a grudge with me from a past life or something??'

When Baek Yun-Ho decided to quit the Reapers Guild and created his own, the White Tiger Guild, it was precisely that geezer who helped facilitate the whole process and made sure everything went smoothly. The ensuing aftermath forced the Reapers off the position of the top Guild in the country.

Both the Hunters and the White Tiger were already so far ahead, yet the Reapers Guild was circling around in the exact same spot.

'I mean, isn't that enough by now? Can't you help out the Reapers at least once?!'

Suddenly, he began to resent Goh Gun-Hui.

Even then, he still found himself left with no tangible way forward.

Im Tae-Gyu could only anxiously stomp on the ground, feeling rather aggrieved over this development.

'I finished the Daily Quest.'

Feeling light-hearted, Jin-Woo began searching the internet.

There were two more days to the reassignment test. He decided to gather more information on the artefact trade during this time period, so he switched on his computer.

'Heok?!'

As he browsed through the available information on the auctioned goods, Jin-Woo's eyes grew wider and wider.

'...The minimum starts in the hundreds of millions, huh.'

Was that all? Items that looked okay to his eyes commanded an average of several dozen billion.

'Then again....'

To Hunters, good equipment was like their lifeline.

There was no need to even mention the obvious fact that using better, more expensive equipment made you safer.

Most Hunters made quite a bit of coin, and when given the chance to buy tools that would allow them to hunt faster and safer, was there a reason for them to hold back with their money?

Jin-Woo could understand it. Indeed, he could, but that didn't change the fact that he was taken greatly by surprise.

Seeing the pricing of various artefacts, he was getting more nervous by the minute.

'This... I don't think it'll be enough with what I have in the bank....'

He didn't find a defensive artefact designed to defend against flame-type damage, but it looked increasingly likely that the amount he had would not be enough to buy high-grade defensive equipment at all.

'And I thought that I had enough money now....'

That opinion was from the perspective of a normal person. As a Hunter, it fell far, far too short.

He had around 1.7 billion Won saved up in the bank. If he were to purchase artefacts he wanted, he definitely had to sell the 'Bead of Avarice'.

Now that he was the seller, Jin-Woo's expression rapidly changed.

'Needing a lot of money to buy an artefact means that I can sell my own artefact at a sky-high price.'

Click.

He moved the mouse and continued to search, until the list of the magical tools currently on sale appeared on the monitor.

'.....'

No matter how hard he searched, he could not find a single artefact that

doubled the magic damage. The best ones he found had the enhancement of around 20~30 percent. And those artefacts boasted scarcely-believable asking prices.

‘Man, these prices for the magic tools are no laughing matter, aren’t they?’

When he thought about it, though, the boost of 20% was not small at all. Only the upper tier, no, the very best Hunters out there, would be able to afford such an expensive artefact.

However, with their already-excellent strengths being enhanced by 20%? The difference would be quite incredible to behold. The high-ranked Hunters knew this point as well, so no wonder they were prepared to shell out big bucks for them.

Actually, he could frequently spot the goods being on sale only a moment ago suddenly sporting a ‘Sold’ tag.

The ‘20%’ artefacts were selling out fast like this, so....

‘So, just how much should I sell this guy for?’

Gulp.

Jin-Woo swallowed his saliva.

Not too long ago, he didn’t even dare to dream about touching an artefact. Not too surprisingly, he couldn’t even begin to imagine how much money others were willing to pay for his artefact at the moment.

‘That’s why there’s the thing called auction, right?’

He prayed that, when he put the Bead of Avarice up for auction, a suitable bid would be called out in the end.

With a satisfied smile on his face, Jin-Woo exited the auction information page.

According to his research, there was two obvious way to sell an artefact.

One, selling it via the official route. Or, sell it in the black market.

However, he had no way of approaching this elusive black market at all. Well, there was a limit to the information one could find on the internet, after all.

‘I mean, if you can access it via a couple of mouse clicks, it shouldn’t even be called the black market anymore.’

Besides, the Bead of Avarice didn’t have any disreputable background

anyway, so there was no need to go through the black market in the first place. The best available option was to let the artefact specialists handle the bead and sell it via auction.

Sure, there was the issue of taxes and commission fee, but this was still the best and quickest method that wouldn't produce any unnecessary baggage in the long run.

'So, the only remaining issue would be with me providing the information on where I've found this thing....'

A rank E Hunter showing up with a crazy artefact that shouldn't even exist in the first place.

Would anyone quietly accept that?

The Korean Hunter Auction House was a huge corporation that oversaw all transactions between Hunters. They would surely try to confirm and investigate every single suspicious detail they find.

'That is why I need my new licence.'

The new Hunter licence with 'rank S' nicely printed on it – he took the reassignment test solely for that licence.

And the result was a resounding success.

If he went by what the Association President Goh Gun-Hui had said, he'd be able to get his hands on that licence in two days' time without an issue.

He did worry slightly there for a sec, thinking that he had complicated the matters by refusing to sign up with the Association, but...

'What a relief it is since the Association President doesn't look like that type of person.'

Even until they said their goodbyes, that deep smile never left the President's mouth.

When one spent a long time always minding other people's moods, one would become a master at reading the flow. Jin-Woo was one such example.

He spent four years as a rank E and always had to mind other Hunters. That was why he could more or less figure out what was what by simply looking at other people's expressions.

Goh Gun-Hui's expression was definitely not faked. At least, that's how Jin-Woo saw it. So, he shouldn't worry about anything and quietly wait for the reassignment test in two days' time.

'However.... what I am supposed to do in the meantime?'

Jin-Woo leaned against the back of the chair.

Two days. It was a bit too short to do anything substantial, and maybe a bit too long to do nothing but lounge around at home.

‘Should I just take a look anyway?’

Feeling half-interested, Jin-Woo moved the mouse cursor to the recruitment noticeboard in the Hunter forums.

Click.

One click later, and countless recruitment notices filled up his monitor. He quickly noticed a flood of requests from various freelancer raid teams searching for temps nearby this area.

‘.....’

The reason for this was simple. When he and Yu Jin-Ho monopolised every rank C Gate nearby for a little while, many raid teams temporarily lost their livelihood.

Perhaps as a rebound, the raid teams that had been sitting idle during that time suddenly went into an energetic overdrive in the last few days.

Jin-Woo smiled wryly and changed the page.

‘Well, I won’t level up anymore in rank C dungeons, anyway.’

It took him one full day to level up once in the very last rank C dungeon he entered. No, never mind one day, he actually needed nearly two days for that single level up. And his current level was higher than that time by 15.

If there was a gauge for the experience points, then the needle wouldn’t even budge.

‘Rank C Gates have no meaning to me anymore....’

Unfortunately, he couldn’t find a single recruitment offer for raiding higher ranked dungeons. Freelancer raid teams trying to clear high ranked dungeons was akin to them killing themselves. And the large Guilds wouldn’t really recruit temporary members like this, either.

Still, one would never know.

‘Should I change the search parameters?’

Jin-Woo changed the search condition and had it display only the results with ‘high-ranked dungeons’.

Click.

Even though he was hoping, he wasn't expecting much at all.

However...

'.....Huh?'

Something did pop up.

"You're a rank E?"

"Yes."

"You've never done anything like this before?"

"No, never."

"Well, uh... your speciality is?"

"I'm a close-quarter combat type."

'Well, at least that's a relief.'

The foreman wearing a hard hat swept his gaze up and down over Jin-Woo.

'For a rank E, he's got a pretty impressive physique, doesn't he? His eyes look okay, too.'

Jin-Woo patiently waited for the answer from the foreman.

The foreman returned Jin-Woo's Hunter licence and smiled jovially.

"Hahaha. There are quite a few people similar to you here, Mister Jin-Woo. Don't be too nervous and let's get along well."

The foreman ahjussi was over forty years old, yet he was overflowing with energy. As an added bonus, he even sported a cool moustache, too.

"You can wait here until everyone shows up, Then, you can go inside. And don't forget your equipment, too."

"My equipment....?"

"You can pick up any one of those lying on the ground over there."

".....Okay, got it."

Jin-Woo nodded his head while looking at the pile of pickaxes on the ground.

It was at this point that another ahjussi with a towel draped behind his neck hurriedly approached the two men.

"Mister Bae! Our team is also hurting for manpower, so how can you take people away willy-nilly like that??"

“Aigoo~. That many people’s fine for the retrieval team. Hey, will you take responsibility when a problem occurs during the operation and we miss the Gate closing down?”

“Even then!”

The moustached ahjussi spun the towel ahjussi around and grinned at Jin-Woo.

“Mister Seong? Why don’t you take five over there? This fella and me, we gonna have a bit of chat.”

“Hey, why don’t we just hash it out right over here? Where are you planning to take me now?”

“C’mon, my man. Come with me for a sec.”

The two ahjussis disappeared to somewhere while arguing with each other.

‘The other ahjussi is from the retrieval team, huh....’

The sizes of high-ranked dungeons were so great that a single raid team couldn’t do everything in one go. That was why the labour was divided.

The raid team that cleared the dungeons, the mining team that mined minerals from the dungeon’s interior, and finally, the retrieval team tasked with collecting the remains of the fallen monsters.

Both the mining and the retrieval team entered the dungeon once all the monsters inside except the boss were eliminated.

Jin-Woo applied to the mining team.

‘...Wait, is this all the so-called equipment there is?’

With a somewhat unconvinced expression, Jin-Woo picked up one of the pickaxes. Even though it was faint, he could sense the flow of magical energy in it.

‘Huh. It’s got magic energy inside.’

Modern technology that utilised electricity didn’t work inside dungeons. Because of that, the old fashioned tools like this pickaxe were used instead, with magic energy enhancing their performance.

‘.....’

Once he held the pickaxe tightly, he felt certain. It was not for nothing that Hunters in the mining team were roundly berated by others as dungeon miners.

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the Gate. A giant hole was silently floating

in the air. A Gate with a humongous size that no rank C Gates could even hope to compare filled up Jin-Woo's vision.

'So, that's the rank A Gate....'

That guy was his sole reason for showing up here today.

'I want to see high-rank dungeons with my own eyes.'

Even though all the monsters inside – except the boss, of course – were dead, he still wanted to confirm the interior layout of the rank A dungeon with his own two eyes.

'Well, I'll be entering one sooner or later.'

Knowledge was indeed power. However, there would always be a limit to learning from books and internet articles. Didn't the newbies of the White Tiger Guild meet with a huge misfortune simply because they had overlooked that crucial fact?

'If I wasn't there, none of them would have survived.'

Knowing something, and personally experiencing it, were two different things. When the opportunity arose, Jin-Woo readily applied to enter the mining team in order to get used to rank A dungeons.

He did feel a slight pang of regret when holding that deeply-uncool pickaxe, but when staring at that massive, fearsome Gate, such misgivings flew out of his mind.

'Looks like I've made the right choice.'

He still had some time left to kill until the reassignment test, so what a good opportunity this was.

The 'chat' must've gone well, because the moustached ahjussi – no, the foreman Bae Yun-Sek, ran to where Jin-Woo was with a smile on his face.

"Let's go inside. They say they are ready."

While gripping the pickaxe, Jin-Woo smiled and nodded his head.



Chapter 81 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Knock, knock.

“Here are the requested files, sir.”

“Come in.”

Woo Jin-Cheol entered the Association President’s office.

As if he had been waiting a while, Goh Gun-Hui welcomed him as his expression brightened considerably. As soon as opening the file Woo Jin-Cheol handed over, a familiar youth’s face could be seen.

It was none other than Seong Jin-Woo.

The Jin-Woo in the identity photo looked immature and the atmosphere exuded seemed quite different compared to now, but it wasn’t enough to make it impossible to recognise him.

“H-mm...”

Reading the youth’s prior records, Goh Gun-Hui gradually became serious.

‘Four years of Hunter activity as a rank E? Not only that, the lowest grade there is?’

This was no different than him trying to kill himself.

Even if the Gates under the Association’s jurisdiction were of lower grades compared to what large Guilds or freelancers were in charge of, they should still be breathlessly difficult for a rank E!

And as expected....

Jin-Woo had spent as much time in the hospital as he was active as a Hunter.

“Even with all these frequent injuries, he still managed to tough it out.”

“Apparently, he couldn’t quit the Association because of his mother’s hospital fees.”

“...A rare type of youth in this age, indeed.”

An unreadable light flickered in Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes.

‘In place of his missing father, he has been looking after his sick mother and a younger sister who is still a student, all by himself....’

After learning that Seong Jin-Woo was a Re-Awakened, Goh Gun-Hui decided to take a peek at the youth’s files half out of interest, but he sure didn’t expect this.

Goh Gun-Hui found the youth even more likeable after reading more about the kid.

‘It’ll be just too much of a waste to hand him over to large Guilds.’

The longer he took a look at the information, the greater Goh Gun-Hui’s regret grew for failing to recruit the youth to the Association’s folds.

“Tsk.”

He smacked his lips a little and flipped the page, and eventually, arrived at the last one. Feeling satisfied now, Goh Gun-Hui closed the file folder.

“Thank you. This was informative.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Woo Jin-Cheol took the files being handed back to him and turned around to leave, only to stop and open his mouth, apparently in some difficulty.

“Excuse me... President, sir.”

“Mm?”

Goh Gun-Hui raised his head.

The look of hesitation could clearly be seen on Woo Jin-Cheol’s face.

‘...Why would Chief Woo make that kind of face, when normally, he looks hard enough to chew on rocks for breakfast?’

Was there a difficult matter to discuss?

Goh Gun-Hui’s curiosity had been stoked for good now.

“What’s the matter?”

Woo Jin-Cheol hesitated for a while before he finally replied.

“There is something you should know, sir..... The truth is, I received word not too long ago that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo has entered a raid team earlier today.”

“Already? Okay, so whose team are we talking about here?”

“It’s the raid team from the Hunters Guild.”

“Hmm... Hunters, is it?”

Seong Jin-Woo had chosen the Hunters. Not only that, in one day, too.

Goh Gun-Hui’s expression hardened.

‘Could he have been just all talk, and he got tempted by the massive contract signing fee of the Hunters...?’

If so, what a disappointing turn of events this was. Well, he was feeling genuinely moved for the first time in a long, long while after meeting a Hunter worthy of that job title.

However, when thinking back to the attitude the youth carried from yesterday’s meeting, as well as the information Goh Gun-Hui had read just now, Seong Jin-Woo definitely did not look like someone who’d change his mind with a flip of his hand.

There must be some other reason.

Such as...

“For sure, if he wished to combat truly powerful monsters, then the Hunters Guild should suit him the best.”

Goh Gun-Hui was ready to accept this explanation. Too bad, because Woo Jin-Cheol quickly tackled him off that thought process.

“It doesn’t sound like that’s the case, sir.”

“Have you heard of something?”

“It has been confirmed that he.... Hunter Seong Jin-Woo didn’t join with the main raid team, but actually with the mining team, instead. Sir.”

Goh Gun-Hui shot up from his chair.

“What did you say? A rank S Hunter applied to become a miner???”

His voice accurately conveyed his disbelief.

In all honesty, Woo Jin-Cheol reacted the same back then. That was why he confirmed it several times to make sure, but the result didn’t change no matter what.

‘That’s why I hesitated about telling him about this matter....’

Just what was Seong Jin-Woo thinking?

Cold sweat trickled down Woo Jin-Cheol’s face as he spoke.

“Yes, sir. He has indeed done so.”

Goh Gun-Hui plopped down on the chair and began chuckling in

helplessness.

“What a hard to understand young man he is.”

After putting on the distributed hard hat and the miner’s overall, Jin-Woo followed after the foreman Bae Yun-Seok. He found a fairly large group of Hunters wearing hard hats like him near the Gate itself. Around twenty or so?

Their gazes focused on Foreman Bae. And the moustached man introduced Jin-Woo to everyone.

“This here is Mister Seong, and he’ll be working with us from today onwards.”

“Hello.”

Jin-Woo lightly bowed his head and tried to read the overall atmosphere of the mining team.

“....”

Their reactions were indifferent. But, that was understandable.

‘Of course....’

On one hand, he was a temp who may or may not show up tomorrow. And on the other side, they were Hunters who had signed formal contracts with the Guild to become full-time members of the mining team.

From their perspective, there was no reason to get particularly friendly with Jin-Woo.

“Gee whiz.... These guys. He’s a colleague who’s going to work together with you, you know.”

Foreman Bae smiled awkwardly and pointed at a guy with pretty scary facial features standing far back.

“Mister Seong, please stick with Mister Mok over there, and if you’re curious about something, learn from him. Mister Mok might be a silent type, but he’s the most experienced out of everyone here.”

“...Understood.”

Jin-Woo didn’t say anything else and stood next to this Mister Mok. When their gazes briefly met, Mister Mok spoke in a voice small enough to miss it.

“It’s Mok Jin-Su.”

“I’m Seong Jin-Woo.”

The introduction ended with that. Before long, Mok Jin-Su’s gaze had

shifted to the foreman.

‘...What a friendly guy.’

Jin-Woo also shifted his gaze.

The foreman was conversing with a regular person who must’ve been the Guild employee in a location a bit of a distance away, looking rather serious. When Jin-Woo concentrated a little harder, he could hear the contents of that conversation.

“...The raid team hasn’t come out yet? Didn’t you say they were finished already? How many minutes ago was that?”

“They said that they are almost finished for real, this time. Please be patient for a little while longer until all the monsters inside are taken care of. This is all for the safety of you and your team, you know.”

“I’ve heard the exact same thing three times already.”

“Eii~. Mister Foreman, you know as much as I do how complicated it’ll become when we don’t do a thorough job, and a hidden monster pops out during the mining operation.”

When the male employee who was young enough to be his son smiled and went on a charm offensive, Foreman Bae could no longer stay angry anymore. The moustached man turned around with a smirk on his lips.

“Okay, okay. I got it.”

“Oh? Mister Foreman, you’re not angry anymore?”

“I said I got it. So get going already.”

“Yes, sir. As soon as the raid team exits from the Gate, I’ll definitely run over to you right away without a moment’s hesitation. Oh, by the way. You still remember that we’re all having a drink after today’s operation, yes?”

“Aigoo. I know. I know! So get going, young man.”

Fortunately, the conversation came to an end without any potential problems developing. That employee’s responses were quite excellent, indeed.

‘Most folks would think that, once you start working for a large Guild, you become more arrogant than before no matter where you are, but...’

The truth was, most of the Guild’s administrative staff were regular people, while those operating out in the field were mostly Hunters – those who had Awakened.

There were many things requiring the touch of an Awakened, but there would always be a finite number of them.

In other words, it was impossible to hire and fire Awakened at will as if they were parts of a factory machine that could easily be replaced. That was why all Guild employees did their best to mind the Hunters and their moods.

From others' perspective, they might seem like they had made it in life, but the employees of large Guilds all had to go through trials and tribulations that only they knew.

It was then.

'.....Mm?'

Jin-Woo was focusing on the conversation between the foreman and the employee, but out of the blue, he could also hear the whisperings coming from his side.

"Did you hear that? The newbie joining us today is supposed to be a rank E."

'Are they talking about me again?'

Sometimes, Jin-Woo couldn't help but resent his excellent sense of hearing.

'Still, doesn't mean I'm gonna cover up my ears or anything....'

While he bitterly smiled to himself, other Hunters were cautiously whispering to each other.

"What? A rank E?"

"A rank E has been selected?"

"That's right."

Jin-Woo could sense the sharp glares boring down on the back of his head.

"What the heck. What is the foreman thinking of, hiring a rank E and all?"

"Does a rank E even have enough strength, I wonder?"

"Yeah, I wonder about that, too."

"Huh, can we even finish today's operation on time?"

Worried voices could be heard coming from here and there.

Still, they kept their voices low, perhaps in consideration of the new guy. Too bad, such actions were meaningless in front of Jin-Woo, though.

Jin-Woo could only keep his chuckles down.

‘There was another reason for their reactions not being so welcoming, huh.’

As expected – a rank E would receive cold shoulders no matter where they went. He was already well used to this, so it didn’t faze him anymore.

‘Well, it’s not like I’ll be seeing them for long, anyway.’

But then, something else happened.

Noisy, noisy....

Suddenly, the front of the Gate became rather noisy.

“The raid team has come out.”

“Looks like they are finally finished.”

The tired expressions of the Hunters in the mining team, restless from all that waiting, brightened one by one. Foreman Bae had been observing the situation until then, and he gestured at his team.

“Okay, okay. Everyone, let’s get going.”

Hunters in the mining team checked their equipment and slowly shuffled towards their destination. Jin-Woo blended in and went along with them.

“Thank you for your hard work.”

“Thank you.”

“You all worked hard, everyone!”

The Hunters Guild employees stood in front of the Gate and welcomed the raid team members as they made their exit one by one.

The term raid team as used in the field seemed to refer to the members belonging to the Guild’s main assault force.

‘So, these people are.... the country’s best assault force.’

Studying the faces of each and every upper rank – no, the very highest ranked – Hunters walking by, Jin-Woo’s eyes sharpened considerably.

He spotted a familiar face among them.

‘....Choi Jong-In.’

The leader of the Hunters Guild, and a rank S mage-type Hunter.

Jin-Woo pulled the hard hat lower to hide his face, figuring that things might get complicated if Choi Jong-In recognised him here. Thankfully, there were many Hunters wearing a similar get-up as him nearby. So, Jin-Woo was able to blend in just fine.

And so, as he stood amidst the miners and silently studied the members of the country's very best assault force, Jin-Woo began thinking that...

'....Are they really the true elites of the Hunters Guild?'

He was feeling quite incredulous inwardly.

Quite contrary to his initial expectations, it was hard to find a single Hunter with a really powerful aura.

As befitting of the nickname 'Ultimate Weapon', Jin-Woo could sense an enormous amount of magical energy from Choi Jong-In, but besides that guy, not one was worthy of mention.

'Could they be the weak ones, instead?'

But, that simply made no sense.

Jin-Woo softly shook his head.

These were the members of the no.1 raid team selected from the cream of the crop found in the country's top Guild.

'I mean, the Guild Master himself has participated in the raid, so there's just no way that some nobodies would be chosen as team members.'

The word most ill-suited to describe these people would be 'Weak'. Then, there could be only one conclusion.

'No, it's me who has gotten stronger.'

A thin smile crept up on Jin-Woo's lips. Strength was relative, wasn't it?

The efforts of the last couple of months definitely did not betray his expectations. His Stats had increased by so much that he could think of the raid team that managed to conquer a rank A dungeon as weaklings.

By using the difference between himself and them, he could sense his own strength.

Thump, thump, thump....

His heart began beating faster from this realisation.

But, then....

No one told him to do so, and there was no sound attracting him, yet Jin-Woo's head instinctively swivelled back towards the Gate. And then, he gasped out in surprise.

'How can this be....?'

There was a woman with a short hairstyle relaxedly walking out from the

Gate.

The very first things that caught his attention on her makeup-less face were a pair of large and clear eyes. up, her clean and pale skin, as well as her smoothly flowing neckline, also managed to attract his gaze.

If there were 100 men, 99 of them would unhesitatingly praise her looks and call it beautiful. However, besides all that, what attracted Jin-Woo's attention the most was not her looks but what was inside her.

The power that was hidden inside her.

From that expressionless woman, an incredible amount of magic energy was leaking out non-stop.

'At a bare minimum, she's on the same level as Choi Jong-In.'

Or maybe, even more than that.

She possessed an aura that easily overwhelmed her surroundings.

By the time his shock wore off and cold reasoning succeeded in driving his emotions out of his head, Jin-Woo recalled this woman's name.

'She must be....'

The only female rank S, Cha Hae-In.

The top-ranked Hunter who formed, along with Choi Jong-In, one of the core pillars of the Hunters Guild.

'I can't think of anyone else.'

Just how many women possessing such an aura existed in South Korea?

Compared to her 'rarity' though, Cha Hae-In's face wasn't all that well known. It was because she didn't enjoy being exposed to the cameras. And that was also why Jin-Woo saw Cha Hae-In's face for the first time today as well.

'Wait, her face doesn't even look weird like in some rumours, so how come she hates being in front of a camera?'

Indeed, pretty much all ladies in their early twenties loved taking photos. Sure, all those happened to be selfies, but still.

Perhaps his stare was too direct, Cha Hae-in's own gaze began shifting in Jin-Woo's direction.

'Stealth... shouldn't be necessary here, right?'

Jin-Woo easily hid his presence. Cha Hae-In continued to scan the area Jin-

Woo used to stand before tilting her head slightly.

‘What was that? I thought I felt a really strong presence just now.’

Was she mistaken?

Initially, she thought that the Association President Goh Gun-Hui had stopped by at the operations area. However, that powerful presence disappeared completely as if it was a lie.

‘Well, someone as busy as the Association President wouldn’t come unannounced, now would he?’

Too bad for her, the cost of her misunderstanding was rather great.

Because she was searching after the hint of that strong presence, she had to focus her senses, and that meant the heavy odour several times worse than normal assaulted her nose.

“Euk.”

As usual, Cha Hae-In pulled out a handkerchief to cover her nose, and while tottering around somewhat uneasily, escaped from the cordon of Hunters.

‘Her perception is better than I thought.’

Jin-Woo let out a sigh of relief while watching Cha Hae-In’s distancing back. With her exit, all the raid team members had come out of the Gate.

Having been waiting with bated breath for this moment, the foreman of the mining team Bae Yun-Seok turned around to face his boys. He clapped his hands loudly and spoke up with a bright voice.

“Well, it’s our turn now, so let’s all do our best!”

The unique nature of the job meant that the retrieval team would have to enter first, followed by the mining team.

Jin-Woo stood in front of the Gate.

‘.....’

As he stood there while silently admiring the splendour of the rank A Gate, something he hadn’t experienced before, Bae Yun-Seok approached him.

“Mister Seong, what are you doing? We should go inside.”

“Alright.”

Jin-Woo replied briefly and stepped through the Gate, just like other Hunters did before him.

And then, a familiar message popped up before his eyes.

[You have entered a dungeon.]



Chapter 82 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘There’s a breeze inside this dungeon?’

Jin-Woo raised his head.

As soon as stepping inside, he sensed an ominous wind blowing in from the deepest part of the cave-like dungeon.

Suddenly, he felt a chill run down his back. And at the same time, Jin-Woo realised the identity of this mysterious wind.

‘It’s no normal wind, is it?’

No, this was a ripple caused by the magic energy. The powerful magic energy emitted by the boss of this rank A dungeon was physically touching Jin-Woo’s body.

Considering that the rank S dungeons were incredibly hard to find, even in the entire world, the owner of this magic energy could very well be the highest levelled monster Jin-Woo could realistically meet.

‘The boss of a rank A dungeon....’

He was tempted to confirm the creature with his own two eyes now. And, if there was a chance....

Even though Jin-Woo was shuddering from the bone-chilling aura that managed to make his hair stand on end, he couldn’t stop smiling at the same time.

Was this the instinct of a hunter?

Wasn’t the act of pointing a gun at a powerful predator the most instinctive act there could be for a real hunter?

It was then.

Tap.

A guy coming inside the dungeon bumped into Jin-Woo’s shoulder.

“Eiii, come on, man. Walk faster.”

A man named Lee Seong-Gu frowned deeply, the words flying out of his mouth sounding sullen.

The interior of the rank A dungeon was huge. There was plenty of space to go around the person in front. However, Lee Seong-Gu found this newbie who stood there unmoving not to his liking at all.

So, he figured he'd embarrass the kid or something by bumping into his back, but.....

'What the fck is up with this guy? He's like a dmn concrete pillar!'

When he ran into the newbie's back, it was him who got bounced away instead. So, quite obviously, his irritation had shot up to the heavens.

'Why is a rank E this tough?'

Still, this kid was a measly E. And he was a rank C.

Although his skills lagged behind compared to other rank C Hunters, and therefore he had to work as a miner, but regardless of all that, it wouldn't do for him to lose out to a rank E like this.

However, the newbie didn't even show a single hint of a response.

Lee Seong-Gu's eyes narrowed to a slit.

'Oh? Would you look at this fool?'

Now that his ire had reached a boiling point, Lee Seong-Gu angrily glared at the newbie and raised his voice higher.

"Look here, man. Aren't you supposed to apologise if you run into someone?"

Jin-Woo finally turned around, then.

Lee Seong-Gu flinched and took a step back.

'Heok!!'

It was if a dangerous light was emanating from Jin-Woo's eyes just then. While being pressurised by an aura that robbed away his breaths, Lee Seong-Gu began panicking greatly. It was here that Jin-Woo finally opened his mouth.

"Sorry."

"N-no. I....."

Lee Seong-Gu stuttered before managing to squeeze his voice out.

"Well, uh, mistakes... happen."

His voice sounding unexpectedly meek now, Lee Seong-Gu lowered his reddened face and hurriedly walked past Jin-Woo.

“Fuu-woo....”

Only after distancing himself far away from the newbie did Lee Seong-Gu find some leeway to pat his pounding chest.

‘What the hell was up with those eyes, man? And why was he smiling so creepily like that?!’

Their gazes met for only a brief second, yet Lee Seong-Gu’s entire body froze up and he couldn’t even speak properly. Him managing to not avert his eyes right away was his desperate attempt to hold on to his pride.

‘.....Is he really a rank E?’

When he bumped into him, and that murderous glare – just what the heck was going on here?

‘Eiii, who cares anymore?’

Lee Seong-Gu shook his head hard in order to get rid of the distracting thoughts and hurried his steps.

“...D*mn it.”

Jin-Woo scratched the side of his head as he looked on at Lee Seong-Gu quickly rushing past him.

‘Because my nerves were in a heightened state due to the boss, I....’

He ended up frightening that guy, instead.

This was only because he lacked enough practice. Yup, more practice was needed. Jin-Woo inwardly reflected on how overly sensitive his response was and chased after the rest of the mining team.

He caught up with them pretty quickly. Jin-Woo stuck to the rear of the advancing miners and matched their walking pace.

‘Well, none of these guys would be able to catch up with me if I walk in my usual speed....’

So, he had to match theirs.

However....

The deeper they went in, the greater the ripples of the magic energy from the boss became.

‘My Perception Stat has risen up by a lot, hasn’t it.’

To be able to clearly sense the boss monster hidden in the deepest chamber of the dungeon like this....

Because of that, he was getting excited for no particular reason.

‘Would I even be able to concentrate on my job at this rate?’

As if to try answering his rhetorical question, he could hear the loud, manly roars coming from his front.

“Orya! Orya!!”

The retrieval team that had entered one step earlier than the mining team was already in the middle of their operation. And that would be to drag a corpse of a huge monster outside using the ropes tightly tied around it.

“One, two! One, two!”

“Eut-chaaa!”

The physical strength of the close-quarter combat-type Hunters was excellent, to begin with, so they didn’t require help from specialised tools to smoothly carry out their work.

Jin-Woo imprinted every step of a high-rank dungeon’s conquest into his brain.

‘First of all, the raid team enters before everyone else and eliminates all the monsters found inside, with the exception of the boss.’

Afterwards, the retrieval team entered to drag out the monster remains, and finally, the mining team entered to extract various minerals embedded in the dungeon’s walls.

In order to maximise profit, none of these steps could be omitted.

Both the Mana stones and magic crystals were a given, but the high-ranked monster’s body could be utilised in various ways as well, and thus was worth a lot of money.

‘Bones, hides, flesh, etc.... Not one part of a high-ranked monster is useless.’

And that was one of the differences between monsters found in low-ranked dungeons and those from the high-ranked ones.

After sweeping away every single thing worth money from a dungeon....

‘They kill the boss and close the Gate.’

Only after going through all four stages of this process could one declare that the high-ranked dungeon was perfectly conquered. At least, that would be from the Guild’s perspective.

However....

‘Wouldn’t my soldiers be enough to carry out these simple labours?’

While walking past the sweating Hunters of the retrieval team, Jin-Woo suddenly came up with that idea.

For sure, after all their level-ups, the shadow soldiers were much stronger than the members of the retrieval team, who were all Hunters ranked below rank C, to begin with.

Dividing his troops into three, and by making one group hunt, another one retrieve, while the remaining group took care of mining, then.....

‘Then, I might really be able to perfectly conquer a high-rank dungeon all by myself.’

A satisfied smile formed on Jin-Woo’s face.

The reason for him being here was to explore. And now, he was beginning to think that it was a good idea to come here, after all.

“Mister Seong? Did something good happen?”

The foreman asked him from the side.

Seeing that the rank E with no experience of being inside a high-ranked dungeon broke out in a grin like that, he couldn’t help but get curious.

“Well, I was just surprised by the sizes of the monsters that are bigger than I thought, that’s all.”

Perhaps finding Jin-Woo’s vague answer satisfying, the foreman replied jovially while trying to dig through his memory.

“Oh, is that so? Well, even I couldn’t keep my mouth shut the first time I entered one, too.”

Now that they were talking like this, Jin-Woo decided to ask a couple more questions.

“I heard that all the regular monsters have been killed off, but the boss is still alive, isn’t it?”

“That’s right. Well, if the boss dies, the Gate will close down, after all.”

His answer implied that, until the retrieval and mining operations were completed, the boss could not be hunted down.

“What if the boss comes out of the boss room?”

“Well, such a case is almost non-existent, but.... In that case, everyone remaining inside would be dead meat.”

Now that would be an obvious result.

The raid team exiting from the dungeon would take an extended break until the boss raid. And quite obviously, the Hunters in the mining team or the extraction team didn't possess enough power to fight against a boss of a rank A dungeon.

However, the commonly-accepted belief was that, before the dungeon break occurs, the boss would almost always remain inside the boss room. Perhaps that was why there was no trace of fear on the foreman's expression.

“But, such a horrifying monster is not too far from us. You aren't even remotely scared?”

“Not at all.”

The Foreman Bae sounded confident.

“In the last three years I worked for the Hunters Guild, not once was there an incident similar to that. So, you can rest easy, Mister Seong.”

Jin-Woo stared at the grinning foreman Bae lightly tapping him on the shoulder, and couldn't help but find it rather envious.

‘Ignorance is a blessing, isn't it?’

The ripples of magic energy coming from the boss were powerful enough to shake his body even when standing still.

It looked like only Jin-Woo could pick up on the boss's aura in this place.

“Ohh, so it starts from here!”

The Foreman Bae discovered Mana stones on the cave walls and smiled brightly.

The experienced miners began occupying their natural spots in front of the stones even though no one directed them to do so. They put down their gear and hefted the pickaxes up.

Jin-Woo too stood towards the end of the cavern wall filled with Mana stones.

‘So, am I suppose to just strike down?’

He grew worried that, were he to use his real strength and strike down, both the Mana stones and the pickaxe might shatter into tiny little pieces.

‘What should I do?’

Jin-Woo stood there hesitating, unable to start his job. But, he was able to take in the sight of Mok Jin-Su, the supposed veteran of the mining team as

referred to by the Foreman Bae.

Swish! Crack! Swish-! Crack!!

Mok Jin-Su rhythmically mined the stones. Whenever he struck the walls, Mana stones noisily tumbled down to the ground.

‘Wow....’

Now that was some skill worthy of the ‘veteran’ label. He was mining the stones twice as quickly as compared to the speed of his colleagues.

Jin-Woo’s eyes gleamed brightly.

As the time slowed down in his perception, Jin-Woo observed and learned Mok Jin-Su’s postures and breathing patterns, as well as the movements of muscles.

And soon, Mok Jin-Su’s economical but effective movements were being replayed countless times in Jin-Woo’s head.

‘I think I get it now.’

Indeed, he thought he understood it, more or less. Jin-Woo lifted his pickaxe up. It was as if he was the mirror image of Mok Jin-Su.

Swish! Crack! Swish-! Crack!!

Even if their movements were similar, Jin-Woo’s strength was on a completely another level from Mok Jin-Su’s. Whenever Jin-Woo struck the cave walls, larger, more intact Mana stones tumbled down in droves.

Swish!!! Craaack! Swish-! Crack!!

A rather refreshing noise came from the end of the wall. The Hunters of the mining team realised one by one that something didn’t feel right.

“Uhm... Oii.”

“What’s up?”

“Look over there.”

“Heok?!”

“What the hell is up with him?”

The Hunters stopped what they were doing and dazedly stared at Jin-Woo. Even Mok Jin-Su’s tireless hands came to a stop, too.

‘.....’

Everyone was rendered speechless.

The supposedly mining-virgin rank E Hunter was currently making easy mincemeat out of the Mana stone wall with practised movements!

“What are you doing, guys?! You came here to do a job, so why are you all standing around like that?”

The Foreman Bae had been jotting down the scale of the Mana stone deposit on a ledger until then. But when he discovered that every member of the mining team had downed tools for some reason, he got shocked out of his mind and quickly ran to where they were.

“Foreman? Will you take a look over there?”

“What now?”

The Foreman Bae craned his neck to look. And then, his eyes grew super large.

“Heot?!”

Even the foreman displayed the same reaction as everyone else. He couldn't rip his eyes away from Jin-Woo and his speed, which was around three times faster than other miners.

“Foreman, didn't you say that it's the newbie's first time today?”

“...That I did.”

Lee Seong-Gu, who had been wondering about Jin-Woo's identity earlier, butted in suddenly.

“Is he really a rank E?”

“I confirmed it with his licence, obviously! You think I'll let a complete stranger into my team without confirming his Hunter licence first?”

“Well, then. How do you explain that?”

“...”

Wordlessly observing Jin-Woo, the Foreman Bae nervously swallowed his saliva as excitement dyed his expression.

“Without a doubt.... Mister Seong is the heaven-sent miner.”

Indeed, there was a reason why those rugged, tough-looking chest muscles caught the foreman's attention back when they were having a short job interview.

‘Yup, I really am good at finding the right people.’

A thick smile spread on the Foreman Bae's face.

Beep, beep, beep!

An alarm went off from Foreman Bae's wristwatch. He raised his wrist to confirm the time.

'Aigoo~. It's already.....'

It was lunch hour already.

"Everyone, let's take a break and have lunch."

"Yes!!"

Everyone dropped their tools and dusted their hands.

While the miners were walking towards the exit in pairs and groups, Jin-Woo showed no hint of moving from the spot. Foreman Bae got closer and asked him.

"Mister Seong? Aren't you going, too?"

"I'm not feeling all that hungry at the moment."

"Even then, you should eat something if you plan to continue working in the afternoon."

"Nah, I'm fine. I did eat my breakfast a bit later than usual, anyway."

"Really?Well, nothing I can do about that, then."

Bae was planning to talk about the future together with this young man during the lunch break, but that didn't mean he should forcibly drag the kid away, no?

Foreman Bae ruefully turned around towards the Gate's exit.

It was at this point that the corners of Jin-Woo's lips arched up. Watching the distancing backs of the miners, he formed a deep smile.

'I can't miss such a wonderful opportunity, right?'

Finally, he was left all alone. Both the mining team and the retrieval team had left the dungeon. For about one hour, he was free to do whatever he wanted.

Meaning, this was the best chance for him to seek out the boss hiding in the deepest part of the dungeon.

Jin-Woo put the pickaxe down, and slowly shifted his gaze to the direction of the boss room. He could still sense the thick aura of the monster.

'I'll just go and take a quick look.'

He wasn't thinking of doing anything at all. No, he just wanted to see what

the boss looked like.

Thump, thump, thump...

Just from imagining him seeing the boss, his heart was pounding faster.

Jin-Woo forcibly controlled his wildly-beating heart and walked forward. He moved deeper into the cave, following after the aura of the boss.

And so, just how long did he have to walk?

A long stroll later, he finally arrived at the entrance of a huge chamber. It was the boss room. The cavern itself was already pretty huge, but the boss room was even bigger.

Was every high ranking dungeon as huge as this one? Just as he began wondering like that....

He discovered the boss and automatically accepted that this dungeon simply had to be this big.

‘If a monster like that gets outside...’

His eyes spotted the lone humanoid monster standing still at the far end of the boss room. Jin-Woo’s eyes began gleaming brightly like a young kid who got his hands on a toy he wanted so much as a gift.

‘A giant-type monster.’

He heard a few things about this type of monster before, but this would be his first time looking at one. Because a giant-type monster’s corpse was so huge, it was practically impossible to retrieve it in time, so most people would hardly ever get to see one outside of dungeon breaks.

Such a creature was right over there, and that was causing his heart to palpitate faster and faster.

‘That thing’s really strong.’

The hair on his body was standing up. But, for some reason, he didn’t think for once that hunting that thing down was impossible for him.

‘The current me can.....’

He’d be more than enough. The moment he thought like this, he reflexively swallowed his saliva.

Gulp.

Just how much experience points would he earn by hunting that guy down? By working his a*s off inside the Demon’s Castle, he levelled up 15 times in a week. But, if he could kill one boss and raise his level by 2, 3 times....

‘No, I shouldn’t be doing this.’

Even though he was telling himself he shouldn’t, both the ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ and the ‘Knight Killer’ were summoned into his hands already. More importantly, his expression wasn’t of someone stuck in a dilemma, wondering whether he should do something or not.

Should I just go ahead and do this thing?

A soft but excited grin formed on his lips.

However....

While Jin-Woo stood there deliberating with a smile on his face, a certain woman’s incredibly sharp voice flew at him from his behind.

“What do you think you’re doing?”



Chapter 83 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Right then, Jin-Woo felt his heart crash down to the pit of his stomach.

‘When did she....?’

He was paying too much attention to the boss and failed to notice that someone had come closer.

‘I’m busted....’

Jin-Woo could only smack his lips in regret.

Tsk.

However, with an eyewitness around, it was no longer possible to stare avariciously at the boss.

The Hunters Guild had purchased the raid permit for his particular dungeon, so naturally, the boss of this place was also a part of their investment.

And, if the boss was killed off, the Gate would close down. The potential losses the Hunters Guild might incur would be a lot, then.

‘I nearly messed up.’

He got blinded by the desire to level up and nearly put his hands on someone else’s property. Jin-Woo regained his bearings and spat out a sigh of relief; meanwhile, the owner of the voice had walked closer.

“I asked you what you were doing.”

Jin-Woo formed an embarrassed smile and turned around to face her.

“I got lost and ended up here.”

“You got lost?!”

She sounded flabbergasted. Only then did Jin-Woo confirm who the owner of the voice was.

‘Huh? Isn’t she....?’

He saw that face just before entering the dungeon, didn’t he?

It was none other than the rank S Hunter Cha Hae-In. As Cha Hae-In

slowly closed the distance, she carefully scanned both of Jin-Woo's hands.

'I definitely saw him holding weapons just now, though?'

Was she mistaken?

Whatever the case might have been, they had disappeared without a trace.

Cha Hae-In's gaze scanned the entirety of Jin-Woo, up and down.

'A hard hat and a worker's overall..... Is he from our mining team?'

She honestly believed him about getting lost here. She didn't know how he got this far, but well, the boss room was a very dangerous place to hang around.

Discovering the 'reason' was secondary. For now, Cha Hae-In figured that the priority should be on helping this man to leave this place.

"That chamber is where the boss is."

Cha Hae-In covered her nose with her handkerchief as usual and stood before Jin-Woo.

"Please exit from the dungeon as soon as possible. If you manage to attract its aggro, people inside this dungeon could all die."

"Ah. I'm sorry."

It seemed that his acting worked. Jin-Woo formed a satisfied expression and walked past Cha Hae-In. It was then.

'...Uh?'

Cha Hae-In's head snapped towards Jin-Woo.

Something impossible just happened.

Cha Hae-In's eyes opened wide and even before she realised it, she was calling out to him.

"Excuse me. Wait!"

"Yes?"

"Can you take a look at me for a sec?"

What's gotten into her?

And they said that thieves knew what they did wrong; Jin-Woo was not looking forward to Cha Hae-In coming in close to him. Too bad, she was already standing right in front of his nose.

"What.... what's the matter?"

He asked with a troubled look on his face, but she didn't answer and simply proceeded to lightly breathe in the air near him. She had already put away the handkerchief covering her nose.

'What's going on here?'

Jin-Woo failed to understand why she was doing this.

'Wait, why is she suddenly smelling me?'

Jin-Woo began panicking inwardly. However, the state of confusion Cha Hae-In was going through at the moment was several times greater than his.

'There is no.... stink coming from him.'

This would be her first time meeting another Hunter that didn't stink.

Cha Hae-In's surprised eyes stared at Jin-Woo. And a question mark floated above Jin-Woo's head as his reply.

'Is there some kind of a problem?'

'You... Are you a Hunter for real?'

Was there a need for words here? Jin-Woo pushed forward the Hunter licence hanging on his neck. Cha Hae-In took the licence and her gaze quickly alternated between Jin-Woo's face and the ID photo.

'Rank E.... Seong Jin-Woo....'

Was this because his rank was too low?

She could not pick up any type of smell coming from this man named Jin-Woo. No, wait. Actually, a pleasant odour was gently wafting out of him, instead.

Jin-Woo sneakily extracted his licence out of Cha Hae-In's hand.

'Can I go now?'

'Uhm, well, I....'

Cha Hae-In did call out to Jin-Woo, but then, realised that she had nothing else to say nor had a reason to keep him here.

'.....It's nothing. Please be careful on your way out. This dungeon is rather large, you see.'

'Ah, of course.'

Jin-Woo lightly nodded his head and turned towards the location of the mining operation. His back soon disappeared around the corner of the cavern.

However, Cha Hae-In's lingering gaze didn't shift away from the path Jin-

Woo had walked down on.

'He smelled really nice.'

Hunters of the mining team were returning to the mining operations area one by one after finishing their lunch.

Foreman Bae was walking with a toothpick stuck in between his teeth. Once he saw Jin-Woo appearing from the deeper parts of the dungeon, though, he flinched greatly in shock.

"Uh? Huh?? Mister Seong, why are you coming from there??"

"Oh, that...."

Jin-Woo sneakily shifted his gaze over in the direction of the boss.

'...I can't tell him about me stopping by the boss to see what it looks like out of curiosity, right?'

Jin-Woo's gaze returned to Foreman Bae.

"I got lost while searching for the bathroom, actually."

"Aigoo! You need to be more careful, young man. Interiors of these dungeons all look the same, so if you get lost inside, it won't be easy finding your way around! But still, how did you find your way back to here?"

"Oh, I ran into Cha Hae-In Hunter-nim on my way back, so...."

"Ahh, Cha Hunter-nim, was it? She's probably gone to stand guard by the boss room just in case the boss decides to take a stroll. That lady also worries a lot, maybe as much as you, Mister Seong."

Foreman Bae guffawed vigorously. It seemed that Jin-Woo being worried about the boss not too long ago had left a deep impression in his mind.

Jin-Woo could only smile wryly.

'The foreman can laugh like this only because he has no idea how terrifying the boss actually is.'

This was the difference between the Hunters doing these sorts of jobs, and the Hunters working in the assault team.

Cha Hae-In understood very well how dangerous and scary an existence the monsters could be, so she was just being meticulous in those areas that no one else was paying much attention to.

'I didn't know there was such a side to her, what with that expressionless face of hers and all.'

If the boss decided to come out of the boss room, the assault team wouldn't be the ones in danger. No, it would be the workers doing their job, as the raid team would be taking a break outside the dungeon.

And she was sacrificing the allure of sweet rest to stand guard in front of the boss room, just for the sake of total strangers.

'.....She's an amazing woman.'

That was Jin-Woo's honest impression of Cha Hae-In. It was at this point that he suddenly recalled her odd habit.

'Why was she covering her nose with a handkerchief?'

Thinking back, she never let go of the handkerchief not even once, except for their meeting a few moments ago.

"Foreman?"

"Yeah?"

Foreman Bae remained very friendly whenever Jin-Woo asked him a question, even though it'd be quite reasonable for him to get a bit annoyed by now.

'Right, the responses were pretty good back when I was doing my job, wasn't it?'

Indeed, one should strive to do their best in their jobs.

Thanks to his efforts, Jin-Woo could ask about this and that without holding back now. Heck, it was Foreman Bae who urged Jin-Woo to speak, instead.

"Mister Seong? You called for me, so how come you ain't saying a thing?"

"Oh, well, it's nothing important, but... By any chance, do you know why Cha Hae-In Hunter-nim walks around with a handkerchief?"

"Oh, that? Well, it's cuz Hunter Cha is a bit peculiar, you see."

"A bit peculiar?"

What did he mean by that?

Jin-Woo didn't have to ask, because Foreman Bae helpfully explained himself first.

"Hunter Cha can supposedly smell a kind of body odour coming from other Hunters. And I hear she finds them pretty horrible."

“She can smell other Hunters?!”

“I heard something or other about her special constitutions and stuff.”

Her special constitutions, he said.

Jin-Woo also possessed something similar to that – his excellent sense of hearing.

Even from his early years, his hearing could be considered better than average, but once he Awakened, it developed even further.

‘Probably, Cha Hae-In’s sense of smell also got enhanced like mine.’

So, he could more or less understand where she was coming from.

“Well, wouldn’t you agree that she is peculiar?”

Perhaps he enjoyed the sight of Jin-Woo focusing on his words more than he should, because Foreman Bae continued on with his explanations without any prompt from the youth.

“I heard that she finds it really hard to breathe near other Hunters because of the stink.”

“...”

Was that why?

‘...Asking me if I was a Hunter.’

Was it because, unlike other Hunters, he didn’t smell at all?

Back in the Red Gate, the leader of the White Phantoms said something similar.

Wasn’t this a bit similar in context with what that creature told him? He didn’t have the Hunter-specific stink, and they couldn’t hear the voice telling them to kill him.

‘Because, I’m a Player.....’

A unique existence who had received the advantages of the System.

Just what was this ‘Player’?

The question of his own identity rose up in Jin-Woo’s head, but he shook his head eventually.

‘This isn’t a problem I can figure out now, anyway.’

Jin-Woo emptied his mind. Problems that couldn’t be solved by thinking too hard would only tire him out if he continued to dwell on it.

Crack! Kwack!

It was then, he heard his colleagues getting back to work. So, Jin-Woo also lifted the pickaxe.

‘The rank A boss... I wish I could hunt it down.’

What would he have done if Cha Hae-In didn’t show up in time?

He couldn’t help but wonder.

Thanks to Jin-Woo’s brilliant efforts, the mining team was able to finish their operation well before the dinner time. According to the foreman, they had finished two hours faster than planned.

With that, the looks the fellow miners were giving him had gone through substantial changes.

“Nice work, Mister Seong!”

“You were really good, you know?”

“After seeing all those Mana stones tumbling down, I thought we somehow got ourselves on an excavator or something.”

Hunters surrounding Jin-Woo began praising him one by one. The cold, indifferent eyes before entering the Gate were nowhere to be seen now.

Jin-Woo was also feeling rather pleased with himself. This experience of being a dungeon miner proved to be surprisingly educational, and he also got to achieve the purpose of coming to this rank A dungeon as well.

“Well, let’s get out of here, everyone!”

“Roger that!”

“Let’s go!”

At Foreman Bae’s order, the miners all began moving at the same time.

“One, two!”

“Yu-cha!”

They left behind the retrieval team still suffering through their operation and, after changing out of their overalls, the miners re-gathered in one spot.

Unlike the other miners, who were all full-time employees of the Guild, Jin-Woo’s daily wage was handed to him immediately.

“Here. This is your share, Mister Seong.”

“Ah, thank you.”

While handing over the envelope containing the day's wage, Foreman Bae sneakily threw in a question as well.

“We’re planning to go and enjoy a drink together, so how about it? Would you like to join us?”

He sounded light and cheery, but his eyes were gleaming in a serious light.

‘Looks like he has something important to say to me, but...’

Jin-Woo could sense the man's desperation, even. Unfortunately, Jin-Woo declined the invite as tactfully as possible.

“I’m sorry.”

“Mm.... Is that so.”

Foreman Bae scratched his chin.

‘Well, this is a story best told after knocking back a few cold ones, but...’

He hurriedly changed his tactic.

“I’ve met quite a few people while doing this job for many years now.”

“Okay.”

“But, it’s my first time meeting someone like you. You have a natural-born talent to become a miner.”

It seemed that Foreman Bae really liked Jin-Woo here.

‘Haha.... Well, this is....’

All Jin-Woo could do here was to chuckle awkwardly, unable to neither agree or refute that notion. Deciding that the young man's smile was a good omen, Foreman Bae confidently moved on to the main topic at hand.

“I’d normally not say something like this, but.... Don’t you want to come and work for me full-time? I will definitely not treat you poorly, you see.”

This young man named Seong Jin-Woo.

Even though today was his first day as a miner, he managed to outperform the veterans by three, four times the amount.

If he couldn't hold on to such outstanding talent, wouldn't he be a failure of a foreman?

He was even thinking of discussing the matter with the person in charge and have Jin-Woo's wages paid separately from others. That was how badly he wanted to reel in this young man.

Too bad, Jin-Woo remained resolute.

“Thank you for your kind words, but.... Actually, I’m getting ready for something else at the moment.”

Just a few words from Jin-Woo, and Foreman Bae’s face was forming a dejected expression of a man who had lost his country.

“...R-really?”

Jin-Woo chuckled to himself.

‘What an interesting guy.’

To display his raw emotions so openly like this. More than likely, Foreman Bae must’ve thought that he had discovered an unpolished rough within the E rank.

Foreman Bae pondered something for a bit, before cautiously asking the youth.

“What about tomorrow, then? Can you come to work tomorrow as well?”

“Tomorrow? Hmm....”

Actually, he didn’t have anything else planned for tomorrow. The re-evaluation was scheduled for the day after, too.

Still, was there a reason for him to take another mining job now? He already got to learn the process of the dungeon conquest, and he even got to witness the rank A boss, too.

However....

‘Wait a minute.’

Just as he was opening his mouth to voice his refusal, a new question quickly entered Jin-Woo’s mind.

“Does that mean Hunters Guild will go on another raid tomorrow?”

“That’s right. And that one’s also a rank A.”

“But, is that even possible? They finished the raid today.”

Normally, a raid team would take about a week off after finishing up a raid.

‘And this raid only started from yesterday afternoon.’

Which meant the elites of the Hunters Guild were raiding this dungeon for two days in a row – yesterday and today.

And by the time they kill the boss after the retrieval operations finally end, it’d be the early dawn. Naturally, Jin-Woo couldn’t understand how there would be another raid tomorrow.

When Jin-Woo displayed a hint of interest, Foreman Bae also got more enthusiastic.

“You see, assault team B will be stepping forward tomorrow, not team A.”

Assault team B?

Could it be that they were thinking of clearing a rank A dungeon with a backup team?

“And this is precisely the power of the Hunters Guild, you see. I mean, we are probably the only Guild in entire South Korea who can conquer rank A dungeons with two different teams.”

Foreman Bae sounded quite proud, then.

“Does Hunters raid dungeons like this all the time?”

“No, no. Now normally, we wouldn’t have to split up the teams like that. But it looks like the schedule got overlapped this time.”

Because two rank A Gates appeared around the same time in the district the Hunters Guild operated in, Chairman Choi Jong-In had to sweat a lot in order to get the permits for both of them, apparently.

‘Ah. So, the reason for running into Chairman Choi in the Association yesterday was this....’

Someone as busy as Choi Jong-In wouldn’t just randomly show up in the Association for no reason whatsoever.

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

“Okay, so does that mean it’ll be your first time trying to raid the dungeon with the B team?”

“That’s right. However, the B team of the Hunters isn’t your regular backup team, okay? They are even better than the A team of some of the other large Guilds, I’ll have you know.”

“Still, it should be far more dangerous than today, yes?”

Foreman Bae became speechless, then.

Because, that would be quite obvious.

In today’s raid, two rank S Hunters participated. On the other hand, only the rank As and below would try to raid the dungeon tomorrow.

Sure, he heard that the size of tomorrow’s Gate was smaller than the one today, but still, losing two rank S Hunters was a big blow, indeed.

After all, Mister Seong was worried about the boss monster, even when the assault team featuring two rank S Hunters were nearby.

‘Doesn’t mean I can lie to the kid, now is it?’

Foreman Bae was thinking of changing the youth’s mind tomorrow while working beside him, but realising that he had failed, he expressed some regret.

“Yes, it’ll get more dangerous, for sure. If something goes wrong, then the raid itself might fail, too.”

It was here that the light in Jin-Woo’s eyes changed.



Chapter 84 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo didn't ponder for long before speaking up.

"I see."

"If that's what you think, then there's not much I can do."

"Where should I show up tomorrow?"

"...Eh?"

After hearing this unexpected reply, Foreman Bae's eyes went extra round in shock.

'Wait, I haven't made a mistake just now with what I said, right?'

Didn't he definitely say that tomorrow was going to be more dangerous than today?

Mister Seong's expression wasn't so good after hearing Bae's story, so the older man was just about ready to forget about the matter completely. However, what was the meaning of this?

Thanks to this youth, it looked like Bae wouldn't have to worry about finding another miner for tomorrow.

'Is that all??'

Mister Seong could easily do the work of four or five people all by himself. And that was on his first day, too.

The boy's work speed that even managed to impress the 'ace' of the mining team, Mok Jin-Su, was indeed pretty shocking the first time Bae witnessed it.

From Jin-Woo's declaration that he'd come tomorrow, Foreman Bae felt like he had gained a powerful, trustworthy ally and he was filled up with lots of confidence.

"Mister Seong, you made the right choice!"

Foreman Bae's moustache quivered as he formed a blindingly brilliant smile. And then, to make sure that Jin-Woo's mind wouldn't change overnight, he even came up with an unprecedented offer, too.

"I'll have a good chat with the person in charge, and make sure that you

get double the normal daily wages tomorrow.”

“Will that be okay?”

“Of course. You think I won’t be able to do that much for you, Mister Seong?”

Foreman Bae confidently pounded on his chest.

“Mister Seong, don’t you worry about a thing and just come to work tomorrow.”

Quite obviously, who would sweat over paying twice as much in daily wages to a guy capable of doing the work of 4-5 people?

If Bae was the Chairman, never mind double, he’d triple – no, maybe even more with an eye towards the future.

‘Didn’t expect myself to rue the day that I’m not the Chairman of the Hunters....’

Foreman Bae could only swallow back his laughter.

Jin-Woo asked him a question, then.

“Ahh, right. I promised to meet someone tomorrow evening, so will I be able to make that in time?”

Earlier this morning, Yu Jin-Ho gave him a call.

For some reason, he sounded worn out.

‘That kid was on the top of the world yesterday, saying that everything had worked out alright, yet today.....’

Jin-Woo was taken by surprise, but unfortunately, the call came only after he had already applied to become a miner. He had no choice but to delay the meeting until tomorrow evening.

Foreman Bae chuckled out loudly.

“From what I hear, tomorrow’s dungeon should be much smaller in scale than today’s one. So, we should be finished well before 6 o’clock.”

Weren’t they able to finish today’s work around five PM today? They should be even faster tomorrow, not the other way around.

Jin-Woo nodded his head. That would be fine for him, too.

“In that case, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Alright. Take care.”

Watching Jin-Woo turn around and walk away, a satisfied grin formed on

Foreman Bae's lips.

'If I did marry, I'd probably have a son around his age by now.'

Why did that boy's back look so wide and trustworthy? How wonderful would it be if the world was filled with newbies as excellent as Mister Seong?

A thick smile refused to leave Foreman Bae's lips.

However, he wasn't the only one smiling.

While walking towards the bus stop, an imperceptible smile was floating on Jin-Woo's lips, too.

'Well, it's not like I'm wishing for the raid team to make a blunder tomorrow, but....'

But, if something were to happen, then his existence would prove to be a huge help either to the raid team or to the mining team.

It wasn't as if he had a change of heart, either.

Perhaps ironically, the success rate for clearing rank A Gates was actually greater than those of the lower ranks.

'For one, the Association doesn't hand over the permit to any ol' Guilds, and....'

And, once the Guild was given the opportunity, they would commit all of their resources and try to conquer the dungeon, too.

However....

'The Hunters Guild isn't committing their everything in tomorrow's dungeon raid.'

To think, they'd have the balls to split a single assault team into two and prey on two separate rank A Gates at the same time. That was some confidence befitting the holder of the top spot in their profession.

But, it was undeniable that the accompanying risk was incredibly high, too.

'Regardless of what happens, I won't lose out either way.'

If they managed to complete the raid safely, that'd be the best for everyone involved. On the other hand, if an accident did occur, he'd assist the Hunters Guild, but in return, he would get to monopolise the high-ranked monsters by himself.

'Very good.'

A deeper smile formed on Jin-Woo's face as he climbed into the bus.

Late at night.

Cha Hae-In was tossing and turning in her bed.

‘Why is he different from others?’

Occupied by various thoughts regarding the man she met back in the boss room, she couldn’t fall asleep at all.

After Awakening her abilities roughly two years ago, she ran into many, many Hunters but there had never been an exception. Whenever she approached Hunters, or to be more specific, the Awakened, a deeply unpleasant stink assaulted her nose.

At first, she thought she was sick, so she went to see various doctors. However, she made no progress in that regard.

One of the doctors she went to see cautiously told her of his hypothesis.

That guess certainly held some merit; the stink would get worse the higher the rank of a Hunter was. And sure enough, the lower the rank, the more tolerable the stink was, too. Of course, regular people didn’t emit any stink whatsoever.

However.....

‘...This is the first time meeting someone with a pleasant smell.’

Recalling the events of earlier, her heart began beating a bit faster.

She became quite curious who that man could be, so as soon as the raid ended, she connected to the Association’s website and searched for his details.

Rank E.

Seong Jin-Woo.

The information on the man, as seen on the Hunter licence, could be seen on the screen.

‘There are no contact details....’

But then again, what would she even do after finding out about his contact info?

Realising that there was nothing more she could glean from the Association’s website, she then ended up calling the phone number of Joh Myoung-Ki, the manager of the recruitment department. She didn’t even mean to do that, though.

It was already well past one AM by the time she called him.

He wouldn't have answered the phone if it wasn't from South Korea's sole female rank S Hunter, who also happened to be the Vice Chairman of the Hunters Guild.

She couldn't help but think that she made a mistake after hearing the still-sleepy voice of Joh Myoung-Ki, but that lasted only for a short while.

Cha Hae-In opened her mouth with some difficulty.

“Can you find some information on a Hunter named Seong Jin-Woo?”

Cha Hae-In was taken in by a huge surprise.

Joh Myoung-Ki was none other than the man in charge of recruiting in South Korea's best Guild. So, why did a man like that remember the name of a rank E Hunter?

“Do you know who he is?”

“Chairman did that?”

“Do you know what's going on?”

“...So, what did you find out?”

A voice that was thick with a helpless sigh came out of the phone's speaker.

“Ah.....”

“No, it's fine. I'm sorry for calling you so late. Good night.”

Click.

....Those were the contents of the phone call she made three hours ago.

She worked up her courage to find out more about a guy, only for more questions to bubble up in her mind.

A mystery Hunter whose identity was being sought after by the leader of the Hunters Guild, while the Association was doing their best to hide it.

‘There's definitely something going on here.’

No, wait. There simply had to be something....

She earnestly prayed for it.

He could very well be the person to unravel the mysterious and special constitution that continued to torment her ever since she turned 21 – two years ago, when she had Awakened her powers.

‘That man, can I meet him again?’

Could it be that she'd never get to see him again?

She was beset with worry all of a sudden.

Thankfully, Cha Hae-In recalled Seong Jin-Woo's hard hat. She remembered that the hard hat and the overall he was wearing both spotted the emblem of the Hunters Guild.

'I remember now. He was in the mining team, wasn't he?'

Unlike her, who was the part of the raid team A, the mining team would be working later today as well.

If Seong Jin-Woo hadn't left the mining team, then there was a chance that she could meet him again.

'Let's go and take a look.'

Since she was the Vice Chairman of the Guild, it'd not be a strange thing for her to stop by at the raid location.

'Right, I'll just show up there as if nothing's wrong, and see whether that man came to work or not.'

...But, why? As soon as she thought about the possibility of seeing that suspicious Hunter again, she felt much more relaxed.

'If I want to do that, I gotta get some sleep first.'

For the sake of today's schedule, Cha Hae-In forced her unwilling eyes to close.

Even before the morning sun rose up.

Jin-Woo left for the meeting area first thing in the morning. It was different from yesterday, when he had some leeway, as he only joined the crew during the middle of the raid.

'Maybe, I shouldn't have worried.'

He was worried about whether he was too early or not, but...

Well, many Hunters had gathered before the Gate already by the time he got there.

"Uh? Uhh?? Hey, Mister Seong!! Seong!"

Foreman Bae Yun-Seok greeted him first.

"Hey, it's Mister Seong."

"Heyyy, man. Mister Seong!"

Other Hunters began greeting him with a slight nod, and some even raised their hands as high as their chest to greet Jin-Woo, which was quite different

from yesterday.

The work each of the miners did was important, so they'd wholeheartedly welcome a colleague with great skills any time. From the expressions of the Hunters of the mining team, their delight could clearly be seen.

'This is a bit... awkward.'

Jin-Woo had been subjected to poor treatment ever since becoming a rank E Hunter, so when he received such a warm welcome, he couldn't help be dazed somewhat.

Still, he didn't feel bad about their honest reactions.

"..."

Jin-Woo wordlessly lowered his head as his greeting.

"One, two, threeee...."

Foreman Bae counted the number of miners present today and jotted it down on the memo.

"Eighteen, Nineteen.... Well, it's almost everyone."

This should be more than enough. Well, it was fine for one or two to miss out on a day like today.

'Because, we have two aces in our midst now.'

Foreman Bae's gaze met those of Mok Jin-Su and Seong Jin-Woo. Bae grinned like a fool, causing Mok Jin-Su to hurriedly avert his gaze, while Seong Jin-Woo was tilting his head in confusion.

It was then.

"Excuse me, Foreman Bae."

"Argh?! You surprised me!"

Foreman Bae flinched and shuddered grandly from the voice suddenly coming from his side.

Moving around without revealing one's presence was clear evidence of one's excellent skills.

And as expected....

The one Foreman Bae's resentful gaze was directed to was the leader of today's raid team, Sohn Ki-Hoon.

"Aigoo.... My heart nearly stopped from fright just now, Sohn Hunter-nim."

“My apologies. It’s a bad habit I picked up from working in the dungeons for too long.”

Sohn Ki-Hoon grinned sheepishly.

It was then, the foreman of the retrieval team suddenly revealed himself from behind Sohn Ki-Hoon.

“An old man not acting his age...”

“What the? Even you? Why would you two be here where the mining team is?”

“What do you mean, why? We are here because we’ve got business with you, obviously.”

Foreman Bae stared at Sohn Ki-Hoon with a puzzled expression.

Meanwhile, Sohn Ki-Hoon was scanning the Hunters of the mining team as he opened his mouth.

“The thing is, our team’s porter decided to not show up today. Looks like I’ll have to borrow someone from the mining team.”

“Ehhh?”

Foreman Bae’s eyes went round in surprise.

“But, why from my team? When you got the retrieval team with lots of strong people who can carry luggage better than us....?”

As if he was waiting for that reply, the foreman of the retrieval team flew off his handle.

“My boys had to work overtime for three more hours just to finish our operation. They even missed dinner, too! But now, you want to use them as a porter, too?”

The reason why the retrieval team had to put in overtime while missing supper – because the mining team had finished their operation far too early. (TL note at the end)

‘Well, it’s true that we finished our operation which should’ve normally ended around seven in the evening, by around five o’clock all thanks to Mister Seong....’

When the foreman of the retrieval team glared daggers with veins popping up in his neck, Foreman Bae forgot what he wanted to say.

Perhaps he thought that this would be enough of an explanation, Sohn Ki-Hoon then addressed the miners.

“Is there anyone among you who wish to accompany the raid team? Once the raid is over, we will furnish you the additional hazard pay immediately.”

“.....”

Soh Ki-Hoon’s pleading eyes darted from here to there, but no one stepped forward. Either they looked down on the ground, or stared at the heavens, deliberately avoiding meeting his gaze.

That would be obvious, really.

‘I ain’t gonna risk my neck for a couple more bucks.’

‘Won’t do it, even if you beat me up....’

The highest ranked Hunter among the mining team was only a rank C. Most of them were rank Ds. Heck, they even had a rank E among them, too.

However, the place Sohn Ki-Hoon wanted to take them to was a rank A dungeon, seen as perhaps the most dangerous of the lot, realistically speaking.

The miners would still hesitate greatly even if the dungeon in question was rated B, yet it was an A!

Even a gentle graze would kill these Hunters in there. No, just stepping on the wrong spot would result in one’s death.

That dungeon was not a place where low ranked Hunters could survive.

Sure, porters only had to lug around the raid team’s gear, but still.... Compared to the job of mining, it was still far too dangerous.

“Is there... no one?”

Sohn Ki-Hoon’s expression became more and more crestfallen.

Who knew how much more time and effort he needed to waste in order to find another porter? Probably the whole morning, or even till the afternoon; or, if he was really unlucky, then the entire day might go down the drain.

‘This is going to be big trouble....’

It was at this point when his eyes met with a certain young Hunter’s.

‘...Uh?’

Unlike other Hunters, this guy was staring right back at him. It was, of course, Jin-Woo.

‘Hmm.....’

While Sohn Ki-Hoon was staring at him, Jin-Woo too was slowly scanning

that man's appearance.

'Isn't he a bit sharp for a tanker?'

Common sense dictated that the leaders of raid teams were 'tankers' most of the time.

Compared to other tankers, though, Sohn Ki-Hoon was a bit on the lankier side. He was also quite tall, so, rather than a Hunter, he looked more like a basketball player more than anything else.

'.....'

Jin-Woo finally stopped looking at Sohn Ki-Hoon and his eyes drifted away.

"...Fuu-ha...."

Only then did Sohn Ki-Hoon spit out his deeply-held breaths.

What just happened?

Just now, his entire body had frozen up so much that he even forgot to breathe. He couldn't understand why.

'Am I getting too tense, since this will be my first raid as a leader and all?'

Up until now, he had participated in raids as an auxiliary tanker. That was why today's opportunity was doubly important to him. And he definitely could not afford to commit a blunder today.

Sohn Ki-Hoon was bent over and panting laboriously in order to recover, before raising himself back up again.

Murmur, murmur....

Probably because of his rather embarrassing conduct, the surroundings had gotten noisier. However, he soon realised that the cause for the disturbance was not him.

Sohn Ki-Hoon's gaze shifted back to the mining team's Hunters, only to spot a hand raised up to the sky.

Finally, someone was applying for the job. Someone he had been waiting so desperately for.

Sohn Ki-Hoon's expression brightened considerably.

When Jin-Woo took a step forward, he became the centre of the attention.

"I'll do it."

(TL: Well, I'm not sure what the mining team does has any bearing on what happens to the retrieval team, but okay. I'm just TL-ing according to what's in the raw, so don't question me.....) (ED: The only reason I can think of is it being a matter of workplace pride/appearance. Like, the mining team finished early, so the raid team was only waiting on the retrieval team, hence the overtime/meal skipping. Just my own guess, though.)



Chapter 85 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

A rank E Hunter wanted to enter an uncleared rank A dungeon!

Pure pandemonium broke out.

“Upper-rank monsters are waiting with bated breath inside, yet you wanna go in??”

“Mister Seong, what do you think you’re doing?!”

“You still have a whole life ahead of you, so why are you risking it all for a measly few extra bucks?!”

The members of the mining team surrounded Jin-Woo in no time. At the same time, Foreman Bae hurriedly explained it to Sohn Ki-Hoon.

“Aigoo. That friend only started this job yesterday so he probably raised his hand not knowing anything.”

“What’s his rank?”

“That is....”

Foreman Bae sneaked a glance towards Jin-Woo and then, spoke in a hushed voice.

“It’s E. Regardless of what else, his rank is too low, so how about going with someone else? It’ll be far too dangerous to take that friend along with you.”

Sohn Ki-Hoon’s expression became grave right away.

‘That man is only a rank E....??’

The man who locked gazes with him only a second ago - for sure, he couldn’t sense any exceptional fluctuation of magic energy coming from that man.

However, how should he put this?

A certain aura permeated from that man that... couldn’t be described in simple words, but at the same time, it also felt sharp and utterly under control.

‘He’s definitely not a rank E.’

No matter how hard Sohn Ki-Hoon looked, that man was definitely not the

bottom-ranked Hunter he claimed to be. Of course, Foreman Bae had no reason to lie here but, from Sohn Ki-Hoon's perspective, his own assessment had to be correct.

'Besides all that. The rank of a porter isn't all that important, is it?'

Indeed, a porter only needed to carry luggage around well.

If the luggage carrier located at the very back of the raid team found himself in danger, then one should look at that raid as a complete failure. In a case like that, not even a rank A could guarantee his survival, so would it really matter if the porter's rank was a C or an E?

They'd die regardless, anyway.

When Sohn Ki-Hoon's thought process reached that point, he began regretting the fact that he actually wasted time worrying about it. The raid hadn't even started, yet they had wasted far too much time already.

Sohn Ki-Hoon stared at Jin-Woo and spoke.

"Nope. I'm taking him."

"Isn't it heavy?"

Sohn Ki-Hoon asked a question, and Jin-Woo simply shook his head.

"No, it's fine."

The large bag being carried on Jin-Woo's back was filled to the brim with extra sets of clothing, weapons, and defensive equipment, etc., for the raid team. Its volume was quite considerable, but honestly speaking, he didn't find it heavy at all. All thanks to his Strength Stat, of course.

'Doesn't look like he's straining himself.'

After studying Jin-Woo's expression for a bit, Sohn Ki-Hoon turned towards the Gate. Jin-Woo also shifted his gaze towards it.

A giant Gate, as big as the one from yesterday, silently floated in the air.

'Wait. Maybe this one's a little bit bigger?'

Even then, the detected amount of magic energy was supposedly less than yesterday's Gate. The raid difficulty was judged by the emitted magic energy and not the size of the Gate; that was probably the main reason why the B team was tasked with clearing this particular dungeon.

'For real... the leaking magic energy is incomparably smaller than yesterday.'

Jin-Woo could tell by standing in front of the Gate. The result of the

Association's measurement didn't seem to be wrong.

But then, what was this?

Just like back when he was standing before the Red Gate, a certain creeping sense of ill omen was dawning on him.

'...I hope it's nothing.'

Meanwhile, Sohn Ki-Hoon gave out his order.

"Let's go inside."

The raid team waiting in front of the Gate began moving once more with that order. Hunters entered the dungeon one by one.

"...."

Jin-Woo stopped staring at the Gate and followed them in.

[You have entered a dungeon.]

The interior of the dungeon was rather plain.

Jin-Woo had been tense after picking up on that odd feeling, but he let off a sigh of relief after seeing the passage that was noticeably smaller than yesterday's dungeon.

'Whew.'

Thankfully, he wasn't forcibly transported to another world.

The thing was, though, the members of this team were plenty good enough to clear a Red Gate, were they to step into one.

11 rank As, and 6 rank Bs.

If it weren't the Hunters Guild but somebody else, these guys wouldn't have been assigned to a B team at all.

Jin-Woo smirked softly.

'I'm not here as a part of the raid team anyway. Let's not sweat over stuff like this.'

Yesterday and today....

If he were being honest, he only came here to have fun. And as coincidence would have it, he was now blessed with more things to spectate on today.

There was no need to stay sharp and alert all the time.

When he thought like that, he felt as if weight was lifted off his shoulders.

"You don't have to be that nervous, you know."

A female Hunter, a Healer, engaged him in conversation from his side.

Was her age around the late twenties or so?

Because his expression was stiff, it seemed that she just wanted to help alleviate some of his tension.

“You see, every single member present here, not just Ki-Hoon oppa, oops, I mean, the leader of the team, is a distinguished Hunter. Except me, that is.”

The healer lady smiled refreshingly.

From the word go, Jin-Woo wasn't scared, but after seeing the female Hunter's utterly relaxed face, he felt like a deflated balloon.

Jin-Woo grinned too, and nodded his head.

“Ah. Okay.”

The Healer formed a content expression, evidently satisfied by her efforts.

At the same time, the leader confirmed that there were no monsters near the entrance and gave the signal to advance.

“Let's move.”

Both Jin-Woo and the Healer matched the walking pace of the raid team and slowly advanced forward. They had to watch the surroundings while moving, so naturally, their rate of progress was rather slow.

“Should I help you carry some, if it's too heavy?”

The Healer glanced at Jin-Woo's luggage and asked him. Jin-Woo wordlessly pushed forward a huge bottle of water in his left hand to her.

“Kyachk?!”

The Healer tottered dangerously on her feet trying to lift that, so he quickly took the bottle back. The raid team came to an abrupt stop and glared at the Healer.

“I'm so sorry. Sorry.”

The Healer continued to bow her head here and there, offering an embarrassed apology. After that, he didn't get to hear her asking him if he needed help again. Her sharp glares were just an added bonus, really.

Jin-Woo had to swallow his cackles as he continued to walk forward, pretending to be oblivious.

It sure felt like it'd been a long time since he could laugh like this inside a

dungeon.

‘Well, getting distracted even only for a second would potentially get me in a lot of trouble, after all.’

Especially recently.....

Just remembering back to the difficulty of the ‘Demon’s Castle’ and its upper floors made him shudder in his boots.

However, today was different. Participating in a raid as an outsider like this every now and then didn’t sound like such a bad idea to him.

It was then.

Jin-Woo’s steps came to a halt.

A beat later, the Hunters of the raid team also sensed the change in the surroundings.

“They are coming!”

Even before Sohn Ki-Hoon finished giving his order, the Hunters of the raid team got into their battle formation. It happened literally in the blink of an eye. Jin-Woo was inwardly impressed by that.

‘So, this is how the high-ranked Hunters raid....’

They were definitely a world apart compared to the ragtag raid teams he was used to until now. Heck, pure and bright lights were already emanating from the hands of the naive-looking female Healer.

‘Looks like I won’t even get a chance to step up here.’

On one hand, Jin-Woo felt reassured, but at the same time, he did feel a bit rueful as well.

In any case, monsters finally showed themselves.

Beasts? Canines?

Sohn Ki-Hoon’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

Tadatadatadada....

A group of monsters resembling hyenas was rushing towards the raid team. They were as big as a medium-sized car, too.

Sohn Ki-Hoon tilted his head slightly.

‘Dungeon Jackals?’

He became sure of it once they got close enough. They were indeed ‘Dungeon Jackals.’

Sohn Ki-Hoon had been standing with his shield covering his front, but then, he relaxed a bit and didn't even bother to activate his aggro-attracting skill.

And then, he simply used his shield to batter down the Dungeon Jackal aiming for his neck.

Whimper!!

“What’s this?”

“Aren’t they Dungeon Jackals?”

Other team members, deeply tense until then, began tilting their heads and straightened their hunched stances. Soon, the short death throes of the Dungeon Jackals filled the cavern’s interior.

“Whimper?!”

“Kkheng!”

“Kkhekkheng!”

The Jackal monsters were quickly taken care of.

Over a dozen Dungeon Jackals were turned into corpses in the blink of an eye. Hunters dusted their hands, still confused by what happened.

“What’s this?”

“I didn’t even have enough time to cast a magic spell before it ended.”

“Why are we fighting Dungeon Jackals inside a rank A dungeon?”

“Yeah, right. What’s happening here?”

“Wait, did the Association idiots screw up again?!”

Their voices were getting louder.

Now originally, one of the basic rules in raiding was to never make loud noises inside a dungeon. However, the appearance of the Dungeon Jackals was an event shocking enough to make them forget all about even a simple rule like that.

“Hmm....”

Sohn Ki-Hoon stared at the corpses of the Jackals and scratched the back of his head.

‘But, why are the monsters from rank C dungeons appearing here?’

Sohn Ki-Hoon scanned his surroundings, looking somewhat dumbfounded. Everyone else was forming similar facial expressions.

With the exception of one person.

Only Jin-Woo was staring at the dead Jackals with a grave expression on his face.

‘They are no normal Jackals.’

Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed. He could definitely see that the fur around the Jackal’s neck had been flattened down by something until recently. It was clear evidence of them being tied to something, somewhere.

‘Meaning, the ones that reared these monsters are somewhere else inside this dungeon....’

Monsters with intellect, in other words.

Jin-Woo recalled the White Phantoms he met back inside the Red Gate.

It was now a well-established fact that, regardless of what species it was, intelligent monsters were quite difficult to deal with.

‘Somehow... my premonition might be right after all.’

It was not a good omen, by any stretch of the imagination.

“What are you thinking about so seriously like that?”

The female Hunter peered at Jin-Woo as if to bore a hole in him, just like how he had been staring at the Jackals.

“Shh!”

Jin-Woo raised his index finger and covered his lips.

Step, step.

Step, step.

From the deeper parts of the cave, he could hear the matched footsteps getting closer.

‘The real enemies are coming.’

Jin-Woo stood back up. Other Hunters also belatedly realised something was wrong.

“Oh my god...”

“Get..... Get ready for battle!”

Sohn Ki-Hoon forcibly squeezed his voice out.

Finally, the real enemies revealed themselves from the darkness of the cave on the far side. The eyes of the Hunters grew wide from shock.

“High Orcs?!”

“What the hell? Why High Orcs?”

Many well-trained High Orc warriors now stood in rows before the Hunters’ eyes. Their number was twenty-two.

Not just any High Orcs, but they were twenty-two High Orc warriors, which meant they would be very difficult opponents to fight.

“Something... Something’s wrong.”

Someone muttered softly under his breath.

To think, right after the attack of the low-ranked monsters, they now had to battle these high-ranked monsters famed to be the toughest even among the high ranks.

The High Orcs pointed their lengthy spears at the Hunters.

‘Looks like the momentum of the Hunters and the High Orcs are about even.’

Jin-Woo quickly retreated to a corner, so he could quietly observe the unfolding situation and find the right time to step forward.

However, the female Hunter obviously didn’t share his thought process.

“You gotta keep hiding there, okay! You won’t get hurt that way.”

That kind of infuriated Jin-Woo just a wee bit. He closed his eyes shut and took several deep breaths while working hard to calm his boiling head.

Soon, the battle began.

“Kroooaar!!”

Towards the attacking High Orcs, Sohn Ki-Hoon activated his aggro skill. However, these Orcs didn’t really fall for his provocation. And soon, High Orcs and melee-type Hunters engaged in a bitter close-quarters battle.

Swiiiiish!!

Swish!

Crack!!

Blood splattered to everywhere and a scream reverberated out.

“Uwaaahk!!”

Not too long after that, magic spells fired from the mage-type Hunters slammed into the High Orcs.

Boom!! Kaboom!!

The heads of the High Orcs exploded after getting struck by the arrows of brilliant light. Unfortunately, there was no follow-up attack.

The effects of magic spells were good, but there was the distinct disadvantage of the lengthy casting time.

“Uwaaahk?!”

In a close-quarters battle, High Orcs definitely held the upper hand.

“Heal! Heal!!”

“H-hurry!”

The wounded appeared pretty quickly, and Healers were kept very busy.

“....H-Healer-nim!!”

The female Healer was also kept very busy, running here and there non-stop.

“I’m coming!! Coming!”

The female Healer knelt down next to a heavily-groaning Hunter with a missing arm. She then quickly began chanting.

Wuong....

And then, along with blinding light, the lost arm slowly grew back.

That was the light of regeneration only the Healers ranked A or above could perform.

Just as she concentrated on the injuries of her patient, a tall shadow suddenly loomed over her. The female Healer raised her head.

A High Orc, previously assumed dead, was holding an axe while breathing heavily right beside her.

“Ah....”

The female Healer’s face was drained of all colour, then. Unfortunately, there was no one who could save her nearby.

When the Orc raised its axe up high, the female Healer chose to hug her patient and shield him, instead.

“Noooo!!”

However, she couldn’t feel any pain, no matter how long she waited.

Each passing second felt like a minute or more.

The female Healer sheepishly raised her head up. And she got to witness a rather amazing sight.

“Keu.... Kuehhck....”

The Orc was actually floating in the air, its entire body trembling quite noticeably.

“But, what....?”

What was happening here?

The female Healer’s eyes opened even wider.

But then...

Snap!

The head of the High Orc was literally ripped off of its body, and then, even the part of its spine got dragged out, as well.

Now that was a display of terrifying power.

Plop.

‘.....??’

While staring at the headless body of the High Orc now on the ground, the female Hunter formed a totally confused expression.

“Uh....?!”

Because, the separated head of the High Orc was still floating in the air, that was why.

‘....Blood got splashed on my clothes.’

Jin-Woo frowned deeply and threw the head of the High Orc.

Pow!

Another High Orc was struck down rather unexpectedly by the head of its comrade and collapsed to the ground. Seeing that the victim’s neck was twisted around in a bizarre angle, it coming back to life didn’t seem very likely.

‘That makes it two.’

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze.

Currently, he was in ‘Stealth’. Both the High Orcs and the Hunters couldn’t sense his presence at all.

Jin-Woo had been sitting back quietly, waiting for a right chance to step

forward, because he feared being accused of interfering in other people's raid. But then, he belatedly recalled that he had the 'Stealth' skill.

Wouldn't he be able to do whatever he wanted without running into problems with that skill?

The corners of Jin-Woo's lips arched up.

'Okay, so should I get started for real now?'

And then.

"Uwaaaah-!!"

Just in time, he spotted the leader of the raid team, Sohn Ki-Hoon, engaged in a life-or-death battle with three High Orcs.

Jin-Woo's legs moved swiftly.



Chapter 86 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

A distance not too far, but not too close, either.

Just a little push from his legs and he was instantly far above the ground; when he landed back on the solid earth, the wide back of a High Orc dominated Jin-Woo's view.

While landing on his feet, he began thinking.

'Dismantling these High Orcs would be too easy at this rate.'

But, if he did that, there was no meaning in hiding himself with Stealth. Hunters around him, including Sohn Ki-Hoon, were the elites of the Hunters Guild, often referred to as the best in South Korea.

If these High Orcs were ripped apart by some unseen force, then they would pretty soon figure out that 'Stealth' skill was involved here, as they weren't the same as the scatter-brained female Healer.

'Well, it's not like there'll be trouble from getting discovered, but....'

He was only a day away from the result of his reassignment test being made public, so he didn't want to raise any unnecessary fuss today if he could help it.

That was why he was waiting for the raid to fail completely, but.... But, the losses to the Hunters would be far too severe by then.

For example, that female Healer almost got killed just now.

That was why....

A certain light flickered in Jin-Woo's eyes.

'So, choose only those that won't get me noticed.'

He decided to go with this type of method. It took him the whole of one, maybe two seconds, to come to this decision.

Right away, both the 'Baruka's Dagger' and the 'Knight Killer' were already in his hands, summoned out of sheer reflex, even before he could consciously order them to do so.

'When did they come out?'

A smirk formed on his lips. With the sensation of gripping tight these two familiar dagger handles, his wildly-pounding heart slowly regained its calmness.

What a relief it was....

....That no one could see his expression right now, as he was still in the ‘Stealth’ state. Well, he didn’t want to be labelled as a lunatic for smiling all alone in the midst of a desperate battlefield where humans and High Orcs were performing a blood-soaked dance with each other.

Especially so with the leader of the raid team, too busy sweating buckets while being surrounded by three High orcs – he’d go mental if he saw Jin-Woo right now.

‘First of all, that one.’

Jin-Woo moved. He crouched, and the reverse-gripped dagger drew a line on the Achilles’ heel of a High Orc.

“Kuwahhack?!”

The High Orc Warrior roared out in pain as the back of its ankle was sliced open without a warning.

That was only the beginning.

As if he was dancing, his smooth, unbroken movements led him to stab the ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ into the side of his first victim; he then pulled the dagger out and proceeded to cut open the back of the knee of another High Orc.

“Keururuk!!”

“Keuhark?!”

Perhaps it was impossible to suppress the pain with the adrenaline of the battle, the High Orcs froze up when they were attacked in their weak points when least expected.

That was enough.

Just like how the opening of the sluice gate caused a flood, Sohn Ki-Hoon seized upon the opening created by the High Orcs’ fluster to start his counteroffensive.

Stab!!

“Keuru.... Kururuk....”

“Pant, pant.....”

Sohn Ki-Hoon raised his head. The long sword held out in his hands was

piercing through the heart of the High Orc.

“Kuruk....”

The glaring High Orc and its trembling lips soon collapsed on its back, the whites of its eyes showing.

Thud.

Sohn Ki-Hoon clenched his fist.

‘Yes! I can do this!’

Just as Sohn Ki-Hoon was crying out inwardly in elation while still cutting down the surrounding High Orcs one by one, Jin-Woo was making himself busy by going here and there.

“Kuwahhaack?!”

“Keueueuk!”

Inside the slowed-down time, he moved about freely while avoiding being noticed, and he gradually tilted the balance towards the Hunters’ favour.

Slice!

Whenever Jin-Woo brushed past, wounds large and small appeared on the bodies of the High Orcs.

“Keuhruruk?!”

“Khuwack??”

The moment these High Orcs froze up from wounds being inflicted on them out of nowhere and lost their focus, that would be their end.

These highest-ranked Hunters didn’t fail to grasp the opportunity and continued to attack.

‘For some reason... It’s easier to fight now.’

‘What’s going on?’

‘Could we be winning against this many High Orcs without a casualty?’

Even though members of the raid team were growing rather suspicious, hope and excitement were filling up their hearts at the same time.

They were resolved to lose one or two of their own before they had entered the battle, but exceeding their own expectations, they were fighting quite well until now.

Pow!!

A mace swung by one of the Hunters cracked open the head of a High Orc Warrior. It was then, Jin-Woo got to hear a rather welcoming message.

[Level up!]

‘Oh.’

Indeed, there was a reward for him going around and spending his energy. His level had actually gone up.

It seemed that him not actually killing the enemy outright or wounding them critically still netted him some experience points.

‘And I did kill two of them with my own hands, too.’

He then ‘aided’ in killing more than 13.

Unless he was earning no experience points whatsoever, his level rising up did make sense. Even more excited than before, Jin-Woo’s movement became a lot faster than before.

Slice!

Stab!

“Kuwaaaahck?!”

Thanks to Jin-Woo’s timely and sneaky manoeuvres, this battle was rapidly coming to a close.

‘Fuu-!’

Jin-Woo took a step back and stored his two daggers in his Inventory, before having a quick look around himself.

‘Well, with this much....’

The current situation seemed to be more or less settled now. And as an added bonus, he even levelled up once, too.

Jin-Woo’s gaze drifted lower. Around twenty or so corpses of High Orcs were discarded haphazardly on the ground.

‘Well, if I hunted these down by myself, I’d have gone up more than a single level, though.’

Too bad, this here was a dungeon that the Hunters Guild paid a handsome sum for the exclusive right to hunt. This would have to be as far as he could go.

‘Good.’

With a satisfied expression on his face, Jin-Woo returned to the dark corner

of the dungeon, a place where a porter such as himself should be hiding in the first place.

“Kroooooar!!”

Having their positions reversed, and now being surrounded by the Hunters instead, the last High Orc Warrior cried out at the top of its lungs. Its scream rang around the interior of the cave rather noisily.

While looking at the fall of that High Orc, Jin-Woo undid his Stealth.

Shururu.

Meanwhile, Hunters were panting heavily. They hurriedly scanned the vicinity, but no matter how hard they looked, there were no more High Orcs standing.

“Did we... did we win?!”

“We won?!”

“Hold on.”

Just before everyone could revel in the sensation of victory, their leader Sohn Ki-Hoon confirmed the status of the injured first.

“Anyone hurt? Does anyone need healing?”

The truth was, there wouldn't be that many injured in a raid team with a high-ranking Healer as one of the members. As long as that person was still breathing, any exterior wounds could be treated right away.

So, Sohn Ki-Hoon wasn't asking about the conditions of the potential injured. No, he was actually asking if anyone had died in a roundabout way.

When his gaze met the female Healer's, she shook her head. There were a few injured, but no deceased. And better yet, she had finished healing all of the injured just now.

“In that case.....”

With that, ecstasy filled the faces of the members of the raid team.

“We won!!”

“We did it!!”

“Waaaaah!!”

Hunters hugged each other and celebrated. Jin-Woo crossed his arms and with a gentle smile on his face, watched the jubilant Hunters.

‘Were these high Orcs supposed to be tough, though?’

From his perspective, well....

Since he didn't have any prior experience in raiding high-ranking dungeons, Jin-Woo couldn't really 'get' this loud celebration of the raid team.

Jin-Woo had no idea....

....That, when planning the raid of a dungeon ranked A or B, Hunters not only took into consideration of its ranking, but they even minutely calculated the emitted magic energy before attempting to clear it.

High Orcs were considered to be a higher tier monster within the rank A dungeons. Not only were they not 'normal' High Orcs but High Orc warriors instead, and there were 20 of them to boot....

The current result was far closer to being a miracle than anything else, really.

The main protagonist of that miracle, Jin-Woo, didn't even know the actual worth of his own actions and simply stood there, quietly congratulating the victory of the raid team.

'...Mm?'

In the midst of that, the female Healer approached Sohn Ki-Hoon with a determined face. That was a look of someone wishing to say something important. Jin-Woo focused his hearing in that direction.

"Excuse me, Ki-Hoon oppa?"

"Yeah?"

"When you were fighting against the High Orcs...."

The female Healer cautiously described what she saw in minute detail.

And that would be – the High Orc suddenly floated up in the air, and proceeded to rip its own head off before killing another Orc with its severed head.

She carried a dead-serious face, too.

"....."

Sohn Ki-Hoon was left utterly speechless.

"I'm telling you the truth!!"

As the female Healer and her reddened face protested the injustice of it all, Jin-Woo could barely suppress his giggles.

They basked in the aftermaths of victory for only a little bit longer. The

Hunters soon gathered around their leader Sohn Ki-Hoon one by one.

“Captain, will we continue on?”

“Isn’t this going to be too dangerous? We aren’t even that far from the entrance, yet we ran into a whole bunch of High Orcs already.”

“How about a strategic retreat?”

Sohn Ki-Hoon cast his gaze over to the deeper part of the cave, his mouth closed tight.

‘It won’t be easy.’

Jin-Woo could sympathise with Sohn Ki-Hoon a little bit here.

While working for the Hunters Guild that boasted two rank S Hunters in its ranks, today’s raid might be the one and only time Sohn Ki-Hoon would get to lead a raid team.

And to think, he’d have to retreat so quickly in his very first hunt as a leader....

‘Anyone in his shoes would be tempted to push forward and clear this place.’

However, if you were a smart, wise leader, then....

As if he had made his mind up, Sohn Ki-Hoon’s lips quivered slightly. Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

Fortunately, as it turned out, Sohn Ki-Hoon wasn’t a fool.

“For the time being, let’s retreat.”

The leader’s choice was absolute inside the dungeon. The unspoken rule said that as long as one was a part of the raid team, one had to absolutely follow the commands of the leader.

One used to say that, before in war, insubordinate soldiers were executed right away, didn’t they?

In a certain way, dungeons were a far more dangerous place than any warzone out there. And so, the question of the team’s survival or annihilation depended on who the leader was. Thankfully, Sohn Ki-Hoon didn’t disappoint his team members.

After hearing his order to retreat, everyone lightly patted their chest.

“Whew-woo....”

“I was really worried that Sohn hyung would insist on going till the end,

you know.”

Sohn Ki-Hoon grinned and slapped the person who said that on the shoulder.

“I’m not a blind idiot like that.”

“I know that. But, look here, hyung. Look at my shaking hands.”

Jin-Woo picked up the luggage and placed it on his back.

Along with Sohn Ki-Hoon’s orders, the raid team began moving again, although their direction had reversed.

Jin-Woo smiled wryly.

‘And here I am, hoping to go in a little bit deeper.’

Regardless of what happened, he was nothing more than a guest.

And as a guest, he had no right to run his mouth on this and that about the decision of the house owner, now did he?

It was indeed a bit regretful, but it’d have to end here today.

“Argh.....”

The female Healer must’ve found the leader not believing her word a bit cold-hearted, because she continued to grumble as she got right next to Jin-Woo.

“But, it really happened, though....”

With a big pout on her face, she then stared at Jin-Woo, a single strand of hope still persisting in her heart.

“Excuse me, by any chance, did you see that High....”

“I didn’t see anything.”

“Hiinnng.....”

Her hope had been cruelly shot down just then.

Jin-Woo had to work very hard to make sure that she didn’t notice him sniggering to himself.

However, not long after they began retreating...

The front of the group suddenly came to a halt.

Sohn Ki-Hoon raised his right hand.

“E-everyone, stop!”

There was confusion evident in his voice.

The fatigued Hunters walking cautiously forward came to a stop, and so did Jin-Woo as well; he had been keeping an eye towards the rear in case the monsters decided to chase after them.

Rustle, rustle....

The voices of the Hunters rose up higher.

“What the hell is the meaning of this?!”

“What is going on!”

“Why is the path blocked?! Wasn’t it fine when we entered earlier?”

Jin-Woo walked past the noisy Hunters and got to the front, before reaching out with his hand. And his eyes widened as well.

‘It’s... been blocked off?’

The path had been blocked off by an invisible barrier.

He immediately recalled the instant dungeons. More specifically, the wall that demarcated the border between the instant dungeon and reality. But, he soon shook his head.

‘No, this is different from that.’

He could detect a certain sense of ‘artificiality’ from this invisible wall. Seeing that there was a trace of magic energy mixed in, this barrier must’ve been the result of a magic spell cast by a monster with high intelligence.

‘But, why?’

Why block the path going out, and not going in?

It was then – Jin-Woo’s head swivelled to his rear.

‘.....?’

As if it was waiting for this moment, horrendously powerful magic energy waves crashed into the group like a tsunami from the far end of the cavern.

‘How could this be....?’

This was from the boss of this dungeon?

The scale of the magic energy emission inside the dungeon was on another realm altogether compared to the one felt outside the Gate.

Other Hunters also must’ve sensed that absurd amount of magic energy by now, because they began shivering as well.

“W-what the hell??”

“Why am I getting goosebumps, all of a sudden?!”

Watching the complexions of the Hunters get paler by the second, Jin-Woo came up with a theory.

‘If, let’s say that there is a boss that can hide its presence, then....’

The wall that wasn’t there when they entered. And the boss that bared its fangs only after the barrier had been erected.

‘No way.... Did it lay a trap and wait for Hunters to enter the dungeon?’

When thinking like that, a chill ran down Jin-Woo’s back.

And sure enough....

....From beyond the darkness of the dungeon’s interior, the countless sounds of footsteps, far greater than before, reverberated loudly.



Chapter 87 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

What happened next was a bit of a strange phenomenon.

As the footsteps from the other side of the cavern grew louder and closer, the Hunters were making less and less sound.

“Sohn hyung....”

“....”

Soon, choking silence enveloped the group.

Jin-Woo’s ears were perked up, though – seizing upon the opening created by his surroundings getting quieter, Jin-Woo began counting the numbers of the enemies via their footsteps.

Step, step.

Thud, thud.

Thanks to his already-enhanced hearing, as well as high Perception Stat, he could separate out each of the footsteps to their original owners.

‘...48, 49, 50, 51.’

There were a total of 51 different footsteps. The steps themselves sounded the same as those of the High Orc warriors.

Jin-Woo took a look around him.

‘.....’

The nervous tension was clearly writ large on the faces of the Hunters. It seemed to him that they also had more or less figured out the size of the enemy from the resounding footsteps.

This raid team managed to eke out a victory against 22 High Orc warriors. But now, 51 of them were coming. That was over twice as many.

‘...There is no hope of victory here.’

The raid team members were thinking of roughly the same opinion.

Jin-Woo suddenly cast his glance down at his shadow. He momentarily thought that it was wavering ever so slightly just then.

Wuuuuu....

He even thought that his shadow soldiers were howling out, their desire to see blood intensifying. Jin-Woo raised his head back up again.

Thump, thump, thump!

His calm heart that stayed still until now began pounding harder.

‘Wait for it...’

...Now wasn't the right time yet.

Consoling himself as thus, Jin-Woo silently observed the front.

Eventually, the monsters revealed themselves. The countless marching High Orcs came to a halt just a little bit of distance away from the Hunters.

“Kurururu.”

“Kuruk.”

High Orcs growled as if they'd pounce at any given moment. No words could adequately describe the bloodthirsty aura emitted from over 50 High Orc warriors. The result of a battle was pretty obvious even without actually fighting them.

“This is crazy.”

“How can this nonsensical crap be....”

“Euh....”

Hunters spat out long groans. They continued to retreat ever so slightly after feeling the enormous pressure, but too bad, their path was still blocked off.

So, what would they do now?

The Hunters were all ready for battle from a while ago, but no one stepped forward yet and simply waited for Sohn Ki-Hoon's instructions.

Sohn Ki-Hoon's lips were shut tight in a straight line.

‘God d*mn it...’

If only either Chairman Choi Jong-In or Hunter Cha Hae-In were here....

Sohn Ki-Hoon's expression crumpled unsightly.

Rank S Hunters all possessed incredible powers that could overturn any unfavourable situation. If either one of those two were here, these High Orcs would've been nothing at all.

‘Just why, in a situation like this....’

Why weren't they here?

Sohn Ki-Hoon had fought alongside them all the time, so he could acutely sense his powerlessness right about now. The absence of a single rank S was a bone-chillingly painful thing, indeed.

Unfortunately, he couldn't continue to lament his misfortune forever. No, he had to make a decision here.

‘Fighting here will definitely result in our death.’

However, with their path of retreat blocked off, he no longer had any choice in the matter.

The day he chose to become a Hunter, the day he stepped foot inside a dungeon for the first time ever, and the day he lost consciousness for the first time after getting heavily injured....

Didn't he already guess that a day like today would come sooner or later?

‘Right. That did happen, didn't it?’

Having resolved himself to meet his maker, Sohn Ki-Hoon unsheathed his longsword.

Shurururung....

Sohn Ki-Hoon took a look at his comrades, and the Hunters nodded their heads as if they had been waiting for the signal. Sohn Ki-Hoon's gaze shifted back to his front.

He then brought the shield right up till his chin and glared at the High Orcs, still not showing any signs of movements yet.

‘So, did he finally make his choice, then?’

Jin-Woo also got ready. He hid his right hand behind his back, and the 'Baruka's Dagger' appeared there. He then closed his eyes.

His wildly beating heart suddenly settled down completely as the battle drew near.

Thump, thump, thump....

Get rid of distracting thoughts, and control his breathing.

‘.....Okay.’

When Jin-Woo reopened his eyes, a sharp gleaming light was now burning fiercely within them.

Gulp.

Hunters forcibly swallowed down their dried saliva; cold sweat soaked their foreheads. On the other hand, Jin-Woo was busy smacking his lips.

‘How much experience points will these guys give me?’

A thin smile of anticipation spread on his lips.

However, before anything could happen....

...One of the High Orcs stepped forward.

It roughly shoved aside other Orcs and emerged from the group, its wild beast-like eyes looking in the direction of the Hunters.

“Growl....”

This one possessed a far bigger physique than the others, and its fangs were noticeably longer as well.

‘So, is that the leader?’

Jin-Woo narrowed his eyes.

If he got rid of that guy now, wouldn't the fight become so much easier?

What should he do here, then?

Jin-Woo fiddled with the grip of the 'Baruka's Dagger' and pondered; meanwhile, that High Orc opened its mouth.

“Kurerack tu sheena, wekudo araknaka.”

The creature's voice sure sounded loud. The glare of the High Orc was fixed to the leader of the raid team, Sohn Ki-Hoon.

“Kurerack tu sheena, wekudo araknaka!!”

Rustle, rustle....

Hunters' gazes busily darted about.

“What the hell?”

“Is that thing trying to talk to us?”

“What is it saying?”

It was then.

The facial muscles of the High Orc began trembling. When that strange tremor subsided, a completely different voice from before came out from the monster's mouth.

“Humans.....”

It was as if something else had borrowed the monster’s mouth to speak.

“Oh, humans....”

When looking at closer, that normal-looking Orc’s eyes were now unfocused and blurry like those of a dead fish that died a long time ago.

“Heok!”

Hunters began freaking out as if the back of their heads were smacked out of nowhere.

An Orc just spoke a language of humans!

‘How can an Orc speak Korean?!’

‘Is this magic? Could it be??’

Hunters couldn’t keep their mouths shut at this utterly unexpected situation. The ‘leader’ High Orc continued to speak.

“I am.... Karugalgan..... I.... want.... to.... meet.... humans.... Follow... this.... one.”

A monster wished to speak to humans?

There never had been any reports of such a case before.

Facing this unprecedented event, not only Sohn Ki-Hoon but everyone in the raid team fell into a state of pure confusion.

“Ki-Hoon hyung, I hope you ain’t listening to the words of a monster.”

“Please, you gotta ignore it.”

“Ki-Hoon-ah, it’s a trap. Regardless what happens, we gotta try to finish it here.”

“But, still. If it’s an Orc we can talk to, maybe we can....”

“Don’t be an idiot. You’ve been inside so many dungeons already, so don’t you know how they operate by now?”

In less than a second, their opinions had split up.

Sohn Ki-Hoon maintained his silence for a while, before answering the monster’s words.

“....Karugalgan. Did you block the cavern?”

“That’s right..... I am.... the proud.... High Shaman.... of the Orcs.... My spells.... can’t be.... broken.... by the strength of.... humans.”

“Is there anyone stronger than you inside this cave?”

“Who.... dares to.... oppose.... me!!”

An incredibly loud roar exploded out from the High Orc and slammed into the eardrums of the Hunters. Almost everyone frowned deeply and covered their ears, but Sohn Ki-Hoon was simply nodding his head, still looking rather calm.

His expectation was on the money.

The existence speaking through that High Orc’s mouth was, without a doubt, the boss of this dungeon. Since it couldn’t escape from the boss room until the time of the dungeon break, it was summoning the Hunters to enter its lair instead.

‘I don’t know why it wants us there, but....’

When Sohn Ki-Hoon’s answer didn’t come right away, the leader High Orc raised its large axe above its head.

“Now, choose.... Die here..... at the.... hands... of my soldiers.... Or.... follow... my... soldiers....”

“We’ll follow.”

Sohn Ki-Hoon’s immediate answer prompted the eyes of the Hunters to grow wider.

“Ki-Hoon hyung!!”

“Mister Ki-Hoon!”

Sohn Ki-Hoon interrupted his comrades trying to dissuade him and waited for the reaction of the High Orc.

“Then, come.... Human.”

With the end of those words, the blurred eyes of the leader High Orc regained its original clarity. And that would be wild beast-like glare of bloodlust. The creature spoke up again.

“Ashue tu reka.”

With that one sentence, the High Orc warriors burning with fierce hostility withdrew as if it was all a lie. The leader High Orc waited without withdrawing, and beckoned to Sohn Ki-Hoon, telling him to follow.

“Let’s get going as well.”

Sohn Ki-Hoon was the first to start walking, and the hesitant Hunters began to follow after him one after the other.

‘What is he thinking?’

Jin-Woo stared with a puzzled expression on his face.

There was little doubt that not only the boss but countless more High Orcs would be waiting for them inside the boss room. Meaning, their odds of victory would be even lower on that side.

So, it was hard to figure out what Sohn Ki-Hoon was thinking of when he chose to follow the monsters.

‘Is he trying to negotiate with the boss? In order to get out of here alive?’

Although the odds of that succeeding was extremely low....

No.

Maybe, this was for the better.

Jin-Woo originally believed that this raid would end with him hunting down a few mob creatures, but now, he got himself a chance to meet the boss, instead. He returned the dagger back to his Inventory and slowly followed after the group.

Just how long did they walk?

Sohn Ki-Hoon slowed down his walking speed gradually and had arrived at Jin-Woo’s side. And then, he called out with a hushed voice.

“Hunter-nim.”

“Yes?”

Jin-Woo continued looking at the front while answering him. Sohn Ki-Hoon, too, continued to stare at the backs of the High Orcs walking further up ahead.

“We... as soon as we meet the boss, we’re going to attack right away. When that happens, regardless of whether our attack was successful or not, the b*stard should not be able to maintain the magic spell blocking the exit.”

That made a certain amount of sense.

Unless it was some kind of hex-type magic, one had to keep one’s focus in order to maintain a spell. Especially if one wanted to maintain high-class magic, an incredible mental focus was a necessity.

However, what about it?

Didn’t matter whether they succeed in killing the boss or managed to cancel the magic blocking the exit, they would still meet a dog’s death right

away inside the boss room after getting surrounded by the countless High Orcs anyway.

The odds of this raid team returning alive were still pathetically low.

Perhaps to answer Jin-Woo's curiosity, Sohn Ki-Hoon spoke with a grave expression on his face.

“While their attention is on us, Hunter-nim, please escape from the boss room. Once you get out of the dungeon, you must alert the main assault force.”

By the time the assault team consisting of rank S Hunters arrive here, everything would be over for them. Sohn Ki-Hoon was getting ready to die.

“Are you thinking of dying alongside the boss?”

Jin-Woo sneaked a glance at Sohn Ki-Hoon's expression. His face remained hardened, but there was no wavering in his eyes.

“Our job isn't to get out of this dungeon alive, but to close the Gates. Many people outside are paying us a great deal of money for that purpose.”

Sohn Ki-Hoon's voice gained more conviction as he spoke.

“We will do our job according to what we've been training for. However, you're different. There's no reason for you to die here. I hope you can get out of this place alive.”

One could now hear the unwavering belief in his voice. His words contained his determination.

Jin-Woo realised that nothing he could say right now would be of any help to Sohn Ki-Hoon.

So, he simply nodded his head as his reply.

Cha Hae-In finally arrived at the location of the second rank A Gate.

She had her baseball cap pushed down low, and as a result, only a few passersby recognised her.

The first thing she did was to seek out the mining team.

A few Hunters walked past her and sneaked a couple of glances, but they were all working for the Guild anyway and none of them paid her any great attention after that.

Eventually, she could see Foreman Bae in the distance – as well as the mining team around him.

Thump, thump!

Her heart began beating faster.

Standing a little bit of distance away from them, she scanned the faces of each miner present.

‘Where is he...?’

She couldn’t see Jin-Woo among them.

How should she say this? It felt like all of her energy was abandoning her at once.

‘Did he give up on being a miner?’

Why don’t I wait for another minute? He could have left the spot for only a moment and is coming back soon.

Three minutes more.

No, maybe five.

....And so, she waited for another 15 minutes, but Jin-Woo didn’t show up in the end.

“Fuu....”

After spitting out a long sigh, Cha Hae-In turned around to leave. But, only after taking a couple of steps, she turned around again and returned to her original spot.

She yanked her cap off and took in several deep breaths, before walking towards Foreman Bae. The gazes of the mining team members were directed to her now.

Thankfully, the stink wasn’t so bad, perhaps due to the ranks of Hunters in the mining team being low.

“Uh? Uhhh?”

Recognising Cha Hae-In, Foreman Bae quickly ran over to her.

“Cha Hunter-nim? I thought you were taking a break today?”

“Hello there.”

Cha Hae-In shared a simple greeting with Foreman Bae and after making sure that no one was eavesdropping on her, she cautiously asked him a question.

“By any chance... Is there a Hunter named Seong Jin-Woo working for you?”

“Mister Seong?”

Hearing an unexpected name being mentioned out of the blue, Foreman Bae formed a surprised expression.

“If you’re looking for Mister Seong, he subbed for a porter’s job...”

“A porter?!”

Cha Hae-In gasped out in shock.

“Are you saying he actually went inside the Gate?!”

Foreman Bae nodded his head vigorously as if to show that he, too, couldn’t believe it.

“Yes, miss. That’s what happened.”

A rank E Hunter volunteered as a porter and entered a rank A dungeon? And he didn’t even have dozens of lives or anything, too.

‘What was he thinking?’

But, when Cha Hae-In thought about it, didn’t she find that man loitering around the boss room yesterday with weapons in his hands? Indeed, she did not see wrong back then.

One more thing to be suspicious of, then.

Even though she ended up letting go of yesterday’s event as a coincidence, when she really thought about it in detail, it was a rather strange thing for a Hunter with four years of experience getting lost inside a dungeon like that.

‘I need to find out.’

She began thinking that she simply had to confirm what this Hunter named Seong Jin-Woo wanted from her Hunters Guild. And in order to do so, she had to enter the dungeon.

Not only was she the Vice Chairman of the Hunters Guild, but she was also a rank S Hunter as well. No one would try to stop her if she wanted to enter a dungeon where the Hunters Guild was performing a raid.

Cha Hae-In lightly bit into her thumb while pondering her choices, before swiftly making her decision.

“I’ll have to enter the Gate myself.”



Chapter 88 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Foreman Bae's eyes went extra-round.

“Heok....? Was there some kind of an accident? Should we ask the Guild for additional personnel?”

“No, no need. It's a personal matter. I just wanted to talk to him about something private, so you don't have to worry.”

“Oh... I see.”

Cha Hae-In spun towards the Gate.

However, her side felt rather empty, then.

‘Ah. My weapon.....’

She felt around her waist, only to belatedly remember that she had left her sword back home. Since she never imagined that she'd be entering a dungeon on her off day like this, well.....

Cha Hae-In's forehead beautifully creased up.

‘As a leader, Mister Ki-Hoon is someone totally trustworthy, and the rest of the team are made up of capable Hunters. But....’

But, it was still unimaginable to enter a dungeon without a weapon in hand. A short deliberation later, she turned around to face Foreman Bae once more.

“Is there something else, Miss....?”

Foreman Bae looked at her with confused eyes.

“Mister Foreman, can I borrow a weapon from you?”

“Pardon me?”

Foreman Bae hesitated somewhat, before calling out to a Hunter passing by.

“Hey, over here, Mister Seok. Please bring me one of our equipments.”

“Yes, boss.”

The 'equipment' Mister Seok rapidly brought over was a pickaxe, as used by the mining team.

“.....”

Cha Hae-In’s expression stiffened.

“Excuse me.... Don’t you have anything else?”

“Uhm, such as....?”

“For instance, swords or spears.”

“But, if you ask us for such things, well.....”

“..”

Cha Hae-In sighed out under her breath.

“I understand.”

She then carefully rejected the pickaxe Foreman Bae tried to hand over and quickly walked towards the Gate. He anxiously asked her as he watched her distancing back.

“Cha Hunter-nim, will it be fine for you to be empty-handed in there?”

Cha Hae-In came to an abrupt halt and stood there for a moment, before hurriedly walking back to take the pickaxe from Foreman Bae. He guffawed out in a genial manner.

“I think that’s for the best, miss. I mean, it’ll be dangerous to be weaponless inside a dungeon, regardless of what.”

“Well, then....”

As she turned around to hurriedly leave, Foreman Bae unluckily didn’t get to see her ears dyed in deep shades of crimson.

The looks of determination were clearly visible on the faces of the raid team members. They kept their mouths resolutely shut as if to imply that they knew their fate already. Meanwhile, the female Healer approached Jin-Woo and began rummaging through the luggage.

Jin-Woo turned his head towards her and asked.

“What are you doing?”

“Hold on.”

What she took out was a small ladies handbag.

“I kinda feel a bit uncomfortable if I’m too far away from my bag, you see.”

He didn’t even ask her, yet she provided him with an explanation oh-so-kindly. She took out a memo pad and a pen from the bag and then began

jotting something down on said memo pad.

Because she wasn't looking in front of her, she kept bumping into Jin-Woo's shoulder with her head.

Eventually, though – she closed the memo pad.

Her bag, which she slung around her shoulder while writing on the memo, was pushed back inside the luggage again, but that memo remained in her hands.

Jin-Woo observed her with a bit of interest, wondering what she'd do with that, but she simply pushed the memo towards him, instead.

“.....?”

After taking it, Jin-Woo tilted his head, prompting the female Healer to tearfully spoke up.

“I wrote down what I wanted to say to my family. When you get outside, please make sure that they get it. Please.”

If he burst out in laughter, she'd probably get hurt, no? Jin-Woo suppressed his rising laughter and pocketed the memo.

“I'll hold onto this for the time being, but I'm pretty sure I won't get to deliver this.”

“It's going to be fine.”

The female Healer nodded her head.

‘With High Orc warriors zealously keeping tabs on us like this, it won't be easy for him to get out of here unscathed.’

After all, Mister Porter was only a rank E. She hadn't figured out yet what Jin-Woo meant, though.

Soon, their eyes caught the sight of the boss room. The anxiety felt by the Hunters came over the air and could be felt on his skin.

They were greeted by a huge open space.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo scanned the boss room. It was smaller than yesterday's boss room with the giant in it.

However, quite unlike yesterday, he didn't get the impression that the boss room was huge at all. And that would be all thanks to countless High Orcs completely filling up the chamber.

As a matter of fact, there were over twice as many Orcs here as those that ‘escorted’ the raid team.

‘At least a hundred... no, maybe it’s a bit more than that?’

While there were no monsters inside the rest of the dungeon, they had been gathered inside the boss room, instead.

Seeing the masses of High Orcs waiting inside, Sohn Ki-Hoon’s complexion paled in an instant.

‘If this many High Orcs manage to escape from the Gate, then....’

This was a large enough horde to utterly destroy a small city, even before the top Hunters had the chance to do something about them.

Cold sweat trickled down his backside.

‘At the very least, we gotta eliminate the boss.’

Just like how he resolutely swallowed the dry saliva, he did his best to keep his determination burning in his heart.

The High Orcs of the boss room parted to make way.

“Ah sharkh.”

The leader High Orc beckoned again. The raid team and the escorting High Orcs walked over to an altar located in the corner of the boss room.

“Over there!”

One of the Hunters pointed towards the top of the altar.

And that’s where the High Orc Shaman stood, dressed in all manner of accessories adorning its entire body, including a mask, bone necklace, and earrings.

‘So, that’s the boss....’

Sohn Ki-Hoon’s expression hardened.

He immediately realised that the terrifying magic energy filling up the interior of this dungeon was being emitted from that creature. And then, surrounding that b*stard was....

From the four ‘guards’ possessing an air of alertness standing around the boss, he also sensed a rather ominous aura as well.

‘This isn’t good.’

Could the raid team get past those guards and kill the Shaman in one fell swoop? The Hunters were all thinking roughly the same thing.

The Hunters stopped in front of the Shaman.

A certain intangible tension flowed in between the High Orcs surrounding the human Hunters as they kept a certain distance away.

“Kekeke.”

However, the Shaman didn't seem to care about the mood of the place; it simply opened its rather malformed jaw, visible below the mask, and cackled out.

“Oh humans, welcome.”

The Hunters of the raid team exchanged glances.

‘As soon as Sohn hyung gives us the signal....’

‘We attack together.’

‘Aim for the Shaman, no matter what.’

It was for the purpose of coordinating their attacks.

However....

Suddenly, the air around them began freezing up.

Hunters of this raid team were some of the very best out there. They all shifted their gazes at the same time at this sudden outpouring of chilling aura. The source was the Shaman.

The creature finally took the mask off. When it did, the magic energy it had been hiding until then exploded forth, unchecked and unhindered.

Rumble-!!

The freakish magic power spread out in circular waves with the boss as the centre.

As if they were normal, powerless civilians that ran into a lion or a tiger, the Hunters froze up on the spot like a bunch of statues.

“O-oh my god....”

“How can a magic power of such magnitude be....?”

“We, we gotta fight against something like this?!”

Despair, lamentation, resentment, even regret. The Shaman formed an ominous grin when facing these varying forms of hopelessness.

“Are you scared of me, humans?”

Sohn Ki-Hoon bit down on his lower lip, hard, and took a difficult step

forward before asking a question.

“Why did you summon us here? Your warriors would’ve been enough to kill us back there.”

The Shaman grinned again. Simply looking at the grin chilled the backs of the Hunters.

“It’s for entertainment.”

“What?”

Sohn Ki-Hoon was left utterly speechless.

Were they brought here just for that purpose?

The Shaman continued on.

“While we wait out the remaining time, I will kill you one by one and entertain the soldiers!”

Waaaaaah-!!

High Orc warriors all roared out in frenzy and excitement.

Hunters were ruthlessly forced down by the enormous pressure emitted from the Orcs and couldn’t even breathe properly. One of them even began crying, no less.

“However....”

The Shaman briefly stopped talking, then.

The boss’s gaze shifted and stopped at the rear of the human’s group – where Jin-Woo was.

“....I see that a strange being is mixed among you, humans.”

It was then, Sohn Ki-Hoon’s eyes gleamed dangerously.

‘With the Shaman looking elsewhere, this is my chance!’

Veins bulged in his neck.

“Now!!”

Sohn Ki-Hoon roared out at the top of his lungs, unsheathed his sword, and rushed out. However, it was eerily quiet behind him.

‘How come....?’

He glanced behind him while running, and discovered his comrades rooted to their spots, not daring to move an inch. They had lost their fighting spirit a long time ago from the display of the boss’s overwhelming might.

Sohn Ki-Hoon's heart fell to the pit of his stomach.

'Ah....'

Still, someone had to do this. He couldn't stop now.

His gaze shifted back to the front.

Perhaps his attack wasn't expected, the Shaman was still smiling, and its guards weren't showing any urgent reactions, either.

This could be his one and only chance.

Didn't matter if it was pure luck. He'd accept fluke, too. As long as his sword could reach....

Sohn Ki-Hoon fiercely rushed forward and cocked his sword behind him.

"Euhwaaaaah-!!"

But, even before he could swing the sword with all his might, he collided with something invisible and was flung away.

Boom!!

At first, it was shield magic.

"Keok!"

Flung away from the rebound, Sohn Ki-Hoon landed on the ground and rolled backwards. But, that lasted only for a short while.

"Looks like we have our first volunteer."

Along with the Shaman's mocking words, Sohn Ki-Hoon's body was lifted up into the air.

Wuuuooooo...

And now, it was the anti-gravity magic.

"...."

The lips of the Shaman were moving up and down non-stop. When Sohn Ki-Hoon was lifted up as high as a two-story building, the Shaman began chanting a different spell.

"....."

to come was gravity acceleration.

Kaboom!!!!

Sohn Ki-Hoon was slammed into the ground.

“Keo-heok!”

He didn't even have the time to writhe in pain as he was lifted up in the air again.

“Anti-gravity.”

Kekeke....

Not only the Shaman, but the rest of the High Orcs were cackling in derision as well, their fangs fully bared now.

Kaboom!!

“Keo-heok!!”

Wuuooong....

Boom!!

“Keok!”

The Shaman continued to toy with Sohn Ki-Hoon by lifting him up and slamming him down.

When he landed on the ground for the fourth time, Sohn Ki-Hoon vomited out a mouthful of blood. Seeing that scene, the complexions of the Hunters got paler and paler. However, none of them dared to step forward to stop this.

“Ki-Ki-Hoon hyung....”

They simply stood there trembling while witnessing Sohn Ki-Hoon being broken into pieces.

Plop.

The female Healer collapsed on the floor as if she no longer had any strength left in her legs.

Eventually....

The Shaman raised Sohn Ki-Hoon in the air for the fifth time.

“You sure are a tenacious b*stard, aren't you?”

“Euh, euh.....”

A pained moan leaked out of Sohn Ki-Hoon's mouth. However, he still didn't let go of the sword as if he hadn't given up yet.

Wuuooong!

Slam!

Wuuuonng!

Slam!!

Wuuuonng!

As he was thrown up and down between the air and ground several times more, Sohn Ki-Hoon finally lost his grip on the sword.

Clang....

It happened then.

Just as Sohn Ki-Hoon was thrown down to the ground once more, he vanished from the view.

“Ng??”

The Shaman’s eyes opened wider.

Where did the human disappear to, when all of his bones should be broken by now? The Shaman searched for the whereabouts of Sohn Ki-Hoon.

‘There....?’

In a corner not too far, it discovered Sohn Ki-Hoon, unmoving on the ground. And at the same time, found a certain man crouching nearby.

Of course, it was Jin-Woo.

Jin-Woo carefully laid Sohn Ki-Hoon down and glared at the Shaman.

“Hey, mister leader. I want to ask you something.”

“.....?”

Until now, Sohn Ki-Hoon hadn’t figured out what happened to him.

“Will it be okay if I kill all of the monsters in here?”

“You... What are you....?”

The Shaman frowned and gestured with its chin, and one of the guards swung about its scimitar and ran to where Jin-Woo was.

As Jin-Woo glared at the monster rushing towards him, a light of fury lit up in his eyes. He reached out with his hands.

‘Ruler’s Reach.’

When he did, it was as if a giant, invisible hand grabbed the Orc guard, and the monster was cleanly picked up from the ground.

“Ku, kurua?!”

The monster kicked and struggled in the air.

‘What....?!’

The eyes of the Shaman opened wider.

Jin-Woo pointed down towards the ground.

Slam!!

The guard crashed down to the ground. The impact force was so great that deep cracks spread out on the ground. However, Jin-Woo didn't stop there; just like how the Shaman manipulated Sohn Ki-Hoon's body, he lifted the guard up in the air again.

Slam!!

Boom!!

Kaboom!!

Like a basketball bouncing between the ground and one's hand, the Orc guard continuously slammed into the ceiling and the ground non-stop, a helpless cry coming out from its mouth. Eventually, its head pierced into the ceiling.

Kaboom!!

Scatter....

With that, debris from the ceiling fell down.

While staring at the dangling Orc guard with its head buried deep into the ceiling, both groups of the High Orcs and the Hunters couldn't hide their astonishment.

Sohn Ki-Hoon trembled and questioned Jin-Woo.

“You... Just what is your....?”

“I'll ask you again.”

This here was a hunting ground the Hunters Guild paid for. And there was only one person present that could speak for the Guild at the moment.

Jin-Woo asked for the last time.

“Monsters in this place.... Can I have them all?”

What was this?

Sohn Ki-Hoon realised now that the identity of the porter or whatever didn't matter anymore. No, he was just p*ssed off. He was angry at himself for being toyed around with by the monsters like that. Tears rolled down Sohn Ki-Hoon's face.

“Please.... I beg of you, do something....”

With that, it was done.

When Jin-Woo stood back up, High Orcs approached him. The Shaman was behind them. The boss began smirking in derision.

“For a measly human, you know some interesting skills, don’t you?”

The boss gestured, and the High Orcs quickly surrounded Jin-Woo.

“However, just how far do you think your tricks will get you?”

Jin-Woo’s glare became so much colder. He never really cared for any of the monsters he killed so far, but this would be his first time wanting to slice one up this badly.

“I’ll take care of you last.”

If the boss knew the meaning of enjoyment, surely it’d know what fear tasted like.

Jin-Woo slowly murmured out.

“My shadows....”

Two daggers appeared in Jin-Woo’s hands.

“....Come out and play.”



Chapter 89 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Screech.

A black sedan stopped by the side of the road.

The man climbing out of the driver's seat, kitted out in a pair of sunglasses and a black business suit, was none other than Woo Jin-Cheol, the section chief of the Monitoring Division, the Hunters Association.

Soon after his exit, three more men climbed out of the car from the passenger and rear seats. All of them were from the Monitoring Division as well.

“Chief, weren't we on our way back to the Association?”

“I just wanted to confirm something, first.”

Woo Jin-Cheol shifted his gaze over the Gate, some distance away.

‘A rank A Gate still gives me the creeps every time I look at it.’

Woo Jin-Cheol frowned deeply. If that giant hole opened up like a door and monsters trapped inside emerged outside.....

Just imagining that made him shudder.

‘However, why did that man apply to become a miner in such a horrifying place?’

Not only that, for two days in a row, too.

Even if Association President Goh Gun-Hui hadn't asked him, Woo Jin-Cheol would have personally come here to find out, anyway.

‘Investigating behind his back is.... impossible.’

The man in question was a rank S Awakened. A measly rank A like him going undiscovered while secretly investigating a rank S was, realistically speaking, an impossible dream.

That was why he decided to show up in the open like this.

Since he had a matter to attend to nearby anyway, he was thinking of greeting the youth while saying he was in the neighbourhood, and then ask a couple of simple questions.

‘I hope he won’t find me strange or anything.’

Anyone would get curious of the circumstances if a Hunter, already pretty much confirmed to be a rank S, chose to shovel the ground for some reason.

On top of this, wasn’t Seong Jin-Woo someone the Association President was paying close attention to? The Association President must’ve found this young man very much to his liking, because he even focused all of his attention on everything Jin-Woo did.

‘No, I’m not the strange one here.’

It was obvious that you’d get curious, and it was only natural to ask.

While telling himself that, Woo Jin-Cheol walked over to where the representative of the Hunters Guild was.

“I’m looking for your mining team.”

“Who.... are you?”

“I’m from the Association.”

The Guild employee confirmed Woo Jin-Cheol’s identity and pointed in the direction of the waiting mining team.

“Please head over that way.”

“Thank you.”

Four Hunters from the Monitoring Division were now paying a visit to the mining team. As if he had received a heads-up already, Foreman Bae Yun-Seok hurriedly ran to meet them halfway.

“Aigoo, what brings the Hunters from the Monitoring Division to this place?”

The members of the mining team had been relaxing until then overheard those words, and tension briefly flashed by in their eyes.

The oppressive pressure Hunters felt from the words ‘Monitoring Division’ was rather huge.

The people whose job was to arrest the Awakened that the normal laws couldn’t do anything about, they then either reformed the troublemakers or simply eliminated them. The ‘Monitoring Division’ was where those kinds of people worked for.

“What’s going on?”

“Hunters from the Monitoring Division are here.”

“Monitoring Division?”

“Something must’ve happened.”

Feeling curious now, the mining team members began flocking around Foreman Bae.

Woo Jin-Cheol took his sunglasses off.

‘.....’

He swept his gaze around the miners to locate Seong Jin-Woo, but in the end, he had to ask for that man’s whereabouts from Foreman Bae.

“Do you know by any chance where Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim is?”

“I bloody knew it!”

Suddenly, a man jumped out from among the miners. It was Lee Seong-Gu, who had run into Jin-Woo’s shoulder yesterday.

Lee Seong-Gu passionately spat out his complaints, flying spittle accompanying his rapidly firing words.

“When that bstard looked at me and began grinning, I was terrified that he might eat me alive or something, you know! Uh-whew, it’s still so dmn scary even when I think about it now....”

Woo Jin-Cheol’s brows furrowed slightly.

‘Terrifying enough to eat a person....?’

Just what on earth was this man talking about?

Murmur, murmur...

The voices of the Hunters rose up higher and higher. Woo Jin-Cheol ignored the background noise and asked Lee Seong-Gu.

“Did something happen?”

“Ah, well, that is....”

Lee Seong-Gu was about to answer him, but then, he rapidly realised that he was also at fault and quickly waved his hands around.

“Well, that isn’t really important, but the main thing is, his eyes were really scary, man.”

“...”

Woo Jin-Cheol’s gaze shifted back to Foreman Bae.

“Where can I find Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

“Mister Seong is... He’s inside the Gate right now.”

Seong Jin-Woo was inside the rank A dungeon, where a raid was ongoing? Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes opened wider.

“Why did he enter the dungeon?”

“Well, the raid team’s porter hasn’t shown up today, you see. Nobody wanted to go in there, so Mister Seong volunteered as the porter.”

“...”

“But, it’s a wee bit weird, you know?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, it’s nothing particular, but... Cha Hunter-nim... no, I mean, Cha Hae-In Hunter-nim was also looking for Mister Seong, so she entered the Gate just now, you know? Isn’t it just too weird...?”

Foreman Bae spoke up to there and tilted his head.

Meanwhile, the mind of Woo Jin-Cheol became a bit of mess after hearing that.

‘The Vice Chairman of the Hunters Guild Cha Hae-In was looking for Seong Jin-Woo? Not only that, she even went after him into the dungeon, too?’

Just what was happening here?

He only stopped by to say hello to Seong Jin-Woo, but now, it felt like something big was afoot here.

‘For the time being, I should head over to the Gate.’

That seemed to be the best choice he could make for the time being.

“We’ll stop by at the Gate, and leave afterwards.”

“Oh, sure thing.”

Foreman Bae chuckled genially and nodded his head. Just as Woo Jin-Cheol and his subordinates turned around to leave, Lee Seong-Gu quickly grabbed his arm.

“Excuse me, Mister Hunter?”

Lee Seong-Gu had this expectant face for some reason as he hurriedly asked Woo Jin-Cheol.

“That b*stard, Seong Jin-Woo, did he do something bad? Maybe, he’s killed someone? I mean, he looked like someone fully capable of that.”

Woo Jin-Cheol frowned slightly again. He sort of could understand why Seong Jin-Woo glared scarily at this moron.

‘A fool who’d get blown away into the weeds if Seong Jin-Woo snorts in front of him.....’

Still, there were too many eyes watching. As a Hunter working for the Association, he couldn’t carelessly display his irritation at a stranger.

This was why working for a public organisation sometimes could get rather annoying. Woo Jin-Cheol spat out a long sigh and did his best to sound as diplomatic as possible.

“You’ll find out when you take a look at tomorrow evening’s news broadcast.”

Perhaps that answered most of his own suspicions, Lee Seong-Gu raised his voice high as if he had correctly predicted this.

“I told you, didn’t I? I told you that man is too suspicious!”

“But, he didn’t look that way....”

“Right. And he worked so diligently, too.”

Not minding the lukewarm responses of his colleagues, Lee Seong-Gu went on about how great his discerning eyes were.

‘Tsk.’

Woo Jin-Cheol stared at that man making a fool of himself, before taking his subordinates towards the Gate.

However....

Woo Jin-Cheol instinctively stopped a few steps away from the Gate.

“Chief?”

The subordinates began staring in confusion at Woo Jin-Cheol’s stiff face.

‘This... This can’t be. It makes no sense.’

Woo Jin-Cheol quickly yanked his phone out. He then accessed the Association’s information hub and checked out the available info on the rank A Gate the Hunters Guild was supposed to conquer today.

Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes widened in shock.

‘Why is the measured value of the magic energy so low?!’

His head began rocking side to side automatically.

‘The measurement results are wrong.’

Not all rank A Hunters were equal. For instance, Hunter Woo Jin-Cheol was right near the top within the rank A. And his instincts were telling him this: The measurement value was all wrong.

Woo Jin-Cheol quickly issued an order to his subordinate next to him.

“Go get the magic energy measuring device.”

The subordinate immediately realised that Woo Jin-Cheol’s expression was grave, and hurriedly ran to where their car was parked.

The miniature measuring device used by the Monitoring Division was a world apart in quality from the devices used by the regular Association employees. As befitting a device created from a top-grade magic crystal that cost over a billion Won, this piece of equipment very rarely threw up errors or mistakes in its results.

Bleep.

The measurement result quickly came out.

‘I knew it....’

The displayed result showed a clear discrepancy to the previously measured value. If the Guild formed their raid team according to the measured value presented by the Association, then it’d definitely become a serious situation.

‘Well, with two rank S Hunters inside, I’m sure nothing untoward would happen, but...’

But, when Woo Jin-Cheol placed the measuring device on the ground and tried to stand back up...

Wuuuuooooonng!!

The Gate suddenly began vibrating.

The powerful gushing magic energy wave caused Woo Jin-Cheol and his three subordinates, with far worse perceptions than him, to flinch grandly on the spot. They began trembling like leaves right away.

“S-Section Chief?!”

“What, what was that, sir??”

Woo Jin-Cheol shifted his gaze to the youngest of the agents present, the kid’s complexion looking awfully pale now.

“You okay?”

“Y-yes, sir. I’m okay.”

The youngest agent cautiously stared at the back of his hand after making his reply. He could see goosebumps covering up his skin.

Woo Jin-Cheol stood upright.

“We’re going inside.”

“Pardon me?”

“You want to go in there, sir?”

Woo Jin-Cheol’s determination didn’t waver, even for a second.

“If you’re scared, it’s okay for you to back out.”

Only he knew that the measurement value was incorrect at this stage. It was his duty to inform the Hunters trapped inside. It was the duty of the Association’s agents to manage other Hunters, and to keep a close watch on them, but also to aid them in time of their needs.

“N-no, sir.”

“We’ll go with you.”

Woo Jin-Cheol nodded his head in satisfaction.

“Junior. Stay behind and report the new measurement result back to the Association.”

“Yes. No, wait. Sir?”

“Can you do it?”

Woo Jin-Cheol lightly tapped the youngest agent here on the shoulder, and the latter nodded his head with some difficulty.

“...Yes, sir. I understand.”

Woo Jin-Cheol turned to look back at the Gate.

On top of its already nonsensically-high magic energy emission, an even greater storm of magic power rushed out from the Gate just now.

‘What the hell is going on inside this Gate?’

With Woo Jin-Cheol as the lead, the two agents of the Monitoring Division also threw themselves beyond the Gate’s surface.

Around the same time....

Cha Hae-In was following after the traces left behind the raid team.

‘This is so weird. Why can’t I find the traces of monsters?’

In a regular dungeon, it was normal to find the corpses of monsters strewn

about here and there, starting from somewhere near the entrance and all the way till the boss room.

But, no matter how hard she looked, she couldn't see any dead monsters. Did the monsters gather in one place or something?

She thought like this and continued to walk forward, until....

'...Huh?'

She finally located corpses in the distance.

As befitting a rank S melee-type Hunter, Cha Hae-In arrived at the location of the battle in the blink of an eye.

'How can this be?!'

Her eyes opened up super-wide. All the corpses belonged to the High Orcs. It was easy to identify them, because they featured red skin and their fangs were noticeably longer, too.

'How did Mister Sohn Ki-Hoon's team manage to defeat this many High Orcs?!'

And, was that all? There was seemingly not one casualty, too. Of course, if there was a casualty, they would've retreated on their own accord, saving her the trouble of having to step foot inside here.

'...Did I underestimate the rank A and B Hunters by too much?'

That could certainly be the case.

Surveying the location, she thought that the battle had to be a bit one-sided, as well.

However....

'Wait, isn't that....?'

Cha Hae-In discovered something odd and crouched down to take a closer look at one of the corpses. And her eyes grew even wider than before. She stood back up and quickly began checking out each of the High Orc corpses.

'This one, and this one, too....'

Her suspicion gradually morphed into certainty.

'But, how....??'

How could something like this happen?

Almost all the High Orcs were left with injuries inflicted by short but incredibly sharp weapons.

‘They weren’t blows fatal enough to kill, but....’

But, she thought that these were definitely enough to hinder the movements of the High Orcs. Which meant that other Hunters were simply dining on the table full of tasty dishes prepared by someone else.

It also meant that one Hunter managed to almost single-handedly massacre all 20 High Orcs.

Only two High Orcs were killed off in a different fashion to everyone else. One had its head ripped off by an incredible force, while the other one had died after something blunt hit it in the head.

‘Excluding those two, one person managed to drive all the other Orcs to the brink of death?!’

Could such a thing even be possible??

She was deeply confident of her own speed, but even then, she couldn’t be sure of achieving the same feat under the same given situation. And also, from what she knew, there was no Assassin-type Hunter wielding daggers or shortwords within Sohn Ki-Hoon’s team.

‘...Shortwords?’

It was then, a certain scene flashed past her brain.

The man who stood near the boss room yesterday.

Seong Jin-Woo was definitely holding short weapons in both of his hands.

‘Could it be that man?’

When her thoughts arrived at this point, Cha Hae-In’s head snapped towards the deeper parts of the dungeon. And her expression rapidly hardened. She could sense this incredibly powerful magic energy wave, no, magic energy tremors, the kind she’d never experienced before, coming from there.

The air itself was trembling, hard.

‘No!!’

Cha Hae-In bit her lower lips.

If that magical energy belonged to the boss monster, then no one from Sohn Ki-Hoon’s team would be able to survive.

She began running towards the boss room with all her might.



Chapter 90 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Come out and play.”

Everything began with those words.

Whooooosh-!!

A ripple incomparably greater than that of the magic energy wave from the High Orc Shaman spread out everywhere. That wasn't the only change to take place, however.

Along with him unshackling his magic power, the shadow beneath Jin-Woo's feet spread out, too. And it covered the entirety of the chamber's surface at a frightening pace, as if someone had poured a bucket of pitch-black ink onto the floor.

“Heok?!”

“W-what's this??”

The Hunters of Sohn Ki-Hoon's raid team saw the 'shadow' spread beneath their feet and freaked out. How should they even go about describing this situation? Even the most experienced, grizzled Hunters among the group hadn't heard of anything like this, never mind seeing one.

Tremble...

An unknown fear crept up over them.

Sohn Ki-Hoon, lying on the ground, powerlessly began trembling violently while staring up at Jin-Woo.

‘What.... Just what are you planning to do?’

As if to answer his silent question – when the spreading shadow completely covered the floor of the boss room....

Shururuk...

The surface of the shadow wavered, and soldiers wearing jet-black armour rose up one by one.

[You have activated ‘Skill: Sovereign’s Territory’.]

[All Stats of the Shadow Soldiers fighting over the Summoner’s shadow

will rise up by 50%.]

A thin smile spread on Jin-Woo's lips.

'Good.'

This was the new Class-specific Skill he learnt when he broke past level 70 back in the Demon's Castle.

He sensed the fighting spirit of his enhanced soldiers soaring higher. Quite obviously, a satisfied grin formed on his face. 50 summoned Shadow Soldiers stood around Jin-Woo in a circle as if to protect him.

"Ku-kururuk??"

"Kuruk!!"

The High Orc Warriors, famed for their bravery, began retreating one step at a time after getting their wits scared off by the dangerous pressure emitted by Jin-Woo and his soldiers.

"O-Orcs are retreating?!"

"Just what is the meaning of this..."

Even though they were trembling like a leaf from this unbelievable situation, the Hunters also began clutching onto a slender thread of renewed hope now.

"D-did you feel that?"

"Yeah."

"Can... can that even make any sense?"

The mage-type Hunters were sensitive towards the magic energy, to begin with. And they couldn't control their furiously quickening heartbeat no matter what. Because, an insane amount of magic energy was gushing out from the man who subbed in for their luggage carrier. Someone whom they thought of as a simple rank E, no less.

'No, hang on. Is this even magic energy?'

'To think, this magical energy is even more ominous than what the High Orc Shaman is emitting...!!'

The sheer pressure from the magic energy thickly filling up the boss room made it difficult to even breathe properly. The fact that this incredible power didn't belong to an enemy relieved them to no end.

On the other hand, indescribably heavy and taut tension was flowing among the ranks of High Orcs.

With the appearance of the Shadow Soldiers, the difference of 1 to 150 suddenly got reduced to 50 to 150.

More importantly, though, those 50 were no ordinary 50 at all. No, that was the power that already transcended common sense, the one that couldn't be quantified with mere numbers!

As if to prove that reality, Jin-Woo was the very first one to dash forward.

The Shaman hurriedly shouted out, then.

“What are you doing!! Kill that human right now!!”

With their backs pushed forward by the voice carrying a thick amount of the Shaman's magical energy, the High Orc warriors all roared out and raised their weapons.

“Kuwaaaaarr!!”

Step, step, step – slice!!

The skill, 'Sovereign's Territory' was designed solely for his Shadow Soldiers. However, even without a Status boosting buff, Jin-Woo's displayed strength was already out of this world.

“Kuwaahk!!”

“Kuaahh, kuaah!!”

High Orcs screamed out. Limbs, bits of body parts sliced off by Jin-Woo's two daggers, and the ensuing trails of blood scattered in all directions. He was so fast that even the elite Hunters could only catch the glimpses of his afterimage.

“That....”

“Right. That's like seeing our Vice Chairman.”

Cha Hae-In's nickname was the 'Dancer'.

Normally, she remained a calm, composed figure, but when she jumped into a battle, she swiftly cut down monsters as if she was performing a fast-tempo dance routine. Hence, that nickname was given to her.

The woman in question forbade the use of that nickname because of how embarrassing it sounded, so it wasn't widely known, but some people still resorted to calling her that every now and then.

And now, their supposed porter was displaying a movement that equalled Cha Hae-In – no, even exceeding her speed.

If Cha Hae-In danced, then Mister Porter was a typhoon. He had become

the centre of the storm to obliterate the surrounding monsters.

Kuooooaaahhh!!

The Shadow Soldiers didn't lose out, either; the former leader of the Ice Bears, Tank, took a step forward and that signalled the attack of the Shadow Soldiers.

Iron took to the front. Just as he had done previously, Iron yelled out at the top of his lungs before he could enter the fray properly.

Wuooooaaahhhh!!!

[Iron has used 'Skill: Shout of Provocation'.]

[The targets' resistance is too high and the intended effect didn't activate.]

When his skill failed to work, Iron got angry and began roaring out like a beast. And then, he began destroying the hapless High Orcs with his massive hammer.

Swoosh-!!

Kwajeeck!!

Crack!!

"Kuhhhaarck!!"

"Kiiehck!"

He was so destructive that one even felt a smidgeon of pity for the High Orcs.

On the other hand, Igrit was elegantly and efficiently cutting down the necks of his enemies in complete contrast to Iron's brutality. High Orcs running into Igrit didn't even have a chance to scream before their breaths were cut short.

Slice!

When Igrit's sword drew an arc in the air, another High Orc lost its head.

Regular Shadow Soldiers found it hard to fight against individual High Orcs, but they possessed stamina that didn't know the meaning of fatigue, and the capability to regenerate almost endlessly.

And by buying time in this fashion, the sea of fire shooting out from the Magic Soldiers would rain down on top of the enemies with no exceptions.

Kaaabbbooom!!

Rumble-!!

The number of High Orcs decreased substantially in no time at all. The Shaman's swine-like cheek meat quivered in rage.

'How an insolent human being dares to...!'

The boss's glare was now firmly fixed on Jin-Woo. The boss quickly decided to kill that human first.

The black-armoured soldiers were summons called forth by that human! If that human died, then these soldiers would disappear, too.

In order to kill Jin-Woo, the Shaman began chanting a spell.

"..."

The lips of the Shaman quickly moved up and down.

The song of slowness, the song of blindness, the song of crippling fever, the song of intolerable pain, and the song of demonic slumber; five different types of hexes were completed in an instant and flew towards their intended victim.

"It's done!"

The corners of the Shaman's lips arched up.

The moment all those hexes were completed, Jin-Woo also sensed the unnatural movement of magic energy.

'...Magic, is it?'

Jin-Woo's eyes met those of the Shaman's.

The Orc Shaman smirked derisively.

'It's already too late, human.'

Hexes were different from normal magic spells and couldn't be evaded. The moment it was cast, that would be the end.

With that human b*stard turning into a walking corpse wrecked by all sorts of afflictions, his fate was sealed – to be ripped to shreds by the High Orc Warriors and their weapons. That was the end truly befitting a measly human who didn't know his place and dared to show off.

Unfortunately for the monster, however....

A familiar mechanical beep rang in Jin-Woo's ears.

Tti-ring.

[Abnormal status has occurred.]

[All abnormal status will be removed with the effects of ‘Buff: Immunity’.]

Tti-ring, tti-ring, tti-ring.

Mechanical beeps fired out one after the other.

[‘Hex: Slow’ has been dispelled.]

[‘Hex: Blindness’ has been dispelled.]

....

.....

All five hexes were dispelled even before they had the chance to activate.

Grin.

Jin-Woo smirked at the results. There was this ‘Buff’ he received when he changed into the ‘Player’.

[The blessings from the Grand Sorcerer, Kandiaru]

Thanks to that, he didn’t have to worry about status-altering magic, such as hexes.

“W-what?!”

The Shaman shuddered in shock. Fitting for a boss of the rank A dungeon, the High Orc Shaman had immediately realised that its curses were rendered ineffective by an even greater power than it.

‘But, those were hexes I cast!’

This made no sense!

In order to dispel hexes, one required the purification magic, or the blessings of a being possessing greater power than that of the hex itself.

‘There is an even more excellent Shaman than this great me among humans?’

Even before the monster could think about it some more, the Shaman cried out from the pain shooting up from the back of its foot.

“Kuuuwaahk!!”

When it looked down, it found a dagger deeply lodged in its foot.

“Keuh....”

It was Jin-Woo’s ‘Knight Killer’.

The Shaman raised its head and its bloodshot glare landed on Jin-Woo.

“How dare a mere human.....!”

Jin-Woo casually cut apart a High Orc trying to pounce on him, and silently mouthed some words to the Orc Shaman.

...Don't do anything useless, in other words.

Immediately, the Shaman's face reddened up like a beautifully ripe persimmon.

“How dare a measly human!!”

‘...So, it still has some mental capacity left to get angry, huh?’

Jin-Woo's expression turned icy in the blink of an eye.

In all honesty, he could've eliminated the Shaman right at the beginning of the battle if he wanted to. However, he chose not to.

Because, he wanted to instil the sense of fear into the heart of that Shaman, the way it managed to do to the Hunters present.

However, it seemed not quite enough to make that arrogant monster taste the true meaning of fear. The b*stard's eyes were still 'alive'.

In that case....

‘Let me show you an interesting spectacle, then.’

From now on, he'd show the true sphere of influence of a necromancer.

In the eyes of this Shadow Sovereign, his surroundings now resembled a location of celebration, filled with all sorts of delicacies. From the corpses of the High Orcs sprawled on the ground, black smokes eerily rose up as if they were waiting for Jin-Woo's call.

So, Jin-Woo called out to them.

“Rise up.”

[Shadow Extraction has commenced.]

Accompanying the System's message alerting him to the activation of his skill, horrifying screams that resembled death throes resounded out from somewhere unknown.

Wuuuaaaaahhhh—

The Shaman's eyes widened in shock.

“W-what is....?!”

The Shaman didn't get to finish its sentence. Even before it could, black hands began rising up from the shadows beneath the corpses of the High

Orcs, that was why.

[Shadow Extraction is a success.]

Jin-Woo began smiling deeply while gazing contently at the newbies joining his Shadow army.

‘My warriors have become undead...!!’

The Shaman began shuddering uncontrollably. About 50 warriors had lost their lives so far. And about the same number had changed into those black-armoured soldiers.

‘Which means, those soldiers that b*stard had summoned are...?!’

The Shaman finally realised that the unidentifiable human was not wielding regular summons at all. And at the same time, it also realised how disadvantageous they were against the enemy’s powers.

The fight between 50 and 150 had morphed to 100 versus 100.

High Orc Warriors would bravely jump into a fight against enemies stronger than themselves without fear, but they rapidly lost all their fighting spirit the moment they saw their former comrades being ‘revived’ as Shadow Soldiers.

“Ku.... Kururuk.”

“Kuruk.”

“Kuwak.”

High Orcs, renowned for never backing down from a chance to shed some blood, were now openly retreating out of terror.

The fact that they wouldn’t be able to ascend to the warrior’s heaven after their death and instead become the puppets of the enemy was the worst possible nightmare for these High Orcs.

For sure, the impact of him showing off the Shadow Extraction skill was quite huge.

‘It worked against the warriors, so what about the Shaman, then?’

Jin-Woo scanned the complexion of the Shaman next.

‘Hoh.’

Jin-Woo’s expression brightened.

Finally, there were signs of fear in that b*stard’s eyes.

While shaking like a leaf, the Shaman recalled the existence that could

revive the dead into ‘shadows’. There could not possibly be two people possessing the exact same power. So, that human had to be ‘him’.

‘If that person is him, then..... Then, why are we here....?!’

However, the moment the Shaman thought about ‘itself’ and ‘we’, the inside of its brain blanked out and the relevant memories contained within were wiped out in an instant. The only emotion remaining there was fear.

Not knowing what happened, Jin-Woo formed a satisfied expression.

‘That’s right. Stay exactly like that.’

His plan of making the Shaman shudder in fear until the end was a resounding success. He turned his head while smiling like that, and then, spotted a certain familiar female standing by the entrance of the boss room.

Jin-Woo tilted his head.

‘Who was that?’

She seemed a bit too ‘distant’ to be totally familiar to him, however.

That was why he needed a bit of a moment to recall what her name was.

And she was none other than the rank S Hunter currently affiliated to the Hunters Guild, Cha Hae-In.

‘But, what is that woman doing here?’

Jin-Woo might have been somewhat surprised by her presence here, but then, Cha Hae-In’s own shock was far greater than his. Her wide-open eyes stared at Jin-Woo and his Shadow Soldiers.



Chapter 91 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘Summons??’

The first thing Cha Hae-In thought of was summoning when she saw the Shadow Soldiers. However, there were simply too many of them to say that this was the result of summoning magic.

The thing was, the mage-type Hunters specialising in summoning magic could only control one, or two at a push. If one could control two, then the treatment one received improved greatly, and she hadn’t yet heard of anyone capable of controlling three or more summon creatures.

However....

Just how many of them were here?!

‘This makes no sense!’

One man summoned over 100 in one go. And, he didn’t even need a lot of time to summon them, too. No, he only needed a moment to summon dozens and dozens in one go.

‘I wouldn’t have believed it if I didn’t see it with my own two eyes.’

She might be one of the top-ten ranked Hunters in South Korea, but another Hunter’s ability had managed to leave her totally speechless now.

However....

‘This isn’t the time for me to stand around like this.’

Her gaze immediately shifted past the Shadow Soldiers and locked onto the raid team. Their complexions were not good at all. Some of them were squatting on the ground as if they no longer had any energy left.

Didn’t matter what the identity of the man named Seong Jin-Woo was, didn’t matter what kind of ability he possessed – her priority lay with lending him aid by taking care of these High Orcs right away.

The results of her thought process might be simple, but she was incredibly quick to put them into action. Cha Hae-In tightened her grip on the ‘weapon’ in her hands and took a step towards the High Orcs.

However, it happened then.

Her eyes met Jin-Woo's. And his eyes were telling her in no uncertain terms.

...That it was not necessary; that she shouldn't interfere.

That she should just observe from the sidelines.

Cha Hae-In couldn't understand why.

'But, how come....?'

She could easily tell that Seong Jin-Woo was capable of controlling countless summons. However, there were just as many High Orcs standing, and there was also the boss possessing greater power, too.

Because he had to summon that many creatures, and he had to maintain them constantly too, his magic energy reserve should be running empty by now. Yet....

'What is he trying to do on his own?'

She was puzzled, sure, but in the end, Cha Hae-In lowered her weapon. It wasn't because the so-called weapon just so happened to be a pickaxe she borrowed from the mining team. No, she became curious with what the Hunter named Seong Jin-Woo would do against the army of High Orcs, instead.

Expectations.

Her cool-headed reasoning and her expectation had a fight in her mind, and the latter achieved a resounding victory. For some reason, her heart began palpitating faster now.

'Whew, that's a relief.'

Jin-Woo inwardly breathed a sigh of relief after seeing Cha Hae-In's response. Seriously, the real thing was about to begin, so it wouldn't do for some interference to suddenly pop out, now would it?

Heck, he even had to let the poor Sohn Ki-Hoon go through that crap until the very last moment humanly possible, just for a chance to monopolise all the monsters in here.

'Well, he's the kind of a guy who'd try to fight alongside if he has some energy left still.'

That was why he only acted the moment Sohn Ki-Hoon let go of his sword. Even though he had to suppress his urge to rush forward and kick the head of that d*mn Shaman.

It was all for this moment.

‘As expected of a quick-witted woman.’

What a relief it was that Cha Hae-In turned out to be a smart girl. She backed off without him needing to raise his voice, after all. Jin-Woo turned his attention back to his front while a deep smile formed on his face.

“Shadows!”

Jin-Woo loud yell reverberating within the boss room prompted the shadows to take the battle stance all at once, not one of them deviating from the formation ever so slightly.

Clack!!

Only a moment later, an eerie silence filled up the chamber.

The thing that broke this silence was the single word Jin-Woo threw out while pointing at the High Orc Shaman.

“Go.”

With that, over a hundred Shadow Soldiers rushed towards the cowering group of High Orc warriors.

RUMBLE-!!!

The black soldiers and their controlled march shook the ground, the cavern, and even the eyes of all those witnessing this scene.

Woo Jin-Cheol was running breathlessly.

“Pant, pant, pant...”

He ran so hard that he now tasted sweetness in his mouth.

He bent over and tried to catch his breaths, before raising his torso up – only to spot a woman with a short hairstyle standing near the entrance of the boss room. He immediately recognised who she was.

‘Cha Hae-in....’

Where would you find a female Hunter possessing an aura like hers?

‘...However, why is she standing still like that?’

Woo Jin-Cheol found it strange that she didn’t try to participate in the battle and simply stood by, so he quickly walked up next to her.

And it was at that point he got to see clearly the situation inside the boss room.

“This.... What is this?”

Soldiers wearing jet-black armour were one-sidedly massacring the

supposedly-powerful monsters, also known as High Orc warriors.

“K-kuwaaahk!!”

“Kiihkh!”

“Kueehhk!!”

The pitiful screams of the High Orcs even managed to deafen Woo Jin-Cheol’s hearing.

Also, he might have been less shocked if there were only human-shaped soldiers present. But then again, just what were those nonsensically huge black bears with smoke coming out of them, as well as High Orcs kitted out in various black-coloured armours?

“Been a while, Chief Woo Jin-Cheol.”

“Ah, yes, miss. It’s been a while... but, what are they? They don’t seem to be simple monsters....”

“They are summons that man called out.”

Cha Hae-In greeted Woo Jin-Cheol first before pointing at Jin-Woo in the distance.

Woo Jin-Cheol quickly took his sunglasses off and stared at Jin-Woo, now standing in the middle of the battlefield. While wielding two shortswords that looked like daggers, he was busy destroying the formation of the High Orcs.

‘No matter how I see it, doesn’t he look like a top-ranked melee-type Hunter?’

However, he could even use summoning magic, too?

And, sure enough...

When Jin-Woo’s lips moved a little, dozens more summons rose up from the ground.

“Oh, my god!”

Woo Jin-Cheol’s jaw fell to the floor.

Just how many summons could that man control?!

‘This... this is the true ability of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo....’

He couldn’t close shut his slack jaw at all.

Could the Association President Goh Gun-Hui have recognised the skill set of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo already? If so, then his sky-high interest in Hunter Seong Jin-Woo made plenty of sense.

Cha Hae-In couldn't rip her eyes away from Jin-Woo for a long time, but she belatedly did manage that and asked Woo Jin-Cheol.

“By the way, why are you here, Chief Woo? Was the call made to the Monitoring Division already?”

When Cha Hae-In asked him that question, Woo Jin-Cheol somehow managed to regain control over his emotions and replied.

“No, that's not it. We were in the neighbourhood, just passing by. But, it was a coincidence that we discovered the Gate's abnormal condition, and we came here to help facilitate the evacuation of the raid team, but well....”

Woo Jin-Cheol stopped talking there and stared at Jin-Woo again.

“However, looks like that won't be necessary.”

This would be his first time witnessing Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's true skill. And that just so happened to be the spectacle of him clearing a rank A dungeon with his own power.

It didn't look like other's help was necessary.

“Yes. I think standing still is the right call to make here.”

Cha Hae-In too agreed with that assessment.

That man's battle didn't leave any gaps for a rank S like her to butt in at all.

“Do you know who that man is?”

Cha Hae-In asked.

Woo Jin-Cheol was clearly admiring Seong Jin-Woo's skills, and obviously not worried about his identity, at least not outwardly. Also, he was an agent of the Association which did block Jin-Woo's information from leaking out, too.

‘So maybe, Woo Jin-Cheol might know who that man is.’

Her expectation was on the money.

“Yes, a little bit.”

“That man... just who is he?”

Woo Jin-Cheol put his sunglasses back on and replied.

“I can't reveal that information.”

The Shaman was furious.

When it first opened its eyes in this place, only one order was filling up its mind.

However, what was the meaning of this pathetic display?

Wasn't a lone human easily hunting down every single member of its tribe? This wasn't supposed to happen. No, such a thing must not happen at all.

The Shaman's eyes reddened even further as it witnessed the massacre of its subordinates.

'You insect-like b*stard! I'll step on you!!'

If hexes didn't work against the enemy, then all it had to do was to bless itself and fight!

"The song of rage! The song of strengthening! The song of the giants! The song of the fire dragon!"

With the completion of the various spells, the Shaman's body suddenly ballooned up to nearly ten metres tall. Its strength, agility, stamina, and even its confidence increased greatly as well, power filling up every square inch of its frame.

Right away, the Shaman used its gigantic arm to swat away the Shadow Soldiers, and then took a deep breath.

And then...

"Fuuuu-hook!!"

When the Shaman spat out its breath, reddish black flames erupted out of its mouth.

Rumble!!

The soldiers immediately dissipated and scattered away when they were struck dead-on by the flames. Even those grazed by it were no exception. Parts of their bodies were blown away and they were rendered unable to carry on fighting.

The flames didn't end with one attack; the second wave of flames spat out of the Shaman's mouth in a row.

The Shaman was able to greatly reduce the number of the Shadow Soldiers with its continuous attacks. Having received a boost to its confidence, it roared out at the top of its lungs.

"Do you still find this great Karugalgan funny now?!"

The reply came from above its head.

"Yup."

The Shaman flinched and raised its head, all the while hurriedly trying to

chant a defensive spell, but...

But, Jin-Woo was one step quicker.

POW!!

CRACK!!

The Shaman's head smashed down into the ground. The floor shattered and spiderweb-like cracks rapidly spread out.

Jin-Woo had already experienced blowing away Vulcan with his bare fist. And that demon was much, much larger than this arrogant Shaman, too.

[You have killed the owner of the dungeon.]

Tab.

When he lightly landed on the ground, feel-good messages began popping up in his view one after the other.

Tt-ring.

[Level up!]

“There you go!”

Jin-Woo pumped his fist.

Back when he was fighting using 'Stealth', he levelled up once. When he was killing these Orcs, another level up. And, after killing the boss just now, another level up. Clearing this rank A dungeon netted him three level ups, in other words. This was a result well above his expectation. He even felt very grateful towards Foreman Bae for suggesting yesterday that they should work together again.

‘This is very good.’

With an elated mind, Jin-Woo walked closer to the boss. The once-buffed up Shaman's body had reverted back to its original size already.

He saw an egg-sized magic crystal embedded in the dead boss's necklace, but he decided to not to get too greedy.

‘Earning experience points is good enough.’

This was the Hunters Guild's dungeon, at the end of the day.

If he wanted to get his hands on a magic crystal from a rank A dungeon, he didn't need to enter someone else's dungeon – he'd just buy himself a permit for a dungeon of his own, instead.

No, what Jin-Woo was aiming for was something else. And that would be

the black smoke beginning to rise up from the boss's corpse.

Gulp.

Jin-Woo licked his lips in anticipation.

He couldn't help but remember the corpse of Baruka, the one that slipped through his fingers back in the Red Gate.

'But, my situation is a lot different compared to then.'

Compared to now, his Stats weren't that high back then.

Also, killing that b*stard took a lot out of him. Only after receiving the aid of two knight-grade soldiers, Igrit and Iron, did he manage to beat that boss down.

However, he was able to kill this Shaman comparatively easily today.

A week spent inside the Demon's Castle – this was the definite proof that the events of those short seven days weren't in vain.

Jin-Woo issued a new order at the rising, wavering black steam-like smoke.

"Rise up."

At the same time, an ominous wind brushed past his two cheeks. He instinctively realised it right away.

'It worked!'

A radiant smile bloomed on Jin-Woo's face.

Kuwaaaahhh!!

As the soul-tearing scream resounded out, a mage covered in black robe rose up from the shadow of the dead Shaman.

'...Huh?'

Jin-Woo sensed something was different about this guy, and so he checked the information window.

[?? Lv.1]

Elite Knight grade

'An Elite Knight?'

ly, Jin-Woo was able to confirm that there were three grades to the Shadow Soldiers.

Regular grade.

Elite grade.

And then, the Knight grade.

But now, for the first time ever, the ‘Elite Knight’ grade appeared.

He began to think that, seeing the word ‘elite’ tacked on to the already-existing grade ‘Knight’, this new guy had to be a realm higher than either Igrit or Iron in terms of combat prowess.

‘For sure, I can sense that its magic energy is far greater than that of my two knights.’

As expected of turning the boss of a rank A dungeon into his Shadow Soldier.

Tti-ring.

[Please set the soldier’s name.]

And also as expected, he got another System message telling to name the new guy, now that another Knight-grade Shadow Soldier had appeared.

‘A name, is it...’

Well, its face was hidden under the hood of the robe now, but still, High Orcs and lengthy fangs went hand in hand, no?

‘Right, let’s name it Fangs.’ (TL note at the end)

He didn’t need to issue a separate order; just thinking about it meant the new guy’s name would be set.

[Fangs Lv.1]

Elite Knight grade.

Instead of question marks, the new name appeared in the information window.

If the Shaman who remained utterly arrogant right till the moment it died heard this name, the poor guy might have fainted on the spot. But well, who cares? It was already dead, anyway.

With a satisfied grin on his face, Jin-Woo recalled his Shadow Soldiers.

He could now store almost 130 of them. Although it was a bit regrettable, he had to return the rest back to the void.

‘This much is more than enough, though.’

He stepped off from the altar with a big smile on his face, but then, several people rushed over to him. They were – Hunters from the raid team, Cha Hae-In, and finally, a group of men wearing matching black business suits.

Jin-Woo recognised one of the faces among the black suits.

‘Since when did Chief Woo Jin-Cheol show up?’

Seeing the expression on Woo Jin-Cheol, he probably had witnessed the Shadow Soldiers in action in full.

“Mister Seong Jin-Woo.”

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

“Mister Porter?!”

Everyone called out to him at the same time, then they took glances at each other.

Well, it was all fine and dandy that he got to fight to his heart’s content since he no longer had any reason to hide his powers, but.....

‘...How am I supposed to get out of this now?’

Jin-Woo looked at all these people surrounding him and scratched the back of his head.

(TL: Right, for some reason, this author keep using the Korean word for molars when describing the characteristics of the High Orc. So, he named the new Shadow Soldier ***“Molar”*** but I just couldn’t use that in my good conscience and swapped it out to ***“Fangs”*** which, to me personally, make more physiological sense. I mean, lengthy molars wouldn’t be practical at all, right? And I’m pretty sure Orcs have long fangs, not long molars....)



Chapter 92 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Woo Jin-Cheol was the first to react.

While everyone else was busy eyeing others around them, he quickly walked right up to Jin-Woo's side, pulled out his identification card and displayed it proudly for all to see.

“We’re from the Association’s Monitoring Division.”

Didn't matter whether you were a high ranked Hunter or a low ranked one, you'd inevitably tense up after hearing the name of the Monitoring Division. And this tactic was the right one.

It was only for a brief moment, but a hint of nervousness flashed past the expressions of the Hunters Guild members, with the sole exception of Cha Hae-In.

Woo Jin-Cheol seized upon this chance and carried on with what he wanted to say.

“The identity of Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim is being strictly guarded by the Association. It is highly classified information that cannot be revealed publicly.”

Jin-Woo could only stand back in dumbfounded admiration at Woo Jin-Cheol's skilful bullsh*tting.

Heck, his expression and words looked and sounded so natural that one couldn't help but wonder if he practised it every morning while looking in the mirror or some such.

Whatever the case may be, his intentions definitely got through to the other party. At the same time, Woo Jin-Cheol sent the slightest hint of a signal to Jin-Woo with his eyes.

‘We will assist you with avoiding unnecessary fuss when exiting from this place.’

Jin-Woo had no idea why the Monitoring Division were helping him, but since they were volunteering to take care of the aftermath, was there a reason for him to refuse now?

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

That's what he wanted, anyway.

The quick-witted subordinates of Woo Jin-Cheol quickly surrounded Jin-Woo like bodyguards.

“If you have any questions, please send them to the Association. We shall escort Seong Jin-Woo Hunter now.”

Not-so-subtle implication of ‘We won’t hear any of your objections’ was apparent in his voice.

All thanks to Woo Jin-Cheol’s hardened attitude, hard enough to shatter a rock even, the members of the Hunters Guild had no choice but to rein in their questions and stay silent.

“Shall we go?”

While being escorted by the agents of the Monitoring Division, Jin-Woo walked past the Hunters.

‘Well, I am grateful, but...’

Something felt a bit odd, just then. Why did Chief Woo Jin-Cheol do something no one asked him to do in the first place? Once they got to a sufficient distance away from the members of the Hunters Guild, Jin-Woo quietly asked.

“Why are you doing this all of a sudden?”

“By any chance, are you thinking of signing up with the Hunters Guild?”

Jin-Woo shook his head. As if he knew that such an answer was coming already, Woo Jin-Cheol quickly made his reply.

“What you did just now was to display the kind of power that exceeds rank S classification in front of the employees working for the largest, wealthiest Guild in South Korea. If you wish to avoid annoying matters in the near future, this method is the best one.”

Indeed, he was right.

No one could tell just what lengths the wealthy Hunters Guild might go to secure another rank S Hunter. Other Hunters would raise their hands and welcome that, but Jin-Woo was different.

It was the same story for the Hunter’s Association, too.

And so, the interests of both the Association, trying to prevent the concentration of too much power to one specific Guild, and Jin-Woo’s, who found the hindrance (?) of the Guilds annoying, lined up rather nicely.

Since this wasn't one-sided goodwill coming from the other party but something that would help both sides, Jin-Woo didn't feel uncomfortable by the current situation at all.

'Well, things have become more convenient thanks to the Association.'

Because this matter had been resolved quite nicely in an unexpected manner, Jin-Woo could afford to float a thin, nearly-imperceptible smile on his lips.

But, as they were about to exit from the boss room for good....

"H-hold on!!"

An urgent call came from behind the group.

Unintentionally looking back, Jin-Woo spotted Sohn Ki-Hoon approaching them while being supported by his big-framed colleague. All of his external wounds had been healed perfectly, but his complexion remained pale as he had lost a lot of blood.

'It'd be better for him to not move yet, though.'

Despite Jin-Woo's worries, Sohn Ki-Hoon managed to stand before him. He then bowed deeply.

"Thank you."

And he began speaking up his mind without holding anything back.

"Thanks to you, we are all still alive. On behalf of the raid team, I'd like to thank you."

If one believed the words of the Monitoring Division's Hunters, then this young man seemed to be burdened by some kind of circumstances preventing him from revealing himself.

'With that kind of power, it'd not be too strange if he does have some kind of an unspeakable circumstance.'

However....

He risked his identity being revealed to aid Sohn Ki-Hoon and the rest of the raid team. But, was that all? He didn't even ask for any compensation, either.

He could've easily requested the Hunters Guild for the corpses of the monsters or for the cost of saving the lives of the raid team, but he backed off without saying a thing.

So, how could he not bow down to this young man?

“....Thank you very much!”

His emotions now getting raw, Sohn Ki-Hoon bent his back forward 90 degrees once more. That sudden movement caused his aching body to scream out in pain, but he actually found that rather welcoming.

His heart had welled up with emotions when he saw Jin-Woo kill the monster in the exact same fashion as how he had been toyed around with before. Thinking back to that moment was enough for him to thank this young man a countless number of times.

The Hunters of the raid team saw their leader bow down to express his gratitude and finally snapped out of their stupor.

‘If it wasn’t for that man....’

‘He’s our saviour, isn’t he?’

‘In that case, I shouldn’t be standing around like this in a daze.’

They scrambled to get closer and bowed their heads as well.

“Thank you, Mister Port.... No, I mean, Hunter-nim.”

“If it wasn’t for you, we.....”

“Thanks to you, my wife won’t become a widow now.”

A young male Hunter who showed off his shaking hands back when Sohn Ki-Hoon decided to give up on raiding this dungeon, approached Jin-Woo with a tearful face.

“Excuse me, Hunter-nim.... It’s because I’m really grateful so, like, can I hug you just this once?”

“Eiii, that’s too much, dude.”

“He’s starting again. Someone stop him.”

“Well, why don’t you hug me instead, then??”

Hug.

“Euh-heok?! You’re giving me the creeps, so let go of me!!”

Wahahahahaha.....

For the first time ever since entering this particular rank A dungeon, the members of the raid team got to laugh to their heart’s content.

Jin-Woo stared at these Hunters, feeling content inside. He didn’t help them out for their flattery or for their praises, but their genuine thanks did automatically bring about a warm smile to his lips.

“....Ah.”

Jin-Woo walked over to the female Hunter jumping up and down by the corner.

‘Because she’s so small, I nearly failed to spot her.’

When he pushed forward the memo she gave to him earlier, the female Healer blushed and received it with both of her hands.

“T-thank you....”

Inwardly, though, she was admonishing herself.

‘Ah-whew. Why did I even say those embarrassing things to him back then?’

She now had one more reason to kick her sheets before going to bed if and when she ended up remembering today’s event in the future.

From the perspective of Mister Porter who could easily punch the dungeon boss to death, she must’ve looked really funny when she handed over a memo while saying it contained her final will.

She slightly raised her head and found that, thankfully enough, he wasn’t sneering at her. No, actually – he began speaking to her in a bit of strict voice.

“Miss Healer.”

“Y-yes?”

The female Healer straightened her posture right away like a student being reprimanded for her sloppy behaviour.

“From today onwards, please refrain from placing your personal articles inside the raid team’s luggage. It only serves to increase the volume.”

“....Pardon me??”

The female Healer became utterly speechless, her eyes opening up to form round buttons. Jin-Woo grinned in satisfaction.

He said all he wanted to say. And it seemed that the other party had pretty much said everything in her mind, too. So, putting the dazed female Healer behind him, he coolly turned around to leave.

“Let’s go.”

As soon as Jin-Woo began walking, the agents of the Monitoring Division moved together in one unit as if they had been rehearsing it.

There was one exception, though.

‘Ah...’

Only Cha Hae-In had failed to say something to Jin-Woo and she tried to reach out to him, but gave up in the end.

‘I wanted to ask him for his contact numbers....’

All she wanted was to ask him if he could find some time to talk to her. However, she might be misunderstood if she asked him that now, what with the current situation not being settled yet.

It was then.

A female Hunter walked over to Cha Hae-In.

“Excuse me.... Vice Chair?”

“Yes?”

When Cha Hae-In turned around to look, the female Hunter pointed to her hand.

“Why are you carrying a pickaxe?”

Cha Hae-In’s gaze drifted towards the head of the pickaxe and her face began blushing rather quickly. She hurriedly lowered the pickaxe and cautiously asked.

“You think he found me weird?”

The female Hunter, a mage, tilted her head and asked back.

“Who did?”

And that caused not just Cha Hae-In’s face, but even her neck to blush in the deep shade of crimson.

When they came out of the Gate...

Woo Jin-Cheol took a look at his wristwatch and asked Jin-Woo.

“We’re planning to return to the Association but, well.... If it’s okay with you, why don’t you ride along with us and join the Association President for dinner?”

“What time is it now?”

“It’s quarter past five. PM.”

‘Mm...’

Although he was cutting it close, he should be able to arrive at the promised location in time.

Jin-Woo politely rejected Woo Jin-Cheol's invitation.

"I'm sorry. I've already made a prior engagement."

Shu, shu, fuu, fuu....

Yu Jin-Ho did his very best to maintain his calm by breathing in deeply several times, just like how he saw it in one of the movies.

'My fated hour is approaching.'

Indeed, hyung-nim's choice would decide Yu Jin-Ho's fate.

His heart was palpitating faster, and he felt even more nervous compared to a few days ago when he was negotiating with his father for the right to become the Yujin Guild Master.

'Let's go back to my original purpose. My original purpose....'

It was no coincidence that he chose the exact same cafe as the first time he met hyung-nim back when to propose his plan.

'Without hyung-nim's help, I wouldn't even be here right now.'

He began looking around the interior of the cafe while thinking as such, and he was able to see this place in a new light. Quite coincidentally, the table he chose was the exact same one as the last time, too.

Ringgg....

Along with the doorbell, Jin-Woo entered the cafe.

"Hyung-nim!"

Yu Jin-Ho discovered Jin-Woo and shot up from his seat with a welcoming smile on his face. He bowed down as his greeting. Jin-Woo performed a simple little greeting with a nod and settled down on the opposite side of Yu Jin-Ho. The latter sat down after that.

"So, what did you call me here for?"

Yu Jin-Ho raised his head, only for his eyes to widen.

"H-hyung-nim, your clothes.....?"

"Oh, this?"

Jin-Woo came running here right after killing the High Orcs so his clothing was understandably dirty. His shirt even sported bloodstains from the dying High Orcs, too. He spoke as if there was nothing to worry about.

"I was coming straight from a dungeon, that's why."

'Heok!'

Yu Jin-Ho was taken by surprise once more.

He was nothing compared to someone like hyung-nim; after getting his Guild Master licence, all Yu Jin-Ho did was to waste time by drinking and partying. But, what did hyung-nim do in the meantime? He possessed incredible power, yet he still found time to enter dungeons to further hone his crafts.

Suddenly, Yu Jin-Ho felt ashamed of himself.

‘As expected of hyung-nim....’

And at the same time, he held hyung-nim in an even higher reverence now.

The reason why hyung-nim didn't bother to wipe away the blood on his clothes was probably because he was confident and forthright enough not to feel the need to hide his training process.

‘Well, the evidence of battle would be more like a medal of honour that he earned through his own two hands, after all.’

Yu Jin-Ho's expression hardened. He was ready to follow hyung-nim's decision, regardless of which direction he'd take.

So, he should come clean and don't hold anything back.

“Hyung-nim, actually....”

Yu Jin-Ho didn't leave anything out and reported everything that happened during the negotiation with his father to Jin-Woo – even the event of Goh Myoung-Hwan's testimony revealing the truth of who saved the Hunters of the White Tiger Guild from the Red Gate incident, too.

‘That uncle, doing something unnecessary....’

Still, that man did that for Jin-Woo's benefit, so he couldn't get angry at that.

Perhaps that was the reason for Yu Jin-Ho's expression to be a bit more glowing than usual when he was talking about the Red Gate incident.

In any case....

Jin-Woo knew what Yu Jin-Ho was trying to say here.

“So, in order for you to become the Yujin Guild's new Master, you need my help, is that about right?”

Finishing all he had to say, Yu Jin-Ho calmly waited for Jin-Woo's reply. He didn't grow restless or try to sweet talk like how he would do normally.

‘Well, I'm talking to hyung-nim here, after all.’

Yu Jin-Ho was definitely thinking of leaving everything to hyung-nim's decision.

Remaining silent as long as Yu Jin-Ho's worries were deep, Jin-Woo finally raised his gaze.

“Hey, Jin-Ho. I am....”

Gulp.

Yu Jin-Ho swallowed his drying saliva.

The Chairman of the Hunters Guild Choi Jong-In received a certain call. After answering that, he abandoned what he was doing, entered his private chamber, and began shouting out loudly at the phone.

“What was that?! Seong Jin-Woo was present during our raids yesterday and today?!”

The newly-appeared rank S Hunter, Seong Jin-Woo.

Such a man decided to present himself right before Choi Jong-In's own Guild, yet why did he fail to even notice that?! It was the same thing as kicking away the golden goose willing to enter his house.

It was enough to make him tear his hair out, but...

“Whaaat?! He was working for the mining team yesterday, and today, he was carrying luggage?!”

....After hearing that revelation, it did make sense for him to not know.

‘Okay, for the time being, let's not worry about why he did what he did....’

He got this feeling that sweating over that mystery would only give him a case of a migraine and no tangible answer to chew on. Besides, that wasn't important at all.

‘After White Tiger, us Hunters also owe that man now.’

Indeed, they were indebted to Seong Jin-Woo.

Choi Jong-In wished to talk to that man as equals as much as he could before attempting to scout him, but now, his position was no different than that of the White Tiger.

‘Even still, I learned of the tenth rank S's existence before anyone else, so that's something.’

That's right.

The more pressing issue here was not the fact that his Guild received that man's aid, but rather, knowing of what his abilities were.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, what type of Hunter was he?”

As he listened to the explanation coming from the other side of the phone line, Choi Jong-In began talking progressively less and less.

The person he was talking to right now – the Hunter who took on the role of the raid team's captain, Sohn Ki-Hoon, wasn't a fellow who'd lie about something that didn't happen, or embellish something minor as if it was a big deal. Even then, Choi Jong-In asked reflexively.

“Are you telling me the truth??”

‘That's all he saw....?! Does that mean there could be more?!’

If Seong Jin-Woo was that powerful, then....

“If you compare him to me, then how about it?”

Although he may have sounded a bit childish just then, there was no better way to ascertain someone's strength than this question.

Sohn Ki-Hoon took a little time before continuing on.

“.....No, it's impossible.”

‘Cha Hae-In was there, too?’

Something felt a bit off, but her being there was not a big problem to worry about.

“Is there a chance that the dungeon was not an upper grade rank A?”

“....”

Choi Jong-In was often referred to as the ‘Ultimate Weapon’.

From a certain perspective, one could argue that he was being roundly disregarded in this situation, but rather than feeling sour, his heart was pounding harder instead.

‘Me, Cha Hae-In, and then, Seong Jin-Woo.’

This was the golden chance that his Guild could become renowned in South Korea, no, Asia, no, the whole world, on the back of Seong Jin-Woo's abilities alone.

Sohn Ki-Hoon was definitely not someone who'd go beyond his stations and run his mouth off about the Guild. So, Choi Jong-In became even more curious about what he might say next.

“No, it’s fine. Please speak.”

Ba-dump.

Choi Jong-In’s heart began beating faster.

He tried very hard to disguise his trembling voice as he spoke.

“I’ll do my best.”

In front of the Korean Hunters Association main building.

The sea of reporters showing up to cover Rhee Min-Seong’s rank assignment test had set up a camp in front of the Association building.

South Korea’s own Rhee Min-Seong, often referred as Asia’s top superstar, becoming a Hunter!

It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that the cameras from the entire world were being focused here today.

What with space being such a premium, the reporters began a war of nerves with each other.

“Excuse me! We already reserved this spot!”

“Hey man! Are you blind? Can’t you see how many people showed up today? Who cares about your spot or mine?! Your spot is where you’re standing.”

“Dang it....”

Meanwhile, a full-blown smile was forming on Rhee Min-Seong’s face as he stared through the window at the sea of reporters extending as far as the access road while standing inside the Association building.

“Indeed, this many people showing up sounds about right.”

Deliberately wasting time and attracting the attention of the public definitely paid off today.

“Excuse me, Mister Min-Seong? This will be tomorrow’s headline, but what do you think about it?”

South Korea’s top newspaper reporter showed Rhee Min-Seong the manuscript for tomorrow’s front page and asked.

“Don’t you think using that as the headline is a bit dull?”

“You think so?”

“Hmm.... How about this one? ‘The man who has everything, Rhee Min-Seong. He now grasps power transcending humanity!’. Well?”

“But, if we use a strong lead-in like that, don’t you think a portion of the readers will feel uncomfortable?”

“Well, I’m not exaggerating here, and besides, no one in their right minds would talk rubbish about me in South Korea, anyway. I mean, both the media and my fans are watching closely with their eyes wide open, after all.”

“Okay. Got it. We’ll go with that one.”

“I’ll be in your care.”

Rhee Min-Seong bowed his head good-naturedly, but when he raised it again, a deep frown was etched on his face.

‘He’s going to do what I told him in the end, so why does he have to yap on about so much crap?’

It was then, two imported luxury sedans arrived at the parking lot of the Association. Two men climbed out of their respective cars almost at the same time – they were none other than Baek Yun-Ho from the White Tiger Guild, and Choi Jong-In from the Hunters Guild.

“Uh? Look at that!”

“It’s Baek Yun-Ho!”

“Choi Jong-In’s here too!”

The reporters blocking the front entrance of the Association building all rushed towards the side of these two men. Baek Yun-Ho and Choi Jong-In both frowned unhappily.

‘What is up with these reporters?’

‘Why is it so chaotic today?’

The noises of camera flashes going off were ringing out loudly. Countless reporters surrounded these two men and began their barrage of questions.

“Are you two visiting the Association to scout Mister Rhee Min-Seong?”

“As the Hunters representing South Korea, what do you think about Mister Rhee Min-Seong potentially retiring from the entertainment industry?”

“What do you think will be Mister Rhee Min-Seong’s rank?”

“Please share your thoughts on Mister Rhee Min-Seong.”

The famously short-tempered Baek Yun-Ho waved his hands around as if he found all this annoying.

“I’m not here because of that man. I’ve nothing else to say.”

...While Choi Jong-In emotionlessly stated the facts.

“Anyone related to this matter would know by now that Mister Rhee Min-Seong has already signed up with the Reapers Guild. I’m visiting the Association today on an unrelated matter.”

After hearing answers that didn’t meet their expectations, the reporters inwardly grumbled and turned around.

‘Eii, what the hell.’

‘And I thought I might have a juicy new story.’

‘I got excited for no dang reason.’

Still, none of them dared to express their dissatisfaction in front of a pair of rank S Hunters. Reporters returned to their spots and began their waiting for Rhee Min-Seong’s emergence once more.

Once the reporters left them alone, Baek Yun-Ho and Choi Jong-In met each other’s glare. Baek Yun-Ho greeted his counterpart first.

“I heard the story. Hunters Guild almost got into a big tangle yesterday, too. Or so I hear.”

He even deliberately emphasized the word ‘too’ as well.

“Well, it wasn’t much of a big ‘tangle’, compared to how the White Tiger had to lose their newbie rank A.”

The two men’s war of nerves was just as fierce as the one taking place among the reporters. Baek Yun-Ho was incensed for a little bit there, but eventually, he sighed out softly and spoke up.

“In any case, both the Hunters and us are in that man’s debt.”

“We really were kissed by Lady Luck yesterday. If he wasn’t there, my second elite team would’ve been wiped out.”

Even though both men knew that person’s name, not mentioning it could be considered the final act to their war of nerves. Choi Jong-In took a step closer.

“That is why, out of principal, I’d like to ‘definitely’ bring that man over to our Guild.”

Baek Yun-Ho didn’t back down. He and Choi Jong-In got close enough for their foreheads to nearly butt against each other.

“We even had suffered casualties. Looking at the need to replenish our combat force, wouldn’t you agree that person joining us makes more

sense?”

“Just what are you planning to do by recruiting a rank S to shore up your combat force? Are you thinking of invading North Korea or something?”

“What about you? Since when did you worry about principals and the like to talk about your principals here?”

Flames erupted out from the eyes of the two men.

‘...Huh?’

Master of the Reapers Guild, Im Tae-Gyu, was arriving at the Association building just now to match the timing of the press conference. When he saw those two growling at one another, a mocking smirk formed on his face.

Wasn't there an old saying for that?

Didn't it go, counting chickens before hatching or something like that?

For Im Tae-Gyu, this sure was an exciting development, since he always lost out to their two Guilds when trying to secure resources until now. He did his best to not to let the corners of his lips arch up and approached the two men.

“Oiii, two Guild chairmen over there. I hope you aren't acting like that over my Min-Seong, no?”

And then, both Baek Yun-Ho and Choi Jong-In's heads spun at the same time towards Im Tae-Gyu. It was hard to tell who was first, really.

‘What the hell is up with this moron?’

*‘I don't give a rat's a*s about this Rhee Min-Seong or Rhee Min-Gun or whatever.’*

Im Tae-Gyu flinched in surprise and took a step back when two rather terrifying glares landed squarely on him.

*‘What is up with these two b*stards all of a sudden?!’*

‘What's this? Choi Jong-In, and Baek Yun-Ho, too?’

Rhee Min-Seong grinned deeply.

He already familiar with Chairman Im Tae-Gyu when they met during the signing of the contract.

Rhee Min-Seong signing up with the Reapers Guild, which had been criticised for being a shell of its former glory, while disregarding the country's top two Guilds, was a calculated move on his part.

‘I mean, with this, I’ll enjoy the image of someone willing to stand up for the underdogs.’

Crudely speaking, celebrities survived on their public image. And Rhee Min-Seong was really meticulous about maintaining his.

‘The best Guilds in Korea are fighting over me....’

He wasn’t thinking of carrying on this Hunter lifestyle for long, but still, that sight naturally made him feel even better about himself. Soon afterwards, his manager entered the reception area.

“Min-Seong-ah, they say they are ready now. Let’s go and do the press conference.”

“Alright.”

The manager took the lead. He opened the glass front entrance and allowed Rhee Min-Seong to emerge from the Association building; camera flashes exploded in a scary cacophony of endless shutter clicks.

Click, click, click, click, click.....

As he would do every day, Rhee Min-Seong formed a fake smile towards hundreds of lenses surrounding him.

It was then.

Jin-Woo had finally arrived at the front of the Association.

‘.....??’

Just like he’d been told, he was stopping by the Association three days later.

‘Why is it so noisy here?’

However, it didn’t look like he’d be able to enter the Association at all under the current circumstances. Of course, there were plenty of ways to go around these people, such as using ‘Stealth’, or jumping over the reporters, or even by finding a back entrance.

But then again, his re-evaluation test had been reserved in advance three days ago, so he didn’t feel like going through the back entrance just to avoid this wall of reporters.

‘It’s not like I committed a crime or something anyways.’

He had no reason not to use the front door at all. Jin-Woo then proceeded to push away the tightly-packed throngs of reporters and made a path for himself.

“I’m coming through.”

“Oii, what are you doing??”

“What the hell?”

“What’s wrong with you?!”

This was the physical strength of a rank S Hunter. Reporters were all helplessly pushed away, deep frowns etched on their faces. The path forward was opened up in the blink of an eye, and Jin-Woo could walk up the steps leading to the front entrance of the Association.

However, even before he could take another step, a large, muscular dude suddenly blocked Jin-Woo’s path.

“Oii!!”

He was Rhee Min-Seong’s manager. His eyebrows rose up as he growled menacingly.

“Who the hell are you? You work for the Association or something?”

Jin-Woo didn’t bother to avert his gaze and met this manager’s glare squarely, before shaking his head.

‘Huh? Would you look at this b*stard?’

The manager’s thick eyebrows quivered.

“Can’t you see all those reporters behind you?!”

Jin-Woo took a short glance at the reporters. They were all shooting him with unhappy glares. Even Jin-Woo could understand that they were trying to do a press conference here. However, it wasn’t as if they had rented out the whole entrance, now had they?

A private individual had no right to chase away the reporters, and conversely, they had no right to chase him away, either. That was common knowledge.

There were plenty of eyes watching and Jin-Woo didn’t particularly want to raise his voice here, so he was going to ignore this idiot and walk right by, but at that moment....

“Go back to where you came from. You can’t go through here. Get lost, punk.”

The manager blocked the path again and tried to shove Jin-Woo’s chest away. The light in Jin-Woo’s eyes changed immediately.

‘...What was that?!’

The manager was taken by a huge surprise.

He was a melee-type rank D Awakened, and pushed this young punk away with the full intention of embarrassing him, but the guy didn't even budge from the spot as if his legs were nailed to the ground.

The manager had used enough force that would've injured a regular person greatly. Jin-Woo also knew that fact very well.

“.....”

That was why he wordlessly glared, and that alone was enough to gradually drain the manager's face of all colour.

“What the heck? What's the matter with that guy?”

“What happened? Are they going to fight?”

Bustle, bustle...

The reporters present all sensed the atmosphere becoming rather strange, and they became noisy quite quickly.

Cold sweat was pouring out of the manager.

If there was no one watching, he'd have conceded already and stepped aside. However, never mind the reporters, his employer Rhee Min-Seong was watching him from behind at the moment.

Rhee Min-Seong walked closer to the manager and whispered with a deep frown.

“Argh, hyung, what are you doing? Hurry up and get rid of this loser already.”

“Uh, uh..... S-sure thing.”

If he showed a shameful sight here, then he'd lose his job without a doubt. The manager's expression crumpled unsightly and he raised his voice up high.

“You can't pass by here, so get lost already!”

“And just who said you can block the entrance like this?”

‘Uh?’

The reply didn't come from the manager's front but from his back. The manager quickly spun his head around.

The Hunter's Association President Goh Gun-Hui stood tall in front of the glass doors. The eyes of the reporters grew extra round. They were so

shocked that they even forgot to operate their cameras.

“G-Goh Gun-Hui?!”

“President Goh Gun-Hui’s here?”

The once-chaotic bustling atmosphere immediately cooled down with the entrance of someone completely unexpected. Goh Gun-Hui walked right up to the steps and spoke up.

“This gentleman is my guest.”

And then, Goh Gun-Hui stared at Rhee Min-Seong.

“I hope you haven’t forgotten who gave you the permission to hold a press conference in this place, Mister Rhee Min-Seong.”

Rhee Min-Seong recovered his wits right away.

“O-of course, sir.”

The first day as a Hunter, he falls out of favour with the Association President and loses the location of the press conference – Rhee Min-Seong couldn’t afford to suffer such a humiliation when there were so many eyes watching him right now.

Rhee Min-Seong frowned and quickly signalled his manager; the burly guy bowed slightly to both Goh Gun-Hui and Jin-Woo and voluntarily stepped aside.

“Please, follow me, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

Even until Jin-Woo disappeared into the Association building under the guidance of Goh Gun-Hui, the gathered reporters couldn’t hide their confusion at all.

Noisy, noisy....

“What was that all about?”

“Who was that man, and why is the Association President personally coming out to greet him?”

“Does anyone know who that man is?”

Reporters felt frustrated and raised their voices, but there was no one answering them.



Chapter 93 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Rhee Min-Seong's expression stiffened right away.

A mysterious man who cut through the throng of reporters, and then, the Association President Goh Gun-Hui who came out to personally escort that man into the building.

“How does President Goh Gun-Hui’s schedule look like for the rest of today?”

“I hear he cancelled everything for the morning.”

“Are you telling me that the Association President cancelled the whole morning’s worth of appointments for that man?”

Noisy, noisy.....

This place had become too restless after those two men’s sudden entrance, and the current situation was no longer suitable for holding a press conference.

But, just how much effort did Rhee Min-Seong pour in for today’s event? He shot a glare at his manager with an expression of a man chewing on insects.

‘D*mn idiot of a manager who can’t even take care of something so simple...’

The manager couldn’t meet that glare and powerlessly lowered his head; now that Rhee Min-Seong had become a rank A Awakened, the manager couldn’t even win against him in physical strength anymore. He had no choice but to cower accordingly.

‘.....’

Rhee Min-Seong glared at his manager for a long time, before his head naturally spun towards his side.

“Cue!”

‘D*mn it!’

Like throwing salt on the wound, the camera crew from the news stations were getting ready to leave. They were supposed to broadcast everything live.

If this ‘distracted’ spectacle got on the airwaves and was broadcast to the rest of the country, then there was a good chance that all of Rhee Min-Seong’s hard work to increase his brand’s value by becoming a rank A Hunter would go down the drain for good.

However, the Association President Goh Gun-Hui’s entrance caused too much of a ripple to calm the mood down and restart the press conference. Just why did someone so big have to appear at such an important time??

‘Isn’t there a way to reverse this situation?’

The quick-witted Rhee Min-Seong began kicking his brain into gear.

‘Right. Only a big something can reverse a situation like this one.’

These reporters didn’t come here because they wanted to find out about his feelings regarding the rank assignment test or some such. No, they came here to find out what the top star Rhee Min-Seong’s Hunter ranking would be, as well as what his future plan was after he got his licence.

If he gave them what they wanted, then everything would return to order.

‘I should start the assignment test ahead of schedule.’

A sly smile formed on Rhee Min-Seong’s face.

Indeed, his ability to come up with schemes on the fly, something others around him had already acknowledged him for, remained rather exceptional.

“Excuse me, everyone. Allow me to go have a quick chat regarding my schedule today with the Association’s representatives.”

Blurting that nonsense to the reporters, Rhee Min-Seong then headed to the main Association building. It was to not to ‘discuss’ the change of schedule but to ‘declare’ his intentions.

‘I mean, you have any idea how much my dad donates to the Association? The Association or not, they should grovel accordingly before me.’

Unfortunately...

‘Huh??’

Just before he could push open the glass front door, Hunters from the Monitoring Division rushed out first and he was pushed back, instead. They stood in a line to block off the front entrance.

‘What the hell is this now?!’

Rhee Min-Seong’s forehead creased up. He quickly checked the name tag

attached to one of the men's chest.

'Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol, Hunter's Association Monitoring Division?'

Rhee Min-Seong questioned Woo Jin-Cheol right away.

"What's the meaning of this? Why are you blocking the entrance?"

Woo Jin-Cheol's sunglasses-covered eyes stared down at Rhee Min-Seong.

"Currently, another Awakened is going through the process of the rank re-assignment test. No one will be allowed to enter the building until 11 o'clock, when the test is scheduled to end."

"What did you just say?!"

By 'another Awakened', was this man referring to that young man who followed the Association President into the building not too long ago?

Rhee Min-Seong took a look at his watch. The time now was half past ten in the morning. Eleven o'clock was the originally scheduled time for his rank assignment test. No one was allowed to enter before that?

Rhee Min-Seong's scheme to take the test ahead of schedule to reverse the situation was about to blow up in his face.

At first, he spoke in a polite tone of voice.

"Please, don't be like this and let me in. I have something to discuss with the related department of the Association."

"I'm sorry."

Woo Jin-Cheol shut his mouth up with that single short sentence.

With his frustration boiling over, Rhee Min-Seong couldn't hold back any longer and his true colours slowly surfaced to the fore.

"Look here, mister. Don't you know who I am? I'm Rhee Min-Seong, man. Rhee Min-Seong!"

Rhee Min-Seong's tone of voice became sharp and abrasive as if he could no longer take this crap, but still, Woo Jin-Cheol showed no sign of budging.

"Hah...."

Rhee Min-Seong spat out a dumbfounded groan.

"Oii. You know that Yujin Construction is the biggest sponsor of the Hunter's Association, right?"

The corners of Rhee Min-Seong's lips arched up.

“Vice Chairman of the Yujin Construction, Rhee Won-Gyu is my father, okay? And do you see all these people behind me?”

Rhee Min-Seong pointed towards the sea of reporters below the entrance steps.

“You think you can treat the son of Yujin Construction’s Vice Chairman this badly in front of these many reporters? You think you can handle the fallout?”

Woo Jin-Cheol’s reply was pretty simple.

“Yes, we can.”

“What?!”

Rhee Min-Seong was even more dumbfounded now.

Just who the hell was that young man for the Association President to personally escort him inside, and block off the entire building for a measly rank assignment test?

And, letting a Section Chief gopher, someone not even that high up in the food chain like a head of the department, to do whatever the hell he pleased??

Rhee Min-Seong’s hands were placed on his waist as he began questioning in anger.

“Just who the hell is this ‘another Awakened’ supposed to be that the Association is willing to bend over backwards like this?”

Only then did Woo Jin-Cheol remove his sunglasses.

“If I were to tell you that....”

Flinch.

When Woo Jin-Cheol’s sharp, scary eyes resembling a bird of prey were finally revealed, Rhee Min-Seong unwittingly took a step back.

Woo Jin-Cheol continued to glare at Rhee Min-Seong and quietly spoke.

“.....Do you think you can handle the fallout instead, Mister Rhee Min-Seong?”

The inside of the main building was rather empty.

There was no one waiting to take their rank assignment test inside the hallway, with only a smattering of Association employees going about their usual business.

This unusual situation was probably related to the reason why all those

reporters were camping outside.

“Please, come this way.”

“Alright.”

Jin-Woo was about to follow after Goh Gun-Hui’s guidance and enter the measurement room, but then, spotted two somewhat familiar-looking faces.

‘Eh?’

Baek Yun-Ho and Choi Jong-In were sitting on the waiting room chairs facing the measurement room. That was where smartly-dressed headhunters of various smaller Guilds could be found three days ago.

When their gazes met, both men stood up from their seats and bowed lightly. Jin-Woo reciprocated the greeting and walked past the hallway. As they walked down on the passageway, a soft smile formed on Goh Gun-Hui’s lips.

“Those two men, they have been waiting for you for about an hour.”

The leaders of two Guilds that represented South Korea in the world stage had shown up one hour early to wait for the re-evaluation result?

Perhaps he had read Jin-Woo’s expression, because Goh Gun-Hui continued to explain in a calm voice.

“A new rank S Hunter has appeared after two long years. And besides, Choi Jong-In has heard of your powers so he should be even more anxious at the moment.”

Jin-Woo slowly nodded his head.

“Oh, my!”

“Association President!”

The Association employees they met on the way all politely greeted Goh Gun-Hui, and stared at Jin-Woo with mystified eyes.

‘Who is that man that necessitates our Association President to personally guide him?’

‘Could he be someone really important?’

‘How can someone that young know our President?’

Goh Gun-Hui had never shown up to personally receive guests even when a government minister came to visit, so the fact that he was doing precisely that had shocked the Association employees to no end.

Goh Gun-Hui spoke while keeping his eyes fixed to the front.

“I heard about what happened yesterday.”

Goh Gun-Hui’s expression was one of enjoyment for some reason.

As a matter of fact, he was indeed feeling really excited. Because his expectation of Seong Jin-Woo being a different type of Hunter from the rest proved to be right on the money, that was why.

When he heard about Seong Jin-Woo’s actions from Woo Jin-Cheol, sweat formed in Goh Gun-Hui’s hands as if he was personally there, witnessing everything.

‘Yes, he does have incredible powers, but also....’

But also, he found Seong Jin-Woo’s actions afterwards even more to his liking.

Including the boss, he had almost single-handedly cleared the dungeon all by himself, yet the young man had shown not one trace of greed over the loot found within.

If Seong Jin-Woo’s real aim was to fight monsters and protect other people rather than become famous and make lots of money, then the Association was fully prepared to support him in every conceivable manner. Because, that goal lined up perfectly with the purpose of the Association’s existence.

‘If it’s possible, I wish I could bring him into the Association with whatever means necessary, but...’

But, he couldn’t do that, now could he?

Just like what the young man told him before, entering the Association would mean he’d have nearly zero opportunity to fight against the monsters.

And from what Goh Gun-Hui had heard about Seong Jin-Woo’s powers, it was way too good to be wasted outside dungeons.

Soon, they arrived at the examination area, located deeper within the building.

“Before the re-evaluation can take place, we must confirm your abilities first and set the new classification for you.”

Jin-Woo already knew that.

Hunters were classified as a melee, mage, healing, or even support-type according to their abilities, and performed their roles where they were needed the most.

The Association employee waiting at the examination area bent his back forward 90 degrees to greet Goh Gun-Hui, and took over guiding Jin-Woo from him.

“Please, come this way.”

Jin-Woo stepped up to the middle of the examination area. Its interior layout much resembled an indoor gymnasium commonly found everywhere.

If there was one thing different from those gymnasiums, then it'd be the fact that one could sense powerful fluctuations of magic energy coming from the walls as well as from the floor. Magic had been utilised to reinforce the structure in case something went wrong.

The examiner asked Jin-Woo.

“What kind of ability can you use?”

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui didn't return to his office immediately and, while standing in the far corner, stared at the examination process with a great deal of interest.

This was the reason why he came to guide Jin-Woo personally. He wanted to confirm Jin-Woo's powers with his own eyes as quickly as possible.

“Well, I can do this.”

Jin-Woo called out a single Shadow Soldier.

“Heok?!”

The examiner was greatly taken by surprise.

Seriously speaking, how could anyone stay composed when a soldier decked out in jet-black armour suddenly rose up from the ground?

Jin-Woo deliberately chose the lowest levelled one out of his regular Soldiers, but still, the dude emitted intense pressure that most normal people found hard to endure.

“This.... Is this your summoned creature? You can control a summon?”

The examiner's voice was trembling noticeably.

Jin-Woo had half a mind to helpfully explain that his Soldier was definitely not dangerous, but....

He formed a pitying expression while making his reply.

“....Well, something like that.”

“I-in that case, h-how many summoned creatures can you control?”

‘Well, it will be useless to lie, so....’

Indeed, the number of eyewitnesses who saw his Shadow Soldiers yesterday was nearly twenty.

Jin-Woo spoke up a slightly reduced number of Soldiers sealed inside his shadow through his skill.

“It’s around 100 or so....”

The examiner’s eyes went extra round at the number 100.

“A h-hundred?!”

“Yes.”

On the other hand, Jin-Woo remained nonplussed.

At the same time...

As he stared at the Shadow Soldier, Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes were glittering brightly.

‘A hundred of those....’

At a glance, that ‘soldier’ possessed around the same amount of magic energy as a rank B Hunter. If that young man could summon a hundred of those soldiers, then one simply had to concede that his powers had already exceeded a regular large Guild’s combat force.

Truthfully, that was an incredible ability.

Jin-Woo could feel Goh Gun-Hui’s passionate gaze burning up on his skin.

He breathed a sigh of relief after confirming the reactions of the surroundings.

‘Well, if one regular Soldier can elicit this sort of reaction, then....’

He should thank his lucky stars that he didn’t choose to call out the highest levelled soldier among his flock, ‘Igrit’, or the boss-level creature he managed to poach yesterday, ‘Fangs’.

Whatever the case may be, this was enough to prove the type of ability he had possessed.

“In that case.... Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, you’re a mage type.”

The examiner studiously jotted down something on the recording document and raised his head up, while looking rather satisfied.

“We can now head to the measurement room.”

Jin-Woo held the newly-issued Hunter licence in his hand.

It said, ‘Seong Jin-Woo, rank S, Mage-type’.

Even though his face was plastered on the photo box, he still found it hard to believe.

‘Very good. It’s been smooth sailing until now.’

Jin-Woo quickly shoved his new Hunter licence inside his wallet. When he got to the end of the corridor, the waiting duo of Baek Yun-Ho and Choi Jong-In approached him.

“Mister Seong Jin-Woo, can we have a chat?”

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, I....”

“I’m sorry. I’m pressed for time at the moment.”

Jin-Woo ignored them both and quickly walked towards the glass door.

“Uh? Uh?!”

Baek Yun-Ho raised his worried voice.

“If it was me, I wouldn’t use that exit.”

‘Is he trying to imply that the sweet deals he prepared for this occasion will make me regret walking out of this door or something?’

Jin-Woo wasn’t interested regardless of what was being offered, so he continued to ignore Baek Yun-Ho’s dissuasion and pushed the glass door wide open.

When that happened....

Click, click, click, click, click, click....!!

The reporters that had managed to climb up the steps to push and shove against the Monitoring Division’s agents, began clicking their cameras non-stop, with flashes exploding brightly all around him.

‘What the heck is this?’

Jin-Woo became utterly speechless at this blinding explosion of lights.

As usual, Seong Jin-Ah stopped by the school tuck shop after the third period ended, and bought herself a pack of banana milk.

There was still around one hour to go to lunch. If she didn’t fill herself up temporarily with something like milk, for instance, she’d be unable to concentrate during the class.

And sure enough....

Rumble...

Already, her remorseless stomach was noisily demanding for more fuel to be put in there. Jin-Ah rubbed her hungry tummy and was about to enter her classroom, but then, one of her friends grabbed her wrist, a shocked expression clearly visible on that girl's face.

“J-Jin-Ah!!”

“Wha-what?!”

With her friend shocked like this, even Jin-Ah got shocked alongside her for no reason.

“It's your oppa! He's on TV right now!!”

“What?? Why is my oppa...??”

Jin-Woo felt her heart tumble to the pit of her stomach.

Did he get injured again? If not, could it be even worse....??

The friend dragged Jin-Ah by her wrist inside the classroom as if she didn't want to waste time explaining anymore.

Jin-Ah's eyes immediately shifted over to the large TV located next to the blackboard.

And there was....

“O.... oppa?!”

The moment Jin-Ah saw the TV screen, the banana milk in her hand fell to the floor.



Chapter 94 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Ten minutes prior, in front of the Hunters Association building.

When it clearly became impossible to take his rank evaluation test ahead of schedule, Rhee Min-Seong sensed the looming crisis, and in the end, decided to drop a bombshell.

“Excuse me, I, Rhee Min-Seong, will retire from the entertainment industry regardless of the test result, and I shall pledge my service as a Hunter for the betterment of the public!!”

This was his last hurrah at reviving the atmosphere of the press conference that had cooled off from the sudden entrance of Goh Gun-Hui. Its effect was immediately noticeable.

“What?!”

“Rhee Min-Seong is going to retire?”

“Regardless of what his rank is?”

Right away, the atmosphere became frenzied.

Click, click, click!!

Countless cameras were now pointing at Rhee Min-Seong, and questions from excited reporters poured down on him non-stop.

“Mister Rhee Min-Seong!! Please look this way!”

“Are you telling us that you’ll abandon the title of Asia’s top movie star and choose the life of a low-ranked Hunter if need be?”

“Are you willing to give up on everything you built up as a successful actor?”

‘Yes! Very good!’

Rhee Min-Seong was pleased as punch at all the attention being focused on him again.

“Even if the result is bad and I end up with a low rank, I wish to repay all the love everyone has shown me by fighting the monster threats.”

Of course, he was lying through his teeth.

Just two years. He was thinking of helping out with the Reapers Guild's public image as its most famous rank A Hunter for only two years, while enjoying the sky-high annual pay package.

This was the best method to silence those voices raising issues with him avoiding the draft with his father's help, as well as a few distracting noises rising up here and there recently, all in one fell swoop.

Climbing down from the summit to protect the ordinary citizens while risking his own life!

This was the greatest opportunity for him yet, to achieve that often-talked about 'lifetime guarantee against criticism' status.

Enjoying the taste of everything finally going according to his plan, Rhee Min-Seong continued on with the press conference.

“And, with the Master of Reapers Guild, Chairman Im Tae-Gyu, who shares my wish, I...”

And so, as the gathered reporters were listening to Rhee Min-Seong's future aspirations....

Ringggg....

Someone's phone suddenly went off. The surrounding reporters glared at the phone's owner, and he quickly killed the phone before lowering his head in apology several times.

Thanks to that, the press conference was slightly interrupted, but fortunately enough, it was not a permanent interruption in the end. Rhee Min-Seong also pretended to not hear it and continued on.

However....

This time, someone else's phone went off.

“Argh, what the hell?”

“Whose phone was that?!”

“Isn't it a common sense to switch it off before a conference?”

“Turn it off, now.”

Thinking that this might be a good chance to earn himself some extra brownie points, Rhee Min-Seong beamed brightly and spoke up.

“I'm fine with it, so why don't we continue after you answer your urgent call?”

Hahahaha....

Rhee Min-Seong's spontaneous response elicited jovial laughter from here and there. But, who knew that was merely the beginning?

Buzzzz....

Vrrrr....

Seemingly from everywhere, mobile phones were singing out in a messy chorus of noises.

“What’s this?”

“What the hell? Even me?”

The first reporter who switched his phone off first realised that something was very wrong. Meanwhile, the eyes of the reporters were growing extra wide after confirming the contents of the calls.

“You got a call from the Association??”

“Why are you only telling me this now?!”

Reporters present hurriedly accessed the Association's website. It was then, they discovered the new rank S Hunter's photo and his name being uploaded there as if everything had been prepared beforehand.

The announcement date for that person's evaluation result just so happened to be today.

‘Wait, but didn’t they say something about the measurement room not being available in the morning?’

‘It wasn’t because of Rhee Min-Seong?’

‘In that case, the reason for the measurement room being emptied out wasn’t because of Rhee Min-Seong’s rank evaluation, but this new rank S Hunter?’

And then, the face of a certain man flashed by in the heads of all the reporters present.

Could he have been?

That young man who followed Association President Goh Gun-Hui into the building! He was the only one to have accessed the measurement room today.

If they all go inside now, wouldn't they be able to take that man's pictures?

“E-everyone?!”

With their eyes now resembling those of a starving predator, reporters ignored Rhee Min-Seong and rushed towards the Association building.

Rumble....

When Woo Jin-Cheol signalled with his eyes, Hunters from the Monitoring Division spread out their arms and formed a human barricade.

“Let us in!!”

“A rank S has emerged, right? Aren’t you supposed to announce this ahead of time?”

“Just get out of the way, will you?!”

Reporters violently pounced forward, but they couldn’t overcome the wall created by the agents of the Monitoring Division, where every single member was a Hunter.

“W-what the hell is this??”

Having been forgotten by everyone in an instant, Rhee Min-Seong and his flustered face ran over to his burly manager. Mister manager pushed forward the screen of his phone with what he discovered only a second ago.

“....A rank S?!”

Rhee Min-Seong became completely dazed.

“A rank S showed up today, of all days?!”

He wanted to receive the attention and adulations of the world by becoming a rank A Hunter. But, to think that a rank S Hunter would pop up out of nowhere and ruin everything....

Rhee Min-Seong shook his head, hard.

‘No, wait. Something doesn’t feel right here.’

Seriously now, a rank S wasn’t a cup of instant coffee one could buy in a vending machine with a couple of change, now was it? Maybe, these reporters knew something about what was happening right now?

It was at that point that Rhee Min-Seong spotted a reporter still talking to someone on the phone while belatedly climbing up the steps. He was none other than the exact same reporter who sought out Rhee Min-Seong’s opinion regarding tomorrow’s headline earlier.

“Excuse me, Reporter Im?”

Even though Rhee Min-Seong’s voice sounded urgent, Reporter Im simply walked past while responding in haste.

“Ah, Mister Rhee Min-Seong. I’ll get in touch a little bit later, okay?”

“Excuse me? Reporter Im!! Wait!”

Rhee Min-Seong got to eavesdrop on the contents of the call as the Reporter Im’s back gradually distanced itself away from him.

“...That’s right. I’m telling you to go with the headline of ‘Tears of rank E, now joys of rank S’ for tomorrow.”

Rhee Min-Seong scanned his vicinity with energyless eyes. There was no one around him now. He fell down on his knees.

“What.... what is this....”

While he remained on the ground muttering to himself in dejection, the front entrance to the Association was abruptly pushed open wide, and South Korea’s tenth rank S Hunter revealed himself.

Click, click, click, click, click, click, click....

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened up super-wide.

‘What the heck is this?’

The camera lenses captured in full Jin-Woo standing in front of the entrance, and behind him, Baek Yun-Ho with a rueful expression and Choi Jong-In and his bitter smile.

It was now lunch time.

The Hunters of the mining team had ended the morning’s operation and were sitting around to enjoy their lunch.

Mining might have been their main role, but, since there was no threat of rockfall or cave-in, the mood of the team was rather carefree.

Some Hunters were lying on the floor resting, having gobbled up their meals in the blink; some Hunters were busy giggling to themselves while checking out their phones; a few Hunters were even enjoying cold alcoholic beverages while sharing snacks among themselves.

“Huh??”

One of the Hunters playing with his phone cried out in surprise and hurriedly raised his upper body up.

“Hey, isn’t this Mister Seong??”

Lee Seong-Gu’s ears perked up.

“Hey, it is him!”

“Mister Seong’s on the news.”

Indeed, Lee Seong-Gu hadn't heard wrong.

"I knew it."

With his face considerably flushed red after ingesting three cups of alcohol, Lee Seong-Gu ran to where his colleagues were as if he had been waiting for this. Even while he was doing that, his mouth continued to operate without rest.

"I knew it from the moment that bastard glared at me! Let me see for myself what horrible things that insolent bastard committed now!"

Perhaps Lee Seong-Gu's voice was too loud?

"Mister Seong did what?"

"Did Mister Seong commit a crime or something?"

Including Foreman Bae, all of the mining team's Hunters in the near vicinity gathered in one spot.

Jin-Woo's face filled up the palm-sized screen of the mobile phone, and just below that, large subtitles flashed by.

[...Following after Hwang Dong-Seok and Cha Hae-In, South Korea's tenth rank S Hunter, Mister Seong Jin-Woo, has just now...]

"Heok?!"

Having 'discovered' Jin-Woo, Lee Seong-Gu's eyes began trembling.

In front of the private office of Yujin Construction's chairman.

Standing in front of the door, Yu Jin-Ho let out a short sigh.

"Fuu...."

He opened the door, and as it smoothly glided inward, he also raised his head to spot his father busy going through several documents, not bothering to even turn his head this way.

"Come inside."

Even though he made his 'reply', Yu Myung-Hwan continued to scribble his signatures on the documents.

Yu Jin-Ho stood next to Yu Myung-Hwan. The father briefly raised his head to confirm the son's visage, before continuing on with his work.

'Dad's still the same, I see.'

In the past, Yu Jin-Ho would've been suppressed by his father being like this and run off, utterly unable to say what he wanted to say. However, it was

different now.

“I’d like to speak to you about something, Father.”

“Is it regarding Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?”

“Yes.”

Yu Myung-Hwan finally raised his head up.

“Alright. So, what happe....”

It was then.

Yu Myung-Hwan’s phone suddenly went off.

Vrrrr...

“Hold on.”

Yu Myung-Hwan raised his hand and stopped Yu Jin-Ho’s words. Checking the message on the phone’s screen, Yu Myung-Hwan’s eyes grew wide just a little.

‘My dad can get surprised too?’

Yu Jin-Ho tilted his head slightly.

“...There’s something you should see.”

“Pardon?”

Rather than providing an answer, Yu Myung-Hwan operated the remote and switched the giant TV mounted on one of the walls, instead.

A breaking news piece immediately came up on the screen.

[Yes, it has been confirmed just now. The Hunter who was evaluated as rank S earlier today is a Re-Awakened, someone who has gone through the secondary Awakening process after his initial one. His name is Mister Seong Jin-Woo, who used to work for the Association as a rank E previously.]

The reporter’s excited voice easily conveyed the current atmosphere of the location. Yu Jin-Ho had been listening disinterestedly, but when he heard the name ‘Seong Jin-Woo’, he was taken greatly by surprise.

‘Heok!’

The screen changed after that. It was now showing the emotionless face of someone he was quite familiar with, busy surveying the immediate surroundings.

It was none other than his hyung-nim.

'I'm sure of it. Hyung-nim is feeling irritated right now.'

Thanks to Yu Jin-Ho sticking around hyung-nim for a while, it became pretty easy to tell what he was thinking about simply through his expressions. But, besides all that – he was a rank S?

Yu Jin-Ho was well aware of his hyung-nim being great, but that greatness had far exceeded his own imagination.

At the same time....

'Even though he possesses such incredible power, he enters dungeons every day to train himself even further?'

A sense of awe rushed in, fast. As a person who used to guard his side, Yu Jin-Ho's heart swelled with pride as Jin-Woo's name got continuously mentioned on the TV.

Beep....

The TV was switched off and hyung-nim's face also disappeared from the view. Yu Jin-Ho formed a wistful expression.

"Okay, continue."

Father was telling Yu Jin-Ho to continue with what he wanted to say.

As he had practised beforehand, Yu Jin-Ho bowed down hard and spoke.

"My apologies, father. I couldn't change hyung-nim's mind."

Yu Myung-Hwan's expression hardened.

".....Okay, what did Hunter Seong Jin-Woo say while rejecting your offer?"

"Well, hyung-nim said....."

Yu Jin-Ho hesitated slightly, but he slightly raised his head and spoke.

"He wants to make his own Guild, so if I was interested in the Vice Master spot, I should come over, instead....."

Yu Jin-Ho thought that father would get angry or ignore that suggestion altogether, but instead, his expression was solidly frozen up.

And then....

Grin.

Yu Myung-Hwan chuckled without making a sound.

Someone widely known for his poker face, Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan had actually revealed a change of expression in front of his own son.

‘What is my dad doing?’

Yu Jin-Ho couldn't dare to ask what was happening, so all he could do was to avert his gaze this way and that.

Yu Myung-Hwan spoke, that smile now erased from his lips.

“Do you know why I’m trying to establish the Yujin Guild?”

“Isn’t it because.... there’s money to be made in the Hunter business?”

“No, it’s not.”

Yu Myung-Hwan’s tone of voice was resolute, unwavering.

“We have more than enough money right now. You think I’ll try something that could put us at odds with other large Guilds just for the sake of chasing after a couple more bucks?”

Was he trying to imply that money wasn't the reason?

Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes widened.

“But, if not that, then....?”

Yu Myung-Hwan carefully put the pen down.

“It’s in order to protect ourselves.”

Yu Myung-Hwan’s serious, dignified eyes caused Yu Jin-Ho to swallow his dry saliva in nervousness.

“Hunters are growing in power every day. And it’s not uncommon to see a single person possessing enough power to rival a country’s military might.”

For instance, the world’s most powerful Hunters, seen as already on the level of exercising power equal to that of a country’s government.

Yu Myung-Hwan was talking about those people.

“I hear that some Hunters already rule smaller nations like kings. How long do you think that the rule of law and governmental authority will keep us safe under the current situation?”

Yu Myung-Hwan’s voice was getting heavier.

However, as Yu Jin-Ho was listening to this explanation, it suddenly dawned on him that he was actually feeling happy at the moment.

Why was that?

‘....Ah.’

That was because, his father included him too and said ‘We’, instead.

Indeed, Yu Jin-Ho felt happy because he thought he got to glimpse for the first time another side of his father.

Yu Myung-Hwan’s explanation continued on.

“I wished to establish a Guild and gather trustworthy Hunters to our side. Not because I needed more money or that I am searching for talented individuals, but it’s all to find those Hunters who we can trust as fellow human beings, as well as for us to rely on their strength.”

And then, a nearly imperceptible smile formed on Yu Myung-Hwan’s face again.

“Looks like you already found someone like that, haven’t you?”

“Yes, Father.”

Yu Jin-Ho replied right away. It was a bit hard to tell where his father was going with this, but well, it was true regardless that Yu Jin-Ho could trust and rely on his hyung-nim.

Yu Myung-Hwan nodded his head.

“Very good.”

“Yes?”

“You pass.”

What did he pass just now? Yu Jin-Ho belatedly raised his bowed head.

“I shall entrust the Yujin Guild to you.”

“Pardon me?”

“Do your best to develop the Yujin Guild. Make those trustworthy and reliable Hunters ‘your’ people. In the future, they will no doubt become even more valuable assets than any form of wealth.”

Yu Myung-Hwan spoke with abundant certainty in his voice. And, just as his certainty was great, so was Yu Jin-Ho’s delight.

Would this be the first time since his birth that Yu Jin-Ho was acknowledged by his father?

“Thank you very much, Father!”

With an ample smile blooming on his face, Yu Jin-Ho bent his back forward 90 degrees. Yu Myung-Hwan looked on at that sight with a content expression.

Unfortunately, what Yu Jin-Ho said next went completely against Yu Myung-Hwan's expectations.

"However, Father, I don't think I can accept your offer."

"Mm?"

Yu Myung-Hwan's brows quivered slightly.

The financial wherewithal of the Yujin Construction was more than enough to put the soon-to-be-established Yujin Guild on the fast track.

Already, talks with a few rank S Hunters had advanced into a more concrete stage, as well.

The Yujin Guild becoming South Korea's best, biggest Guild was already a foregone conclusion.

Yu Jin-Ho must've known this, too.

"That's why my son wanted to become the Master, wasn't it?"

However, now that he was about to hand the Guild over, why was his boy declining it? Did he get scared in the meantime?

Yu Myung-Hwan did his best to suppress his disappointment and rage towards Yu Jin-Ho, and managed to say something.

"....What is your reason?"

Yu Jin-Ho raised his head at that prompt, and while still carrying a happy-looking face, he spoke without holding anything back.

"I've decided to work for hyung-nim's Guild."



Chapter 95 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Finding himself surrounded by a wall of reporters, Jin-Woo became quite flustered.

‘Why aren’t these people taking pictures of Rhee Min-Seong like they were supposed to, instead of blocking my way??’

Wondering if Rhee Min-Seong was standing behind him, he took a quick glance, but he could only see Baek Yun-Ho and Choi Jong-In there.

It was then, his thigh began vibrating.

Vrrrr.... Vrrrr....

It was his mobile phone inside the pocket.

‘Why would Jin-Ah call me at this time of the day?’

As soon as he tapped on the ‘Answer’ icon, his little sister’s urgent voice exploded out from the speaker.

But, that was obvious. Just how many TV cameras were present here? You would still get roughly the same picture regardless of which TV station you tuned into.

He got momentarily tense after his sister, who was supposed to be still in school, suddenly called him up but was able to breathe a sigh in relief.

“Mm.... So, nothing in particular happened, right?”

From her voice, it was quite obvious that the girl was feeling really shocked at the moment. Unfortunately, his current circumstances meant that he couldn’t explain everything to her in detail.

“Right now, I’m a bit occupied so.... Okay, I’ll tell you everything once you get back home.”

Despite his sister’s anxious voice calling out to him, Jin-Woo ended the call.

Click.

And at the same time, he got to figure out how the current situation came to be.

‘...There was a message, huh.’

The Hunters Association used a dedicated app to deliver important information in real time. Most of the time, the app alerted the users to the locations of rank A or higher dungeons, or where dungeon breaks were about to occur, but it was a different story today.

‘...Huh.’

After confirming the contents of the message, Jin-Woo quickly accessed the Association’s website. And sure enough....

The ink on his rank S Hunter licence wasn’t even dry yet, but the list of the highest ranking Hunters in South Korea had been updated already.

[Seong Jin-Woo, rank S, Mage-type]

It was as it was written on his licence.

‘...They are unnecessarily fast on things like this.’

Shoving the phone back in his pocket, Jin-Woo redirected his gaze back to the front.

“Mister Seong Jin-Woo! Are you really the rank E Hunter once affiliated with the Association?”

“You are now a very rare Re-Awakened!! How are you feeling right now?”

Reporters writhed and struggled desperately in order to capture a bit more of Jin-Woo’s face or his voice with their cameras. However, Jin-Woo found their explosive attention towards him simply annoying.

‘I gotta get out of this place first.’

Asking them politely to make way wouldn’t going to work.

Jin-Woo’s brows quivered. Should he just summon his Shadow Soldiers to carve out a path and leave?

“Over here! Mister Seong Jin-Woo, please look over this way!”

“Mister Seong Jin-Woo! The whole country is watching, so how about a smile for the viewers?”

While the camera lenses and mics were gradually inching closer, Jin-Woo spent the next two seconds earnestly pondering whether he should summon Shadow Soldiers like ‘Tank’ or ‘Fangs’ or not.

Meanwhile, behind Jin-Woo...

Choi Jong-In looked at Jin-Woo's back as the youth stood there, unable to go anywhere thanks to the cordon of reporters blocking his way.

He approached Baek Yun-Ho and spoke.

“Looks like my new recruit Hunter-nim is feeling a bit troubled from the excessive attention, no?”

“And just who gave you the permission to call Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim ‘your’ new recruit now?”

“Can’t I even make a joke? It’s just a joke.”

Two men began their war of nerves once more. In the end, though, Choi Jong-In took a step back first. He sighed before speaking up again.

“In any case, it’d be the same thing as giving other Guilds a chance if we waste any more time here.”

Baek Yun-Ho agreed with that assessment. Not just the Reapers Guild's Master Im Tae-Gyu, who just so coincidentally was present here today because of Rhee Min-Seong, but the other remaining super-large Guilds would be desperately trying to get in touch with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo right about now.

Baek Yun-Ho scanned the crowd of reporters.

“So, Chairman Choi, what you’re suggesting is...”

“Before flies come rushing in from the smell, let us escort Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim to his residence. While we have a chat with him regarding this and that.”

Meaning, the two of them should pool their resources first, and prevent more potential rivals from appearing.

Didn't matter what kind of abilities Hunter Seong Jin-Woo possessed, he'd still need a Guild's aid if he were to attack high-ranking dungeons. So, if they played their cards right, then either the White Tiger or the Hunters Guild could find themselves with another rank S in the roster.

Choi Jong-In was utterly confident of the Guild he led, the Hunters, and....

“Alright.”

...Baek Yun-Ho too didn't feel that this was a bad suggestion, either.

The White Tiger might not have been as big as the Hunters, but it still was a Guild with great future prospects.

‘Besides, our Section Chief Ahn and Deputy Hyun are familiar with

Mister Seong Jin-Woo from a while ago, too.'

At a bare minimum, he knew for sure that they had a closer relationship than the Hunters Guild.

And so, the interests of these two men lined up rather nicely. They exchanged a few suspicious gazes at each other, before turning around to approach Jin-Woo.

The first one to engage the young man in conversation was Baek Yun-Ho.

"Hunter-nim."

Jin-Woo looked behind him.

"Yes?"

Choi Jong-In inwardly clicked his tongue after losing the initiative, but since they made a tacit agreement to cooperate, he didn't interfere. Baek Yun-Ho formed the brightest smile he could manage and continued on.

"Are you feeling lost with all these reporters around? We can safely escort you back to your house, so how about going with us? We are pretty good at dealing with these sorts of situations, you see."

Although a bit of exaggeration was mixed in there, what he said wasn't an empty promise at all.

This event was something any rank S Hunter would experience at least once. Not only that, these two men also learned how to deal with people's attention while managing their respective large Guilds, too.

Choi Jong-In provided support fire from the side.

"Let's head out together. Also, there is something we'd like to discuss with you, as well."

Too bad for them, Jin-Woo simply formed a polite-enough smile to reject them.

"I'll be alright."

He then pulled the hood attached to his top and hid his face.

"I actually do have a place I need to stop by first."

"Excuse me? But, how will you get out of here, what with all these repor....."

Choi Jong-In couldn't get to continue with the rest of his sentence.

Swish-!!

Because, Jin-Woo turned to face the reporters and then, jumped up tens of metres in the air before landing on the other side of the crowd, that's why.

“Uh, uh???”

Even before the flustered reporters could respond, Jin-Woo blended into the crowd and disappeared from the view.

Choi Jong-In was left speechless. Now that was a movement he couldn't even react to in time, even though he was a rank S. It was quite obvious that the reporters, who were all regular people, wouldn't be able to follow that with their naked eyes.

Choi Jong-In let out a wry chuckle.

‘As soon as registering as a rank S, he's already playing the part of Superman?’

How was he supposed to be a Mage-type with that sort of physical ability? As a fellow Mage-type, it sure riled him up a bit.

But, in that case, how would a rank S melee-type Hunter think of that?

“Just now, he....”

Choi Jong-In turned towards Baek Yun-Ho in order to ask a question, but he flinched and reflexively took a step back.

“Chairman Baek, your eyes??”

He was so surprised that he even forgot to add the honorific title.

“Ah....! M-my apologies.”

Baek Yun-Ho hurriedly covered his eyes with his hand and turned around. When he opened his eyes again a short while later, they had reverted back from the monster-like irises to those of a normal human being. However, just because his eyes changed back to normal, that didn't mean his shock had worn off.

‘How can this be.....??’

Baek Yun-Ho trembled on the spot.

Just now, when Jin-Woo gathered strength on his legs to prepare for that jump, he very briefly released his magic energy he'd been concealing until then.

No matter how skilful a Hunter was, it was nearly impossible to detect anything in such a short period of time. However, that incredible magic energy still caused Baek Yun-Ho to instinctively activate one of his abilities,

the Eyes of the Beast, and those eyes successfully detected Jin-Woo's hidden power.

'He's strong.'

Baek Yun-Ho already knew how strong the youth was. However....

'No, that's not important.'

Back when they had gotten into a bit of confrontation in front of the Red Gate, Baek Yun-Ho also activated the Eyes of the Beast inadvertently. Jin-Woo's strength was clearly imprinted in Baek Yun-Ho's mind back then.

Back then, the youth was very strong. Even if it was Baek Yun-Ho himself, he would not have been able to win without sacrificing an arm.

However, that was all.

If he was willing to sacrifice that much, then he'd be able to win at any time.

But now....

What was the meaning of this difference in strength? He detected magic energy incomparably greater than before. That youth was so much stronger now.

So, so much stronger than back then.

His Re-Awakening process should've been over a long time ago. So, how could this be?

In that instant, an implausible theory popped up in Baek Yun-Ho's head.

'Could he... be able to grow stronger?'

Possibly, not through Re-Awakening process, but through growing stronger that he.....

Just as his thoughts arrived at this point,

"Excuse me, Chairman Baek? Are you alright? Your complexion is...."

....Choi Jong-In worriedly asked him.

Baek Yun-Ho rubbed his face and shook his head, hard.

"I was suddenly feeling a bit dizzy just now. I'm okay."

"You're still young.... You should be more careful."

While conversing with Choi Jong-In, Baek Yun-Ho continued to stare in the direction that Jin-Woo had disappeared to.

‘He’s already transcended the regular rank S, but if he could continue increasing his strength, then...’

Shudder.

Baek Yun-Ho’s entire body shuddered from goosebumps.

“Taxi!”

After successfully shaking off the reporters, Jin-Woo caught a taxi on a deserted road.

He now possessed the rank S licence that he so wanted. Him levelling up and clearing dungeons were all good and nice, but right now, the most important thing was curing his mother.

‘The Divine Water of Life....’

He didn’t know if this item called ‘Divine Water of Life’ could really heal his mother.

‘However, if there is a one in a thousand, no, even if it’s one in a ten thousand chance, then I....’

He wanted to clear the Demon’s Castle as quickly as humanly possible and collect all the ingredients so he could craft this ‘Divine Water of Life’. And in order to do that, he needed to find an artefact that could protect him from the overwhelming heat of the Demon’s Castle.

Jin-Woo settled down in the backseat of the taxi and told the driver his destination.

“To the Korean Hunter Auction, please.”

The taxi driver took a glance through the rear-view mirror and grinned brightly.

“Well, you must be going there to sell something good, am I right? I hear that the minimum trading price starts at around tens of millions of Won.”

Instead of a reply, Jin-Woo simply formed a thin smile.

Gulp.

The driver swallowed his saliva.

By saying that he wanted to go to the Hunter Auction to sell something, that youth was declaring that he was a Hunter; and the driver needed to be extra careful when dealing with Hunters.

There were more than a few among the Hunters possessing somewhat of ‘particular’ personalities that were just as strange as their powers. If the driver

made a mistake and got on the bad side of this youth, a big incident might break out.

‘Well, this young man doesn’t look like one of those people, but still, it’s better to be on the cautious side, no?’

The driver remained mindful of Jin-Woo’s moods and kept his mouth shut, and thanks to that, the interior of the taxi was left largely quiet during the drive. Jin-Woo used this part of the trip to search the internet.

Various articles, social media sites, as well as portal communities etc., were all filled with the discussion regarding the new rank S Hunter. Rhee Min-Seong used to be the number one most-searched-for topic until this morning, yet his name could no longer be seen in the top 10 now.

‘Tsk.’

Jin-Woo clicked his tongue.

‘I didn’t expect it to be this crazy, though.’

Sure, he did expect some amount of attention, but he definitely didn’t believe that it’d become such a hot trending topic at all.

Then again...

There were only ten in South Korea.

If one were to exclude two who died or had emigrated to elsewhere, then there were only eight rank S Hunters in the country, so how could the response of its citizens not be feverish?

‘Wait, why was it quiet back when Cha Hae-In became a rank S?’

Because the ninth rank S Cha Hae-In was almost never exposed to the media, Jin-Woo thought his case would be similar to that. But when he searched this and that, he eventually discovered that, once Cha Hae-In had become a rank S, she requested the Association to keep most of her details confidential.

‘Just by requesting the Association, both the media and Guilds can’t even rely on laws to approach you.’

If there was such a convenient method available, why didn’t the Association President tell him about this?

‘...Ah.’

Jin-Woo recalled the question he got just as he was about to enter the examination area. Back then, the Association President asked him this:

“Have you thought of a Guild to join?”

“No, not yet.”

Did he ask because of that?

If he were to request confidentiality, then Guilds wouldn't have been able to approach him, so it was likely that the Association President deliberately hadn't said anything.

‘Well, that’s that, I guess.’

Jin-Woo requested confidentiality from the Association while online, and rang up the Korean Hunter Auction.

Click.

“I’d like to get an artefact appraised. I’m on my way there, but will it be okay?”

“It’s a bead containing an amplification effect on one’s magic.”

“Indeed I have, but they weren’t really all that trustworthy so I wanted to get the Hunter Auction’s opinion.”

The conversation was halted for a moment as if the other party was jotting something down, but it soon resumed.

“It was 100%.”

“It was a one hundred percent amplification effect.”

The voice over the phone came out after a short pause.

“Yes, I am.”

The corners of Jin-Woo's lips arched up.

‘I knew this would happen.’

Would the Hunter Auction even talk to him if he wanted to sell this nonsensical artefact when he was still a rank E Hunter? It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he got re-evaluated precisely for this moment.

Jin-Woo confidently declared.

“It’s rank S. Name’s Seong Jin-Woo.”



Chapter 96 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo soon arrived at the Hunter Auction.

The main building was not tall but was rather wide, leading to an initial impression that, instead of an office building, it was more like a museum or an art gallery. The massive car park seemed to scream out loud ‘We’ll accommodate everyone regardless of whether the participants are in the hundreds or in the thousands!’

The impressive building was standing in the middle of that parking lot.

One could easily guess just how much money the Hunter Auction was making through commissions from the artefact trade.

Jin-Woo exited from the taxi and made his way towards the building, but even before he could take a couple more steps, a formally-dressed man suddenly ran outside first.

“You must be Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

“Yes, I am.”

The man checked Jin-Woo’s face and formed a surprised expression. But, he quickly remembered his role and greeted the youth with a welcoming tone of voice.

“My name is Kim Jeong-Ki from the Hunter Auction Appraisal Department. We talked on the phone. Please, follow me.”

Jin-Woo lightly nodded his head.

While leading Jin-Woo towards the appraisal room, Kim Jeong-Ki’s mind was racing.

‘The new rank S that disappeared from the reporters only a short while ago is standing right behind me.’

When he first received the call, he thought it had to be some kind of a prank.

First of all, the supposed effect of the artefact sounded nonsensical, and more importantly, it was because the guy on the phone said that he was the rank S Hunter announced earlier in the day.

‘I almost ended up insulting a rank S Hunter, didn’t I?’

Just how frightened was he after the Hunters Association confirmed that the phone number did indeed belong to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?

He should thank the lucky stars that he followed the book and didn’t rudely dismiss the call outright.

[...Now officially registered in his new rank, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo has jumped up over five levels in rank, from E to S, through his Re-Awakening process, and it’s revealed that he possesses Mage-type abilities....]

Even now, this young man’s face could be seen plastered on the TV screens mounted on various parts of the Auction house. Perhaps he himself found it a bit too much, since the youth pulled his hood low to hide his face.

They weren’t even talking about Kim Jeong-Ki, but for some reason, he felt a bit flattered as the news broadcast continued to mention Jin-Woo’s name.

‘Should I ask him if we can take a selfie together?’

He shook his head, though. If he wasn’t currently at work, he’d have ‘requested’ for a selfie as well as some autographs. However, he couldn’t do something that rude to a client coming in for an important trade. He had to persevere and hold tight for the time being.

‘Was the corridor from the entrance to here this short?’

They arrived at the appraisal room while several thoughts fled in and out of his head. Kim Jeong-Ki spoke with a wistful expression.

“It’s this way.”

The head of the Appraisal Department, as well as the company’s best appraiser, were anxiously waiting inside this wide room. They even gave up on lunch just to be here.

Seeing Jin-Woo’s face, the department head’s eyes opened wider.

‘It’s really the same guy from the news!’

Meanwhile, the appraiser nervously swallowed his dry saliva.

‘In that case, the magic amplification tool is really....??’

No, nothing was certain, yet. Just because the guy was real, that didn’t mean the stuff would be real, too. The appraiser repeated this in his head as if to calm himself down.

Even the best magic amplification artefact created with top materials by the

world's greatest artefact maker pouring out his soul would not exceed 50% in effect.

And then, gathering of the right materials itself would not be easy, not to mention that the manpower necessary and time required to make one should be ridiculous as well. One might consider himself lucky if he got to see one of those artefacts popping up in the market once every few years.

There were willing Mage-type Hunters from around the world lining up in a long-a*s queue to buy such items, but there was literally nothing to sell to them.

Well, there was no need to go as far as the 'world' here.

Even locally, the Mage-type Hunter, and often referred to as the Ultimate Weapon, Choi Jong-In was seriously determined to purchase an amplification artefact with '50% or more' effect.

But then, a Hunter who might be a rank S but not widely known, came to visit the Auction while carrying an artefact with 100% amplification effect?

'That must be nonsense....'

The story was so inconceivable that, if only the guy wasn't the top-ranked Hunter, they would've kicked him in the a*s and thrown him out of the premises already.

However....

They couldn't refuse admittance to a rank S Hunter. Even if today's matter ended as a whole heap of nothing, this man would no doubt become an important client in the future.

'Well, there's nothing to lose here.'

The appraiser spoke to Jin-Woo, his face a mixture of a slight expectation and several times greater misgiving.

"May.... May I take a look at that artefact?"

Both Kim Jeong-Ki and the department head also stared at Jin-Woo with tense expressions.

"Alright."

While pretending to take it out from his pocket, Jin-Woo summoned the Bead of Avarice from his Inventory.

"So, this is...."

The appraiser adjusted his glasses and stared at the beautiful round blood-

coloured bead. It was an item possessing a certain magnetic charm that made the onlookers gasp out in astonishment involuntarily.

The two men from the Appraisal Department expressed their admiration under their breaths.

“H-mm....”

However, the appraiser was tilting his head while adjusting his glasses again.

“This doesn’t look like an artefact made from a magic crystal or a Mana Stone. Am I correct?”

“Yes, you’re right.”

The appraiser nodded his head.

‘As I thought.’

He had been an appraiser for seven years already. He was able to observe countless artefacts until now, but he hadn’t seen a single crystal emitting a crimson hue like this one.

Most regular crystals emitted a clean bluish tinge, and the higher the grade, the darker they got.

However, this one was a red colour?

The appraiser continued to tilt his head this way and that, before receiving the bead.

When he did....

‘W-what is this?’

Suddenly, he felt a chill run down his spine. It was because of the unidentifiable power he sensed from the crystal bead.

‘C-could it be....??’

He was frightened out of his wits as he stared at the magic bead. The appraiser was actually a rank B Mage-type Awakened. And thus, he could immediately sense what kind of an item he was holding in his hand.

Cold sweat broke out all over him.

‘Oh my god!’

Goosebumps formed on his skin because of the sheer power emanating from this magic bead, and he hurriedly raised his head to find Jin-Woo wordlessly staring back at him.

‘If the person who brought this here was a low-rank Hunter, then I...’

This was his first time feeling like this.

He lost count how many priceless artefacts he had handled over the years, but this was the first and the only time he felt the strong desire to beat up the person bringing this item for appraisal and steal it.

Unfortunately, his opponent was a rank S.

‘.....?’

Jin-Woo continued to silently stare. The appraiser managed to pull himself together and rein his desire in after receiving that stare.

‘I wanted to rob a rank S?’

Never mind trying, he wouldn’t even dare to imagine doing something like that to a Hunter with such a huge gap in power from him.

Just like how the appraiser did when he was looking at the bead, Jin-Woo was tilting his head at the appraiser now.

‘What’s the matter with him?’

Was he feeling unwell, somehow?

Nonetheless, the appraiser wiped the cold sweat off his forehead and spoke to the department head.

“Excuse me, director. Please turn the camera on.”

“Ah! Yes, hold on.”

The meaning behind that request was that the item in the appraiser’s hand was not a fake. The department head’s heartbeat increased rapidly.

The person to answer Jin-Woo’s call first, Kim Jeong-Ki, also displayed a similar expression.

“Filming will commence now.”

The department head shifted the camera lens over to the appraiser.

The appraiser walked over to the dish-shaped magic energy measuring device. First, he put the bead down and got himself measured.

Bleep-

Numerical values showed up.

up, he got measured again, but this time with the magic bead in his hand. The measured magic energy leaking out of the appraiser instantly doubled in value.

Bleep-

After confirming the results, Kim Jeong-Ki's complexion paled.

“How could this be.....?”

The department head also hurriedly approached closer and confirmed the results, too.

‘100 percent?! It's really a magic tool possessing 100% amplification effect???’

His heart began pounding harder.

The average commission the Hunter Auction earned from assisting with the artefact trade was around five percent. If an item sold for around 100 billion Won, then they would earn about 5 billion from the deal.

However, even with his vast experience, he could not estimate just how much this crimson magic bead could be sold for.

‘This is a huge jackpot! A jackpot!!’

If there were no one looking, he'd have cried out ***“Hooray!!”*** and hug the subordinate employee next to him. Just how much sales incentive would he receive if the deal goes through successfully?

The overwhelming excitement left him utterly breathless.

Kim Jeong-Ki's reactions were not too different from his superior. He clenched his fists tightly with an ecstatic expression on his face.

‘Yes!!’

If he could get recognised for today's work, then it'd be only a matter of time before he got a promotion.

“I... will move on to demonstration next.”

The appraiser spoke with great difficulty, his voice trembling non-stop. The two men from the Appraisal Department quickly distanced themselves.

Jin-Woo also took a few steps back.

The camera was filming everything quite well. If one were to appeal to the potential buyers, actual footage was far more effective than simple numerical values.

The appraiser's eyes were directed towards the camera.

“Let's get started.”

The blizzard the size of a truck's wheel began raging on the appraiser's

right hand. He continued on.

“While maintaining this magic energy, I shall touch the magic bead.”

The moment his left hand touched the ‘Bead of Avarice’....

Wheeeeeeiing-!!!

The blizzard dancing on his hand rocked the entire appraisal room.

“Heok!!”

If the stunned appraiser hadn’t cancelled his magic quickly, the entire room might have frozen solid in an instant.

“Turn the camera off, please.”

“Ah, yes.”

The department head nodded and ran to the camera to turn it off. With that, the artefact appraisal process had been concluded.

‘Fuu....’

Jin-Woo was worried after sensing the magic energy exploding out of the appraiser’s hand, but in the end, he got to breathe a sigh of relief. It wasn’t just him, though, as everyone present in the room also spat out long sighs to calm their trembling hearts.

Almost instantly, silence descended in the room.

Jin-Woo quietly asked.

“How much do you think it’ll go for?”

Could he be able to buy the artefact he wanted after selling this guy off?

Well, besides that, he was also genuinely curious about how much a magic tool capable of amplifying one’s magic by 100% would go for.

The appraiser stared at the ‘Bead of Avarice’ with a look of incredulity.

“This.... How can I even think about putting a price tag on this....”

His gaze shifted over to Jin-Woo.

Gulp.

He swallowed down his dry saliva.

Just where did this man acquire an artefact like this? This wasn’t a problem the appraiser should worry about. He knew that, but still, he couldn’t hold back and asked anyway.

“Where did you find this?”

Jin-Woo looked at Kim Jeong-Ki, not the appraiser, and asked instead.

“Is that question also necessary for a smooth transaction?”

Kim Jeong-Ki avoided meeting his gaze as if he was feeling sheepish, and scratched the back of his neck. The appraiser quickly shook his head.

“No, not at all. It’s just that, I... I was just too surprised, that’s all. However, when the existence of this magic tool is revealed to the public, everyone would no doubt grow curious about its origins.”

Indeed, the other two men present seemed to be dying of curiosity as well.

‘Well, I guess it doesn’t really matter.’

There was no reason not to answer if they asked him. It wasn’t as if he acquired this bead through less-than-honest means, and also, even if others know, none of them would be able to find another one for themselves, anyway.

Jin-Woo’s lips parted.

Three other people in the room held their breaths and focused on Jin-Woo’s answer, wondering just what might come out of his mouth.

Jin-Woo simply grinned and replied.

“I picked it up in a dungeon.”

Baek Yun-Ho returned to his private office.

“I wish to be left alone for a while, so don’t let anyone in.”

Maybe he found ordering his secretary wasn’t enough, he even locked the door, too. Only after that, he switched on his computer. And then, using the authority afforded to a rank S Hunter, as well as a Master of a Guild, he began perusing every information he could get his hands on.

‘Can it really happen?’

Baek Yun-Ho couldn’t stop thinking about Jin-Woo.

A Hunter that could grow stronger?

But, if not that, then how could anyone explain that man’s strength that had increased to an unrecognisable degree in only a few days?

Baek Yun-Ho’s fingers moved quite quickly.

He logged in to the special Hunter website that only the top-ranked Hunters around the world could access, and searched for any information related to this matter. Unfortunately, it was a waste of time.

‘There’s nothing....’

There was not one Hunter who could improve their stats all by themselves. No, they could only grow stronger through pure luck, also known as Awakening, or Re-Awakening process.

So, should he call that man not as a Hunter, but someone chosen by the gods?

Countless windows repeatedly popped up, only to disappear, and countless texts filled the computer screen without a moment’s rest. Three hours passed by like that.

Getting fatigued from the long hours spent on searching, Baek Yun-Ho leaned against the back of his chair.

‘Maybe, I overreacted?’

That could’ve been a possibility.

Because he was too shocked by the incredible strength Hunter Seong Jin-Woo displayed, he could’ve thought up a crazy theory as a way to explain that.

“...Hahaha.”

What was he doing when things remained so hectic?

Rather than wasting time like this, he should be sending another offer to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, instead. Who knows, that quick-witted Chairman Choi could already be visiting Hunter Seong Jin-Woo with a contract in his hand by now.

Baek Yun-Ho chuckled wryly and began closing all the windows one by one. But, when only a single window was left open....

‘Wait a minute....’

Just for fun, he typed ‘Hunter level up ability’ in the search engine. Of course, there was no result to speak of. Baek Yun-Ho wasn’t expecting anything tangible, to begin with, when he typed that, anyway. It was just that, he was unconsciously repeating the actions he’d perform when searching for something online.

‘Now that I think about it.... I haven’t had lunch today.’

He slowly rubbed his tummy as he belatedly sensed his hunger. Baek Yun-Ho was about to log off the search engine altogether, but then, his eyes gleamed brightly.

‘.....?’

He spotted a certain link with some words below it, found on the fifth page of the search results.

If the linked address wasn't the forum only Hunters could sign up with, he'd have ignored those words and move on.

Baek Yun-Ho quickly moved the mouse.

[Title: Something weird has happened to me.]

[Description: I can suddenly see my Stats in numbers like in a video game, and I can even increase their values, too. Is there anyone who has experienced something similar to me?]

An 'anonymous' had opened a thread with those words.

However, how should Baek Yun-Ho describe this? When he read that, he could feel his breaths quickening, as well as his heartbeat, pounding faster and faster.

'Surely, others will think that I've lost my mind.'

Still, there was nothing to lose by confirming it. Baek Yun-Ho picked his phone up.

Soon, the Section Chief of the Second Division, Ahn Sahng-Min, answered the call.

"I'd like you to find something out for me, please."

Baek Yun-Ho wanted to find out what Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was doing on the day this anonymous wrote those words.

With a short but simple answer, the call ended.

Section Chief Ahn was a talented employee. If Baek Yun-Ho waited for a little while, then that man would find what he needed through any means necessary. However, the result arrived sooner than he expected.

'Already?'

Baek Yun-Ho quickly picked up the ringing phone.

"Oh, really?"

Baek Yun-Ho smiled brightly.

Now that he thought about it, there once was a time when the entirety of the Second Division was focused on gathering intel on Hunter Seong Jin-Woo after Chief Ahn ordered them. Thanks to that, he didn't have to wait for long.

"Yes, I remember."

“Oh.... Is that so.”

Baek Yun-Ho formed a disappointed expression.

An unconscious man wouldn't be able to upload anything on the internet, after all.

‘Increasing your Stat values.... There's no way such a thing is even possible.’

It all really was an unfunny waste of time in the end. He was getting somewhat tired now. He decided that he'd go home a bit early today and sleep, but then....

From the phone's speaker, Ahn Sahng-Min's mystified voice came out.



Chapter 97 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

As soon as he heard that, Baek Yun-Ho quickly fixed his previously-slouched sitting posture.

‘He woke up on that day?’

Ahn Sahng-Min amended his answer almost right away. But, Baek Yun-Ho thought that the time difference of one day wasn't important here. No, the truly important bit was the fact that the possibility of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo posting those words had not dissipated at all.

“...I see. That should be enough. Thank you for your help.”

Baek Yun-Ho ended the call there, and after finding the folder containing a certain file on his computer, he opened it. It was the report compiled on Seong Jin-Woo by the Second Division.

Click, click....

Baek Yun-Ho paid greater attention to Jin-Woo's recent activities as he browsed through the information. He hadn't displayed anything particularly interesting before that incident. He lived a typical life of rank E Hunter – got injured often, didn't make a lot of money, etc.

However....

‘After the dual dungeon incident....’

Baek Yun-Ho was present that day as well.

The Association urgently sought after the aid of the nearest large Guild, which was the White Tiger, and Baek Yun-Ho gladly led the elite assault team and went over there.

That's when he saw the sight of an unconscious young man being taken to the hospital in an ambulance.

‘Well, I didn't know that was Seong Jin-Woo back then....’

Just what went down inside that dungeon?

In any case, Seong Jin-Woo had changed completely from that point onwards.

He used to quietly help out with the work of Association until then; but, not

only he chose to join up with a freelancer raid team, he even cleared several rank C Gates in a single day, as well.

Without a doubt, something in him changed inside that dual dungeon.

‘This is definitely not your typical Re-Awakening.’

Section Chief Ahn theorised that Yujin Construction was testing out Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s powers after he went through the Re-Awakening process, but....

‘No, it’s not.’

But, that wouldn’t be able to explain the continued and rather speedy increase in that man’s powers even though his Re-Awakening process should have ended by now.

So, what if....

‘...What if, there is a Hunter who can continuously grow stronger?’

Not only that, his rate of growth was so fast that, within a span of a few months, his powers rose up from the rank E all the way up to rank S?

“...”

Baek Yun-Ho inadvertently let a gasp escape from his mouth.

It was a goosebumps-inducing idea, indeed. Of course, there was no evidence that the anonymous poster and Hunter Seong Jin-Woo were the same person.

However, if Hunter Seong Jin-Woo could increase his strength exactly like how it was written in that post, then just imagining how much further he could grow made Baek Yun-Ho dizzy.

And at the same time....

‘I was being foolish.’

He finally understood why Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was so disinterested in signing up with a Guild.

‘Thinking about it from his perspective....’

If he was given an ability where he could theoretically grow stronger infinitely, would he want to enter someone else’s Guild?

Baek Yun-Ho shook his head.

‘Nope, I’d rather make a Guild of my own.’

Who cared about the number one or two Guilds in the country? After all,

his own would soon become the best, anyway.

‘This.... Both Choi Jong-In and I have been wasting time chasing after a pipe dream, huh.’

Thinking about Chairman Choi who should be sweating profusely right about now while trying to woo Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, a wry chuckle automatically broke out of his mouth.

However....

‘If my theory is correct, then this matter isn’t something to laugh about.’

In the not too distant future, that man would surely become an existence that would get to control the community of Hunters in South Korea. No, Hunters of the entire world might focus all their attention on him, at this rate.

He needed to completely rethink the plan regarding Hunter Seong Jin-Woo now.

But before all that...

‘I need to meet him face to face and confirm it first.’

Baek Yun-Ho nodded his head. No matter how hard he thought about it, meeting Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was the number one priority.

Unfortunately....

‘...How am I supposed to ask him for a meeting??’

Baek Yun-Ho held his head tightly.

“...”

When he realised that he just made his mind up to meet with a man who didn’t even reply once to the countless requests for a sit-down until now, his head already began throbbing from a migraine.

The appraiser spoke in a shocked tone of voice.

“You... ‘picked’ it up in a dungeon?!”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Technically speaking, he did ‘pick’ it up after defeating Vulcan in the Demon’s Castle ‘dungeon’.

So, he wasn’t lying here, was he?

‘You can find something like this inside a dungeon??’

‘Well, it’s not something the current level of craftsmanship can create....’

The appraiser who asked the question, as well as the two members of the Appraisal Department who heard the answer, all carried unconvinced expressions, but since the person himself said so, there was no other choice but to accept it.

And truth be told, it wasn't really important where this crimson magic tool came from.

'No, the important thing would be what this Hunter-nim wants to do with it.'

The department head took a step forward.

"It has been confirmed to be a real deal."

His gaze was fixed on the bead lying in Jin-Woo's palm.

"Will you commence with the auction with us? We will ensure that you get the maximum amount for this article."

So, what should Jin-Woo do now?

Before he could decide on what to do with the 'Bead of Avarice', he asked for something else, first.

"By any chance, can I purchase a flame resistant defensive artefact here?"

The department head and Kim Jeong-Ki looked at each other. And then, they looked back at Jin-Woo with somewhat awkward expressions.

Jin-Woo was confused by that.

"Did I ask for something I shouldn't have?"

"No, not at all."

"Or is it really difficult to find a flame resistance armour, then?"

"Actually...."

The department head smiled and spoke.

"It's the exact opposite. It's really easy to acquire one."

"But, I couldn't find one online, though?"

"Weapons and defensive equipment with innate attributes cost a lot of money, so they don't normally appear online all that often. Even still, if you are looking for it, you should be able to find one very quickly. Well, fire-type magic is the most common attack magic spells there are, after all."

But, of course.

Most of the Mage-type Hunters Jin-Woo met so far either wielded flames or rays of light. He heard that even the rank S Hunter Choi Jong-In specialised in flame attribute magic, too. Not only that, the Shadow Magic Soldiers he controlled also used flames, and even Fangs could breathe fire.

In other words, 'fire' type attacks were a pretty common sight.

'What a relief to hear that it's easy to find one.'

He did kinda feel a bit pressured after hearing that it would cost a lot, but his mother's treatment depended on him getting one. As long as he could find one quickly enough, he was willing to pay regardless of what the asking price was.

If the push came to shove, he could sell the 'Bead of Avarice', too.

"Can you find one for me?"

"Yes, of course."

The department head about to exit the appraisal room, but stopped and looked at Kim Jeong-Ki.

"Mister Jeong-Ki? Rather than having our guest wait here doing nothing at all, how about showing him around the items that will go up in auction soon?"

"Ah, of course. I will."

Kim Jeong-Ki stepped forward.

"Please, come with me."

So, two men headed off to the display hall exclusively reserved for the VIP clients that exhibited only those ultra-expensive artefacts about to be auctioned off, or still waiting for their willing buyers.

Weapons, armours, Rune Stones, etc., were displayed inside clear glass cases. Jin-Woo stopped in front of a glass display case that contained a longsword. Kim Jeong-Ki approached him.

"Do you see something you're interested in?"

"No, it's not that, but...."

Jin-Woo lightly knocked on the glass case.

"Can you really protect these artefacts with such a thin glass? I don't see any particular security system in here, either."

Kim Jeong-Ki formed a proud expression.

“They may look that way, but these glasses are reinforced with powerful magical energy by the very best craftsmen. Nothing would happen even if a melee-type rank A Hunter hits them with everything he has.”

“Even when a rank A hits it....?”

Seeing that Jin-Woo seemed rather unconvinced, Kim Jeong-Ki smirked and carried on.

“If you don’t believe me, how about hitting the glass once? If you manage to break it, then I might give you the artefact found inside, Hunter-nim.”

“Hmm....”

Was this reinforced glass really that strong?

‘I can sense some magic energy in it, but...’

Now feeling genuinely curious, Jin-Woo began gathering strength in his right arm to test it out.

Fuu-wook!

In an instant, his shoulder and forearm expanded, and the surrounding air sank under the heavy pressure.

“H-hold on!!”

Kim Jeong-Ki hurriedly blocked Jin-Woo’s way.

“I was only just joking! I wasn’t really asking you to hit it, you know.”

“...Oh. I see.”

“If the case really breaks, then the elites of the Hunters Guild will rush over here. Our Auction house and the Hunters have signed a security contract, you see.”

“Aha.”

....This man, telling joking as if he’s being earnest.

Jin-Woo withdrew his strength. As soon as the heavy pressure emanating from him was lifted, Kim Jeong-Ki quickly breathed a sigh of relief.

‘By the way, this guy... Wasn’t he supposed to be a Mage-type Hunter??’

He was supposed to be a Mage-type Hunter, yet why was his aura so outrageous?

Kim Jeong-Ki wasn’t joking when he told Jin-Woo to hit the glass.

He was thinking that, even though this youth was a rank S, he was a Mage-

type, so his physical strength couldn't actually be that high. But then, when Jin-Woo began concentrating, all the hair on Kim Jeong-Ki's body stood up and instinctively, he knew that he had to stop the youth.

What a relief it was that Jin-Woo backed off without raising a fuss.

'Well, Hunter-nim's hand might get hurt if something went wrong, so this is fine.'

Kim Jeong-Ki consoled himself like that and guided Jin-Woo to other artefacts on display.

After taking a look around once, Jin-Woo asked.

"Isn't there anything that I can actually touch? Daggers, if possible."

Since he wasn't really the type who depended on weapons, he hadn't paid much attention to the matter until now, but after taking a look at the various equipment on display, he suddenly became curious.

Kim Jeong-Ki's expression brightened.

The reason for showing off these artefacts to Hunters was exactly for moments like this. Hunters may be sellers, but they were also valuable clients as well.

"Of course, we have them."

After replying, Kim Jeong-Ki used the mic attached to the collar of his suit just below his neck to summon the staff member in charge of the weapons.

Fearing that Jin-Woo might change his mind, the staff member quickly arrived.

"And this gentleman is?"

The staff signalled with his eyes, and Kim Jeong-Ki nodded his head.

"Ah, it's a pleasure to meet you. I'm in charge of the weapons section. Please come with me."

The staff member guided Jin-Woo and they exited from the VIP display hall.

After seeing those two off, Kim Jeong-Ki spat out another sigh.

'This Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim seems to possess a talent for surprising people, doesn't he?'

After regaining some of his calm, Kim Jeong-Ki disinterestedly took a look around him, before he walked over to the glass case with the longsword Jin-Woo seemed to be interested in earlier.

He checked the glass case to see if there was a fingerprint or something since Jin-Woo had been standing pretty close to it, but then, he tilted his head slightly.

“Ng?”

Something was on the upper side of the case.

“What the heck?”

He spotted a crack in the corner of the glass case that was so small, it was easy to miss with naked eyes.

“Since when did this happen?”

He pulled out a handkerchief and rubbed it, but sure enough, it didn't get wiped away. It wasn't some dirt, but an actual crack.

“Well, I'll be.”

Kim Jeong-Ki frowned deeply.

How disappointed Hunter Seong Jin-Woo would've been, someone who could be one of their most important clients, if he saw that?

It was a small relief that the crack was near the corner of the case in a hard-to-spot location.

“Tsk, tsk.”

Kim Jeong-Ki tutted audibly and summoned the maintenance team, before exiting from the VIP display hall, like Jin-Woo had done.

Jin-Woo picked up the dagger that the staff member in charge gave to him. If he were being honest, it was rather lousy in quality.

‘It's far worse than the Knight Killer, which is ranked at rarity B.’

The attack power was not even half of the Knight Killer, too. With a disappointed expression on his face, Jin-Woo returned the dagger.

“How much is this guy?”

“It's 30 million Won.” (TL: Around \$26,830)

Jin-Woo's eyes widened.

How much did he say for this measly little dagger??

“How much??”

“30 million Won, Hunter-nim.”

“H-hold on.”

Jin-Woo turned around, and while pretending to rummage around, he summoned the Knight Killer and showed it to the staff member.

“Okay, how much would this guy go for, then?”

It was now the turn of staff to widen his eyes.

“Is this your current weapon? Wowsers. I can definitely sense the touch of a great artisan from this dagger!”

‘No, well, I bought it off the Store, though....’

The staff member hesitated slightly, before raising his voice with a grin.

“It won’t be accurate since I’m not a dedicated appraiser, but at the bare minimum, I think it should cost well over 100 million Won.”

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened.

‘But, uh, I paid 3 million Gold for it in the Store?’

Or was it more like 2.8 million?

Seeing Jin-Woo’s expression, the staff member embarrassedly scratched the back of his head.

“Was I wrong? Since I’m a specialist when it comes to weapons, I thought I could give it a shot, even though it’s not really my place.”

“No, it’s nothing like that.”

Indeed, Jin-Woo was simply shocked by the sky-high price tag, that was all.

But, well....

The first real weapon he held, Kim Sahng-Sik’s steel sword and its attack damage of 10, was supposedly over three million Won in price, while Yu Jin-Ho’s equipment, which the kid didn’t really get to use all that much, also commanded price tags of over 100 million each.

So, he shouldn’t have been surprised by the fact that items with high Stats sold in the System’s Store could potentially fetch high asking price in real life, too.

‘It’s just that I didn’t pay attention to that side of things until now.’

Because he wasn’t too interested in making a quick buck.

‘Wait a minute....’

Currently, he had so much Gold stored in his Inventory that it was practically bursting at the seams. However, if he could buy items from the

Store with that accumulated Gold, and then sell them off at a really high price?

Jin-Woo's head spun pretty quickly then.

'Doesn't this mean I won't have to sell the Bead of Avarice?'

Just as his thoughts arrived at this point....

Waaaaahhh-!!

Were his emotions to blame?

He thought he could hear the loud cheers of the Magic Soldiers hidden inside his shadow.



Chapter 98 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Holy cow! Oppa, those reporters are still outside the building!”

Jin-Ah spoke while looking out of the window.

It was already late in the evening. Reporters who hadn't given up yet were still gathered around in front of the apartment's entrance like a storm cloud.

“Look!! Up there!”

After discovering the silhouette of a person by the window, they hurriedly operated their cameras, thinking that it was Jin-Woo.

Click, click, click!!

Seeing all those camera flashes suddenly exploding from here and there, Jin-Ah jumped up in fright and quickly shuttered the curtains. She turned around and sighed softly like a timid little animal.

“Whew....”

Having returned from the Hunter Auction, Jin-Woo was thinking of taking a bit of a well-deserved rest, but he was carrying a rather stiff expression at the moment.

“Should I go downstairs and say something?”

It was fine for those folks to disrupt his rest. However, he was more worried about them disrupting his sister's studies. Jin-Ah was a high school senior, about to take the most important test of her life.

Wasn't this the time when some overly-sensitive kids would throw a tantrum just because of the faint footsteps outside their doors disrupting their studies?

‘Well, Jin-Ah isn't the type to raise a fuss over stuff like this, but...’

But, still – could she even be able to concentrate with all these distracting noises coming from the outside?

Just as Jin-Woo was getting prepared to step forward....

“Nonono, don't do it.”

...Jin-Ah quickly waved her hands about.

“Oppa, you’re already being slagged off in the internet, you know? So, can you imagine what they’ll say if you chase away the reporters?”

“Slagged off?”

‘Since when did I do something worthy of that treatment??’

As Jin-Woo tilted his head this way and that, Jin-Ah accessed one of the news articles online with her phone and pushed it forward. So, he took it from her.

‘.....’

On the screen, he could see the photo of him standing in front of the Association’s entrance, relaxedly answering his phone while being surrounded by a sea of reporters.

Maybe because a professional snapped that shot, even a plain guy like him came out looking pretty good, so he was happy about that. However, when he took a look a bit lower down....

‘His attitude sucks.’

‘He already doesn’t care about the reporters.’

‘He’s way too cool for himself.’

Countless comments with similar nature were posted below the article, and the highest upvoted comment was ‘Mom, I’ve become a rank S!!’

Because the photo and the comment went so well along with each other, Jin-Woo ended up breaking out in a grin.

Jin-Ah in turn became flabbergasted from his reaction.

“How can you smile from that?!”

“But, it is funny.”

“....”

When Jin-Woo showed her the top upvoted comment, Jin-Ah too nearly broke out in laughter, but somehow managed to suppress it. And, perhaps as a rebound....

“No, wait a minute! That’s not important, is it?!”

With a slightly flushed face, Jin-Ah raised her voice.

“Why did you have to answer your phone there?? I mean, there were so many reporters present, you know! Thanks to you, everyone now knows my name!”

Jin-Woo replied confidently as if he couldn't be fazed by anything.

“Do I really need to observe reporters and their moods when answering my little sister’s call?”

“Euk!!”

Jin-Ah became speechless. No matter how hard she thought about it, he wasn't wrong, so she couldn't readily come up with a suitable rebuttal.

‘...I simply can’t win against him in an argument.’

Jin-Woo handed the phone back to her.

“Here.”

Jin-Ah took the phone back with a slightly testy face, and opened her mouth.

“In any case, I’ll be fine, so oppa, don’t mind the reporters, okay?”

“Okay. Got it.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

If the current situation persisted, then he might have done something, but then again, the Association did call him earlier to say that these reporters should all receive orders to stay far away from him in a day or two.

‘Well, I can endure that.’

And there was also Jin-Ah not wanting to inflate the situation any further, too.

“By the way, just what on earth happened here?”

Jin-Ah looked at her brother with a pair of mystified eyes.

“My own oppa became a rank S Hunter, and reporters are camping outside our house, too....”

Some said that it'd be difficult to run into a rank S Hunter even once in your entire life, yet there was one standing right in front of her. Not only that, he was her older brother, no less.

Pretty much anyone would react the same way if they were in her shoes. Jin-Ah sounded as if she couldn't quite believe it.

Too bad, she had no choice but to adjust to the new reality sooner rather than later.

‘Just like how I had to.’

Jin-Woo smirked softly.

And, in order to soothe his sister and her still-stunned heart, he lightly pinched Jin-Ah's cheeks. Of course, she reacted in the same manner as in the past by kicking him, but....

“Ouch!!”

She instead grabbed her foot and jumped up and down in pain.

“Heeiing~.”

Jin-Ah glared at him from the corners of her eyes as if this was just too much, while Jin-Woo could only shrug his shoulders. It seemed that she'd need quite a lot of time to get used to the fact that her oppa was now a rank S Awakened.

“Oppa, I guess you'll become a lot busier now, right?”

Jin-Ah cautiously asked him.

“Mm.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

There were lots of things he wanted to do, and plenty of work to get through, too – but for now, clearing the Demon's Castle took priority. He even resorted to buying a flame-resistance defensive artefact for the sole purpose of conquering the upper floors, after all.

His own funds came up ridiculously short so his heart nearly fell to the pit of his stomach, but thankfully, he was able to use one of the Store's rarity 'A' items as collateral and got a loan from the Hunter Auction.

‘I'm in debt as soon as becoming a rank S....’

For some reason, a wry chuckle escaped from his lips.

Well, as long as the items from the Store could be sold off at high prices in auctions, that debt would be wiped clean in an instant, though.

“In that case, it'd get harder to see you, right?”

Hearing that he might get a lot busier in the future, Jin-Ah formed a slightly rueful expression. Indeed, being alone would be a lonesome task.

Without saying anything, Jin-Woo placed his hand on Jin-Ah's head.

A few days from now....

Once he cleared the Demon's Castle dungeon, there would never be another day when his sister would have to house-sit all alone.

‘I'll make sure that happens for real.’

It was then.

Jin-Woo's eyes narrowed to a slit. His gaze shifted toward the front door.

'Someone's coming this way.'

Jin-Ah also noticed her brother's tense aura. She asked, sounding a little anxious.

"Oppa?"

"Stay in your room for a bit, okay?"

"What's the matter?"

A presence climbing out of the elevator was walking straight to here now.

'It's a Hunter....?'

The suspicious presence emitted a thin and weak magic energy. Jin-Woo couldn't sense any hostile intentions from this presence, but still, he didn't feel like humouring an uninvited guest.

Did a Guild send someone over? Or, was it a foolhardy reporter placing too much faith in his own Awakened powers?

Didn't matter which was which – Jin-Woo wasn't a gracious enough person to accept with a smile an uninvited guest trying to invade the privacy of his home, when the hour was already well past ten in the evening.

Jin-Woo stood before the door.

'With that kind of power...'

He didn't need to summon his weapons. Jin-Woo lightly loosened his muscles. He tilted his head left and right, and his neck issued cracking noise.

And, as he expected....

Thud, thud.

Someone 'knocked' on the door, causing Jin-Ah to run into her room in a bit of surprise. Jin-Woo quietly opened the door.

Clang.

And from the slowly-widening gap of the door, a familiar face of a man could be seen. The man spoke.

"Hyunnng-nim...."

He was even sniffing, too.

Yu Jin-Ho and his reddened nose were standing in front of the door,

sniffing like a little kid.

“.....”

Jin-Woo was so dumbstruck that he stood there in a total daze, prompting Yu Jin-Ho to tearfully speak up.

“Hyung-nim. I got kicked out of the house. Dad kicked me out.”

“...”

Now that Jin-Woo took another look, there was a backpack as big as Yu Jin-Ho slung on his back. He was even carrying quite a lot of luggage in both of his hands, too.

“.....Wait, didn’t you live alone already?”

“Well, that....”

Sniff.

“The villa I was living in was under father’s name, and he took it away. He even blocked all my bank accounts.”

A father blocking his son’s bank accounts. All of them. What a movie-like situation that was, but well, this being the top businessman in South Korea, Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan, it sounded rather plausible.

Besides all that, though – what did this kid do to get on his father’s bad side like this?

When Jin-Woo stared with a pair of questioning gaze, Yu Jin-Ho spoke up, his voice trembling.

“So, like, I was wondering, hyung-nim. Can I impose on you for the time being?”

Creaaak....

Clank.

Jin-Woo quietly closed the door, and even proceeded to lock it.

Click.

Worried Jin-Ah had been observing the situation from her room, and once Jin-Woo turned away from the door, she quickly jogged next to him and asked.

“Oppa, who was that? Do you know him?”

Jin-Woo shook his head.

“Nope. Never met him before.”

“You really don’t know him? But, why did he come to our place, then?”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m sure he got the wrong address.”

“.....Really?”

But, it sure didn’t look like that, though.

As Jin-Woo gently but firmly pushed his still-suspicious little sister back into her room, Yu Jin-Ho’s sorrowful voice continued to ring out behind him.

Thud, thud!!

“Hyuuung-niiim!! Hyung-niiiiim!!”

“Dear, don’t you think you were being too harsh on Jin-Ho earlier today?”

“Hmph.”

Yu Myung-Hwan roughly yanked at his tie.

What an insolent little child.

He was about to be gifted with the Yujin Guild, which would no doubt become the Yujin Construction’s core business in the future, yet he dared to answer like that?

[“I’ve decided to work for hyung-nim’s Guild.”]

What?

Follow ‘hyung-nim’, was it?

“That fool deserved it.”

Yu Myung-Han snorted derisively.

If the boy wished to stand on his two feet, then he should do so on his own power, too.

The father thought that he’d teach his son about every choice being accompanied by responsibilities and consequences.

Was it because he was far too agitated? For some reason, it felt like his d*mn tie just didn’t want to come undone. His clumsy and hasty hands caused the tie to be tangled up even more instead, prompting the lady of the Yu family to reach out with her hands.

“Let me do it for you.”

Soon enough, the tie was easily loosened. Yu Myung-Han entrusted himself to his wife’s skilful hands.

However....

The wife began giggling while holding his tie.

“What’s the matter, dear?”

Yu Myung-Han was confused. She had been doing his ties for as long as they were together. So, she shouldn’t have found his tangled up tie all that funny by now.

“My dear. Are you sure you’re really angry?”

“Mm....??”

Did she eat something wrong? Why was she saying something so nonsensical?

Yu Myung-Han tilted his head slightly and took a look at his own reflection in the mirror.

‘What the....’

He was surprised by what he saw.

Why did he look so pleased in the reflection, even though his mouth was busy spewing out complaints only until a second ago?

Feeling embarrassed now, Yu Myung-Han began rubbing his cheeks and chin.

“Today was the first time, wasn’t it, dear?”

“What do you mean?”

“Jin-Ho rebelling against you.”

“....”

That was why he was angry.

Just like how water flowed from the top to bottom, a large corporation would not be able to sustain its massive self if the orders from the top didn’t get delivered to the rest. He believed it was the same story for running a family, as well.

That was why he maintained the exact same type of attitude he’d have when at work while he was home with his family, and he did not accept anyone going against his decisions.

However....

Even though he was feeling angry today, why didn’t he feel bad about it, either?

‘I’m angry, but not unhappy at the same time?’

This situation made no sense when he thought about it.

The madam spoke gently like a mother pacifying a child, as if she had already read everything in her husband’s mind.

“Jin-Ho is trying to do something he feels passionate about for the first time in his life. So, how about cooling your anger a little and cheering him on from the side?”

“.....”

Yu Myung-Han shut his mouth tight.

He found it a bit hard to decipher his own head at the moment.

“For the time being... I shall keep an eye on him.”

“Of course.”

The madam formed a sweet smile and received his jacket as he took it off. However, something happened then.

Yu Myung-Han stared at his wife’s face.

“But, this is quite strange.”

“What is strange, dear?”

“I can see two of your faces.”

“Pardon?”

Just as the madam’s eyes widened, Yu Myung-Han lost his balance and staggered unsteadily.

“Dear?!”

The frightened madam hurriedly tried to support Yu Myung-Han. He shook his head continuously, heavily gasps escaping from his mouth.

“Pant, pant.....”

The madam’s eyes opened wider.

‘Why is there so much cold sweat?!’

Yu Myung-Han tried to keep his eyes wide open to forcefully beat back the sudden feeling of sleepiness, but in the end, lost his consciousness.

Yu Myung-Han reopened his eyes inside the VIP room located in the country’s top university hospital.

One of the doctors in charge approached him to check up on Yu Myung-

Han's complexion. They had been working in a 24-hour rotation schedule to keep an eye on his condition.

"Can you hear me, Chairman?"

"...."

Yu Myung-Han took a quick look around him, and immediately figured out where he was.

"How long have I been here?"

"You've been sleeping for the last two days."

Two days?

The person most likely to be picked as the role model for ***"hard working"*** would be Yu Myung-Han. He had never slept for more than five hours in a day in his entire life, no matter how tired he was.

"....."

Yu Myung-Han resolutely kept his mouth shut, before speaking up as if it was nothing.

"I guess I was quite tired, then."

He was indeed swarmed with various matters that kept him insanely busy recently. The sudden bout of vertigo and that unshakeable sleepiness were probably the side effects.

However, the doctor couldn't hide the seriousness from his expression.

Yu Myung-Han was the owner of the country's top company that employed tens of thousands of people. So, he was already a master at reading people's expressions.

Seeing the stiffening face of the doctor, Yu Myung-Han asked him.

"By any chance.... Have you discovered something wrong with my body?"



Chapter 99 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Mister Chairman, by any chance, do you have anyone near you who is a Hunter, or someone who’s not a Hunter yet but has been evaluated as an Awakened?”

The doctor suddenly asked about something rather strange.

Yu Myung-Han asked if there was something wrong with his body, yet why was he talking about Hunters now?

Yu Myung-Han asked back feeling puzzled now.

“What are you talking about? Why Hunters, all of a sudden?”

“Have you heard of Eternal Sleep?”

Hearing the term ***“Eternal Sleep”***, Yu Myung-Han finally lost his cool, and his eyes trembled.

The Eternal Sleep Disorder. An endless slumber that no one could wake up from.

Not only was it impossible to wake up from its death-like slumber, but the lifeforce of the sufferer would also decline quite sharply, so it was a necessity to use life support machines that utilised magic energy.

Appearing for the first time after the advent of the Gates, it was a terrifying illness that managed to kill scores of people who lacked the wherewithal to borrow one of those life support machines.

“It’s an illness where you’d be assaulted often by drowsiness, and eventually, you’d be unable to wake up at all.”

The doctor carried a complicated expression. There had not been a single case of the sufferer of the ‘Eternal Sleep’ waking up, so far.

Even if one’s life was extended via machines, you’d still be unable to open your eyes. It was no different from a death sentence for the victims.

“...”

Yu Myung-Han waited for the doctor to finish explaining before asking his question.

“How does that relate to Hunters?”

“The ‘Eternal Sleep’ is widely believed to be deeply related to magic energy.”

There were those people who, by nature, couldn't endure magic energy all that well. One of the abnormalities displayed by these people after being exposed to surrounding magic energy for a long time was this Eternal Sleep Disorder.

“Wait, isn't magic energy used to power the life support machines that supply lifeforce to the patients?”

“That is true, but...”

Just like how one could safely use the electricity generated by the dangerous material fuelling the nuclear reaction, the doctor explained, magical devices and magics utilising magic energy did not harm people.

“What you need to be careful with are the Magic Crystals, Mana Stones, as well as people possessing magic energy.”

‘People possessing magic energy.....’

Yu Myung-Han immediately recalled the sole Awakened in his family, Yu Jin-Ho. Meanwhile, the doctor cautiously carried on.

“I've heard that your second son is a Hunter, sir.”

When Yu Jin-Ho was mentioned, Yu Myung-Han's face visibly hardened.

“So, the gist of it is... you want me to never meet my own son? Is that it?”

“If it's at all possible, that is indeed my recomm.....”

“Don't make me laugh!!”

Yu Myung-Han abruptly cut the doctor off and empathised his point.

“Don't speak of nonsense.”

And then, as if he was annoyed, he gestured the doctor to leave.

“Chairman....”

The doctor hesitated, not knowing what to do, but he soon left the room as if he was being chased away after being glared at by Yu Myung-Han's furious eyes.

He continued to glare at the door the doctor used to escape with barely concealed fury in his eyes.

‘Distance oneself from one's son, just because one fears the illness

getting worse? Is that something a father should even say??

Sure, let's say that did happen.

What if Jin-Ho heard that news? What would that boy think of, then?

As a father, he could not bear to burden his son with something that heavy. At least, that's what Yu Myung-Han believed.

'Not only that...'

With each passing day, people found more and more practical applications for magic energy, and the number of people innately possessing magic energy was steadily increasing, as well.

So, if you couldn't withstand magic energy when living in a world like this, didn't that already mean you had been eliminated from the natural selection?

Yu Myung-Han harrumphed unhappily.

'I, Yu Myung-Han, have failed to make the cut?'

Such a thing could never happen.

'I will not submit.'

Even when everyone else ridiculed him and predicted his failure, he always managed to succeed so his detractors could take a good look at him.

He was the very person who, after inheriting the Yujin Construction that barely cracked the top 30 in the country, turned it into the number one corporation in South Korea.

'So, you think I'll kneel in defeat over a stupid illness like this?'

He wouldn't give up.

Yu Myung-Han inwardly told himself this over and over again.

Before leaving, Jin-Woo carefully opened the door to his sister's room.

As it was still in the early hours, Jin-Ah remained blissfully stuck in a slumber so deep that she'd not be any wiser if someone kidnapped her right now.

Suddenly, he felt worried.

'There might be a jacka*s or two who'll try to get closer to her while I'm away.'

Of course, there should be no one stupid enough to harm the little sister of a rank S Hunter, but well, it was hard to tell what was in a human's heart sometimes.

At least, he needed some sort of a contingency plan.

'Wait a minute. I can hide my soldiers inside shadows, right?'

Jin-Woo recalled the time when he sent out his Shadow Soldiers on the patrol of the district, in case that serial killer decided to show up again.

Back then, soldiers moved by hiding in the various shades found in the surroundings. By utilising that, he might be able to protect his sister without anyone even noticing it.

Which was good, because he just so happened to possess the perfect candidates for this role.

'Come out.'

Jin-Woo called out those monster soldiers that had been guarding 'Fangs' when they were still alive.

Shururu....

Three of the biggest, burliest High Orcs appeared simultaneously and ended up making the already-tiny room of his sister feel even more claustrophobic.

However....

'Huh? Why are there only three?'

There definitely had been four guards, though?

Jin-Woo combed through his memories, only to spit out a soundless groan.

'Ah.'

Only now did he remember that he 'planted' one of the guards in the ceiling of the boss room. And naturally, he forgot to extract that guy's shadow.

'I guess I should pay closer attention next time.'

Jin-Woo smirked softly, before shifting his gaze over to the three monster soldiers, who used to be High Orc guards while still alive. All of them were elite grade.

They were on another scale altogether when compared to the shadows extracted from the 'regular' High Orcs. With these three, they would still be fine even if their opponent was a rank A Hunter.

He wasn't exaggerating here – the leader of the Hunters' raid team, the rank A Sohn Ki-Hoon, was pushed to a corner while fighting off three regular High Orcs, after all.

So, there was no reason to worry about these guys.

Jin-Woo pointed with his chin towards the sleeping Jin-Ah. And when that happened...

Shururu....

The guards returned to 'shadow' forms and moved along the floor, and they assimilated into her shadow.

'Very good.'

Hide in there quietly, and when Jin-Ah finds herself in danger, get rid of the opponent, regardless of who it is.

Jin-Woo gave that order to the guards and carefully closed shut the door to her room.

'I can relax a little now.'

Indeed, he felt less worried.

He made sure to lock the front door properly and exited from the apartment, and found Yu Jin-Ho waiting for him there, just as promised.

"Hyung-nim!"

Yu Jin-Ho greeted Jin-Woo with a bright face.

"Was it okay sleeping in that place?"

"Yes, it was fine, hyung-nim. I had no idea, but motels nowadays seem to feature pretty good amenities."

Since his little sister was staying at home, Jin-Woo had Yu Jin-Ho stay in a local motel nearby. Thankfully, it must not have been too bad there.

"Until we can find some office space for my Guild, stay there for the time being."

"Got it, hyung-nim."

He must've been enjoying himself, since Yu Jin-Ho continued to giggle.

Jin-Woo already heard the most of what happened from the kid last night. While listening to the tale, he was hoping against hoping, but to think, this kid would show up here after really rejecting the golden chance to become a Guild Master.....

When he heard that, Jin-Woo was so dumbfounded that he just had to ask, and that prompted Yu Jin-Ho to reply while sounding like a victim.

["You really came over just because I made an offer?!"]

[“But, hyung-nim, you said I should come!!”]

Even then, Jin-Woo couldn't really kick to the curve a kid who gave up on a job equivalent to being a chairman of a company just to be next to him.

“Okay, well, let's go.”

“Yes, hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho climbed into the driver's seat of the van, and Jin-Woo settled down on the passenger's. And the van containing two people drove towards the Daesung Tower.

Yu Jin-Ho sneaked a glance at Jin-Woo.

‘What business does he have in the Daesung Tower so early in the morning?’

He was curious, but he also thought that asking hyung-nim this and that would be quite insolent of him, so his lips didn't want to part that easily.

Screech.

By the time their van came to a stop in front of the Daesung Tower, though, he managed to work up some courage.

“By the way, hyung-nim. What about this Daesung Towe....”

“I'm off.”

“Eh?”

Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly turned his head to the passenger side. However, the door was already wide open, and hyung-nim was nowhere to be seen.

Didn't something similar to this happen before?

Yu Jin-Ho scratched the side of his head.

‘Hyung-nim can be so elusive sometimes, you know.’

[You have entered Demon's Castle dungeon.]

Jin-Woo cancelled his 'Stealth' skill.

‘I've finally returned.’

Thinking that he had returned to the place where he could cut loose without worry, his heart began pounding harder.

As soon as he walked past the castle's gates, the mechanical bleep went off as if it was waiting for his arrival.

Tti-ring.

[A new quest is available.]

Unlike the first time he got here, Jin-Woo wasn't surprised.

Well, the quest he got the first time was called 'Collect the Souls of Demons! (1)', after all. He expected the next part of the quest to show up sooner or later.

Jin-Woo opened the message window.

Tti-ring.

[Normal Quest: Collect the Souls of Demons! (2)]

The sovereign of the demons, 'Baran', can be found residing on the top floor of the Demon's Castle. Defeat Baran and collect his soul.

If you succeed in sealing the soul of the Demon King, you will be rewarded handsomely.

Quest generation conditions:

Quest completion condition:

Rewards:

'The goal of this quest is to kill the Demon King?'

Jin-Woo's expression brightened. He no longer needed to go all over the place now. Instead, he just needed to climb up to the top floor of the Demon's Castle as soon as possible.

And the rewards on offer were excellent as well.

'30 bonus Stat points!'

The previous quest was pretty much slave labour, asking him to collect ten thousand demon souls. And after all that hard work, he 'only' received 20 bonus Stat points.

However, he could earn 30 points this time by killing one Demon King. He'd need ten days of Daily Quests, or six level-ups, to match that amount of Stat points. A smile instinctively broke out of his lips at this unexpectedly rich reward.

'Ok so, what is this highest grade Rune Stone all about?'

Jin-Woo confirmed the details of the first reward next.

Tti-ring.

[Highest grade Rune Stone: Shadow Exchange]

By breaking this highest grade Rune Stone, you can learn a Class-specific

Skill.

‘I can learn a Class-specific skill?’

Jin-Woo’s brows shot up.

So far, he had ‘earned’ three Class-specific skills.

The ‘Shadow Extraction’.

The ‘Shadow Storage’.

And finally, ‘Sovereign’s Territory’.

Every single one of them was an indispensable skill. And, just from the mere idea of adding one more skill to his roster, his heart palpitated even harder.

‘What kind of skill is this?’

He wanted to confirm the information on the skill, but the only thing that popped up was its name, and no in-depth explanation was offered.

‘Tsk.’

Jin-Woo could only smack his lips wryly.

‘Well, I’ll find out eventually after completing the quest.’

A Class-specific skill, and 30 bonus Stat points, too. Even when excluding the unknown reward, it was already a remarkable amount of loot on offer. He was really tempted to simply rush up to the top floor in one go, but...

‘Before I start anything, though...’

Jin-Woo summoned his Status Window for the first time in a while.

Tti-ring.

[Name: Seong Jin-Woo]

[Level: 80]

[Title: The One Who Overcame the Adversity (extra 1)]

[HP: 24,406]

[MP: 5,019]

[Tiredness: 0]

[Stats]

Strength: 186

Endurance: 145

Agility: 175

Intelligence: 189

Perception: 126

(Remaining points available to distribute: 0)

Reduction in physical damage: 46%

[Skills]

Passive Skills:

Active Skills:

[Class-specific Skills]

Active Skills:

[Crafting Skill]

Consumable: Divine Water of Life (2/3)

[Equipped Items]

His level was already 80. And thanks to him investing every single bonus Stat point on Intelligence, he could see that it exceeded his Strength Stat now.

‘My Intelligence Stat is nearing the 200 mark already.’

The result of that was his total MP now went past 5000.

His MP, or Mana, was a must for one thing. It was like a cheat device that allowed him to infinitely revive his soldiers. But, when he thought about the number of his soldiers increasing in the future, that 5000 MP seemed rather inadequate to his eyes.

‘Fine. Let’s get started.’

Even a second couldn’t be wasted here.

Jin-Woo closed his Status Windows.

Currently, he was standing on the ground floor of the Demon’s Castle. Getting back to the 76th floor, where he temporarily had to stop his conquest, wouldn’t take long at all.

So, he immediately made his way over to the floor-transfer magic circle.

[Floors 1 to 76 have been opened.]

[Which floor would you like to go to?]

Jin-Woo spoke without hesitation.

“76.”

The light gleamed brightly. In the moment it took to blink an eye, his surroundings had changed completely. He was now faced with a vigorously-burning city.

When inside the floor-transfer magic circle, he wasn't supposed to be affected by the environments outside, but it still felt like his skin was burning up already.

Jin-Woo put the luggage down and pulled two artefacts out. First one was a black robe named the 'Wind Robe' by its maker, and the other one was a nameless ring with water-type magic imbued within.

Jin-Woo put on both the robe and the ring.

After putting on the robe and pulling on the hood, Jin-Woo finally felt like he was a true Mage-type Hunter now.

'...I can feel my body cooling down.'

Just by wearing them, it felt like he was standing inside a refreshingly cool cavern or some such.

'I wonder, will this work against the flames of the Demon's Castle?'

Jin-Woo slowly stepped outside of the magic circle. And thankfully, these artefacts proved their expensive worth. The debilitating heat couldn't affect him at all now, quite unlike the last time he was here.

'Wait, won't it be uncomfortable to move around because it's a robe?'

He couldn't be sure, so he moved this way and that, but it proved to be surprisingly comfortable. As befitting its name, 'Wind Robe', the whole thing felt as light as air.

'Nice.'

With that, his preparations were complete.

However, it seemed that he wasn't the only one who had finished his preparations, because demons had picked up on his scent, and had formed a large group to rush towards his position.

If it was in the past, he'd probably fight them off in order to loosen his muscles or search through every nook and cranny of each floor to increase his level.

'However, right now....'

Now that his mother's treatment depended on this dungeon being cleared,

he couldn't afford to waste a single second here. Rather than summoning out his daggers like the usual, he instead called out his soldiers first.

Shururu....

His trusty Shadow Soldiers revealed themselves.

'Where is Fangs?'

Jin-Woo looked for Fangs amidst his soldiers. It seemed that the higher the soldier's grade, the closer he'd appear, because Fangs had been summoned right behind Jin-Woo.

He took out the 'Bead of Avarice' from his Inventory and placed it on top of Fangs' palm.

"You use this from now on."

Even though Jin-Woo was supposed to be a Mage-type as well, the amplification effect of the 'Bead of Avarice' didn't work on him. But, he thought it'd prove to be quite helpful to a sorcerer like Fangs.

'.....'

As if to express his gratitude, Fangs deeply bowed his head.

Thump, thump, thump!!!

Finally, Jin-Woo could see the huge bodies of the demons getting closer.

'Okay, time to get started.'

After ordering his soldiers to get ready for battle, Jin-Woo grasped both 'Baruka's Dagger' and 'Knight Killer' in his hands.

Soon, demons rushed forward like a horde of insects in front of his nose. However, his own numbers weren't that lacking, either.

With a more relaxed expression on his face compared to his previous sojourn in this place, Jin-Woo bid his time and then, loudly shouted out.

"Go....!"

No, actually, he was planning to shout, 'Go, now!'

But, even before he could finish his words....

Kuuuuuuooooooooohhh-!!

From somewhere high up above his head, a stupendously thick frightening pillar of flames fell in a diagonal line and swept every single enemy away.

"W-what the f*ck?!"

Kuuuuuooooohh!!

The moment that scary pillar of flames swept by, everything had melted down, whether that be demons or the ground itself.

“Kiiiiieehhckk!!”

“Kiieeck!!”

Demons were incinerated in an instant, and familiar mechanical beeps rang one after the other in his ears.

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

‘No way.....’

Jin-Woo tried to calm his trembling heart and took a look behind him. And he spotted Fangs standing there, now twice the size of what his living counterpart grew to back in the dungeon, busy breathing out grey smoke from his mouth.

Gulp.

Jin-Woo swallowed down dry saliva.

‘Is this the true might of the ‘Bead of Avarice’??’

Since these monsters lived inside the Demon’s Castle, they all must’ve had some amount of innate resistance towards flame-based attacks, but they were all burned away into oblivion, just like that.

“Huh, huhuhuh....”

Once he figured out what was going on, a chuckle broke out of his lips all by itself.

‘Wait, maybe I’ll get to clear this place a lot quicker than I thought?’

Jin-Woo stared at the still-burning remains of the demons as well as at the scorched-black earth and screamed out in joy inwardly.



Chapter 100 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Fangs' power, having been buffed up by the item 'Bead of Avarice', was gobsmackingly incredible.

Fuu-woop.

Fangs sucked in so much air that the temperature of the surroundings momentarily dropped to a bone-chilling level. And then...

Kuuuuuuuuuu....

He spat out a massive pillar of flames from left to right and literally vaporised all enemies before him.

[You killed a High-Ranked Demon.]

[You have earned 1,700 experience points.]

[You killed a Superior Demon.]

[You have earned 2,200 experience points.]

....

.....

[You killed a High-Ranked Demon.]

The messages telling him that he killed a demon and earned some experience points endlessly popped up in his view. And the tti-ring, tti-rings of the mechanical beeps didn't want to end for a while, too.

Jin-Woo was all smiles, though.

'I've hit the jackpot!!'

His Mana must've run dry, because Fangs stopped attacking.

A single shot from Fangs managed to vaporise the majority of the attacking demons' group, but there were a few lucky ones who managed to somehow survive the fiery massacre. Jin-Woo simply ordered his Shadow Soldiers to go and get rid of them.

Quietly watching over one hundred of his Shadow Soldiers marching forward in perfect order, Jin-Woo finally felt like the 'Shadow Sovereign'.

[You killed a High-Ranked Demon.]

[You killed a High-Ranked Demon.]

The feel-good messages continued on. Jin-Woo didn't even lift a finger and used only his Shadow Soldiers to annihilate the monsters. The biggest contributor among them was, of course, Fangs.

'Fangs, you beauty....'

Jin-Woo looked behind him – or, more specifically, way up behind him.

He then saw the gigantified Shadow Magic Soldier, previously a High Orc Sorcerer, and the 'Bead of Avarice' that had also been enlarged to match his size.

That bead was an item capable of doubling the power of its holder's magic attack. From Jin-Woo's perspective, it looked like that bead shored up Fangs' powers quite nicely, which would've been nerfed somewhat after becoming a Shadow Soldier. And it looked like there was some room to spare too.

'Looks like I'll have to entrust the 'Bead of Avarice' to Fangs for a while.'

Even though he was also a mage-type, he possessed not one skill that might enjoy the amplification effect, so he didn't have much of a choice here.

Jin-Woo opened his own Skill Window.

[Number of shadows that can be extracted: 127/820]

[Number of shadows that can be stored: 127/155]

'Shadow Extraction, Shadow Storage, and Sovereign's Territory.' All three skills were unaffected by the 'Bead of Avarice' whatsoever.

If he wanted to increase the number of slots for either the extraction or storage for his shadows, the sole method available currently was to increase his Intelligence Stat.

Jin-Woo closed the Skill Window.

Meanwhile, the soldiers gathered one by one in front of Jin-Woo after mopping up their quarries.

Seeing the mountains of demon corpses piled up like that, the corners of Jin-Woo's lips arched up considerably.

'With this many demons, I get plenty of loot as a result.'

Tti-ring, tti-ring, tti-ring....

This time, an endless stream of item acquisition messages popped up in his view.

‘Well, I got everything I can from here....’

Jin-Woo smiled deeply as he went about acquiring all the loot, and after finishing that up, he climbed up on the back of ‘Tank’, his trusty Ice Bear Shadow Beast Soldier.

The so-called ‘Entry Permit’ allowing him to move to the next floor hadn’t come out yet. Which meant, he had to kill more monsters on this floor.

Jin-Woo ordered his troops to move out.

“Giddy up!”

Tank slowly began trotting forward, and the Shadow Soldiers all followed after Jin-Woo in an orderly fashion.

‘The whole army moving around together is inefficient.’

Jin-Woo thought that all 120 Shadow Soldiers acting as one unit was not quite efficient enough. If the individual soldier was weak, fine, this tactic made sense. But, even the regular soldiers had gone up several levels now and they could more or less hold their own against the demons and still achieve some success.

Not only that, he even had assimilated monsters from a rank A dungeon into his Shadow Soldier army, too. Quite obviously, the overall quality of the soldiers had risen up by a lot.

“Kiiiiehhk!!”

“Kiiaahk!”

[You killed a High-Ranked....]

[You killed a.....]

What with his soldiers boasting such a mighty combat prowess, the time taken to move around and search for monsters turned out to be longer than it took to actually kill them.

The thing was, each floor of this Demon’s Castle was as wide as an average city.

‘This will take forever at this rate.’

Jin-Woo divided his soldiers into six groups of twenty. And then, had them scatter around to hunt down monsters.

He gave them two orders.

‘One, kill every enemy you can find.’

‘Two, if the entry permit for the next floor is found, let me know straight away.’

It may not be possible to hold a conversation with his soldiers, but he could still communicate by using simple hand gestures.

Since the soldiers couldn’t pick up any loot, he had to go there personally if he were to acquire the entry permit. Sure, he’d have to give up on other loot beside the ‘floor entry permit’, but his current priority was to get to the top floor as soon as possible.

“Begin.”

With his command, all six groups went their separate ways.

And, a short while later....

[You have earned 1,500 experience points.]

[You have earned 1,500 experience points.]

[You have earned 900 experience points.]

[You have earned 1,100 experience points.]

Experience points began raining down on him from literally everywhere.

‘Looks like my shadows have begun hunting, huh.’

Jin-Woo watched his experience points climb up and formed a pleased expression. However, he soon discovered that something was off.

‘The amount of experience points I get has decreased?’

After arriving on the upper floors, he never once ran into the commonly-found low or mid-ranked demons from the lower floors.

High-Ranked Demons appeared most of the time now, and every now and then, he would find a couple of Superior Demons mixed in among them.

The amount of experience points earned after killing a High-Ranked Demon was 1,700. And from the Superior Demon, a creature one rank higher than High-Ranked Demons, he received the fixed amount of 2,200 points.

However, the amount he was getting at the moment fell far, far short of those numbers.

‘Could it be that the further away they are from me, the less experience points I earn?’

Jin-Woo quietly observed the experience points messages popping up non-

stop for a while. The amount earned had definitely decreased, albeit by a small margin. It seemed that he was right about the distance affecting the amount of experience points he could earn.

‘I got to learn about something useful.’

He wouldn't have found out about this fact without the unique set-up of the Demon's Castle, which let him know of the information regarding experience points.

He also thought that, he did the right thing by not letting his soldiers go out in groups to hunt on the lower floors. Back then, he wanted to refine his combat style even further by personally fighting the monsters, as well as not wanting to miss out on a single 'Demon's Soul', the so-called quest completion 'items'.

Still, he didn't think the reduced experience points weren't much of a loss.

‘Sure, I'm getting less experience points, but...’

Now that much more efficient hunting was taking place over a greater expanse of the hunting area, the overall rate of the experience points earned was actually a lot faster than before. Even now, the experience points messages were raining down on him.

With the situation being like this, his level that had stayed still since the first battle of this floor suddenly gained a lot of momentum.

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

Jin-Woo clenched his fists tightly.

‘Nice!’

Sure, he felt a bit sore about giving up on loot, but...

‘Levelling up and fast clearing speed, I shall catch these two birds in one go.’

Jin-Woo smiled in satisfaction as he confirmed his level jumping up by two.

His plan was on the money. He got to climb up to the 80th floor much faster than anticipated.

As soon as arriving there, he summoned his soldiers once more.

Shururuk.

119 Shadow Soldiers were summoned simultaneously.

The soldiers and their levels had all climbed up pretty nicely after going on their own groups to hunt monsters and earn a ton of experience points for themselves.

‘Oh? Since when did Tank gain over ten levels?’

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened wider.

Maybe it felt happy after his owner’s interested gaze fell on it, Tank, who had reached level 28 only yesterday, stood on his hind legs and let out a roar of ‘Wuuong’. Jin-Woo wasn’t the only one to enjoy the fruits of the efficient hunting, as it turned out.

He grinned brightly.

“Alright, then. Let’s go!”

Just like before, he divided his army into six groups and had them set off. He then took off alone, as well. He was familiar with acting alone anyway, and he also didn’t really need the soldiers’ help, either.

Excluding Fangs buffed up by the ‘Bead of Avarice’, he was pretty confident of fighting the whole Shadow Soldier army and winning.

However....

‘If Fangs is included?’

In that case, who knows?

If Fangs was indeed included, then things could get really interesting, that’s for sure. In the end, though, it was just him imagining something improbable, anyway.

‘Was it a week or so ago?’

Out of sheer curiosity, and also a bit as an experiment, he ordered Shadow Soldiers to attack him. For the first time ever, the soldiers disobeyed him.

‘I couldn’t tell whether that was from their loyalty to me, or because of another power restricting them....’

They didn’t budge an inch, in the end. Well, as the guy using them as his subordinates, that result wasn’t such a bad one.

Regardless of all that....

‘How come I can’t see any demons?’

After summoning ‘Baruka’s Dagger’, Jin-Woo lightly tossed it over his head and caught it a few times while searching for the presence of monsters.

‘I can tell that they are nearby, but....’

Jin-Woo took a quick look around. He could definitely sense their presence nearby, but he couldn’t spot a single monster.

When was it again?

Didn’t he experience something similar to this before?

It was then, the ground seemed to undulate violently a couple of times, before the earth suddenly shot up.

“Kek, kek.”

“Keeheehee....”

At the same time, three Superior Demons emerged from the ground and surrounded Jin-Woo while letting off rather unpleasant cackles.

Jin-Woo frowned deeply. Demons took that as the sign of their prey being scared, and they scrambled among themselves to throw their wide open maws first at the head of the prey.

It was to call dibs on the tastiest part of a human, the head.

However, when that prey jumped up and spun around once in the air...

Swiiiiish!!

Even before Jin-Woo’s feet landed back on the ground, heads of the demons fell with soft thud, thud!! first.

[You killed a Superior Demon.]

[You killed a.....]

“Ah!”

Jin-Woo lightly clapped his hands.

He finally recalled when it happened – it was the last rank C dungeon he cleared with Yu Jin-Ho.

‘Right, those Stonemen back then were hiding underground before bursting out like this, weren’t they?’

Jin-Woo’s expression that had darkened from failing to remember brightened up immediately. It sure felt like he had gotten a load off his chest.

Jin-Woo took care of the loot from the monster corpses, his face still bright, and began walking away again.

But, only after taking a handful of steps, he stopped again.

“....”

Jin-Woo’s eyes were now nailed to the ground.

While glaring at the ground beneath his feet, he spoke up.

“By the way, why aren’t you guys coming out already?”

No one could tell whether the thing that trembled just then happened to be the ground or the demons’ eyes.

Jin-Woo wasn’t able to easily leave the 80th floor.

‘Is there a group of really strong monsters somewhere on this floor?’

Yet another of Jin-Woo’s group returned back to him as shadows. He had no choice but to call them back because his Mana couldn’t sustain the rate of the soldiers’ destruction and revival anymore.

This would be the first time this happened.

From the 76th to 80th floor...

The method of hunting in dispersed groups during the past four floors had yielded the highest efficiency.

‘Is it because fighting against Superior Demons is still too much to ask for?’

For sure, it were the Superior Demons and not High-Ranked Demons that appeared on the 80th floor most of the time. Heck, these Superior Demons even employed petty tricks like hiding under the ground, too.

Even then, he didn’t think these Superior Demons possessed such powers, to be able to push back his soldiers to this degree.

‘Not only that...’

There was something weird here as well. And that would be the groups of soldiers getting attacked all happened to lack a ‘captain-class’ among them.

The groups with Fangs, Igrit, Iron, and Tank were all perfectly fine, but the other two with no captain-class got annihilated.

‘Wait, could it be that the enemy is deliberately attacking the weakest groups first?’

If so, this could only mean that a monster possessing high-enough intelligence to detect the opponent’s weakness existed on this floor. Not only strong, but it even possessed intelligence.

He obviously didn’t know who it, or they, were, but without a doubt, they

were proving to be a bit of a pain in the neck.

There were four groups remaining. If he were to include himself, then five.

‘If the enemy has figured out the soldiers’ movement pattern, then their next target is pretty obvious.’

The moment he thought that, Jin-Woo disappeared from the spot.



Chapter 101 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo quickly arrived near where Tank's group was.

In the not too far distance, he spotted the Shadow Beast Soldier squad half made up of black bears with black steam rising up from their bodies, and High Orcs covered in armour from head to toe.

Right in front of the pack, Tank was walking slowly but steadily forward.

'I'm pretty sure the next target will be this group.'

Tank was originally the pack leader of the Ice Bears. When it was still alive, he was strong enough to easily overwhelm the Shadow Soldiers. Even as a shadow, not many soldiers could defeat him in terms of sheer physical strength.

Unfortunately, the comparison didn't favour him this time.

First of all, the captains of the other groups, Iron, Igrit, and Fangs were different 'grades' to begin with. Even though Tank's level was high, at the end of the day, he was still an elite soldier grade.

But, both Igrit and Iron were knight grades, while Fangs enjoyed the prefix of 'elite' tacked onto his knight grade, too. Meaning, there was no comparison here.

Since the enemy seemed to possess enough intelligence to detect weaker opponents, as well as to identify the movements of the soldiers, their next target had to be here.

'Let's observe for a little while.'

Jin-Woo hid his presence to the best of his abilities and, while maintaining a fixed distance, he followed after his Shadow Beast Soldiers. His own soldiers didn't even realise that he was following them.

And so, just how much time passed them by?

Even after a long period of waiting, no enemies showed themselves, and Jin-Woo began tilting his head.

'Was I wrong about this whole thing?'

He began suspecting that, rather than powerful enemies, there just so

happened to be a big concentration of enemies in the location of his soldiers getting annihilated – but, then....

Jin-Woo's eyes narrowed to a slit.

'....Here they come.'

Maybe the enemies were also concealing their presence until the soldiers got closer to them, Jin-Woo had discovered them a bit later than usual. He closed his eyes and focused his Perception.

His shockingly enhanced Perception began sweeping over all the presences found within the vicinity like a radar.

'Four presences approaching. My soldiers, 20. Demons hiding underground, five.'

Jin-Woo opened his eyes. He decided to get rid of the five demons playing possum underground a bit later, and then....

'Stealth.'

Shururuk....

Jin-Woo activated the Stealth skill to become invisible and approached his soldiers. And soon enough, he got to confirm the enemies' appearance with his own eyes.

'....They are riding on horseback??'

Rumble, rumble....

'Not only that, they are armed, too?'

Not just the riders, but even the horses they were riding on were armoured.

When the enemies came close enough, their names became visible.

He was thinking that these guys were way too different from the regular demons that walked around 'naked', whether they be low or high demons, and now he could even see that their names were different from the rest, as well.

'....A Demon Aristocrat, and three Demon Knights?'

The names he saw for the first time were written in black and very clear to see. He sensed strong hostility from all four of them.

'It must be those four that attacked my boys.'

They all possessed powerful auras and strong hostility. Jin-Woo decided to maintain 'Stealth' and observe the situation for a little while longer.

‘Let’s see what happens next.’

Since these monsters were new, he wanted to check out their skills and battle styles with his own eyes first.

‘Monsters capable of massacring Shadow Soldiers, is it...’

He was also feeling a bit expectant, too.

Jin-Woo stopped at a suitable position where he wouldn’t get in the way of the battle between the Shadow Beast Soldiers and the new types of demons that was about to get underway.

Growl?

Tank finally discovered the demons.

Once the demons got close enough, they dismounted from the horses.

‘Huh. So, those rides were simply a means of transportation.’

Jin-Woo continued to stare at the demons with a great deal of interest.

Soon afterwards, the Beast Soldiers became excited by the entrance of enemies, roared out, and attacked first, signalling the beginning of the bitter, violent battle between these two groups.

Rooooaaaar!!

Tank took to the front.

He shot forward with every ounce of power provided with his four limbs, and when he arrived in front of the enemies, he reared up on his hind legs.

A regular person would’ve fainted from the enormous pressure alone. However, the four demons remained steadfast. Even when Tank swung his massive front leg like a baseball bat, they didn’t even blink.

Whooooosh!

Tank’s front paw scythed the air. It was an agile attack that belied his massive frame.

However....

Tank’s target, the Demon Aristocrat, easily jumped over the swung front paw with a light but quick movement.

‘.....!!’

Jin-Woo’s brows shot up.

That wasn’t the end of the surprising spectacle, either. The Demon Aristocrat then spun in the air and thrust forward the spear held in its hand at

Tank's chest.

Kaboom-!!

The fierce attack containing magic energy put a watermelon-sized hole in Tank's torso.

From that small-ish frame, an explosive aura could be felt rather clearly. And on top of that, it also possessed beautifully simple and clean movements, too. Jin-Woo grew even more interested by then.

'Yup, not a regular monster, alright.'

It wasn't just the Demon Aristocrat either, but the three Demon Knights were also eye-wideningly strong, as well.

The battle was one-sided. In short, the Beast Soldiers were no match for the demons.

Quite unlike the Superior Demons, which were only big in size but rather easy to hunt, these so-called Demon 'Aristocrats' or whatever and their humanoid appearances simply toyed around with the Beast Soldiers.

'This was why the rate of regeneration couldn't keep up.'

Jin-Woo's expression gradually hardened.

"Roar!!"

"Keuahahk!"

Even before the Beast Soldiers could regenerate, they were cut and sliced apart and stabbed through by spears and swords.

By then, Jin-Woo was carrying a crumpled expression. He knew very well that, as long as his MP supply held up, his Beast Soldiers were practically immortals. Even if his MP did run out, they would simply return to him as shadows.

"Kuwaak!!"

However, he sure as hell didn't feel pleased watching his own boys getting pummelled like that. Was this how an older brother would feel when his younger sibling came home all beaten up black and blue?

'That is enough.'

Jin-Woo couldn't stand it anymore and recalled his Beast Soldiers. They reverted back to their shadow forms and quickly moved below his feet, and absorbed back into his own shadow.

As soon as the Beast Soldiers disappeared after seemingly failing to endure

the attacks, the demons gazed at each other and nodded their heads.

It was as if they were celebrating their third victory on the trot.

However, it happened then.

Shururuk.

Jin-Woo undid his Stealth in the midst of the demons.

Flinch!!

The demons were greatly taken by surprise, but as expected of ‘pros’, they immediately sensed Jin-Woo’s hostility and attacked him right away.

Slam!! Kwang!!

Jin-Woo punched down bare-fisted on the two knights beside him, and then, grabbed the last one rushing at him and slammed the sucker down hard on the ground.

CRACK!

The spiderweb-like cracks formed on the ground and a message popped up in his view.

[You killed a Demon Knight.]

[You have earned 3,000 experience points.]

The exact same messages repeated three times.

Each of his attacks killed one of his enemies. In less than one second, he cut short the lives of three monsters.

‘These guys were side distractions, anyway. The real deal is that guy.’

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the Demon Aristocrat. After their eyes met, the Aristocrat flinched rather grandly and pointed at him with its spear.

‘I always wondered whether monsters could feel fear or not...’

But now, he was pretty certain of it.

Different from back when the Demon Aristocrat was pointing the spear at the Beast Soldier group, the tip of the weapon was trembling ever so slightly. Well, being able to sense the opponent’s strength was also a part of one’s skills, after all.

‘I ain’t going to go easy on you because of that, though.’

Jin-Woo dashed forward. At the same time, the Demon Aristocrat thrust the spear forward.

Jin-Woo evaded the attack by tilting his head out of the way.

Surprisingly, though – the spear changed directions multiple times and continued to harass him slightly.

First, it was his face, , his neck. And right after that, his heart. As if this wasn't something learned overnight, the demon's movement was smooth like flowing water.

However, the spear was constantly blocked by Jin-Woo's weapon, 'Baruka's Dagger'.

And when the final attack aiming for his heart was parried off, 'Baruka's Dagger' sliced the spear's shaft in two.

“...!!”

The Demon Aristocrat froze up after seeing its broken spear.

With that, this battle was over.

‘Well, not even three, or four, rank A Hunters would be able to win against you, but....’

Jin-Woo rated the demon's abilities pretty highly. Too bad, today's match-up was all wrong for the monster.

Jin-Woo reached out and grabbed the enemy's helmet with his left hand.

“Keuk!”

The shocked enemy immediately went into panic mode. It tried to pull its head back, but couldn't do anything from Jin-Woo's powerful grip. He was thinking of yanking the helmet loose and cut the head off, so he strengthened his left hand some more.

As expected, the helmet came off rather easily. And, Jin-Woo raised the 'Baruka's Dagger' high up.

“I surrender!! I will surrender!!”

Jin-Woo frowned and stopped moving.

“...A female?”

The face underneath the helmet definitely belonged to a female.

Actually, Jin-Woo didn't really care whether a monster was a male or female. But the thing was, the monster quickly lifted its hands high up in the air and declared its intentions to surrender, making him realise that he could initiate conversation with it. And right after that, 'she' even fell to the ground in a kowtow, too.

‘.....’

So, naturally, he felt a bit put off by the idea of stabbing ‘her’ with his dagger for the time being.

“P-p-please accept my apologies! We were in the wrong! P-p-please spare my life!”

Not only had she changed her stance in the blink of an eye, but she was also now even begging for her life?

A monster was doing what now???

“Hah.....??”

With a disbelieving expression etched on his face, Jin-Woo stared at the petite back of the ‘monster’ still prostrating before his feet.

Since intelligent monsters could be found in regular dungeons, it wasn’t so strange for intelligent monsters to appear in these instant dungeons, as well.

Even then, this creature... was a strange one.

‘.....’

Left feeling a bit speechless, Jin-Woo pondered what he should say here for a while, and eventually, he opened his mouth with some difficulty.

“You attacked my soldiers, yet you want my forgiveness?”

“W-we have committed a grave sin.”

The Demon Aristocrat planted her forehead on the ground and continued on.

“However, as our clan is tasked with protecting this place, we couldn’t simply let some basta.... Heok! I, I mean, we couldn’t let any great beings go on a demon hunting spree without doing anything. I’d be eternally grateful if you forgive us.”

Oh, well.

From the demons’ perspective, it was reasonable for them to think of this whole thing as a bit unfair. After all, it was he who just barged in here totally unannounced to hunt and massacre demons one-sidedly, right?

So, Jin-Woo changed his question slightly.

“Is it alright for you to beg for your life from someone who killed your own soldiers?”

“The main role of the knights are to protect their lord. As long as I’m

safe, they should be happy with the results.”

Jin-Woo scratched his temple for a little. He was even more speechless now.

‘I can’t tell whether she’s thick-skinned, or just way too optimistic.’

The Demon Aristocrat slightly raised her head and tried to read Jin-Woo’s reactions.

‘Heok!!’

She couldn’t help but feel that the situation was getting gradually worse for her. She kowtowed even harder than before and spoke in an urgent voice.

“If you spare my measly life, I shall give you anything you want.”

Jin-Woo placed his hands on his waist.

This Demon Aristocrat was a powerful monster, yes, but what with her armament now stripped from her, killing her was now easier than drinking cold soup for Jin-Woo.

‘So, what should I do with this one, then?’

Jin-Woo was in a dilemma.

And that wasn’t to do with letting her go or not – no, he was simply trying to think of something more valuable than the experience points and possible loot he could get his hands on after killing her.

‘...Ah.’

There indeed was one such item.

“I want the Entry Permit.”

“Excuse me??”

Swish.

The Demon Aristocrat raised her head and stared at him with a surprised expression. Her face was shaped completely like a human’s, excluding a pair of sharp incisors he saw when she opened her mouth just now, of course.

Jin-Woo disinterestedly asked her.

“Can you get it for me?”

“...”

When her gaze met Jin-Woo’s, her complexion paled even more and she planted her forehead back on the ground.

‘Oh well. I should’ve known that monsters weren’t aware of what items are.’

The negotiation was over with that.

Jin-Woo recalled ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ back from his Inventory.

He didn’t know why monsters possessed intelligence, and were able to use that intelligence to beg for her life like this, but he had not one thought of giving up on the potential experience points.

‘A Demon Knight gave three thousand points, so how much will she give me?’

Who knows, the Entry Permit might appear after killing her, too.

However....

“I, I shall give it to you.”

“Give me what, exactly?”

“The... the Entry Permit.”

The ‘monster’ raised her head and immediately began shedding cold sweat drops after spotting the deadly-looking dagger in Jin-Woo’s hand.

“You can give me the Entry Permit? Really?”

The Demon Aristocrat hurriedly nodded her head.

“It’s in safekeeping by our clan. If you allow me to safely return, I shall hand over the permit.”

Demons were guarding the entry permit?

Jin-Woo slowly scratched his chin.

For sure, it had been a long time since he arrived on the 80th floor. And not to forget, lots of demons were hunted down so far, too. Yet, there hadn’t been a peep about the news of the entry permit.

‘I thought the drop rate had worsened because I’m in the upper floors, or that a mid-boss was carrying it around, but now....’

If she was telling the truth about monsters hiding the permit, then, well, the current situation made a bit more sense.

Seeing that Jin-Woo was silently pondering his options, the Demon Aristocrat felt even more desperate than ever before and quickly added some more ‘encouragement’.

“I also know where you can locate the Entry Permits on the upper floors

as well. If you guarantee my, and my clan's, safety, then I shall safely escort you to where they are."

The light shining in Jin-Woo's eyes changed a little bit. Now that offer was a bit more enticing.

To Jin-Woo's ears, who wanted to get to the top floor as soon as possible, her suggestion of guiding him to where each floor's Entry Permit sounded rather attractive.

However....

'The question is, can I really trust her?'

Jin-Woo reached down and lifted the demon's chin. She was clearly panicking, but he didn't lessen his strength. He then looked straight into her eyes.

'Intimidation.'

[You have activated 'Skill: Intimidation'.]

Swwwoooosh....

A chill-inducing aura emanated from Jin-Woo's eyes. The Demon Aristocrat was so terrified that her lips were trembling involuntarily.

"Can I trust you?"

"I, I, I am not l-l-lying."

He made a pledge to himself back when he received the power of the System.

'Give and take.'

Even if his opponent was a monster, his principals wouldn't change. If a monster kept her side of the bargain, so would he.

"Alright."

Jin-Woo withdrew the 'Intimidation'.

"You hand over the Entry Permit, and I'll quietly leave."

"T-truthfully?"

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

It was a bit of a waste to give up on the potential experience points gained from this demon, as well as those monsters supposedly guarding the Entry Permit. But then again, he found it even more of a waste to spend time searching for the permit himself.

He had been delayed for much longer than expected on this 80th floor already.

Besides, if this female demon was thinking of tricking him, well, he wouldn't be too unhappy about that, either. Because, if she did, then he'd get to go all out in the monsters' main camp, now wouldn't he?

“Thank you very much!!”

The complexion of the Demon Aristocrat brightened so much that he couldn't help but notice it.

Was she just honest with her emotions, or was she just a simpleton?

Jin-Woo inwardly clicked his tongue, but still, didn't forget to ask her something he was curious about for a while.

“Before all that, though.... Just what are you?”



Chapter 102 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“I am Esil, the first-born daughter of House Radiru. And my clan is...”

“No, not that.”

Jin-Woo cut Esil off.

He didn't really care about the finer details of a monster family's history. What he wanted to know was the reason why monsters and instant dungeons existed.

How should he go about asking this question, so he'd get himself a satisfying enough answer?

No, he would still be okay if there was no concrete answer. He'd be happy enough to get a single clue, a lead of some kind.

He tried asking the same thing to monsters in the regular dungeons, but the only thing he got to learn was that they could only hear the order of 'Kill the humans' inside their heads.

‘In that case, do these guys receive the exact same order, too?’

In order to help him compare the current situation with the monsters of the regular dungeons, he simplified the question a bit.

“Hey, do you also hear a voice telling you to kill humans?”

“Pardon me?”

Esil looked at him with a pair of confused eyes.

Because she was still kowtowing on the ground, he had to continue staring down at her if he wanted to talk to her face to face, and he kinda felt a bit uncomfortable about this arrangement.

‘Tsk.’

Jin-Woo lightly clicked his tongue, and as if Esil was a little kid, picked her up and made her stand straight. And then, he stared at her face again.

Maybe she got scared of the unannounced physical contact, he heard her heart rate quicken noticeably. Not minding that, Jin-Woo asked her again.

“I'm asking you if you hear a whisper of someone busy telling you to kill

humans.”

“Oh....”

Esil hesitated and pondered for a moment, before opening her mouth.

“No. But, we do hear a different voice all the time.”

“Okay. What does it say?”

“It tells us to... protect the space we’re residing in.”

Esil spoke cautiously while being extra mindful of Jin-Woo’s reactions.

‘The purpose of the instant dungeon’s monsters is different from monsters of the regular dungeons?’

The sole purpose of the monsters from the regular dungeons was to kill humans, while the monsters of the instant dungeons were to guard where they were. The nature of the two camps’ aim was quite different from each other.

‘Wait a minute....’

Now that he thought about it, wasn’t Jin-Woo a monster-like existence to these monsters of the instant dungeons??

Esil’s complexion was still quite pale after bearing the full brunt of his skill, ‘Intimidation’, and he couldn’t help but feel a wee bit of pity for her.

Just a tiny bit, though.

“How long have you been hearing that voice?”

“It’s right after we opened our eyes in this place.”

‘After opening their eyes in this place, is it?’

Didn’t that imply that she and others were living in another location before this? Whether that was a genuine or a fake memory, that’s what was left imprinted in her brain.

Jin-Woo continued on with his questioning.

“Okay. Then, where have you been before waking up in this place?”

“We were in the Demon World. We just woke up one day and found ourselves stuck here.”

“And what were you doing back in the Demon World before that?”

“We were.... getting ready for war.”

“War, you say?”

“Yes.”

Did she recall the memories of back then? Esil's expression no longer had any traces of fear when she was begging for her life, now only filled with grave determination.

“We were in the situation of preparing for war against a horrifyingly powerful foe that necessitated every demon scattered around in the Demon World to unite....”

....And that's where Esil's words were cut off.

“...”

No, accurately speaking, Esil was still talking. Her lips were clearly moving up and down even now. However, Jin-Woo couldn't hear her voice at all. Instead, he was blessed with the monotone mechanical voice spat out by the System.

[You have exceeded the allowed information threshold, therefore this conversation has been blocked.]

[You have exceeded the allowed information threshold, therefore this conversation has been blocked.]

[You have exceeded the allowed information threshold....]

Right until Esil's explanations came to an end, that exact same message played over and over again.

Jin-Woo's eyes gleamed suspiciously.

‘Had you left it alone, I wouldn't have suspected anything, actually.’

Indeed, he might have thought Esil's explanations as a backstory for the monsters of this place cooked up by the System or some such. Levelling up, instant dungeons, quests, quest rewards, penalties, and even the process of getting his Class.....

He was faced with one situation after another that resembled video games, so if monsters had a game-like backstory as well, it'd not come across as strange at all.

However, the moment the System forcibly intervened, Jin-Woo became sure of one thing.

‘Talking to her might give me a clue to solving everything, in other words.’

The System made a clear and definite mistake here, just now.

“Did.... Did I make a mistake somewhere?”

When Jin-Woo's expression became graver, even Esil's own expression darkened.

'What does the System want to hide? This unknown foe the demons were supposed to fight? Or the reason for the war? Maybe the end result?'

In order to figure this out, he narrowed down the scope of his next question.

"What was the identity of those horrifyingly powerful foes?"

However, at that moment....

Like a toy with a dead battery, Esil froze up on the spot. But, that lasted only for a little while. She suddenly lost consciousness and powerlessly collapsed to the floor.

Jin-Woo quickly snatched her, and carefully laid her down on the ground. Seeing that her breathing was steady, it didn't look like she was in any danger.

However, there was a frown on her face; perhaps she felt a bit uncomfortable somewhere. She seemed to be having a bit of trouble breathing properly, too.

In order to help her rest more easily, Jin-Woo began ripping her armours off.

Riiiiip.

Her armours came off rather easily. He also tore the mantle on the back of the armour, rolled it up and placed it under her head like a pillow. It sure was a lot of work for a monster, but he didn't think this was him being too nice at all.

Because she ended up in this state, he got himself yet another clue, that's why.

'The foes demons fought....'

The System reacted way too sensitively towards the identity of this unknown foe, or foes.

'Could those beings be related?'

What if those beings possessed some kind of incredible transcendental powers, and for some reason, exerted their influence on Earth and more specifically, him....?

Jin-Woo summoned the Store interface.

He tried to wake Esil up with a potion, but it didn't seem to work.

'I guess I don't have a choice but to wait it out.'

Plop.

Jin-Woo sat down next to Esil.

And until she woke up, he systematically pieced together each tidbit of info she supplied him with.

"...Uh?"

Esil quickly raised her upper body.

Sensing another presence nearby, she looked to her side and found the totally-wordless Jin-Woo sitting there. Her shoulders flinched a little, just then.

'S-so, I wasn't dreaming....'

Slowly getting to terms with her new reality, Esil took a look around her. And there were huge piles of dead Superior Demons found nearly everywhere. Her brows shot up immediately.

Demons with little intelligence didn't treat other demons with intelligence as their kin. So, an unconscious demon like her would've been seen as a tasty meal.

However.....

The only reason why she was unscathed like this, was....

"Were you protecting me all this time?"

Rather than answering her, Jin-Woo raised his body up and then, extended his hand out to Esil.

Esil looked as if she was profoundly moved and, after holding onto his hand, cautiously stood up from the spot.

"Thank you."

"How long will we take to get to where the Entry Permit is?"

"It's not too far from here. I'll take you there."

Esil then presented Jin-Woo with both of her wrists.

".....?"

"...??"

Jin-Woo and Esil stared at each other in confusion. Feeling a bit frustrated, Esil opened her mouth first.

“I’m your hostage, so aren’t you supposed to bind my hands first before moving out?”

“Don’t wanna.”

He was confident of stopping her from resisting or escaping even without the aid of restraints. Besides, way too much time had been wasted already for him to waste even more on something useless like that.

Jin-Woo spun Esil around and pushed her slightly on her back.

Maybe she was still scared of him, he sensed her heartbeat getting faster, but Jin-Woo didn’t mention it. Instead, his gaze shifted over to the horses the demons rode on.

“What about them?”

“I’ll take them along.”

With a slightly flushed face, Esil took the reins of the horses and took the lead. Jin-Woo quietly followed her from behind.

Just as Esil said, they didn’t have to travel far before arriving at a location where the Entry Permit was likely to be present. And it just so happened to be a large castle.

‘A demon’s castle inside the Demon’s Castle, is it....?’

The Demon’s Castle was only a ‘castle’ in name and was actually a tower, but the one in front of his eyes seemed to have taken quite a lot of inspirations from the ancient castles of the medieval times.

The soldiers guarding the castle gates became tense instantly after seeing Jin-Woo, but....

“He’s a guest.”

Esil spoke disinterestedly and pointed with her chin, causing the guards to quickly open the castle gates. Soon, a group of knights came out from the inside of the castle to greet her.

“Lady Esil. We were waiting for your return.”

“Where is my father?”

“The lord is waiting in the audience chamber.”

“Understood.”

One of the knights glanced at Jin-Woo and asked.

“Lady Esil.... This gentleman is...?”

“He’s an important guest, so do not forget to mind your manners.”

After hearing Esil’s solemn tone of voice, knights quickly parted ways and lowered their heads.

Jin-Woo wordlessly followed after her and entered the deeper part of the castle. After a long walk down a wide corridor, he found himself entering a very large chamber that looked like a boss room in a dungeon.

‘So, this is the audience chamber?’

Jin-Woo scanned his surroundings.

Other than tall stone pillars reaching up to the ceiling situated at a regular interval to either sides of the chamber, it was pretty much wide open and empty. It was as if this whole place had been prepared for potential battles that could break out.

‘If I were to fight my way here, then I guess I was supposed to face the boss in this chamber, huh.’

Which meant, the male Demon Aristocrat sitting on a huge throne atop a rostrum located on the other side of the audience chamber was the boss of this place.

Esil and Jin-Woo stopped before the ‘boss’.

The boss was the first to break the ice.

“Esil.”

“Father, this person is....”

Even before listening to Esil’s explanation, the boss met the gaze of Jin-Woo, and its brows shot up high. The irises of the boss were quaking visibly now.

“Y-you!! Just who did you bring before me?!”

“F-Father, this man is a guest....”

Esil desperately tried to explain, but the boss’s agitation didn’t want to lessen at all.

“A guest?! Just what kind of a guest invades the home of the inviter with an army?!”

“Pardon me?!”

Esil quickly shifted her gaze over to Jin-Woo. Just where was this army her father was speaking of here?

The boss, meanwhile, kept his eyes firmly fixed on Jin-Woo and spoke with a trembling voice.

“Esil, do you not see it with your own eyes? Can you not see the countless soldiers hidden in that man’s darkness?” (TL note at the end)

Jin-Woo’s glare sharpened up a notch.

Flinching from the sudden change in the atmosphere, Esil quickly took a step back. Meanwhile, Jin-Woo was somewhat surprised by this development.

‘I guess he’s got pretty good senses.’

It seemed that the boss was able to ‘see’ the soldiers hidden inside Jin-Woo’s shadow.

‘Not sure whether I can call this a good thing or not, though.’

He had recalled all of his Shadow Soldiers and stored them back in his shadow to prepare for battles, just in case, before arriving here.

“How dare you bring soldiers into my house?!”

As soon as the boss roared out, many knights rushed inside the audience chamber.

“Father!”

Esil cried out to her father in a loud voice of her own.

The boss was now standing up from his throne, glaring down with anger-filled eyes. Staring silently at the developing situation until then, Jin-Woo finally opened his mouth.

“We made a promise.”

Failing to sense any form of tension whatsoever from Jin-Woo, the boss’s brows quivered greatly.

“What kind of a promise did you make?”

“The Entry Permit.”

Jin-Woo took a step forward.

“As long as you hand over the floor entry permit, I’ll quietly leave this floor.”

The boss swallowed his saliva nervously.

‘The man who hunted down demons at a frightening pace while climbing up the floors must be him.’

The boss recalled how despondent he felt when the news of the much-

trusted Vulcan and Metus falling reached his ears.

Even though the Radiru clan was nominally aristocrats, they were actually ranked 20th, the very last spot on the list of the demon's hierarchy. Meaning, they were the weakest among the aristocratic clans.

If they were to face off against an enemy that took care of Vulcan and Metus quite easily, the boss knew that he'd have to sacrifice quite a lot of their own. However, such a terrifying enemy was saying that he'd leave on his own volition.

'Should I believe him....?'

The boss asked, feeling not entirely convinced.

"Is that the only thing you want from us?"

As if he was waiting for that, Jin-Woo spoke up.

"And also...."

'But, of course....'

The boss's forehead creased up in a frown as the situation unfolded as he expected. The demands of the strong were always unfair and constant.

Even before hearing the ridiculousness of the demands that would insult the clan's honour, and ridicule his proud soldiers, the boss could feel his chest tighten in frustration already.

Sure enough....

The man placed his hand on the shoulder of the boss's daughter and spoke.

"I wish to borrow this kid from you, too."

"....What did you say??"

The boss and the knights all cried out in astonishment simultaneously. Jin-Woo scanned his vicinity, feeling genuinely puzzled now.

'Mm?'

Esil told him that she knew where the Entry Permits were at in the higher floors. He only asked to 'borrow' her for a little bit so she could guide him to where the permits were, but this was....

'Did I say something wrong?'

Jin-Woo could only tilt his head this way and that as he alternated his gaze between the heavily-trembling boss, the knights who couldn't hide their astonishment, as well as Esil and her deeply-blushing face.



Chapter 103 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“My daughter, as a guide??”

Esil’s explanation and Jin-Woo saying the exact same thing finally managed to calm down the boss’s agitation. He settled back down on his throne to think.

‘The floor entry permit, and a guide? Are they truly everything he wants from us?’

From the moment the demons found themselves locked up in here, they had to constantly hear the order to protect this land in their heads.

The order itself was not what one would call forceful. However, just like one would follow their instincts to eat when they were hungry and sleep when they were tired, the demons all thought that they had to carry this order out.

That was why the boss felt his heart fall to the pit of his stomach when he heard the news of black-armoured soldiers suddenly invading this land and hunting down lesser demons. He knew that the thing they were supposed to protect this place from had finally arrived.

The boss gave it a lot of thought, before ordering the subjugation force to move out. And surprisingly, the platoons made up of black soldiers proved easier than expected to defeat.

However, according to the reports made by the advanced scouts, there were enemies on a completely different scale compared to those easy-to-defeat black soldiers present as well.

They said that against platoons led by the robe-wearing giant ‘knight’ that could spit out flames, or a knight with something lengthy attached to its helm, there was no guarantee of victory at all.

And that was why the entirety of the Radiru Clan was getting ready to sortie in order to subjugate those two forces.

Unfortunately, those reports failed to mention the man in front of the boss’s eyes. Not even once. Meaning, the enemies’ true combat force was someone else entirely different.

‘If I knew this monster-like human was the leader of those soldiers, I

wouldn't even have started fighting in the first place.'

The boss could see it.

He rejoiced after hearing the news of those black soldiers suddenly vanishing. But, they were now gathered right in front of his eyes. They were hiding within the man's darkness, waiting for an order to attack.

Even now, the boss felt a chill from the countless soldiers inside the shadow shooting him cold glares filled with thick, bone-chilling murderous intent.

'Negotiating with a mere human hurts my pride, but...'

A certain scroll named 'Entry Permit' could also be found in the list of things the demons were supposed to protect. However, wasn't the cost of protecting that single scroll far too high?

No, even if the boss was prepared to sacrifice every single one of his clansmen, he couldn't be sure of winning against this human and his soldiers.

Not only that, this man....

'...Is hiding his true abilities.'

It was uncertain what he was aiming for, but there was little doubt that he was hiding almost all of his powers like an iceberg floating on the quiet water's surface. Fighting against an enemy no one could truly comprehend was a terrifying prospect, indeed.

The boss asked again with a nervous expression.

"Truly... is that all you want?"

If the boss could protect everyone simply by handing out that Entry permit, then there was no reason not to. Also, since he'd be doing that in order to protect this land, he wasn't exactly going against that order from the unknown source, either.

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

"You will not bring harm upon my daughter?"

Suddenly, Jin-Woo felt Esil's glance.

'A monster worrying about his daughter, is it.....'

Jin-Woo was inwardly surprised but didn't forget to nod his head regardless.

The boss pondered for a short while, before a smile formed on his face.

“We’ll do that, then.”

The moment he agreed to hand it over, the boss felt as if a persistently-annoying aching tooth had finally come loose or some such.

If the event of stopping the prophetised advent of calamity by handing over a scrap of paper didn’t qualify as a matter to rejoice, then what else would?

“No, if you could do that, we’d be very grateful.”

Jin-Woo had been getting ready for the eventuality where things go the other way, but after seeing the boss’s bright smile, he too smirked and let go of all the built-up tension in his body.

‘I guess Esil got her personality from her old man.’

Was this how the System’s setting was like for this place, or what she said was really.....

Jin-Woo quickly shook off the distracting thoughts and gave his assurance to the eagerly-waiting boss.

“I keep my promises.”

“Very good.”

The boss snapped his fingers, and a soldier hurriedly brought a large scroll from somewhere to present it before Jin-Woo. He then unfurled the scroll.

‘It is really the Entry permit.’

Confirming the contents of the scroll, a thick smile formed on Jin-Woo’s lips.

[Item: Entry Permit]

Rarity: ??

Type: ??

A permit allowing you to enter the 81st floor of the Demon’s Castle. Can only be used on the 80th floor’s floor-transfer magic circle.

He was suspicious of whether he could get an item from monsters through nothing more than just dialogue, but this was really the Entry Permit he was looking for.

If there was one difference from the permits found on the lower floors, then it’d be the red emblem of the Radiru Clan stamped on the bottom of the permit itself.

‘So, does this mean I’m supposed to take the permits away from different

clans from this floor onwards?’

The corners of Jin-Woo’s lips arched up.

He preferred this arrangement a lot more than hunting monsters endlessly and waiting forever for the permit to randomly drop without notice.

Jin-Woo rolled the scroll back up and sent it to his Inventory.

“Hey, is it fine if we get going now?”

Jin-Woo urged Esil and turned towards the exit, but then, the waiting knights suddenly blocked the doorway.

‘.....?’

Jin-Woo looked back feeling puzzled, only to find Esil grinning brightly back at him.

So, what was going on now?

The boss quickly walked over and stood before Jin-Woo.

“We’d never let an important guest of the Radiru Clan go like this.”

A certain overbearing aura came off from the boss’s large frame. However, seeing that there was a smile of a friendly neighbourhood uncle etched on his face, it didn’t look like he was trying to intimidate the other party.

The boss spoke with a pleading tone of voice.

“As a celebration of the successful negotiation, would you mind having a feast with us? We also need to prepare my daughter for the long voyage ahead.”

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to Esil.

She was cautiously waiting for his answer, although he could easily see that she also wanted this.

Well, she did keep her side of the bargain. So, wouldn’t it be only right that he too behave in a gentlemanly manner, too?

Besides, he also needed to eat anyway, and he had grown sick and tired of the stale bread and jerky strip combo being sold in the Store by now.

“...Okay, I will.”

Jin-Woo finally consented after a short bout of hesitation, prompting the boss to break out in a big grin.

“Thank you!”

The complexions of Esil and the knights also brightened considerably.

Soon, the boss was yelling at his subordinates.

“What are you all doing? Prepared for a grand feast!”

Since he had spent way too much time on the 80th floor, he wasn't planning on wasting any more on other floors.

He was worried about whether Esil, coming with him as a guide, could use the floor-transfer magic circles or not, but that worry was put to rest pretty quickly.

[A Demon Aristocrat has requested to accompany you.]

[Will you allow it?]

[Once allowed, the companion will be able to use the magic circles, and depending on the rate of contribution, experience points earned will be shared as well.]

‘...Wait, I'll be sharing my experience points with my companion??’

The thing about sharing experience points got on his nerves slightly, but thankfully, there was the clause about ‘rate of contribution’. Which meant that, as long as he didn't give his companion a chance to fight, the experience points wouldn't be divided at all.

So, Jin-Woo made sure to drill this point into Esil.

“Even if battles break out, you must not interfere. I shall take care of everything. Understood?”

“.....Y-yes.”

Esil replied rather shyly.

‘....??’

In any case, Jin-Woo agreed to her accompanying him and hurried with his steps. A few steps behind him, Esil did her best to chase after Jin-Woo while carrying luggage several times the size of her actual body.

The luggage itself wasn't heavy, but keeping up with Jin-Woo's walking speed was proving to be somewhat challenging to her. Jin-Woo had no choice but to stop and wait now and then so she could catch up to him.

“We can see it now over there.”

After arriving on the 81st floor, Esil began checking out the map of this very floor, and then, pointed at the faint outline of a castle far away from them. Jin-Woo nodded his head, having already thought as much.

“Please wait.”

Esil put down the large luggage, and began rummaging through it. Soon, a ceramic liquor bottle rested in her hands. Jin-Woo had to ask her about that.

“What are you planning to do with that now?”

“This is a bottle of the finest liquor that the Clan Head of the Garuche Clan enjoys. If we go and speak to him with it, the negotiation will be....”

“Negotiation?”

Jin-Woo smirked and summoned his Shadow Soldiers out.

‘Come out.’

As soon as he called, the soldiers instantly revealed themselves.

Shururu....

‘How can this be....?!’

Esil doubted her own sight, then.

There were three ‘soldiers’ with similar levels to that of an upper Demon Aristocrat. And then, two deadly-looking daggers suddenly appeared out of nowhere to rest in the hands of the very person who summoned these soldiers.

After being subjected to an aura that was sharp enough to almost slice her flesh simply by standing near him, Esil had to do a double take to make sure that the man in front of her eyes was the same person she had been conversing with until just now.

“Y-you’re not going to negotiate with them??”

Rather than an answer, Jin-Woo asked back, instead.

“By any chance, is your clan friendly with this Garuche or whatever clan?”

“N-no, not at all. We the aristocrats always competed bitterly against each other for a place in the Demon World’s nobility ranking, so.... Still, they are a group we can hold civilised meetings with.”

Hearing that, Jin-Woo simply grinned.

“In that case, it’s fine.”

Making one exception was enough. Just as important as finding the Entry Permit, he needed to raise his level, too.

“You, wait here.”

Jin-Woo told her as so, and while leading his soldiers forward, headed towards the distant castle.

“P-please, wait!!”

Esil stood there in stunned silence for a moment, before she belatedly stared in the direction of Jin-Woo’s travel.

“Heok!!”

In that short amount of time, the castle belonging to the Garuche Clan was burning in flames.

Rumble.....

A monster as tall as a giant spat out a pillar of flames, and the castle’s gate and walls melted down without offering any resistance whatsoever. Garuche knights rushing out in confusion were cut down by the black soldiers one by one.

“Oh, my dear lord....’

Esil was so shocked that she spat out something that could either be a gasp or a moan.

“Kuwaahhk!!”

“Uwaaah!!”

The castle of Garuche that looked several times more impregnable than Radiru Clan’s own castle, was powerlessly crumbling down. Esil could only swallow down her nervous saliva.

‘If father didn’t hand over the permit willingly, then.....’

The Radiru castle might have been burning down to cinders just like the Garuche castle right about now.

Just imagining it made her dizzy. At the same time, she thought that her clan got a really lucky break after their negotiation went down so well.

Kaboom!!!

Another tower beyond the castle walls crumbled back down to earth with a loud explosion.

‘How can anyone fight against a monster like him....?’

Esil wiped the sweat drops trickling down to her chin, and breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that her clan had managed to skirt past a calamity.

The higher-ups of the Japanese Hunter Association and the ministerial members of the Japanese government had gathered today for an urgent meeting.

As the heavy, gloomy atmosphere descended on the conference chamber, the Association President quietly opened his mouth.

“I hear that recently, the mood in South Korea is boisterous due to the entrance of their tenth rank S Hunter.”

The high ranking officials present smirked slightly.

There were already more than twenty rank S Hunters in Japan. Yet, the Koreans were celebrating their tenth rank S?

Well, that did make some sense considering that, after excluding the two they lost to an accident as well as to emigration, there were only eight rank S Hunters found in Korea, to begin with.

Whatever the case may be, today’s meeting wasn’t held to ridicule South Korea. If that were the case, then the atmosphere of this place wouldn’t be this grave.

Sitting in his chair with a deep frown on his face, the ‘Boei Daijin’ of Japan – the Minister of Defense – testily opened his mouth.

“What does that have to do with today’s meeting?”

His voice accurately conveyed how deeply troubled he was.

The island at the southern end of the Korean peninsula, Jeju Island, had been completely overrun by monsters after the Koreans failed to clear a dungeon there.

On top of that, these weren’t any other regular monsters, but ant-types that boasted a rigid hierarchy system as well as an incredibly rapid reproduction rate.

If that was all, the Japanese government would simply ridicule their Korean counterpart and laugh at their misfortune, but now, the Japanese mainland was bearing the cost of that mishap as well.

Only yesterday, an ant they suspected to have flown in from the Jeju Island completely wiped a small village off the Japanese map.

They could no longer ignore the fallout from that event anymore. Most of all, their urgent priority had to be with calming down the irate Prime Minister and his orders of finding a speedy resolution to this crisis.

Which meant, the job security of several important people gathered here was hanging in the balance, yet to start such an important meeting off with some useless banter?

It was only natural that the Defense Minister would frown unhappily.

However, the Association President carried on regardless.

“People are more prone to making mistakes when they are in an agitated state.”

The snow-white hair and wrinkles filling up the entirety of his face spoke of how old he was already.

“And I believe this is the best chance for us.”

His declaration managed to gather the eyes of everyone present within this noisy conference chamber. Unlike just now, when he raised his voice in unhappiness, the Minister of Defense was speaking with a lot more nervousness.

“Do.... you have a good plan in mind?”

“Rather than calling it ‘good’, I’d say ‘appropriate’ is a more suitable description, instead.”

Everyone present, including the Minister of Defense, as well as various ministers and Association’s own upper management, all focused their attention on the Association President’s words.

As if he was taking his time for precisely this moment, the President opened his mouth.

“If you insist that a piece of land is yours when you don’t even have enough strength to defend it, will anyone acknowledge you as the owner?”

“.....”

A bout of silence fell on the conference room.

Just what was the Association President trying to say here?

Considering the relationship between South Korea and Japan, that declaration would never be glossed over as a senile old man’s ramblings if the general public got wind of that.

Not to forget, this old man was none other than the current President of the Japanese Hunter’s Association.

“...So, what is it that you wish to say?”

Minister of State cautiously asked.

The Association President scanned the men sitting to his left and right side, before confidently declaring out loudly.

“We shall get rid of the monsters in the Jeju island.”

Noisy, noisy....

“And then....”

The chamber had gotten noisy for a brief moment, but it was silenced immediately by the Association President’s voice.

He carried on.

“...We will take Jeju island from them.”



Chapter 104 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Taking Jeju Island away?

The higher-ups of the Japanese Hunter's Association remained calm as if they had heard the story from the Association President prior to the meeting. However, the same couldn't be said about the government officials.

“What on earth are you even talking about?!”

“Are you suggesting that we should wage a war with the Koreans?”

“They have been getting ready for war for the last 60 years!”

“Say something that makes sense, will you?!”

The voices of the government representatives quickly got heated up.

Right now, the proverbial flames from the ant monster incident that fell on their feet were in the process of spreading to their ankles. If they failed to present an acceptable solution to the Prime Minister and to the mass media, just who knows how many sitting here today would lose their posts?

That was why they had summoned the Association President for this meeting, so he could suggest a tangible solution, yet what was he saying now?

The Jeju Island this and that?!

How could they not be incensed when the Association President was yapping on about sheer nonsense in front of these busy people?

If it weren't for the Hunters guarding the sides of the Association President Matsumoto Shigeo, the government officials would've already started their expletive-laden tirades.

‘How can my expectation be on the money this wonderfully?’

Matsumoto Shigeo looked at the barrage of ugly criticism flying in his way and smirked inwardly. Their furious reactions were well within his calculations.

‘Tsk, tsk.’

Matsumoto tutted lightly in his mind, before opening his mouth he'd been keeping close until then.

“Obviously, I’m not suggesting that we should wage war with the Koreans. And I’m also not suggesting that we take the land away by force, either.”

“What was that?”

“Then, just what is it that you’re trying to say?”

“Can’t you stop beating around the bush?”

A corner of Matsumoto Shigeo’s lips arched up.

“We simply make the Korean give us the land on their own volition.”

The riled up mood of the conference chamber rapidly cooled down from the cold attitude of Matsumoto Shigeo. Judging from the strength of the tone of his voice, or from his attitude when saying these words, anyone hearing him could tell that the Association President was being dead serious.

‘.....’

The Vice Prime Minister was famed for his ice-cold demeanour, yet he chose to break his silence precisely at that moment.

“Association President Matsumoto.”

He was the closest aide to the current Prime Minister, not to mention his spokesperson on this occasion.

He was attending this meeting as the proxy of Japan’s current leader, so what he said in this place carried as much weight as the Prime Minister’s own words.

“What you said just now.... How will you achieve that?”

A man who could realistically be called the second most powerful figure in the Japanese government was showing his interest in the Association President Matsumoto Shigeo’s plan.

Was it because someone had finally paid attention?

Matsumoto Shigeo became sombre as he proceeded with his explanations.

“The Koreans currently lack the strength to deal with a rank S Gate. That was the situation four years ago when the ants first appeared, and it’s still the same story even now.”

The Vice Prime Minister nodded his head.

Jeju Island was a large island that equalled around 2% of South Korea’s total land mass. They had lost that much land to the monsters, yet were utterly unable to do anything about it, so was there any further explanation

necessary?

After the third subjugation effort ended in failure, the Korean government unofficially gave up on Jeju Island.

That was the unofficial story everyone accepted as of now.

“Under the current circumstances, how would they react when we make a suggestion of the Japanese rank S Hunters aiding with the subjugation of the ants?”

The news of the portion of the mutated ants capable of flight should have reached Korea by now. Meaning, they should’ve also realised that it was only a matter of time before the Korean mainland would be attacked.

Unless the decision makers of the Korean government were mad, there was no way they would reject external help if provided.

However....

“Even if we do lend some aid, do you believe the Koreans would hand over Jeju Island like that?”

Just as the Vice Minister alluded to just now, there were certainly a few holes in the Association President’s words. From here and there, several officials began smirking openly as well. Unlike them, though, the Vice Prime Minister carried on in a calm voice, sounding neither ridiculing nor angry.

“Just as you said, Mister Association President, the ants might be taken care of if we lend aid to the Koreans.”

Out of everyone present today, the person most knowledgeable regarding the combined strengths of the Korean and Japanese Hunters was the Association President Matsumoto Shigeo. And he was certain of the total defeat of the ants.

There was no disagreement over that.

“However, even if that happened, what is there for us to gain?”

Even though the Japanese citizens had suffered somewhat, ultimately, the ants of Jeju Island were the Koreans’ problem to solve. There was no way they would sacrifice their own Hunters to help out the Koreans.

‘What a nonsensical notion that is.’

The Vice Prime Minister had always been wise to the potential benefits to be gained. And he was inwardly snorting in derision right now. If you concede on something, you were supposed to gain something back in return. That was one of the basics in politics.

If they were to lend out their Hunters, then they had to get something suitable back as compensation.

‘Receiving Jeju Island would be barely on the acceptable level of compensation.’

The Vice Prime Minister showed some interest because his thoughts had aligned with that of the Association President. However, the reply he got instead sounded like an attempt at catching the floating clouds.

Naturally, the interest of the Vice Prime Minister had cooled down faster than anyone else’s.

It was then, the Association President formed a mysterious smile.

“When did I say we’d be helping the Koreans?”

The Vice Prime Minister frowned deeply.

‘Is he trying sophistry with me?’

Just as he was about to reprimand the Association President in a dignified way with the words of ***“Stop wasting our time”***....

‘Wait....’

The eyes of the Vice Minister widened.

The Association President said he’d ‘suggest’ lending an aid, but not about actually lending it.

“You, perhaps.....?”

“It is as you suspect.”

The Association President willingly acknowledged it. As soon as he discovered the utterly shocked expression of the Vice Prime Minister, the Association President knew that man had arrived at the same conclusion as well.

“You’re planning to..... shove the Korean Hunters inside that ant hole, aren’t you?”

As expected of a seasoned politician.

‘So, there was a reason why he’s rumoured to be a rather ‘smart’ man.’

The Association President sent a satisfied smile to the Vice Prime Minister and his rather quick-witted way of thinking.

“When Korea’s top Hunters enter the ant tunnel to kill the ant queen while placing their faith in our supposed ‘aid’, we’ll simply withdraw our

Hunters.”

The Koreans had suffered three failures already. If that losing streak extended to fourth, who'd suspect the betrayal of the Japanese Hunters had anything to do with it? No, it was fine to be suspect. By then, everything would be finished already, anyway.

The voice of the Vice Prime Minister quaked noticeably.

“Are you... Are you planning to annihilate the top Hunters of South Korea?”

“The moment a Gate they couldn't handle opened up in Jeju Island, their fate has been sealed already.”

The Association President once more voiced his own fatalistic world view.

“No, they only managed to sustain their pathetic lives somehow, until now.”

“But, that is...”

“Once their top Hunters disappear in that manner, the Koreans will definitely not feel secure anymore.”

What would happen when mutated ants capable of flight begin appearing in South Korea one by one, with all of their rank S Hunters dead?

Would the Koreans continue playing dumb when that happens?

If it were one or two ants, their Guilds might be able to kill the invading monsters somehow. However, just as the statistics showed, the number of mutated ants would only increase exponentially, and eventually, the entirety of South Korea would be shaken up sooner or later.

‘When that happens, surely they would request aid from other country's Hunters.’

However, who would be willing to help the Koreans out by then?

China or Russia, with their great number of Hunters, but also with massive land mass they needed to cover, too?

Or, the Americans, who refused to help when the rank S Gate opened up back then?

Or, the North Koreans, who might invade Seoul by bringing over their own rank S Hunters, instead?

‘No, it'd be only us, the Japanese.’

Because, Japan would also be in trouble when the number of mutated ants

increases. The Koreans would have no choice but to cling onto Japan, and when that happened, Japan would be able to demand anything from them in return.

‘Koreans might really be willing to hand over Jeju Island by then....’

It’d be as exactly as the Association President had said.

Suddenly, the Vice Minister felt a chill run down his spine. To think, that man was willing to drive another country’s top Hunters to death just to make his ambition into reality....

Wouldn’t a country fall to ruin because of this man if others weren’t being careful?

‘He’s a truly terrifying man, this Association President Matsumoto Shigeo.’

The Vice Minister shuddered from the horrifying scheme of the Association President. However, that wasn’t the end.

The Association President carried on.

“Jeju Island will just be the beginning.”

One by one....

Whenever the Koreans needed the power of rank S Hunters, they would have no choice but to slowly come under Japan’s influence. It was truly possible to swallow up South Korea without firing a single shot.

“....And those are my thoughts.”

Only after the Association President ended his lengthy explanation did the various cabinet members take their deeply held-up breaths. Those who previously dismissed the Association President as a crazy fool were now listening closely, strands of cold sweat trickling down their faces.

The Association President quietly inquired.

“What is your decision, Mister Vice Prime Minister?”

The gazes of everyone present focused on the Vice Prime Minister.

“.....”

The Vice Prime Minister swallowed his saliva.

Currently, he was speaking for the Prime Minister here. Of course, as long as the Prime Minister trusted him, the decision made in this chamber would not be overturned at a later date.

So, carefully, and even more cautiously than before....

‘.....’

After lengthy deliberation, the Vice Prime Minister raised his head.

“How should the government aid you in this venture?”

[You killed a Demon Knight.]

[You have earned 3,000 experience points.]

[You killed a Demon Knight.]

[You have earned 3,000 experience points.]

[You killed a Demon Aristocrat.]

[You have earned 4,500 experience points.]

Each time the Shadow Soldiers killed a demon found inside the castle, Jin-Woo was inundated with the experience points messages without rest.

Preparing for the final showdown on the top floor, Jin-Woo continued to raise his levels diligently.

When there were good rewards on offer, the accompanying risk would also be high, as well.

‘The Divine Water of Life, bonus Stat points, top-ranked Rune Stones, etc....’

When he thought about the rewards he would get after defeating the king of demons, there was just no way he’d slack off on levelling up himself.

[Level up!]

As it so happened, almost all the demons in the vicinity had been taken care of, so Jin-Woo summoned his Status Window to confirm his current level.

[Level: 87]

Before he entered the Demon’s Castle for the second time, his level was 80, but it had already reached 87. Seeing the increased Stats, a smile automatically formed on his face.

‘Nice.’

Jin-Woo tightly clenched his fist.

[You killed a Demon Aristocrat.]

[You killed a Demon Aristocrat.]

In the meantime, his Shadow Soldiers killed off the remaining demons. It

was a complete victory.

With the battle now over, the soldiers gathered before Jin-Woo as usual. Among them, Iron was the fastest to arrive at his side. As if he was expecting to be praised, Iron puffed out his chest and stood at attention.

Jin-Woo chuckled slightly while looking at the mountainous physique blocking his view.

“You finish with everything?”

Iron nodded his head.

“Are you sure?”

Iron nodded his head even more energetically than before. Jin-Woo smirked and extended out his senses. And then, as he spun around, he also threw the ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ behind him.

‘Dagger Throw!’

His dagger flew towards a certain empty wall in the blink of an eye. But, then....

“Keo-heok!!”

The dagger didn’t hit the wall, but instead stabbed deeply into the chest of a demon hiding there quietly while using invisibility. It had been quietly waiting for Jin-Woo to be separated from his soldiers to mount a sneak attack.

“Euh-euhk....”

The demon could only freak out inwardly at the dagger piercing its left chest.

‘How did he find out?!’

If the demon was a human, that’s where the heart would have been. Meaning, that human male had completely seen through the invisibility magic from a high-ranked demon aristocrat.

‘How could a measly human....?’

When the demon raised its shocked gaze away from his wound, Jin-Woo was already standing beside his target. The demon’s eyes quaked violently.

“But, how....?”

Jin-Woo pulled out the ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ and activated his only close-quarter combat skill.

‘Vital Point Targeting!’

Stab!

The demon that barely managed to hold on from the damage inflicted by the Dagger Throw, ended up dying in one hit from the maxed-out ‘Vital Point Targetting’ skill.

[You killed a Demon Aristocrat.]

Jin-Woo returned the ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ back to his Inventory, and stood before Iron again.

“So, how will you explain this?”

‘.....’

As if he was feeling sheepish, Iron lowered his gaze and scratched the back of his head. Well, rather than the head, it was the back of his helmet, though. Soon, Igrit also made his return, having killed all the demons hiding in the deeper parts of the castle.

Ng?’

However, Jin-Woo sensed something was different about Igrit.

‘What’s this?’

Jin-Woo observed the approaching Igrit and tilted his head.

Igrit quickly approached Jin-Woo and knelt down, before lowering his head. Up until here, it wasn’t such a strange scene. But, quite unlike from before, Jin-Woo heard the mechanical beep of ‘tti-ring’ going off suddenly in his head.

‘There’s a System message?’

Jin-Woo swallowed his saliva.



Chapter 105 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

[Knight 'Igrit' is requesting your permission to advance his grade.]

[Will you permit the advancement?]

'Permission to advance?'

Surprised by the never-before-seen System message, Jin-Woo quickly confirmed Igrit's information to make sure.

[Igrit Lv. Max]

Knight grade.

It's now possible to advance the grade after the level requirement has been met. Will advance to the next grade when the Sovereign gives his permission.

'Igrit's level.....??'

The level that previously hovered around the 30 mark had changed to 'Max' before he had noticed it. It must've been the case that, once the Shadow Soldier's level cap had been met, he'd be given an opportunity to advance to the next grade.

'Is the requirement level for advancement somewhere between the late thirties and early forties?'

When taking into account the potential level-ups happening during a single battle, he suspected that the required level had to be around there somewhere.

Considering that the average level of the Shadow Soldiers was still around the early twenties, it sure as heck felt like a cumbersome requirement.

'Besides all that, it also needs my consent, too.'

That must've been the reason why Jin-Woo thought there were hints of unknown but earnest yearning in Igrit's eyes as he ran over here.

'.....'

Igrit didn't raise his lowered head at all.

Jin-Woo could even sense a nervous determination emanating from Igrit as he waited for his lord's decision without budging an inch from his kneeling position.

Jin-Woo was even tempted to pat the dude on the shoulder and praise him for the job well done.

‘This guy....’

Jin-Woo’s gaze shifted back to the System message.

[Will you permit the advancement?]

The message was blinking slowly as if to urge him for an answer.

Igrit was one of the very first to become his Shadow Soldiers, not to mention one who fought the hardest until now, as well. Was there a reason not to allow the grade advancement here?

Without a shred of hesitation, Jin-Woo replied to the System’s message.

“I allow it.”

[Please designate the command phrase.]

‘I need a command phrase for something like this, too?’

Jin-Woo frowned briefly, but changed his mind just as quick.

‘Oh, well.’

Quite a few became Shadow Soldiers at the same time. For today, it was only Igrit, but if more than a few soldiers requested him for the advancement permission at the same time in the near future, then it might become rather tedious and time consuming to answer their call one by one. Especially so, if it happened during the middle of a fight.

The command phrase would prove to be useful on those occasions, that’s for sure. After a short deliberation, Jin-Woo spoke up.

“Permitted.”

He went with the ‘Simple is best’ mantra.

As soon as the command phrase was set, changes rapidly took place. It began from beneath Igrit’s feet.

Wuuuaaahhh-!!

Accompanied by screams coming from a distant place, countless black hands emerged from Igrit’s shadow and they grabbed onto every part of him.

‘What’s this?’

Jin-Woo observed in great interest the unfolding process of the advancement. At first, he thought that those black hands would drag Igrit back into the shadow, but in reality, the opposite happened, instead.

The hands holding onto Igrit turned into black smoke and spun around him quite ferociously, before getting absorbed by him. It was as if Igrit was absorbing the black smoke voluntarily.

Psuuuuuaaahhk!

Igrit emerged from the dissipating black smoke while emitting a far greater aura than ever before.

Tti-ring.

The System message informed Jin-Woo of the results.

[The current grade of Knight 'Igrit' has advanced from 'Knight grade' to 'Elite Knight grade'.]

'Niiice!'

Jin-Woo did his best to calm his trembling heart and rechecked Igrit's information window.

[Igrit Lv.1]

Elite Knight grade

'His level has been reset, but his current grade is the same as Fangs now.'

Before joining Jin-Woo's army of the Shadow Soldiers recently, Fangs used to be the boss monster of a rank A dungeon. Now that Igrit was on the same grade as a creature that powerful, it could only mean that his abilities had grown by that great a deal now.

Ba-dump...

Jin-Woo's heart beat faster. The theory he came up with back when he became the Shadow Sovereign turned out to be correct.

'It wasn't just me who can get stronger.'

Jin-Woo's gaze swept over each of his Shadow Soldiers.

'All these guys are growing stronger alongside me, too.'

After Igrit changed so noticeably through the grade advancement, he was reminded once more of his soldiers' capability for growth. He was now beset with the desire to urgently raise the levels of other soldiers and have them advance to the next grade as soon as possible.

'Looks like one more thing has been added to my to-do list, huh?'

And so, as he stood there checking out his soldiers while feeling rather

satisfied with himself....

From afar, he spotted Tank quickly approaching closer with a dead body of a demon that escaped a little while ago in his jaw.

‘Uh?’

However, the light shining in Tank’s eyes as he hurriedly ran closer also seemed rather suspicious, too. Those eyes, that aura....

Jin-Woo quietly stared, before asking aloud with a disbelieving expression on his face.

“Even you?!”

Tank finally stopped right in front of Jin-Woo’s nose and quickly discarded the corpse he worked so hard to bring here. He then began prostrating as well, with his front legs gathered together before his head.

“Wuuong.”

And sure enough, another message popped up in Jin-Woo’s view.

Tti-ring.

[Elite ‘Shadow Beast Soldier’ is requesting for permission to advance his grade.]

[Will you permit the advancement?]

‘...Holy cow.’

Jin-Woo facepalmed in surprise. A quick confirmation of Tank’s information revealed that his level had also reached the cap as well.

[Shadow Beast Soldier Lv. Max]

Elite grade

It’s now possible to advance the grade after the level requirement has been met. Will advance to the next grade when the Sovereign gives his permission.

‘Wait a minute....’

Jin-Woo found this rather odd.

Unlike the tireless battle machine named Igrit, who started off as a level 7 and maintained his sky-high level until now, Tank was still a far away from meeting the level cap that Jin-Woo suspected to be the advancement requirement.

Yet, both Igrit and Tank were about to advance around the same time?

The difference in these two guys’ levels wasn’t something that could be

bridged by this one battle alone.

‘Could it be.... the required level is different for each grade?’

If so, then it made sense.

He thought that since Tank was an ‘Elite’ rank, his level cap would be lower which meant his advancement would be faster; on the other hand, Igrit and his ‘Knight’ grade needed more time to advance.

If that was the case, then indeed it was possible for the timing of their advancements to match so coincidentally like this.

When Jin-Woo’s thoughts reached this point, a certain possibility suddenly entered his mind.

‘Wait, if I reach the right level, could I advance in grade, too?’

It was just that the required level was so high that he hadn’t reached it yet.

‘...Eiii, there’s no way.’

Jin-Woo smirked to himself. At the same time, he allowed the advancement to commence.

“Permitted.”

As soon as his permission left his lips, the same type of process as Igrit took place with Tank as well. Hands emerged from the shadow, changed to smoke, and got absorbed into Tank.

Shuuuuhhak....

And just like Igrit, Tank also became a realm stronger than before.

[The current grade of Elite ‘Shadow Beast Soldier’ has advanced from ‘Elite grade’ to ‘Knight grade’.]

However, there were some differences, too.

Tti-ring, tti-ring, tti-ring.

The mechanical beep went off continuously and System messages popped up one after another.

[You can bestow a name to a soldier with Knight grade or above.]

[The bestowed name will be maintained until the Shadow Soldier is dismissed.]

[Please assign the soldier’s name.]

Tank was a temporary name Jin-Woo came up with on a whim.

Since a name couldn't be assigned unless a soldier was a Knight grade, Tank's official moniker had been stuck as a 'Shadow Beast Soldier'. If it weren't for his twice-as-huge frame compared to other bears, there was no way to differentiate Tank from the others.

But now, Jin-Woo could freely assign a name now.

A deep smile formed on his face.

"Tank."

[Will you assign it as 'Tank'?]

"I will."

When Jin-Woo confirmed it, the information on the 'Shadow Beast Soldier' changed.

[Tank Lv.1]

Knight grade.

Perhaps he knew that the advancement process had ended, Tank raised his body up. Standing on his hind legs, he was as tall as a regular two-story house now. Jin-Woo wholeheartedly praised him.

"You finally have a name now, Tank."

Feeling pleased, Tank raised its head up high and roared out loudly.

"You guys all did well."

So, time to take a well-deserved break until the next floor.

Jin-Woo recalled his soldiers back into his shadow, and while doing that, he couldn't help but spot Iron and his drooping shoulders. The poor guy was the only one out of the 'old' members to not get an advancement today.

Shururu....

After his soldiers disappeared as shadows, Jin-Woo left the castle. Esil was waiting for him outside with a rather haggard face.

"E-excuse me, Sir Jin-Woo?"

"I told you, stop calling me a Sir."

"Y-yes."

Esil hesitated somewhat after Jin-Woo curtly replied to her, but eventually, she spoke again.

"Excuse me.... Uhm, Jin-Woo... sir."

The demons were a lot more ‘sensitive’ towards one’s seniority than expected, it seemed.

“...Fine. What now?”

“Do you know.... how many clans have ceased to exist by your hands?”

Currently, they were on the 89th floor.

Esil’s clan was on the 80th, so that would make nine clans?

What with her witnessing a clan being killed off every time they climbed up a floor, Esil had finally grown too anxious to remain silent.

“Clans of superior aristocrats are managing the floors 90 and above. They are on another level compared to the upper aristocrats you’ve encountered so far.”

Jin-Woo didn’t slow down his steps, but still asked her anyway.

“Okay, so what?”

“How about resolving the matters with dialogue from now on? If you talk to them nicely, they might hand over the Entry Permit like my cla....”

Jin-Woo cut her off there.

“If I was weaker than your clan, you think your people would’ve tried talking to me at all?”

Esil quickly shut her mouth up. A measly little human dared to show up uninvited to a castle full of demons, and not only that, proceeded to demand something from said castle, too?

That human wouldn’t have been able to return home alive.

“That’s how it is.”

Jin-Woo smirked deeply.

Whether it was a monster from a regular dungeon, or a monster from instant dungeons, the relationship with humans would go only as far.

‘The strong will devour the weak.’

Jin-Woo agreed with that concept. Besides, he was urgently pressed for both the Entry Permits and the level-ups, so he wasn’t planning to give up on either of those.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo glanced at Esil to his side.

He found her continued silence and the expression of dejection strange and

asked her about it.

“I thought it’d be a good thing for your people if other clans were destroyed?”

“Pardon?”

“Didn’t you say that demon clans are bitterly contesting with one another on the hierarchy or whatever?”

“Ah, that.... That is true. However....”

From here onwards, they were stepping into the territories of the superior aristocrats.

If Jin-Woo failed in his conquest for some reason, then the fury of those superior aristocrats would be directed in full towards her and her own clan. Esil was worried about that.

Regardless of her worries, Jin-Woo spoke up confidently.

“I’ll make your Radish Clan as the number one on the pecking order.”

‘...But, our clan is Radiru, you know.’

Esil could only complain meekly in her mind.

Soon, they would be stepping into the upper floor. Could a lone man manage to destroy the superior aristocrats and their clans with nothing but his own powers?

‘.....Eiii, I don’t care anymore.’

She had taken on the task of being his guide, so all she had to do was to do her job properly. Esil decided to give up on sweating over it.

‘Ah, I almost forgot....’

Still, there was this one thing she just had to ask.

“Excuse me, Jin-Woo.... sir”

“Yeah?”

Jin-Woo looked back at her.

Having witnessed Jin-Woo continuously destroy other demon clans so easily, she found it pretty scary to meet his eyes anymore, so Esil quickly lowered her gaze to her feet and asked.

“Why did you spare my clan?”

Without a doubt, the Radiru Clan would never be able to oppose this man’s quest. She knew her clan’s military might the best, and now that she had

witnessed Jin-Woo's true power, she was sure of this fact.

Even then, her Radiru clan emerged relatively unscathed from this merciless man's onslaught. Why was that? She was really curious.

Jin-Woo entered the floor-transfer magic circle and turned around to face Esil.

"Cuz I find you likeable."

Even though she was a monster, she knew when to surrender, she knew when to negotiate, and most importantly, offered up quite a bit of useful information, too.

"P-p-pardon me?!"

Esil flinched grandly in surprise, and her neck rapidly dyed in a crimson colour. She stood on the spot hesitating as she fidgeted with her fingers in a clear fluster. Their schedule had been affected by her being rooted to the spot like that, so Jin-Woo asked her to get a move on.

"Aren't you coming?"

Then, he glanced at the System message asking him which floor he'd like to go.

"If you don't get in now, we'll go back to the 80th floor, okay?"

"I-I'm sorry."

Her face still blushing deeply in red, Esil hurriedly entered the magic circle.

'.....'

However, she couldn't raise her head again even after arriving on the next floor.

The Incheon International Airport.

The representatives from the Japanese Hunter Association arrived in South Korea to discuss the matters of Jeju Island's ant problem. They already had set up a conference with the Korean counterparts.

Along with the Japanese Hunter Association's President Matsumoto Shigeo, Japan's number one Hunter, the rank S Goto Ryuji stepped into the airport. (TL note at the end)

The atmosphere within the airport seemed a bit chaotic, so Matsumoto Shigeo took a look around to see what was what.

"What's happening here?"

“.....There is a very powerful presence nearby.”

“Stronger than you?”

Goto Ryuji smirked derisively.

Seeing the fully-confident face of Goto Ryuji, Matsumoto Shigeo didn't bother to ask anymore.

‘There’s no way South Korea can produce someone like that.’

Not too long after that, an employee from the Korean Hunters Association hurriedly ran forward to greet and received them.

“I’m terribly sorry. I was delayed by all the chaos unfolding inside the airport at the moment.”

The employee hurriedly lowered his head in apology. Matsumoto Shigeo hid his dissatisfaction expertly and formed a magnanimous smile.

“It’s fine. However, is there something going on at the airport?”

“Ah, that.... It’s nothing serious, sir. It’s just that a Hunter from the United States has arrived just now.”

“What brings an American Hunter to South Korea?”

“I hear that it’s a personal matter, sir. I’m sure that there’s nothing to worry about.”

The employee thought the Association President Matsumoto Shigeo was worried about a possible dungeon break and did his best to assuage the Japanese group's fears.

Unfortunately, Matsumoto Shigeo's expression remained dark.

‘A Hunter from America, is it.... I hope this person won't interfere with our business here.’

Goto Ryuji's gaze was fixed in the direction of the noisy crowd of people over yonder. Most likely, that's where the American Hunter was.

Meanwhile, Matsumoto Shigeo confirmed the time.

If he were to make it to the conference on time, he needed to get going now.

Matsumoto Shigeo spoke.

“Let's go.”



Chapter 106 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Two Association Presidents, Goh Gun-Hui and Matsumoto Shigeo, sat down while facing each other.

On either side of the two men, representatives from the Japanese Hunter's Association and their Korean counterparts, as well as higher-ups from various government departments sat in a row.

With the subject matter being what it was, the conference was moving at a brisk pace.

“How do you feel about forming a united assault team comprising of top-ranked Japanese and Korean Hunters?”

This explosive suggestion from Matsumoto Shigeo caused the Koreans present to show much surprise on their faces.

They were all under the impression that today's conference would be to discuss the reparation Japanese would demand for the damage they had suffered.

But then, the Japanese were saying they would voluntarily help with taking care of this headache?

What kind of jackpot was this?

The surprised state of the Korean politicians didn't last long, though, as it was soon replaced by the brightened complexions, instead. With the sole exception of one man, that was.

Only Goh Gun-Hui maintained a sharp glare as he observed Matsumoto Shigeo.

“Are you saying that you wish to attack the nest of the ants by forming an alliance?”

“That is correct.”

“We're aware that Japan enjoys an abundance of top-ranked Hunters. However, it is still far too dangerous to invade Jeju Island.”

Goh Gun-Hui also added that there were several times more of the monsters to be found on the island compared to two years ago, when the last subjugation effort failed.

It was here that Matsumoto Shigeo formed a rather suspicious smile.

“It’d prove to be dangerous indeed if we rushed into the enemy’s main camp without a proper plan.”

One of the Korean politicians, utterly hooked by the suggestion from the Japanese that they would help, asked in an expectant manner.

“Do you have a good plan in mind?”

“Yes.”

Matsumoto Shigeo gathered everyone’s attention to himself with a quick answer, but then, continued on only after taking a bit of time for himself.

“Of course, we have one.”

With a single command from him, the prepared files matching the exact number of Korean representatives were placed in front of them.

“These are all the data compiled from our observation of the ants.”

While the Koreans attendees of the conference were perusing through the file, Matsumoto Shigeo began his in-depth explanation.

“Each ant may be strong enough to rival a high-rank Hunter, but it also possesses a fatal weakness. And that’s their short lifespan.”

Ants could only live for around one year at most.

“Which means, if the ant queen is removed from the equation, every ant found on Jeju Island will eventually die out in around one year.”

“Indeed....”

The Korean attendees nodded their heads as they read the well-researched data.

Only the queen needed to be eliminated.

That sounded a whole lot more achievable than killing thousands of unrankable monsters that came out of a rank S Gate. However, Goh Gun-Hui’s glare remained icy cold.

‘What a nonsensical notion that is....’

He knew the truth already.

He knew that the act of killing one queen was no different than actually trying to kill every single one of the thousands of those monsters.

“Are you making this suggestion because you don’t know of ants’ instincts to sacrifice themselves in order to protect their queen?”

When Goh Gun-Hui pointed this fact out, Matsumoto Shigeo simply smiled and lightly rebutted him.

“Of course I know. If we were to kill the queen, we’d most likely have to break through the defensive wall of thousands of ants.”

Goh Gun-Hui’s suspicions grew only larger and larger after he saw how relaxed Matsumoto Shigeo’s demeanour was.

‘Just what are they thinking?’

The corner of Matsumoto Shigeo’s lips arched up.

“However, what if all of the ants abandon the ant tunnel for some reason?”

The ant queen lived in the deepest part of the ant tunnel. Why would the ants leave the ant tunnel unguarded, when they were supposed to protect the queen as well as the eggs at all cost?

When questioning expressions formed on the faces of all the Korean representatives, Matsumoto Shigeo opened his mouth to answer their confusion.

“There have been. A total of three times.”

Three times?

There had been three times where such an event occurred?

But, besides all that – how did Japan know so intimately about such things in the first place?

The answer to this question arrived right away.

“The ants emptied out of their tunnel to fight, when the Korean Hunters landed on Jeju Island for the subjugation operations three times in the past.”

“Keu-euhk.”

Goh Gun-Hui tightly clenched his fists resting on his knees.

While the Hunters of South Korea risked their lives and fought, the Japanese were covertly spying on them. No one here criticised Japan for not helping South Korea out back then.

But regardless, how could they use the misfortune of the neighbouring nation as their research material, and then proudly reveal the results to said neighbour like this?

A rank S lost his life during the third failed attempt. And besides him,

countless others also died. The Association President Goh Gun-Hui had to watch them die from a very close vantage point back then.

His clenched fists were trembling hard now.

‘Mm...?’

Sensing that the complexion of Goh Gun-Hui was getting rather suspicious, Japan’s best Hunter, Goto Ryuji unleashed his own magical energy.

It was a warning – if the other side tried to do something untoward, then this side would also make a move.

Attending the conference as Goh Gun-Hui’s bodyguard, Woo Jin-Cheol quickly approached the Association President’s side.

“...Sir?”

“...I’m okay now.”

Goh Gun-Hui dismissed Woo Jin-Cheol, and the latter quietly stepped back.

Regardless of what the Japanese’s attitude was like, this presented a golden opportunity to deal with the ants once and for all if their research data proved to be reliable.

‘I can’t afford to let slip such an opportunity because of my personal feelings.’

Goh Gun-Hui could only calm his boiling anger inwardly.

Once the threatening tension of the conference room dissipated, Matsumoto Shigeo finally got to the main point.

“The Japanese Hunters will take on that role.”

Japan’s rank S Hunters would split into several teams and attack Jeju Island from different directions. Ants would rush out to face the intruders, and just like before, the tunnel with ant queen hiding in it would be emptied out.

“We wish to ask Korea’s top Hunters with the killing of the queen.”

South Korea’s rank S Hunters would sneak into the island using a helicopter, and once they kill off the queen, they escape via a helicopter again.

Noisy, noisy.....

The plan put forward by the Japanese was rather detailed and sounded quite doable, so the Korean representatives began to get heated up from excitement.

“If we follow the Japanese plan, do we get to recover Jeju Island?”

“These Japanese b*stards, they have finally showed their hands now that they too have become victims.”

“This is a great chance.”

“Let’s seize this opportunity and use the Japanese Hunters to reclaim Jeju Island.”

Goh Gun-Hui didn’t participate in the heated discussion of the Korean representatives, choosing to quietly mull over Matsumoto Shigeo’s suggested plan, instead.

‘Without a doubt, there is a good chance.’

There were 21 rank S Hunters in Japan.

In comparison, there were only eight in South Korea.

But, by excluding himself who couldn’t move due to health reasons, or the other Hunter who had to retire early, then realistically speaking, there were only six that could participate.

‘It’ll be impossible to draw and scatter the attention of thousands of ants with that number.’

In order to do so, they needed Japan and her twenty or so top-ranked Hunters. Even if they were to be split into groups of five, you’d still get four groups, and that would be enough to buy the Koreans time to do their job.

But the real problem was, would South Korea’s top Hunters actually be able to kill the boss of a rank S dungeon, the ant queen?

‘Is it even possible?’

It was then, Goh Gun-Hui suddenly remembered the name of Seong Jin-Woo.

Seong Jin-Woo was strong enough to solo kill the boss of a rank A dungeon, so what if he worked together with other rank S Hunters?

Ba-dump, ba-dump....

Goh Gun-Hui’s heart began racing now.

‘We can’t delay this any longer.’

Currently, ant monsters were evolving at a rapid pace. No one could predict precisely when the entirety of the ant army would become flight-capable. It could be ten years, five, or even, right next year.

Before something like that happened, the Koreans had to kill off the dastardly ants, and if they had to resort to borrowing another country’s

strength, then so be it.

But, before that....

“What does Japan want as compensation from this cooperation?”

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui didn't let this important matter slip through.

Matsumoto Shigeo did his best to form the most magnanimous smile he could physically perform.

“When the rest of ants die in a year, we evenly split the magic crystals left behind on the island.”

Only that much?

Goh Gun-Hui tilted his head, unconvinced.

“Will you really be happy with only that?”

Goh Gun-Hui's question caused the Korean government officials and politicians near him to frown rather deeply.

‘If they are willing to do it for a small asking price, he should just gladly accept it, so why is he questioning them like this?’

‘What will he do if the Japanese decide to change their mind all of a sudden...?’

‘Association President Goh Gun-Hui, you're still too distrusting, what with your background being a man who used to run a corporation.’

Their hot dagger-like glares stabbed deeply into Goh Gun-Hui. He had no choice but to shut his mouth.

A short discussion took place between the Korean attendees, but no one raised a voice of objection.

In the end, the Japanese's proposal was approved unanimously.

After the conference successfully came to an end, Matsumoto Shigeo approached Goh Gun-Hui with a beaming smile and offered his right hand.

“The future of our two nations depends on this cooperation. Let us combine our resources together and do our best.”

After returning to his hotel room, Matsumoto Shigeo placed a cigarette in between his lips. Goto Ryuji to his side lit it up for him.

“You worked hard today, sir.”

“Mister Goto, it's you who worked hard today.”

“You’re praising me too much, sir.”

“I’m not. Didn’t you see Goh Gun-Hui’s face back then?”

Matsumoto Shigeo smirked deeply.

The fleeting emotion that flickered in and out momentarily on Goh Gun-Hui’s face back then – it was definitely rage. The reason why Matsumoto Shigeo was able to display so much leisure in front of a rank S Hunter who reputedly possessed the greatest strength in South Korea, was simple – because, he had a powerful ally standing behind him.

And that was Goto Ryuji, Japan’s number one melee-type Hunter. And also, the trustworthy right-hand man of the President of the Japanese Hunter Association, Matsumoto Shigeo.

Recalling Goh Gun-Hui’s expression, Matsumoto formed a mocking smile.

“Borrowing the power of someone whom you don’t even want to talk to. Now that would be quite intolerable from the perspective of the weak.”

Goto Ryuji also smirked as well.

In the end, the Koreans agreed to work with the Japanese, just as Matsumoto Shigeo had predicted. Everything was moving according to plan.

“South Korea is merely the beginning.”

Matsumoto Shigeo spoke up.

“Hunters are the new power, the new political influence. With this power given to Japan, I shall create a new empire.”

His gaze then shifted over to Goto Ryuji.

“And you shall become its next emperor.”

If Matsumoto Shigeo was to be considered the first ruler of the empire founded on his crafty schemes, then Goto Ryuji would be the second by relying on his powers alone. And this was the reason why Goto Ryuji treated Matsumoto Shigeo as his superior all this time.

It was then.

“I almost forgot.”

Matsumoto Shigeo recalled something and asked Goto Ryuji while killing the cigarette.

“Do we still not have any information on South Korea’s newest rank S Hunter?”

“Even the South Koreans don’t seem to know much about that man, sir.”

“...Is that so.”

They already knew everything there was to know regarding all of South Korea’s top Hunters. Except for one person.

They didn’t have a single reliable piece of information on the Hunter who was registered as a rank S recently. The unknown factor could cause deviations to their plan. Now that his ambition had been revealed in full with the commencement of this operation, Matsumoto Shigeo couldn’t afford any form of deviation whatsoever to his plan.

‘Although it is questionable what a single person could achieve on his own, but, still...’

There were five such people in the entire world.

They were referred to as Hunters on the rank of ‘Special Authority’, which meant that each one of them possessed power equalling that of a country’s military.

They all shared one common point; each one of them had cleared at least one rank S Gate in the past. A Hunter with that kind of ability could easily disrupt his plan.

‘However, the odds of that are extremely low.’

Taking into account that there were seven billion people on Earth, the odds would be less than a billion to one. If someone of that calibre appeared, then there was no way the South Koreans would keep quiet about him. But judging from the current atmosphere, there didn’t seem to be any cause for concern on that front.

‘I can’t ruin everything by being too cautious here.’

Matsumoto Shigeo picked up his phone.

Then, he gave his command to the higher-ups of his own Association, who were all anxiously waiting for his call back home.

“The Koreans have agreed to work with us, so summon all the rank S Hunters as planned.”

Goh Gun-Hui was also calling the Korean Hunters at that moment.

The first priority was to explain the seriousness of the current situation. He was planning to fine-tune the Association’s schedule accordingly, but....

“What did you say??”

A completely unexpected piece of news flew out of nowhere and punched him in the face.

“You can’t get in touch with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo at all???”

For some reason, only Seong Jin-Woo was out of reach.

“His phone’s been switched off for several days as well, sir. We can’t even figure out where he could be.”

“...”

Goh Gun-Hui shut his mouth tightly then, before opening his mouth. He sounded exasperated at that moment.

“In that case, summon the other Hunters excluding him as soon as possible.”

“Understood, sir.”

The agent of the Association bowed and quickly ran out of the President’s office. Goh Gun-Hui’s expression hardened as he fell into deep contemplation.

‘Where could he possibly be?’

After hearing the report of Seong Jin-Woo going missing, Goh Gun-Hui suddenly had a foreboding premonition of the future.



Chapter 107 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Just as Esil had alluded to earlier, the difficulty of the quest rose up steeply from the 90th floor upwards. The levels and the number of monsters guarding each floor's castle were so much incomparably higher compared to the lower floors.

It got so tough that he no longer could enjoy the fruit of his current sky-high Intelligence Stat – his MP used to hover near the max almost all the time, but now, it fluctuated greatly every time there was a battle.

That showed just how many of his Shadow Soldiers were destroyed and had to be revived over and over again.

It wasn't some fluke that Jin-Woo managed to clear the 90th floor, however.

Just like a hammer shaping the raw iron that had been heated for a long, long time, he had been constantly polishing his skills as he climbed up from the lowest floor to get to where he was now.

The clear evidence of that was his current level, which had reached 90 already.

The fiercer the resistance of the superior Demon Aristocrats became, the stronger the attacks of Jin-Woo and his Shadow Soldiers got in order to break past their defences.

[Level up!]

As Jin-Woo exited from the castle carrying the 97th floor's Entry Permit, haze-like gas was rising up from his body. That steam was from his sweat evaporating in the heat, caused by the friction of him moving beyond the physical limits.

That was a clear indication of how much of a life-or-death struggle this battle had been. And accordingly, Jin-Woo's face was filled with the satisfaction from the victory well earned.

Esil had been hiding until then, and when she saw him, quickly ran up to his side.

She could see a castle was roaring in flames behind Jin-Woo, and the Entry

permit held firmly in his hand.

‘Fifth-ranked Ricardo Clan, and now, even the fourth-ranked Faetos Clan, too....’

Esil no longer had any reserve energy to be shocked anymore. If every other intruder boasted strength on this scale, then rather than protecting her land, it’d be difficult to even survive from the initial assault, instead.

“Are all the other Humans as powerful as you?”

Esil anxiously asked.

Jin-Woo combed through his memory for a bit, before making a suitable reply.

“Maybe, there are two more, I think.”

Goh Gun-Hui and Cha Hae-In were those two. Jin-Woo had no doubt that they were much stronger than other rank S Hunters he came in contact with so far.

As for the rest, which were Baek Yun-Ho, Choi Jong-In and Im Tae-Gyu, he didn’t feel that they were that particularly strong.

Especially for Choi Jong-In - he seemed to be highly rated by everyone, but to Jin-Woo’s eyes, that seemed to be the case solely due to him being in charge of South Korea’s top-ranked Guild, the ‘Hunters’, rather than because his own skills were impressive.

‘If I were to judge from their auras alone, Cha Hae-In is several times stronger than Choi Jong-In.’

Without a doubt, one could still find differences in power even among the ranks of ‘S’ Hunters.

No, maybe the differences found within this rank would be far greater than any other ranks precisely because those who couldn’t be measured by regular means were all lumped in together here.

Jin-Woo formed a subtle smirk.

‘How would I perceive others after I get out of here?’

Just like how the feelings he got from Baek Yun-Ho differed from their first meeting to the second, would there be a change in how he perceived the Association President Goh Gun-Hui?

Jin-Woo’s heart raced faster when he thought about checking out how much he had changed.

‘But, before I can do that....’

He had to clear this Demon’s Castle instant dungeon first. There were only four more floors remaining. He’d get to clear this dungeon soon enough. Jin-Woo turned to speak to Esil.

“You should go back to your people now.”

She had been utterly dejected after hearing that there were two more people like Jin-Woo out there, but then, she was jolted out of her morose state and raised her head.

“Excuse me?”

“I’ll find my own paths on the floors above this one.”

Thanks to Esil guiding the way, he got to quickly locate the Demon Aristocrats and their castles. However, he no longer needed her help from now on.

‘Well, my Perception Stat has risen up pretty high so that’s one of the reasons, but also....’

The auras emanating from the superior aristocrats were so strong that he could easily locate them from afar now. She didn’t do much besides showing him the way, so he didn’t want to walk around with one more luggage anymore if he could help it.

When he finished explaining himself like that....

“A-am I no longer useful to you?”

Esil’s complexion had paled completely.

‘She’s a funny one until the end, huh.’

Jin-Woo suppressed his laughter as he saw Esil’s reaction that always managed to exceed his expectations. He then walked right up to her nose.

‘Heok!’

Esil’s eyes opened wider as he got progressively closer and closer.

‘A-am I being eliminated, as well?’

Ba-dump, ba-dump....

Her pounding heartbeat sounded like thunderclaps to her ears.

She then spotted Jin-Woo raising his hand. Seeing the tip of his hand slowly approach her face, Esil could only squeeze her eyes shut in terror.

However....

‘...Uh?’

His hand lightly rested on her shoulder, instead. The warmth spreading from her shoulder prompted her to open her eyes just a little. Jin-Woo’s face was oh-so close to hers. As if he was waiting for her to open her eyes, he began smiling brightly right away.

“You really worked hard until now. Thank you.”

With that, it was done.

Jin-Woo thought that he made a good-enough goodbye just then, and he took large strides to enter the floor-transfer magic circle.

Tti-ring.

[Floors 1 to 96 have been opened.]

[Which floor would you like to transfer to?]

He turned around to look at Esil’s face, and he saw the emotions of surprise and wistful longing forming the perfect two halves of her expression.

Terror, anxiety, shock, wistfulness....

Those were the range of emotions the monsters with intelligence had shown him.

Were they truly residents of another world, just as Esil said, or were they simply figments of the System’s imagination, brought to reality for this dungeon?

‘I can’t tell that yet, but....’

If he continued to gather more clues in this manner, eventually he’d get to understand the true identity of the System as well as what it wanted from him.

Meanwhile, the hesitant Esil finally mustered up some courage to call out to Jin-Woo.

“Uhm, excuse me....”

But, almost at the same time, Jin-Woo raised his head and replied to the System message.

“97th floor.”

97, 98, 99....

Jin-Woo finally acquired the ‘key’ to enter the abode of the Demon King.

[Item: Entry Permit]

Rarity: ??

Type: ??

A permit allowing you to enter the 100th floor of the Demon's Castle. Can only be used on the 99th floor's floor-transfer magic circle.

Just how much hardship did he have to go through for this thing? Before entering the 100th floor where the Demon King was waiting for his arrival, Jin-Woo checked out his Status first.

[Level: 93]

His level was already knocking on 100's doorway. He could sense his increased Stats throughout his entire body. Strength flowed in every corner of his body, and his senses were so much sharper than before. His condition was at its peak.

'Very good.'

Jin-Woo summoned the Store. He topped up his HP and MP with potions bought from there. He even bought some bandages as well. Just like before, he wrapped it around the right hand holding the dagger. It had been a long time since he felt this nervous.

Once he was done, he slowly moved his body this way and that.

Swish....

Slice....

'Hmm, it's not too bad, I guess?'

His movement gradually picked up speed, his limbs moving accurately according to his commands.

Faster! Even faster!

Jin-Woo left behind countless after-images in the air but quite suddenly, he stopped moving altogether. Hot steam rose up like a fog from his shoulders.

Should he say this was sufficient for a warm-up?

Whatever the case might have been, he was finished with his preparations now.

"Fuu...."

Jin-Woo inhaled and exhaled a big chunk of air, before stepping onto the floor-transfer magic circle. Just like before, the magic circle asked for his destination, and Jin-Woo confidently replied.

"100th floor."

By the time he blinked, the surroundings had already changed. Jin-Woo surveyed his new surroundings.

'There are no flames here?'

The horrifying flames that seemingly burned for all eternity on the lower floors were all gone, and he could only see the burnt-out remains. He raised head and spotted snowflakes falling from the sky.

'....Snow?'

The colour seemed a little off for real snowflakes, so he extended his hand out. The flakes falling on his hand didn't melt down, weirdly enough. When he took a closer look, he realised that it was actually ash.

Ash was falling from the sky like snow.

It was then.

Tti-ring.

He heard the familiar mechanical beep. Jin-Woo's sharpened glare was directed to the distant skies above.

'So, it's above me....'

Soon, the System alerted him to the entrance of the enemy via its trusty messages.

[The Demon King Baran has discovered the intruder!]

A black dot that wandered in the sky....

That black dot gradually got closer to the ground, before settling down on a spot pretty far away. It was a winged lizard-like creature.

After successfully landing on the ground, the lizard flapped its large wings and screeched out aloud.

Kiiiiieeeehhk!!

Just above the head of the lizard, Jin-Woo saw a face of a demon, with a certain blue aura oozing out from it. A male creature kitted out in a flashy set of armour that only royalty might wear, while riding on the back of the large winged lizard....

The four words could clearly be seen above the male demon's head.

[The Demon King, Baran]

This boss was emitting an extraordinary aura.

Cold sweat formed on Jin-Woo's forehead. As befitting the boss protecting

the top floor of a dungeon this massive, the creature was full of magnificent splendour.

Jin-Woo's gaze shifted to the side of the boss, however.

'Mm?'

The lizard this boss was riding on also possessed a name of its own.

[The Sky Dragon Kaisellin]

'...Sky Dragon?'

Judging from its name and its appearance, it didn't look like a demon at all.

'Wait a minute.... If it's not a demon, then could I....?'

Even if he worked his butt off to kill demons, he couldn't extract their shadows. So, he had already given up on acquiring a useful shadow in this place. But, what if it was a non-demon monster that could also fly?

'.....I want it.'

If he could extract its shadow, then definitely he would.

This would be the first time he ran into a shadow he so dearly wanted to extract since encountering the leader of the White Phantoms, Baruka. Jin-Woo swallowed his dry saliva.

It was then, Baran raised its hand towards the sky.

Tti-ring.

[The Demon King Baran has activated 'Skill: The Army of Hell'.]

'...The Army of Hell??'

Tti-ring, tti-ring, tti-ring.

Several warning bells rang one after the other in Jin-Woo's ears.

[Demon Soldiers have been summoned!]

[Demon Knights have been summoned!]

[Demon Generals have been summoned!]

Along with the messages filling up his view, an army entirely consisting of demons appeared around the Demon King. Even at a casual glance, there must've been over a thousand of them.

'So, this must be the beginning.'

Jin-Woo also released all of his hidden magic energy.

When Baran arrogantly lowered the hand pointing at the sky in the direction of Jin-Woo, the demonic army rushed at him like a black tide.

Rumble-!!

The ground vibrated from the forceful march of the demons.

Jin-Woo stared at the Demon King's army as the corner of his lips arched up.

'I also have soldiers too, you know.'

Jin-Woo opened his mouth.

"My shadows...."

In the blink of an eye, Jin-Woo's shadow spread out to all the surrounding areas. He had activated the skill, 'Sovereign's Territory'. When the Demon King's army set foot within the darkened land, Jin-Woo finally summoned his Shadow Soldiers.

"...Show yourselves."

His shadows stood up all at once to answer his call.

'...!!!'

Jin-Woo could acutely feel the confusion and panic among the enemies' ranks.

Wuuooooohhh!!

Kkkrrroar!!

Immediately seizing upon this opening, the two 'physical' type Knight grade soldiers, Iron and Tank, ran forward with everything they had and crashed into the enemy.

Kaboom!!

"Kuwaahk!!"

"Kehgehk!!"

Dozens of demons screamed and were flung away from the absurd strengths of the two Shadow Soldiers. Right behind them, over one hundred soldiers rushed forward like a black tidal wave.

And the highlight of this opening salvo obviously belonged to Igrit!

He jumped lightly over the head of Iron and landed gently on the ground, before using the swords he held in each hand to cut and slice apart every demon he could find.

“Kiieehhk!!”

“Keuhark!!”

It was a performance befitting the grade of ‘Elite Knight’.

‘By the way, Igrit isn’t the only Elite Knight in my army, you know.’

Jin-Woo’s gaze shifted over to his side.

Fangs had finished gigantifying himself by then, and walked forward with large, heavy thuds as if to emphasize that it was his turn to fight. Jin-Woo formed a content expression as he watched Fangs’ large back.

Fuu-wuu-wuheup.

Fangs took a deep, deep breath. His chest puffed up noticeably. Jin-Woo quickly recalled all the Shadow Soldiers found in front of Fangs, so his giant soldier could attack without holding anything back. The soldiers reverted to shadows, and shifted to the new location Jin-Woo pointed with his finger.

And then.....

Kuwuuuuuuu....

Massive, ferocious pillar of flames spewing out from Fangs’ mouth completely vaporised the demons on the ground. The flames didn’t stop there, though.

Kuwuuuuuuu.....

Fangs moved his head left to right, and utterly incinerated all demons trapped with the arc of the attack. All those poor demons swallowed up by the flames couldn’t even leak out a scream.

A few Shadow Soldiers were sucked into the attack in the process as well, but as long as they were under the influence of their Sovereign, it was possible to infinitely revive them.

‘Very good!’

Jin-Woo clenched his fists tightly.

One hundred-plus Shadow Soldiers were overwhelming the army over ten times their numbers. The demonic soldiers and their ranks crumbled in no time at all.

But, it was then.

Baran stopped standing back passively, and finally made his move. Countless arcs of blue sparks buzzed and crackled within the wide-open mouth of the boss creature.

Gahaaaaahark!

Along with that hair-raising yell, a chill-inducing beam of blue light enveloped the Shadow Soldiers.

Kwa-bzzzzzzzzzz!!

‘...*Lightning?!*’

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened from sheer surprise.

Soldiers getting swept up in the blue electrical storm disintegrated in an instant, while those that managed to avoid instant death stood still in their spots as if they were frozen solid.

‘...*It’s not regular lightning.*’

Lightning bolts containing horrifying destructive power, as well as side-effects of stunning their targets, fell all over the place. And of course, one of these blue-coloured electrical storms also headed for Jin-Woo as well.

Cra-ckle!!

Quite unlike his Shadow Soldiers, he didn’t receive a single lick of damage, however.

All burn-related damage was absorbed by the ‘Wind Robe’ he currently had on, and....

[You have resisted abnormal status with the effects of ‘Buff: Immunity’.]

[You have resisted abnormal status with the effects of ‘Buff: Immunity’.]

[You have resisted abnormal status with the effects of ‘Buff: Immunity’.]

....As for the lightning’s stun effect, his abnormal status immunity buff dealt with it.

Jin-Woo dashed towards Baran right away. If he didn’t stop the boss’s AOE magic right now, there was a good chance that the flow of battle would shift away from his favour.

Baran’s glare landed on Jin-Woo.

Gahaaaaahk!!

Another ear-screeching yell exploded out from the boss’s wide open mouth, and blue streaks of lightning rained all around Jin-Woo.

Crackle, crack, crackle!!

However, Baran flinched grandly upon realising that the concentrated lightning attacks had no effect on Jin-Woo.

‘.....!!’

He sensed the boss’s agitation quite clearly.

Utilising the skill ‘Dash’ that had reached the maximum achievable level, Jin-Woo closed the distance in the blink of an eye and jumped up high in the air. Baran also unsheathed its sword.

Jin-Woo’s reverse-gripped ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ and the Demon King’s blade, infused with bluish flames, clashed face to face.

BOOM!!

A huge explosion of noise spread out; Baran was shoved off the Sky Dragon, while Jin-Woo was flung away by the rebound as well.

Jin-Woo stopped rolling on the ground and got up at the same time as Baran. They glared at each other only for a brief moment.

Both of them dashed towards each other with everything they had almost out of pure instinct.

Gaaaaaahk!!

Baran spat out more blue sparks from his mouth.

Craaaack!! Crack!!

Countless blue-coloured rays of light crashed down on him. Jin-Woo continued to run forward while believing in the defensive properties of the robe, but then, he sensed something was off.

‘...It’s getting hotter?’

When he glanced back, he realised that the end of the robe was on fire. He quickly threw off the robe.

‘I guess that’s as far as the robe can protect me.’

In the end, it was an artefact crafted by humans. It had already performed its job quite admirably up to this point, so he felt no regret. From here onwards, Jin-Woo had to take care of things on his own.

He swallowed his saliva.

Gaaahhhak!!

As if it had sensed that an opportunity had arrived, the intensity of the blue sparks crackling within Baran’s mouth increased by a notch. Jin-Woo heightened his senses as much as he could to get ready.

‘I can do this.’

No, he simply had to do this.

With time slowing down substantially in his perspective, Jin-Woo calmly evaded each and every single one of the blue arcs of lightning flying right at him.

‘...Why is this happening?’

Craaackle!

As Baran’s figure got closer and closer, Jin-Woo began recalling his memories of the Demon’s Castle one by one. Even during that, he still managed to evade the blue lightnings.

Craaaaackle!!

His heart was beating quite gently right now.

Ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump....

Jin-Woo dodged all of Baran’s attacks by a truly paper-thin margin, and eventually, stood before the Demon King.

‘...Ah.’

Only then did he finally realise why he was reminiscing about the events of the Demon’s Castle like this. Because, he was feeling grateful.

‘Thanks.’

To grant him this great power to fight evenly against an absurdly strong monster like this....

As he climbed up each floor, he was moulded and refined further and further. It was as if he was being trained precisely for this moment.

So, how could he not feel grateful right now?

Swish-!

Baran slashed down diagonally with his sword, and Jin-Woo raised ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ in his right hand to block it, before using the ‘Knight Killer’ to stab the Demon King’s shoulder.

Crack!!

The weapon designed specifically to tear through the enemy’s armour dug deeply into Baran’s shoulder.

‘.....!!’

Jin-Woo momentarily thought that he could hear Baran’s soundless scream just then. He yanked the ‘Knight Killer’ out. Flames of rage erupted within

Baran's eyes. The Demon King began panting out rather laboriously.

Finally, the boss made his move.

Jin-Woo's two daggers and Baran's sword swished and swung and clashed against each other countless times, leaving behind several wounds on their bodies.

Clang!! Claaaank!! Clang, clunk!!

Every time their blades collided, the ground around the two caved in by the shock waves emanating from the collision of the magic energy.

A deep frown formed on Jin-Woo's forehead.

'Even with such a deep wound on his shoulder....'

As befitting the title of the Demon King, Baran's powers were nothing to scoff at. Jin-Woo felt aching coming from his wrists. He realised that he'd be in a disadvantageous position if things continued on in this fashion.

'I need to break this deadlock.'

Jin-Woo and Baran both had two hands. However, Jin-Woo also possessed a hidden third hand.

'Ruler's Reach!'

Out of the blue, a powerful impact force pushed Baran down on one knee.

Thud!

'....??'

Even before Baran could recover from his confusion, Jin-Woo's fist slammed hard into the Demon King's face.

Ka-boom!!

Baran's uncontrollable tumbling only came to an end after it rolled on the ground for dozens of metres. However, it couldn't get up. Because, Jin-Woo was already straddling the torso of the Demon King by then.

Baran quickly opened its mouth wide towards him.

Gah-ark!

Too bad, Baran couldn't fire off another lightning. Jin-Woo's left fist shoved deep into the Demon King's mouth ensured that the 'spell' would remain sealed.

'.....!!'

Baran's eyes shook hard.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo raised his fist up high, choosing not to use the dagger wrapped around his hand.

Slam!!

Boom!!

Slam!!

Kaboom!!

The terrifying physical power from the Strength Stat that had exceeded 200 rapidly shaved away the boss monster's HP.

And finally....

Jin-Woo placed almost all of his strength into the raised right fist.

Fuu-huup!

In an instant, his shoulder and arm muscles expanded greatly, and the air around him became so heavy that it actually sank lower. An enormous amount of magic energy pooling around his right arm forced all sounds away, and instantly, the surroundings became eerily quiet.

‘.....’

Within this brief respite of silence, Jin-Woo looked down at the boss below him and murmured.

“Thanks for everything.”

Of course, there was no reply. The Demon King only glared at Jin-Woo with hatred deeply burning in its eyes.

‘I’m sure you’ll never understand what I’m trying to say here.’

Even then, he wanted to convey this emotion welling up inside his chest.

After he gave his honest thanks...

Jin-Woo landed the final hit against the ‘owner’ of this Demon’s Castle.

KABOOM!!

And then, he was greeted by the sound of ‘Tti-ring!’ as well as several messages that made him feel even better.

[You killed the Demon King, Baran.]

[You have acquired Baran’s Soul.]

[You have completed ‘Quest: Collect the Souls of Demons! (2)’.]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]



Chapter 108 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Fuu...”

Jin-Woo spat out a short sigh of relief.

This was the moment his long march that started from the very first floor of the Demon’s Castle dungeon was drawing to a close here on this 100th floor.

He closed his eyes for a moment in order to get a grip on his turbulent emotions, only for the image of his mom’s face to pop up.

‘...’

When he reopened his eyes, the System messages that hadn’t gone away yet entered his view again. Four alerts of him levelling up floated up there.

‘I rose up four levels in one go?’

Jin-Woo’s expression brightened up considerably. Thinking back to how his levelling speed had slowed down to a crawl after he broke past level 90, he couldn’t help but revel in happiness.

He quickly checked his Status Window.

[Level: 97]

Indeed, his level had jumped up by four.

‘Niiice!!’

Jin-Woo fist-pumped.

A dizzying sense of achievement was quickly added on top of the relief he felt from finally clearing this dungeon. However, he quickly put aside this joy to the back of his mind.

He still had something far more important than levelling up right now.

‘The Purified Blood of the Demon King.’

That was the final puzzle piece to craft the item, ‘Divine Water of Life’. Jin-Woo quickly unwrapped the bandage off his hand and reached out towards the blinking lights on the corpse of the Demon King, Baran.

[You have discovered ‘Item: Demon Sovereign’s Ring’. Will you take it?]

[You have discovered 'Item: Demon King's Longsword'. Will you take it?]

[You have discovered 'Item: Demon King's Shortsword'. Will you take it?]

[You have discovered 'Item: Demon King's Shortsword'. Will you take it?]

[You have discovered 'Item: Baran's Two Horns'. Will you take it?]

[You have discovered 'Ingredient Item: Purified Blood of the Demon King'. Will you take it?]

Rather than feeling elated, Jin-Woo felt anxious instead from the list of 'item discovered' messages that continued to pop up. Because, he couldn't spot the item he was looking for. However, he cried out in excitement as soon as he spotted the very last item, 'Purified Blood of the Demon King'.

'It's here!'

Jin-Woo quickly acquired all the items and lifted up the item that must've been the Purified Blood of the Demon King.

[Ingredient Item: Purified Blood of the Demon King]

Rarity: ??

Type: Ingredient

This is the liquid created from purifying the blood of Baran, the Sovereign of the demons.

Possesses immense magical energy, but even after going through the purifying process, the blood still retains strong toxins. In order to use the blood as a medical ingredient, both the 'Fragment of the World Tree' and 'Spring Water from the Forest of Echoes' are needed to neutralize the toxin.

The red liquid sloshed inside a clear glass bottle according to the angle it was held.

'This is the blood of the Demon King...'

He already possessed the other two ingredients, 'Fragment of the World Tree' and the 'Spring Water from the Forest of Echoes'. So, what was there to hesitate about?

Jin-Woo promptly summoned the Crafting Skill Window.

[Crafting Skills]

Consumable: Divine Water of Life (3/3)

Different from the past, the words ‘Divine Water of Life’ was now blinking constantly. When he checked the details, the words ‘Crafting possible’ immediately caught his attention.

[Divine Water of Life]

[Will you start crafting ‘Item: Divine Water of Life’?]

Jin-Woo was in a hurry to see the finished article, so he didn’t waste any more time and chose to start the crafting process.

“Start.”

[Crafting process for ‘Item: Divine Water of Life’ has commenced.]

[10, 9, 8....]

Jin-Woo waited for the result with bated breath.

[7, 6, 5....]

[The ‘percentage of Crafting success’ and ‘number of finished items’ will depend on Crafter’s Intelligence Stat.]

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened.

‘Are you telling me only now that the odds of success, as well as the number of completed items, will depend on the Intelligence Stat?!’

If you were stupid, then you couldn’t even craft anything?

....It did sound somewhat logical, so Jin-Woo could only nod his head.

In the meantime, the countdown steadily ticked on.

[4, 3, 2....]

Why did the words ‘percentage of Crafting success’ get on his nerves so much? The only solace he could take away right now was the fact that he had at least woke up to the importance of the Intelligence Stat quickly enough to invest a lot of extra Stat points there.

[...1, 0.]

[Crating process has been completed!]

[Crafting is a success!]

[You have acquired ‘Item: Divine Water of Life x6’.]

“That’s what I’m talking about!!”

Jin-Woo had been waiting anxiously until then, but as soon as the ‘Success!’ message popped up, he raised his hands high up into the sky.

‘...Huh?’

However, he quickly discovered something a bit odd. The bottle containing the blood of the Demon King still remained in his right hand.

‘Well, uh, the amount of blood has decreased by a little, but...’

Jin-Woo tilted his head, before summoning the ‘Fragment of the World Tree’ and the ‘Spring Water from the Forest of Echoes’ from his Inventory.

The only thing that appeared on the ground was the slightly-shaved-on-the-edge Fragment of the World Tree, though. He accessed his Inventory and searched, but couldn’t find the Spring Water anywhere.

‘Could it be....?’

Feeling a bit suspicious, he confirmed the Crafting Skill Window, and his suspicion was soon answered in full.

-Ingredients:

Out of the three ingredients, only the Spring Water showed ‘0’.

‘So, it’s something like, not all the ingredients will be used up, but only the necessary amount – is that it?’

The Crafting process must’ve come to a stop because the Spring Water from the Forest of Echoes had run out, unlike with other two ingredients.

From the get-go, he got this feeling that the Crafting process wouldn’t have required a lot of the Demon King’s blood. As for the Fragment of the World Tree, it was a gigantic piece of lumber when he had initially acquired it, to begin with.

It was rather obvious that the Spring Water contained within a small bottle would be the first one to run out.

Jin-Woo grinned widely in satisfaction.

‘Well, it’s not a bad result for me regardless.’

Because, as long as he could find more of that ‘Spring Water from the Forest of Echoes’ in the future, he’d get to craft more of this Divine Water of Life.

‘Hold on, there’s another problem to consider, isn’t there?’

Jin-Woo was desperate for a bottle of this Divine Water, yet now, there were six wooden bottles waiting for him on the ground, so it was rather difficult for him to calm his wildly beating heart.

[Item: Divine Water of Life]

Rarity: S

Type: Consumable

A mysterious liquid medicine that cures any and all illnesses through powerful magic contained within. The effect will only manifest after one whole bottle has been consumed.

Would this item truly cure his mother's illness?

'...I guess I'll find out later today.'

His heart palpitated faster.

Jin-Woo carefully stored away all six bottles in his Inventory, as well as the remaining ingredients. Even then, he still had lots of other items to go through.

'One ring, one longsword, two shortswords and two japtems.'

Because Baran was the boss of a rank S dungeon, it sure coughed up a lot of loot. This proverbial pile of treasure was a sight for sore eyes, but there was no reason to go through all of them right now.

Indeed, his priority lay with getting out of here to see his mother.

Jin-Woo simply dumped all the items acquired from the corpse of the Demon King in his trusty Inventory. And then, while lightly dusting his hands, took a look around him.

'I've got a pressing matter to attend to, but...'

...But, he shouldn't miss out on other things because of that, no?

Wasn't there an old saying about 'the more of a hurry you are in, you should take the longer of the routes available' or some such?

Jin-Woo looked behind him, and found his Shadow Soldiers standing at attention in rows, having massacred an army ten times their number. Behind his boys, dead demons were strewn about everywhere.

'What about the Sky Dragon?'

Jin-Woo's wandering gaze hurriedly searched for the monster that the Demon King rode around in. Worryingly enough, all he could spot were the corpses of demons piled up on high, with not a hint of the Sky Dragon anywhere.

'Wait, it couldn't have flown away during the fight, right?'

Thankfully though, his worries didn't last for long. Iron was dragging a limp corpse behind him. It was none other than the Sky Dragon, Kaisellin.

“Iron, nicely done.”

Maybe Iron felt embarrassed by Jin-Woo’s praise, which was a first in a while, because he began scratching the back of his head. Of course, it was still the back of his helmet, though.

Jin-Woo lightly patted the shoulder of Iron and stood before the Sky Dragon’s body.

‘It’s as I thought.’

Just as he suspected it from the monster’s name and its appearance, he could see the black smoke slowly rising up from the corpse of the Sky Dragon. Which meant, it was possible to extract its shadow.

Jin-Woo extended his hand out.

“Rise up.”

The Shadow Extraction worked without any problems whatsoever, perhaps due to his much higher level.

Kiyaaaahhk-!

Accompanied by the death throes of a beast, a creature covered in some type of black gas crawled out of the Sky Dragon’s shadow. The dead Dragon’s shadow immediately recognised his new owner and lowered his head in front of Jin-Woo.

[Please assign the name of the Shadow Soldier.]

‘Oh.’

Jin-Woo formed a surprised expression.

Since he didn’t get to witness the creature fighting, he only assumed it to be a mount and not much else, but it must’ve been pretty handy in battles, because the Sky Dragon’s shadow started right away as a Knight grade.

If he considered the fact that the ace of the Shadow Army, Igrit, was also a Knight grade not too long ago, this was a surprising development. But, then again, it made some sense. There was no way a boss referred to as the ‘Demon King’ would ride on a weak, pathetic monster, now was there?

Jin-Woo was genuinely satisfied with the grade of his new soldier, and replied to the System message.

“Kaisellin.... No, wait.”

Inexplicably, he thought that name was a bit too long.

“...Kaisel.”

The Sky Dragon, now bestowed with a brand new name, raised his head up high into the sky and spat out a lengthy roar.

Kiiiiieehhk!!

“Everyone, you all worked hard.”

With those words, Jin-Woo stored all of his Shadow Soldiers, including the new addition of Kaisal, back into his shadow. It was almost time to make his exit from the Demon’s Castle. There was one more thing still remaining, however.

Jin-Woo opened the inbox, where the quest completion messages were still waiting for him.

[You have completed ‘Normal Quest: Collect the Souls of Demons! (2).]

[Completion rewards are now available.]

[Will you confirm the rewards?] (Y/N)

‘Yes, obviously.’

As soon as he answered, the list of rewards popped up in his view.

Tti-ring.

[Following rewards are made available.]

[Will you take them all?]

The so-called ‘Shadow Exchange’ skill. Just what could it be?

As he had been curious about this ‘highest-grade’ Rune Stone ever since the beginning of the quest, Jin-Woo chose to take that one first.

‘Okay, I choose the first reward for the time being.’

Tti-ring.

[‘Highest grade Rune Stone: Shadow Exchange’ has been delivered.]

After that message came and gone, he felt a small rock residing within his palm. When he brought the hand closer to his nose and opened it, he found a jet-black Rune Stone resting there. Its colour was completely different from the ‘regular’ Rune Stones.

Also, its hue came across as so much more mysterious compared to the average black colour.

Crumble.

Unlike in the past, when he physically had to break the Stone, the item crumbled all on its own the moment he thought about squeezing his hand.

The pitch-black aura rising up from the shattered Rune Stone slowly enveloped Jin-Woo, before getting absorbed into his body.

He hurriedly checked his Skill Window.

[Skill: Shadow Exchange Lv.1]

Class-specific skill.

Mana required to activate: None.

The summoner can switch locations with the designated Shadow Soldier.

Once activated, you must wait three hours of ‘cool down’ period before being able to use the skill again. The ‘cool down’ period will change according to the Skill’s level.]

‘Heok!!!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened as he read the skill’s description.

Sure, it might be handicapped by the limitation of the cool down period, but... No, instead, it was an incredible skill that perhaps necessitated that cool down period to make it fair.

‘Doesn’t this mean it’s possible to switch locations regardless of where my Shadow Soldier is?’

Depending on how he used it, this was almost on the level of teleportation.

Jin-Woo was about to summon a Shadow Soldier and test this new skill out right away, but quickly changed his mind.

‘If I’m to test it out, I might as well try it with a soldier that’s really far away.’

Thankfully, he did leave behind a handful of soldiers outside the Demon’s Castle. He hid three of them in his sister’s shadow, while five were patrolling the district as of this moment.

‘There’s nothing to think about, is it?’

He didn’t know what kind of an after-effect the skill might have, and also, he couldn’t just haphazardly pop out near his sister’s location, either. And that was after setting aside the possibility of his sister freaking out, too.

So, he sought out the ‘signal’ emitted from one of the five Shadow Soldiers patrolling around his district and zeroed in on it.

“....Shadow Exchange.”

As soon as Jin-Woo opened his mouth...

“...Uh? Eh?”

As if gravity was powerfully pulling him down, he was rapidly sucked into his own shadow.



Chapter 109 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Just before Jin-Woo was completely swallowed up by his shadow, he heard another message issued by the System.

[The dungeon's interior will revert back to original appearance with the death of....]

The sensation of him falling didn't last long. Suddenly, the gravity's direction reversed, and he was now being lifted back up at the same speed as he was being sucked in.

His darkened vision reverted back to the original state in no time at all.

'Isn't this place....?'

Jin-Woo took a quick look around.

Tick, tick....

A street light that continued to flicker as if it was broken; a hand-pulled wooden cart leaning precariously against a wall; an electrical pole with a half-torn flier stiller stuck to it.

He found himself in a deserted alleyway he often had to walk past when heading back home.

'...Hey, this is the suburb I live in, isn't it?!'

Somewhat coincidentally, it was also the exact same spot where he issued the five shadows to start patrolling the district, as well.

'My location really changed.'

Jin-Woo did feel deeply stunned at the moment, but still, he somehow managed to remain calm as he checked the shadow beneath his feet. Just like when he summoned his Shadow Soldiers, he too rose up from the shadow. He cautiously poked his shadow with the tip of his foot.

'.....'

Back when he activated the skill, the shadow caved in as if he was stepping on the surface of water, but it was just a regular shadow now. Feeling genuinely impressed, Jin-Woo re-checked the Skill Window.

Just as the Skill description had stated, the 'cool down' period of three

hours was in effect.

[Skill: Shadow Exchange Lv. 1]

Class-specific Skill...

....Can be used again in ***[02:59:57]***.

'...I've struck gold.'

Having witnessed the awesomeness of this skill, Jin-Woo's heart pounded faster and faster.

'And it was so fast, too....'

He had been maintaining the peak state of concentration the moment he was sucked into the shadow. Considering the fact that the perceived time would greatly slow down when he was concentrating fully, the transfer to this location did really happen in the blink of an eye.

His saliva nosily slid down his throat.

This skill called Shadow Exchange – it possessed limitless application, depending on how he used it.

'Ah, right. This isn't the right time.'

Jin-Woo calmed his excitement down and withdrew his magic energy. He had finally managed to get his hands on a medicine that could potentially cure his mother, so he shouldn't be wasting time here like this.

Feeling a lot more urgent now, Jin-Woo switched his Hunter-issue mobile phone and confirmed the current time.

'It's already this late....?'

Jin-Woo's forehead creased up big time.

The touchscreen display showed ten in the evening. Although the visitation hours had long passed now, Jin-Woo didn't hesitate once as he summoned the shadow of the Sky Dragon.

'Kaisel.'

Kiiieehhk-!

Answering the call of his owner, Kaisel yelled out in joy and pushed his head out of the ground. And soon, a huge lizard-like creature the size of a truck with no arms but huge wings revealed itself.

When Kaisel spread open its vast wings, the already-narrow alleyway seemed to get filled to the brim in an instant. It was a small mercy that there

were no other people nearby, otherwise.....

Jin-Woo walked closer, and Kaisal lowered his body to allow ease of mounting. Jin-Woo duly did so.

Even though this was his first time, he already felt a sense of familiarity as if he had been riding on Kaisal for a long time. He figured that flying in the air wouldn't pose any problems since he felt this way.

'It doesn't matter if someone tries to stop me.'

He wasn't talking about the hospital staff – even if cops or the military tried to block him, he knew he had the power to break past them. And, at least for this moment, he didn't want anyone to obstruct his path.

'Let's go.'

Jin-Woo formed a serious expression and issued a command. Kaisal began beating his huge wings.

Kiieehhkk!!

Kaisal rose up in the air right away and quickly flew in the direction Jin-Woo pointed at.

A meeting was still taking place within the walls of the Hunters Association, even though the hours were getting late.

The Korea-Japan cooperative raid was already around the proverbial corner, and the Association was doing everything in their power to ensure the successful subjugation of Jeju Island's ant monsters.

"Here is the data sent by the Japanese."

The agent of the Association pressed a button on the remote. Soon, the giant screen was filled with the footage of the ant monsters, captured by the magic-power sensing camera attached to a Japanese satellite.

These were the records taken during the first, second and the third subjugation attempts. Goh Gun-Hui's eyes narrowed to a slit.

'Indeed, excluding the ant queen and its guards, every single ant did leave the ant tunnel.'

The ant monsters moved just as the Japanese said they would.

Although the existence of the guardian ants was a worrisome variable in the equation, it was also normal to find a few guardian-type monsters protecting their bosses within higher ranked dungeons, as well.

Still, it was hard to claim that there was no risk. The top man in the Korean

side of the operation, Goh Gun-Hui, quickly thought of one of the worst case situations.

“What are the odds of the ants turning around quicker than anticipated after realising their queen is in danger?”

The Japanese had already thought about that too, however.

“They have said they would use ‘interference radio wave’ signal.”

“Radio wave signal?”

“According to their research, they discovered that the ant monsters use specific radio waves to communicate among themselves.”

Indeed, if one wanted to order an army of several thousands as one unit, then a method to send out commands should exist. Goh Gun-Hui nodded his head.

“And they can interrupt the communication of ants with radio waves?”

“That’s what they said, sir.”

“So, they want us to fully concentrate on killing the ant queen, is it....”

The subjugation plan itself was quite simple.

Even though it was simple, there was a higher chance of succeeding when compared to other plans, as well.

Yet, why did Goh Gun-Hui feel so anxious like this?

He rested his chin on his hands.

‘Could it be that I’m worried about...’

It was then.

Goh Gun-Hui spun his head towards the outside of the window, his brows shooting up high. Everyone inside the meeting room flinched at the sudden movement of the Association President.

Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol, here to guard his boss from the side, rapidly walked in closer.

“Did something happen, sir?”

“Just now....”

Goh Gun-Hui shifted his gaze over to Woo Jin-Cheol. The latter’s expression remained the same as usual.

“Haven’t you felt that?”

“Sir? I don’t understand what you mean....”

“....”

Just now, an astonishing wave of magic power flooded in from a faraway place beyond the windows.

Although it only lasted for a brief moment and quickly disappeared from Goh Gun-Hui’s perception, he still had felt the full brunt of that.

‘.....’

As their Association President continued to stare into the distance outside the window, the agents had to stop the meeting and cautiously ask their boss.

“Sir....?”

Only then did Goh Gun-Hui shift his gaze away, his head still tilting side to side.

He wondered about the possible origin of that powerful burst of magic energy, but for the time being, he had to concentrate on the current meeting. Goh Gun-Hui fell into deep thought, before throwing a question at one of the agents in charge.

“Have you succeeded in getting in contact with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?”

Baek Yun-Ho asked, his head still looking over his shoulder.

“Did you sense that?”

Min Byung-Gu replied testily.

“I may be retired now, but my rank hasn’t dropped, you know.”

These two men had been sharing a bottle of cheap liquor for the first time in a long while inside a certain ‘pojangmacha’ until then, but now, only the heavy silence flowed between them. (TL note at the end)

Baek Yun-Ho eventually shifted his gaze back to his front.

“What was that just now?”

“Maybe Choi Jong-In and Cha Hae-In started fighting over the shares of the Hunters Guild. Who knows.”

Min Byung-Gu had been frozen on the spot with a shot glass in his hand, but suddenly broke out in a fit of giggles before emptying the soju down his throat. Baek Yun-Ho formed a dumbfounded expression.

“Don’t tell me you were trying to make me laugh with that.”

“But, wasn’t it funny, hyung?”

“....Never mind. Forget it.”

But, then again - including his sense of humour, Min Byung-Gu could be considered a bit strange in the head. No doubt about that.

‘I mean, he’s supposed to be the first rank S Hunter in the world to retire when he’s still all healthy and the like, isn’t he?’

Not only the first in the world, but he was also the only one so far, too.

Just how many people out there would willingly give up on the ridiculous amount of wealth a rank S Hunter could earn, simply because he wasn’t interested anymore?

Min Byung-Gu wasn’t even from a wealthy stock, to begin with.

Sensing Baek Yun-Ho’s questioning gaze, Min Byung-Gu asked back.

“Hyung. Are you really going to participate?”

“....Yeah.”

“But, you saw how Eun-Seok hyung died.”

“That’s why I must go back.”

Min Byung-Gu looked at his drinking partner with a bit of confusion on his face. Baek Yun-Ho emptied his shot glass and continued on.

“If we leave the ants alone, the entirety of South Korea would end up like that place.”

“Since when did you become this patriotic....?”

“Well, we’re supposed to do it sooner rather than later, so might as well come up with a nice-sounding excuse while I’m at it. Don’t you agree?”

The Guilds could not decline the Association’s summons. The Association would accommodate the needs of the various Guilds, and the Guilds themselves simply had to answer the Association’s call in return.

If one didn’t want to, then there was the option of emigrating to somewhere else. How unfortunate, then, that there was no sane-minded nation willing to accept a Hunter running away from a high-difficulty raid.

Even if a country did accept such a person, could anyone actually be sure of that said Hunter not pulling the exact same stunt again in the future?

‘I don’t want to run away, anyways.’

Baek Yun-Ho smirked to himself. Meanwhile, Min Byung-Gu bluntly replied.

“I won’t be participating. I will never go back there. If you asked to see me, hoping to change my mind, you might as well give.....”

“That’s not it.”

Baek Yun-Ho put the cash down for the alcohol and stood up. The bottle was empty by then.

“I came to say goodbye, just in case. I don’t know if we’ll get to sit down for a drink again, after all.”

“Hyung.....”

Min Byung-Gu gave up on changing Baek Yun-Ho’s mind, as he watched the latter wave his hand while walking away.

Baek Yun-Ho already knew full well the dangers of the subjugation plan, perhaps better than anyone else.

‘Even then, he’s still going.....’

Baek Yun-Ho’s expression wasn’t of someone being dragged away despite feeling deeply scared. No, rather, he carried the face of someone getting ready to step on and kill as many ants as he could with this opportunity, instead. Indeed, he seemed to be eagerly waiting for the day of the subjugation.

Min Byung-Gu could only chew on the snacks with a helpless expression on his face, only for his chopsticks to stop moving shortly thereafter.

‘Wait a minute..... I can’t think of that many Hunters who don’t like fighting against monsters, now can I?’

There were a few like that among the Healers, but on the flip side, those folks simply loved to heal others, instead.

Min Byung-Gu dazedly stared at the bowl of oden soup, before roughly scratching the side of his head.

‘Could it be that only those who like fighting become Awakened?’

Eii, there was no way that could be true.

Min Byung-Gu found something to be rather funny, and laughed all by himself while finishing the oden.

Jin-Woo quickly arrived in the hospital.

‘Let’s see..... It was room number 305, right?’

He wasn’t planning to enter the hospital through the front door, to begin with. While still riding on Kaisel, he searched for the windows of his mother’s hospital room.

‘Ruler’s Reach.’

The curtains covering the windows silently parted sideways. He saw the quietly-sleeping sight of his mother on the bed. She looked exactly the same as the last time he came to visit.

Jin-Woo used ‘Ruler’s Reach’ one more time to open the window and silently stepped into the hospital room. Kaisal had disappeared into his shadow by then.

He soon stood by the side of the bed. His heart was pounding madly now that the time he had been waiting for so long was here.

‘If something goes wrong, I won’t be able to do anything.’

His mother had been unconscious for a very long time. There was a chance that she might not even be able to swallow the Divine Water of Life, and even if she did, there was no guarantee that she’d be okay afterwards.

‘However...’

Jin-Woo got to witness plenty of miracles the System caused so far.

If it happened to someone else, he’d never have believed a word of it. One didn’t even have to look far for tangible evidence, either. Wasn’t he the walking proof of those miracles?

‘I was a rank E, yet now look at me standing here.’

All of his achievements, they were due to the System’s powers. Jin-Woo wordlessly stared at his two hands, before raising his head.

His mother lay right in front of his eyes, looking as if she’d wake up at any moment if he called out to her. He summoned the ‘Divine Water of Life’ from the Inventory.

Shururu....

On top of his hand, a wooden bottle materialised out of the blue. He read the item information over and over again, just in case he might have missed something important.

And so, by the time he had thoroughly memorised every word in the item information by repeatedly reading it over and over again, he managed to build up enough courage to pull the cork off of the wooden bottle.

Pop.

His hands that stayed steady during the life-or-death battle against the Demon King were trembling greatly now. Jin-Woo took a deep, deep breath to calm his mind.

'If I make a mistake here, my mother will bear the cost, instead.'

The moment he told himself there could not be any mistake whatsoever, he was able to regain the usual calmness right away. Even his hands stopped shaking.

'...I'm fine now.'

Jin-Woo cautiously supported the back of his mother's, Park Gyung-Hye's, neck with his left hand. He then brought the mouth of the wooden bottle closer to her lips.

Soon, the 'Divine Water of Life' slowly trickled into her slightly parted lips. Jin-Woo didn't rush it and made sure to let only a tiny strand enter her mouth.

'This wound....'

He then noticed the burn marks on the side of his mom's neck. The burns continued down the back of her neck, too.

Although he couldn't see it from this angle, Jin-Woo knew only too well that the burn mark extended from the entirety of the back of her neck and her shoulders to some part of her head.

'She got that because of me, after all.'

Back then, he only wanted to wash his mother's hair, inside the public bathhouse. He wanted to emulate what his mother did, when she washed the hair of very young Jin-Ah.

However, the young Jin-Woo, who never had much of an opportunity to visit public bathhouses before, lacked the ability to tell apart the temperature of the water.

Splash, splash....

The very hot water, hot enough to bubble up, filled up the plastic wash basin. The young Jin-Woo did his very best not to spill any of the hot water and cautiously walked to the back of his mom.

And then....

Splash!

He poured the water out of the plastic basin.

Mom flinched a little, but didn't move from the spot even when her flesh was visibly cooked red. All because, she feared that the hot water might end up on Jin-Ah's face. She simply held her daughter tight in her embrace.

She didn't make any noise.

The belated screams came from not his mother, but from the mouths of the aunts nearby.

“Oh, my god!! Someone, help!”

“Jin-Woo's mom!”

Only then did Jin-Woo realise he did something bad. But, all he wanted to do was to help his mother.

Jin-Woo dropped the plastic basin and began crying, but his mom tightly grasped his shoulders. And then, asked him.

“Jin-Woo? Are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere?”

The young Jin-Woo thought that he'd be scolded for sure. He could never forget the events of that day and those words his mother said to him. Not even now.

‘And here I am, thinking that I don't owe anyone anything....’

After their father went missing, it was mom alone who raised the siblings Jin-Woo and Jin-Ah.

He hated owing someone, or someone owing him, so he made sure that such a thing never happened, but still....

He owed his mother a debt that he could never possibly repay.

It was then.

The very last drop entered his mother's mouth.

Jin-Woo put the bottle down and carefully laid her on the bed again. He stood quietly to the side as if he was praying to someone while waiting for the result.

Thump, thump, thump!!

His heart pounded so much that his chest actually ached. Nervous saliva travelled down his throat, too.

‘.....’

However, there was no visible change.

Just as a drop of blood from Jin-Woo's tightly clenched fist was about to fall....

“Heo-heok!!”

Her eyes still closed, mom sucked in a deep breath like a person getting

rescued from drowning.

‘.....!!!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened.

A little bit of colour was returning to mom’s once-slightly pale face. Like colour spreading on the black and white TV screen, a healthy complexion was spreading over his mother’s skin.

Every passing second felt like an hour to him.

How much time did pass like that?

Jin-Woo’s mother slowly opened her eyes. Her gaze wandered around for a moment or two, before stopping at Jin-Woo.

“Who.... No, wait, could you be... Jin-Woo?”

Jin-Woo’s heart nearly fell just then, but he managed to nod his head a little.

It was obvious that she didn’t recognise him right away. Four years had passed by already, and he had grown by a lot since then, too.

Jin-Woo didn’t rush things and quietly waited.

Like water slowly filling up an empty bowl, blurry memories of the past filled up the empty hole of the last four years in Jin-Woo’s mother, Park Gyung-Hye’s mind bit by bit.

It didn’t take her a long time to realise why she was lying on the hospital bed like this.

“How long have I been lying here, son?”

“It’s been four years, mom.”

He could’ve also added that it was four years and a few days, but he didn’t. His mother currently needed as much calmness, a sense of stability, so he did his best to sound and look normal.

But, mom was still taken back by the revelation of four years, and she hurriedly asked him.

“What about Jin-Ah?? Is your sister alright??”

It was then, Jin-Woo felt something powerful welling up from deep within his heart.

She had been teetering on the edge of life and death for the last four years, yet the first thing she asked after waking up was the well-being of her

daughter.....

If he hadn't bitten down on his lower lip, he might have broken down right there and then.

'It's no time to worry about that girl, you know.'

He wanted to say that out loud. But, he suppressed his emotions and formed a thin smile, instead.

"Yes, mom. She's doing okay."

His mother sighed, her expression one of genuine relief.

Jin-Woo was inwardly concerned, hoping that his mother would start worrying about herself soon, but at the same time, he began to relax somewhat as his mother seemingly hadn't changed at all.

'Things will go back to how it's been, soon.'

Finally recognising that mom's illness had been cured, his heart palpitated again. But then, he was jolted out of his thoughts. Mom was holding his left hand even before he had noticed it.

"Mom?"

"Thank you, son. You kept your promise."

Promise?

'...Ah, I forgot.'

Then again, he had always thought it was the most obvious thing in the world, so it was possible that he didn't consciously see it as a promise.

The so-called 'Eternal Sleep' disorder, where you'd fall deeper and deeper into slumber, until you'd never wake up again....

It became harder for mom to carry on with her daily life as drowsiness frequently assaulted her without warning with every passing day. Out of the blue, though, she asked Jin-Woo for a favour.

She carried a smile of a mother asking her child for a simple errand back then.

That was why he had been enduring until now. He didn't resent her at all. Because all he did was to take over the burden his mother had been carrying until then.

However, mom tightly squeezed his hand as if she knew everything.

"My son.... It must've been hard for you."

Jin-Woo tried to smile like he had done before to assuage his mother's worries. As if nothing of note had happened until then.

Unfortunately, he couldn't do that.

All the tears he held back until then travelled down his face, and his lips parted all on their own.

“Yeah.”



Chapter 110 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“What was that??”

The director of Seoul-Ilsin Hospital, Doctor Lee Seong-Chul got to hear a rather stunning piece of news. A patient suffering from ‘Eternal Sleep’ disorder had woken up from the terminal stage of the illness.

“Are you telling me the truth??”

“Yes, Director. I’ve confirmed it personally.”

As a doctor, his ears would perk up greatly if such an event occurred in someone else’s hospital, yet the patient in question was actually in his own??

“Who knew such a jackpot would come knocking at my door?”

The exceptional brain of Director Lee Seong-Chul began punching some numbers in his mental calculator.

“Isn’t this an unprecedented event in the whole world?”

“You’re correct, Director.”

The doctor in charge nodded his head.

Lee Seong-Chul’s smile was so wide that it actually broke past his ears and threatened to rip his face in half.

“Nicely done!! Doctor Choi!!”

“I beg your pardon? D-director, I haven’t done....”

“Ehheii, my man, don’t be like that now!”

Lee Seong-Chul sent a meaningful gaze at the doctor in charge.

“It doesn’t matter ‘how’ it happened, we can always cook something up later. But, it’s only right and proper that the doctor in charge is praised for the work well done when a patient gets better! Am I wrong?”

Not to mention, the hospital that the doctor was working in would be praised, too!

“Ah, y-yes.... T-thank you very much, director.”

The doctor in charge gave in and bowed his head slightly to the director.

Even though the doctor's response was rather lukewarm, the wide smile on Lee Seong-Chul's face didn't want to leave him, knowing that he had been blessed with an unexpected boon.

'If we play our cards right, the world's attention might gather on my Ilsin Hospital!!'

Being constantly talked about by other people because of a good piece of news was, in a word, free publicity. There was nothing to lose here, and everything to gain.

If this news got out, reporters from all over the world would descend upon this hospital and absolutely lose their minds trying to uncover any related info, however small or insignificant it was.

This was a great opportunity to advertise the hospital's name without spending a dime.

'What those reporters want to know would be the treatment method, but...'

Well, all he had to do was to keep the patient nearby and find out what happened a step at a time. Indeed, nothing could go wrong here. That's what Lee Seong-Chul thought.

The doctor in charge acted as if something was troubling him and cautiously spoke up.

"The patient's legal guardian requested for immediate discharge."

"What was that?!"

No, that definitely could not be allowed!

Reporters would only come to the hospital if the patient was still here! No, never mind the reporters, he needed to keep the patient here in order to figure out how the disorder had been cured, to begin with!

Lee Seong-Chul's brows quivered.

"What was the status of the patient?"

"Everything was normal, director."

"The patient's been asleep, completely immobile, for the past four years, yet you are telling me that her body was completely fine??"

"Couldn't it be because of the life support machines?"

"H-mm....."

Indeed, the performance of the machines being too good could also be a

factor here.

“Delay the discharge for as long as possible with an excuse that... we need to observe the patient for a while longer to make sure she’s fine.”

“I said the exact same thing to the guardian, but it didn’t work, Director.”

‘We can’t keep a patient here without a valid reason if she wishes to leave, can we.....’

If that was the case, then he had only one option remaining – and that would be to let the world know before the patient left the hospital.

“Let’s alert the press while they are still in the premise.”

The doctor in charge shook his head.

“That will be.... difficult, Director.”

“How come?”

“We can’t expose the identity of the patient. If we handle this poorly, something really bad will happen, Director.”

Hearing those unexpected words, Lee Seong-Chul could only form a flustered expression. Seeing the doctor’s own troubled expression, he didn’t seem to be exaggerating things, either.

Lee Seong-Chul’s attitude became a lot more serious.

“Is the patient such an important person?”

“It’s not the patient herself, but the guardian, well.... The protection of the private information has been requested by the guardian himself, actually.”

Now that Lee Seong-Chul thought about it, Doctor Choi was being super respectful whenever he mentioned the legal guardian.

“Just who is this guardian supposed to be that you’re acting like this?”

What kind of a person was the guardian that the hospital had to honour the request for the protection of the patient’s information, as well as Doctor Choi being this polite?

“Have you heard about Mister Seong Jin-Woo?”

“Seong Jin-Woo?”

Was he a powerful politician? Or, a CEO of some massive corporation?

Lee Seong-Chul thought that he had heard of the name somewhere, but couldn’t quite recall the face, and helplessly tilted his head. As if he expected

this to happen, the doctor in charge quickly offered up an explanation.

“He’s the Hunter who was evaluated as a rank S recently.”

“A rank S!!”

Here was the reason why Doctor Choi was being so cautious. Who would have guessed that the patient’s guardian happened to be a rank S Hunter?

‘This... It’ll be the end for us if we make a rash move and things go sideways as a result.’

The influence a rank S Hunter had over society was extensive, to begin with, but more importantly, if such a Hunter lost his cool and decided to rampage around, then....

Lee Seong-Chul nervously swallowed dry saliva when a rather unexpected name was brought up.

‘That sure was too close for comfort....’

His hardened expression suddenly softened into a cheery smile.

“Begin the discharge procedure right away.”

“Indeed, we should do that.”

“Yes, we must.”

A smile of a good-natured person remained on Lee Seong-Chul’s lips.

They should definitely release the patient now. What were they hoping to gain by getting on the bad side of a rank S Hunter? He quickly came with a logical-sounding excuse that contained the rough meaning of what both of them were thinking about.

“We surely can’t force a perfectly healthy person to remain cooped up in a hospital, now can we?”

“Indeed, Director.”

The doctor in charge quickly stood up from his seat.

And after he left....

“Whew....”

Lee Seong-Chul stared at the now-closed door to the director’s office and spat out a sigh of relief.

As soon as she got the call, Jin-Ah dropped everything and rushed to the hospital.

Jin-Woo had been sitting on a chair next to mom’s bed, and when he sensed

his fast-approaching sister, quickly stood up. Right then, the door to his mom's hospital room was flung open.

“Mom?? Mom!!”

She hadn't even crossed the doorway yet, but Jin-Ah's face was already a messy mixture of streaming tears and snot falling from her nose.

“Oh, my gosh. My little girl, you've grown up so much.”

The last time their mom, Park Gyung-Hye, saw her daughter was when she was still in middle school. She gazed at her grown-up daughter with a surprised expression, but shortly afterwards, opened her arms wide to welcome Jin-Ah with a warm smile on her face.

When that happened....

“Mom!!”

Jin-Ah tightly embraced her mother.

Jin-Woo hesitated slightly. That wasn't something she should have done to a patient who regained her consciousness after four years of being in a coma. But, seeing his sister crying her eyes out like that while locked in their mother's embrace, he couldn't bring himself to stop her.

“Mom, Mom.....”

She always acted all grown-up, but in the end, Jin-Ah was still a kid inside. The energetic and brave everyday appearance of Jin-Ah overlapped with the current sobbing one, and that stung Jin-Woo's nostrils a bit.

“That is eno....”

Jin-Woo eventually moved in to separate Jin-Ah, but Park Gyung-Hye placed her index finger on her lips and slowly shook her head, her other hand still gently patting her daughter's back.

Jin-Woo sighed softly and took a step back.

As he looked on at his sister in his mom's embrace, as well as his mom's gentle and warm expression, a satisfied smile automatically formed on his lips.

‘My effort wasn't in vain.’

It felt like he was being fully rewarded for all the hard work he had put in right at this moment. Also, he felt as if something hard and stubborn stuck in the corner of his heart had finally melted down and was now flowing away, out of him.

In that case, should he leave the two of them alone for a while? At least, until his little sister found a way to get a hold of her overflowing emotions.

Since she was one smart girl, she'd know not to unnecessarily stress out mom. Only that, she needed a bit more time here.

Jin-Woo grinned a little and shifted his gaze outside the hospital window. As if to congratulate the reunion of his family, the weather outside was brilliantly sunny today.

Feeling a bit awkward from standing there and staring at the weather without saying anything, he decided to pull out his phone.

‘.....’

There was a scary amount of missed calls and text messages left on his phone that he couldn't even dare to attempt replying to a select few, never mind all of them. Jin-Woo scrolled the list of the missed calls and texts, before giving up and closing the window altogether.

‘Well, if it's something urgent, I'm sure they'll contact me again.’

He quickly gave up on replying and instead, accessed the internet browser.

But then....

‘...Heok!!’

He clicked on the online news portal without thinking too much, only to perform a grand facepalm.

[A flying monster spotted over the skies of Seoul?]

[The potential destination of the flying monster?]

[Hunters Association fails to respond. What about the safety of citizens?]

Photos of Kaisal were plastered all over the various internet news sites.

From the vicinity of his house all the way to this hospital, the distance between the two points was rather considerable, but he figured nothing serious would happen because he was travelling at such a high speed. But this....

‘...It was only a short flight, but we got photographed a lot, didn't we?’

The only fortunate thing here was that the photos didn't show him riding on the back of Kaisal.

He made up his mind to not care about what others thought of him when he summoned Kaisal near his house, but now that he was dominating the headlines, he sure felt conflicted now.

'Oh, well.'

Anyone would have their hearts in their mouths, seeing a monster flying in the sky like that. Jin-Woo scanned the news articles filled with a great deal of anxiety and told himself to be more careful in the future.

'There's no need to go out of my way to scare the public, anyway.'

Indeed, didn't he feel a certain aversion towards the Class of Necromancer because he was worried about failing to handle all the pointed stares of the public?

'However, if the frenzy over a winged lizard is this huge, then, uh, the responses to the gigantic Fangs would really be something else, no?'

While he was thinking of this and that....

Vrrr.... Vrrr....

His phone began vibrating.

'Who's this?'

He didn't recognise the number; after exiting the hospital room, he answered the call.

"Hello?"

A baritone yet still bright voice of an old man came out. Jin-Woo immediately recalled the owner of that voice.

"Association President?"

'Why is he giving me a call?'

What prompted the one-and-only Association President to give him a call like this? Jin-Woo noticed that there were several people walking to and fro within the hospital's corridor, so he quickly walked towards a more secluded area. He continued to speak in the meantime.

"What's the matter, sir?"

'...What news?'

Jin-Woo tilted his head a bit, before realising that this wouldn't do and asked again.

"I'm not sure what news you're talking about....?"

'Wow. I guess the speed of news getting around these days is nothing to scoff at.'

Jin-Woo readily admitted to his wrongdoing.

“I’m sorry about that. But I’ll make sure to be more careful next time.”

Only after hearing the confused voice of Goh Gun-Hui did Jin-Woo realise that he was deeply mistaken about something here.

‘Wait, wasn’t he calling me about Kaisal?’

If not, what else could the news outlets be talking about, instead?

The dual dungeon, the Red Gate, clearing the rank A dungeons, the ‘Bead of Avarice’, etc....

Now that he thought about, there were quite a few potential topics of contention, instead.

“.....Can you clarify what happened?”

“I’ve been spending some time in a location recently where contacting outside was difficult, actually.”

He wasn’t lying about that, technically speaking.

Goh Gun-Hui’s voice betrayed how surprised he was, but then, it became even graver than before.

According to Jin-Woo’s experience, this could only mean that the reason for this call should be brought up now.

Jin-Woo’s suspicion grew even larger compared to when he first answered the phone.

‘Calling me on the phone isn’t enough, so the Association President wishes to come here and see me personally?’

Just how much of an important matter was this to make someone as busy as him personally move?

Even then....

Jin-Woo glanced in the direction of mom’s hospital room.

‘I can’t ask the Association President to come here.’

He might have to come up with bullsh*t stories related to his mother if that happened.

“No, I’ll go over there, instead.”

“Yes, I will.”

That was far more simpler for him.

Quickly making the arrangement over the phone, and after telling his mom and sister that he had an errand to run and he’d be back a little later, Jin-Woo

left the hospital.

Having spent way too long inside the Demon's Castle where there was no sunlight, his eyes were feeling a bit itchy as the warm rays fell on him. Jin-Woo furrowed his brows.

'Man, this is so cumbersome. Should I just summon Kaisei?'

He deliberated for a moment or two, before smirking to himself and walked towards a waiting taxi.



Chapter 111 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The footage shown was quite a shocking one.

Shot from a CCTV camera placed high up on a stretch of road, the viewer could see how deserted this unknown street was; it was so quiet that, even after the footage had been greatly sped up, only a handful of cars drove by.

One might even end up suspecting that the road was located in the sparsely-populated outskirts of a city or even in a rural area.

The sped-up footage was slowed down greatly. And then, it happened.

A saloon appeared on the edge of the screen. It was moving fast enough that even when the footage had been slowed down, one could still sense its high speed.

But then, in the blink of an eye....

A black thing suddenly appeared before the speeding car. It was a dark lifeform, standing on two feet like a person. The car couldn't slow down sufficiently with this sudden development. However, no such thing as the car and the unknown lifeform colliding ever occurred.

Just before the collision happened, the car suddenly flew up in the air.

The dark lifeform easily flipped the mid-sized saloon speeding towards it with one hand, and then, dragged the unconscious driver out from the wreckage to devour the poor guy from the head.

Chomp, chomp....

That surely would've been the noise most likely to be captured by a mic, had the CCTV camera been equipped with one.

The footage came to an end there.

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze away from the giant TV screen filling up an entire wall of the Association President's office, and to Goh Gun-Hui sitting on the other side of the table.

The older man slowly put the remote down.

“Three hundred people.”

Unlike some others, he didn't speak about the neighbouring nation's

misfortune with an easy-going attitude.

“That one ant managed to kill that many people.”

“Were the Japanese too slow to respond?”

“That’s not correct.”

Goh Gun-Hui shook his head.

“From what I hear, the Japanese Hunters only took 30 minutes to get to the location. But, in that short period of time, a small village was wiped off the map.”

Japan boasted one of the most advanced Hunter systems in all of Asia. And a country like that had to experience such a level of devastation, so what would happen if an ant entered the South Korean border?

Goh Gun-Hui had viewed that footage multiple times already, but he still was overcome with a chilling premonition of an impending crisis every time he did.

‘Before it’s too late, we need to destroy the ants once and for all.’

The subjugation operation would get underway in four days’ time. The Japanese had been demanding the release of the final list of all Korean Hunters participating in the operation for a few days now.

However, using his authority as the leader of the Korean side, Goh Gun-Hui delayed the announcement of the final list. The reason for that was simple.

Because no one could get in touch with Jin-Woo until now.

And so, after a long wait, the moment of the list being finalised had arrived. Goh Gun-Hui continued on with a trembling heart.

“We’ll go to Jeju Island and get rid of the ants found there.”

He formed a pleading expression next.

“And that is why we need your help, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

up, Goh Gun-Hui’s expression shifted to one of anxiety.

If Jin-Woo refused to participate, then there was nothing anyone could do. He was no longer affiliated with the Association, and he was not duty-bound to carry out the demands of the Association, either. In other words, the final decision rested solely on his whim.

After lengthy deliberation, he opened his mouth.

“I....”

After ending the meeting with the Association President, Jin-Woo stood up from the seat to leave, only to sense something and shifted his head in that direction.

‘What was that just now?’

In a place not too far from here, he sensed clashes of magical energy.

‘Could it be a dungeon break?’

Initially, he suspected a dungeon break happening nearby, but he soon realised that wasn’t the case. He couldn’t sense any presence of monsters, only the magic energy coming from various Hunters, instead.

“Did something happen?”

Goh Gun-Hui had stood up from his seat first and walked over to the doorway to bid Jin-Woo goodbye, only to turn around and question him when the youth failed to move from the spot.

“Well, I don’t think it’s anything serious, but.... It seems that Hunters are fighting each other nearby.”

“But, that can’t be.”

Goh Gun-Hui chuckled loudly.

Which foolhardy Hunters would dare to fight each other near the Association’s HQ? There was no way such a thing would happen.

‘No, wait.... The direction of Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim is looking at....?’

A possibility formed in Goh Gun-Hui’s mind.

“I believe that rank S Hunters are doing some light exercises in the gymnasium. Maybe you’re talking about that?”

‘...Light exercises, is it?’

If that was the case, then for sure, the continuous yet restrained clashes of magical energy made sense. Jin-Woo nodded his head.

“I see.”

Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes looking at the youth were filled with undisguised surprise.

‘He can sense something like that from this distance?’

The Association’s gymnasium was designed to greatly minimise the

amount of magic energy leaking outside. In actual reality, even Goh Gun-Hui himself couldn't sense anything.

But then, not only had Jin-Woo sensed the minuscule amount leaking out from there, he even correctly guessed that different magic energies were clashing with one another, too.

'Just how highly attuned are his senses?'

It was simply impossible to even take a wild guess.

"....Ah, right! Would you like to take a look if you're interested?"

Goh Gun-Hui made a quick suggestion. It was a rare event to find all of the rank S Hunters in South Korea gathered in one place. Personally witnessing the abilities of other rank S Hunters from the sideline would do a world of good to Seong Jin-Woo, who had become a rank S himself only recently.

"I believe that Mister Goto Ryuji is also present there."

Jin-Woo was thinking of taking a look-see with an open mind, only to stop in his tracks.

"If you say Goto Ryuji, do you mean....?"

"Yes, it is him."

If you were a Hunter – no, even if you weren't a Hunter – you'd have at least heard of that name once, the name that belonged to one of the most powerful Hunters in existence.

"It is indeed that Goto Ryuji. He's currently staying in the country to aid in building a good repertoire and a sense of camaraderie in both the Korean and Japanese participants. Since he's planning to leave tomorrow, if you don't meet him today, you might not get another opportunity in the future."

Not only were Korea's best Hunters gathered in one place, but even Japan's best was also here too?

'Obviously, I can't miss this chance.'

Jin-Woo accepted Goh Gun-Hui's suggestion with a deeply interested expression.

At the same time, Goto Ryuji was doing his very best to stifle a yawn.

'This is supposed to be the abilities of Korea's best?'

How laughable.

No, they were actually pitiful.

The assessment of 'laughable' was made from an objective point of view, while the 'pitiful' bit came from him adding a bit of sympathy to that initial assessment.

'Rather than leaving the safety of the country to these people's hands, wouldn't it be far better to be under the protection of us, the Japanese, instead?'

Goto Ryuji formed a leery smile and surveyed the Korean rank S Hunters. Out of all the rank S Hunters he met in Korea so far, only one seemed to be somewhat 'useful' to his eyes.

'Her name's supposed to be Cha Hae-In, right?'

Even then, her abilities were only around the level of Japan's upper-rank Hunters. She fell way, way short when compared to the best Hunters Japan could offer.

'But, there's no helping it, is there?'

South Korea was a small nation, and its population wasn't that vast, either. Also, the person who had Awakened the greatest ability within the populace just so happened to be an old man who didn't have that many days to live and couldn't even fight properly.

'If it's Goh Gun-Hui, then he might be able to contend with some of our best on a similar level, but.....'

He could say that the Koreans had drawn a short straw on this one.

In any case, he was done with assessing the capabilities of the Korean Hunters. He had completed the real reason for his extended stay in Korea.

'They wouldn't even survive for five minutes if we withdraw during the subjugation.'

Thinking that there was no more reason to stick around, Goto Ryuji turned around to leave, but then, he spotted someone unfamiliar walking closer from the entrance of the gymnasium.

'Mm....?'

Goto Ryuji's brows quivered greatly.

He hadn't realised the approach of this unknown man even though they were in close proximity already. He was looking at the man with his own eyes, yet he still couldn't sense the other person's presence at all.

'Is he an Assassin-type Hunter?'

Goto Ryuji asked the Association employee tasked with translation next to

him.

“Who is that man?”

The employee fidgeted with his glasses and stared for a long time, before finally recalling who the unknown man was and formed a smile.

“Ah. He’s the newly registered rank S Hunter.”

“Aha....”

So, that man was that Re-Awakened with no known reliable information available?

Goto Ryuji was thinking of spending the remaining time in Korea to unearth more about this man, but he now thought that this was actually better for him. He formed a bright smile and asked the Association employee again.

“Seems like he’s a pretty excellent Assassin?”

“Pardon?”

When the employee stared back with a strange expression, Goto Ryuji realised something was off.

“Did I make a mistake?”

“Oh, no. That’s not it. But, well...”

The employee pointed at Jin-Woo and spoke.

“He’s actually a Mage-type Hunter. Mister Goto.”

‘No freaking way?!’

Carrying a disbelieving expression, Goto Ryuji quickly accessed the Korean Hunters Association website and went through the list of rank S Hunters there.

The automated translation app allowed him to read the information on the Korean rank S Hunters right away.

[Seong Jin-Woo, rank S, Mage-type]

There it was. The profile image and the person’s face were a perfect match.

‘He’s really a Mage-type??’

Goto Ryuji got inwardly stunned by this and hurriedly raised his shocked face. By then, that man was already standing nearby.

‘So, this guy is Goto Ryuji, huh.’

Jin-Woo only needed one glance to recognise Japan’s most powerful

Hunter.

He was a tall man with a sharp sense of fashion. His beard was trimmed neatly, too. At a casual glance, one might mistakenly think that he was a famous Japanese actor.

‘But, why does he keep looking at me like that?’

Just as Jin-Woo was beginning to feel a bit unhappy at the continued gaze, the Japanese man performed a simple greeting with his eyes first.

Did he stare like that because they had never met before until now?

Jin-Woo didn’t think too much about it and reciprocated the light greeting, and took a look around.

In the middle of the gymnasium, the shirtless Baek Yun-Ho and a hulking middle-aged man with a huge frame were having a sparring session. Excluding Goto Ryuji, everyone else present was looking on at that with deeply interested expressions.

Swish-!!

Baek Yun-Ho slapped away the hand of the quickly-approaching man, spun his lower half, and sent out a powerful low kick.

Pah!

Contrary to expectations, though, the one to frown was Baek Yun-Ho.

‘Oho.’

Jin-Woo could tell why. In that briefest of moments, the giant man utilised a body reinforcement-type skill to defend his legs.

Judging from that huge body and the skill he used just now, he seemed to be a Tanker type, but his Agility Stat must’ve been rather out of the norm, as well. Should Jin-Woo chalk that one up to that man being a rank S?

The giant middle-aged man smirked.

“Instructor Baek! It won’t do for a young man like you to be this powerless.”

“I’m not an instructor, Mah Instructor-nim.”

The giant man referred to as Mah Instructor-nim chuckled genially and grabbed the belt of his dobok. Maybe because a guy with a physique of a Sumo wrestler was wearing a dobok, it kind of felt a bit out of place to Jin-Woo’s eyes.

“Well, in that case.”

The giant man fixed his attire for a moment before pouncing forward again, and Baek Yun-Ho unleashed his magic power to counter-attack. Both of them were carrying joyous expressions.

As Instructor Mah pushed forward, and as Baek Yun-Ho was pushed back, they both looked to be enjoying themselves.

It seemed that they were relishing this rare opportunity to unleash some of their powers that had to be restrained most of the time in this gathering of rank S Awakened.

“Even then, if Mister Baek Yun-Ho were to fight seriously, Mister Mah Dong-Wook wouldn’t be able to endure it.”

Choi Jong-In walked in closer to Jin-Woo and spoke up. The latter turned his head to look, prompting the former to nod his head in a greeting.

Jin-Woo reciprocated the greeting, and their conversation continued on from there.

“That person wearing dobok is the Shining Star’s Mah Dong-Wook.”

‘Ah.’

Jin-Woo was thinking to himself that he had heard of that name before, and it turned out that man was the Master of the Shining Star. He nodded his head and threw a question.

“It’s not like he needs to go easy on his opponent, so why is Master Baek hiding most of his powers?”

“He finds it a bit troublesome to reveal his powers in front of too many eyes.... Chairman Baek transforms into a real monster when he fights seriously, you see.”

Back in front of the Red Gate, Baek Yun-Ho did reveal a pair of beast-like eyes to Jin-Woo.

‘So, it’s not just his eyes that can transform, eh.’

Just like Baek Yun-Ho’s ability to transform, one would hear about top Hunters possessing rather unique abilities every now and then.

In a way, they were the possessors of monster-like powers. From other people’s perspective, Jin-Woo thought that he’d be seen like that, too.

‘A guy who can morph into a monster, and a guy who can summon monsters....’

When he thought about others finding him mystifying, just like how he thought of Baek Yun-Ho’s powers being weird, Jin-Woo couldn’t help but

smirk softly to himself.

But, that was all.

He only found Baek Yun-Ho's ability to transform strange and nothing else. There was nothing interesting to look at in regards to the sparring between Baek Yun-Ho and Mah Dong-Wook.

'So slow.'

Jin-Woo didn't even need to concentrate, yet he could clearly read the attacks and counters of both men.

It was then.

"...Uh?"

Sensing something was off, Baek Yun-Ho stopped moving. Mah Dong-Wook also stopped at the same time, as well. And their gazes shifted to Jin-Woo simultaneously as if they had made a prior arrangement.

Maybe it was because Jin-Woo's boredom was too easy to see?

'.....?'

But then again, too many people were looking at Jin-Woo the same way for him to think that was the case. However, he got to figure out the reason soon enough.

'It's not me, but behind me....'

When he looked back, Goto Ryuji was standing there. The light glinting in his eyes was rather suspicious.

The interpreter next to the Japanese man spoke on behalf of Goto Ryuji.

"Hunter-nim? Mister Goto wishes to speak to you for a moment."

Jin-Woo knew that Goto Ryuji was standing nearby, but because he hadn't expected to be addressed at all, he could only form a confused expression.

'This guy, I sensed that he didn't seem right since a while ago, but now....'

Did Jin-Woo's unhappiness get transmitted? Because Goto Ryuji quietly threw out a rather unexpected question.

"Will you have a sparring match with me?"



Chapter 112 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

There wasn't any deeper meaning behind his actions. Goto Ryuji came to South Korea to personally confirm the capabilities of the top Korean Hunters with his own eyes. And now, he had developed a bit of curiosity after discovering someone a bit unique out of the lot. That was all.

'I'll soon find out whether he's really a Mage or not.'

Goto Ryuji refused to accept that the man standing right in front of his eyes wasn't a melee-type Hunter.

He needed more 'data'. In order to eliminate any and all form of unexpected variations, he simply had to acquire more data on Seong Jin-Woo.

'Well, half of it is for fun, though....'

Goto Ryuji smirked to himself.

The interpreter heard what the Japanese Hunter had to say, jumped up in surprise, before hurriedly asking a question.

"M-mister Goto, are you sure about this?"

"Please translate what I said to this man ad verbatim."

"B-but, even then...."

"Will there be a problem?"

Goto Ryuji asked back in a teasing tone. His voice seemed to ask why shouldn't he participate in the proceedings, when the Korean Hunters were already doing some 'light exercises'?

The interpreter continued to sweat buckets, before giving up in the end and replied to him.

"I... I understand."

He turned his head and met Jin-Woo's questioning gaze. The interpreter hesitated before opening his mouth.

"Mister Goto is asking... If you don't mind 'training' with him....."

There was no need for an extra explanation on what that training was supposed to be.

Jin-Woo's gaze shifted over to Goto Ryuji. The Japanese man was waiting for an answer with an unreadable smile on his face.

'You want to find out more about my skill level, is that it?'

There was no way that the world-famous Goto Ryuji would do something so eye-catching just to show off his abilities. If that was indeed his aim, he'd have asked either Choi Jong-In or Baek Yun-Ho, the leaders of the number one and two South Korean Guilds respectively, instead.

'I don't know what you're planning here, but...'

Judging from the undisguised stare from earlier on, it was more than likely that Goto Ryuji's interest was on Jin-Woo.

Even then, he didn't feel displeased by the Japanese Hunter's abrupt suggestion. No, rather than that, he was genuinely intrigued by the prospect of the fight itself.

He wanted to test out the strength he got to raise inside the Demon's Castle, and he was also curious about the abilities of Japan's top Hunter, too. Indeed, it wasn't only Goto Ryuji who was curious about his opponent's strength.

'.....Mm?'

Goto Ryuji stopped smiling as a thin frown formed on his forehead.

'He's smiling?'

He expected Jin-Woo to become flustered and then eventually try to back out, but then, the Korean Hunter simply displayed a certain relaxed vibe, instead.

Was there something he felt confident of? Or, was he smiling wryly after finding the current situation troublesome to handle?

The answer was revealed soon enough. Jin-Woo told something to the interpreter, and the latter jumped up pretty high in shock right away.

up, the interpreter looked as if he was doing his best to dissuade the youth, while Jin-Woo was all smiles as he tried to calm the former, instead. Since they were talking in Korean, Goto Ryuji couldn't understand a word being spoken and as a result, a frown grew progressively deeper on his face.

'What are they even talking about...?'

It should've only been either 'yes' or 'no'.

Why was the interpreter sweating buckets like that over a question with only two exceedingly simple available answers?

Just as Goto Ryuji's patience was about to run out, the interpreter spoke up while continuously sneaking glances at Jin-Woo.

“Uhm, excuse me, Mister Goto....”

If only there were no eyes watching right now, Goto Ryuji would've shouted at the man to stop wasting time and hurry up with it. Forcibly maintaining his smile meant that Goto Ryuji's brows were quivering greatly, as he waited for the interpreter's next words.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim agreed to your proposal. However....”

“However?”

“He says he has a condition.”

‘A condition?’

Not only had the opponent failed to lower his tail and cower, but he also accepted the challenge straight away, and even put up an extra condition, as well. It was Goto Ryuji's turn to feel somewhat flustered now.

“And what is this condition?”

“Well, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim said that.....”

The interpreter took one last look at Jin-Woo, and the latter nodded his head.

“....He'll agree only on the condition that Mister Goto gives his all.”

Goto Ryuji's stare immediately shifted to Seong Jin-Woo.

‘Is he being serious??’

Seeing the expression on Jin-Woo's face, one could tell that he wasn't kidding around. Goto Ryuji tilted his head.

‘Wait... Maybe he doesn't know who I am?’

But, that couldn't be. Even if he didn't know before, the interpreter should've provided an explanation just now. Even then, for him to not cower and back off – was this the case of arrogance or a mistaken belief in himself?

‘....This might be fun.’

The smile was already wiped clean from Goto Ryuji's mug.

He was thinking of matching the opponent's pace and ending things after checking out Seong Jin-Woo's skill, but now, his thoughts had changed. Thankfully, with a rank S Healer nearby, there shouldn't be any big 'accidents' either.

“Alright, I accept.”

“Heok!”

The interpreter’s face paled immediately.

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had just advanced to rank ‘S’, so he might not be able to contain his overflowing passion, but why was Mister Goto, who had experienced all sorts of trials and tribulations, behaving like this?

Unfortunately, the atmosphere had already gone past the point of no return.

“Who’s that guy next to the Japanese Hunter?”

“Isn’t he... Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?”

“What’s this? Are they going to spar or something?”

Soon, the rank S Hunters and Association employees within the gymnasium all gathered around the two men glaring at each other. As everyone was immersed in the developing situation, half of them looking on with worry while the other half in anticipation, Cha Hae-In also stood next to the Hunters and looked on at the duo.

‘Will he be fine...?’

Jin-Woo’s opponent was a man who managed to stand at the top of Japan, a country with over 20 rank S Hunters.

As for Jin-Woo himself, if one excluded the years he spent as a rank E, then he should be considered as a newbie who had been a rank S for only a few days now.

It’d be the right thing to stop Hunter Seong Jin-Woo from continuing on any further.

From Cha Hae-In’s perspective as someone affiliated with the Hunters Guild, Seong Jin-Woo was a benefactor who saved the lives of an entire team consisting of her Guild’s elite men and women.

She wasn’t some honour-less woman who’d do nothing and watch a benefactor get hurt from the sidelines.

However, she kept recalling the events of that day whenever she thought about dissuading him.

...The look Jin-Woo gave her, telling her not to interfere even when he was facing off against over one hundred High Orcs and a boss of a rank A dungeon.

When recalling that powerful, determined stare, she felt her chest palpitate,

and unexplainable anticipation bubbled up in her heart. That was why she couldn't readily step forward, only to bite down on her lower lip in nervousness.

It was then.

“Are you feeling okay today with other Hunters around you?”

Before she had time to notice it, Baek Yun-Ho was already next to her to ask that question. They had gone on several raids together, so he knew very well of her strange physical condition.

“Well, it's not like I'll be able to continue blocking my nose in Jeju Island, so...”

Hearing her answer, Baek Yun-Ho nodded his head. It was her turn to ask next.

“You said before that you're an acquaintance with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, yes?”

“Yes.”

Cha Hae-In remembered that the White Tiger Guild also received Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's help in the past, just like her own Guild did.

“In that case, shouldn't you try to stop Mister Seong Jin-Woo?”

“I guess that's the normal way of thinking.”

After all, the opponent today was none other than Goto Ryuji. Cha Hae-In tilted her head.

“If so, then why....?”

Baek Yun-Ho shifted his gaze and met her eyes before replying to her.

“It's the same reason as yours, Cha Hunter-nim.”

Flinch.

Cha Hae-In felt as if her inner secrets had been exposed by Baek Yun-Ho just now. Her always-taciturn expression displayed just a hint of change.

“I don't....”

“Don't you feel this strange anticipation in the air?”

....She couldn't deny that.

Even now, her heart was racing with a singular thought of 'If it's Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, then he might....' filling up her head.

“It's the same story for me.”

Baek Yun-Ho replied with a grin and looked back in Jin-Woo and Goto Ryuji's direction. His expression was filled with barely-checked anticipation.

'If Hunter Seong is really an Awakened who can grow stronger as per my expectation, then....'

This could be the chance to confirm that theory.

Goto Ryuji raised his fist first.

The interpreter standing nearby hurriedly left their side. Two rank S Hunters were about to have a smackdown. Not only that, one of them happened to be referred to as Japan's best, as well. A normal person would die simply from being too close in this situation.

Making sure that the interpreter had run off to a safe-enough distance, Jin-Woo belatedly put his dukes up as well. No, that's what he tried to do.

But then...

Swish!

Without a moment's delay, Goto Ryuji's fist flew past where Jin-Woo's head had been a blink ago.

The Japanese man's eyes grew wide.

'I missed?'

The attack was meant to floor Jin-Woo in one go and help Goto recover his damaged pride, but now, it was all for nothing. Jin-Woo evaded the punch by tilting his head out of the way, and then, he easily created some distance between them.

His reaction speed was surprisingly fast.

'And you still claim to be a Mage after that??'

What a bloody laughable notion that was.

Indeed, Goto Ryuji's eyes weren't mistaken. He didn't know the reason for the Korean Association hiding that man's true abilities, but without a doubt, Seong Jin-Woo was a melee-type Hunter. Not only that, definitely an Assassin, too. His agile movements and his silent steps were all the proof needed.

'You may be able to fool the others, but you can't hide the truth from me.'

The corner of Goto Ryuji's lips arched up.

'Allow me to peel off another layer of yours.'

....Right until everything you possess is brought up to the surface!

For the first time in a long, long while, Goto Ryuji was feeling genuinely pumped up.

After taking some distance away from the aggressive Japanese Hunter, Jin-Woo stood still and listened to his heartbeat.

Thump, thump, thump....

Indeed, his heart was beating faster. He could sense power on another level compared to other Hunters from Goto Ryuji.

However, the emotion filling up Jin-Woo's heart whenever Goto Ryuji's unbelievable aura touched his skin was this strong sense of belief in himself.

'So, that guy is the best in Japan....'

Only now could he truly recognise how much he had changed while raising his level to 97. His strong confidence was clearly visible on his face now. On the other hand, Goto Ryuji's expression was hardening.

'He's smiling again?'

How dare he, in front of me??

Goto Ryuji spat out a heavy breath.

The scarcely-believable amount of magical energy he emitted began to heavily press down the surrounding air. Hunters watching on were jolted by a nasty surprise.

'Shouldn't we stop them before something happens here?'

'Goto Ryuji, maybe he's thinking of really going for it now?'

However, there was a thin smile on Jin-Woo's face. This was what he wanted, anyways.

Goto Ryuji saw that Jin-Woo showed no signs of cowering even after he had unleashed his fearsome level of magic power, and felt something welling up from deep within.

His eyes gleamed dangerously just then!

Even before other Hunters had the chance to step forward and stop this bout, Goto Ryuji pounced like an angry predator.

The distance closed up in an instant; Goto Ryuji reached out with his hand; Jin-Woo leaned back in the nick of time and evaded the attack.

'....!!'

Goto Ryuji's eyes trembled imperceptibly.

'He dodged?!'

Was that also a coincidence, or....?

Even though many thoughts fled in and out of his head, he didn't stop his hands and continued to rain down his attacks. Too bad, not one of them could connect to his target; Jin-Woo always managed to dodge by a hair's breadth or repelled the incoming hits away.

'How could this be...??'

Cold sweat drops formed on Goto Ryuji's forehead.

Goto Ryuji and his brilliantly flashy attacks, and Jin-Woo who managed to dodge everything by the smallest margins imaginable. Other Hunters watched the duo and expressed their genuine admiration.

"That's some fierce attacks, alright."

"Hard to follow those movements with my naked eyes."

"Look, even Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is enduring pretty well, no?"

"Right, it's already pretty remarkable that he can evade the attacks from Japan's best to that extent."

Cha Hae-In shook her head multiple times inwardly.

'No, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo isn't enduring anything right now.'

Others could only see that Jin-Woo was being endlessly led around by Goto Ryuji's continuous stream of attacks, but in reality, it was completely the opposite. Cha Hae-In swallowed her saliva, feeling rather astonished at the moment.

'He's actually leading Goto in such a way that Goto has no choice but to keep attacking!'

If she was not wrong about this, then... Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had matched his own pace to the opponent's, so he could figure out more about who he was facing here.

Such a thing was only possible if his own level of abilities was several times greater than that of his opponent's.

'How can that even make any sense....??'

But, that nonsensical event was actually unfolding right before her eyes. And now, she couldn't help but think that the real reason to stop this sparring wasn't that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo might find himself in danger, but the other

way around....

Just as Cha Hae-In's thoughts arrived at this point, she discovered Baek Yun-Ho next to her shuddering non-stop.

“C-Chairman Baek...??”

She called out to him in a soft voice, but he didn't respond. His eyes were glued to Jin-Woo and nothing else. She tried to read his expression, only to get stunned by what she saw.

‘His eyes....?’

Baek Yun-Ho's eyes were gleaming in yellow colour like that of a wild beast. His vertical-slit eyes were trembling softly in shock.

She looked on with a worried expression on her face, but he didn't even notice that someone was looking at him right now. Baek Yun-Ho was seeing everything clearly with his 'Eyes of the Beast'.

‘I... I was right!’

Jin-Woo's current level of power was incomparably greater than back when they last met in front of the Association building.

‘...A Hunter who can grow stronger!!’

Baek Yun-Ho's entire body shook from the unbridled shock.

It was then.

“...Ah!”

Baek Yun-Ho had been paying his utmost attention to Jin-Woo all this time, and when 'it' happened, he unconsciously spat out a frightened gasp. Cha Hae-In next to her also sensed this deeply chilling aura and hurriedly shifted her gaze.

“Ah!!”

A few seconds ago....

Goto Ryuji knew better than anyone else here that he had been suckered into Jin-Woo's pace.

He had been always referred to as the 'Strongest' back home, so it felt like his pride had been shoved down the gutter in its entirety by this development.

‘How dare he do this to me....?!’

The attack that he meticulously aimed at the opening also missed its mark, as Jin-Woo narrowly avoided it at the last possible second. Goto Ryuji grew

enraged, and murderous intent began filling up his eyes.

'I'll kill him!!'

Jin-Woo's own eyes grew wider. He could acutely sense Goto Ryuji's killing intent pricking his skin.

'Murderous intent?!'

Jin-Woo's heart nearly fell to the pit of his stomach, then.

If someone formed a murderous intent towards him, the System would float up a message and issue an emergency quest right afterwards. What if he got a quest telling him to kill Goto Ryuji here...??

Tti-ring!

A mechanical beep resounded out right at that moment, and Jin-Woo quickly looked up.

[Warning! Discovered a subject with murderous intent nearby!]

Thankfully, it was still a warning message; there was no emergency quest, like back then with Hwang Dong-Seok or Kahng Tae-Sik.

However....

Swish-!!

Goto Ryuji's outstretched hand, aimed at Jin-Woo's eye, narrowly missed and ended up slicing his cheek just a little. If his reflexes that had reached the absolute limit, didn't react in time and tilt his head out of the way, he might have really lost his eye just now.

It was an attack that clearly carried the intent to kill, and it was clearly aimed at a vital spot of the human anatomy. Such a thing would never be accepted during a training match like this.

Grit.

In the blink of an eye, the atmosphere changed.

"Ah."

Baek Yun-Ho unconsciously spat out a frightened gasp.

The first person to sense the abrupt shift in the atmosphere was actually Goto Ryuji, however. Unfortunately for him, although his body understood the change, his head could not.

The chilly air roused sleeping goosebumps to break out all over his body, and all the hair on the back of his neck stood up. He had never, ever felt like

this before.

‘This, what is this....?’

Even before his brain had the time to process anything, Jin-Woo grabbed his wrist, hard. Goto Ryuji tried to yank his arm out with all his might, but it wouldn’t budge.

‘What kind of strength is this....?!’

His gaze briefly lingered on his wrist, before moving on to Jin-Woo’s face. And he found an icy cold glare.

But what caught Goto Ryuji’s attention even more than Jin-Woo’s cold eyes were his right shoulder and his raised right arm. Jin-Woo’s arm was cocked back by a lot; a tightly-clenched fist at the end of that arm was taking an aim at Goto Ryuji’s unguarded face.

The air sinking lower all around Goto Ryuji pressed down on his shoulders. He suddenly couldn’t breathe anymore.

Why?

Why did he inexplicably think of the word ‘death’ right at this moment?

But, then....

“S-stop!”

Baek Yun-Ho and Cha Hae-In jumped into the fray purely out of instinct and grabbed hold onto Jin-Woo’s right arm.

The former was tightly hugging Jin-Woo’s shoulder as if he was trying to pull it down, while the latter was grabbing onto his wrist with everything she had.

When Jin-Woo looked back, Baek Yun-Ho hurriedly shook his head. Even Cha Hae-In was looking at him with anxious eyes, fear clearly visible on her face.

‘.....’

The desperate dissuasion of these two that didn’t even care about their own safety helped Jin-Woo to cool his agitation down somehow.

“Fuu.”

Jin-Woo let off a short sigh and released Goto Ryuji’s wrist.

The Japanese man rubbed his now-freed wrist and retreated quickly. Meanwhile, the interpreter hurriedly arrived near his side. Baek Yun-Ho quickly spoke to him.

“Let’s stop the sparring session here, since the mood seems to have turned for the worse. Please tell the Japanese for us.”

The interpreter nodded his head.

When Baek Yun-Ho’s words were relayed to him, Goto Ryuji proceeded to glare at Jin-Woo for a long time, before spinning on his heels to exit from the gymnasium without saying single a word.

“M-mister Goto!!”

The voice of the interpreter as he ran after Goto Ryuji sounded so pitiful. Baek Yun-Ho finally spat out a sigh of relief and lowered his head at Jin-Woo.

“Forgive us for butting in.”

“...”

“That man is supposed to lead the Japanese team in the operation a few days from now. I couldn’t just stand by and watch, even though there was a chance that something might go horribly wrong for us.”

Baek Yun-Ho cautiously studied Jin-Woo’s expression and asked.

“Did I do something unnecessary?”

“No, not at all.”

Jin-Woo readily admitted to it.

Baek Yun-Ho was right. If something happened to Goto Ryuji and that led to an unnecessary snag in the operation, then both countries might end up suffering severe consequences afterwards.

So, he never thought of assigning any blame on Baek Yun-Ho or Cha Hae-In after they interfered in the timely fashion.

“Wow....”

Now that the situation seemed to have calmed down, people absorbed in spectating on the sparring session between Goto Ryuji and Jin-Woo quickly approached him. The way they looked at him went through a noticeable change.

The first one to make his approach was the Master of the Shining Star Guild, the massive-framed Mah Dong-Wook.

“Huhuh!!”

Mah Dong-Wook laughed genially.

“To be able to walk away with only a small scratch on your cheek after

having a bout with the one and only Goto, you're truly something else, young man!"

Regretfully, no one else seemed to have figured out what happened here besides Cha Hae-In and Baek Yun-Ho.

"Ooh!! You have really firm muscles! What an outstanding physique!"

Mah Dong-Wook touched Jin-Woo's shoulders and arms while expressing his genuine admiration.

"My Guild is full of Mage-type Hunters, so we're severely lacking in melee-types at the moment. Instructor Seong, if you haven't thought of a Guild to join, how about joining mine?"

"Excuse me, Mah Instructor-nim?"

Having been quietly observing the situation from behind until then, Choi Jong-In stepped forward and raised his voice.

"Yes?"

When Mah Dong-Wook turned his head, Choi Jong-In spoke up as if he was waiting for this moment.

"Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is actually a Mage-type Hunter."

A massive earthquake erupted within Mah Dong-Wook's eyes.

"What was that?!"

On the other hand....

Goto Ryuji escaped from the confines of the gymnasium and, after quickly distancing himself from the interpreter, he checked his wrist.

'.....'

His wrist was bruised black and blue all over. Even though the weather wasn't all that hot, there were cold sweat drops visible on his forehead. He pulled out his phone and dialled a familiar number. After a couple of rings, he could hear the sound of the phone's receiver being picked up.

Click.

"Association President."

Goto Ryuji did his best to calm his trembling voice.

"In South Korea.... There's an incredible Hunter in South Korea."

"More than likely, sir."

"I think there's a need to modify our plan a little bit, sir."

Matsumoto Shigeo didn't immediately say anything, but rummaged through something for a while instead, before finally asking a question.

"It's Seong Jin-Woo. He's a Re-Awakened, evaluated as a rank S recently."

"I beg your pardon?"

Such a name didn't exist?!

Did that mean the Hunter Goto Ryuji met just now was a phantom, an illusion? Well, he did kind of feel that he had been bewitched just now, though. However, didn't he also personally enter the Korean Association's website to confirm that that man was supposed to be a Mage??

"What do you mean, sir? How can Seong Jin-Woo not exist?"

"Are you saying Seong Jin-Woo isn't on the list?"

But, how could that be?

Unless Goh Gun-Hui had gone truly senile, there was just no way that he'd form a raiding party without the strongest member available.

Matsumoto Shigeo spoke in a calm manner from across the phone line.

As if to signify that there was no need to modify their plan at all, Matsumoto Shigeo spoke in a voice filled with conviction.

Baek Yun-Ho took a deep breath.

Even after the two men who turned the inside of the gymnasium chaotic had left, his heartbeat didn't want to slow down at all.

'Was such a thing even possible?'

Having witnessed something that he'd been hypothesizing in his head for real, Baek Yun-Ho had difficulty trying to hide his astonishment.

'An Awakened that can really grow stronger....'

Just what would be that man's true value? He couldn't even dare to imagine it.

This was his reason for standing back and watching on from the distance at the efforts of Choi Jong-In, Mah Dong-Wook, and Im Tae-Gyu as they tried to scout Jin-Woo. He remembered Choi Jong-In's confused stare directed at him, as he didn't even bother to sweet-talk the youth.

'If it was me, I'd probably never even think about joining a Guild with an ability like that.'

Indeed.

All the attempts to scout Hunter Seong Jin-Woo were a waste of time. However, there were all sorts of ways to form a good relationship with a brilliant Hunter that didn't involve scouting him.

Time to activate the 'Plan B', then.

It was then.

Vrrr....

His mobile phone suddenly began vibrating. Seeing that the vibration didn't last for long, it must've been a text message. Without thinking too much, he pulled his phone out and took a look.

It was an alert sent out by the Association. And it was the final list of the participants for the ant subjugation raid taking place four days from now.

Baek Yun-Ho skipped past the lengthy list of the Japanese Hunters and scanned the list of the Koreans, only for his eyes to widen in surprise.

He shot up from his spot in the wooden bench.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo isn't on the list?!”



Chapter 113 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The mass media was whipped into a frenzy.

Where would you find another story that could stimulate the interests of the country's citizens even more than this news?

TV channels ran news segments related to this upcoming raid all day long, while every front page of newspapers was completely dominated by the topics of the united raid team.

However, it was only Korea's media that kept talking about this matter. Even though the number of Japanese Hunters participating in this operation exceeded the Koreans by three folds, no one thought it was strange that the Japanese media kept quiet over the upcoming event.

And when a handful of articles did appear online, the comments that followed said articles were negative in nature, to say the least.

↳ What did you expect when the Koreans are too weak to close a Gate by themselves?

↳ Why are you cleaning up the sh*t left behind by the Koreans?

↳ Are they going to compensate us for the damages those ants caused here or not?

↳ Useless Japanese Hunter's Association, and irresponsible Korean Hunters, why dontcha all kick the bucket together on Jeju Island? LOL

'Dong-sahng-yi-mong'. (TL note at the end)

While two parties thought of two different things regarding the same upcoming event, time continued to tick down towards the date of the operation.

In the meantime, these past few days proved to be the happiest Jin-Woo had been since his mother was admitted to the hospital.

Many things went through a change. First thing first – the Seong family returned to their home with their mom as soon as she was discharged from the hospital.

Clank....

When he opened the front entrance, the first thing he saw was the messy living room of the apartment, all thanks to Jin-Ah being alone while he was kept busy inside the Demon's Castle.

“...”

Jin-Woo began pinching his sister's cheeks, and with gentle laughter, Mom tried to stop him.

The very first thing their mother had to do after returning home from four years of coma, was to clean the house. Jin-Woo tried to dissuade her, but in the end, he couldn't win against her insistence. Eventually, the whole family rolled their sleeves up to clean up their home.

Once the house was spotless, the complexions of all three brightened up considerably as well. The apartment that had always felt empty and lonely after Mom's admittance to the hospital now seemed so full of life.

For the first time in a long while, Jin-Woo got to stretch his legs and go to bed without any worries in his mind. And on the next morning, when he got to the living room....

He got to truly appreciate the fact that his mother had returned when he saw the breakfast neatly arranged on the dining table. Park Gyung-Hye stopped cutting the spring onions, turned her head towards Jin-Woo, and asked.

“Did you sleep well, son?”

With still-sleepy eyes, he replied as a smile bloomed on his face.

“...Yes, Mom.”

The so-called expert continued to speak on the TV screen.

“The rate of evolution these ant monsters have shown is truly surprising to behold.”

A guest sitting next to the expert formed an exaggerated expression of surprise and asked.

“Monsters are evolving?! Wasn't the ant found in Japan, a lone mutated creature?”

“You're correct. When the mutated specimen increase in number and gain control of the whole horde, then we call that evolution.”

After that, the prepared video footage began playing. Ants, as they appeared during the first and second subjugation attempts, were displayed on the screen.

At first, they were no different from regular ants as they crawled on the ground. Just from their external appearances alone, they looked exactly like oversized super-massive ants.

But then, a short while later....

“This is the footage taken during the third subjugation attempt.”

The ant monsters were now walking on two legs like humans. The once-giant heads had shrunk down in size by a great deal, they were able to move around much more nimbly, and the four limbs acted like arms.

Its appearance looked as if half an ant and half a person had been mashed together to form a new creature. In only two years, the distinct characteristics of the ant species had been completely transformed into something else.

“And this footage of the ant monster was taken recently as it wreaked havoc in Japan.”

“Wow...”

The audience members in the studio all gasped out in shock at the footage being played. To their horror, the ant was now even closer in appearance to a human, and not only that, it even sported huge wings on its back.

The comedian appearing in this show as a guest flinched in great surprise and raised his voice higher.

“That thing can now fly?!”

“That’s correct. And that would be the decisive factor in the formation of the Korea-Japan united raid team.”

‘The Korea-Japan united raid team.’

When that term came out of the TV’s speakers, Jin-Woo wordlessly switched the TV off. In all honesty, he also didn’t want to miss out on this operation. His heart began racing so fast after he thought of all the experience points he’d get to earn when Association President Goh Gun-Hui requested for his participation in the raid.

However, his excitement cooled down in no time at all. And he was able to objectively and coldly analyse the situation.

‘It hadn’t even been one day since Mom woke up.’

More than that, his mom didn’t know that her son was a Hunter yet. He also recalled the sight of his mother staying up all night for several months after she heard the news of his father going missing inside the Gate all those years ago, too.

He couldn't bring himself to tell mom that he was going to Jeju Island when she was already carrying around such a painful memory, to begin with.

His lips didn't want to part and provide an answer. He wanted to spend some time with his family for a few days, at the least. And he definitely didn't want to delay the moment he'd been fighting for so long for some other matter.

“...I will...”

Jin-Woo barely made up his mind and spoke with great difficulty.

“...Not take part in the operation.”

The one thing far more precious than experience points, the reason why he gritted his teeth and endured everything in order to become stronger. He did not regret making this choice.

Except that, now....

↳ BTW, why is Seong Jin-Woo not on the Korean list?

↳ Your disposition won't change just because you've become a rank S, you know. Once a rank E, forever a rank E, dude. Prolly ran off to hide, nearly wetting his pants in the process. Kek.

↳ 21 Jap rank S Hunters + even the retired Hunter is gonna represent for Korea, yet.... where is Seong Jin-Woo?

↳ Why does he want to do that when he's a rank S? It's so embarrassing;;

Except that, all these anonymous pointing fingers who didn't even know of his situation were really getting on his nerves now. Or, to be more specific, it was his sister's stress level that got on his nerves, actually.

‘I don't really give a d*mn about what others think of me, and mom doesn't really go online, so it's fine on that front, but...’

...But, Jin-Ah liked to search for stuff like this in her spare time.

‘Tsk’.

Jin-Woo clicked his tongue and put his phone down. There was no helping it, what with the poor timing and all.

Mom had retired early for the day, and it was also still too early for Jin-Ah to come back from her studies. He was thinking of taking a stroll to get some fresh air and change his spoiled mood, but like a devil, his phone began ringing just then.

Jin-Woo checked the caller ID and a grin formed on his face.

Click.

“Hey, Jin-Ho.”

Now that Jin-Woo thought about it, was this kid still staying in that local motel even now?

“Where are you staying now? Is it the same motel?”

Hearing his giggling voice, Jin-Woo felt happy inwardly as well.

Yu Jin-Ho briefly updated Jin-Woo regarding the status of his life, before hurriedly continuing on after remembering the reason for the call in the first place.

What office space was he even talking about?

“What office?”

When Jin-Woo asked with a confused voice, Yu Jin-Ho confidently declared.

‘Yu Jin-Ho, this kid.....’

It seemed more than likely that this kid was under the grand delusion of developing the Guild he’d preside over as its Vice Master, and make it as big as the Hunters or the White Tiger in the near future. Jin-Woo slowly scratched his chin.

‘If I tell him that the raid team will consist of only me and no one else, he might flip out in shock here....’

He only invited the kid to join him in passing, but now that it was time to explain to Yu Jin-Ho the future of the Guild, Jin-Woo didn’t even know how he should go about it.

“What do you think, hyung-nim?”

Now that he was here, Jin-Woo could understand why Yu Jin-Ho sounded so confident on the phone. He scanned the empty office space and nodded his head.

Its location was pretty good.

“I specifically chose a place not too far from your place, hyung-nim.”

It was also tidy, too.

“I deliberately went for the newly-developed office spaces. I believe that the old saying goes something like ‘put new wine in a new bottle’. Don’t you agree, hyung-nim?”

Perhaps most importantly, the place was freaking huge.

‘.....’

“I’ll do my best to grow this Guild so it’ll surpass the five large Guilds someday, hyung-nim!”

Yu Jin-Ho was burning with unbridled passion, figuratively speaking.

“It’s fine for you to burn with passion like that, but please, leave me out of it....”

Jin-Woo pondered seriously about this quandary: Should he tell Yu Jin-Ho to just go back to Yujin Guild now, before it’s too late?

Well, he had this gut feeling that the Yujin’s Chairman, a guy who even froze his own son’s bank account, wouldn’t be so keen on taking his son back at this point in time. Seeing that Jin-Woo was in deep contemplation, Yu Jin-Ho formed an expression that cried out ***“Heok!”***

“Hyung-nim.... You don’t like this place?”

“.....No, that’s not it.”

“Then, should I sign the lease contract, hyung-nim?”

“....Sure, why not.”

Judging from the size of the place, the monthly rental must’ve been crazy steep, but when comparing to the potential revenue stream of a Guild, it’d be a chump change at the end of the day.

“I guess it’ll be fine to let him dream a little bit longer.”

For now, Jin-Woo couldn’t tell the kid that it’d be only the two of them sharing this huge office space.

“Ah!”

Yu Jin-Ho suddenly clapped his hands.

“By the way, hyung-nim. Who do you have in mind for the remaining spot?”

“....The remaining spot?”

Did he make a promise to open up a spot for someone?

Since Jin-Woo wasn’t the type to forget his promises, he could only look at Yu Jin-Ho with a confused expression, prompting the latter to excitedly explain the situation.

“You need at least three people when creating a Guild, hyung-nim.”

The Master, the Vice-Master, and an employee.

Indeed, that was the minimum required composition of a Guild's founding members. The rule of the minimum number for a team raiding the least dangerous Gate out there, a rank E, being three people seemed to be related to this, somehow.

'Well, you will never find a Guild wanting to clear a rank E Gate, though....'

The founding members, was it?

Several familiar faces fledged in and out of Jin-Woo's head as he considered who could fill up the remaining vacant spot. The only condition being, they had to be Hunters, too. If it was at all possible, someone who didn't want to work as a Hunter ever again, and only there to make up the numbers.

'Why do I keep picturing women's faces....?'

He recalled the faces of the high school girl who decided to give up being a Hunter, as well as a certain female Healer who went back to her family home in the city of Busan, but they disappeared from his thoughts quickly enough. It was then.

"Ah, I almost forgot."

Yu Jin-Ho abruptly opened his mouth. Jin-Woo quickly asked him.

"Did you suddenly remember someone suitable for the spot, then?"

"No, it's not that, hyung-nim. Actually, there was someone looking for you."

"Me?"

"Yes, hyung-nim."

Jin-Woo couldn't help but get curious. Seeing that this unknown person had indirectly contacted him through Yu Jin-Ho, he or she must've done their thorough research.

'Yu Jin-Ho and I aren't known as associates publicly, after all.'

Indeed, if anything, others should see their relationship simply as one being the previous raid leader while the other being the member of that raid team.

'Even then, calling me through Yu Jin-Ho, is it?'

Jin-Woo's eyes narrowed to a slit just a little.

"Who was it?"

“I don’t know, hyung-nim. That person was definitely an English-speaking foreigner. Hold on.”

Yu Jin-Ho rummaged through his pockets, pulled out his wallet and extracted a piece of a memo from there.

“This person said that he’d be staying in Korea until the 17th, so he’d very much appreciate it if you give him a call, hyung-nim.”

Jin-Woo took the memo and found a number for a mobile phone as well as a hotel room number. He took a look at the back of the memo, but nothing was written there.

‘17th... that’s three days from now.’

An English-speaking foreigner – just who could it be? He couldn’t think of anyone he knew or fit the bill.

However, quite suddenly...

“....Looks like I’ll have to go home first.”

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened.

“Pardon? You’re going home already, hyung-nim?”

Yu Jin-Ho had been thinking of treating his hyung-nim to a delicious meal since it had been a long time they ate together. But now, he looked like a person who had lost his country. Perhaps a bit too callously, though, Jin-Woo didn’t even try to understand his dongsaeng’s feelings at all.

“I’m going ahead first.”

Yu Jin-Ho quickly hid his disappointed expression and quickly bent down in a polite bow, as usual.

“Okay, have a safe trip, hyung.... nim?”

When he raised his head, Jin-Woo was already long gone.

It was now that time in the day when the inky-black darkness dwelt on the hidden alleyways.

A female college student named Eun Ji-Min was on her way back home; her heart was pounding like crazy at the moment, however.

‘There’s no way, right....?’

Because, there was a man busy following her.

She hoped that they were simply walking in the same direction, and that had to be the reason why his footsteps were continuing right behind her like

that.

'I saw something like this on a message board.'

In a situation like this one, it wasn't only the woman, but the man would be feeling rather troubled, as well. A man's walking speed should be faster or similar to that of a woman; if he tried to walk past her, she'd freak out, but if he tried to simply stay behind her, then he'd come across even more suspicious, instead.

On top of that, by going around the corner up ahead, she'd find herself in a secluded street with a broken street lamp, which could potentially make things even more awkward for the parties involved.

Eun Ji-Min took a glance behind her.

A man with a baseball cap pulled down low and his face staring at the ground was quietly walking on the street. Although it was suspicious, it was not a crime to wear baseball caps like that in public.

'Instead of letting this awkward walk-together thing carry on, maybe I should....'

Eun Ji-Min stopped walking as if she needed to tie her shoelaces, and eventually, the man walked right past her.

"Whew...."

After confirming that the man was gone from her sight, Eun Ji-Min spat out a sigh of relief. She then gathered her hands in mock prayer and closed her eyes.

'I'm really sorry about that, mister unknown uncle.'

She looked around her vicinity for a bit longer before tidying up her clothes. With a smile on her face, Eun Ji-Min energetically began walking again.

She had a mountain of assignments to get through! If she were to prepare for the end-of-term exams, running back home now would still leave her with not enough time.

'How wide was the scope again?'

Thinking about how she'd have to spend the whole night studying, her shoulders slumped dejectedly. But, as Eun Ji-Min went around the corner, her eyes widened.

"You make a noise, I'll kill you."

The man who walked right by her seconds ago was standing in the street

corner with a kitchen knife and an insidious smile on his face.

“You know that.... a few people had died here already, right?”

“Ah.....”

Eun Ji-Min couldn't even scream. With a pale complexion, she stood there completely frozen.

The man lowered the white surgical mask on his face and grinned.

“Follow me.”

Tick, tick...

There was no one around them; only the broken street light flickered listlessly.



Chapter 114 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Ah... S-someone, s-save me...”

Eun Ji-Min somehow managed to squeeze out her dried-up voice and took a couple of steps back.

No, that’s what she tried to.

However, her feet didn’t want to move. It was as if heavy iron ingots were attached to her ankles. She could only stand there frozen as her tears began streaming down her face.

Meanwhile, the man scanned his surroundings.

Since the girl didn’t look like she’d be able to move, he was thinking of offing her here, right now. How fortunate that there was nobody around. Also, there wouldn’t be a CCTV camera of the Big Brother installed in a secluded alleyway like this one, as well.

‘That’s why I love this neighbourhood, you know.’

The man formed an evil grin and thrust the knife at Eun Ji-Min’s midriff.

But then, a hand shot out from the darkness and grabbed the knife.

“Uh??”

The man raised his head, only to find a strange youth standing there. Because of his hood, only the punk’s chin was visible. But he possessed a pretty d*mn outstanding physique.

‘Is he... wearing a glove or something?’

Not a drop of blood dripped down from the hand grasping the blade.

“Who the hell are you?!”

The serial killer tried to yank the knife out several times, but after realising that it wouldn’t budge an inch, he quickly let go of the knife’s grip and turned around. He rapidly escaped from the spot.

“What a strange son of a b*tch....”

The serial killer took a look behind several times and found that strange youth was following along, constantly scanning the surroundings while he

was at it.

‘What the hell is up with this b*stard...?’

The serial killer changed his direction and led the youth to a deserted vacant lot, the place he originally wanted to drag that woman to. If that punk was protecting his hand with something, then it’d be fine to attack him elsewhere.

When he arrived at the destination, the serial killer slowed down, and gradually shortened his distance to the strange punk that had been keeping pace with him until then. Once their gap closed to around a couple of feet or so....

“Hey punk, who the hell do you think you are?”

The serial killer spun around and stabbed the youth in the chest with an awl he’d been hiding under his jacket.

“Do I look like an easy mark to you?! Huh?”

Stab!

The hand pushing the awl into the youth’s chest shook, hard.

‘...What the hell could be this hard?!’

A stab-proof vest? Or something else underneath his shirt??

The serial killer quickly threw out a question.

“What the f*ck?! You wearing something under your clothes or something?”

If this guy was able to sense magical energy, then he wouldn’t have asked such a stupid question. Too bad, the serial killer somehow failed to think of the word ‘Hunter’ even though his opponent didn’t try to retaliate after that second sneak attack. Instead, a quiet voice leaked out from under the hood.

“I’m curious about something.”

The voice naturally belonged to Jin-Woo. He discarded the kitchen knife of the serial killer to the ground.

“Why are you doing this?”

“What’s the matter? You wish to reform me or something?”

“Nope. Just curious if you have a reason or not. That’s all.”

The serial killer snorted derisively. He thought that, what with this punk jumping out of nowhere to save that woman, and following him all the way

out here, he was looking at some weirdo masquerading as an ally of justice or something. But now...

'This kid's just a bloody idiot, isn't he?'

Or maybe, this punk was the same type of madman as he was?

The serial killer thought that maybe he could get away from here unscathed if he used his gift of gab, so he readily humoured the youth.

"A reason, is it? Well, if I were to really think of one... because it's fun?"

"Fun?"

"For some reason, whenever I see someone weaker than me, I just wanna torment that....."

....Person.

The serial killer didn't get to finish what he wanted to say. Instead....

"Uwaaaahk?! Uwahk!!"

Instead, he fell to the ground clutching his left ankle where his tendon had been sliced apart. When he raised his head, he realised that Jin-Woo was holding the kitchen knife even before he had the time to notice it.

'But, didn't he throw that away? Just when....?'

It was right then, Jin-Woo's shape grew blurry again.

"Uwaaaahk?!"

This time, it was his right ankle. The serial killer rolled around the ground in pain. Meanwhile, Jin-Woo leisurely rummaged through the serial killer's pockets now that the murdering b*stard wasn't going anywhere with his tendons cut in half. He soon found the killer's mobile phone and the wallet.

"You, you!! Who the hell are you, you son of a b*tch?!"

Jin-Woo ignored the venom-spewing serial killer and calmly dialled 119 to call for an ambulance. He then pulled out the ID card from the wallet to take a look.

, he placed the phone and the wallet back in the hands of the shivering serial killer and murmured quietly.

"Hand yourself over to the police before midnight tomorrow."

"What?!"

"....If you wish to keep breathing, that is."

He said all he wanted to say.

Jin-Woo got up from the spot and inserted one of his Shadow Soldiers inside the serial killer's shadow, before leaving a similar sounding order to that soldier.

'Although, I don't know how patient a High Orc's shadow can be, but...'

That soldier might not be good with patiently waiting around until the designated time, but well, carrying out the next part of the order should be the speciality of High Orcs.

"I'd prefer it if you keep living on."

The killer had to be alive if he were to repent for his sins for the rest of his life.

"J-just... what the hell are you?"

Jin-Woo left the serial killer shivering from pain and fear behind in the vacant lot. He could hear the sirens of an ambulance coming from afar.

He walked to a far enough location, and after confirming that there was no one nearby, he pulled his hood back.

"...Whew."

Thanks to the signal sent by the Shadow Soldier after discovering the serial killer, Jin-Woo was able to arrive just in time.

The 'Shadow Exchange'.

This skill was proving to be exceptionally convenient the more he used it.

'It's not the highest-ranked Rune Stone for nothing, is it?'

Jin-Woo formed a satisfied smile now that he got to experience the greatness of the Shadow Exchange once more in the last couple of days. He couldn't even begin to imagine just how much more useful this skill would get, once the skill level rose up high enough to sufficiently decrease the cooldown time.

And so, as he continued to walk back home...

'Mm?'

He abruptly raised his head to see that the moon was now in the middle of the night sky.

'Now that I think about it... it's already tomorrow.'

The Korea-Japan united assault team's raid. It was already here.

He wasn't even on the team, yet his heart was pounding this much in

anticipation. So, what would the participating members be feeling right now?

Jin-Woo recalled the faces of the raid members he was acquainted with, and prayed for their safety as well as their success in the mission.

Late at night.

Goto Ryuji was still in the dojo inside the Japanese Hunter's Association.

In front of him, two men, and at his back, one other. He was surrounded by rank S Hunters, ostensibly the same rank as he was. Goto Ryuji took a deep breath, and just as his eyes flew open....

“Ta-ha-aht!!”

The Hunters biding their time powerfully pounced on him all at the same time. However....

Slam!

The ones to fall down were the three attacking Hunters.

“That was great!”

“As expected of Goto-san!”

“No one can measure up to your skills, sir.”

The three Hunters lying on the wooden floor of the dojo dusted themselves off and stood back up. This was only possible because Goto Ryuji had held back his power. Without saying anything, he lowered his head slightly to imply that they all did a good job.

‘As expected, there’s no problem with my physical condition.’

No, if he were to frankly assess himself, then he was at peak condition right now. Just from imagining how he'd swallow up South Korea, it felt like his condition was getting better and better all by itself.

So, how come....?

Goto Ryuji continued to stare at the dojo, now empty that the three Hunters had left, as the memories of that day still lingered on in his mind.

Seong Jin-Woo.

Just what was he?

‘.....’

The more he thought back to that day, the more bitter he felt. Soon, though, Goto Ryuji shook his head.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter now.’

Regardless of all else, that man Seong Jin-Woo wasn't taking part in this raid. And the Association President's plan would unfold without any mishaps.

Once South Korea loses almost all of her rank S Hunters, its leadership would naturally fall into Japanese hands. By then, the complaints of the Japanese citizens demanding for the appropriate reparations from the Koreans would have been transformed into rousing cheers of fanfare, instead.

When that happened....

'What can Seong Jin-Woo do all by himself?'

Didn't matter whether Seong Jin-Woo was a genuinely powerful Hunter or he simply came across that way through Goto Ryuji's momentary delusion, the fact remained that, him not participating in tomorrow's raid was for the greater benefit of Japan.

There was nothing to bother him now. The decisive moment would come tomorrow.

Inside this still dojo bathed in the cold moonlight, Goto Ryuji formed a quiet smile to himself.

"We'll be in your care!"

The managing director of a certain TV station deeply bowed his head to the lone cameraman. Such a thing was completely unheard of. However, the cameraman standing in front of the director was no ordinary man; he was an active Hunter and a proud holder of a rank A licence.

"The future of my station depends on this raid."

In order to win the exclusive broadcasting rights, the director had to spend over half of the station's total annual budget. There had been simply too many competing bids, and that's why he had to go all in.

But, then again, there was a compelling reason why he simply had to make such a brave business decision.

Not many rank S Gates opened up around the world. Even when one did open, it was still impossible to take the recording equipment inside to capture the footage of what happened in there.

In other words, this would be the one and only opportunity for regular citizens to witness an actual rank S raid in progress. As long as there wasn't another unfortunate event of a rank S Gate opening up somewhere else, that was.

On top of this, this broadcast wouldn't be a recording, but shown live. Sure, there would be a ten-minute delay to the live feed, but still.

Just how high would the audience rating reach?

70 percent? 80?

When the managing director thought back to all the potential profit margin to be had from selling the footage to the TV networks in other countries, he no longer felt regret in investing half of the station's budget in this venture.

'...As long as the raid doesn't end in failure!'

Indeed, no sane-minded viewer out there would ever want to watch the top-ranked Hunters get devoured by the monsters during the raid. No, even if there were, he couldn't let such footage be broadcast to the public, to begin with.

So, the director had staked everything he had on the success of the fourth subjugation operation.

Considering that, bowing his head several times to the cameraman tasked with capturing the all-too-important footage was indeed, nothing.

Heck, if the cameraman wished for it, the director was prepared to prostrate on the floor, even.

"Please don't worry too much, director."

The cameraman did his best to calm the shivering managing director down from his high anxiety level.

Even before he became a Hunter, he made his living as a cameraman. And after agreeing to take on this job, he made sure to study and polish his skills of wielding the camera even further.

Obviously, he didn't want to spoil the broadcast that the entire nation would be watching through some stupid mistake on his part. Of course, he'd get paid quite a big reward in return, too.

'He's going to give me a portion of the profit earned from the broadcast, after all.'

The cameraman had already earned plenty from being a rank A Hunter, but the offered amount was so high that it really excited him to no end.

If the operation ends in success, then he'd be able to earn an enormous amount of money and fame, perhaps as much as the rank S Hunters actually participating in the raid.

Wouldn't he become quite possibly the most famous rank A Hunter in South Korea?

A smile formed on the cameraman's face as all sorts of wonderful thoughts

of the future bloomed in his head.

“By the way, I’m surprised that the Association President Goh Gun-Hui actually gave his permission to film this raid. I mean, that hard-headed man wouldn’t have allowed it simply for the sake of money, so....”

The station’s director nodded his head at the cameraman’s puzzled question.

“He said that the fee we paid will be split equally among all the Hunters participating today, actually.”

“Oh? In that case, why....?”

Why did he permit the filming of the raid?

The director cautiously voiced his educated guess.

“I think..... I think, perhaps he wishes to console the hearts of the citizens.”

The Korean Hunter’s Association had to swallow the bitter pill of defeat three times at the hands of the ant monsters. Because of the continuous failure, the Association had to suffer great losses, which in turn also led to the loss of the public’s trust. Meanwhile, the citizens felt increasingly powerless as the thought of these ant monsters being invincible took root in their hearts.

As the atmosphere of the nation festered like that, a chance to reverse this whole thing had suddenly landed on their laps.

‘You can tell how the public is responding by taking a quick look at the internet forums.’

The Association President wanted to take a step further than that. He wanted to capture the moment of victory and broadcast it live to the citizens.

His grim and perhaps desperate resolution to not fail could be gleamed from this decision.

The cameraman nodded his head after hearing the managing director’s explanation. He took a look at his wristwatch before standing up with a determined expression on his face.

“It’s time already. I’ll be on my way now, sir.”

The managing director once more bowed deeply to the cameraman.

“We leave everything to you, Hunter-nim!!”

Hunters began boarding the helicopter, as the spinning rotors issued deafening noises above their heads.

“...”

“...”

The constantly-smiling Mah Dong-Wook, the always-confident Choi Jong-In, and even Baek Yun-Ho famed for his positive personality, were all wearing sombre expressions.

The cameraman checked his recording equipment for the last time. The camera itself was designed to be fitted around the head so it should not impinge on his movement by much.

‘I wouldn’t have agreed to come if the camera was bulky and made it impossible to move.’

The place their helicopter was heading off to was perhaps the most dangerous place in the whole of South Korea – no, maybe, even the world. Thinking about their destination, the cameraman could only swallow his saliva down in nervousness.

No matter how hard he tried to stay calm, there was nothing he could do about the nervous tension slowly mushrooming in his heart. It was the same story for the rank S Hunters, as well.

In order to dispel the tension in the air, Baek Yun-Ho started talking to his ‘dongsaeng’, the one he was closest to.

“Hey, Byung-Gu. I really didn’t expect you to show up here today.”

Min Byung-Gu grinned in response.

“I thought that, without me healing you, hyung would be the first one to get killed today. I mean, you always jump on a monster whenever you see one, you know.”

“What the hell. Why do you have talk like that? Since when did I ever ‘jump’ on monsters??”

Other Hunters began giggling after hearing the two men chat.

Min Byung-Gu was the sole rank S Healer in South Korea. All members of the raid team were greatly relieved and happy to hear that he was coming out of retirement especially to participate in this operation.

There was a big difference in whether there was a Healer or not in a raid. After all, one would be able to fight harder without worrying about getting hurt when there was one.

As the tense atmosphere frozen stiff in nervousness gradually relaxed through Baek Yun-Ho and Min Byung-Gu’s conversation, Cha Hae-In sitting

next to the former quietly asked a question.

“Chairman Baek. By any chance, have you spoken to Mister Seong Jin-Woo before coming here today?”

“Mister Seong Jin-Woo?”

“Yes.”

Baek Yun-Ho shook his head.

“No, I haven’t. But, why do you ask?”

“Ah... It’s nothing important, actually. I guess I’ve made a mistake.”

It was then.

Mah Dong-Wook broke out in genial laughter.

“Huhuh. Looks like it’s finally starting.”

The gazes of the Hunters present followed the direction he was pointing at. Through the window of the helicopter, they could see the darkened island that had become the land of monsters.



Chapter 115 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The mutated ants discovered the helicopter's presence in the air and began flying up one by one.

Vuuonng...

Vuuonnnng.....

Maybe the number of specimens that could fly was low, because the Hunters could only see seven flying up to meet them.

“Let me take care of them.”

The sole Mage-type Hunter among the team, Choi Jong-In, stepped forward. His skill, 'Flame Spear', was called into action.

As soon as he was done casting his magic, seven bodies of floating flames drew long lines in the air to resemble burning spears and slammed accurately into the airborne ants.

Kwa-kwa-boom!!

It was difficult to kill a single ant monster with scattered firepower, but it was more than enough to burn away their wings.

Kiiieehk-!!

Kyaahhk-!

With their wings burnt off, the ants fell freely back to the earth. Choi Jung-In tightly clenched his fist while witnessing the result of his hard work. However, now wasn't the time to bask in the glow of his victory.

Choi Jong-In turned around and asked Mah Dong-Wook.

“What's happening with the Japanese side?”

The ants had noticed their approach and began moving now. Meaning, there was no more time for them to take it easy.

Crackle-!

Mah Dong-Wook paid attention to the radio receiver stuck in his ear. As a Tanker, he was named as the leader of the Korean side of the raid team.

“They say they have landed on the island now....”

Ka-boom!!

Just as he was done speaking up, there was a loud explosion from afar.

Boom!!

Kaboom!!!

As if that was the signal, several more explosion began ringing up from all parts of the island as thick, choking smoke plumes rose up. The fourth subjugation operation was now officially underway.

The Master the Reapers Guild, Im Tae-Gyu, looked out of the helicopter's window, and at the ground far below, a deep frown forming on his forehead.

Thousands of ants were pouring out of the ant tunnel, before splitting up into four smaller swarms to rush towards the four cardinal directions.

“That’s some creepy and disgusting thing to look at. Seriously, man.”

“Doesn’t it look like most of them have left the tunnel now?”

“...It does, doesn’t it?”

The once-lengthy lines of ants soon came to an end, leaving behind a massive gaping hole in the ground. That was the entrance to the ant tunnel.

The scale of the ant tunnel must’ve been rather incredible, because the entrance itself was as big as the mouth of a tunnel one would see commonly on the national highway.

And in the deepest part of the ant tunnel, the ant queen was waiting for their arrival.

This raid team only had one goal – to eliminate the ant queen.

“Everyone.”

Before they set off to invade the ant tunnel, Mah Dong-Wook gestured and gathered the raid team members around him. He even gestured towards the hesitant cameraman, too.

Everyone participating in this operation pressed their heads together.

“During hundreds of simulation runs, Japanese were only able to buy us one hour, tops. Which means, we need to kill the ant queen within that hour, no matter what.”

He didn’t bother to speak about the possibility of ‘if we fail’. Unlike the first three subjugation raids, there was no escape path this time around for them. They would be utterly cut off inside the ant tunnel.

Mah Dong-Wook studied the faces of each raid members, and they returned a nod, a look of grim determination clearly etched on each one.

‘These are the best individual team members imaginable.’

Unless there was another tragedy similar to Jeju Island happening in the future, one would never come across an opportunity to hunt together with members this capable ever again.

Mah Dong-Wook was deeply honoured to be the leader of this team.

They soon finished reconfirming their resolve, and then...

“Let’s go.”

From the helicopter, seven people, the six members of the raid team and the lone cameraman, jumped out.

“How long has it been since the Koreans went inside?”

Goto Ryuji threw out a question.

“Hold on.”

Now originally, it was Goto Ryuji’s job to communicate with the mission control centre. But, as he didn’t enjoy carrying around bothersome things, another Hunter was tasked with doing so. It was precisely this person that provided the answer.

“They say it has been less than 10 minutes.”

“Ten minutes, is it...”

Time to start the escape procedure, then.

Before they started withdrawing from Jeju Island, though, Goto Ryuji briefly scanned his vicinity. The corpses of the massacred ants were piled up on high.

The role of the Japanese in this raid, on the surface, of course, was to attract the attention of the ants. They didn’t even focus on killing the ants and concentrated on retreating in order to buy as much time as possible, yet they still managed to achieve such a feat.

‘The Koreans might find these ants as tough opponents, but they are nothing to us, the Japanese.’

The unbridled confidence caused the corner of Goto Ryuji’s lips to arc up. He kicked away an ant corpse hampering his steps to a far away distance and immediately issued the order to withdraw.

Finally, it was time for them to start moving towards the true goal of the

Japanese team.

However....

“Excuse me, Goto-san.”

“Mm?”

The Hunter in charge of the communication formed a worried expression.

“I can’t get in touch with Team 3 from a while ago.”

‘Is it equipment malfunction...?’

The instances of equipment, that had gone through multiple meticulous checks, malfunctioning right before an important part of the mission, or during the important part itself, did happen occasionally.

The landing point of Team 3 was in the southern part of the island. Goto Ryuji’s Team 1 landed on the western part and they had been constantly moving south, so their distance shouldn’t be that great.

“What is the estimated distance between our current position and the last known position of Team 3 before the communication failure?”

“With our current speed, we should be able to get there within ten minutes.”

As expected, it wasn’t far. At this rate, Team 3 would never get to hear the order to withdraw and get left behind in the island, eventually meeting a very bad end for themselves.

‘.....’

When he thought about the next subjugation operation that would take place involving only the Japanese personnel, he simply couldn’t afford to have five rank S Hunters as KIAs.

Also, because Team 3 was planned to be deployed on the southern part of the island, which was the closest to the ant tunnel, the whole team was made up of the best of the best among Japan’s elite.

Losing them here meant that Japan would greatly suffer as well.

‘Well, I’m sure nothing bad has happened over there....’

Indeed, it must’ve been a minor error. Nothing to worry about.

After a short deliberation, Goto Ryuji decided on the next course of action.

“We shall head over there and take a look.”

The moment Jin-Woo stopped his usual daily run, the familiar mechanical

beep rang out in his ear.

Tti-ring.

[Total distance ran: 10 km.]

[You've completed Running, 10 km.]

Completely the opposite to when he started doing the Daily Quests, Jin-Woo wasn't even out of breath. He had repeated these Daily Quests for so long, it simply felt like the part of his daily routine now.

Soon, along with the completion message, his rewards figuratively landed on his lap.

'Stats.'

Out of the three Stat bonus points he gained as a reward, Jin-Woo spent two on his Agility, while the remaining point was spent on his Strength.

[Stats]

Strength: 219

Endurance: 200

Agility: 230

Intelligence: 250

Perception: 200

(Available points to distribute: 0)

Reduction in the physical damage: 46%

Seeing that almost all of his Stats were now ending with a '0', a satisfied smile crept up on his face.

'If only I had one more point....'

Although it was regretful, he couldn't manufacture a point out of thin air, so there was no helping it. Still, looking at his Stat value that had risen up evenly like this, a smile automatically bloomed on his lips.

'Nice.'

After he raised Intelligence Stat to 250, he began maintaining a balance of sorts and made sure that not one Stat was left behind.

'All five Stats are indispensable to me.'

That was his final assessment after levelling up and raising his Stats for a long time. Regardless of which Stat it was, with their numerical values

continuing to soar higher, he hadn't been disappointed once so far by their usefulness.

'That's why....'

He was planning to continue with this Stat balancing act for the foreseeable future – as long as there weren't any unexpected circumstances forcing him to change, of course.

Jin-Woo dismissed the Stat Window with a satisfied grin still etched on his face. He then took a look around him. His neighbourhood had always been on the quieter side, but today, he failed to spot a single soul so far. He could easily guess the reason why, though.

Jin-Woo pulled his phone out and confirmed the current time.

'I knew it.'

The Korea-Japan united team's raid would be in full swing by now. And pretty much every single citizen should be glued to their TV screens, too.

Jin-Woo turned around. His Daily Quest was already over, but the steps leading him back home were far more urgent than usual.

The operation was unfolding smoothly so far.

Just as the Japanese had predicted, Mah Dong-Wook's team didn't encounter any obstructions as they entered the deeper parts of the ant tunnel.

The inside of the tunnel resembled the cave-type dungeons in its layout. However, if there was one clear difference to note, then that would be the lack of illuminating stones. The Hunters had to provide light themselves to see where they were going.

'.....'

Gulp.

The cameraman thought that he had plenty of experience exploring dungeons before, but today, he just had to nervously swallow his saliva.

His current position was right at the back of the group. The team maintained a formation of Choi Jong-In standing right at the front to light their way using magic, while the other Hunters were sticking very close to him.

The cameraman also had a flashlight attached to his headgear for the purpose of filming.

Unfortunately, this darkness was infused with a heavy amount of magical energy. The flashlight didn't provide as much help as the magic from a rank S

Mage, and it could just barely illuminate a bit of space in front of his eyes.

“It’s really quiet in here.”

Choi Jong-In voiced his opinion without giving it too much thought, and Mah Dong-Wook next to him nodded his head to express his agreement.

“Mm.”

As a leader and a Tanker, he was duty-bound to protect the Mage, Choi Jong-In, who should originally be stationed at the far back.

Was that the reason why? Mah Dong-Wook continued to glare at the surroundings with a pair of sharp, focused eyes. His usual, out-going demeanour was nowhere to be seen now.

It was the same story with Baek Yun-Ho, as well. He activated the ‘Eyes of the Beast’ even before entering the ant tunnel. He hadn’t spoken a single word and did his absolute hardest to latch on to any slight movement or deviation in the flow of the magic energy.

Both Min Byung-Gu and the cameraman also carried deeply tense expressions.

Only Cha Hae-In maintained that expressionless face of hers, silently walking forward while her hand rested on the hilt of her sword.

It was then.

“Look, over there....”

He must’ve found something in the distance, because Choi Jong-In raised his voice.

“...Huh.”

“Mm....”

The Hunters all gasped out in nasty shock.

Countless ant eggs were attached to the walls and the ceiling of this huge chamber with nary an empty space between them.

They could see dark-coloured larva wiggling inside the semi-transparent shell of each egg. There could only ever be one emotion they felt when facing this nursery area filled with gloomy, dreary atmosphere and a seriously terrible stench.

That would be ‘sheer disgust’.

“Don’t you think we should just burn all these away?”

Choi Jong-In spoke, his expression crumpling greatly.

For the first time since he entered this ant tunnel, Mah Dong-Wook formed a smile.

“I’d like nothing more than to do exactly that, but since we don’t have much time, let us not.”

Even if all of these creatures hatched, they would only live for no more than one year, at most. As long as they could kill the mother, they didn’t have to worry about these critters anymore.

“...Here they come.”

Baek Yun-Ho pointed towards the distant darkness and warned the rest of the team. Even before he made his warning, though, Cha Hae-In had unsheathed her sword already.

Mah Dong-Wook pulled the shield as large as his body right up to his chin and glared at his front.

Shashashasha....

A group of around ten ants appeared at the same time. As if they were born on Jeju Island and had gone through some sort of a mutation, all of them didn’t have eyes.

“Are they the queen’s guards?” Asked Mah Dong-Wook.

Choi Jong-In shook his head.

“No, they are not. Looks like they are here to guard the nursery area.”

“In that case, this shouldn’t be difficult.”

If they were regular monsters, not the guards of the boss creature, then there was just no way these critters could withstand the combined firepower of a raid team consisting entirely of rank S Hunters!

Knowing better than anyone else that there wasn’t a lot of time, Mah Dong-Wook jumped into the fray first.

“Let’s go!”

Hunters followed after him. Right behind them, flames flared out brightly from Choi Jong-In’s hands, and arrows fired by Im Tae-Gyu sliced up the air as they flew to their targets.

Just as Mah Dong-Woo predicted, the battle was concluded pretty quickly.

Kiiehhk!

The head of the last ant fell to the ground. Cha Hae-In wordlessly shook off the bodily fluids clinging onto her sword. Meanwhile, Mah Dong-Wook spoke up.

“Since the nursery area is right here, that means....”

Choi Jong-In provided the follow-up.

“...The queen’s lair is nearby.”

As the Hunters began checking their equipment before they rushed into the decisive showdown against the ant queen, the cameraman began looking here and there to capture more footage. But then, he gasped out in pure shock.

“Heok!!”

The gazes of the Hunters were immediately focused on him.

“I-I’m really sorry.”

Momentarily forgetting that the camera attached to his head was actually broadcasting to the rest of the nation, the cameraman hurriedly bowed towards the Hunters. Sensing something was afoot, Baek Yun-Ho approached the cameraman.

“Did you find something?”

“Ah, well, it’s just that.... Over there.”

The cameraman sheepishly smiled and pointed to the corner of the chamber.

“There’s a pile of empty eggshells over there, but like, one of them happens to be really, really big, you see.”

‘....!!’

Baek Yun-Ho’s eyes grew larger.

It was as the cameraman said. Most of the eggs containing regular ants were only about the size of a bicycle wheel, yet the one pointed out was as big as a grown man....

‘No, wait.’

The lengthy and ovoid shape of the egg was large enough to say that a fully-grown ant specimen must’ve emerged from it.

‘That’s also an ant egg??’

“....Just what the hell came out of that egg?”

Min Byung-Gu had walked closer before anyone had noticed it; there was a

look of huge shock on his face as well. Baek Yun-Ho's expression was stiff for a brief moment, but he quickly changed it to a grin as he lightly slapped Min Byung-Gu's back.

"We're here to kill the queen. Let's not worry about anything else."

".....Right."

Min Myung-Gu carried an uneasy expression as he turned around to walk over to where the rest of the Hunters were. Before he joined the others, Baek Yun-Ho took one last look at that egg.

'That's just crazy....'

'This is just crazy....'

Goto Ryuji had to doubt whether his own eyes were working properly or not.

"Heok!!"

"Mm.....!!"

Other Japanese Hunters either convulsed in shock or muttered lowly under their breaths.

Goto Ryuji frowned deeply as he scanned his surroundings. The Hunters of Team 3 were found in the exact location where their communication had been cut off. All five of them were here, but without their heads.

The sight of their headless colleagues lying on the ground as corpses left a shocking mental imprint on the other Hunters.

'.....'

Goto Ryuji wordlessly massaged his temples, before approaching the bodies to check out their wounds.

'This wasn't done by a blade.'

The necks of the dead Hunters were all roughly bitten off.

'Just how much of a biting force was it for their necks to end up like this?'

While Goto Ryuji was stewing in his astonishment, one of his fellow Hunters walked in closer and angrily spat out.

"How dare these d*mn ants.....!!"

Goto quickly shook his head.

"It's not 'ants'."

“Pardon?”

“Whether this was the handiwork of an ant or not, there was only one enemy.”

“B-but, how can that be?!”

Goto Ryuji swallowed his saliva.

No matter how hard he searched, he couldn't see any hint of a battle taking place here. If ants pushed on with sheer numbers to annihilate Team 3, then he should've found corpses of dead ants or some other traces around this area. However, he couldn't find anything.

Also, the wounds on the dead Hunters – judging from the location of the attack, it was more than likely that they were killed by a single assailant.

‘How could a team of the best Hunters from Japan fall to a single monster....?’

If his guess was correct, then only a rank S dungeon's boss could do something like this.

Goto Ryuji quickly snatched the communication device from the Hunter next to him and spoke up.

“It's Goto.”

“Where is the ant queen? Did it come out of the tunnel?”

The magic energy detection camera mounted on the spy satellite. Only America, Japan and China possessed such technology in the entire world.

In reality, China had to hack the Americans to copy the camera system, so one could argue that only the USA and Japan truly possessed this technology.

The location of the ant queen, as monitored by the technology Japan so proudly boasted to the rest of the world, soon came out of the receiver.

“What was that?!”

Goto Ryuji stood right up.

He felt his heart nearly leap out of his mouth just then.

‘The queen didn't do this?!’

His breathing quickened. He realised that something was going terribly wrong here. Goto Ryuji hurriedly issued a new order.

“Issue the withdrawal.... Tell every single Japanese Hunter to escape from this island immediately.”



Chapter 116 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Goto Ryuji ended the communication there, his expression remaining quite grim.

‘Did we miss something?’

In order to successfully achieve what they were aiming for, the Japanese considered all types of possibilities and variables.

However, the event of a team featuring five of the very best Japanese Hunters getting annihilated in one go like this - such a thing simply exceeded all their expectations.

‘Wait a minute....’

Something popped into his memory just then. There was an odd occurrence about four months ago.

The ant queen, being observed for 24 hours straight every single day, suddenly showed a massive decline in its magical energy emission. It was less than half of the usual amount!

The research team interpreted that as the lifespan of the queen coming to an end, and submitted several hopelessly optimistic reports. That was only until the ant queen began slowly recovering her magic energy, of course.

‘It took about a month, didn’t it?’

It didn’t take too long for the queen to regain its original magic energy output. All those researchers that spoke up about the lifespan or rather had to shut their mouths as this result obviously went against their expectations.

“Goto-san.”

The voice of one of the team members woke Goto Ryuji up from his reminiscence.

“...Mm.”

He had been kneeling on one knee in order to check the bodies of Team 3’s dead Hunters. He slowly stood back up. Now wasn’t the time to worry about anything else.

‘Did we come in far too deep inland...?’

Shashashashak....

Hundreds of ants had appeared behind him by then, and these monsters raised their heads up as if they were smacking their lips in anticipation of a tasty meal.

On the other hand....

The Korean team had entered the boss room, also known as ‘the queen’s chamber’. It took them 15 minutes to get here.

‘If we consider the fact that we’ll need roughly the same amount of time to get out of here....’

They still had around 30 minutes of wiggle room. Assuming that they should be able to shorten their return trip because they were already familiar with the path now, the remaining time was on the ‘more than enough’ side.

‘Very good.’

Having confirmed the time with his wristwatch, Mah Dong-Wook raised his head. Everything was going according to plan. What remained now was how should they go about bookending this operation.

Baek Yun-Ho used his ‘Eyes of the Beast’ to see through the darkness and accurately assessed the number of enemies present.

“The queen is at the rearmost location. There are eight guards in front of the target.”

The queen’s guards were incomparably stronger than the regular ants. It’d be too tough for one Tanker to take on the attacks of the queen and its guard monsters. From here onwards, Mah Dong-Wook needed another person to act as a secondary Tanker. He looked to his side.

“Hunter Cha.”

“Yes.”

“Can you take on the guard duty while I tend to the queen?”

“Leave it to me.”

Cha Hae-In’s reply was short and simple.

She served as the main Tanker during the raids of her Guild, the Hunters. So, performing the role of a sub-Tanker was easier than drinking cold soup for her.

Mah Dong-Wook shifted his gaze to the rest of the team. Every single member present here was a top specialist in hunting down monsters. Going

through detailed explanations was a waste of time for them.

“Let’s go.”

As soon as Mah Dong-Wook turned towards the ants, Choi Jong-In created a massive ball of light and floated it up to the highest point in the boss room. That brightly illuminated the entirety of the chamber.

“Heok.”

The cameraman spat out a quiet gasp at the sheer size of the light sphere. He quickly began whispering towards a small mic located near his lips.

“As a rank A Hunter, I’ve participated in quite a few raids before, but it’s my first time seeing such a huge ‘Light’ magic like that. As expected of Korea’s best Mage-type Hunter!”

His voice entered the mic and got transmitted to the viewers throughout the entire country.

Not too long ago, he heard that the live broadcast he was filming had shot past the audience rating of 80%.

Feeling overly motivated now, the cameraman tried to step forward in order to capture even better footage, but then, Min Byung-Gu standing next to him at the back of the group hurriedly yanked him back by his shoulder.

“Keok?!”

At this absolute strength, the cameraman couldn’t offer any resistance and spun around to face Min Byung-Gu. His shoulder hurt so much that his mouth bobbed up and down all by itself.

‘How can a Healer be this strong....??’

There was no time to get shocked, though. The cameraman was now facing Min Byung-Gu who carried a completely different expression to when he was busy cracking jokes during the ride in the helicopter.

“This here is a boss room of a rank S dungeon. No one here is responsible for your life, except yourself.”

Hearing Min Byung-Gu’s anger-infused voice, the cameraman could only continue to nod his head, unable to form an intelligible reply.

“If you understand, then stay at the back. The real thing is about to get started.”

The overflowing energy of a rank S Hunter – even a Healer, who was supposed to be the physically weakest out of all the Hunter types, still could display an aura that easily overwhelmed a rank A Hunter. That was the

difference between a rank S and a rank A.

Such monstrous beings were uniting together to start an intense battle, so what could a measly little rank A cameraman even achieve here? The cameraman felt his own powerlessness for the first time since becoming a Hunter, and hurriedly stood behind Min Byung-Gu. Sure enough....

“Here they come.”

A super-giant ant discovered the Hunters’ presence and shifted its six legs to slowly approach where they were.

“So, that’s the queen....”

Baek Yun-Ho nervously swallowed his saliva.

The taut, nervous tension was also writ large on the faces of other Hunters.

The absolutely commanding presence of the ant queen!

These men and woman had become the very first humans to witness the outer appearance of the ant queen, having sneaked past the wall of hundreds, thousands of ants to get here.

‘Today, we shall end the lifeline of these d*mnable ants for good.’

Baek Yun-Ho’s heart trembled as he thought about bringing that massive creature down. But, if they were to do that, then first of all....

Baek Yun-Ho’s glare that had been fixed on the ant queen now shifted lower to the ground.

‘We need to....’

Eight ants walking in front of the ant queen – they had to get rid of the guards first.

“Ha-ahp!”

As if he had read the minds of his fellow raid members, the main Tanker of the team, Mah Dong-Wook, rushed forward to the frontline. A thick vein protruded out of his neck as he shouted out.

“You d*mn ants, come and get some!”

His impressive roar!

The ants’ sights had degenerated now, but in return, their sense of hearing had become even more developed, so they immediately bared their fangs and claws before pouncing on Mah Dong-Wook’s position.

He quickly looked behind him.

“Hunter Cha! Now!”

Cha Hae-In had been running behind Mah Dong-Wook while maintaining a certain distance, and when she heard his call, quickly unsheathed her longsword. Grabbing the hilt in a reverse grip with both hands, she powerfully stabbed the ground.

Skill, ‘Tremor of Provocation’ - activated!

Khwack!!

With the sword stabbing the ground serving as the epicentre, magic energy radiated out in circular waves. The ant guards aiming at Mah Dong-Wook suddenly all changed their directions and jumped at Cha Hae-In instead, as if they had been entranced by something powerful.

‘There you go!’

Mah Dong-Wook inwardly fist-pumped the air as the monsters ran past him and towards Cha Hae-In. She was successful in attracting the aggro of the ant guards.

up, it was his turn.

Mah Dong-Wook quickly stepped in between Cha Hae-In and the giant ant queen trying to shuffle towards her.

“You’re mine.”

The ant queen must’ve been displeased by an enemy blocking its way, because it began bellowing out a high-pitched scream.

Kiiiiieehhk!!

Any old Tanker would have been suppressed by the sheer pressure and cover their ears from that horrifying screech, but such a trick wouldn’t work against Korea’s best Tanker, Mah Dong-Wook.

“Hap-!!”

He instead activated his skill, ‘Battle Cry of Provocation’.

Unlike Cha Hae-In, who activated an AOE aggro skill, Mah Dong-Wook activated one that only worked against a single target.

The ant queen stopped screeching out and glared at Mah Dong-Wook now. He had successfully attracted its aggro.

‘Yes!!’

And now, his role was to endure the boss’s attacks until his colleagues managed to kill off the ant guards and come to his aid. And that would be the

role he felt most confident of performing in this world.

Mah Dong-Wook lifted up that heavy, large shield right up below his chin, the light of grim determination burning in his eyes. As he always had done, he began praying deep in his heart.

‘Please grant me the power to protect myself and my colleagues today.’

Kwa-ka-boom!!

Just then, a huge explosion resounded out from behind him, signalling the beginning of the raid of the ant queen, where countless lives were at stake.

“Grandpa, aren’t you going to watch? Hunters are supposed to show up on screen today.”

“Grandma, I don’t care.”

“Don’t be like that now.....The folks in TV said just now that they can really smash apart those ants today this time, so let’s watch together.”

“Argh. They all say the exact same thing all the bloody time. I told you, I don’t care.”

An old grandpa turned away on his chair and concentrated on the newspaper, instead. But then, a sound of him clicking his tongue came out from his slightly hunched back.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk. Even this newspaper is talking about those d*mn Hunters and nothing else. How boring.”

The old grandma cautiously closed shut the door to their bedroom as the grouchy voice of her husband continued to enter her ears.

“Uh-whew....”

Only until two years ago, her husband used to hold so much interest towards all the news related to Jeju Island. He was also a big supporter of Hunters, too.

Their one and only child was taken from them by the ants of Jeju Island, after all.

The despair that felt like their world was collapsing on them soon became deep hatred towards the ant monsters. Her husband donated a sizeable amount of money to the Hunters Association whenever there was a subjugation operation taking place to cheer on the participating Hunters.

He failed to fall asleep because of nervousness on the nights leading up to the operation dates, too.

However, the bigger the one's expectation, the greater the one's disappointment would be.

When the third subjugation attempt, where the Hunters promised to spare no effort to succeed, also ended up in failure with heavy losses incurred, her husband couldn't regain his wits for several days, looking all dazed and the like.

After that, her husband stopped talking about Hunters altogether. He stopped expecting, and stopped hoping for a miracle from them.

“Whew....”

The grandma sighed out once more and picked up the remote of the TV in the living room. When it was switched on, the host of the broadcast was in the middle of making his emotional speech.

The Hunters were getting ready to engage in combat just as she turned the TV on. The grandma gathered her hands in front of her chest and continued to watch on, her heart beating faster and faster in anxiety.

When the Hunters were injured, she averted her gaze while feeling sorry for them. When the attacks of the Hunters landed successfully, she clapped her hands in delight.

“Aigo! Aigoo!!”

That was the beginning. The terrifying-looking ant monsters began falling one by one from the fierce attacks of the Hunters. And whenever that happened, the roars and cheers of people shook and reverberated throughout the apartment building the grandma lived in.

“Aigoo! Aigoo!!”

Hearing that announcement, tears suddenly formed in the grandma's eyes.

First of all, she was thankful towards these Hunters who were risking their lives to protect other people.

Secondly, she recalled the face of her son as the boy celebrated him getting hired by a large corporation located in Jeju Island.

It was then.

Slam!

The bedroom's door flew open and the grandpa hurriedly ran out, his face burning with emotions.

“Dear....”

Even though grandma called out to him, grandpa didn't say anything, his reddened eyes glued to the TV screen and nowhere else. His tightly-clenched fists were trembling hard now.

The host held his breath and continued to observe the situation for a while, before....

The TV screen now displayed the stirring image of five Hunters rushing in at the same time from behind Mah Dong-Wook, who had endured commendably well against the ant queen's attacks.

Thick tears streamed down grandpa's face as he energetically punched the air almost out of instinct.

“Uwaaahhh-!!”

Inside the TV station.

As the phone calls of encouragements and support inundated the station's phone line, the station's director yelled out in pure, unadulterated joy.

“Sir, the audience rating has gone past 85% just now!!”

“We did it!!”

The director tightly clenched both of his fists.

The audience rating of 85%!!

Now that was a record that would never be beaten, even if the South Korean football team reached the final of the World Cup. And when he thought about all the profit coming from overseas, as well as the potential future revenue.....

‘A jackpot!!’

He plopped down on his chair and rubbed his face. All the other employees within the station's 'situation room' all breathed sighs of relief after seeing the happy face of their boss.

On the main screen showing the transmitted footage from the island, the Korean Hunters were busy making mincemeat out of the ant queen.

The station's director took out his handkerchief to pat down his sweat-soaked slick forehead.

‘Yes, very good! Very good!!’

The queen was on the brink of death now; all these Hunters had to do now was to finish off the ant monster and safely escape from the ant tunnel.

However....

Kyahhhhhhhh-!!!

“What the hell?!”

The director was jolted out of his senses and he quickly took a look behind him. One of the producers hurriedly lowered the volume. The director tilted his head this way and that, before walking closer to where this producer was.

“Producer Nah? What was that noise just now?”

“Ah, that was.... This is the real-time live feed coming from Jeju Island, actually. That screech came from the ant queen.”

“The ant queen made that noise?”

There was a slight delay between the broadcast being shown to the public and that of the real-time live feed coming in from the island. Since no one knew what would happen during the raid itself, it was decided that the real-time footage couldn't be shown to the public directly.

The station's director stared at the feed, before issuing an order with a smile on his face.

“Well, I think it won't do for a monster's terrible screech to come out when we're about to witness a historic victory. How about you edit that part out, or decrease the audio volume?”

“Will do, sir.”

This producer named 'Nah' nodded his head, and the director squeezed his right shoulder as a gesture of encouragement. It was then.

One of the station's employee hurriedly ran up to him with a hardened expression.

“Director, Producer Nah!!”

The director quickly turned his head around.

According to his personal experience, not once did the reports made by his subordinates carrying such expressions turn out to be a good one.

Even before the director heard the report, he was beset with this rather ominous hunch. Praying that he was wrong, at least for today, the director cautiously asked the employee.

“...What happened?”

Unfortunately, one's ominous hunches had a way of coming true. The employee spoke in a disconcerted voice.

“Sir, I just found out that Japanese Hunters are withdrawing from the

island right now!”

“What was that?!”

Mah Dong-Wook spurred his teammates on.

“We’re almost there!! Let us just push a little bit harder, everyone!”

Just as his words implied, the ant queen was truly on its last legs. All they needed was a little more push, and that would be it.

There were hundreds of arrows stuck tightly together on the head of the queen fired by Im Tae-Gyu, and the creature resembled a hedgehog as a result.

Pi-ooong!

Kwa-jeeck!

Yet another arrow flew and struck the queen in the face. The creature screeched out as if it was in great pain and shook its head.

Kieeehhk!!

The queen quickly recovered its bearings and began spewing out poisonous acidic liquid throughout the boss room.

Splash-!!

It was such a wide-scale attack that several Hunters failed to escape in time. Their skins began burning up into black charcoal, but their wounds were restored in full by Min Byung-Gu’s healing magic.

Kiieehk!!

The queen was further enraged by the fact that its acid attack wasn’t effective, and bit down on Mah Dong-Woo in front of the group with its large, saw-like fangs.

Kwack!!!

However, Mah Dong-Wook activated the ‘Advanced Fortification’ skill to defend his entire body and managed to endure the queen’s attack.

One side of the ant’s jaw was blocked off by the shield, while the other side, with his left hand. While Mah Dong-Wook was buying more time in this fashion, a huge pillar of flames exploded out from the side of the ant queen.

Kwa-ka-ka-boom!!

It was Choi Jong-In’s magic doing its thing.

Kiiehk!!

The queen staggered and failed to balance itself. Baek Yun-Ho in his beast-type monster form, meanwhile, seized upon this chance and jumped up very quickly to rip out the queen's left fang with his bare hand/paw.

Kwajeeck!!

Deftly landing back on the ground, Baek Yun-Ho breathed heavily as certainty grew larger in his heart.

'The queen's finished.'

His extensive hunting experience told him so. This would be the moment when they finally kill the leader of an army of monsters that dyed this land black with the blood of their victims.

Just a little bit more, and it'd be done. When he thought like that, a certain powerful emotion welled up from deep inside his heart.

but then, the queen suddenly raised its head high up in the air. And....

Kyaaaaaaaaahhh-!!

A screech that was so loud that it almost ruptured the Hunters' eardrums reverberated throughout the entire ant tunnel. Baek Yun-Ho's eyes shook hard.

'What was that?! A roar of anger? Its death throes?'

No, it felt different from those. That screech sounded like a pleading call towards someone, something, which was still far away.

'It's calling for something?!'

When his thought process reached there, he felt an unexplainable chill run down his spine.

"We need to stop that thing!!"

Before Baek Yun-Ho could take another step forward, Cha Hae-In jumped up rather gracefully and swung down the sword she held firmly with both hands.

Slice!

The queen's head fell down to the ground first before she could land back on her feet.

Thud!!

The cameraman had been holding his breath as he bore witness to this battle of the rank S creatures. And finally, he was able to raise both of his arms up high in elation as tears formed in his eyes.

This was the moment when the curtains closed on the horrifying battle that lasted for 4 years.

“Pant, pant....”

The heavily-panting Mah Dong-Wook raised his thumb up towards his teammates.

Cha Hae-In also sighed out in relief. Choi Jong-In grinned as he adjusted his glasses, while Im Tae-Gyu punched the air. Everyone was expressing their delight over the victory in their own way.

Only Baek Yun-Ho among them was shuddering from this ominous and unexplainable chill taking root within the corner of his heart.

“Hyung, we just became the seventh raid team in the entire world to successfully clear a rank S Gate, so why do you look like....”

“Hold on.”

It was then. Mah Dong-Wook, who had been in communication with the command centre, suddenly formed an enraged expression.

There was no time for them to relax like this. He quickly called out to his teammates taking a short break nearby.

“The Japanese have withdrawn already, and the remaining ants are heading this way! We need to escape from here, right now!”

“What?!”

“But, don’t we still have some time left?!”

“20 rank S Hunters couldn’t even hold out for 30 minutes, never mind one hour?!”

When his teammates grew visibly flustered, Mah Dong-Wook spoke in a complicated voice.

“I don’t know the details, but... The Association is trying to find out what’s going on, but the Japanese have one-sidedly cut off the communication.”

“Those stinking sons of b*tches...!”

Choi Jong-In spat out some choice words in disgust.

If it were the Japanese Hunters down here and not the Koreans, would they have given up this early and withdraw? No matter what, though – one had to be alive first in order to get angry later.

To prevent unrest from breaking out among his teammates, Mah Dong-

Wook did his best to suppress his own feelings. With a calm face, he hurried with their escape from this place.

“Everyone, hurry!”

The members of the Korean raid team hurriedly ran towards the exit of the queen’s chamber.

However, the one running in the lead, Baek Yun-Ho, stopped in his tracks first.

“Ah.....”

“Hyung?”

Min Byung-Gun running right behind had to stop there, and as a chain reaction, everyone else came to a stop as well. Wordlessly rooted to the spot, Baek Yun-Ho’s gaze was fixed in one direction as his entire body began trembling noticeably.

“This, this can’t be....”

This couldn’t be happening.

No, such a thing shouldn’t even happen in the first place.

As he watched a shadow approach them, he recalled the tall, humanoid-shaped eggshell back in the nursery area.

‘This... you’re telling me that this is the power possessed by a single monster??’

Baek Yun-Ho’s complexion paled instantly.

Other Hunters feeling puzzled finally sensed something was wrong and quickly took a step back from the exit.

“What’s this?”

“Did the ants return here already??”

As the Hunters began falling into a confused state....

From the far side of the ant tunnel draped in darkness, a single winged ant was slowly walking towards the Korean Hunters.



Chapter 117 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Cha Hae-In immediately felt something was very wrong as soon as she saw the ant monster leisurely entering the queen's chamber.

'There's... no presence?'

It was almost impossible to locate the creature without keeping her eyes locked on it constantly; that's how difficult it was to sense its presence.

There were only two beings out of all the Hunters and the monsters she met until now, that had this sort of effect on Cha Hae-In. One of them was this ant monster right in front of her eyes, and the other one was....

'...Mister Seong Jin-Woo.'

She inexplicably recalled Seong Jin-Woo, who had finally bared his hidden fangs at Japan's most powerful Hunter a couple of days ago.

What if that man stood in front of her as her enemy?

Shudder.

She couldn't breathe anymore as a crippling chill ran down her spine.

'.....'

Just imagining it alone caused her expression to harden considerably. The entrance of this unknown ant monster was definitely not good news for the Korean Hunters, who were still deeply fatigued from fighting the ant queen.

"That thing...."

"Something's wrong with that monster."

"It feels really creepy."

It wasn't to the extent of Baek Yun-Ho or Cha Hae-In, but other Hunters also felt a certain sense of incongruence here.

Gulp.

It was just a single monster, yet the atmosphere was shifting rather rapidly.

'What should we do?'

Mah Dong-Wook was inwardly worried. When faced with an unexpected

situation, a leader had to make a quick decision. Especially so, when they were pressed for time like this.

‘It’s a monster, so we should just kill it, but....’

But.

Just why was he feeling this enormous sense of unease right now?

While they stood there pondering and hesitating, the ant monster narrowed the distance between them quite quickly. Its movements were so eerily quiet that goosebumps automatically rose up on their skins.

‘We don’t have the time to hesitate like this.’

By the time Mah Dong-Wook finally managed to suppress the warning bells rung by his instincts and made the next logical decision....

...The monster suddenly disappeared from his view.

“Where?!”

Mah Dong-Wook’s eyes opened super-wide as he hurriedly scanned his vicinity. The reactions of other Hunters weren’t all that different, either.

“Behind....”

The cameraman anxiously looking around belatedly located the monster and shouted out.

“It’s behind us!!”

The Hunters were startled by this and quickly turned around. With the speed none of them could see, the ant monster had slipped past the Hunters to stand before the dead corpse of the ant queen.

‘It went past us?!’

‘But, how....??’

Just like that, the Hunters of the Korean raid team finally got to see what Baek Yun-Ho saw earlier with his ‘Eyes of the Beast’.

Thump, thump, thump!

Their heart rate rapidly picked up and their breathing quickened in no time.

‘...That’s no ordinary monster.’

Cold sweat drops dribbled down Mah Dong-Wook’s forehead.

The ant monster quietly stared at the dead queen, not even showing a hint of interest towards the Hunters. But then, it raised its head and....

Kiiiiieeeeeehhhh.....!!!

It began screeching out a beastly howl so terrifying and loud that the entire ant tunnel began shaking from the reverberation.

Plop!

The cameraman was the first to lose all his strength in his legs.

Plop!

Plop!

The other Hunters couldn't withstand the sheer pressure as well, and they began kneeling on the ground one by one. Mah Dong-Wook too carried a look of pure disbelief as he tried to support himself off the ground.

'I... I'm kneeling because of a howl?'

Eeeehhhhhkkk...!!!

By the time the seemingly-never-ending howl came to an end, the only one standing still was Cha Hae-In and no one else. However, her two legs were wobbling noticeably too, as if standing upright was all she could do at the moment. Obviously, fighting back was out of the question here.

Only then did the ant monster display some interest towards the Hunters. With a clear hostile intent, to boot.

'...!!'

Cha Hae-In's eyes grew wider.

The creature's face was hideously twisted as it turned around to face the Hunters, as if it was expressing its anger at the death of the queen.

She did her best to calmly move her hand towards the hilt of her sword. However, the ant monster was a step faster than the speed of Cha Hae-In drawing her sword from her waist.

Piishuk-!

The ant monster literally blinked and reappeared right in front of her nose. Cha Hae-In's eyes shook hard. She didn't even have enough time to think about defending herself.

SLAM-!!

"Ahk!"

Being struck in the side of her head, Cha Hae-In flew away in a straight line and slammed into a far wall, before powerlessly falling to the ground.

Tumble....

Just one hit, and Cha Hae-In was rendered unconscious. All of her teammates couldn't hide their astonishment after seeing that horrible spectacle. Because... their strongest member had been knocked down in one hit, that was why.

Unfortunately, they didn't have any time to stay shocked like that.

They had confirmed the ridiculous power level of their new enemy. Through their experiences, these Hunters knew very well that their odds of survival would decline further the longer they remained hesitant as they were now.

As the main Tanker, Mah Dong-Wook took a step forward first.

“Hup-!!”

Mah Dong-Wook powerfully bear-hugged the ant monster from behind and strengthened both his arms.

With the strength that could easily uproot a full-grown tree, he squeezed hard at the ant monster's body. Thick veins popped up all over his arms and his neck. Unfortunately...

“Uwaaaahk-!!”

When the ant monster increased its strength for a bit, both of Mah Dong-Wook's arms fell off, just like that. He fell down to his knees.

“No!!”

Baek Yun-Ho pounced forward.

If he failed to draw that thing's attention away now, then Mah Dong-Wook would be killed off in an instant now that he lacked the means to defend himself.

Baek Yun-Ho gritted his teeth. White fur began sprouting up all over his body; his claws extended and he transformed into a ferocious beast, before pouncing on the monster.

Piishuk-!!

The monster disappeared from the spot again.

‘Where...?!’

Even Baek Yun-Ho's 'Eyes of the Beast' failed to follow the monster's movements.

The scream came from his behind.

“Uwaaahkk!!”

This time, it was Choi Jong-In, who was getting ready to cast his magic. The ant monster’s long claw left a lengthy, diagonal cut wound on his upper torso, and he fell to the ground with a pained moan.

About five paces from where he was, Im Tae-Gyu had been waiting for an opening while hiding his presence. He immediately fired an arrow containing his magic energy.

‘I’ll never miss in this distance!!’

His strong self-belief was contained within that shot.

Swish-!!

Too bad for him,

Grab.

A powerful tremor rocked Im Tae-Gyu’s eyes.

‘Heok?!’

The ant monster snatched the flying arrow and easily snapped it in half.

Crack!

Im Tae-Gyu hurriedly tried to nock his next arrow, but by the time he did so and raised his bow, the monster was already standing in front of him.

“....F*ck.”

POW!

Im Tae-Gyu was struck in the face and flew away.

Baek Yun-Ho attacked when the ant monster’s back was turned away from him, but the back of his head was grabbed by the monster instead, as the creature spun around in an instant. He was planted violently into the ground next.

Boom!!

Baek Yun-Ho’s body quivered from the impact.

Just as the ant monster was getting ready to slam Baek Yun-Ho to the ground again, Mah Dong-Wook dashed forward and shoulder charged the creature away.

Kwahng!!!

The ant monster rolled on the ground for a little while, before standing back up. Mah Dong-Wook’s arms had been severed for sure only a moment

ago, yet he was attacking the creature with all his limbs completely intact.

The ant monster defeated Mah Dong-Wook again, and then, proceeded to defeat other Hunters again, too. Yet, the humans that should've stayed down with crippling injuries were attacking again, all fully healed in the blink of an eye.

Only then did the ant monster begin to recognise the existence of a Healer. The monster scanned the vicinity to find this annoying human.

However, Min Byung-Gu stayed calm under the pressure.

His lone self-defence skill, 'Camouflage'.

He was able to completely hide himself with this skill that was quite similar to the 'Stealth' skill, but there was a drawback to it: He couldn't move from the spot. Even then, that was more than enough for a Healer like him.

He simply had to stand still in one spot and continue to heal his teammates, that was all.

When the healing skill continued to fly in from an unknown place, the ant monster changed its tactic. It selected Mah Dong-Wook who looked the sturdiest among the Hunters, grabbed his leg, and dangled him upside down in the air.

'What is that thing trying to do now??'

Min Byung-Gu was taken aback with great surprise.

The ant monster then proceeded to slowly destroy Mah Dong-Wook. Min Byung-Gu carried on healing him as that happened.

He had no choice there. The moment he stopped healing Mah Dong-Wook, that man would be dead in less than a blink, after all. Sweat poured out in buckets as Min Byung-Gu continued on with the healing magic.

The ant monster traced the continuously-firing healing magic's origin, and then, its head swivelled in Min Byung-Gu's direction.

'It can't be?!'

His heart skipped a beat; he blinked, and the ant monster was gone from the spot.

'What the hell?'

Where did it disappear to this time?

'Byung-Gu!!'

Baek Yun-Ho loudly yelled out.

It happened, then.

Stab!

“Keok!”

Blood sprayed out of Min Byung-Gu.

The pain of being burnt alive came from below, and he took a look down to see a huge hole in his stomach. And the ant monster’s black arm emerging out of that hole.

He raised his head in disbelief and met Baek Yun-Ho’s gaze.

Min Byung-Gu spoke in a faltering voice.

“Hyung.... Run.”

“B-Byung-Gu!!”

Baek Yun-Ho tried to get up, but he couldn’t put any strength to his wounded leg.

Kwajeeck!

The ant monster tore into Min Byung-Gu’s head.

Kwajeeck! Kwajeeck!!!

“Uwaaaaahh!!”

Baek Yun-Ho staggered unsteadily and ran forward. The ant monster discarded the now-headless body of Min Byung-Gu and grabbed Baek Yun-Ho by his neck.

He struggled with all his might, but it was still insufficient to escape from the creature’s incredible grip.

Suddenly, the ant monster opened its mouth.

“Hyung.... Run.... Hyung.... Run.....”

“.....??”

Baek Yun-Ho was freaked out of his skull, his brows shooting up real high in shock and terror.

The ant monster was perfectly mimicking the speech pattern of Min Byung-Gu. If one subtracted the off-putting crack in its voice, one might even mistake it as Min Byung-Gu’s, even.

“Run.... Hyung.”

The ant monster repeated the same words for a long time, before looking

straight into Baek Yun-Ho's eyes.

"You are all..... weak."

From the mouth of the ant monster, a familiar language flowed out. It sounded inarticulate, but for sure, it was still undeniably Korean.

"What the....?!"

Baek Yun-Ho's eyes widened even further.

"This side... Queen, dead..... Killing soldiers..... Not enough payment... your king, who?"

"....King?"

The ant monster strengthened its grip on Baek Yun-Ho's neck.

"Keok."

"Your king... where?"

Baek Yun-Ho's brain kicked into gear.

With the strongest person in the Korean team, Cha Hae-In, still unconscious, he needed to find someone who could buy him and the rest of the group a little bit of time.

And he immediately thought of the Japanese team that had abandoned the Koreans. More specifically, the strongest among the Japanese, Goto Ryuji.

"Out... Outside...."

"Outside...."

The ant monster raised its head up. It seemed to be searching for something, before speaking again in a satisfied tone of voice.

"...There..... A strong one."

And then, it discarded Baek Yun-Ho as if he was not even worth wasting time on, and disappeared from his sight in a scarcely believable speed.

"Keok, keok."

Baek Yun-Ho lay on the ground and panted out heavily. He quickly took a look around him.

This wasn't the time for this. Before that thing comes back, they needed to get out of here.

However...

Shashashasha.....

While they were engaged in the battle against that ridiculously overpowered monster, the swarm of ants had returned to the ant tunnel and were slowly encroaching upon the queen's chamber now.

“Hmm....”

Goto Ryuji sheathed his sword back in the scabbard. Corpses of ants were piled up like small hills all around him. At a quick glance, there must've been over a hundred of these creatures.

It was a perfect demonstration of the abilities possessed by Japan's strongest.

“Looks like we've taken care of most of them.”

“Yes, sir.”

His teammates nodded their heads while admiring the sight of the always-trustworthy Goto Ryuji. They thought that, as long as they stuck by his side, they at least would avoid the fate of getting killed off.

“Sir, I've been told that we'll be the last to withdraw.”

The Hunter receiving the transmission from the operations centre relayed the message. Goto Ryuji nodded his head and turned in the direction of the coast.

“This way....”

Goto Ryuji didn't get to finish his sentence.

Swish-!!

Because an ant monster suddenly appeared out of nowhere and was now standing before his group, that's why.

‘.....’

With a single glance, Goto Ryuji figured out the capabilities of the new enemy.

‘That isn't a normal ant at all.’

“Goto-san!”

His colleagues tried to step forward to help him, but he held them back.

“I'll handle this.”

Against an opponent this strong, his colleagues would only prove to be a hindrance, instead. Going at it solo would be simpler for him.

Trusting his judgement, the teammates heeded his order and retreated to a

distance while leaving everything on his shoulders. Goto Ryuji unsheathed his sword with a circumspect look on his face.

“An ant.... You seem to possess a pretty strong aura.”

Perhaps the ant monster had also sensed his power, because it wasn't budging an inch from the spot.

But, that was to be expected – if that creature displayed even a hint of movement, Goto Ryuji was planning to slice it up into hundreds of fine little pieces.

It was then, the ant monster opened its mouth.

“You are... the king?”

“King?”

Goto's eyes opened wider.

An ant just spoke a human language!

However, it was already a well-known fact that intelligent monsters conversed in their own languages. So, it wouldn't be a stretch of his imagination to think that a monster would succeed in imitating human's languages.

A smirk formed on Goto Ryuji's face.

‘A king, is it....?’

When Association President Matsumoto Shigeo finishes building his empire of Hunters, then indeed, he was the one and only viable candidate to assume the throne, wasn't he?

“That's right. I'm the king.”

Kekek.

As soon as the desired answer came out of his mouth, the ant monster fully unleashed its magic energy.

Hwa-ahck!

Like failing to realise how big an iceberg was from seeing only its tip, Goto Ryuji misjudged the true power of the enemy from the small portion of its magic energy that leaked out. His eyes imperceptibly trembled.

‘This, what is this....?!’

The bone-chilling cold air woke goosebumps up on his skin, and all the hair on the back of his neck stood right up. He had experienced a sensation

like this only once before.

‘.....Seong Jin-Woo??’

Slice.

Almost at the same time as the ant monster made its move, Goto Ryuji’s head fell to the ground.

“Uwaaahh!!”

The Korean team was currently surrounded by the swarm of ants.

Mah Dong-Wook fought; Im Tae-Gyu fought; Choi Jong-In also fought, and even the cameraman had to kill the ants. However, there was seemingly no end to the waves upon waves of ants.

“Pant, pant, pant....”

All sounds had stopped and all Baek Yun-Ho could hear was his own heavy breathing.

‘Is this the end?’

He quickly wiped the blood trickling down below his eyebrow with the back of his hand. With their lone Healer-type Hunter gone, they had no avenue to deal with these many monsters now.

This resistance was a futile one, indeed.

Even then, he couldn’t bring himself to give up – because, two of his most precious friends had lost their lives in this d*mn place. He definitely didn’t want to dig his grave where they were buried, too.

“Uwaaaah-!!”

He destroyed the head of yet another ant. However, countless more replaced the dead one and tried to pounce on him.

Kiiechk!

Kiiehck!!

Baek Yun-Ho powerfully shook off the ants and stood with his back against a wall. Like this, he at least wouldn’t get surrounded from all sides now.

“Pant, pant....”

He raised his head and searched for other Hunters. His colleagues, who had been fighting alongside him only a moment ago, could no longer be seen, their figures completely buried within the swarm of ants.

No way. He wanted to believe that it wasn’t possible....

He bit his lower lip, but then, was jolted out of his senses with a sudden presence appearing behind his back.

He spun around rapidly and threw a punch, but stopped before he reached his target. Because... the one standing behind him wasn't an ant.

'What... Who is this?'

It was, in fact, a 'soldier' decked out in black full-body armour.

This was his first time seeing one, but then again, he heard plenty of times before about this 'thing' from Park Hui-Jin who had been involved with the Red Gate incident.

'Isn't this....??'

Baek Yun-Ho cried out in surprise.

"Why is this thing here?"

It was then.

From the soldier, a familiar voice came out.



Chapter 118 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

One year before the Korea-Japan united raid team came knocking on the island....

The ant queen began thinking.

Other lifeforms that should've served as their food source had all disappeared from the island, and the incidents of its children devouring each other occurred frequently now. There was no source of food on this island to sustain the citizens of the queendom now that its population had swelled up to several thousand strong.

Abandon the existing nation and seek out a fertile land overflowing with other lifeforms to establish a new one – if the domination of the island was the queen's first task, then this problem would be its second one.

However, the queen remembered. It remembered all the powerful invaders that stepped on the island several times before.

The queen's forces managed to repel them, but the nation had to suffer great losses as well. Far too many of the queen's children had to be sacrificed. Would its children be able to defeat those beings if they went to another land?

It needed a single most powerful soldier to lead the citizens of the nation. And so, the queen decided upon the direction of their evolution.

Half a year later.

By gathering the magic power it already possessed, as well as all the nutrients it had amply absorbed before, the queen gave birth to a brand new life. It was the greatest combat weapon imaginable, born solely for the sake of dealing with the strong humans.

The queen's determination to create the most powerful soldier there was, combined with the original order of killing all humans it heard in its head, created a horrifying monster that simply exceeded all common sense.

The monster was born with the skill, 'Gluttony'.

By consuming its opponents, this new monster could turn their magic energy as well as a portion of their knowledge into its own.

The monster realised what its powers were early on and began devouring

its own kin, but the queen left it alone. What this monster wanted was the same as the queen's desire, after all.

The queen was greatly happy as 'he' grew stronger and stronger day by day.

It was happy because 'he' had already exceeded the power of 'his' mother now. And without encountering a single hitch, the army 'he' would lead was getting closer to completion as well. That was why.

In the midst of that....

The human invaders entered this land once more. Their numbers were lower this time, but they were far stronger than before. However, the queen laughed at them.

In preparation of the ants waging war against humanity in another land, this should serve as a great opportunity to test out the powers of 'him'.

The queen, as usual, sent out all of the soldiers guarding its castle along with 'him'.

Just as the queen desired so, 'he' went out and completed the first mission 'he' was given. But when 'he' returned, the queen was already dead.

'He' was enraged.

And thankfully, there were enough strong humans left on this island that would serve as the outlet for 'his' rage.

First of all, the king of the humans was killed. And then, it systematically annihilated all the subordinates next to the dead king. One of the subordinates cried out before he got killed off.

He asked just what the hell 'he' was.

After devouring humans through the skill 'Gluttony', 'he' now possessed the ability to reason. 'He' then began thinking to itself.

'What... am I?'

Up until that point, 'he' was a soldier of the queen.

But now, with the queen's death at the hands of the humans, what should 'he' call itself now?

A sole existence that must lead the remaining soldiers of the queendom. 'He' only knew one word to denote such an existence.

'...King.'

'He' had killed off the enemy king already, so 'he' had definitely satisfied

the requirement to become one now.

Grab.

The ant king bit onto the head of the remaining human. But, then....

Suddenly, the ant king's head swivelled in the direction of the ant castle. There was an enormous aura rushing out like a fierce storm from where the queen used to live.

That level of power couldn't have come from a common foot soldier.

‘.....A king?’

Immediately sensing that an enemy that could threaten itself had appeared, the ant king slowly rose up towards the ant castle.

Just what kind of a calamity was this?

The TV station's situation room used to be enveloped in the celebratory mood, but now, everything felt sombre and dreary like a funeral.

The 'live' broadcast showing up on the viewers' TVs suddenly got cut off with the entrance of a strange, winged ant monster. Understandably, they began flooding the station with phone calls of angry complaints and urgent inquiries.

Ringgg...!

Ringgg....!!

One of the employees walked over to the station's director and cautiously made his report.

“Sir, our communication network is about to collapse from all the calls made by the irate viewers.”

The station's director raised his head.

“So what? Are you suggesting that we should broadcast live the scenes of our Hunters getting ripped to shreds by a single ant monster??”

“N-no, sir.”

The broadcast got cut off just as the Hunters were getting one-sidedly beaten up by that mysterious ant monster. It was understandable that the curiosity of the viewers would skyrocket.

However, that didn't mean they could broadcast the scenes of Hunter Mah Dong-Wook getting tortured, nor the moment that Hunter Min Byung-Gu got devoured.

The director buried his face in his hands and let out a helpless moan.

“It’s over.... It’s all over.”

The once-in-a-lifetime gamble where the fate of his station rode on, was now going down the drain because of one d*mn ant monster.

“It’s over.....”

Heavy, grim silence filled up the situation room. No one person was brave or dumb enough to open their mouths now. Except for one, that was.

“Huh??”

The producer staring at the real-time feed with an ashen complexion suddenly opened his mouth.

“D-Director!!”

“...What now?”

“Someone just appeared in the location out of nowhere!”

The director didn’t bother to raise his head up and grimly replied.

“Unless it’s Jesus himself, don’t report to me every little thing that happens over there. Got that?”

“However...!!”

“...It’s all over.”

Realising that talking wouldn’t get him anywhere, the producer increased the previously-lowered volume up way higher.

Kiieehck-!!

Kiieehck!!

The situation room was immediately filled up with the screams of the ant monsters.

The director quickly raised his head up out of sheer shock. It wasn’t just him, either. Everyone present within the situation room all rushed to the live feed monitor. And soon, sounds of ***“Oh, oh!”*** came out amongst those watching the screen.

“...”

The director sitting there in a daze finally managed to lift his butt off the chair. When he came in closer, the employees stepped aside to let him through.

The screen of the live-feed monitor was reflected in the director’s eyes.

“Oh, dear lord..... Jesus holy Christ.”

The director suddenly began calling out to Jesus, which he didn't even believe in, to begin with, and hurriedly shouted out to the rest of the employees.

“What the hell are you all doing here? Why aren't getting ready to start broadcasting this?! Are you going to take responsibility if we lose out on the current audience rating?!”

The producer hurriedly tried to dissuade his director who didn't even bother to hide his boiling excitement.

“But, sir! If we start broadcasting again, we'll be showing the live feed, instead! There won't be any delay in the transmission, and everything will be shown in real time, sir! We won't be able to do anything if another emergency situation breaks out!”

The delayed transmission time of ten minutes between the feed and the broadcast had run out by now. Which left the director with the decision of going with either the real-time feed, or end the broadcast altogether right here.

“....It's all or nothing.”

“Pardon me?”

“We've already stopped broadcasting midway, anyway. Things won't get any worse than it already has.”

“Well.... I, I guess so...?”

A Hunter's sudden appearance was caught on the camera. No one could tell whether he was a Korean or a Japanese. Heck, it was unknown if he was a Hunter at all, but with his appearance, the director's gamble that seemed to be over for good suddenly gained one last shot at the glory.

The director issued a new order with a determined expression firmly etched on his face.

“Switch it on. Switch it on, now.”

He then pulled a chair closer to the producer and settled down there.

“Our station's fate rides on that man, you got that?”

“Euhhkhk!”

Even though he was being pushed into the figurative cliff, the cameraman didn't regret anything. Anyone would've dreamed at least once of doing something like this when they were young.

...To become a hero.

If that was impossible, then at least, to become a support to the true hero.

During the time he did menial jobs for the TV station and earned his experience that way, he never imagined that he'd be blessed with an opportunity to do so in his lifetime.

But then, he Awakened into a rank A Hunter, and by earning experience fitting for his rank, he was able to get to this point in his life. Thanks to that, he got to clearly capture the scene of Hunters proudly representing South Korea successfully raid the boss of a rank S Gate.

'I'm the one who caught that on film. Yes, me.'

And with the footage he captured, many people would come to know the valiant sacrifices these rank S Hunters made for the purpose of the extermination of the ant monsters. That was more than enough for him.

He felt like that all of his efforts spent in studying filming techniques and working as a Hunter was finally being paid off here. But, if there was one thing he was a bit regretful about, then that would be....

'Dad...'

His father, who looked after the cameraman all alone after they lost his mother to cancer. Thinking that he'd not get to see his father again, he felt a deep pain in his heart.

Kwajeeck!!

His shoulder was bitten, yet he couldn't feel a thing. His arm had stopped moving a long time ago.

He was originally a Tanker, so he was able to endure somehow, but this really was his limit.

Plop.

He knelt down on the ground. Even then, his head was filled with the thoughts of his father.

'Why did my last conversation with dad have to be me asking him if he had his breakfast?!'

If he knew this would happen, he might have talked for a lot longer.

'On that day, when dad came for a visit to Seoul, I should've cleared up all of my schedule....'

However, time was a ruthless, unrelenting b*stard and regret always

arrived one step too late.

The cameraman raised his head. The horrifying fangs of the ant monster were nearing his head.

He no longer had any magic energy left to activate the 'Fortification' skill, so he wouldn't be able to defend against the monster's attacks now.

Tears formed on the edges of his eyes.

'Dad, I'm sorry.'

It was then.

Kwajeeck!!

Accompanying the noise of the outer shell being crushed, the bodily fluid of an ant got splashed on the cameraman's face.

"...Huh?!"

A blade emitting a cold, silvery gleam had cleanly stabbed through the ant's head.

The cameraman raised his head and followed the blade, only to find another 'ant' with a long red-coloured 'plumage' stuck to the top of its head standing there.

'Why is an ant attacking another ant?!'

No, that thing wasn't an ant!

The cameraman was mistaken because both were of the same black colour. What he saw was an unknown 'soldier' decked out in black armour from head to toe pulling his sword out from the head of the dead ant.

Plop.

The ant monster with a hole in its head powerlessly sagged to the ground.

"Just what on earth is.....?!"

When the black 'soldier' stepped aside, a youthful man with a somewhat familiar face approached the cameraman and shouted at him.

"Open your mouth."

"Pardon me?"

This man didn't even give the confused cameraman a chance to start a conversation; he simply grabbed the injured man's chin and poured down an unknown liquid down the throat.

"Keok?! Keok!!"

The cameraman nearly coughed his lungs out, but he still managed to swallow all of the liquid. He covered his mouth and asked.

“Who, who the hell are you?!”

However, the youthful man didn't even bother to respond and simply turned around to face the ants.

‘W-what the heck?!’

The cameraman was flustered greatly, but still, he stood back up.

‘...Wait a d*mn second here.’

His legs were moving again. But, was that all?

He belatedly realised it, but his arm was also fine after drinking that strange liquid.

‘What happened here? What’s going on??’

Did that man do something to him just now?

He couldn't come up with any other logical explanation besides that one.

It was then.

Quite out of the blue, the cameraman finally remembered where he saw that youthful man's face.

‘Could he be that guy?!’

Jin-Woo calmly scanned his surroundings.

‘.....’

Last time he got to meet the members of the Korean raid team in the Association's gymnasium, he had inserted one of the Shadow Soldiers in Baek Yun-Ho's shadow, just in case. What a relief it was that he did that.

It seemed that what he'd been watching wasn't a live broadcast, as the situation here was far worse than the stuff shown on the TV screen before it got cut off. He managed to save the weakest of the lot, the cameraman, first, but the other rank S Hunters were still surrounded by countless ant monsters.

‘What should I do now?’

The quickest way to deal with this situation would be to summon Fangs out and sweep these pesky ants away in one go with his trademark pillar of flames. But, if Jin-Woo did that, he couldn't guarantee the safety of the rank S Hunters.

So, he needed another solution here.

Jin-Woo quickly made his decision and turned his head towards Iron.

“Iron!!”

Iron tapped his chest in a manly manner as if to say, **“Leave it to me!”**

He then strode forward, his large frame shaking to and fro, before opening his shoulders wide to roar out at the top of his lungs.

Woowuhhhhhh-!!!

Tti-ring.

[Iron has activated ‘Skill: Roar of Provocation’.]

The effect of that was rather amazing. The ants attacking the Hunters all snapped their heads towards Iron’s direction simultaneously. And soon, they all rushed over.

“Nice work.”

Jin-Woo lightly tapped Iron on his back and summoned the two shortwords he got as rewards after killing the demon king.

‘The Demon King’s Shortsword.’

The pair of shortwords with a blue tinge to their blades gleamed threateningly under the light magic’s glare.

Kkiiiiieeehk!

Kiiechk!

When hundreds of ant monsters screeched out and pounced at the same time, his entire view was dyed jet black in an instant. Jin-Woo began gripping the hilts of the shortwords even harder. And then, he vanished from view.

Kiiechk!!

Soon, ants collided with the soldiers in a bloody battle to the finish.

In the meantime, Baek Yun-Ho, whose status was still better than everyone else, managed to move the injured Hunters to a safe corner. Thankfully, they were all still alive. The cameraman joined soon afterwards, and helped Baek Yun-Ho out.

Because Jin-Woo, or more specifically, Jin-Woo’s summoned creature, attracted the aggro of all the ants present here, he was able to safely finish this task.

“Pant, pant, pant....”

Mah Dong-Wook was leaning against the wall, his breathing rough and

irregular. He then grabbed the arm of Baek Yun-Ho, who brought him here, and asked.

“W-what’s going on? Who’s fighting?”

Mah Dong-Wook’s eyes were unfocused. His eyes were injured and he couldn’t see properly.

Baek Yun-Ho placed his hand on Mah Dong-Wook’s hand.

“Instructor Mah. It’s fine now. Everything will be fine.”

“.....”

He then shifted his gaze over to Jin-Woo.

Other people may not have know it yet, but Baek Yun-Ho had a rough idea already on how powerful Seong Jin-Woo was in reality.

Baek Yun-Ho might have been greatly flustered when the black soldier suddenly vanished, only to be replaced by the youth, but he still ended up shouting out loud even before he consciously realised it.

He said, ‘please, help us.’

And then, after seeing the youth move towards the ants along with his summoned black soldiers, the sense of relief washed over Baek Yun-Ho; so much so that he nearly plopped down to the ground.

Sure enough...

Seong Jin-Woo proceeded to massacre and annihilate the ants that gave him and his teammates so much trouble at a frightening pace, as if those creatures were nothing but broken toys to be played around with.

Kiieehk!!

Screams of dying ants exploded out from everywhere and nearly made Baek Yun-Ho dizzy in the head. But, he still sighed out in relief.

‘It’ll be fine now.’

He wasn’t saying that to Mah Dong-Wook. No, he was telling that to himself. The hope of survival was rekindled in his heart. The aid from one Seong Jin-Woo was far more reliable and trustworthy than the 20-plus rank S Japanese Hunters combined.

‘...Looks like there’s no need for me to step up here.’

Baek Yun-Ho formed a smile and sat down next to Mah Dong-Wook.

All he could do now was to sit down quietly like this and watch Hunter

Seong Jin-Woo do his thing. He then drew the cameraman's attention towards Jin-Woo.

“You should keep the camera pointing at him. Because you're going to witness something amazing pretty soon.”

The incident of the Red Gate, and the incident during the raid of the Hunters Guild. This was Baek Yun-Ho's chance to personally witness the spectacle he had been hearing about all this time.

“Y-yes!”

The cameraman did his best to maintain his distance so he wouldn't get in the way and tried to capture Jin-Woo's actions with his camera. The work of the raid team's Hunters may have been finished now, but his own work was far from over.

Gulp.

The cameraman struggled to swallow his saliva.

Kiiiehk!

At the same time, an ant was split cleanly in half from top to bottom by Jin-Woo's hands. He then took a look around him. The number of ants had decreased significantly, and there were just over half of them remaining.

He killed so many ants that he had lost count now, but his breathing remained even and unperturbed. In all honesty, he found this place far easier to manage when compared to the uppermost floors of the Demon's Castle.

‘Should I increase my speed a bit more?’

Glance.

Jin-Woo sneaked a glance at the floor, and he immediately issued an order to the puffs of black smoke rising up from the corpses of the countless ants.

“Rise up!!”



Chapter 119 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The cameraman felt a creeping chill crawl all over his skin.

‘Wha-what’s the meaning of this?’

What was about to happen here?

He was deep inside a cave where breezes shouldn’t exist, yet this eerily chilly air inexplicably brushed past his back.

‘Now that I think about it...’

Just as he began questioning whether the surroundings had become too quiet or not....

Kiiiiieehhk-!!

Thick, heavy screams resounded out within the queen’s chamber and countless black hands began shooting out from the ground.

Tuck.

Tuck....

The hands grabbed the ground, and began pulling themselves out.

“Heok!!”

The cameraman unwittingly gasped out in pure fright. His eyes were opened wider, and his breathing grew rough and heavy. He was a rank A Hunter yet he could scarcely believe the things taking place, so what would the viewers at home watching be feeling right now?

While the cameraman remained stewing in his own astonishment, the owners of the black hands finally emerged out of the ground.

‘Ant monsters?!’

At a casual glance, they looked like ant monsters, but then again, endless streams of black smokes were rising from their bodies. It was hard to tell whether these monsters were physical beings or made out of gases.

Wouldn’t one potentially get that sort of appearance if one carved out the statue of an ant monster using a block of black-coloured dry ice? Several hundreds of such things rose up from the ground.

The cameraman's heart beat so fast and so loud that he couldn't even breathe now.

Seeing that scene, Baek Yun-Ho too gasped out in shock as well. He was comparatively calmer than the cameraman, but that didn't mean he could close his slack jaw.

'All of those.... are his summons???'

Unlike the two speechless men, Jin-Woo was forming a satisfied grin at the new additions to his shadow army.

'Nice.'

Now, the number of his Shadow Soldiers easily overwhelmed the surviving ant monsters.

'With things like this, looks like I won't have to personally step out now.'

Jin-Woo stored the Demon King's Short Swords back to his Inventory. And then, issued the very first order to his new soldiers.

'Go. Don't leave any one of them alive.'

Kiiiiieehhk-!!

With the same intensity as back when the ant monsters flooded into the queen's chamber, Jin-Woo's new soldiers crashed into their enemies like a tsunami wave.

The once seemingly-endless swarm of ant monsters was now being swept away by the black tide.

Wooahhhh!!!

A huge cheering roar broke out inside the TV station's situation room.

The director shot up from his seat and clapped his hands in happiness.

"Yesss!! He's doing it!!"

Seeing those disgusting ant monsters being swept away like that, it felt like his tight chest was being pried open again. It was as if the ten-year-old indigestion plaguing him had finally been flushed away.

If only there were no other eyes watching here, he'd have asked the producer to screen capture that moment and have it sent over to him later – so he could relieve his accumulated stress even if it was several months later. Nay, several years later!

It was indeed very regretful to see the death of Hunter Min Byung-Gu. When the director saw the scene of the team's lone Healer die at the hands of

that d*mn monster, he thought that the heavens were crashing down on him.

Even then, if the Korean Hunters get out of the ant tunnel safely with the help from that unidentified Hunter?

‘That’s all I ask for!’

The Korean team had already achieved its goal by killing the ant queen. With their only method of propagation gone, there was no need to even repeat the simple fact that the ants would eventually die out in the Jeju Island.

And then, what about the Japanese?

Indeed, what would happen to the Japanese team?

Since they abandoned the important mission right in the middle of it all and escaped with their tail between their legs, there was obviously no need to hand over the promised share of the loot. And not only that, the Koreans could even demand reparation from them, instead.

And of course, the footage of the raid selling like hot cakes would be the tasty icing on the cake, too.

The complexion of the director brightened like a midday sun.

‘Just where did this massive ball of fortune fall out from?!’

The director’s expression, as he continued to stare at the face of Jin-Woo in the monitor’s screen, remained somewhat confused. It was then.

Another employee hurriedly ran towards him.

“Sir!”

The director shot up from his seat, nearly freaking out of his skull.

“What is it this time?!”

The director’s expression hardened in an instant.

His heart began quivering, thinking that maybe another mishap occurred somewhere just as he was beginning to soak himself in the sea of happiness.

What with the situation arriving at this point in time, the director was quickly growing resentful of this dumb employee. He even wanted to reach out to cover that employee’s mouth and pretend that no bad news was afoot.

‘Looks like I’ve finally lost it....’

Completely unaware of what his boss was thinking of at that moment, the employee spoke hurriedly with an excited face.

“We discovered that man’s identity!”

The director's eyes opened up super-wide.

“What was that?!”

Inside the office of the Hunter Association's President.

Kwajeek!!

Goh Gun-Hui hurriedly lifted his hand off the crushed armrest. His private doctor sitting next to him turned to look at him.

“...Association President.”

“...It seems that I got overexcited just now.”

He unconsciously gripped too tight, and this happened. However, how could he not get excited by the scenes he was seeing right now?

Indeed, watching Jin-Woo's performance playing out on the giant screen made his emotions well up without him even realising it. If only his body permitted it, he'd have gone there to fight alongside, too.

“Getting overexcited is not good for your body, sir.”

Goh Gun-Hui nodded his head.

There was only one reason why he, as the Association President, wasn't present in the mission control centre. Didn't matter whether this subjugation operation ended as a success or a failure, there was a potential risk that he'd strain his heart simply by being there.

Even watching the broadcast like this carried enough risk, so the personal doctor had to set up a camp next to Goh Gun-Hui.

‘Maybe, it would've been better to not let him watch the broadcast.’

The personal doctor worried about his decision for a brief moment, but after seeing the expression etched on the face of the Association President, he soon shook his head.

Ever since the Hunter named Seong Jin-Woo appeared on the scene, that wide smile didn't want to leave Goh Gun-Hui's face.

[“Hey, that man, that's Seong Jin-Woo!”]

In that critical moment, as the despair quickly transformed into a loud cheer, the words Association President cried out still rung inside the doctor's ears.

Meanwhile, Goh Gun-Hui was beaming widely.

‘I can't believe this is happening.’

He then cautiously placed his hand back on the sofa's armrest. Unless he was holding onto something, his entire body would itch too much and he'd be unable to endure it.

'But, how did Hunter Seong Jin-Woo get there?'

Initially, he was greatly intrigued by this quandary. The island must be overflowing with the ant monsters, so how did he appear there without anyone else noticing it?

But, such a thing wasn't important right now.

No, the truly important thing would be that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was there. And with that, the other Hunters had hope. Those two were the important things.

It was then.

Goh Gun-Hui's eyes grew extra large after witnessing the spectacle of Jin-Woo creating even more soldiers by extracting shadows out from the dead ant monsters.

'That friend, he lied to me, didn't he?'

Who could've guessed that there were well more than ***"only about a hundred"*** summons? Even at a casual glance, there must've been over 300, easy. However, Goh Gun-Hui didn't look like someone who'd been lied to.

No, a smile of contentment was filling up his face, instead.

'He said that he wanted to fight against the monsters, didn't he?'

Goh Gun-Hui could now understand a bit more of why the youth said those words to him back then. After all, he possessed such incredible power, so no monsters out there should faze him.

For sure, Jin-Woo looked like he was enjoying himself as he fought the monsters. It was to the extent that the viewers watching felt a deep stirring within their hearts.

However....

Why did Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, who so dearly wished to battle monsters that badly, asked to be left out of the Korean raid team?

'He must've had an important reason behind that decision.'

Goh Gun-Hui nodded his head. Without such a reason, there was just no way that a man who formed an expression like that during battle would willingly walk away from a raid team.

When his thought arrived at that point, Goh Gun-Hui grew very curious about what could possibly be Jin-Woo's reason.

Tang, tang!

Jin-Ah was studying in her bedroom, but she heard those loud noises and hurriedly came out to the living room.

"Mom??"

"I, I'm sorry. That was too loud, wasn't it?"

Jin-Ah shook her head.

Mom had already lowered the volume of the TV until not much could be heard so she'd not interrupt her daughter's studies. Jin-Ah didn't feel like unduly burdening her any more than that.

"Besides all that, what's going on? Is the TV broken?"

"Not sure. It just stopped working all of a sudden."

"Where's oppa?"

"He's right h...."

Mom turned around to look, only to gasp out in surprise.

"Oh, my?? Where did he go? But, he was here only about a second ago??"

Jin-Ah tilted her head and opened Jin-Woo's bedroom door.

"Oppa?"

He wasn't even in the bathroom, either. Jin-Ah proceeded to scour the entirety of the apartment before turning around towards her mom.

"What were you watching together just now?"

"The Jeju Island raid."

"...."

Suddenly, Jin-Ah was overcome with a certain ominous foreboding. Now that she thought about it, the entire apartment building was bustling with loud noises ever since a little while ago.

'No way....?'

Jin-Ah hurriedly ran back inside her room and switched on her phone. When she did....

Just as the vigorous, loud cheers exploded out from the floors above and

below hers, Jin-Ah's eyes opened wider as she finally confirmed the scene playing out within her phone's screen.

“Oppa?!”

After utterly massacring every single ant monster found inside the queen's chamber, Jin-Woo stored his soldiers back inside his shadow.

Even now, ants that had been spread out to the rest of the island were scurrying back to the ant tunnel. He judged that his priority should be placed on guiding the Hunters out of here to somewhere safe before more ants showed up.

‘We have the injured here to worry about, too.’

Jin-Woo strode towards the Hunters. Beside Baek Yun-Ho and the cameraman, the rest weren't in a good shape. Cha Hae-In was still unconscious, and the three others had suffered some serious wounds, as well.

Jin-Woo asked while looking around.

“What about Min Byung-Gu Hunter-nim?”

Baek Yun-Ho shook his head with a hardened expression.

“...”

Not saying anything else, Jin-Woo brought out the potions and began treating the Hunters one by one. Since the potions would become useless once they leave his hands, he had to personally feed each of the Hunters.

“M-mm....”

After drinking the potions, Hunters began regaining their consciousness.

“What's this?”

Im Tae-Gyu quickly raised his upper torso up, touched all over his body, and spat out a gasp of amazement.

“What the....?”

Both Choi Jong-In and Mah Dong-Wook recovered from the numerous injuries on their bodies in no time.

“Hmm...”

“Cough, cough.”

Choi Jong-In had no clue on what had transpired here, so as soon as he laid his eyes on Jin-Woo, he was taken aback rather greatly.

“Mister Seong Jin-Woo? What are you doing here??”

“Let’s talk after getting out of this place first.”

“Oh....”

Choi Jong-In took a look around and nodded his head. They were still stuck inside the deepest part of the ant tunnel. This was no place to idly chat away, indeed.

“Instructor Seong!”

Having regained his eyesight, Mah Dong-Wook was able to reach out and grab Jin-Woo’s hands.

“Were you the one fighting off those ants? Thank you. Thank you so much!!”

Jin-Woo replied in the same manner to him as well.

“Let us get out of here first.”

“Got it.”

Finally, Cha Hae-In.

Standing before her, a frown formed on Jin-Woo’s face.

‘Something’s not right... her aura’s far too weak.’

While feeling a sense of foreboding, Jin-Woo raised her head and cautiously poured the potion down her mouth.

Sure enough, a message quickly popped up in his view.

Tti-ring.

[When the remaining HP is less than 10%, it is impossible to recover HP with healing potions.]

Jin-Woo’s expression crumpled.

When he slowly pulled out his hand supporting her head, it was soaked in her blood.

‘.....’

That ant b*stard.

That creature inflicted a fatal blow to the strongest person among the Korean Hunters, Cha Hae-In, with nothing but a single blow.

The sole reason why these Hunters were still alive wasn’t that they were strong. On the contrary, that b*stard simply toyed with them for a little while, that was all.

Jin-Woo's expression hardened.

'In any case, I gotta....'

Cha Hae-In's injuries took priority. If her wounds couldn't be healed by the potions, then she needed to get out of this island as soon as possible and get a Healer-type Hunter to heal her, ASAP.

"Let's hurry."

Jin-Woo carefully picked her up and stood up to leave. Other Hunters also stood up.

As they were preparing to leave the ant queen's chamber, Jin-Woo walking in front of the pack suddenly spat out a long sigh.

'.....'

Baek Yun-Ho could guess the reason why.

Jin-Woo entrusted Cha Hae-In over to Baek Yun-Ho. Suddenly dumped with the responsibility of carrying her around, Baek Yun-Ho formed a flustered expression, and he hurriedly raised his voice.

"I would like to help."

Jin-Woo looked at the Hunters present, including Baek Yun-Ho, and told them all in no uncertain terms.

"Do not ever step forward during the fight. It'll be faster that way."

"But, Mister Seong Jin-Woo, that means...."

Choi Jung-Hoon was still oblivious to what had transpired before, so he was about to speak up his opinion, but Mah Dong-Wook stopped him and shook his head.

He may not have seen the situation unfold with his own eyes, but through his perception, he was able to detect how Jin-Woo annihilated the swarm of ants from the beginning until the end.

Jin-Woo was right about this.

However, Baek Yun-Ho still butted in.

"Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim."

Jin-Woo turned his head to look at him.

"I understand full well that you're strong. I can confidently say that no one here knows that better than me. However....."

Baek Yun-Ho spoke with a serious expression on his face.

“However, you’ve already summoned far too many creatures by now.”

But, why would that be a problem? When Jin-Woo stared at him with a confused expression, Baek Yun-Ho got flustered and quickly added more explanation.

“You must’ve had exhausted a lot of your magical energy by now. What would happen if you completely spend them?”

‘Ahh... so that’s what he was talking about.’

Jin-Woo guessed from Baek Yun-Ho’s words that the other Hunters utilising the summoning magic had to be using a lot of magic energy to summon even a single creature.

‘I’m sure there aren’t any real reason to reveal that my Shadow Soldiers don’t need any magic energy, right?’

Even without him saying anything, his soldiers wouldn’t look like ordinary summons to these people’s eyes, anyway. So, Jin-Woo decided to change the story ever so slightly.

“My summons don’t require as much magic energy as you think. You don’t need to worry about me.”

“Excuse me?”

Both Baek Yun-Ho and the cameraman exclaimed out at the same time.

He controlled that many summoned creatures all at once, yet he was saying that the magic energy usage wasn’t high? Then, just what was his weak point, then?

‘.....’

Realising that explaining would take up too much time, he simply turned towards the cave up ahead, instead. With excellent timing, the waves of ant monsters were rushing inside the chamber.

‘Wow, there are still so many of them.’

Their side had someone in a critical condition. So, he couldn’t afford to waste time here.

Jin-Woo activated the Sovereign’s Territory for maximum efficiency. The ground beneath his feet was immediately dyed in black.

Just as he was done with preparations to call his soldiers back out again, an ominous, creepy air blew in from the other side of the cave.

‘.....?’

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to where that eerie aura was coming from. There was this one individual among the masses of ants. It looked similar to the others, but it was a completely different type of monster compared to the others.

‘Ah, so that’s the one.’

Jin-Woo instantly recognised the ‘ant king’. And likewise, the ant king recognised Jin-Woo as well.

Taking its time, the ant king slowly walked over to him.

“A human... you seem to possess a pretty strong aura.”

It even imitated Goto Ryuji’s speech pattern.

Hunters immediately recalled the nightmare of a few moments ago and flinched grandly as soon as spotting that ant monster. On the other hand, Jin-Woo showed no outward ripples and simply stared at the creature without saying a word.

Eventually, the ant king stood before Jin-Woo.

“Are you the king of humans?”

“....Huh, an insect that knows how to speak. Well, I’ll be.”

When Jin-Woo replied with a less than impressed expression on his face, the ant king’s own expression crumpled unsightly.

The power the queen bestowed it with, and the power it gathered through the ‘Gluttony’ skill - the moment the ant king unleashed all of its magic energy, its body suddenly ballooned up greatly in size. Its height, which used to be around the same as Jin-Woo’s, grew by at least 1.5 times taller.

The ant king then screeched out loudly right in front of Jin-Woo’s nose.

Kiiiiieeeeeehhhhk-!!!

Jin-Woo didn’t even blink once, and instead, a smirk formed on his lips.

“Yup, now you’re acting properly like an insect.”

And then, he himself unleashed his own magical energy.



Chapter 120 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“All communications with Goto and his team have been cut off?!”

The Association President Matsumoto Shigeo’s complexion became ashen. The Association employee next to him presented a receiver and asked politely.

“Would you like to hear the last communication, sir?”

Matsumoto Shigeo snatched the receiver away from the employee’s hand and put it on his head, before nodding once.

Soon, the recorded sound clip began playing.

Beep.

“That’s where the communication ends, sir.”

Matsumoto’s face, as he took off the receiver, was as hard as a rock. The creepy noises and the horrible screech the monster made in between the chatter – he couldn’t picture any other situation where those sounds would come out of.

‘An ant monster using a human language? And Goto Ryuji was killed by that thing?!’

Such an eventuality was not within his calculations. He and his compatriots had definitely planned everything out, and made preparations for every eventuality, so why....

The ends of Matsumoto Shigeo’s fingers trembled almost imperceptibly.

“....Sir?”

Only after he realised that the gazes of his employees were focused on his trembling fingertips did Matsumoto Shigeo carefully hide his hands. He quickly changed the topic.

“Where is the monster that.... No, where is the talking monster, right now?”

He couldn’t bring himself to say the words ‘the monster that killed Goto Ryuji’.

“It’s disappeared, sir.”

“What do you mean, disappeared??”

It was a creature capable of killing Goto Ryuji. So, how could the satellite equipped with the magic energy detection camera keeping a close eye on Jeju Island not pick up on such a powerful monster?

The employee seemed to have figured out what his boss was about to say, and he pointed at the monitor once more.

“That spot of light is the magic energy emitted from the monster at that moment.”

The magic energy detection camera displayed the emitted magic energy as spots of lights. The bigger the spot of light appearing on the monitor, the more powerful the existence was.

Once spots of lights belonging to Goto Ryuji and the Hunters around him disappeared, the larger, brighter light vanished quickly, as well.

“Oh, my god....”

Matsumoto Shigeo spat out a shocked gasp. The unknown enemy was in perfect control of its magical energy.

‘That was why.... Because it was such a monster, that....’

That was why the research team failed to notice the creature before.

It was, without a doubt, a perfect failure. And as a punishment, Japan just lost ten of her elite Hunters. Among them, the best Hunter in the country. For a result of a single oversight, it was very, very painful price to pay. Even worse, the price most likely hadn't been fully paid yet, either.

‘When that nonsensical monstrosity crosses the ocean and enters the country....’

Even though Matsumoto Shigeo tried to shake them off, the horrifying images continued to fill up his head. It was then.

“We found it! The b*stard has reappeared again!”

Matsumoto Shigeo's eyes shot open wider.

“Where is the creature?”

“It's inside the ant queen's chamber, sir.”

“....”

Only the ants returning to the ant tunnel, as well as the Korean Hunters facing off against them, remained in that place. They must be fighting with everything they had, but unfortunately, their opponent this time easily

exceeded everyone's imaginations.

'In the end, even the Koreans will be finished for good.'

That's what he believed, but then, Matsumoto Shigeo's brows shot up instantly.

'.....???'

There was another spot of light that suddenly appeared right next to that horrifying monster.

"W-what's the meaning of this?!"

Matsumoto Shigeo gasped out in sheer astonishment and quickly looked at his employees. One of the employees, affiliated with the research team, urgently shook his head.

"It, it's also our first time seeing this, sir."

That spot of light was as big and bright as the monster's. No, maybe it was even bigger than that.

What was even more astonishing was the fact that there were hundreds of smaller light spots swirling around that large one.

Even the head researcher of Japan's research team, who had been analysing the spy images for many years now, had never seen such a phenomenon before.

'Ah....!'

Seeing the mesmerising sight of the sea of lights repeatedly separating into tiny pieces before gathering back together, all those present couldn't help but gasp out in admiration.

However, Matsumoto Shigeo didn't have the time to leisurely stew in his emotions right now.

"The Korean team! They must be broadcasting the raid even now, aren't they??"

If the Korean team was still strutting around like that, that could also mean that the broadcast was still ongoing. Matsumoto Shigeo was beset with curiosity and wanted urgently to find out just what was going on here.

"The Korean team's broadcast!! Bring that up to the main monitor!!"

When he shouted out, the super-large screen in the middle of the Japanese mission control centre was immediately filled with the image of a certain young man having a stare-down with an ant monster.

After seeing that man's face, Matsumoto Shigeo nervously swallowed his saliva. The lone strand of sweat trickled down his temple and pooled on the bottom of his chin.

'That man.... That man is the source of that massive light spot?'

And then, the giant ant monster standing in front of that man. That thing was at least over 1.5 times larger than regular ant monsters. They were only looking at the thing through the monitor, yet the sheer pressure emanating from that thing managed to quicken their heartbeats.

'.....'

Matsumoto Shigeo's expression hardened even further.

It was then.

The ant monster made its move.

The ant king's fist powerfully slammed into Jin-Woo's face.

SLAM!!

Jin-Woo's back nearly bent backwards, but he stomped down and withstood the hit.

'.....!!'

The ant king had struck with all of its might behind that punch, so it couldn't help but get taken by surprise.

"You can... withstand my power?"

The ant king struck out with a simple plan to kill this puny human in one hit, but instead of sending him flying away, the whole thing simply ended with his head turning slightly away.

Too bad, there was no time to remain surprised, because Jin-Woo's own fist flew in afterwards.

Swish-!!

SLAM!!

The ant king was smacked right in the middle of its face, and it flew away to crash into the wall on the far side of the cavern.

Kaboom!

As if a meteor had collided there, the wall caved in deeply. Although it was only for a short while, the impact force was powerful enough to shake the entire ant tunnel.

“What kind of an ant talks this much?”

When the ‘live’ broadcast got suddenly cut off, and the static screen showing the message of about the station encountering ‘technical difficulty’ appeared on their TV screens, countless viewers were left devastated and stunned by what they saw.

“The Hunters.... What’s happening to the Hunters?!”

“What was up with that ant just now?!”

“What the hell! How can you cut the broadcast off right there?!”

The scenes of an ant monster suddenly appearing without warning, and then, it proceeding to systematically dismantle the Hunters one by one....

The viewers celebrating after the death of the ant queen felt like a bucket of cold water was poured down on them by that horrifying scene. Not too long afterwards, the static screen with the ‘technical difficulty’ message went away and the emcee appeared there, instead.

With a sorrowful voice, he relayed the death of Hunter Min Byung-Gu. And he also added that the safety of the Hunters remaining in the ant tunnel couldn’t be guaranteed, either.

“God d*mn it!!”

“They got the ant queen, so why are they dying now?!”

“What about Japan?”

“Isn’t it supposed to be a united team or something? Where are the d*mn Japanese?!”

Some people raged on, some people worried about their safety, while some others grieved.

The news of the Hunters risking their lives potentially meeting with a grisly fate spread out like an uncontrollable wildfire. Weirdly enough, the audience rating actually rose up higher than ever before, even though the raid broadcast had been cut off for a while now.

The emcee’s expression brightened considerably after receiving an urgent message.

Those words were more than enough to inject much-needed vitality into the fatigued eyes of the viewers staying put in front of their TV screens.

Soon, the live feed was restored, and....

“What the heck?”

“This...!!”

The viewers were greeted by the black soldiers filling up their TV screens, and they all shot up from their seats.

They then saw those black soldiers fighting tooth-and-nail against the waves upon waves of ants flooding into the ant queen’s chamber. The camera moved around to take in the unfolding events, before locking onto a single young man.

He was too far away and it was hard to see what he looked like.

The viewers watching on with nervous tension all cried out in elation from that news. And then, they began cheering for that unidentified Hunter.

“Yes!! Go and smash them all!!”

“You’re doing great!! Push them back!!”

“Let’s go!!!”

And finally....

When that unidentified Hunter summoned an even greater number of soldiers to completely massacre the ants....

Woooooahhhh!!!

People punched the sky with their fists and celebrated wildly.

Those who had lost their families and friends to the ants and sought revenge shed tears as the cathartic moment played out in their screens. As if he was waiting for the perfect timing, the emcee’s heightened voice came out from the speakers just in the nick of time.

The eyes and ears of every single viewer out there were now turned towards their screens.

Just who was that man?

Just what was the identity of a man capable of rescuing rank S Hunters from a place crawling with rank S monsters?

And so, the viewers grew even more cheerful from the fact that a Hunter possessing such an incredible ability was not a Japanese, but a Korean like them.

Countless ants were soon taken care of in no time at all.

Just as the Hunters were getting ready to escape from the ant tunnel, yet another wave of ants appeared.

“Uh?! Uhhh??”

“Isn’t that...?”

The ant monster that appeared just before the broadcast got cut off the first time was now leisurely walking forward while pushing past the swarm of ants. Since there weren’t that many ants with wings to begin with, and the shape of its face was different from everything else, it wasn’t that hard to tell that monster apart.

The viewers were instantly thrown into confusion.

“What the hell? I thought that b*stard was already dead?!”

“Why is that thing appearing again?!”

The winged ant monster stood before Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.

Those viewers who understood a bit about the compatibility of different abilities grew deeply anxious when the two stood face to face.

“Aigoo! He’s going to get killed here!”

“Why would a Mage-type give up on the safety of distance like that??”

“It’s not too late, so run away!”

That monster was strong enough to blow away Hunter Cha Hae-In, a melee-type Hunter, with a single blow. They thought that it was beyond obvious how things would turn out now.

It was already distressing enough to see those two glare at each other in close proximity, but then, the d*mn ant monster suddenly grew larger and larger as well.

Every viewer watching their TV screens cried out in shock.

And then...

Pow!!

Those with weaker constitutions squeezed their eyes shut at that moment. They thought that the moment the monster’s punch found its target, the Hunter’s head would explode.

However, contrary to their expectations, the Hunter was fine.

‘Huh??’

‘A Mage withstood a punch strong enough to knock out the Tanker Mah Dong-Wook in one hit?!’

The eyes of the viewers grew wider and wider.

And then....

SLAM!!

The ant monster got shoved deeply into the cave wall.

“....”

“.....”

Most viewers required a little bit of time to process what just transpired.

But when the camera zoomed in on the ant king half-buried in the cave wall.....

Waaaahhhh!!!

Yet another round of loud cheering exploded out.

“Heok!!”

The cameraman’s jaw fell to the floor.

When Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was struck by the ant’s fist, he flinched in surprise. Even Cha Hae-In lost her consciousness from that hit.

But then, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo blew away the ant monster, instead. The very same monster, that toyed around with six rank S Hunters as if it was nothing. No wonder he’d gasp out a **“Heok!”**

‘Were the rank S Hunters that weak?’

No, of course not.

The Korean Hunters bravely fought and managed to defeat the rank S boss, the ant queen.

So, the mutated ant monster that made an utter fool out of those Hunters was the weird one. And Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, who blew away that weird mutated ant, was an even weirder one.

Gulp.

The cameraman suppressed his agitation and swallowed his dry saliva.

The reactions of other Hunters weren’t all that different, either.

While everyone was staring at Jin-Woo with excited eyes, only Choi Jong-In began looking around in his vicinity. And he could see mountains of ant corpses. He initially thought that those were the result of the Hunters working together while he was out cold. But now, having witnessed Jin-Woo’s power, his thoughts had changed.

‘Can it... Could it be.... Mister Seong Jin-Woo alone was responsible

for....?’

After taking a rough count of the dead ants, Choi Jong-In’s eyes began trembling non-stop.

Kiiiiieehhkhk!!

A beastly screech exploding out without warning caused his head to snap back.

The ant king extricated itself out of the wall and displayed its rage. The air within the ant queen’s chamber was quivering noticeably.

‘Ho-oh?’

Jin-Woo stared at the ant king with a genuine surprise. The damage he dealt was far less than he thought.

‘Is it because... of the exoskeleton?’

The black, tough shell covering the entirety of that b*stard – whatever that thing was, it had already exceeded being a normal organic matter.

In that case, he’d use brute force to shatter that shell. The thing that could break one’s armour wasn’t a sword or a spear. No, it was a hammer.

Jin-Woo’s shoulder and arm muscles expanded, thick veins bulging visibly on his skin. The air grew thicker and heavier as it descended all around him.

The ant king stopped screeching and shifted its horrifyingly crumpled expression towards Jin-Woo.

“You dare!!”

As the two of them walked closer, the distance between them shortened faster and faster. Soon, Jin-Woo and the ant king stood right before each other again. And then, without a hint of hesitation or mercy, they began exchanging countless attacks, each thumping hit carrying all their might.

Slam!!

Kaboom!!

BOOM!!

The Hunters watching from the sideline were all stupefied into silence.

The shock wave from the collision of magic energy whenever Jin-Woo and the ant king exchanged blows rocked the ant tunnel itself. It was so severe that these top-ranked Hunters, renowned for their mastery over wielding their magic energy, felt their innards tumble.

“Woo-wuop...”

“Are you alright?”

“I, I’m fine.”

The cameraman was only a rank A, but he still tried his best to suppress the contents of his stomach from rising up. He was even experiencing vertigo, too.

‘Woo-wook....’

Even then – even as his complexion paled greatly, he could still maintain his smile all because....

Slam! Slam!! Slam!!!

‘How can a lone Hunter do that against such a monster....?’

....Because, he saw a ray of hope.

Kwa-boooooom!!

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo might be getting wounded from that exchange, but the outer shell of the ant king was definitely being broken as well.



Chapter 121 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The ant king quickly sensed the ‘changes’ taking place on the body that it felt so proud of.

Crack.

Crack....

Its outer skin, most likely tougher and harder than any known metal on this planet, began developing cracks all over the place. On the other hand, the enemy was easily withstanding the ant king’s attacks.

‘It can’t be.’

An impossible hypothesis quickly entered the ant king’s head.

‘I... I’m losing out on physical strength?!’

Not only that, to a human less than half its size?

But, right at that moment....

CRACK.

It realised that the fresh wound on its waist from that powerful hit felt ‘wrong’. Even the sound coming from there was not too good to hear.

The exoskeleton lacked pain receptors, so the ant king had to divert its attention for the briefest of moments to confirm the status of its shell down there.

Sneak.

The result was rather shocking to behold.

‘...It’s cracked open!’

The small crack that was no more than just a nick had spread out to everywhere and was growing larger and larger. It was the same thing as a warning sign, telling the creature that there wasn’t a lot of time left.

The ant king quickly turned its head around. However, even if it was only for a brief moment, Jin-Woo wasn’t some amateur who’d miss this golden opportunity.

Ka-boom!!

The king's face spun to its side.

‘.....??’

The ant king staggered unsteadily for a second or two from the ridiculous impact force that ignored the ant king's forged steel-like shell on its face.

It managed to regain its balance before it took a step back, but by then, the follow-up punch was already closing in from below.

KWAHNG!!

The ant king's chin shot upwards.

‘How dare a human, who's inferior than a bug...!!’

While its head still pointing up at the ceiling, the ant king shot a glare full of murderous rage down below.

The power this human possessed – it was indeed great. However, unlike this human, who only had his physical strength to fall back on, the ant king possessed a variety of other powerful means at its disposal.

Such as....

The ant king's head snapped back down, and at the same time, it fired a poison needle out of its mouth. A tip coated in deadly poison attached to the tongue-like tentacle shot out like a bullet.

It was an unavoidable attack aimed at the enemy's face in this point-blank range.

Swish-!

The human deftly tilted his head out of the way to dodge the needle, but a smile still crept up on the face of the ant king as the result of its attack became clear. The needle still managed to scratch the human's cheek and left a small wound there.

‘It's done!’

That alone was more than enough.

Once, the ant king devoured a sea snail and somewhat coincidentally, absorbed a skill called ‘Paralysis Poison’.

One of the most fatal poisons secreted by the known lifeforms in this world had been transformed into an even more deadly substance within the ant king's body after it became a concentrated mix that contained the magical energy of the host creature.

It was indeed the worst poison imaginable, evolved forcibly by the skill,

‘Gluttony’.

‘You’ve really given me so much trouble, you human b*stard.’

Even the slightest scratch would result in complete paralysis in one’s nervous system within seconds; the victims would lose all sensations in their bodies and lose control of themselves.

The only thing remaining would be to systematically destroy the resistance-less enemy.

“....?”

As if the poison was doing its thing, the human formed a flustered expression.

“This is the power of the true king!”

The ant king smiled widely and smacked the human’s face. However....

Kwahng!!

The human raised his left hand and blocked it.

‘.....??’

The question of how he was still able to move lasted only for a second.

Ka-boooooom!!

The human’s right fist flew in from the other side and struck the ant king so hard that the monster was shoved down to the ground rather unceremoniously.

“Kiiiehk!!”

For the first time ever, a pained yelp shot out from the king’s mouth.

Tti-ring.

Jin-Woo confirmed the System message popping up in his view as that familiar mechanical beep rang out.

[Detoxification has been completed.]

‘I was wondering why it was celebrating all alone, but huh, is this why?’

Maybe that was the case because, for some reason, he could sense that the ant king showed much more panic when he moved without a problem just now.

What a mystifying thing this was.

He wasn’t talking about the all-powerful Buff getting rid of the poison, no, but the fact that he could actually sense the insect-like monster’s emotions.

Before he had realised it, he could sense what other monsters were feeling about.

‘Wait, was it from around the time I fought those High Orcs?’

Back then, he thought that he was able to decipher what those creatures were feeling by looking at their facial expressions and their gestures. However, that ant monster wasn't even what you'd classify as a humanoid creature.

Indeed, that thing had no other facial expressions other than crumpling it in anger.

‘Is this because of my Perception?’

Just as his Stat values had all increased by so much lately, his Perception Stat also had increased by a lot, too. It was possible that some other unknown, hidden abilities to his Stats were unlocked when they went past a certain threshold.

However....

‘...Now isn't the time to think about that, is it?’

Indeed, his priority lay with killing this thing and getting out of this place. Jin-Woo sprinted towards the ant king trying to push itself off from the ground.

‘.....!!’

He could definitely feel the ant king's nervousness on his skin now. His continued pounding resulted in the creature's exoskeleton almost being cracked open. Just a little bit more now!

He thought like so and closed the distance in the blink of an eye, before jumping up slightly in the air. And then, he kicked down.

Kwa-boom!!

However, the ant king had already vanished from the spot. Only the poor ground caved in from the impact.

“Where did it go?!”

“It disappeared??”

While the other Hunters hurriedly searched for the ant king, Jin-Woo calmly looked above him. The monster was flying in the air using its wings.

‘Well, I guess this is convenient.’

Jin-Woo smirked to himself.

What with him being able to sense the monster's fluctuating emotions, searching for its presence had become a step easier now. The emotion of confusion felt had changed to fear, before it changed once more to happiness.

The ant king had changed its strategy now.

'If that human's speciality is his strength, then there's no need to face him head-on.'

The ant king's true weapon was its speed. Even that foolish human who lied and said he was the king of humans, couldn't even react to the ant king's movements and lost his neck.

From the onset, the reason why the creature wanted to use physical strength to suppress the human was a type of desire to show off its kingly powers.

But, right now, the ant king had decided to throw away that selfish reasoning and focus all of its being in this battle from now on.

Shushushuk....

The enlarged body reverted back to its original size, while the claws in its hands grew even longer and sharper, like well-honed blades.

'Its claws....'

Jin-Woo studied the changes taking place in the ant king and realised that the creature would change how it attacked from here onwards.

Shururuk....

Two shortwords he summoned from the Inventory landed in Jin-Woo's hands.

Swiiiiish-!!

The airborne ant king shot down towards Jin-Woo. Its speed was incomparable to only a minute ago.

'.....!!'

Jin-Woo focused his senses.

Time slowed down, and every single movement the monster made entered his vision. In all honesty, Jin-Woo felt most confident when it came down to the contest of speed. He easily deflected the ant king's claw slashing down from above with his shortsword.

The follow-up attacks from the ant king landing on the ground, as well as from Jin-Woo spinning around, clashed violently.

Clang!! Claaaang!! Clang!!

As they exchanged offence and defence countless times, the ant king was now completely beset with unbridled shock.

‘How can this be?!’

The enemy was actually matching its speed. No, it wasn't only that – as the seconds ticked by, his movement speed was actually picking up as if his muscles had finally loosened up sufficiently enough.

‘How... How can such a....’

The ant king had been pushed back during the contest of raw strength, and now it was also being gradually pushed back in the contest of speed, too.

One step, another step....

As the number of retreating steps taken increased, so did the wounds appearing on the exoskeleton. The greater the monster's retreating distance became, the more confident Jin-Woo grew.

‘I can finish this.’

The mental shock this monster, this so-called ant king felt right now, it was being transmitted in full to Jin-Woo. Right now, that monster was greatly shaken up.

Compared to the Demon King Baran, this monster's strength, speed, and abilities fell some ways behind. No, maybe, it was on the same level as the dead Demon King, or even exceeded it in some regards.

Unfortunately, the current Jin-Woo wasn't the same as the Jin-Woo of back then.

Indeed, he had stepped up into a far higher realm with the rewards he had received after completing the Demon's Castle dungeon.

‘Here's the fruit of all my labours.’

Jin-Woo got to fully experience just how much his Stats had grown through this particular opponent. Along with the satisfaction derived from knowing that his Stats had been greatly enhanced now, even more stirring emotions welled up from deep inside his chest.

When the ant king took another step back, Jin-Woo took two steps forward. And then...

‘Vital Spot Targetting!’

Jin-Woo's skill stabbed straight into the ant king's torso.

The ‘Vital Points Targetting’ was a skill that inflicted additional damage if

he had managed to stab the enemy's weak spots. With the monster's exoskeleton broken in several places, it was not an exaggeration to say that the creature's entire body was now the so-called weak spot.

Pa-ba-bak!!

Dozens of 'Vital Points Targetting' landed on the hapless monster.

['Skill: Vital Points Targetting' will now be upgraded to the ultimate version, 'Skill: Violent Slash'.]

'...Violent Slash?'

Having unlocked a new skill, Jin-Woo promptly used it.

It was then, his shortswords immediately sought out all of the ant king's openings and, literally in the blink of an eye, slashed out dozens of times.

Tadadadadada!!

"Kiiiiieehhckkk?!"

The ant king screamed out.

As the creature writhed around in pain, Jin-Woo swung his shortsword once more and sliced off its arm.

Slice.

The monster's long, black-coloured arm fell to the ground with a dull thud.

"Kiiehhk!"

By now, the ant king lost all semblance of pride or desire for revenge, and hurriedly fled to the air. Its instinctive desire to survive overruled everything. Unfortunately for it, Jin-Woo didn't allow for one moment of respite.

Sensing the approach of another being, the ant king took a look behind.

'A human... is flying?!'

Jin-Woo flung himself up using the 'Ruler's Reach' skill and proceeded to cut off one of the ant king's wings.

Plop!

The ant king crash-landed in an unsightly manner. During that short time of its fall, the ant king constantly thought about a way to escape from this incredibly dangerous predicament, even though confusion and fear threatened to paralyse it.

'I, I need to come up with something to overwhelm the enemy!'

Physical strength, speed, and even its hidden trump card, 'poison' all failed

to work. It couldn't come up with anything.

Did it not possess anything that was better than what that human possessed?

Just before the despair set in, the ant king finally arrived at the right answer. It recalled the one thing that it held an advantage in over the enemy.

And that would be.... the headcount.

There was only one enemy. But the ant king possessed thousands of soldiers. Indeed, didn't it have brave warriors waiting for its orders by the entrance of the chamber right this moment?

The ant king staggered back to its feet, before pointing at Jin-Woo with its one remaining arm.

“Kiiiiieehhkk-!!”

As if they were waiting for that rage-filled screech, the waves upon waves of ants began flooding into the chamber.

‘Take this, human!!’

“Kiiiiieehk!!”

The king continued to screech out. It was to restore its crushed pride, and also to rouse the fighting spirit of its countless soldiers, as well. And so, as it confidently glared at the impudent human....

“...?”

From that side, a black 'wave' was rushing out now.

‘Go!’

Jin-Woo issued an order to his Shadow Soldiers.

The 'Sovereign's Territory' he had activated prior to the battle was still active. The Shadow Soldiers, enhanced a step further by this skill, marched towards the ants at a frightening speed.

Dududududu....!!

The loud footsteps reverberated throughout the ant tunnel.

‘And then.... You come out, too.’

Finally, Jin-Woo summoned Fangs out, as well.

As if it was feeling sheepish for being summoned all alone, Fangs looked around himself and scratched the back of his head. Jin-Woo handed over the Bead of Avarice and warned him in no uncertain terms.

“Aim only at the ants. Only at them. If even a single lick of flames land on the humans sitting over there, I will never summon you out ever again.”

Fangs enthusiastically nodded his head as if he was confident of doing exactly that.

Soon, Fangs grew super-large with the ‘Song of the Giant’ and spewed out that enormous pillar of flames.

Kuwaaaaaaahhhh-!!!

Although he had seen that plenty enough times by now, Jin-Woo couldn’t help but feel impressed by the sight regardless.

‘It’s kinda like his flame pillar is getting bigger every day, isn’t it?’

Was it because his level was also rising up?

Only Jin-Woo could come up with such a reaction since he had seen this spectacle before, but well, other people were thinking of entirely different things.

The Hunters hiding in the far corner holding their breaths while witnessing the battle between Jin-Woo and the ant king could only gasp out in pure astonishment at the emergence of this new ‘monster’.

A rather severe reaction also came out from their midst, too.

“T-that is his summoned creature?! What?! That’s a summon?!”

Im Tae-Gyu pointed at Fangs and raised his voice.

As for the other Hunters, no one could respond to him as their jaws were still resting on the ground at that moment. However, everyone was thinking of roughly the same thing.

How could that thing be classified as a mere summon??

From the way it looked, or the powers it possessed, that thing no longer looked like a simple summoned creature, but a demon king that had descended to this earth.

Whatever the case may have been, that totally nonsensical pillar of flames roasted the swarm of ants like there was no tomorrow.

The ant king began shuddering once more.

‘These... These are that human’s soldiers....??’

Less than one minute later, hundreds of the ant king’s soldiers were evaporated into ash and dust. It wasn’t some metaphor, either. The ant monsters coming into contact with that strange pillar of flames really did

evaporate where they stood.

For the first time ever....

The ant king felt true terror towards another being for the first time in its life.

It also sensed an unscalable wall. The ant king finally learned that there was an enemy that couldn't be overcome, regardless of what power it tried to use.

This was a complete defeat, in every sense of the word.

But, how could such a thing be...?

'I was born to fight against the strong humans, so why....'

That was its sole calling. It hurried with its growth for that purpose. It even absorbed human's powers in order to facilitate that goal.

But to think, it still couldn't win against this one human....

The ant king began shivering and turned around to run. It just had to run away far, far away from this human. At least in this very moment, the thoughts of its glorious kingdom and its soldiers had completely disappeared from the ant king's head.

Using the healing skill taken from one of the dead humans, the ant king quickly regenerated its lost wing and took to the air again.

'Even if it's only a little bit further away.....'

But, it happened then.

Khu-woong!

Out of the blue, a powerful force pushed it down and planted the ant king flat on the ground.

"Kiiieehk!!"

It spat out a mouthful of bodily fluid.

Having utilised the skill 'Ruler's Reach' like a flyswatter, Jin-Woo quickly walked over to where the downed ant king was.

'I can't let this guy escape, obviously.'

It was a strong monster. He wanted to turn it into his Shadow Soldier no matter what. But, in order to do that....

'Killing it comes first.'

After discovering Jin-Woo approaching it, the look of sheer terror filled up

on the face of the ant king, so much so that the creature looked almost pitiful to the onlookers.

“Kii, kiieehck!!”

In the end, the ant king began crawling on the ground to get away from him. That arrogant, dignified appearance it displayed back when it proceeded to toy around with the Korean Hunters – it was now long, long gone.

“Now you look like a proper insect.”

Jin-Woo closed in quickly, took aim at the back of the ant king, and activated his skill, ‘Vital Points Targetting’ – no, ‘Violent Slash’.

That brought up the message window.

Tti-ring!

[You have killed your enemy.]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

‘Niiice!’

Jin-Woo clenched his fist. But his celebrations lasted only for a short while.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!”

He quickly turned around after Baek Yun-Ho called out to him, and found the latter’s complexion to be extremely poor. Jin-Woo quickly ran over to him.

Other Hunters rejoicing at the defeat of the ant king stopped and shifted their gazes over to Baek Yun-Ho, as well.

Meanwhile, Baek Yun-Ho continued to speak to Jin-Woo.

“Hunter Cha Hae-In is....”

Just as his unfinished sentence implied, Cha Hae-In’s vitality had declined so much that it was hard to even sense it now. The situation had deteriorated even further than before.

Jin-Woo’s expression quickly hardened.

Time had almost run out.

Even if he rode on Kaisel, just when would he arrive in his destination and just how long would he take to find a Healer to heal her?

‘I need another way....’

After some brief pondering, Jin-Woo came up with a method to save Cha Hae-In.

He finished checking her complexion and stood back up. He then turned towards the cameraman.

“Can you switch off the camera for a minute or two?”



Chapter 122 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Excuse me? The camera?”

“Yes.”

The cameraman looked at Jin-Woo with a flustered expression. But, Jin-Woo’s face was solemn, deeply serious, and unmoving.

“But, why the camera, all of a sudden...?”

Jin-Woo remained silent at the flustered cameraman’s question.

“...”

The cameraman couldn’t come to a decision here. Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was indeed his saviour. He’d gladly heed that man’s request, especially when he was also saving the lives of others here, too.

‘However, to ask me to switch the camera off....’

It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that every South Korean citizen must be watching this broadcast, right now. As a broadcaster, he found it hard to press the ‘off’ button on his camera under the current situation.

When he began hesitating like that, Jin-Woo chose to not waste any more time, and spoke up.

“If you don’t, I’ll just break it.”

Hearing Jin-Woo’s icy tone of voice, the cameraman flinched grandly. If Hunter Seong Jin-Woo decided to break the camera, then would the combined efforts of the Hunters present here even be enough to stop him?

The ‘why’ no longer mattered as he was left with no choice in the matter anymore.

“I-I understand. Hold on.”

The cameraman removed the head-mounted camera and switched the device off. After confirming the ‘power’ light of the camera was gone, Jin-Woo took Cha Hae-In back from Baek Yun-Ho.

‘I didn’t want to scare the cameraman, but....’

It couldn’t be helped if he wanted to save Cha Hae-In.

While holding her, Jin-Woo quickly scanned his vicinity. He then took a couple of deep breaths and closed his eyes.

‘What is he trying to do now?’

The attention of the Hunters were all gathered on him now. Soon, he opened his eyes. Finding the location of what he was searching for, Jin-Woo suddenly turned around and headed deeper into the ant tunnel.

His steps were brisk, but he never broke into a full-blown sprint in consideration of Cha Hae-In’s current condition. Others dazedly stared at his back, before quickly recovering their wits to run after him.

Finally, Jin-Woo came to a stop and cautiously put Cha Hae-In down. He then began removing the pile of ant corpses from around her.

“Heok!!”

Discovering something rather unexpected, the cameraman was the first one to gasp out in surprise.

“Mm....”

Other Hunters also let a stunned gasp to leak out from their mouths. Because, the cold, headless body of Min Byung-Gu was there. It was a gruesome sight to behold, where there was literally nothing above his neck area.

Only then did they venture to guess why Hunter Seong Jin-Woo demanded for the camera to be cut off. No one out there would want to witness that horrible scene, after all.

“Keuk.”

The closest person to Min Byung-Gu out of everyone present here, Baek Yun-Ho, squeezed his eyes shut and turned his head away. But then...

‘Wait a minute...’

He suddenly thought of something.

‘How did Hunter Seong Jin-Woo find where Byung-Gu was among all these dead monsters?’

The answer arrived soon enough in his mind.

Without the aid of a special skill, such a thing wouldn’t have been possible. The magic energy emission coming from humans and monsters were minutely different, but Jin-Woo was able to differentiate between the two and managed to locate Min Byung-Gu’s corpse before the emission from him completely dissipated.

If true, then that could only be described as an astonishing sensory perception. Such a task would be impossible even for Baek Yun-Ho's 'Eyes of the Beast', which was supposed to be a specialised trait meant for that kind of job.

After his thoughts reached up to this point, Baek Yun-Ho shifted his head back in the direction of Jin-Woo. Even at the risk of the final appearance of Byung-Gu being deeply etched in his nightmares, Baek Yun-Ho wanted to witness with his own two eyes just what would happen next.

'Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.... Just what are you trying to do?'

Cold sweat drops formed on his forehead as he alternated his gaze between Jin-Woo, Min Byung-Gu, and Cha Hae-In.

In the meantime, Jin-Woo took a closer look at the status of Min Byung-Gu. The black smokes were rising up from the corpse. Meaning, it was possible to perform the 'Shadow Extraction' on it.

And, sure enough....

Tti-ring.

[It is possible to perform Shadow Extraction on the selected target.]

The familiar mechanical beep and the System's message informed him in such a 'friendly' way that what he wanted to do was, well, doable.

Of course, Jin-Woo was cognisant of the fact that Hunter Min Byung-Gu could be turned into a Shadow Soldier the moment he heard of the latter meeting an unfortunate fate.

Only that he didn't feel like doing it.

To turn a blameless guy into an undead and use him as a soldier.... Even if the corpse belonged to a rank S Hunter, he'd still reject the idea outright. That was not something a human being should do. However...

Jin-Woo stared at Cha Hae-In's gradually paling face.

'...This is the best way.'

What if, in a situation where every second counted, he could entrust the gravely injured to the best Healer in South Korea? What was there to even think about here?

If the decision was left up to Min Byung-Gu himself, he'd have made the same call 100 times out of 100. Jin-Woo formed a solemn expression and issued an order to the shadow.

"Rise up."

However, the end result was different from what he expected.

Tti-ring!

[The Shadow Extraction has failed.]

Confusion and anxiety began entering Jin-Woo's expression.

Was this because the skill level was too low compared to the target's Stat values? Or, was it because he wasn't really feeling it with this particular Shadow Extraction?

Jin-Woo quickly shook off all distracting thoughts. And then, spoke up once more, his voice now containing his will.

"Rise up."

The desirable changes took place, then.

Uaaaaahhhh—!

A low, heavy sound that could be described as either a victorious roar or a scream resounded out from the distant somewhere, and an eerie wind suddenly swept past everyone. The eyes of the Hunters were shot open in shock as the creeping chill crawled down their spines.

"Oh, my god!!"

"That, isn't that...?!"

From Min Byung-Gu's shadow, a black hand rose up. As if it didn't want to go back inside the shadow again, the black hand powerfully grabbed the ground. And then, it began pulling itself out from the darkness.

'How, how can this be?!'

Baek Yun-Ho felt as if his heart would explode from what he was seeing right now. Other people might not see it, but his eyes clearly captured everything.

Min Byung-Gu's magic energy rising up from his shadow was slowly solidifying into the shape of a person. More specifically, a soldier decked out in jet-black armour.

And soon, the so-called 'summoned' creature finally revealed itself.

"...."

The Hunters were rendered utterly speechless and dazedly stared at the new summoned creature of Jin-Woo. And from this creature, they could sense the kind of magical energy that could only be felt from a top-ranked Hunter.

‘No, wait a minute...?’

The quick-witted Choi Jong-In flinched grandly in realisation as his brows shot up.

As everyone watched with bated breaths, Jin-Woo’s calm eyes were studying the shadow of Min Byung-Gu. When their gazes met, the new Shadow Soldier nodded his head.

The moment a shadow was transformed into one of his soldiers, it would immediately form a mental link with Jin-Woo. They would know what their sovereign wanted from them. Without needing any further orders, Min Byung-Gu’s shadow knelt down and began casting healing magic on Cha Hae-In.

Wuuoonngg...

As soon as the warm rays of light escaped from the Shadow Soldier’s hands, Cha Hae-In’s pale complexion began recovering gradually. This was the top level healing magic at work.

‘I knew it!!’

Choi Jung-Hoon was properly freaking out now. He was completely sure of his guesses, now that he had seen those lights heal Cha Hae-In. The identity of that black ‘soldier’ was none other than Min Byung-Gu!

By then, other Hunters were also beginning to realise what was going on here.

Mah Dong-Wook hadn’t been able to shut his slack jaw from the moment that black hand rose up from Min Byung-Gu’s shadow, but now, he was able to collect himself enough to finally express his astonishment.

“Instructor Seong, you... weren’t an ordinary Summoner, I see.”

Jin-Woo neither agreed or denied it.

However, just what kind of people were they, to begin with? Every single one of them was an excellent Hunter who each represented the largest Guilds in South Korea. They didn’t need to hear a confirmation to understand the gist of it.

“By any chance... Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, you can utilise the powers of the deceased?”

Choi Jong-In asked with a nervous tension writ large on his face.

Jin-Woo simply nodded his head, once. Now that he found himself here, there was no more reason to hide his powers, nor did he want to mask it with

lies, either.

‘Well, it’s not like these folks will fall for some random lies I cook up on the spot, anyway.’

Actually, he felt as if a load was taken off his shoulders now that he had revealed his powers to someone else.

Other people might fear it, but to Jin-Woo, he’d feel eternally grateful towards this power for helping him get to where he was. He was proud of the power of the Shadow Sovereign.

Seeing that confident look on Jin-Woo’s face, other Hunters began to fear the extent of his powers.

‘He can summon creatures using the powers of the deceased??’

‘Wouldn’t he become stronger and stronger as the battle becomes fiercer? What a scary ability this is....’

‘I don’t even know what to say anymore.’

To these Hunters, having bore witness to Jin-Woo’s ability today, this revelation left different types of impressions.

However, Baek Yun-Ho was privy to one more piece of secret info that others didn’t know.

‘Not only can his own powers continue to grow stronger, but he can also even control his vanquished enemies as his own summoned creatures. Wouldn’t that mean.....’

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s current level of power had already reached an unfathomable degree. But when Baek Yun-Ho thought about the kind of strength the youth would possess in the future, his entire body began shuddering uncontrollably.

Suddenly, the cameraman spoke up as if he remembered something just then.

“Ah! Then the reason why you requested the camera to be turned off was because....”

This power was capable of making the nation’s top Hunters scared. Anyone could’ve easily guessed the reason why Jin-Woo didn’t want to reveal such a power to the rest of the country.

It was around then that Min Byung-Gu’s shadow stood back up. The treatment process must’ve been finished, because there was a hint of crimson colour gently glowing on Hunter Cha Hae-In’s face.

‘Whew-woo....’

After confirming her status, Jin-Woo sighed out in relief. Although she was still unconscious, her breathing and her heartbeat had returned to normal. As a matter of fact, her wounds were completely healed now.

Jin-Woo patted the shoulder of Min Byung-Gu’s shadow. That was the gesture of appreciation for the job well done.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo guessed what kind of person Min Byung-Gu must’ve been when he was still alive, from the gentle eyes of the Shadow Soldier looking back at him.

Jin-Woo slowly took his hand away from the shoulder, and then...

‘Extraction cancellation.’

With a slight smile on his lips, he let the shadow return to the abyss.

No matter what, he didn’t possess the right to lord over this man as one of his soldiers, when Min Byung-Gu even sacrificed his life to fight against the monster threats. Indeed, he thought that such an act was not fitting for a fallen hero.

‘...Let’s get out of here.’

Putting aside the slight regret in his heart, Jin-Woo picked up Cha Hae-In from the ground.

After losing their two leaders – the queen and the king – the ant monsters scattered and fled to the ends of the island in order to hide from the Shadow Soldiers. The ant tunnel, once filled to the brim with ants, was now completely empty.

Jin-Woo took several steps forward before looking behind him to speak to other Hunters.

“Let’s get going.”

Their bodies and physical fatigue might have been recovered to some extent from the potions they ingested, but their mental fatigue had almost reached a breaking point by now. So, when they heard his suggestion, the expressions of the Hunters brightened up considerably.

It was now finally over.

Their smile-filled faces perfectly expressed their current emotions.

After they safely got out from the ant tunnel, they found a helicopter

hovering in the air, having arrived in their location just now with an exquisite sense of timing.

“There they are! Hunters are coming out!”

“Yes!! Well done!”

The helicopter carefully descended and landed on the ground after its occupants discovered the exact location of the Hunters. The tired Hunters entered the vehicle one by one until only two people remained.

They were Jin-Woo and Baek Yun-Ho.

Jin-Woo was standing closer to the helicopter. He carefully handed Cha Hae-In over to Baek Yun-Ho.

“What are you doing, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

“I still have some unfinished business to take care of on this island.”

Hearing that, Baek Yun-Ho could only smirk softly.

There were still plenty of ant monsters that had escaped death roaming around on the Jeju Island. If some other people said that they wanted to remain here, then Baek Yun-Ho would’ve questioned their sanity, but the man in front of his eyes was definitely not included in that group.

To fight monsters, you needed a monster.

Baek Yun-Ho thought that he wouldn’t get surprised anymore regardless of what Jin-Woo was planning to do on this island.

“Excuse me.”

Before leaving the island, Baek Yun-Ho threw out one last question.

“Byung-Gu.... No, wait. What will happen to the summoned creature that came out from Byung-Gu? Will he... stay as your soldier and continue to fight on?”

Jin-Woo shook his head.

“I’ve cancelled the summoning. It won’t be possible to see him again.”

Baek Yun-Ho nodded his head and formed a content smile.

“That’s a relief.”

“Pardon?”

“That guy, he... really hated fighting, you know? I’m sure that he’s thanking you right now, wherever he is.”

And so, the six warriors and one cameraman who had bravely fought on

finally left the island of Jeju.

Their fight was over. However, it was merely another beginning for Jin-Woo.

‘I need only one more level up to hit 100.’

He’d get there no problem, considering the number of remaining monsters on this island. And besides, there were plenty of shadows waiting to be extracted back inside the ant tunnel, as well.

So, then – should he get started now?

‘First of all, I should take care of the ants that had run away....’

Jin-Woo formed a deep smile and summoned Kaisel out.

Inside the Japanese Hunter’s Association.

The Association President Matsumoto Shigeo switched the giant TV screen off, his expression one of deep sorrow and defeat. A monster strong enough to instantly annihilate ten of the best Hunters from Japan, was killed off by a single Hunter from South Korea.

‘How come, why, what is....?’

Matsumoto Shigeo’s trembling hands began tearing at what little hair remained on the side of his head.

A completely illogical event had unfolded in front of his eyes just now.

Thanks to that, Japan’s total combat potential had declined by over half, and even his position as the Association President was under threat now. If the Koreans also failed, then he might have tried to come up with some vague excuses to gloss over this whole thing, and then ask the international community for their help, but....

Not only had the Koreans managed to kill the ant queen, they even escaped safely from the clutches of the thousands of ant monsters as well as that mutated freak of an ant, too.

Seong Jin-Woo.

That one Hunter was responsible for smashing everything apart.

‘Seong Jin-Woo... Seong Jin-Woo.....’

Inexplicably, the contents of the phone call he shared with Goto Ryuji while the latter was still in Korea played back in his mind.

[“In South Korea.... There’s an incredible Hunter in South Korea.”]

["More than you?"]

["More than likely, sir."]

["....."]

["I think there's a need to modify our plan a little bit, sir."]

If only.

If only he paid attention to what Goto Ryuji was saying back then.

Wasn't he the most knowledgeable person when it came to understanding the differences of strength in Hunters? For the first time ever, such a man had assessed a Korean Hunter as ***"incredible"***, yet why did he.....

'Why was I so arrogant....?'

If they had completely analysed the capabilities of Seong Jin-Woo beforehand, they might have cooperated with the Koreans in good faith, and resolved everything without a single problem.

No, wait. Even if the Japanese didn't do anything, the Koreans might have stepped forward themselves to take care of the problem, instead.

But then, he ended up digging his own grave just because he resorted to underhanded schemes.

"A-Association President? Sir?"

Seeing how wane his face had become, the Association employee next to him began asking in a worried voice. However, Matsumoto Shigeo didn't bother to raise his head and simply waved his hand to dismiss the employee.

The employee bowed his head and left the office as if he was running away.

Matsumoto Shigeo's expression crumpled unsightly.

'There can only be one way out of this for me.'

And that would be to raise the Japanese Association back on its feet, and make it stronger than ever before. In order to do so, he needed just one man.

'Seong Jin-Woo....'

No matter what, he must reel that man in. With Goto Ryuji dying in vain like that, there was only one way to revitalise the Japanese Hunter's Association.

The entirety of Korea's citizens would have witnessed live the grand feats of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo so it would not be easy, but well, there was already precedence of a top Hunter abandoning South Korea, which meant there was

still hope.

‘What should I do to reel Hunter Seong Jin-Woo over to this side?’

Matsumoto Shigeo’s brain, momentarily frozen from despair, began spinning rapidly again.

The Eastern United States.

Ringgg.... Ringgg.... Ringgg....

The phone rang endlessly off the hook.

Unable to endure that racket any longer, David Brennan angrily snatched at the receiver.

‘Which insane motherf*cker is calling me at this time of the night?!’

He was the director of the most powerful organisation in the States, the Hunter Bureau. Promising himself to find the son of a b*tch regardless of the method or cost and throw him in a jail cell if this turned out to be a prank call, he answered the call in a testy voice.

Click.

“Who is this?”

“Deputy....?”

David Brennan’s sleep flew away the moment he heard that familiar voice and he raised his torso up.

“It’s already pretty late. What’s the matter?”

“A video...?”

When he checked his mobile phone, there were seven missed calls as well as a video file. It seemed that he missed them all because he had muted the phone before going to bed.

“I understand. I’ll give you a call after watching the clip.”

“.....What do you mean by that?”

“What?”

David Brennan jumped up from the bed and took a look at the alarm sitting on the bedside bureau. It said ‘04:12 AM’.

He discarded the phone on the bed and ran towards the bedroom window to take a look, and indeed, the deputy director was waiting for him outside the front of the house with his car parked right there. Once their gazes met, the deputy director nodded his greeting.

David Brennan stared back somewhat dumbfounded, his head tilting to the side, before turning around.

‘What’s going on?’

Sensing that something big must’ve happened, he picked his phone up, the video clip still waiting to be played on the device.



Chapter 123 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The video clip finally finished playing on the phone.

“...”

The footage of a raid taking place in a small nation to the Far East left a pretty hefty mental shock to David Brennan, the director of America’s Hunter Bureau.

“What do you think?”

The deputy director cautiously asked his boss. And the director was quick with his reply.

“Never mind what I think, aren’t you here in these early hours because you already know what I’m about to say? Am I right?”

That was indeed true.

It was already an uncommon occurrence for the director of the mighty Hunter Bureau and his deputy to have a meeting at four in the morning, but then, their meeting place also happened to be the kitchen of the director’s private residence, as well.

A heavy silence descended between two men sitting opposite side of the dining table.

Puff, puff....

The director replayed the video one more time as he sucked on his cigarette. He was still getting shocked by what he was watching. Especially when he got to the part where the Hunter summoned out black ‘soldiers’ to sweep away the swarm of ants, the director’s entire body shuddered noticeably.

‘.....’

What could anyone say after viewing this crazy video?

And so, as he continued sucking on another cigarette in silence....

The director’s wife came down from the upstairs bedroom in search of her missing husband, and called out his name after spotting the light in the kitchen.

“Dave? Is everything alright?”

When the director wordlessly gestured with his hand, the wife looked at him worriedly for a moment or two before going back to the bedroom.

Exactly three cigarettes later, the director quietly opened his mouth.

“What a waste of talent to be confined in a small country like South Korea.”

“I agree.”

“What do we know about him?”

The deputy director readily brought out a file containing all the pertinent information related to Seong Jin-Woo. The director scanned the files and formed a satisfied smile.

“Very good.”

It had been less than an hour since the raid came to an end on the island of Jeju in the country far, far east, yet the related data was already in his hands. Not only that, the file contained everything from that Hunter’s type as well as his close associates and relatives, too.

Now, this was the power of the United States, the Hunter ‘superpower’ in the world.

On the other side of the table, the deputy was smiling inwardly to himself.

‘We got lucky on this one.’

Sure, the swiftness of the American intelligence network was one thing, but luck played a big part, as well. To be more precise, the ‘Seong Il-Hwan’ incident.

An existence that could either be a human or a monster in disguise exited from a dungeon and claimed that he was a Korean Hunter. The data compiled back then still remained in the database of the Hunter Bureau.

In the current situation where no other nation even knew what his name was – with the exception of South Korea, of course – the Americans were able to get two steps ahead of everyone else.

‘God bless America.’

Indeed, if this wasn’t the heavens helping them out, then what was?

However, it wouldn’t do to get all worked up over a minor lucky coincidence like this one. No, it all depended on the abilities of the individuals involved when it came to turning a lucky coincidence into a

genuine opportunity.

The deputy formed a pretty serious expression.

“His father went missing in a Gate, but he still hasn’t received any proper compensation until now.”

“H-mm....”

“And also, before he went through a Re-Awakening process, he risked death countless times to pay for his mother’s hospital fees.”

“....What an inconceivable tale that is.”

How could they treat the wife and the son of a hero this badly, when he lost his life fighting against monsters all for the sake of his nation? Such a thing was completely unimaginable in the US.

“And well, this isn’t confirmed information, but...”

The director lifted his gaze off from the files. The deputy took his time to build suspense and finally murmured out.

“Apparently, he hasn’t signed up with any Guilds yet.”

“.....!!”

Now that piece of news managed to perk up the director’s ears even more. He closed the file with a sombre expression on his face.

“This is a different matter altogether from Hwang Dong-Su’s case.”

When that familiar name was mentioned, the glint in the deputy’s eyes changed.

“Taking away two rank S Hunters from a single country.... That’d be akin to declaring that we are turning our backs on that particular nation.”

South Korea and America had been allied nations for a very long time. What the director was implying here was that the impact of this matter would mushroom into something rather substantial in the near future.

However, the deputy replied with a confident tone of voice.

“Even still..... Don’t you think he’s a talent worth all that trouble?”

“...”

Of course.

The director couldn’t deny that. So, he answered with a question, instead.

“Can you do it?”

The deputy answered with the exact same words he used back during the Hwang Dong-Su's case.

“I’ll do my best.”

Because of those four words, the deputy was able to quickly climb the career ladder to get to where he was now. As for the man that the deputy director had locked his sights on...

The United States of America already boasted two of the most powerful Hunters in the world, the so-called ‘Special Authority-ranks’ in their roster, but even then, the director David Brennan wanted to naturalise that youth as an American citizen.

The director placed his fourth cigarette of the morning in his lips and spoke in a grave tone of voice.

“Regardless of what conditions he puts forth, you will bring him over to this side.”

Jin-Woo rode on the back of Kaisal to hunt down and kill every single ant monster his Shadow Soldiers missed the first time around.

Kiieehhk!!

Yet another ant fell after getting struck by the skill, Dagger Throw. Jin-Woo didn't bother to step down from Kaisal and simply used the skill, Ruler's Reach, to easily retrieve his shortsword.

‘I must be pretty close to levelling up now.’

There weren't that many ants left to be found on the island. Jin-Woo really preferred that he'd get to level up by killing the remaining ants in this place.

First of all, just a single level up would take him to level 100. For Jin-Woo, who loved to see numbers ending in the multiples of five, 100 was such a fantastic level that he simply had to get there as soon as possible.

Since he hadn't booked any Gates, once he leaves Jeju Island he wouldn't have any other avenues to earn experience points for a while. As long as he didn't get lucky and another key to an instant dungeon popped out of the random boxes, or a dungeon break occurred near where he lived, of course.

‘Wait, it's not cool to think of a dungeon break as being lucky, is it.’

If a dungeon break occurred, then that meant one or more teams had failed in their raids. So, to him, it was far more preferable to get to level 100 in this place.

And, if there was another reason for doing so, then....

He ended up recalling a painful memory while trying to extract Hunter Min Byung-Gu's shadow.

The leader of the White Phantoms, Baruka.

After failing three times to extract his shadow, Jin-Woo couldn't convert him into his Shadow Soldier.

When he failed in his first attempt earlier in the day, his heart fell to the pit of his stomach, as the thoughts of 'Am I going to have another episode like that' filled his head.

'Well, I did manage somehow to succeed on my second try, but still...'

Wasn't this the case of 'A burnt child fears fire'?

There was no guarantee that the same thing as Baruka wouldn't happen later when trying to extract the ant king's shadow. That guy's Stat values were so high that comparing Hunter Min Byung-Gu to that monster was a time-wasting gesture.

Even if it was by a small margin, Jin-Woo wanted to increase his odds of successfully extracting that guy's shadow by raising his level. He was sure that, although there was only one level difference, it would definitely help out his cause.

'...Uh?'

After discovering something on the ground, Jin-Woo ordered Kaisal to land.

Kiihkh!

Kaisal flapped its wings and lightly landed on the ground. Jin-Woo climbed down from his back and scanned his surroundings.

'It was around here....'

He rummaged through the tall grasses, before discovering the corpses lying there hidden. A deep frown immediately formed on his face. He had discovered the bodies of the Japanese Hunters, lying here and there. There were several with their heads missing, but there was also one that got mangled beyond recognition, as well.

Jin-Woo took a closer look at the bodies.

'Pretty strong magic energy....'

Without a doubt, these people were strong. They didn't look like they would die in this place in such a manner. The fact that they did die so gruesomely could only mean that an extremely powerful 'something' had paid

them a visit.

‘Probably the handiwork of that mutated ant....’

He was unconvinced that something else was responsible for this massacre. Well, when he was struck for the first time by the ant king, his jaw stung pretty sharply, didn't it? If it were any other Hunters, they wouldn't have been able to endure it even once.

Jin-Woo looked around the ground while feeling somewhat bitter, before his steps came to a halt on a certain spot.

‘This aura....’

Jin-Woo crouched down and took a closer look at the ground. The soil here was all muddy and sticky from a prodigious amount of blood having soaked the earth. A faint trace of magical energy emanated from the wet ground. He had encountered this magic energy emission once before.

‘.....Goto Ryuji.’

Jin-Woo searched his vicinity again. Goto's magic energy could still be felt, but his remains were nowhere to be seen. Most likely, he had been completely devoured by the mutated ant monster.

“Tsk, tsk.”

Jin-Woo could only tut to himself at the ultimately meaningless death of Japan's strongest Hunter, before standing back up again. With excellent timing, the Shadow Soldiers he dispatched to the all corners of the island reported back to him that the remnants of the ant monsters had been completely exterminated.

‘...In the end, I killed them all, huh.’

Every Korean citizen would 100 times out of 100 cry out in elation from that news, but Jin-Woo could only lick his lower lip in disappointment. Because, his level didn't go up in the end.

Now that there were no more monsters remaining, he figured that the only thing left to do would be to go back inside the ant tunnel to extract the shadows of the mutated ant and the queen. But then....

....His steps came to an abrupt halt.

‘Wait a second... there are still monsters remaining?’

His extended senses picked up the presences of monsters from nearby. Not only that, there were so many, too!

A smile quickly bloomed on Jin-Woo's face to replace the look of

disappointment. He lightly jumped back up on Kaisel.

“Let’s go!”

Just as expected....

Jin-Woo’s expression brightened greatly as soon as he stepped inside the nursery area. There were countless eggs lining up the floor, pillars, and even the ceiling.

Seeing that there were wiggling movements from underneath the semi-transparent shells, these things were definitely monsters, too.

‘Not sure how much experience points I will get here, but...’

But then again, with this many monsters here, he was sure of making up for the lacking amount of experience points. Jin-Woo summoned out the Shadow Soldiers specialised in wide-range attacks.

“Gather around.”

Fangs and three Magic Soldiers stood in line, according to their grades.

Jin-Woo handed over the Bead of Avarice over to Fangs, and studied each of the four soldiers in turn.

“You all understand what you need to do, right?”

The Magic Soldiers all nodded their heads in unison. Jin-Woo pointed at the eggs.

“Begin.”

Right away, Fangs grew to an incredible height and spat out the horrifying flames at the eggs. The other Magic Soldiers finished chanting their magic and began chucking large balls of flames here and there as well.

Kuwaaahhhh-!

KWABOOM!!

Boom!!

Eggs had no means of resisting, and in no time at all, began to burn up and explode one by one.

Kiiehhhk!

Jin-Woo took a closer look at one of the dead ant larvae leaning against the corner of the broken egg. He discovered the corpse of an ant, near adulthood, just below the melted-down shell of the larva. As it turned out, every single one of them he saw sported a pair of wings, without exceptions.

‘If these things reached maturity and crossed the ocean with that mutated ant in the lead, then....’

Even though the queen was successfully subjugated, both South Korea and Japan would’ve suffered tremendous losses.

What a relief that he was able to stop that from becoming reality.

BLAM!!

Boom!!

Jin-Woo noticed that his boys were breaking out in buckets of sweat, and summoned the Demon King’s Longsword out from the Inventory.

‘Should I have a go with this one?’

Every time he moved this cool-looking blue-coloured longsword, arcs of electricity crackled up from the blade itself. He had stored it inside the Inventory after defeating the Demon King Baran back in the Demon’s Castle. There was a reason why he brought this longsword out instead of his main weapons, the daggers/shortswords.

....Because of the added magic attribute of the longsword.

Swish-!

When Jin-Woo energetically swung the sword....

Bzzzzz-!!!

Lightning crackled boisterously all over the place and caused the blue-coloured storm to kick up.

‘Ohhh!’

A wide smile formed on Jin-Woo’s face.

Although he couldn’t recreate the destructive might or the added ‘Stun’ effect as displayed by the Demon King, it was still more than enough to burn these ant eggs, that’s for sure.

‘Isn’t it too wasteful to leave inside the Inventory?’

Because he was already far too familiar with the daggers, he would probably never use this sword again in the near future, but still, he felt that this weapon was too good to be left forgotten inside his Inventory.

And so.... just how long did he spend wrestling with these eggs?

Eventually, he got to hear the familiar and very welcoming mechanical beep.

Tti-ring.

[Level up!]

‘Finally!’

Jin-Woo cried out in elation. Inwardly, of course.

He immediately returned the Demon King’s Longsword back inside the Inventory and headed straight to the ant queen’s chamber, leaving the mop-up operation to his Shadow Soldiers.

He found the mutated ant monster still lying dead on the same spot. Jin-Woo stood next to it.

His heart was already pounding hard from his intense desire to turn this mutated ant into his Shadow Soldier.

However....

He had learned that the power of concentration was critically important during his attempts to extract Hunter Min Byung-Gu’s shadow.

‘I gotta calm down.’

Gradually, Jin-Woo’s gaze grew colder, and his breathing regained its usual calmness as well.

‘.....Okay, good.’

His condition was now back to its peak.

Jin-Woo’s gaze shifted lower to the ground. Thicker and greatly more ominous black smoke compared to other monsters were oozing out of the mutated ant’s corpse.

Was this because the creature was so extraordinarily strong? So strong that Jin-Woo didn’t even know who to compare it to?

While thinking like that, he calmly extended his hands out towards the rising black smoke.

“Rise up.”



Chapter 124: Chapter 124

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Right at that moment....

The light within the ant queen's chamber suddenly dimmed and brightened back up over and over again, as if it was being illuminated by a dying fluorescent light bulb.

Jin-Woo raised his head. The large ball of light that Choi Jong-In floated up on the ceiling to help with the ant queen raid was flickering noticeably now.

'Is the magic about to come undone?'

At first, he absentmindedly thought like that.

However, it hadn't even an hour since the Korean Hunters stepped foot inside this chamber. So, how could the spell be dissipating already? Not only that, wasn't it a spell cast by a rank S Mage so he and his colleagues could safely carry out this potentially deadly raid?

There was no way such a thing could be true. In that case....

'.....Could it be?'

Could the Shadow Extraction he performed on the mutated ant be the cause? Just as this thought entered his mind....

Paht-!

The surroundings became completely dark.

He'd still be able to see around him thanks to his Perception Stat if there had been a sliver, a trace of light coming in from somewhere. But this all-encompassing darkness didn't even permit that.

It must've been a second or two later.

The darkness lingered on only for a briefest of brief moments before receding away – to reveal the mutated ant standing right in front of his eyes.

'.....!!'

Jin-Woo flinched grandly and took a step back.

If it weren't for the System message saying ***"Shadow Extraction was a success"*** appearing almost at the same time, he might have lashed out while

thinking that the ant had come back to life or some such.

“Whew.... That surprised me.”

Jin-Woo spat out a sigh of relief.

Now that he calmly took another look at the creature from a step away, it sure did look a bit different from when it was still alive. From its body, streams of black smoke were continuously rising up.

‘So, this is that ant monster’s shadow....’

He couldn’t tell just how much of its original Stats had changed, but at least, the ominous aura it gave off seemed to have gone up a few levels. Jin-Woo stood before the ant’s shadow. He could clearly feel its enormous magic energy reserve.

The mutated ant becoming his soldier finally felt real to him now that he could stand right before the creature and sense its magical energy like this.

‘Hmm....’

He wanted to remain calm, but the corners of his lips continued to curl upwards.

Ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump!

His heart was pounding away madly like a child who got his hands on a toy he so badly wished to own.

Soon, the shadow’s information popped up in his view. Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed to a slit as he read the info floating above the shadow’s head.

[?? Lv.1]

Commander grade

Jin-Woo began clenching his fists tightly after confirming its grade. A new one just made its appearance. Which could only mean this guy possessed the kind of power that was on another realm compared to his other soldiers.

‘Well, that’s obvious when considering its original abilities while it was still alive....’

Just the name of the new grade alone implied that this soldier was not your average, common soldier. This was the fruit of his labour for having worked so hard to own this shadow. It was then.

Shu-wook.

The shadow knelt down after meeting his gaze with Jin-Woo’s. Without a doubt, the ‘absolute loyalty’ that affected all the other Shadow Soldiers also

applied to this guy, as well.

'Nice.'

stop, the ant queen.

Jin-Woo formed a satisfied smile and turned around. But, then....

"Oh, my king...."

Jin-Woo's steps came to an abrupt halt after he heard that voice coming from behind him. He never thought that he'd got scared that easily, but at least in this moment, he did feel like his heart had taken a nasty tumble down to the pit of his stomach.

....Could it have been auditory hallucination?

Jin-Woo looked behind him. Even without doing that, he could tell with his acute senses that there was nothing there besides the ant's shadow. That shadow was still kneeling on the ground, his head deeply bowed.

'.....'

Jin-Woo studied the shadow as he slowly turned around.

"Was it you?"

The shadow opened its mouth as if he was waiting for this moment.

"Please grant me... a name....."

Although it sounded a little inarticulate, the ant's shadow was definitely speaking back to him.

The helicopter containing the Hunters headed straight back to the city of Seoul.

Tatatatatata-!

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui had been anxiously waiting for their arrival, so when the helicopter landed on the landing pad located on the Hunters Association, he quickly went over personally and opened the vehicle's door.

"How is Cha Hae-In Hunter-nim's condition?"

The gazes of the Hunters all shifted towards where Cha Hae-In was. She still hadn't recovered her consciousness yet, and was lying on top of a blanket laid out on the helicopter's floor.

"Hurry! This way!"

Two rank A Healers, waiting just outside the landing pad, hurriedly sprinted forward as soon as Goh Gun-Hui issued his order. But, when they began checking out her condition,

“...??”

“...??”

They exchanged puzzled glances with each other.

“What’s going on?”

When Goh Gun-Hui asked them, they answered almost at the same time, making it hard to tell who was the first to open his mouth.

“She’s not injured anywhere.”

“She’s perfectly normal.”

“Are you saying that there’s no need to treat Hunter Cha now?”

The Healers nodded their heads. They also explained themselves a bit further.

“Not sure who did it, but truly incredible healing magic was cast on her. Because of that, we don’t need to do anything here, sir.”

Goh Gun-Hui was feeling genuinely flustered now.

When he last confirmed Cha Hae-In’s condition through the live broadcast, her injuries looked quite severe. And also from a report he received, her condition was so bad that she failed to regain her consciousness until now.

That was why he had urgently searched for and found a couple of rank A Healers, and had them on standby here. But now...

‘There’s no need to heal her?’

Goh Gun-Hui swept his gaze all over the unmoving Cha Hae-In. For sure, her complexion didn’t look so bad. It was almost as if she was fast asleep.

Just what transpired after the camera was turned off?

Goh Gun-Hui tilted his head in confusion.

‘They didn’t have a Healer over there, too....’

After all, their sole Healer, Min Byung-Gu, met with a grisly fate, didn’t he?

Goh Gun-Hui asked the team leader, Mah Dong-Wook.

“Just what happened back there, Hunter Mah?”

“That is....”

As Mah Dong-Wook fell into a dilemma, wondering how he should go about explain this situation, one of the Healers hurriedly shouted out.

“She’s waking up!”

Everyone’s attention was focused on her in an instant. Goh Gun-Hui carefully sat down near her head and asked her.

“Cha Hunter-nim, can you hear me?”

Cha Hae-In slowly opened her eyes.

“Where....?”

“You’re inside the helicopter. Currently, it’s landed on the Hunters Association, and we are planning to escort you to the hospital very soon.”

“A hospital....”

Cha Hae-In briefly looked around her, before taking a deep breath. The scent of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had permeated throughout her body. She stared at Goh Gun-Hui with unfocused eyes.

“....Did Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim show up there?”

She was supposed to be unconscious all this time, so when she mentioned Seong Jin-Woo’s name, other Hunters were all inwardly taken by surprise. Instead of a verbal answer, Goh Gun-Hui slowly nodded his head.

A thin smile formed on Cha Hae-In’s face.

‘I knew it... it wasn’t a dream.’

Cha Hae-In had briefly woken up, but she fell back into a deep slumber again. After confirming that her breathing was stable, Goh Gun-Hui ordered his subordinates to take her to the hospital, so she could get some much-needed rest.

Only then did he notice that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo wasn’t in the helicopter. He shifted his gaze back to Mah Dong-Wook.

“By the way, where is Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

Having heard that question from the side, Baek Yun-Ho quickly butted in to provide an answer.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, he... chose to stay behind.”

“What do you mean, stay behind?”

Goh Gun-Hui formed an expression of someone who couldn’t understand.

As far as he knew, this helicopter fitted with the magic energy engine flew non-stop from Jeju Island to get to this place.

It didn't make any pitstops in the middle of the trip, so exactly where did that man chose to stay behind? Goh Gun-Hui asked again.

“Where did he choose to stay behind?”

“He told me that he still had business to take care of on Jeju Island.”

“...Are you saying that he didn't even get on the helicopter in the first place?”

While Goh Gun-Hui asked, sounding quite flustered, Baek Yun-Ho smiled sheepishly and nodded his head.

“Yes.”

“How is it that you're able to talk?”

“I just.... can.”

The ant's shadow kept answering Jin-Woo's questions, but regretfully, none of them were much of a help.

The ant monster could talk as a shadow because it knew how to talk when it was still alive – could that be it?

‘...No, wait.’

Jin-Woo shook his head.

Before he was turned into the now-trustworthy knight ‘Iron’, the former Hunter Kim Cheol not only knew how to speak, but he was actually a human being in the first place. Even then, having a conversation with Iron was still impossible.

It was the same story with Min Byung-Gu. He was unable to say a single word before he returned to the void. And then, Fangs also shut his mouth for good after becoming a Shadow Soldier, even though he used to be such a chatty monster while still alive.

So, how come...

How come only this guy could talk?

There was only one obvious difference between this guy and those who couldn't talk.

‘Grades....’

Unlike his other soldiers with grades of 'Elite Knight' or simply 'Knight', this guy came with a new grade called 'Commander'.

It was possible that one would be able to talk after reaching a certain grade. As he didn't have any solid proof yet, this was the most plausible explanation he could think of.

'That means, my boys will all start talking as soon as they level up high enough....'

It seemed that yet another reason was added to the list of 'why the levels of soldiers must be raised up higher'. Jin-Woo thought for a little while, before throwing that one question to the ant's shadow, the one he always wanted to ask his soldiers before.

"I'm the one who killed you."

"..."

"Yet, you still wish to serve me?"

"I...."

A completely unexpected reply came from the ant's shadow.

"I didn't die, but... through the power of my liege... I am reborn."

The shadow then raised his head. And while meeting Jin-Woo's gaze, it continued on.

"Within me... elation... overflows. I shall follow my liege... for eternity."

Ba-dump!

Why did it happen? Was it because he felt the shadow's true feelings?

Jin-Woo's heart pounded powerfully right at that moment when the ant's shadow swore his eternal loyalty. He placed his hand on his chest to somehow calm his wildly beating heart. It quickly regained its usual calmness.

It was then, the ant's shadow lowered his head again and pleaded with Jin-Woo once more.

"Oh, my king..... Please, grant me... a name...."

The talk had reverted back to the beginning.

This sure came across as a rather different experience to Jin-Woo, now that he was hearing the plea of the subject directly from itself, rather than from some prompts of the System.

A name, a name.....

From the get-go, he didn't pay all that much attention to the naming of his soldiers, but....

'But even then, it's a bit too much to call it ant this and ant that, right?'

There were already hundreds of similar ants like him now in Jin-Woo's army, so it wouldn't do for a Knight Commander to be saddled with a name like 'Ant', now would it?

That was why.....

Jin-Woo pondered for a little while, before a smirk formed on his face.

"....Beru."

He recalled the name of an author who became famous through the novel called 'Ants'. (TL note at the end)

He readily made up his mind after only thinking about it for a very short time.

"You name will now be Beru."

After Jin-Woo granted him the new name, Beru lowered his already lowered head even further to the ground as if he was truly moved by the gesture.

"I am grateful... my liege."

The information floating above Beru's head had already been amended by then.

[Beru Lv.1]

Commander grade

'It's done.'

Feeling genuinely pleased with his choice of the name, Jin-Woo turned towards the queen's corpse. Now, it really was the turn of the queen to get her shadow extracted.

Maybe he got a confidence boost from successfully transforming Beru into his Shadow Soldier – because, the queen's Shadow Extraction turned out to be a rather painless affair.

"Rise up."

Kiiaaahhhhk-!

Accompanied by the scream that sounded like the death throes, the Beast Soldier resembling the ant queen emerged out from the shadow.

“Nice!!”

Jin-Woo expressed his delight at the continuous successful extractions, but then, began tilting his head after discovering something rather odd.

‘What’s this?’

His connections to the Shadow Soldiers who were originally ant monsters suddenly grew fainter after the queen’s shadow materialised. It almost felt as if a pale grey fog was covering up the threads connecting them.

“Beru.”

Even before he finished calling it, Beru had already approached Jin-Woo’s side.

Step.

If it weren’t for his Perception Stat that had climbed past the 200 mark, Jin-Woo would never have followed that movement properly with his naked eyes alone. Such a creature was one of his loyal soldiers now. Jin-Woo felt his confidence soaring up even higher from that realisation.

“You know what’s going on here?”

Jin-Woo asked while pointing at the queen’s shadow with his chin. Beru knew everything there was to know when it came to the inner workings of the ant army so it made sense to ask him.

He politely made his reply.

“The ruling of the ant army... it’s the queen’s innate ability.”

‘Aha.’

So, did that mean the authority to control the army of ant shadows would automatically be handed over to the queen?

‘But, that is a bit...’

Even though the queen was subservient to him, he thought that it wasn’t okay to entrust the control of all of his ant soldiers. Because, he’d have to issue orders through the queen every single time.

Jin-Woo scratched his chin for a bit, before asking Beru again.

“Okay, what about the reason for the decrease in the queen’s magic energy?”

“Most of the queen’s magic energy... is for propagation. Propagation is impossible.... without a body, that is why...”

Jin-Woo cut him off there.

“That’s why it only has half of its original magic power?”

“That is correct... my liege.”

By piecing together what Beru had said, the queen didn’t seem to have much of a use for Jin-Woo. After a short deliberation later, he decided to cancel the summoning altogether. He didn’t have any reason whatsoever to keep around a subordinate who had no use but only continued to drain his limited resources, now did he?

Kiiieehhk-!

The queen’s shadow instantly became smoke and scattered in the air.

[Number of stored shadows: 570/570]

His shadow was now packed to the brim with soldiers, so....

‘...So, the only things remaining here are the magic crystals.’

Jin-Woo took a look around him. Top grade magic crystals only seen within rank S Gates were rolling on the floor like common pebbles.

Since there was no one watching here, and he was the one who killed the majority of them, he could have swept them all up if he wanted to do so. However, Jin-Woo gave up on that idea.

He heard that these crystals would be used to compensate the victims, as well as to rebuild the Jeju Island to its former glory. Jin-Woo wasn’t exactly hurting for cash, so he wouldn’t covet after other people’s stuff.

‘Still, I’m sure no one will mind me taking this one.’

Jin-Woo took out the magic crystal from Beru’s original body. It was a beautiful pitch-black magic crystal that resembled a gemstone. After pocketing the magic crystal, Jin-Woo summoned out Kaisel.

Kiiaahjk!

Kaisel flapped its wings and finished getting ready to fly in an instant. Jin-Woo lightly jumped on his back and took one last look at the queen’s chamber.

The place once filled with unbridled chaos was now enveloped in this eerie silence.

‘.....’

The Jeju Island expedition was now over.

Jin-Woo's gaze shifted away from the interior of the chamber and towards the exit.

"To home."

And then, Kaisal powerfully flew up in the air.



Chapter 125 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Kaisel landed in front of the Hunter's Association building.

Kiiaaahk-!

Naturally, stunned folks of the Association all came running outside when a massive monster suddenly descended in the middle of Seoul – not only that, right on the front lawn of the Hunter's Association, no less.

Hunters of the Monitoring Division, normally tasked with detecting the approach of all beings possessing magical energy, also ran outside with various weapons in their hands.

But, their complexions all lost colour after Jin-Woo hopped off from the back of the creature.

'Return.'

Kaisel heeded Jin-Woo's order and immediately disappeared into his shadow.

Meanwhile, people gathered here began recognising who he was.

'W-was that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's summoned creature?'

'He can even control a monster like that, too??'

All these people had seen Jin-Woo's ability through their TV screens. So, it didn't come as much of a surprise that he could control a monster.

Jin-Woo walked over to an Association employee he recognised and addressed him. This person was a Hunter working for the Monitoring Division and was often seen accompanying the Association President.

"I'd like to speak to the Association President."

You wouldn't normally get to meet the President just because you wanted to. Even a government minister had to wait for a whole week for a meeting with Goh Gun-Hui.

However, who here was brave enough to tell that to the young man in front of their eyes?

A Hunter, who wasn't originally a member of the raid team, suddenly appeared out of nowhere and easily disposed of the ant monster – a monster

so powerful that it toyed around with several rank S Hunters.

So, wouldn't the Association President be dying to speak to this man more than anyone else right now?

The Association employee quickly replied.

"The Association President is in the hospital at the moment."

"Is he feeling unwell?"

Jin-Woo asked while remembering that the Association President's health wasn't so good, to begin with. It was possible that he somehow worsened his condition because he watched the raid broadcast.

"No, not at all. He went over to observe the situation with Hunter Cha Hae-In."

Jin-Woo nodded his head. Did that mean it'd be hard to meet him today?

Just as he was preparing to leave, the employee continued on.

"Let me call the President on the phone. If you will, please wait for a little while at the reception room."

"Got it."

Jin-Woo felt relieved. There was something he wanted to tell the President as soon as possible, actually.

Cha Hae-In was admitted to the largest Association-designated Hunter hospital there was. Goh Gun-Hui quietly waited for the examination results, and soon, his personal doctor approached him with some news.

The Association President hurriedly asked.

"How does she look?"

"We haven't performed an in-depth examination yet, but... she seems to be 100% normal, at least outwardly speaking. She's resting comfortably at the moment."

"I see..."

Goh Gun-Hui nodded his head, thinking 'I thought as much' to himself.

The doctor was alongside Goh Gun-Hui when they watched the raid together. Cha Hae-In's current condition was as much of a mystery even for him.

"Her complexion was really poor from the massive haemorrhaging, so how did her condition improve in such a short period of time?"

“...”

Goh Gun-Hui had already been debriefed by the Korean raid team members, but he chose to keep his mouth shut here.

‘Would he even believe me if I tell him?’

...The fact that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo ‘borrowed’ the power of the dead Hunter Min Byung-Gu to heal Cha Hae-In?

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo wanted the camera turned off, because he didn’t want to reveal his powers.

The Association President wasn’t stupid enough to reveal that information so carelessly to other people. Other Hunters were thinking along the same line as well.

“The rank A Healers I had on standby managed to save her.”

“She looked to be in such a precarious position.... Well, it’s a relief that the treatment was carried out in time.”

Thankfully for Goh Gun-Hui, the doctor seemed to have believed him.

“Ah!”

The personal doctor opened his mouth again after recalling something just now.

“Sir, it’s regarding Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

Goh Gun-Hui’s ears perked up after Seong Jin-Woo’s name was brought up.

“What about Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?”

The doctor was quick to continue, having seen the light glinting in Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes change like that.

“You know that his mother was a patient in our hospital, yes?”

“The Eternal Sleep disorder, right?”

“That’s correct.”

Goh Gun-Hui did get to read up on Jin-Woo’s family back when the investigation to the youth’s background was still ongoing. He suddenly thought of the worst possible scenario and asked, his expression hardening rapidly.

“It can’t be.... Did she pass on?”

The doctor shook his head.

“It’s the exact opposite, actually.”

“The exact opposite?”

“I heard that she actually woke up from the ‘final sleep’ stage and was discharged recently.”

“Are you telling me the truth?!”

“Those in the know are in a huge uproar over this whole thing, sir. We may not have made any official announcement, but well, it did happen in our hospital, so....”

The higher-ups of the hospital naturally saw today’s raid, as well. And that meant they continued to talk about Seong Jin-Woo’s matter, and eventually, even Goh Gun-Hui’s personal doctor got to hear about it.

“But, Eternal Sleep was cured? Was that even possible?”

“I believe this is the first time ever in the world, sir.”

“When did she wake up?”

“Most likely....”

The doctor confirmed the date in his head.

“About five days ago.”

“.....”

Now it made sense.

The day he asked Jin-Woo to join the raid, and the day the youth’s mother woke up, were almost the same.

‘Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s father went missing inside a Gate, didn’t he?’

A wife who lost her husband to the Gate. Hunter Seong Jin-Woo would’ve found it very hard to leave such a mother behind all alone to participate in the Jeju Island raid. Not to mention, to participate in the subjugation operation that had failed three times in the past as well.

Goh Gun-Hui reflected on his carelessness for failing to check upon his situation.

‘That’s why he couldn’t participate in this raid.’

Jin-Woo’s situation, and the feats he performed today, combined to wash away the misunderstanding that almost managed to block up his chest. Goh Gun-Hui’s heart began racing once more.

He really liked this young man. Such a man was a rare breed, indeed.

It was then, an Association employee approached him.

“Sir.”

“Did something happen?”

“We couldn’t get in touch with Hunter Min Byung-Gu’s family.”

“You mean... His mother?”

“Yes, sir.”

That was to be expected. She learnt of her son’s passing through a d*mn TV. She then called the Association on the phone, her voice trembling non-stop. The Association had no choice but to be honest with her.

“I’ll go and see her personally.”

“Sir, you’re planning to go there personally?”

“A parent is about to hold a funeral for her child without his body. You really think she’s in any state of mind to pick up a phone?”

“B-but, sir.”

“I’ll go and speak to her personally and inform her of everything that happened. And I’ll express my condolences as well.”

“...Understood, sir.”

The employee turned around with a hardened face. But then, his phone began ringing quite noisily and made him stop.

He saw that the call came from the Association, so he got permission from the President to answer it.

“Mm? There’s someone who wishes to speak to the Association President? What?! It’s him?”

Goh Gun-Hui shook his head.

“Tell them I’m not meeting anyone today.”

The employee covered the phone with his hand and quickly spoke up.

“Sir, the person who wishes to speak to you is... Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo??”

Goh Gun-Hui opened his eyes wide and retracted what he said just now right away.

“Tell them I’ll be there shortly.”

Jin-Woo got to the Association President’s office under the guidance of an

employee. He was then asked rather affectionately as soon as he settled down on the couch.

“Would you like something to drink?”

Jin-Woo was about to decline the offer, only to feel a bit of thirst creeping up on him. Now that he thought about it for a sec, he hadn't taken a sip of water even though he had fought such an intense battle.

“Water will be fine.”

“Thank you very much!”

“...?”

What was he so thankful about?

The employee's face reddened after blurting his words out from sheer nervousness. He placed the bottle of water in front of Jin-Woo and deeply bowed his head.

“If you need anything else, please don't hesitate to call me.”

“I will.”

Jin-Woo thought the employee's attitude was far more cautious and sincere than the last time he came here.

‘It's probably because of the raid broadcast.’

He guessed that the attitude of many people, as well as the way they looked at him, would change greatly from now on. Not too long afterwards, Goh Gun-Hui entered the office.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!”

Jin-Woo tried to get up, but the Association President Goh Gun-Hui dissuaded the youth from doing so.

Jin-Woo just returned from Jeju Island. And he even fought a mutated ant monster that almost annihilated a team of rank S Hunters.

So, the current Jin-Woo was a VIP among all VIPs.

Goh Gun-Hui was definitely not planning to treat with disrespect a person who saved the lives of South Korea's rank S Hunters.

Goh Gun-Hui settled down on the couch opposite to Jin-Woo, rather than in his usual spot at the seat of the honour.

“I've heard what transpired inside the ant tunnel.”

“Ah, I see.”

In that case, this talk should proceed quite swimmingly, then. Jin-Woo felt that this was for the better. Goh Gun-Hui continued on.

“Also, I’ve been informed on how you got here, as well.”

Countless witnesses saw Kaisel flying now. There was no way the President of the Hunter’s Association wouldn’t hear about it.

“Did you get to Jeju Island while riding on the back of that creature?”

Well, Jin-Woo used ‘Shadow Exchange’ to reach the island, but was there a reason to reveal all of his cards here?

Jin-Woo was rather economical with his words.

“Something like that.”

This was the same thing as him making a confession that the flying monster appearing in Seoul a few nights ago was his doing. But, this would prove to be more convenient if he were to continue riding on Kaisel from now on.

“So, that was the case.”

It was as expected. The Association President nodded his head.

Jin-Woo was able to utilise the powers of dead monsters. So, it’d not be such a strange thing for him to ride around on the back of a creature if he managed to kill a flying monster somewhere.

Goh Gun-Hui’s curiosity had been satisfied now. And it was time to get to the main topic.

“You said you wanted to speak to me....?”

“Yes.”

“Is something the matter?”

“I’ve taken care of all the ants on the island.”

“Excuse me??”

Goh Gun-Hui jumped up from his seat.

“You managed to kill every single one of those ants?!”

“Yes.”

Jin-Woo confidently replied.

“You won’t encounter any problems when entering Jeju Island.”

“But, how....”

No, Goh Gun-Hui could already guess the ‘how’ of it.

The TV camera caught the sight of hundreds of Jin-Woo's summons. If those things combed every inch of Jeju Island, then it wouldn't be a problem for him to annihilate every single ant in such a short period of time.

The important point here was, of course, entry into Jeju Island was possible now.

And it also signified that they would be able to retrieve Hunter Min Byung-Gu's remains resting deep within the ant tunnel, too.

Goh Gun-Hui was greatly troubled by the fact that the remains of Hunter Min Byung-Gu had to be left abandoned there until the ant monsters were all gone, but now....

The ends of his eyes reddened up with emotions. He then wholehearted thanked Jin-Woo.

"Thank you very much, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim."

Inside a suite of South Korea's top luxury hotel.

Although his presence had been buried under the huge news of the Jeju Island raid recently, it was still an undeniable fact that one of the world's most powerful Hunters had taken up a temporary residence there.

Thomas switched off the monitor still playing the video of the raid. He had already seen that recorded video three times by now.

Laura, who stood next to him, asked him. She accompanied him to Korea as his sole subordinate.

"What do you think, sir?"

"Well... it's as you can see."

He leaned against the couch and placed his legs on the coffee table.

Thomas had fair blonde hair and a high nose. A seemingly never-ending happy smile was deeply etched on his sunglasses-wearing face.

"So, are you sure that's the Hunter Mister Hwang was investigating?"

"Yes."

"And he asked you what would happen if he killed someone in Korea?"

"Yes."

Thomas ordered the potential connection between Hwang Dong-Su and Seong Jin-Woo to be secretly investigated as soon as Laura made her report. And, as it turned out, there was only one connection between the two.

That would be Hwang Dong-Su's older brother, Hwang Dong-Seok.

He and Seong Jin-Woo entered the same dungeon together, but only the latter walked out alive, while the former went missing.

No one would question what happened inside a dungeon. That had become common sense throughout the world now.

“So, it's revenge, is it?”

“Most likely.”

“And here I thought that he had no family. He hid it pretty well.”

“I heard that Mister Hwang's brother was meticulous in hiding the family connection, sir.”

“Probably because he was involved in shady stuff, that's why.”

So shady, in fact, it'd greatly affect his own younger brother if the word got out. Laura used her silence to indicate her agreement.

And then... the Jeju Island raid happened.

“I guess it will become far harder to meet Seong Jin-Woo now, what with an incident like that taking place.”

“I believe so.”

Laura replied confidently.

There was only one reason why the Master of Scavenger Guild, as well as one of the most renowned Hunters in the world, Thomas, gave himself some time off and came to this small nation. And that was to meet Seong Jin-Woo.

More specifically, he wanted to find out what might happen if Mister Hwang did get to have a go with Seong Jin-Woo for real.

He told the management of the Guild that he was coming here to scout yet another rank S South Korean Hunter.

“I really wanted to meet him, too. What a shame this is.”

Thomas's voice was thick with the emotion of wistfulness.

Laura cautiously asked him from the side.

“As I thought... It'd be for the best to prevent Mister Hwang from encountering Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, yes?”

“Well.....”

Thomas slowly scratched his chin, before replying to her with a smirk.

“The South Korean government did save Mister Hwang’s life, that’s for sure.”

The Korean government immediately blocked Hwang Dong-Seok from entering the country. After all, he did abandon his mother nation to emigrate to the States as soon as he was evaluated to be a rank S, didn’t he?

The whole thing could’ve turned into an international incident, but Thomas was able to utilise the time earned that way to come and visit Korea first.

Too bad, Mister Hwang wasn’t someone who’d simply give up just because he was refused entry to a country. Especially so, if his purpose was revenge.

In all honesty, Thomas didn’t have a stuffy personality. He had no thoughts of stopping Mister Hwang at the risk of being on the end of his hostility when the latter wanted to avenge the death of his family member.

But then, that man was an important asset to Scavenger Guild. And that was precisely the reason why Thomas thought of finding out the exact skill level of Seong Jin-Woo, who was also ranked S.

Because, it’d prove to be troublesome if Mister Hwang ended up kicking the bucket, instead.

However....

The impression Thomas got from seeing Seong Jin-Woo was that, the American should be thanking the lucky stars right about now.

“No matter what, never let Mister Hwang step a foot inside South Korea. With that, hopefully, these two won’t run into each other.”

“Understood. I’ll also withdraw the legal procedures.”

“I should be the one to talk to Mister Hwang. That friend’s got a fiery personality, so I guess I’ll have to do my best on this one.”

Laura studiously jotted down everything her Guild Master said on a memo pad. But then, a question popped up in her head.

“What if... even after we did all this, the two of them end up fighting.... What will you do then, sir?”

“Laura. Don’t you know me?”

Thomas grinned deeply.

“Mister Hwang is Scavenger Guild’s asset. And Scavenger is my property.”

His lips might be smiling, but the eyes hidden beneath the sunglasses

certainly weren't. He always wore a pair of sunglasses to hide his incredibly sharp eyes.

He sat back up straight and lowered his voice.

“I will never forgive anyone who dares to touch my property. Even if that's the American government itself.”

One person's power equalled that of an entire country.

His name was Thomas Andre.

One of only five in the entire world. This was the confidence that only a Special Authority-rank Hunter, an international powerhouse, could possess.



Chapter 126 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Let us escort you back home, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui hurriedly made that offer as Jin-Woo stood up to leave.

“If you wait for a minute, one of our agents will bring a car around. How about going home with that, instead?”

“....”

Jin-Woo had fully understood that the Hunter’s Association, and especially its boss man, Goh Gun-Hui, were feeling extremely grateful towards him.

However, that didn’t mean he wanted to be treated like royalty even in something as minor as this.

It wasn’t as if his home was too far away and he needed to borrow a car, either. If he wanted to save on time, he might as well ride on Kaisel. Or run all the way back home, which would actually be quicker, instead.

That’s why Jin-Woo declined the offer.

“Thank you, but I’ll be fine.”

However, Goh Gun-Hui shook his head and insisted on it.

“I believe that... it’ll be more convenient for you to get a ride home.”

“What do you mean by that....?”

Goh Gun-Hui approached the window and spoke to him.

“Could you please come over this way?”

Jin-Woo also walked over to the window, and that’s when he saw it.

....Outside the window.

Less than one hour ago, the front entrance of the Association used to be sparsely populated. But now, a huge crowd of people had gathered there and he couldn’t see any openings at all.

“All these people came here to see you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim. They have heard that you came for a visit in the Association.”

Jin-Woo didn't have to ask how these people knew.

'Well, I did fly on Kaisal to get here, so....'

In this day and age, everyone walked around with a minimum of one camera on their persons. The images of Jin-Woo riding on Kaisal, and disembarking in front of the Association, spread through the medium of SNS like wildfire. And sure enough, online reporters were also among those who heard of the news.

Just one headline was all that's needed. The article itself wasn't even that long, either.

'Who is the owner of the monster that landed in the Association?'

The article stated that the monster was definitely not what one would call average, and that it was jet-black like a shadow. Finally, the article went on to posit that it was most likely one of Jin-Woo's summoned creatures, as it looked similar to what millions saw on their TV sets.

Those who heard the news and came here to confirm the truth, and those who only wished to meet Jin-Woo in person, combined to create this massive throng of people gathering right on the front lawn of the Association building.

A flood of emotions welled up inside Jin-Woo as he stared at all these people.

Goh Gun-Hui also stared at the crowd in silence for a while, before he calmly opened his mouth.

"I'm sure that you're aware of it by now... Our countrymen had been thirsting for a victory."

South Korea became the sole nation on Earth who lost a part of their land to monsters after a catastrophic dungeon break occurred on Jeju Island four years ago.

Many countries outwardly expressed their solidarity but inwardly, they were mocking the Korean Hunters for their uselessness. By the time the third subjugation operation ended in failure, that sentiment reached its peak.

Two years of humiliation later....

People learned of the news that the fourth subjugation attempt would be a joint operation with the Japanese. There were some sceptical voices mocking the Koreans for their inability to deal with the monsters without the aid of the Japanese. Unfortunately, that was the actual hard truth.

But then....

The mighty Japanese and their twenty-plus rank S Hunters turned tail and ran away from the raid. Yet, Jin-Woo suddenly made his appearance along with his black soldiers. It was understandable that people would go absolutely crazy about him.

Exactly like how one would quench his thirst in an oasis, the citizens witnessed Jin-Woo's feats and threw away their sense of powerlessness. Many viewers had to pour out onto the streets, unable to contain their unbridled joy. And when they heard of Jin-Woo's whereabouts, they ended up running over here.

“Of course, I’m sure you can also fly away using your monster.”

Goh Gun-Hui gently chuckled from the side.

“However, I believe that you should go downstairs in consideration of the crowd. Because, the people... need a hero, you see.”

Jin-Woo pushed open the glass door and exited from the Association building. All chaos suddenly died down right away.

Everyone gathered here kept their mouths closed and quietly stared at Jin-Woo.

“....”

“.....”

Many areas of Jin-Woo's clothes still sported traces of battles he fought.

There were blotches of ant monster's bodily liquid, and some part had been torn open at the hands of the mutated ant monster, too. However, not one person here made fun of Jin-Woo's current appearance.

No, the citizens simply stared at him in silence while feeling a certain boiling something well up from deep within their chests.

Jin-Woo quietly stared back at them as well. Just as the heavy silence descended between him and the citizens....

“Hunter-nim, please. This way.”

Woo Jin-Cheol was now tasked with guiding Jin-Woo, and he faithfully carried out his duty.

The agents of the Monitoring Division went ahead and created a path forward while asking the crowd for their understanding; citizens moved aside without any complaints whatsoever.

However, there was a sole exception.

A grandpa walked in front of Jin-Woo when there wasn't that much distance left to the waiting car.

"Hunter-nim...."

One of the Monitoring Division's agents tried to stop the grandpa, but he hesitated somewhat after seeing the tear-soaked face of the old man, before he had to take a step back. Because, Jin-Woo held the agent back, that's why.

The grandpa was finally able to stand before Jin-Woo. Thick tears streamed down his face and he called out to the young Hunter in a choked-up voice.

"Hunter-nim.... Thanks to you... My son, he can close his eyes and rest now."

The grandpa faltered as strength left his legs. Jin-Woo quickly supported him before he fell.

The grandpa held on to Jin-Woo's hands and arms and kept bowing his head over and over again.

"Thank you, Hunter-nim..... Truly, I....."

"I only did what had to be done. Please, do try to stand up."

Woo Jin-Cheol helped with assisting the grandpa, and then entrusted the still-crying old man to his subordinate. He leaned in closer and whispered to Jin-Woo.

"Hunter-nim. The crowd is getting larger. Perhaps we should get going...."

"Alright."

Jin-Woo nodded his head. Woo Jin-Cheol opened the car's rear door and held it there.

Jin-Woo took one last look at the crowd before climbing into the car.

It was unknown who started it first.

Someone within the crowd quickly lowered his head as soon as meeting Jin-Woo's gaze as a sign of a thank you, but then, everyone followed suit and did the same. Greetings filled with genuine appreciation came back to him wherever his eyes swept by.

".....Hunter-nim."

Woo Jin-Cheol's anxious voice woke Jin-Woo up and only then did he fully climb into the car.

Woo Jin-Cheol entered the front passenger's seat while his subordinate

settled into the driver's. Eventually, the car drove slowly away from the Association's grounds.

Without saying a word, Jin-Woo gazed outside the window.

The crowd kept looking at the car right up until it could no longer be seen.

He leaned back on the seat and placed his hand on his pounding chest.

Ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump....

His heart was beating fast as the wonderful sense of accomplishment filled him up.

He initially felt at a loss when the Association President suggested that he should meet with the crowd. But now, he was glad that he didn't just walk past them.

It felt like every single gaze he met were his reward for a job well done.

It was then....

"Ah!"

Woo Jin-Cheol hurriedly looked behind him after Jin-Woo inadvertently cried out.

"Did something happen, Hunter-nim??"

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

Jin-Woo remembered only now that he broke the TV without an explanation, just so he could reduce the shock his mom might feel. He helplessly massaged his forehead.

'Just how am I supposed to explain all this?'

Sure enough....

He switched his phone back on to find 13 missed calls from home.

It was pandemonium in online forums, too. But, that was to be expected.

The Jeju Island subjugation raid was the very first time Jin-Woo made his public appearance, ever since getting his rank S licence. It was the same thing as him making his public debut.

And during his first public appearance, he overwhelmed the mutated monster ant that freaked out everyone, and then, swept away thousands of ants blocking the escape route with his summoned creatures.

Like the excited fans pouring out into the streets after a match, those who witnessed the raid broadcast all logged online to voice their opinions.

└ Wow.... I'm speechless....

└ But, I thought that you can't call out that many summoned creatures?

└ My ten-year-old tumour got cured from watching the assault of Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim's summoned creatures.

└ By the way, mister? That tumour must've been a minor one since you had it for only ten years.

└ It was so cool. It was the best.

└ I lost my parents four years ago on Jeju Island. I know that Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim won't read this, but....

The operation managed to capture the interest of all South Korean citizens. It was no wonder that various online forums were overflowing with the stories related to the raid. And Jin-Woo's name always cropped up in those discussions.

Also, a hot debate regarding how high Jin-Woo's skills should be rated opened up among the netizens famed for their love of comparisons.

└ With his powers, shouldn't we say that our country now also has a Special Authority-rank in our midst?

└ Eiii. With only that? You should limit your intake of Kimchi soup per day. (TL: a Korean idiom, "**drinking Kimchi soup**". Means you're putting the cart before the horse.)

└ But, why not? He almost solo cleared a rank S dungeon, and the gap between him and other rank S Hunters is pretty vast, you know?

└ Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's record isn't extensive enough. If his skills are for real, then people will acknowledge him sooner or later.

└ In any case, man, he was so freaking awesome.

└ A rank E is only a bit better than a regular person, so how can someone like that become so strong?

└ Is Hunter Seong Jin-Woo a Re-Awakened?

└ Lots of people don't seem to know that Seong Jin-Woo is a Re-Awakened. He applied to have his private information protected right away, so.....

Of course, there were some people among many who felt mighty uncomfortable about Jin-Woo, as well.

└ But, hold up.... If Seong Jin-Woo participated in the raid from the get-

go, Min Byung-Gu wouldn't have died, right?

↳ He wanted to be left out in the beginning, so why did he show up in the middle?

↳ Looks like guys above mine haven't seen the article put up by the Association explaining themselves yet.

↳ What article? Links please.

The contents of the article went like this.

Even though he was ranked S, Jin-Woo lacked experience in entering high-ranked dungeons. Therefore, the Association chose to keep him in reserve nearby in case of an emergency, instead of making him join the raid team from the beginning. Once the situation became dire, they decided to insert him right away.

It was a hastily-cooked up story, but it proved to be enough to convince the masses.

'This is the best I can do for Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.'

Goh Gun-Hui's quick response was able to stop the sharp arrows of criticism from pointing at Jin-Woo, while also managing to keep the latter's private affairs out of public limelight.

Thanks to that, some people denounced the inability of the Association to properly gauge the capabilities of their own Hunters, but no one pointed the fingers of blame in Jin-Woo's direction.

No, Jin-Woo's acclaim only rose even further in the eyes of the public.

The situation was at its worst point, with the Japanese team tasked with buying time having withdrawn from the island and the Korean team facing certain annihilation. Yet, he didn't complain once and jumped into the ant tunnel all alone.

↳ I wouldn't have been able to go in there, even if someone pushed me from the back, 'cuz I'd get scared sh*tless. Other rank S Hunters were getting massacred in there, so why should I?

↳ Agreed.

↳ What did he think about when he entered there?

↳ Shouldn't Seong Jin-Woo be the true role model of all the Hunters out there?

↳ Shouldn't those idiots slagging off Seong Jin-Woo for not participating beg for his forgiveness right about now?

↳ LOLOLOL That's why you shouldn't yap on like that when you don't know anything.

Jin-Woo was fast becoming the most famous Hunter in South Korea, much to his fluster. Even though he had requested for the protection of his private information early on, his fame continued to soar higher.

Two days later.

Military personnel and Hunters landed on Jeju Island to recover the remains of Hunter Min Byung-Gu.

They were from the Yeongnam District's Guild, the 'Knight Order'. Although they were one of the five large Guilds representing South Korea, they lacked a rank S Hunter in their midst and therefore, couldn't participate in the raid.

They sensed their reputation diminishing from this event, and volunteered for this mission. Thanks to that, the matters had progressed rather swiftly.

Hunters had to take the lead after seeing the specially-trained soldiers hesitating somewhat.

"Oii, stop it and come on, already."

"I'm telling you, there isn't a single detectable magical energy on this island. Argh, you guys are far too distrustful."

Hunters walking forward far up ahead waved at the soldiers. The hesitant soldiers cautiously followed from behind, but they still kept their guards up.

From the Hunters' perspective, that sure was one frustrating sight to see, but there was no helping it. Regular people couldn't sense magical energy, nor were they able to fight against the monsters. So they could only be overly cautious like that.

"Tsk, tsk."

The Guild Master of the Knight Order tutted unhappily, and placed his hands on his waist while scanning his surroundings.

'Huh....'

His jaw dropped all on its own.

The closer they got to the vicinity of the ant tunnel, the greater the number of dead ants strewn about on the ground.

Nay, they resembled small mountains now, instead.

The Vice Guild Master, a close friend and a fellow Hunter who he fought

alongside for a long time, helplessly shook his head.

“Hyung-nim.... Can you believe this? You telling me that a lone Hunter did all of this?”

“.....”

The Knight Order Guild also took part back during the third subjugation operation along with countless other Hunters. That’s why they knew better than anyone here how scary these creatures could be.

“To think that those ants ended up in this sorry state....”

“Wow.... That kid, Seong Jin-Woo or whatever his name was, he’s no ordinary man, that’s for sure.”

The Vice Guild Master continued to look around at his surroundings and spoke while sounding a bit fed up.

“How did he even manage to wipe out every single ant on this huge island??”

“I wonder about that myself.”

The elite members of the Knight Order, pretty well versed in all things monster-related, could only gawk in astonishment at the piles upon piles of dead monsters.

Eventually, though, their astonished steps brought them to the entrance of the ant tunnel.

“Hyung-nim, I can see it.”

“Yup, me too.”

Hunters came to a stop in front of the ant tunnel so they could enter it together with the soldiers. The latter group was still a bit of distance away. Since there wasn’t much to do during the wait, the Guild Master lit up a cigarette. The Vice Guild Master also lit one up for himself.

But then....

The Guild Master furrowed his brows after seeing that lit cigarette powerlessly fall from the Vice’s lips.

“Oii. What’s the matter?”

“H-hyung-nim!!”

The Vice Guild Master urgently slapped the Master’s shoulder as he pointed to the front. The latter finally realised that something was off and quickly turned his head to the front.

“Heok!!”

A distinct shadow of a man appeared in the entrance of the tunnel.

The wide-eyed Guild Master flinched in surprise, before opening his mouth up to speak.

“Y-you, who... are you?”



Chapter 127 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The Master of the Knight Order Guild, Park Jong-Su, had to doubt his own eyes. Because, there was a good-looking foreign man leisurely strolling out of the ant tunnel's entrance at that very moment.

But, that was just impossible.

'The ants being completely wiped out should still be a top secret, so how could this be??'

Everything found rolling around on the ground was literally the top-grade magic crystals. So, the Association decided to keep the annihilation of the ants a secret in order to prevent those enterprising souls from taking their chances here, at least until they could come up with a suitable solution to this problem.

So, only a few select people knew that there were no monsters left on this island.

'It's only to the extent of the Association entrusting the mission to us, the military, and then....'

And then, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.

However, Park Jong-Su could confidently bet his entire life savings that the man standing in front of the ant tunnel was definitely not Seong Jin-Woo.

How could anyone forget that man's face? Not only was he the most talked-about Hunter in South Korea, but he also occupied the top spot on the Knight Order's must-scout list.

Park Jong-Su asked again.

'I asked you who you are! Why are you coming out from there?'

It was unknown whether the foreigner didn't understand a single word coming out of his mouth or wasn't planning to answer in the first place. No, that man just stood there, smiling brightly.

The Knight Order's Vice Master, Jeong Yun-Tae, got right next to Park Jong-Soo, his suspicious eyes firmly locked on the foreigner.

'Hyung-nim. Is that guy even a human?'

“I.... I’m not sure, myself.”

They couldn’t sense any magic energy emission from the mysterious man, so he couldn’t have been a Hunter nor a monster.... But, for some reason, he was also emitting this strange aura.

Jeong Yun-Tae always had been the ‘act first, talk later’ type of a guy. But even he had to take a step back and cautiously observe his surroundings after sensing the ominous aura.

Unfortunately, soldiers didn’t possess the Hunter-like sensory perception. They belatedly discovered the foreigner’s presence and hurriedly raised their firearms.

Park Jong-Su quickly dissuaded them, fearing that they might end up inadvertently killing someone.

“Oii, oii! Don’t shoot! He’s not a monster!”

“Is he a human, then?”

“Well, that is.... Maybe?”

Park Jong-Su could only nod his head with a somewhat unconvinced expression.

‘You can only be a human being if you’re not a monster.’

Park Jong-Su’s limited scope of knowledge meant that he could only arrive at this faulty conclusion.

The military commander briefly nodded his head.

“Understood. From here onwards, we’ll handle the affairs of that person.”

“Pardon me? I thought you guys came here to take Hunter Min Byung-Gu’s remains back home?”

“Our orders were to secure the remains of Hunter Min Byung-Gu, as well as to control the situation on the island itself.”

Park Jong-Su stepped back, having understood the gist of it.

If they weren’t dealing with monsters or other Hunters then the Knight Order didn’t have to get involved here. Besides, they wouldn’t get mired in unnecessary headaches this way, too.

The commander shouted at the mystery man.

“You are currently inside a restricted area. Please follow my orders to the letter or you’ll be fired upon.”

“...”

The mystery man continued to smile, not a single hint of nervousness visible on his face.

Gulp.

Soldiers swallowed their saliva while thinking to themselves, **“Are we really going to open fire at him?”**

This was an expected response from these soldiers who had never pulled the trigger on another human being before.

Hunters were also carrying tense expressions now. They began thinking that there was something strange going on with this situation when that mysterious man continued to smile like that.

It was then – the man slid his hands inside the trouser pockets.

‘That man.... Is he really a human being?’

Could anyone stay so nonchalant when these many guns were pointing at them?

Park Jong-Su’s expression gradually hardened. Meanwhile, the nervousness of the soldiers reached their peak when they could no longer see the mysterious man’s hands.

“Hold your fire!! Hold your fire! Not yet!”

A thick vein popped up on the commander’s neck as he shouted at his soldiers.

But, then....

“Commander, look!”

The commander quickly turned his head towards the mysterious man as soon as he heard that urgent call. That man was slowly opening his mouth.

“...??”

He couldn’t understand the language being spoken here.

It wasn’t that he had never heard of it, but more like it didn’t even originate from Earth, to begin with, judging from the way that man sounded and how he enunciated the words.

“What?”

“What is he saying?”

While the soldiers were at a loss from this situation they had never

encountered before, Park Jong-Su's lips were busy flapping open all on their own.

“M-monster language??”

One could sometimes meet intelligent monsters in higher-ranked dungeons. What that man said sounded almost like the language spoken by those creatures.

“Which means, is that....”

Before the commander could finish his sentence with ***“....is that a monster?”*** the mystery man pulled his hands out from the pockets.

Blam-!

An ear-splitting boom reverberated throughout the land.

When that mysterious man behaved in a suspicious manner, one of the well-trained special forces soldiers ended up reflexively squeezing the trigger.

‘Heok!’

The commander's stunned eyes quickly locked on to the man.

The bullet, failing to dig into the man's smooth forehead, fell to the ground with a light thud. The smile on his face was already gone.

“It, it's a monster!”

“It's not a human!”

Their cries lasted only for a brief moment because, as soon as that man's eyes changed colour to red, everyone here felt an incredible pressure tightly squeezing down on their hearts.

“Ah, ah-!!”

“Argh....”

But, then...

Snap!

Like puppets with their strings cut, the soldiers and Hunters all collapsed to the ground along with the sound of a crisp finger snap. That mysterious man wasn't responsible for this event.

He looked behind him and testily spoke up.

“What do you think you're doing?”

There was a short-statured middle-aged man standing behind him now.

“There’s no need to make a commotion here. I just put them all to sleep.”

The middle-aged man also wasn’t speaking in the language of humans.

“...Indeed.”

The mysterious man sounded rueful, but still agreed with his new guest nonetheless. The middle-aged man shifted his gaze towards the interior of the ant tunnel and asked.

“Did you confirm it?”

The mysterious man nodded his head.

“It’s definitely ‘his’ power.”

“How strange.”

The middle-aged man’s gaze now shifted over to the collapsed Hunters.

“Why is ‘he’ helping out these humans?”

“Who knows what ‘he’ is thinking? If you’re curious, why don’t you go ask ‘him’ personally?”

“...I’ll decline.”

The middle-aged man shook his head before continuing on.

“We commence with the hunt as planned. Nothing has changed.”

“Got it.”

The middle-aged man lightly twirled his hand in the air. A black Gate small enough to let a person through opened up there.

“Oh, by the way.”

The middle-aged man stopped briefly and looked behind him when the mysterious man called out to him.

“I think one of them is here.”

“You mean, here in South Korea?”

“Since we’re here, how about we take care of that guy, first?”

The middle-aged man closed his eyes slightly. Soon, the information the mysterious man was talking about flowed into his head. However, the middle-aged man didn’t look wholly convinced.

“If it’s around here.... Let’s leave it to his hands.”

“You don’t want to get involved, is that it?”

“It’s fine to think of it that way. It doesn’t matter.”

The middle-aged man and his trailing voice soon disappeared along with the Gate itself.

After confirming that the black Gate was closed for good, the mysterious man muttered to himself.

“What a coward....”

He took a look at all the unmoving humans lying on the ground. They were only knocked out for a little while and should regain their consciousness soon enough.

“Hmph.”

The man snorted derisively and extended his hand towards the humans. However...

‘.....’

He quietly withdrew his hand.

“Well, there’s no need to raise a commotion.”

He also entered a small Gate and disappeared from the spot, as well.

Late at night.

Jin-Woo was sitting on his bedroom floor, busy taking a closer look at his shortsword. Currently, he was holding the ‘Demon King’s Shortsword’, a weapon that proved its worth several times over during the battle against the mutated ant monster.

[Item: Demon King’s Shortsword]

Rarity: S

Type: Shortsword

Attack: +220

A shortsword taken from the Demon King, Baran. Using two ‘Demon King’s Shortswords’ will activate a set effect.

Set effect ‘Two Becomes One’: Extra attack power equal to the current Strength Stat will be added to each shortsword.

His eyes almost bulged out when he first saw that attack power, as well as its additional attribute. In fact, he now forgot how many times he re-read that information.

His reaction was justified, though. The ‘Baruka’s Dagger’, a rarity A item,

only boasted the attack power of 110, after all. He searched through the Store just in case, but not many of the rarity S daggers being sold there exceeded 200 in their attack power.

‘Not only that....’

He really liked the fact that, when wielding both Demon King’s Shortswords at once, his Strength Stat would be converted and added to the weapons’ existing attack power.

His current Strength Stat had far exceeded the 200 mark, and was fast closing in on 250. And now, such a high Stat value would be added to the weapon’s attack power as well?

If he omitted the last digit and added up the numbers, then he’d still get to a frightening four times the attack power of what ‘Baruka’s Dagger’ possessed.

‘This is why it felt so good when I swung them around back then.’

Other Hunters would froth in their mouths like madmen and pounce on these shortswords, if they were able to see the item’s information like he could.

What about the longsword’s specs, then?

[Item: Demon King’s Longsword]

Rarity: S

Type: Longsword

Attack: +350

A longsword containing the power of the Demon King, Baran. Swinging the sword will activate the effect, ‘Tempest of White Flames’.

Effect ‘Tempest of White Flames’: Summons a persistent thunderstorm within the designated area.

A longsword had to be wielded with both of his hands, while he could hold one shortsword each in his individual hands. This meant that, quite obviously, the former would boast better attack damage than the latter.

However, the additional effect the longsword had been blessed with was not ‘obvious’ at all.

‘I can perform an AOE attack just by swinging this thing?’

It was a weapon that would no doubt prove its worth during a fight against multiple opponents.

He still felt chills run down his spine whenever he thought back to how

Baran's magic attacks rendered his Shadow Soldiers into a bunch of helpless sitting ducks.

Of course, the sword's effect wasn't as good as Baran's magic, but it was still an excellent trump card to hold onto, nonetheless.

'If it weren't for my dagger skills, I might even consider using this longsword, instead....'

Jin-Woo was about to take a swing with the sword, only to stop himself in time.

'.....'

The hours were getting late; but then, you'd still wake up from your sleep in sheer fright when a lightning strikes in the room next to yours, now wouldn't you?

He didn't want to shock his mother any more than he had already. So, he cautiously put the sword down.

'Well, what a relief it was, at least.'

Indeed, it was a relief that his mother didn't object to his decision.

That day, Jin-Woo explained everything that happened to him to his mother, minus the stuff about the System, of course.

He told her that, he coincidentally went through a Re-Awakening and became a rank S Hunter, and that he'd like to continue working as one in the future, too.

Mom was worried about him but eventually, decided to support her son all the way.

The sole condition his mom put forward was that he was forbidden from pushing himself too far.

'But, well, if I'm in a situation where I have to push myself to that extent, then....'

Jin-Woo shook his head since his imagination was about to take him to a pretty dark and horrifying place.

It was then, he abruptly remembered something else his mom told him.

Mom added that she had never heard of someone else's voice before and after that day, as well.

'I guess Mom still hasn't gotten over Dad yet.'

Even then, his mother didn't try to stop her only son from being a Hunter. It

was proof that she trusted him. Jin-Woo didn't plan on betraying that trust any time soon.

Survival.

That had always been his priority, his end goal.

He only got to this place precisely because he didn't give up and struggled right till the end during one of the most dangerous moments in his life.

'...Alright.'

Now that his biggest worry, his mom saying no, had been addressed, there was nothing stopping him from entering dungeons now. He'd establish his own Guild, monopolise high-ranked dungeons and quickly raise his levels even higher.

Jin-Woo's heart began beating faster and faster.

'Well, now I have a different reason to raise my levels, don't I?'

Shururuk...

Igrit revealed himself after Jin-Woo called him out.

This guy had been with him for the longest time out of all his soldiers.

'Not only that....'

He was also the lone Knight-grade soldier the System gifted him with.

In other words, one could say that Igrit was the closest to the System out of all his soldiers currently.

"I'm sure you'll be able to talk once your grade goes up, right?"

Jin-Woo had so many things he wanted to ask Igrit. Of course, he couldn't hear any answers from his trusty knight yet.

"..."

Igrit replied with silence, as usual.

If silence could be seen as words, then wouldn't this guy qualify to be the most talkative soldier in the whole world?

Jin-Woo smirked to himself and scratched the side of his head. He then carefully picked up the Demon King's weapons to store them back in his Inventory.

'Inventory....?'

But then, Jin-Woo's eyes caught a flash of light being reflected off an object.

‘...*What was that?*’

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened wider.

An item was gleaming brightly inside his Inventory.



Chapter 128 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The mystery item was a black key.

The key he found inside the ‘Cursed’ Random Box was shining brightly as if to remind him of where it had been hiding all along.

Jin-Woo stared somewhat dazedly at that arresting sight before he cautiously put the weapons in his arms down on the floor again. He then reached into the Inventory and tightly grasped the black key.

‘.....’

And, when he opened his hand again....

[Item: Key to the Karutenon Temple]

Rarity: ??

Type: Key

‘You have met the required condition.’

A key allowing you entry into the Karutenon Temple. It can be used at the designated Gate.

The location of the designated Gate will be revealed after the predetermined time has been reached.

Remaining time: 417:06:52

The item information he couldn’t see before was now filling up his view.

‘...Karutenon Temple?’

Jin-Woo began tilting his head in confusion.

What was going on here? He was pretty certain that he had never heard of that name before. So how come it sounded so familiar to him?

‘No, hold on. I... have heard of it before.’

He carefully combed through the maze of his memories until he finally recalled what he was searching for, and his brows shot up in response.

‘The dual dungeon!!’

More specifically, that name was etched on a stone tablet held by a statue,

found in the ancient temple located right at the end of the dual dungeon.

The memories of that fateful day were coming back to him one by one.

‘Right, definitely....’

The voice of Song Chi-Yeol ahjussi, as he read the first line of that stone tablet, suddenly rang so vividly around in his ears.

[“The laws of the Karutenon Temple.”]

Indeed, that stone tablet’s texts indicated that the name of the temple filled with those terrifying statues was none other than ‘Karutenon’.

It couldn’t have been a simple coincidence that the name carved into that stone tablet, and the name of the temple in the key’s information, was exactly the same.

Which could mean.....

‘I can go back inside that place with this key?!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes grew wider in stunned silence.

The memories of that day, indistinct and hard to recall as if they were enveloped in a veil of fog, suddenly returned to him in their full, gory detail.

‘Could it be....?’

No, this was no longer in the category of ‘Could it be’ anymore. The System was definitely summoning him – summoning him back to the place where it all began.

The key that emitted the bright light all on its own, perhaps fearing the distinct possibility of him never bothering to read its information; and then, there was the name of the location where this key was supposed to be used, written so clearly that he’d never miss it.

No matter how he tried to slice it, there was little doubt that the System was summoning him there.

Oddly enough, Jin-Woo was getting curious about something else as well. Why was this happening now, of all times?

‘Is it somehow related to the quests I received from the Demon’s Castle?’

This black key, and the ‘Cursed’ Random Box it came from, was the ‘unknown reward’ he chose to receive at the end of the ‘Collect the Souls of Demons! (1)’ quest.

Hoping that maybe there was a connection here, he quickly checked the ‘unknown reward’ he got from the ‘Collect the Souls of Demons! (2)’ quest.

‘Title.’

Along with the familiar **“*Tti-ring!*”** of the mechanical beep, the information regarding his new Title, the one he got as the reward, rose up to his view.

[Title: Demon Hunter]

‘You have not satisfied its conditions.’

He hoped that something might have changed, but well, too bad; it was the exact same story as the first time he received that Title.

‘Okay, so that one wasn’t it.’

up, he began reading the item descriptions of the Demon Sovereign’s Accessory set, which he got to complete after killing the Demon King, Baran.

[Item: Demon Sovereign’s Ring]

Rarity: S

Type: Accessory

Perception +20. Intelligence +20.

When worn together with ‘Demon Sovereign’s Earrings’ and ‘Demon Sovereign’s Necklace’, set bonuses will be unlocked.

Set bonus effect 1. All Stats +5

Set bonus effect 2. All Stats +10

He took a closer look at the information provided, wondering if another, hidden, set effect had been unlocked, but that wasn’t it, either.

‘In that case....’

There was only one other possibility remaining now, and Jin-Woo shifted his gaze towards the information appearing above his Title column, towards the final suspect.

[Name: Seong Jin-Woo]

[Level: 100]

[Class: Shadow Sovereign]

[Title:.....]

Out of all of those, his gaze stopped moving at his level.

There it was, his level ‘100’, the one he just barely got to reach after massacring every single ant monster, as well as every egg and larva found on

the island of Jeju.

‘The condition this key’s been talking about has to be this.’

That was the most plausible explanation he could come up with.

Because he could take out, or put back, any item inside Inventory with nothing but his thoughts, he’d never really paid much attention to what was inside his storage. Unless he got a new toy he needed to put away, of course.

That was most likely why he only got to discover the changes to this key a couple of days after he reached level 100.

Heck, if it wasn’t for him suddenly coming down with an urge to spring clean his Inventory after he took out those weapons from there earlier, he wouldn’t even have discovered the key’s presence, at least not for a long while.

Good thing that he discovered it before it was far too late.

‘417 hours... that’s about 17 days from now. I still have over two weeks left.’

The System hadn’t lied to him once until now. So, the Gate in question would definitely open up in the location as noted in the item’s information.

‘I gotta start preparing myself....’

Just as those thoughts raced past in his head, Jin-Woo gasped out in surprise.

‘Hold on... was I really planning to walk in there again?’

“Ha, haha...”

A wry chuckle leaked out of his mouth without him realising it.

Sure, they were lower ranked Hunters working for the Association, but still, over half of the raid team got killed in there. Not to forget, he himself nearly died several times, too.

‘I even lost my leg towards the end, didn’t I?’

What a horrifying memory that was. He used to break out in an uncontrollable shiver just from recalling the emptiness below his knee he saw back then.

But now, fighting spirit began burning powerfully in his eyes, instead.

‘I’m different now.’

He felt utterly confident of his chances now.

Heck, he even felt a certain expectation bubbling up inside him, wondering if he'd be able to turn those stone statues, or even the god statue itself, into his Shadow Soldiers.

There was also something else to consider – he might be hit with an unknown penalty if he decided to ignore the System's summons.

Didn't he already realise the fact that, depending on the choices he makes, the System would either become his ally or an enemy? Didn't he learn his lesson back when he ignored the first Daily Quest or when he was issued an emergency quest?

When his thoughts reached up to that point, his hand holding the key was suddenly became soaked in his sweat.

Gulp....

He was so tense that his dry saliva scratched his throat as it slid down. Jin-Woo slowly shook his head and closed his eyes.

'...No, let's not get too worked up over this.'

He needed to calm down.

His pounding heart gradually slowed down as he worked hard to find stability in his emotions. After his chaotic breathing had regained their normalcy, he ever so slightly reopened his eyes.

"Alright."

'If the System has business with me, then it could very well be another opportunity for me.'

Didn't the 'Cursed' Random Box's description say that it would give him what he needed the most?

'Still, it'd be prudent to make some preparations in advance.'

Jin-Woo began thinking about the preparations he'd have to make, just in case. That led him to remember something else he'd been delaying for a little while now.

And that would be the establishment of his own Guild.

Having a Guild would certainly make it simpler to enter various Gates, and it'd also make his, and his soldiers' levelling-up process, that much easier, too.

He had left the very-motivated Yu Jin-Ho in charge of the initial process of founding a Guild, at least for the time being.

‘I wonder, how far along is he now?’

Jin-Woo decided to give Yu Jin-Ho a call, but after checking the time, he sheepishly put the phone down. It was two in the morning.

‘It’s already this late....’

Since he had stuff to do on the following day, he figured that it’d be simpler to just go and pay a visit to Yu Jin-Ho at the same time.

‘Yeah, I’ll stop by the office tomorrow.’

Yu Jin-Ho’s glares became a level sharper.

Like the eyes of a hawk locking onto a prey, his glare scanning the computer monitor was filled to the brim with unbridled sharpness. And then, proverbial flames erupted out of his eyes next.

‘I shall never forgive those trying to obstruct the path of hyung-nim!!’

Yu Jin-Ho quickly screen-captured the offending online forum post in question, as well as the comments appearing below it, and then, proceeded to write up a formal letter of complaint with lightning speed. He moved so expertly and quickly that he must’ve had more than enough experience doing this thing.

And, in the blink of an eye, his work was done.

“Whew.”

His hand departing from the computer’s keyboard lightly wiped away a single bead of sweat rolling down his forehead.

He had done it again. Today, he was indeed successful in rooting out an insidious group trying to slander his hyung-nim.

Hyung-nim was the face of their fledgeling Guild, not to mention its guiding light.

The b*stards that tried to speak ill of hyung-nim, or even spread false rumours about him, were unforgivable sinners that deserved to be put to death. Of course, he also needed to be even more proactive in taking them down when he thought about the future of the Guild.

After all, wasn’t this the Guild where he’d become its Vice Master?

That’s why his personal feelings had nothing to do with what he was doing right now. It was all a part of official business he had to perform for the sake of their Guild.

Unfortunately, Yu Jin-Ho was reminded of the sad truth that the Guild he’d

be the Vice Master of still didn't have an official name yet. This was a serious problem requiring a speedy resolution.

Hyung-nim hadn't said a word about this problem until now, so Yu Jin-Ho decided that it was his duty as the Guild's Vice Master to come up with a suitable name.

'Hmm....'

How about putting the 'Seong' of Seong Jin-Woo and 'Yu' of Yu Jin-Ho together to name the Guild 'Seong-yu'?

He quickly shook his head, though.

'It's got a nice meaning, but uh, it sounds a bit...'

If he were to consider how it sounded, then it was indeed better to flip the two words around to make 'Yu-Seong', but then again, he'd never be able to accept the fact that his own surname would come before his hyung-nim's.

'I must discuss this with hyung-nim when he stops by.'

It had been two whole days since they moved into this office.

Hyung-nim had become the centre of the world's attention after his heroic feats during the Jeju Island raid got broadcast live, while Yu Jin-Ho found himself manning this big office all alone a lot more than he'd like to.

'No, hang on a minute. What if I just take the last part of our names and name the Guild Woo-Ho?'

It was then.

"Hey, what are you so deeply worried about?"

"Heok?!"

Yu Jin-Ho jumped up like a scalded cat. He quickly got up from the chair and looked behind him, only to discover Jin-Woo standing there.

"H-hyung-nim?!"

Jin-Woo shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly as if he couldn't understand why anyone would be that surprised. Meanwhile, Yu Jin-Ho was busy patting his pounding chest down.

'Seriously, if he doesn't want you to know that he's here, you wouldn't even realise it....'

He wasn't even paying attention to anything particular just now, too. It sure felt like hyung-nim's penchant for suddenly appearing and then disappearing seemed to have gotten worse with every passing day.

Embarrassed by his own over-the-top reaction, Yu Jin-Ho sheepishly scratched the back of his head and asked Jin-Woo.

“When did you arrive here, hyung-nim?”

“Just now.”

After making a simple reply, Jin-Woo leaned in and took a look at the computer monitor that captured Yu Jin-Ho’s attention until then, but before he got a proper look, the latter quickly covered up the screen with his entire body.

“Hyung-nim, you don’t have to worry about b*stards like them. I’ll take very good care of them, so you can rest easy, hyung-nim.”

Jin-Woo looked at that determined face of Yu Jin-Ho and an expression of dumbfoundedness formed on his.

“....So, it was you.”

Jin-Woo heard that there was someone out there that pounced on any negative comments or false articles about him online like a wild beast and, while relying on the threat of legal action, demanded them to be taken down immediately.

But to think, that person was someone so close by!

Yu Jin-Ho’s complexion reddened from embarrassment now that his secret activity had been inadvertently exposed to the open.

“Eiii, hyung-nim... I’m supposed to do things like this for you, you know.”

Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes sparkled like an expectant kid waiting for a praise, and Jin-Woo could only chuckle at that sight.

“Right. Thanks.”

Mistakenly thinking that the smile on Jin-Woo’s face was one of satisfaction, Yu Jin-Ho secretly made up his mind to become even more hands-on, all for the sake of his hyung-nim.

But then....

“...Uh? Hyung-nim, are you going somewhere today?”

Yu Jin-Ho asked Jin-Woo after finally discovering a different set of duds on the latter’s body.

Jin-Woo was nonplussed in his answer.

“I have some business to attend to today.”

“Aha....”

Yu Jin-Ho was feeling really amazed at that moment. He had only seen Jin-Woo wear clothes that were easy to move around in, so seeing his hyung-nim kitted out in a black business suit from head to toe like this, he was struck by a sense of unfamiliarity and amazement at the same time.

Too bad, Jin-Woo didn't have enough free time to explain himself. He took another quick look at his watch.

‘I’m running way too tight....’

Jin-Woo lifted his head away from the watch and asked Yu Jin-Ho.

“Are there any other documents that I must bring with me when getting the Guild Master licence?”

“Not at all! When you get to the Association, you’ll be asked to take a simple test. Your licence will be issued right away afterwards, hyung-nim.”

“Okay.”

So, his hyung-nim was headed off to the Association?

‘But, isn’t his attire a bit too much, considering he’s only going to the Association....?’

Yu Jin-Ho incorrectly guessed Jin-Woo’s destination and began tilting his head, but soon enough, he accepted it as a fact.

‘Well, hyung-nim’s a celebrity now, so I guess he’ll have to watch what he wears in public.’

There were good sides to being famous, but on the flip side, there was also a tiresome aspect to it, as well.

Yu Jin-Ho thought about the stress and the burden carried around by folks surrounding him from all sides – the famous folks that every Korean citizen would immediately recognise with their names alone – and briefly sympathised with their plight.

Not really caring either way, Jin-Woo pointed to the car keys placed on a desk a bit of distance away from him.

“I’m going to borrow the van for a while.”

“Use it as much as you want, hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho reached out to pick the keys up. However, he was taken greatly by surprise as the keys slipped out of his reach and flew into Jin-Woo’s hands.

“H-hyung-nim, what was....?”

Jin-Woo cut him off abruptly.

“It’s a skill.”

“...”

Yu Jin-Ho was rendered speechless yet again.

Even if hyung-nim declared that he could fly around using another one of his skills, Yu Jin-Ho was confident of not finding that strange at all.

‘Is there anything hyung-nim can’t do??’

Hyung-nim was like an onion that had so many layers still left to peel. The more you knew about him, the more he’d surprise you.

‘Wait, now isn’t the time for this.’

Yu Jin-Ho abruptly woke up from his daydream, remembering that he still a few things to ask hyung-nim. Since he was in the office, now was the perfect opportunity to do exactly that

Jin-Woo stopped walking away after sensing that Yu Jin-Ho had something else to say from the way the kid was looking at him.

“Yeah?”

“Hyung-nim, it’s only been a day since we started advertising on the online job marketplace. But we’ve been swarmed by the applicants wanting to become our fellow founding members, so I went ahead and compiled a list for you to take a look.”

“Oh, that. Let’s talk about it after I come back.”

He was running short on time, to begin with.

Yu Jin-Ho felt his own urgency kick in, having seen how badly Jin-Woo wanted to be on his way.

“Ah, hyung-nim! Have you decided on the name of the Guild?”

Indeed, this was the most pressing issue of them all.

Because, you’d need a name of the Guild if you wanted to place job postings on the bulletin boards, or even when conducting other official businesses, now wouldn’t it?

‘Does he have something in mind for the name of the Guild?’

Yu Jin-Ho’s heart was pounding in anticipation for Jin-Woo’s answer. He was fully prepared to suggest the names he had thought up if hyung-nim was unable to come up with one.

‘Seong-Yu, Jin-Jin, Woo-Ho.... I hope he finds one of them to his liking.’

Jin-Woo pondered for a bit while Yu Jin-Ho continued to gaze at him with eyes glinting with the light of expectation. A smirk found its way to Jin-Woo’s lips and he finally made his reply.

“How about, Solo Play Guild?” (TL: In the raw, it’s ***“Sol-Ple.”*** which is ***“Solo Play”*** but shortened.)

“Eh?”

Yu Jin-Ho blinked his eyes several times.

Was he supposed to start laughing here? But, didn’t Jin-Woo’s expression look like he wasn’t joking at all?

Jin-Woo didn’t expect to see a reaction anyway, so he quickly turned towards the door to leave.

“See you later.”

Yu Jin-Ho fell into a train of thought while watching Jin-Woo make his exit from the office.

‘....So, there WAS something hyung-nim couldn’t do, after all.’

As expected, his hyung-nim was a human being, just like everyone else.

Although he was afraid that the ‘Solo Play’ would get stuck as the Guild’s name, Yu Jin-Ho also felt just a tiny bit more reassured after being reminded of Jin-Woo being a human like him.

The location of Hunter Min Byung-Gu’s funeral ceremony.

Originally, the plan was to hold a small private ceremony with only the close relatives invited to attend the event. However, there were far too many people who wished to pay their respects and so, the funeral had to be changed to a public one.

Countless people showed up to the funeral parlour to pay their respects and remember Hunter Min Byung-Gu’s valiant sacrifice. Jin-Woo was among them.

‘Uh, uh? Isn’t that....?’

‘Heok! Isn’t he Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?’

‘It’s really him!’

The funeral goers soon discovered Jin-Woo’s presence and began whispering to each other as their excitement heated up.



Chapter 129 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo didn't particularly mind the gazes of other people, unless he was talking about some special circumstances. As long as no one bothered him, it didn't matter to him if he got famous, either.

That's why he didn't really care when the mourners discovered his presence and started whispering among themselves.

However....

'At the very least, you all should know that now isn't the time nor the place.'

Jin-Woo furrowed his brows unhappily.

Wasn't this the place to remember and honour the valiant sacrifice of Hunter Min Byung-Gu?

Jin-Woo didn't want this solemn occasion to fall into some noisy chaos because of him, so he briefly unleashed a portion of his magic energy – no, not even that, but an amount so tiny that it didn't even qualify to be called a portion.

'.....!!'

The desired effect took place right away. The air suddenly became incomparably heavier and oppressive silence descended to the place. Even the breathing of the mourners became incredibly cautious.

'....'

'....'

All those people noisily yapping to each other promptly shut their mouths up at once.

'Alright.'

Jin-Woo succeeded in creating an acceptable atmosphere with nothing but a quiet display of power before he started walking forward again. He didn't get to walk for long, though, as a middle-aged lady, who was too young to be called a granny but too old to be called an auntie, stood before him.

She was none other than Hunter Min Byung-Gu's mother.

People began gasping softly as they looked on at the mother and Jin-Woo standing in an apparent face-off like that.

‘Uh, uh?’

‘Wait, she isn’t going to scold him and chase him away, right?’

Fortunately, the outcome people were worried about didn’t come to pass. The why of it was simple enough.

“You’ve arrived. Thank you for coming.”

“Thank you for inviting me, ma’am.”

It was actually Hunter Min-Byung-Gu’s mother who pleaded with him to come by here today.

“There was something I’d like to speak to you in person and that’s why I had to make that call. I hope I wasn’t troubling you.”

“No, not at all, ma’am.”

“Hunter-nim, I heard you got rid of all the monsters in that place so that my son could come home.”

Min Byung-Gu’s mother stopped there and gazed up at Jin-Woo, perhaps wanting to confirm the story she was told straight from the man himself.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo had various personal reasons for hunting down the ants of Jeju Island. However, it was also true that a part of him didn’t want to see Hunter Min Byung-Gu rot away forgotten somewhere in the darkness of that ant tunnel. So, Jin-Woo quietly nodded his head.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“You helped my son so he won’t sleep in that dark, damp place. I....”

Min Byung-Gu’s mother finally began shedding the tears she’d been holding and continued on.

“I was to able to meet my son for the last time with your help. Thank you very much, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

There were no words that could console a parent grieving for her lost child. Jin-Woo could only remain silent with an agonised look on his face. In the meantime, the relatives of Min Byung-Gu’s mother came over and carefully escorted her away deeper into the funeral venue.

Even then, even as she was getting further away from him, she never stopped bowing to him to express her gratitude.

‘.....’

For a moment there, the face of Min Byung-Gu’s mother overlapped with that of his own mom’s from ten years ago in Jin-Woo’s eyes, back when she heard the news of his father going missing inside the Gate.

A thick lump formed in his throat.

‘But....’

Just like how his father sacrificed his life to save a countless number of his colleagues, Hunter Min Byung-Gu’s sacrifice wasn’t in vain.

Without his dedicated effort to heal his comrades, it’d have been really difficult for the Korean Hunters to walk out of the ant tunnel alive. Not only that, he used his powers to save the life of one more Hunter even in death.

Min Byung-Gu’s shadow actually felt relieved after it confirmed the colour of life gradually seep back into Hunter Cha Hae-In’s complexion. From that alone, Jin-Woo could sense how much the Healer cared for his comrades.

Coincidentally, Jin-Woo spotted Cha Hae-In in the distance as he quietly approached the black-and-white portrait of the deceased to lay down the flowers. But when their gazes met, she suddenly flinched and fell into a panicked state.

‘Did they come together?’

The members of the Korean team around her sent him a silent greeting with a slight nod of their heads, but Cha Hae-In looked as if she had no clue which expression she was supposed to make right now.

‘Huh, so that woman can make a face like that, too?’

He couldn’t recall any other times when she didn’t carry that expressionless face of hers. Indeed, one should get to know somebody for a longer time before passing judgement, that’s for sure.

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze away and stood before the portrait.

Hunter Min Byung-Gu within the black photo frame was smiling brightly without a care in the world. Jin-Woo placed the flower in front of the portrait and closed his eyes for a brief moment.

‘I hope you find yourself in a better place.’

Finishing up with the prayer for the departed, he turned around to see a familiar figure approach him from the distance.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

The low, bassy voice naturally belonged to the Association President, Goh Gun-Hui.

“Sir.”

“I was actually planning to give you a call later, but it’s good that we have run into each other here.”

“You wanted to see me?”

It was pretty obvious why the Association would look for a Hunter. Thinking that he might find himself with an opportunity to raise his level, Jin-Woo gazed at Goh Gun-Hui with anticipation, but regrettably, the Association President gently laughed and shook his head.

“It’s not what you’re thinking about, Hunter-nim.”

“...Oh. I see.”

How deflating, that.

Jin-Woo could only ruefully smack his lips.

“In any case, I’d like to speak to you for a moment or two. Will that be fine with you?”

Jin-Woo was planning to stop by the Association after leaving here to resolve his Guild Master licence problem anyway, so he said yes immediately.

“I have business in the Association, so why don’t we go and speak there?”

“You have business in the Association....? May I inquire what that is?”

“Oh, actually, I need a Guild Master licence, you see.”

“Pardon?”

A question mark floated up above Goh Gun-Hui’s head.

“Why do you need the Guild Master licence when you already possess a rank S licence?”

“Wait, does that mean a rank S can establish a Guild without a licence?”

“Of course.”

Goh Gun-Hui formed a good-natured smile and continued on.

“If you wish to form your own Guild, all you have to do is to give the Association a call. We’ll take care of the rest.”

“.....”

The rank 'S' was a realm he never expected to step into half a year ago. So, it wasn't surprising to see Jin-Woo greatly underestimate all the cool benefits this rank came with.

He was inwardly flustered after learning of something he didn't know until now, but...

'But, this is actually for the better, isn't it. Let's find out more about all the benefits a rank S Hunter enjoys while I'm at it.'

Also, seeing that he could directly get in touch with the Association President Goh Gun-Hui, he might be able to establish his Guild right away as long as he met the minimum requirements.

Was this the reason why the old saying went on about finding the right backer if you wanted to succeed in life?

Most people would never get to meet the President of the Hunter's Association in their lifetime, yet such a man had already become a dependable backer for Jin-Woo.

Goh Gun-Hui continued on.

"What I'd like to speak to you about won't take long, so we don't have to change the venue."

Jin-Woo nodded his head, leading Goh Gun-Hui to quickly ask him a question.

"By any chance, have you cast some kind of a barrier spell over Jeju Island?"

"What do you mean?"

Where was this barrier magic thingy coming from, all of a sudden?

Did something happen in Jeju Island after he killed every ant there and left for home?

Goh Gun-Hui calmly explained what had happened.

"During the operation to retrieve Hunter Min-Byung-Gu's remains, there was an incident of the military personnel and the accompanying Hunters losing their consciousness in the same location. Hmm, rather than losing consciousness, it'd be more appropriate to say that they had all fallen asleep, instead."

Everyone within the same location... all fell asleep? Jin-Woo could only tilt his head slightly.

'Sounds like an AOE abnormal status magic, doesn't it?'

....It sounded similar to the thunder magic of the Demon King Baran that inflicted 'Stun' effect to all the Shadow Soldiers caught within the attack range.

However, the problem lay with the fact that the folks present during that incident weren't your average Hunters.

"I thought the elite members of the Knight Order were asked to go to Jeju Island?"

Jin-Woo's question elicited a nod from Goh Gun-Hui.

"They were either Hunters in the top of the rank A pile, or rank Bs who are very close to rank A in terms of their abilities."

To be able to put not just one, but several dozens of such people to sleep all at once – a regular rank S Mage wouldn't even dare to try performing a spell of that magnitude.

"That's why I had to ask you about it, just in case. I was hoping that maybe you cast a barrier there but forgot to tell us about it."

Here was the solid proof that both Hunter's Association and its boss, Goh Gun-Hui, rated Jin-Woo's abilities incredibly high.

Unfortunately for them, Jin-Woo's speciality didn't lay in casting debuff or abnormal status magic. And, perhaps more importantly, there was just no way that he'd forget about activating such a magic spell in the first place.

Jin-Woo promptly shook his head.

"I'm sorry. I haven't done that."

"I see.... I guess so."

Traces of worry slowly entered Goh Gun-Hui's expression. The most optimistic explanation he could think of turned out to be wide off the mark in the end.

"What did the Hunters say, sir?"

"That is...."

Goh Gun-Hui formed a troubled face of a man finding it hard to explain something, before continuing on his explanations with some difficulty.

"Not only the soldiers, but even the Hunters can't remember anything that happened before they lost their consciousness."

His voice sounded even more dispirited next.

"Actually, we can't even figure out whether they were victims of a magic"

spell or not in the first place.”

“...”

If it were just the soldiers, who were simply regular people, it'd be possible to knock them out with something like the sleeping gas, but even the rank A Hunters and their exceptional physical abilities fell victim as well. So, it couldn't have been a conventional weapon of some kind.

‘Could it have been a trap left behind by the ants?’

Jin-Woo was really tempted to summon out Beru right now and ask him about it, but....

‘.....’

If he did that, this funeral venue might morph into a blood-splattered battlefield in no time at all. The thing was, Jin-Woo could see a few dozen high-ranked Hunters around here just from a quick headcount.

Of course, he wasn't worried about Beru at all. Nope, he was only concerned about the Hunters rashly trying to pick a fight with the former ant monster.

It was then.

A young man who must've been an Association employee approached them in hurried steps and whispered something to Goh Gun-Hui's ear. The Association President formed a rueful expression as he spoke to Jin-Woo.

“A guest has arrived sooner than expected, and unfortunately, I must be on my way now. Thank you for your time.”

“You too, sir.”

After sharing brief goodbyes, Goh Gun-Hui hurriedly left the venue and disappeared from the view along with that unnamed employee.

Now that he no longer had any reason to go to the Association, Jin-Woo figured that he might as well go home, instead. He too left the venue and began walking towards the location of the parked van.

But, then....

‘What's this?’

He seemed to have picked up a somewhat puzzling ‘tail’ since from a short while ago. Jin-Woo tilted his head in confusion.

‘Aren't you supposed to do your best not to get discovered when tailing someone?’

Not only that, any ol' regular folks wouldn't even dare to dream about tailing a rank S Hunter, too.

Step, step....

Since he couldn't hear the roll of a camera, the person following him didn't seem to be a reporter. Heck, this person wasn't even trying to mask his presence, either.

Getting curious about how long the tail would follow him, as well as what would this person do after catching up to him, Jin-Woo chose to keep walking over to the van without saying a word.

And sure enough, the tail diligently followed after him.

'Huh. Well, I'll be....'

Jin-Woo was getting more and more dumbfounded here. He even realised for the first time that he didn't want to deal seriously with someone who was this unprofessional at what he was supposed to do.

However....

Just as Jin-Woo was about to grab the door handle of his van, he heard a voice calling out to him from behind.

"Are you Mister Seong Jin-Woo?"

Jin-Woo smirked slightly and turned around while thinking to himself, 'Well, you've finally revealed your true colours, haven't you.'

"Yes, I am."

But then, Jin-Woo was momentarily taken aback after confirming the face of his opponent.

'He's a foreigner?'

That man's Korean was so perfect that Jin-Woo didn't expect him to be a Westerner at all. Meanwhile, the young Westerner, sporting a business suit so slick that it bordered on being a fashion statement, formed a smile as bright as his golden hair colour.

"This is who I am."

The man pulled out a business card and presented it to Jin-Woo. His name, the organisation he worked for, as well as his contact numbers, were all printed in large, legible letters on the card.

[Senior Agent Adam White, Hunter Bureau, the United States of America]

‘Hunter Bureau??’

What did an elite agent from the most powerful organisation in the US want from him now?

‘No. There’s only one reason why the Hunter Bureau would want to speak to a Hunter.’

Jin-Woo tore his eyes away from the card and looked straight at the agent, prompting the American to introduce himself with a sunny smile.

“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim. Please call me Adam from now on.”



Chapter 130 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo locked his gaze on the young American man named Adam White, who turned out to be an agent of the Hunter Bureau.

‘.....’

Judging from the glint in that man’s eyes, he obviously had no ill intentions towards Jin-Woo whatsoever.

The Americans spending an exorbitant sum of money to bring in top Hunters from all over the globe was already a well-known fact. So, Jin-Woo figured that the guy would start extolling the virtues of coming to America soon after making his introduction.

However, what Adam White said next went wildly against his expectations.

“There is a piece of information we’d like to share with you, Hunter-nim.”

“Information, is it....?”

“Yes. And you won’t ever hear about this information from any other existing country or organisation in the world. Except ours, of course.”

Jin-Woo tilted his head slightly. What would be their reason for revealing such highly-classified information to a foreign Hunter like him, a complete stranger?

“Why are you willing to share such information with me?”

Jin-Woo’s probing question only managed to elicit another round of a refreshing smile from Adam White.

“We certainly will get something in return by revealing this information to an exclusive group of a specially chosen few.”

“Specially chosen few”, he said.

Which meant that the Americans considered Jin-Woo to be eligible to enter that category now. Sure enough, that roused his curiosity rather greatly.

“Okay, let’s hear it.”

“That is as far as I’m permitted to tell you, Hunter-nim. As for the rest, you’ll have to hear it from our deputy director.”

The deputy director of the mighty Hunter Bureau? A man who possessed more political clout than a minister of some government actually was in South Korea, right now?

‘Sounds like it can’t be some run-of-the-mill info, then.’

Adam White must’ve thought that he was successful in stoking the flames of Jin-Woo’s curiosity, because he finally delved into the main topic at hand.

“We have a car ready nearby. How about accompanying me to meet up with the deputy director?”

Unfortunately for him, though – it was Jin-Woo who had the final say in the matter.

‘Information, is it...’

It could only be one of two things. Either it was info that would benefit him in some way after learning of it, or a tip of someone coming after his life. Funnily enough, he didn’t feel all that compelled to get to the bottom of this matter at the moment.

For the time being, he wanted to focus on the preparations for the ‘black key’, even if this info proved to be beneficial to him. If it was the latter and someone indeed wanted to take him out, then he was pretty confident of emerging victorious from that, too.

Also, most importantly....

‘It’s not like I can fully trust the information these guys will furnish me with, in the first place....’

This whole thing about sharing information could be just a ruse, too.

He wasn’t even sure of the opponent’s hands being useful to him, or for that matter, if the opponent held any useful hands at all. So, was there a reason for him to be lead around by the nose here?

He quickly arrived at his decision.

“I’ll sleep on it, and give you a call later.”

“...!!”

Adam felt like someone had just punched him in the back of his head as this unexpected turn of the conversation left him reeling in shock.

‘What? The deputy director of the Hunter Bureau came all this way to share information, yet he’s ignoring that and wants to go on his way??’

Jin-Woo didn’t look like he was bluffing here, because he was already

opening the driver's door of the van. Cold perspiration immediately coated Adam White's forehead.

If Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was allowed to slip through his fingers now, then who knew when he'd get another chance like this? No, there was even a distinct possibility that this could be the very last time.

It was unknown whether the Korean intended for this reaction or not, but without a doubt, the ones ruing the missed opportunity would be them, not him.

“Well, have a nice day.”

Just as Jin-Woo was about to climb into the van, the restless Adam White urgently cried out.

“P-please, hold on!”

Jin-Woo shifted his disinterested gaze over to Adam White. Hoping to rouse Jin-Woo's curiosity further, even if it was only by a fraction, Adam White hurriedly continued on.

“Upgrader....”

“An Upgrader?”

Adam formed an expression of a defeated man and explained the meaning behind the word he just spat out.

“Did you know that there is an Awakened who can enhance the abilities of other Awakened?”

‘Yup, you should've started with that from the beginning.’

Right away, Jin-Woo realised that the stuff being shared by Agent Adam White, no, the deputy director of the Hunter Bureau, was actually of far greater importance than mere 'information'.

‘An Awakened who can enhance other Awakened, is it...?’

Finally, Jin-Woo felt compelled enough now. He pulled the half-entered leg out of the van and closed the door. Adam could sigh a sigh of relief after seeing that.

“Whew...”

When he raised his head, though, Jin-Woo was already standing a couple of inches away from him.

“Jesus H. Christ?!”

The startled Adam White took a step back in fright, but Jin-Woo didn't care

about that and simply asked the man.

“Where am I supposed to go?”

Screech-

The black saloon carrying the two men came to a stop in front of a famous luxury hotel.

“We’re here.”

Jin-Woo noted that the name of the hotel was the same as the one from the memo Yu Jin-Ho handed over to him not too long ago.

‘Wait, that English-speaking foreigner Yu Jin-Ho was talking about, could it have been one of these guys?’

Jin-Woo followed after Adam White and climbed up to the suite where the deputy director was waiting for him.

The deputy director of the Hunter Bureau, Michael Connor, failed to disguise his excitement at the sight of a certain Oriental man standing behind his subordinate.

‘Very good!’

One of the more difficult aspects of negotiation was bringing the other party to the negotiating table. One could even declare that half the battle was won already by doing so.

The deputy director smiled brightly and extended his hand to Jin-Woo for a cordial handshake.

“My name is Michael Connor. I’m the deputy director of the Hunter Bureau.”

His self-introduction was translated into fluent Korean with the speed of lightning by Adam White. Jin-Woo took the deputy director’s hand and lightly shook it.

“I’m Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

Now that their brief introductions were over, they settled down on the opposing sides of a table. Adam remained standing next to his deputy director.

“Before we start, have anyone claiming to be from foreign Hunter-related organisations tried to make contact with you before us?”

The deputy director directly fired the opening salvo.

“No one, so far.”

Once that anticipated answer was given, the deputy director formed a smile of pure satisfaction.

‘But, of course. There shouldn’t be anyone else on Earth quicker than the United States of America.’

Only the striker a step ahead of everyone else could score the winning goal, indeed.

The deputy director didn’t plan on wasting this golden chance that no one else had the luxury to enjoy yet – especially when his target was someone his superior officer ordered to reel over to their side, no matter the cost or the method.

He didn’t even try to beat around the bush and went straight to the topic at hand.

“Allow me to be frank with you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.

With a solemn, determined face, the deputy director pushed a rather sizeable mountain of files towards Jin-Woo and continued on.

“We, at the United States of America, want you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

“These are....?”

“These are all the documents needed to emigrate to America. Now normally, you’d need at least one or two years for these papers to be processed. However, it’ll be a different story for you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

The deputy director then raised his index finger.

“Just a single second.”

He declared in a very confident voice.

“If you agree to immigrate, then you’ll become an American citizen in one second. And not as a simple, regular citizen, either – no, you become eligible to receive the equal treatment as the nation’s existing top-ranked Hunters.”

“...”

Everything so far had been what Jin-Woo expected to hear from this man. However, what he wanted to find out about was the information related to this Awakened called ‘Upgrader’. He shifted his gaze over to Adam, causing the American agent to flinch slightly and avert his eyes away.

Jin-Woo looked back at the deputy director.

“But, I only came here because Adam said something about some ‘information’.”

The deputy director let out a burst of genial laughter when he heard that.

“That isn’t entirely unrelated to what I was talking about.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Hunter-nim. If you give us your word that you’ll become the next American Hunter, then we will definitely enhance your abilities to an even higher realm.”

The so-called ‘Upgrader’. It seemed that this Awakened could really do what that moniker implied.

Still, Jin-Woo was not entirely convinced, even if the deputy director said roughly the same thing as Agent Adam White.

‘Could there really be an Awakened possessing such a power?’

That’s why he decided to make d*mn sure.

“To enhance one’s abilities – can such a thing be for real?”

Jin-Woo’s apparent interest caused the deputy director to become even more excited.

“Actually.... she’s here with us, right now.”

Jin-Woo already knew that there was someone else within the hotel’s suite. From a while ago, he had picked up on the minute amount of magic power leaking out from the gap of the closed door just over there.

Because the magic energy emitted didn’t seem all that powerful, he was inwardly thinking that person was too weak to be a bodyguard of someone as important as the Hunter Bureau’s deputy director. And now, his suspicion proved to be correct.

The deputy director quickly issued an order.

“Please bring Madam Selner here.”

Click.

Almost immediately, the door was opened and two agents escorted a middle-aged African-American woman out from the room beyond. Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed slightly after picking up on a strange vibe coming off of her.

‘.....’

Somehow, she gave off a different aura from other, regular Awakened.

The African-American lady stood next to the table, and the agent quickly pulled out a chair for her. She then elegantly settled down on the end of the cushion.

She immediately recognised who Jin-Woo was and floated a smile of genuine interest.

“So, you are that man from the video....”

She was already familiar with all the important information on Jin-Woo and needed no introduction, so the deputy director’s job became a bit easier.

“This is Madam Norma Selner. She is the lone Awakened, the only one of her type in the entire world, who can enhance the abilities of other Awakened to even greater heights.”

At the end of the introduction, Madam Selner did a simple nod of her head as a greeting to Jin-Woo. He reciprocated the greeting with the nod, as well.

“Madam Selner. Please, if you will, briefly explain what you can do to Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

She formed a teasing smile while staring at the still-unconvinced Jin-Woo’s face.

“Everyone has the same look as you, in the beginning, Hunter-nim. However....”

She then leaned in closer to Jin-Woo and whispered softly to him.

“Once they have a taste, they have no choice but to beg me for more.”

“Madam, please....”

The deputy director furrowed his brows a little, prompting her to laugh out and wave her hand about.

“I know, I know. Don’t worry, Director Connor. I know that he’s a very important man.”

Still with an alluring smile, Madam Selner began with her explanation.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim. As you may know already, all Awakened face a limit they can’t breach. No one can overcome it.”

That was why the ranks of the Awakened would never change, unless one was lucky enough to go through a Re-Awakening process. This was common knowledge that all living Hunters out there knew all too well.

“But, Madam. You can....?”

Even before Jin-Woo could finish his question, Madam Selner formed an

expression of a little kid picking up the final piece of strawberry on top of a cake that she'd been saving up for the very last.

“You’re correct.”

Jin-Woo’s eyes grew progressively wider.

“I can increase that limit even higher in three separate stages. I don’t know whether to call it a forced Re-Awakening, or simply waking up the latent potential sleeping within the subject already, but yes, I can do it.”

What an incredible ability that was!

The things she said just now were explosive enough to shake the very cores of every top-ranked Hunters found throughout the world. Jin-Woo’s gaze shifted over to the deputy director.

He nodded his head to reaffirm what she said.

“What she said are all true. It’s just that, once she uses her powers once, she needs to take a lengthy break to recover her energy. So, only around three to four lucky Awakened get to enjoy this benefit in a single year.”

“...How effective is it?”

“It depends on individuals, but once one goes through all three stages, they say that they grew stronger by a minimum of 20 percent, and as much as 30 percent, over their original powers.”

Twenty to thirty percent!

With the average of his Stat values nearing the 250 mark, if Jin-Woo got that mystery enhancement, that average value would shoot past the 300 mark, instead,

Without a doubt, that would be an enormous leap up.

....As long as these guys weren’t lying to him, of course.

‘Is she casting a buff that raises one’s powers? Or, is it more like raising the fixed level cap?’

Regardless of what it was, the ability she possessed would be like a precious treasure for all the Hunters out there. Which also meant that there should be no shortages of people aiming for her, too.

“If the knowledge of such an ability is made public, then....”

The deputy director nodded his head.

“That is why Madam Selner is with us.”

She too worried about the exact same thing as Jin-Woo had thought of, and after lengthy deliberation, she joined the Hunter Bureau who'd guarantee her safety while also letting her use her powers as often as she wanted to.

“We ensure her absolute safety and reward her accordingly, while she enhances the abilities of those Hunters we deem worthy of joining us. We have been maintaining this symbiotic relationship for a long time now.”

And so, that's where the deputy director bookended the explanation. Now, the time for the fireworks to begin.

“Madam Selner's ability, that is precisely the gift we wish to give to you, Hunter-nim.”

“A gift, is it....”

Indeed, could there be a gift even more valuable than this one?

“If you become a Hunter of the United States of America, you will be the first in line to receive this benefit. Also, we will make sure that you get the best possible terms when negotiating with any Guilds you wish to join.”

From the perspective of an ordinary Hunter, these were simply too good of conditions to say no to.

Only now could Jin-Woo understand why Hwang Dong-Soo didn't even hesitate once and emigrated to the States when everyone was criticising him for it. The enormous sum of money the Americans reportedly paid him was most likely a cover-up story to hide the real reason.

Regular Hunters would lose their collective sh*t if they ever heard of such a tale. So, if you told a top Hunter that his or her abilities could be enhanced even further? Who in their right minds would say no to that?

However....

“Can you prove that she really possesses such a power?”

Everything they said so far were just words, and there had been no proof to back them up yet.

It was her turn to butt in next.

“No need to rush. Today, I'm only here to undo the first button, you know.”

Jin-Woo finally realised what she meant earlier.

‘One taste, and people beg her for more, was it?’

Just as she had alluded to, every Hunter seeing her powers with their own

eyes chose to head to America right away, one hundred times out of one hundred. Her sky-high confidence was based off on that.

The deputy director quietly asked a question to Jin-Woo.

“It is as she says. So, will you let us unlock your ‘first stage’?”

“Without anything in return?”

“Think of it as a ‘service’ from us, Hunter-nim.”

Madam Selner lightly grasped Jin-Woo’s wrist. When he turned to look at her, she formed a gentle smile and gestured to him to get closer.

“Please, look into my eyes. Look deeply into them. That will be your first step.”

Was she telling the truth?

To confirm if this Madam Selner really did possess the power the Hunter Bureau was swearing by, Jin-Woo decided to follow her instructions for the time being.

The deputy director leaned against the back of the chair and crossed his arms.

‘It’s done! He’s ours now!’

The game was already over.

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had been constantly maintaining that cold, indifferent expression until now, but that was only because he hadn’t yet experienced what this lady’s power had to offer.

Once the first lifting of the natural limit was completed, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo would call them on his own volition sooner rather than later. No, if he had an impulsive personality, then he might sign the immigration documents right here, right now.

The deputy director’s curiosity shifted on to something else now.

‘Just how high will his limit be, I wonder?’

The deputy director uncrossed his arms and rubbed his chin, his eyes of anticipation firmly locked on Jin-Woo. But, it was then.

“Heok!!”

Madam Selner sucked in her breath, as her eyes began to quake quite violently.



Chapter 131 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Her name was Norma Selner.

An African-American woman of 46 years of age, and often referred to as Madam Selner or Mrs Selner, the Hunter Bureau offered her a higher degree of protection than the President of the country.

Meaning, if both her and the President's lives were under threat, then the Hunter Bureau would prioritise in rescuing her first and then worry about the President later.

But, how could such a thing even be possible?

When the previous director of the Hunter Bureau retired from the office and handed over the responsibility to his successor, he described her with the following words.

That's how it was.

Because she managed to attract the world's elite rank S Hunters here, the American citizens were able to rest easy every night knowing that they didn't need to worry about high-ranking Gates opening up somewhere within this massive country of theirs.

The top-ranked Hunters who changed their nationality because of her was already 26.

This was already a number far exceeding other so-called Hunter superpower nations and their roster of rank S Hunters. The Hunter Bureau also carefully selected their targets as well, so it went without saying that their Hunters were of far superior quality, as well.

So, one could say that Madam Selner was the guardian angel looking after America from behind the scenes.

Regardless of how high a rank S Hunter's position was, or the treatment he or she received, none of them were seen as being as important as Madam Selner at the end of the day.

She was the top classified secret that not even the American President could easily approach. Quite obviously, the rank S Hunters allowed to meet her were selected via the most strict, rigorous vetting process.

They were the specially chosen few, as coined by Agent Adam White earlier.

["We certainly will get something in return by revealing this information to an exclusive group of a specially chosen few."]

At first, Jin-Woo had no clue what it meant to be included in that exclusive group of the chosen few. Not just him, but most of the rank S Hunters, too.

However, they would come to a realisation after Madam Selner broke open their limits – the realisation of who chose them, and what it meant to be chosen!

One of the Hunters was so moved by the overflowing power coursing through his body, he even knelt down before her to shed tears of gratitude. On the following day, his nationality changed from Congo to America.

'That always happened, didn't it?'

And that was why the current serving deputy director of the Hunter Bureau, Michael Conner, didn't believe that anything would go wrong.

He was sure that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo would cry out in alternating emotions of elation and shock, maybe even search for his God, just as everyone else before him did.

Then, he'd beg for more.

Was there any other, more fitting description than that?

He confidently thought like that, not even a hint of suspicion within his mind. But, then....

The cry of shock actually came out from someone else's mouth.

"Uaaahhk?!"

Madam Selner stared deep into Jin-Woo's eyes for a long time, before she screamed at the top of her lungs as if she had seen something she shouldn't have. She fell off the chair on to the floor.

Almost right away, two agents here to guard her whipped their pistols out and took aim at Jin-Woo.

"Stop!! Have you all lost your minds?!"

The deputy director witnessed the agents and their recklessness, and cried out in alarm. Loud cussing exploded out of his mouth as he jumped up from his sitting position to push down the pointed pistols of the agents.

"Do you not know who this person is? How dare you point at him with

such a thing?!”

“But, sir, the Madam is....”

“You idiots! If you’re that worried about Madam Selner, then check up on her first!!”

“M-my apologies.”

The agents quickly put their guns away and supported the shivering Madam Selner off from the ground. Her complexion had become so pale that she looked quite pitiful right now.

Meanwhile, the deputy director bowed his back 90 degrees to Jin-Woo.

“I’m truly sorry, Hunter-nim. My agents committed a grave blunder.”

Judging from the previously-relaxed voice of the deputy director tremble like that, he must’ve been frightened out of his wits rather greatly just now.

‘They are trained to put the safety of the Madam above all else, but to think, they’d be stupid enough to point a gun at a rank S Hunter!’

If their opponent possessed a fiery temper, then never mind the two foolish agents, even their boss’s neck wouldn’t have remained in its original place.

He couldn’t even come up with an excuse to explain away the agents shoving guns in the face of a top-ranked Hunter in a country where carrying firearms was illegal.

The deputy director’s heart still loudly pounded in his chest, unable to calm down from the fright he felt when Madam Selner screamed and fell, and also, when the agents pulled their guns out without any warning.

Funnily enough, though, Jin-Woo was also deeply flustered by what transpired just now.

‘Just what the hell is up with this situation?’

That lady suddenly screamed out and fell down, the Hunter Bureau’s agents pointed guns at him, and finally, their deputy director jumped up and down in a huff before apologising with a deep bow of his head.

At first, he was dumbfounded. up, he was speechless, and finally....

“....It’s fine. No one got hurt, after all.”

He didn’t even feel like getting angry here.

He kinda figured that angrily threatening the other party was a pretty disgraceful thing to do, especially when the second most powerful man from another country’s top organisation was quick to admit the mistakes of his

subordinates and apologised like this.

A part of him also didn't feel much of anything when guns were being pointed at him. Rather than weapons, they looked more like children's toys to him now. That was how wide the gap between them and Jin-Woo was.

“Thank you for your understanding, Hunter-nim.”

Only after Jin-Woo let it go did the deputy director raise his head back up again. He then sneaked a glance at Jin-Woo's face and confirmed that the Korean wasn't being sarcastic or anything. He felt that he had really dodged a bullet here.

‘If something like this happened in front of either Thomas Andre or China's Liu Zhigeng, then...’

The hearts of those two agents pulling out their guns would have stopped beating long before he had the chance to apologise. What a relief that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was such an understanding gentleman.

‘Whew-.’

The deputy director sighed out in relief and wiped the pooled sweat off his nose. He managed to put out the most pressing flames first. , it was time to focus on the other matter.

The deputy director bowed his head one more time and then, urgently checked up on Madam Selner's current condition.

“Madam? What happened?”

“M-Michael....”

“Madam? You're sweating so much... are you feeling unwell somewhere?”

The deputy director may have shed a few cold sweat drops over the volatile situation just now, but she was completely soaked from head to toe at the moment.

‘What's going on here?’

Worried about her condition, Jin-Woo got up from the chair and cautiously made his approach, but she didn't want to look him in the eye and began shivering even harder. Seeing her react like this, the deputy director could only chew on his lower lip.

‘With her condition, we can't....’

He had succeeded in bringing Hunter Seong Jin-Woo to the table with much difficulty, but now, the most important negotiating hand was no longer

available to him. Madam was in no condition whatsoever to use her ability.

The deputy director turned around and while carrying a heavy, distressed expression, spoke to Jin-Woo.

“Madam Selner’s condition isn’t very good today. May I give you a call at another time?”

Around the same time.

An important guest was waiting inside the President’s office of the Korean Hunter’s Association. It was none other than the President of the Japanese Association, Matsumoto Shigeo.

Two Presidents of the respective organisations settled down on the opposite sides, with no one else except their interpreters accompanying them.

Goh Gun-Hui was the first to open his mouth.

“I’ve heard about what happened to Mister Goto.”

“It’s truly a lamentable thing.”

An expression of bitterness briefly flashed past Matsumoto Shigeo, before his complexion recovered.

“However, I didn’t come here to discuss what happened in the past, but to talk about the way forward.”

Goh Gun-Hui nodded his head. There were a few matters between these two men – no, between the nations of Korea and Japan, that needed to be settled.

First of all, splitting up of the magic crystals. The original plan was to divide the loot one year later, when all the ant monsters would’ve have died out on the island. But Jin-Woo had completely exterminated every single one of them before that.

Japan did discover his utterly unbelievable actions through their spy satellite and its high-tech camera, so they were aware of this fact, too.

The old idiom said that uncertainty would kill a man.

In the proverbial blink of an eye, all traces of magic energy disappeared from the island of Jeju.

With the sole exception of one, that was – the massive bundle of magic energy suspected to be that of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.

‘Incredible physical strength. Unpredictable movement patterns. And the

ruthless streak to hunt down every single monster, even though it's no longer necessary....'

Where would one find a Hunter more suited to a life in Japan than that man in this wide world?

Matsumoto Shigeo smirked to himself after recalling the atmosphere of the mission control room back then. He then pushed forward several documents to Goh Gun-Hui.

"And these are?"

Goh Gun-Hui asked as he picked them up.

"This is the official declaration that Japan will give up on the rights to our share of magic crystals from the Jeju Island."

".....?"

Feeling not entirely convinced, Goh Gun-Hui browsed through the documents, and eventually, his brows gradually rose up higher. Matsumoto Shigeo was telling the truth.

"But, why?"

Why was the Japanese Association, who had suffered heavy losses themselves, willing to give up on such a massive revenue source?

His answer arrived soon enough.

"In return, hand Mister Seong Jin-Woo over to us."

"...Huhuh."

Goh Gun-Hui guffawed out and leaned against the back of the couch.

"Regretfully, he's not affiliated with the Korean Hunter's Association."

Of course, even if he was, Goh Gun-Hui never planned to 'hand over' such a Hunter to anyone, to begin with.

"We know."

Matsumoto Shigeo replied as if he was waiting for this moment.

"However, he has a very close relationship with the Korean Association. And it's currently impossible to get in contact with him unless it's through your Association."

It was truly unfortunate, but the Japanese didn't enjoy the kind of information network the American Hunter Bureau did. Which meant that, if Matsumoto Shigeo wanted to get in touch with Jin-Woo, then he needed to get

permission from the Korean Association first.

“I didn’t mean to imply that you are being forced to do something. No, just give me an opportunity to negotiate with him, that’s all.”

“Are you throwing away this astronomical sum just for that chance?”

Nod.

Matsumoto Shigeo readily admitted to it.

Japan lost ten of her top-ranked Hunters through this incident.

In the current situation where Japan needed to import top-ranked Hunters quite urgently, her Association was blessed with ample cash reserve to pay out the compensation meant for the victims of the raid.

Indeed, they had so much money that it was practically rotting away in the bank right now. So, if Matsumoto could get his hands on a Hunter of Seong Jin-Woo’s calibre, then he didn’t give a rat’s a*s about those magic crystals anymore.

Unfortunately....

“I refuse.”

The reply Matsumoto Shigeo got was different from what he expected.

“What do you mean, you refuse?”

The Japanese man was stunned by that answer.

He was deeply confident of winning Hunter Seong Jin-Woo over to Japan’s side, but just in case, he told Goh Gun-Hui that he only wanted an opportunity to negotiate with that young man.

But, to think, his counterpart would say no to the offer first.

“Are you turning down an opportunity like this because you’re afraid of losing Hunter Seong Jin-Woo to Japan?”

“Not at all.”

Goh Gun-Hui slowly shook his head.

“No, I’m saying that, from the beginning, you people have no right to claim even a single magic crystal from us.”

The Japanese interpreter quickly looked at Goh Gun-Hui after he made that bombshell of a declaration packed full of hidden implications.

“Sir, should I relay that in full?”

“Of course. Don’t miss out on a single word and translate them in full.”

Matsumoto Shigeo's complexion reddened considerably the moment he heard the interpreter.

“President Goh Gun-Hui! What nonsense are you spewing now?”

His voice naturally rose up higher. But then, Japanese unhurriedly flowed out from Goh Gun-Hui's mouth.

“I wish to speak to you without the presence of the interpreters.”

Matsumoto flinched and gasped in surprise.

“You... know how to speak Japanese?”

“My father used to run a small company in Japan when I was a young lad. It's been a long time so it'd be difficult to hold a conversation, but....”

The two interpreters left the office soon after Matsumoto agreed to the suggestion. And he fired the opening shot first.

“We lost over ten of our rank S Hunters for you people.”

Japan's top Hunter, Goto Ryuji, was also included in that list.

“If you do not wish to accept my suggestion, then there's nothing we can do. Not only will we demand the agreed-upon half of the magic crystal haul, but we will also claim compensation from the Korean government, too.”

Goh Gun-Hui simply snorted in derision.

“President Matsumoto.... Looks like you still mistakenly believe that you hold an upper hand here.”

“President Goh!”

Matsumoto shot up from his seat, his glare getting fiercer.

“Is that something you're supposed to say to someone who fought for your people?”

Unlike the agitated Matsumoto, though, Goh Gun-Hui remained collected throughout.

“I couldn't understand this one thing.”

Goh Gun-Hui's calm demeanour managed to cool Matsumoto's own rage, and the latter slowly settled back down on his couch. Waiting until he was completely seated. Goh Gun-Hui carried on.

“And that would be – why did your people, who enjoyed showing off in front of the world, decide to entrust us with what was arguably the core part of this raid, the hunting of the ant queen.”

“That’s obviously because the Koreans lacked the means to buy the necessary time from the ant army....”

“If that’s what you were thinking of, then wouldn’t it have been better for you to insert the Koreans as a part of the distraction, like how you had split up yours into four different groups? And then, hunt the ant queen with some of your top elite Hunters, instead?”

‘He is as I expected...’

The light in Matsumoto’s eyes changed.

“.....So, what is it that you want to say to me, President Goh Gun-Hui?”

For some reason, he was enunciating Goh Gun-Hui’s name as clearly as he could.

“And the timing of your people withdrawing.... It looked as if it was your plan all along, regardless of the mutated ant monster or not.”

“You have gone crazy.”

“It’s you who have gone crazy. Just what were you planning to do after driving the Korean Hunters to death?”

Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

It was then, Matsumoto burst into a fit of loud cackles.

“Hahahaha!!”

He then pulled out a voice recorder from his pocket. He slowly shook his head and continued on.

“Everything you said just now, it’s been captured in full. Your sins of insulting the Japanese Hunters without proof, and using that as an excuse to back out of the earlier agreement, everything is here!”

An odious smile formed on Matsumoto’s lips.

“You shall be judged by the international community.”

Just this little sound file containing Goh Gun-Hui’s voice was more than enough to cover up the fact the Japanese Hunters withdrew in the middle of the operation. As for the public opinion, that would come around soon enough.

This was clearly a slip-up on Goh Gun-Hui’s part, because he doggedly pursued his conviction and nothing else. What if he lost his cool completely and laid a hand on Matsumoto right now?

Now that would be seen as even more irrefutable proof.

The sound file was already transmitted to the computers in the Japanese situation room by now.

Too bad for him, though.

“Proof? Of course, I have it.”

Goh Gun-Hui pulled out a black-coloured object the size of a stamp from his inner pocket and left it on the table.

“...?”

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo found it on the location.”

Sensing something ominous was about to go down, Matsumoto’s attitude had softened a tad.

“What... is this?”

Goh Gun-Hui smirked at the sight of the puzzled Matsumoto Shigeo.

“It’s a black box attached to your communication equipment, the one Goto’s team was using.”

Right away, the colour of Matsumoto’s complexion changed to ash. Not missing out on this opening, Goh Gun-Hui also brought out an MP3 player and proceeded to play the sound file extracted from this black box.

Click.

The voice of Goto Ryuji, one of the most famous Japanese in the world, could be heard clearly from the recording.

Goh Gun-Hui switched the player off and continued on.

“Do you know why I didn’t reveal the existence of this file to the rest of the world, President of Japanese Hunter Association, Matsumoto Shigeo?”

Matsumoto slowly shook his head. The ashen complexion of his was now getting paler than a sheet of white paper now.

“It’s simply because I didn’t want to dampen the joy of my fellow countrymen basking in the glow of a hard-fought victory with this bullsh*t you people managed to cook up. Do you get it now? I’ve only delayed its release for the sake of our people, not you.”

The recorder fell from Matsumoto’s hand with a thud. Meanwhile, Goh Gun-Hui relentlessly pressed on.

“I’m sure that you get what I’m saying to you, President Matsumoto.”

Goh Gun-Hui then crushed the player in his hand to pieces with his

physical strength of a rank S Hunter.

“Get the f*ck out of this office. Now.”

After Jin-Woo had left, the deputy director found himself alone with Madam Selner in the hotel’s suite.

“Madam. What happened back there?”

They had worked with many Hunters before, and this wasn’t Madam Selner’s first rodeo either. Meaning, this would be the first time something like this happened.

She suppressed her pounding heart and managed to squeeze out her trembling voice.

“He is a ‘king’. A very powerful ‘king’.”

The deputy director’s eyes grew wider and wider.

Those who knew how her power worked were the director of the Hunter Bureau, the deputy, and of course, Madam Selner herself. Only these three. And she confirmed that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was a ‘king’.

Ba-dump, ba-dump.

The deputy director sensed his heartbeat pick up pace.

“Which means.... he’s on the same level as the Special Authority-rank Hunters?”

Shake, shake.

She shook her head.

“No, I don’t.... This was my first time experiencing such a phenomenon, so I can’t be sure at all. He is definitely a ‘king’, but he’s also different from the other ‘kings’.”

“Excuse me? Please, explain it in simpler terms....”

“When I looked into him, ‘it’ too was looking back at me.”

“But, other Hunters also....”

“No!! Not Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, but the endless darkness hiding within him was staring back at me!”

Madam Selner hysterically cried out. Her complexion paled again and her body shuddered greatly. This was the display of an instinctual fear all living organisms possessed: the fear of death.

But, that wasn't important at the moment. No, the truly important thing was, even though her entire body continued to shiver in terror, she still managed to recall one more thing.

“And he....”

The deputy director focused on her words again.

Her lips parted with so much difficulty.

“He doesn't have any limits.”



Chapter 132 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Plop.

Matsumoto Shigeo fell down on his knees.

A boss of an organisation – not only that, a man representing the opinions and positions of every Hunter in the country called Japan, was kneeling in front of another person.

‘.....’

Even in this brief moment, countless thoughts raced through Matsumoto’s brain.

However, no matter how hard he wracked his brain, he couldn’t come up with a way to get out of this predicament.

This was not the time to worry about his pride or honour. If any of this got out, then its ensuing aftermath wouldn’t end with him just losing his position.

“President Goh Gun-Hui.... Please, forgive me.”

Unfortunately for him, Goh Gun-Hui’s glare remained icy and unmoving.

This man was shouting blue murder when there was no proof of his wrongdoing, but as soon as the situation turned disadvantageous, he obediently lowered his tail.

Who’d look at such a man with sympathetic eyes?

“Get up.”

Goh Gun-Hui’s icy voice advised his Japanese counterpart to stop wasting time with this hollow apology, but Matsumoto didn’t heed that and slammed his forehead on the office floor repeatedly.

Thud! Thud!!

“Our nation, Japan, has lost half of her top-ranked Hunters and we will soon have to beg the international community for their aid.”

No matter how excellent the Hunter system in Japan was, they would eventually see the gaps in their defences opening up sooner or later with half of their rank S Hunters dead.

Their remaining combat force would be enough to deal with rank A Gates for the time being, but....

But, Japan would have to be on their toes the moment a rank S Gate opens up somewhere in their territory. Even worse, the repeat of the tragedy that occurred on Jeju Island could happen in Japan, too.

“If that sound file gets out, then we’ll be completely isolated from the world. I beg of you, President Goh Gun-Hui. Please, think about the innocent Japanese citizens and forgive our transgressions just this once....!”

“Think of it as your due punishment.”

Goh Gun-Hui ruthlessly cut Matsumoto’s words there.

“Think of it as the punishment for the sin you and your Hunters tried to commit and gladly accept it.”

Carry around a bomb that might go off at any given moment, and wait for the hour of reckoning – that’s what Goh Gun-Hui was implying here.

However, Matsumoto didn’t show any sign of lifting his head off the floor.

“President Goh Gun-Hui.... Until I appease your anger, I shall not rise up again. I beg of you, please, please! Consider it one more time!”

“You leave me with no choice.”

With a displeased expression firmly etched on his face, Goh Gun-Hui pulled out his mobile phone.

“You have five minutes.”

What could he mean by that?

Unable to win against his curiosity, Matsumoto raised his head and looked up at Goh Gun-Hui. The Korean man slowly waved his phone around.

“If you don’t get out of here in the next five minutes, a message will be sent to the numbers of every reporter saved on this phone. It’ll be a message about the President of the Japanese Association grovelling before me.”

If you cling onto me in fear of the bomb going off at any second, then I’ll just let it go off, right now – he wasn’t threatening anymore. No, it was a declaration.

“But, that...”

Matsumoto bit his lower lip.

Goh Gun-Hui’s determination wasn’t soft enough to be shaken up by

nothing but a pitiful plea for leniency. Matsumoto belatedly realised this fact. And this was also the moment his last-ditch attempt to save this situation at the cost of his pride ending up in total failure.

Powerlessly, Matsumoto stood back up.

Goh Gun-Hui's glare remained icy, his phone gradually being lowered. He then spoke to the unsteady Japanese man.

“You should thank Mister Seong Jin-Woo.”

The light of pure anger flickered dangerously within Goh Gun-Hui's beast-like eyes.

“Not at the hands of that mutated ant, no, but if my Hunters got hurt from the schemes of your people, then you wouldn't have walked out of this room alive.”

Matsumoto's trembling hands packed up his belongings and without taking a single look back, he escaped from the Korean Association's building in a hurry. Not one lick of his former pride and confidence he displayed during his last visit here could be seen from his departing back now.

“Fuu....”

Meanwhile, Goh Gun-Hui was leaning against the back of the couch. It felt like all of his pent-up stress was cleared away in one shot. Of course, he wasn't planning to end things here.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he now held the lifeline of the Japanese Hunter Association.

‘If you committed a crime, then you get punished for it.’

From early on in his life, Goh Gun-Hui was taught how to treat his friends and enemies accordingly.

It was then, his mobile phone resting on the table suddenly issued a loud racket.

‘Mm?’

He tapped on the ‘Answer’ icon, and an urgent voice came out from the speaker. Goh Gun-Hui quietly listened to what happened, and his eyes progressively grew wider and wider.

“What?! A Gate formed in the middle of a road??”

Not only that, it was rated to be a rank B Gate that no regular raid team could do something about, too!

“Where is it located?”

The best course of action for this problem was to contact a major Guild and have them send over a capable raid team. But, then....

‘...Hold on.’

Having heard the report from the agent on site, Goh Gun-Hui’s expression became a bit strange.

‘Didn’t Hunter Seong Jin-Woo get an office for his Guild around there?’

The road suddenly became really clogged up.

Jin-Woo was in deep contemplation as he found himself stuck in the middle of an unmoving sea of traffic.

‘That lady, she definitely saw something.’

That woman called Madam Norma Selner. She must’ve faced countless powerful Hunters, yet she couldn’t even meet his gaze because she felt a crippling fear of him.

Just what did she ‘see’ in him?

Was it the traces of his System?

The System would make a few ridiculous demands from him every now and then, sure, but it was certainly not a scary existence.

‘Instead of being scary, that thing’s my greatest ally.’

However, how would it look like in other people’s views?

The deputy director asked him back then if it was fine to get in touch at a later time. The thing was, though, the woman regaining some calm behind him suddenly got startled again and began shuddering as soon as he asked that question.

Even if Jin-Woo wanted to see that woman again, she’d avoid him of her own volition. Her entire body displayed her unwillingness quite clearly. Jin-Woo then came to a realisation.

Maybe, that woman’s power didn’t work on him. He was very different from normal Hunters, after all.

‘Well, I guess there’s no need to waste more of my time with those folks, then.’

That was why he already told the American deputy director that there wouldn’t be a need and tactfully declined their invite. The frozen-stiff expression of the deputy director was particularly memorable, to say the least.

‘Besides all that, what is up with this traffic, man?’

Jin-Woo furrowed his brows at the road ahead utterly mired in congestion as far as his eyes could see.

‘This is why taking the subway is so much more convenient.’

Just as he began wondering if there was an accident up ahead or something....

Vrrrr....

His phone stuck in the car charger vibrated rather noisily. Jin-Woo checked the ID of the caller.

‘...It’s the Association President?’

They saw each other in the funeral venue only a few hours ago, so what business did he have in calling him so soon? Jin-Woo tapped the ‘Answer’ icon.

The Association President explained the situation taking place in the middle of Seoul in a calm voice.

“Excuse me? A Gate opened up in the middle of the road?”

He was beginning to think that this traffic jam was far too heavy to be normal, but there was a good reason behind it, as it turned out.

Hoping to turn the van around, Jin-Woo scanned around the vehicle. Unfortunately, there were simply too many cars tightly packed around him and it was not possible to move an inch. He helplessly shook his head and returned his gaze to the front of the road. It was then.

A welcoming piece of news capable of washing away the wave of dissatisfaction rising up from the traffic jam jumped out from his phone.

‘Heot!’

Jin-Woo struggled to suppress the giggles of joy this truly excellent news managed to awaken. As a matter of fact, he shouldn’t be pleased about something that was greatly inconveniencing so many citizens like this. Yes.

Jin-Woo managed to straighten his voice and cautiously asked.

“I don’t have the raid permit, so can I just enter like that, sir?”

“It’s issued by the Association.”

Jin-Woo suppressed his laughter again and replied seriously.

“You’re the President of the Hunter’s Association.”

“Well, in that case, thank you for the me.... No, I mean, thank you for the opportunity.”

Jin-Woo clenched his fist.

He climbed out of the van and began walking after the trace of the magic energy leaking out from the Gate. Because of the cars packed tightly in all sides, he didn't even need to park the van somewhere else, too.

“....Yes. Everyone, the black hole in the air you see behind me is the Gate that has appeared in the city today....”

“....According to my sources, this Gate has been ranked at B, a high-ranking Gate that requires the participation of a large Guild....”

Reporters had already formed a cordon around the Gate by the time he got there, and the Association employees, as well as the members of the local police force, were restricting the access.

‘Hmm...’

Jin-Woo brushed past the wall of the reporters and approached the Gate, but then, a female Association employee with a by-the-book demeanour abruptly blocked his path.

“Please hold it! What do you think you're doing?!”

She pushed at his chest and spoke loudly.

“You can't just barge your way in here like this!”

Too bad, no matter how hard she pushed with her small hands, Jin-Woo didn't show any signs of budging from the spot. Only then she belatedly realised that the guy standing in front of her was a Hunter – and a pretty high-ranking Hunter at that.

“Are you... a Hunter?”

Jin-Woo pulled out his licence and showed it to her. Naturally, her eyes grew super large.

‘A r-r-r-rank S? Seong Jin-Woo???’

Wasn't he the same guy who killed all those ant monsters on Jeju Island....?

Finally learning of Jin-Woo's identity, the female Association employee raised her head to take another look.

Jin-Woo looked a lot different from when he appeared on TV, so even though she was an Association employee, she ended up failing to recognise a

rank S Hunter.

However, it was also natural for people with discerning eyes to exist within the large crowd gathered here.

“Uh??”

“Isn’t he...?”

“It’s Seong Jin-Woo!”

“I think Seong Jin-Woo came here to deal with the Gate personally!”

People feeling fed up from being stuck here began recognising Jin-Woo, and their complexions brightened greatly. Some people among them with appointments to get to even cried out in elation, too.

However, the female employee completely disregarded the reactions of the citizens and showed no signs of backing down. She hesitated slightly before asking him.

“What... What brings you here?”

What did she even mean, what brings him here?

There would be only one reason why a Hunter chose to stand before a Gate, wouldn’t it?

Jin-Woo figured that there was no need to explain, so he simply pointed at the Gate beyond her shoulders. She looked behind her for a second or two, and then, formed an expression of pure determination.

Many Hunters ended up losing their lives after placing too much faith in their skills while disregarding the established rules and regulations.

‘It should be the same story with a rank S Hunter, right...?’

The Association existed to prevent such accidents – this fact had been drilled into her head over and over again. Hunters and their safety were the top priority of the Association.

Especially when the person in question happened to be an exceptional individual ranked ‘S’, her duty was to prevent any mishaps from happening to him no matter what. That’s what she thought, and so, she expressed her belief with a plucky attitude.

“Even if you’re a rank S Hunter, sir, I will not tolerate any behaviour that ignores proper procedures.”

“...”

Jin-Woo was lost for words and blankly stared at her face. He didn’t expect

her to come out like this at all.

She thought that she had succeeded in persuading a rank S Hunter, and continued on with her next question.

“Did you obtain the raid permit?”

Jin-Woo shook his head, which led her to....

“No, wait. Even if you did obtain the permit, since you haven’t met the minimum required number of team members, you can’t be allowed in.”

The female employee was impressively unyielding.

Jin-Woo could tell from the look in her eyes that she wasn’t doing this out of spite. No, she just seemed to be the type to stick as close to the rule book as humanly possible.

Jin-Woo scratched the back of his head. Well, there’s no helping it, then.

“Hold on for a sec.”

Jin-Woo immediately called somebody on the phone. After the call connected to the other side, he pushed the phone to her.

“Here.”

When the female employee looked at him puzzled, Jin-Woo spoke to her in a clear voice.

“Please, take it. The call’s actually for you.”

She maintained her puzzled expression while asking him.

“W-who is it on the phone?”

“Someone else you may not ‘tolerate’ as well.”

She inadvertently took the phone from him, but when she discovered the name of the call’s receiver appearing on the screen, her brows shot up really high.

‘Goh, Goh Gun-Hui?!’

If the person on the line was really...

“H-hello....?”

The female employee’s nervous voice was greeted by a deep, heavy voice from the phone’s speaker.

Sure enough, it was him.

The female employee’s eyes trembled noticeably, before she began nodding

her head over and over again.

“Yes, yes. No, sir. Yes. Yes. I shall do as you say, sir.”

Click.

She returned the phone with a crestfallen expression on her face. When Jin-Woo walked past her, he whispered to her in a hushed tone.

“Thanks.”

“Pardon me?”

“For worrying about me.”

“Y-you, you knew....?!”

Jin-Woo hurriedly disappeared into the Gate.

‘Euh....!’

Greatly annoyed by his antics now, the female employee shuddered from dissatisfaction and she threw... not a curse, but more like an unhappy grumble at his departing back.

‘Father in heaven! Sprain that guy’s ankle or something inside the dungeon, please!’

However....

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was a man who walked away safely from the Jeju Island that was completely overrun with rank S monsters.

‘Such a guy won’t have much trouble inside a rank B dungeon, probably?’

But then, it happened at that moment. Screams were rising up from here and there.

“Uhhh? What’s going on here??”

“Why is it changing to red colour?!”

Right after Jin-Woo stepped past the Gate, the eerie colour of blood slowly spread over its black surface. It was a Red Gate!! A terrifying event was unfolding right now.

“Ah.....!”

The female employee felt utterly devastated after seeing the Red Gate appear.

‘Was it because I prayed for him to get that sprained ankle?!’

Of course, that wasn't it. However, she couldn't get rid of the voices in her head telling her that it was her fault.

She was taught that the Red Gate, a portal to another world, was one of the most dangerous places there was. She also heard that even the high-ranked Hunters weren't guaranteed to get out of there alive.

'It can't be.....'

Suddenly, her head was filled with the images of the worst case scenario, and her complexion paled instantly.

'If, if that Hunter-nim gets injured for real, what then.....?'

Just how many minutes went by like this?

She continued to stew in self-guilt, but when she felt a presence near her, the female employee tore her gaze away from the asphalt below to look up. And found Jin-Woo standing before her.

"M-mommy?!"

She got royally frightened out of her wits as if she saw a real ghost just now. Jin-Woo simply threw a grin at her way and walked right past her.

'.....'

The face of this female employee was in a deeper shade of red than when she was talking to the Association President earlier.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo searched around for something, and eventually, made his way over to a driver of a truck filled with sacks of potatoes.

"Excuse me, ahjussi? Can I buy a sack from you?"

"Pardon? You wanna buy some potatoes?"

Jin-Woo shook his head.

"No, just the sack."

The Vice-Master of the tentatively-named 'Solo Play' Guild, as well as its chief recruitment officer, its sole lawyer, and even its accountant, Yu Jin-Ho smiled brightly as he saw Jin-Woo entering the office.

"You came back, hyung-nim!"

"Nothing happened while I was gone, right?"

"Yes, hyung-nim. However, an applicant wanting to become a founding member is....."

"Okay. Show me the list. Let me go through it as well."

Seeing that Yu Jin-Ho was pressing him with the same stuff they'd been talking about in the morning, the kid must've been desperate to establish the Guild as soon as possible.

Thankfully, Jin-Woo was thinking the same thing.

They only needed one more person for the spot of the founding member. The minimum of three people was needed to satisfy the requirements to establish a Guild.

'Even if we're trying to fill in the headcount, it's better to pick someone hard-working and trustworthy, I think. It's not like we'll be seeing each other only once, after all.'

Jin-Woo nodded his head, convinced by his own thoughts. But now that he took a closer look, Yu Jin-Ho's complexion seemed a bit cloudy for some reason.

"Did something happen?"

"The thing is.... Hyung-nim."

"Yeah?"

"As you may well know, you need a lot of capital in order to establish a Guild. The bidding prices for higher ranked Gates all start at astronomical sums, we gotta pay the signing fees to the newly-joining Hunters, and most importantly, the person applying to become our founding mem...."

Jin-Woo cut him off there.

"Is this enough capital for now?"

Thud.

Jin-Woo placed the potato sack he carried into the office on the floor.

'What's this?'

Yu Jin-Ho's puzzled gaze peered into the open gap of the sack. And he found it packed full of expensive magic crystals.

"H-hyung-nim....?! W-what are these?"

Jin-Woo was nonchalant in his reply.

"There was an open Gate on the way to the office, so I made a pit stop."

"....."

He went out only a couple of hours ago, yet during such a short period of time, he found a high-ranking dungeon, cleared it completely, and brought out

all the magic crystals found within?

“As expected of you, you’re amazing, hyung-nim!!”

Yu Jin-Ho stopped thinking about this matter there. It was ultimately a fruitless endeavour to pigeon-hole hyung-nim with common sense.

Jin-Woo watched Yu Jin-Ho celebrating the acquisition of their seed money with a content smile, before shifting his gaze over to the conference suite.

“By the way, why is she here?”

“Pardon? Ahh. I was about to talk to you about her a minute ago.... Well, someone applying to become a founding member is waiting for you, hyung-nim.”

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened.

“An applicant?”

“Yes, hyung-nim.”

“Who is?”

“The person waiting for you in the conference suite, hyung-nim.”

“That’s what she said?”

“Yes, hyung-nim.”

What on earth was this kid even talking about....?

Jin-Woo quickly strode over to the conference suite as soon as Yu Jin-Ho was finished and opened the door wide open.

Clunk.

And then, inside this mostly-empty conference suite, he found a woman sipping on a can of coffee all alone and in silence turning her head to meet his gaze. Incidentally, Yu Jin-Ho had to quickly dash outside to get that coffee because they hadn’t even bought proper office equipment yet.

“What brings you here, Hunter-nim??”

Jin-Woo asked his guest with a dumbfounded expression on his face.

Then, Cha Hae-In opened her own mouth, still looking up at him from her sitting position.

“I came to.... join your Guild.”



Chapter 133 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Did he hear that right? Jin-Woo ended up doubting his own hearing, then.

Cha Hae-In was the Vice-Master of South Korea's top Guild, and her skills were ranked to be among the very best, but she willingly walked into a Guild that hadn't even taken its first baby step yet?

Unless she was being threatened into coming here, how could this situation make any sense? But then again....

'Uh, well, just who'd be brave enough to threaten her?'

Jin-Woo decided to bring up the one person with enough clout to potentially threaten her in South Korea.

"Did the Association President order you to do this?"

Cha Hae-In formed a confused expression, evidently not understanding why Goh Gun-Hui was being brought up in this discussion.

"Why would he....?"

It was Jin-Woo who couldn't understand what was going on here, so why was she making that face even though she was the reason for all this confusion?

'No, hang on. Let's calm down.'

It was a situation where most people would've been left too stunned or get overexcited, but Jin-Woo was able to stay calm as he pulled out a chair to sit on Cha Hae-In's opposite side. He then wordlessly stared at her.

He only needed to focus for a short while. As the time visibly slowed down in his perception, various bits of information about her flowed into his brain, one at the time.

'She's restless.'

Her heartbeat, her breathing, even the glow within her eyes. She was doing her best to look composed, but there was no fooling Jin-Woo's sky-high Perception.

So, the question was – why was she forcing herself to this extent and trying to enter the tentatively-named 'Solo Play' Guild?

Jin-Woo had to ask her.

“Don’t you still have some time left in the duration of your contract with the Hunters Guild?”

Now normally, the Guild would negotiate contracts with Hunters in five-year terms. Cha Hae-In joined the Hunters Guild two years ago when she was evaluated to be a rank S, so at a bare minimum, she should still have three years left in her contract.

“I have enough money to pay the penalty for breach of contract.”

Cha Hae-In’s collected answer only elicited Jin-Woo’s head-tilting.

Most of the time, such a penalty fee would be between two to three times the original signing fee.

Thinking about the exorbitant sum the Hunters Guild must’ve forked out in order to sign up a rank S Hunter like her, one didn’t need to be a genius to figure out that the breach of contract penalty fee would be absolutely horrendous, as well.

Since he was about to speak to her about harsh reality, Jin-Woo’s attitude became very business-like.

“Our ‘Solo Play’ Guild simply can’t afford to pay the kind of signing fee your skill set warrants, Cha Hunter-nim.”

“T-the name of your Guild is ‘Solo Play’??”

“You have a problem with the name that the Vice-Master and myself came up with?”

“...No, not really.”

Cha Hae-In let a soft sigh escape from her, and continued on.

“It doesn’t matter. It’s fine if you don’t pay me the contract signing fee.”

She didn’t mind signing a contract without any payment, even though she’d have to pay an enormous breach of contract fee to the Hunters Guild?

‘What is she scheming here?’

Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

When their eyes stayed locked for a while, Cha Hae-In could no longer endure the silent pressure and averted her gaze. Her heart was beating a step faster than before, too.

Jin-Woo’s ears perked up. His acute sense of hearing didn’t miss out on a single change taking place inside her.

‘Is she hiding something?’

At this point, he simply had to ask her or he’d die of curiosity.

“Why are you willing to go through such a wringer just to join our Guild?”

“...”

As expected, Cha Hae-In couldn’t easily answer him and kept her mouth resolutely shut. And seeing her face redden like that, it became oh-so-obvious that she was hiding something from him, too.

‘Wait a minute...’

Now that he thought about it, he remembered sensing that something was different about her even back in the funeral venue. He couldn’t tell what she was thinking of, but she could have been planning to do this for quite some time already.

Jin-Woo quietly waited for Cha Hae-In’s answer. However, she kept her head lowered and for a long while, didn’t say a single word.

‘...But, how can I even explain myself to him?’

...That I sensed your presence next to me even after I lost my consciousness from the attack of that mutated ant monster?

...That, I felt safe and warm after picking up on your scent as I sank deeper into an empty and endless dark void?’

There was no word in this world adequate enough to describe what she felt back then.

‘Even if I explain it, he’d only say that I’ve gone mad.’

Her heart began beating faster after she learned of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo really being there. She felt so relieved, knowing that she wasn’t imagining things.

And also....

‘What if...’

She discovered that she wanted Jin-Woo to be by her side in the worst case scenario of her being unable to escape from the cold blade of death.

‘...To think, it’d be like ‘please be right by my side until my final moments’.’

How could she even attempt saying that, when just thinking about it made her blush uncontrollably?

That was an impossible task for Cha Hae-In who didn't know anything about a normal girl's sensibilities. That was why she finally spoke up an answer she cooked up before coming here.

"...To be more comfortable."

She raised her head to meet Jin-Woo's gaze and continue on with the rest.

"I wish to be live more comfortably..."

Although it wasn't exactly what she tried to say, it wasn't a complete lie, either.

She couldn't even lift her head properly from all the horrendous stink when high-ranked Hunters were standing next to her. But, in contrast, she felt her mind getting peaceful in the presence of Jin-Woo.

The meaning of Cha Hae-In's 'comfortable' was precisely that.

Jin-Woo didn't interpret the meaning that way, but still, he could understand where she was coming from. He slowly nodded his head from her answer.

She apparently wanted to leave a big Guild like the Hunters, and spend a more 'comfortable' time in a far smaller Guild like his.

According to Jin-Woo's knowledge, Cha Hae-In was either twenty-two or twenty-three years old.

'I'm sure the burden that a rank S must carry would be pretty heavy for a woman in her early twenties.'

Especially more so, after she felt the threat of death during the Jeju Island raid.

Jin-Woo could easily understand her feelings as he too felt like abandoning everything and running away from it all countless times, back when he still worked for the Association.

Unfortunately for her....

'Although her plight is pitiable, but.....'

But, he couldn't just accept her like that.

Why would he have named the Guild 'Solo Play'? That was because he planned to book dungeons using the name of his Guild and clear them all by himself.

If the minimum number of team members proved to be a stumbling block, then he'd simply hire temps to fill the headcount, just like how it was back

when he cleared those rank C Gates with Yu Jin-Ho. That was the smartest thing to do in his quest to level up higher.

However, if Cha Hae-In entered the picture, things would become rather complicated in many ways. Even if they forget about her contract signing fee, wouldn't she still need money for her daily necessities?

By hiring a rank S Hunter with huge salaries, someone he didn't even need in the first place and wasn't planning to put to work either, he'd be committing a massive wastage on a national scale.

However...

'If I reject a rank S Hunter who's willing to waive the contract signing fee and join my Guild without a proper reason, it's going to look pretty suspicious.'

That was why Jin-Woo quickly came up with a plan.

"Actually, our Guild has an admittance test you need to go through."

"Pardon? But, the job posting didn't specify anything li..."

Jin-Woo quickly cut off Cha Hae-In's flustered words.

"This rule is pretty new, so it's possible that the Vice-Master may have made a small error."

The glow in Cha Hae-In's eyes became quite serious at the mention of a test.

"What kind of a test is it?"

Jin-Woo was inwardly taken by surprise from her reaction.

'This gal, she was really serious?'

Because of her professional pride, he expected her to quit after being told about taking a test. However, Cha Hae-In acted the exact opposite. No, she was actually burning up even hotter with the desire to win.

He could sense her fervour hidden behind that expressionless mask of hers.

'Is she the type to face any fight coming her way head on?'

Or, was this the case of misplaced pride?

Whatever the case may have been, Jin-Woo couldn't back off now while staying it was all a misunderstanding.

"It's to win against the summoned creature I pick."

Crack.

He swore that he heard the physical sound of a crack forming on her ego.

“...”

‘Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, is that how low your assessment of me is?’

What a mysterious thing this was. He only looked into her eyes briefly, yet it felt like her voice could be heard so clearly inside his head.

However, Cha Hae-In didn’t display any of her thoughts and asked in her usual collected manner.

“Which summon will you pick?”

“For you, Cha Hunter-nim, I’ll especially have to pick the strongest one.”

“.....Alright.”

She wasn’t backing down here.

Most likely, she wouldn’t have dreamed it in her wildest imaginations, regarding who became the latest addition to Jin-Woo’s summoned creatures – no, his Shadow Army collection.

Jin-Woo thought that, since her will to win was so strong, she’d give up on her own after tasting defeat. He immediately agreed to the bout.

“Okay, let’s do it.”

“When will the test be?”

“Right now.”

Jin-Woo wanted to establish his Guild as soon as possible, so he didn’t want to waste any more time on Cha Hae-In. Since he came up with this idea, might as well do it now.

The location would be the gymnasium of the Hunter’s Association.

A rank S Hunter could rent out the gymnasium whenever he felt like it. It was one of the many special privileges afforded to rank S Hunters.

“Got it.”

Cha Hae-In nodded her head. She too wanted to move things along as quickly as possible. They both stood up at the same time as if they made a promise to do that.

‘...Hold on.’

It was then, a certain thought flashed past his brain. He quickly called out to Cha Hae-In as she was about to turn the door handle.

“Cha Hunter-nim, please wait.”

“Pardon?”

“There’s no need to go that way.”

“...?”

Cha Hae-In formed a confused expression.

There was only one door in the conference suite. He obviously wasn’t suggesting that they should jump out of the window, so....

Jin-Woo quickly walked over to her unmoving frame.

“I have a quicker way of getting there, actually.”

“Excuse me?”

“But, I must be touching you if I’m to use this method, so will it be alright with you?”

“Oh.....”

Cha Hae-In recalled what Baek Yun-Ho told her about the situation back then. He said that, as all the members of the Korean assault team found themselves in a life-or-death situation, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo suddenly popped up behind him.

‘Is he trying to show me that skill?’

She quickly swallowed her dry saliva and looked up at Jin-Woo’s face that was now much closer than her initial expectations.

“Sorry about this.”

Jin-Woo lightly embraced her.

He thought that such a light hug wouldn’t mean anything to her since he had carried her unconscious frame around inside the ant tunnel, but Cha Hae-In’s face was rapidly dyeing in a beet-red colour.

However, she didn’t struggle or try to get out of his embrace.

‘...His nice scent.’

While her face was getting progressively redder and redder, Jin-Woo cautiously held her to make sure they wouldn’t get separated and finished getting ready.

‘Okay, all done.’

There was this thing he wanted to confirm. And he wouldn’t find as good an opportunity as this one in the future.

“It might get a little dizzy.”

Well, he felt that the first time, so there.

Cha Hae-In only then wrapped her arms around Jin-Woo and whispered her reply.

“Okay.”

Jin-Woo raised his head up to his front and issued a command in his mind.

‘Shadow Exchange.’

Shururu.....

Two of them soundlessly got sucked into the shadow beneath their feet.

It was right at that moment Yu Jin-Ho opened the door and entered the conference suite. He ran out to the local convenience store to buy some refreshments after thinking that the talk might go on for a bit.

“Please, drink these while you two ch....”

A High Orc Shadow Soldier met Yu Jin-Ho’s gaze, and as if he was feeling a bit sheepish over something, scratched the back of his head.

“....”

Claaank!!

The tray in Yu Jin-Ho’s hand crashed to the floor, and cups of liquid refreshment shattered from the impact.

“W-what the hell?!”

Yu Jin-Ho freaked out grandly and blinked his eyes, but the High Orc soldier was gone without a trace.

‘B-b-but, I definitely....!!’

He rubbed his eyes hard and shook his head to regain his composure. He took another look at his surroundings, but he couldn’t spot a single trace of the monster anywhere.

‘....I guess I’ve been working too hard recently.’

Yup, that must be it, what with seeing a hallucination and all.

Yu Jin-Ho tilted his head and scanned the conference suite one more time, before turning around to find a mop to clean up the mess on the floor. But then....

A thought entered his mind and stopped his feet from moving again.

“Where did hyung-nim and Cha Hae-In Hunter-nim disappear to?”



Chapter 134 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The moment the ground disappeared and they got sucked into the shadow, Jin-Woo looked at Cha Hae-In falling together at the same time.

‘As I thought....’

His expectation was on the money.

He wondered if the skill ‘Shadow Exchange’ worked in this manner while using it a few times in the past, and he was right.

The identity of the skill ‘Shadow Exchange’ was actually a ‘Gate’. That theory was proven correct when Cha Hae-In travelled alongside him through the shadow.

‘The entrance is generated below my feet, and the exit is where the determined coordinates are.’

And those coordinates would be the location of a Shadow Soldier.

Even though there was a limitation of the three-hour-long cooldown time, he was still able to create a Gate with this skill. If he wanted to, then wouldn’t it be possible for him to move to the other side of the planet every three hours? Jin-Woo unconsciously swallowed his saliva.

But, his stunned state lasted only for a brief while longer.

His view covered up by the inky darkness reverted back to normal almost right away. And the two of them found themselves inside the Association’s gymnasium.

The last time he came here, Jin-Woo left behind a shadow just in case he found himself in an urgent need to visit the Association.

Ting! Ting! Ting! Ting!

The overhead lighting system sensed the magic energy from them and the bulbs came on one by one, brightly illuminating the gymnasium’s interior. Cha Hae-In opened her eyes after sensing the brightness through her closed eyelids.

“But, how....?!”

Her brows shot up as she failed to hide her astonishment. They were

already in a familiar place.

She sensed only about one second passing by, yet the surroundings were completely different when she opened her eyes.

‘How is this even possible?!’

She had never heard of such a skill existing in the world. Cha Hae-In looked around in utter amazement before shifting her gaze back to Jin-Woo.

“You....”

She had so, so many things she wanted to ask, but in the end, she couldn’t open her lips to voice any of them.

The first reason for that was because she didn’t even know just where to start her questions, and secondly, their distance was far, far too close for a spot of civilised conversation.

“It’s safe now, so....”

Jin-Woo lightly grasped her wrists and unwrapped her arms around his waist.

“....You don’t have to hold on to me anymore.”

Nod, nod.

Cha Hae-In lightly rubbed her wrists he had grasped and wordlessly nodded her head.

“Okay. Let’s get started.”

Jin-Woo walked out of the corner the High Orc Shadow Soldier was probably hiding in, and strode towards the centre of the gymnasium.

“Alright.”

She too followed behind him only to remember that she left her sword back in her car. Although a weapon was an indispensable tool for her trade, it would be quite rude to visit someone else’s office fully armed, now wouldn’t it?

Cha Hae-In quickly spoke to him.

“I left my weapon back in my car....”

“Oh, you mean that pickaxe?”

“Excuse me?”

“You know, the one you were carrying around back in the rank A dungeon with High Orcs in it.”

Her face reddened as soon as she remembered a small detail she'd been wanting to forget.

"N-no, my weapon is..."

She then spotted Jin-Woo giggling to himself, and belatedly realised that he was teasing her just now.

"..."

Jin-Woo waved his hand after seeing Cha Hae-In's reddened complexion.

"I was just joking with you."

Time to stop kidding around, however.

'Seriously, though. What should I do?'

Even if it was Cha Hae-In, she wouldn't be able to fight against the soldier he was planning to summon out. Of course, he wanted his soldier to win, but that didn't mean he wanted to see her get hurt, either.

"It'll be fine."

Cha Hae-In shifted her gaze towards the storage located within the gymnasium.

"I'm sure there will be a weapon I can borrow in the storage."

'Oho.'

A light gleamed within Jin-Woo's eyes after learning of something new. She walked up to the storage and diagonally swiped her Hunter licence on the electronic lock found on the side of the door.

That prompted the storage door to automatically slide open.

Rows of not-too-shabby-looking spare weapons were displayed inside the storage. Looking into the interior from a bit of distance away, Jin-Woo was inwardly impressed by the preparedness of the Hunter's Association.

'So, there was even stuff like this inside the Association....'

He wondered where all those high taxes Hunters had to fork out over the years ended up, but it looked like they were being put to good use. Cha Hae-In scanned the displayed items before picking up a sword similar in length to the one she'd been using and exited from the storage.

"I'm ready."

"Will that be fine? It's not a sword you've been using before, so wouldn't it feel off in your hands?"

Cha Hae-In shook her head.

“It doesn’t really matter what weapon it is. Monsters don’t care about what weapons Hunters are wielding when they fight us, after all.”

Those were some wise words.

Jin-Woo carried the same opinion as her, so he didn’t argue with her there. At the very least, he found her straightforwardness rather likeable.

‘So, calling out my soldier is next, right?’

As if to prove that she wasn’t joking about being ready, a sharp, focused aura oozed out of her. Against someone like her, any ol’ regular soldier would be sliced up into tiny pieces in no time.

That’s why, Jin-Woo called for the best card he could bring out under the current circumstances.

‘Come out.’

A small portion separated from Jin-Woo’s shadow and moved away a couple of steps from him. Then a black knight rose up from the unmoving shadow.

The jet-black armour and the helm; the red plumage attached to the helm, extending all the way down to his waist. The best sword-wielding Shadow Soldier in his army. It was Igrit.

‘I told her that I’d be summoning the most powerful guy out, but...’

But, he thought that calling out Beru was a bit too much. Before he was turned into a Shadow Soldier, Beru was the terrifying creature that nearly drowned the entirety of Korean team members in the pit of pure terror. Hell, even Cha Hae-In herself almost died from his attack, too.

Jin-Woo couldn’t bring Beru out when considering the potential mental shock she could suffer after seeing him again.

As for Fangs, he might end up destroying the gymnasium, so he was excluded. That’s why he chose Igrit.

‘Yup, at the end of the day, it can only be you.’

Jin-Woo knew he made the right call when looking at the wide, dependable back of Igrit. But then.....

“Mister Seong Jin-Woo.”

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to Cha Hae-In.

“What are the conditions for victory and defeat?”

When he heard her icy voice that was cold enough to instantly freeze the listener's heart, his belief began wavering somewhat. Jin-Woo pondered a bit before making his reply.

“Either my summon is destroyed, or Cha Hunter-nim admits defeat first.”

Nod.

Cha Hae-In briefly nodded her head. Then, unsheathed the sword she got from the storage.

She was only holding a simple, plain magic sword one could buy pretty much anywhere, but even then, the aura oozing out of her was still quite incredible to behold.

‘Yup, she’s definitely strong.’

Jin-Woo could sense it. Her surging aura, after she decided to get serious, was definitely fitting for a woman whose skills were rated as the best even among the rank S Hunters.

Igrit also unsheathed his sword. As a matter of fact, he was now holding a longsword each in his hands. Even then, Jin-Woo couldn't help but think that Igrit would be defeated by her at this rate.

But then.....

‘Wait a sec.... Didn’t she say that it doesn’t really matter what weapon it was, right?’

Jin-Woo recalled what she said just now and a smile floated up on his lips as he asked her for a small favour.

“Can you turn around for a second, please?”

“.....?”

Cha Hae-In tilted her head for a bit, but didn't complain and turned around as he asked. Using that gap, Jin-Woo summoned the 'Demon King's Longsword' out of his Inventory and handed it over to Igrit.

‘Use this.’

By saying that she didn't mind what weapon she used, it could also be interpreted as she didn't mind what weapon her opponent was using.

Having been bestowed a sword straight from his sovereign, Igrit tried to kneel down to express his profound gratitude, but Jin-Woo quickly stopped him.

‘I’m telling you, you don’t have to stand on ceremony all the time, you know?’

If only Iron could learn half of Igrit’s attitude....

In any case, the preparation was done, so Jin-Woo called out to Cha Hae-In again.

“It’s fine now.”

She turned around and spotted Igit now holding a brand new sword that crackled with blue arcs of electricity. Which he clearly wasn’t holding a minute ago.

“.....”

“Will it be fine if we start now?”

Jin-Woo pretended to not notice anything and asked her if she was good to go.

“...Yes.”

Cha Hae-In, having already agreed to do this, could only say yes again with a begrudging expression.

“Okay then, begin.”

Soon after Jin-Woo signalled the beginning, Igrit swung the ‘Demon King’s Longsword’ to activate its passive ability as his opening attack.

Crack!

A strand of lightning flew in a straight line at Cha Hae-In. She flinched for the briefest of brief moments. But then, like an agile cat, she bent her upper body back and evaded the lightning.

Crackle!!

The wall of the gymnasium was scorched jet-black after getting struck by the stray lightning.

Shudder.

Cha Hae-In righted her torso and sent her sharp glare in Jin-Woo’s direction, but he averted his gaze to stare into the distance, still pretending to not notice a thing.

‘.....’

Without saying anything, Cha Hae-In gripped the sword tighter in her hands.

It was right then. Igrit rushed towards her at a frightening pace from her front to heed his Sovereign's order to bring her down. However, she didn't even blink once and also flung herself forward towards her opponent.

The office of the Association President, located on the top floor of the main building.

One could clearly see not just other Association buildings but the surrounding scenery when sitting inside this office.

'Mm?'

The Association President was in the middle of going through a report, but then, his gaze abruptly shifted over to the window. There should have been no one inside the gymnasium, but the lights there came on just now.

Goh Gun-Hui tilted his head slightly, before picking up his phone to speak to his PA.

"Did someone book out the gymnasium today?"

"Is that so?"

Goh Gun-Hui covered the phone's receiver and organised his thoughts for a bit, before speaking to his subordinate again.

"Can you send the CCTV feed from the gymnasium into my office?"

Shortly thereafter, the live feed was displayed on the giant TV occupying the entire wall of his office. And that's when he got to see Seong Jin-Woo and Cha Hae-In hugging each other inside the gymnasium.

"....Keu-hum."

Stunned by what he saw, Goh Gun-Hui hurriedly coughed to clear his throat. He looked over and over again, but it was definitely those two. He then tilted his head again.

'Did those two people have such a relationship?'

But then again, the very first person Hunter Cha Hae-In searched for when she regained consciousness briefly inside the helicopter was none other than Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.

'It seems that I was very slow on the uptake, huh.'

A content smile spread on Goh Gun-Hui's face as he gazed at the two young people on the TV screen.

Both of them requested for their private information to be protected as soon as they got their rank S licences. Even then, there was not one person in this

country who didn't know Cha Hae-In, or for that matter, Seong Jin-Woo.

So, if two such people wished to spend some quiet time together, there would be no better place than the Association's gymnasium after the closing time.

To think, they'd chose a gymnasium as their date venue, quite unlike the youths of today. What a wonderfully wholesome date this was.

Goh Gun-Hui maintained a heartwarming smile and shook his head wryly.

'Yup, being young is indeed wonderful.'

He reached out to the resting phone's receiver and picked it up once more.

"I'm sorry about this, but I want you to switch off all the CCTV feed coming from the gymnasium."

"Just say that today was the maintenance day in the records."

The giant TV screen in the President's office showing the CCTV feed switched off as soon as he ended the call. Goh Gun-Hui took one last look at the gymnasium and returned to perusing the report, a grin still etched on his lips.

But, it was then.

RUMBLE...

The surface of the water in his cup vibrated softly as he sensed a minute tremor coming from the gymnasium's direction.

"Huhuh."

Goh Gun-Hui didn't bother to look at the gymnasium and simply carried on smiling.

'Indeed, being young is the best.'

'This is.....'

Jin-Woo massaged his aching forehead.

It seemed that he had been greatly underestimating Cha Hae-In's actual skills up until now. Igrit's strength had been boosted overall by the 'Demon King's Longsword', but in the end, he couldn't win against her skills.

Right after Igrit's left arm flew away from being cut, Jin-Woo ended this match.

"Stop!"

Even though they would regenerate back to full, he still couldn't stand the

sight of his soldiers getting destroyed.

“Fuu-.”

Cha Hae-In reined in her rough breathing and let out a long sigh. Her opponent must've been tougher than expected, because she was soaked in sweat from head to toe. Her slender, white fingers wiped the droplets of sweat forming on her forehead.

Jin-Woo looked at that with a rueful expression, inwardly accepting his loss today, and called Igrit back.

“It's my loss.”

Shururuk...

Igrit returned back inside his shadow. However, Cha Hae-In spoke directly to him, her hands not letting go of her sword.

“No. Please, this one doesn't count.”

“...?”

What did she even mean by that, out of the blue? Didn't count?

Cha Hae-In explained herself.

“Didn't you say that you'd bring out the most powerful summon?”

Cha Hae-In walked closer and only stopped when she was one step away from Jin-Woo.

“Was that black knight really your strongest summon?”

She wasn't asking him here. No, it sounded as if she was just trying to confirm what she knew already.

Jin-Woo quietly shook his head. As if she was waiting for that, Cha Hae-In immediately carried on.

“Please call out your strongest summon. We agreed to do from that get-go, didn't we?”

“But, you may get injured.”

“It's fine. I wanted to fight it at least one more time, anyway.”

Jin-Woo's eyes widened from her declaration.

“Wait, you knew?”

Nod, nod.

“I saw the video footage.”

Cha Hae-In had watched the raid video starring Jin-Woo several times by now.

The giant monster that made its appearance during the clip – she definitely remembered seeing that monster shooting out the pillar of flames from somewhere.

“That summoned creature, that was the High Orc Shaman, the boss of that rank A dungeon. Am I correct?”

If that was the case, then the mutated ant monster he hunted down this time would also have become his summoned creature, as well. From the word go, she chose to go through the test while thinking of fighting that mutated ant.

‘There is no meaning in a victory like this.’

She wanted to defeat the summoned creature that used the powers of the mutated ant monster, and thereby get Jin-Woo to acknowledge her true value.

He pondered for a little bit, before nodding his head.

‘Beru’.

Right away, a Shadow Soldier enshrouded in jet-black smoke rose up behind Jin-Woo. Cha Hae-In instinctively jumped back and created some distance as soon as she saw Beru’s entrance.

Back then or now, that guy carried a truly horrendous aura.

Jin-Woo got genuinely worried when all colour drained out of her face and quickly asked her.

“Will this really be fine?”

Even if Beru had gotten weaker compared to when he was alive, this guy was originally a killing weapon born solely for the purpose of eliminating Hunters.

Cha Hae-In’s lips were squeezed shut in a straight line, as she weightily nodded her head.

Beru had been staring at her quietly for a while, before lowering his head to whisper a question to Jin-Woo.

‘Oh my king. How should I deal with this female?’

Cha Hae-In must’ve been unable to hear what Beru was saying, because she showed no particular reaction at all.

‘Defeat her without injuring her.’

‘It shall be done.’

The former king of the ants and the current Shadow Soldier turned towards the deeply tense female warrior.

Gulp.

Cha Hae-In swallowed her dry saliva. She felt goosebumps break out on her skin from the enormous amount of magic energy emitted by her opponent.

‘Mister Seong Jin-Woo fought against a creature like this and won??’

Her eyes that showed no signs of hesitation while fighting against Igrit were now trembling greatly. Beru was done with the necessary preparation to follow his sovereign’s order, and suddenly, spat out a mighty screech.

Kiiiiiaahhk!!

Blade-like claws began extending out from the ends of Beru’s fingers, so Jin-Woo standing behind him sent over an unhappy glare.

‘...Retract the claws.’

The high-spirited Beru immediately retracted his claws. Jin-Woo drilled one more instruction into his soldier’s head.

‘If you injure that woman, it won’t be nice for you, either. Got that?’

‘I shall follow your will.’

Only after hearing that definite answer from Beru did Jin-Woo declare the start of the second bout.

“Begin!”



Chapter 135 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Beru was the first to make his move. His Sovereign had given him only one order.

‘Defeat the enemy without harming her.’

Beru once stood at the peak of his species, and he knew what the best method to perfectly fulfil that order was. And that would be this: Make the opponent lose her will to fight by imprinting the clear gap in power between them in her mind.

Paht!

Beru disappeared from Cha Hae-In’s view the moment he moved, before reappearing right in front of her nose even before she had the chance to realise it.

“...!!”

Cha Hae-In’s animal-like instinct kicked in even as the astonishment at Beru’s speed nearly overwhelmed her, and she swung her sword at her opponent. She followed that up with dozens more.

However, Beru stood in the spot and evaded all of her attacks without taking a single step.

It was a precise movement that eliminated all necessary motion. He was so bloody quick that afterimages were left behind in his wake. This was the display of an unbridgeable gap in their power levels.

‘This is impossible!’

Cha Hae-In’s eyes shook hard every time she missed.

‘It can dodge all my attacks at such a close distance without moving its legs once?’

Just one more time!

She took aim at the neck of her opponent and took a swing, but the creature lightly evaded it by leaning back slightly. No matter where she attacked from, or how she changed her attacks, her opponent easily dodged them all.

‘How can this be....?!’

This thing wasn't even alive anymore. This thing was a summon borrowing the powers of the dead monster, so how could it still be this strong?

And also....

'Mister Seong Jin-Woo, who can freely control such a summon, just what.....'

Cha Hae-In's movements became a tad dull from the vague fear invading her, and Beru seized upon this opportunity to smack her incoming sword away with the back of his hand. And then, pressed his face closer to hers.

Cha Hae-In froze up on the spot as the stench of death blew right into her face.

'This is the end.'

She inadvertently gasped out the moment those huge mandibles filled up her view.

"Ah!"

However, the creature didn't crush her head by snapping shut its maws but instead, chose to screech out loudly right in front of her face.

"Kiiiiieeehhk!!"

She was knocked away ungainly from the screech containing his magical energy.

"Kyahk!"

Jin-Woo grimaced while watching that. Indeed, there was no way he'd start enjoying the sight of someone else getting knocked around one-sidedly like this.

However, she stood back up again and fixed the grip on the sword as if to show that she wasn't giving up at all. Jin-Woo tilted his head.

'What is she trying to do?'

The Cha Hae-In he knew wasn't a low-class Hunter who didn't want to accept the difference between her and her opponent even after confirming the truth with her own eyes.

'And she's definitely not reckless enough to keep attacking when she knows of the gap, too.'

In that case, could she still be in possession of one more card up her sleeve?

'Whatever it is, I hope she's not making an incorrect call.'

Jin-Woo was mentally linked with Beru, so he could feel how much his soldier was suppressing its killing intent at the moment. On the other hand, Cha Ha-In's will remained unyielding, even though she found herself in an absolutely disadvantageous position.

He was getting a bad premonition here. Jin-Woo's expression became even more serious as he watched the two of them.

‘.....?’

On the hand, Beru had failed to understand Cha Ha-In's decision.

He had displayed their overwhelming gap in power several times by now. So, why hadn't she stop her challenges yet?

The former king of ants, a being who lorded over others at the apex of the food chain, was beginning to get displeased by the human female's stubbornness. The basis of his anger stemmed from the past memory of him being a ruler.

‘How dare.....’

The moment Beru made up his mind, he arrived before Cha Hae-In in the blink of an eye. He then pressed his face closer to glare straight into her eyes.

Any lifeform still breathing would've immediately realised who was the predator and the prey in this situation just from their gazes meeting like this. It would be a warning from one's primal instinct.

Beru planned to awaken that instinct of his opponent and make her lose her will to fight in that manner, but unfortunately, his ploy wasn't as effective as he thought.

Just as Jin-Woo had predicted, Cha Hae-In still held one last trump card to fall back on.

The skill, ‘Sword Dance’, one she was most proficient in wielding. Her movements sped up as if she was performing a deadly dance, and the tip of her sword drew splendid arcs in the air.

Paht! Paht! Paht!

Too bad....

Beru used his claws to easily defend against all those smoothly flowing attacks that had no interruptions in between. At the end of the barrage, his expression crumpled unsightly.

‘No more playing around.’

Beru snatched the sword flying at him with his bare hand and crushed it.

Kwajeeck!!

She only had half a sword left, but rather than falling into despair, her glare became icy cold, instead.

'I have only one last chance!'

Every single drop of magic energy in her was poured into the broken sword to activate her skill, 'Blade of Light'.

The magic energy expenditure for this skill was far too great and she could only use it as the final hurrah. And for the first time during this fight, she revealed it in its full glory.

The blade of light shone brilliantly.

Beru had lowered his guard for a moment after breaking her sword, and she used that opening to jump into his front and stabbed the blade of light forward.

Jin-Woo's eyes widened.

'Nooo!'

Of course, he wasn't worried about Beru. Utterly disregarding his worries, the blade glowing in golden light pierced deeply into Beru's tummy.

"Kiiieehhk-!!"

In that brief moment, Beru's mind spun quickly.

'This woman is an enemy.'

It'd not be a problem for him to die. However, if he fell here, then this woman's sword would point towards his Sovereign next.

It was then.

An instinct buried deep within all Shadow Soldiers' psyche, one designed to activate in times of great distress and override everything else, wiggled back into life.

In that moment, inside of Beru's head blanked out into a 'reset' state and the order Jin-Woo gave him, 'defeat the enemy without harming her' was wiped away completely.

Beru transformed into a terrifying monster in order to protect Jin-Woo. His body ballooned up to a giant proportions. His mandibles split wide open as he was getting ready to chew on steel, and finally, his claws extended out to resemble a group of sharp blades!

"Stop!!"

Beru finished getting ready to rip apart his owner's enemy, and swung all ten of his claws and their sharp edges at his target.

Swish-!!

Just before all ten blades reached Cha Hae-In....

Grab!

Jin-Woo managed to make it just in time.

"...I told you to stop, didn't I?"

Jin-Woo stopped both sets of Beru's claws with his bare hands and began glaring at his soldier. Beru met that enraged glare and began shuddering. He quickly leapt back and, while not even bothering to pull that sword of light from his midriff, prostrated flat on the ground and begged for forgiveness.

"Oh, oh my king. Mercy...."

Jin-Woo knew what this guy was thinking of the moment he was about to act. Hell, the singular thought of 'Protect the Sovereign' was ringing really loud inside his head, too.

'.....'

Jin-Woo glared at Beru for a little while, before shifting his gaze away.

Plop.

Cha Hae-In was completely spent and, unable to stand any longer, plopped down to the ground. She knew that she just came face to face with death again during that brief moment.

"Are you alright?"

Jin-Woo walked closer. She was trying to push herself back up, but gave up in the end and, while keeping her gaze rooted to the floor, nodded her head.

"I am fine."

'Fine, my foot.'

Jin-Woo supported her up and asked.

"Why were you pushing yourself that hard? I mean, you shouldn't have any reasons to enter my Guild while putting yourself through a wringer like this, right?"

"....."

Indeed, this was supposed to be a simple test. More than that, this was a 'test' he cooked up to reject her tactfully. But, to think, she'd be this obsessed

about winning, even to the extent of using such a dangerous skill, too.

This couldn't be chalked up to her desire to win at all costs. That was why....

“Could it be.....”

...Jin-Woo cautiously asked her, so as to not damage her ego.

“Are you perhaps interested in me?”

“Excuse me??”

Cha Hae-In got flustered and formed a dazed expression of someone getting hit in the back of her head. Jin-Woo tilted his head.

‘That wasn’t it, either?’

But then, Cha Hae-In carefully reorganised her thoughts and corrected her answer.

“...Yes, I think so.”

Within the United States' Hunter Bureau.

The director was feeling rather unhappy after receiving the news of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's recruitment ending in failure. Instead of getting a report, he summoned the deputy director to the conference chamber.

The deputy director brought Madam Selner with him.

“Explain what happened back there.”

The director asked even before they had the chance to sit down. This was the first time since the founding of the Hunter Bureau that their scouting offer, accompanied by Madam Selner no less, had been rejected by the subject.

The deputy stood up with a darkened expression and lowered his head.

“I’m truly sorry, sir.”

“I didn’t call you here for your apologies, Michael.”

The director pressed a certain button, and all the glass walls were covered up and the exit was locked tight. The interior had become perfectly soundproof.

In order to prevent the leakage of information, all matters pertaining to Madam Selner were never discussed over the phone or through emails. That was why the director was still unaware of what went down in South Korea until now.

“Now, please explain to me what happened.”

The deputy director glanced at Madam Selner for a moment or two. She slowly nodded her head, and only then did the deputy open his tightly-shut lips once more.

“Madam Selner was able to ‘observe’ Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

“What was the result?”

The director knew how her power operated, so the result of her ‘observation’ was as important as the result of the ‘recruitment’ itself.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is....”

The deputy licked his dried-up lips from tension and continued on.

“....Is apparently one of the ‘kings’.”

“What?!”

The director jumped up from his seat.

Of all the powerful Hunters she had met over the years, she described only three people as ‘kings’. And all three of them were powerful enough to shake the world by the scruff of its neck, too.

Quite literally, they were the zenith of Hunters! And the man named Seong Jin-Woo had to be included in that list now, as well.

The director shifted his gaze over to Madam Selner and asked her.

“Does that mean Hunter Seong Jin-Woo possesses the level of power equal to other Special Authority-rank Hunters?”

Strangely enough, she promptly shook her head.

“Excuse me?”

Frowns formed on the director’s forehead.

The deputy could amply understand how his boss must be feeling right about now. He, too, had displayed a similar reaction back when he heard the exact same answer, after all.

Madam Selner let out a long sigh.

“Looks like... I’ll have to explain myself a little.”

Her talk began from those words.

“First of all.... I’ll assume that both of you know just what kind of an ability I possess.”

The director and his deputy both nodded their heads simultaneously. The former spoke first.

“You said that the Awakened are people connected to the powers of the ‘other side’.”

By staring into the eyes of the Awakened, Madam Selner could sense the ‘passageway’ connecting said Awakened to the other side.

However, she said that there were certain Awakened who were receiving so much incredible power from the ‘other side’ that it ends up resembling a blinding flood of light, instead.

These were precisely the ‘kings’ she talked about.

“So, what is different about Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, then?”

“He doesn’t have a passageway.”

Madam shivered in fear again.

“When I looked into his eyes, the darkness within him was staring back at me. Oh, my god. He was the darkness itself.”

The deputy director refuted this immediately.

“But, he has helped out a lot of people during his tenure as a Hunter, and I can’t see him as someone as evil as you describe him to be....”

If Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was indeed a vicious, evil individual, he’d have immediately killed the two agents who pointed guns at him where they stood. However, he just let that slide without caring too much about it.

Madam shook her head.

“I wasn’t talking about whether Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was a good or evil man, deputy director.”

The light shining in her eyes was determined.

“No, I’m talking about the origin of his power.”

The director had been listening to her with his hands pressed below his chin until then, but he finally raised his voice.

“There’s no mistaking that he’s a powerful Hunter, yes?”

Madam nodded her head.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, he’s not borrowing someone else’s power. He only relies on the power residing within him, so he’s not restricted by the passageway. Which means.....”

“There’s no limit to his power.....”

The deputy director muttered absently before breaking into an abrupt

shudder. He couldn't even begin to imagine how absurd the level of power gushing out without any limit could potentially be.

The director fell into a deep thought after he heard both of his guests. And a short while later, he nodded his head, evidently having made his mind up over something.

“Madam, thank you for your hard work.”

After seeing Madam Selner off, the director headed down to the underground floors of the Hunter Bureau with his deputy in tow.

“Director, where are we going?”

“Ninth basement floor.”

“Isn't that where we store old records?”

“We have something else secured there besides the records.”

The director watched as the number on the elevator's display panel steadily decrease and continued on.

“If we can't rely on Madam Selner's power, then we should use a different method to bring him in.”

That man was still so young. And he possessed unfathomable power.

If Hunter Seong Jin-Woo indeed possessed incredible power just as Madam Selner had eluded to, then it no longer mattered whether that was the power of light or the power of darkness.

A knife you picked up to protect yourself would look like a deadly weapon from someone else's perspective. And the director wanted to possess the knife called Seong Jin-Woo.

They arrived at their destination, and while unlocking a series of electronic door locks, steadily walked deeper into the ninth underground floor. A few Bureau agents greeted them as they walked past, but the director didn't even spare a single glance.

“Do you still recall the very first rank S Gate ever to appear?”

“Of course.”

How could anyone forget the worst dungeon break in history that destroyed a portion of the Western United States?

The American government summoned in the world's most powerful Hunters with an unbelievably huge amount of reward on offer, and eventually, they succeeded in killing the boss-level monster that emerged from that rank

S Gate.

However, only five survived that encounter. Meaning, just a single monster managed to kill dozens of the best Hunters out there. Without their sacrifice, the nation of the United States of America might have ceased to exist altogether.

That was why the American government bestowed the five remaining saviours the rights equalling that of the country itself, and that's where the term 'Special Authority-rank' originated from.

The director mouthed the name of the monster that brought upon one of the worst tragedies in the history of mankind.

“Kamish the Dragon...”

Didn't the Mage-type Hunters say that 'Kamish' meant an undying flame?

They entered the deepest room on the floor, and the director opened the safe found in there. And that's when a single Rune Stone, under a heavy guard and being monitored constantly, revealed itself.

The deputy director flinched in surprise.

“In that case, could that thing be....?”

“Your guess is correct.”

The director placed his hand on top of the reinforced glass shielding the Rune Stone and formed a smile.

“This Rune Stone came out from that Kamish's corpse.”

Two of the Special Authority-rank Hunters settled down in the US after the end of the Kamish raid. In a way, they were the gifts that Kamish managed to deliver to the US.

To avoid another calamity like this, the Americans established the Hunter Bureau and focused all their might on improving the strengths of the Hunters. Around eight years passed by since then.

Simply because no Mage-type Hunters were among the surviving Special Authority-rank Hunters, Kamish's Rune Stone was tucked away in this cold underground storage beneath the Hunter Bureau, waiting for a new owner to come along.

The director formed a meaningful smile as he peered into the glass case.

“Kamish will present us with yet another invaluable gift to our beautiful country very soon.”



Chapter 136 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Hyung-nim, I heard that it might be difficult for us to get the permit for the Gate that appeared yesterday.”

The first thing that the chairman of the Knight Order Guild, Park Jong-Su, did after arriving for work was to harden his expression.

“What was that?”

The Vice-Chair Jeong Yun-Tae hurriedly explained himself.

“The result from the Association folks measuring that thing apparently came out higher than they expected.”

“What, it’s a rank S?!”

“No, not that. They say it’s a rank A, but right at the top of the scale.”

“Gimme a freaking break, man. Really now.”

If it was a rank S Gate, then they could have given up on it without hesitation. The Knight Order Guild didn’t have a single rank S Hunter in their midst, so it wouldn’t make much sense for them to attempt clearing a rank S Gate, after all.

Just like back in the Jeju Island raid, the Association would have to summon every rank S Hunters in the country just to deal with such a Gate.

However, the story would change drastically if the magic energy emission measurement came out to be rank ‘A’. The Knight Order Guild would be ridiculed for being unable to deal with a rank A Gate, even though they were supposed to be one of the five major Guilds in South Korea.

Their already thinning presence could become even more invisible at this rate.

“Hyung-nim, what will you do?”

“Not sure yet.”

“If we don’t get involved, then the folks from the Shining Star would definitely show up....”

The Shining Star Guild from the district of Honam. Fine blood vessels bulged within Park Jong-Su’s eyes when he heard that name.

“You want to gift that big Gate hovering right in front of our house to the hands of Mah Dong-Wook?!”

“No, I’m just saying, hyung-nim.”

“I won’t let that happen, even over my dead body.”

“Then, you wanna take it on, hyung-nim?”

The previously-agitated Park Jong-Su suddenly closed his mouth shut.

His reaction was obvious, though. Just one word from him would decide the fate of not just him, but the rest of the raid team members, as well. Even if he was agitated, he shouldn’t mutter whatever he felt like.

A migraine crept into Park Jong-Su’s head.

‘The rank A Hunters in my Guild can stand toe to toe with the rank As from other large Guilds.’

No, if one were to consider the number or the overall quality of the rank As in the Knight Order’s roster, then his outfit easily equalled the best Guild in South Korea, the Hunters.

The only issue was to do with the lack of rank S Hunters.

Because they didn’t have any rank S Hunters in their roster, the Knight Order was in real danger of being kicked out of the so-called five major Guild of South Korea.

For the same reason, the elites of Knight Order were more than good enough to deal with regular rank A Gates. However, if it was a Gate measured to be at the top end of the rank A spectrum, then as they didn’t have a rank S Hunter, the Knight Order had to risk the lives of their raid team members when attempting to clear it.

Even though it was rated nominally at rank A, the difficulty of clearing such a dungeon would be a lot closer to a rank S in reality. The Hunter’s Association also knew of the dangers, and that was why they hadn’t decided on whether to issue the raid permit or not to the Knight Order.

‘.....’

As Park Jong-Su’s silent deliberation grew lengthier, Jeong Yun-Tae cautiously voiced his opinion to his boss.

“Hyung-nim. If that thing turns out to be a Red Gate, then we’ll all die for sure.”

“I’m sure we will.”

It was already tough trying to deal with the highest-rated rank A Gate, but if it were to morph into a dang Red Gate? Even thinking about that horrified him.

If lady luck was on their side, half of the team would survive. If not, the whole of the raid team, including himself, would perish inside the dungeon.

‘If I think about it objectively, then I should give up on this one.’

But then again, he should consider the fate of the Knight Order as good as finished if the story of them giving up on a rank A Gate gets around. Just which newbie would want to join a Guild that didn’t have a single rank S Hunter, and couldn’t even deal with a rank A Gate?

“In that case, hyung-nim, how about forming an alliance with another Guild?”

Park Jong-Su shook his head.

“Who’d wanna form an alliance with us when they already know we can’t go at it alone and need help?”

Especially when they monopolise everything a rank A Gate could offer if the Knight Order was removed from the picture altogether? And, even if they formed an alliance, it’d prove to be problematic, still.

‘It’s the same as us walking around advertising our incompetence.’

Deep frowns of worry drew upon their faces. It was then.

“If allying with another Guild is a problem, then how about working with a freelancer?”

The two men’s heads snapped in unison towards the direction of the woman’s voice, coming from their side. It was from the rank A Healer charged with mending the elite raid team, Jeong Ye-Rim.

A Healer was given a lot of say in the matters of a raid. And if that Healer just so happened to be a rank A possessing various skills, then there was no need to even mention that.

However, as the fate of the Knight Order Guild was hanging in the balance here, Park Jong-Su couldn’t easily hide his troubled expression.

“We want to go inside the hardest rank A Gate, so how could a single freelancer help...”

But then, Park Jong-Su stopped his words right there.

‘Ah!!’

Because, he just remembered a certain someone in the middle of his own speech. A man capable of sweeping away rank S monsters all alone, never mind rank As!

Unable to suppress his excitement anymore, Park Jong-Su shot up from his seat.

‘If Mister Seong Jin-Woo joins us, then....!’

That man easily brushed off a monster that the combined might of the Korean rank S Hunters couldn’t do anything about. If he chose to participate, then the safety of the raid team members was as good as 100% guaranteed. And, was that all?

They could also avoid the ignominy of having to borrow another Guild’s power to clear a rank A Gate, too.

‘On the contrary, the fame of the Knight Order would increase, instead.’

Allying with the best Hunter in the country to complete a raid would not negatively affect the Guild in any shape or form.

The guaranteed safety of the team members, as well as a boost to the honour of the Knight Order Guild itself – this was a wonderful way to catch two birds with one stone.

Feeling really excited now, Park Jong-Su spoke with an eager voice.

“What is Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim doing right now?”

Both Jeong Ye-Rim, who originally came up with the idea, and Jeong Yun-Tae quietly listening from the side, shook their heads.

“Since he cleared the Gate appearing in the middle of the road not too long ago, he’s gone pretty quiet nowadays.”

Jeong Yun-Tae recalled seeing Seong Jin-Woo on one of the TV news broadcasts recently, and pulled his phone out.

“Should I find out the contact number for Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, hyung-nim?”

“No, don’t bother. Put your phone down.”

“Eh?”

“Do you think you should try to solve something this important over a phone call? No, we gotta meet up with him and discuss it face to face.”

“Aha!”

Jeong Yun-Tae agreed with that opinion immediately, and Park Jong-Su

continued on with a smile.

“Let’s go up north.”

That evening.

Cha Hae-In was lying on her bed with sheets pulled right up over her head. But she was writhing around in great distress at the moment.

‘Why did I go and say, I think so?! Just why!!’

Wasn’t that the exact same thing as confessing?!

She wildly kicked the sheets away, and finally stopped moving only after a thought popped up into her head out of the blue.

‘Then.....’

How was she to decipher Mister Seong Jin-Woo’s reply, then?

[“In that case, isn’t there a better way than to join my Guild?”]

She wanted to quickly escape from that situation and told him that she’d think about it before leaving in a hurry, but simply from recalling that moment caused such distress that her thought process ground to a complete halt almost immediately.

Blush.

Her face blushed from the memories she remembered yet again.

Back when she looked into the maddened eyes of the enlarged summoned creature, she predicted her unavoidable death. She felt absolute terror. This was the fate of the prey.

Cha Hae-In even squeezed her eyes shut as ten claws descended upon her from both sides. But, then....

She felt the warmth coming from her back. At the same time, a familiar scent gently wrapped all around her.

‘Ah....’

Cha Hae-In cautiously opened her eyes and looked behind her. And she found Jin-Woo standing there, busy glaring with angry eyes at the summoned creature while stopping the claws with his bare hands.

It was true that her heart skipped a beat in that moment.

But then....

[“Are you perhaps interested in me?”]

Wasn’t it patently unfair to ask a question like that in that sort of a

situation?!

'No, wait.'

Cha Hae-In shook her head hard as if to shake off all the distracting thoughts. Even if he asked her like that, she shouldn't have answered him truthfully.

'He might start seeing me as a strange person, after all.'

Even though she knew she shouldn't, her lips parted on their own.

Maybe because her mind felt more relaxed when she was around Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, she ended up revealing a side to him that she always kept hidden. It was as if she wasn't herself anymore.

'...As if I wasn't myself?'

Those words sounded rather familiar for some reason.

Where could it have been from? She could vaguely remember hearing a similar expression from somewhere.

It was then – a piece of memory once erased from her mind brushed past her brain.

Cha Hae-In quickly bolted upright.

'.....!!'

She finally recalled that voice, a voice that seemed to slowly fade away to the other side, just like a waking dream. Even though it couldn't have been that long ago.

'I, I...'

Cha Hae-In did her very best to remember the contents of the voice as well as the owner of it. The full scope of the memory, blurry and indistinct as if a thick veil of fog was covering it, slowly regained its former glory.

'...I met with Hunter Min Byung-Gu.'

Back when she lost her consciousness and was being dragged into the endless void, Hunter Min Byung-Gu appeared out of nowhere and pulled her back by her wrist. She felt momentarily displeased from her peaceful rest being interrupted back then.

She remembered being puzzled by the black armour covering the entirety of Hunter Min Byung-Gu. Only his face was visible outwardly.

Even that face seemed quite sad for some reason, which was unlike his usual self.

As the memories of those moments slowly crept back into her mind, Cha Hae-In felt a chill run down her spine.

Hunter Min Byung-Gu spoke to her, his expression barely holding back his tears.

‘To Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, what...?’

After ending the shower, Jin-Woo stood before the bathroom window.

‘Hmm....’

He sure looked okay from where he was standing, but....

But, to think that he was so good looking that a beauty like Cha Hae-In felt enough interest to try switching Guilds!

‘Am I really that good looking?’

Jin-Woo peered deeper into the mirror. And a smirk leaked out of his mouth. He wasn’t planning to drown in narcissism even if no one told him to.

He was confident of only one thing about himself, and that would be....

...That would be his taut muscles, getting progressively firmer through repeated daily quest routines, as well as his height that suddenly grew up much higher than before, probably due to the influence of the System. That was about it. Meaning, all he had was his body and not much else.

As for his face.... Well, minus his sharper than normal eyes, wouldn’t it be on the level of an average man commonly seen on the streets?

It was at this point that he noticed something.

‘Hold on.’

Jin-Woo’s expression became serious as he stared into the mirror. He leaned his head slightly to the side, and took an even closer look than before. The Jin-Woo of the mirror’s reflection and the Jin-Woo of reality stared at each other for a long while.

‘Uh?’

A strange light flickered in Jin-Woo’s eyes. His gaze swept all over his face. And as he thought...

He really did change.

Those small scars, spots and nicks that couldn’t be seen normally and needed to be looked at really close, had all disappeared from his face even before he had time to notice it.

‘Is this because of the ‘Will to Recover’ buff?’

One of the buff effects he got as the reward for becoming a Player said that ‘all his damaged body parts would be recovered back to their original state’.

This buff even managed to regenerate the leg that got cut off by one of the stone statues, too. So, it wouldn’t be so strange for those little skin damages to be healed completely, as well. However, what really came across as mystifying was....

‘...I think I’ve actually grown younger?’

He was originally in the middle of his twenties. But the him in the mirror looked two, three years younger, in his early twenties. Now that was a surprising thing.

The magical energy apparently could delay the ageing process of the Awakened to a certain degree, so could this be a similar effect to that?

‘Gimme a break....’

Jin-Woo thought that it was a funny notion for a grown man to stare at himself in the mirror like this, so he decided to leave the bathroom. With excellent timing, his younger sister also emerged from her bedroom, and the siblings got to have a brief reunion in the living room.

Jin-Woo grinned and called out to Jin-Ah.

“Hey, sis?”

“Ng?”

“How do I look to you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like, my appeal as a man.”

“Huh??”

Jin-Ah furrowed her brows.

“And where did you find your baseless confidence from? Because, you’re still the same stay-at-home oppa in my eyes, you know?”

“Alright, thanks for that.”

Jin-Woo grinned and pinched her cheek lightly, and she too threw a rather sharp kick to his shin as a retaliation. Of course, the one jumping around in pain was Jin-Ah.

“You forgot what kind of a person your oppa was? Can you even study

properly with that head of yours?”

“What was that?”

Jin-Ah pouted and narrowed her eyes at him.

“I was ranked first place in the mock test in the entire school, I’ll have you know.”

Jin-Woo really enjoyed his sister’s reaction and had a hard time swallowing back his laughter.

One of the best things about having your family around was that, even if you changed, they still treated you the same with exactly the same attitude as before.

Jin-Woo used the towel to rub his wet hair and walked past Jin-Ah.

“Work hard.”

“You too, oppa.”

Just before he slipped into his room, though, he remembered something and looked behind him.

“Ah, right. I’m thinking of creating a Guild soon.”

“Ohhh!”

Jin-Ah’s expression brightly and her eyes sparkled brilliantly as well.

“Oppa, are you going to be called a ‘chairman’ from now on, too?”

“If it all works out.”

“What’s the name of the Guild?”

“That’s what I wanted to hear your opinion on.”

“Oh! What is it? What is it??”

Jin-Woo cautiously asked his little sister busy looking at him with eyes full of expectations.

“What do you think of ‘Solo Play’ Guild?”



Chapter 137 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“HUH?”

The answer sounded the same but its ‘nuance’ was rather a lot different than the one that came before. If she was kidding around just now, then she was dead serious this time.

“What’s wrong? You think it’s weird?”

“.....Oppa, why are you naming your Guild like that?”

“Because I like moving around solo.”

“It does sound like you, but still, isn’t it a bit strange to name your Guild like that?”

“Why?”

“Isn’t your ability summoning out those black-armoured soldiers?”

“Yeah.”

“So, if you get technical about it, you aren’t fighting alone, right?”

Now that he heard her opinion, that made some sense. Jin-Woo nodded his head.

‘I may think of it as just another one of my skills but it won’t look that way to other people, is that it?’

Indeed, she had a point there.

This Guild might end up accompanying him for the rest of his life, so he wanted to give it a name that best represented who he was. And that’s why he went with ‘Solo Play’, but now....

‘If the true meaning doesn’t come across all that well, it’ll be useless.’

What could be another term that could describe him the best?

Jin-Woo asked his sister’s opinion again.

“How about ‘Ah-Jin’ Guild?”

“Ahjin?”

Jin-Ah mouthed the name for a bit, before asking him back with a smile.

“I kinda like it, cuz it sounds like my name but flipped around. But, what does it even mean?”

“Ah (我) means ‘myself’ and Jin (進) means ‘moving forward’.”

Meaning, only he could tread on this road. And it was a name he wanted to give to the Guild that would grow alongside him.

“Combine them together, and you get the meaning of ‘I shall progress forward’. That’s Ah-Jin (我進).”

“Ohh...”

Jin-Ah came up with the best praise she could think of.

“You know, that doesn’t sound bad at all.”

day.

Jin-Woo went to the office armed with the new Guild name.

“Hey. It’s about the Guild’s name....”

Yu Jin-Ho had been in the office since early morning, working. When he heard the new name from Jin-Woo, a brilliant smile formed on his face.

“That is an excellent name, hyung-nim!!”

Didn’t they say that a swan floating elegantly on water was kicking furiously under the surface? Yu Jin-Ho had been feeling as desperate as that old saying.

‘Whatever it is, everything will be fine as long as it’s not Solo Play.’

He imagined ‘it’ so, so many times already. And that would be him introducing himself as ‘Hello, I’m Yu Jin-Ho, Vice-Chairman of the Solo Play Guild’.

That seriously tormented him.

He couldn’t be sure of why, but a corner of his heart ached every time he imagined himself saying those words. However, how could he dare to rebel against a name that hyung-nim had worked so hard to come up with?

He resigned himself to that fate but then, a heaven-sent opportunity came knocking in his way!

“Hyung-nim, let’s go with that as our Guild’s name!”

Jin-Woo made his decision after receiving his partner’s genuine consent this time.

“Okay, so we decided on the Guild’s name, finally.”

Yu Jin-Ho began crying out in elation inwardly after hearing Jin-Woo make that declaration. Meanwhile, the latter rubbed his chin and muttered out.

“The remaining issue is the last founding member slot, isn’t it?”

“Oh, that. Hyung-nim?”

“Yeah?”

“What happened to Cha Hae-In Hunter-nim yesterday?”

“I don’t think it’ll work out with Hunter Cha. She’s not exactly who I’ve been looking for.”

‘Keok?!’

Yu Jin-Ho hastily swallowed a shocked gasp. He expected his hyung-nim to hold a high standard, but to think that he’d not be satisfied with a Hunter on Cha Hae-In’s level!

Hunter Cha Hae-In was a rank S, she was still very young, her records were excellent, and to top them all off, she was beautiful as well. No matter from which angle, she was pretty much perfect. At least, from the perspective of an ‘average’ joe, that was.

However, would the word ‘average’ even apply to his hyung-nim?

‘I mean, he almost swept away all the rank S monsters by himself in the first public raid he participated in as a rank S, after all.’

It’d be oh-so-obvious that ‘regular’ rank S Hunters wouldn’t even be able to catch his attention. But, if that was the case then just what kind of a Hunter would satisfy hyung-nim’s strict judging criteria?

It felt as if the hundreds of applications this yet-to-be-named Guild had received recently all due to the name of ‘Seong Jin-Woo’ were about to be thrown into a trash heap now.

‘But, I don’t think anyone will be better than Hunter Cha Hae-In among the rest of the applicants, though....’

Yu Jin-Ho was suddenly beset with worry that the Guild might never get to open its door at this rate, and he cautiously asked Jin-Woo.

“Excuse me, hyung-nim. What kind of a person are you looking for, anyway?”

“Someone with a Hunter licence who doesn’t care much about the Guild’s activity but we can still place our trust in.”

“Uh....?”

Yu Jin-Ho thought up of a person meeting that criteria perfectly right away.

‘Isn’t that....’

It was then.

Knock, knock.

Someone knocked on the office’s entrance.

“Who is it?”

Yu Jin-Ho stood up from his seat and opened the door. And he found two unfamiliar men standing there looking somewhat awkward and all.

They were none other than Chairman Park Jong-Su and his deputy, Jeong Yun-Tae of the Knight Order Guild, who rushed up to Seoul to have a chat with Jin-Woo.

Park Jong-Su recognised Jin-Woo first and formed a bright smile.

“Oh! You’re here.”

Jin-Woo got up from his seat and asked them.

“Who are you?”

“Ah, where are my manners?”

Park Jong-Su hurriedly walked up closer and extended his hand out for a gentlemanly handshake.

“I’m Park Jong-Su, the Master of the Knight Order.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head in acceptance. Indeed, he thought he had seen this man’s face from somewhere before. Even if he wasn’t all that interested, he’d still recognise a Master of one of the five major Guilds in South Korea. Such a guy would constantly pop up in news and in television shows, after all.

However, the Knight Order was a major Guild based in the city of Busan, so....

After that brief introduction, Jin-Woo could only tilt his head in confusion.

“By the way, what brings the representatives from the Knight Order to Seoul like this, if I may ask?”

“Ahh, the thing is....”

Park Jong-Su hesitated slightly before exchanging a couple of glances with Jeong Yun-Tae. With some difficulty, he opened his mouth.

“We got assigned a pretty big fish among the rank A Gates, and....”

Hesitation disappeared from his eyes almost immediately as he carried on.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, you won’t regret it from hearing us out, that much I assure you. Would you mind taking some time out of your day and listen to what I have to say?”

[Citizens cowering in fear at the super-large Gate appearing before the Gwang-An-ri’s coastline....]

[The Hunter’s Association, still deliberating on the raid permit.]

[Will the Knight Order Guild give up on the raid of Gwang-An-ri’s Gate?]

[Will the nightmare of Jeju Island repeat itself?]

Park Jong-Su picked one out of the many online news articles and then, played the video clip embedded in it.

The video footage, obviously taken by a civilian, contained the crowd’s scared voices as its BGM. But, that was understandable – the Gate in the video was just nonsensically too large. It was taller than a ten-story building, even.

This particular Gate was so big that it managed to terrify even those citizens who were now pretty much numbed by the smaller Gates popping up almost everywhere without warning these days.

“The size of a Gate and its ranking don’t always line up, but....”

Park Jong-Su ended the video playback and further explained himself.

“As befitting its nonsensical size, it’s also apparently busy dumping out a massive amount of magic energy as well.”

Jin-Woo’s eyes began gleaming from this rather interesting piece of news.

“Is it a rank S?”

“We’ve been told that it hasn’t reached the rank of ‘unable to measure’, but just below the threshold, apparently. It’s supposed to be the largest Gate to ever appear in Busan.”

Meaning, although it was nominally a rank A, it was far closer to being a rank S, instead.

‘If that’s the case, I can expect a fair bit of experience points, can’t I?’

In contrary to Jin-Woo's heart quietly gearing up to pump even faster, Park Jong-Su's voice sounded quite bitter as he carried on.

“As you can see from those headlines, the Association doesn't want to issue us the raid permit.”

“Is it because it'll be too dangerous?”

“Our Guild lacks a rank S Hunter, as you might have heard. From the perspective of the Hunter's Association, they can't trust us to get the job done.”

Park Jong-Su stopped talking there and sneaked a glance at Jin-Woo.

“If you are still searching for a Guild to join, then how about....?”

Before Park Jong-Su had the chance to finish his sentence, Jin-Woo pointed at the cover of a file lying on the top of the conference table.

One could quite clearly see the title written on the upper half of the cover.

[List of applicants for the Guild founding member spot]

Park Jong-Su embarrassedly scratched the back of his head and nodded once.

“Aha....”

And with that, Park Jong-Su's hope-against-hope attempt at reeling Jin-Woo to the Knight Order Guild went down the drain. In that case, it was time to get to the meat of the story.

“The elite Hunters of our Knight Order are in no way inferior compared to those from the Hunters Guild. It's just that we don't have a rank S who can lead our rank As. That's all.”

They had done well up until this point, but 'anything' could happen during this particular raid. In case that worried 'anything' happens, they definitely needed the presence of the top-ranked Hunter.

Just a single rank S Hunter would be enough to reverse any situation.

Right now, there was no need to search for one from afar. Because, he was sitting right here.

Just as the Hunters of the Korean team were facing complete and utter annihilation, this young man appeared out of nowhere and overturned the situation all by himself. Such a man was sitting right in front of him.

More than that, now that he could see Hunter Seong Jin-Woo up close.... Even though they were the same Hunters, this man simply instilled trust and

confidence in others.

‘An autograph.... If I ask him, will he give me one?’

Suddenly, Park Jong-Su could understand where the Healer Jeong Ye-Rim was coming from, back when she asked him to get at least an autograph even if Seong Jin-Woo said no to the idea of cooperation.

“Is there something on my face?”

“Oh, no. Not at all.”

Park Jong-Su smiled and waved his hand about before carrying on.

“Actually, I believe that we’ll get the raid permit for this Gate if you decide to cooperate with our assault team, Hunter-nim.”

Jin-Woo crossed his arms and leaned against the back of his chair. Before his pondering could get any deeper, though, Park Jong-Su hurriedly added on.

“Of course, we will definitely make sure not to treat you poorly.”

With a smile still etched on his face, he pulled out the prepared contract.

“We will hand over 20% of the revenue generated from this dungeon.”

He was saying that one of the major Guilds was prepared to submit two-tenths of the potential profit from a Gate to a freelancer. Now that was an unimaginable offer for a regular Hunter.

Now typically, a rank S Hunter would only commend around ten percent of the overall revenue when a large Guild raided a dungeon. But the Knight Order was offering up double of that norm. As Park Jong-Su had said, this certainly wasn’t a ‘poor’ treatment by any stretch of the imagination.

Unfortunately, Jin-Woo’s thoughts were a bit different.

“Fifty-fifty split.”

Park Jong-Su’s hand flinched momentarily as it was about to pull out a pen that was supposed to help Jin-Woo sign the contract.

“If you agree to consider me not as a freelancer but as a Guild, then I shall cooperate with you.”

Jin-Woo made sure that declaration was heard loud and clear.

An earthquake erupted within Park Jong-Su’s eyes at the suggestion of splitting the revenue in half.

‘Keu-heuk...!’

However, he didn’t have any means to come out as strongly as Jin-Woo

here. It was not an exaggeration to say that the fate of his Knight Order Guild depended on this raid.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo was inwardly clicking his tongue.

‘I mean, twenty percent is just not on, don’t you think so?’

He wasn’t trying to exploit the urgent situation the Knight Order Guild found themselves in. But, when calculated from all possible angles, the most sensible ratio of splitting the loot was 50:50.

‘Even if they are the elites of the Knight Order, are they as good as my Shadow Soldiers?’

Either in number or even in quality, they were incomparable. Not only that, his side even included a rank S Hunter, too. If the commission received for all that potential was measly 20%, then that was as good as working for free.

Was there a reason why he should give up on what was rightfully his when both sides were making a straightforward deal in the name of mutual benefit? Besides, Jin-Woo also didn’t want to lower his own worth, as well.

“In that case, how about 40 to 60.....”

“Apologies, but I’m not trying to negotiate with the Knight Order Guild here.”

“Does that mean you won’t accept anything less than 50:50 split?”

Instead of a verbal answer, Jin-Woo nodded once as his reply.

‘Groan....’

Park Jong-Su fell into deep thought.

‘I thought things would work out easily enough because he’s still young and looks friendly, but I see now that he is no pushover.’

But, that made sense. He was someone that not even the combined might of South Korea’s rank S Hunters could defeat.

Park Jong-Su was trying to add such a Hunter to his assault team. He suddenly realised that this young man’s demand might not be as outlandish as it sounded initially.

‘No, that’s not right.’

Park Jong-Su shook his head.

An outlandish demand?

If the other party decided to come out hard and unforgiving, then forget

about 50:50, he'd have demanded 80% of the loot for himself, instead. Regardless of what, the one in the bind was not Hunter Seong Jin-Woo in this situation.

The losses to the Knight Order after giving up on this raid would be too enormous to even properly take a guess. But, what would this young man lose in return?

Absolutely nothing at all.

Actually, this was the same thing as this young man unwillingly being dragged into the negotiation table by the other party. But then, he was only demanding half of the share, so wasn't he being quite considerate here?

'Is that all?'

If this deal does go through, then the Knight Order would be taking out the most trustworthy insurance policy in South Korea, otherwise known as Seong Jin-Woo.

Inexplicably, Park Jong-Su recalled what Jeong Yun-Tae told him yesterday.

["Hyung-nim. If that thing turns out to be a Red Gate, then we'll all die for sure."]

However, what if Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was accompanying them? This young man didn't even bet an eyelid as he faced off against thousands of rank S monsters.

And, didn't Park Jong-Su personally confirm how the ants of Jeju all ended up?

'Right, that happened, didn't it?'

Only now did he remember that the man responsible for wiping all those ants out was sitting right in front of him.

Gulp.

Dry saliva painfully slid down Park Jong-Su's throat.

He witnessed with his own two eyes the killing field filled with massacred ants, but here he was, busy yapping on about 20 to 80 split with the man responsible.

'Yup, the rude one was actually me, wasn't it?'

Park Jong-Su finally admitted to his oversight. And then, he became deeply grateful for Jin-Woo's gracious counteroffer.

However, being grateful would have to wait.

The offer from the other side meant that he'd be taking a step back, so in return, he needed to take something away as well if the fairness of the deal was to be reached.

So, then. What should he do now?

After a lengthy bout of deep deliberation, Park Jong-Su cautiously raised his voice.

“Alright, we will accept. In return....”

“In return?”

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, can you take on the boss monster by yourself?”



Chapter 138 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Park Jong-Su's expression became sombre as he resolved himself to at least get this much out of the negotiation.

The boss-level monsters were responsible for the majority of losses suffered in dungeons. And to minimise the potential losses to his raid team, Park Jong-Su made an aggressive move and asked Jin-Woo to deal with the boss monster, instead.

'With the strength Hunter Seong Jin-Woo displayed back inside the ant tunnel, he should be able to deal with the boss monster all by himself.'

Feeling nervous that this offer would be rejected, Park Jong-Su kept his mouth shut and waited for Jin-Woo's answer. However, in a complete contrast to Park Jong-Su and his gradually-stiffening face as time ticked by....

'Keu-heuph....'

In order to hide a smirk trying to break out of his lips, Jin-Woo lifted the hand previously supporting his chin right up below his nose and covered the entirety of his mouth. Then, formed an impressive frown.

He wanted to look as if he was giving it a very serious consideration here. And it worked wonders.

Park Jong-Su forgot all about the passage of time and solely concentrated on Jin-Woo's decision, as his hands were soaked in sweat.

After a long while, Jin-Woo let out a soft sigh, and then....

"Alright."

...Continued on with what he wanted to say.

"We'll do it that way."

Park Jung-Ho's two hands, hidden under the table, clenched into tight fists.

'Yes! It's done!'

Just from hearing Jin-Woo's consent, Park Jong-Su felt that all his worries and burdens weighing down on his shoulders were being washed away.

Why did he even waste his time worrying about this problem until now? He should've done this from the very beginning.

For the first time since leaving Busan, the frozen-stiff face of Park Jong-Su broke out into a bright smile.

The only remaining thing now was to contact the Association and get the raid permit. What with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo agreeing to cooperate, there was no point in hesitating anymore.

“It’s been some time since the Gate first appeared, so at the latest, we need to start the raid tomorrow.”

“Then, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Ah.”

Park Jong-Su stopped packing his stuff and hurriedly made a suggestion.

“Instead of that, how about we travel south together in our car?”

Since they were going to meet again tomorrow anyway, wouldn’t it be more efficient to move around together, instead of making a promise like this? Park Jong-Su made his suggestion with that in mind.

“We’ll guide you to the best hotel in the city, and we will also pay for your lodging.”

However, there was no reason for Jin-Woo to travel a long distance inside a cramped car. All he had to do was to insert one of his Shadow Soldiers inside Park Jong-Su’s shadow, and that’d be it.

With that, he’d never get lost and would never be late, either.

He sneaked a glance at the circular-shaped shadow crawling away on the floor and came up with a suitable excuse.

“I already made a prior arrangement for this evening, so it’ll be difficult for me to go with you.”

“Aha!”

“But, don’t worry. I’ll definitely make it in time.”

There was no way a Master of a Guild like himself would be late to a party, after all!

It was then.

Jeong Yun-Tae, the Vice-Chair of the Knight Order, had to leave the conference suite briefly to take care of some ***“personal business”*** earlier on. He was just about to walk back inside, but he stopped and screamed at the top of his lungs.

“H-hyung-nim!!”

Park Jong-Su panicked and jumped up to take a wild look around him.

“What?! What now?!”

“The shadow! It just moved! From that side to this side!”

Park Jong-Su froze up for a second, before he stood straight back up and glared at Jeong Yun-Tae.

“Hey, Yun-Tae.... Are you drunk right now?”

“....”

Sensing the atmosphere had suddenly gotten a bit chilly all of a sudden, Jeong Yun-Tae forgot what he wanted to say and rubbed below his nose with his index finger.

“I said, are you drunk right now?”

“Uhm, I had a couple of beer as an appetizer back in the motorway service station, hyung-nim.”

“Didn’t I say that you gotta be more mindful when we’re trying to conduct official business?”

“I’m sorry, hyung-nim.”

Jeong Yun-Tae bowed to Park Jong-Su, before bowing to Jin-Woo as well.

“I’m sorry, Hunter-nim.”

Park Jong-Su proceeded to push the back of Jeong Yun-Tae’s head further down and bowed himself as well.

“This guy here, he means well, but he also sometimes spews out nonsense with a couple of drinks in him. I apologise if we ended up making a fuss.”

“No, it’s fine. I mean, shadows can move around sometimes.”

And so, as the meeting was coming to an end in a friendly atmosphere, Jin-Woo’s phone resting on the conference table suddenly vibrated.

Vrrrrr....

‘Who’s this?’

He took a look at the caller, but he couldn’t recognise the number.

“Excuse me. I’ll have to answer this call.”

“Ah, yes.”

Jin-Woo asked for his guests’ understanding like a gentleman and made his exit from the conference suite. Both Jeong Yun-Tae, responsible for making a

bit of racket just now, and Park Jong-Su with his nervous heart, spat out a long, long sigh of relief.

Soon after that, though, Jeong Yun-Tae tilted his head and softly muttered to himself.

“Argh, but the shadow really moved....”

“Imma just.... You!”

Jeong Yun-Tae finally shut his mouth up over this matter after being subjected to Park Jong-Su’s fierce glare.

After a short silence....

Jeong Yun-Tae grew curious about the result of the negotiation and opened his mouth again.

“Hyung-nim, so, like, what happened?”

“What do you mean, what happened? He agreed to cooperate.”

“Now that’s great news!”

The previously-tense face of Jeong Yun-Tae brightened up immediately. A wide grin still attached to his face, he asked some more.

“By the way, did you ask him about joining our Guild?”

“Don’t even bring that up. He shows me this, saying that he’s making a Guild for himself.”

Just like what Jin-Woo did earlier, Park Jong-Su picked up the file [*List of applicants for the Guild founding member spot*] and showed it to his companion.

Jeong Yun-Tae cackled to himself.

“The Guild situation in Korea has more or less been stabilised by now, so how big would his Guild get by making one at this stage? If he just joined up with ours, he’d be treated like a king, yet he’s willing to go through so much pain for nothing here.”

“Yeah, what a shame that is.”

Park Jong-Su licked his lips in regret over the missed opportunity and tried to put the file back in its original position, but then, an application form slipped out of there. He got startled and quickly picked it back up only for his expression to freeze up right there.

“Huh?”

A photo of a rather familiar-looking woman was attached to the application form.

“Keok!”

Even Jeong Yun-Tae’s expression froze up as well.

“H-hyung-nim, isn’t she.....??”

Jeong Yun-Tae couldn’t believe it even though he saw it with his own two eyes. Park Jong-Su nodded his head as a confirmation.

“Uh, you’re right. That’s the Vice-Chair of the Hunters Guild.”

Jeong Yun-Tae silently observed Cha Hae-In’s photo for a bit, before sneakily checking out Park Jong-Su’s mood.

“Hyung-nim. Shouldn’t we also do stuff like mergers and acquisitions?”

Right away, Park Jong-Su’s expression crumpled.

“You dang idiot....”

After making his way out of the conference suite, Jin-Woo tapped on the ‘Answer’ icon. Then, a familiar voice came out of the phone’s speaker.

After confirming who it was, Jin-Woo felt rather relieved but at the same time, felt a bit rueful as well.

“Mom, did you buy a new phone?”

Jin-Woo glanced at the conference suite with two people from the Knight Order Guild still inside and smirked slightly.

“Nah, it’s fine, Mom.”

“Did you go to the store alone? Why didn’t you take Jin-Ah along with you?”

It’d been nice if Mom thought of herself instead of her children every once in a while. Jin-Woo ended the call with his mom and sighed softly under his breath.

However, why did he feel a bit disappointed when he found out that the call was from his mom?

‘What was I waiting for?’

Jin-Woo smirked to himself and pocketed the phone, before raising his head up. Renewed vigour was gleaming brightly in his eyes.

He was about to breathe in the dungeon air again tomorrow, all thanks to the nice guys of the Knight Order coming to visit him like this.

‘A rank A Gate that’s close to being a rank S, is it?’

It felt as if he hadn’t cut loose and went all out in a long while now. Hadn’t it been a week already since the end of the Jeju Island raid? Besides entering that rank B Gate, he hadn’t done anything worthy of mention lately.

Ba-dump, ba-dump....

His heart began pounding away again after a long while of nothing much happening, and Jin-Woo hyped himself up for tomorrow’s raid.

The cream of the Knight Order’s crop had gathered in one place. They were all in a buzz right now from anticipation and excitement. It couldn’t be helped, though.

They would probably have had to take a big gamble with their lives by going on this raid. And if it turned into a Red Gate, then avoiding a complete annihilation would have been impossible.

But then, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo agreed to join them on such a raid.

“Kyahhk!”

The one to come up with this idea, Jeong Ye-Rim, cried out in happiness when she first heard the news of Seong Jin-Woo’s participation. Other Hunters also rejoiced in their own ways at the knowledge that a powerful safety net was about to cast below them.

There was only one person among them feeling mighty nervous at the moment. And that would be the Master of the Knight Order Guild, Park Jong-Su. He couldn’t stay still and paced up and down in nervousness as he waited for Jin-Woo to show up.

‘Aww.... I should’ve just brought him along with us yesterday.’

Park Jong-Su confirmed the time through his watch. It was five minutes before eleven in the morning. According to their schedule, the raid was supposed to get underway in five minutes.

It was a little wonder that he was suffocating from anxiety, since the promised person hadn’t shown up yet. Without him, this raid couldn’t even get underway.

The Hunter’s Association immediately issued the raid permit as soon as the Knight Order let them know of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s participation. It was as if they were waiting for this chance all along.

There was little doubt that Seong Jin-Woo’s name had proven its worth there. But then, to start a raid without him around?

‘Even if I put that aside.....’

Park Jong-Su took a look at the faces of the raid team members. Would you look at those eyes filled with anticipation? This raid might not get underway not because of the Association, but because of his own Guild members, instead!

‘There are three minutes remaining...’

Park Jong-Su pulled his phone out of sheer anxiousness, but he pocketed it again after mustering up a superhuman-level of patience. It’d be a bit rude to call someone who said he’d be here shortly about ten minutes ago, now wouldn’t it?

However, he couldn’t sense anyone possessing great aura approaching this location, nor did he receive the call from Jin-Woo saying that he arrived at the vicinity.

Park Jong-Su looked for something else to chew on instead of his innards, and eventually settled on a cigarette.

‘Just where are you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-niiiiim....!’

Around the same time....

Jin-Woo was stepping outside his apartment. He was kitted out in easy-to-move clothing and a pair of sneakers. He looked at his watch, and it said one minute before eleven AM. He raised his head up to see an overcast, gloomy sky.

‘I wonder, did Jin-Ah take an umbrella with her in the morning?’

Such thoughts only lasted for a short while.

‘Okay, time to make my way there, then.’

Jin-Woo pulled up the hood to hide his face as a smile crept up on his lips. First of all, he activated ‘Stealth’, and then....

‘Shadow Exchange.’

He immediately swapped his position with the soldier currently in the shadow state.

Meanwhile, somewhere in Jin-Ah’s high school....

Three male students and their faces were currently full of unhappiness at being asked to run an errand for their art teacher.

“Isn’t this clearly exploitation of labour force?”

“Yeah, I wonder about that myself.”

“I mean, why are we doing something that guy was supposed to do it himself in the first place?”

The male students continued to complain bitterly as they unlatched the bulky lock of the second art classroom, currently serving as their school’s storage unit.

“Argh, look at all this dust.”

“Bleugh~.”

The thick coating of dust befitting a disused, forgotten storage greeted the trio of students.

Several worn art supplies, pieces of paintings thrown away by their original owners, and plaster statues once used for sketch exercises lay discarded in this place.

“Hey, how many of these plaster statues were we supposed to take with us?”

“There are six of them here, so it must be six.”

“Argh, come on.... That means we have to come back here again.”

“Why don’t you carry four of them at the same time, then?”

The male students rolled their sleeves up in order to carry the plaster figures away. But then, the student picking up the dusty figure tucked away at the deepest corner ended up discovering ‘something’ else.

“Uh?”

After hearing his surprised-sounding voice, his friends quickly walked over to take a look.

“Uh? Isn’t this....?”

There was a large ‘hole’ in the wall. It was a Gate about the size of an adult human. The biggest student among the trio smirked after taking a look at the Gate.

“And here I was, wondering what was up.”

The male student pressed his hand on the surface of the Gate and carried on.

“A closed Gate like this one is safe. Only Hunters can go inside, and the things inside can’t come out, either.”

It was then.

Crack.

A crack suddenly formed on the surface of the Gate and at the same time, a 'hand' shot out to grab the head of the male student.

“Huh?”

The male student struggled fiercely to get out of the grip, but the hand didn't even budge an inch.

And then...

Kwajeeck-!!

Accompanying the sound of a hard surface of a fruit shattering into pieces, blood splattered all over the dust-filled storage.

“Euh, euwaaaahk?!”

“Joon-Seok-ah!!”

And, as the two blood-soaked male students screamed out, the black 'curtain' covering up the entrance of the Gate shattered like glass, and the monsters trapped inside began pouring out.



Chapter 139 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Orcs were natural-born hunters.

Their level of intelligence fell some way short of that of humans, but they easily exceeded humanity when it came to tracking and hunting prey weaker than they were.

And now, the doorway had been shattered. The ‘wall’ blocking the dungeon from the rest of the world was gone, and these hunters began pouring out from the Gate.

“Kururuk.”

“Keuk.”

The Orcs shoved away the annoying corpses of the high school boys and scanned their surroundings.

“Sniff, sniff.”

“Kuruk.”

These hunters had been trapped inside the dark dungeon for the whole week, quietly waiting for this day. It was rather obvious that they would get excited from all the smell of blood and flesh coming from their surroundings.

However, this group was merely advanced scouts. Even if their blood was boiling, they weren’t supposed to act as they pleased. Dozens of their brethren were waiting impatiently for their reports just beyond the roundish doorway.

These Orcs looked around and spotted straight walls with many doors and windows.

The Orc in charge of the advanced scouts immediately realised that they were standing inside a complicated artificial structure like a castle.

“Kururuk.”

Its nostrils twitched.

There were two choices here to make. One, leave this ‘castle’ and kill every prey they could find with utter impunity.

Or, kill every human found within this ‘castle’ and turn it into a fortress – and then, commence with their hunting in earnest. There was no need to even

consider which one was the safer choice.

The leader Orc ordered its underling.

“Summon our brothers.”

And then, it raised its head to glare at the ceiling above. The monster’s ears twitched and caught onto the noises coming down from upper floors.

Above, and then, more above that, still; this structure was seemingly filled with prey.

Its head was currently ringing painfully with a voice that kept telling the creature to kill every single one of those prey.

“Good.”

The monster’s maw parted and its yellowing fangs were revealed to the world.

“First, we cleanse this place completely.”

There was a sizeable crowd of people gathered in the coastline of Gwang-An-ri. Even though the weather was overcast and gloomy, there was this one thing that made these people show up here in morbid fascination.

And that would be the gigantic Gate floating above the beach.

The members of the local police force, whose assistance had been requested, and the employees of the Hunter’s Association, Busan branch, had cordoned off the area and strictly prohibited civilians from approaching the location.

But, for some reason, the number of folks gathering around hadn’t lessened at all.

“Senior?”

A newbie female employee, who enjoyed the misfortune of being knocked around by the waves of people, formed a tearful expression and asked her senior as she sought shelter from the storm of curious humans.

“Do we have to repeat this same thing every time a Gate appears?”

The senior employee was also feeling flustered over this matter as well. This would be his first time seeing a commotion of this level around a Gate.

“Well, I guess it can’t be helped, since this Gate is the biggest one ever to open up in Busan.”

He then sneaked a glance behind him. There it was, the ginormous hole, silently floating in the air.

Just looking at it made him feel like he was being sucked inside, so he was consciously trying to ignore its presence.

But, of course....

‘I know that thing can’t harm people unless there’s dungeon break, but still....’

Even then, he still disliked these Gates just like how some people irrationally feared outer space or the depths of oceans.

That was why he always prayed in his mind that Hunters would quickly take care of the ominous hole every time he was dispatched to a Gate’s location.

In a way, though, there was this thing that made him feel a lot more reassured about this raid. The newbie must’ve remembered the reason too, because she suddenly began talking to him.

“Ahh! Senior, did you hear?”

“Hear what?”

“A rank S Hunter from Seoul is supposed to come today, right?”

Was anyone here who didn’t know that already? Probably, half out of everyone here came solely to see the rank S Hunter with their own eyes while the other half, to spectate on the Gate itself.

“You mean, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?”

“Yes, him!”

“Why are you so happy? You personally know him or something?”

“N-no, not really.”

The newbie quickly shook her hands around and began writhing her body with a hyped-up expression on her face.

“Actually, it’ll be my first time seeing a rank S Hunter, so....”

The senior employee formed a disappointed expression, instead.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is a newbie, and you’re also a noob, yet how come the two you could be this different??”

“S-senior?!”

“If you still have this much energy left to fool around, then why don’t you go over that side and lend them some help?”

“But, I came here to take a short break, you know? I’ve been standing

around since the early morning and my legs are killing me, you know!”

The senior agent tutted unhappily.

Seeing her narrow her eyes angrily like that, she must've felt that he was being unfair to her, but he couldn't quite trust what she was trying to sell here.

Still, it wasn't as if he couldn't understand where she was coming from, either.

“Well, yeah. I'm also a little bit curious, too. Everyone's been talking about him lately and all.”

“See? Even you too, senior.”

“I mean, he solo hunted a boss from the rank S Gate, didn't he?”

Originally, the true boss monster of the rank S Gate appearing on Jeju Island was the queen ant. However, many of those who watched the broadcast thought that the mutated ant monster was the boss instead, all thanks to the visceral visual impact that creature had left behind.

Killing the boss-level monster meant that the Gate itself would close up soon. And that young man was a Hunter who could close shut a rank S Gate.

It wasn't for nothing that the noises of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo being a potential 'Special Authority-rank' were gaining momentum recently. It was only natural that the attention of the public was focused on him.

“A rank S Hunter, of all people! I wonder, what will be like seeing one for real?”

The senior employee looked at the sparkling eyes of his junior and his thoughts became complicated in an instant.

“This kid, maybe she applied for a job in the Association not because she likes the work, but because she hankers after Hunters or something??”

The newbie employee didn't care how her senior was looking at her. Her eyes continued to sparkle brightly and her voice remained all giddy from anticipation.

“Senior, senior!”

“What now?”

“I hear that you can't even look the really strong Hunters in their eyes. Right, I hear you once saw a rank S Hunter in the past? Is that true?”

The senior employee recalled his business trip to Gwang-Ju last year.

“...Yeah, I have.”

“Wow-!”

Suddenly, the senior employee felt his shoulders straightening up a bit after seeing his junior display her admiration like that.

“So? What was it like, senior? Was it really scary?”

“Hey, hey. Don’t even mention it, okay? Last year, I had a chance to meet Hunter Mah Dong-Wook of the Shining Star Guild because of the work from the Association, and.....”

“....Excuse me, coming through.”

“Ah, sure.”

The two Association employees quickly stepped aside to create a path for a young man, and came back together again. But, then....

“...Uh?”

The senior agent looked behind him at the youth wearing a hoodie.

“What’s wrong, senior?”

“No, well, I thought that guy kind of looked familiar.”

“Uh? Really? That’s so weird. I was thinking the exact same thing.”

“Is he also a staff member from the Association?”

“H-mm....”

“Hold on, where was I with my story?”

“That was.... Ah, Hunter Mah Dong-Wook from the Shining Star!”

“Ahh, right. I had a chance to meet Hunter Mah Dong-Wook in person, and well, that guy was so huge that his shoulders were thiiiiis wide.”

“Wow-!”

These two senior and junior employees sure got along so fabulously well, it seemed.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-niiiiim!”

Park Jong-Su welcomed Jin-Woo with a tearful voice that certainly didn’t suit his late-thirties age group. That just went to show how much was riding on this particular raid.

Jin-Woo quietly confirmed the time even as he was subjected to Park Jong-Su’s passionate reaction. The numbers as indicated on the phone’s screen switched from 10:59 to 11:00.

‘Very good.’

Jin-Woo grinned brightly.

In order to avoid raising chaos, he remained in ‘Stealth’ and got to somewhere a bit away, before walking back here, but he still managed to make it in time nonetheless.

The raid was yet to start, but he was feeling good about it already. And when he raised his head to look....

‘...Looking at it for real now, it kinda looks bigger, doesn’t it?’

He could see the Gate right in front of his eyes that looked way bigger than the one from the video clips. The amount of magic energy leaking out of that thing was as serious as what the Association had told the Knight Order Guild, too.

‘What kind of monsters will I find inside?’

A smile unconsciously bloomed on his lips.

Besides that nonsensically huge Gate, though – everything else looked the same, more or less. Just like how it’d be with raids being taken on by other Guilds, there were two groups of low-ranked Hunters nearby.

‘That’s the retrieval team, and that’s the mining team.’

And the old saying said that you’d see as much as you knew. He could easily tell apart their roles through the attire and their equipment. This was indeed all thanks to ‘participating’ in the raids of the Hunters Guild in the past.

‘Annnd, back then or now, the Guild’s officials are running around and keeping themselves busy, too.’

He felt more relaxed now compared to back then, when he was still clueless and didn’t know which end was up. Indeed, experience proved to be the best teacher there was.

“Huh??”

“He really came!”

“It’s Mister Seong Jin-Woo?!”

The elite Hunters began gathering around after hearing Park Jong-Su’s call sign, and began forming bright expression after they recognised Jin-Woo.

He shared simple greetings with them and observed each and everyone present here.

30 high-ranked Hunters had gathered for today's raid. Like Park Jong-Su's confident declaration, the numbers and quality alone didn't lose out to the Hunters Guild at all.

'As expected....'

Should he say, as expected of a Guild representing this part of the country?

And they were all kitted out in proper metal armours or special defensive equipment imbued with magical effects, so they certainly fit the bill of 'Knight Order' rather well.

To think, such a Guild would be underestimated solely because they lacked a rank S Hunter. What a regretful thing that was.

Jin-Woo could now understand a little bit of the mindset of Park Jong-Su who asked him out of nowhere if he was interested in joining the Knight Order.

While he was thinking of this and that, it didn't take long for the Hunters to gather all around him.

"Excuse me...."

"Hm."

They sneaked glances at each other before engaging in a competition to see who could start talking first.

"Hunter-nim! The Jeju Island raid was really amazing!"

"How do you summon those black soldiers? Wait a sec, are they even summons?"

"Will you be taking the lead in today's raid, Mister Seong Jin-Woo??"

Just as Jin-Woo was feeling progressively lost from the outpouring of all these questions....

"Argh, stop! Will you just stop?!"

Healer Jeong He-Rim, responsible for coming up with the idea of bringing Jin-Woo in the first place, pushed aside other Hunters and stepped up to the front.

"Why are you trying to trouble Seong Hunter-nim to this degree?? You aren't some country bumpkins either, so why?"

Her eyes glaring at her wayward colleagues were as sharp as a pair of blades.

A high-ranked Healer was comparable to one's own mother in a way;

because, she was responsible for the raid team's overall well-being. The team members had to swallow their dissatisfaction and keep their mouths shut, as if they were being scolded by their mother.

'Fut.'

Jeong Ye-Rim formed a grin. She then airily spun around and extended her hand to Jin-Woo for a handshake.

"I'm the main Healer of the Knight Order's elite assault team, Jeong. Ye. Rim. It's a pleasure to meet you."

She formed a soft smile with her eyes and continued on.

"I don't know about others, but seeing that you're about to lead the team, and the fact that I'm the main Healer, we should be at least on the same page before we start, yes?"

Jin-Woo avoided meeting her ulterior motive-filled eyes and looked at Park Jong-Su, instead.

"You haven't explained to them already?"

"Oh, that. Well....."

Park Jong-Su scratched the back of his head as if he was embarrassed about something.

"My schedule had been just too tight, you see. I was so busy with going through all the formalities and summoning these guys out here that I've ended up forgetting about it. Sorry about that."

He sheepishly smiled and swept his gaze over the Hunters.

Well, it was certainly nice that he didn't have to repeat himself over and over again, what with the members of the assault team having gathered in one spot already.

"I, Park Jong-Su, will take the lead for today's raid."

Team members began murmuring to themselves after Park Jong-Su declared himself to be the leader of this raid.

"Chairman, it's you again?"

"But, we have Hunter Seong Jin-Woo here, so why....?"

"Is it okay to even do that?"

Park Jong-Su was a tanker at the very top of the rank A, so it was definitely not a strange occurrence to have him lead a team. Excluding those times that he couldn't participate due to his condition being less than ideal, the majority

of the raids happened under Park Jong-Su's leadership.

However, didn't they have a rank S Hunter among the team now?

The strongest Hunter present taking up the lead – this was one of the commonly-accepted rules in raiding a dungeon.

Park Jong-Su quickly offered up an explanation for the sake of his confused teammates.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim will take up the role of guarding our rear, and will ensure our safety during the raid itself.”

Watch the assault team from the back and take care of the safety of the team members – this was Park Jong-Su's demand. This was for the safety of the team, of course, but also for the sake of the Guild's honour, as well.

It was true that the Hunters with high physical combat abilities stood in the front of the team. The rear of the formation would usually be taken up by the Hunters ill-equipped to deal against ambushes, such as Mage-types, Healers, or support-types.

Knight Order was finding it hard to recruit new blood to their roster recently, so the survival of these Hunters was essential to the fate of the Guild itself. And, by placing Hunter Seong Jin-Woo there?

The assault team could commit to a speedy raid of the dungeon without worrying about their rear being attacked.

No, hold on!

If enemies did show up from the rear, now that would be a cause for celebration, instead.

Just who was this man standing there for them?

It was none other than Seong Jin-Woo, who forcibly broke through thousands of rank S monsters without so much as batting an eyelid once. If enemies kept appearing behind the team all the time, then well, they could even aim to end this raid early and go home.

That was Park Jong-Su's first reason.

And, the much-more-important second reason was....

Gulp.

Park Jong-Su looked at the throng of reporters gathered just beyond the police line and swallowed down his dry saliva with some effort.

That was proof that a lot of people were interested in this raid. If he wasn't

careful here, then all those people might end up thinking that the Knight Order Guild was leeching off on Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.

‘Well... that might be true, but...’

Whatever the case may be, he couldn't allow others to see the situation that way. To the Knight Order, the true aim of this raid was to let the world know that the Guild was still going strong, that it was still at its peak.

That was why Park Jong-Su desperately pleaded with Jin-Woo.

And this was the result.

“I’ve already discussed the matter with Seong Hunter-nim and agreed to do the raid this way, so if you have any complaints, save it until we finish the raid.”

Park Jong-Su finally got to tell the rest of the team members the result of the negotiation. However, this happened then.

“Yo, hold up. I really don’t get something here, so I gotta ask.”

A rank A Hunter suddenly stepped forward. He was a rookie who hadn't been working for the Knight Order Guild for long.

“Since when did we become such weak Hunters that we need protection from someone else?”

That one sentence caused the complexions of the senior Hunters to go utterly pale.

‘Keok.....!!’

‘N-no, junior, don’t!’

The young Hunter, who looked to be around the same age as Jin-Woo, formed an expression overflowing with confidence.

“Don’t you agree with me? Hyung-nim? Noo-nim?” (TL: Noo-nim – a respectful way to call an older female)

Because... this rookie just so happened to receive the second-most attention from the potential suitors after ‘Kim Cheol’ in this year's crop of new Hunters. Indeed, he had a reason to be confident of himself.

Unfortunately, there was a problem, and that would be the guy he was talking to.

“Do the elites of our Knight Order look that weak to your eyes, Mister Seong Jin-Woo?”

‘.....’

Jin-Woo suppressed the rising fit of laughter to the best of his abilities and silently stared at this newbie rank A Hunter. It was the task of other Hunters to feel their blood all dry up, not him, so it was fine.

‘What the hell, with what idiotic confidence is that kid trying to....?’

‘No, wait. That punk... I knew that he’s a country bumpkin from Busan, but could it be that he has never even seen a rank S in action?’

‘Someone, please stop that guy!’

‘But, you can only stop someone who knows when to spew nonsense in the right time and at right place....’

Seeing that his seniors were all rendered speechless, and that Jin-Woo was maintaining his silence, the newbie Hunter’s confidence swelled up even more.

“Besides that, Chairman, you went too far, you know!”

“What, me?”

‘Why is it me this time?!’

Park Jong-Su dumbfoundedly pointed to himself.

“Even if the name value of a rank S Hunter is high, how can you agree that easily to the condition of a freelancer taking away a Guild’s worth of the loot?”

“....”

A migraine had developed in Park Jong-Su’s head by now, and he sent a quick glance to Jin-Woo.

‘Seong Hunter-nim... I leave our junior in your capable hands.’

Jin-Woo nodded briefly.

“Whatever the case may be, I simply can’t understand this nonsensical contra....”

It was then.

Right in front of the rookie making his passionate speech, Igrit was summoned.

‘Heok!’

The rank A newbie flinched from the massive magical energy emanating from the black knight and hastily took a step back. However, he ran into something hard on his back even before he could take a second step.

Stunned silly now, he quickly turned around only to find another knight, several heads taller than the one before, looking down on him. It was Iron, of course.

“Heok!!”

The gasp he tried to hide jumped out of his throat all on its own.

And then, ‘it’ came from the side.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder, and the newbie slowly turned his sweat-soaked face to find a figure draped in black robes standing there this time.

“U-uwahhk?!”

The newbie lost all of his leg strength from the ominous magic energy oozing out from Fangs, and plopped down on to his butt.

‘He looks way too pitiful, so I shouldn’t summon out Beru, no?’

Jin-Woo flicked his hand once and the three knight-grade soldiers surrounding the newbie Hunter quickly returned to their shadow state.

Jin-Woo walked over to the pale-faced newbie and reached out with his hand.

“You still can’t understand anything yet?”

The rank A newbie took his hand and unsteadily stood back up, before nodding at the speed of light.



Chapter 140 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The handling of trivial matters was now over. Along with the members of the Knight Order Guild, Jin-Woo moved to the front of the Gate.

Before they were about to enter, though....

“Please wait.”

Chairman Park Jong-Su and his deputy, Vice-Chair Jeong Yun-Tae, began going through their equipment as well as the conditions of the team members for the last time.

Maybe because they were now standing before the entrance, the noisy atmosphere from before was now long gone, replaced by weighty silence.

‘.....’

He wasn’t sure from when it started, but Jin-Woo began liking this state of tension just before entering a dungeon. It felt as if the inside of his head was settling down.

Such a thing would’ve been totally unimaginable back in the past when he avoided answering phone calls out of the fear he felt for the Hunter Association’s periodic call-ups.

“Hyung-nim, there are no problems.”

“Very good.”

Park Jong-Su nodded his head and walked over to Jin-Woo, standing a step away from the rest of the raid team. The latter shifted his gaze to the leader of this raid.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

“Yes?”

Jin-Woo uncrossed his arms and stared directly into Park Jong-Su’s eyes, and the older man lowered his head right away.

“We’ll be in your care from now on.”

Although short, those words contained many of Park Jong-Su’s feelings and worries. Jin-Woo used similar words as his reply.

“I’ll be in your care, as well.”

Park Jong-Su and Jeong Yun-Tae entered the Gate first, and the rest of the Hunters entered one by one after them. And after confirming that the Hunters had all gone inside, the last person still standing outside, Jin-Woo, slowly walked into the Gate as well.

[You have entered a dungeon.]

As usual, the System message no one else could see beside him welcomed Jin-Woo before anything else could happen. But then....

‘Mm?’

Jin-Woo tilted his head.

He was greeted by a dungeon with passageways large enough to accommodate giants passing by.

He hadn’t entered a lot of high-ranked dungeons before, but he was lucky enough to be inside one this huge. That was why Jin-Woo wasn’t puzzled by the size of the dungeon. No, it had to do with this strange feeling he got from the air of the dungeon itself.

‘What’s this....?’

For some reason, he felt incomparably comfortable inside here.

He felt ominous sensations being carried in the air of the dungeons countless times, but this would be his first time feeling like this.

However...

“It’s the Ogre!”

Somewhat different from Jin-Woo’s own premonition, the assault team was greeted by huge trouble from the entrance, instead.

“It’s the Twin-Head Ogre!!”

“Everyone, be careful!!”

A monster that would typically appear as a boss in other high-ranked dungeons was standing in the entrance, its bloodshot eyes glaring at the Hunters.

“Groooooaaar!!!”

A Twin-Head Ogre was about twice the size of a regular Ogre. But it was difficult to quantify how many times greater the creature’s powers were.

If it were any other ‘regular’ assault team that had to face off against a

Twin-Head Ogre in a dungeon, they would have been utterly frightened out of their senses and have tried to escape right away, but....

“Let’s go!”

...It was a different story with the elites of the Knight Order.

Park Jong-Su the tanker raised his shield up and rushed towards the Ogre.

Discovering the human approaching it, the monster raised above its two heads a huge club that looked as if it was made from a tree yanked straight out of the ground, roots and all.

SLAM!!

The impact force actually shook the interior of the dungeon!

However, Park Jong-Su activated his skill in time to balloon up his muscle mass and managed to endure against the incredible physical strength of the Twin-Head Ogre without being brought down to his knees.

“Hyung-nim!”

“I’m fine!”

“Then, I’m coming, too!”

The sub-tanker, Jeong Yun-Tae, stood next to Park Jong-Su.

Succeeding in his mission to get the Ogre’s attention locked firmly onto himself, Park Jong-Su yelled out loudly, veins in his neck standing up.

“Attack!!”

With that, the counteroffensive of the Knight Order commenced. Arrows, magic spells, swords, and spears rained down on the Twin-Head Ogre.

Krrroooaar!!

The Twin-Head Ogre became agitated and began rampaging around. However, Park Jong-Su didn’t give the monster a chance to divert its attention elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Jeong Yun-Tae quickly ran over and defended the others whenever they were targetted by the Ogre.

THUD!!

Just now, Jeong Yun-Tae defended against the Ogre’s kick and was shoved back greatly as two lines were gouged on the ground by his feet. Thanks to him, though, other Hunters suffered almost no damage at all.

“K-krooar, Kheu-uh-uhrk!”

The body of the Ogre was gradually shaved away due to the combined attacks of the damage dealers. It was a spectacular teamwork!

From this spectacle alone, Jin-Woo could now understand why the Knight Order Guild managed to lock down on the position of Yeong-Nam district's number one for such a long time.

“Gheo-uh-uhrk!”

Eventually, the Ogre fell backwards, bubbles foaming in its mouths.

THUD!

It was the moment when a boss-level monster fell without injuring a single person. A perfect victory, in other words.

“We did it!”

The leader of the team, Park Jong-Su, tightly clenched both of his fists.

Was it because they had a guest today? Not just him, but even the rest of his teammates were much more motivated than usual.

How would they have looked in Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's eyes just now?

‘I'd be beyond ecstatic if he got moved by our teamwork and suddenly decides to join our Guild....’

Sneak...

Park Jong-Su sneaked a glance and immediately encountered Jin-Woo's gaze.

Feeling as if his inner thoughts had been laid bare, Park Jong-Su became a bit sheepish and began wondering what he should do next, before deciding to approach Jin-Woo with a warm smile.

“We'll stay here for a bit longer to recheck our equipment before advancing forward.”

“Ah, okay. Please do.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

While he only needed to drink potions to refill his magic energy or stamina, other Hunters clearly suffered from a physical limit to their magical energy reserve or fatigue. It was a must to take a break, even if it was a short one, after fighting against a powerful monster like that.

Park Jong-Su was now standing next to Jin-Woo. He stared at the dead body of the Ogre and spoke with an awkward look on his face.

“This is going to be big trouble.”

“...?”

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to Park Jong-Su. The latter continued on.

“It seems likely that this raid won’t be easy, unfortunately. To think, we’d end up running into a Twin-Head Ogre right from the start.”

He rubbed his chin before turning to look at Jin-Woo with a grin.

“Do you know what the nickname of a Twin-Head Ogre is, by any chance?”

Jin-Woo shook his head, and the older man replied as if he expected that answer.

“It’s the ‘grave keeper’.”

Did that nickname come about because it was such a powerful monster that killed a lot of people? However, Park Jong-Su’s explanation was far off Jin-Woo’s estimations.

“The thing is....”

The older man cast his gaze deeper into the cavern’s interior. An ominous aura seemed to be oozing out from the other side of the cavern still enshrouded in darkness, at least in his eyes.

“...When you meet one as the boss of a dungeon, it’s fine, but when you run into one right at the beginning, then well, you’ll find that this dungeon...”

Park Jong-Su sounded worried as he finished his sentence.

“....This dungeon is full of undead monsters.”

An urgent call came through to the Hunter’s Association emergency hotline. The caller’s voice belonged to a young teenage girl.

The call centre employee heard the scared sobbing coming from the other side of the line as soon as the call got connected, and realised something was wrong.

“Yes, it is. Please speak.”

“Outside? Where are you making this call from?”

Her sobbing meant that her words were constantly being cut off and it was hard to carry on a conversation. However, the call centre employee was experienced enough to piece together those stuttering words and figured out what this girl was trying to say.

Immediately, an urgent message was sent to the Association's main building.

[Monsters appeared in the local school, one confirmed victim, the informant in hiding.]

Could it be that a dungeon break occurred inside a school? The employee shuddered from the horrifying images taking root in his head and focused all of his being in trying to keep this female student alive.

“How many monsters are there? Are they any near you right now?”

“Please calm down and listen to my voice.”

This employee knew very well from his extensive experience about how weak-kneed humans could get when faced with life-threatening situations. He knew he had to be calm and collected in such situations while answering the call.

He had to calm the caller down sufficiently enough and then, had to suggest some kind of a plan for the current situation. That was his role.

“Right now, Hunters from the Association are headed your way. These Hunters will not give up on you guys. That is why you need to stay calm and rational, okay? Can you hear me?”

The voice coming from the other side of the line was gradually recovering from the panicked state. That was a good sign.

The employee thought that he succeeded in calming the female student down, and then asked the question that could prove to be most important in saving the girl's life.

“By any chance, those monsters... do you know what kind of monsters those are?”

“Which monsters are they?”

If the monsters possessed weak senses and chased after humans using their eyes, then hiding in a bathroom would work as a suitable solution for the time being. The employee prayed that such monsters had invaded the school, instead.

‘Can it be?!’

The eyes of the employee grew wider and wider.

“Orcs... are they Orcs?”

‘N-no, this can't be!!’

The employee shot up from his seat before he realised it and cried out.

“You need to run away from there! Hurry! Orcs can.....”

It was then.

Despite the employee’s earnest prayer, he could hear the sound of the bathroom door being destroyed, followed soon by a sorrowful scream.

The Knight Order’s raid was trucking along quite smoothly.

As a matter of fact, things were working out so well that the Hunters felt the whole thing was strangely too easy.

For instance, there encountered yet another monster, but....

“Kuwaahk!”

A rotting creature the size of a house tried to escape from the assault team, only to get ensnared by the restriction magic spell cast by the Mage-type Hunter, and soon, it too met with a grisly end.

And when the exact same thing repeated itself over and over again, the Hunters were getting progressively more puzzled.

“Isn’t this weird?”

“Why are these monsters running away when they see us?”

“Isn’t it like they were being chased away?”

Powerful undead creatures, such as Vampires, Liches, Dread Worms, Red Ghouls, etc., continued to pop up inside this dungeon.

Undeads were difficult opponents to fight against.

Not only were they difficult to kill, but even after killing them, Hunters couldn’t let their guards down. Because no one knew when they would regenerate or get revived to start attacking again.

However, these creatures couldn’t do much to display their prowess for some reason, and continued to get powerlessly massacred at the assault team’s hands.

‘It’s like they are too scared and can’t even think about resisting us.....’

That was Park Jong-Su’s assessment after observing the monsters and their strange behaviour. He even thought that maybe there was no need to bring Hunter Seong Jin-Woo along when things were this easy.

‘Seriously, man. You really can’t tell what’s going to happen inside a dungeon.’

Who'd have imagined that they were clearing a highest-difficult rank A dungeon this painlessly?

'Even still....'

Being able to end a raid without a single person getting injured was always a good thing. There might have been an unnecessary loss of profit here, but result-wise, it sure was a big relief.

On the other hand, Jin-Woo was inwardly feeling quite disappointed.

'Here I was, really hyped up because this place was supposed to be the hardest rank A dungeon there could be....'

There was still that enormous magic energy leaking out from the deeper part of the dungeon, but would he even be able to earn any experience points if things continued on at this rate?

Because of the spirited attacks by the members of the Knight Order Guild, he didn't even have a single chance to step forward at all.

'.....'

Jin-Woo inwardly sighed out. But then, he abruptly halted his steps.

'Uh?'

When Jin-Woo looked behind him, Healer Jeong Ye-Rim also came to a stop as well.

"What's the matter, Seong Hunter-nim? Is something following us?"

Jin-Woo didn't answer her. As a matter of fact, his heart was beating so madly that he didn't even have any leeway to answer her questions.

'Could it be.....?'

Jin-Woo's eyes, as they stared towards the outside of this dungeon, began quaking violently. Only then did Jeong Ye-Rim also realise that something was wrong as well.

"Seong Hunter-nim??"

It was then.

Jin-Woo's expression hardened like stone.

"Uwaahhk!"

"Kyaahhk!"

Heartbreaking screams rose up from all corners of the school.

Less than half of the students managed to escape from the school alive. As

for the rest, either they had all ended up as corpses, or were busy running around inside the school's premise trying to evade the Orcs. Unfortunately, their futile resistance could only buy them a brief respite.

The hunts of the Orcs that started from the lowest floor continued on to higher floors and drove all victims caught in their wake to gruesome deaths.

“Uwaaahk!”

The students who couldn't run away in time and remained trapped in their classrooms could only cover their ears as more screams rose up from the lower floors.

The classrooms for the third year students were located on the top floor of the school building. Jin-Ah was also among those 3rd-year students who couldn't run away in time. The doorway shoddily blocked up with junk was the only thing that could defend them against the marauding Orc horde.

“Ah...”

“...F*ck me.”

The male students grabbed onto chairs and mops or whatever that could serve as weapons with their trembling hands. But, none of them helped to instil a sense of confidence in the scared students.

No, all they could do was to wait and pray fervently for the Hunters to show up before those Orcs stepped foot inside their classroom.

KWANG!

The bent classroom door was flung away.

“Uwaaahk!”

“Kyaaahk!”

As the screams of the frightened students resounded out, two Orcs covered in the blood of the countless number of people they had murdered stepped into the classroom.

“U-uwaaahk!”

A male student holding a mop near the door threw away his make-shift weapon and ran to the back entrance, before yanking it open.

However, another Orc was lying in wait there, and it slammed an axe down on the forehead of this fleeing male student.

Kwajeeck!

The male student fell powerlessly, the light of life leaving his eyes.

“Kyaaaaahk!”

“Uwak!”

Both entrances of the classroom were now blocked off by the Orcs.

The remaining students screamed out loudly and crowded against the windows, but they all knew that the results would largely end up the same regardless of whether they chose to jump out from a sixth-story window or get caught by the Orcs.

‘Oppa, oppa!!’

Finding herself stuck in the middle of the students fleeing towards the corners of the classroom as they tried to get away from the Orcs, Jin-Ah squeezed her eyes shut and called out to Jin-Woo.

Her oppa, the rank S Hunter. If she called out to him, it felt as if he’d show up here right away. That was her only hope.

“Kurururuk.”

“Ku-euk?”

The Orcs stopped advancing after they surrounded the students from all corners. They began conversing to each other in their native tongue.

“Boss. There is a human with magic energy coming off.”

“Kill that one first.”

Unlike regular humans, those that knew how to wield magic energy were dangerous opponents. Therefore, these Orcs had to deal with a threat like that first.

The Orc, having received the boss’s order, began scanning the students before eventually locking onto Jin-Ah’s location.

“Ah!”

The Orc grabbed her wrist and dragged her out to the middle of the classroom.

“Is this female the one?”

“It is, boss.”

The underling was right. Although faint, they could sense magic energy coming from somewhere on this girl. Whether that came from this female’s abilities or some sort of a weapon she possessed, it didn’t change the fact that she had to be eliminated first before everyone else.

The boss raised its axe up.

“Ah, ah....!”

Jin-Ah saw the axe rising up high above her head, and eventually squeezed her eyes shut.

“Kuruk.”

The boss twitched its nose and swung the axe down with a disinterested face.

Swiiiiish-!

‘Oppa!’

But then, this happened.

Rumble-!

A veil of black smoke suddenly exploded out from Jin-Ah’s shadow and took on a solid shape.

Grab.

The brows of the advanced scout’s boss shot up high in surprise.

Because, it just realised that a High Orc wearing black armour suddenly appeared out of nowhere to grab onto its wrist, that was why.

“Kuruk?”

Before the puzzled Orc could say something....

The High Orc threw a simple punch and shattered the head of the monster like an exploding watermelon.

Kwajeeck!!



Chapter 141 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

How should one go about deciphering this situation?

The jaws of the students watching this sight fell to the floor.

They were about to avert their gazes before the scene of their classmate getting murdered played out, yet these ‘soldiers’ decked out in black armour suddenly appeared without a single warning.

Soldiers?

No, hold on – was it even okay to call those things ‘soldiers’?

But, these monsters looked more Orc-ish than Orcs themselves, and were at least double the size of an Orc and featured red skin? Really?

When standing before the black-armoured Orc, that scary-looking Orc now resembled a boy about to enter his teenage years, instead. But, that was to be expected.

The Shadow Soldiers Jin-Woo had left behind in Jin-Ah’s shadow were the High Orcs serving as the guards of the boss monster ‘Fangs’ from the high-ranking dungeon. Not only that, these guys were the cream of the warrior crop found there.

Regular Orcs dared to have a go against High Orc warriors? What a funny notion that was.

As if to demonstrate that clear gap in power, the High Orc threw a powerful punch.

Kwajeeck!!

An Orc’s head shattered from the impact and the dead monster crashed down to the classroom’s floor. Meanwhile, the students were freaking out properly now.

‘Heok!!’

The terrifying monsters threatening their lives up until only a few seconds ago were getting massacred by even more monsterish monsters now.

Their current level of shock and fear had gone far past what they could tolerate, and caused the inside of these students’ heads to completely blank

out. Except for one person, that was.

Only Jin-Ah knew the significance of those black armours and began crying softly.

‘Oppa? Did oppa....?’

Jin-Ah could sense her oppa’s trace from these three High Orcs surrounding her like a trio of bodyguards.

“Gururu....”

The two High Orcs standing behind her didn’t even need to step forward. The High Orc in front, having destroyed the head of the scout leader Orc, reached out to grasp the scruffs of the two remaining Orcs trying to flee.

“Kururuk!!”

“Kheuwahahahk!”

Now raised up high in the air, two monsters kicked and struggled desperately. But their struggles were ultimately in vain as their heads were violently slammed into one another.

KWAHNG!

The dead monsters and their shattered foreheads fell in a pair of heaps on the floor.

Plop.

Plop....

In the blink of an eye, the three Orcs invading the classroom were taken care of. That was the end.

The High Orcs stopped moving again from their spots and quietly guarded Jin-Ah’s sides.

Just how many seconds ticked by like this?

The students had regained some semblance of calmness by then; while trying their best to suppress their still-pounding hearts, they silently exchanged glances with one another.

‘W-what’s going on here?’

‘Did those monsters save us?’

‘Are we being protected?’

At the bare minimum, they felt sure of these black-armoured Orcs weren’t going to harm them.

“W-where is oppa? Is he here?”

Jin-Ah tearfully asked for Jin-Woo, but the High Orc soldiers didn't reply back to her.

“Oppa?”

Instead, they lightly stopped her when she tried to go somewhere else.

“.....?”

When Jin-Ah cautiously looked up at the High Orc, the creature silently shook its head. The top priority for these High Orcs was to secure Jin-Ah's safety. They couldn't let her roam around the building when it was packed full of enemies right now.

And, sure enough, footsteps climbing up the stairs could be heard coming from outside the classroom.

Step, step, step!

Step, step, step.

High Orc soldiers began pulling out their weapons housed on their backs and waists.

The students got tenser and tenser as those footsteps approached closer, but at the same time, hope wormed its way into their hearts as they watched these High Orcs calmly get ready for battle.

The hope that they could get out of here alive, and the sense of relief that there were powerful allies protecting them.

Among them, though, there were still a few who cried from the jumbled mixture of emotions – from fear, worry, anxiety, sorrow, etc.

“Sob.... Hic....”

Students hugged tightly their sobbing friends and held their breaths.

The footsteps were getting closer and closer.

Step, step, step.

And so – the Orcs spread around the school building all heard the death throes of their brethren and began gathering near the classroom of the third year seniors.

The signal was coming through loud and clear.

The High Orcs tasked with protecting his sister were sending out powerful signals.

‘Did something happen near Jin-Ah’s vicinity?’

“Seong Hunter-nim?”

Jeong Ye-Rim called out to him again, still sounding anxious.

“...”

With his lips firmly shut, Jin-Woo walked past her.

She tilted her head in utter confusion.

‘What’s gotten into him?’

The attitude of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, who was practically a paragon of relaxation up until a few seconds ago, suddenly did a complete 180. She could even say that he had to be someone else just from looking at the expression on his face now.

‘Hold on....’

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was a rank S. Such a man was now looking behind him with a grave expression etched on his face. Could that mean he had discovered something on the path they walked past earlier, something they all failed to notice back then?

She suddenly felt her anxiety spiking up.

‘Ng?’

Jeong Yun-Tae looked behind after sensing the approach of a person.

“Hyung-nim? Seong Hunter-nim is walking over here.”

“What?”

Park Jong-Su stopped his advancement, which meant that the assault team’s advance also naturally came to a halt, as well.

‘Why would Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim....?’

He turned around to look, only to gasp out inadvertently after locking gazes with the approaching Jin-Woo and his eyes.

‘Heok!’

Jin-Woo’s atmosphere was completely different from only a few moments ago.

‘What’s going on?’

In that brief moment, Park Jong-Su quickly combed through his memories to see if he had done anything stupid to get on Jin-Woo’s nerves. But, regardless of how hard he wracked his brain, he couldn’t come up with an

answer.

'If that's the case....'

If that was the case, then how was he to interpret that young man's hardened expression and that murderous glare?

Park Jong-Su nervously swallowed his saliva after finally realising what it felt like to deal with a stronger being who was clearly not having a good time at the moment.

This here was inside of a dungeon. Anything could happen in here and that wouldn't be seen as strange at all.

Park Jong-Su's attitude became a level more cautious.

"Hunter-nim, is there something troubling you?"

Jin-Woo was feeling really pressed at the moment, so he didn't bother to beat around the bush.

"Something urgent came up and I must leave now."

'Heok!'

Park Jong-Su freaked out. This was a far worse situation than his expectations.

The raid had been a relatively easy one so far. Indeed, it was chugging along so painlessly that he even wondered if it was a necessity to ask Jin-Woo to accompany them in the first place.

However, Park Jong-Su was one of the very first Hunters to appear when this whole started all those years ago. Meaning, he wasn't some naive rookie who might forget that accidents always happened when one was being too careless.

'Nothing happened until now, so we need to be even more cautious from here onwards.'

In a situation where no one could tell what kind of dangers were hiding up ahead, losing the most powerful combat potential would prove to be a big, painful blow.

Park Jong-Su's complexion darkened.

"Without your presence, Seong Hunter-nim, we could find ourselves in great danger. You know this too, don't you?"

Park Jong-Su did his best to dissuade Jin-Woo in the most roundabout way he could think of. He was acutely aware that agitating Jin-Woo was far more

dangerous than attempting to clear this dungeon without the young rank S Hunter's help.

That was how badly contorted Jin-Woo's current expression was.

'.....'

Park Jong-Su felt as if he was walking on a tightrope suspended at a dizzying height, as he cautiously observed Jin-Woo's reaction.

As his lips dried up from the nervousness....

Jin-Woo finally raised his voice.

"Then, let me do this."

"Ah, yes."

Park Jong-Su ended up nodding his head even before hearing what Jin-Woo had to say.

"Right now, let me call on a friend that you can place your trust in, as much as you'd trust me. From here on, that friend will take care of everything."

Park Jong-Su's ears perked up. Not just anyone, but another Hunter whose ability was guaranteed by none other than Hunter Seong Jin-Woo himself?

'Who could it be? Choi Jong-In? Or is it Cha Hae-In?'

Now that Park Jong-Su thought about it, didn't he see a document containing Hunter Cha Hae-In's profile in Jin-Woo's office yesterday?

'If its Cha Hunter-nim, then yeah, she'll be more than enough.'

Although it was regretful that he couldn't stop Jin-Woo from leaving, but still, Park Jong-Su's expression got brighter at the prospect of the potential replacement. As long as it wasn't Mah Dong-Wook from the Shining Star, then he'd welcome anyone.

"If you do that, then we will...."

Park Jong-Su's eyes sparkled brightly now. How powerful would this Hunter be, that he was capable of subbing for Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?

Anticipation began filling up the void left behind when anxiety receded in his mind. The rest of the team members also eavesdropped on the conversation and began looking at Jin-Woo with eyes half mixed with anticipation and misgivings.

Jin-Woo didn't waste time hesitating and summoned forth the most powerful soldier in his shadow army.

'Beru.'

The king of ants, its body shrouded in black mist, answered its master's call.

'Oh, my king....'

Beru emerged from the shadow and politely knelt before Jin-Woo, its head respectfully lowered.

"Uh?! Uh-uh!!"

"Uh?!"

Beru didn't bother to mask its overwhelmingly evil magic energy and that freaked the Hunters out so much that they had to retreat far away immediately.

That absolutely horrendous amount of magic energy, and the exact same outer appearance as 'that' thing.

"C-could that be....??"

"N-no, but how come?!"

These Hunters immediately recognised the identity of Beru.

Without a doubt, this was the very same mutated ant monster that toyed around with the Korean rank S Hunters back inside Jeju Island's ant tunnel. Park Jong-Su quickly asked, unable to hide his shock in his voice.

"H-Hunter-nim, isn't that the mutated ant monster from Jeju?"

Jin-Woo nodded his head. With these high-ranked Hunters recognising Beru, it became more convenient for him now since he didn't need to explain himself any further.

The whole of the country witnessed Beru's power, after all.

"From here onwards, this guy will sub for me."

"EH??"

Park Jong-Su's eyes grew extra wide. Jin-Woo knew what he was about to say. But he simply didn't have enough time to answer all of their questions. He ignored the panicking Park Jung-Su and gave a new order to Beru.

'Protect these humans.'

'I shall follow.'

Beru made a short reply and raised its head.

'In that case, oh my king. What should I do about the existences besides

these humans...?’

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the deepest part of the dungeon for a second or two, before issuing one more order to Beru.

‘Do whatever you wish.’

It was right then. Beru’s repressed desire to kill morphed into an unbridled joy and spread all over its body.

Kiiiiieehk-!!

Beru stood back up and screeched out loudly, the entire cavern reverberating from that horrifying sound.

Shiver.

Hunters began trembling from that screech, even though it wasn’t even directed at them.

‘W-wait... we, we need to finish the raid with that, that thing?!’

Cold perspiration trickled down Park Jong-Su’s back.

Jin-Woo didn’t even pay any mind to the reactions of the Hunters and simply summoned twenty more ‘ant’ Shadow Beast Soldiers to aid Beru’s cause.

Kiiiehhk-!

Kiiieehk!

Having breathed in the ‘fresh’ outside air for the first time in a long while, the Beast Soldiers began screeching out loudly as well. And quite obviously, every Hunter bearing witness to this spectacle froze up where they stood.

“H-hold on!!”

Jeong Ye-Rim quickly turned around and called out to Jin-Woo.

“A-are you going to leave just like that? After letting loose this monsters here??”

“If you want, I’ll simply undo the summoning. But, when that happens....”

Jeong Ye-Rim flinched when Jin-Woo’s cold glare landed on her.

“...I’ll no longer care about what happens to the Knight Order Guild.”

Jin-Woo made a promise. And that was, he’d protect the members of the Knight Order Guild and ensure that they wouldn’t get harmed.

However, if the other side declined his act of goodwill first, then he didn’t

see the need to stay responsible for these people, either.

“....”

Jin-Woo’s unyielding declaration shut up the mouths of not just Jeong Ye-Rim, but the rest of the Knight Order’s Hunters, as well.

Jin-Woo spun around. And almost instantly, he could no longer be seen by the Knight Order’s raid team members.

‘How long do I have left until the cooldown time ends?’

As his distance from the raid team grew, Jin-Woo summoned up his Skills window to confirm.

[Skill: Shadow Exchange Lv.1]

Class specific...

.....[01:02:16] remaining before the skill can be used again.

‘D*mn it.....’

Jin-Woo bit his lower lip.

He needed to wait over an hour if he were to use the Shadow Exchange skill. The signals from his soldiers were still coming in, even right now.

He was getting a really bad premonition here.

‘I can’t wait for another hour.’

He needed to exit from this dungeon first. Making up his mind thus, Jin-Woo took another step, but then....

Undead monsters that were supposed to be finished off after the assault team went past here began raising their bodies up again.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo’s eyes burned brilliantly from rage. He was enraged by these worthless monsters trying to block his path.

When that happened,

‘.....??’

Like a lie, the undead monsters all knelt down towards Jin-Woo.

Plop.

Plop.

There was not one exception here. Every single revived undead monster was prostrating before Jin-Woo now.

‘But, why?’

Jin-Woo tilted his head. Could the reason for every monster encountered by the assault team being so terrified be all because of him?

‘Is it because I possess a higher ranked Class than a Necromancer capable of controlling the undead?’

The current situation was puzzling, but he didn’t have enough time to think about this too deeply. He stored the shortsword back in his Inventory and ran with all his might to exit from the Gate.

The attention of the people waiting outside the Gate focused on him in an instant.

Why did only Hunter Seong Jin-Woo get out of the Gate?

They sent their curiosity-filled gazes in his direction, but Jin-Woo ignored them all.

‘Kaisel!’

Suddenly, a Sky Dragon covered in black mist revealed itself.

Kiiiaaahhk-!!

The spectators immediately recognised the Sky Dragon, which had appeared in the news a couple of times before, and they began crying out while pointing to Jin-Woo.

“Waaaahh-!!”

“Look! That!!”

“That’s Seong Jin-Woo!!”

Jin-Woo quickly climbed above Kaisel’s back as the people cheered on, and he issued a command to his mount.

‘To where my little sister is! At your fastest speed!’

If something tried to block his way, he’d smash past them regardless of what they were.

Kaisel roared out in happiness, knowing that now it could flap its wings without any restrictions whatsoever.

Kiiiaahk!

Right away, Kaisel unfurled its massive wings and took to the sky.



Chapter 142: Chapter 142

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The last restriction was finally undone.

Finally gaining the freedom of movement, the ‘owner of the dungeon’ left the boss chamber and strode outside the Gate. It was the Chieftain of the Orcs, ‘Guroktaru’.

Its entire body was covered in black tattoos, seemingly not leaving behind even a single patch of empty skin.

Tattoos signified victory to Orcs. These were proof of how many battles this creature fought and how many enemies it had slain so far.

“Guroktaru!”

“Guroktaru!!”

The Orcs waiting for the Chieftain in front of the Gate chanted out its name and lowered their heads.

On the other hand, Guroktaru raised its head towards the ceiling without saying anything.

‘.....’

Because, it was getting rather noisy up there.

It had been some time since the advanced scouts took away a few of the warriors while declaring that they would conquer this castle of humans.

However, they still hadn’t ended their battle yet?

A sweating Orc received the furious glare of its Chieftain and hurriedly explained the situation.

“High Orc warriors are aiding humans.”

“High Orcs?”

Indeed, High Orc warriors were strong. Regular Orc warriors wouldn’t be able to fight against them. Meaning, it was now time for the Chieftain to step up.

“How many?”

“Three.”

Even if their opponents were strong, what a shameful notion it was for dozens of great Orc warriors to fail at subduing only three High Orcs.

“Pathetic....”

Guroktaru’s expression crumpled.

The Orcs were scared stiff from the Chieftain’s anger and began trembling like leaves. It was then, the Orc great warriors that had been left behind by Guroktaru’s speed, finally emerged out of the Gate one by one.

There were a total of five out-of-breath Orc great warriors.

Confirming that all of its guards had escaped from the Gate now, Guroktaru gestured at the Orc making that report with its chin.

“Lead the way.”

The Orc lowered its head and stood at the front. The Chieftain and its guards strode right behind. Meanwhile, lights of madness were burning furiously within Guroktaru’s eyes.

‘Insolent b*stards....’

It was now time to demand appropriate compensation from the High Orcs, who dare to interrupt the hunting of the Orc warriors.

Suddenly finding himself left behind along with ant monsters, Park Jong-Su was feeling rather dumbstruck at the moment.

“Hyung-nim.....”

“Leave me for a bit, okay? I need time to think.”

Kiiiiieehhk-

Keeck, keeck...

Ka-ahahak!

Being surrounded by over twenty of these monsters, no, ‘summons’, Park Jong-Su was getting this close to abandoning this raid altogether.

Not only that....

Well, this guy over there. This one guy, with a far bigger physique and with wings on its back. Wasn’t that guy the same mutated ant monster that made an utter mockery out of the rank S Hunters?

This guy’s horrifying level of magic energy was making Park Jong-Su’s skin crawl just by being near the dang thing.

‘If I think about a creature like this turning on us.....’

He suddenly thought that the rank S Hunters willing to fight against this thing were a rather amazing bunch of folks, instead. And, at the same time...

'Hold on a sec....'

...And, at the same time, a certain suspicion bloomed in his head.

Just what was the identity of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo controlling this mutated ant monster as his summoned creature?

'Didn't Hunter Seong Jin-Woo solo this guy, too?'

When his thoughts reached that point, his heart began pounding even harder.

'No, wait. I've gotten sidetracked.'

Park Jong-Su shook his head to throw away all the distracting thoughts.

Indeed, he needed to think about whether to continue on with this raid along with these monsters or not, instead of wasting time on nonsense like how strong Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was or what his true identity could be.

'Okay, so... let's say that we give up on this raid.'

If so, then how should he explain the result of this raid to the reporters waiting outside?

Could he say, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had to suddenly leave the assault team and therefore they couldn't afford to advance forward anymore?

Or, they had to give up on the raid because they got too scared of the new 'friends' Hunter Seong Jin-Woo summoned here for them?

'What kind of an embarrassment would that be.....?'

Didn't matter which excuse was used, it'd become a source of ridicule for them, probably for forever.

Park Jong-Su clenched his teeth.

'Fine. We go forward.'

Did it really matter if they were scared of these summons? At the end of the day, weren't they Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's slaves?

When Park Jong-Su thought about this, his mind calmed down just a tad.

'I mean, seriously. These guys are Seong Hunter-nim's summoned creatures, so they won't do anything weird to us, right?'

Park Jong-Su's confidence filled eyes shifted over to Beru, and the latter approached the Hunter after sensing his gaze.

‘Heok....’

The confidence of a few seconds ago evaporated real fast, and Park Jong-Su could barely squeeze out a trembling voice.

“L-let’s get going.”

Rather naturally, he began speaking in a super-polite tone. However, Beru showed no reaction even after hearing Park Jong-Su’s voice. No, ‘it’ just stood there and simply stared back.

Wondering if his manner of speech was still not good enough for this creature’s whims, Park Jong-Su became even more polite in his tone.

“Should.... Should we get going now?”

Even then, Beru showed no sign of budging from the spot.

Park Jong-Su’s consciousness was gradually getting fainter as he had to stare longer and longer into the powerful glare of the creature in front of him.

It was then, Jeong Yun-Tae approached him from behind.

“Hyung-nim, will we be continuing with this raid alongside these guys?”

Park Jong-Su was already feeling jittery, so when his deputy began pressing him, he ended up blurting out in anger.

“Just keep quiet, will ya?!”

The words, ‘Or, why dontcha become the leader of this assault team and tell these things we’re going to give up’, almost jumped out of his throat but somehow, he managed to swallow them all back down.

Park Jong-Su glared daggers at the poor Jeong Yun-Tae for a bit before shifting his attention back to Beru.

Gulp.

His dry saliva went down the throat all by itself. Park Jong-Su desperately wanted this awkwardness to go away as soon as possible.

But, then suddenly a thought popped up in his head.

‘Could it be that this guy can’t understand what I’m saying here and that’s why it’s not moving?’

When Park Jong-Su’s thoughts reached this point, he forced his facial muscle to contort into an ungainly smile. And then, he pointed towards the interior of the dungeon.

“In front. Forward.”

In that moment.

Pii-shook!

The mutated ant monster disappeared instantly, along with the sound of a bullet leaving the silenced gun.

‘...Uh?’

Where did it go?

Even before Park Jong-Su could scan his vicinity with puzzled eyes, Beru returned to his original position.

Taht.

Beru then pushed forward something held in his hand towards Park Jong-Su’s face.

‘W-what the heck?’

When the flustered Hunter took a closer look, he realised that the mystery object was actually the head of a monster.

Not only that, it was the helmet of one of the most powerful undead monsters, Death Knight, with a rotting head still trapped inside. It dangled oh-so innocuously in the hand of the mutated ant monster.

“U-uwaaaahk?!”

Park Jong-Su freaked out and plopped down his butt, real hard.

The other members of the assault team also were jolted into stunned silence and hurriedly gathered around Park Jong-Su.

Beru disinterestedly scanned the Hunters now grouped together in one spot, then tossed the Death Knight’s head away somewhere. He loudly screeched out to the rest of the ant monsters.

“Kiiiieehk!!”

With that, the ant army began to march forward in perfect order.

‘.....’

Beru looked down at Park Jong-Su still on the ground for a little while, before he slowly turned around and followed after the marching ants. The Hunters hurriedly checked out Park Jong-Su’s current condition.

“Hyung-nim!!”

“Chairman, are you alright?!”

“Are you okay?”

Park Jong-Su replied to them with a stupefied face.

“Uh, uh. I’m okay.”

His body was fine. But, for some reason, his heart ached, instead. It felt as if he got ridiculed by a summoned creature.

‘There’s no way that’s true, surely not....’

Indeed, a summoned creature couldn’t have possessed such a level of intelligence. Whatever the case may be, though – he couldn’t give up on this raid now that he even got humiliated somewhat like this.

Park Jong-Su dusted off his butt and got back up.

“Let’s go, as well.”

The expressions of the Hunters stiffened up.

“Eh?”

“You want to follow after those things?”

“How can we go on a raid with monsters? I won’t do it.”

“Yeah, me too.”

Park Jong-Su spat out a groan as if he was feeling annoyed now.

Was there a need for him to waste his breath convincing these folks with words here? He quickly searched for the head of the Death Knight discarded by the mutated ant monster and picked it up.

“Heok!”

“H-hey, isn’t that the head of a Death Knight?”

“A Death Knight, you say??”

The experienced Hunters among the group recognised the helmet of the Death Knight and gasped out in pure shock.

Park Jong-Su calmly explained it to them.

“You are all aware of how much Magic Crystals coming out of high-ranked monsters sell for, yes?”

Gulp.

Hunters swallowed their greedy salivas.

“All we have to do is to follow them and simply pick those Crystals up.”

The expressions of the Hunters, filled with dissatisfaction up until a second ago, gradually brightened up. That was an expected and perhaps, inevitable

reaction in this situation. Park Jong-Su used a question to end his speech.

“So, anyone still unwilling to continue?”

Hunters moved in an even more orderly fashion than the ant army. Those who had already advanced far forward looked back and called out to Park Jong-Su.

“Chairman? What are you doing at the far back?”

“Please hurry up! We might leave you behind, you know?”

“Hyung-nim, how long are you planning to stay there?”

Park Jong-Su bitterly smacked his lips.

“Well, I’ll be... these people. Seriously.”

And so, the momentarily-halted raid of the Knight Order Guild recommenced from this point onwards.

Jin-Woo directed his gaze below him.

People, roads, cars, buildings, rivers, trees, mountains, mountains, and even more mountains – the scenery kept changing every time he blinked over and over again.

‘So fast.’

Kaisel’s unrestricted speed had reached a truly gobsmacking level.

If he was a simple, regular powerless person and not a highest-ranked Hunter out there, then he wouldn’t have been able to withstand the air pressure his body was being subjected to right now.

Even then....

Despite this amazing turn of speed....

Jin-Woo was getting more and more anxious.

The signals from his soldiers were still getting to him, but they were gradually getting weaker.

Not only that...

‘Status window.’

[MP: 8,619/8,770]

From a short while ago, his MP began declining as well. That definitely was not a good sign. Because it could only mean that the High Orc Shadow Soldiers were repeatedly being destroyed only to get revived again.

‘An enemy on the level of destroying my Shadow Soldiers are aiming for Jin-Ah.’

Grit.

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened.

Even if not a single strand of his little sister’s hair was harmed, he swore to never let this enemy get out of there alive. Murderous rage filled up in Jin-Woo’s eyes.

‘Faster. Faster!’

Kyaaahhh-!

Kaisel heard Jin-Woo’s order and screeched out again, before increasing its speed even further.

The High Orc warriors were indeed strong. Unfortunately, they were still no match for the Orc Chieftain, Guroktaru.

The Orc’s leader left behind its guards in the corridor and stepped forward to fight all by itself. And then, while easily evading the attacks of the High Orcs, pulled out a scimitar sheathed on its back.

“Is this all you have?!”

The interior of the classroom was filled with the corpses of the Orcs. Even at a casual count, there were 50 of them here.

Over 50 of its underlings were done in by these three High Orcs.

“Make me enjoy this more, warriors of the High Orc race!”

The Chieftain’s rage was transferred directly into merciless swings of its curved blade.

Guroktaru’s scimitar drew elaborate arcs in the air and began shaving away the High Orcs, their armours and all.

“Ahh!!”

“Kyaaahk!”

The screams didn’t come from the High Orcs, naturally, but from the mouths of the humans hiding behind them. Guroktaru’s forehead creased up in displeasure.

‘Annoyingly noisy.’

After taking care of these High Orcs, those bugs would be next.

Guroktaru sliced off an arm of a High Orc and chopped it up in fine pieces

until it got eventually bored of doing that, and spun on its heels to cut off the opponent's neck clean off.

Slice!

When that happened, other Orcs who had retreated outside the classroom because of the High Orcs all began raising loud cheers.

“Guroktaru!”

“Guroktaru-!!”

It was then, Guroktaru's brows quivered.

The headless High Orc morphed to black smoke before reverting back to how it was originally, right in front of its eyes.

‘Is this shamanism?’

Even after the Orc Chieftain cut and sliced its enemies several more times, the story remained the same.

“Kuwahk!”

Guroktaru eventually became really frustrated and roared out. It had sliced and hacked these High Orcs numerous times to death, yet they all reverted back to their original shapes again and again.

‘It won't be hard killing them hundreds, thousands times.’

However, there would be no end in sight if that happened.

Even right now, that d*mn voice in its head was repeatedly ordering Guroktaru to kill humans. As a matter of fact, the Orc was beginning to suffer from a migraine as the voice continuously rang inside its head.

But that didn't mean it could ignore these High Orcs and try to kill the humans, either.

‘...Time to finish this.’

Guroktaru rolled its brain into gear.

If these High Orcs were creations from some kind of sorcery, then without a doubt, there must be a shaman controlling them somewhere. Guroktaru had fought against many different kinds of sorcery in the past battles, and therefore, it subsequently knew how to end this dirty trick once and for all, as well.

‘That female!’

That human female, standing far behind these High Orcs and holding her

breath! Although faint, she was somehow connected to these High Orcs.

Guroktaru's eyes gleamed dangerously.

'So, is it you?'

The monster's target for its murderous rage was redirected to her. The moment Jin-Ah met Guroktaru's gaze, her entire body shuddered uncontrollably.

That human female definitely knew something – Guroktaru decided as so, and pointed at Jin-Ah while glancing behind itself.

"Kill that human female!"

Even before its words were finished, the guards observing the fight from the back rushed forward to carry out Guroktaru's order.

Then, the High Orcs ignored Guroktaru in front of them to desperately block against the advancing guards.

'I thought as much.'

Indeed, the Orc Chieftain's guess was correct.

By seizing the opening created from the High Orcs being held up, Guroktaru stood before Jin-Ah.

"So, it was you."

The Orc used the hand not holding the scimitar and grabbed Jin-Ah's neck, before lifting her up.

"Ah...."

The female, with her airways squeezed tight, couldn't even scream properly. This caused Guroktaru to tilt its head.

It was such a weak, slender neck that it'd get broken just from the monster squeezing a little harder than usual. But, how could such a weak human manage to complete a high-class sorcery that changed warriors into immortals?

There was a simple way to find out.

'Kill her and I'll see.'

And, just as Guroktaru began squeezing the female's neck to snap it in half....

Kiiiaaahhk-!

From afar, the cry of a Sky Dragon resounded out.



Chapter 143: Chapter 143

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Right away, Guroktaru felt every hair on its body stand up.

‘What is this?’

As time slowed down from the extreme tension it felt, the Orc Chieftain’s instincts of a warrior, trained to their very limit, sent out countless warning bells. It said that a truly ‘terrifying’ being was headed this way.

Badump!!

The sound of the Orc’s heartbeat rang around painfully in its eardrums, like a series of thunderclaps.

If it didn’t get out of here right now, it’d be killed.

The sharp instincts of a warrior, honed like a fine blade, would sometimes display powers close to that of the gift of foresight. Just like right now!

‘.....!!’

Guroktaru quickly discarded the human female and with the movements akin to a wild animal, fled to the door of the classroom.

BOOM!!

A mighty, ear-splitting explosion occurred next, the shards of glass flying out like shrapnel. Meanwhile, Orcs manning the doorways began hastily retreating away after the back of their Chieftain suddenly appeared in front of their eyes.

‘.....’

Guroktaru wordlessly glared forward, its breathing now becoming extremely cautious.

It was picking up on an unusual and eerie vibe. It could see a human male it hadn’t seen before standing on the spot where the human female was just now.

Guroktaru shifted its gaze ever so slightly to the side.

Its opposite corner was where the windows were. Nothing remained of the entirety of that wall as if it had been struck by a powerful siege weapon.

‘Did the human enter by breaking through the windows?’

Even with its excellent dynamic visual acuity, the Orc Chieftain still failed to follow that man’s movements.

‘.....’

Guroktaru could only swallow its saliva at the sudden entrance of a powerful opponent. A strand of cold sweat trickled down its temple.

Kiiiaaahhk-!!

Guroktaru’s head snapped upwards after it heard that screech.

Past the ceiling, beyond the roof – yet another powerful enemy was circling around above the Orc’s head like a hawk waiting for prey to emerge.

‘This might become a difficult fight.’

Guroktaru’s eyes were now dyed in the colour of nervousness, something that didn’t exist only a few moments ago.

The new enemy completely ignored the presence of the Orc Chieftain and its underlings, and simply proceeded to confirm the human female’s condition.

Guroktaru spoke to its enemy.

“I am Guroktaru, from the proud tribe of Red Blade!”

That was the warrior’s introduction only granted to an opponent capable of reaping away the Orc’s life. Having completed its introduction, Guroktaru asked the human male.

“And who are you?”

Jin-Woo raised his head and quietly spoke.

“Shut your mouth and quietly wait for your turn over there.”

A human just used the language of the Orcs?

The Orc’s surprise lasted only for a moment.

Perhaps it was because of the power carried in that man’s voice, none of the Orcs, which included Guroktaru itself, could even dare to budge an inch from the spot.

“Cough, cough.”

Jin-Woo gently patted Jin-Ah’s back as she continued to cough and wheeze while he carefully checked to see if she had sustained any injuries. Thankfully, he couldn’t see any.

....With the sole exception of the handprint clearly visible on her neck, that was. Jin-Woo asked, his expression hard and unforgiving.

“Are you alright?”

“Oppa!!”

Jin-Ah finally stopped coughing and jumped into his embrace, tears streaming from her eyes.

Jin-Woo gently stroked her hair as if he was soothing a scared child.

‘...Oppa?’

‘Jin-Ah’s Oppa... that means....?’

‘Ah!’

The students finally realised who the man in front of their eyes was. He was Seong Jin-Woo, a Hunter ranked S!

‘We’re saved!!’

The students confirmed Jin-Woo’s face and began sobbing again. These tears weren’t of despair and fear like the ones from before, but were formed from the mixture of joy and relief they felt.

“Sob, sob...”

“It’s fine now. I’m here, so everything will be okay.”

Jin-Woo gently soothed his sobbing sister, while extending his sensory perception to the rest of the school. And, within this large school building, the only presence of humans he could pick up on was.... 17.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo’s hardened complexion was now dyed in the darkness of rage.

He very cautiously separated his sister from him as she tried hard not to leave his side. He then called out his Shadow Soldiers matching the exact number of the surviving students.

“Everyone, follow my summons out of the building.”

The students nodded their heads, and the soldiers proceeded to pick up them up in an embrace. As for Jin-Ah, he entrusted her especially to Igrit.

“Please wait for me downstairs, okay? I’m going to join you very soon after dealing with this.”

Normally, Jin-Ah would try to stop her oppa, telling him that they should go together regardless of whether he was a rank S Hunter or not. No, she’d

still say that even if he was something greater.

But now.... She couldn't do that.

Because, Jin-Woo's current expression was far, far too scary for her to say those words. So, Jin-Ah could only nod her head.

Jin-Woo gave out his signal, and the soldiers carrying the students jumped outside of the destroyed wall one by one. Orcs in the corridor flinched slightly at the sight of the almost-caught prey making their escape. When that happened, Jin-Woo glared at them with his ice-cold eyes.

"I told you not to move."

Like some kind of a lie, all Orcs stopped moving altogether. None of them could go against his glare.

One of the Orcs, its complexion utterly pale, sneaked its gaze around and cautiously whispered to Guroktaru.

"C-chief...."

"Shush."

Guroktaru was in agreement with that Orc, though.

It was true that right now wasn't the time to care about those weak prey escaping. No, they should be minding the 'hunter' right in front of their eyes. A fight between hunters would commence very soon, where who eats who would be determined.

'Even then.... We can't let them get away that easily.'

Guroktaru sent out a sneaky little signal, and two of its guards moved without making any sounds.

After confirming that all of the students had left the classroom safely, Jin-Woo turned around to face the Orcs. He didn't let them leave because he was worried about them getting injured.

'These measly Orcs....'

He was confident of killing them all in the blink of an eye.

He simply didn't want to show his little sister or other kids what was about to happen in here, that was all.

And now, there were no more eyes watching. Meaning, there was nothing to restrict his actions now.

'.....'

Jin-Woo's gaze briefly drifted towards the stairs outside the classroom. He sensed two Orcs going downstairs while hiding their presence to the best of their abilities. It seemed that they were going after the kids, but... it didn't matter.

He had sent Igrit there, and Kaisal was circling around in the air, too.

'So, the remaining task is to deal with these lot, then.'

Jin-Woo exhaled softly. The exiting air contained a heavy, dense amount of magic energy.

Guroktaru asked him again.

"Who are you? How can you speak our tongue?"

Jin-Woo ignored the Orc's words and slowly made his way over to them. Realising that the human male had no intentions to answer back, Guroktaru bared its fangs and shouted out.

"Attack!"

The brave Orc warriors pounced on Jin-Woo all at once after hearing the Chieftain's order.

"Kurururuk!"

"Kurarak!"

When they did... the time froze.

Within this freeze-frame of a moment, Jin-Woo leisurely walked in between the Orcs that were moving agonisingly slowly, and proceeded to destroy them one by one.

He didn't even need to take his weapons out. He only needed to use his finger. Every time Jin-Woo's finger brushed by an Orc, heads, shoulders, wrists, waists and midriffs of the monsters exploded into bits. And after utterly destroying over twenty Orcs in one blink of an eye....

Jin-Woo stood before Guroktaru.

The Orc Chieftain could only barely keep up with Jin-Woo's afterimage with its eyes. Its trembling lips parted with much difficulty.

"W-what....?"

It didn't even have a chance to swing its scimitar. Jin-Woo's left hand grabbed Guroktaru's mouth and jaw, and the Orc could only whimper pathetically.

"Keok!"

Jin-Woo walked forward just like that and slammed the Orc's head against the corridor's wall.

SLAM!!

The empty corridor reverberated with the thunderous boom.

Jin-Woo's gaze shifted towards either end of the corridor. It was filled with the remains of the students. It was truly a hard-to-look gruesome sight to behold.

However, Jin-Woo didn't avert his gaze and imprinted the sight of every single one of these kids in his mind, just so he could demand reparations from the guilty one responsible.

Jin-Woo shifted his eyes to Guroktaru.

"Why?"

His voice was incomparably icy.

"Why does your kind want to kill humans to this extreme level?"

Guroktaru had long lost its desire to resist and could only tremble in fear as it replied.

"In, in our heads, telling us.... to kill humans...."

Jin-Woo became momentarily confused.

'Kill humans?'

He had heard of the exact same thing before. But, back then, he interpreted the word 'humans' as another term for 'Hunters'.

But it seemed that the word 'human' really did mean all humans, now that he got to hear this monster's reply.

"Then? What about me?"

Jin-Woo asked the Orc again.

"Do you not hear the voice telling you to kill me?"

He brought his face closer.

It was inevitable that Guroktaru would look into Jin-Woo's eyes. The Orc began shaking its head and shivered hard as if it had discovered something in there.

"F, f-forgive.... Forgive, me...."

Something impossible happened. The brave and mighty great warrior of the Orc race began shedding tears like a little child. Jin-Woo felt the inside of his

head suddenly cool off as he watched the terrified monster cowering before him.

‘So, that’s how it is....’

He was not being seen as a human even in this guy’s head, was that it?

‘....Well, it doesn’t really matter.’

Jin-Woo wasn’t all that interested in how monsters viewed him. No, he simply killed them because they were out to harm humans.

Guroktaru shivered and continued sob as the fear it couldn’t overcome completely enveloped it.

“Please.... forgive.....”

Jin-Woo replied.

“I’ll forgive you.”

And then, he summoned the ‘Demon King’s Shortsword’.

“However, do not think that the process will be a painless one for you.”

The Knight Order Guild’s assault team could only gasp out in astonishment while spectating on the battles of the monsters.

“Heok!”

“H-how could it be....”

How could anyone call this a raid now? Because, the ants very easily subdued the undead monsters and then, began greedily devouring them.

Crunch, crunch....

The eyes of the Hunters opened wider and wider from this horrifying spectacle.

“B-but, if they eat up everything like that, nothing will be left behind, you know?”

“Right. Even the Magic Crystals....”

The Hunters could only anxiously look on as the top-class Magic Crystals all ended up in the stomachs of these monsters, no, summoned creatures.

Unable to watch from the sidelines any longer, Jeong Ye-Rim hastily ran out.

“Don’t you know how expensive that is?!”

She tried to wrestle away the corpse of a Vampire, but that only managed to

annoy the ant, and the creature swung its arm at her direction.

“Ahk!”

She cried out and tumbled backwards after the ant’s claw cut into her forearm.

Plop.

“O-ouch.”

Just as she tried to get up while rubbing her butt....

“Kururuk-!”

By the time she regained her wits, the ant monster that swung its arm was standing before her. The creature had its gigantic maw and its horrifying mandibles wide open as if to swallow her head whole.

Jeong Ye-Rim’s expression froze stiff at that moment.

“Ah.... Ah....”

It was then. Beru had come swooping in and turned that ant around. He opened his own maw wide just like how this ant did a moment ago, and then....

“Kiiiiieeehhk-!!!”

...And then, he screeched out incredibly loudly.

Being subjected to the rage of an existence on another level, the ant creature couldn’t even meet Beru’s gaze and simply shivered in fear.

“K-keeiick....”

Beru let go of the ant’s shoulder, causing the creature to hurriedly scurry away from there. Jeong Ye-Rim watched this scene play out in a total daze, but Beru approached her and extended his hand out.

‘Uh....?’

Still stupefied over everything, she grabbed the offered hand and was able to finally stand back up.

“I, uh... T-tha....”

She was about to say something, only for her lips to stop. Because, she saw the gentle blue light circulating around Beru’s fingertips, that was why.

“....Healing magic?!”

Jeong Ye-Rim’s brows shot up real high in surprise.

The wound in her arm healed up immediately the moment that blue light touched her. After confirming that her wound was completely cured, Beru turned towards the ants and shouted out.

“Khe-ehck!”

That caused the ants to end their mealtime and began moving deeper into the dungeon’s interior.

Jeong Ye-Rim watched the back of Beru and murmured to herself.

“How can.... a summon cast better healing magic than me??”

The Hunters finally arrived in the school.

They followed the direction the needle of the magic compass was pointing to and climbed up the stairs. An incredible magic energy reaction was coming from the sixth floor’s corridor.

The man in charge of the Hunters looked behind at his group and spoke.

“Be careful.”

The Hunters nodded their heads.

And when they eventually arrived on the sixth floor, they got to discover two things.

“Heok!!”

One, an Orc sliced up into so many pieces that it was impossible to count; two, a lone man covered in blood standing still with a shortsword in his hand.

‘And that person is....?’

The leader of the assault team met Jin-Woo’s icy cold eyes and his breath nearly came to a sudden stop. But he recovered somehow and picked up the walkie talkie.

“Yes, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is here.”

The leader took a look around and made another report.

“The situation has been resolved.”



Chapter 144 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Because of the nature of the incident itself, a massive crowd of people had rushed towards the school's perimeters.

"My son goes to this school!!"

"Get out of the way!"

"I need to confirm what happened with my own eyes!!"

"Aigo, aigo!!"

If it weren't for the desperate crowd control efforts by the police and the Association's employees, the scene of the incident would've descended into pure pandemonium from the maddened crowd.

The reporters had also rushed here as soon as word got out and were now busy snapping away with their cameras.

"Uh? It's Seong Jin-Woo!"

"Take his pictures!!"

Jin-Woo evaded their gazes and wordlessly walked over to someone that seemed to be a staff member of the Hunter's Association. This staff member immediately froze up in nervousness after seeing Jin-Woo's face. That was how scary the Hunter's complexion looked at that moment.

"S-Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim...."

"Where's my sister?"

"Miss Seong Jin-Ah and other students have been transferred to the Seoul Il-Sin hospital."

"....."

Jin-Woo nodded his head, his expression still remaining grave, and turned around to walk away. The staff member unconsciously swallowed dry saliva while watching his back get further away.

Gulp.

The first thing those arriving here did was to confirm the status of the student named Seong Jin-Ah, as per the instruction from the Association.

Thankfully, she was unhurt. With the exception of abrasions suffered around her neck and wrists, there were no other injuries on her.

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was the one who had rescued her, so he should know that fact better than anyone, yet....

‘Even then, for him to be that p*ssed off...’

It was a good thing that he arrived on time, otherwise, how would he have reacted if something happened to his sister? The staff member shuddered from the terrifying dizziness he suddenly felt just then.

It indeed was a huge relief.

Contrary to the relief of the staff member, though, Jin-Woo was feeling quite gloomy at the moment as he pulled out his phone.

‘I’m sure Mom’s about to get the news.’

Too many students lost their lives at the hands of the monsters. Rather obviously, his mother would feel like her world was about to crumble after receiving the news.

‘Before that happens, I need to tell her that Jin-Ah’s okay.’

He thought as such and was about to tap the **“Call”** icon, but then, he heard an unexpected voice coming from behind him and stopped.

“I’ve already sent some of the Association’s agents over to speak to your mother, Seong Hunter-nim. They should be on their way to the hospital as we speak.”

Jin-Woo looked behind him.

“Mister Association President.”

Goh Gun-Hui stood there, his complexion as dark as Jin-Woo’s.

Even though the President himself was not at fault here, as the person representing South Korea’s Hunter’s Association, he was feeling the burden of responsibility for failing to prevent this tragedy. Jin-Woo could only express his gratitude for Goh Gun-Hui looking out for his family even under the current circumstances.

That prompted Goh Gun-Hui to shake his head.

“No, it’s us that should be thanking you.”

Seventeen students survived.

It was only because of Jin-Woo’s arrival that those students among the trapped in the school building were able to get out of there alive.

“We are constantly in your debt, Hunter-nim.”

Jin-Woo could only smile bitterly at that.

He could have saved a lot more students if he were able to use the Shadow Exchange and get here right away. Such regret seeped clearly into his expression.

Goh Gun-Hui could faintly sense what Jin-Woo was feeling right now from his expression. But the older man shook his head.

‘Now isn’t the time to wallow in our emotions.’

Indeed, didn’t he have something important to say to this young man? Goh Gun-Hui raised his head.

“Will you be heading to the hospital now?”

Jin-Woo thought back to the Gate in Gwang-An-ri, but quickly stopped worrying about it.

His MP remained the same as before. Meaning, Beru and his ants were conquering the dungeon without encountering any problem at the moment.

‘Well.... It’s not just any soldier but Beru, so it’ll be fine.’

There was no need to worry about the progress of the raid right now.

“Yes, I am.”

“Please, let me give you a ride there.”

“No, I’ll be fine.”

“Please, allow me. There is something else I wish to talk to you about on the way, as well.”

Jin-Woo initially declined thinking that the offer was made out of courtesy, but he nodded his head after seeing the earnest attitude of the Association President.

“Alright, I will.”

Jin-Woo followed Goh Gun-Hui’s guidance and they both climbed into the back seat of the waiting car.

Even though it was a full-size saloon, the back seat felt cramped after Goh Gun-Hui’s huge frame and Jin-Woo’s wide shoulders climbed aboard. Woo Jin-Cheol was sitting in the driver’s seat, and nodded his greeting through the rear-view mirror.

Jin-Woo also nodded slightly as his greeting.

The car slowly set forward and only then did the Association President stop hesitating and speak up.

“...In a way, you could say that today’s tragedy has been foretold in advance.”

His expression was hard.

On the other hand, Jin-Woo was feeling confused.

‘Does that mean the Association didn’t do anything about an incident they could have prevented in advance?’

Before his confusion had the chance to transform into anger, the Association President pulled out his phone and showed Jin-Woo its display. It showed a graphical chart.

“This shows the increase in the Gate activity around the city of Seoul for the last six months.”

The dots drew a gentle curvature but when it got nearer to present, it suddenly spiked up steeply.

“And this side shows the stats from around the world.”

If the Association President didn’t make that clear, Jin-Woo might have mistaken them for two of the exact same thing. That was how similar-looking the inclines in those two graphs were.

“The numbers of Gates appearing has spiked up noticeably throughout the world.”

Goh Gun-Hui’s complexion got darker and darker.

“However, that isn’t the only strange thing.”

He returned the phone back into his inner jacket pocket and carried on.

“People wanting to confirm their Awakened rankings are practically lining up in a long queue outside the Association every day now.”

The number of Gates where monsters come out was increasing, and at the same time, the number of Hunters who were supposed to block the Gates was also increasing? As if to maintain a balance?

Seeing Jin-Woo’s interested expression, the Association President spoke in a complicated tone of voice.

“We think that....”

Goh Gun-Hui ended his lengthy explanation while implying that it was only his personal hypothesis.

“....Something is changing.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

This was indeed interesting information. Anyone could tell something big was afoot from that data. Unfortunately, that didn't mean Jin-Woo could do anything about them right now. It was the same story for Goh Gun-Hui, as well.

Also, a simple phone call would have sufficed if it was about sharing of information and a hypothesis. Jin-Woo thought that Association President wouldn't have taken time out of his packed schedule to simply have this conversation.

“In that case, what you wish to talk to me about was....?”

As if he was waiting for that, Goh Gun-Hui picked up a briefcase resting by the footwell and pulled out various documents from there.

“Japan, the States, China, Russia, France, Britain, Germany, and even from the Middle East....”

All the nations with some international clout were brought up abruptly.

“These are all the official documents sent in from those nations that wish to make contact with you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim. I'm fairly certain that some of them even have made unofficial contacts with you already.”

Jin-Woo briefly recalled the incident involving the American Hunter Bureau's people, but decided not to mention it.

“In all honesty, we at the Hunter's Association simply don't have any rights to stop these people. No, we can only protect your personal information according to your request.”

Jin-Woo silently listened to the older man's story.

“I know that everything depends on your decision, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, but.... But, I fear that our country will not be able to adapt to the incoming changes if you decide to leave us.”

Rather than a concrete answer, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze out of the car's window. As he fell deeper into a myriad of distracting thoughts, one of the biggest hospitals in the country entered his view.

It was the very hospital where Jin-Ah had been admitted to.

“We will provide you with every convenience we can possibly provide.”

Goh Gun-Hui stuffed the documents back inside the briefcase and asked Jin-Woo with a tense expression.

“So, would you please remain in South Korea?”

The Knight Order’s assault team chased after the ants and arrived at the boss chamber’s entrance.

Jeong Yun-Tae’s eyes grew extra large after he spotted the ants that began entering the boss chamber.

“Hyung-nim, shouldn’t we try to stop them??”

“...I don’t think I can.”

Indeed, Park Jong-Su was not confident at all of persuading the summoned creatures that they needed to stop the raid for the moment, so they could start retrieving the remains of the dead monsters and the Magic Crystals.

He could only spit out a resigned sigh.

‘Yup, let’s just forget about it.’

His thoughts just went and did a 180.

They entered this Gate in order to let the world know that the Knight Order Guild was still going strong, didn’t they? It’d be perfectly acceptable to show the world that they could still clear a rank A dungeon, the highest rated one at that, without a single casualty or someone getting injured badly during the raid itself.

‘Not only that, without Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s presence, too!’

Wasn’t it the case of no one would know of what happened inside a dungeon?

Even if those ants managed to defeat the boss, the folks outside would only remember the name of the Knight Order Guild, not the creatures Hunter Seong Jin-Woo summoned out before leaving in a hurry.

Better still, once the boss died and the Gate closed, there would be no way to confirm the truth. Judging from Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s personality, he wasn’t the type to go around blabbing his mouth, either.

Park Jong-Su’s thought process arrived at that point and a smile floated up on his lips.

‘Well, isn’t this a fortune among misfortunes?’

It was then. The Hunters at the back of the pack suddenly became rather noisy.

“Chairman? There are a lot of things coming from our rear!”

“Yeah, I can hear them coming, too.”

“...Mm?”

Park Jong-Su tilted his head and walked to the rear of the team. And for sure, he could hear lots of footsteps as well.

‘Wait, did the retrieval team enter the Gate already?’

But, the highly-trained retrieval team of the Knight Order Guild wouldn't have entered a dungeon without receiving an order first, so how could this be?

Just as such thoughts entered his head....

“...Heok?!”

Park Jong-Su's brows shot up high. Because, the undead monsters, those the ants didn't snack on, were busy rushing to where the assault team was, all of them fully revived back to how they were.

‘C-could it be....??’

Did the ants chow up the undead because they knew this might happen?

Such a thought only lasted for a moment in his head. Park Jong-Su realised that his team wouldn't be able to deal with that many monsters, and hurriedly shouted out to his teammates.

“Everyone, enter the boss room, now!”

Their sole hope for survival was the summoned creatures left behind by Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. The assault team didn't even have a chance to confirm what was waiting for them inside the boss chamber and hurriedly jumped in.

After confirming that every last Hunter had entered, Park Jong-Su shouted out, veins popping up in his throat.

“Block the exit!!”

Jeong Ye-Rim activated her skill, 'Holy Wall', and blocked up the entryway connecting the boss room and the passageway before it.

Slam-!

Boom-!!

The Death Knight standing in front of the rushing horde noisily pounded on the invisible barrier. Her forehead soaked in cold sweat now, Jeong Ye-Rim turned her head towards Park Jong-Su.

“Chairman! I won't be able to hold this for more than five minutes,

tops!”

“I know!”

Not only Park Jong-Su, but the rest of the assault team members had finished preparing for a battle in case the wall was breached.

But, when they took a good look at the undead monsters pressing forward like a horde of insects on the other side of the wall, they began doubting whether they had any chances of winning here.

“All we can do here now is to pray that the summons kill the boss quickly and open up the path for us.”

Park Jong-Su looked back at the ants that should be facing off against the boss with a pair of desperate eyes. He prayed that the boss was an easy monster to fight.

‘...Oh, my dear lord.’

His eyes opened even wider than before.

The boss monster currently standing in a face-off against the ants was something even Park Jong-Su knew of, after hearing about it many times in the past.

A pale-faced ‘Mage’ wearing a tattered robe – the Arch Lich.

It was the strongest undead-type monster, thought to be the creature at the top of the undead food chain.

‘Why did it have to be a d*mn Arch Lich?!’

Park Jong-Su’s complexion darkened considerably.

He prayed for the summoned creatures to quickly kill the boss and help them out, but then, the opponent turned out to be a d*mn Arch Lich. It’d be more realistic for the Hunters to get rid of the scores of undead first and help the summoned creatures out next.

It was then.

Beru took a step forward towards the Arch Lich.

The Arch Lich then immediately summoned over a dozen Death Knights around the ants and surrounded them.

“Kiiiiieehhk-!!”

Beru bared his fangs and extended its claws out.

‘.....?’

The Arch Lich recognised the black smoke continuously rising up from Beru's entire body. It was almost as if the completely-empty eye sockets had widened for a second there.

“The Shadow Army??”

The language of the monsters came out from the Arch Lich's mouth. Beru retracted his claws after hearing the boss's words.

The Arch Lich swept its gaze around the ants behind Beru and asked in a puzzled voice.

“Why is the king's personal army attacking us?”

Kekeke.

Beru leaked out a sound that sounded like a cackle of ridicule, before pointing to himself.

“We have been chosen by the king.”

And then, he pointed at the Arch Lich.

“And you... weren't.”

The Arch Lich couldn't believe it, its voice now containing a trace of anger.

“That can't be! I shall personally report to the king, and.....!”

Unfortunately, even before the Arch Lich could finish its sentence, Beru appeared right before its stunned eyes.

‘....!!’

The shoulders of the Arch Lich quivered momentarily.

Beru was a high-class monster that the owner of a rank S dungeon sacrificed its own lifeforce to create. Even if its overall Stats had fallen a little ever since becoming a Shadow Soldier, there was just no way that an owner of a measly rank A dungeon, an Arch Lich, could fight against Beru.

The former ant king simply thrust its hand into the shocked boss's chest without hesitation.

Stab!!

The hand pierced through the chest, along with a pendant hanging on the Arch Lich's neck.

“Keok!!”

Beru's hand exiting from the back of the Arch Lich was grasping the pendant now. That piece of jewellery was basically the heart of the Arch Lich.

It wasn't all that difficult for Beru, once a top monster himself, to detect what was supplying the lifeforce to his enemy. The Arch Lich desperately shook its head.

“No... This can't be...!”

However, Beru didn't pay any attention to the pleading of his enemy and simply crushed the pendant in his hand.

Crack.

“You talk too much for someone about to die.”

Along with Beru's words, the body of the Arch Lich crumbled to dust.



Chapter 145: Chapter 145

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Park Jong-Su's jaw dropped to the floor. He was so shocked that he needed some time to process the event his own two eyes had witnessed just now.

'How could it kill the Arch Lich in one hit?!'

There was an event that catapulted the Arch Lich as a pretty infamous creature among the boss-level monsters. And that would be the incident of the Gold Dragon Guild's annihilation.

An entire Guild was completely destroyed by a single Arch Lich. Not just any Guild either, but one that was supposed to be quite powerful even within China, no less. But then again, that might have been an obvious result.

The Arch Lich could continuously summon out 'Death Knights' any time it wanted to. And one Death Knight was a very powerful undead-type monster that required the bitter struggle of multiple rank A Hunters to defeat.

If you underestimated the boss monster simply because it didn't have any guards around it initially, then you'd not be able to escape the fate of total destruction.

In the end, a dungeon break occurred from the Gate the Gold Dragon Guild failed to close. China's own Special Authority-rank Hunter Liu Zhigeng arrived in the nick of time so the incident didn't turn into a catastrophe, but still, many Hunters got to know the terror an Arch Lich posed through this incident.

'But now.....'

That mutated ant summon killed the Arch Lich in one hit. What an astonishing event that was.

Maybe it wasn't only Park Jong-Su who thought like this, because Jeong Yun-Tae standing next to him also couldn't seem to close his slack jaw at all.

"Oh, my god....."

As if he couldn't believe his own eyes, he asked Park Jong-Su for another confirmation.

"Hyung-nim, wasn't that an Arch Lich?"

"Yeah, it was. The thing that came out of the Gate during that Gold

Dragon Guild incident.”

“If that’s true, then that ant just one-shotted an Arch Lich....?”

Jeong Yun-Tae now formed a completely disbelieving expression. Other Hunters also heard the conversation taking place between Park Jong-Su and Jeong Yun-Tae, and failed to hide their extreme shock as well.

“An Arch Lich?!”

“That thing was an Arch Lich??”

“And the ant took it down in one hit??”

“Whoa.”

Just as the entirety of the Knight Order Guild’s assault team was being astonished by Jin-Woo’s ‘summon’ that could kill the boss of a rank A dungeon in the blink of an eye....

The multi-talented healer Jeong Ye-Rim, currently sweating profusely while trying to hold back the tide of the undead monsters, was dying of curiosity regarding what happened behind her back.

“What was that? What happened??”

However, her curiosity couldn’t be maintained for long. Something quite surprising started happening right in front of her eyes, that was why.

“Uh??”

All those undead monsters, rampaging around as if they were only a moment away from breaking past the ‘Holy Wall’, suddenly collapsed on the ground like puppets with their strings cut.

Plop.

Plop.

And then, they didn’t stand back up again.

“C-Chairman??”

Jeong Ye-Rim was startled by this sudden turn of event and hurriedly looked behind her. Park Jong-Su was nodding his head.

‘The Arch Lich must’ve had something to do with the defeated undead monsters reviving in full.’

He really did feel utterly dazed and lost at the sight of the crazed horde of the monsters rushing in like a black tidal wave, wondering what would happen to him and his group, but now...

It felt like he could breathe easy again.

“Fuu....”

Behind Park Jong-Su busy sighing out in relief, the Hunters standing there failed to hide their elated expressions. They were all excited at the idea of exiting from this dungeon safe and sound.

“Hyung-nim, you worked hard.”

“What do you mean, I worked hard.... It’s those guys that worked hard, not me.”

Park Jong-Su used his chin to point and Jeong Yun-Tae looked behind him. The summons were all standing still unmoving and staring at the human Hunters as if to ask ‘Where are we going next?’

‘Well, uh, them standing around like that and not budging makes them look a wee bit cuter....’

However, one of the ants must’ve felt bored, because, for no apparent reason, it loudly screeched towards the ceiling.

“Kkkkieeeehhk-!!”

Just like that, Jeong Yun-Tae’s expression that contained a hint of favourable impression towards the creatures flew away in an instant.

Swish.

Jeong Yun-Tae swivelled his head back and asked his boss.

“Hyung-nim. Isn’t this the same as Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim solo clearing this dungeon?”

“Yup, more or less.”

Park Jong-Su also agreed with that assessment. In the deeper parts of the dungeon, where the difficulty was at its highest, the Knight Order Guild’s assault team did nothing but just followed around the ant monsters.

And those ants were Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s summoned creatures. In the end, it was the same thing as Jin-Woo clearing the dungeon all by himself, just as Jeong Yun-Tae had alluded to.

‘What a scary power....’

They had seen the extent of his power in Jeju Island, but having witnessed it for real, they had to concede the fact that he possessed an incredible ability.

The fact that the summoned creatures were capable of displaying levels of combat prowess easily exceeding their imagination, and the fact that Seong

Hunter was able to freely control these summons, left a deep mental shock in the Knight Order's Hunters.

“Which means, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim doesn't even need to enter a Gate and still gets to clear it by just sending these guys in, no?”

Jeong Yun-Tae spoke without thinking too much about what he was saying. However, Park Jong-Su felt goosebumps break out all over his skin after he thought about what his deputy just mentioned in passing.

‘Hold up....’

The number of summons Hunter Seong brought out back in Jeju Island was at least over two hundred. That was only from those that got caught on camera. So, it was difficult to even estimate how many more he could actually summon out at once.

What if he didn't even need to make a single move, but simply send out his summons to clear out dungeons....?

‘There must be some exhaustion of magic energy when summoning out and controlling these creatures, so he might not be able to use them all at the same time, but....’

Just half of his summons.

No, even if that guy could only utilise half of that half, his method would be so much more efficient than what other large Guilds could even come up with.

‘Urgh.’

Park Jong-Su suddenly realised that he'd have invested his entire life savings if Hunter Seong's Guild was a publicly-traded company.

“Hyung-nim, let's not waste more time and push ahead with merging our Guild with Seong Hunter-nim's Guild.”

“This guy, really now.....”

Park Jong-Su glared scarily at Jeong Yun-Tae, before his expression became a lot more serious.

“Refer to it as ‘M&A’, okay? M&A. The new Guild created by the best Hunter, and one of the five major Guilds in the country, the Knight Order, pushing forward for the M&A. How nice sounding is that?” (TL: M&A = mergers and acquisitions)

“Keok??”

Jeong Yun-Tae flinched grandly.

“You really wanna try your luck with that, hyung-nim?!”

“Think about it. Combine Seong Hunter-nim’s abilities with our Guild’s know-how – even the likes of the Hunters Guild should be terrified by our potential, man!”

Would Vice-Chairwoman Cha Hae-In leave the Hunters Guild and join hands with Hunter Seong for no reason? Of course not.

Elation bubbled up in Jeong Yun-Tae’s face as he nodded, but then, he began rubbing his chin and tilted his head.

“But then, hyung-nim. You honestly believe that Seong Hunter-nim needs us?”

“Tsk, tsk.”

Park Jong-Su tutted and explained in detail.

“Do you really think that Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim will be able to disregard the law if he wants to work?”

“Excuse me?”

“Even if it’s possible for his summons to clear dungeons, he still needs to fill up the minimum headcount for the raid team, no?”

“Ohh....”

Hearing that plausible explanation, Jeong Yun-Tae’s expression brightened up once more.

“You’re right, hyung-nim.”

As the two men stared at each other with happy smiles on their faces, the ground beneath their feet trembled ever so softly.

Rumble....

“Aigoo.”

Park Jong-Su stopped wasting time. With the death of the boss-level monster, the Gate was starting to close up.

“Well, let’s carry on our discussion after we get out of here first.”

“Yes, hyung-nim.”

Park Jong-Su loudly called out to the rest of the assault team still waiting for his orders.

“Everyone, let’s all get out of this place before the Gate closes down!”

“You’ll provide all the convenience you can?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

Jin-Woo’s question was met with Association President Goh Gun-Hui’s assured answer.

Officially, there were ten rank S Hunters recorded in the Korean Hunter’s Association’s database. But, they had lost three now. Two died at the hands of monsters, while one abandoned Korea for America.

From the perspective of the Hunter’s Association, they could not afford to be hands-off in this matter anymore.

They wanted to do everything they could – this wasn’t just the opinion of Association President Goh Gun-Hui, but the rest of the Association as well.

‘Unless it’s the other rank S Hunters.....’

They definitely could not afford to let Hunter Seong Jin-Woo slip away.

Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes gleamed with the light of determination. As the representative of the Hunter’s Association, he had met countless Hunters over the years. Several of them were those whom you’d qualify as some of the strongest in the world, as well.

However, Seong Jin-Woo was the first Hunter ever to make his heart race this madly. Not just as the Association President, but as the citizen of this nation, he definitely wanted Jin-Woo to remain in South Korea.

[“We will provide you with every convenience we can possibly provide.”]

Those words expressed the Association President Goh Gun-Hui’s strong will to keep Jin-Woo in the country. They also contained how highly the older man thought of the young Hunter, as well.

“If that’s the case....”

Jin-Woo thought for a little while, before opening his mouth.

“Will you let me enter high-ranking Gates all by myself in the future?”

“Pardon me?”

When he was faced with a completely unexpected demand, Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes opened up wide.

“Are you asking me to exclude you from the minimum headcount rule?”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

“Huh-uh....”

The regulation regarding the number of raid team members was the

minimum safety net in place for the Hunters. It was a policy to prevent the incidents of Hunters entering a dungeon without sufficient preparation and losing their lives.

However....

Did Hunter Seong require such a safety net when his summons could beat down countless rank S monsters? Abruptly recalling a certain scene from the ant tunnel raid, Goh Gun-Hui asked as his expression tensed up.

“By any chance.... The raid permits your Guild will be issued with, are you planning to clear those Gates all by yourself?”

“Yes.”

Goh Gun-Hui became speechless from Jin-Woo’s straightforward reply. There was not one trace of worry in his voice.

‘Could it be that he made the Guild just for this.....?’

Did he do that so he could solo-clear high-ranking dungeons?

There were many powerful Hunters throughout the world, but none of them planned their raids in this manner.

But, when the images of this Jin-Woo confidently chatting away, and the Jin-Woo back in the ant tunnel summoning countless soldiers to sweep away the ant monsters, overlapped in Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes, the older man suddenly began shivering almost uncontrollably.

‘A one-man army....’

For Goh Gun-Hui, who had been constantly worried about the unchecked growth of the major Guilds, that proved to be one hell of an attractive concept.

Ba-dump, ba-dump!!!

His heart began racing again.

Goh Gun-Hui placed his hand on the chest that began to hurt a little, and formed a bitter smile after comparing himself to the virile and healthy-looking Jin-Woo.

“Will it be difficult?”

Jin-Woo asked, but Goh Gun-Hui immediately shook his head.

“It’s not going to be impossible.”

Indeed, it wouldn’t be impossible, but it’d be quite difficult, nonetheless. That was what Goh Gun-Hui thought.

But, just what kind of man was he? He was the President of the Hunter's Association, a rank S Hunter, and the member of the National Assembly.

This was a request from not just anyone, but Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. Even if it was a tough request, there would be nothing holding Goh Gun-Hui back from fulfilling it.

And if that was enough to keep Hunter Seong in South Korea, then all the better for it.

“Leave it to me.”

Jin-Woo grinned brightly after hearing Goh Gun-Hui's confident reply.

‘Nice.’

One of the things that could've proved to be a source of headache got resolved just now.

“Thank you.”

Jin-Woo smiled and expressed his gratitude, and Goh Gun-Hui replied with a smile of his own.

“I always bring this up, but well, it should be us thanking you, Hunter-nim.”

Screech.

The large saloon carrying the two stopped at a bit of distance away from the hospital's entrance.

“Let us speak again soon, Seong Hunter-nim.”

“Of course.”

After sharing simple goodbyes, Jin-Woo climbed out of the car.

The news of the victims being transferred to this hospital must've gotten around, because there were a lot of reporters camping by the entrance already.

The car stopping a fair distance away from the entrance was all due to Woo Jin-Cheol's consideration. There was little doubt that another commotion would've broken out if the car carrying the Association President came to a stop in front of the hospital and Jin-Woo climbed out from there.

‘It's times like this that being famous can get really annoying.’

Jin-Woo shook his head and used 'Stealth' to conceal himself.

Inside the office of the Yujin Construction's chairman.

Chairman Yu Myung-Han, who had been taking a nap on the impossibly-

wide desk, slowly raised his slouched torso up.

Sunlight entered at an angle through the windows.

He felt his eyelids getting impossibly heavier, and it seemed that he eventually had fallen into a bit of slumber.

On the couch located in front of the desk, the right-hand man of Yu Myung-Han, Secretary Kim, was sitting upright and looking back at his boss.

Yu Myung-Han rubbed his face to chase away the remaining sleepiness and spoke up.

“Looks like I have napped for a little while. How long was I asleep for?”

Secretary Kim looked at his wristwatch and then raised his head back up again.

“Sir, you’ve been asleep for 23 hours and 46 minutes.”

‘.....’

Yu Myung-Han’s hand rubbing his face came to a sudden stop.

“I’ve been waiting here in order to carry out your order of escorting you to the hospital if you don’t wake up after 24 hours have elapsed, sir.”

Was it that illness striking again?

Yu Myung-Han’s face, his hand no longer covering it, was frozen stiff.

He would sometimes fall into a state of deep sleep without any warning signs, and once asleep, it became harder and harder to wake up.

The ‘Eternal Sleep’ disorder.

Although the process was slow, this disease definitely dragged all of its victims to death’s doorway.

Secretary Kim strode quickly forward and stood before Yu Myung-Han.

“Sir, there are two things I need to inform you about.”

“What are they?”

As befitting his nickname of ‘Pokerface’, Yu Myung-Han had already wiped off all traces of worry from his face and reverted back to his regular stoic expression.

Secretary Kim picked up the newspaper resting at the corner of the large desk and politely placed it before Yu Myung-Han.

‘....?’

Somewhat puzzled, Yu Myung-Han quickly picked the paper up and browsed through it. The article dominating the front page was about the event of a Gate opening up in a school somewhere in Seoul, causing the devastating losses of hundreds of high school students.

“Tsk, tsk....”

Yu Myung-Han grimaced after seeing that terrible news.

“What a terrible incident this is. Make sure our company donates something to the school and to the victims.”

“Yes, sir. But, Chairman, that’s not it.”

Yu Myung-Han put the paper down. Secretary Kim bowed slightly and carefully flipped the page of the newspaper, so the next page could be seen. There was a large photo dominating this page.

“This is the photograph I wanted to show to you, sir.”

The tip of Secretary Kim’s finger stopped by at a certain lady within that photo.

“This woman.... Do you recall who she is, sir?”

The photo was of a hospital where the survivors of that horrible incident had been admitted to. Secretary Kim had singled out a certain woman among the many pictured. She was hurriedly running into the hospital’s entrance.

Quite coincidentally, she was someone Chairman Yu Myung-Han still remembered quite clearly.

“But, how.....??”

Yu Myung-Han never forgot a person’s face. And he definitely had seen that woman’s photograph before.

She was none other than Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s mother.

“But, I thought Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s mother suffered from the Eternal Sleep, too?”

He had studied Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s profile several times in great detail.

A person who, according to Yu Myung-Han’s knowledge, should be confined to a bed and unable to move while completely dependent on the life support machines, was walking around looking completely healthy.

The thing Secretary Kim wanted to talk to him about – Chairman Yu Myung-Han finally realised what that was. His hand gripping the newspaper

began trembling.

“Can you find out for me what happened in detail?”

“Understood, sir.”

“.....Thank you.”

As his response to Yu Myung-Han’s praise, Secretary Kim bowed again for a brief moment, before raising his head again. After putting the newspaper back down again, Yu Myung-Han quietly opened his mouth.

“You said there are two things I need to know about.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What is the second matter, then?”

Yu Myung-Han raised his head and met Secretary Kim’s gaze. And the light in the latter’s eyes wasn’t so good. This was one of Kim’s old habits. He always brought up the good news first, then spoke the bad news the last.

Secretary Kim displayed some hints of hesitation, before speaking up as if he decided to give up.

“The Young Miss has returned home yesterday.”

As if waiting for that declaration...

Clung!

The door to the Chairman’s office was flung wide open and an intellectual-type beauty rushed inside.

Chairman Yu Myung-Han’s daughter, Yu Jin-Hui, saw how thin her father had become and tears began wetting her eyes.

“How long have you been like this, Father?”



Chapter 146 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Camera flashes went off every few seconds as a slim woman with natural black hair assumed several different poses.

“Good, that’s good.”

A wide grin didn’t want to leave the face of the photographer as he snapped away with his camera.

Click!

The final click of the shutter rang out and the photographer raised his head.

“This is great. Nicely done.”

Cousin/older sister of Yu Jin-Ho, as well as his best friend, Yu Soo-Hyun, smiled brightly and bowed her head to the director.

“Thank you for your hard work!”

“You too, Miss Soo-Hyun.”

All thanks to Yu Soo-Hyun’s rather affable personality, the photo shoots she participated in were always filled with jovial laughter.

It was to such an extent that, even those photographers previously unwilling to work with her because of her image as the daughter of a chaebol family, would actively seek her out for more photo shoots after working with her just once.

“Thank you.”

“Thanks for your work today.”

With a bright expression, Yu Soo-Hyun thanked the photographer and other staff members of the shoot, before trotting over to her coordinator who also happened to be her manager as well.

“Unni, did Jin-Hui call me back?” (TL: Unni = honorific to denote older female by another female, usually younger)

The coordinator shook her head, her expression one of worry.

Yu Soo-Hyun had tried to call her cousin four times already. She could only pout unhappily at the fact that her diligence hadn’t been rewarded with a reply

so far.

‘She’s supposed to be back in the country since yesterday, so how come I can’t get in touch with her?’

Yu Soo-Hyun heard the news of her cousin, studying abroad, briefly making a trip home around yesterday morning.

She had been involved in a photo shoot that lasted the whole night and was fast asleep when her cousin’s call came through. Who’d have thought that missing one phone call would lead to such a hassle?

There was utterly not a peep from her cousin since then.

‘Did something happen to her?’

No, that couldn’t be. Yu Soo-Hyun shook her head.

That girl was none other than Yu Jin-Hui, the eldest daughter of Yu Myung-Han – the owner of the biggest corporation in South Korea. The odds of something bad happening to her was about the same as a rank S Hunter entering a dungeon only to meet with a grisly end.

“Unni, gimme my phone back for a sec, please.”

Yu Soo-Hyun took the phone back, thinking that she’d try her luck again. But then, her phone suddenly began vibrating and a bright expression immediately formed on her face.

‘Is this from Jin-Hui?’

However, she began pouting again after confirming who the caller was.

‘.....’

Yu Soo-Hyun tapped on the ‘Answer’ icon and spoke in an annoyed voice.

“Hello?”

It was from Yu Jin-Ho, regrettably.

Yu Soo-Hyun was well aware of the fact that this kid would only call her ‘noona’ if he wanted something from her. She spat out a grand sigh in her heart and asked him.

“Do you know by any chance where Jin-Hui is right now?”

“.....”

Now that she thought about it for a sec, didn’t this kid get chased out of his own home after rejecting his father’s order of becoming the Yujin Guild’s Master? Indeed, this cousin of hers proved to be of no help whatsoever, even

now.

“No, never mind. Okay, so what did you call me for?”

Surely, he wouldn't be calling her for another drinking binge like the last time. It was then, Yu Jin-Ho's rather exhilarated voice came out of the phone.

What on earth was he on about, out of the blue?

A thin frown formed for a second there on Yu Soo-Hyun's fine, smooth forehead.

“Your Guild?”

She was so dumbfounded that she simply had to ask again.

....And this was the rather remarkable reply she got in return.

Yu Soo-Hyun's voice became quite low as she got more and more suspicious.

“And why do you need my name in the first place?”

“Wait, are you telling me to join a Guild that's not even a real thing yet??”

Yu Jin-Ho answered back oh-so-innocently.

Yu Soo-Hyun felt her head slowly develop a pulsing migraine simply from wondering just what this kid believed in to become such an optimistic human being.

‘No, besides all that.... Just who could be the other person, then?’

Rather than the 'idiot' asking her to put her name down as one of the Guild's founding members, she was getting a lot more suspicious of the other person's reasoning for wanting to make a Guild with this 'idiot', instead.

“You, you aren't acting like this 'cuz some shady character sweet-talked you into it, right?”

Who'd want to create a Guild with a rank D Hunter possessing a negligible amount of hunting experience other than swindlers? However, Yu Jin-Ho's response was rather different from her expectations.

From the other side of the phone line, the sound of a chuckle formed when the corner of one's lips arched up came out, followed soon after by a relaxed voice.

“Okay, who is it?”

“I'm hanging up.”

Her hand moving towards the 'End Call' icon stopped as that desperately pleading voice came out of the speaker. Yu Soo-Hyun smirked and placed the phone back against her ear.

"I'm giving you three seconds to tell me. Three, two...."

'....Seong Jin-Woo?'

Yu Soo-Hyun's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets after hearing that rather unexpected name.

"You mean, that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo??"

"You mean, that rank S Hunter who single-handedly smashed apart Rhee Min-Seong's press conference before suddenly disappearing from everyone's view?"

"Are you really telling me that it's him?"

Regardless of what Yu Jin-Ho's retort was like, Seong Jin-Woo would forever be the rank S Hunter who stepped on the pride of that arrogant jerk-off Rhee Min-Seong in Yu Soo-Hyun's eyes.

Just how refreshed did she feel back then? A lot.

If what Yu Jin-Ho said was true, then it was not that difficult to understand that bottomless, sky-high confidence of his.

'Well, Jin-Ho might like to put on airs sometimes, but he's not the type to lie, so...'

Yu Soo-Hyun pondered for a second or two, before asking her cousin again.

"Can we meet up and talk?"

"What's the address?"

Yu Soo-Hyun took a post-it note from nearby and quickly jotted down the address. She did her best to calm her bubbling excitement down and made her reply.

"I'm on my way right now."

Click.

That's where the conversation came to its end. The coordinator, 'accidentally' overhearing the contents of the call, sent out a probing question.

"Do you need to go somewhere? Are you even planning to drop out of the afterparty?"

Nod, nod.

Yu Soo-Hyun rapidly swapped out of her modelling clothes and packed her belongings as if she didn't even have the time to explain herself.

“There’s someone I wanted to meet, you see.”

“Who....?”

“I’ll explain later.”

Yu Soo-Hyun tried to brush it aside and was about to leave the shoot location, but the coordinator hurriedly called out and stopped her.

“Please tell me who it is! I need to know who it is so I can report back to the Chairman!”

Yu Soo-Hyun’s father was the Chairman of the XX Pharmaceuticals. When his daughter told him that she wanted to work in the entertainment industry, he came up with a single condition. And that would be her being accompanied around by a chaperone all the time.

Naturally, the coordinator was hired by Yu Soo-Hyun’s father. Meaning, she was Yu Soo-Hyun’s coordinator, her manager, as well as her monitor.

Yu Soo-Hyun belatedly remembered that her coordinator unni would get scolded by her father if she left without saying a single word like this. So, she turned around and grinned refreshingly before making her reply.

“It’s Mister Seong Jin-Woo!”

Yu Soo-Hyun quickly ran off after that. The coordinator’s expression was slowly filling up with worry as she watched the distancing back of her charge.

“The Chairman will throw a fit when he learns of his daughter meeting a man without permission....”

The coordinator tutted for a little while, before she began recalling what Yu Soo-Hyun had said.

‘Wait.... Who did she say she was meeting again?’

Didn’t the coordinator hear that person’s name before somewhere?

She carefully combed through her memories only for her brows to shoot up in surprise. She quickly swivelled her head towards the exit Yu Soo-Hyun used only a moment ago.

“Who did you say it was again?!”

‘It’s not here... not here, either....’

Yu Jin-Ho stared daggers at the computer screen while chewing on his fingernails.

‘Not here.... It’s not here, too.....’

From a certain point in time, all thread forums and posts slagging his dear hyung-nim off had vanished from the view. But, then again, such a thing wasn’t that hard to understand why.

His hyung-nim rescued rank S Hunters from Jeju Island. He then closed a rank B Gate in double time and cleared up the heavy traffic. And yesterday, he saved the lives of a whole bunch of high school students as well.

So, it’d be far stranger to find someone trying to badmouth hyung-nim now.

Those persistently annoying anti-hyung-nim idiots had been mostly driven away into oblivion, all due to Yu Jin-Ho’s own concerted efforts as well as everything hyung-nim had done so far.

Even those rarer-than-rare negative comments that cropped up on articles concerning hyung-nim couldn’t endure against the concentrated cross-fire of other commenters, and would eventually get deleted.

This was excellent news. Indeed, it was a great development.

‘But, why am I....?’

Why was he feeling so empty right now?

It felt like the things he could do was decreasing one by one, what with things going like this.

Click, click....

Yu Jin-Ho formed a saddened expression and operated his mouse. In the meantime, the office’s door quietly opened up. Jin-Woo was entering the premise.

Yu Jin-Ho’s complexion brightened up after confirming Jin-Woo’s face, and he quickly stood up to bow his head.

“You came, hyung-nim?”

“Yeah.”

Jin-Woo looked quite fatigued. But, that was rather understandable, really. He had been staying next to Jin-Ah’s side from last night till this morning. He briefly stopped by his home to get a quick wash-up before showing up here.

In case a rank A Gate suddenly popped up in the hospital, he even left Beru

in her shadow to deal with all the threats coming from there.

Yu Jin-Ho asked in an anxious voice.

“Hyung-nim, is your sister doing okay?”

“Fortunately, yeah.”

Jin-Woo kept his answer short. He was trying hard to show that everything was fine, but then, he was still her older brother and couldn't stop worrying about her.

Even the doctor in charge recommended that she needed to be in close observation for the time being, as the mental shock she suffered would have been quite serious.

‘I hope she can quickly overcome this....’

After all, she was a bright, energetic kid to begin with. All Jin-Woo could do now was to cheer her on in his heart.

It was then.

“Oh my gosh!! You were telling the truth!”

The surprised voice of a woman came from Jin-Woo's side. He turned around to find Yu Soo-Hyun exiting from the conference suite with a pair of very large eyes staring back at him.

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to Yu Jin-Ho and silently asked him.

‘And she is?’

Yu Jin-Ho replied with a pair of tense eyes.

‘It’s her, hyung-nim.’

Before arriving here, Jin-Woo had already heard the gist of the situation from Yu Jin-Ho.

[“There is this one person that perfectly fits your criteria, hyung-nim! How about meeting her, at least once?”]

Someone who carried around a Hunter licence but couldn't be bothered about the matters of the Guild, yet worthy of their trust.

‘And, she’s even a rank A Hunter, too....’

Her rank wasn't all that important, though.

In any case, the first impression she gave off was not bad at all, perhaps owing to her clear eyes and her bright smile. They shared quick and simple introductions.

“Excuse me.”

Before they could sign the contract, Jin-Woo decided to ask her about something he was curious about.

“If you do this, your relationship with your uncle might get a lot more tricky. Will that be fine with you?”

“That’s still better than getting mixed up with Yu Jin-Seong, you know.”

“Yu Jin-Seong?”

Jin-Woo looked back to Yu Jin-Ho, and the latter embarrassedly scratched the back of his head.

“He’s my older brother, hyung-nim.”

‘Ahh, that bad-personality older brother he talked about. Right, Yu Jin-Seong was supposed to take over the Guild if Yu Jin-Ho failed to cut the mustard, wasn’t it?’

Jin-Woo quietly nodded his head.

This wouldn’t have happened if Yu Jin-Ho did as he was told and took over the Yujin Guild. In a way, Yu Soo-Hyun was another victim of the choice Yu Jin-Ho made.

‘Because of this kid, many people are being greatly inconvenienced, aren’t they....?’

Jin-Woo shifted his slightly narrowed eyes over to Yu Jin-Ho. The latter formed a happy smile, not knowing what was in the former’s mind.

‘.....’

While Jin-Woo was groaning inwardly, Yu Soo-Hyun cautiously walked up to him.

“Uhm, excuse me....”

“Yes?”

She was blushing just a little bit. It seemed like she had something important to say to him, judging from how her eyes were quietly trembling like that. Jin-Woo also formed a serious expression.

“Is there something you’d like to ask me?”

Yu Soo-Hyun hesitated slightly but after hearing his words, she worked up enough courage to ask him. Her eyes even began sparkling.

“Can we take a selfie together? I wish to upload it to my SNS profile.”

The Chairman's office of the XX Pharmaceuticals.

The younger brother of Yu Myung-Han, Yu Seok-Ho's expression was far more grave and serious than ever before.

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Yes, sir."

The coordinator nodded her head. She looked quite scared at the moment.

"My little girl is meeting up with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?"

"That's correct, Mister Chairman."

"Can it be another man with the same name?"

"I was also feeling unsure about that, but this...."

The coordinator rummaged through her pockets and cautiously pulled out her phone. Yu Soo-Hyun's SNS profile was displayed on the phone's screen.

Yu Seok-Ho's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets after he saw the last uploaded image. Wasn't that really the face of the Hunter that kept showing up in the news lately?!

'This, this is.....!'

Yu Seok-Ho glared daggers until he could almost bore a hole through the photo, but eventually, he began massaging his forehead and spat out a soft groan.

"...Huh."

"A-are you alright, sir?"

"....Please leave me alone for a while."

"P-pardon me?"

"Uh-huh! Didn't I say to leave me alone?"

Yu Seok-Ho returned the phone back to the coordinator and almost literally chased her out of his office. And then, having made sure she was gone for good, he quickly switched on his computer to read every article concerning Jin-Woo online.

「[Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, what could be his true worth?],」

「[Propositions flooding in from every country in the world! What will Hunter Seong Jin-Woo choose to do next?]

「[Chairman Park Jong-Su of the Knight Order Guild: "Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's abilities are impossible to evaluate."],」

‘[Hunter Seong Jin-Woo: Did the Americans contact him in secret already?],’

‘[Experts describe Hunter Seong Jin-Woo as the walking, talking large corporation....],’

Public’s interest in that Hunter had gone through the roof ever since the raid on Jeju Island. The clear indication of that was all these articles found online.

As Chairman Yu Seok-Ho continued to read the articles one at the time, the look of admiration formed on his face.

“Huh-uh, huh-uh....!”

Two hours passed by like that.

He leaned back against his chair as his fatigued eyes ached rhythmically. He had been concentrating so hard that his forehead was soaked completely in sweat.

He dabbed his forehead with a handkerchief and put a cigarette between his lips. But, before he could light it up, he remembered something. He put the cigarette down and picked up his phone instead.

Ring.... Ring.....

Click.

A voice of a middle-aged woman came from the phone.

“Huhuh, dear. Do you happen to know who our little girl is getting acquainted with lately?”

“I’m telling you, my dear. I sure have raised our girl properly, haven’t I?”

Chairman Yu Seok-Ho was utterly sure of it.

Just who was his little girl, Soo-Hyun? Wasn’t she his daughter who did not lack for anything when it came to her looks, her background, and even her academic achievements?

Even if he supposed that these two young people were nothing more than just acquaintances now, it was only a matter of time before they developed a far more intimate relationship.

The voice of his wife coming out of the phone’s speaker sounded puzzled now.

“Huhuhuh. Did I really do that?”

Yu Seok-Ho suddenly guffawed loudly enough to almost shake the chairman's office.

“You'd be just as surprised as me when you find out, ahahahaha!”



Chapter 147 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“You will acknowledge summoned creatures as members of a raid team?! Do you think such a thing even makes sense?”

Nam Joon-Wook yelled out at the top of his lungs.

Formerly a prosecutor, he now served as a member of the National Assembly. No one in this country came remotely close to this man’s ability to sniff out and latch onto a person’s wrongdoings.

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui maintained his silence as he sat on the opposite side of such a man.

Nam Joon-Wook was actually smiling inside as he was staring at his current verbal sparring partner.

‘Indeed, even if you had ten mouths, you’d not have anything to say.’

The victor had been decided already. No matter who it was, they would say this was Association President Goh Gun-Hui going too far. He must’ve known this too, because he showed absolutely no signs of counterattacking yet.

‘However....’

Nam Joon-Wook was not thinking of easing up here.

His style was to keep up the pressure when the enemy was on the back foot. He’d push his opponents hard until they were driven to the edge of a cliff.

Veins bulged in his neck as he raised his voice high, not at Goh Gun-Hui, but at the entirety of the third conference hall, currently filled to the brim with the interested parties and a cordon of reporters.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo has barely finished creating his Guild, yet you already wish to pass this nonsensical regulation? If this isn’t the case of preferential treatment, then what is?”

The Hunter’s Association, a supposedly-neutral organisation, was actively getting behind Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. There was such a rumour doing the rounds already, yet the so-called new regulation was this nonsensical? It was no wonder serious questions were being raised regarding this matter.

Today's hearing was convened in order to hear the reasonings, but for some reason, Association President Goh Gun-Hui was resolutely keeping his mouth shut.

'Very good.'

Nam Joon-Wook sensed his impending victory.

Goh Gun-Hui's fame had skyrocketed recently due to him pulling off the Jeju Island raid so brilliantly. But now, Nam Joon-Wook got to deal two powerful blows to that man, with the recent high school dungeon break incident, and the controversy surrounding the preferential treatment Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had received.

Basically, politics was a turf war of sorts.

If he got to bring down Goh Gun-Hui, a man standing at the opposite end of the political battlefield, then Nam Joon-Wook would get to enjoy his share of the benefits sooner rather than later.

He imagined himself dominating the front pages of tomorrow's newspapers and glared at Goh Gun-Hui with an arrogant expression etched on his face.

"Please say something, Association President Goh Gun-Hui!"

Wuuong.

For the first time today, Goh Gun-Hui's mic was turned on.

Tap, tap.

Goh Gun-Hui lightly tapped on the end of the mic to confirm that it was working properly, and brought his lips closer to it.

"Just what is it that you wish to hear from me?"

Nam Joon-Wook's eyes narrowed to a slit.

'What a thick-faced geezer....'

He expected Goh Gun-Hui to start by offering up an apology. But, could it be that the old man still had some things to say?

Nam Joon-Wook raised his voice even higher.

"The new regulation you put into place! Is this a preferential treatment for Hunter Seong Jin-Woo or not??"

'So, now – how will you dodge this one?'

Nam Joon-Wook was waiting for a cowardly excuse but then, Goh Gun-Hui went and threw a wet blanket on his parade.

“Yes, it is preferential treatment.”

His answer was short, but the impact it carried was enormous.

Noisy, noisy....

Not just the spectators in the gallery, but also the reporters and politicians were busy exchanging knowing or shocked glances with people sitting next to them, which only served to further add fuel to the chaos.

Of course, the one most surprised among them was Nam Joon-Wook.

‘Did this geezer finally go senile??’

Goh Gun-Hui was supposed to deny everything till the end, or start grovelling for mercy when things went sideways, yet he came out and straightforwardly admitted to his wrongdoing. However, his eyes were far too calm for someone making a confession.

Such a calm and audacious demeanour only managed to bring up a sense of an inexplicable nervousness in Nam Joon-Wook.

Gulp.

Dry saliva painfully slid down his throat.

And sure enough, Goh Gun-Hui began speaking again.

“There is one thing I’d like to ask everyone that has gathered here today.”

He possessed an overwhelming presence. As if everyone had made a prior agreement, they all shut their mouths at once when Goh Gun-Hui spoke up.

“An assault team comprising of 20 rank A Hunters, or an assault team comprising of just one person, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

Goh Gun-Hui slowly stood up and swept his gaze over the faces of every attendee present as he continued on with his speech.

“If you were to accompany either one of those teams during a dungeon break, which one will you choose?”

No one could offer up an answer.

Because, it was pretty much the same thing as the answer already being set in stone. There was no reason to answer back at all.

“.....”

“.....”

Everyone tried to avoid meeting Goh Gun-Hui’s gaze, and soon, the

Association President's head stopped moving in the direction of Nam Joon-Wook.

“...”

Even Nam Joon-Wook himself couldn't utter a single thing.

Perhaps thinking that he got a satisfying enough reaction from the crowd, a smile floated up on Goh Gun-Hui's lips.

“Do you still believe the preferential treatment given to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is unfair?”

A Hunter who could ably execute the role of an elite raid team from a large Guild all by himself – Goh Gun-Hui was now asking the crowd if they should hold back such an individual with a regulation that didn't even apply to him anymore.

Nam Joon-Wook was about to say something. But before he could, Goh Gun-Hui was a step faster and continued on.

“A total of 21 countries, including the United States, Japan, China, etc., have demanded more information on Hunter Seong.”

Goh Gun-Hui waved around thick official documents for all to see.

“Every single one of them is hell-bent on stealing away Hunter Seong to their countries.”

Goh Gun-Hui took some time to look at the cordon of reporters, before shifting his gaze back over to the member of National Assembly, Nam Joon-Wook.

“Our current situation is like this, yet are you really telling me that you want Hunter Seong to remain in our country even though you are not willing to do a favour this small for him?”

“.....”

Nam Joon-Wook's complexion was getting darker and darker. He could definitely sense that the tide had turned against him now. Unfortunately, Goh Gun-Hui wasn't thinking of letting his opponent go this easily. He kept his gaze firmly locked on Nam Joon-Wook before throwing another question.

“Let me ask you this – do you wish to see a repeat of the incident of Hwang Dong-Su abandoning us for America?”

‘Euhk.’

Nam Joon-Wook bit his lower lip.

As Goh Gun-Hui put the documents down, he was now overflowing with a certain relaxed air, something he had kept hidden until then.

Nam Joon-Wook knew what that look signified. That was the look of the victor he used to make often, just as he was closing in on yet another political victory for himself in situations similar to this one.

Nam Joon-Wook gritted his teeth and tried to raise his objection.

“However, you still need fairness in.....”

“This is why I’m raising this point right now.”

Goh Gun-Hui cut Nam Joon-Wook’s words right off.

“Honourable member Nam Joon-Wook, didn’t you move house recently to a brand new apartment building located near the Hunters Guild?”

Nam Joon-Wook’s face reddened so much that even a casual glance could detect the change.

“What was your reason for changing your residence to a location where the cost of the real estate is several times more expensive than the surrounding area?”

“...”

If only his opponent wasn’t a rank S Hunter – Nam Joon-Wook’s would’ve run over there and punched the old man in the face. His own face was now in the alternating shades of red and blue as seconds ticked on.

Too bad, Goh Gun-Hui also knew how to deal with an opponent that was on his back foot, perhaps even better than Nam Joon-Wook himself.

“I’d like to urge you to think about this carefully. If and when another rank S Gate appears in our land, just who will step up to protect your life?”

And with these following words, Goh Gun-Hui finished the proceedings off.

“You will not be able to buy back your life even if you are willing to pay hundreds of times, no, make that thousands of times the price you paid for your new residence.”

Standing before a rank A Gate for the first time ever in his life, Yu Jin-Ho’s bulging eyes were trying to look up at the top of this enormously tall Gate.

“Heok...”

He needed to look really high up just to barely spot it.

Seeing how Yu Jin-Ho couldn't close his mouth for the last 20 minutes or so, Jin-Woo began thinking that his own reaction of seeing the rank A Gate back then was perhaps too reserved for a first timer.

“Hey, Jin-Ho? Your jaw will come loose if you keep doing that.”

“Sorry? Ah, yes. My bad, hyung-nim. It's just that, I've never seen a Gate this big before.”

How would he even react if he saw the Gwang-an-ri Gate, then? Jin-Woo smirked softly to himself.

Yu Jin-Ho scratched his head as if he felt embarrassed for being so shocked by the Gate's size.

“Hyung-nim, will it be really okay to not hire any retrieval teams or mining teams?”

“Nah, it'll be fine.”

Jin-Woo summoned 30 of the elite grade Shadow Soldiers that had been with him the longest.

“These guys will carry out those jobs.”

Yu Jin-Ho flinched just a little after all those Shadow Soldiers suddenly appeared behind Jin-Woo, but eventually, he began nodding his head.

“Aha!!”

These guys with black armours and their black eyes. They always seemed to be overflowing with dense pressure whenever Yu Jin-Ho looked at them.

With excellent timing, the employees dispatched from the Association approached them from afar. One of them happened to be a rather familiar face, as well.

“Good day, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

“Hello, Section Chief Woo.”

The Chief of the Monitoring Division, Woo Jin-Cheol received the portable magic energy measuring device shaped like a speed gun from one of his subordinates.

“Will it be okay if I go ahead and measure them?”

“Please do.”

Jin-Woo moved aside and the Shadow Soldiers all uniformly took a step forward. Woo Jin-Cheol began measuring the magic energy emission of each of the soldiers.

‘Oh my god....’

His eyes were opening wider and wider as he checked every each one of these so-called soldiers. He thanked his lucky stars that no one got to see the look of sheer shock on his face due to the sunglasses he was currently wearing.

‘All of his summons are either rank As or rank Bs.’

Indeed, Jin-Woo had easily exceeded the criteria for earning the raid permit for a rank A Gate such as this one. But then, these weren’t all the summons Hunter Seong Jin-Woo could call out, were they?

If the remaining summons all possessed similar levels of magic energy, then...

The corners of Woo Jin-Cheol’s lips arched up.

‘All those people arguing over the preferential treatment or not are simply idiots.’

He smiled and lightly shook his head, before turning around to face Jin-Woo.

“I’m finished with the confirmation. There are no issues.”

Nod.

Jin-Woo nodded his head with a smile, as well. And now, there should be nothing else that would get in his way of starting this raid. That’s what he thought, but then....

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!! Please look this way!”

“Please tell us how you feel regarding the very first raid of your Guild, Ah-Jin!”

“Was there a special reason for naming your Guild as Ah-Jin?”

“What is your relationship with the fellow founding member, Miss Yu Soo-Hyun?”

From just beyond the police line, the proverbial torrent of questions from countless reporters were barrelling down on Jin-Woo.

This was the first raid Jin-Woo’s Guild was about to embark on. So, countless reporters camped out here since early morning to capture this historic moment with their cameras, and inevitably, there was no more space to even stand around near the Gate’s vicinity.

If there was one thing different from other Guilds and their raids, then that

would be the employees from the Association holding the reporters back, instead of a Guild's own personnel doing that job.

Jin-Woo pointed to the reporters with his chin.

"I thought you were protecting my information?"

"Yes, we are indeed protecting your private information, but regretfully, there's not much we can do about the locations of Gates, Seong Hunter-nim."

Woo Jin-Cheol grinned and made his reply.

"We will hold the reporters back, so you can ignore them and simply focus on the raid, Hunter-nim."

"..."

Watching the Association employees giving their all to fight off the frenzied reporters, Jin-Woo thought that he could momentarily feel the considerate hands of the Association President patting him on the back.

"Please, express my gratitude to the President."

"Yes, I will definitely do so."

Woo Jin-Cheol bowed deeply and turned around to leave. And soon, all those uninvolved had left and the only people remaining in front of the Gate were Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho. The former asked the latter.

"Are you really sure about this?"

"Yes, hyung-nim."

Yu Jin-Ho gritted his teeth and replied.

"Even if it's the ends of hell itself, I shall follow you wherever you go, hyung-nim."

Yu Jin-Ho sounded so gravely determined that Jin-Woo couldn't help but let a smirk escape from his lips.

"Alright."

Yu Jin-Ho was only a rank D Hunter. It was the same thing as committing suicide for a rank D to step inside a rank A dungeon.

Jin-Woo tried very hard to change Yu Jin-Ho's mind, but the kid insisted that he'd stay as his hyung-nim's porter. In the end, it was Jin-Woo who gave up first.

'Well, I can definitely protect this one guy, so it's not a problem.'

He was thinking that the kid would give up on his own volition after having a taste of a rank A dungeon. And also, he figured that it wouldn't be so bad to have someone to talk to inside the dungeon as well.

“Okay, so. Shall we get going, then?”

“Yes, hyung-nim.”

“Indeed, let's get going.”

The heads of Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho simultaneously swivelled back after hearing that voice coming from behind them. And that's where they spotted Woo Jin-Cheol, his usual black business suit now replaced by various armours covering from head to toe.

“I thought you already left?”

Jin-Woo asked, puzzled.

“The Association President ordered me to find out if it is really safe during Seong Hunter-nim's raid.”

Goh Gun-Hui was planning to use Woo Jin-Cheol as a witness if the issue with Jin-Woo going on solo raids was raised up again in the future.

“Is that why you want to come with us??”

Woo Jin-Cheol replied as his face reddened slightly. It was unknown whether that was due to him not being used to the armour or he was embarrassed by the current situation.

“...Will it be a problem for me to accompany you?”

Well, the guy was just doing his job, so was there reason not to let him tag along?

“It'll be fine as long as you don't try to hunt monsters.”

“My department isn't called the Monitoring Division for nothing, Hunter-nim. I'll only monitor the situation quietly from the back.”

“That'll be fine.”

Jin-Woo easily agreed to it and Woo Jin-Cheol bowed his head again.

“Thank you very much, Hunter-nim.”

“Well, in that case... let's get going.”

Along with that declaration, Yu Jin-Ho and Woo Jin-Cheol stepped inside the Gate, Jin-Woo following closely behind them.

When he did, the System message welcomed him again along with the

familiar mechanical beep.

Tti-ring.

[You have entered a dungeon.]



Chapter 148 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘The raid must’ve started by now.’

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui looked at his wristwatch and smiled softly to himself. The raid in question was, of course, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s.

If it was at all possible, he wanted to see for himself, but.... due to the nature of his job, it was simply not feasible, so all he could do was to send in an Association employee he trusted greatly as a proxy, instead.

He was getting all worked up already, thinking about what Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol’s report would entail.

‘Ah, right. I shouldn’t be doing this right now.’

Goh Gun-Hui shook his head lightly to get rid of the distracting thoughts. There were mountains of documents sitting on top of his desk right now. They were practically forming the towers of documents at this point.

Ever since the dungeon break inside the high school happened, this pile of documents didn’t want to decrease no matter how hard he worked every single day. No, they seemed to get even taller, instead. That was how insanely busy he was, yet his interest in Hunter Seong Jin-Woo didn’t wane one bit.

If only his body was healthy – wouldn’t he have cleared some dungeons together with Hunter Seong, too?

‘Huh, I’m also being hopeless, aren’t I?’

Goh Gun-Hui shook his head one more time and returned to his work with a smile on his face.

And so, just how long did he concentrate on the documents?

Knock, knock.

He raised his head after hearing the knock on the door, and realised that three hours had flown by.

“It’s Woo Jin-Cheol, sir.”

The news he was waiting for had finally arrived. Without a single hint of fatigue visible on his countenance, Goh Gun-Hui welcomed Woo Jin-Cheol

into the office.

“Please, come in.”

Creak.

Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes nearly popped out of their sockets after he saw Woo Jin-Cheol’s face as the latter cautiously entered the office.

‘What’s this?’

He expected there to be no problems, yet Woo Jin-Cheol looked as if he got dragged through a wringer, instead.

‘It’s not just anybody but Hunter Seong Jin-Woo we are talking about here, so how come Chief Woo looks like that....??’

His confusion only lasted for a short while, though.

“May I sit down for a little while, sir?”

Woo Jin-Cheol sounded desperate, so Goh Gun-Hui quickly pointed to the couch.

“Of course, it’s fine. Do take a seat.”

He then got up from the President’s chair behind the desk to settle down in the opposite side to Woo Jin-Cheol.

Plop.

Woo Jin-Cheol powerlessly sunk deep into the couch. He rubbed his face with his hands, showing how tired he was.

Just what happened inside the dungeon?

Even before Woo Jin-Cheol could start explaining himself, Goh Gun-Hui couldn’t win against his curiosity and started first.

“What happened to you? Why does your face look like....?”

“Pardon? Is there something on my face, sir?”

“You look incredibly tired right now. As if you couldn’t sleep a wink for the past few days.”

“Ah.....”

Nod, nod.

Woo Jin-Cheol wordlessly nodded his head a few times as if he could understand everything now.

“It’s probably because I’m just too shocked, that’s all. Sir.”

“Shocked....? Please, tell me more in detail. My friend, didn’t you accompany Hunter Seong Jin-Woo to observe his raid?”

Woo Jin-Cheol lowered his gaze and slowly shook his head.

“That, sir, that wasn’t a raid. It was.....”

“....It was?”

Woo Jin-Cheol raised his head, shock and fear still writ large in his trembling eyes.

“Sir, it was the scene of a massacre.”

The charismatic leader of the Monitoring Division, Woo Jin-Cheol, often thought to be possessing an inborn heart of steel, was speaking with a voice that trembled ever so softly.

“A massacre, is it.....?”

Goh Gun-Hui swallowed his saliva.

Woo Jin-Cheol replied without hesitation, evidently not even thinking of changing or denying his description.

“Yes, sir.”

Was there any other description that fit what happened in there? It was as the word suggested, a total massacre. Woo Jin-Cheol didn’t hold back on anything and confessed to everything he saw at the behest of the Association President.

“The dungeon was a nest of Nagas, sir.”

Goh Gun-Hui narrowed his eyes as he combed through his knowledge of various monsters.

‘If it’s a Naga....’

Creatures that resembled a hybrid of a human and a sea snake, preferred to live in damp areas, and experts of both melee and magic attacks, capable of giving many experienced Hunters a hard time – those points were the Nagas in a nutshell.

They were also known as really tough opponents to contend with as they moved around in large groups, even though they were high-ranked monsters.

However....

‘But, someone of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s level shouldn’t be having a hard time against a handful of Nagas going around in groups?’

As if he had read Goh Gun-Hui's inner thoughts, Woo Jin-Cheol clarified himself.

"...I even felt sorry for the Nagas at some point, sir."

".....!!"

Woo Jin-Cheol recalled the scenes back then. When a group of 30-strong Nagas suddenly made their appearance, he even momentarily forgot who was next to him and tensed up greatly. Nagas were dangerous enough existences to warrant such a reaction from him.

But then....

"...The surrounding areas suddenly became 'dark', sir."

Or, more specifically, he should have said that a massive black shadow suddenly extended out from beneath Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's feet.

All the hair on Woo Jin-Cheol's body stood up after he realised that something big was about to happen. And precisely at that moment, soldiers emerged above ground one by one from the extended shadow.

And the battle – no, a massacre, commenced.

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's summoned creatures pounced forward and proceeded to mercilessly rip the Nagas apart into many bloody pieces.

"At least, those summons wearing black armours, like the humanoid types and the High Orcs types, were a bit more humane. But then....."

The summons resembling bears and ants were far too feral even for his tolerance level.

"Some of the ants even began eating the corpse of the monsters. Hunter Seong Jin-Woo became so incensed that he even physically kicked them."

Woo Jin-Cheol began shuddering after remembering this one ant that tried to sneak a dead Naga's head into its mouth, only to get discovered by irate Hunter Seong. It got splendidly buried deep into a wall from a powerful kick.

Although, he still couldn't tell whether he was shuddering from the horrifying summons, or from Jin-Woo who could unhesitatingly kick a summon like that into a wall.

Seeing the tense look on Woo Jin-Cheol's eyes, even Goh Gun-Hui became extra tense as well, dry saliva gliding down his throat.

"Were his summons strong?"

"They were really strong, sir."

There was no need to even mention it. Soldiers resembling humans, Orc-type soldiers, bears and ant type soldiers; not one of them could be called weak by any stretch of the imagination. But, the biggest highlight of them all was....

“There was this one summon with a red mane attached to its black helmet.”

Woo Jin-Cheol raised his dipped head again and stared straight into Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes.

“Would you believe me when I told you that particular summon could shoot lightning out of its sword every time it took a swing, sir?”

“Oh my god....”

Goh Gun-Hui was feeling completely astonished now. The lightning magic contained the destructive power of fire-based magic as well as the speedy nature of the light-based magic.

Because of that, only a handful of very high-class Mage-type Hunters could cast such magic spells. Even then, firing them consecutively was out of the question.

But then, a summon could shoot such magic all the time by swinging its sword around?

Goh Gun-Hui could only shake his head in helplessness. He definitely wouldn’t have believed it if it weren’t coming from the subordinate he deeply believed in. But then, the unbelievable story continued on even further.

“In my opinion, that particular summon should be above rank A in terms of power, sir.”

“Are you serious??”

Goh Gun-Hui’s voice rose up higher.

How could a single summon possess powers almost at the level of a rank S?!

Unfortunately, Woo Jin-Cheol guaranteed it. And he was right at the peak of rank A Hunters too, ability-wise, so he knew what he was talking about.

“If I were to fight that summon one on one.... Honestly, I’m not confident of winning, sir.”

Indeed, if such an evaluation came out from Woo Jin-Cheol’s mouth, someone with strong self-confidence, then it would be no problem to evaluate that summon as a rank S.

“Huh-uh...”

Goh Gun-Hui leaned against the couch’s back.

He already had a good idea how capable Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was, but to think, each and every one of his summons would possess such a high level of power, too.

What a regretful thing it was, not being there to personally confirm it with his own two eyes.

Goh Gun-Hui was getting shocked just from hearing it second-hand, so how would Woo Jin-Cheol have felt as he was actually there? Suddenly, it became rather easier to understand the worn-down appearance of Woo Jin-Cheol. He must’ve been slapped in the face constantly with one surprise after another.

“However, sir, there was an even more shocking spectacle, sir.”

Woo Jin-Cheol carried on as if that was not even the end of the tale.

“The ants.... they began ‘working’, sir.”

Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes trembled again as he recalled those scenes.

Ants received pickaxes from the bag carried by Ah-Jin Guild’s Vice-Master. And then, they proceeded to mine out the Mana Stones from the dungeon walls.

Ants were also in charge of carrying away the mined Mana Stones as well as the remains of the dead monsters. Woo Jin-Cheol simply couldn’t tear his eyes away from the perfectly-organised ants and their unbelievably fast working speed. They were basically the incarnations of efficient ‘operation’.

Woo Jin-Cheol was deeply astonished back then, and he was feeling admiration now.

“What I saw, sir, it wasn’t something as simple as a one-man raid team. Not at all.”

No, this one man was capable of clearing a dungeon, retrieving the remains, and also mining out the minerals, too.

Woo Jin-Cheol was definitely sure of it. And that would be – calling Hunter Seong a one-man raid team was actually insulting the man.

“No, sir. That man, he’s actually an entire Guild rolled into one.”

He was not a one-man raid team, but a one-man Guild, instead. Technically speaking, there was that not-that-helpful Vice Master too, but nothing would’ve changed even if he wasn’t present, so Woo Jin-Cheol’s assertion

wasn't wrong at all.

Goh Gun-Hui slapped his knee.

'I knew it. My eyes weren't wrong!'

A broad smile didn't want to leave his face now.

Like how he had been anticipating it since the beginning, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo would definitely go on to become the brand-new ballast that keeps the balance neutral in the Korean Hunter community. But now, he began to think that the youth might even go on to change the map of the Hunters worldwide, too.

"And then.... we finally arrived at the boss chamber, sir."

The story hadn't ended yet??

Goh Gun-Hui quickly refocused on the tale once more. Woo Jin-Cheol carried on.

Normal Nagas would be around two, three times larger than regular human beings. But, he said that the boss Naga found within the boss room was easily four-times larger, and the pressure it emitted was incredible as well.

"Did Seong Hunter use his summons to quickly finish off the boss-level monsters?"

Woo Jin-Cheol slowly shook his head.

"No, sir. He actually cancelled the summoning altogether, except for those ants busy with retrieval and mining operations."

"What? But, why would he??"

Goh Gun-Hui gasped out in surprise, and Woo Jin-Cheol could only reply with a stiff face.

"I was also curious as to why, so I asked him. I questioned him why he would cancel the summoning when he was about to fight the boss."

Goh Gun-Hui was so invested in the tale that, unbeknownst to him, he had begun leaning forward.

"And what did he say?"

"Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim told me this...."

Woo Jin-Cheol took his time a little as if to drag out his unwilling memories to the surface, and cautiously opened his mouth.

"If he relied too much on his summons, then his...."

“....My instincts would become softer, you see.”

Jin-Woo spoke up and took a step forward as the pair of ‘Demon King’s Shortsword’ was grasped in his hands.

He didn’t even need to call out his soldiers. There was only one boss-level monster and four others guarding said boss creature, after all.

Jin-Woo kicked the ground and dashed forward.

‘Quicksilver!’

Even before any of the guardian monsters could react, he slipped past them and closed the distance with the giant Naga at the back.

‘Violent Slash!!’

Dozens upon dozens of silvery light flickered and descended on the lower body of the boss monster.

Slice-slice-slice-slice!!

“Keuhaaaakk!!”

The boss writhed and screamed, and in the meantime, the guardians tried to pounce on Jin-Woo. But he simply used the head of one of the guards to jump straight upwards.

Taht!

And when his eyes drew level with the boss’s way up above in the air, he swung his shortsword sideways.

SWISH-!!

“Kiiiahk!!”

The boss’s head was sliced off clean and it flew away. At the same time, a new System message popped into his view.

Tti-ring.

[You have killed the owner of this dungeon.]

[Level up!]

Jin-Woo’s expression brightened at once from that wonderful message.

‘Ohh!!’

He landed softly back on the ground and spun around once. That caused all of the guard monsters trying to rush at him to collapse to the ground at the same time.

Strangely enough, the System messages didn't end there.

Tti-ring, tti-ring, tti-ring....!!

Suddenly, he was inundated with a constant barrage of mechanical beeps.

'What's this?!'

His fluster could only last for a short while, though.

[You have reached level 101.]

[Levels of all your Class-specific skills have risen.]

[Skill: 'Shadow Extraction' has levelled up.]

[Skill: 'Shadow Storage' has levelled up.]

[Skill: 'Sovereign's Territory' has levelled up.]

[Skill: 'Shadow Exchange' has levelled up.]

Jin-Woo's eyes almost bulged out of their sockets at the rising wall of messages.



Chapter 149 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘Huh...!’

He had been using his Class-specific skills constantly, but they showed no signs of budging until now. But then, their levels all went up in one go?!

Ba-thump, ba-thump!!

Jin-Woo’s heart began pounding really hard for the first time in a while.

Currently, there were only two other people inside the boss chamber, and that would be Yu Jin-Ho and Woo Jin-Cheol. Since both of them weren’t the type to needlessly complain about small matters, he decided to not to mind their presence and summoned out his Status Window.

‘Stat Window.’

Tti-ring.

Along with the familiar mechanical bleep, all the information about him, starting from his level to every item he was wearing, and even his current physical status, appeared to fill up his view.

Jin-Woo’s gaze stopped at the ‘Class-specific Skills’ list.

[Class-specific Skills]

Active Skills

‘It’s for real.’

Hearing about the truth and actually seeing it were two different things. Jin-Woo clenched his fist tighter, especially from the fact that the level for ‘Shadow Exchange’ had gone up.

‘Nice!’

The Shadow Exchange skill possessed such an endless potential but he was feeling frustrated by the limitation posed by its lengthy cooldown time.

‘The description said that cooldown will change according to the skill level, right?’

With this, his frustration should go down a little.

This was today’s biggest gain for him. He was far more pleased about the

skill Shadow Exchange being enhanced rather than his stalled level rising up again.

‘Should I see how much of it has changed now?’

Feeling like a kid pulling the wrapping off his new present, Jin-Woo accessed the information on the skill Shadow Exchange.

Tti-ring.

[Skill: Shadow Exchange Lv. 2]

Class-specific....

...Once activated, you must wait two hours of ‘cooldown’ period before being able to use the skill again.

The ‘cooldown’ period will change according to the Skill’s level.

‘.....!!’

Reduction of one hour!!

Just by going up one level, the cooldown time had decreased by one-third. Jin-Woo could barely hide his excitement now.

‘One hour’s gone after going up one level.’

A simple calculation told him that there was a high possibility of yet another hour being chopped off from the cooldown time with the next level up of the skill. And, what if he raised the level of this skill one more time after that?

‘It means, regardless of where I am, mom and Jin-Ah will never find themselves in trouble....’

Just thinking about that made his entire body shiver. That was the most important thing for Jin-Woo, after all. Maybe his excitement showed up on his face, Yu Jin-Ho asked him a question with a jovial smile.

“Hyung-nim? Did something good happen?”

“Mm?”

Only then did Jin-Woo realise that Yu Jin-Ho had come closer to him.

‘I was too focused on the Status Window, wasn’t I....?’

He also could see Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol walking towards this way behind Yu Jin-Ho as well. Jin-Woo grinned and closed the Status Window. Even if these two men weren’t the types to raise a fuss over every single thing, there was no reason for him to look like a madman to their eyes, either.

“Yeah, something like that.”

“That’s cool, hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho’s wits had become a lot quicker after following Jin-Woo around for a while, so he didn’t try to dig in anymore. Instead, his attention shifted to the sight right next to them.

“Wowsers.”

This would be Yu Jin-Ho’s first time ever seeing an actual rank A dungeon’s boss. This monster’s upper torso looked human-ish, but the lower part looked like a sea snake.

It looked so nonsensically huge from afar, but now that he got to take a look up close, it seemed even bigger and really disgusting to behold, as well.

It was only natural that he couldn’t close his slack jaw after seeing such a humongous monster.

‘I know that hyung-nim has entered several other high-ranking dungeons prior to this one, so does that mean....’

Did that mean he killed creatures like this one every time he entered such a Gate?

Gulp.

Yu Jin-Ho swallowed some dry saliva. For some reason, his hyung-nim looked even more imposing and cool to his eyes today. And he felt incredibly proud of himself, as it was him and not someone else standing beside such an incredible man.

“Hyung-nim!!”

“Mm?”

“I respect you.”

“What?”

“It’s nothing.”

‘Silly kid.’

Jin-Woo stared wordlessly at Yu Jin-Ho, and the latter averted his gaze after realising how embarrassed he was feeling right now. Meanwhile, Woo Jin-Cheol next to them was also stewing in a bottomless shock at the moment.

‘I knew Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s skills were amazing, but this....’

To think, he’d be able to easily take care of a boss-level Naga like this.

Other raid teams would begin tearing their hair out after seeing this spectacle. Especially when they would need the full participation of tankers, damage dealers, and Healers just to barely bring down a monster of this magnitude.

‘.....’

Woo Jin-Cheol walked up close to the remains of the boss-level Naga and lightly tapped on the monster’s scales. He could definitely sense the steel-like hardness through his fingertips.

Scales of Naga boasted amazing hardness and they were often used in the manufacturing of all sorts of defensive items, such as various armours and shields.

‘But, such scales were....’

Some part of the scales on the lower torso of the monster were crushed and torn into pieces as if they were made out of paper. That was the aftermath left behind by Jin-Woo’s skill, ‘Violent Slash’.

‘Being able to produce such devastating destructive power, while using nothing more than a couple of shortwords.’

Cold sweat formed on Woo Jin-Cheol’s forehead as he observed the monster’s corpse. What a great relief that the youth was their ally and not an enemy.

It was then, Jin-Woo’s voice came from behind him.

“....Can you step aside for a bit, please?”

Woo Jin-Cheol was too deep in his thoughts and couldn’t properly hear that, so he quickly looked behind him in a fluster.

“Y-yes?”

“I’m trying to create another summoned creature, but Chief Woo, you are too close, you see.”

“Ah.”

Yu Jin-Ho had already moved to a far enough location and was busy gesturing at Woo Jin-Cheol to come over there.

“M-my apologies.”

Woo Jin-Cheol offered an appropriate-sounding apology and quickly stepped aside. He kept staring with great anticipation, though. He had seen how the summoned creatures were created during his trip here, but this would be the first time seeing a boss-level monster become a summon.

‘Could this huge thing become a summoned creature as how it looks?’

Even Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes were sparkling as he waited for the result. Even though he was subjected to two men’s boiling anticipation, Jin-Woo was utterly relaxed as he activated Shadow Extraction.

‘Rise up.’

The shadow of the boss-level monster answered the call of its new owner.

Kiiiiaahhh-!!

A hand emerged out from the shadow and grabbed hold of the ground, before dragging its body out from the darkness. However, the newly summoned creature was way smaller in size than what the audience was expecting to see.

As a matter of fact, it was only about the same size as the summoned creatures created out of regular Nagas. Maybe, it was slightly larger, but that was about it.

‘Haha....’

Woo Jin-Cheol was so tense that his palms were soaked in sweat, but now, he could let off a wry chuckle. This result was perhaps an inevitable one.

How could a summon created from borrowing the dead monster’s powers be similar to the actual thing? That would be just about the right size, whether that criteria being its actual power or the physical size.

Woo Jin-Cheol felt relieved for some reason after seeing the summon and its comparatively miniaturised size.

‘Maybe, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s powers have a defined and clear ceiling?’

Even if that was the case, Hunter Seong’s own combat abilities easily exceeded one’s imaginations, so one could never see him as an easy opponent at all.

Quite different from Woo Jin-Cheol’s thoughts, though, Jin-Woo was shouting out in elation at the unexpected jackpot he just stumbled onto.

[The Sovereign’s voice has roused the fighting spirit of the deceased.]

[You have succeeded in strengthening the shadow!]

[The shadow’s level will start from 13.]

‘Nice!!’

Was this because of the Shadow Extraction had levelled up? For the first

time since Igrit's case, the message regarding the strengthening of a shadow popped out. Jin-Woo quickly checked the new soldier's information.

[?? Lv. 13]

Elite Knight grade

It wasn't that surprising to see the grade 'Elite Knight' pop up like Fangs before since this guy used to be the boss of the rank A dungeon. However, its starting level was 13!!

Jin-Woo confirmed that level and could barely keep his happy chuckles in check.

'Is it because its level is so high? Its power is not all that different from the original.'

Unlike the soldiers he had extracted so far, he couldn't sense many discrepancies between this guy's stats and those of the dead original. He picked up on the massive magic energy hidden deep within its smaller body.

He was actually puzzled by its different size, but he could make one hypothesis here.

'Maybe, this is how it looked originally?'

That made sense, seeing that they were all Nagas, to begin with. So, how could the boss be that much bigger than the others? If it used magic like Fangs to balloon up its size, then that made perfect sense.

His hypothesis was supported by the fact that this new guy was ably controlling its own magic energy just like how Fangs did, and also from its great reserve of magic energy as well. That reserve wasn't as huge as Fangs, though.

It was then.

[Please assign the soldier's name.]

Just like before, the message urging him to name this new soldier popped up to his view. Jin-Woo didn't give it much thought and named it 'Jima'.

[Will you name the soldier 'Jima'?]

'That's right.'

And so, a powerful new mage had been added to his Shadow Army, as well as to his new Naga troops, as well. With the extraction process now over, Jin-Woo absorbed Jima back into his shadow.

Right on cue, the dungeon began sending out warning signals now that it

no longer had an owner.

Rumble.....

A faint tremor rose up from the ground. It was the signal that the Gate would close in one hour. Yu Jin-Ho stopped staying back and quickly ran over to his hyung-nim's side.

“It’s time for us to leave this place, hyung-nim.”

“Right.”

Yu Jin-Ho took one last sweeping look around him and smacked his lips as if he was feeling regretful over something.

“But, hyung-nim. This is a bit of a waste.”

His gaze was now fixed on the corpse of the boss-level monster.

“That thing would’ve fetched a handsome amount on the market, you know?”

A Gate would close soon after the dungeon's boss was killed off. Meaning, one would have to take on a huge risk to bring out the body of the boss monster outside the dungeon.

If you made one mistake and got trapped in here, then you'd literally become 'missing in dungeon' forever, so to speak.

Perhaps that was why it was rare to see the corpses of boss monsters outside of the Gates. The first problem being, because they were so much bigger, transporting them itself posed a significant challenge.

Of course, their rarity ensured that the price they fetched was quite substantial, as well. Strangely enough, Jin-Woo replied nonchalantly to Yu Jin-Ho and his wistful longing.

“What’s the problem? We’ll just take it with us.”

“Eh?”

Yu Jin-Ho's eyes opened up wider as he hastily asked a question.

“Hyung-nim, isn’t that too big to take with us?”

Jin-Woo smirked softly.

“It’s fine.”

He didn't know how strong his guy was physically, but well, didn't he have someone on his side who was way bigger than that corpse?

‘Come out.’

When Jin-Woo issued his order, a former High Orc Shaman Shadow Soldier decked out in a black robe made a soundless appearance.

Shururuk....

Fangs lowered his head as his greetings, and Jin-Woo pointed at the corpse with his chin.

‘Go ahead.’

In the blink of an eye, Fangs grew back into a giant. He then began dragging out the boss-level Naga, which wasn’t even half his size, out of the boss chamber.

“Heok!!”

Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes shook hard after witnessing such a shocking spectacle.

‘Wasn’t that thing.....??’

Without a doubt, that was the High Orc Shaman from the Hunters Guild raid not too long ago that Jin-Woo killed in one hit. He clearly witnessed it back then.

But now, that thing was at least twice the size than when it was still alive. And it wasn’t just its size that had grown bigger, too. The emitted waves of magic energy coming from its body when it grew to that size was far, far scarier compared to back then as well.

Woo Jin-Cheol was genuinely astonished by this new development.

‘What is this?! Didn’t the monster’s power drop when turning into a summon??’

If that was the case, then how should he go about explaining that summon created out from the High Orc Shaman?

Jin-Woo could create summons out of the boss monsters from rank A dungeons, and he could even strengthen them, too?

‘How can this make any sort of logical sense.....??’

Jin-Woo asked a nonplussed question to Woo Jin-Cheol and his slack jaw.

“Chief Woo? Aren’t you coming as well?”

“Ah....”

If one were to lose some of their lifespan through mental shocks, then Woo Jin-Cheol must’ve lost half of his life here today.

He had a mountain of questions he'd like to ask. But then, he was actually afraid of the kind of answers he might get, so he felt disinclined to ask them, as well.

Woo Jin-Cheol hesitated, but in the end, could only reply with a tired look on his face.

".....Yes, let's get going."

Reporters were thinking of leaving for early lunch but then, their eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets after Jin-Woo leisurely walked out of the Gate.

"What the heck? Has he finished already?!"

"No way??"

He cleared a rank A dungeon in less than three hours?!

A big lightbulb got switched on inside the heads of the gathered reporters.

'This is a huge scoop! A jackpot!'

The reporters gripping their cameras tightly began flooding towards the Gate, fearing that they might miss Jin-Woo if they didn't hurry up. Too bad, the Hunters from the Monitoring Division waiting there quickly blocked their progress.

"Argh, let me go! We aren't going to interview him, you know??"

"I just want to snap a photo! What the heck, will you take responsibility if I get fired for failing to take a single picture today??"

"It's just one photo, so why are you all behaving like this??"

And just as the desperate scuffle between the reporters and the Monitoring Division's agents intensified....

THUD.

The sound of something heavy stepping on the ground resounded out.

"Uh..."

One of the reporters dropped his camera in an utter daze.

Crack.

He didn't even realise that his fallen camera was stepped on by other reporters. No, he could only point towards the Gate and stutter out in pure shock.

"L-look over there..."

Or, more specifically, he was pointing at the massive, hulking giant of a monster stepping outside the Gate.

“R-run away!! No, no wait! Take its pictures first! Hurry!”

“Are you filming this??”

“Ah, yes!!”

The reporters quickly forgot about the physical confrontation of a second ago and hurriedly began snapping away with their raised cameras.

They were inwardly fearful of the monster suddenly attacking them, but at the same time, their fingers continued to move at a blinding pace as if they had been bewitched by something.

Clickclickclickclickclickclick-!!!

Fangs was diligently dragging the boss-level Naga’s corpse outside the Gate, but when he felt quite a lot of stares landing on his back, he slowly turned around to look.

‘.....??’

And he found that, not just the reporters, but the police, Association employees, and even the passersby on the street stopped in their tracks to look up at him.

Fangs was now suddenly overcome with embarrassment and sheepishly scratched the back of his head.



Chapter 150 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

A certain man was sneaking into a large hospital.

There was only one reason why he was making d*mn sure that no one saw him. And that would be because of the jerry can full of petrol he was carrying at the moment.

In the past, one couldn't find any sort of desire or drive within this man's eyes. But now, they were burning with vigour.

'So, you dare to look down on me, huh?'

He was already resolved to die today.

This man wandered about silently for a long while, before finally choosing a suitable location. His steps came to a halt in one of the hospital's many corridors, although this particular one didn't seem to enjoy all that much foot traffic. He began cautiously pouring the petrol on the floor.

'You think I'll die all alone?'

It happened one week ago.

He got p*ss drunk and wandered around the streets, before picking a fight with some random passerby. And as a result, he got beaten up black and blue. So, he ended up in this hospital.

He regained his consciousness a bit later and declared to the doctor busy treating him. He said, 'I don't have enough money for the hospital fees, so might as well stop what you're doing and let me go'.

It happened then.

He saw it.

He saw the doctor's eyes, looking down on him as if he was a pathetic fool.

That dmn doctor bstard. This man couldn't quite remember the face of that doctor, but even after all this time, he could never forget those eyes.

That's why he made up his mind.

'I'll get my revenge on you.'

And that was his reason for seeking out the very hospital he once visited as

its guest.

He wasn't planning to live any longer, anyway. So, he poured the petrol all over this corner of the hospital, and then, dumped what little remained on himself.

“We'll all go together.”

His voice was thickly laden with spiteful rage.

Of course, this hospital was pretty d*mn huge, so something like this wouldn't even be able to burn it down completely. However, he should still be able to take a few with him. It'd be very good if a handful of doctors were included in that 'few', but if not, there's not much he could do about that.

He already ruined his life through gambling anyway. But, he wasn't planning to quietly disappear like everyone else.

He threw away the empty jerry can, and after rummaging through his pockets for a while, pulled out a lighter. The moment his thumb spins that flint, this f*cked-up life of his would come to an end.

“...”

He became expressionless and was about to press down with his thumb, but then, an eerie breeze suddenly brushed him by.

‘...There's a breeze?’

The man felt something was off and scanned his vicinity. This corridor didn't even have any windows, so where could have that breeze come from?

‘What was that?’

He tilted his head while looking around himself, only to abruptly realise that something felt rather empty down there. He lowered his gaze to his hand.

The lighter he held in his hand was gone.

‘...!!’

What an incredibly puzzling thing that was.

He wondered if he dropped the lighter while he was preoccupied, so he carefully combed over the floor, but that turned out to be a waste of time.

‘Just where did it disappear to....?’

Feeling utterly puzzled now, he raised his head and then spotted a large, black something standing right in front of his eyes.

It was an 'insect' with hands and legs.

The man was greatly taken by surprise, his eyes bulging out until they were almost popping out. Before he could scream, though, the ‘insect’ reached out and grabbed his mouth.

“Euph!!”

“Kiikiik.”

The ‘insect’ raised the index finger of its free hand and pressed it against its mouth.

“Shush.”

This human shouldn’t raise a commotion like this. The human female his king told him to protect was sleeping in a room nearby, after all.

The man struggled bitterly, but he couldn’t even budge a single finger of the monster off his face.

“Euph, eupphhh!!”

The man’s eyes now saw the ‘insect’ – no, Beru’s open mouth slowly growing closer towards him.

Why did ‘it’ happen on level 101?

As Jin-Woo drove back, he thought back to how his skills abruptly went up a level earlier in the day. Even though his mind was occupied with something else, his hands holding the steering wheel remained steady and controlled.

‘It’s not even level 100, too.’

He thought that, if something about him were to change because of the level ups, then that should happen on level 100. However, his expectation was a bit off the mark.

His Class-specific skills all got an upgrade after he reached level 101.

A few guesses fled in and out of his head, but currently, only two of them held the strongest possibilities of being right.

The first one was about what the number ‘1’ signified. ‘1’ meant a new beginning.

Could it be that, when his level reached 101, all restrictions on his Class-specific skills were removed and he was now free to upgrade them at will?

‘If that’s not it....’

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened when he thought about the second theory. Personally, he’d have much preferred for this one to be wrong, though.

‘Could it be because I got my Class at level 51.....?’

There was a possibility that the Skill levels rose up because he was exactly 50 levels higher than when he got his Class. Which also kind of implied that he needed to reach level 151 if he wanted to upgrade his Skills again.

‘.....I don’t want that.’

If he thought about his levelling up speed lately, then indeed, he could only dearly pray that this remained nothing more than his hypothesis.

Soon, the building with his Guild office came into his view. Jin-Woo drove the van into the underground parking lot. He was the only passenger riding on the trusty steed of the Ah-Jin Guild, ‘Bonggo’. Yu Jin-Ho chose to stay back in the Gate’s location, saying that he’d wrap up the proceedings before going back to the office.

The raid might have ended, but there was still one more step of handing over the recovered loot to the brokers to think about. Since it was Yu Jin-Ho who had contacted these brokers, it seemed that he wanted to personally take charge of handling this matter.

[“Please, leave everything to me, hyung-nim!”]

Jin-Woo thought that he could still hear Yu Jin-Ho’s voice filled with confidence even now.

‘I wonder, will he be okay?’

It was all good and well for a Vice-Chair of the Guild to be full of drive and energy, but wouldn’t it be better still to hire dedicated staff members for matters like this? Jin-Woo told himself to search for more employees and walked out of the underground parking lot.

But then....

‘Mm?’

He spotted a familiar figure walking towards the Guild building from afar. And that familiar person also discovered Jin-Woo staring back at her.

“Ah....”

Her steps came to an abrupt halt right then and there.

Cha Hae-In formed a shocked expression and began to backtrack one step at a time before she turned around completely, and began running away.

‘...HUH??’

Jin-Woo was utterly dumbstruck by what just happened.

The thing was, though – he could gloss over the reason why she suddenly started running away after seeing his face, but he simply couldn't...

'...You think you can escape from me because you started running?'

Just who did she think she was dealing with here?

Jin-Woo was suddenly overcome with a streak of stubbornness and pounced forward with everything he had after activating his 'Quicksilver' skill.

Time slowed down to a crawl, and only the background images seemed to move at a blinding pace. The distance between him and Cha Hae-In decreased quickly enough, and then he began thinking to himself.

'If I grab her from the back or try to touch her, she might get hurt, so....'

Jin-Woo lightly jumped up in the air, spun around once, and landed in front of Cha Hae-In's escaping figure.

'....!!'

Her eyes grew super wide in an instant.

Her escape route had been cut off, and before she could do anything else, her shoulders were caught by Jin-Woo's hands.

"Kyahk!"

And so, the foot chase between two rank S Hunters came to a very anti-climatic end. Now that she was caught by him, she couldn't even bring herself to look into his eyes.

Jin-Woo continued to stare at her with deeply puzzled eyes, before calmly asking her the important question.

"Why did you run away after seeing me?"

"..."

Well, he could concede a bit here and say that it was possible for her to bolt like that. Fine.

"If you were going to run, then why did you even bother to come to my office?"

If she wanted to avoid him that much, then she shouldn't even come anywhere near him, no? Jin-Woo's pointed question elicited Cha Hae-In to reply in a voice that was smaller than a buzzing mosquito.

"My car is... still in your parking lot...."

‘Ah. Right. There was an unfamiliar car parked in the lot for the last couple of days, wasn’t there?’

That day, when Cha Hae-In came to the office, saying that she wanted to join his Guild....

After they ‘teleported’ directly to the Association’s gymnasium from the Guild office, she forgot to take her car back and left it in the underground parking lot until now.

‘Looks like she came sneaking back in to get her car back because our Guild was supposed to be on a raid today.’

Too bad for her, she couldn’t have imagined that he’d only need a little over two hours to complete the raid of a rank A Gate. As a result, these two young people got to meet each other again. She quickly tried to get away from him, but in the end, was apprehended by him instead.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo’s wordless stare continued, and Cha Hae-In’s head drooped lower and lower. He let out a helpless sigh and slowly let her shoulders go.

“There’s no need to run away from me, you know.”

Jin-Woo spoke as he formed an amiable smile.

“A person’s mind can change all the time, am I right?”

Indeed, wouldn’t people lose their interest, or suddenly gain interest when there was none, to begin with? Wasn’t that how a person’s heart operated? There was no reason for them to go out of their way to avoid each other like this.

“.....”

However, Cha Hae-In didn’t even try to refute him, her head still remaining lowered.

‘Maybe, she doesn’t even feel like talking to me?’

It was possible that she was unhappy about suddenly being grabbed like that.

“Well, then.”

Jin-Woo turned around to leave with a little nod as his goodbye. No, he was going to turn around. But before he could, Cha Hae-In hurriedly held on to his sleeve.

“Excuse me.....”

“....?”

By the time four, five question marks floated over Jin-Woo’s head, she finally stopped hesitating and opened her lips to speak.

“Can you free up some time so we can talk for a little while?”

Only a minute ago she was fleeing for her dear life, but now, she wanted to speak to him?

Perhaps she sensed Jin-Woo’s flustered confusion, Cha Hae-In quickly explained herself.

“Actually, Min Byung-Gu Hunter-nim wanted me to pass on a message to you.”

Jin-Woo’s expression changed once he heard that unexpected name come out of her mouth.

“A message for me?”

Nod, nod.

Cha Hae-In’s head bobbed up and down.

“He said, there was something he wanted to say about your powers, Seong Hunter-nim.”

But, how could that be? Jin-Woo didn’t have any point of contact, private or otherwise, with Hunter Min Byung-Gu. And their one and only meeting came around when Jin-Woo revived Min Byung-Gu into a Shadow Soldier for a short while back then.

The deceased Hunter carried out his job perfectly and thanks to that, Cha Hae-In was able to survive. It was all due to that man’s efforts that these two young people could talk to each other like this.

But then, just when did he have the time to leave a message behind?

Jin-Woo didn’t display his power until the Jeju raid, and when he did, Min Byung-Gu was already long dead.

Something like that couldn’t have happened.

Jin-Woo stared at her with a disbelieving expression. Cha Hae-In cautiously continued on.

“Your power, Seong Hunter-nim....”

But, when her words reached there, Jin-Woo quickly cut her off.

“Hold on, please.”

Didn't matter if what she wanted to say was true or not, this topic didn't seem well suited to be discussed in the middle of the street.

Jin-Woo scanned his vicinity once, and then continued to speak to her.

“Let’s continue our discussion somewhere more private, shall we?”

Chairman Yu Myung-Han received the files containing certain information from his Secretary Kim.

“These are?”

“They are information gathered from Seoul Il-Sin hospital, sir.”

Il-Sin hospital was where Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's mother had been staying until recently. Yu Myung-Han's eyes sharpened instantly. Without saying anything else, he began reading the documents.

‘The nurse entered in the morning and she was already wide awake? And Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was found right next to his mother?’

There was another strange thing mentioned in the file.

The hospital staff recommended an in-depth analysis of the patient's conditions to be carried out as they were concerned about her health, but Hunter Seong strongly demanded for her release, instead.

Chairman Yu Myung-Han unconsciously shook his head.

‘That doesn’t sound like him....’

That man possessed such a strong filial love that he risked his life and limb by entering dangerous raids in order to earn enough money for her hospital fees. However, such a man one-sidedly demanded his mother's release, when he couldn't have been sure of her physical condition?

‘No, it’s the exact opposite.’

This could only mean that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had already confirmed his mother's status by then.

But, how did he do that?

The longer Yu Myung-Han read the data sent in from the hospital, the deeper the frowns on his forehead became.

Everything about Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was shrouded in mystery.

‘The dual dungeon incident, his sudden Re-Awakening, his mother’s abrupt recovery, and even his mysterious ability to create countless summoned creatures.....’

Wouldn't a series of serendipities eventually become inevitability?

There was definitely something here. There was absolutely no doubt about that. Yu Myung-Han's sharply-honed senses were telling him such. His resolution became even firmer than before.

"Looks like I'll have to talk to him face to face."

"I shall send over someone before the end of today, sir."

"No need for that."

Secretary Kim was taken aback from that reply.

"Sir, are you planning to go see him personally?"

"Secretary Kim. Who do you think the man I'm trying to meet is?"

"...."

That was enough to shut Secretary Kim's mouth.

It was then.

Vrrrr....

Secretary Kim's phone suddenly began vibrating. Chairman Yu Myung-Han returned his gaze back to the files and gave his permission.

"It's fine to answer it."

Secretary Kim bowed his head slightly and quickly checked his phone. It was a text message carrying urgent breaking news.

"Chairman, sir."

Yu Myung-Han raised his head again.

"There's breaking news coming from Japan as we speak. Would you like to see it, sir?"

Secretary Kim wasn't someone to get easily agitated over a simple matter. If he was asking you about whether you wanted to see something or not, then that was the same thing as you needing to see that something immediately.

Nod.

Yu Myung-Han nodded his head, and as if he was waiting for that, Secretary Kim quickly switched on the giant TV hanging on the wall.

The real-time live broadcast of Japan's most bustling downtown area filled up the TV screen as the device flickered into life.

Shinjuku, located in Tokyo, Japan.

A gloomy shadow was being cast on the busiest, liveliest avenue in Tokyo, the one often referred to as the beating heart of Japan. That wasn't a simple figure of speech, though.

Every single car, bicycle, and person – didn't matter who or what, they were all standing still beneath this massive shade cast over them.

People began climbing out from their stopped vehicles one by one. The road was becoming uncontrollably clogged up, but not one honked their horns or yelled out in irritation.

It was as if everyone here had been bewitched by an unseen force.

Every single gaze was directed to one particular spot.

“Oh, my god...”

“Dear Lord....”

There was a Gate so huge that it blocked out the sky to cast an enormous shade onto the ground below.

The people below saw this common-sense-shattering Gate that easily matched a regular skyscraper in sheer size, and fell deep into the state of indescribable shock.

“...”

“....”

The avenue once bustling with overflowing people was now being gripped tighter and tighter by a silence so wretched that it almost induced some of the witnesses to start vomiting.

The atmosphere in the Japanese Prime Minister's official residence was rather poor, as well.

Slam!

The Prime Minister couldn't hold back his rising tide of anger and threw the remote control hard at the TV busy showing the breaking news.

“P-Prime Minister!”

His adjutants hurriedly got up, but they shut their mouths and sat back down once the Prime Minister's dagger-like eyes landed on them.

“Why isn't the Hunter's Association saying anything?”

The President of the Japanese Hunter's Association, Matsumoto Shigeo, weakly lowered his head. He had become a lot more haggard ever since returning from his trip to South Korea.

The Prime Minister's expression hardened.

“God d*mn it....”

Something that horrifying had appeared in the middle of Tokyo, yet the Association who should be in charge of such things, were keeping their mouths shut?!

“A rank S Gate has appeared right in the heart of Tokyo! But, do you think it makes any sort of sense for the Association to not have a single countermeasure in place? How??”

The Prime Minister cried out in anguish.

Unfortunately for him, everyone present kept their mouths shut as if they had agreed to do so beforehand. The Prime Minister's expression crumpled unsightly, like a man carrying the weight of all the suffering found in this world, before he collapsed down onto his chair.

“Be honest with me, Association President.”

He then pointed at the cracked TV screen.

“What will happen if that thing opens up on us?”

“.....It'll be the end, sir.”

As he thought – the Prime Minister hugged his head and muttered out helplessly.

“So, that's how it is..... Just one Gate, and the city of Tokyo is finished, is that it?”

“That's not what I'm saying, Prime Minister.”

“....?”

The Prime Minister raised his head to look, and Association President Matsumoto Shigeo continued on with an emotionless voice.

“I meant to say that the entirety of Japan will be finished, sir.”



Chapter 151 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Somewhere.... private??”

Embarrassment began dyeing Cha Hae-In’s expression beet red as she took a look around where they were. Jin-Woo’s own expression hardened as well.

‘How come all the buildings around here are so....’

Indeed, they were now in a location where everything around them was ill-suited for a pair of young people to casually walk in.

Before this awkward situation could get any worse, Jin-Woo quickly came up with a solution.

“You need to get your car anyway, so why don’t we go back to our Guild office?”

“Ah, yes.”

Nod, nod.

He briefly thought that her nodding like that with a reddened face was rather adorable to look at. But still, he quickly turned around in the direction of the office.

“Shall we?”

“Okay.”

Jin-Woo began retracing the path he and Cha Hae-In took and was reminded of the fact that she was indeed a rank S Hunter like him.

‘Wow, we really did run far, didn’t we?’

Although it felt like only a brief moment for him, they needed ten minutes of regular walking just get back to his office.

The Guild office was located on the third floor. Jin-Woo placed his thumb on the electronic lock, and the door clicked open to allow them inside.

He was about to head straight into the conference room, but then, he had to stop in his treks and take a look behind him, at Cha Hae-In still standing by the doorway.

“....?”

Jin-Woo stared at her with eyes asking ***“Aren’t you coming in?”*** which prompted her to ask back at him, instead.

“Isn’t it too dark inside?”

“...Ah.”

Only then did Jin-Woo realise that the interior of the office was pitch-black.

His vision wasn’t hindered by regular levels of darkness, so stuff like this would happen every once in a while. As for Hunter Cha, maybe she wasn’t as good with darkness as he was.

Click.

He flipped the switch and the interior was brightly lit up. She took a look inside the illuminated interior and cautiously asked him again.

“There is no one in the office?”

“The Vice-Chair wanted to remain behind in the Gate’s location, you see.”

“Could there be only two people in this Gui...”

Cha Hae-In stopped her words there and quickly shook her head when she saw Jin-Woo and his expression that said, ***“So, what’s the problem with that?”***

“....No, it’s nothing.”

Cha Hae-In was very quickly coming to an understanding that the common sense of the world didn’t seem to apply to the man in front of her eyes.

‘Hold on.’

Her steps taking her into the Guild office suddenly came to an abrupt halt.

‘Doesn’t that mean there are only me and Mister Seong Jin-Woo inside this Guild building??’

The light of tension quickly filled up Cha Hae-In’s eyes. At the same time, she also realised that it’d been a while since she felt this tense as well.

‘Maybe, it’s my first time since becoming an Awakened....’

How many men out there in this world were capable of making her feel this tense? Especially when she was acknowledged to be one of the highest levelled among the ranked S Hunters, at that?

For some reason, the words of ‘somewhere private’ kept repeating in her head and she became even more conscious of herself because of that. Her

heart was palpitating faster and faster.

She began giggling then, suddenly thinking that she was no longer acting like a rank S Hunter, but like a regular girl now.

“Keuk, keuk.”

Jin-Woo gazed at Cha Hae-In trying hard to suppress her giggles and tilted his head.

‘Is it that funny to have only two employees in a Guild?’

But, then again, she was a part of the top Guild in South Korea, so from her perspective, this arrangement must’ve come across as totally inconceivable.

So, Jin-Woo stopped paying any mind to that and entered the conference suite. He made her sit close by and settled down on the opposing chair.

He started talking only after the air in the conference suite felt a bit more familiar to both of them.

“Please tell me. What happened?”

Just those simple words were enough to change the atmosphere within the suite completely.

“How is it possible for Hunter Min Byung-Gu to leave you with messages for me?”

Jin-Woo’s expression was serious. He didn’t know her all that well, but still, he got the impression that she wasn’t a type to start spewing baseless lies just to get some attention.

That was why he became so much more serious now.

“...”

Either she needed some time to recall her sleeping memories, or didn’t know where to begin her tale, because she needed a bit of time before she was ready to open lips.

“That day.....”

Cha Hae-In finally raised her head and looked deeply into his eyes. Her gentle eyes were now filled to the brim with tears. When Jin-Woo saw her expression, he thought he could more or less tell where she’d start her story.

She quietly spoke.

“I heard his voice.”

Cha Hae-In was getting sucked deeper into the unending darkness, but it was none other than the hand of Min Byung-Gu reaching down to stop her falling.

“Min Byung-Gu.... Hunter-nim?”

Min Byung-Gu slowly nodded his head.

Cha Hae-In had to confirm that it was him multiple times because he was currently decked out in unfamiliar black armour. If it weren't for his uncovered face, she'd never have figured out that it was him.

Cha Hae-In asked him in confusion.

“Where.... Where are we?”

“I don't know myself, but I do know what will happen if I let go of the hand holding you.”

Cha Hae-In was about to take a look below her, but Min Byung-Gu hurriedly stopped her.

“Don't look!!”

“Excuse me??”

Cha Hae-In got startled and she quickly looked up at him. Min Byung-Gu explained to her with a sombre look on his face.

“If you look down there, you might not be able to come back up again.”

As he said those words, she got to read a certain emotion that almost felt like a longing of some kind within his eyes.

‘No, it can't be....’

She began recalling the scene taking place seconds before she lost consciousness.

The Jeju Island raid.

The ant queen.

And then, the sudden appearance of a truly terrifying mutated ant monster.

She sensed a scary something approaching her, and then, the darkness came over her.

“Did I... Am I dead?”

Min Byung-Gu shook his head.

“No, not yet.”

“But then, what about you, Min Byung-Gu Hunter-nim?”

He didn't reply. Instead, Min Byung-Gu stopped her line of questioning there.

“We don't have much time left, so allow me to get to the point.”

This was likely his one and only chance. If he missed it, then he'd never be able to get this message across. Min Byung-Gu's expression became urgent, pleading even, as he spoke to her.

“Please pass this message to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

‘Seong Jin-Woo....?’

Cha Hae-In could only briefly stew in her confusion arising from that name unexpectedly being mentioned here. Min Byung-Gu carried on.

“You must tell him that he needs to be careful with the power he possesses.”

“What, what do you mean by that?”

“You must've noticed it by now, but I've already died once. I fell to the bottom of this place, but someone pulled me back up. He pulled me back out of this endless darkness.”

“Could it be that man is....?”

“Yes, it was Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

Cha Hae-In's eyes began quaking powerfully now. Even if Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was ridiculously overpowered, was he really powerful enough to revive a dead person??

However, Min Byung-Gu continued to recount the experience he had gone through without holding anything back.

“Truth is, even though it was indeed I that got revived, that wasn't really me, either. I possessed my will and my consciousness, but I was also prepared to do anything for him.... It felt like I have become an unquestioning, unconditional slave only existing to serve him and nothing else.”

There was no reason for Cha Hae-In to ask who this 'he' was in Min Byung-Gu's explanations. She swallowed her nervous saliva.

“I was scared as well, because the mere idea of serving him made me feel so happy.”

Min Byung-Gu formed a bitter expression.

“You must let Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim know this.”

His expression then hardened into a sombre one.

“His powers are absolute, and it was incredibly scary. He needs to know this, as well.”

However, what was even more horrifying than that was...

His expression now shifted to the one of sheer terror as he recalled the memories of only a few moments ago.

As he stood up from the ground after becoming the new Shadow Soldier through Hunter Seong’s command, he got to see the welcoming cheers of the countless black-armoured soldiers lining up behind Jin-Woo.

Their numbers were in the tens of thousands. No, millions.

As if they were faithfully waiting for the commands of their Sovereign, the innumerable number of soldiers were ‘hiding’ quietly behind Jin-Woo.

And when Min Byung-Gu’s gaze met the eyes of their general standing before them, he lost all his sense of self and Cha Hae-In’s lying body filled up his view, instead. He already knew what he needed to do by then.

Not only that, he also understood that there was something else he had to do on top of saving her. And that would be letting Hunter Seong Jin-Woo know of how terrifying the power sleeping within him was.

In that brief moment when his mind was connected to Jin-Woo’s, Min Byung-Gu got to see the true identity of that power – as well as the extent of his true army.

He sensed that his time was rapidly running out and shouted at her.

“You must remember!! The real army of Hunter Seong is....”

It was then.

A blinding light came from somewhere above and enveloped Cha Hae-In. Min Byung-Gu’s expression stiffened.

“His real army is....!!”

Unfortunately, his voice was buried within the empty echoes, and it flickered dimmer and dimmer, eventually sinking deep into the void below.

“....”

That was as far as Cha Hae-In could remember. Her memories had become

faint and indistinct like a fading dream, but they somehow managed to return to her not too long ago.

Jin-Woo's expression was understandably heavy after hearing her tale.

'Her consciousness seconds before dying met with that of Hunter Min Byung-Gu's, who actually did die and became a Shadow Soldier?'

It was a truly hard-to-believe story.

Was it possible that her subconscious mind created a false memory with the stuff she picked up from the surroundings, all because she received a heavy mental trauma after facing the imminent threat of death?

Jin-Woo raised this point with her, and she replied with these following words.

"Yes, I also thought that could be a possibility."

Why wouldn't Cha Hae-In consider such a possibility? That was why she found herself in a deep dilemma over the last few days, before she finally worked up enough courage to tell him about the message.

Jin-Woo nodded his head in understanding. He then pushed forward his phone towards her.

"Let me give you my number. In case you remember anything else, please, can you give me a call right away?"

Cha Hae-In nodded her head.

"Yes. If I do, I'll contact you immediately."

Her complexion seemed to have brightened just a tad now.

Japan immediately sent out requests for help to the international community.

As they had lost over half of their combat force ranked S, this somewhat rapid decision had an air of inevitability to it.

Unfortunately, the international community's attitude was rather icy, to say the least.

Japan wilfully ignored the dangerous situation developing in the neighbouring nation of Korea. But then, the Japanese got all worked up about putting out the fire only after the flames landed on their feet.

The international community hadn't forgotten that.

The Japanese were left baffled and lost after the United States, already well known for never, ever letting their rank S Hunters work overseas, as well as the most powerful Hunter nation in Asia, China, abandoned them to their devices.

[The USA abandons Japan.]

[Will China do nothing and let the destruction of Japan happen?]

[The Tokyo Gate: two days since its appearance. The remaining time is....]

[What will Korea choose to do?]

The world's attention began focusing on Japan; sensational articles were being published every single day.

It was at precisely at this point that a lone Hunter extended his hands of salvation towards the Japanese public being overwhelmed by despair and terror.

His name was Yuri Orlov, a rank S Hunter of Russian nationality.

In order to negotiate the terms with the Japanese government, he invited over the related representatives to his place. The Japanese Hunter's Association President Matsumoto Shigeo jumped aboard a plane taking him to the Russian Federation at the first chance he got.

Yuri Orlov didn't even bother to greet the Japanese representatives at the airport and instead, received them in the living room of his palace-like mansion.

"My name is Matsumoto Shigeo."

A middle-aged blonde Caucasian man arrogantly greeted back.

"I'm Yuri Orlov. You should probably know this by now, but I'm called the best Support-type Hunter in the world."

After that brief introduction, the two men settled down on the opposite side.

Yuri Orlov had asked for all the related data concerning the Tokyo Gate before this meeting. After getting his hands on those files, he began to leisurely browse them.

And so, how much time passed by like this?

He kept nodding his head as he calculated the cost, and eventually opened his mouth to name his price.

“Ten million US Dollars per day. You pay me the money properly on time, and I will block the Gate for you for as long as you want.” (TL note at the end)

Ten million per day??

The Japanese representatives almost flew into rage from that outrageous price, but Matsumoto Shigeo didn't. He raised his hands and gestured them to calm down, prompting the flinching Japanese Hunters to settle back down in their seats.

“Looks like I can hold a civilised conversation with you.”

Yuri Orlov grinned, his gold-plated teeth now on full display.

“3.6 billion in a year. That money will save your nation. It's not even 36 billion, either. So, how about it? Will you save your country with 10 million per day, or will you give up on your country because you think that's a waste of money?”

Officially, the wealth of the richest man alive was supposed to be just over 100 billion US Dollars. So, 3.6 billion per year was definitely not a small sum by any stretch of the imagination.

‘But, when compared to the nation of Japan, it truly is a negligible amount.’

Matsumoto Shigeo had come to a decision and opened his mouth.

“We are willing to pay you that amount.”

“Very good. Then, let's sign the contract right now, and my signing fee....”

“But before we do that,”

Yuri Orlov was busy ordering his underling to bring along the contract, but he stopped and took a long hard look at Matsumoto Shigeo.

“....?”

Even though he was being subjected to that blatantly criticising glare, Matsumoto Shigeo remained collected as he carried on.

“Please, can you demonstrate your abilities to us, at least once.”

Yuri Orlov heard the translation from the interpreter and began guffawing out right away.

“Euhahahahahat!!”

He laughed his head off until tears came out of his eyes. He eventually

collected himself enough to speak up.

“You think you’re in any position to get picky here? When licking my boots and pleading on your knees might not even be enough?”

It was then—two Japanese rank S Hunters tasked with guarding Matsumoto Shigeo during this trip to Russia could no longer endure this insult and shot up from their seats.

“Stop, you two!!”

Matsumoto hurriedly shouted out, but it was too late; the eyes of the two rank S Hunters were burning in rage and they weren’t backing down.

However....

Thud!

Thud, thud!!

The rank S Hunters did try to make their moves but, as if they were stuck behind invisible walls, couldn’t even budge an inch from the spot. They were like rats trapped inside a glass bottle, only being able to exchange shocked glances with each other.

Yuri Orlov cackled again while looking at the two men.

“Free yourselves if you can, alright? But then, you won’t be able to move a single foot without my permission.”

Yuri Orlov was the ‘master’ of placing barriers. Not just the two trapped rank S Hunters, but even Matsumoto Shigeo couldn’t hide their shock from this development. The corners of Yuri Orlov’s lips arched up as he made his offer again.

“For the price of ten million per day, I’ll block the Gate for you, plus I shall add the lives of these two morons on top, as well. So, how about it? Isn’t this enough to satisfy you now?”

His teeth reflected the living room’s light and glittered in gold.

He had just demonstrated the power of his restrictions that could tie up two rank S Hunters as if they were nothing much at all.

“Is trusting this man the best option we have at this point....?”

Matsumoto Shigeo’s head slowly bobbed up and down.

“May I use the phone for a little while?”

“But, of course.”

And on the following day.

The name of Yuri Orlov filled up the news broadcasts from all over the world.



Chapter 152 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The first thing Jin-Woo did after he got home was to bring up his Status Window.

‘Stat Window.’

What he wanted to check out was the newly updated info on his Skills. His gaze scrolled past his current level, his Class and Title, and eventually arrived at the Skill Window.

[Skills]

Passive Skills

Active Skills

Almost all of his bountiful skills displayed in the Skill Window had reached their level limit and evolved into their ultimate forms, or were about to evolve into one.

The level cap for a skill was 3. And when a skill reached the level cap, the number would change to ‘MAX’ and stopped rising any further than that. However, if he continued to increase his proficiency with the skills, they would eventually evolve into their ultimate versions. The gap between the skill’s effectiveness before and after its evolution was noticeably huge.

The skill ‘Dash’ had evolved into ‘Quicksilver’.

The skill ‘Vital Points Targetting’ had evolved into ‘Violent Slash’.

And ‘Dagger Throw’ had morphed into ‘Dagger Rush’.

Even the passive skill that aided with handling daggers and shortwords, ‘High-Grade Dagger Technique’, had evolved into ‘Master of Shortsword’.

The result of that last evolution was something like this. Jin-Woo summoned ‘Demon King’s Shortsword’ out and began manipulating it this way and that on his hand.

He spun the weapon seamlessly around his index finger before letting it glide up to the palm of his hand. It then smoothly slithered around to the back of his hand.

The near-acrobatic silky movements continued on for a little while, before

he lightly tossed the weapon over his head and snatched it back in his grip. Jin-Woo slowly smacked his lips afterwards.

‘What a pity that there is no one here to appreciate this.’

The shortsword felt like an extension of his own limb, and that was all due to the passive skill, ‘Master of Shortsword’.

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the Skill Window while repeatedly tossing the shortsword up and down.

‘So, ‘Intimidation’ and ‘Stealth’ are the only two with realistic chances of getting stronger, huh.’

Regretfully, there didn’t seem to be much room for the ‘Tenacity’ skill to improve beyond level 1, where it had been stuck ever since he got the skill. But, that was inevitable, really.

[Skill: Tenacity Lv.1]

Passive Skill.

Mana required to activate: None.

You possess untiring tenacity. When your stamina drops below 30%, this skill will automatically activate and reduce all damage received by 50%.

...Because, ‘Tenacity’ was a skill that only activated when his stamina dropped below 30%. Obviously, he wouldn’t endanger his own life just to level up one of his skills, now would he?

Also, Jin-Woo had experienced a fair number of close shaves after that passive skill became part of his arsenal. Even then, it hadn’t changed from being level 1, so that could only mean he’d need to go through an extraordinary situation just for a chance to upgrade this skill.

Besides, Jin-Woo becoming far too strong also played a factor here. Just how many enemies out there could realistically drive him to a desperate corner now?

All things considered, he had no choice but to forget about upgrading ‘Tenacity’ altogether.

He then decided to increase his proficiency with both ‘Stealth’ and ‘Intimidation’, the latter of which he hadn’t had a lot of chances to utilise until now and was stuck at level 2 as a result.

Unlike ‘Intimidation’, which was rather difficult to activate willy-nilly anywhere as he pleased, he could activate ‘Stealth’ even when he was going through his daily routines.

But, right now, Jin-Woo's gaze was fixed to a spot up above those skills.

'Just what could this guy be?'

He was looking at the skill simply labelled as 'Unknown' found within the passive skill list.

This skill had been with him ever since he became the 'Player'. But up until now, not even its basic information had been revealed to him.

'I thought it'd eventually disclose its secrets after a while, but...'

Did this skill also require him to meet some kind of a condition to be unlocked as well? Because it was labelled 'MAX' from the very beginning, he was really looking forward to finding out just what kind of skill it was, but this....

A lot of time had passed since those days, but his curiosity only managed to grow larger and larger in the meantime.

'.....'

Jin-Woo continued to stare at the 'Unknown' skill until he almost bore a hole right through it, but in the end, he shook his head in defeat. Besides, what he really wanted to confirm couldn't be found within the regular Skill Window, anyway.

No, they were right below it.

Indeed, he wanted to check his Class-specific skills that had all gone up a level earlier in the day.

[Class-specific Skills]

Active Skill

'So, what changed, and by how much?'

Jin-Woo took a closer look at the information on the skills, excluding 'Shadow Exchange', which he had already taken a gander before.

[Skill: Shadow Extraction]

Class-specific skill.

Required Mana to activate: None

Creates a shadow soldier by extracting Mana from the recently deceased lifeform.

The odds of extraction failure will rise higher depending on the target's original Stat values, as well as the length of time since its death.

Number of shadows that can be extracted: 590/1,300

Level 2 effect 'Boost': Increases the odds of enhancing the Stats of the extracted shadow.

Perhaps as a reward for such a tough levelling up process, the number of shadows he could extract had shot up to a shocking degree.

'The maximum number of shadows is now 1,300?!'

As long as his surroundings were filled with targets for Shadow Extraction, he'd be able to increase the number of his allies by well over double the current size. Not only that, there was the special added effect to consider as well, which raised the odds of the extracted shadows starting off at higher levels.

'So, that's what it was....'

The reason for the boss-level Naga 'Jima' to start from level 13 was most likely due to this 'Boost' effect. It wasn't a coincidence at all.

'What would've happened if I possessed this Boost effect before I made Beru into a Shadow Soldier?'

Without a doubt, he might have gotten his hands on an even more terrifying monster.

'Heh, and the wise old 'they' say that a man's greed knows no bounds, didn't they?'

Jin-Woo smirked softly to himself and confirmed the details of his other Class-specific skills one by one. The other two skills had also received a lot of enhancements, and a new, never-before-seen effect was added to each of them, as well.

A wide grin settled on Jin-Woo's lips as he read the explanations of his upgraded skills, 'Shadow Storage' and 'Sovereign's Territory'.

'This is great.'

He closed the Skill Windows with a satisfied grin on his face.

There was no doubt that his growth had slowed down recently. Even then, he still managed to keep moving forward, and when he thought about the fact that there was still more room for him to grow, his heart began pounding even harder.

He wanted to climb even higher and higher.

'I don't know where the summit is, but....'

Every time he managed to reach and exceed his goals, his heart was filled with this indescribable happiness, a powerful bliss.

Ba-thump, ba-thump!!

Jin-Woo returned the shortsword back to Inventory and placed his hand quietly on his chest.

Ba-thump, ba-thump.

His heart issued pleasant noises as it continued to beat steadily.

It was then, he abruptly remembered something else that happened earlier in the day.

‘.....She said it was a scary power, didn’t she?’

He recalled the tale he heard from Cha Hae-In a few hours ago.

Min Byung-Gu left a warning for him. He said that Jin-Woo was in possession of a scary power, and he needed to be circumspect about it.

‘Was he talking about the System?’

Jin-Woo also was scared of the things happening to him initially as well. He felt fearful towards the System capable of creating all these unexplainable phenomena around him.

However, his fears didn’t last for long.

He adapted to the ways of the System in no time at all. And the System quickly became the single greatest tool he possessed.

Sure, there were still far too many mysteries left unanswered, but that was about it, really.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo’s gaze drifted towards the empty air in front of him.

“Just what are you?”

Of course, he didn’t get an answer in return.

“I mean, isn’t it okay to tell me what’s going on already?”

He quietly stared into the empty air as if he was expecting an answer to arrive, but rather obviously, nothing came.

‘Inventory.’

Jin-Woo opened his storage to extract the black key.

[Item: Key to the Karutenon temple]

Rarity....

...has been reached.

Remaining time: 249:25:07

Here it was, the invitation sent out by the System.

A week's worth of time had flown by already, and only around 250 hours remained.

'What kind of answers will I find in that place?'

Half of him was filled with expectations. And the other half, deep curiosity. His heart rate that quietened down for a bit began beating faster again. Jin-Woo lifted his hand off his chest.

His thoughts of doing everything he could during the remaining time hadn't changed at all. He picked his phone up and quickly made a call.

Yu Jin-Ho replied in a cheerful voice over the phone. Jin-Woo wasted no time and got straight into the main topic.

"Hey, Jin-Ho?"

"You think we'll be able to book every single high-ranking Gate opening up in our area from tomorrow onwards?"

"Yeah, like that."

Yu Jin-Ho thought for a little while, before replying back with a bright-sounding voice.

A huge crowd had gathered in the Japanese airport where the Russian rank S Hunter, Yuri Orlov, made his landing, and there was hardly any space left to even set a foot inside.

The corners of Yuri Orlov's lips arched up as he took in the sight of the massive throng of Japanese people coming to see him.

On the other hand, the high-ranking members of the Japanese Hunter's Association bringing the Russian home walked around with their heads lowered as if they were criminals going on a trial.

'The country lacking enough talented Hunters to stop a calamity by themselves, so they must borrow the strength of Hunters from another nation.'

Those words were what Japan used to ridicule South Korea only a few weeks ago. Yet, the exact same situation was playing itself out within the Japanese border now.

The Association President Matsumoto Shigeo, as well as the Association's representatives, recalled their own past indiscretion and couldn't even dare to lift their heads up again.

'If only we didn't lose our Hunters on Jeju Island....'

Matsumoto Shigeo bit his lower lip.

"It's Yuri Orlov!!"

"It's him, Yuri!"

The reporters from all corners of the world discovered Yuri Orlov's triumphant figure and began madly snapping away with their cameras.

Click, click, click, click, click, click-!!

The Russian Hunter stood before them and formed a wide grin as if to proudly advertise his gold teeth.

His entry procedure was taken care of in a flash. The first request Yuri Orlov received from the Japanese government was to assuage the fears of the country's citizens. And he agreed to do the request easily enough.

His nickname was the 'Saviour'. This moniker came about because he had blocked up countless Gates on the brink of entering the dungeon break stage up until now.

As for Yuri Orlov himself, he definitely didn't shy away from this nickname which held the potential to earn him all the wealth and fame in the world.

"Are you ready, Mister Yuri Orlov?"

"Of course."

That evening, he was moved to a certain TV station for a live interview. It was quite obvious that the attention of the entire nation of Japan was focused on this broadcast.

Once the proceedings got underway, the interviewer asked the Russian.

"How will you block the Gate, Mister Yuri?"

"In the same way that I've been doing until now, obviously."

Yuri Orlov's expression was overflowing with relaxed, assured confidence. He raised both of his hands in the air and drew a large circle.

"I'll be creating a huge magic circle. Like so, around the Gate itself."

The screen changed for a brief moment to show the Gate in Shinjuku. And

then, the 3D diagram of the magic circle was superimposed with the image of that massive Gate.

“And then, everything will be finished after I pour my magic energy into it. Whatever is inside that Gate, they won’t be able to come out ever again.”

Unfortunately, such a simple explanation wasn’t enough to calm the fears of the Japanese people. The interviewer tilted his head, looking unconvinced.

“Pardon me, but... is that even possible?”

Yuri Orlov’s brows twitched slightly.

“What is?”

The interviewer cautiously studied the Russian’s mood as he asked again.

“Well, the claim of one rank S Hunter being able to block up an entire rank S Gate is.... Shall I say that, it’s a bit hard to believe?”

Suddenly, Yuri Orlov began smirking derisively.

The Russian Hunter was famed for his short fuse. So, the interviewer felt quite relieved inside when Yuri Orlov chuckled instead of flying directly into an enraged state. But at the same time, the Japanese interviewer became even more unnerved than before, wondering if he had inadvertently touched that man’s reverse scale.

Fortunately enough, Yuri Orlov kept his smile.

“If I were to continue spending my magic energy to maintain that barrier, then sure, even I wouldn’t be able to pull that off.”

He wouldn’t be able to do it?

Gulp.

The interviewer swallowed his dry saliva.

With the Japanese rank S Hunters having effectively announced their intentions to give up on the raid, if Yuri Orlov himself also decided to forget about the Gate, then there were no other solutions left for the Japanese people.

The Russian took his time and enjoyed the sight of the stiff face of the interviewer before continuing on with his words.

“However, the thing with my ability is.... The barrier magic circle I use absorbs magic energy from its surroundings to maintain itself.”

“....!!!”

In an instant, the interviewer’s expression changed.

“If that’s the case, then what did you mean when you said your own magic energy was needed....?”

“It’s the same principal as switching on the ignition of a car. Once my barrier gets going, it will start absorbing the magic energy and become an even sturdier and bigger fortress wall.”

A certain ray of light descended on the faces of the interviewer as well as the filming crew after they heard that explanation.

Yuri Orlov’s leisurely voice was filled to the brim with undeniable self-confidence. And as if that confidence had begun spreading around like an infection, the Japanese TV crew felt their fears slowly melt away.

According to his explanation, wouldn’t his barrier grow tougher and stronger when there was a great amount of magic energy present in the surroundings?

There was no need to even mention the simple fact that the magic energy being emitted by a rank S Gate was absolutely enormous. So, what would happen when such a barrier was to wrap around a Gate of that magnitude?

It’d get all tied up by its own power, that’s what. Where would anyone find a situation that better fit the idea of one falling into the trap it made itself?

At this rate, the hardness of that barrier would become the greatest in the recorded history of mankind.

Yuri Orlov pointed to the camera. He was probably pointing at the unspecified number of viewers at home with his finger. Thick veins bulged in his neck as he shouted out.

“I will save all of you! So, all you have to do is to remember who is saving you!”

Beep.

The giant TV was switched off.

The President of Korean Hunter’s Association, Goh Gun-Hui, put the TV remote down, but his expression wasn’t very good at all. Woo Jin-Cheol standing next to him asked.

“What do you think, sir?”

“I can’t be sure.”

Goh Gun-Hui leaned against the couch, his expression now full of worry. He was different from his Japanese counterpart; he definitely wasn’t some low-rent villain who’d deride the misfortune of his neighbouring nation.

Although, that didn't mean he was willing to help them out while taking on the harsh cost his own nation might have to bear. He deliberated for a short while, before opening his mouth again.

“I don't know whether Yuri Orlov will be successful in blocking up that rank S Gate or not, but....”

The eyes of the Association President Goh Gun-Hui became a lot sharper.

“....But, I am well aware of what will happen if he fails in his task.”

“.....It's such a relief, sir.”

“.....?”

Goh Gun-Hui looked up at Woo Jin-Cheol with a surprised face. Only then did the latter realise that his boss had misunderstood his words. Woo Jin-Cheol hurriedly waved around his hands.

“I wasn't referring to the situation in Japan, sir. But....”

Woo Jin-Cheol stopped for a second or two before finishing up his explanation.

“Unlike how it is with the Japanese, I'm relieved by the fact that we have a Hunter we can wholly place our trust in. That's what I meant, sir.”

Nod, nod.

Goh Gun-Hui nodded his head greatly. There was no need for him to specifically ask who that Hunter was, either. That Hunter's presence alone imparted such a sense of security in him.

“Oh, by the way. How goes it with Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim nowadays?”

Woo Jin-Cheol wordlessly pushed forward a piece of printed document to his boss.

On it, one could find the listed locations of all the high-ranking Gates that had appeared recently around the city of Seoul and the surrounding Gyeonggi province.

“Why are you giving me this, all of a sudden....?”

“Sir, can you see how many of the locations have been circled in red?”

“Looks like it's about half of all the dungeons.”

Woo Jin-Cheol quickly wiped the cold sweat streaking down his forehead and replied.

“Ah-Jin Guild wants the raid permits of all of the highlighted Gates, sir.”

Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes nearly popped out of their sockets.

“These.... All of them?!”

“Yes, sir. That’s correct.”



Chapter 153 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Woo Jin-Cheol was among the very best within the Hunters ranked A, and could be considered the core fighting force of the Monitoring Division.

There was no one within the Association, save for Goh Gun-Hui, who could win against him in a fight. He was that strong.

However, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was capable of controlling not just one or two summoned creatures, but several hundreds of them at the same time, each one of them strong enough to shock someone of Woo Jin-Cheol's calibre. In that case, a schedule like this one shouldn't be seen as strange at all.

However, why was he in such a hurry like this?

'H-mm.'

Deep frowns formed on Goh Gun-Hui's forehead.

If it were someone else, a different Hunter, then he'd pack his lunch and follow them around to dissuade them. He was even prepared to whip them until they changed their minds, but now....

'But, I can't imagine Hunter Seong Jin-Woo getting hurt inside measly rank A and B Gates at all.'

If he were to borrow Woo Jin-Cheol's description from earlier, than wouldn't it be 'pitying the monsters', instead? Goh Gun-Hui smirked softly and nodded his head.

"If there isn't any serious problem, do as he wishes, please."

From the perspective of the Association President, he was thankful for the fact that there was a Hunter taking lead in subjugating monsters all on his own. Especially when that person was a powerful being who'd not get injured during the process, too.

However, Woo Jin-Cheol apparently didn't agree.

"Sir, I believe it could lead to problems."

"You mean, his activity will overlap with the jurisdictions of other large Guilds, is that it?"

"Yes, sir."

There were three major Guilds operating within the Seoul Capital Area: the White Tiger, the Hunters, and the Reapers.

These three Guilds took care of high-ranking Gates that appeared within the districts they were in charge of.

But, if Ah-Jin suddenly butted their heads in among them without notice and start expanding rapidly like this, then the three Guilds would obviously grow unhappy rather quickly. It'd be basically the same thing as old nails being driven out by a new one.

'They might end up in a conflict.'

That was Woo Jin-Cheol's opinion and Goh Gun-Hui certainly agreed with that. Still, a smile floated up on the Association President's lips.

'I thought President was on Seong Hunter-nim's side?'

Woo Jin-Cheol formed a puzzled expression as he asked.

".....Did you come up with a good idea, sir?"

"No, not that. It's just that, I can't stop smiling when I think about how a newly established Guild with only three members and one combatant on their roster, have managed to exceed the major Guilds and are already coveting their territories like this."

"Ah....."

Only then did Woo Jin-Cheol understand.

"I agree, sir."

It was Goh Gun-Hui's turn to ask, that smile still etched on his lips.

"Did Ah-Jin provide an explanation on why they want to do this?"

"They said that they have a personal reason and wants us to entrust them with the Gates nearby only for the next week or so, sir."

"A week, is it...."

During the Jeju Island raid, the Masters of the three major Guilds ended up owing their lives to Hunter Seong. It'd not be hard to get their understandings if it were only for a week.

'If there's one thing that I'm still puzzled about, then it'd be....'

That would have to be 'why Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was willing to put himself under such a strenuous schedule' – or, at least, when viewed from someone else's perspective.

'It can't be... about money.'

If he wanted wealth, then there were other ways. If he negotiated with either the United States or China, he'd have gotten his hands on astronomical sums of wealth.

However, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo decided to remain in South Korea, and he didn't even bother to bargain with any of the Guilds, either.

'Then, just why....?'

Goh Gun-Hui's gaze was soon directed to Woo Jin-Cheol guarding his side. The former asked as if it was in passing.

"In your opinion, why do you think Hunter Seong is trying to clear this many Gates in such a short time?"

Woo Jin-Cheol thought about it for a moment, before answering his boss.

"There is one thing I can think of, sir."

Goh Gun-Hui expected an answer along the lines of ***"I don't know"*** or ***"Can't be sure"***, so he couldn't help but pay more attention to this somewhat surprising reply.

"What would that be?"

"I remember seeing how delighted he was during the process of hunting down the monsters."

"He was 'happy' hunting down monsters?"

"Yes, sir."

Woo Jin-Cheol dragged out the memories of the recent past to the fore.

Even back when Jin-Woo was helping out the Hunters Guild by fighting the High Orcs, he was carrying an expression of delight as he cheerfully moved around.

"And he was especially elated when taking down the boss-level monster, sir."

"He feels delight at hunting down powerful monsters, is it...."

Goh Gun-Hui remembered listening to Jin-Woo saying something similar in the past.

["I wish to fight against the monsters."]

And ever since he made that declaration, he had been diligently keeping his promise.

‘What an interesting fellow he is.’

That man was certainly a lot exceptional than being merely interesting, too.

It was then, the office of the Association President was suddenly filled with the noisy ring of the telephone.

It was a call from one of his adjutants.

“What’s going on?”

“From America?”

Not only that, from the Hunter Bureau, too? Goh Gun-Hui tilted his head slightly.

‘Why would the Hunter Bureau contact me, the President of the Korean Hunter’s Association?’

A country like the United States wouldn’t request South Korea for cooperation, so what could this possibly be about?

“Connect me through.”

The call was connected right away. It didn’t even take one, maybe two seconds for the voice coming out from the phone’s receiver to change.

“Hello. This is Goh Gun-Hui from the Korean Hunter’s Association.”

The basic language for any aspiring businessman was English. And unsurprisingly, fluent English flowed out from Goh Gun-Hui’s mouth. He was far more confident of this language than he was with Japanese, the latter of which he only dabbled with when he was much younger.

“What business does America’s Hunter Bureau have with us?”

Adam White didn’t tarry and got right to the point.

“.....Okay, so?”

Before he got going properly with his raids, Jin-Woo searched for the appropriate Guild first. He needed a Guild that could painlessly handle the disposal of various loot he’d get from the high ranking dungeons.

‘I mean, it’s not like I’m planning to clear a raid once every few days here, is it....?’

It’d be quite tough for a newbie Vice-Chair to get through the tightly-packed raid schedule all alone, after all. Besides, he thought that it’d be far more advantageous to form a partnership with another Guild and work together with them, rather than letting the middlemen deal with the loot every single time.

‘The question is, who should I go with?’

He initially thought of the White Tiger, which he had interacted with often in the past, or with the Hunters Guild where Cha Hae-In was a member, but in the end, he settled on the Knight Order, instead.

He only had one reason for doing so. And that would be because they had worked together recently.

Also, some part of his decision was influenced by the fact that one was located in Seoul while the other one was in Busan, and therefore their activities wouldn’t overlap with each other.

Jin-Woo made his call during the early evening that day.

Chairman of the Knight Order Guild Park Jong-Su was lying on the couch in his living room, busy giggling away while watching the TV.

Vrrr.... Vrrr.....

He picked up his vibrating phone resting on the couch’s armrest without giving too much thought.

‘Mm??’

[Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim]

But then, he confirmed who the caller was and his eyes rapidly grew wider. He shot up from his lying-down position and quickly answered his phone.

“Hunter-nim? Is that you?”

“Ah, yes. It’s Park Jong-Su from the Knight Order.”

“Of course.”

Park Jong-Su’s complexion gradually brightened as he heard Jin-Woo’s explanation.

To be honest, Park Jin-Su had been feeling dejected lately, after his plans of building a very close relationship with Jin-Woo went down the crapper after the regulation had changed overnight.

Combining the know-how of the Knight Order Guild and the strength of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo – what a dang waste of time....

Even his trusted Vice-Chair Jeong Yun-Tae looked severely disappointed when the whole thing went sideways pretty quickly.

But then, what kind of jackpot was this? A phone call he didn’t even expect came his way all on its own volition?

Forming a tie with a strong Guild, nay, a Hunter, was probably one of the most important acts for any Guild out there.

“Yes, yes! There will be no problem at all.”

A bright smile didn't want to leave Park Jong-Su's face as he continued to chat away on the phone.

“Leave everything to us.”

The matter of processing various loot from a dungeon was not that hard for the Knight Order Guild and their extensive prior experience.

Normally, the Guild's processing team would be doing nothing but sucking on their thumbs when there was no raid in sight. So, how good would it be to utilise them in this situation?

The smile grew with wider as Park Jong-Su spoke up.

“We'll see you tomorrow!”

The lunch box Mom packed was indeed quite delicious. Even if the location for their meal turned out to be in the middle of a dungeon overflowing with monsters.

Yu Jin-Ho raised his head and spoke, his mouth still full of chow.

“With us being like this, I can't help but think back to how we were clearing all those rank C dungeons, hyung-nim.”

Jin-Woo smirked and replied back.

“Hey, finish chewing your food first before talking, alright?”

“Ah, my bad, hyung-nim.”

It wasn't as if Jin-Woo couldn't understand what Yu Jin-Ho was talking about, though.

In the past few days, they kept themselves real busy by raiding every single Gate they could book, one after the other, with barely any rest in between. The only thing that had changed since then would be that, rather than rank C dungeons, they were raiding rank B or higher dungeons this time.

And, if he were to think of yet another difference, then that would be....

‘.....’

Igrit met Jin-Woo's gaze and bowed slightly in a dignified manner.

“Well, I now have a lookout during the meal times? Is that about it?”

It didn't matter if he had one or not, though. Because of his Perception Stat,

he didn't have to concentrate hard to sense all the movements within the interior of the dungeons. Meaning, he could deal with any monster daring to approach him, even with his eyes closed.

It was just that, he didn't want to be disturbed during his mealtime, and also, wanted to decrease Yu Jin-Ho's fears a bit so he had a lookout like this.

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze to the other side.

'.....'

Iron also met his owner's gaze and powerfully pounded on his chest as if to say ***"Leave everything to me!"***

Thud, thud.

Metallic thuds filled the interior of the cavern. Jin-Woo wryly shook his head.

'It's a problem that this guy's enthusiasm still gets the better of him.'

Yu Jin-Ho looked in the direction of the noise, before asking Jin-Woo a question out of the blue.

"Hyung-nim?"

"Yeah?"

"Can't your summons act on their own?"

"Well, yeah. More or less."

Hunter Min Byung-Gu did say that, didn't he? He said that each of the Shadow Soldiers possessed their own 'ego'.

'Not sure how much of that story I can believe, though.'

Whatever the case may be – Yu Jin-Ho continued on with his question.

"Doesn't that mean it's fine to let the summons clear the raids by themselves during when we are having a meal, or otherwise can't move around for some reason, hyung-nim?"

"Nope, that I can't do."

The amount of experience points he'd earn decreased when the distance between himself and the soldiers increased. He couldn't really explain what the experience points were and all that to Yu Jin-Ho, though, so Jin-Woo simply formed a sombre, serious expression and replied.

"These guys, who knows what they will do when I'm not looking?"

"Hiiiick?!"

Jin-Woo thought that he could hear the noise of Yu Jin-Ho's falling appetite in real time. That's how far he was prepared to take that joke, however.

'Okay, should I try 'that' one more time?'

Jin-Woo finished his meal and quietly put the spoon down.

[Skill: Shadow Storage Lv. 2]

Class-specific skill.

Mana required to activate: None.

Stores the shadow soldiers inside the summoner's shadow.

The stored soldiers can be summoned back into the open or absorbed back at any time the summoner chooses to.

Number of stored shadow soldiers: 840/840

Level 2 effect 'Sensory Sharing': You can share your sensory perception with a single designated Shadow Soldier from your storage.

The newly added effect to the skill 'Shadow Storage' was called 'Sensory Sharing'. It was a rather unique ability that let the summoner, him, feel what a Shadow Soldier was sensing.

Since it was possible to choose a Shadow Soldier far away from him and see what was going on around there, he ended up using it rather often in the last couple of days. Such as now.

Jin-Woo quietly closed his eyes.

'Sensory Sharing.'

He picked up on the signal sent out by the Shadow Soldiers spread all over outside the dungeon, within the nation of South Korea.

'I sure have spread around quite a few, haven't I?'

Without worrying about it too much, he selected one of them to see. Quite coincidentally, it just so happened to be a soldier hidden with Hunter Cha's shadow. And when he connected with that soldier...

Splash.....

...He heard the sounds of water falling on the floor.

'It shouldn't be raining today, so what's up with all the water noi.....?!'

His confusion lasted only for a brief second.

Jin-Woo's eyelids shot up open in haste as soon as he saw the pale nude figure enshrouded in the rising steam.

Yu Jin-Ho was taken by surprise alongside him.

“Hyung-nim?? What happened? Were you taking a nap just now?”

“...No, it’s nothing.”

Jin-Woo shook his head.

He inwardly told himself to buy Hunter Cha a hearty meal as soon as possible as a gesture of apology.

“Oh, right. Hyung-nim, have you heard the news?”

“Which one?”

“About that massive rank S Gate in Japan’s Shinjuku, hyung-nim. I heard that the dungeon break should be happening sometime around tomorrow.”

Did the time move along that much already? Jin-Woo slowly nodded his head.

‘That means, it’s already been six days since we began clearing these high-ranking Gates.’

During these past six days, Jin-Woo hadn’t been static at all. Although moving at a snail’s pace, his experience points were steadily going up. The result of that being his level having moved to 103 from 101.

That was his reward for focusing on levelling up while forgetting about everything else.

Jin-Woo summoned the black key stored within his Inventory.

Shururuk...

The black key materialised on his palm.

[Item: Key to the Karutenon temple]

Rarity.....

...has been reached.

Remaining time: 26:51:49

‘One more day left.’

Jin-Woo wordlessly grasped the key tightly. His heart began beating faster every time he looked at this thing.

“...Hey, don’t make a move.”

“Eh?”

Yu Jin-Ho had been sneaking glances at both Iron and Igrit more and more while barely managing to eat his meal, after Jin-Woo cracked that joke. However, he nearly jolted upwards after Jin-Woo suddenly issued that order.

“I wasn’t talking to you, though.”

Actually, Jin-Woo was giving an order to his soldiers. The Shadow Soldiers were about to make a move, but when they heard Jin-Woo’s order, they all stopped at the same time.

“Kururururu....”

“Kururuk.”

From the other side of the cavern, beasts baring their fangs walked out into the view while carrying weapons like sickles and longswords. Jin-Woo slowly stood up from his spot as he kept his gaze locked on these monsters.

There was still one more day to go.

‘Right, I still have one more day to kill.’

He summoned the ‘Demon King’s Shortsword’ from his Inventory and smiled as he gripped the weapon tightly.

The evening before the dungeon break.

A massive magic circle was drawn within Tokyo’s Shinjuku district, according to Yuri Orlov’s instructions. Its scale was truly enormous; completely unprecedented in history.

All the residents within the area had been evacuated by now. Yuri Orlov remained in the location to inspect the barrier’s formation right up until the end.

The Japanese representatives quietly watched him, not even daring to swallow their saliva. Every single word the Russian said, every little action he took, all of them were under close scrutiny.

Yuri Orlov frowned and rubbed his chin over and over again, before finally opening his mouth.

“.....This is so weird, you know?”

The interpreter’s eyes opened wider.

“I beg your pardon? Is there some kind of a problem with the formation?”

“No, it’s not that.”

The magic circle drawn was perfect. Without a doubt, he was confident of

having laid down the greatest masterpiece of his life down here.

No, the barrier formation wasn't the weird one here.

"It's like, there's someone nearby, watching us."

"Ehh?"

If that weren't the case, why would Yuri Orlov's heart tremble non-stop like this? The Russian opened his eyes wider and scanned his vicinity, before angrily shouting out at the top of his voice.

"Who the hell are you? Where are you??"

Too bad, no one replied back to him. No, only the echoes of his voice reverberating within the deserted streets came back to haunt him.

"....."

One of the Japanese representatives wiped the cold sweat off his forehead and forced out a smile.

"Mister Orlov, the dungeon break is happening tomorrow so there shouldn't be any foolhardy person waiting around here. Wouldn't you agree?"

Yuri Orlov snorted out derisively.

"When did I say it was a person?"

"Pardon??"

Yuri Orlov looked at the Japanese representative getting paler by the second with disproving eyes, before tilting his head again.

"Was I mistaken....?"

Unfortunately for him, there indeed was the figure of a person staring at him from the roof of a tall building far away.

'He's got a pretty good perception.'

But, then again – when considering where Yuri Orlov drew his powers from, that wouldn't be such a strange thing.

'More importantly.....'

The mysterious man's gaze shifted over to the rank S Gate. The silence was so eerie that it induced a certain disgust in all who looked as it circulated around that giant Gate.

'.....'

The man slowly pulled back the hood covering his face. It revealed the face

of an Oriental man in his late thirties. The unkempt and bushy beard covering most of his face told the man's identity rather clearly.

He was none other than Seong Il-Hwan.

He continued to gaze at the massive Gate with a regretful expression, before pulling the hood back up.

'Finally... it's starting.'

Everything was moving according to the schedule.



Chapter 154 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The reporters from all over the world descended on Japan.

If there was one thing in particular about that, then it was that most of those reporters were war correspondents used to covering various conflicts happening across the globe.

This was as good a proof as any that the event about to unfold here was as dangerous as an actual war.

The security cordon built around the Gate was incredibly heavy. Reporters raised their cameras and pointed towards the building-sized Gate and the barrier formation drawn around it, as well as the army of men and women surrounding them both.

The whole location was chock-full with palpable tension only seen just before the outbreak of war.

The assistant reporter swallowed his nervous saliva and asked his boss, the famed English war correspondent William Bell.

“Modern firearms don’t work against monsters, so why are the army present here?”

William Bell replied, while he continued to capture each and every determined face of the soldiers present today with his camera.

“To buy us more time.”

“Excuse me?!”

“Their job is to draw the attention of the monsters so the Hunters can get ready for their counteroffensive. Also, to act as baits, so those higher-ups spectating from over there will find enough time to evacuate from this place, too”

Click.

The next person’s face to be captured in William Bell’s lens was the President of the Japanese Hunter’s Association Matsumoto Shigeo, currently standing close to the barrier. He was conversing with several staff members, his expression hard and sombre.

‘Sure, this is no time for him to crack a smile, isn’t it.’

Click.

“Which means....”

The assistant reporter, who wasn't as experienced as William Bell was, spoke with a tense gleam in his eyes.

“They are... cannon fodder.”

“Look, man. You're putting me in a spot here if you think that's someone else's fate.”

“Excuse me?”

“I mean, if something were about to happen to me, it's your job to stand before me, right?”

“Ehhhh?!”

The young assistant reporter got startled and quickly looked back, prompting William Bell to lightly rib the kid with his elbow.

“If you remain tense like that, you won't even get a chance to run away before you are dead, okay? What I'm trying to say here is, loosen up a little.”

The assistant reporter realised that it was just a joke from that knowing wink William Bell threw his way and patted his trembling chest down.

‘Mister Bell... He can still crack a joke in a situation like this.’

The relaxed air thickly laden with the seasoned reporter's commanding presence seeped into the younger reporter and that helped to soften the tension he felt.

However, the assistant was acutely aware of the truth. Whenever William Bell began smiling like that, that was when you should be most nervous as well.

The assistant shifted his gaze back to the Gate standing tall into the sky.

“Just what kind of monstrosity would come out from there, I wonder?”

William Bell stopped snapping pictures and looked up at the same spot as his assistant.

That thing sure as hell was huge. So huge, in fact, one could easily get overwhelmed just from its sheer size.

After Gates began appearing in the world, the second battlefield these war correspondents went to had become the locations of various Gates. Meaning, William Bell had come across his fair share of terrifying Gates before.

Hell, he even had the misfortune of reporting from the actual location of a dungeon break, too....

But then, the Gate floating before his eyes was on another realm altogether. Just looking up at that d*mn thing made him break out in cold sweat.

‘This was probably why no advanced scout party got dispatched.’

Not one high-ranked Hunter volunteered to enter the Gate to see what was inside, so currently, no one knew what might jump out of that thing once it breaks open wide.

William Bell’s lips, closed shut in a straight line until then, slowly parted ways.

“Not sure what’ll come out of there, but....”

A bitter smile formed on his lips next.

“But, whatever comes out, let’s just pray that Yuri Orlov’s barrier is strong enough to hold them back.”

The last place his camera headed to was Yuri Orlov’s direction, busy inspecting the barrier’s formation for one last time. The Russian Hunter was beaming from ear to ear at the moment.

“It’s perfect. Very good.”

Yuri Orlov was deeply confident of the resulting barrier now.

Because, well... his barriers had always been exceptional. Besides, that wasn’t the only thing motivating him, either.

The Association President Matsumoto Shigeo was worried about the Japanese citizens strongly rebuking them for the deal, so he kept everything hush-hush, on the down low. As a result, the Japanese public was under the assumption that the Russian came here out of the goodness of his heart, and began showering him with lots of donations.

And so, he got to earn an even greater amount of wealth that way. Besides that, there was even more! Countless reporters had braved the dangers to come and snap his pictures.

Wealth and fame. The two things Yuri Orlov went crazy for had fallen into his lap in one fell swoop.

He emphasized himself one last time to the crowd.

“It’s perfect!!”

After today, he’d go down in history books as the first man ever to block a

rank S Gate all by himself.

‘I’d much prefer to be remembered as a man clearing a rank S Gate all alone, though....’

Too bad, he couldn’t get too greedy here, since another Hunter better suited for that title had appeared already. What could he do about that, realistically speaking? That guy was a melee-type Hunter, while he was a support-type, after all.

One only had to become the best in their chosen fields. That’s all there was to it.

‘Right, right!’

Slightly carried away by his own thoughts, Yuri Orlov pulled out a flask the size of his palm from his inner pocket. When he opened the lid, the pungent smell of vodka wafted out.

“M-Mister Yuri!! Alcohol...?!”

The Association employee in charge of minding the Russian freaked out and tried to stop him, but Yuri Orlov angrily glared at the hapless Japanese, instead.

“This is a celebratory toast, get it? A toast! So, let go of your tension, okay? Because I’m going to put on the greatest show on earth very soon.”

“E-even then....”

“Hey, you want a sip? I’m telling you, your worries and tension just fly away in one shot.”

Yuri Orlov wrapped his arm around the employee’s shoulders and began offering up the vodka. The Association President Matsumoto Shigeo frowned deeply as he stared at that spectacle from afar.

‘To think, the fate of Japan depends on such a man....’

He silently clicked his tongue and asked one of his entourage next to him.

“How many rank S Hunters are on standby?”

“It’s a total of three, sir.”

“Three, is it....”

Out of the ten still surviving rank S Hunters, only three responded to the summons of the Association. The frowns on Matsumoto Shigeo’s face deepened by another level.

After the Jeju Island raid landed a calamitous blow to the community of

Hunters in Japan, his influence had waned greatly until it hit rock bottom.

Some quarters were now loudly claiming that it was Matsumoto Shigeo who drove rank S Hunters to their deaths, having been blinded by his own greed. And, the majority of the remaining rank S Hunters had turned their backs on him.

They even left an ultimatum saying that, as long as he remained the Association President, they would not heed the orders of the Association again.

‘If only Goto-kun was still here with me....’

Matsumoto Shigeo’s clenched fists trembled hard. Goto Ryuji’s death was far too painful a loss for the Japanese Association President, who used him as his right-hand man.

‘But, that is why....’

....That was why today was doubly important for him.

If the concerted efforts of the Association resulted in the rank S Gate being blocked off, then he’d use that to aim towards the top once more.

‘Goh Gun-Hui... and then, Seong Jin-Woo.’

Along the way, he might find a chance to pay back all the humiliation, with interest, to those men who had ruined his future.

‘I shall, definitely.....’

Definitely, this had to work.

The Association President Matsumoto glared at the Gate again, his expression becoming even graver than before. One of his attendants looked at his watch and whispered to him.

“Sir, it’s three minutes before the dungeon break.”

“I see.”

Matsumoto Shigeo nodded his head. Countless thoughts swirled within his gaze now taking in the sight of the massive Gate.

Two minutes, one minute, 59 seconds, 58.....

Time, filled with taut tension, ticked down seemingly at the rate of knots. And soon enough, the black ‘wall’ covering the giant Gate’s surface began to get blurry.

The reporters all cried out in unison.

“Uh, uh?!”

“Hey, the Gate’s opening up!!”

“They... they are coming out!”

“Son?”

Jin-Woo was about to sneakily get up, but sat back down quietly again when his mom called out to him.

“Yes, Mom?”

Mom took her eyes off the TV and looked at Jin-Woo. The TV news had been constantly showing the special broadcast related to the rank S Gate in Japan for a while now.

The story currently on was something about the dungeon break that would happen in a few minutes or so.

“You weren’t trying to... go somewhere, were you?”

His mother’s sixth sense could sometimes be even sharper than that of a high-ranking Hunter’s, Jin-Woo mused inwardly. He flinched just a little, but replied as if nothing was amiss.

“I have a promise to keep, you see.”

“A promise? On a day like this?”

“I made that promise a while ago, Mom. I thought that, since that Gate is opening in Japan anyway and it won’t affect us, I didn’t cancel it.”

Mom was still staring at him with unconvinced eyes, though. However, he wasn’t lying here, technically speaking.

‘In a way, this is a promise I made with the System, isn’t it?’

Mom continued to stare at Jin-Woo for a little while longer, before asking her son again.

“I don’t have to worry about you, right?”

Jin-Woo replied confidently.

“Of course, Mom.”

He worked hard to achieve this strength precisely for that purpose. Mom formed a gentle smile only after looking deeply into Jin-Woo’s eyes overflowing with palpable confidence.

“Be careful on your way out, Son.”

Jin-Woo smiled refreshingly as well.

“I’ll be back soon, Mom.”

Jin-Woo got up and left the house pretty soon afterwards.

His family’s apartment was located on the ninth floor and, for the first time ever, he got to learn today how slow the elevator taking him to the ground floor was.

He felt anxiety creeping in as his expectation ballooned, wondering just what kind of a dungeon this black key of his would unlock.

Ting.

The elevator door to the ground floor slid open. An ahjussi he’d never seen before raised his head without thinking too much, and their gazes locked for a brief while.

He must’ve been one of the very few people who didn’t know that a rank S Hunter was living in this building, because as soon as he recognised Jin-Woo’s face, his eyes nearly popped out of their sockets.

“HUH???”

Jin-Woo quickly brushed past him and pulled up the hoodie attached to his top. His steps were quick, perhaps owing to the fact that his mind was also racing really fast, too.

Jin-Woo was able to leave the apartment complex in no time at all and while standing on the street, looked all around him.

‘...Is this because of the Gate in Japan?’

For some reason, the streets were oddly deserted. But, thanks to that, Jin-Woo didn’t have to mind the stares of the surroundings as he leisurely confirmed the information on the black key.

[Item: Key to the Karutenon temple]

Rarity: ??

Type: Key

‘You have met the required conditions.’

A key allowing you entry into the Karutenon Temple. It can be used in the designated Gate.

The location of the designated Gate will be revealed after the predetermined time has been reached.

Remaining time: 00:01:02

Only one minute remained now.

'...It's almost here.'

His heart, calmly submerged deep below the cold surface, began to quietly pick up its pace now.

Ba-thump, ba-thump!!

Jin-Woo stood still and focused his hearing on the pulsing beat of his heart while waiting out the remaining minute. He didn't even need his watch, either. The biological clock within him, honed to the extreme, was more accurate than any time measuring device known to man in this world.

'...3, 2, 1.'

Exactly one minute later, Jin-Woo opened his closed eyes.

Click.

[Remaining time: 00:00:00]

[The location where the key can be used will now be made available.]

Jin-Woo's eyes widened greatly.

'Isn't this place....?'

The location of the Gate appearing within the System's message wasn't too far from here. As a matter of fact, he was rather familiar with that place.

Jin-Woo quickly used one of the features his Hunter-only phone possessed to log onto the website of the Hunter's Association, and checked the information on the Gate in question.

Sure enough, its location was exactly where the Association's warning notice, issued some time ago, said it'd be.

He didn't expect the location this key was supposed to 'unlock' would be there. As if someone had smacked him in the back of his head, Jin-Woo felt somewhat dizzy.

'I made a mistake.'

In reality, the key's description wasn't lying to him. The System said that the information on the Gate would be made available, but said nothing about a Gate appearing somewhere.

He got blindsided just now.

Jin-Woo's hands manipulating his phone became a lot busier. He checked the info on the Gate some more, and found out that there was a Guild already

busy with clearing it right now. The rank of the Gate in question was ‘C’.

‘It’s not a high rank, but...’

The real problem was with not really knowing what was hidden inside.

‘It’s a small relief that the location isn’t far.’

It was about ten minutes away with a car. If he ran with everything he had, he’d get there in less than 60 seconds. Jin-Woo hid with ‘Stealth’ and began running at full tilt. He even activated the skill ‘Quicksilver’ for good measure, too.

His new destination was actually the athletics field of Jin-Ah’s former high school. The school remained closed ever since the Orc incident, so there was no danger of unaware civilians getting hurt just in case, but...

‘...But, it’s the raid team clearing the dungeon in danger, instead.’

Jin-Woo recalled the moments he was visiting that underground temple.

He recalled all those close shaves. He clearly remembered several moments he almost got killed on that day.

But, what was the reason for this? Without a doubt, those were startlingly terrifying memories in his life, but when he looked back, his heart began racing quicker in excitement. Even now.

It probably had something to do with the fact that, inside that temple, Jin-Woo got to feel for the first time what it felt to be alive. Back then, he wasn’t some useless, powerless rank E Hunter, but a challenger going up against impossible odds.

In the blink of an eye, he rounded up several streets and the sight of the familiar school was caught in his eyes. He really only needed a few dozens of seconds to arrive at the school.

He stepped through the front gate and spotted the Gate floating in the air just above the athletics field to the side. A handful of Association employees and staff members from the Guild doing the raid were standing around the Gate as if to guard its surroundings.

They were all carrying on in a quiet atmosphere, perhaps because they hadn’t heard any news of something major happening inside yet. But that quietness was shattered immediately by Jin-Woo’s sudden entrance. Because... he chose to undo his Stealth near the Gate.

“Uh, uh??”

One of the Guild’s staff members belatedly discovered Jin-Woo’s presence

and tried to cut him off.

“You’re not allowed in here.”

Jin-Woo pulled back his hoodie and revealed himself. And that elicited a loud ***“Heok!!”*** from the side.

“It’s you!!”

The Association employee immediately recognised Jin-Woo and cried out in surprise. It was the same bespectacled female employee he ran into back when he took care of the rank B Gate that popped up in the middle of the road.

Jin-Woo figured that it’d be quicker to talk to her instead of this Guild staff blocking his way, so he ignored the guy altogether and spoke directly to her.

“You need to stop this raid right now.”

“Pardon me??”

She got flustered as she tried to make her reply.

“B-but, the measurement result came out as only C...”

Jin-Woo shook his head and told her in no uncertain terms.

“If you don’t stop the raid now, they will all die.”

“.....!!”

Jin-Woo raised his head and glared at the Gate.

Couldn’t these people pick up on that?

An eerie aura so sickening that it gave him goosebumps, was slowly oozing out from the Gate.



Chapter 155 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“How long has it been since they went inside?”

Jin-Woo urgently asked the female Association employee. The longer it had been the deeper these Hunters would've gone inside, and that significantly decreased their odds of returning safely.

The female Association employee answered in her bewilderment.

“It's been about two hours.”

Two hours, she said. It was one of those in-between time that could neither be called short nor too long. It was then.

“Who the hell are you? You from the Association??”

The Guild staff member grabbed Jin-Woo by his shoulder and tried to turn him around. It seemed that this guy wasn't happy with this newcomer's attitude. After all, this unknown youngster proceeded to not only ignore him, but he even went on to spew out some pretty abhorrent bullsh*t on top as well.

The strength gripping his shoulder was nothing to write home about, but Jin-Woo still turned around to face the Guild member, regardless.

He figured that, rather than starting a lengthy explanation of containing hundreds of words, simply showing his face once would be far more effective in a situation like this.

“You should answer back when people are ta....”

The Guild staff member's words came to an abrupt halt as soon as he locked gazes with Jin-Woo's eyes.

‘Hold up. Haven't I seen this guy's face before, like, a lot?’

But, from where?

The staff member combed through his memories before finally recalling a certain name. He gasped out in disbelief and stuttered out a question.

“H-Hunter S-Seong Jin-Woo?!”

Who'd have think that he'd run into a rank S Hunter in front of rank C Gate? Not only that, but he also rudely grabbed the shoulder and glared at

such a guy, too??

The Guild staff member was frightened out of his skull and reflexively took his hand away before taking two, three quick steps back.

“I-I’m truly sorry.”

“...”

Even now, time continued to tick down. There was no time to waste on this Guild Staff; Jin-Woo shifted his gaze back to the female Association employee.

“I’m going inside to bring those people back.”

The flustered female employee found herself in a bind now.

This very man walked out with a face full of smiles even when the rank B Gate he entered changed into a Red Gate. But such a person was now telling her in an urgent manner that people inside that seemingly-normal rank C Gate were in great danger.

“Just what is going on here that makes you say that? If you could just explain what...”

“There is no time.”

Jin-Woo cut her off.

In all honesty, he could’ve just maintained ‘Stealth’ and strode right inside the Gate. In fact, there were many ways to distract these people and walk inside the Gate unnoticed.

The sole reason why he didn’t do so was because he had no idea what might happen in there. He chose to cover his bases to some degree so he could avoid getting swept up in annoying problems later down the line.

The female employee’s lips bobbed up and down several times. She was in a genuine dilemma now.

Would it be fine to let a Hunter waltz right into a Gate without any clear evidence, when another Guild had officially been sanctioned to raid it in the first place? Originally, something like that would have been unimaginable.

However, seeing the light in Jin-Woo’s eyes, she couldn’t bring herself to say no.

“...Please, go in.”

“I’ll see you later.”

Jin-Woo nodded once to her and ran inside the Gate right away.

[You have entered a dungeon.]

He quickly located various corpses of monsters with their magic crystals removed, discarded here and there on the dungeon's floor.

The thing was, there wasn't that much loot to find in lower ranked dungeons. Which was quite different from higher ranked ones, where the remains of the monsters alone would fetch quite a sum of money.

The only real source of income found within low ranked dungeons was the magic crystals. And this scene was a rather familiar sight to him.

Jin-Woo closed his eyes and concentrated. For some reason, he couldn't sense the presence of the raid team.

'Could they already have been....?'

Jin-Woo quickly shook his head. Even if he was too late, magic energy still leaked out from the bodies of the freshly deceased. But he couldn't even pick up on that magic energy.

Jin-Woo quietly studied the interior of the dungeon, before a certain sense of déjà vu hit him. Indeed, this place seemed familiar for some reason.

He had seen a dungeon like this one before.

'...Ah.'

If his memories served him right, then this dungeon was roughly the same in layout as the dual dungeon he got his powers from.

'If that's that case....'

Jin-Woo quickly made his way over to where the entrance of the dual dungeon was last time. And sure enough, there was another 'entrance' within the dungeon.

'It's the same as before.'

Only then did he realise why he couldn't sense the presence of the raid team's Hunters.

'This dungeon... it was nonsensically huge, wasn't it?'

That was the case back then. Sure, it was the walking speed of low-ranked Hunters, but still, they needed almost one hour to get to that strange doorway.

If this dungeon's structure was similar to the one he knew, then it'd not be all that surprising for the Hunters to be really far away now. And, it was also almost impossible to sense the presence of the Hunters who possessed only a negligible amount of magic energy individually.

Jin-Woo looked deeper into the cavern.

There was only one path. And, just like back then, it was enshrouded in total darkness.

But he wasn't worried. His Perception Stat he pushed to the extremes, showed him the path within that inky blackness. Jin-Woo's eyes glowed in a pale, cold hue like those animals of the night caught on camera.

'I can see it.'

His eyes rapidly got used to the lack of light and he could see one object after the other hidden within the darkness.

'Fuu-woo....'

Jin-Woo took a short but deep breath before shooting forward like a bullet. The background images fell back in an instant, over and over again.

It was indeed one long passageway. Even then, his speed was fast and he didn't need a lot of time to get to his destination.

'And we had to walk for one hour in this place back then.....'

What dramatic progress he made when compared to the first time he walked on this road.

Soon enough, he could sense the presence of people up ahead. They were the Hunters of the raiding party. They were also standing around in one spot.

Jin-Woo initially thought that they were involved in a battle or were all dead, but thankfully that wasn't it. When he got close enough, he could hear their voices.

"You wanna go back when we came this far??"

Taht.

When Jin-Woo stopped not too far from them, he heard some words that sounded oddly familiar and let a wry chuckle leak out of his mouth.

What a relief it was, though. It seemed that these people hadn't stepped foot inside yet. If they did, then they wouldn't even have enough time to waste their breaths on useless banter like this.

He heard a woman's voice next.

"So, what do you want to do, then? The door didn't budge even when we poured magic on it."

"Wouldn't it be better to go back outside and get the cooperation of a larger Guild?"

“Yeah, I think that might be for the better.”

These people were busy arguing back and forth in front of the door that would not open regardless of their efforts.

Jin-Woo could understand where they were coming from. After discovering that this was actually a dual dungeon, they must’ve been dreaming of getting their hands on an untold amount of wealth. Meaning, they would never choose to go back empty-handed after walking non-stop for nearly one hour.

However, here was the surviving witness from that time. Jin-Woo could confidently say the truth out aloud without any reservation.

“This is a trap, everyone.”

Hunters hadn’t picked up on Jin-Woo’s presence well until he was near their position. Understandably, they were jolted back to their senses from a sudden voice coming out from the darkness behind them.

“Oh my gosh!! That surprised me!”

“W-what the heck? Who are you?”

Jin-Woo pointed at the steel door he had seen before with his chin and replied.

“I’m a survivor of a dual dungeon incident.”

A survivor of a dual dungeon incident?

Hunters exchanged glances and whispered softly among themselves. Because it was so dark inside, they needed a little bit of time to recognise Jin-Woo’s face.

“...Uh?”

“What?”

“Isn’t he Hunter Seong Jin-Woo??”

“What was that?”

The attention of the raid team members descended upon the Hunter who identified Jin-Woo. And the next direction their gazes shifted to was, naturally, Jin-Woo’s face.

“N-now that you mention it...”

“It’s really him??”

“But, but, why would a rank S Hunter even come here?”

Jin-Woo strode closer towards the doorway. Hunters surrounding the

unknown door parted ways to make room for him. He lightly placed his palm on the door and spoke to the Hunters.

“I know what’s behind this door.”

Jin-Woo was overcome with a reminiscence of the past as he finally got to stand before this very doorway after what felt like a genuinely long, long time.

This place was the location the System had invited him to.

For the sake of these Hunters, as well as for himself, he couldn’t have any uninvited guest loitering around. Jin-Woo turned around and looked at each of the Hunters present, before speaking up with a heavy voice.

“This place is incredibly dangerous. I’ll take care of things from now on, so please, you must return outside.”

Noisy, noisy....

The surroundings became rather chaotic.

If it weren’t for the fact that Jin-Woo was a super-famous rank S Hunter, these people might have exploded in dissatisfaction right away, as the looks on their faces attested to that.

Out of all of them, the man who earlier stated that he couldn’t go back empty-handed, just had to step forward to say something.

“Excuse me, Seong Hunter-nim.”

He just so happened to be the Master of this small-to-medium Guild who had been pushing forward with this raid.

“We at the Bravery Guild bought the permit to raid this dungeon fair and square. You simply don’t have any right to tell us to leave.”

“T-that’s right! Being a rank S isn’t everything, you know!”

Jin-Woo closed his mouth in a straight line as his reply to the opposition coming from these Hunters.

‘.....’

They were behaving this way, even though he was doing them a favour and was trying to help them. However, that didn’t mean he was planning to explain the situation to them one by one, either.

‘I don’t have the obligation to do that, anyway.’

He had done what he could do for these people. So, Jin-Woo decided to leave it for them to choose for themselves.

If he were honest, he wasn't so keen on that idea either, because he still remembered the terrible cost he and his fellow bottom-dwelling Association Hunters had to pay when they made the same decision as these people were about to make.

Jin-Woo wordlessly faced the door and tried to turn the doorknob.

Thunk!

Jin-Woo pushed down, but even with his Strength Stat, it didn't want to budge.

'Does it have some kind of restrictive magic?'

Without that, measly steel door like this would've moved already by now.

It was then – along with that familiar 'Tti-ring!', a new System message appeared before his eyes.

[The door to the Karutenon temple is currently locked.]

[Please use the key provided.]

'Ah, so that's why I needed the key.'

Jin-Woo took out the black key. Simply by him slotting it in the keyhole, the door slid open all on its own volition.

Clunk.

The raid team members of the Bravery Guild had already confirmed how tightly locked the door was before he got here. So, when such a stubbornly-locked door opened easily like that, their collective brows shot up in shock.

'Heok?!'

'What the heck? How did he open it?'

Jin-Woo ignored their whisperings and spoke to them in a cold voice.

"I won't try to stop you. If you want to follow me inside, then go ahead."

Of course, he didn't forget to warn them, too.

"However, you must remember that it'll be hard for you to come back out alive if you decide to do so."

That one sentence managed to freeze these Hunters to their spots. This was advice given by a rank S Hunter. Who'd scoff at that and ignore it?

However, the Master of the Bravery Guild still stepped forward as if he was trying to act according to the name of his organisation.

"I'll go in."

“....”

Jin-Woo didn't reply to that.

It was up to them to make the choice. He was going to let them bear the cost of their decision, as well.

The Guild Master looked back to his raid team members while walking towards the doorway, but none of them followed after him, only choosing to sheepishly look at each other's reactions. The Guild Master glared at his so-called comrades with disapproving eyes and eventually stopped before the door.

In order to make it easier for him to enter, Jin-Woo opened the door slightly wider.

Rumble-!

The heavy-looking door moved without too much trouble.

There was a look of determination writ large on the Guild Master's face when Jin-Woo briefly met his gaze. His hesitation lasted only for a few moments; after mustering up enough courage, he took a step inside.

It was then.

Several messages cascaded up in front of Jin-Woo's view.

Tti-ring, tti-ring, tti-ring!!

[An individual not holding the key has entered the temple.]

[This entry has been disapproved.]

[Failure to comply will result in the immediate retaliation from the gatekeepers.]

Several dangerous-sounding, important messages popped up, but as these Hunters were not a 'Player', their eyes and ears failed to see or hear the warnings. Only Jin-Woo could hear the warnings of the System.

The completely-unaware Guild Master took yet another step forward, and then....

SWISH-!!

....A large hammer fell on top of his head.

Crash!!

The hammer smashed down to the ground and shattered the stone slab into pieces.

“Keok!!”

If it weren't for Jin-Woo hurriedly yanking at the scruff of the Guild Master's shirt and pulling him out, his head would've ended up in that state, instead.

“Uwa, uwaaahk?!”

The Guild Master freaked out as the gatekeepers reached out to him. Jin-Woo grabbed the hapless Hunter and tossed him outside the door before closing it quickly.

“Things found inside are all like that.”

Jin-Woo turned around to face the other Hunters.

“So, you still want to go inside?”

The Guild Master on the ground shook his head like a madman. His fellow Guild members quickly helped him up and they escaped from there, double time.

Only after confirming that the Hunters had left for good, Jin-Woo made his way back inside.

Tti-ring.

[The holder of the key has entered.]

Slam.

The door closed shut behind him with a loud thud.

The massive scale of this chamber; stone statues filling up the walls; and then, the huge statue of a 'god' located in the deepest recess of this chamber.

Everything matched his memories.

‘I’ve... returned.’

His heart began pounding really fast.

However, there was also a clear difference from back then, as well. That would be none other than himself. The current Jin-Woo, different from his past self, could easily decipher the truth of these stone statues now.

‘These statues are not monsters, nor are they lifeforms to begin with.’

No, they were just puppets tied to strings, connected to something else.

There was only one creature emitting magic energy within this chamber. Even then, it was concealing its magic energy so expertly that, even Jin-Woo found it impossible to directly sense it. He could only trace the ominous and eerie aura, instead.

Jin-Woo slowly walked over to that b*stard in question.

“So, you were the real one, huh.”

Jin-Woo tried to engage it in conversation, but the creature didn't display any reactions whatsoever.

“Oh, so you want to play it like that now, huh?”

The corners of Jin-Woo's lips arched up.

He suddenly raised his speed greatly and stabbed the shortsword into the chest of the 'creature'.

But then....

Crack!

His attack was stopped by the stone tablet the creature was holding.

The blade of the shortsword deeply stabbed into the tablet.

There was only one stone statue among many in here that held a stone tablet.

“...Finally.”

The stone statue with six wings on its back looked at Jin-Woo over the stone tablet with a grin etched on its face and spoke.

“You've arrived.”

Tokyo, Shinjuku.

Monsters began walking out one by one from the Gate, as tall as the high-rise skyscrapers.

Thud.

Thud.

“Heok....”

“W-what the hell are those?”

These monsters were Giants. Monsters often serving as bosses in many of the highest-difficulty rank A Gates were pouring out like common creatures now.

“Giants!!”

“It's the Giants!!”

While every observer watching this spectacle was freaking out and was taking hasty steps back, only Yuri Orlov remained calm as he took another

swig from his flask.

‘There’s no problem if it’s only this much.’

These monsters were scary enough to bring a chill down anyone’s spine. However, Yuri Orlov was deeply confident of the barrier he had created.

“Come at me!”

And, his prediction proved to be right on the money.

Boom!

Bang!!

Giants began pounding on the invisible ‘wall’ surrounding the vicinity of the Gate, but it stood firm and didn’t even budge an inch at all.

Boom!! Bang!!

They pushed with their shoulders, and even threw their entire bodies against the wall, but Yuri Orlov’s barrier formation proved to be as perfect as he claimed earlier.

“Euhahahahaha!!”

Yuri Orlov exploded in a fit of laughter while ridiculing the Giants trapped behind the barrier. About 30 minutes passed by like that.

The Giants must’ve been tired out after going on a rampage to break the barrier, because they suddenly began walking back into the Gate. People witnessing that scene all cried out in pure shock.

“Oh, my god!!”

“Monsters coming out of the dungeon break are going back inside the Gate?!”

Such a thing was completely inconceivable. Not one person present here ever heard of anything like this before. These reporters with their countless years of experience were now operating their cameras non-stop, as if they were left feeling truly exhilarated by the unfolding spectacle.

And when the last Giant walked back inside the Gate, the Association President Matsumoto Shigeo stood up from his seat and hurriedly clapped his hands.

Clap, clap, clap, clap!

Not too long after that, the lone clapping sounds became many, and it morphed into excited cries, and eventually, transformed into loud cheers of joy.

Waaaaaah-!!!

Receiving the passionate adulations and cheers of everyone present, Yuri Orlov turned around to face the throng of the reporters.

“Only I can do this! I am the one blocking a rank S Gate!”

Thick veins bulged on his neck as he made his declaration.

“That guy who hunted down a couple of those measly ants, and this great me who shoved those giants back inside the Gate!! You don’t need me to tell you who’s even more amazing, right?”

He didn’t even bother to hide his face now getting even redder from the influence of booze, and toothily grinned at the reporters, his gold-plated teeth fully on display for all to see.

But then, this happened.

THUD!

The ground rumbled hard quite suddenly.

THUD!!!

Even the tanks on standby bounced up and down.

‘.....??’

Only then did Yuri Orlov realise that the reporters were no longer looking at him. No, their gazes were unilaterally focused on the Gate. The Russian also slowly looked behind him.

And then.... the flask he held in his hand slipped out of his grasp.

‘Oh, oh my god.....’

Yuri Orlov’s eyes grew wider and wider.

A truly humongous Giant that made the previous Giants small by comparison, stepped out of the Gate and stood straight up.

Indeed, it was standing upright after exiting from the huge rank S Gate.

Yuri Orlov blinked his eyes several times, unable to tell whether this scene playing out was real or not.

‘How.... How could there be a monster so big that it needs to crouch to pass through such a humongous Gate???’

No one needed to explain anything, but everyone intuitively knew that they were now looking at the boss monster.

The Giant monster finished standing upright and took a long sweeping look

around its surroundings, before slamming into the barrier's walls.

BOOM-!!

Far, far heavier noise than before resounded out and the earth itself began quaking rather precariously.

BOOM-!! BOOM!! BOOM-!!

Yuri Orlov's eyes could clearly see everything. And that would be the sight of the magic barrier only he could see, gaining spiderweb-like cracks.

'How can this be.....'

His legs began shaking uncontrollably.

The Giant monster pushed hard at the wall with its shoulder, before taking several steps back as if it realised that was enough. It sprinted at full tilt and threw its entire body at the barrier.

It was then!

KA-BOOM-!!!

The sound of an explosion filled up the air as the motes of light illuminating the magic circle on the ground dissipated away.

"Uwa-uwaaaahhk?!?!"

Yuri Orlov started screaming around at the same time.

The Giant monster, as soon as it destroyed the invisible wall, reached down and picked up the Russian still trying to send in his magic energy to the barrier.

Now caught within the Giant's hand, Yuri Orlov screamed out as bone-breaking pain wrecked his entire body. He desperately thrashed around.

"Uwaaaah!! Uwaaaahhk!!"

Gulp.

However, his screams could no longer be heard when the Giant monster opened its mouth again.

And then....

Behind the Giant monster that swallowed Yuri Orlov in one go, all those Giants that returned back to the Gate were pouring out again.



Chapter 156 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Creak, creak!

The stone statue began moving as weird creaking noises came out from its various joints. Jin-Woo glared at this ‘creature’.

There were several differences between this guy and the other stone statues, but the biggest one had to be the wings attached to its back, which made it look somewhat like an angel.

Indeed, this guy was the only one among the statues designed to resemble an angel. Not just any angel either, but one with six wings on its back, too.

The angel statue slowly stood up from its sitting position and straightened its bent back. As it turned out, it was over three metres tall.

Paht!

Jin-Woo quickly retreated and summoned the second shortsword into his other hand, before lowering his stance to get ready.

When he made up his mind to fight against that thing, every single strand of sensory receptors on his body awakened in full; every part of himself, from his mind to all corners of his body, had become fully optimised for the upcoming battle.

‘.....’

However, the angel statue showed no signs of wiping that smile off its face, even though it must’ve clearly sensed Jin-Woo’s desire to fight. That smile was so disgusting and unnatural that it sent a shiver down his spine.

The angel statue took a look at the stone tablet damaged by the shortsword and simply tossed it away, as if it meant nothing to the ‘creature’.

...As if, it was doing the most obvious thing in the world.

Crack!

The stone tablet clattered on the floor and shattered into countless pieces. The angel statue stiffly laughed as it took in the sight of the now-useless tablet.

“...*Hahaha.*”

Jin-Woo narrowed his eyes.

‘So, from the very beginning.....’

Just then, he realised that there was no meaning behind them from the very beginning. That stone tablet, and the so-called laws written on it, none of them meant anything.

‘If not, there’s no way that thing would’ve treated it so recklessly.’

In that case, just what exactly was this place? And what did this thing want from him?

‘And....’

All those quests, levelling up, instant dungeon keys, etc. All those strange events that took place after he left this temple – what did they even signify?

Finally, an opportunity to get the answers for all of his burning questions had come. When he thought like that...

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!!

His heart began madly pounding away in his chest. Usually, it beat in a regular rhythmic pulse most of the time. But now, right at this moment, it shook and rumbled and revved harder than a race car’s engine.

‘This thing knows everything.’

Jin-Woo didn’t lower his vigilance and threw out a question in a low voice.

“Were you the one calling me here?”

Jin-Woo was asking about what the statue’s relationship with his System was through that question.

“That’s correct.”

The angel statue moved its individual fingers before carrying on.

“You have done well to get here.”

up, its neck. The ‘creature’ rotated its head from side to side.

Creeeak.

Creak.

The d*mn thing was busy loosening itself. It didn’t take a genius to tell why it was loosening up like that.

Now normally, Jin-Woo wouldn’t hesitate to get the first strike in when finding himself in a situation like this one. However, he was making an exception this time.

He had far too many questions to ask this angel statue and didn't want to end the little conversation that he got going here.

Jin-Woo threw out another question.

“Are you a monster?”

The waves of magic energy being emitted from the angel statue were certainly different from the ones emitted by the regular monsters.

However, meaning behind the term ‘monster’ was simply created by humans for their own convenience. If that term was used to denote a true monster, then yes, that statue was without a doubt, a real ‘monster’.

A stone statue that could speak and move around – where would anyone even hope to find a monster more monster-ish than that?

So, what Jin-Woo wanted to find out here was whether this thing was in cahoots with the regular monsters or not.

Craaack.

Creak.

The angel statue bent down to loosen up its back before standing straight up again.

“That’s the wrong question to ask.”

“.....?”

“Rather than asking what I am, you should be asking what you are, instead.”

Jin-Woo was frozen for a brief moment there, but he couldn't stay flustered for long.

Clap!

The sound of the angel statue clapping its hands wiped all distracting thoughts out of his head.

“Well, then. This will be your final test.”

The smile was long gone from the angel statue's face as it finally finished loosening up.

“If you still manage to stand on two feet by the end of the test, then everything you wished to know will be revealed to you. That....”

The angel statue snapped its fingers, and almost immediately, a red glow appeared within the eyes of the countless stone statues within the temple.

“....Will be my reward to you.”

It was then.

Every single head of the stone statues densely packed into this chamber all snapped in Jin-Woo’s direction.

Thud.

And they all uniformly stepped off their pedestals.

Clack!

All the statues raised the weapons in their grasp.

Jin-Woo swept his gaze around the stone statues. Even if they were puppets, they still seemed quite tough opponents to deal with. He actually almost died several times because of them in the past, too, didn’t he?

Jin-Woo remained calm as he summoned out his Shadow Soldiers.

‘Come out.’

But, then....

Tti-ring!

[For the duration of the final test, all of your Class-specific skills have been sealed.]

[Usage of various potions and the Store’s functions have been prohibited, and status recovery effects from levelling up and quest completion bonuses will be inapplicable during the duration of the test.]

[You can not exist this chamber until the end of the final test.]

‘What??’

Jin-Woo’s forehead creased up as mechanical beeps continued to go ‘Tti-ring, tti-ring’ in his ears, but even those lasted for only a short while. Because the stone statues had begun sprinting towards him right then.

Their movements were eerily silent, yet also incredibly fast as well. This was on a whole new level compared to back when he faced down hundreds of ‘knights’ during the Class Advancement test.

‘Oh, so you want to play it like this, is that it?’

All the hidden cards he had come prepared with, just in case – various potions, quest rewards, etc. – had become useless in one fell swoop. The System had been with Jin-Woo ever since the beginning, and knew how he operated the best.

‘In that case, I shall overcome this with nothing but my own power!’

Jin-Woo firmed up his resolve and gripped his shortswords even tighter.

The easiest way to get out of this dangerous situation was to eliminate the main body enabling the stone statues to move. And that would be the angel statue. However, he’d not be able to get what he wanted if the angel statue was killed off. So, that would have to be consigned as the final resort for now.

For the time being, he decided to go along with this ‘test’ thing the statue talked about.

‘And that is why, I...’

...That was why he never stopped getting stronger right up until now.

He never once stopped polishing his skill levels, just so he could achieve everything he aimed for regardless of what sort of situations tried to hinder him.

Fuu-whoop-!

Jin-Woo spat out white-hot air from his nostrils and mouth.

The things he initially couldn’t see, the stuff he had missed when he first set foot in this place began entering his field of vision. His naked eyes could chase the movements of the stone statues that looked like instant teleportation to him back then.

‘From my left.’

His shortsword blocked the spear of the stone statue stabbing forward from his left.

CLANG!!

‘Left, again.’

Another stone statue launched itself in the air by stepping on the shoulders of the statue with the spear, and slammed down with a war axe.

It was inefficient to defend against an attack falling from above head-on, so Jin-Woo tilted his body halfway to the side and let the axe simply brush past him.

Kwa-boom!!

Broken bits of rock spat up from the floor, now shattered by the force of the axe. Meanwhile, Jin-Woo powerfully kicked the face of the axe-wielding stone statue.

Ka-boom!!

The moment its head came in contact with his foot, it got crushed into fine powder. However....

Swish-!

Jin-Woo bent backwards and dodged an arrow. It flew straight past him and got embedded in the wall on the far side.

He didn't even have time to feel happy about eliminating one enemy – the proper assault was only just beginning now.

'Right.'

This time, it was a sword.

Swish-!

Clang!

Jin-Woo used his physical strength to shove away the blocked sword of the statue and at the same time, drew a diagonal line in the air with the shortsword held in his other hand.

Tuk!

The stone statue, now missing an arm, fell away while writhing around as if it could feel crippling pain.

From his left, right, right, left, front, front, right, and left.

'I can do this.'

The more he concentrated on the battle, the slower the movements of the stone statues became. On the other hand, his own movements got progressively faster and faster.

It was then – he sensed a chill right behind his neck.

'Behind me!'

Jin-Woo jumped up above the head of the stone statue trying to ambush him from behind and while still in the air, easily sliced its head off.

Slice!

He let his Perception Stat cover him from the enemies that tried to attack him in his blindspots.

Ha-ah!

His exhaled breath exploded out.

His body, trained to the absolute limit, and every cell within his flesh, were reacting to the movements of these stone statues. Light burned fiercely within

his eyes.

He began gradually thinning out the horde of the statues while blocking, slapping away or shaking off their persistent, annoying attacks.

‘As if, for this very moment....’

It felt as if the ‘Demon King’s Shortswords’ were solely created for this moment. He held them tightly in his hands and easily sliced up the limbs and body parts of the statues made out of solid stone.

Jin-Woo sensed his body, his mind, his cells and even his shortswords become a single entity. He endlessly moved, fled in and out, and continued to slither around without rest.

The angel statue, silently observing Jin-Woo’s remarkable movements with a great deal of interest, began to shudder greatly.

‘How could he move like that with the physique of a mere human.....?’

The smile that was gone momentarily on the angel statue’s face was back in full force now. It knew it had made the right choice.

However – it was still far, far too early to end the test.

The angel statue looked behind itself. With that, the eyes of the humongous statue of the god sitting on the throne and silently waiting for its turn, began glowing an eerie crimson hue.

It gripped the armrests of the throne tightly and slowly lifted up its unimaginably huge frame.

Kuuuggguuuuuugung!!!!

Because it was so gigantic, simply seeing it stand up sent shivers down one’s spine.

THUD.

The god statue took its first step, and the vast interior of the temple shook hard from the resulting noise.

THUD, THUD, THUD.

The god statue’s strides were so enormous that it didn’t need to walk for long before arriving where Jin-Woo was. The rubble of the fallen stone statues was forming small mountains all around him by then.

The god statue stopped walking in front of him and raised its right arm.

It was also around this time that Jin-Woo, in the midst of a maddened melee among the stone statues, felt something change around him.

He realised that the surroundings had become dark for some reason and raised his head.

‘.....?’

A giant descending palm was rapidly filling up his entire vision. The god statue slapped down on the ground as if it couldn’t care any less about the well-being of the stone statues surrounding Jin-Woo.

RUMBLE-!!

He hurriedly flung himself away to get out of the range of that gigantic palm strike. He rolled on the ground several times, before shooting right back up on his two feet. His expression hardened as he glared at the god statue.

‘Right, there was that guy, too.’

This was definitely the case of one headache after another.

Jin-Woo lowered his gaze to see around a hundred or so still-surviving stone statues busy sprinting towards him right this very moment. These tireless enemies arrived in front of his nose in no time at all.

He lightly tipped away the iron mace flying his way at a frightening speed with the end of his shortsword; he then slid forward as if he was skating on ice and sliced off the head of the mace-wielding statue.

Thud.

As if the head of the statue crashing to the ground was the signal, the rest of the statues following right behind pounced on Jin-Woo like a pack of wild, but well-organised, animals. However, the truly dangerous opponent wasn’t one of these statues.

It felt as if every hair on his body was standing up straight. Jin-Woo flinched in nasty shock and hurriedly raised his head.

‘...!!’

Sure enough, the bone-chilling red light was coagulating in the two eyes of the god statue.

‘Dodging it... it’s too late for that.’

His brain quickly calculated that his escape routes would be blocked off by the stone statues if he were to make a wrong move now. The odds of him getting melted down to nothing by that laser beam or whatever would be too high for his liking if that happened.

‘In that case....’

Jin-Woo quickly put the shortsword down and immediately extended his now-empty left hand at the stone statues pouncing on him.

‘Ruler’s Reach!!’

Five of the stone statues got caught in the skill ‘Ruler’s Reach’ and were stacked up together in the air.

Tti-ring!!

[Skill: ‘Ruler’s Reach’ has been upgraded to its ultimate version, Skill: ‘Ruler’s Authority’.]

‘Nice!’

Too bad, he still didn’t have a single second of leeway to bask in the happiness of his skill getting an upgrade right now. Jin-Woo quickly moved the make-shift shield made from the stone statues into the trajectory of the god statue’s glare.

Buzzzzing-!!

Just as he expected, red laser beams shot out from the eyes of the god statue.

Chiiiiii-jick!

It didn’t even take one second for the shield made out of the stone statues to melt away, but Jin-Woo successfully used that brief respite to safely get out of the attack range of that beam.

He withdrew the skill ‘Ruler’s Authority’, and the smouldering remnants of the statues dropped to the floor.

Tumble-!

Jin-Woo rapidly revised his battle plan as he confirmed the power of the god statue capable of completely evaporating these stone statues.

‘As I thought, getting rid of the god statue should be my priority.’

His next goal had been set now. Before the god statue could fire the second laser beam attack, Jin-Woo kicked the ground hard and dashed forward.

‘Quicksilver!’

Tadadadadadaht-!!!

Jin-Woo’s movement was already fast, but with that skill activated, his speed immediately shot past what the god statue could actually follow with its perception.

Jin-Woo arrived at the foot of the god statue in the proverbial blink of an eye and tensed up his leg muscles to the extreme. An unbelievable amount of energy, reserved solely for jumping up, condensed within his crouched position.

He had only one shot.

Without a doubt, it'd become much harder to dodge the red laser beams flying in at a terrifying speed once he was airborne. It was impossible to move freely in the air, after all.

But then again, hadn't he learned that valuable lesson already?

If he weren't willing to take on some risks, then he'd not be able to find himself with any opportunities.

'That is why....'

Jin-Woo's lips shut tight in a straight line as he powerfully leapt up from the ground.

His entire frame flew up like a fired rocket.

'....Just get destroyed already!'



Chapter 157 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo arrived at the god statue's eye level instantly.

This was at the highest point of the jump before one's body would begin its descent due to gravity. It felt as if everything around him had come to a standstill.

The drops of sweat flying off of his body as he jumped sparkled under the light. Although slow, they were definitely getting further away from him.

He was in the state of peak concentration right now. The undeniable threat of losing his life from the smallest mistake pushed all of Jin-Woo's abilities to their absolute limits.

'This is the true power of the Agility Stat....'

His heart pounded hard and fast as the realisation dawned on him that this was what the peak state of the Agility Stat could produce when pushed to the extreme. However, he obviously did not have the leeway to revel in the fruit of his labour.

Even now, the eyes of the god statue were moving towards him, albeit at a crawling speed. Seeing up close the crimson light coagulating within the d*m thing's eyes sent shivers all over his body.

Just getting brushed by that thing would mean his end.

Sensing the dizziness of the danger, his mind re-focused on the task at hand.

'Stay calm.....'

He reached out with his left hand, still not holding any weapon.

'Ruler's Authority!'

The upgraded skill based on 'Ruler's Reach' began pulling at the shoulder of the god statue. He was thinking of reeling himself in, rather than actually dragging the god statue and its incalculable body weight towards him.

Wuuong-!!

However, his expectation was somewhat shaken up as the upper body of the god statue actually did creep forward just a little.

‘.....!!!’

What an incredible force of attraction that was!

The power of the skill must have gone up several notches when it evolved from ‘Ruler’s Reach’ to ‘Ruler’s Authority’.

And all thanks to that, Jin-Woo got to land on the god statue’s shoulder far easier than he anticipated. He quickly raised his head to look behind him.

Buzzzzing-!

The scarlet-red laser beam exploding out accurately pierced past the location in the air he was floating in, only a moment ago.

‘Nice.’

For the next few seconds, he was safe from the god statue’s laser beam attacks.

Feeling unburdened now, Jin-Woo sprinted on top of the statue’s shoulder with all his might and arrived near its neck. His right hand gripped the hilt of the ‘Demon King’s Shortsword’ tightly.

‘Violent Slash!!’

Several silver streaks of blade light rained down on the target like the shells of a shotgun.

Dududududududu-!!

Dozens upon dozens of slashes landed on the statue’s neck. However, there was barely any visible damage.

Not one slash managed to inflict a heavy enough wound; they all stopped at simply causing negligible, superficial nicks on the skin.

‘So, the shortsword doesn’t work, is that it?’

It was that moment that the ‘Demon King’s Shortsword’, previously capable of slicing up the steel-like scales of the boss-level Naga into ragged bits, came across as an insignificant and shabby toy.

It was then.

Jin-Woo discovered a giant hand busy flying in his general direction. Before it could grasp him, though, he ran on the back of the statue’s neck and changed his position to the other shoulder.

He took a quick look down as he ran and saw how dizzyingly high he was right now.

He raised his head up and glared at the side of the god statue's face. This god statue wouldn't be the first enemy that his blades failed to inflict any damage. As a matter of fact, he had dealt with a countless number of them so far.

'If I can't stab it, then I'll just pummel it!'

He didn't invest all those Stat points in his Strength Stat just for fun. Jin-Woo's eyes gleamed brightly with determination. He lightly jumped up and thrust his left hand at the temple of the god statue's face.

Crack!!

All five fingers of his left hand dug deep under the surface.

'It's done!'

Jin-Woo clenched his left hand into a fist. With that, he was firmly secured onto the god statue's face like a rock climber hanging onto the surface of a cliff with one hand. All this was simply him getting ready.

The real thing was starting now.

Jin-Woo's right back, his right shoulder, and then his right arm all began to balloon up to an unnatural size. That was the result of an incredible amount of magic energy enveloping his right arm.

As a test, he threw a single punch first.

Ka-boom!!!

The god statue's head, that didn't even budge from the shortsword's attacks, suddenly and visibly trembled.

'.....!!'

The angel statue observing the unfolding situation was shocked beyond words from that.

The enormous amount of magic energy spreading out from high up above managed to shake the air within the entire underground temple. The angel statue continued to look up while not even bothering to hide its extremely excited state at all.

To think, that a human would deal with its masterpiece in such a manner.

An even greater level of anticipation bubbled up within the gleaming light of the angel statue's eyes.

Ka-bbooom!!

Jin-Woo's fist punched the god statue's face for the second time.

Stagger.

For a brief moment there, the god statue lost its balance. The attacks were definitely working.

However, the god statue wasn't planning to stand still and not do anything while getting punched to death by him.

Vuwoong-!!

As if it was trying to catch a mosquito, the god statue slapped its own face with that giant hand.

BOOM-!!

Jin-Woo dodged that giant palm strike and safely landed back on the god statue's shoulder, a mocking grin etched on his face now. That was no different from this thing busily slapping itself.

He didn't wait and sprinted back towards the god statue's face as soon as its hand went away. And then....

Boom!! Ka-boom!! Kwang! Kwang!! Kwa-boom!!!

Terrifying, deafening booms reverberated continuously throughout the large dome-shaped temple.

Crack, craaack....

Cracks formed on the face of the god statue and spread all over the surface like a spider's web. The tottering god statue tried its best to maintain its balance before it began running towards one of the walls in this massive, open space.

Thud, thud, thud!!

The 'creature's huge legs viciously stomped on the ground. It was trying to crush Jin-Woo still sticking to its face by ramming into the wall.

'But, before that happens....'

....He'd finish this fight!

Jin-Woo's fist began pounding faster, harder, and with even less mercy onto the face of the god statue.

Kwang!! Kwang!! Kwang!! Kwaaahng!!

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The god statue increased its running speed and the gap to the wall was reduced in seconds.

Sneak.

Jin-Woo confirmed the remaining distance with his eyes and, for the purpose of landing the final blow, sent all of his power to his right arm.

Thick veins bulged on his ballooning arm muscles as a horrifying amount of magic energy filled his limb up.

‘...Very good.’

The physical strength of a level 103. Jin-Woo poured all of that into this single fist of his. Just before he was about to collide against the wall....

KWA-BOOM!!

CRACK!!!

Along with the loud noise of a ripened watermelon shattering into pieces, half of the god statue’s face was blown away. It eventually faltered and fell down on its knees.

RUMBLE-!!

The entirety of the empty dome-shaped arena rumbled spectacularly. And then, the gigantic body of the god statue powerlessly tilted over to the ground.

RUUUMBLE-!!

A thick, choking cloud of dust kicked up into the air as the massive figure collapsed, hard, to the dry ground. Jin-Woo walked out from there while waving away the dust covering up the room like a thick fog.

“Fuu-woo.”

Jin-Woo let out a soft sigh under his breath.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump....

Even now, the sound of his wildly beating heart noisily rang around in his ear canals. The god statue that nearly made him wet his pants the first time he stood before it, had fallen face down on the ground, unmoving.

No one else did that. He was responsible for this spectacle.

‘I can definitely do this.’

....Regardless of what that was.

He recalled the Hunters who lost their lives inside here and a powerful emotion welled up from deep within his heart. Unfortunately, the remaining stone statues continued to move quickly, as if they didn’t want him to have this quiet moment to himself.

They surrounded him in a circle and closed the distance. Just before they were about to pounce on him, though....

Jin-Woo stopped looking at his two hands... and raised his head.

“Ruler’s Authority.”

BOOM-!!

Every single stone statue slammed their heads down on the floor and stopped moving altogether. This was the power of the invisible hand, also known as the skill ‘Ruler’s Authority’.

Jin-Woo returned his gaze back to his hands.

‘I’ve become even stronger through today’s battle.’

He clenched his fists and unfurled them, before repeating his actions again.

An incredible power was overflowing out of his fists, no, from his entire body. He could clearly sense this flow of power now.

At the same time, his heart showed no signs of slowing down at all. It felt as if something sleeping deep within him had awakened through this life-or-death struggle.

It was then.

Clap, clap, clap, clap, clap.

He heard slow handclaps. Jin-Woo raised his head in the direction of that clapping noise. The angel statue was clapping its hands in an exaggerated manner, that repulsive smile still etched on its face.

“Truly excellent.”

Quite unlike the words leaving its mouth, though, the light oozing out of its eyes were of rather nefarious origins. Jin-Woo calmly spoke to the statue.

“Don’t you have an agreement to uphold, first?”

The d*mn thing clearly announced that, as long as Jin-Woo managed to stand on his two feet after the end of this final test, all the answers he wanted to know would be provided to him.

So, he wanted to hear them right now.

Unfortunately, a stiff smile formed on the angel statue as if it had no intentions of letting him know that easily.

“Hah, hah.”

It took a step closer to him.

“Your test isn’t finished yet.”

Then, another step closer.

“In here....”

Yet another step.

The angel statue closed the distance with several large strides and eventually stood before Jin-Woo’s nose.

“...I’m still here, aren’t I?”

Dududuk, dududuk!!!

The lengthy wings on the back of the angel statue suddenly twisted and writhed around before transforming into arms. Two arms coming out of its shoulders, and six more sprouting from its back – eight hands in total began clenching into tight fists.

“I am your final test.”

Jin-Woo frowned deeply. Before he could say anything, though – the angel statue cut him off.

“There is no need to worry about my ‘life’.”

Flinch.

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened in surprise. This thing knew what he wanted to say in advance. He was about to raise his voice in irritation, telling the creature that its death would result in him not getting any answers in the end.

“Are you surprised?”

The angel statue raised one of its hands and pointed at its own head.

“All of your information is in here.’

‘...Could it be?’

Cold sweat drops rapidly formed on Jin-Woo’s forehead.

“As expected of a quick-witted human. Hah, hah.”

The angel statue issued out more of that stiff, mechanical laughter. And then, carried on with what it wanted to say.

“If you try to control your power to prevent me from dying, that will make it difficult to properly measure your true strength. So, to prevent that...”

Right in that moment – the angel statue’s lips moved at a quick pace.

However, the voice of the angel statue didn’t come out from there. It came

out from somewhere else.

[An 'Emergency Quest' has been issued.]

[If you fail to defeat the enemy within the designated time limit, your heart will stop operating altogether.]

[Remaining time: 10:00]

Just as the quest message finished saying its piece, one second ticked down from the remaining time.

Tick.

[Remaining time: 09:59]

Jin-Woo's eyes began trembling hard as he stared at the angel statue.

"That's right."

[That's right.]

Whenever the angel statue spoke, he also heard the System's voice at the same time as well.

Jin-Woo's heart that seemed to have recovered some calmness just now began madly pounding away again. His breathing quickened and his fingertips trembled.

The angel statue studied Jin-Woo's reaction before answering one of the very first questions he asked earlier – ***"What are you?"***

"I am the architect of the System."

[I am the architect of the System.]

"Mister Kim, you're a reporter. There's a dungeon break happening in Japan right now, so is it okay for you to be camping out here like this?"

Woo Jin-Cheol threw that question out as if he was feeling greatly annoyed by something at the moment.

The reporter named Kim yawned grandly while scratching the area around his sideburns.

"That place is already packed full of other reporters. Nothing will change even if I show up there, wouldn't you agree? It'll be better for me to stick with the folks of the Monitoring Division and get myself a scoop or two."

"..."

Woo Jin-Cheol was tempted to advise this reporter that he should either

stick to yawning or scratching his face, but gave up and sighed inwardly.

This was because Kim was one of a very few reporters that wrote favourable articles regarding the Association when everyone else seemed to be hell-bent on ‘uncovering’ wrongdoings of the organisation or coming up with provocative gossip pieces on the private lives of various Hunters.

‘No need to turn an ally into an enemy, now is there....?’

That was why Woo Jin-Cheol was keeping this reporter named Kim company as the latter paid a visit to the Monitoring Division’s offices.

Kim finally finished his lengthy yawn and threw a question back.

“Besides that, Chief Woo. Our whole country is going through a bit of upheaval right now, so is it fine for you to be sitting here and doing nothing in the office like this?”

Woo Jin-Cheol closed the cover on the file he was working on and spoke in a soft voice that sounded almost like a gentle sigh.

“Someone has to stay behind to guard his assigned station, you see.”

“Ohhh.”

Reporter Kim’s eyes opened up wider in understanding and replied while quickly pulling out a palm-sized memo pad and a pen.

“You know, that’s a cool soundbite. I want to make sure not to miss out on a single word, so can you repeat them for me, please?”

“Mister Kim, you really....”

Woo Jin-Cheol was about to raise his voice higher but with excellent timing, his smartphone went off.

‘...Mm?’

It was a call coming from the report centre. If it was a call not coming through the hotline of the Monitoring Division but to his personal phone, then that could only mean the matter at hand wasn’t simple in nature.

Woo Jin-Cheol quickly answered the call.

“This is Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol speaking, Monitoring Division.”

Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

“What happened?”

“Did something happen in that place again....?”

‘A dual dungeon?’

Woo Jin-Cheol's eyes grew wider.

It seemed that the employee charged with receiving the reports still had something else to say. Woo Jin-Cheol's voice became more urgent.

“Okay, so what else is there?”



Chapter 158 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

He didn't even have enough time to get surprised.

The angel statue suddenly began its attack. A large, tightly-clenched fist came flying at him like a flash of light.

The attack was coming from too close a distance and its speed was also too fast to evade cleanly – that's what his brain, trained to near-perfection through countless battles, had told him.

Jin-Woo urgently raised his arms to block the attack. It was not an incorrect decision to make, but that didn't mean it was the correct one, either.

SLAM-!!

The power behind that punch was so incredulous that both his legs momentarily became airborne as he flew to the wall on the far side before ungainly crashing into it.

Crack-!!

The debris from the broken wall tumbled down to the floor.

'...Keu-heuk.'

Jin-Woo swallowed back the pained moan. From that unexpected attack, he ended up receiving an unexpectedly large amount of damage. Unfortunately, the angel statue had already arrived in front of Jin-Woo's nose, evidently not keen on giving him any time to reorganise himself.

Boom!!

Jin-Woo tilted his head to the side and evaded the fist of the angel statue. It left a massive hole on the wall behind him, instead.

That was just the beginning.

Jin-Woo's back was up against the wall. The angel statue blocked off his route of retreat and then, its eight fists ruthlessly rained down on him.

Attacks poured down without a single break in between, each punch powerful enough to kill a high-ranking Hunter in a single hit.

Tudududududududu-!!

As time wore on, though – the eyes of the angel statue were growing wider and wider, instead.

‘He’s... blocking my punches?’

The bombardment of attacks from eight separate arms was being blocked, deflected, or was redirected by just two arms. His movements were so fast that he simply looked like a collection of afterimages now.

The angel statue was inwardly impressed by this display.

From the very beginning, the end result of this battle was already set in stone. No, this was just one of the formalities to go through. And that would be the statue performing a once-over of Jin-Woo for the last time whether he agreed to it or not. Normally, this process itself should have been a rather boring one to go through. But now....

‘Isn’t this amusing.’

To think, it’d start enjoying a fight against a human like this. The angel statue had never once thought that a mere human could ever be an even match in its long, long life.

The moment its thoughts reached there, a light suddenly flashed in its vision. No, it wasn’t actually light.

It was a punch the human threw at the statue.

Boom-!!

Jin-Woo jumped up and threw a punch. It hit the face of the angel statue, resulting in it being unceremoniously deposited on to the ground and rolling away in the dirt. It still stood right back up again, though.

There were minute cracks developing on its still-smiling face.

[Hahah.]

How long had it been since it felt this joyous?

The angel statue was so excited that it began to shudder in regret from the shortness of the remaining time.

“Fuu-woo....”

Jin-Woo managed to land a good-looking hit on the angel statue, but he didn’t bother to celebrate his feat. He instead spat out heavy, laboured breaths.

‘It’s strong.’

Indeed, his opponent was way stronger than any enemy he had faced so far.

This 'thing' introduced itself as the architect of the System.

The questions of why it created the System, why he was chosen as a Player, and just what was going on with this world – the questions he wanted to ask so badly were already forming a small mountain in his head.

'If I want to ask them....'

He needed to prioritise bringing that thing down first. Jin-Woo clenched his fists tightly. It was then.

He felt a warm, sticky liquid sliding down his face. It was his blood.

It was trickling out from a tear on his forehead.

'I guess I didn't dodge everything, huh.'

He thought that he perfectly countered all those attacks, but it seemed that one or two did get through to him. What bad luck it was, his blood seeping into his eye and interfering with his vision.

On the other hand, the enemy was completely fine. It'd be very hard to describe this situation as a good one for him, even if he were to exaggerate somewhat.

'Fighting up close puts me in a disadvantage.'

That was a rather obvious assessment to make. The enemy's physique was several times larger than his, and it also enjoyed the benefit of having six more arms, too.

Realistically speaking, it was nigh impossible to evade or defend against speedy attacks coming in from all sorts of angles. The wound on his forehead attested to that fact.

'In that case.'

It was time to change the look of this battle just a tiny bit.

The moment he made up his mind as thus, the angel statue flew in like an arrow and swung its big fist at him.

Ka-ka-boom!!

The punch sliced open the air and crashed into the wall. It collapsed into countless pieces of rubble. The angel statue tilted its head to the side.

Jin-Woo had taken some distance away from his enemy even before the statue had the chance to consciously realise it.

'I certainly am a match for it in terms of speed.'

So, if he maintained this distance and damaged it from afar....

Jin-Woo immediately activated 'Ruler's Authority' towards the angel statue as it turned around to face him.

Pow!!

The powerful attack pressing down from the sky to the ground!

The technique used to swat the king of the ants, Beru, off the air swooped down on the angel statue's head. However....

'....?'

Jin-Woo did a quick double take.

The skill that managed to tilt the torso of the massive god statue only managed to tilt the head of the angel ever so slightly. He couldn't be sure, but the opponent seemed to have activated a skill of its own to defend itself. There was no other explanation he could think of other than that one.

'What could it be?'

His confused state couldn't be maintained for long.

[How amusing. So very amusing.]

From some time ago, the angel statue's low voice and the System's mechanical female-like voice were overlapping in his ears. That unnatural combination was really getting on his nerves a bit.

[This is so very amusing.]

The angel extended all of its eight arms out, and the weapons previously held by the stone statues began vibrating on the ground.

'Isn't that...?'

Jin-Woo's eyes widened greatly.

The weapons of the stone statues soon rose up in the air and flew towards the angel. Eight different weapons were now tightly grasped in the angel's eight hands all at once.

'That's Ruler's Reach.'

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the angel statue also knew how to use the skill 'Ruler's Reach'. Its power seemed to be below Jin-Woo's own skill, but whatever the case may have been, he now knew what the angel used to counter the attack earlier on.

Indeed, this thing was not an ordinary opponent at all.

Tick.

Abruptly, Jin-Woo's gaze shifted up.

[Remaining time: 06:19]

And now, he only had roughly six minutes left.

'I need to finish this quickly.'

He learned that long distance attacks weren't going to work. Jin-Woo revised his plan once more and summoned the 'Demon King's Shortsword' again. The other one that he tossed away in a hurry was currently nowhere to be seen.

'Fighting against eight weapons with a single shortsword, is it?'

Ba-thump, ba-thump!!

The more he was pushed to the corner in a fight, the faster his heart beat.

Taht.

The angel statue jumped up high as if it wanted to touch the ceiling, before landing back down in front of Jin-Woo.

Craaack!!

The stone tiles on the floor couldn't endure against the falling statue's momentum and spat out bits of debris as it shattered into countless pieces.

Jin-Woo pointed forward with his shortsword as he felt the small pebbles pelting him on his ankles.

'I can do this.'

He definitely could do this. Jin-Woo stared into the angel statue's eyes and calmly drew his breaths in. Immediately, he felt a chill brush run down his back. Sure enough, eight disparate weapons, such as a sword, a spear, a blade, an axe, a war hammer, etc., flew at his way as if they all possessed individual wills.

Fuu...

Jin-Woo spat out heavy, white-hot breaths, his brows shooting up high.

Under the glare of the interior that was neither too bright nor too dark, the light in Jin-Woo's eyes left behind long shimmering trails that chased after his movements.

Kwagagwahk-!! Kwa-kwa-kwa-kwa-gwa-gwahk!!

Would blocking countless flying bullets with bullets fired from an opposing

gun create a cacophony of noise similar to this?

The deafening roars continued on unabated as Jin-Woo and the angel statue exchanged innumerable attacks and counterattacks in an instant.

Within the world slowed down to a crawl, only these two writhed and struggled mightily as if to rebel against the flow of time itself.

There was no one superior or inferior; just an evenly-matched battle of blades where only one would emerge as the victor. Even then....

‘I can feel it.’

Jin-Woo’s shoulder moved ever so slightly. The sword wielded by the angel statue brushed past his shoulder with a gap that couldn’t be detected by the naked eyes.

He stopped caring about his other eye that couldn’t be used anymore. His sensory perception that had exceeded the extreme limits and stepped into a whole new realm helped him to read the trajectories of every weapon his enemy held.

He began dodging every attack the angel statue threw at him by truly paper-thin margins and accurately landed his counters one by one.

More and more wounds appeared on the statue. The angel’s speed remained constant, yet Jin-Woo was getting faster and faster.

Naturally, the angel statue was deeply astonished by this.

“.....!!”

If it was only for the purpose of a test, there was no reason to go this far. However, this human had managed to draw out the angel’s full power.

Indeed, just as the term implied – it had to fight with everything it had.

But then, a human was able to fight evenly against the angel statue going at full tilt?

The angel’s puzzled, suspicious eyes began peering deeper into Jin-Woo now. And then, it realised the reason for this.

‘It’s only by a little, but... it’s mixed in there.’

Flinch.

The shoulders of the angel statue trembled in shock. Was that the reason why he could freely wield the immense power so naturally like this?

However, that was also another thing this ‘creature’ wished for from the beginning, anyway.

Just as the look of elation formed on the angel statue's face, a cleanly sliced off arm flew up into the air. The statue's head was raised up to look at it.

The arm let go of a weapon as it flew away.... it was the angel's right arm.

[Kuuuwaahhk!!]

Even if this statue was not its real body, the pain still got transmitted in full. The angel statue tottered unsteadily and retreated after losing its arm in the blink of an eye.

[How dare a measly human!]

The colour of the angel statue's eyes reddened in an instant. Its true nature woke up and it forgot its true purpose, its duty, for being here.

[You dare!!]

It cried out in anger, and the fallen, destroyed stone statues all stood right back up.

BOOM!

Even the god statue and its partially-destroyed head began pushing off the ground as well.

Jin-Woo could sense all the enemies being reanimated, but he didn't fall into a panic and simply pounced on the angel statue again.

Clang!!

The four arms of the angel were used to block a single shortsword, yet it was shoved far, far back from the impact force.

Agility, Perception, Strength, and even Stamina – all of Jin-Woo's Stats had far exceeded the expectation of the angel statue.

[Kuwahk!!]

The angel statue roared out like a wild beast, and the reanimated stone statues pounced on Jin-Woo. And so, the fight between every single thing within this temple and the lone human commenced.

Tick.

[03:02]

Even in the midst of all this chaos, the timer was still resolutely ticking down to zero.

Jin-Woo's shortsword sliced away yet another of the angel statue's arms. This time, it was one of the six created out of its wings.

[Kuwaahhk!!]

Unfortunately, the resistance of the reanimated stone statues was nothing to scoff at.

There were far too many of them surrounding him now and it became too much of a task to dodge every single attack coming his way. He focused on attacking the angel statue and dodged only those attacks that might critically injure him while ignoring the rest.

His HP and Stamina were cut down in double time.

Stab!

A stone statue slammed down with its shield on his left shoulder.

'Keuk!'

Jin-Woo diverted his attention towards this particular statue.

It was preparing to strike for the second time with its shield. Jin-Woo's expression crumpled into something unsightly. He didn't really care about others, but he simply couldn't forgive this b*stard.

Only then did Jin-Woo move slightly away from the angel statue; using the elbow of his left arm not holding a weapon, he stomped the head of the offending statue.

CRACK!

The elbow drop containing magic energy ensured that the statue's head exploded into tiny bits and pieces.

In the meantime, other statues quickly surrounded him and tried to jump on top of him. However, Jin-Woo simply activated his skill and pushed them all away.

'Ruler's Authority!'

BOOM!!

A group of stone statues were flung away as if they were thrown off from the centre of an explosion.

"Pant, pant...."

Unfortunately, even before Jin-Woo had time to catch his breath, the god statue threw its massive fist down on his head. He lightly leapt to his side and avoided it.

Vuuwuong-!!

The gigantic fist only managed to sweep away dozens of stone statues from Jin-Woo's vicinity. He ran in a wide arc to lose the stone statues mindlessly trying to jump on him and approached the angel statue again.

And the angel greeted him with a deeply crumpled expression. That was the expression of pure rage.

For the second time today, Jin-Woo, the angel statue, and the stone statues all fell into a frenzied melee. His blood and sweat danced in the air and flew everywhere. But, all of that lasted only for a brief moment.

Soon, blood and sweat evaporated from the sheer heat generated and red mist rose up from Jin-Woo's shoulders.

The stone statues were forced back, the god statue slammed its fist down, and the arms of the angel statue busily moved about. And in the middle of it all stood Jin-Woo.

[Kuwaahhk!!]

Another one of the angel's arms flew off, and Jin-Woo's shortsword found itself pressed tightly against the angel statue's neck. Way above both of them, the god statue was about to pound down with its two hands locked together.

Jin-Woo calmly strengthened the arm pressing the blade to the angel statue's neck to cut it off in one go.

At that moment, the angel statue announced its surrender.

[I lost.]

Simultaneously, the god statue and the rest of the stone statues all froze up and stopped moving.

[Your test has ended.]

Tick.

Like a lie, the timer ceaselessly ticking down also froze up along with the angel's words announcing the end of everything.

[Remaining time: 02:11]

Red hot steam was rising up in a fine mist from Jin-Woo's entire body.

Only after confirming that the timer had stopped for real, he lowered his head. His glare was locked onto the angel statue.

"I have a question."

[You can ask anything. I shall answer if it's within my knowledge.]

Rather unexpectedly, the now-expressionless angel statue agreed to his demand without offering any resistance.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo didn’t say anything and thought to himself.

When he asked the angel statue ‘What are you’, the thing mocked him for asking the wrong question.

However, his confusion got more confounded after he heard the identity of this ‘thing’ from its own mouth, and now, he had more questions than ever before burning a hole in his head.

That was why Jin-Woo decided to heed the advice the angel gave him earlier on and ask the right question.

“Who am I?”



Chapter 159 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The Hunters of the Monitoring Division arrived on site. There were a total of seven high-ranked Hunters. Woo Jin-Cheol had scrounged up the top elites of the Association that could be mobilised on such short notice.

However, he knew the truth. He knew that this little fighting power would not be of any help to Hunter Seong.

‘Even still, for the worst case scenario....’

These Hunters from the Monitoring Division would buy enough time so Hunter Seong would be able to escape from the dangers. They came to this location with such a resolve in their hearts.

“Is that the one, Chief?”

“Looks that way.”

Hunters from the Monitoring Division stepped out of the minivan and entered the school’s athletics field.

They found the Hunters from the Bravery Guild who had made the report earlier waiting for their arrival. Their expressions brightened once they saw the members of the Monitoring Division.

“Over here, mister agents!”

The Master of the Guild came running and greeted the Hunters of the Monitoring Division. However, Woo Jin-Cheol’s gaze remained fixed on that Gate in question.

He could pick up on an ominous aura coming out of it already. Woo Jin-Cheol looked at his subordinates and issued an order.

“Let’s hurry.”

“Yes, sir.”

Their steps became hurried and they crossed the field to arrive before the Gate in a proverbial heartbeat.

But then, Woo Jin-Cheol’s steps came to an abrupt halt.

“Chief?”

“Senior?”

The subordinates behind him naturally came to a stop, as well. Woo Jin-Cheol cautiously took off his sunglasses. His hand holding the accessory was trembling imperceptibly.

‘This... what the hell is this....?’

He picked up on the utterly horrifying maelstrom of magical energy all around the Gate. As a matter of fact, the magical energy leaking out was so savage and brutal that the space around the portal looked as if it was being distorted to his naked eyes.

He was startled by what he saw and quickly took a step back.

Was this simply an optical illusion, or the sign of an impending ill omen?

He thought that, all of a sudden, a dark veil seemed to be enveloping this Gate from above. He had seen this somewhere before. It was the looming shadow of death.

All the hair on the back of his neck stood up.

Woo Jin-Cheol instinctively knew it.

He knew that the fight taking place inside was not something he or his boys could possibly butt in on.

The subordinates saw his complexion getting paler and gasped out in surprise. They hurriedly asked him.

“Section Chief?? Are you alright?”

“....”

Rather than an answer, Woo Jin-Cheol threw out a question, instead.

“Is there a... major Guild with a team ready for a raid nearby?”

One of his subordinates checked the Association’s database and quickly made his reply.

“Yes, sir. The Hunters Guild is getting ready for a raid at the moment.”

“What about their two rank S Hunters?”

“According to the data, both Choi Jong-In and Cha Hae-In Hunter-nims are scheduled to partake in the raid, sir.”

Choi Jong-In and Cha Hae-In. If it were those two, then they might be able to do something.

Woo Jin-Cheol shifted his gaze back to the Gate. That imperceptible

trembling that started from his hand had slowly but steadily spread out to the rest of his body.

Gulp.

Dry saliva slid down his throat all on its own.

Woo Jin-Cheol barely managed to rein his trembling voice and spoke to his subordinate.

“Send... the emergency cooperation request to the Hunters Guild.”

He finally asked it.

Just as the angel statue had recommended it, he changed his question from ***“What are you?”*** to ***“Who am I?”***

In that short moment, Jin-Woo’s heavy and laboured panting relaxed to his usual rhythmic breathing. The sound of his breaths was so measured and calm that it was hard to believe he was involved in a fierce life-or-death battle just now.

Even his panting shoulders had stopped quivering completely.

[...]

The answer from the angel statue seemed to be getting delayed for some reason, and Jin-Woo pressed the shortsword deeper against its skin as a reminder. The blade dug into the neck of the stone statue.

If this thing was a human, its skin would’ve been cut open and began bleeding by now. Since it was seemingly made out of stone, it didn’t bleed, but he knew there was no problem with cutting its head off like this.

Perhaps the angel statue also knew this truth? It belatedly opened its mouth.

[Finally.]

Hearing it from such close proximity, this thing’s voice sounded even more freakish than before.

[You have asked a proper question.]

It then formed a smile next. There was not one hint of fear on its face even though several of its arms were sliced off and there was a blade pressed just below its chin.

‘Maybe, its real body is somewhere else?’

Jin-Woo’s exceptional sensory perception scanned his surroundings but he couldn’t pick up any other aura. If the real body was indeed somewhere else, then the current him couldn’t even begin to imagine just how incredible the

technique being employed here was to conceal the connection this perfectly.

The angel statue carried on with what it wanted to say while that smile remained etched on its stony face.

[The answer is within you.]

'...In me?'

Jin-Woo had been glaring at his query until now, worried that this thing would try another petty trick on him. But when he heard that, his eyes became even sharper than ever before.

He spent four years of his life as a lowest-ranked Hunter and had to fight against countless enemies that were stronger than himself and could have killed him instantly.

Even though he was classified as a rank E Hunter, and not only that, as the lowest even among the rank Es, Jin-Woo still managed to survive in those four years as he bravely roamed around in various dungeons. That was no mean feat, indeed.

It was only possible because of his sixth sense, honed through experiencing several life-or-death moments, helped him to pick the best possible option available during the worst of all the worst situations.

And his ultra-sharp sixth sense was warning him of a certain shift in the atmosphere. Sure enough...

Tti-ring!

The mechanical beep abruptly rang out in his head, accompanied by the usual voice of the System. It was definitely not the angel statue's voice – he only heard that of a mechanical-sounding female.

[Recalling the stored data in the System's memory.]

[Will you consent to its playback?] (Y/N)

It wasn't just the voice this time, but even the actual message window also popped up, as well. It was asking him 'Yes' or 'No'.

The alphabets 'Y' and 'N' lazily blinked in front of his eyes as if they were patiently waiting for his answer.

'Just what on earth is this....?'

Just what was this d*mn thing trying to pull this time?

Jin-Woo's gaze shifted away from the message and landed on the angel statue. The smile was long gone from the statue's face. It spoke to him with a

completely emotionless face.

“The decision is up to you.”

Unlike before, its voice was now separated from the System. The machine-like, stiff male voice grated against his eardrums. Jin-Woo shut his mouth tight after seeing that face.

‘Data saved in the System’s memory, is it....’

Just like how it was with various video games, did the System also possess a save file or something similar to that? And, he could view what that save file contained, right now?

‘.....’

In this short span of time, all kinds of thoughts raced in and out of his brain. Of course, his answer had already been decided.

He finally earned what could be his one and only chance to confirm the truth for himself, so why should he back out of it now?

If the System wanted to trick him into a trap, then well, it didn’t have to go through such an elaborate process, either. After all, the System possessed the power to decide when his heart would stop beating, didn’t it?

‘Just as the angel said, if all these were just the processes of a test, then.... Then, I have earned the right to view this data.’

He suddenly recalled what the angel statue told him before the battle commenced.

[“If you still manage to stand on two feet by the end of the test, then everything you wished to know will be revealed to you. That will be my reward to you.”]

Most likely, the reward the angel talked about meant his right to view the data. He finally arrived at this conclusion.

Jin-Woo made his decision and slowly opened his mouth.

“....Yes.”

When he did, darkness immediately enveloped him.

Tti-ring.

The familiar mechanical beep hit him in the eardrums, and the voice of the System followed right after.

[The saved data has been successfully uploaded.]

It felt like he crossed an endless tunnel at a speed very close to that of infinity.

He flew past the space filled with nothing but darkness; the light seeping into this space from such a long distance away slammed into him in an instant.

After the blinding by the light dissipated away....

Jin-Woo was greeted by the immense spectacle laid out before his eyes – no, below him – and spat out a shocked gasp in his mind.

‘Oh, my god....’

An army consisting solely of innumerable monsters stretched far beyond the scope of vision below him.

From where he was, all the way to beyond the horizon. Countless monsters completely covered up the ground until there was no uncovered patch left.

In all honesty, that was one hell of a terrifying sight to behold. If this many monsters jumped out of a Gate all at once, humanity wouldn’t have a chance in hell at winning against them.

Just from seeing this, he felt his innards tighten as if he was having indigestion.

‘Hold on... Where is this place, anyway?’

It couldn’t have been Earth. He could see thin, tall, and bizarre looking rocky outcroppings jutting out from here and there on this reddish-brown, dried up plains where not even a single blade of grass grew.

This was a completely foreign landscape that he had never seen before.

His eyes could catch the sight of the reddish-brown ground, those strange rock formations, and then, the great army of monsters standing on top of said ground.

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to these monsters.

He spotted weaklings commonly seen in low ranked dungeons, all the way to the powerful monsters that could only be seen in much higher-ranked dungeons, such as High Orcs, White Phantoms, and even Giants.

This disparate gathering of monsters that ignored their ranks and species were busy looking up and waiting for something to happen.

‘What are they all looking at?’

Jin-Woo followed after their gazes and raised his head to the sky above.

And then... he discovered it.

‘.....!!’

He saw a jet-black lake, quietly floating high up in the sky.

No, it was actually not a lake. He mistook it for a lake because of its sheer size. But, it was a Gate so big that he couldn't even begin to guess its size. And it was silently looking down on the ground.

This black 'hole' was blocking up the purple sky beyond it.

‘Purple sky, is it.....?’

Seeing the colour of the sky that should not exist, he became doubly sure that this was not Earth anymore.

In a world that was clearly not Earth, something major was about to happen between the monsters and that Gate.

He unconsciously swallowed his saliva. Trapped within this eerie silence, his nervousness also increased as the time wore on.

Gowoooooh....

Just what would come out from that Gate?

Jin-Woo began wondering if he'd get to see the weapons of humanity or the armies of humans stepping out of that huge Gate, just like how monsters would step onto Earth through those portals.

However....

CRACK!

What came out of the cracked-open Gate's mouth was soldiers decked out in silver armour, with wings attached to their backs.

These silver-armoured soldiers poured out of the Gate like agitated bees rushing out of the disturbed beehive.

While monsters covered up the entirety of the ground, these soldiers in turn utterly blotted out the sky.

It was truly a spectacular sight. Jin-Woo couldn't stop admiring this incredible view.

However, the monsters must've thought rather differently. They began howling at the top of their lungs upon seeing the silver-armoured soldiers covering the sky and began bucking around in agitation.

He didn't even have to be a genius to figure out what would happen next.

It was war.

Swahhh-!!

The flying soldiers became silver drops of light and descended to the ground below. As it turned out, there was more than one Gate in the sky. There were several of them, and silver soldiers poured out of them one after the other.

Monsters on the ground versus the soldiers of the sky!!

Two groups, clearly burning with hostile intentions against each other, soon collided just above the ground. And a battle of an indescribable scale and proportion unfolded next.

ROOOAAAR-!!

The beastly roars of the monsters shook the land below, and....

Vuuoooo—!!

....And, horns being blown by the silver-armoured soldiers thunderously resounded out.

Weapons collided with other weapons; the sounds of armours shattering noisily rang out. The beastly roars soon morphed into screams and pained groans. The ground below was steadily being dyed the colour of blood.

The superiority in this battle was established very quickly.

The silver-armoured soldiers were very powerful. These guys easily sliced off the necks of the monsters that were strong enough to rip high-ranked Hunters apart with their bare hands.

Such powerful beings had formed a massive invading group, so perhaps it was only inevitable that the monsters were being swept away.

The balance was tilting noticeably now to their favour. Even then, silver-armoured soldiers continued to pour out from the Gates non-stop.

The waves upon waves of the silver soldiers crashing forward like the incoming tide erased all traces of living monsters off the dried plains in no time at all.

Kuwaaahk!

Kiiiehhk!

The war began as a fierce clash between two forces, but now, it descended into a blood-soaked massacre, instead.

Just like how Jin-Woo was with his foes, the swords and spears of the silver

soldiers knew no mercy. Because of that, the number of monsters decreased quite rapidly.

Jin-Woo watched this scene of the horrifying monsters being killed off with little to no resistance and was overcome with a puzzling mixture of emotions.

‘Am I mourning all those people who lost their lives to these b*stards, or am I feeling rueful for humans not being able to possess powers like that....?’

Such trivial thoughts remained in his head for only a short while. The truly extraordinary event only happened afterwards, that was why.

With the complete annihilation of the monsters mere moments away...

The silver soldiers of the sky that violently pushed their enemies back suddenly stopped moving one at the time.

‘What’s going on?’

Could they possibly have developed a sense of pity for these things now, of all times? But, there was just no way. If they did, then they shouldn’t be gripping their weapons even tighter like that.

They were gripping their weapons so hard, in fact, their hands were beginning to tremble noticeably, too. On top of that, the emotions filling up the faces of these silver soldiers were as far from the ones of compassion as you could get. No, they were definitely filled with terror.

Their collective gazes were focused in a certain direction. And that was somewhere behind him.

Jin-Woo suddenly had a hunch. He felt that something extraordinary was about to happen behind him, one amazing enough to overturn this situation on its head.

However, his gaze didn’t immediately look behind him, but instead, to the ground below.

On top of this reddish-brown land, a black shadow was spreading out. This shadow rapidly spread beyond the blood dyeing the land red, as well as the mountains of corpses. And when this darkness sped past underneath these corpses, mysterious screams could be heard.

Screams that no one could tell where they were coming from.

Jin-Woo knew of a skill that was eerily similar to this – no, make that pretty much identical.

‘Sovereign’s Territory....’

A powerful chill ran down his spine immediately.

He slowly, agonisingly slowly, turned his head around to take a look.

And there he found an impressive knight covered in jet-black armour from his head right down to his toes. From this knight, and the horse he was riding on, black aura-like strands of energy continuously rose up.

Why did this happen? No one told him, yet Jin-Woo could think of only one title when looking at that black knight.

‘...The Shadow Sovereign.’

Just by being in front of this being subjected him to an incredible pressure that was heavy enough to strangle him.

Whether it was the silver-armoured soldiers from the sky, monsters with intelligence, or even those without it, they all forgot to breathe and simply stared at this Shadow Sovereign.

Every single gaze within this battlefield was now looking at only this black knight.

[.....]

The Sovereign glared at the soldiers of the sky, before extending his hand out as if he wanted to grasp something.

Flinch.

Jin-Woo now could see the sight of the silver-armoured soldiers flinch and start to back away in fear. The intolerable stillness that stifled one's breaths pressed down on the shoulders of every single being under the heavens.

And soon....

The Sovereign's solemn voice shattered that stillness.

[Rise up.]



Chapter 160 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Ba-thump.

His heart beat louder just then.

‘Rise up.’

The ripple generated from those two words spread out at a frightening speed and roused up the shadows. The battlefield dyed in the colours of monsters’ blood roiled and tumbled in black waves.

Uwaaaahhh-!!

The Shadow Soldiers leaping out of the ground roared out in what could have been either loud cheers or screams of horror. They then shifted their blackened eyes towards their enemies.

Those eyes carried not one trace of fear towards their enemies now.

For the silver soldiers of the skies supposed to deal with this new army, the scene before them was worthy of sending cold shivers down their spines. Too bad for them, the Sovereign’s powers didn’t stop there.

[Wuoooohhhhh-!!]

The Sovereign bellowed heavily towards the skies. That powerful roar didn’t attack the eardrums of the listeners, but directly shook their hearts, instead.

Hearts, legs, and even the ground shook from his roar.

The land began crying as its response.

Jin-Woo didn’t need a lot of time to figure out what that roar was meant for. Because... the Shadow Soldiers raised their weapons up high and roared alongside as well.

WUUUOOOOHHH-!!

Just that single roar alone, and the Shadow Soldiers all transformed into completely different beings in an instant.

From this corner of the land, all the way to the other side – the dead monsters were instantly reorganised into Shadow Soldiers.

Jin-Woo had been quietly observing this process while holding his breath. A powerful shudder ran through his entire body from the combined roars of the Shadow Soldiers.

Ba-thump!!

His heart loudly beat again.

If this scene was supposed to demonstrate the true pinnacle of the Shadow Sovereign Class, then it certainly succeeded in letting him know just how much further he still had to walk to get there.

Eventually, the soldiers of the sky stopped hesitating and began moving again. They gathered into one large mass, and like a gigantic swarm of bees, descended on the black soldiers below.

However, the monsters that were reborn as Shadow Soldiers didn't fall as easily as before.

Weapons clashed against weapons.

Soldiers collided against soldiers.

The silver army and the black army got tangled up on top of this expansive land.

Explosions rang out constantly, and the ground quaked over and over again. The battle that should have ended as a one-sided massacre reverted back to full-on warfare.

Just the entrance of a single individual had changed everything. Now that was the display of truly shocking power. Jin-Woo didn't know why this scene was being shown to him, but nevertheless, he found himself unable to tear his eyes away from it.

The violent, fierce clash continued on.

A desperate and bloody engagement, incomparably fiercer and more violent than the first battle that took place, unfolded before his eyes.

Monsters were unable to contend with a single soldier of the sky while they were still alive, but after becoming Shadow Soldiers, they were now able to stand their ground and not get pushed back.

But, well, the truly terrifying thing about these Shadow Soldiers weren't their fighting spirit or their combat potentials.

The soldiers of the sky drove the Shadow Soldiers back with their powerful attacks and excellent martial prowess. The ferocity of the Shadow Soldiers that rebelled against death itself wasn't enough to bridge the gap of strength.

The balance of the battle seemed to tilt in favour of the soldiers of the sky once more. However, the Shadow Soldiers regained their original appearances almost right after they were destroyed.

Kuwaaahhk!

A Shadow Soldier writhed and screamed out as a spear belonging to a soldier of the sky pierced through it.

The silver soldier sensed that its victory was near. It let go of its spear and unsheathed the sword on its hips to slice off the head of its enemy, the Shadow Soldier.

Slice!

However, right after the head flew off....

‘...!!’

The head of the Shadow Soldier falling to the ground and the headless body all transformed into black smoke, before combining back to one form a couple of steps away.

As the soldier of the sky flinched, the Shadow Soldier used the sword it held to stab the chest of its silver-clad enemy.

Crack!!

The blade broke through the chest armour, dug into the internals, broke through the back skin and emerged out in the open again.

The silver soldier of the sky powerlessly fell to the ground.

Plop.

As the light of life within the fallen silver soldier’s eyes faded away, someone’s dignified voice entered its ears and woke it back up.

[Rise up.]

In an unknown instant....

The soldier of the sky discovered the black spear being held by its hands. What came to visit this soldier wasn’t death, but a new beginning.

Its now-blackened eyes shifted towards other soldiers of the sky who used to be its comrades only a few breaths ago.

Flinch.

When their gazes met, it saw the trembling shoulders of its former comrades. Even then, the reborn soldier knew what it had to do.

“Wuuooooouhhh!!”

It joyously accepted the brand new fate bestowed upon it.

Jin-Woo tore his eyes away from these soldiers and took an overview of the entire battlefield and its situation.

The battle taking place between the soldiers of the sky endlessly pouring out from the Gates in the air, and the Shadow Soldiers reborn through the orders of the Shadow Sovereign, was incredibly even.

Many poured out of the Gate to match the number of the dead, and just as many stood up from the shadows to match the dead, too.

If war broke out in hell, would it resemble something like this?

Horrifying warfare that a human’s intuition couldn’t even properly tell what would happen next breathlessly continued on in this vast land.

However, the balance between these two opposing sides broke in a single instant.

The flow of the war shifted very quickly when the Shadow Sovereign stopped issuing commands to his troops from far back and personally stepped forward to enter the fray.

The black horse carrying the Sovereign dashed into the battlefield.

Whenever he swung his sword, thousands of enemy troops fell to create a pathway. And the dead enemies, without an exception, became Shadow Soldiers and stood back up.

Just one flick of the Sovereign’s hand and all those enemy soldiers flying away to safety had their wings broken and they all crashed back down to earth.

‘Ruler’s Authority.....’

The areas the Sovereign dashed through got utterly swept away as if a storm rampaged past there. For the first time ever since the two opposing camps started clashing their weapons – the soldiers of the sky were being forced back.

Hundreds of thousands, no, millions of silver-clad soldiers couldn’t deal with a single enemy and were constantly pushed back.

Jin-Woo could only gasp out in admiration at this sheer marvellous spectacle. He thought that the war would come to an end like this.

However...

Just as the Shadow Soldiers began pushing back the tides of the silver soldiers of the sky, an ominous, eerie wind that was hard to describe in words blew in from somewhere behind him.

Auras powerful enough to send a shudder down his spine rushed in.

The Sovereign temporarily disregarded the enemies to his front and looked behind him. Two ginormous Gates had been generated in some place far behind the Shadow army. Their sizes didn't lose out to the ones floating up in the air.

And from these two Gates, two disparate groups of monsters poured out in droves. On one side, beast-type creatures being led by a wolf the size of a mountain.

And from the other one, knights and soldiers rushed out with countless banners proudly announcing their clans being waved about in their midst.

Jin-Woo's eyes grew wider and wider.

'Huh....??'

The clan crests embroidered on those banners were all familiar to him. From Ricardo's, Faestos's, Rokan's, Ingreyace's, and even Radiru's.

'...Esil.'

Those crests belonged to the aristocratic clans of demons he ran into as he was climbing up to the top floor of the Demon's Castle.

His confusion regarding why those demons appeared here could only last for a short while. The beasts and the demons began attacking the shadow soldiers together as if they had a prior agreement.

The back line of the Shadow Soldiers was immediately torn up into shreds from the combined assault of the two monster armies.

That wasn't the end, however.

Their front was occupied by the soldiers of the sky, still alive and ready to battle. These silver-clad beings changed their strategy and began striking back once more.

The soldiers of the sky to the front and the armies of monsters at the back surrounded the Shadow Soldiers in a pincer attack and closed in on them. The flow of the battle had changed once more.

Ba-thump.

Jin-Woo grasped his chest tightly.

His heart was aching now.

His gaze slowly shifted towards the Sovereign standing next to him.

Why was this? Why could he sense the Sovereign's emotions so clearly like this?

Just like when he was reading the thoughts of his Shadow Soldiers, the Sovereign's emotions were vividly transmitted to him. The emotion welling up thickly from the deepest depths of his heart was none other than indignation.

No, it had already exceeded past the level of indignation and into the territory of pure wrath.

Now that they were surrounded by enemies from all sides, the Shadow Soldiers had to endlessly repeat the cycle of destruction and regeneration. Although they seemed to have possessed a never-ending power of recovery, Jin-Woo too possessed the same ability and he knew its fatal weakness very well.

'It can hold up as long as there's MP....'

When MP ran out, the Soldiers would not be revived again. Meaning, the Sovereign wouldn't be able to use his army again. He sensed the Sovereign's magical energy that felt bottomless and vast in the beginning, slowly reaching its limit.

The Sovereign changed the direction of his mount away from the army of the sky and towards his rear. His black horse kicked the ground and rushed forward.

The ensuing battle was truly intense.

Corpses formed mountains. Blood formed oceans.

This conflagration called 'war' created by countless soldiers swallowed up every single lifeform still standing on this land and continued on its horrific path of destruction.

But, even then – this stubbornly persistent battle that didn't seem to end was slowly marching towards its inevitable conclusion.

Not too many remained standing on the battlefield now.

The Sovereign lost his mount during the battle. He wasn't hindered in the least, however. He cut down two demon knights blocking his path and stood before a certain demon breathlessly panting away as it leaned against a bizarre rock formation.

The demon's face was hidden behind its helm, but the Sovereign seemed to know its identity as he glared down at his feeble prey.

[We could have ended the war with them today.]

"..."

[But, why did you betray me?]

The demon weakly faltered its head, but it forced himself to look up. It had already suffered grievous wounds and it seemed unlikely it'd be able to survive its injuries.

The voice coming out from beneath the helm sounded precariously close to being cut off.

"So.... regrettable. We could have ended you for good today, but...."

The Sovereign's voice became even icier as he asked again.

[I said, why did you betray me?]

"Keuk, keuk."

The demon's shoulders trembled as it painfully cackled, before it raised its head up again. And then, it replied.

"#\$%^&#@\$."

For some reason, Jin-Woo couldn't properly hear that answer. Did he lose his concentration and miss it somehow?

No, that wasn't it.

"@\$^\$##."

The demon said something else, but he still couldn't understand a single word of it.

However, it must've sounded different to the Sovereign's ears, because as soon as he heard the reply, he extended his hand out and sucked the demon in. The creature spat out a pained moan as its neck was tightly grasped by the Shadow Sovereign.

"Keo-heok."

Crumble!

The piece of armour protecting the neck crumpled up. Even in the middle of this, the demon continued to say the things it wanted to say.

"...%^&*\$@%^&."

Stab.

The Sovereign's thumb plunged into the throat of the demon.

Cough!

The demon spat out a mouthful of blood. And that was precisely the moment when his gaze met with the demon's eyes staring back from within that helm.

But, how could this be?!

Jin-Woo freaked out and let go of the dying demon's neck.

Plop.

Its life had ended by then and its body limply crumpled to the ground.

'But, that doesn't make any sense.'

Those eyes in hidden in the helm – he had seen those eyes before. But, such a thing could not have happened.

Ba-thump!

His heart began pounding madly now.

Jin-Woo shook his head hard and cautiously approached the dead demon to take its helm off. Even in death, the creature was maintaining the same glare it shot him back when it was still alive.

How could he ever forget that glare?

The removed helm fell out of Jin-Woo's hands and clattered to the ground.

Clang.

The wide-open eyes of the demon were still filled with the light of pure rage. It was the exact same light he saw back on the top floor of the Demon's Castle.

'The Demon King... Baran?!'

The moment he realised this fact, he also discovered one more strange thing.

He saw his hands decked out in black armour. He then saw his feet, his legs, and his own chest. From a certain point in time, he had been using the Shadow Sovereign's body as his own.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!!

The pounding beats of his heart grew even heavier and louder, assaulting his eardrums. Jin-Woo placed his hand where his heart was.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!

His eyes grew wider and wider.

‘How... How come I haven’t noticed it until now?!’

He had grown more conscious of his own heartbeat after surviving the events of the underground temple. Even then, he had failed to notice it until now.

Jin-Woo’s trembling hand moved to the right side of his chest. He sensed the tremor there. One coming from the left, and then another coming from his right.

Ba-thump!

Two hearts were issuing exact same sounds.

His shock-filled eyes were lowered immediately, but then, he discovered four shadows on the ground, slowly growing larger. Some things were approaching him from above. His head hurriedly rose up to the skies.

And, right above his head...

Four angels with six wings each were slowly descending towards him.

The ‘memory’ lasted only up until then.

Tti-ring.

Along with that mechanical beep, darkness blinded him again.

He heard the clear, concise voice of the System as his consciousness grew further away.

[Playback of the saved data has concluded.]



Chapter 161 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Telling the Master of a Guild that best represented the Republic of Korea to show up before a rank C Gate?

When he got the call from Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol, Choi Jong-In initially wasn't feeling too pleased by its contents. He even thought about not bothering to go there personally and simply send out an assault team consisting of just a handful of higher ranked Hunters.

However, he heard the detailed explanation next, and he had no choice but to personally make the move.

'Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had entered the dual dungeon by himself?'

The dual dungeon alone was enough to draw his attention, but now, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was in there, too? How many Guild Masters, no, Hunters out there would remain aloof and unimpressed after hearing those revelations?

At Chief Woo Jin-Cheol's urgent request that emphasized time was of the essence, Choi Jong-In immediately delayed the raid they were preparing to go on and summoned the elite Hunters.

"We received a request for assistance from the Association. Looks like we will have to get involved on this one."

Hunters began whispering to each other because these people knew very well through experience, that this sort of summons only happened in extraordinary circumstances.

And the fact that the Hunters Guild had to be summoned, who were just about to raid a rank A Gate – was there a need to even mention the seriousness of the occasion?

On top of this, these Hunters also had to hear about the breaking news coming out from Japan not too long ago, so the commotion within them could only grow larger.

"Did something happen?"

The woman who possessed the second highest authority behind Choi Jong-In as the Vice-Chair of the Guild, asked her boss for clarification. He looked back at Cha Hae-In and replied.

“A dual dungeon was found within a rank C Gate.”

‘A dual dungeon?’

Cha Hae-In tilted her head in confusion.

Of course, it was not everyday one gets to hear about a dual dungeon. A dungeon found within another one – there was no way such a thing could happen all the time.

However, the Hunters Guild was being summoned because there was another dungeon attached to a measly rank C Gate? It was hard to understand from a common-sense point of view.

Choi Jong-In still got ready to move out regardless of her puzzled stare but still spoke to her to dispel her confusion.

“It sounds like Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is fighting something inside all by himself. Since it’s none other than that Chief Woo Jin-Cheol from the Association requesting us for assistance, and he sounded rather frightened out of his wits too, so... Hunter Cha? What’s the matter?”

Choi Jong-In asked her after spotting the abrupt change within her eyes.

“No, it’s nothing.”

“....Well, yeah. It’s Hunter Seong we’re talking about, so nothing serious would happen to him, but still, let’s go take a look anyway.”

Nod.

Cha Hae-In nodded her head, and other Hunters listening in on their conversation also quickly packed their gear and got ready. Their gear consisted entirely of weapons they were to use within the raid, but that didn’t mean they could be lackadaisical with their preparations.

“Uh? Why is there one person mis...”

A Hunter was taking the headcount, but someone lightly tapped on his shoulder. He looked behind to see who it was, and his colleague was pointing at a certain corner with his chin. A man with a devastated face was on his knees there.

“...Suzuki?”

“Leave him be.”

“Ah....”

That Hunter immediately understood it.

Suzuki was a Hunter who got scouted recently and left Japan for a life here

in South Korea. It was only obvious that he couldn't tear his eyes away from his smartphone that kept issuing breaking news one after the other regarding the dungeon break taking place in his home country.

“We gotta do what we gotta do. Let's get going.”

“Ah, yes.”

Two Hunters let Suzuki be and climbed aboard the Hunters Guild's private van.

And so, vehicles carrying the elites of the Hunters Guild quickly travelled towards their new destinations.

“Argh, hot, hot!!”

A reporter named Kim freaked out and hurriedly discarded the cigarette butt. The ground beneath was sand, but still, his foot stomping on the butt to kill it carried all of his bared emotions.

That lasted only for a little while, though. This was no time to waste his attention on some stupid cigarette butt.

Reporter Kim's gaze returned to the parked vans again. He thought that every single person climbing out of those vehicles looked familiar, but when he took a second look, weren't they the top elites from the Hunters Guild??

He didn't even notice that his fingers were getting burnt off while he was searching for all the famous aces in that Guild.

‘Choi Jong-In and Cha Hae-In? Yun Jeong-Ho too? Uh, uh?? Even Sohn Ki-Hoon's here?’

With these folks here, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the top faces of the Hunters had all shown up. He chased after Woo Jin-Cheol without a plan to speak of, but to think, he'd stumble into a location filled with such bigshots like this?

And, the Gate in question was only a rank C.

Reporter Kim swallowed his nervous saliva. He couldn't even begin to imagine just what was going on inside there right now.

Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol would normally let the cat out of the bag pretty easily, but even he shut his mouth tightly while saying that it was top secret. So, Kim didn't have much of a choice but to suck on one cigarette after another to soothe his anxious mind.

Indeed, butts he discarded since a while ago formed a small mound near his feet.

Woo Jin-Cheol paid no heed to Reporter Kim's longing expression and hurriedly approached Choi Jong-In. The latter couldn't tear his eyes away from that Gate, just like how the former had reacted earlier.

“What the fck...?! Dmn it...! What the hell is that thing??”

Cusses jumped out all on their own from Choi Jong-In's mouth. That was how ominous the aura emitted from the Gate was.

Unlike Woo Jin-Cheol, who possessed exceptionally good senses for a melee-type Hunter, Choi Jong-In was South Korea's most powerful Mage.

After Baek Yun-Ho and his 'Eyes of the Beast', as well as Seong Jin-Woo and his otherworldly level of sensory perception, one could confidently say that Choi Jong-In was the best in the country when it came to sensing the flow of magical energy.

“Can you do it?”

That's how Woo Jin-Cheol framed his question. Choi Jong-In didn't miss the subtext of 'It was impossible with just us' in that question.

He replied with a bitter expression.

“You said that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is inside, yes?”

“Yes, that's been confirmed.”

Nod, nod.

Choi Jong-In nodded his head gravely.

But, of course. If it wasn't him, who'd be capable enough to participate in a fight of this scale? No, who else besides him was capable of defending against an opponent that emitted this much magical energy?

“Is he trying to save this planet all by himself or something?”

He meant to say that in his head but his words still came out of his mouth in the end.

Rather than asking for the clarification, though, Woo Jin-Cheol simply nodded his head with a heavy expression. To him, that sounded quite plausible.

“Whether we can do it or not, we still need to go inside anyway. We owe a debt to Hunter Seong, after all.”

If the monsters inside were something that couldn't be stopped by the combined might of Hunter Seong and the Hunters Guild, then no one else in South Korea could stop them. Meaning, there would be no second opportunity

if they couldn't kill the monsters by aiding Hunter Seong today.

'What was that? Hunter Seong??'

Reporter Kim was standing a little further away and was doing his best to eavesdrop, but after hearing something incredible, his eyes rapidly transformed into a pair of round dots resembling those of a rabbit's.

'Hunter Seong is inside that Gate??'

Kim's shocked gaze quickly shifted towards the Gate, before scanning the vicinity around it.

There were two rank S Hunters here, and as for the number of rank As, he had already lost count. But then, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter was inside that Gate, too??

'My, my.... my memo. Where's my d*mn memo pad?!'

Reporter Kim's nose picked up on the trail of a huge scoop and hurriedly sought out his memo pad.

From this point onwards, he could not afford to miss a single word muttered nor a single event happening before him. He found himself with a god-sent opportunity to report on a massive scoop involving three rank S Hunters as well as the Association itself when everyone else was too busy with the events taking place in Japan.

'That's why Chief Woo kept his mouth shut, wasn't it?'

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's private information was a closely-guarded secret, not to mention he was a super VIP under the special supervision of the Hunter's Association.

Kim now could understand the reason why Woo Jin-Cheol was not willing to talk about what was going on here.

While Woo Jin-Cheol and Choi Jong-In were sharing a brief conversation, the elite assault team had finished getting ready. The Tankers picked up their defensive armaments, damage dealers picked up their weapons, and Healers held on to magic tools filled with magical energy.

As befitting the top Guild in the country, their preparation was quite fast.

Choi Jong-In briefly exchanged glances with Cha Hae-In and nodded his head. Cha Hae-In swept her gaze over the rest of the team once and nodded her head as well. That meant that the preparation and inspection were finished now.

The elites of the Monitoring Division had already finished their

preparations a while ago. Woo Jin-Cheol received confirmation from his subordinate and turned around to face the others with a heavy expression.

“Let’s get going.”

The passage before them was incredibly long.

They moved at the fastest speed they could afford, but they didn’t break into a full-bore running. Even if they were all nominally high-ranked Hunters, their individual running speeds were vastly different, that was why. Among them, Cha Hae-In was especially fast.

She was about to run ahead, but Choi Jong-In next to her grasped her wrist in a hurry.

“Hunter Cha. What do you think you’ll achieve by going there alone?”

“...”

He understood that she wanted to go and save Seong Jin-Woo from danger, but if she went ahead, the whole team might end up falling into grave danger, instead.

“If we try to keep up with your speed, there’s a good chance that the entire team might become disorganised, instead.”

Cha Hae-In’s expression hardened as she stood still, but eventually, she returned to the rear of the team. Woo Jin-Cheol watched her make her way back and whispered softly to himself.

“I guess the rumour was true.”

“Pardon?”

Woo Jin-Cheol mumbled some excuses out when Choi Jong-In questioned him.

“Ah... No, it’s nothing important.”

Choi Jong-In tilted his head slightly but shifted his gaze back to his front anyway. The ominous magic energy that caused goosebumps to break out on his skin was still flooding out from the deepest part of this dungeon.

He had to keep his wits about him here.

He also thought that it’d be the same story for Hunter Seong Jin-Woo who had entered in here ahead of everyone else.

‘I pray we aren’t too late....’

For the time being, there was nothing he could do to help other than pray for Hunter Seong’s safety – while moving as quickly as they could without

lowering their vigilance, of course.

However, it was also true that too much tension would in turn dull one's body, as well. In order to dispel some of this tension, he engaged Woo Jin-Cheol in a conversation.

“How did Hunter Seong come across this place, anyway?”

“I also don't know the details. But, by piecing together what the people making the reports said, it seems that Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim knew that this Gate was a dual dungeon even before entering it.”

“H-mm.”

Choi Jong-In's expression became circumspect. This time, it was Woo Jin-Cheol who asked the question.

“By any chance, can you think of something suspicious?”

“No, it's not that, but.... Just that, this feels quite strange, doesn't it?”

“Strange as in how?”

“I did some research on Seong Hunter-nim in the past, you see.”

Choi Jong-In was a Master of a huge Guild. It was his duty to build a Guild with highly capable individuals, so it was only obvious that he'd hold an extreme amount of interest towards Jin-Woo.

“There was an event similar to this, wasn't there?”

Woo Jin-Cheol did personally investigate the event Choi Jong-In was talking about so, he indeed knew a lot about that incident. He quickly figured out what the Master of Hunters Guild was trying to say here.

Less than half a year ago, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo experienced going into a dual dungeon. And now, after all this time, he sought after another one and entered it.

Those who knew this truth would not see today's event as a mere coincidence. Just like how Woo Jin-Cheol had predicted, Choi Jong-In's next words were about that.

“Experiencing dual dungeons twice by himself, when it'd be near impossible for anyone to see it once in their lifetime... Not just that, he willingly walked into the second one on his own volition? Don't you find that strange?”

Woo Jin-Cheol didn't immediately make his reply.

Just as Choi Jong-In had alluded to, many things about Hunter Seong were

shrouded in a veil of mystery. The dual dungeon. The Re-Awakened. And possessing a unique ability.

However, there was one indisputable fact, and that would be Seong Jin-Woo being utterly indispensable to the Association, no, the entire nation of South Korea.

And that was why Woo Jin-Cheol requested the Hunters Guild for their assistance without waiting for the clearance from the higher-ups when he found out that Hunter Seong had walked right into this Gate.

No matter what, they had to secure Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's safety. It'd not be too late to ask him the necessary questions afterwards.

Woo Jin-Cheol swam inside his thoughts, before raising his head.

'So, over there.....'

The distance that would have taken nearly one hour for regular Hunters to cross was bridged in less than ten minutes by the rapid marching of these high-ranked Hunters. They could finally see the end of this cave in the far off distance.

"Looks like we're here."

"Yes, I can sense it."

Indeed, they could sense something horrifyingly massive in there. Choi Jong-In's face stiffened hard as he replied. The colour of blood was slowing draining out of his complexion right now.

The only consolation he could think of right now was the fact that he could also sense Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's presence.

'As long as Hunter Seong is fine, it's okay.'

Combining his abilities with the support from these elite Hunters, they'd win regardless of what the monsters within this dungeon were like. Choi Jong-In assured himself with that line of thought and called out to the rest of the team.

"Let's hurry!"

The elite Hunters from the Hunters Guild and the Association rushed past the massive doorway reminiscent of an ancient castle.

And then....

The sight waiting for them beyond was a spectacle none of them had ever seen before during their lengthy and illustrious careers as Hunters.

“This... What on earth is this....?”

“What the hell is this place?!”

First, they found innumerable destroyed stone statues strewn about the floor. Their debris was piling up into small hills all over the place.

“Look, look!!!”

One of the Hunters raised his finger high up.

And in the direction his finger was pointing at, everyone could see a truly gigantic statue of an unknown god standing frozen still, its hands interlocked in the gesture of slamming down. Its head, with half of its face blown away, especially caught their attention.

Woo Jin-Cheol’s heart began racing like crazy as he remembered the testimonies of the survivors from the previous dual dungeon incident.

‘It was all real... the god statue and the stone statues were all real...!!’

The survivors all said the same thing – that this place was filled with a monstrous god statue that could melt down a rank C Hunter with nothing but a glare from its eyes, as well as countless stone statues whose movements couldn’t be picked up by the naked eye.

This whole open area was pockmarked with clear signs of desperate battle having taken place recently.

‘Wait a minute. Where is Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?’

It looked as if all the enemies had been eliminated already. Their priority was to confirm the status of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.

Choi Jong-In shifted his head this way and that to locate Jin-Woo’s presence, and eventually found him.

“He’s over there.”

Jin-Woo was quietly lying on his back just below the god statue as if he was asleep.

“Seong Hunter-nim!!”

Hunters were about to run to his side, but this time, it was Cha Hae-In’s turn to raise both of her arms to stop them in their treks. Feeling urgent now, Woo Jin-Cheol turned to look at her.

Her rather shapely facial features were soaked completely from cold sweat right now.

“Cha..... Hunter-nim??”

She bit her lower lip and spoke up.

“Over there... there’s something over there.”

It was then. A certain stone statue kneeling next to Jin-Woo slowly stood up. The wings on its back were all torn up, and it only had one remaining arm.

“I don’t remember inviting you humans in here.”

The angel statue stood up completely and swept its gaze over at the Hunters intruding into the temple. The corner of its lips suddenly arched up.



Chapter 162 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Ah....”

They all became utterly speechless. There could not have been a more fitting description than that.

Choi Jung-Hoon forgot what he wanted to say. But, he was certain of something. The origin of that ominous energy he sensed before entering this Gate was that living sculpture.

The magic energy leaking out of that thing was so great that the space surrounding the d*mn creature seemed to twist around in his view.

He was simply staring at it from far away, yet goosebumps were breaking out on his entire body.

Glance.

His gaze was redirected towards Jin-Woo.

It made some sense to see someone as strong as Hunter Seong lying unconscious if he had been in a battle against a ‘thing’ like that.

No, hold on.

Fighting against such a ‘thing’ while also finding enough leeway to destroy all these other enemies – the stone statues – was only possible precisely because it was Hunter Seong Jin-Woo and not someone else.

He felt nothing but admiration in his heart. However....

‘It’s our turn to fight against such an opponent now.’

A thick drop of sweat slid down the side of his face and stopped on his chin.

The strength of this one monster easily exceeded that of the mutated ant that appeared on Jeju Island. No, it was unknown whether this enemy was really a monster or not, to begin with.

Gulp.

His dry saliva painfully slid down his throat.

Choi Jong-In glanced to his side and found that the complexions of Cha

Hae-In and Woo Jin-Cheol were utterly pale from fright as well. These two had also figured out the depths of the enemy's power and were in the middle of inwardly freaking out.

On the other hand, the Hunters behind them were getting surprised by something else entirely.

“That thing... did that thing just speak??”

“Wait, I didn't hear incorrectly just now, did I?”

“A monster can speak our language?”

Hunters exchanged glances with one another, their faces filled with incredulity. Something like this seemed impossible.

It was already public knowledge that the monsters with intelligence spoke the language of their own.

Back when these Gates began appearing for the first time, some tried to learn the language of the monsters. Of course, their attempts all ended in failure.

The sole reason for that was the violent tendencies of the monsters. Monsters captured alive through great difficulties couldn't seem to endure being around humans the longer they remained in contact.

Even if their entire bodies were restrained, they tried to rampage around trying to attack humans - even when under the intense pain of their flesh being ripped apart and their bones snapping in half. In the end, either they were killed off by their human captors, or died naturally after being unable to win against the tides of their rage.

This was the unanimous conclusion reached by the scientists researching monsters from all over the globe, one they were completely certain of.

However, the monster in front of their eyes was speaking in Korean as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

A monster that could be seen as the find of the century had made its entrance, but for some reason, these Hunters all felt this inexplicable sense of dread in their hearts.

That was the warning bell rung by the primal instinct only detectable by the first-class Hunters such as these people.

Flinch.

The angel statue took one step forward, causing the trembling Hunters to hurriedly back away. The creature slowly shifted its gaze left to right as if to

appreciate the sight of these humans and their expressions of fear and terror.

“Oh, strong humans.”

The statue spoke up as it began looking at the Hunters with the eyes of someone finding a delicious snack.

“It seems that there are no shortages for the first sacrifices prepared for the king.”

If a snake could smile, would that be as disgusting as the one on this creature? The movements of the Hunters froze stiff from the smile forming on the angel statue’s face.

‘...The king?’

Could there have been yet another monster here?

Choi Jong-In’s head slanted to the side briefly, but too bad for him, now wasn’t the time to dissect what the monster was saying.

The angel statue ripped up the arm of one of the stone statues strewn about on the floor.

Crack!!

‘What is it trying to do?’

Hunters and their confusion didn’t last for long. It placed the torn arm in its right shoulder socket that was already missing a limb, and the two parts suddenly began fusing by themselves.

‘Heok...!’

As the Hunters gasped out in astonishment, the angel statue moved the newly-regenerated arm around this way and that. It was then.

Shooph.

The statue suddenly appeared before the Hunters. They didn’t even have any time to respond. The angel statue took a swing with its right arm. The face of the Hunter standing in front of the group was crushed inward.

Peo-geok!!

The Hunter and his crushed face flew backwards and slammed into the wall. Other Hunters nearby threw out urgent counterattacks, but by then, the angel statue was already gone.

“Where...?!”

“Over there!!”

The creature was now standing on the same spot as before as if it never made a move in the first place. As a matter of fact, it was busy fidgeting with its newly-attached right hand and its fingers. It looked like it was testing out whether its new limb was functioning properly or not.

“M-Myung-Cheol-ah!!”

“Euh, uwaaaahh!!”

Hunters belatedly discovered the casualty among them and began crying out in anguish. He was killed instantly. A rank A Tanker working for South Korea’s best Guild had died in a single hit.

Choi Jong-In’s eyes as he stared at the angel statue began shaking unsteadily now.

‘Hunter Seong Jin-Woo fought against such a thing all by himself...?’

Rather than the pain of losing one of his comrades, his mind was overcome with this hopeless sense of vagueness at not knowing how to break out of the current situation.

Unfortunately, not everyone was capable of rational thought process like Choi Jong-In.

“You son of a b*tch!!”

One of the female Hunters, the lover of the deceased Hunter, screamed out and dashed forward in anger. A pair of flames were burning brightly in both of her hands as she did so.

Just as she was about to launch those flames, someone grabbed her wrists from behind. The female Hunter looked to her side and discovered that Cha Hae-In had approached her before she noticed it. The female Hunter shook her arm and yelled out.

“Let me go!”

“Unni, you must hold it back.”

“I said, let go of me, right now!!”

“Please, you gotta hold it back!”

The female Hunter glared straight at Cha Hae-In’s face. The latter carried a grave but determined expression as she bit her lower lip.

“I’m also holding back, you know....”

Cha Hae-In’s hardened expression caused the female Hunter to stop writhing around in anger. Because... even she knew it was unwise to agitate a

monster that no longer showed any interest in their group after making that initial attack.

It was just that, she found it nearly impossible to hold herself back. Someone she loved was met with a horrific death, yet she was unable to do anything. The female Hunter began sobbing under her breath.

“Heuk....”

Once she stopped displaying hints of making a rash decision, Cha Hae-In shifted her attention over to Jin-Woo lying on the ground far away. The female Hunter wasn't the only one holding herself back, indeed.

For some reason, the monster had stopped attacking the group. And Jin-Woo looked unhurt as he continued to breathe normally. His expression was peaceful, as if he was simply asleep right now.

‘For now...’

....She and others had to buy as much time as possible until Jin-Woo woke up. That was the best they could do.

It was then.

The angel statue moved its body this way and that before laughter abruptly broke out from its lips.

“Haha.”

The empty interior of the underground temple was suddenly filled up with the echoes of the angel statue's voice. It kept its laughter short and shifted its gaze over to the Hunters.

“Well now, should I get the fun started?”

The colour of the angel statue's eyes suddenly reddened up.

Was that the beginning of the assault? The Hunters strengthened their grips on their chosen weapons and prepared for battle.

If it was only one... if it was only one enemy, couldn't they be able to do something here? Not only did they have two rank S Hunters present, but there were also dozens of top local Hunters gathered here at the moment, too.

As such an optimistic outlook quickly raced past the minds of the Hunters, this happened.

Dudududududuk.

Suddenly, an earthquake broke out inside this huge, open chamber.

“Ah.... No, this can't be....”

The dark shadow of despair drew upon the faces of the Hunters. The broken stone statues were beginning to stand up one by one, that was why.

The b*stards without heads, b*stards with holes in their chests, and even b*stards with limbs missing all began standing up. But the absolute worst among them all was the statue of the unknown god that could only be described as truly gigantic.

“...Oh, my god.”

The god statue and the stone statues were standing upright and glaring at the Hunters as if they had never been destroyed in the first place. Their expressionless faces only made the already creepy atmosphere that much more bizarre.

Hunters began to backtrack a step at a time, only to run into something solid behind their backs.

“Uh...?”

It was the door.

Even before they had realised it, the doorway to this once-empty arena was closed shut tightly. It seemed that the angel statue had no thoughts of letting these humans go at all.

The angel statue spoke to them.

“Those who manage to survive until all of my dolls have fallen will be given the opportunity to witness the glorious rebirth of the king.”

The monster kept saying ‘king’ this and ‘king’ that for a while now.

‘Just what is it trying to say here?’

Woo Jin-Cheol’s brows creased up.

He just couldn’t understand the words the creature was busy spewing out. However, one thing was for certain. He knew that this creature was trying to kill everyone within the chamber.

He gritted his teeth.

He spent the last four years of his life in the Association.

He had faced plenty of hair-raising situations, but still managed to pull through by bitterly struggling till the end. Today would not be any different. He wasn’t planning to die as easily as the monster wanted him to.

‘Even I can’t make it out of here....’

At least, he’d try to save Hunter Seong.

His thoughts reached there and he glanced at Jin-Woo. Rather coincidentally, the angel statue also pointed at the youth lying unmoving on the ground.

“This person was able to destroy all my puppets in less than five minutes.”

The pointed finger of the angel statue was then locked onto the rest of the Hunters.

“How many minutes will it take for all of you to die today, then?”

Just as the words of the angel statue came to an end, Woo Jin-Cheol cried out at the top of his lungs.

“Everyone, get down!!”

Hunters hurriedly bent down to the ground.

A red laser beam sliced right past just above their heads with almost no gap to spare. The casualty was zero this time. It was almost a miracle in and of itself.

The red energy beam shooting out from the eyes of the god statue slowly dissipated.

‘Ho-oh.’

The angel statue stared at the Hunters with eyes of some interest as it took a step back. It seemed that these humans might be able to provide some fun distraction before the king awakens.

“Pant, pant, pant.”

Woo Jin-Cheol panted out heavily. Cold sweat poured out from his pores.

If he hadn't heard about the special trait of the god statue beforehand, would he be able to survive that blast? His entire body shuddered from sheer horror. Still, they managed to somehow live through the first attack.

Of course, that wasn't the end.

‘No, it's merely the beginning.’

Woo Jin-Cheol raised his head.

The stone statues were rushing towards them now. They were so quick that only the high-ranked melee-type Hunters would be capable of following their movements.

Fortunately, Woo Jin-Cheol was one of the very best within the rank A Hunters. He rose up from his spot in an instant and while rotating his waist,

sent out a powerful punch. The specially-constructed glove slammed hard into the face of a stone statue.

Boom!!

Woo Jin-Cheol's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets.

'...??'

He genuinely believed that one punch would be enough. However, the stone statue was unscathed.

Because he saw that one of this statue's shoulders was completely destroyed from an unknown attack, he ended up making a mistake on his enemy's durability. It was a gaffe he shouldn't have made when thinking back to just who it was that destroyed all these statues in the first place.

The stone statue's face was pushed back only by a little bit, but it recovered from the impact force almost right away and thrust forward the sword in its hand.

'Tsk.'

Woo Jin-Cheol inwardly clicked his tongue.

He threw that punch out without taking into consideration the possible counterattack so he was unable to dodge. Besides, the enemy wasn't slow enough for him to evade at such a close distance, anyway.

But, then.

Ka-boom!!

A powerful explosion wrapped the statue up and it flew away.

Woo Jin-Cheol frowned and shook his head hard to recover from the buzzing sensation in his ears. Only then did he get to hear the voice coming from his side.

"Are you alright??"

It was none other than the 'ultimate weapon', Choi Jong-In. Woo Jin-Cheol nodded once to express his gratitude. They simply didn't have enough time to leisurely share a conversation.

Boom!!

Because, the god statue began moving in earnest, and...

Dudududu-!!

...And, the stone statues had already arrived right before their noses by

then.

“Chairman Choi!! Aggro skills don’t work against these things!!”

Tankers loudly cried out.

“What was that??”

Choi Jong-In’s expression hardened considerably. If the aggro skills didn’t work on them, then these creatures would instinctively start targetting the physically weakest Hunters present.

If the Healers were killed off first, then their line of defence would collapse in no time at all. It was nigh impossible for them to fight against powerful enemies without some sort of a defensive line to back them up.

Not only that....

Right behind these d*mn stone statues, the massive god statue was now raising its equally massive fist as well.

‘Can we really get out of this place alive?’

Their situation was despairingly critical.

However, he still could think of one final method. And that would be waking up the unconscious Hunter Seong.

The angel sculpture b*stard said it, didn’t it?

‘That thing said that Hunter Seong was able to destroy them all by himself. In less than five minutes, too.’

Their situation could change greatly if his guess was correct and the only reason why Hunter Seong lost to the angel statue was that he became too fatigued from destroying all these stone statues.

Indeed, weren’t there dozens of first-class Hunters present here that could aid Hunter Seong right now?

That is why....

‘I need to wake up Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.’

Flames alighted on Choi Jong-In’s hands. It was not for nothing that he was called the ‘ultimate weapon’. Not only his firepower, but even his accuracy didn’t lose out to any of the modern firearms.

It was now ‘sink or swim’ time.

Choi Jong-In fired the magic he cast in Jin-Woo’s direction.

Hunter Seong might experience some discomfort, but he wasn’t weak

enough to get injured greatly by this level of magic. But, if he did wake up from the impact of the explosion, then the human Hunters would stand a good chance of surviving this event.

‘That is why, please...!’

The flames flew towards their target while leaving behind a long trail. However....

Boom!

The flames simply exploded on the torso of the angel statue that stepped into the trajectory in the blink of an eye.

‘....??’

Choi Jong-In was greatly taken by surprise from the unexpected interference from the angel statue and hurriedly raised his head.

Every muscle on the face of the angel was distorted unsightly until they couldn’t be twisted any further to form a truly terrifying expression.

“How dare.....”

For the first time ever, the angel statue stopped smiling and bared its fangs.

“How dare you try to interrupt the slumber of the king!?”



Chapter 163 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The king? Who was?

Choi Jong-In couldn't even begin to figure out heads or tails of what the angel statue was saying and asked back in a daze.

“What did you just say....?”

However, the angel statue didn't reply.

Would a human bother to converse with insects? The same principle applied to the angel statue, too.

For now, it simply had to assume this form due to some unavoidable circumstances, but it was still a superior creature nonetheless. It had no thoughts of having a Q&A session with this insignificant human being.

If an insect proved to be annoying, swat it to death and that would be the end of it.

The angel statue raised its fist up in the air and smashed it down like a hammer. It descended at a super-high speed straight towards Choi Jong-In's head.

Swish-!!

Choi Jong-In's heart tumbled down to the pit of his stomach. However, he didn't turn his head away. Do not give up, right up until the very last moment – that was what he always told his teammates, after all.

Before the fist landed on top of his head, though, a flash of light streaked past his eyes.

Boom!!

He opened his eyes to see the blade made out of pure light wavering in front of his face. Choi Jong-In's eyes went extra round.

“Hunter Cha?!”

Cha Hae-In was standing there, blocking the angel statue's fist with the skill 'Blade of Light'. If she was late even by a millisecond, Choi Jong-In's head would have been splattered into a gooey mess.

While he inwardly breathed a sigh of relief, she spoke to him in no

uncertain terms.

“I’ll take over from here, so please go help out other Hunters, Chairman.”

“Got it.”

Choi Jong-In went away and began providing support to other Hunters busy battling the stone statues. Meanwhile, the angel statue stared down at Cha Hae-In’s sword, now glowing with light, and its eyes quickly filled up with curiosity.

“Haha.”

To think, there was yet another human besides Jin-Woo that could block its attack.

“You are very amusing. Very amusing, indeed.”

The angel statue put more strength into its fist. Cha Hae-In’s knees bent down slightly. She had managed to stop its attacks, but still, she was losing out in terms of raw strength.

“Euh-euhk....”

A thin, weak moan leaked out of her finely-shaped lips. Her wrists began trembling imperceptibly, as well.

“There, there.”

The angel statue smirked derisively and applied more and more power as if it was turning up the heat on the stove. The ground beneath her feet shattered and cracks spread out on the stone surface.

Just a single arm, yet it was laden with a nonsensical amount of power already. Cha Hae-In bit her lower lip.

‘At this rate... I won’t be able to endure it.’

She determined that she’d not be able to last long at this rate, and focused all of her strength in an instant and forced the angel statue’s fist back.

As expected of the explosive strength befitting Cha Hae-In, ranked as one of the very best even among the rank S Hunters!

The angel statue smiled again as it was forced to take a step back.

“Haha.”

It considered her as a simple fun distraction, yet she managed to entertain the statue beyond its initial expectations. It seemed that there was more enjoyment to derive out of this human after all.

“Very good, very good.”

This time, magic energy began pooling on both hands of the angel statue.

Gulp.

Cha Hae-In swallowed down her dry saliva. An immense level of power was oozing out from the clenched fists of the angel statue. She wanted to escape from this place if that was at all possible right now. That’s how scared she felt.

‘However....’

With Jin-Woo lying on the ground unconscious, there would be no one capable enough to face off against this monster if she were to turn her back and run.

Her glare became even sharper than before.

In complete contrast to her, the angel statue grinned carefreely and took a large stride forward to stand before her. The huge enemy nearly three metres tall kept forming that loose grin. And then, the b*stard’s attacks commenced for real.

Just like what it did against Jin-Woo, the angel statue punched out indiscriminately with both of its fists. It was somewhat regretful that it now had only two arms, but that was still more than enough for the level of this human.

The clenched fists rained down like a barrage of bullets.

Dududududu-!!

Cha Hae-In’s brows shot high up.

‘Sword Dance!’

Her movements quickened up significantly as if she was performing a dance, and her sword drew stylish arcs in the air. Unfortunately, the punches of the angel statue were far too quick and, instead of attacking back, she could only defend herself desperately.

The flurry of fatal attacks rained down on her constantly, with each one powerful enough to kill her if she made just one mistake.

Khang! Ka-gang!! Khang!! Khang! Khang! Khahang! Ka-gang! Khang, kahng! Khang! Ka-gang! Khang! Khang! Khahang! Khang!

“That’s right. Right, like that. Haha.”

The angel statue was really enjoying itself as it continuously poured out the

types of attacks that regular Hunters would never be able to follow with their naked eyes.

Cha Hae-In was being pushed back bit by bit, her entire body soaked in sweat.

Was that why? Or did she finally reach her limit?

Her wet hands slipped and she missed one of the attacks from the angel statue. It was a painful mistake on her part. Her sword failed to deflect the punch, and it hit her on the shoulder before sliding past her altogether.

Pah-gahk!!

“...!!”

Cha Hae-In quickly retreated while gritting her teeth. Unfortunately, her bones must've broke, because she couldn't feel anything from her shoulder.

And so, she lost her left hand in that fashion. She looked at her limp left arm with a dismayed, regretful gaze.

“Haha. So, is that all? Is that as far as you can go?”

The angel statue rapidly closed the distance again. The b*stard didn't even give her a small break. The attacks that were briefly paused for a moment or two, rained down on her again.

Khang! Ka-gang! Khahang!!

She had trouble defending against these attacks when both of her arms were still functioning. Therefore, having only one arm was simply not going to be enough. She missed more and more attacks and gradually, her body got destroyed.

Puhk! Puh-buck! Puhk!

Her bones broke, and her flesh tore away. And then, the deciding blow landed on her.

Puhk!!

The angel statue's fist dug deep into her lower belly, and her feet left the ground. She coughed out a mouthful of blood.

“Keok!”

Her bent figure rose up in the air.

Obviously, her movements in the air would be restricted, and her preparation to deal with the next attack would be left incomplete.

The angel statue had finally lost its interest with the broken toy at this point.

To finish the proceedings off, the angel statue approached the woman falling head first to the floor. It straightened its hand into a blade and took aim at her chest.

But then....

A wave of blue light suddenly surged out and enveloped Cha Hae-In.

She suddenly opened her eyes wide in the midst of powerlessly falling to the floor. She rotated her body once and swung her sword, hard.

Flinch.

The angel statue quickly came to a stop and leaned its head back, but the tip of the blade still managed to brush past its brow.

Slice.

A thin line was drawn on the face of the angel statue.

Taht!

Finally succeeding in landing a single counterattack, Cha Hae-In regained her balance with some difficulty and landed back on the ground. Thanks to that timely healing spell, she was able to somehow get out of that really sticky situation.

She got really lucky on that one.

However, what was a fortunate event for Cha Hae-In didn't prove to be as fortunate for everyone else.

Swish!

The angel statue's head swivelled in the direction where that healing spell came in from.

'D*mn it!'

Cha Hae-In quickly looked at the Healer and cried out.

"Get away from there!"

The main Healer standing behind the Tankers and casting various healing magic spells until then heard her cries and flinched grandly.

"Pardon me?"

But, by the time he looked to where Cha Hae-In was, the angel statue was blocking his line of sight already.

“Ah....”

The mouth of the main Healer went slack.

The angel statue unhesitatingly did what it wanted to do to Choi Jong-In earlier.

BOOM!

The Healer’s head was smashed down straight into the ground. His legs quivered and trembled for a short while, before ceasing their movements altogether.

“Oh god, no!!”

The Hunters surrounded the angel statue and pounced at their enemy while not even bothering to hide their rage. Unfortunately, they were going up against an impossible force. Their measly strength couldn’t defeat the angel statue.

Pow, pow!!

Every time the angel statue threw a punch, rank A Hunters died powerlessly as if they were low ranked Hunters standing before a powerful monster.

“This is no fun. This is boring, humans.”

Now that the fun time was over, this superior being didn’t feel the need for mercy anymore.

Once the number of Hunters standing towards the rear decreased, the line of Tankers dealing with the god statue as well as the stone statues began collapsing in no time at all.

It was pure pandemonium.

The balance of the engagement broke down in an instant.

Boom!!

The god statue avoided the Tankers and slammed its huge fist down, resulting in the immediate death of two Hunters on the ground.

Afterwards, stone statues carrying weapons surrounded the Hunters with a scary efficiency and began rushing forward.

‘God d*mn it....!!’

Cha Hae-In rapidly cut down four of the stone statues persistently sticking close to the Hunters and pounced on the angel statue. No matter what, this b*stard had to be stopped.

However, the angel statue lightly blocked her descending sword with its wrist and kicked her unguarded side.

SLAM-!!

Now that the angel statue decided to get serious, she too could no longer be considered its opponent anymore.

Having witnessed Cha Hae-In fly away helplessly like that, Choi Jong-In tightly grasped the shoulder of Woo Jin-Cheol next to him. The latter had just finished pounding one of the stone statues down to the ground and quickly looked behind him in surprise.

“I’ll try to gather their attention to myself. Chief Woo, you go and wake up Hunter Seong. That’s the only way.”

“Excuse me? But, I thought Seong Hunter-nim is unconscious because he was defeated?”

“No, he’s not. He’s simply asleep. Both his breathing and the flow of magic energy are stable. The way I see it, he’s not injured, either.”

Could it be that he got done in by sleeping magic or some such?

Choi Jong-In thought that the reason for the angel statue not allowing any attack to fall on the sleeping Hunter Seong was probably because it didn’t want the youth to wake up.

‘I don’t know anything about this king’s sleep or that, but....’

Choi Jong-In recalled the angel statue desperately moving to ‘protect’ Hunter Seong. Without a doubt, the youth waking up would prove to be somehow fatal to the monster.

“Hurry!”

Woo Jin-Cheol nodded his head.

Meanwhile, Choi Jong-In roused up every ounce of magic energy he possessed.

Soon, a giant circular shaped mass of flames formed on top of his hand, and it began spitting out countless sparks to all over the place.

Each of these sparks flying in a straight line caused powerful explosions to resound out every time it touched an object.

Swish-!! Swish-!!!

Boom!! Ka-boom!! Boom!! Kwa-boom!!

Naturally, the attention of the stone statues was directed on Choi Jong-In.

While he was buying time in this fashion, Woo Jin-Cheol hurriedly ran to where Jin-Woo was.

He prayed that Choi Jong-In's estimation wasn't off the mark.

Just as Choi Jong-In and Woo Jin-Cheol were doing their best to wake Jin-Woo up, the angel statue stood before Cha Hae-In as she lay on the ground while panting heavily non-stop.

Every rib bone on one side of her body got broken when she was kicked just now. She still tried to reach out and grasp the sword she had dropped. However, the angel statue stepped on her arm before that happened.

Kwajeeck!

“Aaaaahk!!”

Cha Hae-In grabbed her broken arm and screamed out.

The angel statue had already killed off all those humans possessing the ability to heal others, and this woman had received a grievous wound that disabled her from fighting anymore.

This was the moment that the lone threat among the humans had been eliminated.

“Haha.”

The angel statue formed a blade with its hand again.

“This is the end, then.”

The human female glared at the statue, her breathing still rough and heavy. Everything was indeed over, yet she didn't show one hint of giving up on her struggle here.

She certainly resembled that man in this regard. That man named Seong Jin-Woo. When the angel statue met that man for the first time, he too carried around those eyes.

Smirk.

The corner of the angel statue's lips arched up, and it thrust its hand at Cha Hae-In's chest. No, it tried to. It had to stay its hand just before piercing into her heart.

The angel statue flinched slightly and took a step back. Because... it only now discovered that there was a lone Shadow Soldier hiding in her shadow.

Because of the rule in this chamber, that soldier couldn't come out of her shadow, but regardless, its existence was not in question.

Seeing the surprised face of the angel statue, Cha Hae-In formed a puzzled expression of her own.

‘.....??’

That b*stard could’ve ended her at any time it wanted to, yet now, it looked like it was hesitating somewhat.

Indeed, she was correct. The angel statue was really hesitating right now. This was a human that the king had chosen to plant a soldier within her shadow. Did he have a special plan for her?

Of course, there was a possibility that the human did this, not the king.

However....

‘Without a doubt – the king and the human are currently mixed as one, although it is only by a small amount.’

In that case, how was the statue to know whether this action was from the will of the king or from the will of the human? If the king had a plan and planted the Shadow Soldier in her, then the statue knew it couldn’t carelessly touch her.

That was why the angel statue asked the human female.

“Why did you come here?”

“....”

Cha Hae-In didn’t reply. When the silence deepened, the angel statue decided to change the question.

“What is your relationship with Seong Jin-Woo?”

“....”

There was no reply from her, still.

Cha Hae-In knew very well that she had no obligation to answer her enemy’s questions.

At this rate, it’d be impossible to make her talk. The angel statue figured as much, thus deciding to change its tactic.

Snap.

The angel statue snapped its fingers. And that brought about the immediate stop to the screams of the Hunters.

As if the god statue and the stone statues had received a command, they stopped fighting all at once and slowly turned around, before walking to one

side of the chamber. Then, the angel statue extended its hand.

Woo Jin-Cheol, busy approaching Jin-Woo, was pushed down by the 'invisible hand' and got planted on the ground.

“Keu-heuk!”

He tried his best to resist against the power pressing down on him from above, but he couldn't even move an inch. Woo Jin-Cheol's tightly-clenched fist trembled noticeably as pained moans escaped from his lips.

The angel statue pulled its hand back.

It didn't miss a single movement taking place within the chamber. No matter how much these humans struggled, they were all trapped within its palm, anyway. That was the difference between the superior existence and these measly humans.

It was almost impossible to bridge that gap.

“I shall ask again.”

The tip of the angel statue's finger now pointed at Woo Jin-Cheol.

“If you do not answer me this time, I shall kill that man, as well as every single one of your comrades.”

“...Fine.”

Cha Hae-In nodded her head.

If she could buy more time this way then that alone was already a good result. The angel statue stared at her as she forced her upper torso up, and quietly asked her.

“What is your relationship with Seong Jin-Woo?”

“...A friend.”

“And, why did you come here?”

She thought for a little while, before making her answer.

“To save Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

After hearing that answer, a deep smile formed on the face of the angel statue. Just who was saving who now?

The statue was sure of it. These humans had no idea what was going on.

It felt embarrassed for even suspecting that the king had a plan for her. No, these humans only knew about the human 'Seong Jin-Woo', and that's why they came knocking in this place.

The angel statue could no longer hold back and began guffawing out loudly. And then, it spoke to her.

“I shall bless you with an opportunity.”

“...What opportunity?”

“Today, in this place, one of the noble Sovereigns shall descend upon this world. I shall bless you with an opportunity to witness this glorious moment in history.”

Until the angel statue could confirm the intention of the king, it couldn't do anything to Cha Hae-In. So, it had to keep her alive. However, she was the sole exception and it didn't plan on letting other humans live.

“But, every other human beside you....”

The smile was gone from the face of the angel statue, and its expression became incredibly murderous.

“...Will die here today.”

Indeed, it wouldn't do for all these uninvited pests to be present in this glorious moment, would it? However, the reply didn't come from the front but from the back, instead.

“Says who?”

“.....?”

Before the angel statue could even turn around, a fist flew in and punched its face, hard.

Ka-boom!

The statue flew away and crashed into the far wall.

BOOM!!

Cracks ran against the surface of the wall from the sheer impact force and rubble tumbled down to the floor. Just before the angel statue could slide down to the ground, Jin-Woo stood before the creature. He tightly grasped its neck and growled at it.

“You.”

Jin-Woo's other hand was pressing against his right chest.

Indeed, he wasn't dreaming of it.

There was one more heart beating away within the right side of his chest. Jin-Woo clenched the neck of the statue even harder and asked.

“What the hell did you do to my body?”



Chapter 164 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

For a moment then, within the recalled data, Jin-Woo had become THE Shadow Sovereign. And that's when he realised it.

He realised that there was another heart of magical energy beating within his chest. He felt powerful surges of energy ceaselessly flowing out from this new heart.

Could he have made a mistake? It was rather easy to confirm the truth, actually.

'Status Window.'

While keeping his hand firmly locked around the angel statue's neck, he summoned his Status Window. What he wanted to see out of the many listed values in there was his current reserves of magic energy, which the System had designated as 'Mana Points' or 'MP'.

[MP: 109,433]

Jin-Woo's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets.

'Over one hundred grand?!'

He confirmed the truth with his own two eyes, yet he still couldn't believe it. The last time he checked, he definitely only had around nine thousand or so. He confirmed it before arriving here, so he couldn't have made an error on that one.

But now, it was over ten times greater?

However, that wasn't the only surprising thing he discovered.

'My Title has changed?'

As if to let him know of a big change that had taken place, the 'Title' column was blinking continuously. He didn't even change his Title, yet it had been swapped out to something else.

And the new Title was 'Demon Hunter'.

He had been putting this Title in the background because its information was hidden from him until now. Jin-Woo quickly confirmed its newly unveiled info.

[Title: Demon Hunter]

'You have satisfied its requirements.'

You have recovered the memories of defeating the King of Demons, Baran, Sovereign of the White Flames. An immense power has acknowledged the Player as its new owner.

Effect 'Black Heart': Additional MP +100,000

'Black Heart!!'

This here was the reason why his MP reserves had shot up to a nonsensical degree.

Additional MP of one hundred thousand – that was enough power to regenerate his Shadow Soldiers almost infinitely.

Abruptly, Jin-Woo recalled the sight of the Shadow Sovereign from the recalled data. The beings that fought against the silver soldiers blotting out the entire sky were part of the immortal army led by that person.

They went through an endless cycle of destruction and revival while managing to gradually overwhelm their enemies.

The silver soldiers, strong enough to easily suppress roughly the same amount of monsters, couldn't endure against the regenerative abilities of the Shadow Soldiers and, in the end, were forced into retreat.

If it weren't for the timely arrival of the reinforcements, those silver soldiers would not have avoided the fate of being annihilated. And that was all due to the bottomless amount of magic energy the Shadow Sovereign from the data had possessed.

'If that's the case....'

'...As long as I have the effect of this 'Black Heart', then my own Shadow Soldiers can become the immortal army, too...'

When his thoughts reached that far, Jin-Woo's entire body shuddered from the shock.

"But how..... can you be....??"

Jin-Woo raised his head. A trembling voice was leaking out of the angel statue's mouth.

For the first time ever, Jin-Woo saw another expression besides that disgusting smile or the one of anger from this statue's face. The emotion revealed by its new expression was clearly fear.

The angel statue looked at Jin-Woo with true fear and spoke as if it couldn't believe what had happened.

“How can you still retain your former ego, even with the Black Heart beating within you?!”

‘What was that??’

Jin-Woo heard the creature's mutterings and quickly realised two important things.

One, the angel statue was definitely not responsible for this 'Black Heart' appearing within his body. Two, the result of it waking up within him shouldn't have ended well for him.

Crack!

Jin-Woo strengthened his grip on the angel statue's neck, and deep cracks formed on its neck.

“Keu-heuk!!”

The face of the angel statue distorted in pain.

“What is this ‘Player’ thing? What were you trying to do to me?”

Jin-Woo didn't lower his vigilance, so he could shatter this thing's neck at any given moment. However, it seemed that the angel statue wasn't of the right mind to provide an answer.

“Could it be....?! Y-you, you d*mn Shadow Sovereign, you dare to... against us....!! You think other Sovereigns will take this lying down?!”

The angel statue glared at Jin-Woo and kept muttering out some nonsense.

Crack!!

Jin-Woo's fingers dug quite deep into the angel statue's neck. If he simply pulled his fingers back, the creature's neck would shatter into pieces. The enormous pain was transmitted in full to its real body somewhere.

“Keuaaahk!!”

The angel statue screamed to the high heavens.

“Answer my questions.”

That was why he went ahead and gained the right to ask for the result of the test. So, it was only right that he demanded the promised rewards be handed over.

At that time, red lights flashed from the angel statue's eyes.

“Heok?!”

“What’s this??”

Jin-Woo heard the Hunters’ shocked cries and looked behind him.

“T-those things!!”

“They’re coming back!!”

Red lights were burning within the eyes of the god statue and the stone statues that were moved to one corner of the chamber. And then, they began moving again.

“Haha.”

The angel statue guffawed out loudly.

“If you kill me, no one will be able to stop my dolls.”

‘So, can you really kill me now?’ The angel statue glared at Jin-Woo with eyes that screamed that question at him.

Inferior beings possessed far too many weak points. Since this man was also human, this would be one of his weaknesses, too. Without a doubt, he’d have the so-called friends among those humans. However, quite different from the angel statue’s expectation, Jin-Woo suddenly formed a smile.

‘He’s... smiling?’

Jin-Woo asked the dazed statue.

“So, what will happen if I kill you first, and then destroy those dolls afterwards?”

The angel statue hurriedly replied in a panic.

“If you kill me, the architect of the System....!”

“You know, I also thought about that.”

Jin-Woo cut the words of the angel statue off. The look in his eyes was rather similar to what the statue had when it was looking at the human Hunters earlier on.

“Here’s the thing. Just because the guy who created the System disappears, that doesn’t mean the System will suddenly start breaking down, does it?”

The bluff was called.

This human already knew the truth that the angel statue deliberately failed to mention.

This was a serious miscalculation on the angel statue's part. It had forgotten with what criteria this particular human being had been selected in the first place. This man, even in the past, was capable of seeing through the set rules.

'If that's the case, you've forced my hand!'

The angel statue activated the final hand it possessed.

Tti-ring!

[System has denied the System Administrator's access.]

[System has denied the System Administrator's access.]

[System has denied the System Administrator's access.]

Tti-ring! Tti-ring!!

Several more mechanical beeps rang in his head. The exact same Message repeated itself again and again, however.

[System has denied the System Administrator's access.]

The face of the angel statue hardened considerably.

It attempted to use the System and do something to Jin-Woo, but unfortunately, even the System itself had turned its back on the creature.

Jin-Woo shrugged his shoulders, causing the angel statue to go berserk in rage.

"Uwaaaahk!! You b*stard!"

If this thing wasn't going to answer, then....

'...Then, no point in keeping you alive.'

Jin-Woo let go of the angel statue's neck, but at the same time, injected magical energy to his left fist and punched out.

KABOOM!!

The immense impact force broke past the angel statue and left behind a massive crater on the wall behind it.

Guoooooh....

For a moment there, silence filled the surroundings.

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

Jin-Woo bestowed an appropriate level of punishment to the angel statue that tried to use him.

Not just its head, but the entirety of its upper torso had been obliterated.

What remained of the creature slid down against the wall and sunk to the ground.

‘It’s a bit regretful that I didn’t get to hear any answers, but...’

But, this thing was trying to deceive him from the get-go, anyway. Could he be able to believe anything such a creature told him?

‘With this, it’s done.’

As if he was shaking off the regret, Jin-Woo lightly shook the dust off his left hand. It was at this moment that he heard the desperate voice calling out to him.

“Seong Hunter-nim!!”

“...Ah.”

Jin-Woo quickly turned around. He was far too focused on the angel statue and had forgotten about the other stone statues. These things were indiscriminately attacking the Hunters as ordered by the angel statue just before its death.

“Hunter Seong!!”

Choi Jong-In pitifully sought out Jin-Woo as he used his magic to keep the stone statues at bay.

Even then, even as he called out, these statues were still descending on them in their droves like a black storm.

Pow!

Woo Jin-Cheol was struck in the chin by a stone statue and he unsteadily staggered on his feet. He tried to maintain his balance with his faltering legs, his eyes searching to his left and right.

He caught the sight of the blood and sweat belonging to his fellow Hunters spraying into the air as they desperately mounted a resistance against the monsters pouncing on them.

The inside of his head blanked out.

‘Wait. What was I doing just now?’

Ah.

When he regained his senses, the stone statue was already right in front of his nose.

He confirmed just what had struck him on the chin just now. It was actually a d*mn book with a thickness of several encyclopedias stacked together. Of

course, it was made out of stone so it was only obvious that his head would spin like that.

‘No, hang on a minute... can a thick book be considered as a deadly weapon?’

For a brief moment there, Woo Jin-Cheol recalled watching a certain televised criminal law amendment process and smirked to himself. In any case, he no longer possessed any strength to block the book, nor could he avoid it now. He definitely didn’t have any strength left to throw a counter, either.

And that’s why he finally gave up with a wry smirk, but then....

Ka-boom!!

The stone statue’s head split into two and the monster was flung away as if it got swept up in an explosion.

“Huh....?”

His mind abruptly woke up from that. He blinked his eyes and shook his head to clear his mind, and finally spotted a familiar man standing next to him.

“Are you alright?”

“Ah....”

Woo Jin-Cheol could only gasp out at that moment. That familiar man was none other than Seong Jin-Woo.

Woo Jin-Cheol kept that look of surprise on his face as he managed to leak out a question.

“By any chance, you only used bare hands to.....??”

“Let’s talk about the details later.”

Jin-Woo left behind the dazed Chief of the Monitoring Division and dashed away to elsewhere. Even then, he never stopped searching and eventually, he spotted a certain something reflecting the light just over yonder.

It was his missing ‘Demon King’s Shortsword’.

‘Found it!!’

Jin-Woo extended his hand out to the weapon. He activated the ‘invisible hand’ and sucked his shortsword back into his grip.

Grab!

The sense of grip transmitted through his hand remained top-notch.

Boom!!

First of all, he kicked away an annoying stone statue blocking his path and began slicing all the statues that had been tangling with human Hunters.

Fuu-woop.

In the midst of doing that, he took a deep breath.

Time slowed down greatly, but only he remained unbound and free. Right afterwards, Jin-Woo seemingly vanished from the spot and, while using the movement that not even the top-ranked Hunters could follow, he began destroying all the stone statues.

Slice!!

Thud!!

Four stone statues fell apart simultaneously.

The Hunters who barely made it out alive thanks to Jin-Woo's timely intervention could only look on dazedly as their jaws dropped to the floor.

"Uh....?"

Woo Jin-Cheol eventually made his way next to these Hunters and quietly spoke to them.

"That's all you can think of, am I right?"

"...Yes."

Hunters nodded their heads.

"Yes, I'm the same as you."

Woo Jin-Cheol had seen this spectacle a few times by now, but even then, the only thing coming out of his mouth was a gasp of astonishment. He grinned wryly and placed a cigarette between his lips. A Hunter from the Monitoring Division stood next to him.

"Chief, will it be alright for us to step back like this?"

"What's wrong?"

"Right now, Seong Hunter-nim is still engaging the monsters....."

The Hunter from the Monitoring Division turned his head towards Jin-Woo, but even his jaw fell.

"Huh.....?"

Woo Jin-Cheol placed another cigarette in the slack mouth of this guy and even lit up for his subordinate.

“Can you see how should we go about helping him?”

“No, sir... I can’t.”

“So, stay here and quietly smoke that.”

“Y-yes, sir.”

Hunters gazed at Jin-Woo with eyes of awe but still, didn’t forget to swarm around Woo Jin-Cheol. And as a result, his stash of cigarettes ran out very quickly.

But, for some reason, his nose began stinging just a tad.

‘I can’t even remember how many times I nearly died in this place.’

He thought those monsters were a wall he could never overcome, no matter what he tried. But now, seeing Jin-Woo single-handedly sweeping those things away, the sense of relief and powerful emotion of delight were flooding into his heart.

“Section Chief? Are you crying, sir?”

“No, I’m not, you idiot. It’s just this spicy cigarette. Okay?”

“Right. It’s also too spicy for me.”

“Yeah, me too.”

“Me three.”

Maybe this batch of cigarettes tasted far too spicy for them today since teardrops were clearly visible within the eyes of all these Hunters.

SLAM-!!

Sohn Ki-Hoon managed to block the punch of the god statue with his shield and gasped out a pained grunt.

“Keo-heok!”

His knees were bucking hard. With no Healer around, he had no choice but to take on the impact force all by himself, but he knew that anything more than this was asking for too much.

“S-someone.... Anyone!!”

He painfully turned his head to the side and spotted a quiet gathering of his fellow Hunters sitting over there.

What the hell.

He was sh*tting blood trying to block the attacks of the god statue all by himself, yet why wasn't anyone trying to lend him a helping hand here??

Sohn Ki-Hoon was royally p*ssed off and angrily yelled at them.

“What do you all think you’re doing?!”

When he did, the Hunters all pointed above him. Sohn Ki-Hoon interpreted that as them warning him of another attack, so he flinched greatly and raised his shield up again.

However, the expected attack didn't materialise.

‘.....??’

He finally noticed that the surroundings had become eerily quiet for some reason.

‘What’s going on here?’

He sneakily scanned his surroundings below his shield, and finally noticed that all the stone statues in the vicinity had been destroyed.

“What’s this?!”

He got startled out of his skin and hurriedly lowered the shield. And that allowed him to see what was going on above him. He saw the sight of the god statue, as tall as a skyscraper, and Jin-Woo standing on the d*mn thing's shoulder.

“Huh....??”

Even before Sohn Ki-Hoon was done with his surprise...

Ka-boom!!

Jin-Woo's punch blew away the other remaining half of the god statue's face. With its head gone now, the massive statue began unsteadily tottering around.

“...Uh? Ehhh?”

Sohn Ki-Hoon sensed something awry was afoot and ran as if his back was on fire. And just as his senses had warned him, the god statue crashed down right where he used to be standing a second ago.

Kwa-booom!!

A choking dust cloud kicked up and filled the entire interior of this place.

“Cough, cough!”

Choi Jong-In coughed out repeatedly and while blowing away the dust

from himself, he quickly made his way to Cha Hae-In.

“Hunter Cha.”

“Chairman....?”

“How are you feeling? Can you stand up?”

She was still lying on the ground, moaning in pain. She shook her head at his question. Not one part of her body was okay right now. Choi Jong-In’s brows furrowed as he felt somewhat helpless at this.

“Let me help you. Try to slowly stand up.”

Just as he was trying to support Cha Hae-In, Jin-Woo arrived next to him, having finished off all the stone statues in the room.

“Will it be fine if I aid Cha Hunter-nim?”

“Pardon me?”

Choi Jong-In shifted his gaze towards the direction of that voice. It was then, he thought that for a little bit there, Cha Hae-In was pushing his hand away. He replied in somewhat of a daze.

“Oh. Uh, yes. Why not.”

Jin-Woo quickly lifted her up in an embrace. Cha Hae-In’s face reddened instantly.

“Please, hold on for a little while longer.”

Jin-Woo promptly ran over to the exit and kicked the closed door, hard.

BOOM!!

A locked door such as this only needed a good kick from him. The sturdy door that didn’t even want to budge an inch when these high-ranking Hunters pushed at it got destroyed in an instant.

He cautiously laid her down outside the chamber and summoned up his Store. Her current condition was considerably bad. Jin-Woo quickly purchased a superior grade healing potion and carefully emptied the vial in her mouth.

Gulp, gulp.

Her wounds began recovering at a scarcely-believable rate.

“But, how...??”

“Shh.”

Jin-Woo raised his index finger and pressed to his lips. Right now was ill-

suited to explaining himself, wasn't it?

Hunters emerged from the chamber one by one. Could this be called a silver lining within the sea of misfortune? Their current appearance was truly wretched, but thankfully, none of them required emergency medical assistance.

Jin-Woo closed the Store's interface.

Not knowing the existence of the healing potion, Hunters and their eyes could only pop out of their sockets when Cha Hae-In stood back up as if nothing was wrong.

“Huh?? But, Cha Hunter-nim, weren't you.....?”

“Well, I....”

She was about to answer back reflexively, only to sneak a glance at Jin-Woo and quickly diverted the conversation away.

“This isn't the right time to discuss that, so let's get out of here first.”

Hunters all agreed with her.

“Are there any more survivors?”

She asked Jin-Woo, who possessed the best sensory perception among the group. He looked into the interior of the chamber and shook his head.

Only seventeen remained standing outside the chamber. Over half of who stepped inside had died. Their joy at surviving this encounter only lasted for a short while and the atmosphere grew gloomy and heavy.

“In that case....”

Cha Hae-In turned around with a stiff face, but Jin-Woo reached out and held her wrist. She turned to face him.

The reason why the Hunters Guild came here was secondary. He was a lot more curious about something else at the moment.

“Excuse me, but... what happened to Japan?”

Jin-Woo had entered here just before the dungeon break of the rank S Gate occurred and so, he was getting legitimately curious of the news coming out of Japan.

Cha Hae-In hesitated slightly, but eventually, came up with a suitable description.

“They have been destroyed.”



Chapter 165 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

So, that's what happened in the end.

The plan to block up a Gate sounded quite dangerous from the moment Yuri Orlov came up with the idea. Besides, wasn't he trying to deal with a rank S Gate?

Didn't matter whether it was a Hunter or Gate, rank S denoted that something was impossible to evaluate.

“Impossible to evaluate” – meaning, no one knew exactly what would pop out from the Gate, nor what kind of events would happen next. Even then, Yuri Orlov greatly overestimated his strength. And, in the end, his stupidity led to a truly horrifying result.

Jin-Woo's expression became deeply complicated.

Association President Goh Gun-Hui had told him about what the Japanese Hunters were trying to do back in Jeju Island. It was unknown what their real goal was, but nevertheless, they commenced with their plan anyway.

If Jin-Woo didn't show up on time, it'd have been extremely difficult for the Korean Hunters to get out of there alive even if the mutated ant monster hadn't shown up.

And, even after trying something underhanded like that, the b*stard of the Japanese Association's President had the gall to visit South Korea to threaten Goh Gun-Hui.

‘That man deserves to be punished, no doubt about that.’

However, that was the story only for the brain trust of the Japanese Association as well as the top-ranked Hunters who took part in the stinking scheme.

The innocent Japanese citizens not included in that story certainly didn't deserve this.

There might have been some unresolved historical 'feelings' between the two nations, but that wasn't a sin so grave that whole masses of people had to die because of it.

What's even worse, this particular dungeon break occurred in the middle of

the city.

Just because of some Orcs that came out from a Gate within a school, nearly half of all the students there had lost their lives. However, what would happen if a rank S Gate opened up in the middle of a huge city with a population of over 13 million? Obviously, it'd lead to a truly gruesome end result.

Not to forget, this result was partially brought upon by themselves, as well.

'If Goto Ryuji and the other top Japanese Hunters were still alive, the end result could have been different.'

Goto Ryuji was strong. He was strong enough to endanger Jin-Woo for a moment back then. Even he felt greatly startled when the Japanese Hunter's attack barely missed his eye by a hair's breadth.

Would that be all?

Every single dead Japanese Hunter he found on Jeju Island was an exceptional individual that surpassed Korea's own rank S Hunters.

He might not have known their fighting styles, but at least, that's the impression he got after checking out the amount of magic energy still remaining on their corpses.

Back then, Jin-Woo didn't want to turn blameless humans into 'undead' so he gave up on them. But they were such exceptional Hunters that he was greatly tempted to turn them into Shadow Soldiers.

'Turning them into Shadow Soldiers would've been perfectly fine when I think about what they were trying to do, though!'

Too bad, he only got to learn the truth a long time after the fact, so there was nothing he could do about that.

In any case, such powerful Hunters got massacred in one go so it was only obvious that Japan simply lacked enough personnel to deal with a rank S Gate appearing within its borders.

In the end, this event wasn't a calamity engineered by the heavens, but something called upon by the greed of humans, instead. A man-made disaster, in other words.

"Seong Hunter-nim?"

Cha Hae-In worriedly called out to him. Even now, Jin-Woo was still holding her wrist.

"I'm sorry. I was thinking of something else just now."

“Ah.”

Jin-Woo let go of her arm.

The reason why Cha Hae-In called out to him wasn't because of the wrist, but his complexion had darkened considerably out of the blue, that's why.

Did he have family members or relatives living in Japan? Such a question fled in and out of her mind, just then.

She still had no idea that the Japanese Hunter's Association had cooked up such a dastardly scheme. So, she thought of the events unfolding in Japan as merely an accident – no, more correctly, a horrifying incident, instead.

He got to solve his first question of what had happened to Japan. Jin-Woo asked the second thing he was curious about.

“What brought you guys over here, anyway?”

Currently, there were Cha Hae-In, Woo Jin-Cheol, and then, Sohn Ki-Hoon and his team members, who Jin-Woo met when fighting against Fangs, present here.

High-ranking Hunters from the Hunters Guild and the members from the Monitoring Division, the ones that didn't really seem to have a common reason to form a team, had gathered all around him.

Woo Jin-Cheol finished checking up on the injuries of his subordinates and took a step forward to clarify the situation.

“Actually, we came here first after receiving a report from this location. But then, we learned that you had entered the Gate, and the magic energy leaking out from the dungeon itself was so great that...”

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the Chief of the Monitoring Division. Perhaps the number of casualties had been far too great, Woo Jin-Cheol's expression was really stiff right now.

“We thought that our strengths would not be adequate enough so I requested for assistance from the Hunters Guild that had been getting ready for a raid nearby.”

The right to request assistance in emergencies. It was the highest form of authority the Association possessed over the Guilds. Even the Hunters Guild wouldn't have been able to reject the request.

Many had come to aid him, and in the process, many unfortunate sacrifices had to be made. Jin-Woo felt his heart begin to ache.

As the youth grew quieter in contemplation, Woo Jin-Cheol cautiously

raised a question.

“May I ask you a question?”

“Yes?”

“How did you know that you’d find the dual dungeon in this particular Gate, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

That was a very pertinent question to ask.

As the Chairperson of the Hunters Guild, which had suffered huge losses today, Choi Jong-In was deeply curious about this, as well.

How did Seong Jin-Woo know that there was a dual dungeon hiding within a rank C Gate, and that a monster capable of exceeding everyone’s imagination was waiting for him there?

Hunters who had heard of this before coming here were all feeling quite puzzled from this unanswered question.

Rumble....

The cavern they were in trembled. The Gate sent them the signal that it’d close not too long from now, yet the attention of these Hunters were solely focused on Jin-Woo’s answer.

“The dungeon....”

Jin-Woo decided to be as honest as he could be.

“...It summoned me here.”

“....Wait, it summoned you here?”

Woo Jin-Cheol asked back, his expression showing his disbelief.

“Yes. I received a message telling me to come here.”

“Can we view that message, as well?”

Jin-Woo shook his head. Then, he pointed to his temple with his finger.

“I’m sorry. It was a message that appeared in my head.”

The answer nobody expected to hear rendered everyone utterly speechless.

Jin-Woo didn’t lie here, though. It was just that he chose to omit a few other unnecessary details and simply delivered the core of the truth, that was all.

His straightforward expression of hiding nothing managed to overpower other Hunters.

Woo Jin-Cheol could legitimately claim that he knew Jin-Woo the longest out of this group. Even then, he had no choice but throw up the white flag with a shake of his head.

‘He’s... not someone I can read with my common sense.’

The dungeon summoned him through his head?

Could this youth be some kind of an incarnation of a godly being sent to this world so he could smash apart all the dungeons that appear here?

‘Why am I even thinking of such nonsense....?’

Woo Jin-Cheol inwardly gave a wry chuckle. While he was doing that, Jin-Woo soundlessly brushed past him.

He walked past the broken doorway and re-entered the chamber. Cha Hae-In panicked and called out to him in a hurry.

“Hunter Seong?? If we don’t leave right now, it could get dangerous!”

Jin-Woo turned around after hearing her worried voice and made his reply.

“I know.”

How could he not know of the dangers?

Jin-Woo had walked on this lengthy passageway to get here twice already. It was almost an hour’s distance even with the walking speed of Hunters. If they wished to get out of here before the Gate closed, they certainly couldn’t tarry any longer.

Not only that, Jin-Woo’s own old man went missing inside a Gate, too.

He heard that his dad, despite getting grievously injured, still managed to carry out his comrades from the boss chamber one by one before he himself got left behind as the Gate closed.

There was no one out there who understood the dangers of a dungeon better than Jin-Woo. That was why his reply of ***“I know”*** was filled with his conviction. Even then....

“I can’t leave behind the Hunters who came running for my sake, now can I?”

Hunters getting anxious to leave all froze up in their spots after hearing his words. Every single one of those who lost their lives inside that chamber was a comrade to them. If possible, they didn’t want to leave anyone behind.

However, there simply wasn’t enough time to take all the deceased with them. Not only were these Hunters far too exhausted, but trying to locate the

remains buried under the debris of the stone statues would mean they had to search through all corners of the chamber, as well.

And that was why they turned around to leave with bitter tears in their eyes, but now....

“I’m taking them back with me.”

One sentence from Jin-Woo and the Hunters began shuddering as if a bolt of electricity was travelling within their bodies.

No one argued that there was no time, that they had to get out of here. No, they simply watched on in a daze.

Choi Jong-In, who had been silently enduring until then, spoke with a powerless voice.

“Can we... ask you for this favour?”

These Guild members were like his family. If it was possible, he didn’t want them to rot away stuck in a cold corner of this d*mnable cave.

Jin-Woo nodded his head and turned around.

Ba-thump, ba-thump!

His hearts were quietly beating away.

‘I need to sense a little deeper.’

Basically, his two hearts always beat as one. He needed to concentrate really hard to separate the sound of the Black Heart beating from his regular heart. Jin-Woo gathered the magical energy sent out by this mysterious heart towards his fingertips.

‘Did he do it like this?’

Jin-Woo tried to mimic the hand gesture of the Shadow Sovereign he saw within the data’s playback.

His hand reaching up as if he was grasping something – without a doubt, he could sense enormous magical power going crazy within his hand right now.

‘I can do this.’

Jin-Woo felt this powerful self-assurance enter his mind.

He immediately located the whereabouts of the deceased Hunters through their magic energy emission. His eyes gleamed brightly. Shortly afterwards, he stopped silently studying the interior of the chamber and spoke up.

“Ruler’s Authority.”

And when he did....

Dududuk....

All the remains of the Hunters buried under the rubble of the stone statues all uniformly rose up into the air.

“Heok!!”

“But, how?!”

Hunters watching Jin-Woo with bated breaths all cried out in shock.

Never mind the fact that he was able to locate all the dead Hunters in such a short span of time, he even managed to lift them up without touching them? Wasn't this like one of those telekinetic superpowers often seen in movies?

The floating Hunters were carried out of the doorway via invisible hands.

‘How can this be....?’

‘How can something like this even be possible?’

Just like how normal people would get surprised by the Hunters, these Hunters were getting even more astonished by Jin-Woo's feats.

Even Choi Jong-In, who could be called very knowledgeable when it came to the manipulation of magical energy, couldn't quite believe what he just witnessed with his own two eyes.

‘Just what kind of a skill is that?’

It was certainly a skill he had never even heard of before.

After seeing Jin-Woo's powers personally, Choi Jong-In realised that he had been greatly mistaken about something. When he saw the angel statue for the first time, he thought that such a 'thing' would obviously be able to defeat Jin-Woo.

However, his thoughts were wrong. It was a complete miscalculation.

Which monster would be able to deal with a Hunter capable of wielding powers like this as if it was nothing to him? Not realising that he was doing it, Choi Jong-In began shaking his head.

‘Utterly impossible....’

In actual fact, the angel statue was eliminated in an instant almost as soon as Jin-Woo opened his eyes. Only sighs of amazement could come out after seeing this young man's capabilities.

Jin-Woo carefully moved the cold, unmoving corpses of the Hunters to one

side and summoned out his Shadow Soldiers. The restriction only applied within the temple itself so he could call them out no problem outside the doorway.

While the living Hunters couldn't close shut their slack jaws, the Shadow Soldiers proceeded to pick up the dead Hunters. Everyone forgot what they wanted to say and simply looked at Jin-Woo as he addressed them.

“Let's get out of here.”

It was then, the dungeon rumbled one more time as if it was waiting for this moment. The Hunters all nodded their heads.

Soon after they set off, the Shadow Soldiers ran right behind them. Jin-Woo remained behind and watched them move, before turning around to face Cha Hae-In who also hadn't left yet.

Although her physical wounds had been healed, her expression showed how fatigued she was.

‘That is obvious, though.’

Even he himself needed to put in a lot of effort to defeat that angel statue. She'd definitely be exhausted trying to defend against such a creature all by herself.

Jin-Woo walked over to her and asked.

“Would you like me to carry you?”

Cha Hae-In formed a thin smile and shook her head.

Grasp.

He reached out to grasp her wrist again, and she quietly stared at him. He wanted her to feel at ease, at least by a little bit, so he relaxedly spoke to her.

“We should get going, too.”

Nod.

Cha Hae-In, depressed by the deaths of her comrades, wordlessly nodded her head.

Hunters began emerging one by one from the Gate.

Right up until then, those waiting around outside the Gate had no idea the scale of the event taking place within. However, they all realised that something really bad had happened after seeing the deceased Hunters being carried out by the Shadow Soldiers.

“Oh, my god....”

“Are those all....?!”

The members of the Bravery Guild who had reported this matter, and the female Association employee standing by, all saw this procession and their complexions turned ashen in an instant.

The number of casualties was just far too great.

Weren't these people the elite Hunters of the country? The Hunters belonging to the Hunters Guild and the Monitoring Division were called some of the very best, yet....

After everyone had emerged, Jin-Woo and Cha Hae-In simultaneously stepped out of the Gate. Enough time had passed on the outside and it was night-time already.

Reporter Kim had been staying put until then to keep an eye on the situation, and when he saw the conditions of those two, his eyes grew extraordinarily wide from sheer shock.

The heavy traces of intense battle were clearly visible on the bodies of these two rank S Hunters – dried up, caked blood; torn, ripped clothing; their dishevelled hair.

Sure, Cha Hae-In still looked quite lovely even then. But Hunter Seong Jin-Woo gave off a feeling that he'd been through a bitter war all by himself.

‘This is it.... This really is it!’

Reporter Kim raised his camera with his trembling hands.

This was the reason why he became a reporter in the first place. And that was to document event such as this one.

He wanted to let others know that there were some people who willingly put their lives on the line to fight for the masses in some forgotten corner of their country, even though everyone's attention was focused on the events taking place in Japan.

Almost twenty of the country's top Hunters had perished here today. If such a Gate had broken open, then the scale of destruction and losses to life would have exceeded imaginations. These people and their sacrifices had prevented a future tragedy.

However, if Reporter Kim wasn't here, would others ever get to know about these folks and their heroic battle today? He had been circling around the Association just so he could stumble into a story like this one day.

Click, click!!

He was so emotionally moved that tears were forming in his eyes as he busily snapped away photos.

Woo Jin-Cheol lost all the strength in his legs right after leaving the Gate and settled down on the ground. Jin-Woo looked for him and walked closer.

“...Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

Woo Jin-Cheol tried to get up, but Jin-Woo stopped the older man. Instead, the latter pointed at Reporter Kim over yonder.

“He’s taking my photos, but is that allowed?”

Woo Jin-Cheol smirked and made his reply.

“It is indeed disallowed to film you in an individual capacity, Seong Hunter-nim. However, just like how it was back in the Jeju Island raid, it’s impossible to block the report on the incident itself.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Mom would get worried if she saw his messed-up appearance, though. He was sort of worried about that happening, but then again, it didn’t mean he could forcibly stop the reporter from doing his job.

Indeed, that reporter was doing what he was supposed to be doing.

He also wished for someone to let the world know of the ultimate sacrifices these Hunters made while fighting to ensure that no tragedy would unfold in the near future, as well.

A quiet wind seemed to blow by. The sounds of distant sirens from approaching ambulances were carried by the winds.

morning.

Every newspaper carried the front-page headline of the dungeon break happening in Japan, except for one publication. It was the only one that carried the news of the dual dungeon incident.

This paper sold the most number of copies that day.



Chapter 166 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The American Hunter Bureau mobilised its agents from the Asian branch office in order to assess the current situation in Japan.

A helicopter set off from the safe zone and eventually, entered Tokyo's airspace. A senior agent from the Hunter Bureau, who had risked his life and volunteered for this trip, looked out of the vehicle's window and clicked his tongue.

"How tragic."

The current status of Tokyo was far worse than he had imagined. The city itself was completely destroyed after the dungeon break occurred.

Buildings no longer possessed their former appearances; cars folded and crumpled like bits of paper; street lamps bent at their waists; burning flames, rising smoke, scorched remains, and unidentifiable structures turning into ash.

Surely, the word 'tragic' was invented just for a sight as wretched as this one.

The agent's forehead unconsciously creased up. If someone were to ask him in the future if he had seen hell, then yes, he could now say that he indeed have seen one.

Unfortunately, he didn't come here to mourn the now-destroyed city.

No, his mission was to assess the current situation. He continued to film and carefully observed the carnage below, before asking the Japanese representative next to him.

"Even though the city has been destroyed to such an extent, I don't see any human remains?"

The senior agent remembered seeing the images of the rank S Gate opening up on the island of Jeju during his training back in the Hunter Bureau's HQ.

Whether it was from a video clip or a still photo, the streets of the Jeju Island were filled with dead bodies. Ants had killed every single resident who couldn't escape the island in time.

It was one of the worst tragedies ever in history, and the Hunter Bureau kept detailed records of what happened then.

But now, even though the city of Tokyo was wiped clean off the face of the planet, it was hard to see any corpses. No, there were no traces of dead people to be found, actually.

The Japanese representative spoke up.

“That can’t be helped, actually. The Giants have been eating humans, you see.”

He was a young man working for the Japanese Hunter’s Association. It wasn’t all that hard to figure out what his life had been like recently from his bloodshot eyes and the overgrown beard he couldn’t trim yet.

He continued to speak with worries forming deep creases on his face.

“Those b*stards are acting as if to erase all traces of Japanese people from Japan itself. They destroy all the buildings, eat humans, and they even pull out trees from the streets, too.”

Nod, nod.

The Hunter Bureau agent agreed with that.

These Giant-type monsters that came out of the rank S Gate displayed a certain difference in behaviour from other monsters. While other monsters concentrated on killing humans, this batch of monsters was actively trying to destroy everything they could see.

Only the destroyed remains of the civilisation were left behind in these creature’s wake. No matter where in Tokyo, one couldn’t see a building, no, a single house still standing intact.

“But, thanks to that, we were able to buy ourselves a bit of time.”

He said, ‘thanks to that.’

The Japanese Association employee formed a smile full of self-mockery.

Should he be thankful or feel sorrowful for the monsters proceeding to destroy everything in their path, thereby buying enough time for people to escape from their carnage?

Such complicated emotions were writ large on the employee’s face.

The Hunter Bureau agent looked at this Japanese man and thought to himself.

‘It’s already something that he’s able to hold on like this.’

After all, the capital city of his country had fallen into such a wretched state in an instant, had it not?

The sense of loss felt from monsters raping one's country wasn't a foreign concept to this American agent.

The United States also lost a portion of their Western Seaboard about eight years ago from the single monster that came out of the rank S Gate, 'Kamish'.

And, was that all? South Korea right next to Japan also had to surrender the biggest island in the country to monsters for nearly four years, only to somehow recover it recently, didn't they?

The American agent got to confirm something while watching the footage of that raid's ferocious battles.

He had no relations with South Korea at all, yet when he saw the lone Korean Hunter sweep away all those ant monsters and even smack that mutated ant a really good one, he jumped up from his seat and let out an elated cry.

That wasn't simply because he worked for the Asian branch of the Hunter Bureau. No, he saw that battle of Jeju not as a fight between a small nation of Korea and monsters, but as a proxy war between humanity and the waves of monsters, instead.

And here, on this land called Japan, there were more battles taking place between humanity and monsters.

'The result of that is this.....'

Tatatatatata-!!

The spinning rotors of the helicopter remained an incredible racket, but the situation on the ground was severe enough to steal away the agent's attention from the noise.

He felt angry and frustrated. However, there was nothing he could do here. All he could do was to carry out the mission he was given. The agent continued to operate the camera and asked the Japanese the questions that popped up in his head every now and then.

But then, he discovered something that took him by great surprise and he fell hard on his a*s.

"Heok!! T-that thing over there!"

Cold sweat poured out of the American agent as he began calling out to Jesus. The Japanese Association employee helped him to stand back up.

"So, you saw it."

"O-over there! There's a Giant over there!!"

“Yes. There is one Giant still remaining here. No, rather than calling it ‘remaining’, should I say that it’s not budging from the spot, instead?”

The employee’s gaze shifted outside the window. The American agent wiped the cold sweat off his brows and cautiously looked in the same direction as well.

A massive monster, bigger and taller than any monster this agent had ever seen, stood proudly in the downtown area of the utterly-devastated city of Tokyo.

‘That is the Giant-type monster....’

The helicopter began flying closer according to the employee’s instructions. The agent hurriedly inquired as his face paled instantly.

“W-will it be fine to get this close to that thing?”

The American definitely heard this before coming on this trip. All Giant monsters had left Tokyo now, which meant that the abandoned city was as safe as it could get under the circumstances.

But then, wasn’t this way too different from that declaration?

The Japanese Association employee calmly explained the situation with a tone of voice indicating that there was nothing to worry about.

“It’ll be fine. As long as we stay in the altitude that the creature’s hands can’t reach and we don’t attack first, we’ll be 100% safe. This has been confirmed through multiple observation efforts so you can rest easy.”

Gulp.

The American agent swallowed his saliva.

‘Confirmed through multiple observations, is it?’

‘Observation.’

The Japanese employee spoke of that word as if it didn’t mean much, but just how many people had to be sacrificed at the hands of that Giant monster in order to come to that conclusion?

Just thinking about those unlucky few who flew too close to the reach of the Giant sent an eerie shiver down the agent’s spine.

In any case, it was highly valuable information for this agent who was tasked with compiling data on the rank S monsters, as well as to report on Japan’s current status back to HQ.

His brows gradually rose up as he studied the Giant. Now that he took a

closer look, this creature's face seemed familiar to him.

'That's right....'

It was none other than the super-giant b*stard that shattered Yuri Orlov's magical barrier with its body. Unlike other monsters that had been scattered elsewhere, only this Giant monster, designated as the boss rank by many others, chose to remain here.

The Japanese employee spoke with a bitter expression on his face.

"Do you also think that the monster is guarding that Gate, too?"

"Ah.... Well, I...."

"This is my third time seeing that b*stard, but every time I do, I keep thinking of different things."

"What did you thought of just now?"

"To my eyes, that thing is..."

The Japanese employee took his time before carrying on a beat later.

"That thing is waiting for something. That's what it looks like to me."

"I... see."

The agent shifted his gaze back over to the Giant.

Indeed, it certainly looked like that in a way. He thought that it wouldn't be much of a stretch for this Japanese employee to read the current situation that way.

As these two people conversed regarding the boss rank Giant monster, the helicopter had arrived near the absolute limit of the safety.

Even though there was a helicopter buzzing above its head, the Giant didn't even lift a finger. As if it hadn't even perceived the presence of the man-made contraption, it remained utterly docile.

However, according to the employee's explanations, it wasn't as if this thing would never attack, either.

"The creature will definitely attack whatever enters the fixed range. Whether the targets of its attack are people or machines, nothing can escape from it."

Just how many observation attempts were needed to find that out?

The final moments of Yuri Orlov overlapped with that of the employee's face in the American agent's eyes as the Japanese calmly explained the

situation.

The boss monster's agile movements as it broke past the barrier and rapidly snatched up Yuri Orlov left a huge mental shock with all the viewers watching the broadcast at home. The Russian's death had been shown live in that manner to the rest of the world.

The report on the rank S Hunter compiled by the Bureau described Yuri Orlov as such:

He may have failed in extracting money from Japan, but well, he had definitely become one of the most famous Hunters in the entire world through this incident.

'Not sure if that was the result he'd have liked to see but, oh well.'

The agent frowned deeply after recalling the final moments of Yuri Orlov. Meanwhile, the Japanese employee spoke up.

"This is also from a personal point of view, but...."

He said it was a personal point of view. But the American agent found this man's opinions rather interesting, even the one about the Giant monster waiting for someone or something.

"Alright, please tell me."

The agent nodded his head, prompting the employee to continue on.

"When I look at that thing, I don't really get the feeling that the creature is truly 'alive', you see? Yes, it's obviously breathing in and out, and can move around because it's alive, but well, should I say that it's like looking at a machine that only acts according to how it was programmed?"

"A machine, is it....?"

Quite regretfully, the agent couldn't agree with that assessment.

The imposing figure of the Giant monster when looked at from up close was, in a word, overwhelming. When subjected to the chest-tightening pressure emanating from the creature, the agent simply couldn't think of that thing as a machine at all.

It was then.

The Giant's eyes shifted in their direction.

"Heok!!"

Tumble!!

The agent fell on his a*s once more. As if he was waiting for that, the

Japanese agent supported the American back up. He then spoke as if to calm his charge down.

“That thing’s simply looking at us. As long as we maintain this distance, it won’t attack.”

The agent nodded his head. He thought his heart just fell out of his chest just now. He belatedly raised his camera up and recorded the creature in great detail. The reason for the viewfinder shaking ever so slightly like that was probably not entirely due to the helicopter busily buzzing around in the air.

The agent only spoke up again after he figured he had captured enough data by now.

“How many Giants came out from that Gate?”

“A total of 31. Excluding the boss rank, the rest have evenly dispersed throughout the countryside.”

“....And how many have been killed so far?”

“Only two.”

“Which means, with the exception of the boss over here, there are 28 Giants destroying Japan as we speak.”

“Well, there aren’t any Hunters left to fight against the Giants, you see. Everyone’s been preoccupied with escaping at the moment.”

The complexion of the employee was gloomy.

On the day the dungeon break happened, Hunters participating in the crucial battle to buy the residents of Tokyo enough time to evacuate were all killed.

They were able to kill two monsters in the process, but they had no other methods left to stop the remaining 28 from spreading out to the rest of the country.

This here was the reason why the Japanese Association employee said ‘yes’ without resistance to the request for assistance from the Hunter Bureau when he should have been far, far too busy trying to put out the fire burning on his foot – no, make that on his entire body.

Right at that moment.

“W-what are you doing?”

The American agent jumped up and tried to stop him, but the Association employee finally managed to bow his head down. His knees were bent all the way down and his forehead was pressed to the floor.

Stuff like pride or dignity no longer mattered. No, if the only cost to pay were his pride or his dignity, then he'd not have hesitated to do something even more drastic.

And so, still remaining in the kowtowing position, the employee spoke up.

“Please, aid us, the Japanese.”

The American agent was about to help his Japanese guide up but stopped in the middle of his actions. He couldn't say anything back to the grave determination of the employee.

The Japanese spoke in fluent English and emphasized his plea.

“If America doesn't help us, then Japan as a nation will be finished. Hasn't Japan been a trusted ally of the United States all this time? Will you not consider taking on the risk, just this once, for Japan, the allied nation of America?”

It was unknown whether this was coming from the employee's own heart or he was being ordered by the Japanese Hunter's Association. However, regardless of where it was coming from, this young man's desperation could definitely be felt in his voice.

The agent chewed on his lower lip and pondered for a bit before replying with some difficulty.

“I'll lodge a request for aid to the HQ.”

“Thank you. Truly, thank you very much.”

The American agent couldn't tell the Japanese employee bowing his head several times in a row that he shouldn't get his hopes up.

Would the Americans, after having lost many of its high-ranking Hunters from the 'Kamish' incident, and thus began obsessively managing the well-being of their remaining Hunters, make a move just for the sake of the Japanese?

‘I'm pretty sure they won't.’

However, how could the agent tell this young man lowering his head for the sake of his nation, that his beloved country was already as good as finished?

‘All you can do is to leave it to the will of heavens....’

The agent looked at the sky above.

Unfortunately, the heavens simply stared at the world below in disinterest, just like how it had been, like how it was doing right now, and how it would

continue to do so in the future.

The agent dazedly stared at the heavens before muttering to himself.

‘Oh, dear God.... Please, don’t forsake us.’

Jin-Woo woke up early in the morning and went to the Guild office while doing a light jog.

‘Yup, as I suspected.’

His eyes brimming with happiness looked slightly above from the dead centre of his vision. And he could see the current status of the Daily Quest there, just like how it had been until now.

Tti-ring.

[The distance run: 10km]

[You have completed ‘Running: 10km.’]

Even though he got rid of the self-proclaimed architect, nothing seemed to have changed from before. The System continued to function as it had so far, and just like before, the Daily Quest arrived as soon as he opened his eyes in the morning.

His physical condition was at its peak, too.

Ever since this ‘Black Heart’ took root within his body, vitality was overflowing within him. He deliberately held back his speed, yet each of his steps felt light and airy.

However, thanks to the d*mn b*stard getting killed off like that, he was now left with a ton of unanswered questions.

‘Just what was that recorded footage I saw?’

He kind of figured that watching it was one of the conditions to unlocking this ‘Black Heart’, but everything else remained a mystery.

Just as his thoughts were getting deeper....

“Excuse me!! Hold on!”

“Mister Yu Jin-Ho!! May I ask you some questions?”

Jin-Woo raised his head at the noises coming from afar. And that’s when he spotted the big cordon of reporters camping outside the Guild building.

Yu Jin-Ho was currently being surrounded by them, unable to do anything to extricate himself. It seemed that he got ensnared by the reporters during his

morning commute.

The reporters began their barrage of questions.

“Mister Yu Jin-Ho, were you aware of the tragedy of the Hunters Guild that happened yesterday?”

“Please provide us with a statement as the Vice Chairperson of the Ah-Jin Guild.”

“What is Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s connection to that incident?”

“Japan is going through a crisis at the moment, but did Mister Seong Jin-Woo express his thoughts on aiding the Japanese?”

‘Aha.’

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

These reporters couldn’t interview him personally, so they resorted to clinging onto Yu Jin-Ho, who must’ve come across as an easy mark to them.

Jin-Woo was about to take a step forward, thinking that he should help the kid out, but then, he discovered something and he stopped moving altogether.

‘Mm....?’

For some reason, Yu Jin-Ho’s expression didn’t seem so bad right now.

He outwardly looked to be somewhat troubled, but Jin-Woo’s exceptional eyes definitely caught the kid trying to forcibly suppress his smile every now and then.

‘Hah, this Jin-Ho. I didn’t know that he enjoyed stuff like this.’

Jin-Woo was dumbfounded but still formed a soft smirk anyway. It seemed that his help was not strictly necessary here.

‘So, what should I do instead, then?’

Should he just drag Yu Jin-Ho into the office quietly, or go back the way he came so the kid could enjoy himself a bit more?

As Jin-Woo seriously considered his options, a car rolled to a stop right behind Jin-Woo. And its window silently rolled down next.

“Are you Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

Jin-Woo heard that unfamiliar voice and turned around to see who it was without thinking too much about it.

However....

‘Huh?’

His brows rose up slightly after he confirmed who it was.



Chapter 167 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“It is indeed you.”

The man sitting in the car confirmed that the person turning around to face him was Jin-Woo, and stepped out of the vehicle right away. As it turned out, he was actually quite a familiar face to Jin-Woo, as well.

Heck, he didn't even need to dig through his memories to recall this man's name, either. Because this man appeared almost non-stop in South Korea's financial news segments. Not to mention, he was also 'familiar' to Jin-Woo in another meaning of the word, as well.

“I'm Yu Myung-Han from Yujin Construction. It's a pleasure, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

Yu Myung-Han's back remained straight as he lightly lowered his head.

It was a greeting neither disrespectful nor lacking in confidence.

As if he had learned that this was how to greet someone properly, his action was tidy and disciplined. Jin-Woo was inwardly taken by surprise.

It was because he didn't expect a chairman of a huge corporation to greet a total stranger like himself in such a dignified manner.

Since the other party came out so dignified and respectful, Jin-Woo also returned a dignified greeting.

“I'm Seong Jin-Woo. It's also a pleasure.”

After their brief introductions were over, Yu Myung-Han got right down to the topic.

“I apologise for coming to see you without prior communication, but if it's alright with you, can we speak in private?”

A small suspicion brushed past Jin-Woo's brain just then.

‘If he wants to see me....’

It'd have been more convenient for the Chairman to contact Jin-Woo through his son rather than personally showing up here. Yet, why did Yu Myung-Han choose to come all the way out here at the cost of his valuable time?

Jin-Woo swallowed back such suspicions forming in his mind and asked something else.

“What can I help you with?”

Yu Myung-Han replied with an apologetic face implying that he had no choice but to do it this way.

“It is regarding a topic that’s difficult to discuss here.”

Now that Jin-Woo took a look around, he could see that, although no one recognised him in his current get-up of a comfortable tracksuit with a hood pulled up, several curious stares were rapidly landing on Chairman Yu Myung-Han.

There were a fair few passersby on the streets, so indeed, it was not possible to discuss something important in a place like this one. Jin-Woo understood that point very well.

The only problem was....

‘...I don’t have any important business to discuss with Chairman Yu Myung-Han.’

He couldn’t even take a wild guess here.

If he were to really, really think about it, then maybe, something to do with the Chairman’s second son and the Vice-Master of the Ah-Jin Guild, Yu Jin-Ho?

While Jin-Woo’s reply got delayed, more and more people began looking at Yu Myung-Han now. Some even pulled out their smartphones to take snapshots as well.

The Chairman began feeling a bit more urgent compared to before, as more and more eyes were being directed in his way.

‘If I miss this opportunity, it’ll only become harder to converse with him.’

He had a very good reason why he needed to speak to Jin-Woo. So, he worked up his courage and asked for this favour.

“Seong Hunter-nim. If it’s not too much trouble, would you like to accompany me for a little while? I promise that I’ll never speak about a disrespectful subject.”

Jin-Woo took a look behind him first.

He spotted Yu Jin-Ho’s happy, no, ‘troubled’ mug as the kid was surrounded by the extreme levels of interest from the reporters. Jin-Woo hurriedly swallowed back his laughter once more.

‘Looks like Jin-Ho will be preoccupied for the rest of the day, then.’

Since he had been monopolising high-ranking Gates lately thanks to the consideration of other major Guilds, he thought that now might be a good time to take a break from going on raids for a while.

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

“I will.”

“Thank you.”

Chairman Yu Myung-Han bowed slightly and, as if he was treating a super VIP, he even opened the rear door of the car for Jin-Woo.

“Please, get in.”

Jin-Woo climbed aboard first, and the Chairman actually went around to the other side to enter the back seat next to him. The car was so big that even with two well-built men sitting on the back seat, there was still plenty of space left.

Before the car started, though, Jin-Woo asked first.

“Where are we going?”

“We haven’t decided on a destination. Is there a place you’d like to go to, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim....?”

Jin-Woo shook his head, prompting the Chairman to give the signal to his chauffeur. He then looked back at his guest.

“I know of a place where we can chat without worrying about the interruptions from other people. Allow me to take you there.”

Jin-Woo leaned against the back of the seat. Maybe because this was a really expensive car, the suppleness of the cushions was indescribably amazing.

The car glided forward without making any noise and eventually, they arrived in their destination.

“We’re here, Hunter-nim.”

The chauffeur walked over to open the Chairman’s door, but Yu Myung-Han shook his head, prompting the former to approach Jin-Woo’s door, instead. He then opened it for the youth.

Jin-Woo stepped out of the vehicle and looked up at the tall, tall skyscraper in front.

‘So, this is where we can converse without worrying about others, is

it...?’

As Jin-Woo stood there utterly speechless, a group of attendants suddenly came rushing out of the building to surround him and bowed their waists 90 degrees.

“Welcome back, sir!”

“Welcome back, sir!!”

Jin-Woo heard these six people shout out in complete harmony and could only express his admiration inwardly. Just how many times did they have to train together to match each other’s timing this well?

“Let us head inside, Hunter-nim.”

Chairman Yu Myung-Han displayed not one hint of putting on airs and took the lead, walking straight into the building. The words ‘Yujin Construction’ were clearly legible on the windows near the top of the building’s roof.

‘.....’

Soon, Jin-Woo followed after Yu Myung-Han and entered the building. The Chairman had been waiting for the youth to enter and matched the latter’s walking speed.

“This way.”

Employees bent their backs immediately after discovering their Chairman.

Yu Myung-Han maintained an expressionless face but still didn’t forget to reply to all the greetings coming his way with simple nods.

A real big shot – the atmosphere Jin-Woo once felt from the President of the Hunter’s Association Goh Gun-Hui could also be felt from Chairman Yu as well.

Jin-Woo silently followed after him while gaining a rough understanding of the man named Yu Myung-Han’s character through the gazes of these employees who seemed to wholeheartedly trust him.

Meanwhile, the employees bowing their heads to Yu Myung-Han naturally became interested in Jin-Woo walking alongside their boss.

“Who is he?”

“Huh? Isn’t he....?”

“Could he be....?”

The jaw of every employee fell to the floor after they recognised the rank S

Hunter, as he had taken the hood off upon entering the building.

The top Hunter of the nation and the top businessman of the nation. Two such people had stepped into the headquarters of Yujin Construction, so who would not be surprised by this amazing incident?

‘Heok!’

The eyes of the employees nearly fell out of their sockets.

The hearts of the female employees began palpitating unsteadily, while the male employees nodded their heads in Jin-Woo’s direction.

They didn’t know why Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was standing next to their Chairman. However, when the two men who could be considered the best in their respective fields stood tall next to each other, their considerable age gap didn’t seem to matter anymore, and this dazzling imagery now felt perfect and complete to the onlooker’s view.

If you were a man, then you’d yearn to be a part of this amazing sight, too.

And so, as such adulating gazes fell upon them, the two men climbed aboard the executives-only elevator waiting for them with open doors. The assistance of the attendants lasted until here.

As the doors silently slid shut, only Jin-Woo and Chairman Yu remained within the elevator.

“...”

“...”

As Chairman Yu kept his mouth closed, Jin-Woo followed suit and didn’t say anything. The elevator didn’t stop and rose straight up to the top floor, the Chairman’s office.

Ting.

Secretary Kim, the right-hand man of Chairman Yu, was waiting for their arrival in front of the office. He performed a quick nod of his head to Jin-Woo as his greeting and lowered his waist to his boss.

“My apologies, Chairman. There is a guest already waiting for you inside.”

“A guest?”

The expression of Chairman Yu Myung-Han stiffened up.

“Didn’t I say to not let anyone in whenever I’m not in the office?”

Secretary Kim rarely made mistakes, if ever. The reason why Yu Myung-

Han's expression had stiffened wasn't because the emotion of anger but rather something much closer to surprise, instead.

Secretary Kim formed a troubled expression and blurred the ends of his sentence.

“Sir, I’ve already spoken to your guest regarding your wishes, but he was so insistent that I....”

“H-mm.”

Yu Myung-Han only needed to hear that much to immediately figure out who the guest was. He shook his head helplessly and pointed towards the Chairman's office to Jin-Woo.

“It’s nothing to worry about, so you don’t have to pay any attention. Please, this way.”

Wheeeiiing...

The door leading to the Chairman's office slid open.

An older gentleman sitting on the couch, passing the time by browsing through a newspaper, raised his head to look.

“Hyung-nim, why was it this hard to get in touch with you? You even cancelled our appointment for today, too.”

The man sporting a smooth and reflective balding forehead was none other than the younger brother of Yu Myung-Han, Yu Seok-Ho.

As he got up to greet his older brother with a bright face, Yu Myung-Han returned a bit of a frown.

“Didn’t I tell you that I have an important matter to deal with today? I’m currently occupied, so come back later.”

“What do you mean? Hyung-nim, I know your schedule back to front, so what important matter could you be.....??”

Yu Seok-Ho's words came to a stop once he met Jin-Woo's gaze.

“Uh? Uh, uh???”

Didn't this young man's mug look familiar, somehow?

Other people would've recalled newspapers or images from the TV news broadcasts, but the first thing Yu Seok-Ho recalled was the SNS profile of his daughter, Yu Soo-Hyun, instead. He remembered seeing a photo of two young people looking quite comfy with each other.

‘Is this really Hunter Seong Jin-Woo??’

In order to confirm the truth, he turned the newspaper in his hands to the front page. He kept blinking his eyes as he compared the front page photo and that of Jin-Woo's actual face.

This situation was weird enough to fluster Jin-Woo somewhat, but for some reason, he didn't find this unfamiliar half-bald uncle detestable at all.

'Is it because his eyes resemble Yu Jin-Ho's by a lot?'

Could a much older and balding Yu Jin-Ho look like this guy in the future?

Chairman Yu Seok Ho didn't know that he had instantly become the aged Yu Jin-Ho in Jin-Woo's mind. He didn't even mind the sharpened glare his older brother was giving him and extended his hand out with a bright smile on his face.

"Aigoo! Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!"

"Oh, hello."

Jin-Woo unwittingly grasped the offered hand and shook it.

Yu Seok-Ho energetically shook hands as if he was greeting someone he met again after going through many years of hardship. He then introduced himself.

"I'm sure you have heard a lot about me, but well, I'm Yu Seok-Ho from Yu-il Pharmaceuticals."

"....??"

And just where would Jin-Woo have heard a lot about this uncle now?

Still, it wasn't cool to shoot down someone greeting you so happily like this, so Jin-Woo said something suitable as his reply.

"Ah, yes. Hello. Nice to meet you."

Yu Myung-Han was worriedly watching on from the side, but he was now forming a surprised expression, instead. Meanwhile, Yu Seok-Ho's back straightened up in pride as if to show off a little, and he opened his chest up a bit more.

'See this? Hyung-nim, my little girl's standards for men are on this level.'

Yu Seok-Ho had been feeling a slight case of an inferiority complex over the fact that Yu Myung-Han's daughter possessed a genius-level talent in music. But now, he thought he could definitely regain his self-esteem with this event.

Because, well, there wouldn't be that many men as amazing as this youth in

the whole of South Korea, after all.

‘...Seok-Ho’s connections run pretty deep, I see.’

Yu Myung-Han was planning to raise his voice at his little brother once Jin-Woo had left, but now, after seeing that these two seemed to have ‘heard’ of each other, his anger had rapidly melted away and disappeared completely.

It seemed that the talk could go down favourably because of this.

“Oh, my goodness. Where are my manners at?”

Yu Seok-Ho finally released Jin-Woo’s hand.

“Right, you said that you two have something to discuss, didn’t you? Looks like this is where I make my exit, so please, don’t mind me.”

He smiled in satisfaction and turned around to leave the office, but stopped next to Jin-Woo.

“Ah, and by the way, Seong Hunter-nim?”

“Ah, yes?”

“Please, do stop by at my home if you have some time in the near future. I shall eagerly await for you, if it’s you paying us a visit!”

“.....??”

Stop by if he had time?

He’d eagerly await??

“Huhuhuhuht!”

The good-natured uncle said some mysterious things and left the office like a refreshing breeze passing by.

Even though his loud voice and bright expression ensured that he didn’t come across as unlikeable, that uncle still came across as a weird quandary to Jin-Woo.

He stood there tilting his head a bit, and Chairman Yu Myung-Han cautiously asked him.

“Your relationship with my younger brother is....?”

Since the uncle in question was no longer around, was there a reason to mind his feelings anymore?

Jin-Woo’s answer was rather straightforward.

“It’s my first time meeting him today.”

His reply caused Yu Myung-Han's expression to harden instantly.

'Yu Seok-Ho, you fool....'

Just as he suspected it. Unfortunately, there was an important guest present here. As befitting the nickname of 'Pokerface', Yu Myung-Han immediately masked his emotions and suggested that they take a seat.

"Please, have a seat."

Yu Myung-Han settled down on the opposite side to Jin-Woo. Secretary Kim entered the office with excellent timing and asked the Chairman.

"Sir, would you like some tea?"

"I'm fine, so please ask Hunter-nim."

"I'm also fine, thank you."

Jin-Woo shook his head.

Yu Myung-Han addressed Kim with a grave tone of voice.

"I wish to speak privately with Hunter-nim here, so can you leave us alone for a while?"

"Understood, sir."

Secretary Kim exited from the office and stood before the door to guard it. He had received the orders to do so earlier on.

From here onwards, no one could enter the office, even if it was the President of the nation coming for a visit. That was how heavy the weight of the matter today was.

"..."

"..."

Just like how it was back in the elevator, another bout of silence flowed between Jin-Woo and Yu Myung-Han. However, there was a certain difference in the weight of the silence this time.

Yu Myung-Han needed some moment to compose himself. This wasn't going to be a carefree conversation to catch up on old times or some such.

That was why Chairman Yu Myung-Han could only open his mouth after such a long time had passed by. Enough that one might start to get slightly bored by it, even.

"Seong Hunter-nim."

Jin-Woo had been patiently waiting until then and replied calmly as well.

“Yes?”

Yu Myung-Han pulled out a cheque from his inner pocket, issued under his name by a bank that often had dealings with Yujin Construction.

However, this cheque was somewhat different from a normal one.

Where there should have been numerical letters denoting the value of money represented by this slip of paper, there were none to be found.

“Here.”

He pushed such a cheque forward.

Jin-Woo looked at this blank cheque for a little while before raising his head back up again.

Yu Myung-Han continued on with some difficulty.

“I’m not some arrogant fool who thinks he can buy anything with money. Especially even more so, when I’m dealing with a rank S Hunter such as yourself.”

His mouth was drying up even further.

Compared to when he buried his father and inherited the corporation, back when he was about to give his first speech in front of tens of thousands of his employees, even when he was surrounded by hundreds of reporters and had to suffer from ignoble insults to his name – this moment made him tremble more than any of those times in the past.

But, it was obvious why. The importance of this matter greatly outstripped those moments in his past, after all.

Because, his desire to live, to see the future of the company he raised up by sacrificing his entire youth, and then, and then, the greed of a father wanting to see the growth of his offsprings for just a little bit longer - all of those were hanging in the balance right now.

“That is why... I’d greatly appreciate it if you consider this as nothing more than a small gesture of my sincerity.”

Chairman Yu’s eyes were burning in a determined light.

Jin-Woo could now guess the reason for him choosing this venue to hold this conversation. The things to be discussed from now on could not be leaked outside of these walls, that was why.

‘This isn’t about me joining his Guild or something like that.’

That was why the Chairman had chosen his own territory that he could

control 100% per cent unless some kind of a natural disaster was to befall them.

Jin-Woo had always been quick on the uptake.

That was why he simply asked this question.

“Chairman. Just what is it that you wish to buy from me?”



Chapter 168 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Yu Myung-Han spoke frankly about his current situation.

“Actually, I also suffer from the exact same illness as your mother, Hunter-nim.”

That completely unexpected reply took Jin-Woo by surprise and he froze up momentarily.

“....Does Jin-Ho know?”

Yu Myung-Han shook his head.

“Aside from my personal physician, only three others know of my condition. Myself, my wife, and my secretary.”

“And now, it’s four.”

“Indeed.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Only now did he understand why Chairman Yu didn’t bother to go through Yu Jin-Ho and instead contacted him secretly like this. Yu Myung-Han wanted to hide his own illness from the rest of his family.

‘But then again – his shoulders are carrying the fate of several tens of thousands of employees, aren’t they....’

If the rumour of the days that Chairman Yu could freely move about being numbered got out, then it didn’t take a genius to see what might happen to Yujin Construction as well as its subsidiaries in the near future.

The reason for hiding the status of his illness even from his family and keeping a tight leash on the information – Chairman Yu simply carried far too much weight on his shoulders to accept his reality as it was.

Even then...

‘He revealed this secret to me.’

It was probably because he had figured out that he needed to take the risk this time.

Yu Myung-Han was a businessman. Not only that, he was someone whose

vocabulary didn't include the word 'failure'. He was, simply put, a general undefeated in all of his battles so far.

Such a man would not jump into anything while carrying significant risk if there was nothing to gain from it.

Jin-Woo could pretty much guess what Chairman Yu was about to say.

Sure enough – the older man spoke up with a determined expression.

“I have been scouring the world for a cure, a method, to rid myself of this illness for a while. In the process, I was able to discover that a single patient has gained her freedom from this dastardly illness.”

As Jin-Woo expected, the conversation was heading down the path he thought it might.

“I don't think it a coincidence that the sole patient recovering from the illness happens to be your mother, Seong Hunter-nim.”

Jin-Woo had left many in sheer shock and astonishment with his never-before-seen mysterious abilities. Could he have somehow cured his mother's illness with his strange but wonderful abilities?

Chairman Yu had used various avenues to investigate Jin-Woo, which meant that him arriving at such a deduction wasn't so far-fetched at all.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo didn't deny nor agree with the claim and quietly stared at Chairman Yu. The latter swallowed his saliva.

‘I cannot afford to make a mistake here.’

If the talk so far was nothing more than a practice match, an appetizer, then the real game was about to kick off now. This was the most important moment.

Yu Myung-Han let out a deep but short breath and spoke up with some conviction.

“What I'd like to earn from you is the truth, Hunter-nim.”

He then pushed the cheque forward a little bit more with his hand.

“And as your compensation, this is just merely a small part of what I'm willing to provide you with, Seong Hunter-nim.”

Not everything, but merely a part, he said.

Meaning, he was prepared to hand over something else besides money if that's what Jin-Woo wanted.

“If you help me out on this matter, Hunter-nim, I shall never forget this favour for the rest of my life.”

The tiger of the financial world lowered his head and asked for help. If those people who knew Chairman Yu saw this spectacle, they would have cried out in sheer shock just then.

However, perhaps surprisingly, Jin-Woo remained calm even though he was on the receiving end of this plea. His collected gaze quietly studied Chairman Yu.

‘Doesn’t seem like he’s lying to me.’

The older man’s raised heart rate, his quickened breathing, and the desperately pleading expression hidden beneath the facade of unflappable calm told Jin-Woo everything he needed to know.

Chairman Yu was being truthful here.

However, just because someone earnestly wished to get his hands on something, that didn’t mean he’d be successful every single time. After a short deliberation later, Jin-Woo finally opened his tightly-shut mouth.

“I’m sorry.”

That one short sentence caused Yu Myung-Han’s eyes to tremble quite powerfully.

“It is unfortunate, but that’s not something I can help you with.”

“I-in that... case.”

As his hopes riding on this talk had been far too great, Chairman Yu couldn’t easily accept his defeat here.

“...How did... your mother become cured, Seong Hunter-nim?”

“Chairman.”

Jin-Woo’s expression became rather serious.

The surrounding air began to grow chilly all of a sudden. That was enough to remind Chairman Yu just what kind of a person he was dealing with right now.

Jin-Woo continued on.

“Hypothetically speaking, if I knew how the illness had been cured and I wished to get rich from that, why would I have kept my mouth shut until now?”

A handful of possible answers fled in and out of Chairman Yu’s mind.

Was it because Jin-Woo was scared of becoming a target of someone influential? But, that couldn't be.

Chairman Yu immediately shook his head.

Jin-Woo was the currently-active rank S Hunter. Not only that, he was an especially powerful one, too. Just who would dare to think of him as a target, then?

Did this mean he wanted something else besides money?

Unknown to himself, Chairman Yu's own head moved from side to side once more. The current Hunter Seong was capable enough to get all the fame and recognition one could desire, if that was what he wanted. But then, he hadn't done that, either.

'...Ah.'

Chairman Yu belatedly realised what his mistake was this time 'round.

One of the basics in negotiation was finding out what the other party wanted in advance. You'd bring in something the other side wanted and in turn, you got what you wanted from them. That was how a negotiation worked.

However, Chairman Yu didn't know what Jin-Woo wanted. Not even one thing. It was only obvious that the negotiation would fail like this.

'So, it must be one of the two possibilities.'

Either Jin-Woo really didn't know what cured his mother, or Yu Myung-Han simply didn't have what he wanted. Whatever the case may have been, it was still a despairing result for Chairman Yu either way.

"...I see."

Chairman Yu no longer clung onto Jin-Woo.

"Well, in that case."

The older man saw that Jin-Woo was getting up to leave, so he also got up in haste and summoned Secretary Kim. The latter guarding the door quickly entered the office.

"Chair..."

The moment he took his first step inside, he immediately read the frozen atmosphere flowing between Jin-Woo and Chairman Yu. This meeting was the final ray of hope for his boss so even Kim's complexion darkened rather quickly.

“Sir, have you called for me?”

Chairman Yu powerlessly nodded his head.

“Hunter-nim wishes to return. Please take him back to his residence.”

“No, I’ll be fine. Thank you.”

Jin-Woo tactfully declined the offer, and after leaving short goodbyes to both Yu Myung-Han and Secretary Kim, he climbed aboard the elevator all alone.

Weeeiing...

The lift moved at a frightening pace from the penthouse floor right down to the lobby.

He hadn’t noticed it while riding it with someone else, but now that he was alone, he could tell for sure – this elevator was simply far too large and wide for only one person to ride in.

Jin-Woo spat out a long sigh,

“Fuu....”

He didn’t feel so well after rejecting the request. Wasn’t that man the father of someone he treated like a little brother? He could’ve extended his helping hand while pretending to be defeated by his emotions.

However....

‘I don’t know him.’

He didn’t know just what kind of a man Chairman Yu Myung-Han was. He didn’t know whether he was really suffering from the illness, or he was scheming something else.

The ‘Divine Water of Life’ used to cure his mother might possess an otherworldly healing property, but its supply was also limited. And that was why he simply had to be more circumspect with their usages.

The terms put forward by Chairman Yu indeed had been incredibly tempting, but in the end, they failed to change Jin-Woo’s mind. This was the end result.

Ting.

The elevator arrived on the ground floor in no time at all and opened its doors. Jin-Woo pulled his hood up and got out of the lift. Unlike when he was accompanied by Chairman Yu, no one seemed to recognise him now.

Even those giving him cursory glances simply carried the looks of ‘Who

could he be that he's using the executives-only elevator?'

Jin-Woo paid them no mind and walked over to the exit. One of the waiting employees tasked with guiding people spotted Jin-Woo's approach and opened the door for him to pass through.

Jin-Woo continued on and crossed the lobby, but then, his steps came to a halt after he heard a voice coming from somewhere.

[This is the latest update coming from Japan.]

Jin-Woo's head shifted in the direction of that sound. A giant TV in the lobby that had been switched off earlier was now showing the real-time footage of the situation in Japan.

It was the breaking news regarding the dungeon break and the massive calamity spreading at an alarming rate.

Jin-Woo walked to the front of the TV.

The sight of the ruined city captured from the TV station's helicopter was truly gut-wrenching.

The Giant monsters were demolishing the buildings. Those unfortunate citizens failing to evacuate in time were captured and immediately thrown into the mouths of these Giants. What little remained of armed forces poured out all their firepower but that proved to be a useless endeavour.

It was still impossible to kill monsters without the powers of Hunters, after all.

Although it was impossible to accurately calculate the death toll, the rough estimate had come out to well over a million.

In a word, it was an unspeakable tragedy.

Jin-Woo's expression hardened. This would be his first time seeing the current status with his own eyes. But then, that made sense.

It was only yesterday that, after emerging from the dual dungeon, he asked Woo Jin-Cheol to take care of the aftermath and went back home to crash into a deep, deep slumber.

He half-expected the worst, but the situation in Japan was far graver than his initial expectations. This whole thing reminded him of the nightmare unfolding on Jeju Island four years ago.

Maybe one could claim that it was a silver lining among the storm of misfortunes. The dungeon break back then occurred on an island and the uniqueness of landscape meant that Korea was spared of the situation possibly

becoming even worse than before.

However, it was a different story for Japan.

It was far too large to simply be called an island. A whole country was facing total destruction at this rate.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!

Jin-Woo's heart quickened as he watched those Giants.

He was feeling rather displeased right now. When he thought about how such weaklings were stepping on humans like that, a powerful sense of disgust welled up from deep inside of him.

But then....

'Wait a sec....'

Jin-Woo quickly broke out of his reverie.

What did he mean, such weaklings?

He had never fought Giant-type monsters before. And he couldn't sense its magic energy through a TV screen. So, why did he subconsciously think of the word 'weakling' almost right away when he saw a Giant monster?

Was this coming from his self-confidence?

Jin-Woo tilted his head this way and that, before shaking it altogether.

'Huh. Because my head's so messy right now, I'm even beginning to think up some weird stuff, too.'

He turned around to leave.

He managed to slip out of the cordon of people watching the broadcast with worried expressions, and quietly left the building.

The second day of the dungeon break.

The attention of the entire world was focused on Japan. What was their plan of action against the dungeon break? Did Japan have any methods left to employ, anyway? If not, would America really step up to help them?

And then...

Was there a possibility that the Giants, having finished laying waste to Japan, would cross the ocean and start causing destruction in other countries, too?

Worried gazes and ones filled with concern descended upon Japan as it

continued to crumble.

Of course, those nations that held an antagonistic relationship with Japan inwardly thought of different matters altogether, but outwardly at least, they sent over some token words of sympathy.

Unfortunately, what the Japanese needed weren't some words of comfort. No, they needed actual, physical help.

They needed comprehensive power to rescue Japan from the monsters. Indeed, they needed the power capable of 'saving' them.

As the announcement from the Americans was nowhere to be heard, the grim news of one-tenth of Japan already being destroyed became public. The plight of Japanese refugees filling up the highways continued to travel in the airwaves. They all abandoned their homes in order to survive and travelled to the east and west.

However, just as it was the case with every nation on Earth, the landmass of Japan wasn't infinite, to begin with. In the end, these people would eventually be pushed to a corner. The prophesied end was drawing near for them.

And the world began asking more questions as it watched this pitiable sight unfold.

The world remembered seeing the Jeju Island raid that took place only a few weeks ago.

Japan had lost over half of their participating rank S Hunters for the sake of the Koreans. So, the world was asking, why were the Koreans only watching on the crisis unfolding in their neighbouring country and not doing anything to help?

The scale of destruction and the death toll continued to be revised hourly. People grew outraged and grieved for the losses.

As the feelings of sympathy grew larger and larger for the Japanese, the criticisms towards Korea grew harsher and harsher in turn.

The mass media of the world was boiling over.

And before long, another question rose up – the one about why Japan hadn't requested South Korea with the subjugation of the monsters.

And so, as the fourth day dawned on this tragedy....

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui, having decided that now was the right time, stepped in front of the crowd of reporters.

Noisy, noisy....

Goh Gun-Hui swept his gaze over the tightly-packed wall of reporters as well as the cameras pointing at him and quietly opened his mouth to speak.

“I express my condolences at the tragedy unfolding in Japan. And also, I’d like to reveal the position of South Korea’s own Hunter’s Association.”

And also....

A little earlier in the day, the American Hunter Bureau also released a statement, as well.



Chapter 169 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

In the venue for the press conference held by the American Hunter Bureau.

The United States of America had opened her mouth to make her statement.

“We’re currently gathering Hunters to one location.”

Was America finally revealing her hand in order to save Japan?

Reporters had all rushed to attend this press conference after the Hunter Bureau announced that they would clarify their position. They all cried out in elation from this announcement as if this matter concerned them personally.

No one alive would wish for tens of millions, no, hundreds of millions of people to die a gruesome death. That was why these reporters were so enthusiastic about this announcement.

As the atmosphere within the press conference venue heated up to an astounding degree, the spokesperson ruefully shook his head.

“However, it’s not for Japan’s sake.”

What was that?

The gathered reporters began exchanging glances as hushed murmurs grew louder. It seemed that no one present here had received any prior warning about this as they were all cautiously looking at each other’s reactions right now.

The spokesperson pointed to the giant screen behind him.

“....Heok!!”

“What the hell...”

The mouths of the reporters were clamped shut by the image now shown on that screen.

The chaotic atmosphere cooled down in an instant and it was replaced by deathly silence instead. And then, as this weighty silence persisted, shocked gasps could occasionally be heard in between.

The prepared footage indeed carried that much of an impact.

“This is the image of the Gate discovered earlier today in eastern Maryland.”

The size of the Gate was not normal. It was smaller than the one in Japan, but still, its sheer scale was uncommonly massive.

The rank of a Gate didn't always match up to its size. But then again, a Gate with an enormous size never led to a low-ranked dungeon, either.

The spokesperson continued on with his explanation.

“According to the measurement taken by our investigative team, this Gate is also a rank S, exactly like the one that has appeared in Japan. This nation's top Hunters will focus all their efforts in closing this Gate, instead.”

Some reporters covered their faces, some shook their heads in helplessness, some spat out pained sighs to display the despair each of them felt in that moment.

An unprecedented event of two rank S Gates being generated close to one another had taken place.

Of course, the United States of America wasn't worried in the slightest. It was now time for the dozens of rank S Hunters she had reeled in from all over the world to step forward and easily take care of this Gate.

The problem was with Japan.

‘America doesn't have the spare manpower to aid Japan.’

When this horrifying piece of news finally made its way over to Japan, the Japanese people desperately praying for the Americans' aid all cried out in despair.

Japan was finished.

The Giant-type monsters were advancing south as it destroyed everything in their path. People escaping up north were slowly but surely being forced onto a cliff, as well.

In this situation, Korea finally broke her silence over the matter and clarified her position as well.

Goh Gun-Hui stood in front of the reporters and spoke up.

“We will not get involved in Japan's matters.”

A day before the press conference.

Just like any other day, the wide-open office space of the Ah-Jin Guild was

occupied by only two people – Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho.

The latter's eyes sparkled brightly.

“Hyung-nim? A rank B Gate just became available. Should I book it?”

“Is it within the Hunters Guild’s jurisdiction?”

“Pardon? Oh, yes it is, hyung-nim.”

“In that case, don’t.”

“Oh.... okay. I got it, hyung-nim.”

Having sacrificed a lot of her elite Hunters, the Hunters Guild would be going through a seriously hectic time now. It'd not look good if Jin-Woo's Guild swooped in to take advantage of the situation and stole a Gate from under their noses.

Yu Jin-Ho scratched the side of his head before shifting his head over to Jin-Woo.

“Hyung-nim? What have you been you looking at so intently like that?”

Jin-Woo tore his eyes away from the computer screen and leaned his back against the chair.

“Hey, Jin-Ho?”

“Yes, hyung-nim?”

“Should I go over to Japan for a while?”

“Excuse me?”

Yu Jin-Ho's expression hardened.

Of course, he hadn't forgotten just who was saying those words. He had seen hyung-nim's amazing feats closer than anyone else out there.

However, common sense simply didn't apply to rank S Gates. It was impossible to measure, to begin with. Didn't that imply such a Gate was beyond the scope of what's considered normal?

Just like how there was an unscalable wall even among the rank S Hunters, no one could tell just what kind of dangerous monsters would pop out from a Gate that was impossible to measure.

And that was why Yu Jin-Ho simply couldn't think of Jin-Woo's words of going to Japan as him simply kidding around.

Abruptly, his head shifted over to the computer screen Jin-Woo was looking at.

'Ah....'

It was filled with the breaking news regarding Japan.

'Hyung-nim was worried about them.'

Unlike Yu Jin-Ho, hyung-nim possessed incredible powers. It was quite obvious that he'd also suffer from the distress that the responsibility of his power level brought along.

"Hyung-nim, hold up."

"Mm?"

Jin-Woo only lightly threw that suggestion out but Yu Jin-Ho's reactions were rather serious.

Yu Jin-Ho vacated his spot and hurriedly extracted a photo album from the file cabinet before bringing it over. When he flipped that thick book open, all sorts of newspaper articles were clipped onto its pages.

'What's this....?'

All of them were articles related to Jin-Woo.

From the incident of the Red Gate – which the media still didn't know that Jin-Woo was a part of – to the raid of Jeju Island; when he solved the issue of the traffic jam; and even when he took care of the strange, unidentifiable stone statues alongside the Hunters Guild recently, too.

Jin-Woo was dumbfounded by this spectacle and asked Yu Jin-Ho.

"You were collecting all of these?"

"Yes, hyung-nim."

Yu Jin-Ho's face was slightly flushed red.

"Okay, fine. But, why are you showing me this all of a sudden?"

"You know what the common theme among these articles is, hyung-nim?"

"I wonder....?"

'....Surely, he's not trying to say that I'm involved in all these incidents.'

A short while later, Yu Jin-Ho spoke with a voice softer than the buzzing of a mosquito.

"It's that I'm nowhere to be found in all of them, hyung-nim."

If it weren't for Jin-Woo's high Perception reinforcing his hearing, he'd have missed that voice.

“What?!”

Jin-Woo looked back, and Yu Jin-Ho raised his drooped head and stared straight into the former’s eyes.

“Hyung-nim. If you’re planning to go to Japan, please take me along with you.”

“...??”

Jin-Woo was baffled here.

He expected Yu Jin-Ho to either stop him or cheer him on when he said he’d be heading over to Japan, but never did he imagine the kid would say ‘Take me with you!’

However, Yu Jin-Ho was being dead serious.

“Although it is embarrassing to say this out loud, hyung-nim, you’re my pride. You’re the only thing that I can proudly boast about to other people, you know.”

“But, you....”

Jin-Woo quickly shut his mouth up.

Yu Jin-Ho looked outwardly as if he had possessed more than anyone else in the world. According to his own words, however, all of those were shackles that only managed to torment him, and to him, they were nothing to be proud about.

But then, it was Yu Jin-Ho’s own decision to stick around Jin-Woo, and then to continue developing the Ah-Jin Guild. All his, and no one else’s.

Jin-Woo could more or less understand where Yu Jin-Ho was coming from when he said this was his sole source of pride.

“That is why I’d like to be there where you are, hyung-nim. Please, please take me with you, hyung-nim.”

“You, you haven’t forgotten where I want to go, right?”

Even if Yu Jin-Ho was a naïve, immature kid, he surely would have heard about what was happening in Japan.

That place was currently a true hell on earth. Demons called ‘Giants’ were judging mankind in the most gruesome manner imaginable.

Even then, Yu Jin-Ho nodded his head with a determined expression on his face.

“As long as you’re unhurt, hyung-nim, I’ll be alright as well. If you get

hurt somehow... eiii, I don't wanna even think about that."

Yu Jin-Ho looked back with a strong light of trust burning in his eyes.

The feeling you'd get from someone trusting you to such an extent certainly couldn't be described as bad in any shape or form.

Jin-Woo felt this strange warmth tickling him in his chest and he happily ruffled Yu Jin-Ho's hair. The latter was flustered but he didn't withdraw his head.

"H-hyung-nim?!"

"I was only joking, you know? Why would ever I go to Japan when times are like this?"

Jin-Woo stood up from his spot.

"Hey, that's enough for today. Let's just go home. You worked hard anyway."

"Uh? You're going home already, hyung-nim?"

Jin-Woo stepped outside the office door while waving his hands. Yu Jin-Ho bowed his waist deeply to send him off.

"I'll see you tomorrow, hyung-nim!"

Clunk.

Jin-Woo stepped into his house.

A truly mouth-watering savoury scent of stew tickled his nostrils. He stood on the spot and soaked in the evening's smell.

'This is so good.'

One of the great things about mom being discharged from the hospital was that now, he had someone to welcome him back home every day. The dark and quiet home of the past no longer existed in his life. Not anymore.

"Son, you're home?"

He heard his mother's voice coming from the kitchen.

"Yes, Mom."

He took off his shoes and neatly arranged them before walking into the kitchen himself. His mother was looking behind her and he sent her a smile as a greeting.

"I'm home."

"Will you eat dinner?"

“Yes. What about Jin-Ah, though?”

“She says she’s got no appetite.”

Jin-Woo’s hand suddenly stopped before it finished pulling out his chair.

“Even now?”

“She couldn’t get a wink of sleep last night. She only fell asleep not too long ago.”

“...”

Jin-Woo hid his presence and cautiously opened the door to his sister’s room.

“Mm... Mm.....”

Jin-Ah was rolling around in her bed, struggling to fall into a deeper slumber. She normally maintained such a bright appearance, but it seemed that she hadn’t gotten over her mental trauma yet.

‘Then again.... She had to go through such an experience, didn’t she.’

His rage towards monsters boiled over whenever he saw how much his sister was struggling like this.

Why were those things endlessly tormenting humanity?

It was then, Jin-Woo recalled the sight of those silver-clad winged soldiers pouring out from the Gates in the sky to sweep away the monsters. The army with its unfathomable size, burning with clear animosity against the horde of monsters. If such an army actually existed, then....

‘Are they our allies?’

Wasn’t there an old saying about an enemy of an enemy being a friend?

Jin-Woo studied his sleeping sister quietly for a little while, before closing the door behind him.

“Thank you for the meal.”

After finishing his dinner, Jin-Woo headed off to the Association’s gymnasium to get a little bit of exercise in. It indeed proved to be really convenient to have a Shadow Soldier stationed inside the gymnasium.

Sweating a lot was the best cure when one’s head became clogged full of complicated thoughts. And so, he wanted to sweat buckets for the first time in a while.

Jin-Woo summoned Beru out.

As he began to lightly loosen his body, the former king of the ants politely knelt before him and lowered his head.

“Oh, my king...”

Beru was the sole soldier among Jin-Woo’s Shadow Army that could withstand his attacks, at least for a little while. But even he flinched grandly after sensing the extent of Jin-Woo’s change and shuddered where he stood.

“I offer my unreserved congratulations, my king. I sense from you a far greater amount of power than ever before.”

Beru sensed an electrifying shiver run down his body after sensing that incredible amount of magic energy oozing out of the ‘Black Heart’. His head, still lowered to the ground, was trembling noticeably now.

Jin-Woo didn’t summon his Shadow Soldier out to boast of his growth, though. He gestured to Beru to stand up.

“....??”

The former ant king tilted his head after picking up Jin-Woo’s worried eyes, which would be the first time he had sensed such a thing ever since becoming a part of the Shadow Army.

Jin-Woo spoke under his breath.

“Attack me with everything you have.”

“Oh, my king. How dare I even....”

“It’s fine. I just want to shed some sweat for a little while. And you know no one else besides you can do that.”

“I... I am truly honoured....”

Feeling touched, Beru was about to kneel down again, but then, Jin-Woo glared at him with a pair of very sharp eyes.

“Hang on a minute. You know, your vocabulary seems to be increasing every day. You haven’t devoured someone else somewhere, have you?”

Beru’s shoulders flinched somewhat, but Jin-Woo soon let go of the matter. He clenched his fists and issued his order again, instead.

“Remember to hit me with everything you have.”

“If my Sovereign’s wills it, then I shall follow....”

Beru raised his head as his claws lengthened.

“Kiiiieehhk-!!”

There was no burden on Beru as he knew that his claws would never touch his Sovereign. Jin-Woo grinned after seeing that and nodded his head. This was what he wanted, anyway.

“Kiiiiehhk!”

Along with the thunderous roar that shook the interior of the gymnasium, Beru pounced on his master.

Boom!

Beru slammed down on the floor and was laid out flat on his back.

“K-kiiiieck....”

127 times fought, 127 times defeated.

Indeed, even though he threw everything he had, he failed to touch even the hair on his master’s body. In the last few days that Beru didn’t see his king, Jin-Woo had become far stronger than ever before.

The display of power today only deepened the level of respect and loyalty Beru held towards his king.

While the former ant king remained sprawled on the floor unable to move, Jin-Woo settled down next to him. There were a few strands of sweat on his forehead. But this was as far as he could take it.

If he moved any harder than this, then this gymnasium would have been demolished in no time at all.

Jin-Woo remained seated and stared into the far distance.

Beru silently sat back up and knelt down before asking him.

“Oh, my king... Is there a matter that’s troubling you?”

“Troubling me, is it?”

“A portion of our consciousness and the Sovereign’s are connected as one. The king’s troubles are transmitted as pain to us, the subjects.”

“...”

To think, he’d get consoled by a Shadow Soldier. Not only that, from a dude who originally was an insect, too. Jin-Woo couldn’t help but form a wry smirk.

Now normally, he’d simply chuckle and put the matter to bed, but this time, things were a little different.

“There’s something I want to do, but I’m not sure how I should go about

doing that.”

The events taking place in Japan were, strictly speaking, someone else’s troubles.

Who knew what kind of dangers were in hiding and waiting for him there? Besides, it wasn’t as if he could resolve every single incident that happened in the world, either.

And not to forget, there was that resolved emotional baggage between the Korean Hunter’s Association and its Japanese counterpart to consider, as well.

All these thoughts only served to make the inside of his head more complicated than ever before.

It was then, Beru suddenly raised his head.

“Oh, my king!”

Jin-Woo looked at Beru with surprised eyes. This was the first time this guy expressed his thoughts this strongly ever since becoming a Shadow Soldier.

“Nothing must become a hindrance in the path of my king.”

Beru’s voice filled with conviction made him sound more like a close aide that stayed by Jin-Woo’s side for a long time rather than a monster that got turned into a Shadow Soldier recently.

“The one that does what he wants to. That is what it means to be a king.”

“Hold on. I keep telling you, I’m not a king.”

Indeed, the Class he got coincidentally through the System just so happened to be the Shadow Sovereign. That was all.

However, Beru strongly denied Jin-Woo’s assertion.

“That is incorrect, my king. My king, you possess the power to achieve anything you desire.”

Jin-Woo’s eyes shook around heavily.

Ba-thump.

For some reason, his heart began pounding away rather violently.

“You are, without a doubt, a king.”

‘That stuff about being a king again.’

However....

However, his heart that began racing on its own didn’t want to calm down that easily at all.

‘Anything I desire, is it.....’

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze back to the distance, but his eyes were gleaming with a cold light now.

day.

The United States of America made her announcement, and the Association President Goh Gun-Hui also clarified the position of the Korean Association.

“We will not get involved in Japan’s matters.”

Click, click, click, click!!

Camera flashes ceaselessly exploded all around him.

The Association President then proceeded to reveal every little detail of what the Japanese Hunters were trying to do back then to these reporters. The proofs he presented only solidified the inscrutable truth even further.

The CCTV footage of the President of Japanese Association, Matsumoto Shigeo, brazenly yelling at the top of his lungs at his Korean counterpart even after he put into motion such a dastardly scheme left a serious shock to all the reporters watching on.

And the Japanese reporters, hoping for South Korea to come to their aid, could only watch the footage with utter devastation.

Before long, their hands holding the cameras were pointing down to the floor.

Only a short moment ago the Americans said that they couldn’t help Japan. In such a situation, the explosive revelations from the Korean Hunter’s Association were no different from passing a death sentence to the Japanese people. Thick, burning tears began falling from the eyes of the Japanese reporters.

“.....This is everything I wanted to say.”

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui finished saying what he came to say.

Normally, this would be the time when countless questions started inundating him, but no reporter present here could unshackle their mouths from the nasty shock and astonishment to do so.

The poor atmosphere of the press conference was broadcast live to the rest of the country through the various TV cameras. Only then did the viewers watching on realise why the Koreans had maintained their silence over the crisis unfolding in Japan.

But then....

“However....”

Goh Gun-Hui looked as if he'd be turning around to leave as the press conference had come to an end but then, he continued to speak on.

“This is the decision of the Hunter’s Association, and ours alone. We won’t stop any individual Hunters from doing what they wish to do.”

What was he even talking about now?

Noisy, noisy....

Like animals lazily waking up from their winter hibernation, the reporters still frozen in shock began slowly exchanging glances with each other again.

“There is one such person. There is one Hunter who wishes to go to Japan and get rid of the Giant monsters.”

Who could that be?

Who wanted to head to Japan under the current situation all by himself?

The bottomed-out atmosphere of the press conference venue suddenly began boiling over. Even the Japanese reporters shedding tears raised their cameras with their trembling hands.

‘Please... Please....!’

The lone strand of hope was busy hammering away in their hearts now.

One of the Korean reporters raised his hand up. The Association President pointed to this man. Perhaps fearing that his turn would be snatched away from him, he quickly asked his question.

“Just who is this Hunter?”

The attention of everyone present in the venue was directed to Goh Gun-Hui. He took his time for a moment or two, before pressing his lips as close to the mic as possible.

“It’s Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

Click, click, click, click, click, click!!

That one sentence caused hundreds of cameras to explode in a wall of blinding flashes.



Chapter 170 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“It’s Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

Hunters of the world got to hear the voice of the Association President, Goh Gun-Hui. Some through the breaking news coverage, some through being contacted by someone else, and some through video file sharing sites.

And their reactions were almost identical.

These Hunters also knew.

They knew that it’d be difficult to imagine just how grand the Japanese government’s financial reward be like if they managed to put out the urgent fire burning down their country right now.

However, no sane-minded governments out there would want to throw their top-ranked Hunters into a crisis of an unprecedented scale like this one.

The lessons learned from subjugating the monster of the rank S Gate, ‘Kamish’, the creature that managed to decrease the number of top Hunters in the world by a great deal, had made the Hunter communities rather closed and uncooperative in nature.

So, the current situation was, no one could go even if they wanted to. But then again, who’d actually want to go even if they were allowed in the first place?

“It’s just sheer madness.”

Rank S Hunters possessing American citizenship had begun gathering in the most luxurious hotel in the State of Maryland by the time news broke from South Korea and indeed, they all got to hear it.

Most of them had received a boost to their abilities through the power of ‘Upgrader’, Madam Selner.

It wouldn’t be much of a stretch of one’s imagination to call this gathering as the world’s greatest armed force.

And, it was precisely a gathering of such individuals that they could simply laugh off the story of some nameless Hunter living in a small Asian nation.

“It hasn’t been long since his Re-Awakening, and he’s already drunk with his own powers.”

“That idiot, maybe he thinks fighting some measly bugs is the same as fighting against Giant monsters?”

“A Hunter who overestimates his ability will die 100% of the time. Who knew that the fame he got from killing the ants would end up shortening his life. How ironic.”

All these people had seen Jin-Woo’s brilliant performance in Jeju Island.

The power ‘Seong Jin-Woo’ possessed was certainly quite strong. However, the race of Giants was a whole different ball game.

Ants pushed forward with their overwhelming advantage in numbers, and that was why his ability to summon out countless creatures worked so well against them.

Even if he was physically strong, could he be able to fight alone against the Giant monsters, each one of them powerful enough to appear as bosses of the hardest difficulty dungeons found in the rank A Gates?

Besides, what about the boss-level Giant that used some truly astonishing agility to snatch up Yuri Orlov? That movement reminded one of a wild beast, not a humanoid creature.

Such a huge creature possessing incredible speed and agility – how could a single Hunter kill a monster like that?

These American Hunters jokingly began making bets.

“I bet my yacht on him getting killed in less than one day.”

“I bet my mansion on two days.”

“Well then, I...”

It was then.

“Will that really happen, I wonder?”

Thomas Andre, quietly dining all by himself in the corner, lowered his utensils and opened his mouth. He was one of the five Special Authority-rank Hunters in existence.

Strong Awakened continued to appear after the ‘Kamish’ subjugation operation had ended, but none were able to exceed the levels of those Hunters who managed to survive the worst crisis to go down in the history of mankind.

When such a man formed a smirk, everyone else ceased their useless banter right away.

“I shall bet the Scavenger Guild on him surviving till the end.”

He leisurely scanned the other Hunters from beneath his sunglasses and left the restaurant.

“...”

“.....”

Once he left, the uncomfortable silence descended on the crowd. Eventually, though, one of the Hunters frowned in dissatisfaction and broke this stifling quietness.

“That man, he just knows how to ruin the atmosphere, doesn’t he?”

“This ain’t the first time that freak did this, anyway. It’s better to just forget about him, man.”

“Right. Even if that Korean Hunter is really strong, it’s almost impossible for him to stop all those rank S Giants alone.”

A Hunter listening quietly to the side chimed in just then.

“I heard that he’s not alone, though? That another Hunter is going with him?”

It was as they suspected. Even if that Korean was a madman, surely he’d not think of walking into hell all by himself. Other Hunters nodded their heads, and one of them threw a question.

“Which other stupid rank S is following him now?”

“No, I hear it’s not a rank S.”

The three Hunters listening began exchanging strange glances.

That Korean was going to fight rank S Giants, yet he was taking along a Hunter who was ranked below S?!

“Is he taking a rank A Healer, then?”

“Nope. A rank D Tanker named Yu Jin-Ho or something.”

As if they had made a prior arrangement, the three Hunters all forgot what they wanted to say and kept their mouths shut.

This Hunter named Seong Jin-Woo, he must’ve misplaced not just one screw, but several of them in his head. Maybe, these crazies all shared some sort of an understanding?

A single thought brushed past the brains of these three Hunters that just maybe, it might not be a coincidence that Thomas Andre happened to support

Seong Jin-Woo's endeavour.

Incheon International Airport.

“Ah, hold on. We're passing through!”

Yu Jin-Ho parted the sea of people blocking his path and walked forward in an imposing manner.

A huge pair of sunglasses hid his face, and both of his hands were carrying two suitcases packed full of their gear.

The determination oozing out of his expression was serious enough to shame the top movie star about to make his grand appearance in the climactic battle scene.

“We're passing through-!!”

Yu Jin-Ho carved out a path, and Jin-Woo wordlessly followed behind.

Click, click, click, click, click!!

Reporters continued to click away with their cameras, afraid that they might miss even a second of Jin-Woo. Quite unlike Yu Jin-Ho, who was quite clearly excited about the trip, he remained calm and collected, though.

Japan had sent a private plane once they heard the news of Jin-Woo wanting to go there. And of course, all entry procedures had been waved away, as well.

Just before he climbed aboard the plane, Jin-Woo discovered a couple of familiar faces coming to see him off. They belonged to the Association President Goh Gun-Hui as well as Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol.

They exchanged simple nods as their greeting and huddled together to converse among themselves. It was rather chaotic inside the airport, but all three of them were top Hunters with highly-attuned senses. So, there was no need for them to raise their voices high.

Goh Gun-Hui was first to speak, his expression still one of rueful unwillingness.

“Even now, I wish I could change your mind.”

Jin-Woo could be seen as the strongest fighting force out of all the Hunters that South Korea currently possessed. Rather obviously, Goh Gun-Hui didn't want to let such an asset travel somewhere else.

Put bluntly, who could tell what might happen in South Korea during his

absence? Unfortunately, Jin-Woo had made up his mind already.

“I’m sorry. I want to go there.”

He wanted to kill those Giants and raise his level, as well as to increase the number of his Shadow Soldiers.

This was the reason why he demanded all rights to these monsters be handed over to him, and the Japanese government welcomed that very obvious demand with wide open arms.

Goh Gun-Hui let a genial chuckle escape from his mouth.

“Is it because of the monsters over there?”

Jin-Woo grinned as well.

“I simply wish to fight against the monsters.”

“If that’s what you wish for, then there’s nothing we can do.”

Goh Gun-Hui extended his hand out and Jin-Woo firmly shook that hand. As their clenched hands rose and fell, the former bade his earnest goodbye.

“I pray that you’ll come back to us safe and sound.”

Click, click, click, click, click!!

Hundreds of camera lenses captured the sight of these two men shaking their hands in its full glory.

The news of Jin-Woo coming over became the sole ray of hope in the storm of darkness for the Japanese survivors. Those few still-remaining TV stations continued to play the footage related to Jin-Woo over and over again.

People watched his feats and continued to hold on to this renewed thread of hope.

They all felt this electrifying jolt course through their bodies whenever the rank S ant monsters were swept away in their TV screens. Many Japanese who didn’t show much interest during the Korea-Japan united raid operation now clung desperately to the rebroadcast of that raid.

And as the news that the Giants’ relentless march southward had picked up its pace entered their ears, their desperation also grew heavier and heavier as well.

“They said that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo has arrived in Japan!”

A young boy shouted out as he listened to a radio. The complexions of

people around him brightened in an instant.

However, not everyone had discovered the ray of hope, unfortunately.

Those trapped in locations where electricity and gas supply had been cut off from the attacks of the Giants, they weren't able to hear about the arrival of the timely help.

Instead, their sole ray of hope remained with the arrival of the rescue party.

“The JSDF is here!”

Two soldiers carrying pale faces stepped into a small rural nursing hospital run by an old couple.

The aged doctor and his wife let out a sigh of relief after seeing the young soldiers, as they had been praying for the rescue parties to come by.

Unfortunately for them, the situation was not as good as they have been hoping for.

The soldiers shook their heads helplessly.

“We simply don't have the space to carry every patient you have. At a push, we can only accommodate three, four more.”

The old lady addressed the soldiers.

“But, that can't be.... We have over ten patients who suffer from mobility issues.”

The old doctor nodded his head in agreement. Regardless, the young soldiers from the JSDF stomped their feet in anxiety.

“Now isn't the time to worry about those people who might die any second, anyway! Giants are heading this way as we speak!”

The young JSDF soldier, his face caked with sweat, got angry and shouted out.

The residents of the surrounding area had been evacuated already. This was the sole place where the scent of humans could be found, so it was only a matter of time before a Giant would show up here.

The old doctor looked down at the floor for a moment or two, before raising his head up.

“I can't abandon my patients. My wife and I have promised that we'll stay by the sides of our patients until the end.”

The doctor's voice carried his strong determination. The two young soldiers glared angrily at the doctor, but in the end, had no choice but to pick

up their walkie-talkies.

“...Civilians have refused to be evacuated. We are withdrawing from this location.”

They deliberately spoke loudly as if to let others hear them, and urgently left the building once they finished their communication. Soon, the sound of the car’s ignition coming to life could be heard. The old couple sighed at length and quietly consoled each other.

But then, one of the soldiers they thought had left suddenly rushed back inside. He was carrying a cocked rifle to boot, as well.

“W-what are you doing?”

The old couple was taken greatly by surprise and held onto each other. The soldier yelled out loudly, veins popping up on his throat.

“If you stay here, Giants will rip you to death! Rather than dying such gruesome deaths, it’s better to just die by my hand!”

The muzzle was pointed at the old doctor before shifting over to his wife next. The old couple flinched every time that happened.

“This is your final warning. Will you come with us? Or will you die by my hand?”

The young soldier stopped talking there and took aim with his gun.

The old couple didn’t say anything for a long while. How could they not know that the young man in front of their eyes wanted to take them with him?

However, the old couple couldn’t reply that easily. Because, doing that would be akin to turning his back on his belief, the one that led him to serve his community and its people for his entire life.

“...”

“...”

Moments that felt like an eternity passed them by.

The young soldier’s face was already a mess of dried sweat, but then, another thick strand of fresh sweat rolled down his forehead. It travelled along his brow and entered his eye, blurring his vision and stinging him somewhat in the process.

He furrowed his brows just then. Then, this happened.

Growl.

The young soldier’s stomach let the world know of his hunger. However,

he didn't pay any attention to that and maintained his murderous gaze. But then...

"Excuse me, young man."

The young soldier was taken greatly by surprise by the sudden voice coming from his side and quickly took aim at the sickbed.

"W-what do you want?"

In that darkened corner of the hospital ward, a grandmother was sitting on one of the sickbeds. She quietly pushed forward a tray. There was a couple of 'onigiri' on it.

The grandma offered them with a gentle smile.

"If you're hungry, eat these. I just can't work up an appetite nowadays."

"..."

Only then did the young soldier lower his rifle.

"Come. Hurry."

As he received the onigiri, the young soldier's hands trembled. At that moment, he remembered the reason why he decided to put this uniform on in the first place.

Didn't he choose to become a soldier so he could protect and fight for these kind-hearted citizens? Yet, to think, he was about to ignore them and run away just because some monsters were coming to attack this place.

He became so deeply ashamed of his powerlessness.

Tears he couldn't understand began streaming down his face.

He quietly picked up his walkie-talkie and sent his comrade away. The old doctor was taken by surprise and hurriedly grasped the young soldier's shoulder.

"What are you planning to do, young man?"

"I'll stay behind with you."

The young soldier of the JSDF slung the rifle over his shoulder.

"I am a soldier, sir. I can't run away by myself knowing that there are citizens remaining here."

He then somehow managed to chew and swallow down the onigiri, even though his throat was currently choked up with emotion. He deeply bowed towards the grandmother.

“Thank you for the meal. It was really delicious, ma’am.”

It was then.

Thud, thud, thud!!

The ground began quaking all on their own.

The young soldier formed a resolute expression as he ran out of the nursing hospital. He found a single Giant monster approaching this location at a frightening speed. It was crawling on all fours like an actual wild beast.

‘Isn’t that....??’

As the young soldier took aim, his sights spotted something off.

The Giant was currently biting on his comrade that had set off a little earlier. The eyes of the young soldier reddened in an instant.

“Uwaaaahhh-!!”

The soldier fired his rifle at the approaching Giant.

Blam, blam, blam, blam, blam!!

Unfortunately, the weapons of modern civilisation couldn’t harm these monsters. The Giant easily brushed off the hail of bullets and arrived before the young soldier in the blink of an eye.

Click, click...

The ammo-less rifle could only spit out empty coughs and nothing else. More tears formed in the eyes of the young soldier.

‘Oh, dear god, please....’

The Giant monster raised its head to swallow the human it was gnawing on, before leaping towards the young soldier.

It was right at that moment.

A massive Naga slammed into the side of the Giant monster without warning.



Chapter 171 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The Giant monster was flung away and violently rolled on the ground, before bouncing back up again with a spring-like movement that didn't really suit its large frame.

“Gururuk.”

The Giant monster didn't immediately counterattack, instead opting to bare its fangs as it remained prone on the ground. Meanwhile, the giant Naga responsible for flinging it away stood before the growling monster.

It was none other than 'Jima', previously the boss-level monster of the Naga species that were inducted into the Shadow Army not too long ago.

Jima reached his right hand out next to him. When he did, a black spear slowly rose up from the shadow on the ground.

Grab!

Jima powerfully grasped the spear and aimed the weapon at his front. One could sense his unbreakable will to not let anything pass by him.

“Uh....? Uh.....??”

The young soldier from the JSDF couldn't quite figure out whether the spectacle unfolding before his eyes was a dream or reality.

To think, a monster was protecting him from another monster right now.

He thought he'd end up inside the Giant monster's mouth for sure. But, having taken a look at the wide, imposing back of the other monster, he felt several powerful emotions welling up from deep within his heart.

“Just what is going on here...”

Could they survive?

Could they survive against the Giant monster?

Not just the young soldier, but the old couple and the patients, too?

The soldier's thoughts reached this point, and suddenly, all the built-up tension left him and tears rushed up to his eyes.

“Use this.”

Someone pushed forward a colourful handkerchief towards the young soldier. He turned his head to the side to take a look.

A youth who looked to be way younger than the soldier pointed at the handkerchief with his chin and nodded his head afterwards.

Since this youth didn't speak in Japanese, the soldier didn't understand him, but it wasn't all that hard to figure out what he wanted to say in the first place.

'Is he Korean?'

The young soldier wiped the streaming tears away with the offered handkerchief and asked his questions.

"By the way.... just who are you? Wait, why are you even here?"

The Korean youth silently shook his head before raising his thumb up high.

"Good."

"Excuse me?"

"Very Good."

"T-thank.... you, I guess?"

While the young soldier dazedly expressed his gratitude, another man who seemed to be the comrade of this Korean youth appeared from behind him.

Even though this soldier didn't know a whole lot about Hunters, he saw all the blood splatters on this man's clothing and realised that he was now looking at a powerful being who existed on another realm altogether from everyone else.

"This might get dangerous."

Jin-Woo had taken a look inside the rural clinic before showing up here, and he told Yu Jin-Ho while pointing behind him.

"Looks like we'll have change locations. We're too close."

Yu Jin-Ho had witnessed the battle against the Giants a few times by now so he figured out what Jin-Woo was saying almost immediately.

"I'll be on standby over here, hyung-nim."

"Right."

Jin-Woo looked at the young soldier next and saw his scared eyes.

He walked past the soldier and lightly patted the scared, tearful Japanese man on the shoulder. The gesture meant to say that the soldier had done

excellent work.

What he did, standing off against a monster all by himself with just a single rifle, was not something any regular person could even try to imitate.

Jin-Woo had entered many dungeons as a rank E himself so he knew better than anyone just how courageous this soldier had been.

The young JSDF soldier looked at the back of Jin-Woo walking by and let out a gasp of admiration.

“Ah.”

That weightiness brushing past his shoulder, and that warmth from his hand. Just a single touch, and the terror he felt forcing him to get ready for his demise completely washed away.

A powerful sense of relief rushed out from the deepest part of his heart.

It was then, the young soldier recalled the story of two Koreans roaming around in his country while subjugating the Giants.

He recalled the name of one of the two. The name of the Hunter who also subjugated rank S monsters almost all by himself in South Korea, was.....

‘Seong Jin-Woo.... Hunter Seong Jin-Woo....’

It had to be. That man had to be him.

Ba-dump!

The soldier’s heart began pounding hard after running into a person he only heard about in passing. He quickly questioned the Korean youth still standing next to him.

“Is he that person? The rank S Hunter from South Korea??”

Yu Jin-Ho nodded his head and provided his answer.

“Good.”

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo walked over to where the two monsters were in a violent melee. His forehead was creasing up.

“Kiiaaahhk-!!”

The Giant dug deep into Jima’s front in the blink of an eye and proceeded to powerfully rip into the Naga’s shoulder.

He used to be a boss-level monster of a rank A dungeon. Even if his attention had been diverted a bit in order to protect the humans behind him, he should still be a much more powerful being than other, regular Shadow

Soldiers.

To think, he was being suppressed by a regular monster that wasn't even on the same 'boss-level' as he used to be. This situation easily demonstrated how strong these Giant-type monsters were.

Besides all that, Jin-Woo never enjoyed the sight of his soldiers getting beaten down like this at all. His expression hardened as he bent his knees. An unbelievable amount of strength filled up his thighs and shins.

Crack, crack....

The asphalt below that was supporting his legs began splitting as cracks ran underneath his feet.

Ka-boom!

Jin-Woo exploded up from the ground and shot right towards the Giant's face in an instant. In that short moment, the monster's darting eyes discovered him flying straight at it.

A glint of understanding filled the flying human's eyes.

'As I thought, these guys aren't your average monsters at all.'

Jin-Woo's fist slammed into the forehead of the Giant. However, the damage dealt was less than he had expected. The monster pulled its head back just before the hit landed to minimise the impact as much as it could, that was why.

The monster possessed a massive frame, as well as surprisingly agile movements. From the perspectives of the Hunters who had to face off against these b*stards, those two aspects alone would have been enough to give them a sense of helplessness.

The thing was, though, that only applied to regular Hunters.

Jin-Woo immediately summoned a 'Demon King's Shortsword' in the air. And then, he extended his other free hand not holding anything towards the Giant's face.

'Ruler's Authority!'

An invisible hand yanked at the Giant's face with irresistible force. The distance between Jin-Woo and the monster rapidly closed up.

"Kureuk??"

The monster didn't expect the airborne opponent to immediately start attacking again, and it began thrashing about in a panicked frenzy, but in the end, it was all for naught.

Jin-Woo flew in front of the Giant's nose in an instant and activated his skill.

“Violent Slash.”

Dudududududu!!

Rapid-fire attacks so fast that they left behind a series of afterimages turned the Giant's face into a complete mess.

“Kuwaaaak!!”

Boom!!

The monster covered its face and rolled around on the ground. It lost its eyesight from that attack and wildly thrashed about in unbridled pain.

Tap.

After lightly landing back on the ground, Jin-Woo looked on and sensed that this hunt was drawing to a close.

‘It's done.’

But then, the Giant sensed Jin-Woo's approach; its shoulders flinched greatly before it began running away in haste, without even bothering to look behind it.

‘It can also sense the presence of others?’

The more Jin-Woo fought these things, the more surprised he got.

He was speaking from his observations, and it said that these Giant-type monsters were like specialised weapon systems that happened to possess large biological bodies.

The Giant quickly distanced itself. Of course, he wasn't planning on letting it go.

‘Quicksilver.’

Jin-Woo's frame slid forward like a bolt of lightning.

The Giant monster ran with all its might on all fours, but rather than the distance increasing, it rapidly shrank, instead.

The monster felt terror. It sensed a bone-chilling aura emanating right behind its back.

The Giant creature belatedly realised that it could never escape no matter how much it struggled. So, it came to an abrupt stop, spun around, and tried to pounce on its enemy, but...

‘.....??’

The presence of the human that had been closing in at a scary velocity suddenly vanished. And then....

‘...!!’

The presence reappeared behind the creature.

Even though its eyes were not working anymore, the Giant reflexively turned its head around.

That made it easier for him to slice up the monster, however.

Jin-Woo jumped up straight and powerfully swung down the ‘Demon King’s Shortsword’.

Swish-!!

The blade overflowing with the magical energy oozing out from the ‘Black Heart’ vertically split the face of the Giant monster in one slice.

Slice!

“Gu-urk....”

Like a tree that got hacked by an axe, the monster slowly tipped over backwards, not even able to scream out properly.

THUD!!

With that, the third Giant was successfully hunted down.

Jin-Woo cleanly landed back on the ground and let out a light sigh filled with lingering emotions of victory from his lips.

“Fuu...”

“Hyung-nim!!”

Yu Jin-Ho had been standing far, far back while waiting for the battle to finish. Once it was safe, he hurriedly ran over and presented the lid of the thermos containing refreshingly cool tea.

Jin-Woo grinned brightly and accepted the lid.

“Thank you.”

The tea in the lid slid down his throat while issuing the familiar gulping noises.

‘Mm?’

He sensed a presence and looked behind him, only to find Jima and his

slumped shoulders approaching him. The Shadow Soldier was evidently depressed from losing the one on one fight earlier.

'You fought well, regardless. Get some rest.'

Jin-Woo encouraged his underling and had it return. Jima returned to being a shadow and got absorbed back below Jin-Woo's feet.

Yu Jin-Ho stared at that process before raising his voice.

"Hyung-nim?"

Jin-Woo returned the empty lid and replied.

"Yeah?"

"You sent out all your other summons on their own, but well, is there a reason why you decided to act alongside your Nagas?"

Yu Jin-Ho was feeling puzzled by this.

Just now, hyung-nim was almost solely responsible for killing this Giant. It seemed as if he didn't really need the Naga's help at all.

Even then, he always sent out the Naga first, in the beginning of the battle, and only participated after his summon was pushed to its backfoot.

Yu Jin-Ho was curious as to what Jin-Woo's aim could be. The actual reason was simple enough, though.

'Because, I just wanted to level these guys up, you know.'

The Naga Shadow Soldiers had become a part of the Shadow Army relatively recently, and as a result, their levels fell quite behind that of his other soldiers.

That was why he figured that, since he would be fighting these Giants anyway, he'd raise the levels of the Nagas in the process as well. However, as it turned out, these Giant-type monsters weren't easy enough opponents for his new recruits to deal with by themselves.

Although it was a bit tedious, this method was still the best one if he wanted to increase the Nagas' battle experience.

'Of course, I can't really tell Yu Jin-Ho any of this, now can I?'

Jin-Woo formed a smirk.

"Well, I feel like I'm still not too familiar with these Nagas, you see? If I keep them around me for a little longer, wouldn't I become friendlier with them?"

“Oh.”

Yu Jin-Ho nodded his head.

What an easy kid to lie to, this guy - thought Jin-Woo.

But then, Yu Jin-Ho suddenly fell into deep contemplation, before raising his voice as his eyes sparkled brightly.

“You even make sure to look after every single one of your summons, hyung-nim. As expected of you!”

‘.....’

And also, Jin-Woo felt really bad for lying to him, as well.

“Excuse me....”

Jin-Woo’s head shifted to his side.

The young soldier who courageously stood up against the Giant was walking closer while continuously glancing at the dead monster’s mountainous corpse. Jin-Woo could also see the old couple responsible for protecting the hospital behind the soldier’s shoulder, too.

He hadn’t spoken to them yet, but he could already tell what they wanted to say simply from their expressions alone.

That was all he needed.

For now, he didn’t have enough time to receive their gratitude one at a time. Even as he stood around here, these Giants were busy going on a rampage in other locations.

Jin-Woo took a long look at the Giant’s corpse.

The biggest reason why he came to Japan was lying on the ground right in front of his face.

“Stop! Stop!!”

Yu Jin-Ho quickly stopped the Japanese survivors from approaching the location.

Jin-Woo had been feeling it lately, but well, Yu Jin-Ho’s wits seemed to have quickened up considerably since their first meeting. Thanks to that, the job of extracting shadows had become that much easier.

He smirked and looked at Yu Jin-Ho for a bit, before shifting his gaze back to the dead Giant.

He extended his hands out and quietly murmured to himself.

“Rise up.”

“Dear viewers at home.... It’s hard to believe, but the scene before me is truly happening!”

Tatatatatata-!!

The reporter riding on the helicopter continuously spat out gasps of astonishment as if he could hardly believe his own eyes.

The camera began transmitting the scenes below. Several hundreds of ant monsters were uniformly marching towards a certain direction. And in front of them, there was a mutated ant monster with wings on its back.

Of course, it was none other than ‘Beru’.

He had been advancing up ahead of the marching ant army, but he abruptly raised his head high up in the air.

“Kiiiiieehk-!!”

The loud explosion of his screech prompted the reporter to hurriedly cover his ears. Meanwhile, the ants marching behind all came to a stop right when they heard Beru’s call.

There were three Giants to their front.

The differences in size were like looking at an elephant and a mouse.

However, Beru displayed not one hint of fear as his claws extended out like lengthy blades, and he dashed forward.

“Kiiiieehhck!!”

And behind him, the army of ants began covering the land in black.

The intense and bloody battle ended not too long afterwards.

“Oh my god!! Oh my GOD!!”

As the reporter cried out in sheer astonishment over and over again, the ants successfully brought the Giants down. They then began chomping down with their sharp mandibles and ate the corpses.

Wooduduk!!

Kwajeeck!!

Of course, under Beru’s orders, they didn’t forget to leave some part of the monsters behind so more Shadow Soldiers could be created later. As for those ants that got too greedy for their own good, swift kicks from Beru flew in to

sort out the situation immediately.

The reporter was shouting out in a clearly-excited voice now.

“The Giants are being devoured right now!! These Giants are being devoured by the insects right now!!!!”

These Giants that instilled unbridled shock and fear with the actions of devouring humans were in turn, getting devoured by the ants. The Japanese people watching this scene felt a certain sense of inexplicable gratification.

That was perhaps the reason why the most amount of interest was focused on the ant army, since Jin-Woo himself refused to be filmed from the get-go.

The only problem being....

“Heok!!”

The reporter and the cameraman flinched in surprise and hurriedly backed away after spotting Beru flying right next to the helicopter.

The former ant king didn't even hesitate and snatched away the camera pointing at him and destroyed it immediately.

Kwajeeck!!

“Keok!”

The reporter and the cameraman embraced each other and shuddered pitifully in fear.

“....”

Beru alternated his quiet gaze between the two trembling humans before returning back to the ground below.

“Whew....”

“Pant, pant....”

Both men spat out sighs of relief right away.

There was a reason why they followed around the monster ant army even as the cameras worth tens of thousands of dollars were being lost every single time. The countless viewers were going absolutely crazy with ardent fervour for these creatures, that was why.

The cameraman quickly picked up the spare camera prepared for this eventuality, while the reporter spoke the closing words to the mic as if he was already used to this whole situation.

“....I'm Kitamura, reporting from the location.”

“Kkyaaahk!”

She must’ve graduated from elementary school not too long ago. This young girl was running away screaming with a tear-strewn face.

“Ah, ah ah!!”

Right behind her, a Giant gave chase with a disgusting smile on its face.

How far could she go when running on her still-short legs? The distance between them closed up in an instant.

The Giant must’ve found this game of tag with a certain winner set in stone rather amusing to play, because it continued to form a toothy grin.

It reached out with its arm that was at least 1.5 times longer than other Giant’s. And, just before such a rough hand got to snatch the young girl up, a cold flash streaked past the monster’s wrist.

And the blue-coloured lightning that exploded out afterwards began burning up the cut surface of the now-missing wrist with extreme heat.

Crackle!!!

“Guwaaaaahhk!!”

The Giant shot up to its feet and screamed out in pain as it held its wrist.

The owner of the blue-coloured blade was none other than ‘Igrit’.

He spun around and lifted up the pale-faced girl that was on her knees shivering, before quickly evacuating from that place.

The Giant angrily glared below. The creature that had cleanly severed its wrist was busy escaping with its prey.

The eyes of the enraged Giant were quickly dyed in red.

“Gureuk...”

The scene was scary enough for any observers to wet their pants. But even then, someone still stood before such a terrifying monster. It was, of course, ‘Iron’. His armour had become even more enhanced after his grade rose up to ‘Elite Knight’.

Iron stabbed the shield down on the ground and stood proudly with his chest wide open. And then, a truly loud roar exploded out from beneath his helm.

Wooooowuuuuuhhh-!!

[Iron has activated ‘Skill: Roar of Provocation’.]

[The enemy has fallen into a provoked state.]

The glare of the Giant previously aimed at Igrit was instantly switched over to Iron.

As if to say ‘Come if you dare’, Iron pounded on his chest vigorously and raised up high the shield as huge as himself.

“Guwuurk!”

The fist of the enraged Giant mercilessly punched down on Iron.

Ka-boom!

However, Iron was not forced back an inch. The effects of his grade rising up had pushed him to a whole new plateau of power.

Boom! Slam! Bam!

Iron ably defended against dozens of punches and loudly cried out again.

“Wuuouuhh!!”

When he did, the army of Shadow Soldiers and Ice Bears, the ones that had been with Jin-Woo the longest, attacked at the same time from either side of the Giant.

The leader of the Ice Bear troops, Tank, shook its head around and roared out loudly as if he got excited by the prospect of entering the battlefield after a long time of inactivity.

“Krrrooarr!!”

His roar was so loud and explosive that even those far away could feel the faint tremor in the air.

The reporter watching this scene unfold from afar with bated breath shouted at the camera next to him.

“Can you see this, everyone? These summons, these creatures summoned by Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, are raiding the Giant by themselves!”

Could this truly be reality?

This very reporter didn’t believe Yuri Orlov’s claims from the word go, and quite obviously, he also didn’t hold much hope with Jin-Woo, as well.

But then, not just Seong Jin-Woo himself, but even the summoned creatures he ordered to go out on their own were speedily hunting down these Giants, as if they were nothing.

Maybe, just maybe....

When the reporter thought that, just maybe, Seong Jin-Woo could possibly save this country all by himself, something warm and powerful gushed up from the deepest part of his chest.

It was precisely then.

“L-look! Over there!”

The cameraman pointed at the Giant. The reporter hurriedly shifted his tear-soaked gaze in the general direction of the monster.

“How could this be.....!!”

The reporter spat out a moan.

The Giant’s posture was already crumbling. Countless screaming bolts of lightning, shooting out from the tip of Igrit’s sword, were pounding down on the faltering monster’s head.

It was such a mesmerizingly beautiful sight that all those who looked upon it forgot what they wanted to say next.



Chapter 172 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

It was obvious that the Japanese Hunter's Association HQ used to be located in the central district of Tokyo, commonly seen as the beating heart of Japan.

But, that was only until the Giants began pouring out from the Gate, of course.

On that fateful day, as Shinjuku's rank S Gate morphed into a full-on dungeon break, the President of the Japanese Association Matsumoto Shigeo managed to save his life through the sacrifices of the Hunters and soldiers stationed on the frontlines. He hurriedly re-established the HQ of the Association in the city of Osaka's local government offices.

There was only one reason why he chose this city, rather than some others located on the north-west of the country.

He figured that, if they failed to protect the city of Osaka and its 2.66 million inhabitants, then there was no hope for Japan, either. In other words, this was their last defence line – their Maginot Line.

And that was also why Association President Matsumoto experienced the event of his sights darkening from despair when he heard the news of Nagoya, which wasn't that far away from Osaka, falling at the hands of the Giant-type monsters.

The nation's utter annihilation was practically around the corner, but it became impossible to beg for international help.

The dastardly scheme cooked up by the Japanese Association was laid bare in full by the President of the Korean Hunter's Association, Goh Gun-Hui. No one wanted to lend their aid to Japan because of that.

After Goh Gun-Hui's press conference was over, the Japanese government, temporarily relocated to Kyoto, summoned Matsumoto Shigeo to appear before them.

He had to kneel down in front of the government's higher-ups baying for his blood.

“The responsibility for this crisis rests solely on me. However, you need someone to sort out this situation. Please, won't you delay the handing out

of the punishment until then?”

The Prime Minister of Japan, standing his back to the kneeling Matsumoto Shigeo, made his reply after a short deliberation.

“...Fine.”

Without a doubt, the Association President Matsumoto had brought this crisis upon them, but just as he said, someone still had to take care of the mess created by the dungeon break.

The punishment could come afterwards.

It wouldn't be too late to make an example out of this man after the flame not just burning on the foot but on the rest of the body was put out first.

It was around at this point that Jin-Woo landed on Japanese soil.

The very first person to rush out and welcome him while forgetting to even put on his shoes properly was Association President Matsumoto.

His fate was already sealed. That didn't mean he wanted to let his mother nation suffer the same fate as him. That's what he thought.

When he first saw Jin-Woo at the airport, his entire body was overcome with goosebumps of nasty shock.

‘How could this be...??’

This man was strong.

Matsumoto had been the Association President for many years, and he got to meet many powerful beings up until now. That was how he could tell from just one glance.

He stood next to countless Hunters in his life so far, but hadn't encountered many situations where the hair on the back of his neck stood up straight from the unbelievable chill he felt.

No, actually, this would be his first time.

If only he had a chance to meet Jin-Woo just once before the Jeju Island raid took place, he'd have immediately rescinded the plan to drive the Korean Hunters to their demise.

The words of Goto Ryuji from back then, when he personally met Jin-Woo, were definitely not wrong. This Korean Hunter right in front of his eyes possessed such a powerful pressure.

However, the enemies this time were the Giant-type monsters emerging straight out from a rank S Gate.

Matsumoto judged that, no matter how strong Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was, he alone would not be enough to contend with all those monsters. So, he made a desperate plea.

“Please, I beg of you to focus on defending us, with Osaka as the centre.”

The Japanese Hunter’s Association wanted Jin-Woo to focus solely on defence and buy them enough time so that they could negotiate with either the Americans or with the Russians.

Too bad, that plan was immediately thrown out the window with one short sentence from the man in question.

“I refuse.”

Jin-Woo curtly stated his position.

It was only obvious that the Association President Matsumoto Shigeo and all the other Association-related parties would jump up in sheer fluster. Did he suddenly have a change of heart and no longer wanted to kill the monsters?

Matsumoto could only ask with a tightening chest.

“Then.... Then, what will you do, instead?”

Instead of a verbal reply, Jin-Woo answered with his actions.

He separated his summons into three parties and had them operate on their own, while he too began moving by himself as well.

The number of creatures he summoned out was already astonishing enough, but even then, Matsumoto Shigeo was swallowing his worried gasps over something else entirely.

‘Is he really trying to fight against all of the Giants?’

Every Hunter in the world had all said in one voice that such a feat was impossible. But, was he trying to do precisely that?

He had no way of knowing. The best he could do now was to wait while entrusting his, and everyone else’s, fate to the heavens above.

He returned to the Hunter’s Association HQ and focused on gathering information on the unfolding situation.

Unexpectedly, the answer came back soon enough.

“The city of Nagoya, it’s been successfully taken back!!”

“What was that?!”

Matsumoto Shigeo shot up from his chair from that shocking news.

It hadn't been all that long since Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had set off, yet the Giant-type monster in Nagoya had been brought down already?

Even before the Japanese Association President had a chance to calm his fluttering heart, messages began pouring in from all corners of the country.

“A Giant’s corpse has been discovered in the city of Nakatsugawa!”

“The city of Shizuoka has been successfully reclaimed!!”

“The cities of Takayama and Nagano both have been.....”

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo and his summoned creatures were eliminating the Giant-type monsters scattered throughout the country of Japan as they closed in towards Tokyo.

It was truly an unbelievable speed of advancement.

The Association President Matsumoto Shigeo saw the power of the Korean Hunter capable of changing the impossible into the possible and began shivering where he stood.

His pounding heart showed no signs of slowing down at all.

And finally....

“T-the city of Kofu.... Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, he has arrived in Kofu, sir.”

He plopped down on his butt after hearing the news of all the Giants being killed off in Kofu, a city only 130 kilometres removed from Tokyo itself.

“Association President!!”

“Sir, President Matsumoto!!”

His trembling legs didn't want to listen to him at all.

That Korean Hunter was really planning to kill every Giant-type monster found in this nation. A certain thought suddenly entered his mind, then.

‘What he’s doing right now..... Isn’t that what I planned to do to South Korea?’

He was planning to destroy Korea's Hunter system, and by utilising the strengths of the Japanese Hunters, squeeze South Korea as he willed it. But now, the situation had flipped on its head.

Japan and its collapsed Hunter system now found itself under the thumb of one single man, Seong Jin-Woo.

The plan that Matsumoto himself, the Japanese Association, the top

Japanese Hunters, and the government combined their resources together to put into motion, and ultimately failed to carry out, was being ably carried out by just one person. He was being successful in doing so, as well.

“...”

He dazedly sat in his chair, and issued a new order to the Association’s staff members standing around and worrying about him.

“Can you all leave me for a while? I’d like to be alone for a minute or two.”

Soon, his office became emptied. His head slowly drooped real low.

A powerful sense of defeat the likes of which he had never tasted before in his life crashed into him like a tidal wave.

He had lost.

He had completely, utterly lost.

However, the emotions rushing in after the sense of defeat finally left him were a brief moment of self-reflection and remorse, and an infinite amount of gratitude.

On that day, he silently sobbed.

And also on that day, Jin-Woo and his summons starting from Osaka and moving eastward, while killing every Giant they ran into, finally arrived on the doorsteps of the city of Tokyo.

THUD!!

Two more Giant-type monsters fell lifelessly to the ground.

[Level up!]

It had been so long since he got to level up so freely like this. He could barely remember the last time it happened.

Jin-Woo tightly clenched his fists.

As he approached closer and closer to where the dungeon break originally started, the city of Tokyo, he alone had hunted down 13 Giant-type monsters. His level rose up by six during this time.

Each of these Giant-type monsters was on the level of a boss creature, so the experience points they gave out were rather substantial. Of course, experience points earned by his Shadow Soldiers in other locations also played a pretty large role, as well.

Every time that message of **[Level up!]** popped up in his view during his journey, he felt his enthusiasm soar up even higher and higher.

Just like now.

[Level up!]

'That's what I'm talking about!'

Jin-Woo clenched his fists again from that wonderfully-timed message of a level up entering his view. He also heard a familiar voice talking to him in his mind.

'Oh, my king. We have killed off yet another enemy.'

The ones that sent him extra experience points were Beru's ant army, who also happened to possess the fastest marching speed as well.

It was a rather obvious result, though, when considering the fact that Beru was the strongest Shadow Soldier he had, and that the number of ants was also quite large, to begin with. The former ant king always reported back to Jin-Woo every time after killing their enemies.

Jin-Woo congratulated the achievements of the ant army.

'Nicely done. You all did well.'

'I thank thee, oh my king.'

Jin-Woo ended the communication with Beru and used the 'Sensory Sharing' to check up on the status of each of his three armies.

Although it wasn't to the extent of the ant army led by Beru, the army of High Orcs led by Fangs and the army of elite soldiers led by Igrit were also unhindered in their progress as well.

Jin-Woo felt really pleased by the levels of his soldiers that had shot up to a noticeable degree.

"Hyung-nim, should we set up camp here tonight?"

Jin-Woo opened his eyes and ended the 'Sensory Sharing'.

Yu Jin-Ho was asking a question while holding a tent he took out from the vehicle's trunk. Jin-Woo raised his head to see that the day was coming to an end, the dusk casting its shadow on the ground below.

His 'Tiredness' gauge wasn't all that high due to the effects of stamina recovery potions he bought from the Store, as well as from levelling up. However, his mental fatigue had certainly piled up recently.

'Looks like I should take a break.'

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Today's campsite had been decided. They quickly set up the tent and got ready to eat dinner.

The heat had cooled off before long and the breeze of the encroaching evening felt chilly. It was already autumn now.

Jin-Woo thought to himself that winter was just around the corner as he warmed up the food the Japanese Association had supplied him with.

Winter.

If he were to split the rise and fall of the human civilisation in terms of seasons, then the appearance of Tokyo's outer edges certainly gave off the aura of winter in full bloom.

For some reason, though, Tokyo that no longer resembled a city came across as a somewhat familiar sight to him.

'Where have I seen this before?'

Jin-Woo combed his memories for a little while before finding his answer.

'...The Demon's Castle.'

The sight of the ruined, crumbling cities he saw back then resembled Tokyo's current appearance. The only difference being, there were no flames burning right now.

When his thoughts arrived at this point, a dark shadow crept up over his expression.

'Could it be....?'

From the very first floor of the Demon's Castle, all the way up to its final floor, every city found within the dungeon was destroyed almost beyond recognition.

If that was the System's way of giving away hints, then what was the so-called architect trying to tell him?

Jin-Woo smirked to himself.

'Does it really matter now?'

The so-called architect, the manager of the System, was dead and gone inside a dungeon. Seeing that there was no further contact after that, the chances of that guy still being alive were slim, to say the least.

'And, even if what I saw back then was the prediction of the coming events.....'

‘...I shall stop them.’

That was why he continued to grow stronger. He chased after greater strength, because he didn't want to be toyed around with by powers he couldn't fight against.

Raise his level, get his hands on new skills, and raise his level up even higher.....

And eventually, he had arrived at this point in time.

Ba-thump.

The 'Black Heart' beat loudly once as if to react to his thoughts.

Jin-Woo pressed his hand to his chest to feel that as a thin smile spread across his lips. The doctor in the hospital told him that he was completely normal.

["We haven't found any abnormalities with you. Hunter-nim, you're perfectly healthy."]

The day before his departure, Jin-Woo went to a hospital to get a complete check up on his health.

The doctor had him scanned from top to bottom but still failed to discover the second heart or anything similar to that.

The 'Back Heart', then, couldn't have been a physical change taking place within his flesh. It did exist and he could definitely feel its heartbeat, but it also did not exist in reality, too.

‘What the heck does that even mean?’

Jin-Woo wryly laughed to himself.

He was sort of relieved by the fact that his body structure was no different from other people's, but if that was the case, where was this tremor from his chest coming from?

It was then – a light breeze blew in from the city centre of Tokyo. And it carried this sticky and utterly horrifying magical energy that was hard to even fathom how dense it was.

“Hyung-nim....”

Yu Jin-Ho formed a worried expression. This was truly an astonishing power level that even someone like him with a lower threshold of perception could sense.

Jin-Woo wordlessly nodded his head. He didn't have to think too hard

where this breeze blew in from. It was from that massive Giant guarding the Gate in Shinjuku.

This aura was on another realm altogether compared to what he sensed from other Giants so far. He was this far away, yet goosebumps broke out on his arms just for a moment there.

However, a smile still formed on Jin-Woo's face.

As if it was responding to that powerful wave of magic energy, the 'Black Heart' began pounding even harder than before.

How many levels would he gain after killing that monster? Also, what kind of a soldier would come out from its shadow?

Anticipation was bubbling up within him already.



Chapter 173 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Igrit's elite soldier army was the first to arrive in Tokyo.

Fang's High Orc army was the next to arrive.

Igrit discovered the approaching High Orc army and lightly nodded his head as his greeting to their Chieftain. The corners of Fang's lips, hidden under his black hood, arched up as he too, nodded his head.

The elite soldiers army, the division of Ice Bears that acted alongside them, and the High Orc army had now gathered in one spot. And a short while later.

Tap, tap, tap.

The sounds of marching footsteps uniformly resounded out in the surrounding air. Just beyond the ash-grey fog, a large-sized battalion of Shadow Soldiers approached the location.

As befitting of the soldiers that had taken the longest route but also hunted down the most Giants, Beru and his ant army were the last to arrive. The former ant king led the pack and emerged from the settling fog of dust first.

Just like before, Igrit sent out a greeting first.

“...”

However, Beru didn't display any hint of acknowledgement and walked right past Igrit, strode up to Jin-Woo's back before kneeling down on one knee in a dignified manner.

“Ah. You all have arrived.”

Only then did Jin-Woo tear his eyes away from the distant Giant to take a look behind him.

“Everyone, you all did well.”

As he welcomed them all, every Shadow Soldier followed after Beru's example and knelt down on one knee. Ice Bears couldn't physically kneel down, so they simply prostrated, their noses pressed to the ground below.

Everyone, including the elite soldiers, Ice Bears, ants, High Orcs, and Nagas, as well as other types of Shadow Soldiers he had recruited in between – nearly one thousand of his Shadow Soldiers had gathered in one spot.

“All of you, stand up.”

Jin-Woo gestured them to rise to their feet and his soldiers all stood up straight. It was truly a mesmerising spectacle.

Yu Jin-Ho was utterly arrested by this sight and stared dazedly at the Shadow Soldiers.

‘What a relief that this is just one of hyung-nim’s skills, otherwise if these were real monsters....’

Even though he knew no bad things would happen, his body still shuddered as he imagined the scene of these many monsters that also boasted such levels of power moving around as one.

It was indeed a relief that these guys were allies. Where would he find anyone more appropriate to attach that description to other than his hyung-nim?

Unfortunately, there was an even more shocking scene waiting for him right behind him.

Gulp.

Yu Jin-Ho just barely managed to swallow his dry saliva and cautiously took a look behind him. There was a lone Giant standing over yonder.

The size of this Giant-type monster was on another scale altogether compared to the others he saw during his trip to this place.

Simply by staring at the head of a Giant so, so, so far up in the sky, he couldn’t tell whether he was looking at an actual monster or a high-rise building, instead.

“Wowsers....”

A gasp of shock leaked out from his mouth.

There was just too great a difference between seeing it from a video clip and with his own two eyes like this.

Jin-Woo smiled and placed his hand on top of Yu Jin-Ho’s head, as the latter found himself unable to shut his mouth at all.

“Hey, dude. Your jaw will fall off at this rate.”

“H-hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho finally regained his wits and embarrassedly scratched the back of his head. Jin-Woo withdrew his hand from the kid’s head and wordlessly glared at the boss-level Giant-type monster.

‘How can a massive being like that even exist?’

That life-form was simply far too large.

The horrible magic power oozing out from that thing even made him think about getting away from this place as soon as he could. It was that unpleasant to behold.

There were two ways of getting rid of this unpleasantness he felt.

Either running as far away as possible from the source of this unpleasantness and forget about everything, or, root out the cause of the problem itself.

Which choice he’d go for was set in stone the moment he left Korea – no, the moment Jin-Woo had Awakened, as a matter of fact.

Ba-thump, ba-thump....

He closed his eyes and quietly enjoyed the tireless beatings of his heart and before abruptly opening them back again.

“Get to a safe distance.”

“Yes, hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho nodded his head with a determined face and quickly ran in between the Shadow Soldiers to get away from there.

‘Good.’

Jin-Woo patiently waited for the kid to get to a safe enough distance away, and then summoned up his newly-added family members.

“Come out.”

Although not as huge as the boss-level Giant, several massive Shadow Soldiers rose up from the ground.

From No.1 up to No. 13.

Jin-Woo named his Giant Shadow Soldiers No.1 to No.13, according to the order of who got extracted first.

He felt rather pleased from the sight of these massive figures standing in front of his Shadow Army, which made his entire troop seem even more dependable than before.

‘This should be enough.’

Jin-Woo figured that this was enough preparation and raised his hand. As his fingertips pointed to the heavens above, all of the Shadow Soldiers got

ready to attack.

Clang!

“My soldiers.”

His soldiers, all decked in black armour and enveloped in rising smoke – Jin-Woo scanned his Shadow Soldiers one by one before turning back to face the boss-level Giant.

The creature was indifferently staring down at him as if any opponents not entering in its fixed range wouldn't interest it at all.

‘And that’s what I don’t like about that guy.’

Jin-Woo was quite unhappy at the fact that a measly monster was looking down on him from that high up.

A vicious grin broke out of his face, then. And the hand pointing to the sky was pointed towards the Giant next.

“Advance!” (TL note at the end)

Beru raised his head up high and screeched loudly.

“Kiiiiieehhkkk!!”

Ants, Ice Bears, Giants – no, almost every single Shadow Soldier gathered there dashed forward all at once towards the boss-level Giant monster.

RUMBLE-!!

The fierce march of the Shadow Army rocked the ground below. The earth shook and mighty dust storm kicked up. And soon, Jin-Woo's soldiers entered the territory of the Giant.

It happened then.

The surrounding air suddenly transformed.

“What the hell?!”

A scream-like cry of shock exploded out from Jin-Woo's mouth.

The boss Giant had disappeared from his view, and when it reappeared, already half of his Shadow Soldiers had been annihilated.

‘It did a sliding tackle??’

There was no other fitting term to describe the boss Giant sweeping away his soldiers with its stretched leg other than a 'sliding tackle'.

It was an unfathomable destructive power.

With that single attack, a huge entity that was the Shadow Army got split in half. Of course, his soldiers weren't simply standing back to get massacred out there, either.

Even before the dust kicked up from the Giant's foot had settled down, Fangs finished gigantifying himself and stood before the monster's face.

Fuu-heuph!!

He then sucked in a deep, deep breath as his chest expanded greatly. A nonsensically massive pillar of flames erupted out from his mouth.

Kuuuwaaaahhhh-!!

This attack from Fangs was capable of even melting down those monsters with innate resistance to fire in a single breath. Unfortunately, the Giant blocked this blazing inferno with the palm of its hand.

Jin-Woo could sense Fangs getting astonished by what was happening.

While still in the lowered position, the Giant snatched up the ankle of a Giant Shadow Soldier in the vicinity.

His Giant soldier, as big as a regular building, resembled a small child after it got caught by the hand of the boss-level monster. And this creature threw the Giant soldier straight at Fangs.

He was about to suck in another breath for his second attack, but he was struck down by the flying soldier before he could and got disintegrated.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo's eyes narrowed to a slit like a blade as he witnessed Fangs get scattered away in black smoke.

It proceeded from that point on – one thousand against one.

The proper battle between his Shadow Soldiers and the boss-level Giant truly began. No – this was a far too one-sided display of violence to be called a battle.

“Kkiiieehk!”

“Ku-uh-uuhk!”

Shadow Soldiers were crushed constantly and endlessly by the Giant's attacks.

A punch, a slap, an elbow drop, a knee, the back of the foot, and the bottom of it – one movement from the boss-level Giant, and dozens of soldiers were swept away.

Boom!!

Boom!!!

Boom!!!!

The boss-level Giant's flashy movements easily exceeded that of the highest-ranked melee-type Hunter's speed.

“Kiiehk.”

Beru watched the ant army being trampled on and was about to dash forward, but Jin-Woo raised his arm and stopped him.

“Not yet.”

Beru took a step back.

Both Beru and Igrit standing next to Jin-Woo and waiting for his orders displayed visible hints of wanting to join the battle.

‘However, now isn't the time yet.’

Jin-Woo's lips were shut tight in a straight line.

The soldiers repeatedly went through destruction and revival, resulting in his MP decreasing at an alarming rate. In fact, the rate was so severe that even the massive reserve of MP he possessed now thanks to the 'Black Heart' wouldn't be able to keep up.

However, Jin-Woo remained patient and didn't move. He calmly observed the Giant from the distance.

He sent out his immortal army as bait and searched for the creature's weaknesses. That was his plan for this raid.

BOOM!!

The Giant crushed Shadow Soldiers with its knee, and proceeded to punch the ground with its fist.

Ka-boom!!

The ground shook as if there was an earthquake breaking out and dozens of soldiers disappeared in black smoke.

It was a nightmarish battle situation created by the perfect defence and the horrifying destructive power of the monster.

However, he did gain something from all of this.

Within this desolate wasteland that once used to be the centre of Tokyo, Jin-Woo's irises were gleaming brightly from his frightening level of

concentration.

‘As I thought....’

As expected, no attacks could damage the hardy skin of the Giant as it had worn its enormous magic energy around itself like an impregnable carapace.

The creature must’ve been aware of its own defensive capability, because it didn’t even bother to defend itself and continued to pour out one attack after another.

However, there was one single exception. There was one moment that the Giant chose defence instead of offence. That would be when Fangs spat out the ‘Fire Dragon’s Breath’ in the face of the Giant before.

Only then did it raise its arm to protect its face.

If, by chance, that was not a simple coincidence, then.....

“Kaisel!”

Jin-Woo summoned out his Sky Dragon.

Kaisel emerged out from the shadow at once and spread out its massive wings in a spectacular fashion.

Cha-aaahk!

“Kiiiaaahk!!”

Jin-Woo quickly climbed aboard Kaisel’s back.

“Beru, Igrit!”

Beru’s wings extended out from Jin-Woo’s call, while Igrit climbed up behind his Sovereign. Soon, Kaisel flapped its wings and took off while carrying his two new passengers.

Kiihahk!!

The ground quickly grew further away.

‘Let’s go!’

The four of them flew up high in the air and flew in a straight line towards the Giant monster’s head. It was then.

Sneak.

The eyes of the Giant shifted to its side.

Even though it was in the middle of a violent tangle with nearly a thousand Shadow Soldiers, it still had time to discover Kaisel and Beru approaching it at an ultra-high speed.

Seeing that, Jin-Woo nodded his head in understanding. That solidified another one of his theories.

This monster could definitely split time itself during the battle and use it to its advantage just like Jin-Woo would do with his Agility Stat. And that was why this thing could display such an astonishing level of speed compared to other Giant monsters.

The boss twisted its body around. Jin-Woo's vision caught the sight of the creature's massive shoulders moving.

'Evade it!'

Jin-Woo and Igrit kicked away from the back of Kaisel.

A blink of an eye later, the Giant's fist slammed into Kaisel.

Ka-boom!

Jin-Woo watched Kaisel explode into black smoke, his brows quivering. It was still a rotten feeling to watch his soldiers get destroyed like that.

If there was one saving grace, then that would be the fact that the target for his anger was right in front of his face.

Igrit was the first to attack. He jumped high up in the air and swung the 'Demon King's Longsword' down.

Crackle!!

A blue streak of lightning crackling into life from the end of the sword rained down on the Giant's face. The boss rapidly tilted its head back to evade the lightning.

'Did it again!'

Once more, it dodged an attack aimed at its face. Jin-Woo was now sure of where its weak point was. He immediately used 'Ruler's Authority' to reel himself in closer to the Giant's face.

Beru followed closely behind.

'Demon King's Shortsword.'

Jin-Woo tightly grasped the two shortswords suddenly appearing in his hands. Beru's claws had been extended to full in no time, as well.

The combined assault of Jin-Woo and Beru unfolded in the sky high up above. The Shadow Soldiers on the ground succeeded in fully reviving themselves, took aim at the Giant's ankles, and pounced on their targets.

BOOM!!

BANG!!

Flames flying away from the hands of the Magic Soldiers crashed into the Giant's body and continued to explode. Bolts of Lightning crackled and stormed down, pillars of flames erupted forth, and Giants continued to bite and tear.

Yu Jin-Ho watched this hallucination-like battle from beginning till end without missing a beat.

“...”

He was completely at a loss for words.

This was no longer a battle between a Hunter and a monster. No, it was a fight between a monster and another monster.

The monster the size of a high-rise building, and hyung-nim commanding nearly one-thousand summons all at once – if someone asked Yu Jin-Ho who was even more monster-like in this picture, he thought that he wouldn't be able to answer right away.

‘Truly...’

It was truly a lamentable thing that he was the only one witnessing this battle. Yu Jin-Ho did his absolute best to calm his heart, that was ready to explode in his chest, and kept his eyes firmly locked on Jin-Woo's position.

That was also the moment when Jin-Woo's shortsword stabbed deeply into the eye of the Giant.

Stab!!

The boss rocked its head violently from side to side and desperately rampaged around. However, Jin-Woo wasn't flung away from his spot despite all the shaking.

‘It's working.’

He grasped tight the shortsword digging into the eye of the monster and activated a skill with his other hand.

‘Violent Slash!!’

Dududududududu!!

This particular eye of the Giant was soon torn to shreds. The monster contorted its upper torso and resisted, but still, Jin-Woo remained impossible to shake off.

While he tenaciously clung onto the Giant's eye, he took a look behind

him.

'Beru!'

'Your wish is my command!'

Beru understood immediately what his Sovereign wanted and flew in at an unbelievable speed to enter the hole in the Giant's eye.

On the outside, Jin-Woo, while from the inside, Beru. The combined attacks from the two began ripping apart the giant face from inside and outside simultaneously.

The Giant monster's mouth shot wide open as it issued a soundless scream.

Just as the huge monster stopped attacking for a moment, ants focused their efforts on the creature's ankle and finally succeeded in their goal.

Snap.

After losing a tendon in one of the legs, the Giant powerlessly crashed down on one knee.

Kwa-boom!

The ground couldn't deal with the massive collapsing weight and quaked quite viciously.

Even then, Jin-Woo and Beru's combined assault continued on.

"Violent Slash!!"

Dudududududu!!

"Violent Slash!!"

Dudududududu!!

"Violent Slash!!"

Dudududududu!!

The Giant thrashed about in pure madness, but the more it did, the more intense and crafty Jin-Woo's attacks became as he clung onto the monster's face.

From a certain point onwards, the Giant's resistance stopped. Its humongous body slowly began tipping to the side. And finally...

KUUU-WUUOONG!!

The Giant's truly huge body came crashing to the ground.

It was then, Jin-Woo heard the familiar mechanical beeps going off in his

head.

Tti-ring.

[You have defeated your enemy!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

Jin-Woo's clenched fist gripped even harder.

'I did it!'

Jin-Woo lightly landed back on the ground and was about to sigh out in relief, but then, he realised something was amiss and stopped his movements altogether.



Chapter 174 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘Hold up.’

Jin-Woo hurriedly brought the message windows back up.

He didn’t even have time to enjoy the notices of his level going up four times in a row, as his eyes were currently fixed to the very first message.

‘Oh, my god.’

Jin-Woo’s eyes nearly popped out of their sockets.

[You have defeated your enemy.]

‘This wasn’t the boss monster??’

His shocked gaze shifted over to the Giant sagged on the ground, with no focus to be found within its dull eyes.

The incredible power that was on another realm compared to other Giants, and the overwhelming aura that even left Jin-Woo surprised. No matter what, this creature looked, sounded, and smelled like a boss, yet it was apparently not. The System’s message clearly said that this thing was a ‘regular’ monster.

It was then.

“Hyung-niiiiim-!!”

He heard the overexcited voice of Yu Jin-Ho coming from a distance.

Jin-Woo raised his hand quickly to signal the sparkly-eyed Yu Jin-Ho running over here that he should stop right there.

“Heok!!”

It was unknown whether he was a good listener, or maybe he was just scared easily, but regardless, the kid froze up right in his tracks.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo’s glare became even more serious than before.

The message of ***[You have killed the owner of the dungeon]*** hadn’t appeared yet. Which could only mean that this raid was far from over.

That wasn’t the only suspicious thing here, either; it was impossible to perform ‘Shadow Extraction’ on this massive monster, as well. He couldn’t see any black smoke rising up from the corpse, a telltale sign of it being a

candidate for the extraction.

And, just as he suspected....

When he glared hard at the Giant's corpse as if to bore a hole through it, a mechanical beep went off in his head.

Tti-ring.

[It's impossible to perform Shadow Extraction on the target.]

'What's going on?'

Jin-Woo's brows furrowed deeply as the situation began exceeding his expectation in more ways than one. But then, he heard the sounds of bones clattering against each other coming from somewhere.

The jaw of the Giant was suddenly moving again.

The creature's mouth was pried open and a humanoid-shape of something emerged from there.

'.....!!'

Jin-Woo reflexively got into a battle stance. Flashes of sharp light gleamed off the blades summoned into his hands. Fortunately, the voice coming from the Giant's mouth turned out to be a familiar one.

"Oh, my king.... It is I, Beru."

The former ant king managed to extricate itself and stepped out, before displaying the appropriate courtesy towards Jin-Woo.

"...It's only you."

Jin-Woo lowered his vigilance.

After Beru entered the Giant's body, his presence got hidden by the huge monster's near-bottomless magical energy and as a result, it became momentarily impossible to differentiate him.

After confirming that it was Beru for real, Jin-Woo returned his shortswords back to his Storage.

Beru trudged out forward while covered from head to toe in the Giant's flesh and blood. It wasn't that difficult to imagine how hard the former ant king struggled within the monster's head.

Jin-Woo was about to heartily praise his underling with a smile but his expression crumpled in an instant.

'What the hell is up with this stink.....?'

A truly disgusting odour was getting stronger as Beru got nearer. Perhaps he could also smell it, his expression was also deeply crumpled as well.

He eventually stood before Jin-Woo and bowed his head in a dignified fashion.

“Well, then....”

Jin-Woo was about to pat his ant soldier on the shoulder as a gesture of a job well done, but discovered a yellowish liquid of unidentifiable nature there and sneakily withdrew his hand.

“You did well, Beru.”

“....I thank thee, oh my king.”

Jin-Woo was probably mistaken when he thought that he heard a slightly sullen tone of voice coming from the ant soldier.

In any case, what he needed to concentrate on was not the identity of this weird liquid on Beru’s shoulder. If this super-massive Giant-type monster was not the ‘owner of the dungeon’, then where was the real owner?

Just as that thought worked its way into Jin-Woo’s brain, this happened.

Wuuuuu....

Suddenly, the air all around him trembled.

‘....!!’

Sensing yet another change taking place, Jin-Woo hurriedly raised his guard up. Beru also sensed the danger only a beat slower and quickly increased his overall body size to stand guard before his Sovereign.

“Kiiieehhk!!”

A powerful gust of wind assaulted them right afterwards.

‘Keuk.’

Jin-Woo’s forehead creased up.

The stormy winds violent enough to rip out trees, roots and all, swept all around him, but then, they abruptly slithered off to somewhere else.

The commotion died down almost instantly.

Beru decided that the situation had been normalised and stepped away from Jin-Woo’s front. Meanwhile, the latter surveyed the surroundings only to gasp out in pure shock.

‘How could this be?!’

What suddenly ‘attacked’ him just now weren’t some gusts of wind. No, what he mistakenly thought as storm winds was simply the horrifyingly disgusting and bottomless magic energy the dead Giant possessed.

That massive amount of magical energy clawed and swept everything in the vicinity away as it moved entirely elsewhere.

‘What about Yu Jin-Ho?!’

Jin-Woo hurriedly turned to look behind where Yu Jin-Ho had been. Thankfully, the kid was unscathed due to Igrit shielding him.

Jin-Woo sighed in relief.

‘Fuu.’

Now that he found more leeway to search his vicinity, Jin-Woo quickly snapped his head in the direction where that vast magic energy had disappeared to.

‘.....’

It was deep within the Gate.

Every single drop of the magical energy the dead Giant possessed was sucked into the Gate.

It was as if the Gate itself had swallowed up that magic energy.

The black ‘barrier’ blocking the Gate had shattered a long time ago during the dungeon break. The interior of the Gate, which was the inside of the dungeon, could be seen clearly from the outside.

Guuoooo-....

The air itself seemed to cry out softly.

Jin-Woo thought that he had experienced all sorts of trials and tribulations in his life so far, but even he had never seen nor heard of a bizarre event like this one before.

‘Something else is in there.’

His Perception Stat was telling him as much. Jin-Woo stared at the interior of the dungeon, his eyes progressively getting narrower and narrower.

Whatever was waiting for him in there, the moment that he recognised its presence, the hair on the back of his neck all stood right up. A deathly chill came knocking and goosebumps broke out all over his body.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!

As if it was resonating with the crying air, his heart began beating faster and faster.

“Hyung-nim....”

Yu Jin-Ho had crept up closer and closer until he was standing next to Jin-Woo. He too stared at the gigantic Gate.

This might get very dangerous. Jin-Woo looked at Yu Jin-Ho and spoke in a heavy voice.

“You stay here and wait for me.”

“Yes, hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho nodded without raising a fuss. His desire to follow was quite strong, but at the same time, he figured that he'd be more of a hindrance than anything else.

Jin-Woo left the kid on standby outside, and led his Shadow Soldiers into the mouth of the Gate, entering into the dungeon itself.

‘This is really.....’

While entering a few top-ranked dungeons, he thought that he got pretty used to the idea of things being ‘massive’ by now. However, his thoughts had to be revised the moment he entered this particular dungeon.

‘.....Way too huge.’

Jin-Woo walked within the passage that seemed so limitlessly tall and wide. It was as if the word ‘massive’ had been invented just to describe this place, and he continued to swallow back his gasps of astonishment.

He still didn't make any noises inside the dungeon, though.

He continued to maintain this habit formed during the time when he was a lowest ranked Hunter and lacked any means to protect himself from the monsters, even though he greatly exceeded the levels of ‘regular’ rank S Awakened by now.

It was never a bad thing to remain cautious of one's surroundings, after all.

Jin-Woo's eyes glowed softly within the darkness.

He didn't lower his vigilance, not even for a moment, and continued to advance towards the end of the dungeon. The soldiers, having recovered to their perfect state despite being involved in such a fierce battle earlier on, silently followed right after him.

And so, just how long did they have to walk?

Jin-Woo's steps eventually came to a stop.

Beru, walking right behind him, raised his hand to signal the Shadow Army to stop, as well. Perhaps because he was formerly an ant, the species optimised for life in a large group, he was rather adept in commanding the large army.

Chut.

The entire Shadow Army came to a perfect halt. Beru scanned the soldiers once, before sticking close to Jin-Woo's back.

"Oh, my king...."

"Shh."

Jin-Woo raised his index finger, and continued on a short while later.

"Can you hear it?"

Beru concentrated on the ambient noises for a little bit, before nodding his head.

"....Yes, I can hear it, my king."

Beru could also hear it now.

Just over yonder was the end of the dungeon. From the location where the dungeon's boss should usually be, laughter came out from there. It was so soft that only the beings on the levels of Jin-Woo or Beru could perceive it.

The good-natured laughter of a man continued to resound out as if he was genuinely pleased about something.

Jin-Woo couldn't help but get puzzled here.

Even though the darkness of the dungeon had masked them and they couldn't see each other, the other party must've felt Jin-Woo's approach by now. It'd be the same story for the Shadow Army extending far behind him, too.

'Even then, it can still laugh like that?'

Of course, Jin-Woo had already assessed the situation.

Incredible magical energy, one so powerful that it even made breathing difficult, was hidden in the darkness just over yonder. The enemy's aura that gave him a foreboding sensation easily exceeded that of the Giant's magic energy when it was still alive.

However, Jin-Woo himself was no pushover, either. He unleashed all of his cloaked magic power, too.

Wuuuonngg-....

Ripples spread out to Jin-Woo's surroundings.

The massive wave of magical energy rippled out, one strong enough to knock away all the Shadow Soldiers in the vicinity if it had contained any amount of malice.

Even then....

Hahahaha-

The opponent didn't stop laughing, even then.

The corners of Jin-Woo's lips also arched up in response.

'Aren't you an interesting fella.'

With a smile on his face, he stepped into the boss chamber. He was greeted by an unfathomably huge and open space that should have served as the home for the super-massive Giant monster.

Jin-Woo continued to walk towards where the laughter was coming from without a shred of hesitation.

His Shadow Soldiers followed after him and marched forward, as well.

Chut, chut, chut, chut.... (TL: SFX for metal boots walking on a hard surface.)

The spectacle of so many monsters enveloped in black smoke advancing forward in unison was more than enough to instil fear in the hearts of every enemy watching.

However....

"Hahahaha!!"

However, such a thing wasn't applicable to a certain man, whose entire body was tied down by chains, with the sole exception of his head.

Was it him simply being tied down?

No.

It wasn't as simple as that at all.

The black chains connected to the walls of the dungeons not only wrapped tightly around this unknown man several times, some of them even pierced straight through his body, the emerging ends seemingly taking root within his flesh.

It was such a wretched sight that anyone watching would immediately start

wondering, if that was punishment then just how big was the crime committed to warrant such treatment?

Jin-Woo furrowed his brows.

On the other hand, the man formed a bright smile while looking at Jin-Woo as if he had run into a very close friend.

“Oh, how humorous this is! So very humorous!! All of you detestable Ruler b*stards, take a good look at who had come to see me first!”

Jin-Woo came to a stop, not too far but not too close.

The man quickly carried on.

“The chains... hurry and undo these chains. I know all the plans of the Rulers. I need to let the other Sovereigns know of the tru.....”

The man’s words suddenly came to a halt, then. His eyes, filled with joy only until a moment ago, had cooled down in an instant as if it had all been a lie.

“...”

This unknown man quietly peered into Jin-Woo’s eyes. While that was happening, the latter also carefully studied the former. And it was in that moment he realised that this man’s face and that of the super-massive Giant guarding the Gate were exactly the same.

‘It’s not... a human.’

The ripples of magic energy coming from it were too different from a human’s. Besides, the fact that it was speaking the language of monsters so fluently could only mean this guy was not human, for sure.

However, why was a monster being restrained inside a dungeon in this fashion?

In the ensuing ten years since the first Gate opened up, all sorts of different monsters made their appearances, but this would be his first time hearing about the appearance of a monster that was all tied down and couldn’t move inside a dungeon.

However, if there was one clue given away now, it was the term this being used with such disgust – ‘Rulers’.

“...”

“...”

A short bout of silence flowed in between them.

Only after a while did the lips of this unknown man part open.

“You are.... not the one that I know of.”

Jin-Woo had no idea who this guy mistook him for, but he wasn't planning to deny that, either. Well, he also had never seen the face of this tied-up man before. Excluding the dead Giant outside, of course.

Jin-Woo threw a question.

“Did those Rulers or whatever make you look like this?”

“They are trying to use me. As the stepping stone for laying the foundation of the true warfare about to take place.”

This was the first time something like this happened. Jin-Woo had tried to initiate conversations with intelligent monsters up until now, but none of them were able to explain their origins at all.

But then, the one right in front of his eyes had revealed the reason for its existence for the first time ever.

It said, to lay the foundation of the true warfare.

Whether those words were truth or lies, Jin-Woo realised that they could become an important clue to unravelling everything.

“Just what are these things called Rulers?”

“Ancient enemies of the Sovereigns.”

‘Sovereigns....’

The angel statue back then began to go berserk as it was being pushed to the corner. It cried out something about other Sovereigns not taking this lying down. For the time being, even if he were to set aside what kind of existence these Sovereigns were....

He kind of realised just where one of them could be right now.

“In that case, the reason why those beings tied you up like this is that...”

“That’s right.”

The man replied with sorrowful eyes.

“I am also a Sovereign.”

And then, he explained further with a desperate voice.

“It is quite likely that both the Sovereigns and Rulers are aiming for you right now. However, you lack the strength to fight against them. In order to stand a chance against them, you’ll be needing influence, too.”

Out of all the hard-to-fathom words being spewed out, Jin-Woo still managed to catch what this man wanted to say the most.

“Influence?”

The man nodded his head.

“Release me from my seal. I shall aid you.”



Chapter 175 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo could only doubt his own hearing just then.

Who wanted to help who now? A monster helping a human?

He was so flabbergasted that he ended up blurting out what was on his mind.

“You seriously think I’ll believe you?”

The unknown man formed a serious expression.

“Then, I shall make you believe me.”

He began chanting some kind of a spell as his lips moved at an incredible speed that looked like a video playback sped up tens, no, hundreds of times.

At that moment, Jin-Woo sensed the magical energy present within this empty, open arena suddenly coagulate around this man. In the blink of an eye, he summoned his short swords out.

If the gathering magic energy carried even a hint of aggression, then the blade of his weapon would have pierced into the man’s forehead already.

However, Jin-Woo patiently waited.

The amount of magic energy being utilised was very small when compared to the reserves both Jin-Woo and the man possessed. And he couldn’t sense any aggression or hostile intent from the gathered energy, either.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo readied the ultimate version of the skill ‘Dagger Throw’, ‘Dagger Rush’, and waited with bated breaths.

The needle-like tension continued to prick him in his skin.

Eventually, the strange language flowing out of the man’s mouth came to an end, and a System message popped up in Jin-Woo’s view along with the familiar ‘tti-ring’.

[King of Giants, the Sovereign of the Beginning, ‘Reghia’ has activated the ‘Skill: Pledge of Trust (Negotiable)’.]

[Once the ‘Skill: Pledge of Trust (Negotiable)’ has been agreed upon,

both the initiator and the acceptor cannot lie to one another.]

[Will you accept the ‘Skill: Pledge of Trust (Negotiable)’?] (Y/N)

What attracted Jin-Woo’s attention, first of all, was not the contents of the man’s suggestion, but the title denoting what the man’s true identity was.

‘The King of Giants, is it.....’

He remembered the Giant-type monsters he hunted down on his way to here. Most likely, there must be some kind of a connection between this revelation and the reason for the face of the super-massive Giant protecting the Gate being the same as this man’s own mug.

As Jin-Woo fell into a contemplative silence, the man patiently waited for an answer.

‘What should I do?’

Jin-Woo looked at the blinking ‘Y/N’ and pondered his options.

Seeing that the System even bothered to give him an alert like this, the effects of this skill or whatever must’ve been for certain.

He needed to think about who’d be in more of a disadvantage when unable to lie to the other party here. However, there was no reason to think too deeply about this as the conclusion was already clear in his mind.

‘Obviously, it’ll be a loss for him.’

After all, this side was standing on an advantage.

In case a question Jin-Woo could never provide an answer for comes around, all he had to was to kill this creature, even if that sounded callous and cold-hearted.

This deal was suggested by the other side, to begin with. And Jin-Woo wasn’t naïve enough to feel guilty for a monster, of all things.

‘Yes.’

Tti-ring.

A System message appearing simultaneously with the mechanical beep quickly informed him of the successful completion of the negotiation.

[‘Pledge of Trust (Negotiable)’ has been initiated.]

[Through the mutual consent of both the initiator and acceptor, the two parties involved cannot lie to one another until the contract has been terminated.]

The King of Giants urgently repeated what he said before as if he was waiting for Jin-Woo to accept the Pledge.

“Please, free me from this seal. I shall help you.”

“Euph.... Euph....??”

Jin-Woo’s eyes went extra round from surprise. His voice didn’t want to come out of his mouth as if his throat had been blocked off.

A smile crept up on the face of this King of Giants after seeing Jin-Woo’s struggles.

“That’s right. That is the power of the Pledge of Trust.”

“...”

Indeed, the effect had been confirmed to be real.

Half out of curiosity and the other half out of testing purposes, Jin-Woo was about to answer ‘I shall completely trust you. Let me undo those chains right away’. But he really couldn’t say any of those words at all.

‘So, this is the Pledge of Trust at work....’

Jin-Woo confirmed the effects of this ‘skill’ and felt his heart beat faster.

With this, he could trust to a certain extent what this King of Giants had to say to him. There was a simple reason why he didn’t trust 100%, though.

If they had no choice but to speak only the truth from now on, then it was rather obvious that the other party would withhold information that might prove to be damaging to itself.

Jin-Woo’s glare became sharper than when there was no Pledge between the two.

“How come it’s possible to converse freely with you, unlike how it is with other monsters?”

“Monsters?”

“Creatures emerging out from the Gates.”

“...Ah, ah. You must be referring to the denizens of the Chaos World.”

The King of Giants cracked a mocking grin.

“I shall ask you something in return. How could you even think of placing mere denizens of the Chaos World on the same pedestal as a Sovereign who rules over them?”

He then formed a dignified expression truly fitting for a ‘King’.

“All the denizens of the Chaos World emerging from the so-called Gates are, without exception, remnants of the defeated army. They have lost the battles against the army of the Rulers and become captives. They had to remain tied to a leash for an uncountable number of years, so it’s only obvious that their ego has been eroded somewhat. However, I am the King. I am different from them. I have patiently waited for the fated day when I can make my escape from their grasp.”

The King formed a thin smile next.

“And that’s how I got to encounter you.”

“....”

Jin-Woo worked hard to keep his emotions in check and to analyse what this guy was saying as objectively as possible.

‘If he’s really an existence on a higher realm than other monsters, then....’

....Then, he might really find himself with some important clues here.

Gulp.

His saliva travelled down his throat.

He had a ton of stuff he wanted to ask right now. But, before he did that, he needed to confirm something else first.

“By any chance, when you said the army of the Rulers, were you talking about those wearing silver armour with wings on their backs....?”

“That’s right. Those dogs are the soldiers of the Rulers.”

As expected. It felt as if another puzzle piece had clicked into its rightful place.

He suddenly thought that the ‘video playback’ the angel statue showed him was not some make-believe crap, but someone’s real memories of an event that did happen, instead.

Just what the hell was going on in this world, then?

Jin-Woo asked another question.

“Why do those b*stards called Rulers keep sending these monsters to us?”

The reason for the existences of the Gates. If he could find out the reason why these Gates kept popping up, then couldn’t he be able to do something about it and stop that from happening again?

Jin-Woo biggest concern lay with that.

“I have told you that already, have I not?”

The King of the Giants spoke with much more emphasis in his voice.

“They are preparing for war.”

“War?”

“They will change this world into a suitable battlefield to engage the Sovereigns in yet another warfare.”

“I don’t quite follow you here... Just by sending monsters to Earth, this planet suddenly becomes a warzone?”

Well, it was true that sometimes, a situation far more horrifying than a warzone could develop from a Gate, but still.

Jin-Woo momentarily recalled the event that took place in Jin-Ah’s school. Even then, those were matters that involved humanity. He just couldn’t see how those would serve as preparations for some kind of a war involving non-human races.

“It is all to inject magical energy into your world.”

THUD!

Jin-Woo felt as if he was struck in the back of his head just then.

If monsters were calamities emerging from the Gates, then magic energy was the blessing coming from the Gates. Not just the Hunters, but many civilians thought similarly along these lines.

Magic crystals, as well as Mana stones. These items containing magic energy were treated as the greatest source of energy in the modern world.

But then, that energy was actually nothing more than footholds for the upcoming war?

The King of Giants continued on with his explanations.

“There is simply no better way to propagate the type of energy that didn’t exist before than by sacrificing the blood of those that possess the necessary energy. So, the Rulers decided to utilise the captives they had in their possession.”

There was no need to even mention that the density of the magical energy around the world was gradually getting thicker every day.

That was not a naturally occurring phenomenon. No, more than likely that was the fruits from the trees first germinated from the fertile field cultivated

from the blood of the monsters.

“The magic energy fortifies a world. They plan to fortify your world so it wouldn’t get destroyed from the impacts of the warfare.”

“In that case, this warfare is....?”

“Yet another blood-soaked struggle between the Sovereigns and the Rulers. Not too long from now, the world you’re living in will become a true hell.”

A battle between the armies of the Rulers, and the monsters – no, creatures before they were unwittingly turned into monsters. Jin-Woo did clearly witness their enormous battle from the ‘data’.

If Earth had been selected as ground zero for such massive scale warfare, then the assertion of this King of Giants, the one about this planet becoming hell, could not be dismissed as a simple exaggeration.

The complexion of the King suddenly darkened.

“There isn’t a lot of time left.”

“.....?”

“Once the truth about you coming in contact with me gets out, both the Sovereigns and the Rulers will not simply stay back and watch on anymore. It is even likely that the Envoys of the Rulers have begun their schemes already.”

“You’ve been implying that those b*stards will be aiming for my life, but... Why is that?”

“You really don’t know anything, do you?”

The Kings continued on with his explanations in a tone of voice thickly laden with pity.

“The power that you possess actually is not yours.”

Nod.

Jin-Woo agreed with that.

The abilities of the Shadow Sovereign were something he got from the System. He couldn’t deny the notion that this power was not his from the very beginning.

“The mere fact of that power now residing within you could only mean that the original owner had betrayed other Sovereigns.”

When Jin-Woo heard that, he remembered the angel statue saying

something similar in nature. It was likely that the statue was also one of the denizens of the Chaos World that followed the Sovereigns.

As the questions in Jin-Woo's head kept sprouting up one after another, the King of Giants spoke up.

“You have become the enemy of both the Sovereigns, as well as the Rulers. However, only I pledge that I shall stand by your side and fight for you. So, will you not help me?”

The King of Giants had assessed that this much convincing was enough and formed a serious, determined face. Unfortunately for him, Jin-Woo calmly asked a question in return.

“If you wish to stand by my side, then wouldn't it be simpler for me to turn you into a Shadow Soldier, instead?”

The King of the Giants flinched in surprise.

It was only for a second then, but for that briefest of moments, the King saw the actual face of the Shadow Sovereign and this human's overlap.

What the human said was not wrong. To him, there would be bigger merit in having one more absolutely loyal underling than forming a brand new alliance with a complete stranger.

The King inwardly admired the fact that this human didn't miss that crucial point. He spoke up and explained the situation.

“We, the Sovereigns, as well as the Rulers, are made up of spiritual bodies. Once such a spiritual body dies, it is destroyed and can't be turned into one of your Shadow Soldiers. Meaning, I can never become your soldier.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head again.

‘So, that was why.’

Here was the reason why the King thought Jin-Woo would lend a helping hand when there was clearly a much easier method, to turn him into a Shadow Soldier. As the Pledge of Truth was still active, there was no need to decipher if that was a lie or not, too.

Jin-Woo stopped swimming within his thoughts and raised his head.

The King of Giants asked again.

“Are those enough reasons for you to help me now?”

Jin-Woo wordlessly stared at the King.

This being titled the King of Giants, it was carrying an expression of certainty as if it knew that the restraints tying it down would soon be undone.

Of course, Jin-Woo had no such weird tendencies of feeling jealous after seeing someone else being happier than him. Also, this guy said he'd become his ally out of its own volition, so he didn't have any reason to reject the offer, either.

However, why did he keep feeling this uneasiness in his heart?

'Something... I've definitely overlooked something here.'

One cold sweat drop after another began forming on his forehead.

The King of Giants, meanwhile, made another plea.

"Unshackle me, I beseech you."

Jin-Woo took in a deep, deep breath.

No matter how hard he pondered his options, he couldn't think of a reason to reject this King's plea. The longer he thought about what he had missed, the more he felt as if he was getting sucked into a quagmire.

'Am I being too paranoid here....?'

Jin-Woo approached the King of Giants while carrying the 'Demon King's Shortsword'.

And as he walked right up to its own nose, the King nodded his head. Jin-Woo reciprocated that nod.

He swung his shortsword laden with his magic power, and one of the chains powerlessly snapped in half.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!!

His heart was beating louder and louder for some reason.

Why did this indecipherable sense of ill omen continue to pull back at his hands, even though he had already made his decision?

Slice.

The second chain was cut in half, as well.

The King of Giants formed a reverential expression that was neither joyous or sorrowful and waited for his restraints to be undone.

The third chain.

Slice.

Jin-Woo leaned towards the back of the King in order to cut the chains

taking root within its flesh there. But then....

Ba-thump!!

His heart pulsed incredibly powerfully, right then.

He felt as if his heart had crashed down to the pit of his stomach.

The chain of thoughts on what he had overlooked, and why he was feeling that way, violently crashed into his head, as if it was prying apart the small gap between the tight rock formation.

Jin-Woo stayed his hands trying to cut the chain, and looked straight into the King's eyes.

“You have said that you will stand by my side, yes?”

“Of course I will. If you help me, then I shall help you in return. This is a fair and absolute transaction between two Sovereigns.”

He had already heard this reply several times. However, what Jin-Woo wanted to confirm wasn't that answer. So, he threw out the real question next.

“In that case, are you on the side of the humans?”

“...”

The King suddenly became silent.

The 'Pledge of Truth'. The condition of this spell meant that the King of Giants couldn't say anything.

Jin-Woo took a look behind this being's neck. A jet-black Mana Crystal embedded on the back of his neck coldly reflected the ambient light.

As long as that item was stuck in the body, this being would hear the voices of the Rulers in his head, too.

...Exactly like every other monster.

The words of 'Kill every human'.

For a brief moment there, a murderous intent flowed in the air.

With its now-free right hand, the King of Giants took aim at Jin-Woo's temple.

Too bad, it was still not enough to reach him. He lowered his head and evaded the attack, before stabbing the shortsword into the King's chest.

Stab!

As if the chains wrapped around its body didn't even exist, the sharp blade dug deep into the chest cavity of the captive King.

“Keo-heuk!!”

The King of Giants suddenly vomited out a mouthful of blood.

However, that single hit wasn't enough. Letting this thing live was far too risky. This thing... could become an untold calamity.

Jin-Woo analysed the situation as thus and, while evading the right hand of the King constantly attacking him with nothing more than tilting his upper body this way and that, continued to thrust the shortsword into the chest of his enemy.

Stab, stab, stab, stab!

He stabbed for the sixth time.

Only after his blade entered and left the chest cavity for the sixth time did the King of Giants stopped moving his right hand.

It was over.

Jin-Woo extracted his shortsword for the last time. The King of Giants stared straight into his eyes and formed a meaningful grin.

“It is regretful, but this here is the end of the road for me.”

“...”

Jin-Woo took a step back and wordlessly shook the blood off his shortsword. In the meantime, the King continued to speak.

“As the battles between the residents of your world and the captured denizens of the Chaos World become more and more intense, this world will transform further and further into a battlefield.”

Cough! The King coughed out another mouthful of blood and formed the last smile.

“I pray... that everything you wish to protect burn into ashes in the all-ending conflagration of the war....”

“That ain't gonna happen.”

Jin-Woo curtly cut off the words of the King, and swung his shortsword hard to cut the being's head off.

Slice!

[You have killed the owner of the dungeon.]

The moment the King drew his last breath, the ocean-like magical energy sleeping within the creature exploded into the world outside.

The transformation of the world had begun.



Chapter 176 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

A few days before the death of the King of Giants.

A helicopter belonging to America's Hunter Bureau landed on the lawn of a certain ultra-luxurious mansion.

Tatatata....

The owner of this mansion, currently enjoying a belated lunch, stared at that helicopter through his window and stopped cutting into the juicy slab of steak.

"I haven't heard of anyone coming to see me today?"

"I shall go and confirm who it is."

The steward lowered his head and left with a quick trot.

Around the same time, the owner of the mansion spotted two people climbing out of the helicopter and his expression hardened in an instant.

"...This could get troublesome."

The housekeeper carrying away the empty plates heard his muttering by chance and tilted her head. The dignified gentleman sitting at the dining table, the owner of this grand mansion, was one of the only five greatest Hunters alive on this planet.

His name was Christopher Reid.

He was more commonly known as the 'Special Authority-rank Hunter' rather than by his birth name, though. In any case, who'd dare to trouble such a person?

The steward ran past the housekeeper and her curious expression to enter the dining room.

"Sir Christopher!"

"I already know."

Christopher Reid stopped the steward from speaking any further and quietly got up from his chair. With a smile on his face, he then greeted a middle-aged man entering the dining room one step later than his flustered steward.

“It’s been a long time, Deputy Director. And....”

Christopher Reid’s gaze shifted over to the African-American lady standing behind the Deputy Director of the Hunter Bureau.

“...Madam Selner.”

It was already abnormal for someone as important as the deputy director of the Hunter Bureau to pay a personal visit like this. But, this lady making a move personally would be on a whole new scale of seriousness altogether.

Sure enough, the deputy director was carrying a deeply tense face as he scanned his surroundings. He spoke while anxiously rubbing his chin.

“We have an urgent matter to discuss with you, so can you send everyone else away for the time being?”

As Christopher Reid had expected – his prediction of being troubled had come true.

If his guest was only the deputy director, then he’d have made the latter wait for a few hours as the price for disrupting his peaceful afternoon without a heads-up.

However, he couldn’t do something so impolite with Madam Selner present.

Christopher Reid quietly pondered for a moment while washing the inside of his mouth with a glass of wine. He beckoned the steward with his finger. Only after his employee got close enough to touch his forehead did the Hunter whisper his next order.

“Until my two guests leave, do not let anyone come anywhere remotely close to this room. Understood?”

“Understood, sir.”

The steward bowed his head, and began ushering everyone else, including the housekeeper, out from this room. He then also exited from the room and held the door with both hands, before bowing his head once more.

Christopher Reid nodded his head, and the door was silently closed shut.

And so, only three people, the owner of the mansion, the Deputy Director Michael Connor, and Madam Selner, remained within this spacious room.

Christopher Reid swept his gaze over his two guests and couldn’t help but smirk. It was understandable, really. Wasn’t this the occasion where the worth of the second-in-command of the government’s most powerful organisation had become the least important of the trio present?

Christopher Reid himself would be the second as the Special Authority-rank Hunter. And no one could even begin to imagine the potential value of Madam Selner, who could permanently enhance the abilities of a Hunter.

‘Oopsie daisy, where are my manners.’

He couldn’t let these important guests stand around like that, now could he?

Christopher Reid pulled out two chairs from the dining table and addressed them.

“Please, have a seat.”

Once he confirmed that the deputy director and Madam had settled down, he too parked his rear on their opposite side.

“So, now....”

Christopher Reid alternated his gaze between the two guests and smiled amiably.

“What business brings you two to this distant abode of mine?”

Madam Selner searched for a sign of assurance from the deputy director first. He nodded his head to signal go ahead. But, just before Selner could open her mouth to speak, Christopher Reid raised his hand first.

“Before we start.”

There were some hints of displeasure evident in his expression.

“If you have come here to speak to me about that rank S Gate appearing somewhere out in the east, then let me make myself clear. I’m still not interested in going.”

He resolutely stated his case. He made sure to drive the point home so there would be no room for anyone to try changing his mind.

“As both of you should know by now, the United States government had promised me the full rights equalling that of an independent nation. Meaning, I possess the right to refuse any request made by the U.S. government. And, as I have stated in my communique sent out earlier, I have decided not to participate in this raid.”

He was basically a ‘different nation’ within a country.

Such a thing as civic duty simply didn’t hold any meaning for a ‘Special Authority-rank Hunter’, who was treated not as a citizen of a country but as a living, breathing nation in itself and was accorded the same treatment as every other nation on Earth.

Of course, he could lend a helping hand if he wanted to. However, there was a reason why he decided to refuse the invitation.

He figured that there was no need for him to participate in a raid where every rank S Hunter living in the United States was planning to show up.

Even if the deputy director showed up here while thinking of using Madam as a proxy, Christopher Reid held not one thought of changing his mind at all.

Too bad for him, just as he was firm about where he stood, Madam Selner too drew a clear line on where she stood.

“I haven’t come to you because of that Gate, Mister Chris. We have an even bigger problem than that to worry about.”

Right now, the country of Japan was being driven to the brink of destruction from a single rank S Gate. However, did she just say that there was an even bigger problem than a rank S Gate getting ready to open up within the U.S. borders?

Christopher Reid’s torso leaned in closer towards the Madam.

“What is this big problem?”

Madam Selner hesitated greatly before she forced her lips to open.

“Mister Chris..... In the near future, there is a strong possibility that you’ll get assassinated by an unknown assailant.”

At that moment, an awkward silence descended on the room.

Christopher Reid had been wondering why the deputy director seemed so unsettled and nervous like that. As a matter of fact, Michael Connor even pulled out a handkerchief to dab away the sweat soaking his forehead right now.

“...Madam Selner.”

His voice as he called out to her became heavy, low.

“I’ll never forget the favour you did for me for the rest of my life.”

Because of her ability, his powers had become stronger than ever before. He had exceeded his limit that felt like a wall he couldn’t overcome no matter what. However, that didn’t mean she was allowed to look down on him like this.

“Just who is supposed to assassinate who here?”

Just who would dare to touch even a single hair on the body of a Special Authority-rank Hunter?

A cat could never slay a lion. Only a lion could rip apart another lion to death. However, he was utterly confident of not losing to any of the lions on the same level as him.

This was the true reason why he opted to stay out of this raid. How unbecoming was it for a lion to butt in where the stray cats had gathered? Unless you were a low-class lion like Thomas Andre, of course.

Madam Selner had clearly sensed the quiet rage burning within Christopher Reid's mind, but she didn't stop with her explanation.

"Not too long ago, I had a dream related to you."

"A dream?"

"Yes."

Madam nodded her head.

Christopher Reid felt flabbergasted, but Madam continued on regardless.

"In my dream, you were surrounded by some men, and they....."

"Look here, Madam Selner!"

Christopher Reid couldn't hold back anymore and yelled out loudly.

"Just because of some dream you had, you flew all the way out to this place to tell me this nonsense, Madam?!"

"This is not nonsense, and I merely wish to...."

"I already know full well what you used to do before becoming an Awakened, okay?"

Some people believed that, because she used to work as a psychic, Madam Selner came to possess a unique ability that separated her from all the other Awakened out there.

However, her former profession still couldn't excuse this utterly nonsensical drivel. Christopher Reid's expression crumpled rather unsightly.

"I am a Special Authority-rank Hunter. No one can kill me."

"But, in my dream, you definitely...."

"You and your dream again!"

Christopher Reid spat out a long sigh and then, nodded his head.

"Alright, fine. Let's say I believe you, Madam. Let's say there are enemies powerful enough to kill me. In that case, if that is all real, who should I go and ask for help, then?"

Should he call the cops? Or, request protection from the Hunter Bureau? Against an opponent capable enough to supposedly kill a Special Authority-rank Hunter?

What a stupid notion that was.

Christopher Reid snorted in derision and continued on.

“If true, there’s nothing that can be done, is there?”

“.....”

Madam Selner silently deliberated for a long time before making her reply.

“There might be someone who can help you.”

“And just who might this someone be?”

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. If it’s him, he might be able to protect you.”

Seong Jin-Woo?

Christopher Reid was listening without much interest, to begin with, and needed to comb his memories for a moment there. Although the name itself sounded unfamiliar, he was sure of hearing it from somewhere before.

But, where could it have been?

It must’ve been pretty recent when he heard that name ‘Seong Jin-Woo’, however.

‘No, could it be.....?’

The expression on Christopher Reid’s face crumpled even more.

“Wait, are you talking about that Asian Hunter who went off to solve the Japanese dungeon break crisis?”

“That’s correct. He’s Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

Madam Selner definitely saw it back then.

She definitely saw the near-infinite power sleeping deep within Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. If it was him, then he might be able to protect a Special Authority-rank Hunter.

She had spoken these words out of genuine concern regarding Christopher Reid’s welfare. However, his immense pride heard them as nothing but insults to his dignity.

Boom!!

He slammed his fist down on the table reflexively and the furniture buckled to the floor.

“Get out right now, Madam. Right this instant!”

Christopher Reid shot up from his seat and pointed towards the door with his finger.

“I-if you could just listen a bit more....”

The deputy director tried to persuade Christopher Reid, but then....

“W-we shall be on our way....”

...He couldn't say anything else under the sharp, murderous glare of a Special Authority-rank Hunter.

He hurriedly accompanied the clearly-hesitant Madam Selner out of the mansion. The steward on standby outside the room saw the broken table and quickly rushed in.

“Did something happen, sir?”

“...No, not really.”

Christopher Reid slowly shook his head.

If it wasn't Madam Selner who lent a huge helping hand when enhancing his powers – indeed, if it was someone else, then things wouldn't have ended with that person being chased out of his mansion.

He could only swallow back the still-burning rage and took a deep breath.

‘She wants me to ask for help from some second-rate Asian Hunter?’

There was a limit to how much one was allowed to mock the one and only Christopher Reid.

He suddenly swivelled his head towards the steward. The latter flinched a little, but quickly regained his former composure.

“Do you have new orders for me, sir?”

“That.... That Hunter named Seong Jin-Woo. Do you know when he's supposed to start his Japanese raid?”

The story of Japan was one of the hottest talked-about topics in the world. America was no exception. Quite obviously, Seong Jin-Woo's name had become as famous as the dungeon break that happened in Japan or the Giants that popped out from the Gate.

The steward calculated the time difference using his wristwatch and made his reply.

“He should be arriving in Japan in one hour's time, sir.”

“One hour, is it....”

....He shouldn't get bored for a little while, then.

Christopher Reid consoled himself with that thought and continued to glare at the rising helicopter containing the deputy director and Madam Selner.

[You have killed the owner of the dungeon.]

Drop.

The King of Giants lost its head. Jin-Woo quickly stepped away to evade the fountain of blood gushing out from the severed neck. It was then.

Tti-ring!

The familiar mechanical beep went off in his head. Initially, he thought it was just one of those normal alerts the System often sent out.

However, the message was definitely not normal in nature.

[You have killed one of the Nine Sovereigns, the Sovereign of the Beginning, 'Reghia'.]

[Calculating the total earned experience points.]

[Due to the enormous amount of experience points, this process will take some time.]

‘What the heck?’

Jin-Woo was flustered for a moment there as he had never come across a situation like this one before. And a little while later....

Tti-ring! Tti-ring! Tti-ring! Tti-ring!

Mechanical beeps continuously rang inside his head.

And at the same time, Jin-Woo got to spectate on the grand feast of System messages utterly filling up his vision.

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

....

.....

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

‘...!!!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes opened progressively wider and wider.

Six times the message windows went past his eyes, and even then, there had to be two additional mechanical beeps ringing inside his head for the ‘Level up!’ alerts to come to their end.

Jin-Woo hurriedly summoned up his Stat Window.

‘Status Window!’



Chapter 177 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

[Level: 122]

‘Heok!’

Jin-Woo confirmed his new level and swallowed back a huge gasp of shock.

His level reached 100 after hunting down all the ants on Jeju Island. However, his level stayed pretty much the same for a little while after that, probably because of the wide gap between him and the monsters he ran into.

After asking for other major Guilds’ understandings, he got to sweep clean every single high-ranking dungeon in the vicinity for a week and only then did his level rise up to 103.

But now, his level had jumped past 120?

This was all thanks to the Giant-type monsters, each possessing a boss-level worth of experience points, as well as the King of Giants who gifted him with an enormous amount of experience points. Which was as much as eight levels’ worth, no less.

‘Very nice.’

Jin-Woo nodded his head. He had made the right call by killing the King. It was definitely not a coincidence that his level shot up by eight in one go.

This being was able to emit enough pressure to make breathing difficult for him even though its powers had been sealed away by these special chains. If this thing got freed and was allowed to roam freely in the outside world, then....

Jin-Woo shook his head left to right.

He should thank the lucky stars that he got to discover its true nature before that happened.

It was then – the King’s corpse suddenly began splitting up like the ground suffering from drought, and soon, changed into sand-like dust and collapsed to the floor.

The words the King told him abruptly brushed past Jin-Woo’s mind just then.

["Once such a spiritual body dies, it's destroyed and can't be turned into one of your Shadow Soldiers. Meaning, I can never become your soldier."]

The death of a 'spiritual body'.

For the first time in his life, he got to witness the death of a so-called spiritual body.

What the King said was right. Its corpse transformed into sand and no black smokes came up from it, nor did he see a message regarding Shadow Extraction pop up.

Jin-Woo dug out the black Magic Crystal from the pile of sand and lightly dusted its surface.

'It's a bit of a loss that I couldn't get me a new Shadow Soldier, but... I guess I should satisfy myself with this thing, then.'

Jin-Woo studied this large Magic Crystal.

Its mirror-like clear surface reflected his face. As he peered deeply into it, he felt the ends of his fingertips tingle from all the power contained within this thing.

'So, it's those Rulers that keep sending these things over here....'

Why did it happen? Back when he first heard the term 'Rulers', a scene automatically began replaying itself in his mind. And it was about four 'angels' descending from the heavens.

Even though it hadn't really happened to him, Jin-Woo felt a chill run down his backside simply from 'discovering' them in the playback.

Tumble.

He felt as if his heart fell to the pit of his stomach.

'Could those things be the Rulers?'

If those things were planning to invade Earth, then he definitely lacked enough power to stop them as he was right now. He gripped the Magic Crystal even tighter.

'I need to get much stronger.'

In that sense, it was an incredibly fortunate thing that he was bestowed with the powers of the Shadow Sovereign. He had gained an unimaginable power, and there was a very good possibility that he'd grow even stronger in the future.

What would have happened if he lacked enough points back during the

Class quest and was not chosen by the System? Jin-Woo quietly engaged the yet-to-be closed Status Window with a bit of banter.

“Oii... Will you say something back already?”

Too bad, the System still didn't bother to reply back to him.

“...”

Jin-Woo told himself that one day, if he was left with no choice but to compile a bucket list then he'd definitely put 'have a serious chat with the System' somewhere in there. He stood up from the ground to leave.

But as he turned around, his foot touched something lying on the floor.

Tap.

‘Mm?’

He took a look below and discovered that it was the black chain that used to be wrapped around the King of Giants. Immediately, curiosity filled Jin-Woo's eyes. And very soon, that curiosity morphed into full-on interest.

‘Maybe these things.... might come in handy?’

He sneakily reached out and grasped onto one of the chains still attached to the dungeon wall.

And, sure enough, he could sense his strength being sucked away.

‘Ohhh.’

Indeed, this chain was absorbing his magic energy.

Only one wouldn't be a problem, but if these chains were tightly wrapped around you in several layers, even the holder of an incredible power wouldn't be able to extricate themselves out any time soon.

Jin-Woo confirmed the MP reserve being steadily eaten away and grinned brightly.

‘Isn't this an unexpected harvest?’

Feeling rather pleased, he summoned out a 'Demon King's Shortsword' and cut one of the chains off. However, he couldn't sense any magical effects taking place from the now-severed chain.

“Huh?”

It wasn't just this one, either. It was all of them.

‘What's going on?’

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the dungeon wall.

He grasped a chain still connected to the wall, and felt the same sealing effect as before. However, all the severed chains didn't display that magical effect at all.

He could venture a guess on what was going on here.

'...So, that's how it was.'

These chains were not some sort of artefacts. No, the sealing effect was simply the power of this dungeon. In other words, these chains were no better than some scrap metal when outside the dungeon.

'I can't use them.'

Jin-Woo lowered the chains that had become regular items to the floor.

Although he couldn't say for sure that he didn't feel a bit rueful here, he found some solace in the fact that he still had gained a lot on this trip already.

Through this expedition, the shadows of the Giants had been added to his Shadow Army, and his level had shot up to 122 after killing the oversized monsters and their King.

All these alone were results that already far exceeded his expectations.

Jin-Woo decisively gave up on the chains and turned around with a grin.

Beru courteously lowered his head at his Sovereign. He then raised his head back up and pointed to the exit with his finger. The Shadow Soldiers standing in front of Jin-Woo stepped aside at once and created a large pathway.

Jin-Woo saw that Beru's shoulder was all clean from unidentifiable substances and lightly patted him there, before walking over to the exit himself.

Beru felt moved by that gesture of his Sovereign and quietly followed after Jin-Woo as well. And right behind them, the near-thousand Shadow Soldiers who had contributed a great deal in the battle against the Giants, maintained the perfect formation and advanced out of the boss chamber.

Chut, chut, chut, chut.

The interior of the dungeon was soon filled up with the heavy footsteps of the marching Shadow Soldiers.

In the distance, the mouth of the dungeon could be seen.

Jin-Woo formed a smile as he looked at the sunlight permeating into the entrance. It was the moment that this seemingly endless raid had come to its conclusion.

The situation room of the Japanese Hunter's Association.

The inside of this situation room was draped in a deathly silence; not even a squeaking noise could be heard. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the staff members had forgotten to even breathe right now.

All of their attention had been focused on the giant monitor located in front of the room.

Gulp.

Gulp...

Only the subtle noises of dry saliva being swallowed would sometimes murmur out from here and there.

The footage as displayed by the giant screen currently showed the image of Shinjuku, shot from the spy satellite's magic energy detection camera looking down on Earth from space.

This camera displayed the magic energy detected in terms of light spheres. The stronger the magic energy, the brighter the light would be. Weaker magical energy would naturally lead to a smaller light sphere.

There was not one person among everyone present in this situation room who didn't know what that gigantic light sphere making itself at home in the middle of Tokyo represented.

Almost a thousand smaller light spheres gathered and stood right before that large ball of light. Every Association staff member watching that enormous number turned pale from sheer fright.

"T-those, all of those are Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's summons?!"

"Oh, my god...."

"Even with a casual headcount, isn't that over five hundred?"

The Association President Matsumoto quietly leaned his head closer to the agent from the analysis department sitting next to him.

"How many of his summons are there exactly?"

"Because several lights are overlapping with one another, it's difficult to tell exactly, but at the least, I believe there are well more than eight hundred creatures, sir."

Eight hundred creatures, he said.

Since a member of the analysis department even bothered to mention 'well

more than' in his sentence, the offered number should be seen as the absolute minimum value.

Even when looked that way, this was already twice the number of summons first seen back in Jeju Island.

Matsumoto was inwardly astonished.

'It hasn't even been that long ago, but just when did he double the number of his summons?!'

No, it was already not normal to increase the number of one's summons, to begin with.

His trembling hand wiped the area around his mouth.

If this man was considered an enemy, then without a doubt, Matsumoto wouldn't have been able to see a way out, but knowing that Seong Jin-Woo was an ally, his mind had never felt this comfortable before.

What a relief it was that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had graced his mercy on Japan like this. The Association President Matsumoto barely recovered from the mental shock and shifted his gaze back to the large screen.

The smaller spots of lights advanced towards the single large light sphere. It was the beginning of the battle between Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's summons and the Giant guarding the Gate.

Their palms soaked in sweat, everyone present witnessed the spectacle of spots of lights endlessly tangle and writhe around against each other.

And eventually, the flickering large pillar of light.... vanished.

"Waaaaaahhh!!!"

As if waiting for that very moment, cheers loud enough to rock the entire situation room erupted out.

The employees embraced each other tearfully and rejoiced in their happiness. Finally, they were greeted by the momentous occasion of the Japanese mainland being freed from the menace of the Giant-type monsters.

All these had been the handiwork of a single Korean Hunter.

"..."

The Association President Matsumoto kept his mouth resolutely shut and watched the screen before nodding his head to himself.

He blamed the heavens for not gifting such a Hunter to Japan but to Korea back when Jin-Woo ended up foiling his scheme. But now, he was thankful

that such a Hunter indeed was gifted to South Korea, instead.

‘If he wasn’t around, then by now, Japan would have been....’

The Association President Matsumoto shuddered from the horrifying imagery taking root in his head and picked up the phone in order to carry out the final duty he needed to perform.

The call got through quite quickly.

The tense voice of the Japanese Prime Minister came out from the phone’s speaker.

The Association President Matsumoto informed him of the results with a voice slightly choked up with emotions.

“Japan’s.... Japan’s crisis is over, sir.”

Excited, loud yells could be heard from the phone’s speaker next.

However, the Prime Minister spoke in a dignified voice, doing his very best to mask his sheer joy felt in his heart.

“Of course, sir.”

He had already made up his mind.

It was obvious that the general who failed to kill the enemy’s leader would offer his neck up as compensation. And, what if that enemy’s leader ended up saving your own country, too?

Faced with the perfect, utter defeat, Matsumoto Shigeo couldn’t bring himself to mouth any excuses whatsoever.

He simply spoke in a soft voice.

“I shall gladly accept any punishment, sir. That is... the final duty I must carry out.”

The news of the Giants all being hunted down quickly spread to the rest of the world. From the closest neighbour of Japan, South Korea, all the way to Brazil in South America, on the other side of the globe.

The entire world heard of Jin-Woo’s feats.

Various social media networking sites were in upheaval with suggestions of a brand new ‘Special Authority-rank’ Hunter making his appearance. The difference this time, compared to the Jeju Island raid, was that such suggestions were being made not only by the Koreans.

The state of Maryland, in the eastern half of the United States of America.

The American Hunters who had safely concluded the raid of the rank S Gate were supposed to be heading to the celebratory party organised by the U.S. government.

However, all these Hunters didn't enter the party venue and simply stood by the hotel's lounge watching the TV located there as it continued to transmit the news coming out of Japan. Their collective jaws were falling to the floor.

“What the hell??”

“No freaking way.... This doesn't make any sense, logically.”

They just couldn't believe it.

The most famous Support-type rank S Hunter in the world, Yuri Orlov, couldn't do anything before he got killed in the blink of an eye.

The agile movements of the super-massive Giant captured by the TV cameras – calling that thing a monster was simply not enough when considering such a huge body was able to exhibit such speed.

But then, a single rank S Hunter managed to hunt down such a nonsensical creature by himself?!

[...Hunter Jin-Woo Seong, accompanied by another Hunter ranked D, Jin-Ho Yu, arrived in Japan and....]

No, it'd actually be better if he had done it alone.

But then, to say he killed all the Giant-type monsters with a measly rank D in tow as well? It was simply too unbelievable.

Unfortunately, they had no choice but to believe, because the cameras continued to capture the scenes of Japanese citizens continuously shedding tears to express their unbridled joy.

And finally, the footage changed to display the corpse of the super-massive Giant, currently lying sprawled powerlessly on the ground.

“Keok!!”

The three rank S Hunters who made bets earlier spat out shocked gasps almost simultaneously, making it hard to tell who did it first. Only now could they truly believe that the monster had been killed for real.

It was then.

“Ah, everyone. So this was where you were.”

The three men's heads snapped immediately in the direction of where that

voice was coming from. And their eyes all widened as well.

“T-Thomas....”

Thomas Andre stood before them and with a grin, presented them with a single slip of paper.

“W-what is this?”

“The promissory note stating that all of you will uphold the result of the bet.”

“Ehhh?!”

Thomas Andre didn't really give a d*mn about the stunned reactions of the three Hunters and began jotting down the items each of them had put forward in the bet.

“You said your yacht. You, your mansion. And you.....”

Thomas Andre stared straight at the third Hunter and began scratching the side of his head with the end of his pen.

“What did you bet again?”

The singled-out Hunter gulped down his saliva and hurriedly raised his voice.

“I didn't bet anything, actually.”

“Hey, your tie looks pretty cool, no?”

“I didn't....”

“Your tie.”

“No, wait, I....”

Thomas Andre lowered his sunglasses just a little and quietly stared at him, causing the Hunter to shut his mouth.

...Because, this guy had witnessed the power of 'Goliath' capable of ripping rank S monsters apart with nothing but his bare hands. This Hunter had not one bit of desire to go up against Thomas Andre who waltzed around the rank S dungeon as if it was a low-rank dungeon commonly found everywhere.

“Your tie.”

The Hunter undid his tie with a tearful face.

A short while later, Thomas Andre walked into the restaurant of the hotel while whistling to himself before discovering a familiar face there and

stopped his leisurely stroll.

It was the manager in charge of managing the top Hunters of the Scavenger Guild, Laura. When she approached him, Thomas Andre showed off his new tie to her and asked.

“So, what do you think about my new tie?”

“It looks expensive, but it does not suit your Hawaiian shirt, sir.”

“You think so?”

Thomas Andre undid the tie around his neck and chucked it inside a trash can nearby while replying nonchalantly to her.

“Yup, I thought as much.”

Laura had seen how Thomas Andre operated from a close vantage point for a very long time now. So, she didn't display much of a reaction and simply stated the reason why she was here.

“We have a problem.”

“A problem?”

Thomas Andre raised his head away from the trash can.

His experience told him that this problem couldn't have been a minor one since Laura didn't use the phone, but rather showed up here personally to inform him like this.

“What kind of a problem are we talking about here?”

Laura spoke with a worried voice.

“The list of Guilds invited by the Hunter Bureau for this year's International Guild Conference has been published. However, it includes South Korea's Ah-Jin Guild.”

“Ah-Jin... Guild??”

Suddenly, he was overcome with an ominous feeling. Thomas Andre's voice sounded heavier as a result.

Laura nodded her head.

“It's as you suspect. It's Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's Guild.”

As he thought. Why did all the ill omens he sensed never miss their marks?

Thomas Andre frowned deeply and spoke.

“So, I guess he's coming to America, then.”



Chapter 178 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

A certain village located in Ishikawa Prefecture.

The entrance of the village had been bustling with so many people since early morning that there wasn't enough space to walk through.

“What’s going on? What is everyone out here for?”

One of the villagers, who hadn't heard of the news yet, looked around and asked his neighbours.

They should be quite busy with rebuilding their village right now, but for all these people to come out here like this? For this villager who had been working hard to remove the debris of a collapsed building, he couldn't help but be flustered by this new development.

“You see, the thing is....”

A kind auntie was about to explain the matter to this man and parted her lips. However, she spotted a vehicle revealing itself at the far end of the road that led to the village and pointed to it instead.

“Oh, my goodness!! There they are! They’re coming!”

Noisy, noisy....

The villagers discovered the vehicle and began raising a fuss.

Seeing the light of excitement gleaming brightly within their eyes, the whole atmosphere of the place came across as if they were here to welcome a long-lost relative living in a faraway land or some such to the confused male villager.

‘But then again, there’s no way that this many people would share the same relative, so....’

The man used the towel around his neck to wipe the sweat away and looked on with a puzzled expression.

“I’m asking you, just who is coming here today?”

An uncle on the side couldn't endure it any longer and spoke in clear frustration.

“The Hunter-nim is coming today.”

“Hunter-nim? Which Hunter-nim are you talking about?”

“Which Hunter-nim do you think I’m talking about here?”

When the vehicle got closer, the villagers raised their hands and welcomed it with all of their hearts. Their expressions all contained genuine happiness and gratitude.

‘Could it be....?’

Only then did this villager realise just who was coming to pay a visit to this village. His head reflexively swivelled behind him.

And that was where he saw the wretched state of his village, currently half destroyed at the hands of the Giant monsters. He could also see resting tools and unmoving construction equipment brought on to rebuild the village here and there as well.

If no one stepped up to stop those Giant monsters, would any traces of his dear hometown have even survived like this? His home, filled with countless memories of his life, could have been wiped out without a trace.

‘The schools I went to, the roads I walked on, and even the place I work for.’

When he thought like that, a certain emotion surged up from the deepest part of his heart. The end of his nose stung, too.

‘That person is really coming here?’

Swish-!

His head swivelled back to the road.

The villagers gathering like this to welcome the Hunter was not something the higher-ups had organised, nor were they putting up a facade for the sake of others to see.

No, they were here because their hearts told them to do so. It was the thoughts of gratitude that made their legs move.

Before long, the male villager had taken the towel off his neck and swung it around in the air as he yelled out a loud cheer at the approaching vehicle.

“Waaaaah-!!”

Even though the top-end black van driving on the empty road was definitely brand-new, it looked as if it had gone through hellish terrain from the way it was covered in a thick layer of dust and mud. It now looked like it had been in use for at least ten years or so.

The words ‘Japanese Hunter’s Association’ written on the number plate instead of the actual numbers were covered in so much mud that they became almost impossible to read.

The van’s rough condition seemed to tell the story of the bitter, bloody battles it had witnessed in the last few days, and that in turn warmed and softened the hearts of the villagers. Those overflowing with rich emotions even began shedding tears, as well.

A short while later, the van driven with expert skill came to a stop in front of the crowd.

Screech.

“Waaaah!!”

“Hunter-nim!”

As he received the adulations of the crowd, the sunglasses-wearing Yu Jin-Ho exited from the driver’s side of the van.

Tap.

Yu Jin-Ho made sure to wave his hands at each of the villagers rushing in to greet him. It was around then.

“Hunter-nim!”

An employee of the Japanese Hunter’s Association waiting for Jin-Woo’s group to arrive somehow managed to push through the throngs of people and stood before Yu Jin-Ho.

Pant, pant.

He bent over and panted heavily to catch his breath before standing upright to ask a question.

“Are you Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

The Association employee was speaking in Japanese, but thankfully, Yu Jin-Ho could recognise a few of the words spoken just now.

“No.”

He leisurely shook his head, before raising his finger and pointed at the sky.

“De-eol.” (TL note at the end)

When he did...

Kiiaahak!

...The Sky Dragon Kaisal screeched out a cheerful roar as if responding to

his calling.

“W-what on earth is that?!”

“What? What??”

Didn't the old saying go 'once bitten, twice shy'? The villagers who had been living in fear of the Giant-type monsters saw the large black lifeform flying in the air and their shoulders all flinched greatly.

Fortunately for them, Kaisel simply remained circling above their heads and did nothing else.

Kiiiaaahhk!

The villagers finally recognised that Kaisel didn't mean any harm. They continued to look up with mystified eyes, although their expressions still displayed how scared they were.

It was then – a dark humanoid shape jumped off from the back of Kaisel.

Boom!

The villagers watched Jin-Woo land lightly on the ground by using his 'Ruler's Authority' skill and their collective eyes nearly fell out of their sockets.

“...”

Especially for the Association employee closest to Jin-Woo – he stood motionless while tightly holding the ends of his glasses, utterly unable to mutter a single thing out right now. So, Yu Jin-Ho spoke to Jin-Woo on his behalf, instead.

“Hyung-nim, this gentleman here was looking for you just now.”

“Oh, really?”

Jin-Woo turned around and stood before the Association employee.

The latter belatedly regained his wits after seeing Jin-Woo approach him and quickly shook his head left and right. The higher-ups told him in no uncertain terms that he must never make a 'mistake' with this Hunter-nim.

The employee managed to shake off all distracting thoughts and formed a sombre expression before bowing his head.

“It's an honour, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim. My name is Tanaka Hiroshi from the Japanese Hunter's Association, Kanazawa branch.”

He raised his head and explained the purpose of him coming to greet the Korean duo like this.

“I am tasked with guiding you, Hunter-nim, during your visit here today. I’ll be in your care.”

Of course, every single word he spoke was in Japanese. Jin-Woo glanced at Yu Jin-Ho. The latter stared right back at the former without a word.

“...”

“...”

Jin-Woo saw the bright, happy-go-lucky smile on Yu Jin-Ho’s face and spat out a long groan. He just realised that the kid had not one thought of wanting to understand a lick of Japanese.

Left with little choice, Jin-Woo summoned a Shadow Soldier who could act as a trusty Japanese interpreter.

‘Oh, my king....’

Beru emerged out from the shadow and politely bowed his head. He finished greeting his Sovereign and turned around to face the Association employee.

‘I shall take care of this man.’

‘No, hang on. When you say that, it almost sounds like you meant something else and that kinda worries me....’

Jin-Woo must not be the only one thinking along that line, because not only the Association employee, even the gathered villagers saw Beru’s imposing figure and their expressions were frozen solid right away.

“Human.”

Beru walked over to the Association employee and addressed him while opening up his chest wide.

“What is it that you wish to convey to my liege?”

Gasps of astonishment simultaneously leaked out from the villagers watching on. Even Yu Jin-Ho was taken greatly by surprise as he also had never seen a Shadow Soldier talk before.

“Hyung-nim?? That guy could speak all along?!”

“Yeah.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

The Japanese he spoke was so fluent that it wouldn’t be a problem to think of Beru as a native speaker. As long as one discounted the monster-like, loud, ringing voice coming from him, that was.

‘But, then again....’

Jin-Woo’s head was suddenly filled with a thought that, as far as the number of people Beru had eaten was concerned, he had digested more Japanese than Koreans, so perhaps this should be seen as an inevitable result. For some reason, though, he felt a dull pulsing ache develop in his head and began slowly massaging his forehead.

Meanwhile, Beru exchanged a few words with the Association employee and turned around to address Jin-Woo next.

“Oh, my king. This human has been tasked with guiding you through this village. He swears to sincerely serve you to the best of his abilities, my liege.”

“Okay, fine. By the way, just what did you tell him that the poor guy’s face ended up completely white like that?”

“I warned him that, if he dares to resort to any underhanded schemes, I shall devour him in his entirety, from the tip of his toes all the way up to the ends of his hairs, oh, my king.”

“.....Oh. I see.”

What did it matter, anyway? As long as the intent had been communicated, it was fine.

The Association employee fearfully observed Beru now standing behind Jin-Woo and cautiously raised his voice.

“This way, please.”

Jin-Woo found it rather unfortunate that the employee’s complexion had paled to such a pitiable degree, and nodded his head.

“Alright.”

Jin-Woo’s group was led to an abandoned storage facility located somewhere within the village with the guidance of the employee.

There was no need for an entrance, as one of the walls in the storage facility had been blown cleanly away. The corpse of a Giant-type monster lying on its back could be seen within the ruined structure.

“It’s over here.”

The employee pointed to the corpse and stepped aside.

Jin-Woo walked closer and confirmed the status of the monster’s remains.

The corpse was filled with clear signs of the bitter, harsh battle it went

through with... And there were a countless number of bite marks which resulted in various wounds indicative of the monster having been eaten.

‘Your boys.... Did they chow down on this thing?’

Jin-Woo looked back at Beru as his glare became a level sharper. The former ant king had bent his waist well before Jin-Woo even started looking back at him, his gaze firmly fixed to the ground.

Why was this? Why did Yu Jin-Ho picture a section chief stuck in his job seemingly forever kowtowing and currying favours with his department head when looking at the relationship between his hyung-nim and the ant creature?

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze back to the monster’s corpse.

In all honesty, as long as some parts of the corpse remained intact, there was no problem with extracting the shadow.

‘It’s just that I feel a bit weird, that’s all.’

Now that all living Giants within Japan had been eliminated, Jin-Woo was going around to find those remains of the monsters killed off by his soldiers so he could perform ‘Shadow Extraction’ on them.

As he immersed himself in this new task, he could easily tell which division had engaged which creature simply from the conditions of the monster corpses.

Pretty much all the monsters unlucky enough to run into the ant army couldn’t avoid ending up in this pathetic sight.

“Fuu...”

Jin-Woo stared at the monster that probably had died while getting devoured by hundreds of ants and let a sigh leak out of his mouth. He then rolled his sleeves up.

He pointed towards the corpse. A dignified voice soon left Jin-Woo’s lips.

“Rise up.”

And then, this happened.

Didn’t matter who it was, the tightly-packed gathering of villagers following after Jin-Woo gasped out in astonishment almost all at the same time.

Whoa-!!

Along with the distinctive scream, a Giant soldier, his body having recovered to full, emerged out from the shadow and knelt down on one knee

before Jin-Woo.

Boom!

It was yet another success. As easy as they come. With this, he had gotten himself the 27th Giant soldier.

‘I guess there are two left now, right?’

Jin-Woo looked up at the imposing-looking giant soldier and grinned brightly.

At the same time in South Korea.

Goh Gun-Hui was currently sifting through various TV channels with a remote inside his office, located in the Korean Hunter’s Association.

No matter which broadcast he changed to, they were pretty much all dominated by the news of Jin-Woo’s feat in Japan. However, this phenomenon wasn’t happening only in Korea. It was the same story even with the international news channels, as well.

There was no doubt now that, through this incident, Hunter Seong had branded his name in the psyche of the entire world.

“Huhuh.”

A bright smile remained etched on the face of the Association President Goh Gun-Hui as if he was the one experiencing this event.

What if he managed to dissuade Hunter Seong Jin-Woo that day when the young man declared his intentions of going to Japan....? Just thinking about that possibility made him shudder uncomfortably.

He almost ended up making the biggest mistake so late in his life.

The status of the Korean Hunter community had seen such a meteoric rise in fame through this incident that he simply had to thank Hunter Seong for willingly stepping forward like that.

All because of the actions of a single person, some are even openly saying that South Korea had become the new global Hunter superpower now.

That is why the Association President felt proud and happy at the feats Jin-Woo had achieved so far. However, there was one thing he felt quite worried about, and that would be....

“Association President, sir.”

With good timing, Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol knocked on the door and stepped into the president’s office. He was a man who, by achieving back-to-

back results early in his career, got to wear the title of the youngest-ever Section Chief.

He performed a light nod of his head as a greeting and made a report on the current situation.

“The monster has changed its course towards China, sir.”

“Is that so?”

Now that was an unexpected change in the situation.

As Jin-Woo busied himself with killing the Giants in Japan, one of them escaped out into the sea. The creature had been heading into the Pacific, but the news of it completely changing course towards China was a bit of fresh shock to the Association President.

Goh Gun-Hui quickly asked.

“How are the Chinese responding to this situation?”

“We heard that Liu Zhigeng will personally step up, sir.”

Goh Gun-Hui leaned his back against the couch.

“In that case, there should be no problems, then.”

The Giant-type monster should be ripped to shreds even before setting a foot on the Chinese mainland now that Liu Zhigeng, one of the five most powerful Hunters in the world, had decided to get involved.

It was a big relief that the d*mn monster wasn't headed to South Korea when Hunter Seong was still absent from the country. Woo Jin-Cheol saw the relief in the Association President's face and also formed a smile as well, perhaps his own tense mind relaxing a little now.

His eyes then caught the TV screen.

The scenes of destroyed Japan, painfully sobbing and screaming Japanese people, as well as the ongoing rescue efforts and reconstruction work getting off the ground, were displayed one after the other.

“How unfortunate.”

Woo Jin-Cheol clicked his tongue.

“Indeed, it is unfortunate..... Utterly so.”

Goh Gun-Hui agreed with that simple but succinct assessment.

South Korea also had suffered similar pain four years ago back on Jeju Island. The wounds inflicted on that day still ran too deep to say that he had

forgotten how painful it was. The reconstruction of Jeju Island was ongoing even as they spoke in this office, after all.

Goh Gun-Hui raised his voice again.

“However, someone’s pain can also become someone else’s ray of hope.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Do you know the reason why Japan, completely ruined after losing the war, had recovered to become the second most financially prosperous nation on Earth?”

“Wasn’t that because of the Korean War?”

“That’s right. Through wartime special procurement. And something similar is about to happen to our nation.”

With a wry expression, Association President Goh Gun-Hui placed his hand on top of the thick pile of documents currently resting on the table.

“These are all quotation documents sent in by the local corporations wishing to get involved in Japan’s restoration projects.”

The Korean companies were quick to make their move. Some of them even sent in these documents as soon as Hunter Seong had left for Japan. All the other corporations should have finished with their preparations by now, as well.

‘Someone’s pain can become someone else’s hope, is it...’

No, to be more correct, it’d be someone’s profit, instead.

Having accurately understood what the Association President was implying just now, Woo Jin-Cheol also began forming a wry expression to mirror his boss.

Before long though, he quickly spoke as if he recalled something else just now.

“Ah, by the way, sir.”

“Yeah?”

“The Japanese Association President Matsumoto has apparently handed himself over to police.”

“He did what?”

Why would such a shameless man suddenly have a change of heart?

Goh Gun-Hui was about to discuss the details of that news, but then heard

the ringing of the phone and reached out to it.

Ringgg... Ringgg...

He picked up the receiver only to be greeted by a rather urgent voice.

The voice belonged to his personal doctor. He should have been beyond busy dealing with patients rushing in at this time of the day, though.

Goh Gun-Hui could only tilt his head.

“My friend, what made you call me at this time of the day?”

“Too... important?”

Goh Gun-Hui’s voice also became quite serious.

Several likely scenarios fled in and out of his head just then. However, his private doctor ended up mentioning a completely unexpected name, instead.

Chairman Yu Myung-Han was one of the biggest contributors to the Korean Hunter’s Association. He was even a personal acquaintance of Goh Gun-Hui, as well.

What had happened to him, then?

The Association President pressed for an answer, and the private doctor continued on with his explanation.

Goh Gun-Hui shot up from his seat.

“He’s not in any critical danger, is he?”

A heavy silence descended in the office.

The private doctor’s voice, keeping silent for a moment or two, quietly continued on.



Chapter 179 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The explosive flooding of phone calls from various TV stations and newspapers desperate for an interview with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was so severe that it almost completely paralysed the Japanese Hunter's Association.

Ringgg.... ringgg...

“Hello, this is the Japanese Hunter's Associa....”

“Mister Director, that is the very definition of an interview!”

“We already stated that the Hunter-nim has refused all filming and interview requests. I'm very sorry.”

Click.

Ringgg.... ringgg...

“Yes, this is the Japanese Hunter's.....”

“No means no, sir.”

Click.

Such types of calls flooded in hundreds of times throughout the day, so it was only obvious that no normal work could get done under the circumstances.

The person in charge of the department tasked with answering calls began developing a migraine just from hearing the ringtones of a phone now.

However....

‘This just goes to show that the interest of the mass media is focused on Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim currently.’

...It wasn't as if he couldn't understand their interest, either. Who'd not be interested in the story of one man solving a crisis that had destroyed almost 40% of the Japanese mainland?

Even he himself wanted to know more about who this Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was, and was also curious to hear what he had to say, too.

Still, that was that, and this was something else.

He was burdened with the immense weight of the duty that the title of

employee of the Japanese Hunter's Association carried.

And currently, his duty was to respect and uphold the desire of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo who didn't want to do any interviews whatsoever, by shutting out in advance all forms of requests flooding in from the mass media companies.

'I can't let the saviour of my nation feel displeased, now can I?'

The manager nodded his head with a determined expression on his face. In the meantime, a hesitant newbie employee approached him to ask something.

"Excuse me.... Manager?"

Even before the newbie could say something, the man in charge cut him off right away.

"Just tell them no."

He didn't have to hear anything, really. Most likely, this newbie couldn't endure against the threats thrown around by some higher-ups in a TV station or a newspaper from somewhere and just wanted to get the manager's confirmation next.

Unfortunately, he was a bit off the mark this time.

"No, sir. It's not that, but we just got a call from South Korea."

"From Korea?"

"Yes, sir. A person calling himself Goh Gun-Hui from the Korean Hunter's Association wishes to speak to a person in charge."

The manager had been listening to the newbie with some amount of disinterest, but now, an expression of fluster quickly filled up his face.

"You sure it's Goh Gun-Hui?"

"Yes, sir."

There couldn't have been two different people with the name 'Goh Gun-Hui' in South Korea's Hunter's Association.

The whole world knew about the cordial cooperative relationship between Hunter Seong Jin-Woo and the Korean Hunter's Association. And wasn't it Goh Gun-Hui who announced Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's expedition to Japan live on TV?

The manager's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets, before he hurriedly ran back to his desk while shouting at the top of his voice, thick veins now visibly bulging out on his neck.

“Let the call through!! Hurry up!”

“Ah, yes, sir.”

“You’re now speaking to the person in charge, Association President Goh Gun-Hui, sir.”

The manager picked the receiver up half in doubt, but his expression gradually hardened as he listened to the fluent Japanese coming from the speaker.

“Yes, yes. I understand. Yes, I shall get in contact with them right away.”

He’d never get tired of this sight no matter how many times he saw it.

“Hee-ya....”

Yu Jin-Ho was letting out yet another gasp of admiration today.

He felt deeply moved whenever he saw the scene of the giant black creature standing up from the Giant’s corpse before kneeling down to swear his allegiance to his hyung-nim. It was like watching a scene from a movie or something.

‘This is so cool, hyung-nim!’

Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes sparkled in respect and admiration, but then, his ears picked up on the commotion raised by the shocked voices coming from behind.

“Whoa-!!”

“What the heck, how can something like that....?!”

“W-what’s going on? What’s this?”

Noisy, noisy....

He had seen this sight many times now and still couldn’t get fully used to it, so how would these Japanese villagers seeing hyung-nim’s ability for the first time feel right now?

He might not understand what they were talking about, but he could more or less guess the contents of their conversation. Yu Jin-Ho felt deeply flattered as if he was the one being talked about here.

“Ehem.”

Yu Jin-Ho was standing around with a bit of a swollen ego for some reason, but then, an employee from the Japanese Association searching for the two

Koreans approached closer and engaged him in a conversation.

“By any chance, are you Hunter-nim?”

“Ah, if you’re looking for hyung-nim, he’s over.....”

When Yu Jin-Ho heard the word ‘Hunter’, he immediately pointed to Jin-Woo over yonder, but the employee quickly shook his head and pointed to the younger Korean man, instead.

“No, no. You.”

Yu Jin-Ho blinked his eyes several times.

“Me?”

“Yes.”

Yu Jin-Ho utilised his meagre English skills to reconfirm that it was indeed him the Japanese wanted, and quickly received a smartphone from the latter.

And then.... His expression gradually hardened as he listened to the call.

Until the call came to an end, Yu Jin-Ho simply repeated ***“Yes, yes”*** over and over again.

Jin-Woo finished up with storing the giant soldier in his shadow and left the damaged storage facility. Yu Jin-Ho quickly approached him as if waiting for this moment and lowered his head.

“I’m sorry, hyung-nim. Looks like I’ll have to go back to Korea right away.”

Seeing how serious Yu Jin-Ho’s expression was, Jin-Woo couldn’t help but ask.

“What happened?”

“I’m not too sure myself. It’s just that, I’ve been told there’s been an emergency at home and I need to go back immediately.”

“....”

Jin-Woo shut his mouth. He could think of a reason already.

‘Chairman Yu’s illness....’

If his suspicion proved to be correct, then it was understandable why the caller was unable to provide much clarification over the phone to Yu Jin-Ho. How could anyone say to a son in another country that his father had fallen into a comatose state over a phone call?

So, Jin-Woo didn’t inquire any further.

“Okay, got it. You worked hard until now.”

“No, not at all, hyung-nim. I’m sorry about not sticking around until the end of this thing.”

Yu Jin-Ho respectfully apologised one more time before climbing aboard the car the Japanese Association had provided. The driver turned the car around and set off towards the airport.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo wordlessly stared at the back of the departing car.

*

Yu Jin-Ho did his best to sound assured and relaxed in front of his hyung-nim, but in reality, he could barely keep his worries in check.

He could still recall his mom’s voice on the phone. It was the first time that her warm and kind voice sounded so shaken like that.

‘Just what had happened?’

His heart was pounding away madly right now.

Could it be, his father got really angry that his son hadn’t asked for permission and blindly followed his hyung-nim to Japan, seemingly without a plan? Surely, no parent out there would welcome a foolish child willingly walking into a lion’s den, now would there?

Yu Jin-Ho dazedly stared outside the car’s window before shaking his head hard as if to clear out all the unnecessary stuff from his mind.

‘No, I should not think about anything for the time being.’

He had no idea what was going on, so if he kept worrying about it right now, it’d only make his thoughts more complicated. As a matter of fact, it could be nothing serious, as well.

Until he landed back on the Incheon International Airport, he continued to carry such a hopeful thought, however tiny, in his heart.

Unfortunately for him...

“Yu Jin-Ho-gun.” (TL note at the end)

...The moment he discovered the swollen eyes of Secretary Kim ahjussi coming to fetch him, he realised immediately that something really bad had happened.

“Ahjussi....”

“A car is waiting for you. For the time being, please come with me.”

‘...What’s going on....’

Yu Jin-Ho so desperately wanted to ask that question. However, he was scared of the potential answer and couldn’t mouth those three words.

“Please, hurry.”

Secretary Kim pointed at the outside of the airport.

“Ah....”

For some reason, though, Yu Jin-Ho’s feet didn’t want to move from the spot. Perhaps understanding what was going through the young man’s head, Secretary Kim placed his hand on Yu Jin-Ho’s shoulder.

“Jin-Ho-gun.... You need to stay strong in times like these. I shall explain everything on our way.”

Yu Jin-Ho’s tears welled up from those words.

Secretary Kim explained Chairman Yu Myung-Han’s current condition to Yu Jin-Ho as they rode on the car.

But, that couldn’t be; Yu Jin-Ho desperately tried to reject Secretary Kim’s explanations.

No, he didn’t want to believe it.

Unfortunately, after arriving in the hospital – he had no choice but to believe when he saw his sleeping father’s face through the glass wall partition. He remained still as if he was dead.

At the same time, it felt like something in his heart had shattered to pieces.

Seeing his father, who looked so mighty and imposing, lying there on the hospital bed looking so wane and weak, something hard and powerful welled up from deep within.

“Dad!!”

Yu Jin-Ho tried to rush into the hospital room, but the doctors quickly blocked his way.

The approach of a Hunter who couldn’t control his magic energy leakage would only worsen the patient’s condition. Hearing that explanation from the doctors, Yu Jin-Ho’s expression became a person whose soul had abandoned him.

“So, that’s how it was....”

He was a son who always disappointed his father. And now, he couldn't even hold his father's hand for one last time, too. Faced with such a fitting end for himself, he couldn't even shed a tear anymore.

“I see. I've been a completely useless son, even till the end.”

Yu Jin-Ho turned on his heels in dejection. But then, Secretary Kim approached him and handed over a black leather-bound case file.

“What... is this?”

Yu Jin-Ho weakly raised his head up after receiving this unknown file. Secretary Kim calmly explained himself.

“This is the item the Chairman was working on before he collapsed, actually. I've kept it with me in case he searched for it after waking up, but... But, I thought that you might need it more than I do, Jin-Ho-gun.”

“This.... you think so?”

Yu Jin-Ho alternated his gaze between Secretary Kim and the file. Eventually, he cautiously opened it.

It was a scrapbook filled with newspaper clippings.

Every single page was packed full of articles from various newspapers containing either his older brother Yu Jin-Seong or his older sister Yu Jin-Hui.

‘From father to son.’

Yu Jin-Ho wondered just from where he got this habit of cutting out and keeping the newspaper articles he liked, but it seemed that he got it from his father.

‘To think, he had this kind of a hobby....’

Even when stewing in sorrow, a grin still managed to squeak out as he looked at his brother and sister when they were young kids.

Both of them were the pride of his father.

In all sorts of academic competitions, talent contests and concours – they were geniuses that made their names known throughout the country in their favourite subjects.

It was rather obvious that this scrapbook would be filled with articles related to the two of them. As he flipped through the pages, Yu Jin-Ho grew more and more embarrassed by the fact that not a single photo of him could be found within.

However, just as he flipped to the last page, his hands came to an abrupt

stop.

[The Vice Chair of Ah-Jin Guild: Who is Yu Jin-Ho?]

[Two Hunters heading off to Japan.]

[The choice of a rank D Hunter: Is it bravery or foolhardiness?]

There were articles containing his name. Even those meaningless gossip pieces didn't escape his father's attention and found themselves cut out and pasted carefully within the page.

"Uh....."

No words wanted to come out of Yu Jin-Ho's mouth.

While he stood there like that, a newspaper article that hadn't been fully cropped out fell to the floor. He hurriedly bent down to the floor and picked it up, only for the tears to stream down from his eyes.

It was an article containing the photo of himself beaming brightly to the camera. That was taken when, after Jin-Woo killed the boss-level Giant monster, he refused all filming and interview requests from the countless reporters flooding into the location, so Yu Jin-Ho stepped up as the stand-in, instead.

The article was dated today.

Secretary Kim squeezed Yu Jin-Ho's shoulder and spoke.

"It's not true that Chairman Yu never loved you, Jin-Ho-gun. As great as his love for you, he also held equally great expectations of you."

Yu Jin-Ho wordlessly sat there, his shoulders shuddering uncontrollably as he cried. He somehow managed to calm his aching heart and stood back up.

"Dad... Is there any way to wake my father up?"

Secretary Kim shook his head with a darkened complexion.

There was no officially known case of patients opening their eyes again after entering the 'final sleep' state. With the sole exception of one person, that was.

Secretary Kim's thoughts arrived there and spoke up with some difficulty.

"By any chance... Yu Jin-Ho-gun?"

"Yes?"

".....No, it's nothing. Don't mind me."

However, Secretary Kim couldn't bring himself to say what was on his

mind.

Planting a seed of hope when things were uncertain could prove to be even crueler in some cases. And now would be such a time.

Yu Jin-Ho continued to shed long, hard tears as he looked at his father through the glass wall, while Secretary Kim silently swallowed back what he initially wanted to say.

And the conversation they shared was silently listened in on by Yu Jin-Ho's shadow.



Chapter 180 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“For the time being, let me accompany you back to your home.”

“...Alright.”

Yu Jin-Ho left the hospital room of his father, Chairman Yu, with Secretary Kim a little while later.

But, just before the door to this special hospital room closed shut, a portion of the shadow beneath Yu Jin-Ho’s feet separated away and slipped inside the room. No one witnessed this strange phenomenon happen.

Tak.

The door closed shut and the light within the room automatically switched off. And time continued to tick by like this.

When the hour became late and no more people came around to visit this room, a ‘shadow’ sneaked out from underneath Chairman Yu’s bed.

Shururuk...

Then, an ant soldier emerged from this shadow. He quietly looked around the room and discovered the sleeping Chairman Yu.

What sort of delicious open buffet was this?

Kiiehk.

The ant soldier fixed his gaze on the Chairman Yu and began drooling avariciously, but too bad for him, he got rapidly sucked into the shadow and was replaced by Jin-Woo.

That was the effect of the skill ‘Shadow Exchange’.

Jin-Woo already had cloaked himself with ‘Stealth’ even before activating the exchange. Now that he was here, he took a careful look around the hospital room.

There was no source of light to be found inside and, as a result, it was completely dark in the room, but with his Perception Stat having reached such an extreme peak, he could see just fine as if this was in the middle of the day.

Jin-Woo’s eyes gleamed coldly in the darkness as he finished searching for the presence of security cameras in the room.

‘Looks like it’s clean.’

The only people nearby were four guards manning the door from the outside.

As long as there was no event of Chairman Yu Myung-Han suddenly waking up and start yelling at the top of his lungs, Jin-Woo’s presence wouldn’t be detected at all.

Feeling sure of this conclusion, he undid his ‘Stealth’.

Shuuuk...

His once-transparent body revealed its faint outer line before gradually regaining its original colour.

There was a reason why Jin-Woo was being doubly, triply cautious like this. Because he should not carelessly reveal the existence of the item called ‘Divine Water of Life’ to anyone. That’s what he thought.

Not too long ago, Chairman Yu presented him with a blank cheque. That was not all. He even promised to fulfil whatever Jin-Woo wished for as long as it was within his powers.

Did he offer all those juicy terms because he was a kind-hearted gentleman? Of course not.

No way such a thing was true.

He was a man who stood at the apex of the cutthroat corporate world where one could only survive by coldly calculating their gains and losses.

He was also a naturally-gifted businessman who even managed to turn a small corporation he inherited from his parents into one of the biggest conglomerates in the entire world.

He should be fully aware of the true worth of something that ‘can heal the illness he’s suffering from’. And that was his reason for offering up everything he could realistically put on the table.

However, not everyone in this world was as gentlemanly in conduct as Chairman Yu. Desperation could sometimes become a motive that caused one to make rash decisions.

Meaning, it was for the best not to create a potential source of trouble.

That was Jin-Woo’s reason for concealing the existence of the ‘Divine Water of Life’ to the best of his abilities.

Even if he was the father of the kid he thought of as his little brother, Jin-Woo wasn’t naïve enough to risk unknown dangers that may or may not occur

in the future for the sake of Chairman Yu, someone whom he didn't know all that well, to begin with.

'Well, there wouldn't be that many naïve fools out there who bring out an item like 'Divine Water of Life' just because someone asked them to....'

So, he waited quietly for the best timing to make his move, and finally, that moment had arrived.

It wasn't as if Chairman Yu's life would negatively be affected or he'd suffer from some after-effects just because the treatment came about a little later.

If Jin-Woo were to think about those who might be getting a raw deal out of this, then it'd only be the shareholders who quickly got rid of all their shares related with Yujin Corporation after hearing about Chairman Yu's collapse.

'Is this why people say investing in stock markets is pretty much the case of 'all or nothing'?''

Jin-Woo smirked to himself and accessed his Inventory to retrieve one of the five remaining bottles of the 'Divine Water of Life'.

With the usage of this one bottle, he'd had four more left.

He knew exactly what it was like to lose one's parent through this illness. So, he felt that using this bottle for Yu Jin-Ho's sake was not a loss to him in the slightest.

'That kid, why did he have to go and cry like that? Making me feel all bad and stuff.'

Jin-Woo carefully raised the upper torso of Chairman Yu Myung-Han, opened his lips, and slowly poured in the 'Divine Water of Life'.

Very slowly, and only a small amount at a time.

However, Chairman Yu must've known that this item was the sole lifeline capable of saving him, because he gulped the Water down rather commendably well.

"Cough."

The bottle became empty in no time at all.

Jin-Woo lowered Chairman Yu's upper torso back on the bed and returned the empty bottle to his Inventory.

Just like how he remembered with his mother's case, the colour of vitality returned to Chairman Yu's complexion very quickly. Even his faint, weakly-

beating heart gradually picked up pace, as well.

Jin-Woo nodded his head in satisfaction.

'It's done.'

The medicine was working perfectly.

The only remaining thing would be to escape from this room before Chairman Yu Myung-Han wakes up and leave not one trace of himself behind. Jin-Woo reactivated 'Stealth' and stood before the room's door.

Wuiing...

"Huh?"

"What's this?"

The door could only be opened by pressing an electronic button either on the outside or inside, yet it automatically opened up by itself, so the guards quickly fell into a state of panic.

"Huh?!?!"

Before long, though, they spotted Chairman Yu through the glass wall.

An event dozens of times – no, make that hundreds and thousands of times – more shocking than the door opening up was unfolding inside the hospital room.

The guards all discovered Chairman Yu sitting upright on the bed and their eyes almost popped out of their sockets.

"Huh? Uh??"

"C-Chairman has... woken up?!"

Guards stood there completely frozen as if they had seen a ghost, before one of them regained his wits and loudly yelled out, veins on his neck visibly bulging in the process.

"Doctor!! Where is a doctorrrrr!!"

Excluding one guard who ran to elsewhere in search of a doctor, the rest quickly rushed inside the hospital room.

"Mister Chairman!"

"Are you alright?"

Yu Myung-Han formed a refreshed expression of someone just waking up from a good, long rest and took a look at the guards.

"Why are you people raising such a fuss here? Besides all that, who are

you people, anyway?”

“S-sir, we’re....”

“No, wait.”

Yu Myung-Han cut into the guard’s reply, and took a good look around his surroundings first. And he found himself in the VIP hospital room designed to accommodate a victim of the Eternal Sleep.

He easily recognised this place, because it was he who had prepared this room soon after learning of his own terminal condition.

‘Which means, I....’

Could he really have?

“....Did I collapse, but somehow woke up again?”

Wuuiing...

Chairman Yu Myung-Han’s head quickly swivelled in the direction of that sound. He watched through the glass wall the electronic door slowly closing shut by itself.

Ting!

The elevator’s door slid open.

Jin-Woo wordlessly stared at the cordon of doctors rushing in from the other end of the corridor as if they were gathering storm clouds before climbing into the empty elevator.

Now that he thought about it, wasn’t Yu Jin-Ho’s birthday at the end of this month?

‘I know it’s a bit early, but well, happy birthday, Jin-Ho.’

His father’s full recovery – Jin-Woo thought that it might prove to be the best birthday gift for Yu Jin-Ho as he pressed the button for the ground floor.

Click.

An ahjussi belatedly climbed into the elevator and was about to press the same button as well, but he stopped after seeing the light come on all by itself.

“What the...? That’s spooky.”

Jin-Woo was still cloaked with ‘Stealth’ so the interior of the elevator looked empty. The ahjussi grunted out ‘Urgh, dang it’ after taking a look around and quickly left the elevator altogether.

‘My bad, ahjussi.’

Jin-Woo apologised from deep within his heart and pressed the ‘close door’ button.

Clunk...

As the elevator began climbing down, he confirmed his skill window.

‘Skill information.’

[Skill: Shadow Exchange Lv.2]

Class-specific skill.

Mana required to activate: None.

The summoner can switch locations with the designated Shadow Soldier.

Once activated, you must wait two hours of ‘cooldown’ time before being able to use the skill again. The ‘cooldown’ period will change according to the Skill’s level.

Remaining cooldown time: 01:54:11

‘Still one hour and 54 minutes left....’

Even if he disregarded the 11 seconds, he still had roughly two hours left to kill.

He hadn’t finished with the task of extracting shadows yet. Meaning, he still needed to go back to Japan one more time if he were to seek out the remaining dead Giants and turn them into Shadow Soldiers.

He did leave a shadow on standby there, so the issue of travelling back would be resolved as soon as Shadow Exchange’s cooldown time had elapsed. But his current problem would be with how he’d go about spending the next two hours of waiting.

‘Going home.... is out of the question.’

Her son came back home after over a week spent in another country, so what kind of expression would his mom make if he had to leave again only a couple of hours later?

He didn’t have to be there to know.

Ting!

The elevator stopped on the ground floor and opened its door.

Even as he stepped out of the Seoul Ilsin Hospital’s front entrance, Jin-Woo continued to agonise over what he should next, but then, a rather nice idea

popped up in his head.

‘Okay, should I search for an ownerless dungeon or something?’

Jin-Woo undid ‘Stealth’ and greatly extended out his sensory perception.

His senses picked up four or five Gates near his location. He pulled out his Hunter-issued smartphone and accessed the Association’s app to confirm the details on those Gates.

‘...Found you.’

Jin-Woo found out that two of those Gates weren’t reported to the Association yet. A meaningful smile formed on Jin-Woo’s face right away.

“Miss. We’ve arrived.”

“Thank you, driver.”

Chairman Yu Myung-Han’s eldest daughter, Yu Jin-Hui, was returning to the hospital after escorting her nearly-fainted mother back home. She stepped out from the chauffeur-driven car’s back seat.

She felt as if the heavens were crashing down on her the day she learned of her father slowly dying from that illness.

Even then, she unreservedly believed her father’s words.

[“I’m still searching through all avenues for a cure. I seemed to have found a strand of hope, so do not worry about me too much.”]

If someone else declared oh-so-proudly that he’d cure this incurable illness, Yu Jin-Hui would flat out not believe that man.

However, just who was her father?

Was he not the one and only Chairman Yu Myung-Han, the man who could legitimately be called the top dog in South Korea’s financial world?

That was why she held on to that slim strand of hope, but in the end, things had become like this. If only she knew things would end up this way. She’d have thrown away all notions of studying abroad and spent more time with her father, instead.

She recalled him doing his best to hide his loneliness when she told him about her plans to study abroad and quietly wiped her tears away.

It was around then.

As she raised her head, her eyes briefly caught the sight of a rather familiar

face walking past her.

‘...Uh? This man....’

Hadn’t she seen that face often before?

As she began wondering where she had seen him, the man also must’ve sensed her gaze, because he pulled the hood down even further and rapidly distanced himself from her.

She stared at the man’s back and tilted her head just a little, before resuming her walk. The identity of that man was not an important issue to her, anyway.

Yu Jin-Hui anxiously waited for the elevator’s door to open up. But then, her phone suddenly issued out loud ringtones.

Ringggg, ringgg...

With the hour being so late already, the corridors of the hospital were mostly empty now and the ringtone sounded especially loud to her ears.

She didn’t recognise the number shown on the screen. She usually wouldn’t answer a call from an unfamiliar number like this, but now....

‘Who could this be....?’

Perhaps because she had been experiencing a storm of events for the whole day, she got this feeling that she should answer this call no matter what.

Yu Jin-Hui tapped the ‘Answer’ icon and pressed the phone to her ear.

“Hello?”

Her mother had taken a shot of sedative and had fallen asleep at home, so she wouldn’t be able to wake up and answer the phone now.

But, why was the hospital calling her like this? Yu Jin-Hui instantly became scared by this call made by the doctor in charge.

That was why she was extra cautious when asking back.

“Did something happen?”

As she heard the ensuing explanation, her eyes grew as large and round as a rabbit’s.

This had to be a lie.

‘You, you expect me to believe that?!’

Her eyes were getting wetter and wetter but she still managed to ask that one last question.

“You... are you telling me the truth??”

“H-hang on! I’m already there!”

Ting!

With excellent timing, the elevator opened its door and Yu Jin-Hui practically threw herself inside.

Oh my god.

‘Really.... Truly??’

These few minutes the elevator took to climb up felt like the longest moments in her entire life so far.

Ting.

The moment the door opened, she rushed out and entered the hospital room – and was greeted by the sight of her father’s face shifting towards her.

From the top of his head right down to the tip of his toes, he was definitely her father and there was no need to even suspect otherwise.

“Dad!!”

Yu Myung-Han, currently surrounded by a cordon of doctors, turned his head towards his little girl.

“Jin-Hui....?”

“Dad!”

She jumped into his embrace and as Yu Myung-Han gently patted her back, he finally realised that he had returned from death’s doorstep somehow.

‘I’m alive.’

However, could he really describe this as a coincidence?

While the cordon of doctors in charge responded with whispers of ***“It’s a miracle”***, and with his daughter sobbing her eyes out as she clung to her dad, Yu Myung-Han began focusing on the sounds of his own beating heart.

‘B-but.... How could this be??’

Ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump!!

He was already well past his fifties, yet his heart was pounding away vigorously as if he was still in his twenties, instead.



Chapter 181 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Sure enough....

One of the doctors in charge, who proceeded to check and observe Yu Myung-Han's condition throughout the night, continued to tilt his head this way and that while staring into the medical chart containing the good Chairman's test results.

“How can any of this make sense.....”

Yu Myung-Han saw the expression on the doctor's face and cautiously asked.

“Are my results that bad?”

The doctor hurriedly waved his hand around.

“Ahh, no, it's not that, sir. It's the complete opposite, in fact.”

He resumed staring back at the results as if to bore a hole through the paper and carefully asked his question some time later.

“Chairman, by any chance, have you taken your high blood pressure medication before taking these tests?”

Only up until last night, he was hanging precariously on the edge of death. He might be awake now, but that didn't mean Yu Myung-Han had the spare mental capacity to take his meds on time.

“No, I haven't.”

Yu Myung-Han shook his head.

The doctor nodded his as if he knew that answer was coming. Then, he formed a troubled expression as he made his reply.

“Even without the medication, your blood pressure seems to have completely stabilised to a healthy level. No, wait. With your current level, you could even confidently say that you're even healthier than a regular person, sir.”

Chairman Yu Myung-Han's eyes grew really large then.

‘What on earth is he talking about??’

He thought that only death awaited him after entering the ‘final sleep’ state, but after waking up, even the chronic high blood pressure he’d been suffering from for a long time had all been cured away??

The doctor in charge continued to read the medical chart.

“And also, the rest of your bodily functions have reverted back to being perfectly healthy as well. Chairman, if I were to forget about your current age, then I’d have believed that I was looking at a test result from a young man in his early twenties.”

How could such a thing even happen?

As great was Chairman Yu Myung-Han’s surprise, the doctor’s own astonishment was even greater and he struggled to hide that fact from showing up on his expression. His own two eyes definitely saw the results, yet he could hardly believe them even then.

Chairman Yu collapsed for the first time a few weeks ago and was brought to this hospital back then. The results of tests taken on that day were printed on a separate medical chart, and the ink on that thing barely had the chance to dry properly yet.

So, how could anyone go about explaining this completely befuddling test result coming out only a few weeks later?

Did he drastically change his lifestyle or some such during that time period? Not to forget, he was wasting away from an incurable illness only a night before, too.

The doctor in charge confessed what was in his mind without holding back.

“I’ve been a doctor for 30 years or so, but this would be my very first time something like this has happened. This... this can only be described as a miracle and nothing else.”

A patient woke up from the ‘final sleep’ state of the Eternal Sleep disorder, and on top of that, his body had become even healthier than when he went to sleep, too.

Didn’t the word ‘miracle’ exist precisely to describe a situation such as this one right here?

The doctor couldn’t hide his astonishment anymore and let a soft gasp of admiration escape from his mouth before a bright smile bloomed on his face.

“Congratulations, Chairman Yu. Your Eternal Sleep disorder has been cured completely.”

He then added that the Chairman was healthy enough to start running the

length of a full marathon course right now if he wanted to.

However...

‘.....’

Instead of celebrating, Yu Myung-Han pondered something for a while before raising his head to look at the doctor.

“By any chance, are there cameras installed near the hospital room I’ve been staying at?”

“Pardon? I don’t understand what.....”

“There is something I’d like to confirm first. Are there any cameras installed inside the room or around the entrance itself?”

“There are none within the room, but there should be one by its entrance.”

‘Very good.’

Yu Myung-Han nodded his head.

‘Something like this can not be a coincidence.’

Indeed, this matter had gone far beyond treating it as pure coincidence now. There was little doubt that someone possessing an unfathomable ability had intervened in this matter somehow.

And he had a fairly good hunch who that someone might be.

‘I’ve ended up owing him a great deal.’

Yu Myung-Han had lived without owing anyone in his entire life. And he wasn’t planning to start now. But then again, how was he supposed to go about paying the debt of saving his life?

No, more than that. Putting aside the idea of paying or not paying the debt, wouldn’t it be a common sense to at least find out the name of his saviour first?

Yu Myung-Han wished to confirm that personally.

“I’d like to view the footage from the CCTV cameras taken last night.”

Quite obviously, the cameras failed to capture anything.

“Right here. This is the only odd thing that happened, the doorway malfunctioning this one time.”

The guard pointed at the screen and explained what happened back then.

The windows were confirmed to be locked from the inside, so the sole exit left in that hospital room was the doorway.

However, all four guards manning the door said the same thing. They said that not even a single ant had entered the room during their watch. And since these guys were professionals hired from a dedicated security company, they wouldn't make mistakes regarding such things.

“H-mm....”

Yu Myung-Han couldn't have imagined that Jin-Woo possessed the skill 'Stealth' and so, his thoughts had become quite complicated as a result.

Around this time, Secretary Kim hurriedly entered the security room as well to bring some news.

“Chairman. I've found out what you asked for.”

“Alright. What's the news?”

“That is....”

Secretary Kim became extra mindful of the surrounding eyes and ears, leaned in closer and cupped his hand on Yu Myung-Han's ear to whisper his findings.

“I lodged an inquiry to the Association, and they say Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim was in Japan the whole time. He's only scheduled to return to the country around tomorrow or so.”

“.....”

Here he was, thinking that no one else would be capable of making this event happen unless it was Hunter Seong Jin-Woo himself.

Yu Myung-Han finally admitted to making a wrong guess. He now realised that it couldn't have been that young rank S Hunter.

‘If so, then why....’

Even though he had confirmed through all this evidence, why did a certain amount of suspicion remain rooted in the corner of his heart?

He just couldn't understand it at all.

However, there was one thing Chairman Yu Myung-Han and Jin-Woo had in common. And that would be – they were rather decisive in moving on when stuck with a quandary they couldn't solve just yet.

“I see.”

Yu Myung-Han carried on.

“The doctor says I’m healthy enough to even run a marathon right now. I shall return to the company tomorrow so make the appropriate arrangements, please.”

One could say that this was more like him.

Having realised that the attitude of Yu Myung-Han was still the same as before, Secretary Kim barely held back his laughter and replied.

“Sir. Do you know what the mass media is calling you right now?”

It was obvious that there would be quite a bit of chaos unfolding outside right about now, since a guy who was as good as dead only yesterday had gotten back up on his feet perfectly fine.

However, why would such a thing be treated as something big?

Yu Myung-Han asked without a single noticeable change in his expression.

“What are they calling me this time?”

“The Invincible, sir. They are calling you the Invincible.”

“The Invincible, is it?”

Yu Myung-Han wouldn’t break out into a smile that easily over anything but even then, the corners of his lips arched up ever so slightly after he heard that nickname.

‘Invincible’.

Mass media had been calling him with useless labels like ‘Hand of Midas’ or even ‘Pokerface’ but rather surprisingly, they managed to cook up a somewhat okay-sounding nickname this time.

“Huhuh.”

Yu Myung-Han slowly chewed on this new nickname and formed a satisfied smile.

“The Invincible, is it. The Invincible....”

Didn’t this nickname suit him perfectly, when he had never bowed down regardless of the obstacle blocking his path and even managed to survive the threat of a deadly illness?

Yu Myung-Han gratefully accepted this second chance at life and smiled contentedly.

“I really like that one.”

While Korea was set abuzz with the news of Chairman Yu Myung-Han...

Jin-Woo had sneaked back into Japan and eventually, succeeded in gathering all 29 Giant Shadow Soldiers.

'Finally....'

Feeling legit emotional right now, Jin-Woo made the giant soldiers line up starting from No.1 to No.29.

The process of searching for the remains of the giants to extract new soldiers reminded him of a certain video game. But the fruit of his hard labour so far was monumentally tastier than any video game's quests and he even kind of felt apologetic for thinking of comparing the two in the first place.

The Giant Shadow Soldier No.29.

Looking at the imposing figures of twenty-nine giants with black smokes constantly rising up from their bodies standing tall before him, Jin-Woo felt as if he had gained a whole new army of thousand troops and warhorses.

'It's a bit of a shame that one of them escaped from my grasp, but....'

Excluding the one guarding the Gate, the total of the Giant-type monsters emerging from there was thirty. One of them had escaped to the ocean and it was not possible to extract its shadow anymore.

Still, the sense of accomplishment welled up from deep within his heart now that he had successfully gathered up all 29 of them. And with them standing tall and proud in a single location like this, the ruined cityscape suddenly felt rather full all of a sudden.

Of course, Jin-Woo didn't summon all of his giant soldiers out just so he could decorate this empty city, nor was he admiring his new Giant soldier collection, either.

He scanned the Giant soldiers and addressed them.

"Who among you are the strongest?"

There was a need to find the one soldier among the giants that could serve as the leader to control the others, just like how Beru did with the ant battalion, Igrit with the elite soldier battalion, and Fangs with the High Orc battalion.

The Giant soldiers busily looked around at each other and didn't want to step up. Beru standing by the side couldn't endure this sight any longer, so he stepped forward and screeched out loudly.

Kiiiiieeehk-!!

The shoulders of the Giants all flinched greatly at that powerful screech seemingly vicious enough to rip the atmosphere in shreds.

But then again, there were a few of them who got killed by Beru, and even if others were lucky enough to avoid that fate, they should still sense the clear gap in power between him and them. It was quite understandable why they would be scared of him.

Kiieehk!

Only after receiving that hot, harsh scolding from Beru did one of the Giant soldiers hesitantly raise his hand.

Beru turned around and bowed to his Sovereign. Jin-Woo raised his thumb up high, feeling quite impressed.

“Nice work.”

But then, this happened. Something both Jin-Woo and Beru didn’t expect unfolded next.

Another Giant soldier watched the hand of his compatriot raise up and quickly raised his own, as well. The glint in his eyes even said, ***“Regardless of what, I’m better than that guy”***.

“Ohhh.”

As it turned out, the soldiers weren’t hesitating and waiting for others to make a move first but simply that, they didn’t know who was the strongest among them until now.

Jin-Woo smirked a little at this unexpected situation and called those two out to the front.

“No.22 and No.6, to the front.”

No.6 and his unusually large fists, and No.22 with an overall sturdier-looking frame strode forward valiantly.

Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

‘H-mm....’

Just like the assertions of these two soldiers, their individual quantities of magic energy were quite similar to each other. Even Jin-Woo’s excellent sensory perception had a hard time telling them apart.

Now that the matter had come to this, there was only one way to solve it. Jin-Woo grinned brightly.

“I’m sure both of you are ready, right?”

No.6 and No.22 stood facing each other. Their eyes were practically shooting out flames born from their powerful desires not to yield, no matter what.

“Start!”

As soon as Jin-Woo gave his signal, the two giant soldiers entered into a messy dogfight.

Boom! Thud!! Bang!!

At the end of a lengthy fight, No.6 and his big fist managed to beat No.22 down by a paper-thin margin of victory.

“Nice work. From here on, No.6 will be appointed as the leader of the Giant soldier battalion.”

The big-fist Giant raised both of his fists high up in the air, prompting the other Shadow Soldiers watching to cheer on loudly as well.

‘So, that’s the issue of the Giants’ leader all sorted out.’

With this, Jin-Woo had finally concluded all the business he had in Japan. He then summoned out his Status Window next.

‘Stat Window.’

Along with the familiar mechanical beep of **“Tti-ring”**, walls of texts and numbers rose up to fill his view.

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 122

Class: Shadow Sovereign

Title: Demon Hunter (extra 2)

HP: 65,230

MP: 115,160

Tiredness: 0

[Stat]

Strength: 292

Stamina: 281

Agility: 305

Intelligence: 310

Perception: 277

(Available points to distribute: 0)

Reduction in physical damage: 65%

[Skills]

Passive Skills

Active Skills

[Class-specific Skills]

Active Skills

[Equipped Items]

Red Knight's Helm (S)

Demon Sovereign's Earrings (S)

Demon Sovereign's Necklace (S)

Demon Sovereign's Ring (S)

Truth Seeker's Shirt (A)

Truth Seeker's Gloves (A)

Truth Seeker's Pants (A)

Truth Seeker's Shoes (A)

The outcome of his Japanese expedition was all too easy to see. His Stat values that had gone through the roof like crazy were the first things to catch his gaze.

Every one of his Stats was now hovering near the 300 mark, while the Intelligence Stat had shot past that number a while ago after receiving his concerted investment for arguably the longest time out of the lot.

All these were the results of receiving the rewards from the Daily Quests he always made sure to complete every day, the level-ups he got after hunting down the Giant monsters, as well as from the defensive artefacts he bought from the Store after completely exhausting his stack of Gold.

'The Truth Seeker armament set.'

Up until now, he didn't care much for any of the available items in the Store. However, he had no clue how strong the other Sovereigns and the Rulers were – the ones the angel statue and the King of Giants mentioned.

And he figured that he might need some kind of tools to protect him in case he ran into them somewhere along the line.

‘The King of Giants, almost half a corpse from his powers being sealed away like that, was already that powerful. So, it’s more than likely others will also possess truly monstrous levels of strength.’

Jin-Woo recalled those six-winged angels he ‘met’ inside the memories of the Shadow Sovereign. If he were planning to fight them head-on as well, then he simply had to become much stronger.

His gaze shifted up from the list of equipped items back up to where his level was listed.

[Level: 122]

Just killing one Sovereign resulted in his level jumping up by eight in one go.

He couldn’t even begin to imagine just how far he’d get to climb up once he started fighting against these Sovereigns or whatever they were called.

Ba-thump!

His chest was pounding.

It was from fear.

And hidden just beneath that fear – he also could pick up on the throbbing of his heart from excitement, too.

‘I shall level up.’

And all the power earned through levelling up, it’d become the bedrock, the foundation, and the support in his effort to protect everything he held dear.

His heart pulsed powerfully once more.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!

The symphony of two hearts powerfully beating at the same time was enough to cause a dull aching pain within his ear canals.

However, this pain felt pleasant to him, instead.

‘Good.’

Jin-Woo sensed someone’s approach and stored all of his Shadow Soldiers back into his shadow.

Tatatatatata-!!

In a spot not too far from where he was, the Japanese Association helicopter coming to fetch him was making its noisy landing.

For the time being, he’d go home first.

Feeling genuinely happy now, Jin-Woo climbed aboard the helicopter.



Chapter 182 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The Japanese government offered up a suite in a five-star luxury hotel for Jin-Woo so he could rest in comfort until his departure from the country.

He was planning to use ‘Shadow Exchange’ to go back rather than waste time waiting for a plane, so he was thinking of refusing their gesture of goodwill.

But then...

“Please, help us to avoid the fate of being labelled as people who had poorly received the saviour of their nation. We beg of you, Hunter-nim.”

...But then, he ended up changing his mind after hearing the desperate plea of the Japanese government.

The very first impression he got after stepping into the hotel suite that reputedly cost over \$3,500 per night was, ‘Is it really okay for me to spend a night alone in such a huge and luxurious room?’

Jin-Woo studied the gleaming furniture that sparkled brightly as if they were purchased only yesterday, before walking over to the window to look outside.

This allowed him to take in the sight of the cityscape all at once.

He heard from somewhere that the better the view, the higher the real estate price would get. And as expected, the view of the city draped in the darkness of the night was as arresting as the exorbitant price the suite had alluded to.

‘And to think, such a city was about to go up in flames by a bunch of monsters.’

Jin-Woo recalled the sight of the ruined city of Tokyo and tutted to himself. In fact, he felt relieved that he got here just in time before things could get even worse for Japan.

‘...Let’s just go to sleep.’

After a few nights spent camping outdoors, this one night spent in the hotel proved to be rather bloody fantastic.

morning.

His departure time neared and employees from the Japanese Hunter's Association came to escort him.

“Good day to you, Hunter-nim.”

The Association employee tasked with guiding Jin-Woo greeted him using fluent Korean.

“We have readied the vehicle that will take you to the airport.”

What excellent timing it was since he was beginning to feel bored, staying cooped up in the hotel room. Jin-Woo went and picked up his bag that had been discarded in the corner of the suite somewhere and returned to the door.

“Let's get going right away.”

“Heok!”

Just as Jin-Woo was about to leave the suite, the employee saw the state he was in currently and formed a flustered expression.

“H-Hunter-nim.... By any chance, don't you have any other set of clothing with you?”

It wasn't as if Jin-Woo couldn't understand where this reaction of the employee was coming from. Blood and sweat stained both his shirts and pants, serving as clear evidence of the intense battles he had gone through during the last few days.

‘I was trying to be as careful as possible, though....’

From the get-go, it was plainly impossible to evade every single drop of the massive quantity of blood spewing out from bodies of the Giants. Since the rest of his clothes were in a similarly sorry state, all he could do was to helplessly shrug his shoulders as his reply.

The employee suddenly broke out in a grin and politely made his inquiry.

“If it's alright with you, may we be permitted to prepare an extra set of clothing for you to wear?”

That was one of the better suggestions he heard the whole day.

There was no reason for him to walk around with blood-stained clothes like this, and also, he hadn't done anything wrong either so he was disinclined to sneak around like some kind of a criminal, too.

The employee figured out Jin-Woo's answer from his brightened expression and spoke up with a smile.

“We'll have them ready right away. Please wait here for a little while

longer.”

The extra clothing must've been prepared in advance, because it didn't even take ten minutes after the end of the employee's phone call for several men to hurriedly rush in to the suite carrying many business suits.

‘Already?!’

Jin-Woo formed a bit of a suspicious expression, which prompted the employee to answer with a happy smile.

“We thought that something like this might happen, so we had them ready in advance.”

Jin-Woo watched as the business suits were sorted into different colours and sizes in an instant, and somehow managed to keep the gasps of astonishment to himself.

For something that was prepared ‘just in case’, wasn't this just all too well organised?

“If you need anything else besides your clothes....”

Jin-Woo quickly shook his hands around.

“Nonono, it's alright.”

The services he received so far had already been amply satisfactory. He could already see that the Japanese Hunter's Association was trying to do their utmost best here.

Jin-Woo scanned the displayed business suits before picking the one that seemed to fit his size. After swapping out his duds, he stood before the mirror to take a look.

Maybe because all the prepared suits were high-end items, he came across as a completely new person.

‘Hey, don't I look pretty cool like this?’

A smile automatically bloomed on his face. He fixed the ends of the suit and turned around. The Association employee who panicked earlier about the lack of other apparels began gasping out in sighs of admiration.

“Those look very good on you, Hunter-nim.”

“Let's be on our way now.”

“Understood. Our staff members will carry your luggage for you, Hunter-nim.”

Two burly Association employees strode in as if they were waiting for this

moment and picked up Jin-Woo's stuff.

He could sense the Japanese Hunter's Association's desire to make sure that he wouldn't even need to lift a finger from their extremely considerate treatment. He was still treated like royalty even when walking out from the front entrance of the 5-star luxury hotel.

And soon, the black sedan carrying Jin-Woo headed off towards the airport.

When he got near the airport's vicinity, Jin-Woo began realising why the Japanese Association was so particularly mindful of taking care of his appearance.

Because he could see throngs upon throngs of people outside the moving car's window. And there were even more people beyond them.

“...”

Jin-Woo became utterly speechless and silently stared outside, while the Association employee spoke to him in a clearly excited voice.

“Everyone gathered here today all wanted to see you at least once before you depart, Hunter-nim.”

One couldn't even argue that this sea of people was forcibly organised either, as there were simply too many of them for that.

“Just how many people have shown up here today?”

“It's not an exact amount, but we estimate over one hundred thousand, Hunter-nim.”

“That many....?”

The vehicle carrying Jin-Woo quietly glided along the road that had been cordoned off tightly. When they went around a corner, there was just as big a crowd of people, no, maybe even bigger than before, waiting to greet Jin-Woo's car.

“Seong Hunter-nim, you're a hero that saved Japan.”

“....”

From Jin-Woo's perspective, he simply did what he was capable of doing. However, what he did was not something anyone else could do. No, only he was capable of doing it.

The Japanese people had no choice but to shiver in despair after seeing the Giant-type monsters through TV broadcasts, from social media, or even with their own eyes.

No one wanted to help out with the national-level crisis unfolding in Japan. Instead, they all opined in one voice that the country was now doomed.

But then, from their neighbouring nation, South Korea – the man who could possibly be more famous than the country’s own president, the leader of the Korean Hunter’s Association, Goh Gun-Hui, made an announcement which reached the ears of the despairing Japanese people.

["There is one such person. There is one Hunter who wishes to go to Japan and get rid of the Giant monsters."]

Countless Japanese watching the press conference live held their breaths and focused on their TV screens.

["Just who is this Hunter?"]

After the reporter asked that question, Association President Goh Gun-Hui pressed his lips as close to the microphone and made his reply.

["It's Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim."]

It was an already well-known fact that Jin-Woo had killed off every one of the rank S ant monsters occupying Jeju Island all by himself.

The three letters of ‘Seong Jin-Woo’ coming out from Association President Goh Gun-Hui’s lips caused much upheaval within the entirety of Japan. For the Japanese people, Jin-Woo was their sole ray of hope.

And a week later.

Just as he promised before setting off from Korea, Jin-Woo had completely annihilated the Giant monsters from the Japanese mainland and was about to step on the road back home.

Perhaps it was inevitable that the countless Japanese had gathered to see him one last time.

The Association employee explained that, if it weren’t for the country going through the chaos of cleaning up the affected areas, even more people would have turned up today.

He then added this bit at the end.

“Honestly speaking, our Prime Minister also dearly wishes to meet you to express his gratitude as well, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim. May we impose on you for that small matter for a little while?”

The expression of the Association employee was much more serious than ever before. Jin-Woo could easily guess the amount of pressure from the higher-ups this guy must be under.

Unfortunately, what he didn't want to do initially, he still wasn't interested in doing it, even now. Jin-Woo answered in the same way as he did when he was asked the first time.

“I don't want to waste my time doing something unnecessary.”

The Association employee ended up laughing out after witnessing Jin-Woo's direct attitude and nodded his head in understanding.

“Haha... I understand.”

As they continued to make small talk over this and that, the vehicle carrying them had eventually arrived at the airport's entrance. As usual, Jin-Woo calmly exited from the car and stepped on to the pavement.

But, in that exact moment, he was showered by the outpouring of passionate hand claps coming from everywhere.

Jin-Woo looked around at the gathered crowd.

“Hunter-nim!”

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!”

He couldn't understand anything they were saying to him, but then again, every one of the lights gleaming in their eyes, their voices, and their gestures helped him to overcome the language barrier altogether.

Their bottomless gratitude and respect were transmitted in the air and he could sense them all.

Beru, watching this spectacle from within his shadow, quickly engaged him in a chat.

‘Oh, my king. Your loyal subjects are expressing their genuine adulation and awe towards you, my liege.’

‘It's not like that.’

‘Oh my king, perhaps it is for the best that you wave your hand and acknowledge your subjects....’

‘Hey. I said it's not like that.’

Where did this guy see and learn all this weird stuff from?

Jin-Woo was about to ignore Beru's advice and turn around, but then, he stopped in his tracks to ask his ant soldier a question.

‘By the way, do other ants enjoy it when you, you know, acknowledge them, as you said?’

Beru replied in a very proud voice. As a matter of fact, if he was standing outside the shadow right now, he'd definitely have formed a commanding, imposing expression, too.

'But, of course, my king.'

That was to be expected, though. Beru did possess a skill that raised up the morale of the ant soldiers with nothing but his screech, after all.

Jin-Woo nodded his head. All these people came to see him off, so was there a reason not to greet them back, which was something even an ant could do?

Jin-Woo stopped and turned around towards the crowd again. He hesitated and awkwardly raised his left hand, before waving it around at the people watching him.

The sounds of clapping became even more energetic and they were soon accompanied by the loud cheers, as well.

Clap, clap, clap, clap!

Only then did he notice that the Association employee tasked with guiding him vigorously clapping hands as well. The edges of the man's eyes were even reddening up with emotions, too.

"Thank you!"

"Thank you very much, Hunter-nim!"

"We're grateful for everything!"

The Association employee's nose had reddened by this point as well, and he addressed Jin-Woo as he wiped the edges of his eyes with the sleeves of his shirt.

"Let us get going, Hunter-nim. The plane should be leaving soon."

Jin-Woo slowly lowered his hand.

Even then, the sound of clapping didn't cease. They continued on and on, even as his back disappeared from the view of the gathered crowd.

The plane carrying Jin-Woo taxied off amidst the sending-off of over hundred thousand people.

day.

A certain well-known Japanese columnist wrote and published these words.

If the top leader of their nation were chosen through nothing but the support from its citizens, then they would have seen their very first non-native

Prime Minister elected on that day.

In the opulent mansion owned by one of the five Special Authority-rank Hunters, Christopher Reid.

He suddenly woke up in the middle of the night.

The cause? The noises from the surroundings.

As one of the very best Hunters acknowledged by the world, he'd not be able to fall asleep even for a single day if he were to mind every little noise he could hear.

And that was precisely it. He didn't wake up because it was too noisy around him. No, it was the exact opposite.

'Why is it so quiet around here?'

All sorts of ambient noises he could hear if he concentrated just a little were gone as if they were all a lie, to begin with.

He kicked off from his bed and opened the bedroom door. He couldn't pick up on the presence of several hired help who should've been located in various spots of the mansion.

As if he had entered an abandoned house, there was this deeply creepy and eerie atmosphere permeating in the air.

Christopher Reid wordlessly stared at the empty corridor, before walking over to grab a wine glass left on the table and came back to the doorway. And then, he threw it in the corridor.

The wine glass left his hand and drew a gentle arc in the air, before hitting the floor to shatter into bits and pieces.

However, there were no sounds still. Not even one.

At that moment, a powerful chill crawled up his spine. He realised that something that could not happen had happened.

His sharpened senses were sending out warning bells. They were warning him that he was now facing the kind of danger he had never experienced before. His instincts strongly advised him to make a certain action, right now.

He quickly moved away from the doorway. He ran to the bedside bureau to pick up his mobile phone resting on top, and at the same time, he yanked open one of its drawers. There was a piece of crumpled paper resting silently within.

These words were written on its surface.

The deputy director of the Hunter Bureau left behind that note with the steward before leaving.

Christopher Reid learned of this fact a bit later and flew directly into a rage. He was thinking of disposing of the note right away, but then, he couldn't bring himself to do so after the worried face of Madam Selner kept lingering on in his mind for some reason.

'Did the Madam actually predict a moment like this would come?!'

He didn't know the answer to that. But, if he wanted to find out, he needed to survive first.

Christopher Reid quickly flipped the note over. The Association President Goh Gun-Hui's phone number was written on the back. Apparently, the Korean man was fluent in English. So, there shouldn't be an issue with the language barrier here.

As soon as Christopher Reid made this call, he'd get the help from Mister Seong.

'.....'

He was rather certain of reading the obituary of that Korean Hunter a couple of days after the fool flew to Japan. After all, it did seem like the boy had overestimated himself a bit there.

However, Christopher Reid's thoughts went through a very quick change after watching the feats of the summoned creatures that guy controlled. The skillset possessed by Mister Seong was indeed all real.

Madam Selner did tell him this before.

["Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. If it's him, he might be able to protect you."]

Since she said those words, there could be some substance behind them, too.

Christopher Reid quickly dialled the number.

No, he tried to.

Unfortunately, his fingers had to stop moving once he felt the presence of people behind him.

"...."

It was too late now to ask for help or let someone else know of his situation. Christopher Reid put the phone and the note down and quietly stood back up again.

The first person he saw after slowly turning around was a blonde man with a bright smile etched on his face. One of this man's hands was even tucked in his pocket – a display of utter leisure.

Such a relaxed demeanour would be rather impossible to find from a normal person invading the residence of a rank S Hunter, and not only that, a Hunter boasting one of the highest levels in the entire world.

Christopher Reid asked.

“Who are you people?”

The blondie in front of his eyes, and two more behind this one. There were a total of three intruders.

It was already unknown whether he'd be able to fight off just the one in front, and to think, there were two enemies of similar calibre present, too.

A drop of cold sweat trickled down Christopher Reid's forehead. And just as this drop slid past his brow, past his temple, and all the way down his cheek until it reached the point of his chin....

The blondie began speaking up.

“If you keep trying to accommodate these humans during your struggles, you won't be able to save a single thing, oh Fragment of the Brilliant Light.”

And worse still, his voice sounded truly bizarre as if it didn't even belong to this world in the first place.

‘...Monster language?!’

Christopher Reid's brows shot up real high.

“Just what the f*ck are you saying here??”

The blondie watched the agitated Christopher Reid react and raised his finger to press it against his lips.

“Shh. I wasn't talking to you.”

The blonde's fluent English this time caused the eyes of Christopher Reid to grow wider still.

A being that could speak both the language of man as well as the language of monsters as freely as he willed it – as far as Christopher Reid knew, no such person existed in this world.

The finger leaving the blondie's lips then pointed to the heavens above.

“Up there. I was talking to the dude up there connected to you.”

Of course, Christopher Reid couldn't make heads nor tails of what this blonde man was talking about. But he was sure of one thing.

He was sure that this blonde was completely looking down on him right now. Christopher Reid's angry voice powerfully reverberated outward.

“Do I look like a d*mn pushover to you?!”

Crimson light exploded forth from his eyes and soon, vicious flames began whipping around all over his body. In fact, his figure became crimson in colour as well as he grew larger and larger in size. The furniture caught by his expansion were all knocked and shoved away.

Rumble-!!

His new appearance as the angry flames enveloped his entire body was that of the God of Fire! Now easily four metres tall, real flames were spitting out from the creature's eyes.

“At the bare minimum, I will take down one of you with me!”

Christopher Reid's punch collided with the wall and caused a massive explosion.

Ka-boom!!

The two men behind the blondie stepped aside to avoid the debris from the exploding wall and revealed themselves in full.

“Spiritual Body Manifestation....?”

“A human can manifest a Spiritual Body?”

They looked on at Christopher Reid's new appearance with some amount of interest. Meanwhile, the floor Christopher Reid stood on began boiling and melting down.

For the first time since the worst calamity ever to befall humanity, the 'Kamish raid', he prepared himself to die today.

Rumble-!!

The flames wrapped around him became even more violent as if they were about to explode and began swallowing up everything surrounding him.

And as the vicinity was being swept away by his vicious flames, he stood in the middle of this storm of destruction and roared out loudly enough to shake the earth itself.

“Die, you fcking monster bstards-!!”



Chapter 183 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

What were the odds of finding a familiar face occupying a seat next to yours after boarding a plane?

Jin-Woo was guided to the first class cabin by the stewardess, but before he could take his seat, he could only stare vacantly at his temporary neighbour. He then spoke in a rather exasperated voice.

“I hope you aren’t going to blame this one on coincidence.”

“I’d be happy, very much so, if you did, but... yes, it does sound like a bit of stretch, doesn’t it?”

Listening to a blue-eyed foreigner speak such fluent Korean still remained a rather disharmonious experience to Jin-Woo. He didn’t take his eyes off the man as he settled down on his seat.

“We meet again, Mister Adam White.”

“It’s an honour to speak to you again, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

The Senior Agent from America’s Hunter Bureau, Adam White, still carried that amiable smile as he bowed his head, just like the first time they met.

Jin-Woo scanned the rest of the first-class cabin.

‘Ah, so that was why....’

He was wondering why there were two pretty strong Hunters present in the first-class cabin, but now he could venture a guess and say that they were also affiliated with the Hunter Bureau.

Two men kitted out in black business suits met Jin-Woo’s drifting gaze and silently nodded their heads as their greeting.

Here was the thing, though – including the people of the Monitoring Division from the Association as well as these two, why did these ‘agents’ of something or rather all walk around wearing black business suits as if that was their uniform?

Were they trying to show off the fact that they were agents of some organisation?

Jin-Woo studied those two men with such needless thoughts swirling in his head. In the meantime, though, Adam White was letting out a sigh of admiration.

“We’ve only met once briefly, yet you still remember my name. I’m honoured.”

“Well, let’s just say that our first meeting had been too memorable not to remember.”

“I’d like to offer my apology about that day’s events. We certainly didn’t expect there would be a Hunter Madam Selner’s abilities couldn’t reach....”

Jin-Woo lightly waved his hand about.

Because, as far as apologies were concerned, he heard plenty from the deputy director himself until he felt almost fed up on that very day. He didn’t feel like bringing that subject back up again.

However, he was still curious as to why the agents of the Hunter Bureau, who seemed to have cleanly given up on reeling him in, had appeared before him like this.

“I thought our negotiation had broken down completely?”

Jin-Woo’s voice became lower. It was at that moment the amiable smile disappeared from Adam White’s face.

“We’re aware that seeking you out like this without a prior heads-up is quite rude, but an urgent situation had developed and we had no choice but to contact you.”

Jin-Woo abruptly recalled the news of a rank S Gate appearing somewhere in the eastern US.

“Could it be that you guys also failed to handle that rank S Gate....?”

“Mm? Ah, no. Not that. We took care of that one, no problem.”

If this wasn’t about the rank S Gate, then what other problem could there be? Could this matter be somehow related to him killing the King of Giants?

When Jin-Woo displayed his clear interest, Adam White didn’t waste any more time and pulled out a notebook PC.

A video clip came up on the computer’s screen and it showed thick rising plumes of black smoke as if a wide-scale wildfire had broken out somewhere. Adam handed the laptop over to Jin-Woo so that the latter could watch the clip.

He could see that the firefighters were struggling mighty hard to rein in the flames that were clearly getting stronger and stronger. Those flames definitely contained magic energy.

The firefighters were clearly in a panicked state. They seemed to be trying all sorts of methods but the raging inferno showed no signs of weakening at all.

No, it was actually only getting stronger and began to slowly box them in, instead.

A scorched tree toppled over, hitting another tree in the process and transferring the flames; it was a chain reaction giving birth to the unending inferno.

The billowing flames crashed forward like an angry tidal wave.

It was right then. A helicopter arrived in the nick of time and several Mage-type Hunters disembarked from the vehicle. And they proceeded to pour out water-type magic on the flames.

After magical water spray slammed into the fiery forest dozens upon dozens of times, the inferno gradually was brought under control.

Jin-Woo carefully studied the video.

‘All these guys... are top-class Hunters.’

Judging from the strengths of the magic spells used, there was little doubt that they were top-ranked Hunters for sure.

Flames that could only be barely put under control after several top-ranked Hunters had to combine their forces together – this fact confirmed that the cause of the fire itself had to be one hell of a Hunter, as well.

The firefighters continued to express their admiration as they gradually killed off the fire that lost most of its power. If the Hunters had arrived only a second later, there could have been a costly human tragedy unfolding in that location.

The video clip was nearing its end. Seeing that there wasn't much time left in the video's duration, Jin-Woo felt it strange and had to ask.

“Why are you showing me this?”

Sure, it had been an interesting viewing experience, but people coming to see him because of some wildfire in the US didn't make much sense to him at all.

Adam White reached out and skipped forward to the last part of the clip.

“Here... please watch the end.”

The guy shooting the video broke past the thick black smoke still rising up and continued to venture deeper into the scorched forest until the footage could capture the origin of the inferno.

There must have been an incredibly powerful explosion, judging from the radius of things being swept away.

And in the centre of that radius.....

A single corpse was lying face down there.

There was no need to confirm if the victim was still alive or not. There was a wide hole in his chest and that should have been the exact spot where his heart used to be.

“In order to put out the fire this man caused, over 1800 firefighters and 14 Mage-type Hunters had to be mobilised.”

Not only that, they were all top-ranked Hunters, too.

14 high-ranking Hunters had to give their all just to put out a fire lingering around after the one activating it had died already? Just from that alone, Jin-Woo was able to make an educated guess at the identity of the corpse lying face down on the ground.

“Could it be, is he...?”

As Jin-Woo looked up at him, Adam White replied with a melancholic expression.

“As I thought, you have recognised him. Indeed, it was Christopher Reid Hunter-nim.”

The previously-unsure Jin-Woo’s eyes widened in shock.

But, this didn’t make sense. A Special-Authority Hunter, one of the world’s very best, had been murdered by someone else?

“We also don’t want to believe it, but he had definitely been assassinated.”

Right at the end of the video playback, one of the firefighters flipped Christopher Reid’s body on its back. With that, one could see the state of the corpse far more clearly.

Not just a hole in his chest, no, there were several horrible wounds inflicted all over his body, too. They were definitely traces of an intense battle.

“And finally, these are....”

Adam White pulled out several photos from his inner pocket and spoke up.

“These are the photos of the being we at the Hunter Bureau strongly suspect to be the culprit in this case.”

‘...The being?’

Jin-Woo could only feel confused from the way Adam White said his words, as he didn’t sound like he was talking about a man or a woman – as if he wasn’t talking about a human but a ‘thing’, instead. Soon, though, the Korean’s gaze lowered down to the photographs.

There was no need to even take them for a closer look. Jin-Woo simply stood up from his seat and beckoned with his finger, and that caused Adam White to rise up automatically from his seat, as well.

“Uh, uh?!”

Adam White’s eyes opened up wide in surprise.

Jin-Woo used his ‘Ruler’s Authority’ to drag the American agent in closer and grabbed hold of the latter’s collars.

“Keo-heok!”

Now that they were close enough for their noses to touch, Jin-Woo spoke in a voice a few octaves lower than before.

“If this is your way of trying to play some kind of a trick... you, all of you, won’t walk out of here alive.”

He was not making an empty threat here, either.

Jin-Woo’s cold eyes were gleaming like a wild, ferocious beast as he genuinely emitted a murderous intent.

Adam White, although his collars were held tight, still managed to cry out.

“Don’t! Don’t do it!”

Of course, he wasn’t shouting at Jin-Woo.

His desperate dissuasion managed to stop just in time the movements of the two high-ranking Hunters about to descend on Jin-Woo.

Having successfully stopped the actions akin to pouring oil into the fire, Adam White then pleaded with Jin-Woo next.

“That being in the photo walked out from a dungeon! He’s most likely not the person you know!”

“A dungeon....??”

Jin-Woo's grip on Adam White's collars relaxed just a tad. Being able to breathe just a bit easier now, the American hurriedly added more explanation.

“The magic energy emission from that guy was a match to that of monsters, and he suddenly began attacking our rank S Hunter, as well.”

Jin-Woo's gaze lowered down to the photos that fell out of Adam White's hands. The person being photographed by the CCTV cameras was...

None other than Jin-Woo's father.

‘My dad came out of a dungeon, and started attacking other Hunters?’

As Jin-Woo began falling into confusion, Adam White quickly clarified himself.

“Do you still remember the accident that happened a few months ago in the HQ of Hunter Bureau? That explosion?”

How could Jin-Woo forget? That incident caused quite a bit of clamour around the world, after all.

All sorts of wild conspiracy theories were flung about, such as – the explosion being the result of a secret experiment gone wrong, a high-ranking Hunter running amok, or even two rank S Awakened fighting each other, etc.

“Are you telling me that was the handiwork of my father?”

Adam White nodded his head.

“He beat down one of our Hunters and vanished into thin air. We at the Hunter Bureau continued to chase him in secrecy, but as if he had disappeared from this world, we couldn't find any traces of him.

“....”

Jin-Woo wordlessly listened to Adam White's explanation.

“I understand how you feel, Hunter-nim. However, that person fits the profile best for this particular crime.”

For one, he had the precedence of attacking another Hunter, he was strong enough to easily exceed a rank S Awakened, and finally, his whereabouts were a complete mystery. It would not be all that strange to see the Hunter Bureau designate the ‘being claiming to be Seong Il-Hwan’ as one of the main suspects.

However, even if he took what Adam White said as 100% truth....

Jin-Woo's eyes narrowed down to a slit.

“What is your reason for showing me those pictures?”

“The International Guild Conference.”

“...??”

“During the International Guild Conference, where the representatives from the world’s leading Guilds will gather in one spot, the higher-ups of the Hunter Bureau are planning to distribute that person’s pictures.”

Meaning, they would no longer keep the investigation a secret.

It also meant that the American government had become really enraged by the loss of an invaluable asset called a Special Authority-rank Hunter and they would fully mobilise every resource at their disposal in tracking down and apprehending the party responsible.

In that regard, there would be no better timing than the International Guild Conference.

The assassination of a Special Authority-rank Hunter – quite obviously, gathered Guilds would pay extra attention to this topic, and the announcement from the Hunter Bureau would certainly intensify their interest.

“We at the Hunter Bureau would like to continue maintaining our amicable relationship with you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

“So, you came to inform me first before the public announcement takes place, is that it?”

Adam White managed to move his still-restricted head up and down with some difficulty.

“I-if you attend the gathering only to be confronted by the images of your father, you’d no doubt become shocked and confused by it, wouldn’t you agree?”

Even if it was unknown whether that thing was really his father returning from the dungeon or a fake that simply looked like him.

From the death of a Special Authority-rank Hunter, to the existence of a being calling itself Seong Il-Hwan, and finally, even about the warrant itself – these were the Hunter Bureau’s way of showing consideration, as they had rated Jin-Woo’s abilities very highly and didn’t want to become his enemy.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo’s silence continued on.

He could sense truthfulness from the pleading eyes and voice of Adam White. That came from an emotion borne out of friendly intentions.

Jin-Woo was thinking of not holding back the moment he sensed even a

minute level of hostility here.

However, there was the photographic evidence of the being that resembled his father stepping on the neck of the Korean Hunter with American citizenship, Hwang Dong-Su.

He was unable to rebut the assertion of the Hunter Bureau that the person in these photographs couldn't be a human being at all.

“We'd like to ask you for your understanding on why we had no choice but to do this.”

Only then did Jin-Woo let go of his collars. The red-faced Adam White coughed and wheezed heavily to the side.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo picked up the photographs from the floor. No matter how hard he looked, the person in these pictures was definitely his father. His heart madly pounded away as he peered deeper.

Around at that time, the announcement from the pilots came out of the PA system.

[Ladies and gentlemen, the plane will land shortly.]

Even though a commotion broke out in its first-class cabin, the plane still managed to land without any further incident on the runway of the Incheon International Airport.

Using the skill 'Stealth', Jin-Woo escaped from the eyes of all the reporters waiting for him there. The first thing he did after making his getaway was to call up Yu Jin-Ho.

Perhaps because his father had recovered fully, Yu Jin-Ho's voice sounded even happier than before as he welcomed his hyung-nim back.

However, Jin-Woo was in no mood to smile right now.

“Looks like I'll have to travel to the US next week, after all.”

“Situation has changed.”

He needed to find more information.

He needed to know more.

He needed some kind of proof so he could determine whether that being was really his father or something else.

In order to meet his goal, he had no choice but to attend this International Guild Conference.

“Can you book me the plane ticket, then?”

When he asked, an unhesitating reply came right back at him.

Adam White couldn't stand back up again for a long while even after Jin-Woo had left the plane. He tried to get up, only to stagger unsteadily on his feet. The Hunters escorting him quickly asked.

“Are you alright?”

“Yeah, more or less. Just that I'm a bit exhausted right now.”

Adam White sounded more like he was trying to console himself, instead. The Hunters helped him to stand up straight again.

Because his major was in criminal psychology, he got to interrogate his fair share of rather horrible human beings so far. But still, this would be his first time being terrified of another person to this degree.

He could still recall Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's quiet yet cold eyes seemingly tightening around his neck like a noose.

Adam White knew full well that the Korean was not going to come back to harm him, yet just from remembering those eyes, he felt his bowels tighten.

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo before and after the photos was like two different people altogether.

‘A person can switch that much, huh.’

However, the truly shocking thing was something else. Adam White asked the Hunters for the confirmation.

“I need to confirm with you both since it happened too quickly for me. Just now, didn't Hunter Seong Jin-Woo somehow move me without touching me at all, right?”

The two high-ranking Hunters, who wouldn't lose out to anyone on the matters of excellent eyesight, nodded their heads as their reply to Adam White's question.

‘I thought as much...!’

The American agent was now properly freaking out now. He definitely hadn't seen it incorrectly. That Korean man, he could use psychokinesis.

Up until now, he was under the impression that the psychokinesis was the exclusive ability only available to the Special Authority-rank Hunters. However, Hunter Seong had used it without so much as batting an eyelid.

Adam White felt goosebumps breaking out all over his skin.

Seong Jin-Woo was the first one discovered to possess the psychokinesis

skill outside the five Special Authority-rank Hunters.

‘There is no time to waste.’

His trembling hand picked up his phone. The ringtone went for a little while before the deputy director answered the call.

Adam White did his best to calm his trembling voice.

“Deputy director... I just discovered the sixth one.”



Chapter 184 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The American Hunter Bureau released the list of the Guilds invited to the conference.

[Sicario Guild, Alron Diaz (Mexico)]

[Ah-Jin Guild, Seol Jin-Woo (South Korea)]

[Ira et Vitae Guild, Fabio Garco (Italy)]

.....

The International Guild Conference.

It was an important event where Guilds representing their nations were invited over to discuss the current trends and future prospects of the Hunter community at large.

And ‘Ah-Jin Guild’ had been chosen to represent South Korea. Its participation in the conference became the hot topic of conversation for both the local and international mass media.

The thing was, Jin-Woo was the sole high-ranking Hunter affiliated with that Guild as well as its Master. This invitation was no different from the American Hunter Bureau publicly acknowledging that this single Hunter was in no way inferior to any of the very best Guilds in the world. Guilds that countless high-ranked Hunters worked for.

However – no, perhaps unsurprisingly – not one person raised a voice of discontent. Because, was there really a need to discuss whether that lone Hunter was qualified or not in this case?

Jin-Woo already possessed the records of solving two massive crises on the level of bringing their respective nations down to their knees in South Korea and Japan. Most importantly, all by himself, too.

Quite obviously, no one now dismissed the capabilities of the Ah-Jin Guild, or more precisely, the core of the Guild itself, Jin-Woo, and his abilities.

No, even more than that – quite a few people around the world were getting rather hyped up from the prospect of a brand new super-powerful Hunter participating in the gathering, where the strongest Awakened scattered throughout the world would stand on one stage.

Whenever the international mass media talked about the Japanese dungeon break incident, they also mentioned Ah-Jin Guild planning to participate in the International Guild Conference in the same breath as if it was the most obvious thing to do.

South Korea was no exception.

As the local interest in the International Guild Conference heated up, one of the TV stations requested the Master of the Hunters Guild, Choi Jong-In, for an interview.

He knew that the station couldn't ask Jin-Woo for one and had sought him out as an alternative, but still, he readily said yes.

And so, the interview being broadcast live to the nation took up the time slot of the eight in the evening, the one seen as the most important hour just before the watershed.

“Hello, everyone. My name is Choi Jong-In, and I’m the person in charge of the Hunters Guild.”

His handsome visage and the inviting smile made sure to shake up the hearts of many ladies watching the broadcast.

Currently, the comments section of the TV station's website was inundated with complaints from the female viewers at home. They all said that it should've been the Hunters Guild getting the invite for the conference, instead.

“Thank you for coming, Chairman Choi.”

The female interviewer lowered her head as a greeting and began asking the prepared questions.

“The news regarding Ah-Jin Guild has attracted a great deal of interest from many people around the country. But, what are your thoughts regarding this issue?”

Choi Jong-In didn't even hesitate for a second before he made his reply.

“I believe that the American Hunter Bureau made the right choice.”

“It's not ‘you understand the reason why’, but you believe it was the right choice?”

“Yes. I definitely believe that's the case.”

“But, it's not an exaggeration to say that the Ah-Jin Guild is basically a one-man show, is it not?”

“Let's not forget that that one-man show is currently being run by none

other than Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.”

Choi Jong-In replied with an amiable smile on his face, and the interviewer also broke out in a smile, as well.

Before her smile could end, though, Choi Jong-In smoothly continued on.

“If you define the Guild staff members as personnel that could be mobilised in a combat situation, then you could say that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo already possesses hundreds of Guild staff members.”

“Are you referring to Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim’s summons?”

“That’s correct. I believe that Ah-Jin’s overall combat potential won’t lose out to anyone, even when compared to some of the very best Guilds around the world.”

“Just because of Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

“Yes, because of him.”

Noisy, noisy....

Choi Jong-In’s firm, unwavering reply caused an outbreak of low murmurings from the audience members in the studio, but the man himself remained calm in his demeanour.

He had witnessed Jin-Woo’s feats both directly and indirectly, so he was absolutely certain of this. Even now, his feelings hadn’t changed.

Every time he recalled Jin-Woo creating a path in that siege of ant monsters, all the back hair on Choi Jong-In’s neck would stand up and goosebumps quickly enveloped his entire body.

‘Just who out there would believe that, in the past, he used to be a rank E Hunter?’

Choi Jong-In didn’t hold back and acknowledged the difference in strength between his Guild and that of the Ah-Jin Guild, and that elevated the atmosphere of the TV studio to an even hotter degree than ever before.

The interviewer smiled in satisfaction, before cautiously studying Choi Jong-In’s response.

“Even still, the Hunters Guild can’t be too happy about this situation. After all, It was your Guild that had been participating in the Conference for the last several years.”

“Yes, it indeed hurts a little that our dream American trip had to be cancelled this year. I mean, we have all renewed our passports and been waiting for the invite to arrive in the mail, you see.”

Choi Jong-In joked around good-heartedly and that prompted a burst of laughter from the audience members.

“However, the pride I feel easily trumps any pain in my gut.”

Choi Jong-In’s smile that had been constantly fixed on his face was suddenly replaced by something much more earnest. The laughter from the audience members died out gradually. Meanwhile, the light within the interviewer’s eyes also became earnest, as well.

Words spoken from now on would be the main topic of this interview – such atmosphere emanated from the expression Choi Jong-In was making right now. Quite naturally, the gazes of the audience members were directed towards his lips next.

Choi Jong-In had appeared in TV shows quite often and knew how to play the crowd. He built up some suspense to get everyone psyched up first before opening his mouth.

“Please, think about it. Even if monsters my powers aren’t good enough to deal with appear before us, we now have a Hunter we can completely place our faith in.”

His words spoken from the depths of his heart carried a certain weight that no simple description could adequately convey. That weight from one man’s opinion bore down on the studio, leading to the interviewer and the audience members to forget what they wanted to say and simply stare at Choi Jong-In.

As silence filled the once-noisy filming venue, he quietly spoke up.

“In all honesty, my Guild members and I, not to mention countless other people affiliated with other Guilds, managed to survive all thanks to Hunter Seong coming to lend his aid.”

Choi Jong-In scanned the audience members. He wasn’t trying to achieve this effect, but still, the atmosphere had become quite sombre somehow.

In order to brighten up the mood, he formed a warm smile and finished what he wanted to say.

“I am genuinely proud of the fact that Hunter Seong has been chosen to represent South Korea.”

When he did, thunderous clapping exploded out from the audience members.

Choi Jong-In successfully concluded the interview and was about to leave the TV station when he received a call on his mobile phone.

Vrrr.... Vrrr....

‘Mm?’

He lifted up his vibrating phone to find the number belonging to his advisor in the Guild, manager Joh Myoung-Ki.

“Hello, this is Choi Jong-In.”

“That’s good news.”

Choi Jong-In formed a smile after hearing that piece of good news before tilting his head a little.

“By the way, did Ah-Jin Guild not apply for the raid permit again?”

It had been four days since Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had returned from Japan. And during that time, four high ranking Gates had opened up. Basically, it was at the rate of one a day.

The rate of high-ranked Gates being generated had gone up quite rapidly, yet the Ah-Jin Guild – or, more specifically, the entirety of Ah-Jin Guild itself, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, hadn’t shown any signs of movement at all.

But well, the major Guilds located in the Capital had been in a constant state of celebration day after day due to these events.

All because the destroyer of the monsters, the god of destroying dungeons who rushed in like crazy whenever a new Gate appeared so he could completely root out all monsters within, had not shown himself for the last few days.

However, Choi Jong-In felt a certain strange sense of discord whenever Seong Jin-Woo wasn’t there at the location of a Gate, and that made him feel a bit concerned.

‘I’m different from Baek Yun-Ho of the White Tiger or Im Tae-Gyu.’

If you didn’t care about anything else and simply felt happy about an apple suddenly falling from a tree, then what made you any different from a simple-minded ape?

Some would begin drooling at the prospect of free apples, while some others would start thinking about the laws of gravity.

Choi Jong-In thought that his class hadn’t fallen low enough to simply celebrate this sudden slice of good fortune. It was at that moment he got to hear the bright, innocent-sounding voice of manager Joh Myoung-Ki coming from the phone.

“Well, here’s an ape.....”

“Ahh, never mind. It’s nothing.”

Choi Jong-In quickly changed the topic.

“Did the Association say they know what’s going on here?”

“H-mm....”

Choi Jong-In shook his head.

“I don’t think that’s the case.”

Just what kind of a person was Hunter Seong Jin-Woo? Choi Jong-In spoke up his explanation.

“Before his ranking reassignment test, he cleared three to four lower-ranked Gates in a day. And after he became a rank S, he began intruding into the territory of other Guilds, and only a few days ago, he went to Japan and sorted out a rank S dungeon break all by himself. That’s who Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is.”

Having heard all heard that, even Joh Myoung-Ki became curious as to why Ah-Jin Guild had suddenly gone quiet recently. Didn’t Hunter Seong always show up in a place crawling with lots of monsters? He couldn’t have been fatigued from the Giant monster raid, right?

He now thought that his boss getting puzzled by the Ah-Jin Guild’s lack of activity was not so strange anymore.

“Oh, by the way. Wasn’t the Ah-Jin Guild supposed to interview the prospective employees today? But, he still didn’t show up there?”

“....”

A short bout of silence flowed between the two men. Choi Jong-In eventually broke the silence first and spoke in a relatively calm voice.

“And how do you know that, manger Joh?”

The moment Jin-Woo answered the phone, Yu Jin-Ho began bitterly complaining. He couldn’t help but grin a little.

It must’ve indeed been tough staring at the faces of the applicants the whole day. Although the number of hopefuls had been carefully filtered and trimmed down, didn’t it still shoot past several hundred?

The kid might have been young, but he was doing his job as the Vice-Master of a Guild and the proxy of Jin-Woo admirably well.

‘Is this why the wise elders say you are your father’s child?’

Sure, his ‘dongsaeng’ might come across as a bit naïve and dopey, but within Yu Jin-Ho’s body flowed the blood of the natural-born business tycoon

Chairman Yu Myung-Han.

And thanks to that, Jin-Woo could simply leave the running of the Guild to Yu Jin-Ho and freely pursue what he wanted to do.

“Thanks. You worked hard.”

“Here?”

Jin-Woo looked behind him. The JSDF soldiers on standby sent him a signal as if the preparations had been completed. Seeing that, a smile floated back up on his lips.

“Well, it’s the same old story. I guess things could get delayed a bit here, so close up shop without me.”

Yu Jin-Ho’s polite goodbye signalled the end of the phone call.

An employee working for the Japanese Hunter’s Association hurriedly ran towards Jin-Woo and received the phone as well as his luggage. Having handed over his stuff for safekeeping, he slowly loosened his neck and shoulder muscles.

This state of heightened feelings he’d get while lightly stretching his muscles before a raid always served to relax his mind.

As if to provide a conversation partner while Jin-Woo was stretching his body, or maybe he was just curious about something, the Japanese Association employee suddenly asked a question.

“If you let the world know that you’re busy closing the Gates being generated in the disaster areas, your fame would skyrocket even further, so if I may ask, why are you keeping it a secret?”

Jin-Woo’s reply to that was pretty simple. He finished his light stretching exercise and grinned brightly.

“I like peace and quiet, you see.”

Humility was one of the highest praised qualities in Japanese society.

Tears began welling up in the eyes of the Association employee as he took Jin-Woo’s ***“peace and quiet”*** answer as the latter being modest in his actions.

“If you need anything, please let me know immediately! I shall absolutely do everything in my power to make it come true, even if that means I must die!!”

...Well, this guy seemed to be clearly mistaken about something, but as long as the end result was good, all’s well. Jin-Woo could only smile awkwardly and lightly patted the Japanese man on the shoulders before

walking nearer to the Gate.

The JSDF soldiers stepped aside to create a path and saluted Jin-Woo.

This Gate was ranked at ‘A’. Jin-Woo had been travelling from Korea and Japan every day to monopolise all the high-ranking Gates the Japanese couldn’t handle by themselves.

He should thank the Japanese spy satellite that could detect magical energy, as well as his movement skill, ‘Shadow Exchange’, for this venture.

Jin-Woo stood before the Gate and looked up. Indeed, it was a pretty d*mn big thing that totally fit its rank A status.

He didn’t need to spend a heap of cash trying to book high-ranking Gates here, and the Japanese government even promised to waiver all related taxes.

However, the financial side of the things was not the biggest merit for him – no, it’d be the fact that he got to monopolise every single high-ranked Gates appearing within the breadth of Japan, a large country that had lost the functionality of Guilds after the dungeon break disaster.

‘Demon King’s Shortsword.’

Shururuk....

“Heok.”

A young soldier witnessed a pair of shortswords suddenly materialising in Jin-Woo’s hands and reflexively gasped out in surprise. And then, as if he got embarrassed by that outburst, he quickly bowed towards Jin-Woo.

He simply smirked as a reply and began walking towards the Gate.

‘Four days left until the International Guild Conference.’

Jin-Woo told himself that he couldn’t afford to waste a single day and jumped straight into the Gate. Along with the mechanical beep, he was also greeted by the familiar voice in his ears.

Tti-ring.

[You have entered a dungeon.]

“Will this be fine, sir?”

Woo Jin-Cheol cautiously asked his question. The Association President Goh Gun-Hui showed no signs of agitation as he received a report.

“Regarding?”

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.... Recently, he has been frequently visiting

Japan.”

The Hunter’s Association could use the Hunter-issue smartphones to trace the current whereabouts of individual Hunters. And they had been feeding disinformation to those asking for Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s whereabouts as ordered by the Association President Goh Gun-Hui.

“What if Seong Hunter-nim decides to simply stay put in Japan....”

South Korea would be losing the greatest Hunter ever while sucking on their thumbs doing nothing. This would be Woo Jin-Cheol’s worry in a nutshell.

For some reason, though, President Goh Gun-Hui didn’t seem to be all that concerned regarding this event, even though he probably held the highest evaluation of Jin-Woo out of anyone alive.

That appearance certainly caused some amount of frustration in Woo Jin-Cheol’s heart.

Perhaps finding the anxiety-ridden expression of his younger subordinate a bit pitiable, Goh Gun-Hui chuckled gently and finally spoke up.

“You don’t need to worry.”

“By any chance, do you know something, sir?”

“You see, he came to see me before he went over to Japan to hunt down those Giant-type monsters.”

That sounded quite logical. After all, it was precisely the Association President Goh Gun-Hui who announced the story of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo planning to hunt those Giants to the world.

Goh Gun-Hui recalled the memories of that meeting.

“I, of course, tried to dissuade him. I told him that, compared to the risk, he’d be earning far too little from this venture. It wasn’t as if he was promised a huge amount of cash like Yuri Orlov in the first place.”

Woo Jin-Cheol nodded his head.

Jin-Woo demanded the rights to the corpses of the monsters and that was all. For the price of saving an entire country, that was far, far too small.

‘Of course, that didn’t mean there was enough spare time to negotiate a deal with a country busy losing several cities in a day....’

One should say that the matters couldn’t be helped back then.

The Association President should be protecting the Hunters of his own

nation, so it was already an odd thing for him to let Hunter Seong go this easily.

“But then, he told me this.”

Goh Gun-Hui recalled the conversation back then and formed a deep grin. Woo Jin-Cheol couldn't win against his curiosity and asked back first.

“What... did he say?”

Goh Gun-Hui happily replied to that.

“He said, he wanted the Ah-Jin Guild's territory to also include Japan.”

“Keo-heok!”

A shocked gasp jumped out from Woo Jin-Cheol's mouth. Goh Gun-Hui's initial reaction after hearing that declaration from Jin-Woo himself wasn't all that different, either.

“Japan's major Guilds lost most of their strength from the losses incurred on Jeju Island, as well as from the attacks of the Giants. He told me straight that his Ah-Jin Guild will fill the void left behind by them.”

“Huh-uh....”

Woo Jin-Cheol couldn't shut his slack mouth.

Was it the young man's confidence or simply an excellent head on his shoulders that allowed him to think that far ahead, even before he got to hunt down a single Giant? Regardless of what it was, Jin-Woo still got to achieve his objective.

After all, wasn't this story something the Japanese would welcome with wide open arms?

“After hearing that, how could I not permit him going there?”

While the major Guilds were busy bickering among themselves over the comparatively small territory of Seoul, he'd go and make the entirety of Japan his own.

One of the qualifications to become a true Hunter was the talent to choose his own hunting spot. And as he even possessed the necessary power to handle whatever his prey turned out to be, one could definitely call Seong Jin-Woo as someone born to become a Hunter.

Goh Gun-Hui let the opinion stewing in his mind, as well as a sigh of admiration, escape from his mouth.

“He sure is one incredible fellow.”

“....I agree wholeheartedly, sir.”

Woo Jin-Cheol definitely agreed with that sentiment.

Putting aside the incredible power of travelling between Korea and Japan in an instant without the aid of an aeroplane, the fact that he also possessed enough abilities to make that nonsensical goal into reality, could only bring about a sigh of admiration from both men.

With excellent timing, the TV that was left switched on began showing the clip from Choi Jong-In’s interview.

[“I am genuinely proud of the fact that Hunter Seong has been chosen to represent South Korea.”]

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui leaned against the couch as a genuine chuckle left his mouth, and spoke back to Choi Jong-In on the screen.

“I also think the same as you.”



Chapter 185 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Goh Gun-Hui switched the TV off. As it turned out, it was already nine in the evening, a bit too late to say that now's a good time to get off work for the day. However, it seemed that Woo Jin-Cheol still had something else to say.

“The Chinese have requested for information on Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

“Information? You mean, his personal information?”

“No, sir. It's not that.”

“What do they want, then?”

“The requested information is Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim's raid records as well as any official reports related to them.”

That seemed about right; unless the Chinese were truly dumb, they probably knew they wouldn't be receiving any personal information of a rank S Hunter – no, someone who may greatly exceed that category altogether.

The question was, why were the Chinese showing their interest in Hunter Seong Jin-Woo at this belated stage? After all, they must've heard his decision not to entertain any love calls or scouting offers from other countries, which included China.

“The one requesting the information wasn't the Chinese government, sir.”

“Really?”

“It's actually from a single individual.”

“An individual?”

The Hunter's Association representing a country would never release information to any individual Hunters. But to think, this request was made by a person?

Goh Gun-Hui thought it'd be the obvious thing to refuse that request outright, so he was puzzled by the fact that the issue had been brought up at all. Woo Jin-Cheol quickly added some additional explanation.

“It seems that China's Seven Star-ranked Hunter, Liu Zhigeng, has

taken interest in Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

Liu Zhigeng!

With the mentioning of that unexpected name, Goh Gun-Hui became somewhat lost for words.

China didn't accept the global standard in ranking Hunters and used its own unique ranking system. The higher the number of 'stars' in front of your ranking, the better Hunter you were. And for them, 'Five Star' was the highest attainable rank.

However, only one person was separated from that ranking system. Only Liu Zhigeng was ranked as the Seven Star. And rather obviously, the treatment he received was on another realm compared to the ordinary Five Stars.

Of course, not one person was brave enough to raise a fuss regarding the fact that he, a well-known 'Special Authority-rank' Hunter, was receiving preferential treatment.

He possessed abilities that deserved such recognition, and China herself respected that fact greatly as well.

‘That Liu Zhigeng has taken an interest in Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?’

The thirst of Goh Gun-Hui's curiosity was then quenched by Woo Jin-Cheol's reply.

“Sir, didn't Liu Zhigeng fight the Giant-type monster? I'm quite sure that's why he's interested in knowing more about Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, who had hunted down every other Giant.”

That sounded logical. Goh Gun-Hui nodded his head.

Not too long ago, a single Giant-type monster escaped from Japan and swam towards China. And it had been reported that the creature was ably dealt with by Liu Zhigeng at the Chinese coastline.

“The truly strong can recognise another strong being, is that it?”

Goh Gun-Hui formed a slightly mischievous grin.

The American Hunter Bureau that invited the Ah-Jin Guild. And China's greatest Hunter Liu Zhigeng, beginning to show his interest in Jin-Woo.

Both America and China had finally recognised the true worth of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. For someone like Goh Gun-Hui, who knew that man's true value from the very beginning, this development certainly made him feel rather good about himself.

Even then...

‘Even then, that doesn’t mean I’ll hand over any information, just like that.’

Was there a need to advertise how excellent Korea’s genius was to those craving after other people’s geniuses?

Sure, a Special Authority-rank Hunter would get quite annoyed by it, but so what?

‘We have Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, after all.’

Goh Gun-Hui made up his mind and let out a genial, hearty chuckle.

“That request? Deny it, please.”

Dungeons had changed.

That was Jin-Woo’s overriding impression as he cleared all the high-ranked dungeons being generated throughout Japan.

As he scanned the interior of this particular dungeon, his glare became even sharper than before. He could definitely sense the presence of monsters, but his eyes couldn’t detect them.

If his sensory perception or experience had been lacking somehow, this situation would’ve been enough to cause some consternation. Fortunately, Jin-Woo lacked neither of those.

‘Is it up, this time?’

Jin-Woo stopped walking and raised his head up. Sure enough, some type of thick liquid dropped in the spot just a bit up ahead and began melting the ground.

Chi-jiiiiek.....

Thick smoke rose up from the ground as it melted down by what was clearly an acidic substance. Perhaps inevitably, the stink was rather atrocious, as well.

Naturally, Jin-Woo’s expression crumpled unsightly.

When he showed no inclination to come forward anymore, the large blobs of something attached to the ceiling dropped down to the ground, instead.

Thud, thud, plop....

These blobs then began assuming humanoid shapes next.

He was now confronted by a strange type of monster whose face was

covered in a white mask, while the rest of its body was made up of blackish liquid. These bizarre creatures had never been seen before up until now.

Twelve of them were blocking his path. Jin-Woo quietly called out the name of his old pal.

‘Knight Killer.’

Then, a single dagger suddenly appeared in his hand.

In the not too distant past, this guy used to be his main combat weapon alongside ‘Baruka’s Dagger’, but it had been collecting dust in the corner of the Inventory after he got his hands on the pair of ‘Demon King’s Short Swords’.

However, he found a good place to use it for the first time in a while. Jin-Woo briefly felt nostalgic from the familiar grip, before throwing the ‘Knight Killer’ at one of the monsters approaching him.

‘Dagger Rush!’

Swiiiiish-!

The dagger flew in a straight line while issuing a hair-raising screech and landed directly in the chest of the monster. Unfortunately, it simply flew right through as if to mock his accuracy and stabbed deeply into the wall behind the creature.

That wasn’t all, either.

The black liquid coated the dagger as it went through the body of the monster and began melting the weapon down.

Chiii-eeek- Chiiiieek....

The dagger soon turned soft and malleable in no time, before transforming into an unrecognisable substance and slid down from the wall.

‘I thought as much.’

His expectation of regular physical attacks not working against this monster was on the money.

It was then. The monsters didn’t even give him enough time to eulogise the passing of his old comrade, ‘Knight Killer’, and pounced on him at the same time. They were surprisingly nimble, as well.

However, Jin-Woo simply greeted them back with ‘Ruler’s Authority’.

Ka-boom!!

The monsters were attacked by the unseen hands and were immediately

flung away all at the same time.

Tumble!

The bodies of the creatures were ripped to shreds as they tumbled back down to the ground, but then, they coagulated back again and returned to their previous state.

“Huh.”

Jin-Woo chuckled wryly at that gob-smacking level of regeneration. He was almost tempted to summon out his Shadow Soldiers and start a competition of who possessed better regenerative powers, but....

‘...Be patient.’

Physical damage, whether it be tangible or not, didn't seem to work. So, then. What should he do next?

Jin-Woo relaxedly dodged the outpouring of monsters' attacks and pondered this quandary for a bit, before realising that a particular creature among them was moving around unnaturally compared to the others.

‘Mm?’

Jin-Woo's eyes narrowed to a slit.

Now that he took a closer look, one of that particular creature's arms wasn't regenerated, and also, the corner of the white mask covering its face had been cracked to a noticeable degree. It must've been broken off when the monster was flung away by the 'Ruler's Authority' earlier.

‘Oh, so that was your weak point?’

A smirk floated up on Jin-Woo's face. As long as he knew how to attack these things, killing them would be a piece of cake.

Swish, swish!

Jin-Woo continued to easily evade all the punches thrown desperately by the monsters and summoned out his current comrades.

‘Demon King's Shortsword.’

Once he got to tightly grasp the shortwords in each of his hands, cold glint flashed in his eyes.

Crack!

A monster powerlessly crumbled to the ground as the 'Demon King's Shortsword' stabbed its forehead.

Plop.

That was just the beginning. Jin-Woo moved as if he was performing a slick dance routine and in no time at all, destroyed the white masks of all the monsters present.

Crack!

Kwahck!

And eventually...

Crack!

The mask of the sole remaining monster was split in half. The creature reverted to being pure liquid and lost its overall shape as it crumbled to the floor.

Easily taking care of all twelve of them, Jin-Woo returned the 'Demon King's Short Swords' back to his Inventory.

If it wasn't him, but some other people finding themselves in this situation, what would've happened?

Without a doubt, several of them would've met their end before someone finally figured out that regular attacks didn't work. And then, a few more would have been sacrificed until they figured out the monster's weakness.

Or, even worse – the whole raiding party could have lost their lives before finding out the weakness. Even if that party happened to be made up of elite Hunters.

That was how strong, nimble, and dangerous these d*mn things were. Unfortunately, this was not his first time running into creatures this strong.

'For sure.... dungeons have changed.'

On that day, after the King of Giants was killed by his hands, Mana Stones had disappeared from the dungeons appearing throughout the world.

The ores that used to suck up most of the magical energy leaking out from the dungeon itself were now all gone and so, that magic energy with nowhere to go had all become part of the monsters, instead.

Meaning, even if the ranking of a dungeon remained the same as in the past, the conditions had become far more dangerous.

'And on top of that, monsters as dangerous as these ones have begun showing up, too....'

Jin-Woo's frown grew deeper.

If a run-of-the-mill raid party entered a high-ranked dungeon willy-nilly, then they would not be able to avoid running into a serious accident inside.

As a matter of fact, he had been hearing some news of several ‘accidents’ happening from all over the world lately. He already assigned the protection of his family to Beru, as he was feeling anxious about these developments.

If it was Beru, then he’d be able to resolve most crises by himself even if a dungeon break happened nearby.

‘But, then again...’

It wasn’t all necessarily a bad thing for the rate of Gate generation to go up, as well as the monsters in the dungeons to become stronger. At least, for Jin-Woo, that was.

Because, it’d be easier to raise his level this way. For instance, this dungeon was still full of monsters he hadn’t disposed of yet. He could feel on his skin a large number of monsters hiding deeper in the dungeon while emitting overwhelming magical energy.

A smile now floated up on Jin-Woo’s face.

‘Well, I’m now familiar with how to deal with these strange monsters. I guess it’s time to start the hunt properly, isn’t it?’

The warm-up exercises were now over. And the proper subjugation was about to begin.

“Come out.”

Shururuk....

The Shadow Soldiers stopped hiding in Jin-Woo’s shadow and appeared behind him in full force. He told them how to deal with the monsters, so they shouldn’t be experiencing any difficulty in dealing with the enemy.

Jin-Woo sent out the signal with his eyes. Igrit was now entrusted with the command of the entire army, since Beru had become the guard dog protecting his home, instead. The black knight issued the order for the troops to advance.

Dududududu-!!

The entirety of the huge cavern began rocking loudly from the marching footsteps of the Shadow Soldiers.

The world’s best Hunters began landing on US soil one by one before the International Guild Conference began. Among them were, of course, the Special Authority-rank Hunters.

However, Thomas Andre’s interest was solely fixated on one single person.

‘Tomorrow’s the day Seong Jin-Woo enters the US....’

He had confirmed Jin-Woo’s arrival schedule earlier, and on the day before that fateful date, he summoned Hwang Dong-Su into his office.

“Did you call for me, sir?”

Hwang Dong-Su cautiously studied Thomas Andre’s atmosphere. It had been a few years since he started working in the Scavenger Guild, but even now, he found it rather difficult to speak to its Master.

Because, that man wielded incredible strength, was cursed with a hard-to-fathom personality, and finally, was even beset with an extreme case of possessiveness, as well.

Hwang Dong-Su might be a rank S Hunter, but before Thomas Andre, he became an utterly insignificant being.

“Mister Hwang.”

Thomas Andre went to the main topic right away.

“Do not ever provoke Seong Jin-Woo.”

Hwang Dong-Su’s eyes grew larger. He formed an expression that seemed to ask ‘How did you know’ before his gaze drifted towards Laura, standing behind Thomas Andre.

She simply responded with her eyes that said, she only did what she had to do.

“Che.”

Hwang Dong-Su let a dissatisfied grunt escape from his mouth. Meanwhile, Thomas Andre continued on.

“I know about your brother and Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. I’m sure you feel suspicious of some things, and also want to know what happened back then.”

Hwang Dong-Su’s older brother, Hwang Dong-Seok had entered a dungeon along with Seong Jin-Woo, only to go ‘missing’ and never came back out.

The eight fixed members of Hwang Dong-Seok’s raid party were all dead, yet the two people who walked out from that dungeon alive had formed a Guild together.

So, quite obviously, he had plenty of things to ask Seong Jin-Woo. Naturally, his dissatisfaction seeped into his expression.

“But....”

Before he could properly say something, though, Thomas Andre raised his finger up and waved it around. His lips below the sunglasses arched up. He was actually smiling.

“I don’t remember giving you permission to speak, Mister Hwang?”

Keep your mouth shut and just listen – that was the message of a clear threat.

There wouldn’t be all that many people capable of issuing a true warning to a top-ranked Hunter in this world. One of them just so happened to be Thomas Andre.

Hwang Dong-Su was well aware of the gap between himself and his boss, so he obediently kept his mouth shut.

Thomas emphasized his point again.

“Do not ever provoke Seong Jin-Woo. During the duration of the Guild Conference, take some time off and relax at the Guild’s getaway villa in the countryside. So, how about it? Are you willing to humour my earnest plea?”

“....”

“Mister Hwang?”

Hwang Dong-Su nodded his head, unable to hold out any longer.

“....I shall do as you say.”

“Good to hear. You can go now.”

Hwang Dong-Su’s expression stiffened hard as he quickly made his escape from the Guild Master’s office. Meanwhile, Laura asked her boss in a worried voice.

“Will this be enough, sir?”

Thomas Andre’s own expression had hardened as well as he shook his head.

“No.”

He definitely read the signs of ill intent flickering within Hwang Dong-Su’s expression just now. That fool still couldn’t let go of this matter, it seemed.

“Laura?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Until Seong Jin-Woo leaves US soil, place Mister Hwang under strict surveillance.”

“Will he.... take that lying down?”

Although he had been suppressed by the aura of Thomas Andre, Hwang Dong-Su’s original personality was as stubborn as it could get, as well.

However, Thomas wasn’t worried. No, rather, he knew that this matter wasn’t simple enough to sweat over something as minor as Hwang Dong-Su’s disgruntlement.

Thomas Andre scratched his chin before making a nonchalant reply.

“Well... being frustrated should be better than being dead, right?”



Chapter 186 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Why are there so many reporters here?”

Germany’s best Hunter, Lennart Niermann, set foot inside the American airport after disembarking from his plane. He immediately let a surprised gasp escape from his mouth from the view greeting him.

As befitting the Master of the ‘Richter’ Guild representing Germany, he got to attend the International Guild Conference every single year, but even then, he had never seen this many reporters camping out in the airport before.

As he stood there in shock, the Vice-Master of the Richter Guild tried to solve the riddle for him.

“Well, that Korean Hunter everyone’s been talking about is scheduled to arrive today.”

“Aha.”

Lennart understood it right away.

Even if you were a rank S Hunter, it was incredibly difficult to resolve a dungeon break from a rank S Gate. And, what if the creatures popping out from that rank S dungeon just so happened to be Giant-type monsters?

The Hunter capable of solo-clearing a dungeon break that no one else wanted any part of, was about to step on the U.S. soil for the first time in his life. So, how could the mass media remain silent on this momentous occasion?

Perhaps he too got infected by the enthusiasm from all the reporters here, as even Lennart himself grew interested in this matter now.

‘So, he’s coming today?’

With excellent timing, the passengers of the plane inbound from South Korea began pouring out into the airport. The Vice-Master pointed to the side over yonder.

“Ah! There he is!”

The Vice-Master was also a rank S Hunter. He may not be as good as Lennart, his boss, but still, his perception was capable enough to easily suss out Jin-Woo’s face among the crowd of people.

Lennart Niermann's eyes gleamed brightly just then.

"Should we go and say hi?"

"Pardon?"

"We've got nothing to lose by being acquaintances with a strong Hunter, right?"

"Well, yes. That's true."

The Vice-Master agreed with that idea.

The personal connections built up in such a manner would prove to be rather beneficial if an event requiring international cooperation or the aid of another Guild happened in the future.

This was, in essence, what the whole International Guild Conference was originally conceived for, where the best Hunters from the world were asked to come and exchange pointers, as it were. Especially when it was quite difficult for these Hunters to actually meet one another like this.

Lennart tidied his attire and approached Jin-Woo's travelling group. No, he tried to.

However, he came to an abrupt halt after taking only a couple of steps. Even his complexion was gradually paling, too. The Vice-Master ended up walking a step ahead because of his boss's sudden stop. He turned around and asked in confusion.

"Aren't you going to speak to him?"

Lennart's expression hardened instantly as he replied.

"That... can't you see that??"

"Excuse me?"

It seemed that the Vice-Master could not see it at all. However, Lennart was one of the very best Hunters in the entire world and he could clearly sense it. He muttered to himself in complete disbelief.

"Instead of summoning his creatures from some other dimension, he's been going around with them all this time?"

"Eh?"

What was he even talking about?

The Vice-Master was taken aback with surprise from Lennart's reaction and quickly took a look in the direction Jin-Woo was walking in from. But, let alone a single summon, he couldn't even spot a hair of the summoned

creature anywhere near the Korean man.

“He’s with his summons?”

“That’s right! So many of them, too!”

Lennart could pick up on the presence of the Shadow Soldiers hiding within Jin-Woo’s shadow. One hundred. Two hundred. Three...

No, could he even finish counting them all?

He hurriedly swallowed his saliva.

‘From that number alone, I’d have believed it if someone told me that man came here to wage war against America.’

He stood there shivering while thinking that, if he were tasked with the role of inviting people over to his nation, he’d never, ever invite someone like ‘that’.

There could be one of two reasons. Either the American Hunter Bureau had no clue the true depths of that Korean Hunter’s power, or they were completely sure that such a power would never be used against them.

The incredible pressure Jin-Woo emanated grew stronger and stronger as he got nearer the German Hunter. Such a sensation could only be felt from those Hunters labelled Special Authority-rank, such as Thomas Andre or Christopher Reid.

‘.....’

Lennart’s head faltered lower even before he realised it just as Jin-Woo walked right past by him. He simply didn’t have enough courage to meet that man’s eyes at all. His instincts had dictated his actions.

After Jin-Woo’s group had completely walked past them, the Vice-Master shot a quizzical look at his boss acting strangely and asked a question of concern.

“Master? Are you feeling unwell somehow? Your complexion....”

“N-no... it’s not that.”

Lennart Niermann wiped the cold sweat off his brows.

You could only see as much as you know; being able to decipher the gap between yourself and the opponent was also a part of one’s abilities.

But, at least right in this moment, he felt quite envious of his Vice-Master, or for that matter, the throng of reporters, who weren’t scared off by the presence of a truly, nonsensically powerful Hunter.

Jin-Woo tilted his head this way and that, prompting Yu Jin-Ho to take a look behind him and ask.

“Did you spot someone you know, hyung-nim?”

“No. It’s just that, some foreigner was looking at me over and over again.”

Yu Jin-Ho chuckled as if such a thing was nothing to fret about.

“Hyung-nim, your stories have spread out far and wide to the rest of the world, so surely, you must have lots of fans by now. Maybe he wanted your autograph, hyung-nim.”

Well, that guy seemed to be too exceptional a Hunter for someone ‘hunting’ around for autographs, though.

Jin-Woo smirked and continued on with his steps.

Beside himself and Yu Jin-Ho, two more people were accompanying them during this overseas trip – Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol coming along as the show of support from the Korean Hunter’s Association, as well as a female Association employee tagging along as an interpreter.

“Uh! There he is!!”

“It’s Seong Jin-Woo!”

The reporters finally discovered Jin-Woo and his gang.

Click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click-!!

Bright flashes of light exploded from the cameras wielded by the throng of reporters. Woo Jin-Cheol quickly yanked out his sunglasses from his inner pocket and put them on, before scanning the crowd with a pair of very sharp eyes. Seeing how tense he was, Yu Jin-Ho decided that now would be a good time to ask him.

“Now that I think about it some more.... Why are you even here, Chief Woo?”

Without a doubt, the Chief of a department located in the Seoul branch of the Korean Hunter’s Association was not exactly what you’d call an ordinary job.

It was pretty much the same thing as you being responsible for an entire department.

Sure, Yu Jin-Ho felt grateful that the Association helped them out with an interpreter situation. His question, though, was with why someone as important as Woo Jin-Cheol would be accompanying them like this.

Woo Jin-Cheol briefly studied Jin-Woo's reactions and replied, his face reddening slightly.

"I am tasked with... providing security to Seong Hunter-nim."

He worked up lots of courage to make that reply, but regretfully, his words were drowned out by the noise within the airport itself and couldn't reach Yu Jin-Ho's ears. So, the latter cupped his ear and asked again.

"What did you say?"

"....Bodyguard.... of him...."

"Who did you say you're guarding now?"

Jin-Woo could see that even Woo Jin-Cheol's ears were getting red now. So, he wrapped his arm around Yu Jin-Ho's shoulders and put an end to that conversation.

"Hyung-nim?"

Jin-Woo pointed with his chin to a rather familiar face over yonder.

"Over there. Looks like they are here to escort us."

Adam White was standing near the entrance of the airport sporting a cool business suit with his blonde hair slicked back, his face full of a bright, welcoming smile. As if to prove that Jin-Woo's guess was correct, the American agent quickly made his way over to the group.

The two burly guys following after him were the same men from the plane back then. These two met Jin-Woo's gaze and quickly lowered their heads in apparent embarrassment almost simultaneously.

It seemed that they ended up remembering the time inside the plane when they tried to protect Adam White by attacking Jin-Woo, having completely forgotten about the differences in their strengths.

And well, they were carrying expressions of someone who might really ask for some autographs given half a chance. Jin-Woo hurriedly swallowed back his laughter. He greeted the two burly guys with a simple nod and grasped the extended hand of Adam White.

The American agent spoke with a cheery voice.

"We were waiting for your arrival, Seong Hunter-nim."

"I seem to remember hearing that you were responsible for the Asia branch of the Bureau. Was I wrong, Mister White?"

"Ahaha."

Adam White scratched the back of his head and continued on.

“I was, until recently. Now, I’m responsible for matters involving you, Seong Hunter-nim.”

Adam White used his good-natured smile to greet the others and guided Jin-Woo’s group outside the airport.

“Let’s get going, shall we? We have cars waiting for us outside.”

There were two vehicles prepared for them. The two Korean Association people were guided to the vehicle in the back, while Yu Jin-Ho naturally headed towards the car in front. However, Adam White blocked his path.

“...??”

Jin-Woo and Yu Jin-Ho both were puzzled by this. Adam White spoke in a serious tone of voice.

“Excluding Seong Hunter-nim, the remainder of your group will be guided to your hotel.”

Adam White then shifted his gaze over to Jin-Woo.

“And, do you mind accompanying us to a different location for a little while, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

Was this about his father?

Jin-Woo’s glare became icy cold in an instant. Adam White must’ve felt the temperature suddenly drop, because he quickly waved his hand around.

“It’s definitely a story that’ll benefit you, Seong Hunter-nim. Haven’t we already clarified what the Hunter Bureau’s opinion regarding you is?”

They wanted to maintain a good relationship with him. That’s what he said in the past.

They did try to help him out, and even now, Jin-Woo couldn’t sense any malice from the other party. If they were thinking of doing something dodgy, then his ultra-sharp Perception Stat would definitely catch onto that.

Didn’t he discover the loophole in the proposed alliance with the King of Giants that way?

Jin-Woo calmly asked his question.

“Are the topics we’ll be discussing a secret?”

Adam White glanced at Yu Jin-Ho watching and listening to this conversation with bated breath and formed a somewhat awkward smile.

“A few topics to be discussed indeed fall under the ‘top secret’ category, yes.”

Yu Jin-Ho heard that and backed off without complaining.

“Hyung-nim? I’ll see you later at the hotel.”

“Alright.”

Jin-Woo confirmed that Yu Jin-Ho had entered the waiting vehicle in the back, and climbed into the car in front along with Adam White. The driver didn’t need any other commands and he got the vehicle moving as soon as Jin-Woo settled down on his seat.

As if their destination was not the same, the two vehicles went off on different directions from the word go. Before long, the other car couldn’t even be seen anymore. Deciding that he had been waiting long enough, Jin-Woo began asking his questions.

“So, where are we going now?”

“We’re heading straight to the Hunter Bureau’s HQ.”

The Hunter Bureau?

Everyone knew that the International Guild Conference would be held at a rented venue near the hotel. So, that could only mean that this car had a different purpose than the Conference itself.

Jin-Woo asked again.

“Isn’t it fine to tell me already?”

Adam White pressed a certain button inside the vehicle as if he was waiting for this moment.

Click.

When he did....

Shuwiik....

A clear pane of window rose up behind the two front seats and proceeded to completely separate the front and rear cabin. And just above the clear window, the English word ‘Soundproofed’ appeared as a hologram and blinked constantly. The words were actually floating in thin air.

When Jin-Woo didn’t display much of a reaction from that hologram message, Adam White felt incredibly awkward and sheepishly asked a question.

“This is the latest available technology, but... You aren’t surprised?”

“Well, I’ve been seeing something similar every day, so....”

“....”

Adam White must’ve been looking forward to this moment because he instantly began pouting ever-so-slightly in disappointment. Soon, though, his original smile popped back up again on his face.

“Please hold on for a second.”

Knock, knock.

He leaned forward to knock on the divider to confirm before picking up on the conversation where they left off.

“In all honesty, we’re currently under serious pressure at the moment.”

One of the two American citizenship-carrying Special Authority-rank Hunters had been met with an untimely, grisly death – Christopher Reid.

The American Hunter Bureau had been hurting far greater than Jin-Woo could ever imagine.

“Christopher Reid Hunter-nim was one of the pillars of the United States’ strongest combat potential. Because of this, the Hunter Bureau has become even more desperate to fill the void in our fighting power. For now, things are calm on the surface because we haven’t publicly announced the murder of Christopher Reid yet. But soon, we’ll start the process of securing other Hunters who can substitute for him. And spare no efforts in doing so.”

“Am I one of the candidates you’re thinking of?”

Adam White nodded his head.

Jin-Woo liked the fact the other party was being open and honest here. Of course, that didn’t mean he’d entertain the once-refused offer one more time. He displayed a rather uninterested reaction.

“I thought that part of the conversation has concluded for good?”

“Yes, of course.”

However, the light in Adam White’s eyes showed that it was far from over. In fact, he pulled his mobile phone out and began showing Jin-Woo several of the stored images on it.

“This is a completely different offer, however.”

In the photos, there was...

The worst calamity in the history of mankind.

The raid that no one wished to remember in history.

The Dragon, 'Kamish'.

Indeed, these photos documented the process of the raid of the first and the last Dragon ever to appear on this planet.

The world's best Hunters had gathered and fought a battle to their death, and only five managed to survive until the end. Those survivors were now referred to as the Special Authority-rank.

Adam White stopped flipping through the photos. The photo he stopped at showed several first-class Mage-type Hunters extracting a Rune Stone from the corpse of Kamish.

“As you know, the value of a Rune Stone is proportional to the power of the monster the stone was extracted from.”

He tapped on his phone's screen one more time to bring up the next photo. And it showed a Rune Stone sleeping quietly inside a glass case surrounded by layers upon layers of walls and security.

It was none other than Kamish's Rune Stone.

Rather obviously, that was an item where its value couldn't even be imagined in monetary terms, never mind getting one's hands on it, regardless of the price one was willing to pay.

It might possess possibly the greatest skill ever to exist!

“We're currently searching for a new owner of this Rune Stone.”

Magic energy, skills, or even magic – Adam White didn't possess any of those, yet even he felt his heart palpitate when he saw that Rune Stone.

He was already feeling this excited, so how would Hunter Seong Jin-Woo feel when he was a Mage-type, to begin with?

Adam White sneaked a glance at Jin-Woo's direction.

Sure enough, the tense expression was clearly visible on Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's face. He was someone who didn't even blink an eye when the latest technology the American Hunter Bureau possessed was displayed before him, but now...

‘We did it!’

Adam White clenched his fists tightly. But then, Jin-Woo's demand proved to be somewhat off his expectation.

“The photo... can you go back, please?”

“Excuse me?”

“I want to see the photos before this one.”

Adam White tilted his head slightly, but still, he scrolled back to the previous photos as per Jin-Woo’s request.

“Right there.”

Adam White’s flipping hands came to a stop over a certain photo. Jin-Woo pointed to the corner of this particular image and spoke in a low, hushed voice.

“Where is this?”



Chapter 187 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The ‘thing’ Jin-Woo pointed to was a pillar of a building. More specifically, several pillars being built up alongside the body of Kamish.

It was evidence as good as any that they were building a structure to house the dead body of the Dragon.

His eyes shot open incredibly wide after seeing that.

Sure, the monster had died eight years ago. The higher the ranking of a dungeon, the greater the value of the monsters that came out of it. The monster corpses would be dismantled into pieces and be used up where they would be deemed most needed.

That was why he didn’t hold any hopes of Kamish’s corpse remaining intact until now. Because, various countries, corporations and/or laboratories willing to buy the Dragon’s corpse would’ve formed a proverbial long-a*s queue around the corner all those years ago, or so he thought to himself.

But then, the remains of Kamish, as seen on the photograph, were in an utterly pristine state. There were traces of the intense battle it had been involved in, yes, but the corpse was pretty much free of any artificial, after-the-fact damage.

The moment he thought of the possibility that Kamish’s corpse could still be around...

...Jin-Woo’s heart began madly pounding away.

“Could it be that America has been storing Kamish’s intact corpse until now?”

“W-well, yes. We have, but....”

Adam White couldn’t really understand Jin-Woo’s current reaction at all.

They were talking about a Rune Stone that all Hunters alive in this world would drool over non-stop, yet he didn’t show any interest in such a valuable article and began talking about a dead monster, instead.

However, Jin-Woo’s attitude was far too serious to steer the topic of this conversation back on the right course.

Jin-Woo pointed at the photo again.

“Where is this place? Let’s go there right away.”

“Pardon me?”

“I’ve been willing to humour the requests of the Hunter Bureau until now. I’m pretty sure that I have the right to demand this much from you.”

“Ah....”

Adam White didn’t expect the situation to go down in this direction and couldn’t hide his fluster anymore. However, he also realised that strictly speaking, this was not a bad result at all.

Between Hunter Seong Jin-Woo and the Hunter Bureau that Adam was working for, anyone could figure out that the party desperately needing the other side’s cooperation was, of course, the latter.

The Hunter Bureau was trying to attract Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s interest. That’s why they tried with Madam Selner’s ability initially. And when that fell through, they resorted to using Kamish’s Rune Stone to rouse the young Korean Hunter’s interest.

But then, the spark was lit from an unlikely source, instead. This was at once a crisis and an opportunity for Adam White.

‘...They said I was free to use any method, didn’t they?’

Adam White quickly recalled what the director and his deputy said after they had gathered the agents working for the Hunter Bureau.

They said – ‘do whatever it takes to get on Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s good side.’

In order to increase the odds of him moving to the States, even if only by a little. If the Hunter Bureau was in possession of something Jin-Woo wanted, then for the sake of the relationship between them, that thing should be offered up immediately regardless of what it was.

....So they could get into this young man’s good books.

Adam White remembered this incredibly important end goal and cleared his throat so he could speak up.

“Actually, even I do not know where Kamish’s corpse is being stored at the moment. The extent of my knowledge is what the higher-ups are prepared to let me know, unfortunately.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

For sure, Adam White seemed a bit too ‘young’ to know every single secret the organisation he worked for might keep. But, he sounded far more

confident as he spoke, which seemed to contradict the contents of his words from a second ago.

“However, if it’s you making this demand, then I believe the higher-ups will give the go-ahead pretty easily. I’ll have to make a report anyway, so do you mind waiting for their reply for a little while?”

Jin-Woo’s expression brightened instantly.

The odds of the skill ‘Shadow Extraction’ failing would increase proportionally to how long the target had been dead for. And Kamish was killed off eight years ago. The odds of failure were just simply too high.

The possibility of bothering a lot of people, not to mention wasting their precious time for what could ultimately turn out to be nothing was pretty high, too.

However, how should he know without giving it a shot in the first place?

Even if the odds were extremely low, even if there was only a chance of ten thousand in one, no, ten million in one, the moment he somehow succeeds in extracting the Dragon’s shadow, he’d end up with possibly the most powerful Shadow Soldier ever in history.

Just thinking about it made his heart madly pound away.

Even if he failed, the only thing he’d lose would be his time. When compared to what he stood to gain if he succeeded, well, this was one gamble worth taking, that’s for sure.

As long as the Americans permitted it in the first place, of course.

Jin-Woo quickly asked Adam White.

“We’re on our way to the Hunter Bureau, right?”

“That’s correct.”

“Since I’m going to wait anyway, why don’t I go there and wait, instead?”

“Huh....”

Jin-Woo’s overly passionate interest caused Adam White to form an expression of a man not knowing whether to rejoice or be saddened.

The Director of the Hunter Bureau also formed a similar expression, as well.

He shifted his head to the side just in case, and sure enough, his deputy right next to him was also forming the same sort of an expression. So much so

that the director couldn't help but wonder, if he were to look into a mirror now, wouldn't his face look like that?

“Okay, so. Seong Hunter-nim is in the building with us?”

The director had to confirm it one last time. Adam White wordlessly nodded his head.

“But, what about the Rune Stone? Didn't he say anything about it?”

They decided that using up Kamish's Rune Stone was worth it if it meant they got to reel Seong Jin-Woo into the US of A.

Well, a Hunter with an American passport getting stronger was pretty much the same thing as America getting stronger, at the end of the day. But, now...

“No, sir. During our trip, he almost never spoke about the Rune Stone once.”

“Huh-uh... this is troublesome.”

The director could only rub his chin after hearing Adam White's answer.

Both Thomas Andre, as well as Seong Jin-Woo – it always proved to be so difficult to predict how these Hunters standing at the apex would behave next.

He even thought that possibly, one's way of thinking would undergo a drastic change after becoming a top-ranked Hunter in the world.

“So, what he really wants is to view the Dragon's corpse?”

“Yes, sir.”

Adam White nodded his head, his expression full of confidence.

He wasn't feeling bad at all at the moment. From the get-go, his role was to bring Jin-Woo to the negotiating table and have him take part in it.

And with Jin-Woo willingly walking into the Hunter Bureau HQ, Adam White had pretty much fulfilled the role he was tasked with. As for the rest, it'd be up to the higher-ups holding the deck full of negotiable items at the ready.

The person with the final say in the matter, the director carefully pondered this quandary, before speaking to Adam White.

“I wish to discuss this matter with the deputy director first. Please leave the office for a little while.”

“Understood, sir.”

Adam White stood up to leave from the office; once he left, the director

turned around and spoke to his deputy with an awkward expression.

“This... What do you think is the reason for that man wanting to see Kamish’s remains?”

“I wonder.... Well, one thing we can be sure of is that he’s not a tourist. It’s likely that Kamish’s remains possess a greater value than its Rune Stone to him.”

The value of a skill was truly unimaginable. Many Hunters at the top flight would not hold back on their cash reserves in order to purchase a Rune Stone they needed.

Even if it cost tens of thousands, hundreds, even millions of dollars.

It wasn’t as if they had too much money and didn’t know where to spend it, so they were walking around showering their surroundings with cash.

No, a skill was basically the strength a Hunter possessed, and that strength was directly linked to said Hunter’s survival.

‘Even then, seeing that corpse once is much more beneficial than getting his hands on a Rune Stone, is that it....?’

The thoughts forming inside the director’s head was then articulated into words by his deputy.

“It seems likely that it’s related somehow to Seong Hunter-nim’s ability.”

“.....”

The Hunter Bureau proudly boasted the best information-gathering network of any organisation on Earth. So, rather obviously, they had gathered quite a hefty amount of info on Jin-Woo.

And that was the reason why they could leverage both Madam Selner’s ability and now, even Kamish’s Rune Stone. That was why they thought that....

“Wasn’t his ability only applicable to monsters he killed himself?”

After he killed ant monsters, ant soldiers were added to his arsenal, and after he hunted down the Giant-type monsters, Giant soldiers made their appearance next.

The more battles he fought, the stronger Hunter Seong Jin-Woo would become. That was precisely the reason why the Hunter Bureau wished to make Jin-Woo an American Hunter at any cost.

However – what if he could create summons out of corpses of monsters that had died a long time ago, and more importantly, the ones he didn’t even

kill in the first place?

“Oh, my god....”

The deputy director’s eyes grew extremely large.

“He’s planning to make Kamish into one of his summons!”

His voice trembled uncontrollably.

That man was thinking of turning the worst calamity humanity had faced into his summoned creature. No wonder he couldn’t care any less about a Rune Stone.

The director resolutely shook his head.

“That cannot be allowed. We simply can’t let one individual wield that much power.”

“But, sir, if we refuse to accept his demand this time, it’d become far harder to maintain an amicable relationship with him moving forward.”

Jin-Woo being in the Hunter Bureau’s HQ to wait for an answer easily showed how high his expectation was.

It was simple logic, really – if one refused the other’s request because one couldn’t trust the other party, then the relationship of trust would break down completely.

“H-mm.”

The director’s forehead creased up greatly as he fell into deep contemplation.

If their guesses were correct and Hunter Seong Jin-Woo did really make Kamish into one of his summons, then his powers would become impossible to control for any one nation or organisation.

His summons revived right away even after getting destroyed, didn’t they? What if Kamish possessing the infinite regenerative power appeared as an enemy?

Indeed, the associated risk was simply too heavy for a chance to maintain a good relationship with a lone Hunter. The director asked one more question before he could make his decision.

“We have Thomas Andre, a Special Authority-rank Hunter, as well as nearly fifty rank S Hunters recruited from various parts of the globe. Is there really a reason why we should continue pursuing Seong Jin-Woo?”

“Actually, sir...”

The deputy hesitated for a little bit before making up his mind. He had been delaying making a report because its content was not verified yet, but he decided to bring it up anyway.

“There is a good chance that Seong Jin-Woo is a brand new Special Authority-rank Hunter. Sir.”

“What was that?”

The director shot up from his seat.

“Agent White made a report about a week ago. Hunter Seong Jin-Woo can use psychokinesis.”

“.....!!”

With the sole exception of the lone Healer-type, four of the five Special Authority-rank Hunters all possessed an ability to exert physical change to objects without actual physical interaction.

Many strong people had appeared before and after those five had entered the world stage, but even until now, only four people possessed that power.

The Hunter Bureau was the only one to have figured out that similarity among the Special Authority-rank Hunters, and the organisation had even designated that power as the prerequisite for being labelled as one of the Hunters exercising rights equalling a nation.

But now, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was discovered to possess that power, too?

A certain thought suddenly fled in and out of the director’s brain. He wondered if Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was a gift from God to America, now that she had lost one of her strongest weapon, Christopher Reid.

‘God bless America.’

God’s blessing always seemed to accompany the United States of America.

Soon, the director’s expression changed.

“Do you see him as someone worthy of our trust?”

One’s abilities could be assessed subjectively, but the issue of trust would always be viewed from an objective perspective. The deputy spoke up of his opinion on Jin-Woo, which was formed from what he had witnessed so far.

“Can you imagine what would’ve happened if someone pointed a gun at China’s Liu Zhigeng or Thomas Andre?”

“It’d be horrific.”

Both Thomas Andre and Liu Zhigeng showed no mercy towards their

perceived enemies.

That someone in the hypothetical situation would either die or, at a bare minimum, lose the arm holding the gun if luck was on their side.

“However, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo wasn’t like that. He was someone you could still talk to and defuse a tricky situation without violence.”

The director lowered his gaze a little and nodded his head. Meanwhile, the deputy carried on with his explanation.

“Also, let’s not forget about the matter of Japan. Didn’t he solve the dungeon break crisis that no one wanted any part of, all by himself, while not making much of a demand from the Japanese?”

It was a complete contrast to Russian Hunter Yuri Orlov, who demanded an exorbitant sum of ten million dollars a day from the Japanese government.

“....”

The director’s decision-making process didn’t last for long.

His lips remained tightly shut in a straight line for a bit longer, but he stood up from his seat.

“I shall guide him personally. This could be a very good opportunity to witness and observe his ability from up close.”

The deputy’s expression brightened up a notch as he also stood up from his seat.

“By the way, where exactly is Kamish’s remains stored, Director?”

Hearing that question, the smirk formed on the director’s lips.

“Have you ever wondered why our HQ has twenty underground floors?”

Jin-Woo climbed aboard the special elevator with the guidance of the Bureau’s director.

“I wished to speak to you in a more relaxing environment, but... I’m sure this is what you want, yes?”

Adam White translated the director’s words into Korean almost at the same time. Jin-Woo nodded his head to say yes.

The elevator carrying the director, his deputy, Adam White, and finally Jin-Woo himself speedily climbed down to the basement floors.

‘To think, they’d build the Hunter Bureau’s HQ on the very spot where Kamish had been killed....’

Should Jin-Woo chalk this one up to America being, well, America?

In any case, he was told that the remains of the Dragon Kamish would be stored intact forever in order to honour and remember the lives of every Hunter who valiantly sacrificed themselves to stop the worst calamity in human history.

Ting.

The elevator finally opened its door on the 24th basement floor. The staff members waiting for their arrival greeted the four guests to this floor.

“Director.”

“Sir.”

They must’ve been soldiers originally, judging from the dignified manner of their salutes. The director nodded his head to greet them back and continued to guide Jin-Woo further in.

“Please, this way.”

Jin-Woo inwardly swallowed his saliva.

When the door with several layers of strict security finally opened up, a chilling breeze brushed past his cheeks.

‘No, that wasn’t a cold breeze.’

Although faint, he could feel magical energy infused in the air. There was no need to even wonder just who this magic energy belonged to.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!

His heart palpitated hard upon realising that his odds were not zero, after all.

Even though it had been eight years, the remains still emitted some amount of magic energy. So, just how incredible would its power be after turning into a Shadow Soldier?

Jin-Woo calmed his heart that was racing fast enough to explode and wordlessly followed after the Director.

“It’s here.”

Eventually, his steps came to a halt in front of the truly massive open dome brightly illuminated by countless spotlights overhead.

And there it was, the remains of Kamish.

The body was perfectly preserved as it were – exactly as it was from that

day it managed to kill several hundreds of elite Hunters before also getting killed off by the five remaining Special Authority-rank Hunters.

The Red Dragon!

Even Jin-Woo momentarily forgot to breathe at the creature's truly overwhelming presence.

“Actually, all electricity used in the Hunter Bureau's HQ comes from Kamish's Magic Crystal.”

The director proudly explained where all the energy used to preserve Kamish's remains came from.

However, Jin-Woo's ears were not picking up on any of his words. His gaze was already firmly fixed on one spot.

Seeing that fervent gaze, the Director realised that the moment had come.

“...Hunter-nim. Are you satisfied now?”

“Everyone, back away.”

Jin-Woo spoke to the people behind him, causing the staff members to raise a noisy fuss.

“Director, what is that man trying to do?”

“Kamish's remains is our country's national treasure!”

Too bad for them, though, the director loudly reprimanded them right away.

“I already gave my permission!”

In that instant, all unnecessary noises disappeared.

Before they came down here, they had concluded their conversation. Jin-Woo made a promise that nothing would happen to the remains. And just like how the deputy had done, the director decided to trust Jin-Woo's words, as well.

“Let us observe what will happen next.”

As Jin-Woo had instructed, the crowd retreated to a far away distance. In the meantime, he extended his hands out towards Kamish. And then, he quietly spoke up.

“Rise up.”

As if it was waiting for that, a message popped up in his view along with a ‘Ting!’

[Shadow extraction has failed.]

[Two more attempts remaining.]

Jin-Woo's expression didn't change. He calmly moved on and attempted the extraction for the second time.

“Rise up.”

He wished to take control of the greatest monster there ever was. His voice, now containing his desire, echoed and reverberated throughout the interior of the underground dome.

Rise up...

When that happened, all the spotlights located on the ceiling suddenly began flickering. And from somewhere unknown, a streak of brilliantly chilling wind blew in.

Kuwaaaaahh-!!

Screams of a Dragon roared out from some place that was impossible to locate and caused almost everyone present in the dome to cover their ears in a hurry.

The only person who didn't lose his cool in this chaos was Jin-Woo, and no one else. He quickly spotted Kamish's shadow spreading wide on the floor.

‘Did I... Did I succeed?’

It was then – his eyes opened super-wide.

A certain something was slowly rising up from the shadow. The rising shape enveloped in the rising plumes of black smoke was.... undeniably a Dragon.

“Uh?! Uh, uh!!”

“What, what the... What the hell is that?!”

The staff members freaked out and took several steps back. Even the director and his deputy, who already had a pretty good idea on what Jin-Woo's ability was like, forgot to breathe in that moment.

Kuwaaaaahh-!!

The Dragon loudly roared into the air before discovering the human by its feet and stopped its bellowing.

[Were you the one summoning me? Oh, King of the Dead, Shadow Sovereign.]



Chapter 188 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The Shadow Sovereign was the sole existence capable of dragging back a soul that had fallen to the pits of the abyss. That was why the Dragon needed only one glance to recognise Jin-Woo's identity.

The King of the Dead, in the body of a human, was staring right back at the creature with dignified eyes. The authority of a Sovereign that he possessed sent a powerful chill through the Dragon's body.

But, that only lasted for a brief moment.

The creature's eyes shifted to a location a bit further away. And that's when it discovered the stupid-looking humans and their jaws agape as they stared right back at the gigantic creature.

'Humans.... Humans?'

It immediately recalled the bottomless malice it held against humanity right up until its death. And that also helped the Dragon to remember the terrible pain it felt as it drew its very last breath.

'Humans... must be killed.'

Snap.

That's where its rationality got cut off. The Dragon raised its body up as crimson light filled its eyes.

[Every single one of you... I shall kill all of you.]

The air of the underground storage area began boiling right up.

"Oh, my god...."

The Director of the Hunter Bureau spat out a shocked gasp.

This dome had been designed to accommodate the Dragon's sleeping figure. So, the whole space seemed wholly inadequate the moment the creature raised his head high.

Crack!!

The Dragon's head pushed against the ceiling and destroyed the concrete there.

“W-what the hell?!”

“No, could it be....?”

They could now see the blood-red light gather within the open maw of the Dragon.

A mass of red light – both the director and his deputy had seen the video footage countless times and they knew what that red light cluster was supposed to do.

Adam White urgently grabbed the director’s shoulder and shouted out.

“Sir! You need to evacuate....”

“That’s Kamish’s Breath! You think we’ll be safe because we escaped somewhere?!”

It was rather clear that, once the red light exploded out, then forget about the underground storage area, the entire Hunter Bureau building would completely be obliterated in the blink of an eye. There was no place safe from the Dragon’s attack, in other words.

Rumble-!!

One of the stationed staff members collapsed to the floor as if his legs lost all strength from the fright. The other two, meanwhile, were urgently punching the security code to open the electronic door-lock in order to escape from the dome.

The director and his deputy knew full well that was simply a waste of time. They could only alternate their gazes between Jin-Woo and the revived Kamish with dazed expressions etched on their faces.

Kuwaaaaah-!!

The red glow created out of pure magic energy finally transformed into a sphere of blinding flames. The Dragon was finally finished with its preparation to erase all ‘humans’ standing before it. Just before it could spit out its ultra-high temperature Breath, though...

[Die!]

...Jin-Woo roared out at the top of his lungs.

“That’s enough!”

The director and his entourage all raised their arms reflexively to shield their eyes from the bright, blinding light. However, after hearing Jin-Woo’s call, they all slowly lowered their arms.

They thought that everything was over once that light filled up the inside of the dome. As it turned out, they were far too hasty in making that judgement, however.

“But, but.... How can this even be possible?”

The flames within the jaw of the enraged Kamish were dying out gradually.

Did the Dragon that melted away the lives of several hundred elite Hunters with a single Breath, stop its attack because of just one command issued by Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?

Gulp.

The director stared at Jin-Woo with eyes that were clearly still swimming in unbridled shock. And then, those eyes nearly popped out of their sockets from an even more incredulous sight.

Jin-Woo actually began talking to Kamish, that was what.

“The Magic Crystal embedded in your head has been removed a long time ago. You have no more reason to follow the orders of the Rulers.”

The deputy director standing right next to his boss shuddered from a nasty shock and hurriedly asked.

“Is, is Hunter Seong Jin-Woo actually speaking in the monster language right now?!”

“....Even though I’m looking at it, I can’t figure out how to interpret this situation.”

While everyone else was still stuck in their pit of pure astonishment, Jin-Woo was too busy spitting out a sigh of relief in his mind.

‘Whew-woo....’

He was worried about what he needed to do for a brief moment there, but the end result turned out to be rather good. What a relief that was.

Even then, Jin-Woo was honestly almost scared out of his wits the moment he felt the unchecked rage gushing out from the Dragon.

‘What kind of a Shadow Soldier possesses this powerful an ego?!’

It seemed that the thing about higher existences possessing stronger egos, as proclaimed by the King of Giants, could be true after all. Meanwhile, the Dragon was quite surprised by the fact that it willingly obeyed the new Sovereign’s order.

[So, this is how it feels to submit to the Shadow Sovereign....]

The Dragon then lowered its tall posture and paid its respect to Jin-Woo. The humans flinching constantly from each and every movement of the oversized creature finally spat out lengthy sighs of relief.

The Dragon lowered its head, as if to kiss the floor, and spoke.

[This lowly servant who once used to serve the Dragon Emperor pays respects to the new Sovereign.]

There was a great deal of respect in the creature's voice that still growled like that of most monsters. Jin-Woo slowly approached the Dragon and placed his hand on the nose of the creature. It silently closed its eyes and enjoyed the warmth of its new lord.

The sensation that couldn't be described in mere words travelled from its nose tip to the rest of its body.

Jin-Woo also sensed that the Dragon's mood was lifting up. He had barely managed to calm his pounding heart by then, but now, it was racing hard again.

BA-THUMP, BA-THUMP!!

'Kamish.... The Dragon Kamish has really become my Shadow Soldier....'

A broad smile automatically floated up on his face.

Adam White's jaw, meanwhile, had been hanging slack from this unbelievable scene right before his eyes. But then, he discovered something even more incredulous and hurriedly confirmed it with the deputy director.

"S-sir. Is the Dragon really wagging its tail??"

'What the heck, the worst calamity in history isn't some puppy, so what kind of rubbish is he even talking about?'

The deputy director thought such a thing would be completely illogical and shifted his eyes to where Kamish's tail was, only for a pained groan to escape from his mouth.

"Jesus H. Christ...."

Jin-Woo lifted his hand away and the Dragon's tail stopped wagging, as well. It then raised his head up again.

The name 'Kamish' was given to the Dragon for the convenience of humans. Jin-Woo was pondering what new name he should give to his latest addition to the ranks of his Shadow Soldiers, before abruptly recalling the words it used to greet him just now.

“You said you used to serve the Dragon Emperor, right?”

[That is indeed correct, oh, my king.]

The Dragon continued using a polite tone of voice.

[I served the King of Berserk Dragons, the Sovereign of Destruction.]

‘I’m the King of the Dead, the Shadow Sovereign....’

And then, there was the King of the Giants, the Sovereign of the Beginning.

Jin-Woo realised that the former owner the Dragon served had to be one of the nine Sovereigns the System mentioned before.

However, that wasn’t important right now. No, what he wanted to know was the creature’s real name, so he could use that one, too.

“Alright, then. What was your original na....”

Jin-Woo couldn’t continue his words, though. His eyes looking up at the creature began quaking rather violently. Like a sand castle being scattered away by a gust of wind, the Dragon’s body was slowly disintegrating right before him.

[Regrettably, my king... I must bid you farewell.]

“What?!”

Jin-Woo’s Perception Stat communicated with the Dragon’s current emotion. And it was one of pure sorrow, not even a hint of falsehood contained within.

The Dragon was truly lamenting this moment.

[It seems that our meeting came about far too late, my Sovereign.]

Even if it was the power of a Shadow Sovereign, the gap of eight years proved to be far too wide to bridge. The Dragon had been trapped for too long within the bottom of the abyss and as a result, its magical energy had become too weak and began scattering away in the air.

“System?! Systeeem!”

Jin-Woo couldn’t accept this and desperately cried out to the System, but the d*mn thing remained utterly silent, as always.

Just like how he could sense the Dragon’s emotions, the creature could sense his, as well.

[I am truly envious of Your Majesty’s soldiers, as they are now tasked

with serving you for all eternity.]

It spoke from the depths of its heart. To the king who didn't want to lose his soldier, the Dragon left behind one final advice.

[Oh, my king. There are four humans who have borrowed the powers of the Rulers. Please, you need to be wary of them.]

As the Dragon's body became completely blurry and indistinct, even its voice grew further and further away.

[I was honoured to be in the presence of a new king.....]

And then, deathly silence descended on the dome.

Like a shifting mirage, the Dragon's shadow disappeared. All the spotlights flickering precariously above all reverted back to working normally again.

The director had been holding his breath as he witnessed this spectacle. Once the Dragon was gone, he quickly looked at the corpse of the creature.

Absolutely nothing had happened to Kamish's remains.

He felt as if he had been dreaming until now and that left him utterly dazed and confused.

But, then again, if what happened was simply a bad dream, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo wouldn't be standing around making such an empty, despondent expression right now.

“...”

Jin-Woo couldn't rip his gaze away from the spot where the Dragon's shadow used to stand. Eventually, the System message popped up in his view alongside with the familiar 'Tti-ring!'

[Shadow Extraction has failed.]

[Too much time has elapsed since the target's death and therefore, any further attempt at Extraction holds no meaning.]

[The target's shadow has returned to the emptiness of the void.]

Mechanical beeps continued to go off in his head.

Today would be his first time hating the sounds of continuous 'Tti-ring, tti-ring' going off in his head. Jin-Woo's tightly clenched fists trembled ever so slightly.

Ka-boom!

In his rage, he punched the ground hard. For a brief moment there, the

entire building shook around just a little.

Jin-Woo returned to the hotel.

Because he was in such a gloomy mood, Adam White was unable to say a single thing during the trip, even though he was tasked with ‘escorting’ him here.

The American agent checked in for Jin-Woo at the front desk and that finally presented him with an opportunity to talk.

“I’m in charge of accommodating your needs during your stay in the U.S., so if you want something, please, don’t hesitate and give me a call.”

Adam White spoke with a bright expression, but the reply remained frigid and disinterested.

“...Got it.”

The smile on Adam White’s face hardened instantly.

‘S-scary....’

He learned that standing in front of a very upset top-level Hunter could be a quite scary experience for the first time in his life today.

The negotiation had been postponed to a later date. Which wasn’t surprising, considering Jin-Woo’s current mood. And well, both the director and his deputy hadn’t regained their lost spirits so even they didn’t show any signs of disappointment, either.

Jin-Woo figured that he might as well sleep today’s events off and was about to head towards his assigned room, but then....

“Uh?”

Woo Jin-Cheol was coming down to the hotel’s lobby just then and discovered Jin-Woo here. The Chief of the Monitoring Division quickly made his way.

“Seong Hunter-nim, why couldn’t we get a hold of you?”

“Oh, that... I was temporarily in a place where no calls could get through.”

Outsiders were not permitted to carry their personal phones when inside the HQ of the Hunter Bureau. There was no exception to this rule even if you were an important guest. It was a necessity in order to protect the organisation’s many secrets.

If an important person such as Madam Selner got her face photographed,

the entire Hunter Bureau would be turned upside down, that was why.

Woo Jin-Cheol scratched the side of his head and asked.

“Did you get to meet Yu Jin-Ho Hunter-nim, then?”

“Eh?”

Almost right away, an expression of confusion formed on Woo Jin-Cheol’s face.

“But, I thought Yu Hunter-nim received a message from you and that’s why he went out? The message said that you were waiting for him at the Hunter Bureau’s building.”

“That’s where I’m coming from right now, so what are you even talking about here?”

Adam White was listening to this conversation from the side and quickly confirmed the fact for them.

“There was no Yu Jin-Ho Hunter-nim in the visitor’s log.”

“Excuse me? But, how can that be? About two hours ago, a rank S Hunter came here to fetch him personally.”

Jin-Woo quickly butted in there.

“Which rank S Hunter are you talking about?”

“It was Hunter Hwang Dong-Su. He actually came to the hotel.”

Jin-Woo couldn’t understand why he suddenly felt this ominous sensation the moment he heard the name Hwang Dong-Su, which was in stark contrast to the other two men who didn’t seem to know what was going on here.

‘Is this because of the Perception Stat?’

Seeing that the light in Jin-Woo’s eyes had become unusually tense, Adam White quickly pulled his phone out again.

“I shall call Hwang Dong-Su Hunter-nim’s Guild right now.”

Several ringtones later, the manager in charge of Scavenger Guild’s high-ranking Hunters, a woman named Laura answered Adam White’s call. He briefly introduced himself and explained the current situation.

Surprisingly, though – the voice coming from the phone’s speaker was calm and collected, which went completely against Adam White’s expectations. He thought that she might be as flustered as he’d be, but no.

Adam White only said that Hunter Hwang Dong-Su had taken Yu Jin-Ho

away, yet Seong Jin-Woo's name suddenly popped out of nowhere. He tilted his head slightly, before sneaking a glance at Jin-Woo.

The Korean Hunter shook his head briefly. Adam White nodded his head in acknowledgement and came up with a suitable reply.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim hasn't learned of the news yet as he's still stuck in the Hunter Bureau. However, Yu Jin-Ho Hunter-nim's travelling party had called us to find out what was going on earlier, you see.”

And that's where the call came to an abrupt end.

Jin-Woo listened to the conversation without saying a single word and when the call ended, headed straight to the hotel's exit.

“Seong Hunter-nim?! The Scavenger Guild said they will find out, so we should wait for.....”

Adam White hurriedly chased after Jin-Woo and came out of the hotel's exit, but the Korean Hunter was long gone by then.

“What the hell...? Where did he go?”

Adam White stared at the street with a troubled expression on his face, not knowing what to do next.

Jin-Woo sought out a deserted back alley away from the crowded main street and undid 'Stealth'.

A rank S Hunter using his name showed up and took Yu Jin-Ho away. But then, the Guild this guy worked for didn't even try to get a detailed explanation of what happened and simply stated that they would find out before one-sidedly ending the call.

‘Something bad is happening....’

And that thing should be related somehow to why that Guild staff member on the phone mentioned his name right away.

Jin-Woo's expression hardened as he issued a new command. If that guy was looking for trouble, then he certainly picked a very bad day for it.

‘Find him.’

If his thousand-plus soldiers dispersed throughout the city and searched for Yu Jin-Ho's magic energy signature, then finding him shouldn't take that long.

Shashashak, shashashashak...

A thousand shadows breaking off from below Jin-Woo's feet quickly

scattered in all directions.

Thomas Andre scanned the interior of the apartment with a hardened face.

Inside this luxurious apartment where Hwang Dong-Su should have been staying, the two Hunters assigned to keep an eye on him were lying face down with foam bubbling out of their mouths.

“Tsk.”

He clicked his tongue and removed his trademark sunglasses.

“...”

His deeply crumpled expression was finally revealed for all to see, and the complexions of his subordinates searching through the apartment paled instantly.

Thomas Andre gnashed his teeth and issued a new order in a low, growling voice.

“Hwang Dong-Su..... Find him, before Seong Jin-Woo does. No matter what, we must find him first.”



Chapter 189 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo now stood on top of a skyscraper that afforded him a view of the entire city. His eyesight, enhanced to extreme heights through his Perception Stat, began scanning the city from the streets right below the skyscraper all the way to the residential homes located in the far-off distance.

While doing that, his hearing was focused on the noises his Shadow Soldiers picked up.

[Hey, Smith! How have you been?]

[Dear customer, our store doesn't accept returns based on a customer's sudden change of mind....]

[C'mon, man. Why didn't you come to the party last night?]

Pretty much all of them were useless idle talks.

Aside from those, the horns of passing cars, noises from TV speakers, cats meowing, splashes of water from bathrooms, etc. – all sorts of sounds made by a living city entered Jin-Woo's ears.

Sweat drops formed on his forehead as he utilised his five senses, plus the sixth one to detect magic energy, to their fullest extent.

'I wouldn't be going through this much trouble if I just left the Shadow Soldier in Jin-Ho's shadow....'

Didn't someone say this before? It was already too late the moment you start regretting it.

The ant soldier he had inserted in Yu Jin-Ho's shadow just in case had been used to get to Chairman Yu Myung-Han's hospital room. Jin-Woo became really busy after that, and since he was planning to accompany the kid during their trip to the US, he had forgotten about inserting a replacement.

And the end result from all of that is him working his a*s off like this.

'Kamish's shadow is gone, and Jin-Ho's whereabouts are unknown....'

Veins popped up one at a time on Jin-Woo's forehead. His already gloomy mood had now hit rock bottom and was about to convert into a storm cloud.

His knife-like glare, sharp enough to almost shoot bolts of lightning, darted

this way and that as if he didn't want to miss a single movement happening down below.

Unfortunately, never mind Yu Jin-Ho, it proved very difficult to find an Asian youth that resembled him in this city.

'Could it be.... they are not in the city at all?'

To Jin-Woo, Yu Jin-Ho might be a cute little brother, but the truth was, the kid was still a melee-type rank D Hunter. Any ol' group of regular people trying to jump him wouldn't work at all.

If the car supposedly heading for the Hunter Bureau's HQ suddenly drove out of the city limits, Yu Jin-Ho would have realised something was amiss and started resisting his kidnappers.

The sole problem was...

'The b*stard kidnapping Jin-Ho was a rank S Hunter.'

Jin-Woo immediately widened the scope of his shadows' movements.

'His name was Hwang Dong-Su, wasn't it?'

Jin-Woo didn't know why that man faked his name and took Yu Jin-Ho away. However, this was about 'Give and Take'. He was determined to ask for suitable compensation for provoking him like this.

And, if something untoward happened to Jin-Ho for some reason...

A dangerous gleam flashed eerily within Jin-Woo's eyes.

Not too long after, the Shadow Soldiers expanding their search range sent in countless bits of information that encompassed the entirety of the city.

In the end, Hwang Dong-Su really went for it and caused an incident.

An emergency situation descended on the Scavenger Guild once that fact was revealed to its members. Their opponent this time was Seong Jin-Woo.

Just one misstep and Hwang Dong-Su's life could be forfeited.

He was one of the top aces within the Scavenger Guild and should be considered as one of the core pillars of its combat force, too.

Thomas Andre couldn't afford to lose someone like that. But all he could do for the time being was to sit in his office and anxiously wait for any news.

"Anything new?"

His subordinate shook his head with a darkened complexion.

"No, sir."

The frowns on Thomas Andre's forehead grew deeper by a level.

Tracking Hwang Dong-Su through his phone was impossible since he had switched the device off. The places he frequented had been searched thoroughly by the Guild's members, but unfortunately, nothing worthy of note had been uncovered so far. It seemed that Mister Hwang had been planning for this day for quite some time.

'Isn't he scared of dying?'

No, Mister Hwang was also a rank S Hunter. He should be aware of the differences in strengths between himself and Seong Jin-Woo, at the bare minimum.

Even then, he still went ahead and did something so monumentally stupid. Because he probably had something he could place his bets on.

'He knows that I'll step up on his behalf.'

Well, that fool wasn't wrong with his calculation. Regardless of whether that man would cause another incident in the future or not, he'd still remain as Scavenger Guild's asset until the contract duration expired.

The Guild saw potential in Hwang Dong-Su's skills and had invested a ton of money on him. He bravely started this crap with no care for the aftermath because he knew that Thomas Andre would never willingly give up on his assets.

'...Did I treat my Hunters too nicely until now?'

Thomas Andre repeatedly told himself to strictly discipline his underlings as soon as this issue had been sorted out so they wouldn't cause another problem like this one in the future.

The Guild employees in the near vicinity had to stay extra cautious, even with their breathing, as Thomas Andre's upset mood continued to stew quietly.

It was then, his phone suddenly began ringing. Thomas Andre had been waiting too anxiously for news, regardless of what nature it took, and hurriedly yanked the receiver up.

The voice on the line belonged to Laura. Thomas Andre shot up from his chair.

"How?"

She knew what he was feeling right now, so Laura didn't pause for a second before she quickly carried on with her explanation.

‘Very good!’

Thomas Andre nodded his head. Rather unexpectedly, they were able to find a clue sooner than he thought.

“Send everyone to that location. I’ll be on my way there, as well.”

Thomas Andre was about to end the call there but hesitated slightly, before raising the receiver up again.

“By the way... how did you convince the old codgers in the Hunter Bureau, Laura?”

The Hunter Bureau had a habit of recording the locations and movement patterns of all the Hunters via GPS attached to the Hunter-issue smartphones.

Of course, they were not an organisation known for giving away their information willy-nilly. Even if it was the Scavenger Guild making the request, the approval process should take several hours at a bare minimum. But to think, they spat out Hwang Dong-Su’s records, just like that.

This didn’t sound logical at all. Thomas Andre couldn’t help but get curious about the methods Laura employed here to convince them.

However, her answer was rather simple in nature.

“Every single Guild member has begun moving, sir!”

Adam White, currently observing the behaviour of the Scavenger Guild, cried out in an urgent voice at his smartphone. The deputy director on the other side of the line quickly asked back.

“I just found out that the raid they were getting ready for has been cancelled as well, sir. All of their Hunters are being mobilised to go somewhere.”

“...”

Adam White couldn’t easily open his mouth here.

A rank S Hunter from the Scavenger Guild used Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s name and kidnapped Yu Jin-Ho. And then, both Seong Jin-Woo and the Scavenger Guild had begun mobilising.

This couldn’t have been something simple at all.

Not to mention, with the entirety of the Scavenger Guild being mobilised like that, it could only mean that Thomas Andre was behind the move. The ominous foreboding crept up on Adam White and he quickly wiped the sweat off his face.

Sure enough – Adam froze up on the spot after discovering Thomas Andre walk out of the Guild building’s entrance.

‘Heok...’

The American Hunter took a sweeping look around once before climbing into a waiting car. The vehicle then hurriedly set off to an unknown destination.

And it just so happened to be in the same direction where the Hunters of the Scavenger Guild had disappeared to, as well. Adam White did his best to calm his trembling voice and described what he saw to the deputy director.

“S-sir... The Goliath... Thomas Andre has made his move as well. Sir.”

“Is this really alright?”

A man looked at Yu Jin-Ho lying unconscious on the ground and worriedly asked. Hwang Dong-Su to his side nodded his head.

“Look, I’m not gonna do anything bad to him, alright? I just want to ask him about this one thing, that’s all.”

The Guild Master Thomas Andre warned him. He said not to provoke Seong Jin-Woo.

However, Hwang Dong-Su never planned to provoke that man from the get-go, anyway. Why? Because there was one other person beside Seong Jin-Woo that could answer the question burning a hole in his head. That was why.

The question of what happened on that day – the events that took place within the dungeon where his older brother Hwang Dong-Seok, Seong Jin-Woo, and Yu Jin-Ho entered together. Hwang Dong-Su promised Yu Jin-Ho that he’d be freed as soon as he answered that question truthfully.

Unfortunately, Yu Jin-Ho didn’t squeak a word out right until he ended up in such a pathetic, wretched state. The longer Yu Jin-Ho kept his mouth shut, the stronger Hwang Dong-Su’s convictions became, though.

All he wanted to hear was one thing.

[“Seong Jin-Woo killed your brother.”]

If he could just hear that one sentence, he’d no longer have any business with Yu Jin-Ho. But then, with what balls was a punk with a small physique and a naive-looking face keeping his mouth shut against a rank S Hunter? His courage alone was worth praising him for.

‘Of course, his foolhardiness won’t get him off the hook here.’

Hwang Dong-Su lightly kicked the waist of Yu Jin-Ho’s heavily-wounded-

all-over body.

“Oii. Wake up.”

Would this be the fourth time the kid fainted and was woken back up again? Hwang Dong-Su’s irritation grew somewhat at Yu Jin-Ho’s tenacious endurance and his kick became a little more vicious than before.

“I said, get the hell up!”

Pow!

“Keo-heok!”

Yu Jin-Ho curled up on the floor as he spat out the pooled blood in his mouth. The third man of Hwang Dong-Su’s group began cackling out.

“Still, this kid’s supposed to be a tanker, wasn’t he? He sure can withstand some punishment, can’t he? A regular person would’ve died by now.”

Hwang Dong-Su’s face now reflected no emotion whatsoever as he grabbed the back of Yu Jin-Ho’s head to yank it up.

“Listen here. I don’t want to kill you. You see this guy over here laughing his a*s off? Let me tell you, he’s a Healer with some considerable skill. He’ll bring you back just before you are about to die.”

Yu Jin-Ho’s blurry gaze was directed to the cackling man, and the Hunter grinned brightly and wagged his finger around as if to greet the kid.

Hwang Dong-Su’s viciously moved his hand.

“Keo-heok!”

Yu Jin-Ho’s head, still grabbed by that hand, also had to viciously swing to the side. He now could see the dust-filled interior of a decrepit building. Hwang Dong-Su continued on.

“This here is a factory that closed down over five years ago. You can scream all you want, but no one’s gonna hear you.”

After grabbing and fixing Yu Jin-Ho’s head in the place, Hwang Dong-Su brought his own face right up against the kid’s nose. Their locked gazes grew closer and closer.

“Which means, you will suffer from intense pain forever. That is, until you tell me what I want to hear.”

When they got close enough for their noses to touch, Hwang Dong-Su formed a toothy grin.

“So, how about it? Do you feel like talking now?”

“...”

Yu Jin-Ho’s busted lips bobbed up and down but his voice was too small and even Hwang Dong-Su couldn’t hear it.

“What did you say?”

“....”

Hwang Dong-Su tilted his head slightly in confusion and brought his ear near the kid. When the ear was only a few millimetres away from his lips, Yu Jin-Ho whispered softly.

“.....F*ck off.”

Hwang Dong-Su’s expression crumpled instantly.

Ka-boom!

He slammed the side of Yu Jin-Ho’s head on the ground and panted like an angry bull.

“Oii! Did you just kill him?”

The Healer’s brows shot up and he quickly checked for Yu Jin-Ho’s pulse.

“Whew-woo.”

After confirming that the kid’s heart was still beating, the Healer spat out a sigh of relief. Still, there was no doubt that this young and weak Hunter’s life would’ve been cut short if Hwang Dong-Su had used a little more of his strength.

“Mister Hwang, be more careful, will ya? I don’t want to become an accomplice to a murderer just because of money, alright?”

“...I’ll be more careful.”

Hwang Dong-Su acknowledged his mistake.

Was it because of the precariousness of the situation? The man who couldn’t hide his worries from the get-go decided to persuade Hwang Dong-Su.

“Let’s just call it a day and move on. Haven’t you found out all you can by now?”

“What are you talking about? We’re only getting started.”

The corners of Hwang Dong-Su’s lips arched to form a sinister smile. His vicious, cruel nature was pretty much the carbon-copy of his older brother.

The man knew he failed to change Hwang Dong-Su's mind. Still feeling worried and anxious, he continued to scan his surroundings. And it happened at that moment. He discovered something standing over on the other side of the disused factory.

What could it be?

The man's eyes narrowed to a slit.

And then...

"Uh? Huh, uh??"

He became surprised by his discovery and pointed in that direction. Hwang Dong-Su and the Healer both raised their heads to take a look. There it was, a High Orc kitted out in black armour standing over yonder.

"...An Orc?"

Hwang Dong-Su stood up. The Healer checking Yu Jin-Ho's condition also got up from the ground.

"Is there a dungeon break happening nearby?"

Hwang Dong-Su shook his head. If that was the case, their surroundings should've become a pandemonium by now.

He extended out his sensory perception just in case and searched for other presence in the vicinity, but he couldn't sense any other monsters at all. This High Orc was all alone.

"Now that's pretty bizarre."

That wasn't the only bizarre thing, though.

The High Orc was actually shivering.

As a matter of fact, its facial expression contained terror. It looked as if the creature was barely holding back tears threatening to burst out at any moment. And all four of its limbs were quivering from pure fright, too.

"Mister Hwang. I think that thing is terrified of you."

"...I don't have time to fool around like this."

White rays of light began coagulating on Hwang Dong-Su's clenched fist. He didn't know where this Orc came from, but now that he had discovered it, of course, he wouldn't let it just walk away.

Hwang Dong-Su strode right up to the Orc and raised his fist so he could blow the monster's head clean off. Before he could do that, though...

....The heavy voice of a man suddenly called out from somewhere.



Chapter 190 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The TV in the living room was showing the scenes of yet another accident that took place within a dungeon. Those seemed to happen frequently nowadays.

Although no events that could be called truly enormous happened so far, the number of Hunters dying during the raids was on the rise lately, according to the news broadcast.

“I wonder, will my boy be okay?”

His mother, watching the news, recalled Jin-Woo and whispered to herself in a worried voice.

Didn't matter how excellent a Hunter her son was, there was no helping with a mother worrying about her child's safety.

Beru, hiding within the shadows to protect this home as per Jin-Woo's instruction, heard her whispers.

‘Oh, the mother of my king. If my liege meets with an accident that even he can't survive, then no one in this world can.’

Beru did his best to suppress the words trying to jump out of his mouth. Obviously, he couldn't surprise the mother of his liege needlessly, now could he? As his reward, he'd have to suffer in silent frustration all by himself.

He also found the liege's mother, currently equating his liege against those low-class monsters shown on the TV screen, rather cruel and unkind for doing that. However, he roused up a super-human level of endurance and suppressed his desire to preach the incomparable might of his dear liege to her.

[up. We bring you the news on the conference organised by America's Hunter Bureau....]

The scene shown on TV changed yet again to that of a certain American airport as the news related to the International Guild Conference played out. And then, Jin-Woo appeared on the screen as he stepped foot into the airport.

She saw her son walking forward as he was swarmed by the constant explosions of camera flashes. The worried look on her face was soon replaced by a contented smile.

“Jin-Ah? Your brother’s on TV.”

“Really?”

Jin-Ah abandoned her studies and quickly trotted out of her room. This wouldn’t be the first time, but regardless, seeing her oppa on the TV screen remained a mystifying and welcoming viewing experience to her, even now.

But the thing was – both Jin-Ah and her mom had no idea.

They simply had no idea that there was someone very close, cheering on even more passionately than they did while watching the TV screen.

‘Oh, my king....!’

Beru’s deeply-moved eyes were firmly fixed on the screen as he watched the clip being played out.

But then, a powerful chill began invading his body out of the blue. Literally, without warning, his body hidden in the shadows began trembling non-stop.

This sensation, hadn’t he felt something similar to this in the past?

When was that?

Beru combed through his memories and finally recalled that moment. Back then, right when the king’s gaze filled with killing intent was looking down on him. It was at that moment.

A feeling of death that could not be avoided. The warning bells rang out loudly via his instincts after detecting the unmistakable stench of death.

The king’s rage he felt for the first time since becoming his Shadow Soldier was so great that Beru’s entire thought process froze up. However, he was still his king’s loyal soldier!

He regained his wits quite quickly.

‘....My king has been truly enraged.’

Now that he realised something had happened to his king, he couldn’t just sit around quivering in fear like this. Beru quickly sent a signal to Jin-Woo and tried to engage him conversation.

‘Oh, my king. Please compose yourself. I shall get to your side immediately.’

The response arrived immediately.

[You.... Don’t make a move.]

Beru heard the king's voice which sounded like unchecked rage being compressed into a volatile mass. He could only tremble like a leaf against stormy winds.

'I shall obey.'

He could only say that he'd submit to the command, that was all. But at the same time, he became also curious about the moron who managed to earn his king's wrath.

'Why would anyone do something so reckless and ill-advised....'

To numb the fear, even if only by a little, Beru hid his still-trembling body ever deeper into the shadow.

In the city of Busan.

The Knight Order Guild was in the middle of preparing for a raid.

The Master of the Guild, Park Jong-Su, was confirming the raid party members and their current conditions one last time, as the will to make this raid a success burned fiercely within his heart.

"There's been a lot of accidents happening in dungeons lately. So, everyone – keep your wits about you at all times! Let's make sure that not a single person gets injured today!"

"Yes, sir!"

The Guild members had become rather docile after experiencing a raid together with Jin-Woo's summoned creatures. And now, they even sounded properly disciplined, as well.

It was at that moment something strange happened.

The Vice-Master of the Guild, Jeong Yun-Tae, was standing behind Park Jong-Su to nod his head and provide suitable reactions to his boss's words. But, he discovered something and his eyes nearly popped out of his sockets.

"Heok?!"

Park Jong-Su hurriedly looked behind him.

"What?! What happened?"

Jeong Yun-Tae pointed to the ground and alternated his gaze between Park Jong-Su and the shadow beneath his boss's feet.

"H-hyung-nim!! Your, your shadow! The shadow on the ground was vibrating...."

Jeong Yun-Tae discovered that Park Jong-Su was glaring at him with narrowed eyes and stopped talking right there and then.

“Hey, Yun-Tae? How many times have I told you not to touch booze before a raid?”

“N-no, hyung-nim! I haven’t had a drop of the stuff today! But your shadow, it really did vibrate! Like it was alive!”

Park Jong-Su stared at Jeong Yun-Tae with criticising eyes and spat out a long groan.

“This won’t do. Take a day off today.”

“Hyung-nim! I’m telling you the truth!”

“Okay, everyone! Time to go inside. The Knight Order Guild, let’s do our best today, too! Fighting!”

“Ahh! B-but, hyung-nim...!”

Just as Jeong Yun-Tae’s voice that protested his innocence resounded in the air...

Unbelievable sightings of shadows trembling streamed in from all the spots where Jin-Woo had left behind his Shadow Soldiers. Shadows trembled noticeably as if they didn’t care for the presence of witnesses or not.

But then again, the Shadow Soldiers had no choice but to shiver from the emotion of pure rage their lord was feeling at that moment.

The High Orc soldier disappeared, only to be replaced by Jin-Woo.

‘...!!’

Hwang Dong-Su’s group froze up like a mouse confronted by a snake the moment this unexpected intruder entered the stage completely unannounced. Especially for Hwang Dong-Su himself, he nearly even forgot to breathe after recognising Jin-Woo’s face.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo simply strode past the stunned rank S Hunter, as if the latter didn’t even exist, and stopped before Yu Jin-Ho. No one said anything, yet the two Americans standing near the unconscious kid quickly stepped back at the same time, as if they agreed to do so beforehand.

After summoning out a healing potion, Jin-Woo began easing a little bit of liquid down into Yu Jin-Ho’s mouth.

Unfortunately...

[When the remaining HP is less than 10%, it is impossible to recover HP with healing potions.]

...The message saying it was impossible to heal the kid's wounds popped up in his view along with the familiar 'Tti-ring'.

Crack.

The empty vial of healing potion shattered in Jin-Woo's hand.

The 'Divine Water of Life' was meant to heal diseases and illnesses. It couldn't help in matters of physical injuries like this. It was the same principle of healing magic not being able to cure illnesses.

'I need healing magic.'

Too bad, the only Shadow Soldier capable of using healing magic, Beru, was currently back in Korea house-sitting. Even if Jin-Woo recalled him now, who knows just how long he'd take to get here...

...It was around this time that Hwang Dong-Su finally regained his wits and tried to engage Jin-Woo in conversation.

"You... You, what the hell? That Orc, just now... What the hell did you do?"

Jin-Woo didn't respond to that and simply asked the two men before him, instead.

"Is either one of you a Healer?"

Hearing the word 'Healer', the Healer-type Hunter ended up reflexively nodding his head. Jin-Woo pointed to Yu Jin-Ho.

"Heal him. Now."

The Healer's gaze shifted over to Hwang Dong-Su. The latter shook his head. Jin-Woo carefully lowered Yu Jin-Ho's upper torso back down and stood up.

"Final warning. Heal him."

The Healer's gaze shifted back to Hwang Dong-Su again, but the answer remained the same. So, the Healer stared straight at Jin-Woo and the corners of his lips arched up.

"You see, dude, you should talk to the boss first before..."

He didn't get to finish his sentence.

Ka-boom!!

Just like how Hwang Dong-Su had done to Yu Jin-Ho, Jin-Woo slammed the Healer's head on the ground. It happened so fast that no one saw his movements.

Hwang Dong-Su might have been a rank S himself, but he simply failed to even sense Jin-Woo's attack and only belatedly discovered the Healer lying face down on the ground.

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze to the second of the Americans.

“Are you a Healer?”

This man finally confirmed the face of Jin-Woo walking closer to him and his jaw began trembling in shock.

“S-Seong Jin-Woo?! Hunter Seong Jin-Woo??”

He back-pedalled in panic and began glaring at Hwang Dong-Su before shouting out.

“Mister Hwang Dong-Su! You promised that this matter had nothing to do with Seong Jin-Woo! What the f*ck is this?! Ah?? What is this sh*t?!”

“I asked you if you are a Healer or not.”

“N-no, I, I'm not. I'm just....”

His answer was also abruptly cut off there.

Ka-boom!

Struck by an unseen hand, the man's head crashed to the ground like his friend's before him. In the blink of an eye, two high-ranked Hunters had lost their consciousness.

Finally getting to witness Jin-Woo's real strength with his own two eyes, Hwang Dong-Su felt his heart pounding away like crazy.

It was then.

“H-hyung-nim...”

Perhaps because the ground rumbled loudly twice in a row? Yu Jin-Ho had regained his consciousness somehow.

“Hyung.... nim....”

Jin-Woo lowered his body and listened closely to the kid's voice.

“Hey, Jin-Ho. I'm here.”

Yu Jin-Ho managed to crack open his swollen eyelids. He barely managed to move the muscles on his bloodied and messed-up face, his words clearly

being formed with great difficulty.

“Hwang Dong-Su... little brother... Hwang Dong-Seok.... Be careful...”

Jin-Woo looked at Yu Jin-Ho breathing weakly with a helpless expression before stopping the kid’s words.

“Shh. It’s fine. Don’t speak anymore.”

“Hyung-nim....”

Yu Jin-Ho grabbed Jin-Woo’s hand as tears pooled on the edges of his eyes.

Jin-Woo quietly asked.

“Can you hold on for a little longer?”

Nod, nod.

It became harder to speak so Yu Jin-Ho made do with a nod to answer the question.

Jin-Woo carefully let go of his dongsaeng’s hand and slowly got back up to his feet, before shifting his gaze back over to Hwang Dong-Su.

However, Hwang Dong-Su didn’t back down and shot a glare right back. His legs were weakly trembling from the pressure of Jin-Woo’s murderous eyes, but he was not someone who’d cower and run away.

In the meantime, Jin-Woo’s coldly-flickering eyes were getting closer and closer. Hwang Dong-Su did his best to look unruffled and raised his voice.

“It was you, wasn’t it? You killed my older brother, Hwang Dong-Seok. Am I right?”

Hwang Dong-Su’s scared face grew closer with every step taken. And then, a certain someone’s face who enjoyed being strong against the weak, but remained weak against someone stronger, overlapped with his face in Jin-Woo’s view.

That caused his glare to become even colder.

Meanwhile, Hwang Dong-Su cried out.

“Answer me!! Seong Jin-Woo, didn’t you murder my brother and his team?!”

Jin-Woo stopped right in front of Hwang Dong-Su’s nose and replied.

“Ask him after you meet him again.”

Grit.

Hwang Dong-Su punched with his fist wrapped in bright light. He was

aiming for Jin-Woo's face. Unfortunately for him, the latter simply ducked lower to evade that and shoved his own fist deep into the former's stomach.

"Keo-Heok!"

Just one hit and Hwang Dong-Su vomited out a mouthful of blood.

"Stop the car!"

"Sir?"

"I said, stop the d*mn car!"

Thomas Andre roared out and the car he was riding in came to a sudden halt. As the vehicle in front carrying their Guild Master came to an abrupt halt, the chasing cars ferrying the Guild members all hurriedly came to a stop as well.

Screech, screech....

Loud noises resounded out from everywhere. Completely disregarding that...

Boom!

...Thomas Andre kicked the car's door away and climbed out in a hurry so he could glare in a certain direction. His expression crumpled into a vicious scowl.

"D*mn it..."

The elites of the Scavenger Guild, often referred to as the world's best, jumped out from all the halted vehicles.

"Master, what is it?"

"Did something happen?"

Thomas Andre answered briefly to all the hurried questions from the Guild members.

"It has already begun. I'll go ahead, so hurry and follow after me."

"Sir??"

What had already begun?

Before anyone could ask him for an explanation, though, Thomas Andre bent his knees. The muscles on his legs expanded powerfully and the asphalt on the ground began melting down. Other Hunters naturally took two, three steps away from him.

Ka-boom!!

Thomas Andre exploded up from the ground and in an instant, disappeared from their view.

‘Something is.... coming.’

Something strong, that was.

Just as Thomas Andre had sensed Jin-Woo’s powers, the latter also sensed the former’s presence. So, he stopped moving his punching hand.

His other hand was still grabbing onto the collar of Hwang Dong-Su, who now was suffering from just as many grievous wounds as Yu Jin-Ho.

Ka-boom!

A part of the disused factory’s ceiling caved in and through the open gap, one of the four remaining Special Authority-rank Hunters in the world, Thomas Andre, flew in and landed on the ground.

Since he knew that a guest was arriving anyway, Jin-Woo wasn’t surprised in the slightest as he calmly took a look at the landing zone.

Thomas Andre stood up straight and quickly confirmed the situation.

He first saw Yu Jin-Ho, then Jin-Woo, and finally, the end of Jin-Woo’s hand. His gaze moved in that order, until stopping at Hwang Dong-Su.

Right away, Thomas Andre’s forehead creased up. Jin-Woo’s incredible magical energy emission had completely masked Hwang Dong-Su’s presence and he couldn’t initially sense it.

Thomas Andre took off and discarded his sunglasses.

“Hwang Dong-Su... Is he still alive?”

“For now.”

Thomas Andre resorted to using simple English and enunciated each word loudly so that Jin-Woo, someone who might be not familiar with the language, could hear him clearly.

“Let him go. If you do that, we’ll forget that today’s event had ever happened. I’m asking you for a favour.”

Jin-Woo strengthened his grip on Hwang Dong-Su’s collar and asked.

“What if I don’t want to?”

“Then, well. A favour won’t be a favour anymore.”

One of the most powerful Hunters in the world bared his fangs.

A regular Hunter would start p*ssing their pants right about now. However, Jin-Woo's own aura didn't lose out to Thomas Andre's.

“Come, then.”



Chapter 191 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Thomas Andre's brows quivered slightly.

If some insignificant Hunter said that to him, he'd have ripped that fool into tiny bits and shreds immediately.

After all, the United States government wouldn't be able to prosecute him, a Special Authority-rank Hunter, that easily. He was someone possessing rights equal to that of a country.

As the reward for rescuing 300 million American lives from the worst calamity in human history, Thomas Andre got to wield absolute power. This power allowed him to do whatever he pleased.

However, even if that was the case, he couldn't immediately make his move. Because his opponent this time was none other than 'Seong Jin-Woo'.

Thomas Andre couldn't completely suppress his temper and his hands moved for a blink of an eye. He managed to reel himself back in, though. He glared at Hwang Dong-Su and gritted his teeth.

'And I told him not to provoke that man....'

As expected, Seong Jin-Woo was not an easy opponent to face. Seeing him personally confirmed this fact. If Thomas Andre had to describe this feeling into words, then it was like trying to step into a quagmire.

Dark and ominous magical energy oozed out from Seong Jin-Woo's entire body, and Thomas Andre felt as if he'd not be able to escape once he took a wrong step forward here.

Unfortunately, even he could not back away now. An ace Hunter of the Scavenger Guild was currently being manhandled by that man, and most importantly, his pride as a Special Authority-rank Hunter was at stake, too.

With his expression viciously crumpled, Thomas Andre threw out a question.

"...You, by any chance, don't you know who I am?"

Jin-Woo curtly responded.

"Doesn't matter who you are."

It was then – Hwang Dong-Su somehow regained his consciousness and shouted out after discovering Thomas Andre.

“Master! Kill this son of a b*tch! Hurry!”

Boom!

Jin-Woo’s fist struck Hwang Dong-Su, causing the man to black out and go limp again. Meanwhile, veins bulged on Thomas Andre’s forehead.

“You dare....”

‘...You know who I am, yet you dare to do something like that in my presence?’

His expression was already crumpled into something unsightly before, but now, it distorted even more to resemble a devil’s face.

Through personal experience, his body knew how one should deal with an opponent who didn’t want to submit.

‘White trash; a low-class white man.’

Thomas Andre grew up in a poor immigrant family.

The school located in the poorest ghetto filled with African youths proved to be a hostile place for a lone white kid who knew no one and had no friends or acquaintances.

Everywhere was filled with enemies. Just from meeting eyes did the fights break out. And often, his opponents carried around dangerous weapons, too. The moments when he had to fight off multiple enemies happened frequently, as well.

However, the heavens saw fit to bestow a certain gift that could only be described as unprecedented unto this white kid who seemingly possessed nothing.

The overwhelming talent for physical power – the power that allowed him to trample on others!

Paradoxically, the boy’s surroundings became just about a perfect playground for him to confirm his own talents. Through the endless, continuous fights, the boy got to confirm the heaven-gifted talent he possessed.

He clearly witnessed how his powers would change all those holding hostile feeling towards him. And so, he reigned like a king.

Power – the authoritative power, financial power, and physical power. He got to learn quite early on that the many types of power existing in this world

could turn a man into either a king or a slave.

And when a completely different type of ‘power’ manifested into this world, he grasped the opportunity and ascended to the status of a true king.

If an opponent was unwilling to listen, then he’d use power to make them submit. Someone blocking his path would be destroyed without mercy.

And he’d make all those looking down on him kneel on the ground, defeated. Physical power was the truth!

Thomas Andre stayed true to what he knew, to what he was familiar with.

Time seemed to freeze up. Thomas Andre, now full of malice and a destructive desire, pounced forward. The distance between the two men disappeared in an instant.

His eyes met Jin-Woo’s, as they closed in enough for their noses to touch.

‘Blame your own ignorance!’

Thomas Andre reached out with his hand. He was planning to grab Jin-Woo’s head.

His incomprehensible gripping power was one of his many hidden talents. Even if his opponent happened to be a top-ranked Hunter, he’d easily shatter that person’s skull.

Now that the fool was within his attacking range, victory was as good as his. The corners of Thomas Andre’s lips curled up.

Too bad, though...

‘Wha....?!’

In that instant, there was a flash of light before his eyes.

With fortunate timing, the Hunters of the Scavenger Guild arrived at the location. And they all got to witness something peculiar. They got to witness ‘something’ breaking past a wall of the disused factory at an alarming speed.

Boooom-!!

That ‘something’ destroyed the wall and crash-landed on the ground. Even then, it continued to slide away for a long, long time.

Chuwuuuuk...

And when that ‘something’ finally stopped sliding right before their eyes, the Hunters recognised its identity and couldn’t hide their extreme astonishment from exploding out. No one could tell who cried out first.

“Thomas Andre?!”

“Master, are you alright?!”

Just who managed to blow away the Goliath like this?

They simply couldn't believe it.

The force of the impact was so great that hot steam was still rising up from Thomas Andre's entire body.

But then again, the skin on a regular person would've been torn to shreds as he slid on the ground like that. No, before that, his body would've broken into many pieces after slamming into the wall, instead.

However, Thomas Andre was perfectly fine. Should one say, as befitting of a tanker who managed to survive Kamish's Breath with nothing but his bare body?

It was just that the expression he was making as he stood back up was not perfectly fine at all. His face hardened like a surface of a boulder as he stood up. He then took a sweeping look at his Hunters.

Even though they were on the same side, these Hunters paled instantly after being subjected to the murderous glare of a Special Authority-rank Hunter.

“.....”

Without saying anything else, Thomas Andre walked back into the abandoned factory he flew out from. A dizzying amount of killing intent erupted out from his entire body.

Step, step.

The Vice-Master staring at that sight in a daze hurriedly regained his wits and urged the Guild's Hunters.

“What are you all doing? Get a move on, now!”

One hundred or so top-ranked Hunters all rushed into the abandoned factory at once.

After blowing Thomas Andre away, Jin-Woo clenched his fist tighter.

Just a second later, and Yu Jin-Ho's life would have been in grave danger. It felt like his blood would boil over when he saw Hwang Dong-Su slamming the kid's head to the floor through the eyes of the High Orc soldier.

But, that man wanted what now?

He'd pretend that none of this happened if Hwang Dong-Su was released? What a stupid suggestion that was.

Jin-Woo pushed himself to the absolute limit and continued to grow further and further so he'd not get pushed around by powerful beings. So, such a dumb demand wasn't even worth his time to consider.

But then, the response from Thomas Andre was an attack filled to the brim with the intent to kill.

This battle was far from over.

Thomas Andre might have been flung away to a far off distance, but he made his way back with an even stronger intent to kill than before. Jin-Woo discarded the still-unconscious Hwang Dong-Su to a corner of the factory. And then, summoned Kaisal and Igrit out.

Shururuk...

A black Sky Dragon and a black knight revealed themselves. Jin-Woo carefully lifted up Yu Jin-Ho and handed the kid over to Igrit.

“Take Jin-Ho to the nearest hospital. Make sure he gets the necessary treatment. Got it?”

Igrit bowed to display his understanding and jumped on the back of Kaisal to fly out of the factory.

Kii-ahk!

Thomas Andre didn't give a d*mn about the escaping Sky Dragon. No, his glare was firmly locked on Jin-Woo and Jin-Woo alone. Likewise, Jin-Woo's glare was redirected to the American, as well.

And he got to see the crumpled expression of Thomas Andre and top-ranked Hunters rushing inside beyond his shoulders. Their number was around one hundred.

It seemed that this guy mobilised and brought along all the elites of the Scavenger Guild, often referred to as the best Guild in the world.

The thing was, though....

‘...If you want to compare the number of soldiers, then I too have more than enough.’

Jin-Woo immediately called out his Shadow Soldiers hiding within his shadow and waiting for his commands. The darkness slowly spread out from beneath his feet, and one by one, the Shadow Soldiers rose up from the ground.

Thomas Andre's steps came to a halt after he discovered all those soldiers. The number was somewhere near one thousand. The abandoned factory was

completely filled up in an instant, but even then, the columns of soldiers extended well beyond to the back as well.

Thomas Andre narrowed his eyes.

‘It’s not just the incredible numbers, either.’

He even spotted several summoned creatures that were easily on a similar level as rank S Hunters. Such as the knight holding a massive shield, or the Mage wearing a black robe, and even those Giants occupying the backline, too.

Their magical energy emission didn’t lose out to some of the highest-ranked Hunters out there.

Indeed, these were truly excellent summoned creatures that even the entirety of the Scavenger Guild participating could not guarantee a victory against.

Shiver, shiver....

Seeing Seong Jin-Woo’s common sense-breaking summons in the flesh, Thomas Andre felt this powerful shudder run up through his entire body. At the same time, he was feeling genuinely happy.

‘That’s right.’

Wouldn’t he truly get to enjoy the fight now that the level of his opponent was this high?

A smile broke out on Thomas Andre’s face as he licked his lips. That fool Hwang Dong-Su no longer mattered in this fight.

There was only one way to restore his damaged pride. And that would be to...

‘...Kill that impudent b*stard....’

But, before he did that, Thomas Andre made his final offer of mercy.

“If you admit to your mistakes and back off, I promise I’ll spare your life.”

Instead of a verbal answer, Jin-Woo simply flipped him a bird.

“.....”

Thick veins bulged all over on Thomas Andre’s forehead.

“You f*cker, right until the end....”

Riiip!

Thomas Andre ripped his shirt off – a shirt made out of top-class material extracted from the monsters was ripped into pieces like a sheet of cheap paper.

And then....

Wududuk-!

Wuduk!

The muscles in his entire torso ballooned up and hardened like armour covering his whole body. Magic energy so vast that it raised goosebumps from the people nearby leaked out from beneath his feet. It was so vast and powerful, in fact, it looked as if gold-coloured steam was slowly rising up from his shoulders.

The world's greatest Tanker had released his full might once more.

Jin-Woo wordlessly watched Thomas Andre's transformation before unleashing his own magical energy as well.

Shuwahaahk-!!

The magic energy emitted from two monsters occupying wholly different realms forced the surrounding elite Hunters to hold their breaths.

'Heok!'

'I was wondering just who it was that blew away the Goliath, but now....'

Their gazes were directed to one location – to Seong Jin-Woo.

For sure, that feat sounded plausible if it was Seong Jin-Woo, who managed to hunt down all those Giant monsters in Japan.

The Hunters of the Scavenger Guild nervously swallowed their saliva as they stared at Jin-Woo.

Unlike them and their heightened state of tension, though, Jin-Woo was completely calm and collected. He felt that this was the perfect opportunity to test out his growth up until now. He was now facing an opponent that he could definitely go all out against.

Abruptly, Jin-Woo recalled what Kamish the Dragon had told him.

'There are four people borrowing the Rulers' powers, right?'

Could it be that those four were among the five survivors of the Kamish raid – the four of the Special Authority-rank Hunters?

If that was true, then the odds of Thomas Andre being a human borrowing the Rulers' powers were very high.

Jin-Woo made the first move.

“Advance.”

Almost immediately after their Sovereign issued that command, the Shadow Soldiers rushed forward with rather scary vigour.

Thomas Andre also cried out loudly.

“They are coming!”

One man versus one Guild; nearly one thousand ‘summons’ and almost one hundred elite Hunters collided violently on this day.

Boom-!!

Thomas Andre blew away Iron standing at the front of the pack and quickly searched for Jin-Woo’s whereabouts as a bright glare shot out from his eyes.

He spotted someone rushing towards him at an incredible pace.

‘Over there-!!’

Thomas Andre turned around, but Jin-Woo was faster. The latter dug into the former’s defence in an instant and stabbed at the waist with the ‘Demon King’s Shortsword’.

Unfortunately, the blade failed to break past the hardened skin of Thomas Andre.

‘...!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened.

Pow!

The American blew his opponent away with his elbow as a smirk formed on his face.

This was the true power of the Special Authority-rank Hunter. Jin-Woo might possess a pretty decent turn of speed, but there was no way he’d be able to exceed Thomas Andre’s defences.

‘Feel my power and taste what true despair is like!’

Thomas Andre judged that the advantage was now with him. He didn’t stop his attacks there and reached out with his hand.

Wuuonng-!

When he did, a powerful pulling force was generated from his hand and quickly reeled back the flung-away Jin-Woo.

The ‘invisible hand’.

This was Thomas Andre's ability that managed to drag Kamish the Dragon from the air to the ground.

Jin-Woo was brought back closer to Thomas Andre at a frightening turn of speed, but then, his eyes shot open again.

'Ruler's Authority!'

Koo-woong!

Thomas Andre's shoulders quivered from the unseen force slamming down from above.

'What?!'

He was left utterly stunned after confirming with his entire body that his opponent also possessed the power only the Special Authority-rank Hunters possessed.

Jin-Woo didn't miss that opening; his punch slammed into Thomas Andre's face for the second time today.

Ka-boom!!

And for the first time ever after becoming a Hunter, the man nicknamed Goliath spat out blood from his mouth.

"Keo-heok!!"

The Hunter Bureau wasn't sitting back sucking on its fingers either. Dozens of vehicles belonging to the Bureau carrying Hunters were on their way to the same destination as the members of the Scavenger Guild.

However, the two cars right in front of the pack suddenly came to a halt not too far from their destination.

The deeply-anxious Adam White had been watching the passing scenery and was caught unprepared from the sudden stop.

"Wha-what is going on?"

The vehicle's driver looked back at Adam White. He was the sole rank S Hunter affiliated with the Hunter Bureau.

"Agent White. I think it's time you explained to us what's going on here."

"We don't have time for me to explain everything in...."

Adam White couldn't finish his sentence.

Because he saw the complexion of the rank S Hunter growing pale rather quickly at that moment. It was the first time seeing such an expression

forming on the face of a man who famously possessed a steely heart, formed after experiencing all sorts of close shaves in his life.

Realising that something quite serious had happened, Adam White quickly asked.

“Did... something happen up ahead?”

The rank S Hunter replied with a frozen-stiff face.

“If we continue on, all of us will have to risk our lives.”



Chapter 192 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The corners of his lips bust open from that hit.

While being forced away from the impact, Thomas Andre was reeling from the shock of the freakish power that smacked him in the face.

‘How could... how could such a power be...?!’

That punch was heavy enough for his head to shake around. But, that wasn't all.

That man also possessed the ability to apply physical power with nothing but his thoughts. Even then, he didn't resist against the pulling force and willingly got himself dragged in.

Who'd have thought of such a thing?

Unexpectedly, not only did he not use his version of the 'invisible hand' to resist the pull, he instead used it as a distraction to divert the attention of his opponent, and then threw the real attack that couldn't be easily avoided.

The acceleration from the pull became the double-edged blade cutting into the one activating the ability and ended up causing even bigger damage. Now that was a shockingly well-tuned instinct for battle.

‘Just how many fights did he go through to even come up with a tactic like that?’

Thomas Andre had been looking down on Jin-Woo as some random kid even though he willingly acknowledged the Korean's powers. But now, having been struck twice in the face, his thoughts had gone through a rapid change.

Thomas Andre stopped bouncing away and landed back on his feet.

Kwa-jeeeeeek, kwa-jeek!!

The friction destroyed the cement floor below and threw up pieces of broken-off pebble and a dust cloud into the air.

As expected, Jin-Woo didn't give the American time to recover and dashed towards him. That was the sight of an experienced hunter. It seemed as if he had aimed for that moment before his target had regained the balance. However, his prey was the quicker of the two to react this time.

Thomas Andre discarded all arrogant thoughts from his head. He also realised that he might lose today if he continued to fight while being considerate towards his surroundings.

His opponent this time was far, far tougher than his initial expectation.

“Reinforcement.”

When he muttered out those words, his body, armed with muscles that had transformed into solid armour, suddenly ballooned up explosively.

Shu-wahck!

His near two-metre-tall physique transformed into a monster over three metres tall in the blink of an eye.

“Uwaaaaah-!!”

Thomas Andre roared out like an angry beast and raised both of his arms, now as thick as a marble pillar, high above his head. All of this happened way too fast!

‘.....!’

Jin-Woo, in the middle of his sprint, sensed danger up ahead.

‘What could it be?’

His brain fell into a dilemma. The thing was, not once did his instincts lie to him in moments of great peril. Jin-Woo hurriedly stopped his forward movement and almost at the same time, jumped backwards.

With the difference of a millisecond, Thomas Andre’s massive fists pounded on the ground below.

Kwa-kwang!!

Everything caught within the radius disintegrated from the horrifying shock wave.

His skill, ‘Demolition’.

That incredible might forced Jin-Woo to take several more steps backwards, even though he had already escaped to a safe zone.

Tumble....

Debris flung up into the air fell down like raindrops.

As befitting a Hunter who subjugated a Dragon, his sturdiness and destructive power were second to none. But, there was no time to remain stunned. Another loud roar exploded out from Thomas Andre’s mouth.

“Capture!”

A powerful gravitational pulling force with Thomas Andre as the centre began yanking everything within the range towards him. It was as if he had become a black hole. Shadow Soldiers and Hunters all got into a messy tangle and flew towards his position.

Jin-Woo might have been one of the targets of this skill, ‘Capture’, but he used ‘Ruler’s Authority’ to repel away the pulling force.

And when he finally managed to break free from that powerful force and jumped rearward one more time....

....Thomas Andre’s ‘Demolition’ skill burst forth yet again.

KWA-JEECK!!

Not just the Shadow Soldiers, but even the Hunters of the Scavenger got swept away by the shock wave.

“Uwaahk!!”

“Euh, euh....”

Screams rose up from here and there.

The Vice-Master had discovered this horrifying situation rather late and yelled out at the top of his lungs.

“Get away from the Master! Now!!”

Three, four fleet-footed Hunters quickly retrieved their injured colleagues and escaped to the back. Meanwhile, Thomas Andre and his emotionless face viciously dashed towards Jin-Woo’s location.

A rank of ‘Special Authority’ implied one was afforded the same level of rights as an independent nation. That was why he needed to demonstrate what the punishment for disobeying the king was like.

Thomas Andre arrived in Jin-Woo’s location in no time at all and threw a powerful punch forward.

Vuuuowoong-!!

His fist scythed the air.

He already knew it all too well.

He knew better than anyone that he was too slow to land a punch on this b*stard possessing the nimbleness of a wild beast. Especially so, when he was in his reinforced state.

His strength and defence would be enhanced to an unimaginable degree, but at the same time, his speed would drop proportionally. Fortunately enough for Thomas Andre, though, he possessed a skill that could easily cover for that drawback.

He extended his hand out to Jin-Woo who was rapidly creating distance between them.

'Capture!'

Once more, a powerful, incredibly attractive force activated between the two men. The American knew he'd not miss his prey now.

With his body fortified through the 'Reinforcement' skill, his attention wouldn't be stolen away from some measly diversionary tricks.

As expected, Seong Jin-Woo was yanked back in with ease.

Leaving his extended left hand as it was, Thomas Andre pulled his right hand back and clenched it into a tight fist. An enormous amount of magical energy, enough to smash the torso of a top-ranked Hunter apart into a gory mess, gathered into his right fist.

Skill, 'Power Smash'.

Thomas Andre's fist, carrying a gob-smacking level of destructive power, slowly moved forward. But then, it happened.

'.....??'

His eyes opened wider. He saw Jin-Woo's own right arm muscles suddenly expanding greatly in size.

'Could he be... thinking of directly confronting me?'

Finding this incredulous, Thomas Andre increased the pulling power. However, Jin-Woo didn't try to evade it but actually used his 'Ruler's Authority' to further increase his momentum, instead.

The American cried out in shock.

"D*mn it!"

Jin-Woo approached far quicker than Thomas Andre had anticipated and threw a punch a little quicker than his counterpart could. At the same time, he lowered his head and lightly evaded the American's own belated punch.

Kwa-boom!!

Thomas Andre saw a flash of light before his eyes and finally realised it.

'The first attack he hit me with was....'

The attack he failed to see back then was precisely this one.

BOOM!!

Thomas Andre flew away like a rocket, demolished the wall of the disused factory and rolled around on the dirt for quite some time. The deep and lengthy pit left behind on the ground by his sliding body resembled furrows on a field.

“Keu-heuk.”

He hurriedly pushed himself off the ground, but Jin-Woo was already standing before him by then. Thomas Andre roared out and threw countless punches.

“Uwaaaah!!”

Every time his fists flew past, the ground exploded and the air was split seemingly into pieces. Each hit was ferocious enough to utterly destroy a person’s body from just a light touch.

Unfortunately, none of those could actually touch Jin-Woo.

He simply dodged all of Thomas Andre’s fists and accurately landed every one of his counters on the American’s vital spots.

Kwang!! Ka-boom!! Kwahng!!

Little by little, blood pooled in Thomas Andre’s mouth.

“Keo-heok!”

How could this be....?

‘How can a Mage-type Hunter be this powerful and this fast?’

The more confused he got, the greater the physical damage he suffered.

‘Am I... Am I losing?’

But, that couldn’t be happening.

No, that must not happen.

His ability to overwhelm his enemies with pure physical violence was the sole reason for his existence, the only thing proving that he was him and not someone else.

Thomas Andre gritted his blood-soaked teeth. His eyes under the arched-up brows emitted a maddened glow.

“Uwaaaah-!!”

He punched with everything he had, but Jin-Woo evaded that again and

smacked the American's chin.

Puh-geok!

Thomas Andre shook his head hard to get rid of the impact force ringing in his head. But, in that brief gap, Jin-Woo had dug in until he was right below the American's nose and attacked consecutively and without mercy.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!!

“Keo-heok!!”

Thomas Andre, who once resembled a towering fortress, now began faltering around.

He unsteadily tottered about as he backed away. He somehow managed to regain his balance and cried out venomously.

“I am none other than Thomas Andre!! You think you can bring me down with only that much?!”

“That’s why I told you before.”

Kwa-boom!!

Jin-Woo punched Thomas Andre's chin upwards and spoke.

“It doesn’t matter who you are.”

Thomas Andre's head was shot up towards the sky, but he stopped it from going any further. Enraged beyond himself now, the Goliath raised his tightly interlocked fists up high above his head.

“Demolition!!”

BOOM!!

The ground exploded and quaked violently as he slammed down with all his might. Too bad, Jin-Woo was no longer there.

“Where...?!”

Thomas Andre's glare hurriedly wandered around to find Jin-Woo.

It was then.

He belatedly realised that a lump of incredible magical energy was falling from above him.

He quickly looked up.

Jin-Woo had leapt up before the skill ‘Demolition’ was activated and now, he was descending towards his American target.

His elbow powerfully slammed down on Thomas Andre's face.

KWA-BOOM!!

Dozens of vehicles stopped almost all at once in a location fairly far away from the abandoned factory. It was decided that getting any closer would be dangerous for them.

The folks climbing out of the vehicles were elite Hunters affiliated with the Hunter Bureau. Every single one of them was a distinguished, excellent Hunter in their own right.

However, despite being with such great Hunters, Adam White couldn't feel reassured at all right now. But, that was understandable when these people were being compared to Hunters Seong Jin-Woo and Thomas Andre, plus the entirety of the Scavenger Guild's elites.

The rank S Hunter tasked with commanding the Bureau's own Hunter forces, a man named Brent, could only shake his head with a stiff facial expression.

"Oh, my god....."

Just what kind of monsters were fighting right now to emit this much magical energy?

His feet didn't want to budge from the spot, but Adam White was right behind him, waiting to be guided forward with a pair of pleading eyes. Brent had no choice but to give up and spoke in a resigned voice.

"It's over there. However, it truly is dangerous, so my advice is, you need to be dead sure about this."

Adam White nodded his head.

KWA-BOOM!!

It was at that moment something shot up high in the air along with a loud, explosive noise, before crashing back down to the ground.

"...??"

Adam White looked in the direction of that noise, before quickly shifting his gaze back to Brent. The rank S Hunter couldn't bring himself to close shut his slack jaw.

Adam White urgently asked him.

"W-what was that just now?"

"If, If I haven't made a mistake, then that was....."

How could Brent, a rank S Hunter, make a mistake with his identification? Even then, he hesitated greatly before carrying on.

“It was Mister Thomas Andre falling from the air.”

“What was that?!”

“Even I can’t be sure....”

Adam White’s eyes grew incredibly large as he hurriedly shouted out.

“Hurry! We need to go there right now!”

Brent watched Adam White run over there and gestured to other Hunters to follow them.

The Hunter Bureau’s group soon arrived at the location where two gigantic masses of magic energy were colliding against each other. And then, they all saw it.

“Heok.”

They saw the scene of the one and only Thomas Andre being pummelled into a rag by a lone Asian Hunter.

Pow! Pooow! Powww!

Brent freaked out and pointed at that sight.

“T-Thomas... Mister Thomas Andre is being beaten up by Hunter Seong Jin-Woo!!”

“I can also see that!”

Adam White repeatedly stamped his feet on the ground in pure vexation. Even from this far, he could tell that Thomas Andre’s condition as he was getting beaten to a pulp by Jin-Woo didn’t look so good.

Brent hurriedly asked with an expression of someone not knowing what to do.

“What should we do now?”

“We need to stop them! Are you planning to stay back and watch a Special Authority-rank Hunter get beaten to death?!”

“You want us to stop that?? You mean, stop that man?!”

Brent stared dumbfoundedly at the Asian Hunter emitting a truly nonsensical amount of magic power – it was so enormous, in fact, he didn’t even want to go anywhere near that maelstrom if he could help it.

But, before he had a chance to say those words out loud, Adam White

dashed forward.

He might be a Hunter Bureau agent, but still, he was a regular person. He could lose his life simply by coming into contact with magical energy being emitted from a top-ranked Hunter.

Brent's expression crumpled as he weighed options, but eventually, he spat out a pained groan and chased after Adam to run towards Jin-Woo.

“Agent White!”

Thomas Andre's face was stomped on by the elbow and he knelt down to the ground. Both of his hands dug deep into the earth below.

“Euh, euh....Uwaaaah!!”

He somehow managed to raise his upper torso up and continued with his attacks. Unfortunately, he had sustained too much damage to his physical body and his fists couldn't attack with the same level of destructive force anymore.

Jin-Woo saw those now-sluggish punches and re-confirmed the tide of battle turning towards his favour. These powerless flailing arms of Thomas Andre now only contained the losing man's ultimately meaningless rage and desire to kill Jin-Woo.

The Korean Hunter smoothly and easily evaded those punches and counter-attacked once more.

Kwang!! Ka-boom!!

Unlike Thomas Andre's attacks, Jin-Woo's hits constantly raining down aimed precisely at the American's vital spots and as a result, the poor man couldn't even regain his wits anymore.

“Keo-heok!”

Every time Thomas Andre's head snapped in one direction or to the other side, blood spat out from his face. He lost his balance and tottered around unsteadily. Jin-Woo remained merciless as he kicked the American man.

Ka-boom!!

“Keok!”

The colliding magic energy exploded and Thomas Andre's body rocketed up into the sky.

‘Ruler's Authority.’

He yanked at the American man flying up endlessly into the air, causing his

victim to crash-land back down to Earth with no resistance whatsoever.

BOOM-!!

“Cough!”

Thomas Andre lay sprawled on the ground and vomited out a mouthful of blood. Jin-Woo mounted on top of him.

And just like when he was fighting against the demon king Baran back in the Demon’s Castle, he grasped Thomas Andre’s neck and slammed down with his other fist.

Pow! Slam!! Boom!

He could sense Thomas Andre’s resistance weaken gradually.

Pow! Boom! Pow!

And finally – just as Jin-Woo raised his fist high up to land the finisher, he heard a certain someone’s desperate cry.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim! Please, stop! I beg you, stay your hand, please!”

Jin-Woo disinterestedly stared at Adam White running towards him before clenching his fist tightly again. A horrifying amount of magical energy roiled around his greatly-expanded shoulder muscles and his fist.

“N-no! Stop!”

Just before the fist could slam down on the target...

As Adam White cried out, his hand reaching out in desperation...

...Thomas Andre finally opened his mouth.

“...I lost.”

Whoosh-!

Jin-Woo’s fist stopped millimetres away from the American’s nose.

As if he had used up all of his energy just to surrender, Thomas Andre lost his consciousness right afterwards and went limp.

Only then did Jin-Woo withdraw his fist and wordlessly got back up.

Soon afterwards, Hunters affiliated with the Bureau cautiously filed in around him and Thomas Andre on the ground.

“What the f*ck... What the hell is this? Did this really happen? Seriously?!”

A certain reporter was muttering to himself as he continuously snapped one photo after another.

Originally, he planned to snap a few shots of the Scavenger Guild Hunters getting ready for a raid. But now...

All he did was to simply follow after the Hunters who inexplicably cancelled the raid and began moving to somewhere. So, how on earth could he explain this?

The reporter initially thought that there was a dungeon break happening somewhere. But the spectacle unfolding before his eyes easily exceeded his wildest imaginations.

He used the zoom function to confirm the face of the man lying sprawled on the ground once more time.

That was a rather familiar face, that's for sure.

Without a doubt, that face belonged to the Special Authority-rank Hunter, Thomas Andre.

'Oh, my god.... Just who can beat Thomas Andre up like that?!'

The reporter spat out a shocked gasp as he scrolled through the images he had taken so far.

And at the same time, his heart trembled in excitement after realising that the photos contained within this little camera would net him a huge wad of cash.



Chapter 193 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Adam White urgently confirmed the signs of life on Thomas Andre.

Ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump....

He pressed his ear to the chest of the unmoving man and heard the faint beating of the heart. He even brought his hand near Thomas Andre's nose and felt for his breathing, too. Fortunately enough, he was still alive.

However, he was barely hanging on. He might be alive but, he didn't resemble a living man right now. That's how bad his condition was.

'To think, he's capable of reducing the one and only Thomas Andre to this state....'

Just how many Hunters in the world would be capable of doing this? No, was there anyone even remotely capable of doing that, to begin with?

If this news got out, then the entire world would be turned on its head almost instantly. Adam White even felt an emotion similar to awe at Jin-Woo's strength that had easily exceeded the Hunter Bureau's expectations.

Unfortunately, now wasn't the time to stand around in awe.

"Hurry!"

Adam White gestured towards the Hunter Bureau's Healers.

One of the top-rated Healers quickly ran over and settled down next to the patient on the ground. After confirming Thomas Andre's condition before the healing could properly commence, the Healer clicked his tongue and spoke up.

"Every bone in his body is broken. Haemorrhaging is quite serious, as well. I alone won't be able to heal him. It'll be better for everyone to participate at once."

Following the Healer's suggestion, more of his colleagues were added to the process of healing Thomas Andre.

But then, could anyone fill up a lake with water from a tap? Because of how vast Thomas Andre's overall health reserve was, one needed to expend a great deal of effort in order to heal him.

As the Healers sweated profusely and focused on healing the American Hunter, Adam White stood back up from the ground to survey the landscape. He saw the Hunters from the Bureau keeping themselves busy by pulling out the injured from the abandoned factory.

“Euh, euh....”

“My leg, my leg!!”

The state of the Scavenger’s elite Hunters were wretched, to say the least. It was unknown how they ended up in such a miserable state, but it was not that hard to guess just who was responsible for them looking like that.

One man versus one Guild.

Just one Hunter managed to utterly destroy one of the top Guilds in the entire world.

‘Seriously...’

Adam White was utterly flabbergasted by the incredibleness of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, and his abilities that played a key role in this display of incredibleness.

‘...Uh?’

Now that he took another look, he couldn’t see Hunter Seong Jin-Woo anywhere. Adam White searched around to locate the Korean Hunter, but before he could locate his query, a rather familiar ‘song’ entered his ears, instead.

It was the ringtone coming from his phone.

“This is White.”

The call came from the Hunter Bureau. Out of all the stories he heard today, this had to be the best one so far. Adam White’s gloomy-looking expression brightened up once more.

“Really? Where is he now?”

The caller informed him that the grievously-injured Hunter Yu Jin-Ho was discovered in front of a major hospital nearby, and his life was no longer in danger after having received a timely emergency medical treatment.

“I’ll head there right away as soon as the matters this side are sorted out.”

Adam White ended the call and sighed in relief.

“Whew...”

He had no idea how he'd go about dealing with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's wrath if something really bad happened to Yu Jin-Ho. Just thinking about it made him dizzy.

Spilt milk couldn't be saved, anyway. Should he say that the glass holding the milk not breaking was a silver lining among the sea of storm clouds?

A small load was taken off his mind and soon, he got to hear yet another piece of good news.

"We're finished."

The Healers tasked with mending Thomas Andre stood up from the ground. Adam White asked them for a status update.

"How is he? Is he alright?"

"For now."

"For now...? What does that mean?"

"His injured body has been healed, but he did suffer many grievous wounds and it will take some time before he regains consciousness."

"Oh."

Magic from the Healers might be able to restore one's physical wounds, but they were unable to lighten one's psychological trauma.

And since Thomas Andre no doubt suffered a huge mental setback this time 'round, his hospital room would have to be closely monitored. Adam White could only look on at the unconscious face of the Special Authority-rank Hunter with a look of pity. Still, the Healer did find words that provided a bit of comfort and delivered them.

"Even then, it was because it was Special Authority-rank Hunter Thomas Andre that he got to survive this long. If it was any other Hunter being on the receiving end of this much punishment, that person would have died ten times over by now."

"What a reli...."

Adam White nodded and was about to say something suitable as a reply, but then, his words came to a stop.

Only because it was the Special Authority-rank Hunter Thomas Andre, he could survive this event?

If so, what about Hunter Hwang Dong-Su who must've been subjected to the one-sided outpouring of Seong Jin-Woo's rage?

Was that man around here, as well?

Carrying a hardened expression, Adam White quickly made his way into the abandoned factory as more injured were carted out. Once inside, he took a look around and heard someone call out to him.

“Agent White! Over here!”

That urgent voice quickened Adam White’s thought process. He tried to calm his pounding heart and ran towards where that call came from.

One of the Bureau’s Hunters with a serious expression on his face was standing in front of a person lying on the floor. Adam White recognised who it was and whispered out the name of the man like a groan.

“Hwang Dong-Su....”

That prompted the Hunter next to him to speak his findings.

“This man is not breathing, sir. His heart is not beating anymore.”

“I hope you ain’t gonna waste my time by telling me some bullsh*t story about you kidding around or making a mistake here.”

It was already getting pretty late. The editor of a certain publication had come out to meet a freelance reporter after the latter gave him a call. Understandably, the editor’s glare was icy.

Just who was he?

He was none other than the editor of the newspaper boasting the highest circulation figures in the eastern United States.

Originally, someone like a freelancer wouldn’t be able to summon him out for an impromptu meeting like this. But then, he had no choice but to make this trip after hearing the contents of the phone call.

The editor told himself that, if this freelancer was going to waste his time with a fairy tale, then he’d make d*mn sure that this guy ended up in jail with a fake crime he came up with. That was his thought process as he hurriedly put back on the clothes he wore during the day at work for this meeting in the dark.

The reporter quickly waved his hands around after being subjected to the editor’s suspicious glare.

“It’s d-definitely nothing like that. This thing is 100% real. I thought you only liked stories that are real?”

“Hmph....”

“So, how much are you willing to offer?”

“Let me see the photos first.”

The reporter looked around his vicinity as if he was scared of something and began pulling out one photograph after another from his bag. The editor took them with an expressionless face and began flipping through them, but then, his hands came to an abrupt halt.

And an almighty earthquake erupted in his eyes next.

‘H-how can this be?!’

The editor’s astonished gaze naturally shifted over to the reporter’s face next.

His expression clearly was asking, ‘Where did you get these pictures?’ and that made the reporter feel like he was on the top of the world. He quickly shrugged his shoulders as his reply.

The editor continued to flip through the pictures with trembling hands.

They were exactly as the reporter had described over the phone.

‘Thomas Andre passes out after getting beaten to a pulp a day before the International Guild Conference?’

Not only that – the face of the man leisurely turning around to leave after defeating the American was captured within these pictures.

Wasn’t that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo??

This was a huge scoop.

No, hang on – that word ‘scoop’ wasn’t adequate enough to fully describe this incredible jackpot. The editor’s breathing became really rough and heavy now.

Meanwhile, the reporter peered at the picture the editor was looking at and added some of his explanation.

“That’s the man who beat up Thomas Andre. If you can investigate and uncover that guy’s identity in an expose, I think you’re going to create one hell of a firestorm, Mister Editor.”

What a moron this guy was!

Allegedly, Westerners had a problem telling Asian faces apart. Maybe because of that, the reporter had failed to recognise Seong Jin-Woo’s face.

In times like these, the editor felt rather thankful for being an Asian American. And at the same time, he began cooking up the headlines that

would dominate the front page of tomorrow's paper.

[The man who brought down the Dragon, bitten & brought back to earth by an Asian dragon.]

[The Hunter of Giants, Seong Jin-Woo – now even hunting down the Goliath?]

[The stronghold of a Special Authority-rank Hunter, collapsing under the new rising star of South Korea?]

Didn't matter what headlines he decided to use, this news would attract the attention of the entire world. Most importantly, his paper would have the exclusive.

There were dozens of real photographic proof prepared as well, so how could there not be a huge commotion rising up in the world come tomorrow?

The actual worth of these pictures could not be estimated at all. The editor felt his heart quiver.

Having discovered the trembling light within the editor's eyes, the reporter quickly snatched the pictures back.

The editor could only lick his lips in wistfulness.

“Now that you have confirmed the veracity of these pictures, let's talk about my price. How much are you willing to pay me?”

“This.... Well, it's a bit difficult for me to come out with a price for these pictures.”

The editor hesitated greatly before asking the reporter as he carefully studied the other party.

“Why don't you quote me a price you think is fair? So, how much do you want for them?”

The reporter pondered his options for a while, before unfurling all five of his fingers on his hand. The editor nodded his head.

“Fifty grand? Good. We'll go with that.”

“No.”

The reporter immediately corrected the editor on the price.

“It's five million dollars.”

“F-five million?!”

Five million U.S. Dollars is a huge amount of money equalling as much as

6,000,000,000 Korean Won.

Quite obviously, the expression on the editor's face hardened instantly.

“If you think the price isn't right, then I'll just go somewhere else.”

The reporter shoved the pictures back inside the bag and tried to turn around. However, the editor hurriedly stopped him.

“No, hold on!”

Images of a celebrity couple's baby would sell for millions of dollars nowadays, so was there a reason not to spend five million on a scoop of this magnitude?

Once this news gets out, all the TV stations and other newspapers would be talking about this story non-stop for the next few days. He simply couldn't let this opportunity slip through his fingers!

Having arrived at his decision with some difficulty, the editor opened his mouth.

“Fine, you got a deal. However, I want not just the pictures but the originals, too. And you'll have to swear never to leak this out to anyone else. How about it?”

With that, the deal was made.

The reporter had been working as a freelancer and had to wallow at the bottom of society all this time. He thought about being able to see his parents again for the first time since leaving his hometown. His voice trembled slightly as he made his reply.

“...Let's do it.”

The hospital room where Yu Jin-Ho was currently admitted to.

He had made it out from death's doorstep, but he still hadn't regained his consciousness.

Yu Jin-Ho was still breathing out heavily in pain. The pain-suppressing morphine didn't seem to be all that effective for him.

A little bit of time later, after the doctor doing the rounds confirmed Yu Jin-Ho's current status and left....

....A humanoid shape rose up from the blob of shadow sneaking into the hospital room.

Shururuk....

It was Beru, who swapped locations with Jin-Woo via 'Shadow Exchange'.

He reached out to heal Yu Jin-Ho, as ordered by his liege. From the tip of his hands, gentle blue light slowly spread out in this darkened room.

Yu Jin-Ho's expression, scrunched up from pain and discomfort, softened in no time at all.

Beru already possessed powers incomparable to regular rank S Hunters, so it was quite obvious that his healing magic would be unmatched, as well. The former ant king diligently healed his target's wounds so he could also mend Yu Jin-Ho's psychological trauma at the same time.

Wuuonng....

Yu Jin-Ho stopped tossing around in the bed after sensing the warmth wrap up his entire body, and eventually, creaked open his heavy eyelids.

"Uh....?"

The first thing he saw was a giant ant head right in front of his face. On top of that, that giant ant head placed a finger to its mouth and went **"Shh."** as if to tell him to keep quiet.

"...Oh, so I'm still dreaming."

Yu Jin-Ho closed his eyes shut and went back to sleep with a happy expression etched on his face.

"...."

In the meantime, Beru wordlessly concentrated on healing the kid.

The night wore on.

Seoul, the capital city of South Korea.

There was a 14-hour difference between here and the eastern United States. It may have been in the middle of the night over there, but it was in the morning in Korea.

The current location was a deserted children's playground.

A black knight with his head pressed tightly on the ground next to a swing set asked.

"Oh, my king. How long should I stay in this position?"

Jin-Woo, currently sitting quietly on the swing and waiting for Beru's signal, replied disinterestedly.

"I guess.... Until Beru reports back to me that he's done with Jin-Ho's treatment?"

“....”

Perhaps the knight recognised his faults in this matter because he kept his mouth shut and maintained the ‘Wonsan bombing raid’ posture. (TL note at the end)

Jin-Woo wordlessly stared at the knight before his gaze abruptly landed on his hands.

The back of his hands were all messed up. There were several bruises and he could spot traces of blood as well.

That Thomas Andre, he was truly one nonsensically sturdy dude. Just from Jin-Woo beating the living crap out of him, his hands ended up getting bruised to this degree.

Of course, such wounds would be gone without a trace after a good night’s rest all thanks to the passive buff, ‘Good Health and Long Life’, but still.

‘...I’m sleepy.’

He felt a bit of fatigue rush in. A chaotic day was finally drawing to a rather subdued close.

The knight, staying quiet for a while, suddenly addressed Jin-Woo again.

“Oh, my king....”

“What is it?”

“Please, bestow unto me a new name, my king.”

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to his brand-new Shadow Soldier.

[?? Lv.1]

Knight Commander grade

‘Right, I guess you also need a name, don’t you?’

Jin-Woo pondered this dilemma for a little bit before forming a wry smile as he spoke.

“Since you died because of your greed, how about I call you ‘Greed’?”



Chapter 194 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

day.

Almost every TV station and newspaper under the sun was talking about the Hunters arriving in the United States before the International Guild Conference began. However, only one newspaper from the east of the country dared to carry a rather different sort of headline on its front page.

[Thomas Andre loses consciousness!]

There was not one American who didn't know the name of Thomas Andre. So, they couldn't quite believe that their Special Authority-rank Hunter had lost consciousness.

Did he contract some kind of illness?

The passersby were immediately drawn in by that simple-yet-attention-grabbing headline. They reached out to grab their copies of the paper and gladly paid the asking price.

But then, steps of the curious buyers came to a stuttering halt after they unfurled their papers and read the article within. That rather boring headline didn't prepare the readers adequately enough for the bombshell hiding within the article itself.

It was unknown why the fight happened, but regardless, the article went to detail the event of a lone Hunter clashing against Thomas Andre and his Scavenger Guild the night before.

And the aftermath was laid bare for all to see with several pages' worth of large photographs.

They showed bloodied and battered Thomas Andre, as well as many injured Hunters being carried out from a disused factory.

If someone who didn't know any of these people saw the images, that person might have said that they were victims of a terror attack. That's how severe the scenes depicted were.

However, weren't these people all top-ranked Hunters in this nation?

Especially for Thomas Andre – he was the Special Authority-rank Hunter who survived the 'Kamish' raid, referred to as the worst calamity in human

history.

Every single person reading the article couldn't hide how shocked they felt. Their breathing became rough and heavy, just like the editor back when he first laid his eyes on these images.

And when the identity of the man who drove the Hunters of the Scavenger Guild to this wretched state was revealed, the readers focusing on the article cried out in pure shock and astonishment.

“What in the world...”

“Jesus Christ!”

Why was there an image of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo in this article? Wasn't he the current darling of the international media after he stopped a massive-scale crisis taking place in Japan not too long ago?

The contrast between Thomas Andre lying sprawled on the ground, and Jin-Woo turning around to leave with an emotionless face, was so great that it left the readers with an indescribable level of mental shock.

As almost all of the mass media was focused on the International Guild Conference, the ripple caused by the article was even greater than it might have been otherwise.

Rather than traditional media outlets breaking the news, though, the story first gained traction in South Korea through social media, instead.

[ROFLOL. Thomas Andre beaten to a pulp by Seong Jin-Woo was real? Link to the article.]

[Holy cow, it's real. LOL Thomas Andre showed up with Guild members and still got ransacked like nobody's business?]

[Bullsh*t. Tsk, tsk, tsk. Makes no sense. One guy wrecked a Special Authority-rank Hunter + super-top-number one Guild?]

↳ ***[Go read the linked article. All true.]***

↳ ***[Why did they fight, tho?]***

↳ ***[No one knows. No reason provided.]***

[LOLOL Yankee bros yapping on about Special Authority this and that, but now, boom! Maybe, these fools were nothing but hot air?]

[It's not Thomas Andre being useless, it's Seong Jin-Woo being incredible.]

[Yup, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim is the pride of South Korea.]

↳ ***[Kyah~! Barmaid! Time to get drunk! Bring me a tall glass of patriotism!]***

Most of the Korean commenters expressed their surprise at this event, but on the other hand, the comments filled with pride quickly appeared on various Japanese social media accounts.

[It's only obvious that even Thomas Andre was no match for Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.]

[Maybe the U.S. didn't help us because they were afraid of exposing the truth behind their Special Authority-ranked Hunters...]

[We need to be grateful that such a Hunter came to lend us his aid.]

[I've been trying to send a thank you gift to Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim for a little while now. Where should I send it so he can receive it?]

[You can send it here. The address is....]

↳ ***[Hey, dude, why U writing your own address?]***

↳ ***[wwwwww What a crazy b*stard.]***

Jin-Woo was already the hero of Japan.

The wounded pride of the Japanese people was restored when Jin-Woo, a man who rescued their country from the brink of destruction, defeated the hero of America.

Perhaps inevitably, the attention of the world – not just America's, where the incident took place – was laser-focused on Jin-Woo once more, after a short period of peace since the Giant subjugation.

Why did he do it?

Why did Hunter Seong Jin-Woo pummel Thomas Andre and his Guild members into near-oblivion?

Did something irreconcilable happen between the two men?

Public opinion and mass media were burning up from the flames of speculation. Everyone that learnt of this incident could only wait in desperation for some clarity on the situation.

Jin-Woo woke up in the assigned hotel room. He took a look outside the window and saw the sea of reporters camping outside the hotel's entrance and clicked his tongue.

“Where did all these people show up from?”

Sure, it wasn't as if he had no clue why these reporters had gathered

outside the hotel. No, he simply got surprised by the fact that the news had spread out this fast, that was all.

Even then, he had no plans to shy away from them. Wasn't this a good opportunity to let the world know what would happen if someone tried to mess him?

It was not against the law to shoot down someone aiming a gun at you in America. Especially more so, with laws being amended recently, after the appearance of the Hunters.

The issue might have gotten out of hand if he kept attacking the unconscious Thomas Andre. But, he wisely stopped right away the moment his opponent lost the will to fight.

It should be a similar story with Hwang Dong-Su, too. Once people learn about what he did to Yu Jin-Ho, not many would point their fingers at Jin-Woo.

So, he stayed calm and waited for Agent Adam White to contact him. Sure enough...

Knock, knock.

He opened the door after hearing the knock to find Agent Adam White standing on the corridor with two other Bureau-affiliated Hunters.

Jin-Woo asked with absolutely no nervousness in his voice.

“Are you here to arrest me?”

“No, not at all.”

The American agent shook his head and hurriedly continued on.

“We’re here to escort you to the Guild Conference venue because we are expecting quite a big fuss to develop during the day. And also....”

Adam White quickly fixed his attire and politely bent his waist 90 degrees forward, totally out of the blue.

‘.....?’

Feeling puzzled by that gesture, Jin-Woo looked on. However, Adam White showed no signs of straightening himself and spoke while maintaining the current posture.

“Also, I’d like to express my gratitude, as well.”

Jin-Woo combed through his memories briefly just then, but he failed to recall any moments that warranted a thank-you from the Hunter Bureau.

All he did yesterday was – he lost Kamish’s shadow, wandered around searching for the kidnapped Yu Jin-Ho, encountered Thomas Andre coincidentally and beat his a*s down to the ground. That was all.

‘.....’

Recalling the events of yesterday managed to sour his mood by a notch.

The American agent probably wasn’t expressing his gratitude to Jin-Woo for showing him the process of extracting a shadow. So, why was he saying his thanks for?

Fortunately enough, Adam White opened his mouth just in time, right before Jin-Woo’s confusion had the chance to grow any bigger.

“If you hadn’t stopped right then, the United States of America would have lost both of her Special Authority-rank Hunters.”

‘Ahh, so that’s what he was talking about.’

Jin-Woo nodded his head as he recalled the scene of Adam White crying out and trying to dissuade him the night before.

For sure, yesterday’s result might have been entirely different if the American agent didn’t show up and Thomas Andre remained stubborn right until the end.

The U.S. had already lost one of her Special Authority-rank Hunters. So, the government would’ve done everything in order to prevent the loss of her second, regardless of the cost.

Jin-Woo could more or less understand now where Adam White and his bowed head was coming from.

Meanwhile, the American agent carried on.

“We at the Hunter Bureau will do our best to ensure that you’re not unduly troubled by this incident, Seong Hunter-nim.”

With those words, Adam White stood upright again. He looked dead tired, though.

The Hunter Bureau held a night-long emergency meeting on how to deal with this event. Naturally, Adam White had to attend the meeting, seeing that he was in charge of chaperoning Jin-Woo around.

The conclusion of that meeting was....

The higher-ups decided to do everything in their power to make Jin-Woo’s stay in the country that much more comfortable. His feat of defeating Thomas Andre only served to improve the Hunter Bureau’s evaluation of him.

The organisation definitely didn't want to see their relationship with Jin-Woo souring because of the Scavenger Guild's wrongdoings. Most importantly, Thomas Andre wasn't dead, now was he?

Adam White was ordered to carry on as scheduled and so, he came here to escort Jin-Woo. He stared at his charge for a little while before swallowing dry saliva.

Gulp.

'This man alone managed to defeat the Scavenger Guild...'

The normal image of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was a man of power for whom common sense still prevailed.

But then, Adam White got to personally witness the kind of spectacle the Korean Hunter's wrath could bring about. And so, he was genuinely envious of Yu Jin-Ho after realising that such wrath was solely reserved to protect the people close to Jin-Woo.

"Oops. It's already this late."

Adam White confirmed the time and formed a smile.

"Well, then... Shall we get going?"

"Sure. Let's go."

Jin-Woo was escorted out of the hotel with the guidance of Adam White and his fellow agents. The group broke past the wall of the fervent reporters and climbed aboard the waiting Bureau-supplied vehicle.

Click, click, click, click, click-!!

Meanwhile, the reporters continuously and tirelessly took photos even as the vehicle carrying their query gradually disappeared from their views.

On their way to the conference venue, Adam White explained the current situation.

"We have secured the testimonies of Hunter Hwang Dong-Su's accomplices. The Bureau will soon release a statement containing the full account of what happened."

He then went and strongly emphasized that 'Hunter-nim' would not be inconvenienced in any shape or form. It was a welcome piece of news for Jin-Woo, of course.

The reason why he decided to travel to the States had to do with the 'monster' possessing the appearance of his father. He wished to gather information through the International Guild Conference.

He asked the newly Shadow Soldier-ified Hwang Dong-Su, but even that guy didn't know much about this creature who could possibly be his father.

According to the former rank S Hunter, that creature came out of a dungeon all alone, and its magic energy emission was identical to other monsters. When the issue with the being's son was brought up, it became hostile and a fight broke out afterwards.

That was all.

'Just what was its real identity....?'

There was a good chance that it might not be his father, after all. If that thing was really him, then quite obviously, the first thing he'd do was to come and see his family.

The more Jin-Woo looked into this matter, the greater his questions became. To confound the matters even further, several more questions were added on top of the already-existing ones.

It all started off with the final words of Kamish, just before the Dragon disappeared for good.

[Oh, my king. There are four humans who have borrowed the powers of the Rulers. Please, you need to be wary of them.]

Five Hunters survived the Kamish raid. Which meant that the odds of the four among the five Special Authority-rank Hunters borrowing the powers of the Rulers were very high.

'But then... one of the Special Authority-rank Hunters was killed by someone recently.'

That man's name was Christopher Reid.

Just who was he fighting that a Hunter as powerful as he was had to resort to burning down his mansion and the surrounding forest?

Could it be possible that the Sovereigns mentioned by the King of Giants were finally making their move?

If that wasn't it, did the sudden changes dungeons went through recently have anything to do with it?

As several thoughts fled in and out of Jin-Woo's head, he could see the venue for the conference getting nearer and nearer.

The moment Jin-Woo stepped into the lobby of the venue, the conversations and welcoming greetings being shared among the crowd all came to a sudden halt.

Gazes of curiosity and fear came flying at him from pretty much all directions.

He was that Asian Hunter responsible for utterly destroying Thomas Andre, who had been reigning over other Hunters like a king.

Noisy, noisy....

Quite a few Hunters kept whispering the stories related to Jin-Woo even now, but none of them dared to approach him. Because they still didn't know why he went and wrecked the Scavenger Guild to that extent.

Seriously now, what if the reason for that unholy mass beat-down turned out to be nothing more than Thomas Andre staring at him for too long? If so, wouldn't one get marked for death simply by trying to say hello to Jin-Woo?

Even though all these people were ace Hunters that subjugated scary monsters for a living, they found it hard to meet Jin-Woo's gaze right now.

After the cordial lunch prepared by the Hunter Bureau came to an end, the participating Hunters began filling up the seats facing the rostrum in the conference venue.

Afterwards, the conference got going, and several topics were discussed.

Unfortunately, none of those really warranted Jin-Woo's complete attention nor his sustained interest. Most of the things being talked about were similar in nature to status updates and so on.

'If only Jin-Ho was here. I'd not be this bored....'

All Jin-Woo could do was to wake up his super-human patience and wait until the topic he might be interested in came around.

Quite a while later...

Although it was not the information he was waiting for, a topic did manage to grab his attention.

"Everyone, you should be aware of the fact that the number of Gates being generated has shot up recently, and the fact that stronger monsters have made their appearances, too."

Initially, it sounded like something everyone knew only too well.

Since quite a few scientists had appeared before this man to speak their theories regarding this topic already, the atmosphere in the venue came across as lukewarm at best.

"However, there should be almost none of you who have realised that unusual activity has been detected in the skies above us."

The scientist named Belzer emphasized the word ‘skies’ and the Hunters finally began showing signs of interest. Of course, Jin-Woo was included among those Hunters, as well.

“The truth of the magical energy concentration found in the planet’s atmosphere getting greater – we all know of this fact since it has been widely reported.”

Now that he was being showered with the interested gazes of the Hunters, the clearly-happy scientist carried on.

“I’d like to use a different term to denote the magic energy found in our atmosphere. Until another more suitable word is invented, how about we use the term, ‘magisphere’?”

The scientist gestured with his hand, and a huge map was displayed on the screen behind him. It was the atlas of the world that contained all of the continents – no, all of the countries existing on this planet.

The scientist used a laser pointer to highlight several spots on the map.

“Did you know that the magisphere has begun gathering and concentrating on the skies of several nations at present?”

Noisy, noisy....

The noise level among the Hunters gradually rose up. The scientist implored his audience to quieten down and listen to him for a little bit longer, before continuing on with his explanations.

“There are a total of nine spots in the world where the magisphere has begun gathering into a large mass. My purpose today is to reveal the locations of the nine spots.”

Doctor Belzer then calmly read off the names of the nine countries on his list.

“...Province of Alberta, Canada. And finally, this is the spot with the highest magisphere concentration. City of Seoul, South Korea.”

The moment those translated words of the scientist came out from the earpiece Jin-Woo wore – for some reason, every single Hunter sitting inside the venue shifted their gazes in his direction all at once.



Chapter 195 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo had read the article featuring his feat on his way here.

After seeing the gazes of other Hunters locking onto him because of a completely unrelated matter, though, he had to concede that the ripples created from that article were far greater than he anticipated.

Jin-Woo scanned the Hunters and they quickly withdrew their gazes.

‘Come on now. This is just....’

He discovered palpable fear within their eyes and could only let out a helpless sigh in his heart.

‘Looks like these people are really, seriously mistaken about something here.’

All he could do now was to wait for the Hunter Bureau to release that promised statement.

And so – just as the atmosphere within the venue was getting a bit weird, Doctor Belzer looked in Jin-Woo’s direction and cracked a joke.

“I’ve also read this morning’s article. But folks, you shouldn’t be looking at Seong Hunter-nim that way. If he was capable of causing all this magisphere in the air like that, then obviously, he’s no longer a Hunter, is he?”

Hahaha....

Awkward laughter came from here and there. Doctor Belzer smiled refreshingly and carried on with his explanations.

“As you might have guessed, we couldn’t discover any tangible similarities between the locations I have mentioned.”

Since there were no similarities, it was hard to figure out the cause for this change. And since there was also no precedence, it was equally as hard to tell what might happen next.

The scientist then brought up another image on the giant screen.

“This here is a shot of the skies above the aforementioned nine spots.”

He then added that his team had enhanced the footage with special effects

so that the image taken by the magic energy detection camera on the spy satellite could be deciphered far more easily for the audience members.

Just as the scientist had explained, large magisphere lumps could be seen gathered above, in the skies of the nine spots, like some kind of storm clouds.

Since ‘special effects’ had been added to the image, the reality might not be as severe, but still, those things didn’t look like natural phenomena, all things considered.

“Huh....”

“Mm.”

Hunters began leaking out shocked groans after confirming the contents of the giant screen. It was definitely bad news that no one could figure out the reason for this suspicious phenomenon, or what would come out of it.

The skies above Seoul looked to be especially bad.

Jin-Woo studied the satellite image of Seoul, which seemed to have become the eye of the storm made up entirely of magisphere, and wondered why there were nine spots in the world, to begin with.

‘Is it related somehow to the number of the Sovereigns? Because there are nine of them?’

To call it a mere coincidence, it just left that vague uncool aftertaste in his mouth. And also, now that the King of Giants was slain by him, that number nine should not hold significance anymore.

It was then – Doctor Belzer shot him a very quick and sneaky glance. Their gazes met in the air. Unlike the last time this happened, though, there was not a hint of a smile on the good scientist’s face.

“Our current situation is that, since we don’t know the cause, we also don’t know how to respond to this phenomenon.”

The scientist’s lengthy presentation was about to come to its conclusion.

“However, let me make it clear. The assertion of being unable to respond does not mean there is no need to make plans. It’s eminently possible that our world will experience yet another seismic shift soon.”

As the conference was drawing to a close, the director of the Hunter Bureau took to the stage. His reason? To make an important announcement.

Since this wasn’t in the schedule, Hunters naturally became noisy from his unexpected entrance.

Noisy, noisy....

Was the Hunter Bureau about to make an official statement related to the events of the night before?

While being showered by the curious, interested gazes of the Hunters, the director politely requested his audience to quieten down before he could proceed.

“I have something important I must inform you about, everyone.”

Every single Hunter gathered here today were the elites of the elite within their respective nations. The citizens of those nations would recognise who they were just from their names alone.

Indeed, these people were not some unruly immature kids or a ragtag bunch of misfit soldiers.

“...”

“...”

Just one sentence from the director, and in an instant, the venue was enveloped in an eerie silence.

This was their superhuman-level ability to focus in full display; the high degree of concentration that no regular human could ever possess was deeply ingrained like instinct within the highest-ranked Hunters present in this venue.

The director nodded his head as he found the current atmosphere much to his liking and scanned the faces of the Hunters. Eventually, his gaze met Jin-Woo’s.

‘Hunter Seong Jin-Woo...’

The director had been fully informed of everything that transpired yesterday. He sent his acknowledgement in Jin-Woo’s direction with a brief nod.

He was expressing his gratitude for letting Thomas Andre live.

Unfortunately, other Hunters had no clue on the ins and outs of that situation, so they could only begin murmuring their theories to each other when the director of the Bureau shared that greeting with Jin-Woo.

After a short while of unease later, the director finally addressed the crowd.

“My heart is heavy as I deliver this unfortunate news to you all.”

Finally....

Jin-Woo sensed that the moment he was waiting for had finally arrived. The director spoke in a low, gloomy voice.

“About two weeks ago, Hunter Christopher Reid was murdered by unidentified assailants.”

‘...!!’

The gathered Hunters were all astonished by the revelation.

One of the top Hunters in the world was murdered by someone?

Their level of shock transcended what Jin-Woo felt when he heard the news first. This issue was well beyond the realm of who won the fight between two powerful Hunters.

The director brought up the relevant information on the giant screen behind him.

First, the remnants of flames that didn’t want to die out; the ashes of the mansion; and then, Christopher Reid’s dead body with a hole in his chest.

Hunters confirmed the death of the Special Authority-rank Awakened via the provided video footage as well as the several still images on the screen, and reacted by gasping out in shocked moans.

Not one person present was able to dispute the fact of that man being dead now.

As expected, the surprised Hunters began their outpouring of questions, but the director firmly shook his head, instead.

“I’m sorry, but I’ll answer your questions only after this presentation comes to an end.”

There was a far more important matter still to be carried out instead of answering the questions. The director glanced at Jin-Woo from the corner of his eyes. The young Korean Hunter and his gleaming eyes displayed no reaction as he sat quietly in the corner of the conference venue.

His calm attitude managed to rouse up several complicated emotions in the director’s heart.

However, there was no more time to hesitate. He pressed a button on the remote controller and the image on the screen behind him changed again.

“We strongly suspect this man as the perpetrator of this crime.”

A man’s face now filled up the entirety of that giant screen. Almost immediately, the gathered Hunters realised that something was amiss.

That Asian man’s face, wasn’t it uncannily similar to someone else sitting inside this conference venue?

But then, these Hunters also recalled what happened to Thomas Andre, and none of them could voice the thoughts bubbling up inside their minds.

“....”

Jin-Woo too, closed shut his mouth.

The photograph must've been taken moments after 'he' had arrived at the Hunter Bureau for identification purposes. That face definitely belonged to his old man from his memories no matter how many times he took a look.

Jin-Woo eventually bit his lower lip.

'How come it's my father....'

Dungeons were supposedly the territory of the Rulers.

He couldn't tell why they sent a monster with the outer appearance of his father. Regardless of what their intentions were, though – Jin-Woo could still feel the bubbling pit of rage slowly building up its intensity deep within his heart.

Too bad, Hunters nearby completely mistook that rage for something else and they did their absolute best to not look at his way.

'Do not look back. Do not look back!!'

'They just look similar, that's all! Just similar, and nothing else!'

'Asians all look alike, right? Right??'

'But still, that is just so....'

The director branded 'Seong Il-Hwan' as 'Suspect S' and began explaining who this man was. From where he was discovered, what happened during that discovery, and finally, what transpired afterwards.

Hunters were taken by yet another surprise from the revelation that this person actually defeated Hwang Dong-Su during the interrogation to make his escape.

Just who was Hwang Dong-Su?

The Hunter Bureau acknowledged his powers early on and offered him a sweet deal, prompting him to emigrate to the States right away. Moreover, he was also one of the aces in what many believed to be the best Guild in the world, the Scavenger Guild.

The shock these Hunters felt was great, perhaps because the news of his demise hadn't been publicised yet.

They were now thinking that, if multiple assailants possessing similar

levels of strength pounced on their target simultaneously, even a Special Authority-rank Hunter wouldn't be able to hold out for long.

They understood the reason for the Hunter Bureau suspecting this mysterious 'Suspect S' for this crime.

“Several human-type monsters possessing that level of power escaped from dungeons and attacked Hunter Christopher Reid at the same time – we at the Hunter Bureau feel that this is the likeliest explanation.”

As the director continued on, the image of 'Suspect S' pressing down on Hwang Dong-Su's neck with his foot popped up on the giant screen next.

The scene clearly exhibited the extraordinary power of the creature capable of subduing Hwang Dong-Su like some kind of an insect – even though he was a Hunter easily exceeding the regular rank S classification.

Hints of pure astonishment flashed past within the eyes of the Hunters watching the footage on-screen. For Jin-Woo, though, that video clip didn't come across as all that surprising.

This 'Suspect S' was an existence the Rulers had created for some unknown purpose. And they possessed unimaginable powers, enough to generate dungeons, didn't they?

‘So, obviously, it's not weird to see Hwang Dong-Su getting defeated by that creature.’

No, besides that – Jin-Woo was more concerned with what that 'Suspect S' was trying to do. It was engaging Hwang Dong-Su in a conversation.

‘It's trying to... talk to him?’

Jin-Woo's brows shot up. He concentrated hard, like when he would do during battles, and time slowed down instantly. His sharpened senses began reading the lip movements of the Suspect S.

Ba-thump!

Jin-Woo's heart pulsed powerfully just then.

Those last words....

‘...Even in death, not being able to close his eyes?!’

If his lip-reading proved to be correct, then that meant that 'Suspect S' knew about his existence. Thankfully, he knew of a way to easily confirm the contents of that little chat those two had shared.

Jin-Woo suppressed his wildly-pounding heart and called out the name of the brand-new addition to his Shadow Army.

'Greed!'

Greed already knew what Jin-Woo wanted to know through their shared mental link, so he immediately made his reply.

[It is as you suspect, my liege.]

'...!!'

While the thoughts in Jin-Woo's head were getting more and more complicated and confused, the lengthy explanation of the director was coming to an end.

"We're planning to ask you, the Guilds of the world, to help us track down and apprehend this 'Suspect S'. If you discover this man's whereabouts, please, give us a call immediately. That is all."

The end of the director's words signalled the incoming flood of questions that the Hunters had been holding back until then. They impatiently raised their hands into the air.

"Yes, the sir over there."

The director pointed to one of the raised hands, prompting that Hunter to throw his question out, as if he couldn't wait anymore.

"Do you have any proof that this 'Suspect S' isn't a human?"

"We have perfectly matched his magic energy emission to that of monsters. question."

"That creature insisted that he was someone who went missing inside a dungeon. However, did a Hunter like that really exist?"

"Yes, that Hunter did really exist. ."

"If that's the case, why haven't you revealed the identity of that Hunter?"

"Oh...."

The director hesitated greatly, but eventually replied while doing his very best to avoid looking in Jin-Woo's general direction.

"We've decided not to reveal that information because the suspect is related to one of the Hunters currently attending this conference."

That brought about a prompt and sudden end to the barrage of questions. The 'maybe' changed into 'as expected' in that instant.

The director scanned the suddenly-silent conference venue and decided he'd wrap up things here.

“Are there any other questions?”

It was then – someone sitting at the end of the audience seats at the back raised his hand. Even before the director could call out his name, this guy opened his mouth first.

“Even then, don’t you think it’ll be better to release the identity of that person, if you really want to arrest ‘them’?”

Hunters didn’t have to turn around to see who asked that question in that weighty voice. It was spoken in Chinese, and it came from a certain middle-aged man.

He was none other than China’s Seven Star-rank Hunter, Liu Zhigeng.

One of the Special Authority-rank Hunters was looking straight at the director with a sombre expression on his face. Dozens upon dozens of China’s top Hunters, including his own Guild members, sat to his right, left, and front.

The director seemed to be at a loss, but Liu Zhigeng continued to press on.

“Don’t you agree, Mister Director?”

Although it had been urgently decided earlier in the day to seal the information on the identity of ‘Suspect S’, the director realised that he didn’t have much of a choice now and begrudgingly brought up it on the screen behind him.

Beep.

One press of the remote button and the information on Seong Il-Hwan filled up the giant screen. Soon, surprised gasps came out from several of the audience members.

To think, the very first human-shaped monster to appear in dungeons possessed the exact same countenance as Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s missing father!

How could there be such a coincidence?

The once-quiet interior of the conference venue was buzzing with the hushed voices of the Hunters.

Liu Zhigeng quietly stared at the screen before raising his hand again. The director had to point to the Chinese Hunter once more.

“...Hunter Liu.”

“This time, I have a question I want to ask Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

The director shifted his gaze to Jin-Woo. The latter lightly nodded his head

at the former and turned around in his seat to stare at Liu Zhigeng in the distance.

Shortly thereafter, the Chinese Hunter's heavy, bassy voice resounded out within the interior.

“What will you do if this ‘Suspect S’ really turned out to be your long-lost father, and the Hunters of the world were trying to hunt him down?”

Jin-Woo pondered that for a little bit before making his reply.

“If that creature is nothing but a monster, then I’ll kill it with my own hands. However, if it’s not a monster, but really is my father, then....”

If it was really his father?

The gathered Hunters became intensely curious as to what he might say next and began swallowing their saliva. Disregarding them all, Jin-Woo firmly declared his intentions for all to hear.

“I shall protect my family, even if that means every single Hunter in the world becomes my enemy.”



Chapter 196 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“What you said in there – were you being serious?”

Adam White, waiting outside the conference hall, threw that question out.

Even though Jin-Woo wanted to ask back, ***“What are you talking about?”*** he said only one thing inside the conference hall, didn't he?

So, he simply grinned as his reply.

“Yup.”

“Haha...”

Although this was no time to laugh, Adam White ended up chuckling after seeing Jin-Woo's grin, anyway.

Just who were the folks inside the conference hall?

They were 500 or so of the top-ranked Hunters from around 120 countries, who were invited by the Hunter Bureau to attend this conference. In other words, they were the top elites humanity had to offer.

But then, this man went and said to them, ‘Even if it means every Hunter in the world becomes my enemy’.

Any ol' tough guy wouldn't even dare to imitate what Jin-Woo had done. What's more surprising was the fact that not one person ridiculed him for making that claim.

Even Liu Zhigeng, renowned for his vicious personality, simply kept silent and stared at Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. He made no complaints whatsoever towards the Korean's declaration.

Not just the Hunters inside the conference hall, but even the agents watching the proceedings through various monitors couldn't shut their agape mouths. Adam White was among those agents, obviously.

He sighed in admiration and spoke up.

“Most likely, there should be only two people in this whole wide world, including you, who could say something like that in there, Hunter-nim.”

Jin-Woo became slightly curious about who the other guy might be.

“Who is this other person....?”

“Well, he’s in the hospital right now.”

Jin-Woo saw Adam White’s wry smile and immediately realised who that mystery ‘other guy’ could be. It could only be Thomas Andre.

For sure, that guy would do something just as crazy, what with that arrogant personality of his.

‘But, it’s unknown whether he’ll still behave that way or not.’

Jin-Woo recalled the last expression Thomas Andre made as he admitted to his defeat, and formed his own wry smile.

In the meantime, Adam White quickly explained the itinerary for the rest of the day.

“A dinner party has been scheduled to take place this evening. Since we at the Bureau went all out to prepare this grand feast, how about sharing a cordial meal with other Hunters if you don’t have anything urgent to....”

Jin-Woo shook his head right away.

“I’m planning to stop by at a hospital.”

“Excuse me?”

Adam White’s brows shot up.

Did he get injured somewhere last night? No, hang on. Maybe that was an inevitable result. The Special Authority-rank Hunter Thomas Andre suffered such grievous wounds that he still couldn’t recover properly after receiving concentrated healing from several top-class Healers. That attested to how violent and fierce the fight was.

So, even if it was Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, he must have suffered one or two injuries....

“I’m worried about Yu Jin-Ho, you see.”

“Oh....”

So, he was talking about ‘that’.

Having realised that it was unnecessary to worry about Jin-Woo, even for a little bit, Adam White could only reflect on his hastiness in silence. Still, he couldn’t let go and asked one more time, just in case.

“Uh, maybe your shoulder or wrists have been aching since last night....?”

“Pardon?”

“Ah, no. It’s nothing...”

While Adam White was getting more flustered than ever before...

...Hunters that had been gathered in small groups of two and three to chat among themselves suddenly parted ways and stood to either side of the hallway. Naturally, both Jin-Woo’s and Adam White’s attention shifted over there, as well.

And that’s where they spotted Liu Zhigeng.

China’s Seven Star-rank Hunter was flanked by the ‘Liu Zhigeng Squadron’ – made up entirely of his direct subordinates – as he made his way towards Jin-Woo.

As if he already had a destination in mind a long time ago, the Chinese Hunter walked in a straight line until he was standing right before Jin-Woo’s nose.

‘Heok...!’

‘W-what are those two up to now?’

Hunters all stopped talking right there and then.

The taut tension flowing between Jin-Woo and Liu Zhigeng managed to utterly silence the surroundings. The palpable feeling of unease rapidly filled this place up.

Hunters hurriedly looked around in anxiety.

‘Why is Liu Zhigeng behaving that way?’

‘Is it because of what Hunter Seong Jin-Woo said back in there?’

‘Yup, I was wondering why he was keeping quiet back then....’

Without a doubt, what Jin-Woo said could be interpreted as a provocation towards other Hunters. And the person who asked him the question even happened to be none other than Liu Zhigeng.

First, it was Thomas Andre. And now, it was the turn of Liu Zhigeng?

Hunters paid close attention to the changing expressions of these two men, as even more anxiety clouded their own faces, wondering what would happen next.

In the meantime, Adam White found himself stuck between these two titans by sheer bad luck and his own expression paled almost instantly.

“E-excuse me, Hunters....”

Before he could finish saying something, Liu Zhigeng took another step forward and opened his mouth first. His weighty voice flowed out next. Jin-Woo listened to him and a sombre expression gradually formed on his face.

‘.....What on earth is he saying? I can’t understand a single word.’

He had never even gone anywhere remotely close to China before, so there was no way he’d know a lick of Chinese.

Since the other guy was speaking in a serious expression, he too decided to form a similarly serious one, but as it turned out, listening to words he couldn’t understand proved to be a rather uncomfortable and arduous task.

Just as he began thinking that the Chinese Hunter probably wasn’t making fun of him with such a grave expression on his face, Adam White whispered something in his ear.

“He’s saying that he hunted down the Giant monster you missed during your trip to Japan on the Chinese coast recently, Seong Hunter-nim.”

A look of surprise spread all over Jin-Woo’s face.

“You even know Chinese?”

“Well, I was in charge of the Asia branch, after all. I can speak a few Asian languages. Ah, also, I can speak a little bit of Russian, Spanish, Arabic, as well as German....”

Jin-Woo very briefly thought that it’d become a whole lot more convenient for him if Agent Adam White became one of his Shadow Soldiers. Of course, he quickly admonished himself for even entertaining such a thought.

Maybe he still had lots more things to say? Liu Zhigeng continued on with his words in the meantime.

“Please, keep translating for me.”

“Alright.”

Adam White nodded his head and, with a determined expression, began his temporary role as an interpreter.

“He says that he got surprised from how unexpectedly strong the Giant monster was. And he also says that it was a difficult battle as he had to fight the monster on the ocean’s surface.”

Jin-Woo remembered being surprised himself by the strength of those Giant monsters, back when he was hunting them down. They had such huge bodies yet they also moved around nimbly like wild beasts, too.

Since Liu Zhigeng said he fought the monster over the water, which imposed a greater restriction on one's movements, his surprise should have been greater when compared to fighting the creature on dry land.

As a fellow Hunter, Jin-Woo could pretty much understand where the Chinese man's fluster stemmed from.

The longer Liu Zhigeng's words got, the brighter Adam White's expression became.

“Ever since that encounter, he says, he’s been meaning to meet you. He has been really curious to learn more about the person capable of easily hunting down all those powerful monsters. That’s what he said.”

In the same breath that Adam White finished translating, Liu Zhigeng formed a bright smile and reached his hand out for a shake.

It seemed that the previous serious expression came from his nervousness.

Jin-Woo looked at that offered hand for a bit, before shaking it with a smile of his own. He had absolutely no reason to refuse a greeting offered up first by one of the best Hunters in the world.

Adam White had figured out what was going on here and could finally breathe a sigh of relief.

“Whew....”

Forming a bond between fellow Hunters – this encounter certainly stayed true to the original intention of the International Guild Conference.

As they shook hands, Liu Zhigeng said some other things with a smile. Jin-Woo looked at Adam White again.

“Sounds like he’s making a joke, so what is he saying?”

“Ah...”

Adam White briefly formed a lost expression, before the corners of his lips arched up.

“He says that he’s really happy about you teaching Thomas Andre Hunter-nim a lesson. He doesn’t even have to take a look to know that it was Thomas who instigated the whole thing first....”

Jin-Woo grinned at that one.

The Chinese Hunter initially came across as an irritable and rude uncle, but he turned out to be a rather interesting person. Now that the greeting was over, their hands parted ways.

But then, Liu Zhigeng's complexion darkened somewhat.

Likewise, the smile on Adam White's face was wiped off as well. He quickly translated what the Chinese Hunter was saying.

“That is why he will now pray even harder that ‘Suspect S’ isn’t actually your family member. He says that he doesn’t want to fight against you, no matter what.”

Jin-Woo wordlessly nodded his head.

“Both of you are here.”

Jin-Woo and Liu Zhigeng shifted their gazes in the direction of that voice. Although they felt this person's presence, they knew he wasn't a Hunter since he didn't emit any magic energy.

Sure enough, that voice belonged to the Hunter Bureau's Director. He alternated his gaze between Jin-Woo and Liu Zhigeng before asking both men. He sounded rather tense as he did so for some reason.

“Can both of you clear some time in your schedule, please?”

Jin-Woo looked at Adam White for confirmation, but the latter man shook his head. Meaning, this wasn't in their itinerary.

What did he want from them, then?

Before making his reply, Jin-Woo pushed his Perception Stat to the extreme first and analysed the movements of every single Hunter within the conference venue.

‘Two people with a huge concentration of magical energy....’

Two very powerful Hunters were heading towards the same destination under the guidance of several escorts. Seeing that both he and Liu Zhigeng had been called upon like this, that event couldn't be chalked up to being a coincidence.

‘Did something happen somewhere?’

When Jin-Woo looked as if he was hesitating somewhat, Adam White remembered something and quickly answered for him.

“Ah, that's right. Sir, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim said earlier that he'd go visit Yu Jin-Ho Hunter-nim at the hospital....”

However, Jin-Woo placed his hand on the American agent's shoulder to stop him. When their gazes met, he shook his head before turning around to face the director.

“Alright, I will.”

The director’s expression brightened immediately and he looked at Liu Zhigeng next.

“How about you, Hunter Liu Zhigeng?”

“I’m in.”

“Very good. In that case, please, follow me.”

The director’s expression was as bright as a salaryman who managed to pull off a difficult negotiation. He then took the lead and guided the two Hunters away.

Funnily enough, the destinations for the two were not the same.

Liu Zhigeng was guided by other agents and went down the corridor on the left, while Jin-Woo followed the director and continued down their original path.

‘Isn’t this strange....?’

With the addition of Liu Zhigeng to the ranks of those two powerful Hunters he sensed earlier, three beings with rather enormous magic energy had gathered in one spot now.

Jin-Woo thought he’d be escorted to that place as well, but seeing that he was being led to a different destination altogether, he began cooking up several likely reasons for this. He gave up in the end, though, and asked the director.

“Why am I the only one going to the different room?”

“Ah....”

The director pondered his answer for a little bit before deciding to delay it altogether.

“There is someone waiting for you, actually. She will explain everything to you once we get there.”

“....”

As a matter of fact, Jin-Woo could sense a certain person’s aura coming from a room located at the end of this corridor.

‘Uh? Doesn’t this magic energy belong to that....?’

Jin-Woo’s eyes grew wider since the person waiting for him was someone he didn’t expect to see here. As a matter of fact, he never thought they would meet each other again any time soon.

“Looks like you have figured out who she is.”

He must've been feeling really nervous because cold sweat drops were visibly forming on the director's forehead.

“We do our best to not to expose her location if we can help it. But then, this issue being what it is, we didn't have much of a choice....”

“Does that mean the Hunter Bureau demanded her to come?”

“No, not at all. It was she that demanded to be here. She specifically wishes to meet you.”

Clunk....

The director opened the door to the room and Jin-Woo got to meet the gaze of a certain African-American woman waiting patiently for him there.

“It's been a while, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

“Likewise, Madam Selner.”

It was none other than the 'Upgrader', Norma Selner, the Awakened possessing a unique ability.

He wondered if she had calmed down now that a bit of time had passed since their last encounter, but unfortunately, the light shining in her eyes was the same as before. She still looked quite terrified of him.

He definitely sensed her strong fear of him from the way she stared at him. Despite that, she wanted to meet him for some reason. Just what could make her move in spite of her fears? Jin-Woo's curiosity had definitely been stoked now.

“I didn't expect you to seek me out first, ma'am, so....”

Jin-Woo settled down on the seat opposite hers. Adam White, once more assigned as an interpreter, stuck close to Jin-Woo's side.

Madam Selner politely bowed her head.

“I'd like to apologise for that day. Back then, my mind wasn't in the right place to....”

Jin-Woo raised his hands and stopped her.

He wasn't planning to talk about back then just so he could hear her apologise. She sneaked a glance at the director, only to see him nod his head with a hardened expression.

Madam Selner hesitated greatly before her lips parted with some difficulty.

“I’ve been having the exact same dream every day.”

Jin-Woo was not confident about reading people’s dreams. And even he could tell that they didn’t ask for him to be here for that purpose, either. Still, he asked her so he could get some clarification on the topic.

“What kind of a dream was it?”

“In my dream, I watch the scenes of top Hunters being hunted down by a group of unknown people.”

A group of unknown people hunting down powerful Hunters, she said. Almost immediately, Jin-Woo realised that this matter had to be related to him in some capacity.

“And a few days later, that dream becomes reality.”

“Could you be talking about... Christopher Reid?”

Madam Selner nodded her head.

The director took over the explanation from there on.

“We had warned Mister Reid ahead of time, but he wasn’t interested in hearing us out. The end result was... well, you know what happened already.”

Indeed, Jin-Woo had seen and heard enough of Christopher Reid’s fate.

Madam Selner continued on with a trembling voice.

“Powerful Hunters supporting this world will continue to die. Those hunting the Hunters will not stop what they are doing.”

“So, what you’re saying is...”

Jin-Woo collected his thoughts and cautiously opened his mouth.

“...You also wish to warn me of the dangers....?”

“No, that’s not it.”

She resolutely shook her head.

If she didn’t want to warn him, what did she want then? Jin-Woo looked at her with a puzzled expression. Madam Selner then spoke with desperately-pleading tone of voice.

“Please, I beg of you. Protect these Hunters.”



Chapter 197 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

'I lost.'

Thomas Andre slowly opened his eyes as his head kept repeating those two words he never thought he'd say ever again.

He found himself inside a hospital room.

'When was the last time I stopped by at a hospital?'

Jin-Woo might have frequented hospitals as if they were his second home during his early years as a Hunter. However, Thomas Andre didn't, and he couldn't recall a single instance of staying in a hospital even once, ever since becoming a Hunter.

Just who would've expected to see this kind of a result from a fight between a Hunter who used to be the worst even among the rank Es, and a man who started his career at the very top?

Of course, Thomas Andre didn't care about Jin-Woo's past. He was still deeply flustered with this result, though.

'I really... did lose.'

Thomas Andre slowly sat up with a dazed face of a man whose soul had abandoned him.

Tap, tap....

The sound of someone lightly tapping on a keyboard came to a halt. He shifted his gaze in that direction and found the main manager of the Scavenger Guild, Laura, sitting in a location not too far, but not too close, either.

Perhaps she was in the middle of her work because her slender fingers were still hovering above the laptop's keyboard.

"You've woken up."

"...Looks like it."

Thomas Andre withdrew his gaze and rubbed his chin.

One could estimate just how much time had passed, with the length of one's beard. Should he say he felt relieved, then? Because... his beard wasn't

as long as he feared.

“About... one day, is it?”

“**Yes.**”

Laura affirmed it for him with a short answer, before continuing on.

“The first doctor to examine you suggested that I should prepare for the worst case of you waking up several weeks later.”

That was how terrible Thomas Andre’s conditions were last night.

But then....

....She found it bit difficult to decide whether him waking up after only one day was rather befitting of Thomas Andre’s capabilities, or the fact that he even blacked out in the first place was unbecoming of him, instead.

Laura felt this conflict of emotion as she stood next to her boss’s bed.

“Should I call for a doctor?”

“**No, not yet.**”

Thomas Andre massaged his aching temples and shook his head.

The impact force he felt when that man punched him in the head still remained vivid even now. What a horrible pain this was. So much so, he no longer wanted to recall yesterday’s event if he could help it.

A doctor wouldn’t be able to do much anyway, even if one was summoned here. Besides all that, though – wasn’t there something else he should confirm first?

Thomas Andre quickly asked.

“What about Mister Hwang?”

Laura’s lips parted for a moment, but she couldn’t verbalise her answer and simply shook her head.

“**....Is that so.**”

He pondered for a little while longer, before asking a different question with an unconcerned tone of voice.

“What about other losses?”

“We have incurred many injured personnel, but thanks to the timely response from the Hunter Bureau, everyone has fully recovered.”

Thomas Andre had been maintaining his calm until then, but he couldn’t stop his voice from going up an octave.

“There were no other casualties?”

“Yes, sir.”

“.....”

His shock soon morphed into astonishment. He began gasping out inwardly.

Even though the fight had been truly intense, not one person was killed. It could only mean that his opponent went easy on them.

This was a clear sign of an overwhelming defeat.

When a person tastes such a complete defeat, one would often lose any notion of getting angry at the result. That’s how Thomas Andre felt right about now.

He was also awestruck, as well. Jin-Woo had defeated not just Thomas Andre, but all the elite Hunters the American had gathered, all by himself. That made Thomas somewhat fearful of the young Korean Hunter. No, his emotion had gone beyond that and almost into the territory of pure respect.

Thomas Andre always told himself that being powerful was justice, so the mental shock he felt right now was rather immense.

However...

However, why was he being like this?

He tasted an ignoble defeat yet he didn’t feel so bad at all. Maybe, he had no regrets because he got to confirm the gap between him and his opponent?

He didn’t feel like getting angry at the person who defeated him. Nor was he thinking of avenging his loss, either.

‘Instead, it’s more like....’

As several thoughts began crisscrossing in his head, Laura suddenly presented him with a small but lengthy box. It was a case for glasses.

‘....?’

Thomas Andre accepted this case while sending her a puzzled stare. She solved his curiosity right away.

“Your sunglasses were recovered from the location, but they were too damaged to be repaired.”

Click.

He opened the case to find a new pair of sunglasses with the same design as

before that he liked to wear. Thomas Andre broke into a smirk and put them on.

“Looks like I keep ending up owing people.”

Laura was inwardly worried that her boss would start going off on a rampage the moment he woke up, but his response brought about a sense of relief in her and she sighed inwardly, before forming a gentle smile.

“It’s my job, sir.”

Thomas Andre wordlessly stared into the distance, before quietly opening his mouth.

“Mister Hwang.... Make sure you hold a proper funeral for him. He was still one of our own, after all.”

“Understood.”

“Oh, and also....”

And also?

Laura stopped jotting down Thomas Andre’s orders in her memo pad and raised her head.

“Tell Hunter Seong Jin-Woo that the Scavenger Guild will.... No, wait. Scratch that. Send him a message that I, Thomas Andre, will offer an official apology.”

Protect the Hunters.

Why did Madam Selner say something like this? Jin-Woo formed a puzzled expression.

“....Why me?”

She seemed to be unsure of where to start her story but eventually, opened her mouth rather laboriously.

“While the dream kept repeating itself, I tried my best to memorise the faces of those hunting down the Hunters. However, it was all for nought.”

She explained that all she could remember after waking up were faces covered in veils of darkness.

“And so, I decided to use another method. Even if it was just a dream, I’d use my ability to look into their true nature, their true form.”

“Was that why you looked into my eyes last time?”

“Yes, correct.”

Madam Selner readily admitted to how her ability worked.

Ba-thump.

Jin-Woo's heart began racing again.

Back then, what did Madam Selner discover inside him that made her shiver in fear like that? Unfortunately, her story hadn't finished yet, so he had to suppress the rising tide of curiosity and concentrated on her voice.

“What I found within those people was limitless power. But, when I locked gazes with ‘that thing’, I had no choice but to wake up from my dream.”

Jin-Woo's gaze momentarily drifted lower and saw her fingertips tremble imperceptibly.

“When my eyes looked into it... I can still clearly remember the words and voice of ‘that thing’ even now.”

Jin-Woo slightly raised his head back up again. Both the director listening in, as well as Adam White translating from the side, carried deeply tense expressions.

Jin-Woo asked her in a calm voice.

“What did that thing say to you?”

“It said that I should... quietly go back and wait for the war.”

Madam Selner began shuddering in horror after finally recalling that memory. The voice she heard in her dream was far more vivid than any other sound she heard in reality.

Unlike the frightened woman, though, Jin-Woo was focused on the word ‘war’, instead. That was his clue.

‘It’s similar to what the King of Giants told me, isn’t it?’

The battle between the Rulers and the Sovereigns – didn't the King of Giants say it? That ‘they’ were gearing up for war? Most likely, the Rulers weren't the only ones preparing for this upcoming battle.

If that was the case, then, just which side did the b*stards hunting the Hunters belong to?

Although he felt curious about this, he still hadn't heard a reply to his original question. So, he asked again.

“How does that relate to you asking me to protect other Hunters?”

“...Because, I saw the same power sleeping within you.”

Her cautiously-mouthed words slapped wide awake Jin-Woo and in the face. The power of the Shadow Sovereign – that’s what she saw on that day, hiding deep inside of him.

Since she saw the same type of power from the assassins in her dreams, their identity had to be....

‘....Sovereigns.’

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened.

Madam Selner detected the rapid shift in Jin-Woo’s expression and quickly added more explanation.

“They are existences above the Hunters, and in order to stop them, we need you who possess the power that equals theirs, Hunter-nim.”

The director quietly listened up to here and finally entered the conversation.

“In all honesty, I wasn’t convinced by the claim that no one can protect the Hunters besides you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, but, well....”

The reason why this meeting had been hastily arranged was...

“....My fight with Thomas Andre yesterday changed the way the Hunter Bureau thinks, am I correct?”

The director replied awkwardly after the truth was accurately pointed out.

“Yes, you’re correct.”

Thanks to the matters of the day before, the Hunter Bureau finally learned of the difference between Jin-Woo and other Hunters. That event might have been a big incident, yes, but it also helped the organisation to discover a new ray of hope.

Beings capable of murdering Special Authority-rank Hunters, and a lone Hunter possessing powers equal to those beings.

The Hunter Bureau was in desperate need of Jin-Woo’s help more than ever. The United States had already lost one of her Special Authority-rank Hunters. And from their perspective, Thomas Andre had to be protected at any cost.

“Of course, we don’t expect a Hunter as excellent as you to help us without any suitable compensation.”

Anything he wanted, it’d be made available. And that included the greatest treasure Kamish had left behind, its Rune Stone.

The new proposal coming from the Hunter Bureau wasn't about scouting him. Rather than annoy Jin-Woo by pushing forward the already-rejected offer, they'd rather borrow his power to protect America's greatest combat force. That was the response the Bureau had decided to go with regarding the current events, post-Christopher Reid's death.

“.....”

Jin-Woo shut his mouth and fell into a bit of a dilemma.

Madam Selner came clean on what she saw in order to help him make up his mind.

“There are Hunters enjoying powerful blessings in this world. They have supported this world with their powers. If they are gone, this world will not be able to hold on for much longer.”

Jin-Woo finally replied to them after his lengthy deliberation.

“....I'm sorry.”

His firm refusal that didn't leave any room for reconsideration caused the director's brows to shoot up high.

“I-is it because of some unresolved emotion towards Thomas Andre Hunter-nim....??”

Jin-Woo quickly shook his head before people jumped to wrong conclusions.

“No, not at all.”

There was only one reason why he made this decision.

“It's only because I don't know anything about the enemies I'll be facing.”

Even if he had a rough idea about what their identities were, he hadn't encountered them once yet. It was only obvious that he'd not make any promises on protecting someone else when he had no clue on the enemy's capabilities.

Jin-Woo wasn't some amateur who'd readily make promises when he wasn't sure whether he could keep them in the first place.

‘I'll observe the situation for the time being.’

And then, he'd take care of those things he could handle, first.

His collected ways of thinking hadn't changed at all from that day he entered the dual dungeon for the first time all those months ago.

Thankfully, Jin-Woo possessed several Shadow Soldiers who'd accurately convey information to him in real time. By leaving behind his boys in the shadows of all the Hunters the Bureau was concerned about, he'd be able to respond to those b*stards in time if they made a move.

“Well, then....”

Jin-Woo began thinking up a suitable response when the time comes as he stood up from his seat to leave.

In the president's office of the Korean Hunter's Association.

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui was spending yet another busy day.

Why, of all possible things under the heavens, did Hunter Seong and Thomas Andre have to fight a day before the International Guild Conference?

He was worried about things going wrong on the other side so he sent inquiries through all available channels and finally, received a reply from the Hunter Bureau not too long ago.

Their investigation had found that the Scavenger Guild was at fault for the incident and that Jin-Woo wouldn't be unduly inconvenienced in any shape or form moving forward, according to the message from the United States.

“Whew....”

Association President Goh Gun-Hui finally could get this load off his shoulders and plopped down on his chair like a man feeling greatly relieved. No one could imagine how worried to death he was as he thought about Hunter Seong getting locked up in an American prison.

But then again...

‘Hang on a minute.’

....Just who would be capable of locking Hunter Seong up?

Even Thomas Andre had lost consciousness, didn't he?

Goh Gun-Hui broke into a chuckle after his thoughts finally reached there, long after the dust on the matter had settled down.

‘In a way... I was worried about something totally unnecessary.’

“Huhuh....”

Goh Gun-Hui chuckled for a while before feeling a bit of thirst creeping in. He searched for something to drink and found a bottle of water located on top of the coffee table a bit of distance away from the President's desk.

‘.....’

Goh Gun-Hui wordlessly stared at the water bottle before extending his hand out. That prompted the bottle to fly into his hand.

Grab.

He expertly snatched the bottle up and while unscrewing the cap, formed a thin smile.

‘Looks like I’ve got yet another story to hear from Chief Woo once he comes back.’

Huhuh....

Goh Gun-Hui felt quite pleased, knowing that he made the right choice to forcibly send Section Chief Woo Jin-Cheol to the U.S.



Chapter 198 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Hyung-niiiiim!”

Jin-Woo lightly evaded the tearful Yu Jin-Ho’s attempt to bear-hug him. Then, he coolly addressed Woo Jin-Cheol in the same hospital room, who had volunteered to look after the kid during the conference itself.

“What’s gotten into him?”

“Well, I showed him this when he woke up, and now....”

The Chief of the Monitoring Division picked up the newspaper he was reading.

The front page of the folded newspaper was plastered with the photographs of Jin-Woo’s beatdown victims, the utterly wrecked Scavenger Guild’s members, and that of the bloodied and unconscious Thomas Andre’s face.

It might have been something obvious to him, but the same couldn’t be said about Yu Jin-Ho who now had seen the article in its full glory.

Just who in this world would clash head-on against the world’s most powerful Guild in order to rescue him? Not only that, when that Guild’s Master, ‘Goliath’ Thomas Andre was involved in the shenanigans, too?

Yu Jin-Ho was shedding thick tears of heartfelt emotion after reading the article, so when Jin-Woo arrived in the hospital, he began expressing his happiness with his entire being.

“Hyung-niiiiim!!”

Unfortunately....

Jin-Woo’s agility had surpassed far beyond what rank S Hunters were capable of by now. In spite of Yu Jin-Ho concerted efforts, the target for his manly affection kept slipping out of his heartfelt hug.

Jin-Woo slipped past yet another attempt of the kid trying to embrace him, and pointed a thumb at the stumbling Yu Jin-Ho’s back.

“Are you telling me he read an article written in English?”

“Oh, that. I figured that it’s really uncool to let our employee get paid without doing a single thing, so I told her to translate the article for him.”

“Aha.”

The end of Yu Jin-Ho’s nose reddened as if he found Jin-Woo constantly dodging his attempt at skinship rather cold-hearted.

“Hyung-nim!”

“Here.”

Yu Jin-Ho took the tissues Jin-Woo handed over and blew his nose on them.

Sniffle~.

Of course, Jin-Woo knew how the kid felt. Even then, he couldn’t walk around with a snot stain on the expensive suit he especially picked for the International Conference, now could he?

Wiping his tears away seemed to have done the trick and calmed Yu Jin-Ho down. He asked in a more even-sounding voice.

“By the way, hyung-nim, since when did you learn to speak English?”

It seemed that the kid must’ve heard Jin-Woo conversing with Thomas Andre back inside the disused factory, even though his consciousness was wavering in and out.

“Well, you have a lot of free time as a low-ranked Hunter, you know.”

A Hunter without a raid to go to was basically an unemployed bum. Jin-Woo studied English whenever he had time, trying to prepare for the eventuality of him quitting the life of a Hunter someday.

‘I didn’t know it’d come in handy in that sort of situation, though.’

He felt a bit reminiscent of the times back when he was studying the language. Never in his wildest dreams would he have imagined that the first time he used the language he self-taught to converse was during the fight against Thomas Andre.

“Oh...”

Yu Jin-Ho recalled that Jin-Woo was a low ranked Hunter once upon a time and nodded his head in understanding.

When he thought about his hyung-nim’s past in relation to yesterday’s events, he became even more moved by Jin-Woo’s loyalty that propelled him to confront the Scavenger Guild and its entire catalogue of elite Hunters just for his sake.

Yu Jin-Ho began tearing up again as he emotionally declared his intentions.

“Hyung-nim! I’ll definitely trust you and follow you till the ends of the earth!”

His eyes reddened again and snot once more drooped out from his nose tip, which was cleaned barely a minute ago.

Jin-Woo was grinning outwardly, but too bad...

‘...Having a high Perception Stat isn’t always useful, is it?’

Thanks to his supernatural-level of senses that allowed him to read every little minutiae of Yu Jin-Ho’s emotions, even Jin-Woo’s nose began stinging a little bit now. He deliberately avoided meeting the kid’s gaze and shifted his attention over to Woo Jin-Cheol.

“Looks like there’s no problem for him to get discharged, doesn’t it?”

“Agreed. As a matter of fact, the doctor in charge was quite surprised that Mister Jin-Ho had completely recovered from his injuries in just one night.”

“In that case, let’s just go through with the discharge process and return to the hotel. We even have transportation lent to us by the Hunter Bureau, so might as well.”

“Understood.”

“I’ll get ready too, hyung-nim.”

Jin-Woo quietly stared at the still-swollen-eyed Yu Jin-Ho packing up his stuff to leave and felt grateful for the fact that the kid was safe now. And at the same time, his anger towards the culprit responsible for this whole chaos ballooned up in an instant.

‘Greed, when we get back to the hotel, you know what you have to do, right?’

[...I understand, oh, my king.]

As he was leaving the hospital room, Jin-Woo inwardly ‘comforted’ Greed with an assurance that all the former rank S Hunter would have to do was to plant his head on the floor for around two hours, which was neither too long or too short in his opinion.

There were two vehicles prepared by the Hunter Bureau.

Since Jin-Woo had something private to discuss with Adam White, he got in the car in front where the American agent was waiting for him, while Yu Jin-Ho and the two Korean Association employees climbed into the vehicle at the back.

When Jin-Woo opened the rear passenger door with a loud clunk, Adam White flinched awake from his short nap taken while leaning against the window frame and urgently shook his head to chase away the drowsiness.

“You’re here, Hunter-nim.”

The American’s face was haggard, to say the least.

Unmistakable dark circles thickly coated the spots below his eyes. He was utterly exhausted from the breakneck-pace of all the events taking place, as well as the packed itinerary, of the past couple of days.

Jin-Woo looked on at him with pitying eyes, but Adam White didn’t even notice that and simply ordered the driver to start the vehicle.

Now that they were moving again, Jin-Woo got down to the main topic.

“Can you get me the list of the Hunters you people wanted me to protect?”

Those words seemed to have chased away all traces of sleep from Adam White’s mind because his expression brightened in an instant.

“Have you changed your mind?”

“No, but I’m curious about something else.”

“Oh....”

Adam White struggled to hide his disappointment.

He got his hopes raised up before being shot down. Still, he didn’t think this was all bad news. Because it indicated that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was still interested in this problem one way or the other.

Adam formed a smile and replied back.

“I shall draw up a list as soon as I get back to the Bureau.”

As soon as he got back, he said. Jin-Woo snuck a glance at the time. It was already nine in the evening.

He briefly wondered whether he made a mistake or not when he saw Adam White’s complexion waning just a little bit more after the poor man was asked to perform yet another task.

Not surprisingly, the American agent tried hard to keep his sleepy eyes wide open to make sure he’d not drift away to dreamland in front of the Hunter he was supposed to escort.

‘Tsk, tsk.’

Jin-Woo couldn't watch on any longer and reached out toward him.

“Uh? Uhh?”

Adam White's panicky voice cracked up a little when Jin-Woo's left hand covered his eyes.

“H-Hunter-nim?!”

Too bad for him, though, just a couple of words from Jin-Woo and he was petrified in the spot.

“Will you just stay still?”

A normal person doing something similar would send creeping chills down the hapless victim's spine. However, the one doing it right now was Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, arguably the man most far removed from a 'normal' person.

He even beat the living crap out of Thomas Andre until the latter was almost dead.

Gulp.

Suddenly having his vision blocked by the hand of a rank S Hunter, Adam White could only swallow dried up saliva of nervousness.

Jin-Woo leaned the American agent's head back with his left hand and with his right hand, poured the healing potion he just bought from the Store down the now-open mouth.

‘W-what is this?!’

Adam White was obviously very tense from forcibly swallowing the unidentifiable liquid while his vision had been blocked. But even he was able to feel that, as more and more of this liquid slid down his throat, his stamina seemed to recover more and more.

‘But, how can something like this....?!’

By the time Seong Jin-Woo withdrew his hands, Adam White realised that the deluge of drowsiness plaguing him was completely gone.

No, hang on. Was that all?

He felt so refreshed and airy as if he had been asleep in a comfy bed the whole night and was roused from his slumber by the gentle warmth of the morning sun.

As if his fatigue had been a lie, he couldn't feel a single trace of it anywhere on his body.

“H-Hunter... nim?”

‘...How did you do that??’

That was the question Adam White’s look seemed to be asking, but Jin-Woo simply shrugged his shoulders as a reply.

“It’s a trade secret, so....”

“Oh. I see.”

Since it was such a mystifying event, Adam White found it somewhat easier to accept. He moved his body this way and that to confirm and expressed his admiration in a shocked-sounding voice.

“You are... well, how should I phrase this.... It feels like, you’d have greatly succeeded regardless of what you chose to do, even if that was unrelated to being a Hunter.”

Although this praise seemed a bit excessive when coming from a ‘special agent’ of the Hunter Bureau, someone so highly educated that he was capable of speaking ten different languages according to himself, Jin-Woo still formed a content smile regardless, after seeing that look of satisfaction on Adam White’s face.

With this, it’d be easier to ask for the next part of the favour. Indeed, asking for the list of the Hunters was just the beginning of his plan.

“And also, can you organise an opportunity where I can meet the ones found on that list?”

Now was his chance.

Since all the powerful Hunters from around the world had gathered in one place, just by him inserting his Shadow Soldiers in their shadows would allow him to respond quickly to the attacks of the Sovereigns when they happened.

However, Adam White began shaking his head, instead.

This was what Jin-Woo was worried about. Even if the Hunter Bureau was a powerful, influential organisation, it should still be quite difficult to mobilise that many top-ranked Hunters of the world.

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened gradually.

“As I thought... I guess it’s too difficult.”

“No, not at all. On the contrary, I meant to say that there’s no reason to organise such an occasion in the first place, Hunter-nim.”

Adam White grinned refreshingly and explained the itinerary for the final day of the International Guild Conference.

“Don’t forget, there is the ‘Night of the Hunters’ still left.’

He suddenly spoke of a combination of words that would’ve worked well for a video game’s title. For some reason, he seemed quite hyped up over it, too.

“There is a big party organised by the Bureau. All the Hunters attending the Conference are invited. If you wish to meet them, you can most likely do that there, Hunter-nim.”

A party, was it?

Was there a better occasion to meet the Hunters ‘naturally’ and attach Shadow Soldiers on them than a party? Jin-Woo clenched his fist tightly.

‘This is good.’

Through other Hunters, he’d get to meet these mysterious Sovereigns. And from that encounter, he’d get to learn who his real enemies and allies were, and also, how he should go about fighting them, too.

“I will do that, then.”

Jin-Woo smiled and leaned against the back seat.

The night sky of America was getting darker beyond the window of the speeding vehicle.

The ‘Night of the Hunters’.

The world’s top Hunters and related parties began flocking towards a gigantic banquet hall, capable of housing nearly 1,500 people.

“Wow....”

Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes threatened to pop out of their sockets as he soaked in the sight of the legendary gathering of Hunters that he only got to see through TV screens.

Funnily enough, though, the gazes of other Hunters staring at Jin-Woo were quite similar in nature to Yu Jin-Ho’s reaction. The moment he stepped into the banquet hall, everyone’s attention was laser-focused on him in an instant.

“Look, isn’t that....”

“Yes, I saw.”

“He’s right in front of us, but I can’t even feel his presence.”

“He’s on a completely different level.”

And with all the attention being poured on him, it was only natural that

even Yu Jin-Ho would be subjected to their intense scrutiny, as well.

“In that case, the Hunter next to him must be....”

“He fought Thomas Andre in order to rescue that young fella?”

The situation had settled down somewhat by now after the Hunter Bureau had released the public statement.

On one hand, every Hunter in here was deeply shocked by the fact that Jin-Woo was willing to clash against the entirety of the Scavenger Guild for the sake of his rank D Hunter comrade. But on the flip side, they were also getting a heavy case of goosebumps, knowing that the declaration he made towards the end of the conference’s first day was not a bluff at all.

[“I shall protect my family, even if that means every single Hunter in the world becomes my enemy.”]

The photographs accompanying the article clearly demonstrated what had happened to the Scavenger Guild. No wonder everyone in this room was dearly praying that what he said wouldn’t come true.

In any case – now that the Bureau had cleared up the air, lots of Hunters were beginning to seek out a chance to engage Jin-Woo in a conversation, busy waiting for the right moment to strike.

This was the result of his public image going through a revamp of sorts, going from a monster capable of pummelling the freakishly strong Goliath, to that of a monster who’d not hesitate at anything to protect his comrades.

The thing was, though – the very first person to pluck up his courage and made his approach was not a Hunter, but a chairman of a very famous global corporation specialising in dealing with monster remains.

“It’s my honour to meet you like this, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

The businessman introduced himself first, and then...

“We’d like to purchase the remains of all the Giant-type monsters you have hunted down in Japan. Do you have some time to discuss this matter in greater detail?”

Giant-type monsters most of the time appeared as bosses in rank A Gates, so it was very rare to find a completely intact corpse of such creatures.

This man’s desire and acute business acumen led him to make his move a step faster than anyone else present in the banquet hall.

‘This is a good opportunity.’

Jin-Woo grinned affably and introduced Yu Jin-Ho next to him to the

businessman.

“I’m in charge of the raid aspect of the Guild. I usually leave all the business-related discussions to my trusted Vice-Master over here.”

“Ah, is that so?”

Yu Jin-Ho became far bolder than ever before from Jin-Woo propping him up like that. He straightened his back proudly and extended his hand out.

“I’m Yu Jin-Ho, Vice-Chairman of the Ah-Jin Guild.”

“Ahh, yes. Hello. It’s a pleasure.”

“I don’t usually discuss business-related matters in occasions such as this one, but if it’s you, Mister Chairman....”

Jin-Woo watched on as Yu Jin-Ho expertly guided the businessman to somewhere better suited for a conversation like the one they were about to have, and formed a satisfied smile.

‘This kid. He’s finally acting like a proper Vice Chair now.’

But, Jin-Woo’s eyes sharpened almost instantly afterwards. Now that the pair of potential obstructions went away, the real thing would begin now.

Adam White got close to Jin-Woo.

“Here is the list you asked for.”

The screen of the tablet PC he handed over displayed the ten names of the Hunters who could all legitimately be called the world’s best in numerical order.

“We at the Bureau had taken all the feats each Hunter had achieved and converted them into points so we can assign them numbered rankings. These ten people are the ones with the highest amount of ‘Hunter points’ in the world.”

The ‘Hunter points’, he said.

Jin-Woo was intrigued by the fact that the feats and achievements of a Hunter were represented through a points system. He then realised that his name wasn’t on the list and asked Adam White.

“Where am I on this list?”

“If we were to include your feat in hunting down the Giant-type monsters in the points tally, then... you should be around here.”

The American agent pointed in the spot between 3rd and 4th. The names of Liu Zhigeng, Thomas Andre, and Christopher Reid occupied the spots above.

The mere fact that he was already located beneath those three when he hadn't been a rank S Hunter for long attested to all the incredible feats he managed to achieve so far.

'The 4th place is... India's Siddharth Bachchan. And the 5th spot is....'

The first five spots naturally belonged to the five surviving Special Authority-rank Hunters. As for the spots below, they were also occupied by some of the most decorated, celebrated Hunters in the world.

It was then, Jin-Woo stopped reading the list and raised his head after he heard a bit of commotion rising up.

Noisy, noisy....

An unexpected appearance of a certain guest had thrown the party goers into confusion and chaos. Confirming who this guest was, Jin-Woo handed the tablet back to Adam White.

"H-Hunter-nim...."

"You don't need to worry."

As he expected, this guest displayed not one hint of hesitation as he strode straight towards Jin-Woo.

He even proceeded to step aside Liu Zhigeng trying to dissuade him in the middle of the way and stopped right in front of the Korean Hunter, before removing his sunglasses.

Jin-Woo mouthed the man's name.

"Thomas Andre."

Jin-Woo didn't lose his relaxed demeanour even when Thomas Andre was standing before him. However, the same couldn't be said about pretty much all of the onlookers staring at him, and the American with his arm wrapped in bandages. They were getting properly freaked out now.

The burly American looked at his Korean counterpart, who was at least a good head shorter than he was.

"Hunter Seong Jin-Woo... I want to ask you a question."



Chapter 199 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

He wanted to ask a question?

Jin-Woo was puzzled by that, but he didn't pick up any ill intent within the light gleaming from Thomas Andre's eyes so he nodded his head to say yes.

As soon as the answer was given...

"My arm...."

...Thomas Andre raised his left arm, currently wrapped tightly in bandages.

"I heard that the damage from the magic energy attack left behind on this arm was so great that Healers were unable to fix it. Doctors told me the same thing. They said that, although it's healing bit by bit, it'll take a long time before I can use my arm properly again."

He used his left arm to block Jin-Woo's fist lugging around a considerable amount of magic energy. Right after the fight ended, the bones in the arm disintegrated into a fine powder and there was a chance that he'd never get to use his left arm ever again.

Healers and their immediate response, as well as his own excellent regenerative power, had significantly improved his chances, but even then, his condition was still this bad.

That attack was truly, nonsensically powerful.

Traces of bitter battle left behind all over his body gifted him with all sorts of aches and dull pains. However, the pain also gave him the clarity of mind to think about what happened, and then, think some more.

But he failed to arrive at an answer, and having no choice, he decided to seek Jin-Woo out like this.

Even though the Korean Hunter was staring back at him with a look that more or less implied, 'Is he here to boast about his injuries or something?' Thomas Andre still asked him the question in his mind.

"If it was you, you'd have no problem finishing me off, or any of my Guild members."

The ones who kidnapped the Korean's comrade in this foreign land, and

proceeded to attack him when he came to rescue the captive, were Thomas Andre and his underlings.

Just as the statement released by the Hunter Bureau had alluded to, even if Jin-Woo decided to kill every single Scavenger Guild member, he would have escaped any punishment from the U.S. government.

‘Of course, they wouldn’t have any means to prosecute him in the first place....’

However, Seong Jin-Woo took the lives of no one, save for Hwang Dong-Su.

What if Thomas Andre found himself in a similar situation? He’d not let anyone walk away alive. He possessed enough power to do so, and he’d even be backed up by a clear pretext, too.

So, why did Seong Jin-Woo choose to not kill anyone? For the past two days, this thought occupied a big chunk of space inside Thomas Andre’s mind and didn’t want to leave him alone.

“Back then... why did you let us all live?”

Of course, he knew that he was the one who admitted to his defeat and begged for mercy in his own way. However, Jin-Woo was the one who made the final decision in the end.

Not to forget, none of the Guild members had been killed even after being schooled by his summoned creatures. Thomas Andre was really dying to know the ‘why’ of it all.

Too bad for him, Jin-Woo’s answer was so simple that it instantly rendered his deep pondering of the past few days utterly pointless.

“Because none of you committed a crime worthy of death.”

Jin-Woo found it hard to overlook Thomas Andre’s arrogant attitude, but still, the American only showed up back then to protect one of his own Guild members, Hwang Dong-Su.

It was the same story for the rest of the Scavenger Guild members, too. They were in the wrong to start attacking him, but they had fully paid for their indiscretions.

That was what Jin-Woo thought as he withdrew the final attack aimed at Thomas Andre’s head that evening.

Once the American Hunter heard that answer, though, his eyes quaked greatly for a second there.

“....So, that’s how it was.”

Thinking back to the final fate of Hwang Dong-Su who had committed a crime worthy of death as punishment, that answer didn’t seem like a lie.

To think, the reason was a pretty simple one all along.

Thomas Andre’s thoughts were even more complicated than before he heard the answer, but on the flip side, he felt much more refreshed and could form a relaxed smile now.

“I’d like to treat you to a good meal after my arm heals up. Can you leave your contact detail with my manager lady over here, so I can call you later?”

Thomas Andre sounded cautious as he bade goodbye and turned around to leave. Laura was on standby behind him until then and lightly bowed her head.

Her boss didn’t even take a second look behind him and exited from the banquet hall. Every time he took a step forward, the partygoers parted to the side as if he was Moses and they were the Red Sea.

Laura watched his distancing back before shifting her gaze over to Jin-Woo.

“My Guild Master was expressing his gratitude towards you not killing any of his Guild members just now, Hunter-nim.”

Jin-Woo was instantly struck speechless from those words. Just how should he go about interpreting what that man said to arrive at that conclusion??

As if she found Jin-Woo’s confusion not that surprising, Laura quickly added further explanation.

“He might look that way, but in reality, he is far shier than you think.”

“Oh, uh... I see.”

Well, if she said so, that must be it, then.

Thanks to the other side showing up like this first, Jin-Woo got to save time on searching for Thomas Andre and sticking one of his soldiers in the guy’s shadow. So, he just nodded his head to say everything was cool.

Laura, now that her job of interpreting her boss’s particular way of saying goodbyes was complete, pulled out her memo pad and got ready to jot the information down.

“Hunter-nim, if it’s not too much trouble, may I ask you for your contact details? Ah, and also....”

The blonde beauty with her hair tucked up neatly into a bun formed an arresting smile.

“Guild Master wishes to express his gratitude with a gift of some kind. If there is anything you need or want, please tell me.”

“Oh. Thank you, but I don’t need any.”

Jin-Woo politely declined the offer.

Laura quickly formed an awkward smile as if she was troubled by that reply and asked him to reconsider his decision.

“My Guild Master is.... Well, his desire to emerge on top is quite strong, so if he thinks he’s owing someone, he will probably go crazy before long. It really doesn’t matter at all what the item is, so please, tell me what you’d like to have.”

Jin-Woo was about to decline again but stopped resisting after listening to Laura’s recommendation.

He figured that, although he didn’t really need anything, it was against etiquette to reject the other side’s show of goodwill again when they were willing to go this far.

His sole problem remained the same, though.

‘...I can’t think of anything I need right now.’

Money? He already had a considerable amount of that after the last few successful raids.

Besides, the Ah-Jin Guild had made more than what a decently-sized major Guild would make in a year simply by selling off all the remains of the Giant-type monsters. And Jin-Woo was the boss of that Ah-Jin Guild, too.

He knew that the financial might of his Guild would be incomparably small next to the Scavenger’s, but he wasn’t cheap enough to ask for a handout from the American, either.

‘I’m pretty sure there won’t be a moment in the future where I need to ask for help from Thomas Andre or the Scavenger Guild....’

He changed his mind again, thinking that he should probably decline this offer. But then, an idea flashed by in his head.

‘Wait a minute. If it’s the Scavenger....’

This Guild was the gathering of the world’s top elites who continued to work tirelessly every single day.

It was impossible to count all the dungeons they had cleared so far, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the wealth of artefacts they had recovered from those dungeons should be rather sizeable, too.

There was a chance that a useful 'item' might be tucked away within the storage facility of the Scavenger Guild. Jin-Woo forced himself to make his reply.

“If it’s a useful shortsword or a dagger....”

He had run into quite a few opponents with incredible defences recently, and the pair of 'Demon King's Shortswords' was proving to be ineffective against them.

He thought that it might not be a bad idea to swap his weapons for something else with the aid of the Scavenger Guild. Even if no useful item came out from this deal, he'd have nothing to lose, anyway.

“Shortswords or daggers... I see. Thank you, Hunter-nim.”

Laura smiled brightly after hearing his reply. She finished jotting down on her memo pad and also left the banquet hall.

Adam White was scared sh*tless with worry, wondering whether the Goliath's unexpected visit might lead to yet another incident or not. But now that everything ended without a problem, he breathed out a long, long sigh of relief and approached Jin-Woo.

“Hunter-nim. Are you going to meet the Hunters on the list now?”

“Yes, I am.”

“In that case, allow me to be your guide. Our agents are positioned in several places within the hall, so we should be able to locate them very quickly.”

“No need,” replied Jin-Woo with a grin. ***“You don’t have to do that.”***

He had already instructed his Shadow Soldiers to roam around the party venue. He knew pretty much where all the Hunters were by now. All he had to do was to meet them one by one.

Adam White didn't know what was going on, obviously, and could only stand there with his eyes going round from confusion.

“Excuse me?”

Instead of a reply, Jin-Woo asked him a question.

“By the way, there’s one person missing, isn’t there? I don’t see the 6th person on the list in here.”

“But, how did you....?!”

Jin-Woo shrugged his shoulders, and Adam White nodded his head as if he understood.

‘Ah, right. Trade secret, was it...’

The American agent continued on.

“We lost all contact with that person a few days prior to the conference, unfortunately. The Brazilian government is searching for that person’s whereabouts in secret, but they haven’t found any concrete leads yet.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

He got to attach a shadow on the no.2 of the list, Thomas Andre, just now. The 3rd place Christopher Reid and the 6th Brazilian Hunter were not around.

‘Which means there are seven people left.’

Jin-Woo spoke to Adam White.

“Okay, let’s go.”

“Alright.”

The two of them walked around the banquet hall and greeted the Hunters on the list one by one.

He did ask Adam White to organise opportunities to meet them earlier on, because he wanted to learn a bit more about these people he was about to attach the shadows onto. He started off from the first on the list, Liu Zhigeng, and moved on down to the tenth.

‘Uh??’

‘Is Hunter Seong Jin-Woo networking using this occasion?’

‘But, aren’t the Hunters he’s talking to....?’

The Hunters scanned the faces of those people Jin-Woo approached first to share greetings with, and began hoping that just maybe, he’d also stop by and say hello to them as well.

‘He’s coming this way....!’

‘I knew it. Of course, I’m the next one he wants to talk to.’

Hunters waiting anxiously to talk to Jin-Woo would drop their heads in disappointment and wistfulness once he walked right past them.

In no time at all, his ‘operation’ came to an end. Jin-Woo successfully stuck Shadow Soldiers on the Hunters found on the list before leaving the banquet

hall along with his entourage.

“Ah....”

The tenth Hunter on the list cleared his throat and began talking in a louder voice, his back straightening even more. On the other hand, the 11th and below could only knock back their glasses of booze without saying another word.

On that day.

The Hunter Bureau, the organiser of the ‘Night of the Hunters’ banquet, had to work extra hard in order to find out the reason for a sudden, unprecedented spike in the consumption of alcohol during the party.

“So, tomorrow’s the last day, isn’t it?”

The deputy director pushed forward a cup of coffee over to Agent Adam White, currently slouched in an office chair. The younger man sat upright immediately and cautiously took the cup.

“Thank you, sir.”

The deputy director lightly tapped Adam White’s shoulder and settled down next to him.

“I thought I’d faint when I heard the news of Goliath clashing against Hunter Seong, but... it’s a relief that you worked hard to avoid a catastrophe. You did excellent work there.”

“You’re praising me too much, sir....”

He might be saying something like that, but who on this planet would continue to disagree with his superior officer when he was genuinely being praised?

A bright expression formed on Adam White’s face.

The deputy director looked on in contentment at his junior officer’s earnest response and took a sip of his coffee, before asking a question.

“So. What is your opinion on Hunter Seong, now that you had opportunities to observe him from close by?”

Adam White thoughts for a little while, before making his reply.

“Deputy director. Did you know that Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim still exercises every single day, without rest?”

“Exercise?”

“Yes, I confirmed it personally. Every morning, he runs ten kilometres, does 100 push-ups, and also, never forgets to perform sit-ups as well as squats, too.”

“Really??”

The deputy director’s brows arched up.

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, who could legitimately be called the world’s most powerful Hunter, was still performing such basic exercise routines every single day?

Just what kind of an effect would jogging in the morning have on a physique that had surpassed the limitations of the human body by an unimaginable degree?

Adam White saw how confused the deputy director looked and quickly continued on with his thoughts on the matter.

“Sir, I think his exercise routine isn’t about improving his physique, but more to do with his mental discipline.”

“Training his mind, is it...”

Adam White nodded his head.

From his cool-headedness at not being surprised by the technology exceeding what the current level of science could offer, to his diligence of not even missing out on a single day of training – and not to forget, his mysterious ability to recover a fatigued body and mind in an instant.

From Adam White’s perspective, Jin-Woo was a walking, talking bundle of surprises.

The deputy director listening to those tales with a sombre expression wholeheartedly agreed with that assessment.

“Indeed, he... he is truly an amazing fellow.”

How wonderful would it have been if such a man was an American Hunter? He was envious of South Korea for having a Hunter like that as one of their own.

‘Mm? Did coffee taste like this before?’

The coffee the deputy director was drinking alongside his envy and admiration suddenly tasted quite bitter for some reason. In the end, he couldn’t finish it and left behind about half a cup.

There was a well-known saying in Korea.

If you wanted to know where the President's office was located in the Korean Hunter's Association building, just look for the very last window with the lights switching off.

Even today, Goh Gun-Hui was staying behind in his office till late hours to finish up the remainder of his work.

The cases of accidents and incidents were happening more frequently lately as the monsters got stronger, and the number of newbie Awakened increased.

From the perspective of the Hunter's Association charged with managing such situations, it had been a constant parade of one headache after another.

"Hmm."

Goh Gun-Hui put the document down on his desk and rubbed his tired eyes.

'...This is strange.'

For some reason, his heart didn't want to stop trembling for the last few days.

Ba-dump, ba-dump!

His problematic heart had been plaguing him for the last couple of years, so he wasn't too bothered by this, but still, his condition didn't feel right even compared to the past.

'Is this... the limit?'

His personal physician warned him that, if he didn't stop working right away, he'd die within the next half-year or so. But, time continued to tick on for another year. Then, the second year came and went, too.

And he still found himself in this office after all this time.

'If this is as far as I can go, then there's nothing much I can do about it. It's already something else that I managed to carry on this far.'

Goh Gun-Hui formed a thin smile.

"Huhuh."

Why did he feel like this, anyway? In the past, he'd try to push himself even further, wanting to endure for a little while longer. But nowadays, he didn't feel as anxious as back then.

'What has changed?'

What was different now compared to the past couple of years?

Goh Gun-Hui intently deliberated on this subject matter, before a smirk leaked out of his lips after realising how obvious the answer was.

‘Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.’

Finally, South Korea possessed the power to combat a rank S calamity. Just his presence alone, and the status of this country transformed for the better.

‘Right. That’s why my heart’s probably....’

Did his body carry on so he could meet that young man? A bitter and lonely chuckle escaped from Goh Gun-Hui’s lips.

“Look at me, busy talking about some nonsense....”

The Association President’s lonely muttering echoed around the empty office.

‘Now that I think about it, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is scheduled to return tomorrow, isn’t it?’

Just thinking about how he’d get to hear the eyewitness account of Hunter Seong’s feats from the mouth of Chief Woo Jin-Cheol, Goh Gun-Hui’s anticipation began shooting up through the roof.

It was then.

Ringggg.... Ringgg....

His phone suddenly went off unexpectedly.

‘Who’s calling me at this late hour?’

Hopefully, there hadn’t been yet another big scale incident taking place somewhere. Feeling quite anxious, Goh Gun-Hui quickly picked up his phone.

The call was actually from his wife.

“....Oh. Hi, dear.”

The wife was calling to find out her husband’s status since he hadn’t come back home yet, even though it was already so late into the night. Her voice managed to gradually soften the stiff face of Goh Gun-Hui.

“What do you mean, something bad? I was on my home anywa...”

It was then.

Along with a soft ‘chijeek!’ the phone suddenly lost its signal.

“....Hello? Hello?”

Obviously, he could no longer hear his wife's voice.

Did something happen? Goh Gun-Hui tilted his head and put the phone down, before shifting his attention to the outside of the window unconsciously.

'.....!!'

He forgot to breathe, then.

Everything that should be visible through the window was all gone. Various buildings, the roads, even people – all of them.

The only thing remaining was the pitch-black darkness that defied all attempt to decipher how deep it was. Only a blink of an eye later, the scenery outside his window had changed to something else entirely.

An event like this couldn't happen.

“But... But, how can this be?”

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui gasped out in pure shock and was about to get up from his chair, but then...

...But then, he realised that there was someone else in the office right this moment. Someone he had never even seen before.

That man was sitting on the couch as if he had been there for a very long time, too.

‘A human....? No, this isn't the aura of a human being.’

It wasn't just the aura, either.

A face as pale as a corpse; long, silvery-white hair; pointy ears, and silver eyes gleaming brightly like a pair of gemstones.

It was an Ice Elf. Also known as the White Phantom.

Somehow, Goh Gun-Hui had failed to sense its approach, as well as its entrance into the office.

He slowly placed the phone's receiver back into its cradle and quietly threw out a question.

“Who.... are you?”



Chapter 200 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Would talking to ‘it’ work?

The Association President Goh Gun-Hui quietly observed the uninvited guest.

“...”

However, the creature didn’t say anything.

Different from other monsters, though, it didn’t immediately bare its fangs. No, it just sat there in silence while ignoring the owner of this office altogether.

As this uncomfortable silence persisted for a brief period, Goh Gun-Hui found himself with an opportunity to study his new opponent in detail.

‘It looks exactly like an Ice Elf.’

An Ice Elf, often referred to as the White Phantom, was a monster commonly seen within upper-ranked dungeons. The unique appearances of these creatures were well known among the Hunters by now.

Strangely enough, although this uninvited guest’s countenance did possess all the general features of an Ice Elf, there were a few clear differences present as well. That made him question whether this creature was actually from the same Ice Elf race or not.

‘It’s as if....’

....If the Ice Elves were trees that formed part of a forest, then this silent guest of his was like an aged tree guarding a desiccated forest all by itself.

Its skin was cracking up like the bark of a tree; its fingers were bony; a tangled, messy beard on its chin and two deeply-sunken, hollow-looking eyes.

If an Ice Elf managed to live for hundreds, no, thousands of years, then it might look like this guy. It was that kind of face.

The unusual points didn’t end at the creature’s face, though.

Gulp.

Goh Gun-Hui swallowed his dry saliva, unbeknownst to even himself.

‘Its presence... I couldn’t sense its presence at all.’

An uninvited guest had entered in complete silence and settled down on the couch, yet he had failed to sense its approach until he got to confirm the truth with his own two eyes.

His ultra-sharp senses wouldn’t have missed this creature’s arrival if it was nothing but an ordinary monster.

‘...This is not an opponent that I can deal with.’

Goh Gun-Hui quickly assessed his situation, and then, very softly flipped his smartphone up to glance at the screen in order to signal for help.

When he did that, the monster shifted its gaze over to him.

[All contacts with the outside world have been cut off in this space.]

Flinch.

Goh Gun-Hui confirmed that the smartphone had no signal, just as the creature had said, and put the device down.

“Am I dreaming a bad dream right now?”

Not only did a monster intrude into the HQ of Korea’s Hunter’s Association right in the middle of Seoul, it even began speaking in Korean, too. If this wasn’t the very definition of a bad dream, then what else could be?

It was then.

“Keuk!”

Goh Gun-Hui felt a sharp pain brush past his left shoulder and quickly grabbed it tight.

‘Something’ happened the moment this monster pointed at him. He cautiously lifted his hand away to discover a cut wound on the shoulder, as if something sharp had sliced him up.

The truly mystifying thing was, even though his flesh had been sliced open, not a drop of blood came from the wound. Instead, the area around the cut had been frozen solid and white frost had settled around it.

‘Just... how??’

Goh Gun-Hui dazedly stared at his wound before raising his head back up. The monster was still sitting relaxedly on the same spot in the couch.

[Do you think that pain is also a part of your dream?]

Goh Gun-Hui nodded his head.

“I see. So, this is reality. In that case, let me ask you again. Just what are you?”

[I wanted you to recognise me first, but, in the end, you were just a simple human.]

“Just a human....??”

The monster slowly stood up from the couch.

At the same time, couches, the coffee table, and other furniture nearby the creature were shoved violently away and crashed into the walls.

Kwa-du-duk!!

The furniture froze up in an instant and got stuck on the walls.

‘Oh, my god....’

Goh Gun-Hui’s eyes opened wider.

The goosebumps-inducing chill slowly permeated into the office of the Association President.

[I don’t have a habit of toying around with a weakling. Reveal yourself, Fragment of the Brilliant Light.]

Just who would dare to label Goh Gun-Hui as a weakling in this world?

However, he realised that he couldn’t dispute that claim. The creature before his eyes possessed this Mt. Tai-like authoritative power, and whenever it opened its mouth, its voice reverberated and exploded like a thunderclap.

[Hurry up!]

This thing was on another realm compared to him.

He possessed incomparably excellent senses, so he could instantly figure out the differences between his and his opponent’s power level.

Cold perspiration soaked his forehead.

[Are you worried about your vessel breaking? Even if it was not you, your vessel’s lifespan is almost over, anyway.]

The monster then added, ***[But, if you’re hiding away because you’re scared, then...]*** before flipping both of his palms up to face the ceiling. Right away, spine-chilling cold air began condensing there.

[...Then, there is no point in talking to you anymore.]

“...??”

Goh Gun-Hui fell into an extreme case of confusion from the

indecipherable utterance of his opponent, but in the meantime, that incredibly cold air flew out from one of the monster's hands.

KWA-BOOM!!

A powerful explosion swept away the spot where Goh Gun-Hui had been standing on.

White smoke created from the extreme coldness rose up like a veil of fog and covered the surroundings until it was impossible to see anything.

But then, a pair of flames emitting pure light began burning brightly within this smoke. Those were a pair of eyes glowing in a golden hue.

The monster confirmed the colour of the light oozing out from the screen of whiteness and formed an eerie smile, before throwing the remaining clump of cold air in its other hand.

“Hmph!”

Goh Gun-Hui swung his arm and swiped that cold air away. It was flung away and crashed heavily against the wall.

Boom!!

The cold air exploded and the entirety of the wall was blown away. Through the gaping opening, one could see a space filled with endless pitch-black darkness.

The white smoke obscuring the view slowly dissipated, and the unhurt Association President Goh Gun-Hui was revealed in full. Not just his two eyes, but his whole body was enveloped in this stupendous golden aura that wavered around gently in the air.

“You separated the President’s office and hid it in between dimensions. Quite impressive.”

A completely different voice than how he normally sounded came out from Goh Gun-Hui's mouth. The monster began speaking again.

[Finally... finally, we get to meet each other. Oh, Fragment of the most Brilliant Light. I've wandered around for a long time to locate you. But, who'd have thought that you were confined in a broken vessel and couldn't even wield your own powers.]

Unlike the tone of voice that sounded emotional, the monster's expression remained unchanging. With a frozen-stiff face, it continued to speak.

[We have already located the whereabouts of your other seven comrades. And we have destroyed two fragments by now.]

This time, it was Goh Gun-Hui's expression's turn to harden. Not only him, but the locations of all the Rulers had been exposed, and two had already lost their vessels, as well?

Such a counterattack was out of the Rulers' expectations.

[That look on your face.]

The monster formed a creepy smile.

[I always wished to see the panic and fluster in that arrogant, haughty expression of yours. And now, I can destroy your vessel with no regret.]

“Do your worst, Sovereign of Frost!!”

Goh Gun-Hui roared out thunderously!

The wavering golden aura surrounding his body intensified by a step, before transforming into a figure emitting this bright light from his entire body. The darkness filling up the space beyond was illuminated brightly in an instant.

However, even though it was being subjected to this incredible power, the Sovereign of Frost didn't bother to wipe that ridiculing smile off its lips.

[Are you planning to resist me? How foolish.]

Ice-cold white light oozed out from the Sovereign's eyes. At the same time, the floor beneath its feet began freezing up.

Just like how the bright golden light was enveloping Goh Gun-Hui, the intense and bitterly cold air surrounded the Sovereign's entire figure. And then, the creature bared its fangs.

[You merely borrow a human's body, while I have taken over mine. Do you believe that you can even touch a hair on my body?]

At this moment, when the Sovereign had let down its guard – Goh Gun-Hui instinctively realised that this could be his only chance and dashed forward like an arrow to pounce on the Sovereign.

Unfortunately, the opponent's reaction was definitely not slow, either.

KWANG!!

The golden light and the cold air got into a messy tangle and caused a series of intense explosions.

Boom!! Kwahng! Kwa-Boom!!

But, as the battle became protracted, Goh Gun-Hui's movements visibly dulled. Compared to his enemy, the injuries on his body continued to

accumulate. As his actions got harsher and heavier, more and more white steam leaked out from his panting mouth.

“Hah-ahk.”

The length of time a patient at death’s doorstep could fight while stuck in such coldness was at best, two minutes tops. Just as the Sovereign had alluded to, the result of this fight was already set in stone.

His stamina had already reached its limit.

Goh Gun-Hui had already expended more than the permitted amount of magical energy his body could handle. His eyes became bloodshot, and blood began leaking out from the corner of his lips.

Too bad, all of his efforts were for naught.

Stab!

A sharp ice spike stabbed directly into his chest and emerged out his back.

“Keo-heok!”

Goh Gun-Hui spat out a mouthful of blood.

The Sovereign of Frost inflicted a mortal wound on its opponent with an ice spike shooting out from the tip of its hand. Seeing the status of its victim, the creature clicked its tongue as if to lament this situation.

[Is that as far your vessel can go? How pathetic, oh, Fragment of the Brilliant Light.]

Goh Gun-Hui’s head was lowered as he breathed and wheezed painfully. The Sovereign of Frost looked down on him.

[How long will you take to find new vessels? One year? Two years? Unfortunately for you, our armies have already arrived in this world.]

Everything in this world would be destroyed and gone well before the arrival of the Rulers’ soldiers.

[It was your mistake trying to save the denizens of this world. Did we look like such weak opponents that you thought you could win even when diverting your attention to something else?]

The Sovereign of Frost formed a victorious smile.

[Well, then....]

To put the icing on this cake, the Sovereign raised its other hand and got ready. Cold aura began condensing in this raised hand.

The final attack to end the life of the human acting as a Ruler's vessel was taking its shape. But, then....

"Ku-hot. Ahahaha-!!"

Out of the blue, Goh Gun-Hui's blood-soaked lips broke out into hoarse laughter. The Sovereign's hand stopped moving.

[....?]

Goh Gun-Hui panted heavily as he intensely glared at his enemy.

"You think I, cough, fought you without a plan?"

His left hand powerfully and tightly grasped the Sovereign's wrist just beneath his chest.

"Just like how we didn't expect you to imitate our ways, a huge variable has occurred that exceeds your expectation."

[....A variable?]

The eyes of the Sovereign grew wider as it studied the expression of confidence on Goh Gun-Hui's face.

A bluff? No, it couldn't be – his expression was too loaded with hidden meanings for that. Just as the Sovereign's thoughts arrived at that point...

....The creature had to hurriedly tilt its head to the side.

'.....!!'

Truly by a paper-thin margin, an incredible amount of magical energy shot past the location where its head was only a millisecond ago. The attack was so powerful that it even burnt away Goh Gun-Hui's right arm after firing it.

The magic energy crashed into the opposite wall of the separated space and caused a ginormous explosion.

KWA-BOOM!!

The entirety of the separated space trembled from the sheer power.

If such an attack found its intended target, just what might have happened?

'....That was dangerous.'

Too bad for the human, the Sovereign had sensed the enemy's intention in that instant and as a result, was able to dodge it at the very last possible moment. The Sovereign stared at Goh Gun-Hui, who must've exhausted all of his remaining energy from that attack, and formed a smile.

[Was that your final hidden card?]

That smile was clearly one of ridicule. However, Goh Gun-Hui was smiling along, as well.

“That’s right.”

The Sovereign discovered that smile floating up on the pale, waning face of the human and began feeling this puzzling sense of encroaching ill omen.

How come...

How come it was being overwhelmed by this creeping chill, even though victory was at hand? Its puzzlement didn’t last for long, though.

Crack-!

‘...??’

The Sovereign’s gaze quickly shifted to its rear.

The barrier separating this space from the outside was crumbling into pieces after that enormous magical energy slammed into it.

‘Was this his original intention?’

Even then, didn’t this act ultimately a meaningless resistance?

[Nothing would change just because the wall between the dimensions break down.]

It was then, the consciousness of the Ruler dwelling within the old man’s body raised the corner of his lips.

“Will it... really be that way?”

Crash-!!

Soon, the barrier shattered completely and the space regained its original appearance.

Lights from the other buildings; cars on the streets below those buildings; and the President’s office, too. Everything returned to their original place.

Which meant...

Goh Gun-Hui summoned up the last of his strength and shouted at the ground beneath him.

“Now!”

From beneath his feet, a blob separated from his shadow and rapidly transformed into that of a certain ant. This creature avoided the Sovereign altogether and, while screeching out loudly, jumped outside the window.

Kiiehhk-!!

The Sovereign quickly shifted its gaze over to that creature. It couldn't understand why a denizen of the chaos world suddenly appeared here.

However, it was just that, a lone denizen. It was just a weakling of a soldier that submitted to the King of Insects. That was all.

Even then – the Sovereign couldn't rip its eyes away from that ant getting further and further away.

'...Could it be??'

Eventually, the Sovereign's brows shot up higher.

'Ah, ah!'

It should have realised the truth from the beginning.

It should have realised that the reason why the Fragment of the Brilliant Light poured out enough power to shatter the barrier even at the heavy cost to the human's body, when the Ruler always chose to conserve its strength, worried that the vessel would break sooner if it went all out.

Indeed, the b*stard hadn't been resisting so bitterly in order to escape from the barrier. There was yet another reason behind his actions.

'No!'

The Sovereign of Frost belatedly realised the identity of that ant and its eyes grew even wider than before.

Pah-bahk!

The Sovereign hurriedly discarded Goh Gun-Hui and leapt in the direction where that ant had run off to. Cold air coalesced in its hand and froze up to create an ice sickle.

The creature instantly arrived at the ant's location and slammed down with its ice sickle. But then...

Grab!

The wrist wielding the sickle was immediately grabbed by someone's hand. The grasping power was so great that the Sovereign couldn't retract its arm at all, no matter what.

But, even before the creature had any time to be surprised by that power, its neck was grabbed hard, too.

[Keok!]

The Sovereign of Frost confirmed just who appeared in the spot where the ant had disappeared from and felt its heart tumble to the pit of its stomach.

And then, it asked in a disbelieving tone of voice.

[But, you... Why?]

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo grasped the neck of this Sovereign of Frost tightly so it wouldn't be able to escape, and shot it a puzzled look.

“An Ice Elf?”



Chapter 201 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo had a bit of history with the monsters called Ice Elves.

Didn't he encounter these creatures when he stumbled into a Red Gate for the first time in his life? How rueful did he feel back then, after seeing the boss mob 'Baruka' slipping out of his hands while leaving only a dagger behind?

Just remembering that event brought back all the bad emotions he felt then after failing to extract that monster's shadow.

'And here I was, having just barely forgotten about it...'

Naturally, his strength while gripping this creature's wrist and neck increased.

Wuduk!

[Keok!]

In any case, why was a high-ranking monster that should have been confined to a dungeon roaming freely around here?

Jin-Woo got here by switching his position with his Shadow Soldier. up, he used 'Ruler's Authority' to keep his balance and float in the air about 7 or 8 stories high. While gripping the monster tightly, he asked this mysterious Ice Elf a question.

"What the hell are you?"

Seeing those pointy ears, or the long whitish hair, or even its pair of silvery eyes, this thing seemed to be a White Phantom alright, but then again, he could also sense the trace of an unfathomably lengthy passage of time from this creature, too.

Not only that....

[Kuwuaaahk!]

The monster gritted its teeth and shook off Jin-Woo's hands.

'...!!'

What an incredible physical strength!

Even before he had the chance to get surprised from the monster slipping out of his grasp, Jin-Woo picked up on this chilling aura coagulating around the creature's mouth.

Inexplicably, the image of Demon King Baran shooting lightning out of its mouth overlapped with this b*stard. By sheer instinct, Jin-Woo tilted his torso away.

Kawahh-!!

The bitterly cold air shot out from the monster's mouth, sped past Jin-Woo's original position, and poured out into the air behind him.

After confirming the scary amount of magical energy being poured out by the monster with his two eyes, Jin-Woo quickly retreated an adequate-enough distance away.

'.....'

He lightly dusted the particles of ice clinging onto his shoulder and stared intently at the Ice Elf – no, the Sovereign of Frost.

That thing was no ordinary monster. His ultra-sharp senses were warning him that this thing was much stronger than any monster he had faced off against so far.

Jin-Woo wasn't the only one getting surprised, though.

[But, how can you....??]

The Sovereign hurriedly looked at Jin-Woo's shadow and, after confirming the number of soldiers hiding in there, couldn't hide the fact that it was feeling deeply surprised right now.

[You have managed to amass that many soldiers, so why haven't you contacted us already?]

When Jin-Woo made no effort to reply, the Sovereign began looking into his eyes. And then, a pained gasp leaked out from the creature's mouth.

[So, that's how it was.... You're the variable he talked about, aren't you?]

What was this fool talking about?

Jin-Woo was getting rather curious about the meaning behind this monster's constant babbling, but too bad, he didn't have enough leeway to hold a cordial Q&A session with this creature.

Just one moment of carelessness and the enemy's blade would reach him. And that blade wasn't dull enough for him to ignore it and hope for the best. As a matter of fact, his shoulder that got frozen for a moment just a few

seconds ago was still aching even now.

Jin-Woo took a glance at the hurting shoulder and quietly summoned the ‘Demon King’s Short Swords’ from his Inventory.

Weapons silently appeared in his hands.

‘Is it a Mage-type creature?’

Judging from how it barely managed to get out of his grasp, its physical strength or defences didn’t seem to be as high as its magical energy reserve suggested.

Which was a relief, actually.

He knew from his vast experiences in fighting many different types of monsters up until now that the Mage-type enemies were the easiest to deal with since they could be killed in an instant.

Just one hit would be enough to determine the winner.

If they both possessed a similar level of magical energy reserves, then the one needing to dodge the magic attacks would hold an advantage.

His opponent must’ve known that too because it didn’t immediately try to go on the offensive, even though it had clearly sensed Jin-Woo’s hostility.

The Sovereign of Frost deliberated on its options very seriously – but, only for a brief time – before deciding on what it would do next.

[...We shall stop here. I didn’t come here today to hold a life-or-death struggle with you.]

“What was that??”

Jin-Woo frowned deeply. He had no desire to let this guy leave, so just who decided when they would stop fighting?

Besides, this creature wielded a massive amount of magic energy. Jin-Woo couldn’t even begin to imagine just how many experience points he’d earn if he successfully killed this monster. His level might even jump up by another ten, just like back when he killed the King of Giants.

‘...Hang on.’

When his thoughts arrived there, Jin-Woo finally deduced the identity of the monster.

‘Could that thing be....??’

Meanwhile, the Sovereign pointed towards the broken wall of the Hunter’s Association building.

[Did you not come here to save that human?]

Technically speaking, he came here because the ant soldier he left behind in the Association President's shadow sent him an urgent alert, that was all.

Jin-Woo's gaze shifted towards the location the Sovereign's outstretched finger was pointing at. And he found Goh Gun-Hui lying on the floor there.

‘...!!’

The unconscious Association President was covered in blood from head to toe, and even at a casual glance, he could tell that the man's life was hanging precariously on the edge.

It was then.

[Now, choose.]

A large, incredibly sharp ice lance suddenly formed on the left hand of the Sovereign.

[Choose between fighting me or saving that human.]

The moment the creature's words came to an end, the lance flew towards Goh Gun-Hui.

Jin-Woo's eyes widened. He pushed his concentration to the absolute max, causing the flow of time to slow down greatly. He watched the lance fly agonisingly slowly, but accurately, towards the unmoving Association President.

‘Ruler's Authority!’

He tried to use his invisible hand to stop the ice lance, but the magical energy of the one who threw it easily thwarted his attempts. Enraged, Jin-Woo shifted his glare at the Sovereign of Frost.

The b*stard was waiting. For Jin-Woo's answer, that was.

He bit his lower lip before dashing towards the spot where the Association President Goh Gun-Hui had collapsed on.

Wuuwung-!!

The air where Jin-Woo used to be wavered and tumbled about from the explosive power. Just before the lance landed, he arrived by Goh Gun-Hui's side first with almost no time to spare and dragged the unmoving man away from the weapon's trajectory.

Kwajeeck!!

The lance stabbed straight through the floor and the bitter coldness rapidly

flooded out to freeze up the surroundings in an instant.

Kwa-du-duk, kwa-duk!!

In the blink of an eye, the entire floor of the President's office froze up solid from the extremely low temperature.

'D*mn it!'

Jin-Woo picked Goh Gun-Hui up and lightly jumped up in the air to avoid the freeze, and once this incredible biting coldness stopped spreading around, he settled back down on the floor.

Further enraged by this cheap tactic, Jin-Woo raised his head to look, but the b*stard was already jumping into a small Gate to escape from this battle.

In a rush, he quickly summoned 'Baruka's Dagger' from the Inventory and threw it.

'Dagger Rush!'

Swishhhh-!

The dagger flew in a dead-straight line and accurately stabbed into the Sovereign's shoulder.

[Kuwahk!!]

The Sovereign of Frost glared at the dagger in its shoulder, then glared at the one who threw it next – at Jin-Woo – and gnashed its teeth. It soon disappeared into the depth of the Gate.

Jin-Woo was thinking of chasing after the creature, but seeing the Gate's gradually shrink in size, he gave up on that idea. Besides, Goh Gun-Hui's current condition wasn't good enough for him to focus his attention elsewhere.

"Euh-euhk...."

The older man gasped out a pained moan.

Jin-Woo's lips closed shut in a straight line as he watched the Association President Goh Gun-Hui teeter precariously on the edge of life and death.

'This can't be healed with a healing potion.'

In that case, the best response he could come up with was to....

....Jin-Woo yelled out at the top of his lungs.

"Beru!"

Right away, he sensed the familiar aura hurriedly fly out from his

apartment from a far away.

Kwa-boom!!

Beru smashed past several walls after flying in with all his might and entered the President's office, before kneeling down in front of Jin-Woo.

“Have you called for me, oh, my king?”

Jin-Woo cautiously lowered Goh Gun-Hui's upper torso on the floor and took a step back.

There was so much blood dripping out from the Association President that Jin-Woo's hands were now painted crimson just from supporting the older man's torso for a few seconds.

Drip, drip....

Jin-Woo's complexion grew gloomier as he stared at the droplets of blood fall to the floor from his fingertips.

Beru did as his master willed it and approached Goh Gun-Hui. He began using up all of his magical energy healing the gravely injured man.

Wuuonng... Wuuwuong...

Unfortunately, the complexion of the dying man didn't want to improve at all even with such a concerted healing effort. Beru panicked and opened his mouth.

“M-my king....”

Beru's scared eyes shifted over to Jin-Woo as he spoke.

“My healing magic... isn't working on him. I can't heal this man.”

“What??”

He didn't seem to be exaggerating, because Beru's hands were shuddering as he continued on with his healing magic. Even Jin-Woo could sense the enormous amount of Beru's magic energy being spent right now. At this rate, even the former ant king would keel over from exhaustion.

Jin-Woo halted the healing effort and sat down next to Goh Gun-Hui to take a closer look at the man's current condition. Despite Beru's near-selfless efforts, the Association President's vitality had weakened even further than before.

Whatever that attack was, the hole in Goh Gun-Hui's chest didn't want to close up even after Jin-Woo poured in a whole bottle of the most expensive healing potion sold in the Store.

'D*mn it!'

Jin-Woo's breathing became urgent as the critical moment for Goh Gun-Hui approached closer and closer. The man who did his best for Jin-Woo's sake was slipping away and he couldn't do anything.

Out of sheer desperation, he even summoned out the bottle of 'Divine Water of Life', but before he could use it, someone grasped his wrist.

"Please.... stop."

It was Goh Gun-Hui. He managed somehow to force his eyes open.

"Association President!"

His breathing remained heavy as if it was on the brink of cutting out. He still got to confirm the faces of Jin-Woo and Beru next to him, though.

"...You did come for me. Thank you."

A weak smile spread on Goh Gun-Hui's face.

"Please, hold on for a little bit longer. I'll take you to a hospital right now."

Jin-Woo's urgent voice only managed to earn a shake of Goh Gun-Hui's head.

"It's useless... the attack that got me far exceeds the level of being curable with medicine or magic."

"But, sir!"

Jin-Woo was about to get angry after hearing those words of weakness from the Association President, but he had to stop. Goh Gun-Hui's trembling hand was grasping his, that was why.

"Listen to me!"

As if he was spurring on the dying embers of life for one last hurrah, Goh Gun-Hui's brows rose up high, his eyes opening up wide.

"I was able to get in touch with the will of the great beings. I saw their plans, who our common enemies are, and the things that we must do...."

The blood pooling in Goh Gun-Hui mouth gurgled and welled up.

"What a relief that you're here with us... to think, you'd possess that kind of power.... Thank you, God...."

Tears began welling up in Goh Gun-Hui's eyes as he stared at Jin-Woo. He then grasped the young Hunter's hand with both of his own and spoke with a

trembling voice.

“Gates and dungeons weren’t for them. In order to protect us, they chose this method, and.... Cough....”

At that moment, Goh Gun-Hui coughed and reddish-black blood splattered out from his mouth.

Jin-Woo hurriedly tried to use the Divine Water, but Goh Gun-Hui shook his head. He knew the condition of his own body better than anyone.

“Sometime in the future... there will come a time when you must make a decision. When you do... I pray that you remain on the side of mankind.”

Hearing the pained gasping voice of Goh Gun-Hui, Jin-Woo felt as if his heart was being ripped to pieces. But, all he could do right now was to quietly listen to his words. That’s all he could do.

“Cough. I always wished I could fight alongside young people like you. But.... This body of mine made sure that would never happen.”

For the first time ever, Goh Gun-Hui poured out what was in his heart without holding back.

Some people pointed their disapproving fingers at him, accusing him of establishing the Association to rake in more money. Some even insulted him as a senile old fool who was blinded by the allure of power.

The thing was, the man they were criticising was feeling angry that, even though he was blessed with this incredible power, he couldn’t even use it properly.

He sought out other avenues to use his powers and, after spending every cent to his name, created the Hunter’s Association. And through this organisation, he got to be near other Hunters and fulfilled his calling to its fullest.

“Even then, cough, I don’t regret anything. I can now entrust the future to young people like you. That’s all I ask for.”

Drop....

Goh Gun-Hui’s hands holding onto Jin-Woo’s powerlessly fell to the floor. And he was no longer staring at the young man, but at the ceiling of his office.

Was it because his tears had spread out? The lights hanging on the ceiling, the ones he always thought were a bit too dim for his liking, seemed excessively blinding today.

Goh Gun-Hui shielded his eyes to block those lights.

“I’m truly relieved.... Thank you, thank you....”

At the end of those words, the Association President Goh Gun-Hui stopped murmuring altogether.

Confirming that he was no longer breathing now, Jin-Woo wordlessly closed the deceased man’s unmoving eyes shut. Like his final words of gratitude, the expression on his face was one of peace.

Jin-Woo raised his head above to stare outside.

Drip, drip...

He saw through the destroyed wall the raindrops falling from the cloudy sky. The sky that had been gloomy since the early morning.

day. Several headlines dominated the front pages of countless newspapers.

The first news item was about Brazil’s greatest Hunter, ‘Jonas’ being found on the vicinity of a river – as a corpse. The second one was about the grisly murder of the Korean Hunter’s Association President after his chest was stabbed through by an unidentified assailant.

And finally, the news of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo returning to South Korea.



Chapter 202 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

First, it was Christopher Reid.

, Brazil's top Hunter, Jonas.

And finally, the Korean Hunter's Association President, Goh Gun-Hui.

The news of these Hunters dying, thought to be some of the world's best, was revealed to the public one after the other and caused substantial chaos in their wake.

If the enemies were capable of murdering the Hunters who stood at the apex when it came to fighting power, then just who would be able to catch them?

The world's mass media continued to talk about nothing else other than the deaths of these three Hunters for several days and nights. America's own Hunter Bureau even issued an official statement regarding these events, too.

And it said that the Bureau had gotten in contact with various Guilds from other nations to focus their resources in tracking down the culprits responsible.

Unfortunately, the public's fears couldn't be assuaged with a simple statement like that. It was obvious why – the trusty walls that defended them like an impregnable fortress from the dire threats of monsters had been breached, after all.

As the Hunter communities and the mass media around the world were going through an upheaval, the Korean Hunter's Association suddenly released video footage to the public. It contained scenes recorded from Association President Goh Gun-Hui's office at the time of his death.

“Oh, my god!”

“Heok!”

Everyone who clapped their eyes on the footage in question couldn't hide their shocks and astonishments.

Two men were shown on the captured footage.

One of them was, without a doubt, the Association President Goh Gun-Hui. As for the other 'man' stabbing the former's chest with something very sharp,

he was... no matter how one looked, that thing was not human.

It was a monster.

‘An Ice Elf!!’

The shocking sight of a monster that should’ve been confined in a dungeon murdering a top-ranked Hunter was captured so vividly in the video. The creature’s face in a close-up soon spread out to the rest of the world.

The shockwave from that video was massive.

People finally realised that, although Hunters existed to hunt down monsters, they too could be hunted down in turn by their supposed prey, just like everyone else. This only served to create yet another layer of terror in the people’s hearts.

Regular folks were being protected by the Hunters, but then, who was protecting these Hunters?

Things got bad enough to the point where some people began saying that the nation’s best Hunters shouldn’t be let outside their own borders, citing that Jin-Woo was not in Korea at the time of the Association President Goh Gun-Hui’s murder.

And so – as the chaotic atmosphere ruled supreme, the focus of the general public quickly shifted over to Jin-Woo. Everyone knew the close-knit relationship he had with the Association President, so people naturally became curious as to what his response would be.

However, Jin-Woo didn’t say anything to the media.

A few days went by like that.

By this time, the investigation into the Association President Goh Gun-Hui’s cause of death was complete. The day before the funeral, Jin-Woo paid an unannounced visit to the Hunter’s Association.

Woo Jin-Cheol, looking wane and exhausted, came to receive Jin-Woo at the waiting area.

“I’m sorry about the wait, Hunter-nim. It’s been really hectic for the last few days....”

Woo Jin-Cheol rubbed his scruffy, unkempt beard and apologised. On that day they returned from the United States, he was greeted with this out-of-nowhere news and had to rush straight back to the Hunter’s Association.

The meeting of these two men was taking place exactly three days after

that. Before they got down to business, though, Jin-Woo asked him a question.

“Why did you... hide the rest of the footage taken by the CCTV camera?”

The Association’s footage went only as far as revealing the face of the Sovereign of Frost. As for Jin-Woo or Beru who entered the Association President’s office afterwards, their footage was not revealed to the public.

Woo Jin-Cheol scratched his head and replied with a bitter expression on his face.

“We at the Association will always prioritise the safety of our Hunters. We decided that we can’t carelessly reveal one of your hidden abilities to the public.”

A Hunter’s skills were like all the hidden trump cards he or she possessed. Publicly revealing a skill would be akin to unveiling one’s hands. Quite obviously, the higher the one’s Awakened rank was, the more likely it was for one to hide one’s skills, as this act could save one’s life in an unexpected situation.

Jin-Woo’s skill that allowed him to travel in the blink of an eye from America to the Hunter’s Association building in South Korea – the Association decided that they couldn’t reveal a skill this monumental to the world without the consent of the Hunter in question.

“I’m sure that the Association President would have made the exact same decision if he was still with us.”

Chief Woo Jin-Cheol respected Goh Gun-Hui greatly and one could even say that he was closer to his late boss than anybody else in this organisation. So, when he mentioned the term ‘Association President’, his eyes reddened automatically.

“Ah, I see. That was why your expression looked so scary and unforgiving before we got on the plane heading back home.”

Jin-Woo admitted to Woo Jin-Cheol’s guess with a simple nod.

The latter felt as if a mystery was solved the moment he watched the footage – the mystery regarding why Jin-Woo’s atmosphere came across as so heavy on the day they were about to depart for South Korea.

“Was that monster so strong that you couldn’t stop it, Hunter-nim?”

Jin-Woo shook his head.

“When I got here, it was already.....”

Jin-Woo formed a gloomy expression again and Woo Jin-Cheol's head dropped lower in the end.

“I’m sorry.... I’m sure you’re also feeling really bad right now. I was just frustrated and that ended up troubling you....”

Woo Jin-Cheol knew better than anyone that Jin-Woo was not responsible. That was perhaps why the latter's attempt at trying to console the former only made it worse.

“I still can’t believe it.”

Woo Jin-Cheol's gaze remained fixed on the floor as he carried on.

“How could he die.... He was urging me the day before to return as soon as possible because he wanted to hear about everything that happened in the U.S....”

Jin-Woo patiently waited for Woo Jin-Cheol as the latter struggled to finish his sentence.

“What did.... What did the Association President say to you? Before he closed his eyes?”

“He said that he felt relieved.”

“Pardon?”

Woo Jin-Cheol raised his head, surprised.

“He felt relieved that the future could be entrusted to the young Hunters, like myself....”

“Ah.”

That's what he meant.

Tears began falling from Woo Jin-Cheol's eyes as his emotions welled up. He felt moved by the generous heart of Association President Goh Gun-Hui, who worried for the future of his fellow men right up until the end.

He dabbed around his eyes with the back of his hand and hid the tears away before nodding his head.

“Thank you. Thank you for being there for the final moments of the Association President.”

The thing about him being relieved couldn't have been a lie. If it was, how could he have formed such a serene expression as he passed on?

Woo Jin-Cheol's gratitude was genuine, it came from the depths of his heart.

“...”

Jin-Woo kept his mouth firmly shut, opting to not reply. He felt as if his complicated thoughts had been untangled somewhat by having this conversation with Woo Jin-Cheol.

“...I’ll kill that b*stard.”

“Excuse me?”

Jin-Woo’s expression became extremely cold.

“The monster that murdered the Association President. I’ll definitely hunt it down.”

Not just for the sake of avenging Goh Gun-Hui, but to send the clear message to those b*stards threatening him.

Gulp.

Woo Jin-Cheol swallowed his dry saliva.

He knew that this killing aura wasn’t even directed at him, yet he could hardly breathe right now from the intense pressure. As a matter of fact, this cold and heavy murderous intent was squashing down hard on his shoulders.

Jin-Woo spotted Woo Jin-Cheol’s complexion becoming pale and quickly withdrew his aura.

“You can save your thanks until then.”

“Oh....”

Woo Jin-Cheol did his best to calm the pounding heart in his chest and nodded his head.

“I understand.”

Only then did he realise that Jin-Woo still hadn’t told him about the purpose of his visit to the Association. A Hunter on his level wouldn’t have come here to ask about the latter part of the security video footage.

So, Woo Jin-Cheol asked politely.

“I apologise for my inattentiveness.... I even forgot to ask you why you are paying us a visit, Hunter-nim.”

Jin-Woo told him about the decision he had come to after a few days of deliberation.

“Can you organise me a press conference?”

Reporters descended on the press conference venue like a flock of vultures. Jin-Woo was being seen as a walking, talking bundle of big news waiting to happen to these reporters for a while now.

And such a man had called for a press conference, the first time ever that he did that, so which reporter worth his or her salt wouldn't be interested in that?

Noisy, noisy....

The conference venue became quite noisy, as befitting the large number of the gathered crowd. But, just like a lie, every single one of them shut their mouths as soon as Jin-Woo made his entrance.

Right away, the expectant silence filled up the venue.

Jin-Woo could feel each of the focused gazes from the reporters landing on his skin as he began addressing them.

“A group of monsters possessing a high level of intelligence is currently hunting down humanity’s top-ranked Hunters. They are stronger than any Hunters out there, and they also employ all sorts of means to get to their targets.”

A group of monsters?

There was more than one monster that murdered the Association President Goh Gun-Hui?

The reporters were immediately thrown into confusion.

However, Jin-Woo got his information straight from the mouth of the King of Giants, the Sovereign of the Beginning. There were nine Sovereigns, and he said that soon, a battle between them and the so-called ‘Rulers’ would commence.

The Sovereigns were prioritising targetting the Hunters at the top of the pile who were borrowing the powers of the Rulers. Three Hunters had been killed already. And it was unknown how many more victims would arise in the near future.

For the time being, he did attach his boys to those Hunters that the Hunter Bureau had pointed out, but realistically speaking, he couldn't keep his eyes on every single Hunter in the world who was called ‘strong’.

For instance, there could be another victim from an unexpected quarter like Goh Gun-Hui.

Jin-Woo's sudden press conference was meant to serve as a message of warning to the potential victims who were fighting against monsters in some

parts of the world.

“These monsters employ special magic that separates the targetted space from the surroundings. That’s how they isolate their targets.”

This was incredible information. He could reveal this without hesitation because he had met a Sovereign already.

“That is why, if you fear that you might be their next target, please, stay as close as humanly possible to your comrades that could protect you. However, just in case.....”

‘Just in case’, he said.

Jin-Woo finally revealed the reason why he wanted to hold this press conference in the first place.

“If you don’t have a comrade that can fulfil that role, contact the Korean Hunter’s Association. They will put you through to me.”

“Oh, oh!”

Exclamations of admiration came out from the lips of the reporters.

Such unwavering confidence!

The Hunter responsible for beating Thomas Andre to a pulp was emitting a confidence-inspiring aura as if such monsters were a trifling matter to him. This sure was a surprising announcement capable of blowing away the fog of anxiety from the public’s hearts.

The thing was, though – Jin-Woo was actually aiming for something else.

‘I’ll lay a trap using all the Hunters that might be targetted by those b*stards.’

With this, he’d be able to trace the movements of the Sovereigns even if they targetted the retired or inactive Hunters like the Association President Goh Gun-Hui. He had no doubt that at least one of them would fall into his trap sooner or later.

When Jin-Woo was about to end his announcement, a barrage of questions descended on him almost immediately.

“I’m a reporter working for the X Daily! How do you know so much about this group of monsters, Hunter-nim?”

“I’ve encountered them before.”

To be more specific, he had run into them twice already. He met the King of Giants in Japan, while the other one in Korea.

Noisy, noisy....

Reporters couldn't immediately recover from their surprises but still, they didn't forget to jot down what Jin-Woo had said.

“Does that mean you were unscathed even after encountering them, Hunter-nim??”

Jin-Woo replied concisely, his eyes burning with the flames of confidence.

“Yes.”

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was unhurt even after encountering those creatures! Reporters hurriedly operated their cameras as the expected scoop happened yet again.

Click, click, click, click-!!

It was then, a certain reporter sitting a bit away from the front row raised his hand up high. He was none other than the same reporter who accompanied Chief Woo Jin-Cheol to document the sacrifices the Hunters had made trying to battle the angel statue. Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to him.

Reporter Kim slowly lowered his hand and, quite unlike his frenzied peers, voiced his question clearly and concisely.

“What will you do when you meet the monster responsible for the murder of the Association President Goh Gun-Hui?”

Jin-Woo studied the still-furious expression etched on the face of Reporter Kim without saying anything, before switching the mic off.

“....That will be all.”

Reporter Kim stared for a long time at Jin-Woo's departing back as the latter descended from the platform. He thought that, even though there was no verbal answer, he could still hear the young Hunter's determined voice somehow.

“Guild Master.”

“Master!”

The two security guards on duty jumped up from their seats in surprise after seeing Thomas Andre walking towards their guard station, but he simply signalled at them, telling them to settle back down.

Beep.

He pressed his thumb on the fingerprint scanner, and the automated door

slid open. He and the top manager of the Guild, Laura, stepped into the underground storage facility located below the Guild's building.

The two guards who got spooked by Thomas Andre's presence were rank A Hunters in reality.

Since he stayed in the building's penthouse suite and would be informed immediately if something happened, the number of people who could step into this storage facility were extremely few.

Thomas Andre didn't hesitate for a second and headed straight into the deepest part of the underground facility.

"Are you really planning to gift him with 'those', sir?"

Beep.

They finally gained access to the chamber housing 'those' after another round of fingerprint scanning.

"What's the matter? Do you believe this is too much for the price of my Guild members, as well as my life?"

"No, sir. That's not it, but..."

"Well, you think he's not good enough as a Hunter to wield these guys, then?"

"..."

Laura knew that talking to him now was a waste of time. Since she knew retorting to him wouldn't work anyway, she decided to close her mouth shut for now.

Meanwhile, Thomas Andre stood before the items he was searching for. These weapons didn't even suit him at all, yet he couldn't help but feel his heart tremble every time he stood before them.

"...No matter how many times I look at them, they still look cool."

Thomas Andre murmured in admiration, and Laura tried to dissuade him one last time, her voice sounding slightly unwilling.

"Sir, there are only two of these in the entire world."

"Yup, that's true."

"And it'll stay that way."

"I'm sure it will."

"Even then, will you still give them away?"

“That’s why I’m giving them to him.”

Thomas Andre formed a smirk.

It had been almost eight years since these guys were crafted, but the searing light coming off of them hadn’t diminished by a single bit.

“The best Hunter needs the best weapons. Don’t you think it’s too much of a waste to let them rot in here?”

As if to answer him, a pair of shortswords resting within the metal case reflected the spotlight, the glare of the blades remaining sharp and cold.



Chapter 203 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Streets were filled with the gloomy atmosphere of a funeral.

Someone had to perform that role, but no one wanted to step forward to do it – that was the position of the first President of the Hunter’s Association.

Goh Gun-Hui.

When the nation needed someone to rally the powerful Hunters, he unhesitatingly closed up his own successful business and rolled up his sleeves to get to work.

And under the command of its President Goh Gun-Hui, the Korean Hunter’s Association was able to achieve so many things.

The organisation controlled and protected various Hunters; at the same time, it took the lead in compensating the victims of the monster attacks, while also silently aiding the families of the deceased Hunters, as well.

Many victims who had received Goh Gun-Hui’s aid in the past gathered at his memorial service and cried their hearts out in genuine sorrow.

Citizens filled up the venue until there was no room to even stand; the people paying their respects remained until deep into the night, burning their candles and grieving for the life lost.

Even the various TV stations interrupted their regular broadcasting schedules to play the video packages summarising the life of the late Association President and his various accomplishments.

One of the gigantic electronic advertising boards hung up in the middle of the city played the scene of Goh Gun-Hui taking shots at Assemblyman Nam Joon-Wook during the parliamentary hearing.

["I’d like to urge you to think about this carefully. If and when another rank S Gate appears in our land, just who will step up to protect your life? You will not be able to buy back your life even if you are willing to pay hundreds of times, no, make that thousands of times the price you paid for your new residence."]

The pedestrian lights changed colour to green, but no one moved from their spot. They stood still, unable to rip their eyes away from the electronic boards

or from their smartphones.

up was a clip of an interview featuring the longtime personal physician of Goh Gun-Hui.

[“Back when Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim was fighting against the ant monsters on Jeju Island, I was watching the raid broadcast by the Association President’s side. He turned around to tell me that his biggest wish had now come true, and he had no more regrets left. But to think, he’d really leave us like this....”]

His eyes were red and swollen even before the interview began, and the good doctor eventually broke down and cried.

The viewers watching all became lost for words. They began recalling the sight of the Association President Goh Gun-Hui standing before the families of the victims and wordlessly shedding tears after the previous three attempts to take Jeju Island back all ended in failures.

Just as the number of people who respected and admired him was great, the number of those who hated him and were jealous of him was quite high, as well. However, even these people paid their respects to him on this day, their hearts all feeling the same sort of emotion.

*

Late at night.

Jin-Woo stood on the rooftop of the 100-stories-tall Daesung Tower. Powerful gusts of wind constantly blew at him as he stood at this dizzying height, but his body didn’t even sway for one second.

His eyes were fixated on the cityscape below. He could see the streets of Seoul filled with the palpable air of grief.

One of the electronic advertisement boards was playing a documentary detailing the life of the Association President Goh Gun-Hui.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo’s sharp glare scanned every corner of the city like a hawk searching for prey.

Meanwhile, his Shadow Soldiers were searching through Seoul with greater efficiency than before, perhaps owing to the fact that they felt familiar with the order as it was similar to the one he issued in America.

A great deal of information flowed into Jin-Woo’s mind, but none of them was what he wanted to know. No matter how much of the city was searched, no traces of that ancient White Phantom could be detected.

‘As expected, this method isn’t going to work.’

Jin-Woo knew all too well that using a method like this to catch a monster who was capable of freely entering and exiting a dimension through Gates was not the answer.

Back then, he tried to stick a Shadow Soldier on the b*stard before it made its escape so he could chase after it later. But that ended in failure. Because... that creature didn’t have that one little thing that all existences possessed. It didn’t have a shadow.

‘It’s supposed to be a spiritual body or some such, right?’

The King of Giants did say that both the Sovereigns and the Rulers were made up of the ‘spiritual bodies’ so they couldn’t be turned into Shadow Soldiers.

If that was the reason why that Sovereign didn’t possess a shadow, then Jin-Woo no longer enjoyed the benefit of having the greatest method of tracking someone down.

However....

‘...It doesn’t matter.’

The King of Giants warned him back then – once Jin-Woo’s existence was known to the remaining Sovereigns, they would not sit back idly and suck on their thumbs. That’s what he said.

Meaning, these Sovereigns would come knocking on his doorstep sooner rather than later. Not to target the Association President Goh Gun-Hui, but him, as their sole target.

But when that happens, he would.....

The heavy and intense killing intent spread out from Jin-Woo.

Ever since he got the System, his reward for surviving the terrors of the first dual dungeon, he had never missed his enemy. The only one to buck this trend was that ‘Ice Elf’.

Jin-Woo had ensured that his enemies would meet their ends, regardless of whether they were monsters or humans. And he wasn’t planning on letting that thing become the only exception.

But then....

‘Uh....?’

He had to take a pause there.

Jin-Woo was going through all the enemies he fought until now and realised that something was a bit odd.

Now that he thought about it...

‘...Wait, when I was fighting Hwang Dong-Su or Thomas Andre, I didn’t see any messages from the System, did I?’

In the past, the System always warned him with messages if someone nearby directed murderous intent towards him, and soon after that, issued emergency quests.

It happened with Hwang Dong-Seok, Kahng Tae-Sik, and finally, with Kim Cheol. There was no exception.

Hell, he even received a warning message during that sparring session with Goto Ryuji just because, for the briefest moment, the Japanese Hunter attacked him with the intent to cause real harm.

‘But then, no messages popped up when Hwang Dong-Su was trying to get revenge for his brother, or when Thomas Andre declared that he’d kill me. Why?’

What a strange development this was.

No matter how he dissected it, it didn’t sound right. Jin-Woo pondered this mystery for a second or two, then pulled out his phone in order to confirm a theory of his.

Thankfully, he still had the contact number he got from that American’s blonde lady manager.

It was 1 AM in Korea, but when thinking about the time difference to the Eastern United States, he shouldn’t be unduly inconveniencing them.

Ringgg....

As he expected, the ringtone didn’t last long before the other side answered the call.

Perhaps puzzled by the phone call, Thomas Andre’s voice sounded a bit surprised.

“Actually, there was something I wanted to ask you about.”

“That day, when we were fighting....”

“Did you attack me with the intent to kill?”

Since Thomas Andre was rather unwilling to recall the events of that day, Jin-Woo quickly explained that he simply wanted to satisfy his curiosity and

nothing more.

There was no reason to hide anything, though. Thomas Andre took his time before answering as truthfully as he promised earlier.

As expected – the murderous intent the American carried was all for real. Even then, the System maintained silence.

Something definitely....

‘...Has changed.’

His hypothesis that started off from suspicion was quickly morphing into a sure thing.

Thomas Andre must’ve felt the ensuing silence from his answer a wee bit uncomfortable because he tried to change the topic with an excited voice.

Ttuk....

Jin-Woo wasn’t really in the mood to share a jokey banter with Thomas Andre right now, so he mumbled a quick goodbye and ended the call right there.

That answer confirmed it for him. The System didn’t react to the presence of enemies with hostile intentions against him. This was totally different from before. What a big change this was, considering that in the beginning, it tried to make him protect himself no matter what.

‘This is not a problem that I can take lightly.’

When it happened for the first time – when he saw the overtly-threatening quest telling him to kill his enemies or his own heart would stop beating, he began to hold a vague notion on just what the end game of the System could be.

It was likely that the System was trying to goad him down a certain path – that’s what he thought.

So, now that there were no emergency quests being issued, this could signal a change in the goal of the System.

Thanks to this, he now enjoyed the luxury of having more choices, and he also got to spare Thomas Andre even though the American had bared his fangs like that.

‘If another emergency quest was issued, then well, such a thing wouldn’t have happened.’

It sure was a welcome piece of news that he now had a wider variety of options available, but still, he couldn’t help but be curious as to what the real

reason for this change might be.

Did it have something to do with the original owner of this power supposedly betraying the other Sovereigns? Or, did the death of the 'architect' of the System throw a wrench in their plan, whatever it was, and everything had gone down the crapper?

Jin-Woo continued to dissect each guess and hypothesis that popped up one after the other in his mind before ruefully shaking his head.

'I should clear my mind.'

There was a need to set a clear goal for the time being. And that would be to kill that ancient White Phantom, as well as to get as much information on other Sovereigns from the b*stard while he was at it.

If the creature came for him first, that would be good. But, even if it targeted other Hunters instead, he was in the midst of increasing his traps, anyway.

As long as that thing fell for it, then he'd be able to catch two birds with one stone.

The problem was with time.

Since he didn't know when the Sovereigns might appear again, he needed to adequately prepare himself for the battle against the unknown enemies who were, no doubt, incredibly powerful.

Thankfully, he had already got himself a perfect place to keep earning more experience points.

That would be none other than Japan. It had not recovered fully from all the destruction caused by the Giants. Several parts of the country were still left abandoned in ruin.

While Jin-Woo was in America, countless Gates went on to become full-on dungeon breaks, and monsters emerging from them settled down and began increasing their territories.

To the Japanese people, those monsters might be the source of terror, but for Jin-Woo, they were nothing more than juicy prey just waiting to be converted into experience points.

One by one...

His heart began pounding hard just from imagining his level climbing up by pushing back the monsters occupying the land there.

It was then, his phone vibrated for a short moment and alerted him to the

incoming message. He looked at the screen to find a text message from Thomas Andre.

[Mister Seong? Can you give me another call? There was something I still wanna tell you about....]

The old saying went along the lines of ‘the ground will harden after a rainfall’; it seemed that Thomas Andre wanted to form a friendship on the basis of them having fought against each other.

Jin-Woo welcomed the idea, obviously. His social skill wasn’t poor enough for him to refuse the hand of friendship the other side was offering first.

Still, they could chat at any time they wanted to, no? He liked Thomas Andre and his lack of ulterior motives, but it was a bit too late in the evening to share banter with him, he thought.

Jin-Woo quickly typed his reply and sent it on its way.

[OK. But later. I’ve got this urgent thing to take care of.]

Beep.

A smile spread on Jin-Woo’s face after he tapped ‘Send’ icon.

‘Nothing will change.’

Indeed, he’d continue to raise his level in preparation for the days ahead. It was the same story back then or now.

‘Good.’

He felt better than when he was climbing up here. His steps now taking him back down the Daesung Tower were lighter than ever before.

However, Jin-Woo wasn’t the only one getting ready for a battle.

The Sovereign of Frost, after successfully escaping to the hideout, summoned other Sovereigns who had already descended on this planet.

Three men and one woman appeared within this frozen cave. The Sovereign of Frost addressed these four ‘kings’.

[The Shadow Sovereign is in this world.]

And then, it proceeded to explain what it saw and heard to its new guests.

[.....]

[.....]

The Sovereigns weren’t even bothered in the slightest by the coldness of

the cave capable of freezing a person's flesh and blood, but after hearing the story, their atmosphere became incredibly frosty in mere seconds.

[I thought there was no vessel good enough to contain his power?]

Also, wasn't that the reason why the Dragon Emperor couldn't descend to this world, too?

The Sovereign of Frost resolutely shook its head.

[I saw it clearly with my own two eyes. That being was real.]

Two of the Sovereigns who had sensed the lingering power of the Shadow Sovereign back in Jeju Island could only agree with their comrade at this point. The atmosphere remained frosty as the Sovereign of Frost continued on.

[He will prove to be an even bigger threat to us than the Fragments of the Brilliant Light. I shall dispose of him. Are any of you willing to lend me your aid?]

Too bad, the response to its request for aid was indifferent, to say the least. This made some sense. Their opponent this time was seen as one of the most powerful 'kings' among the nine kings that ruled over the Chaos World.

A battle against him was the same as killing yourself. It was only obvious that these Sovereigns would become extra hesitant by the prospect.

One of the Sovereigns spoke up.

[How about we wait for the Dragon Emperor?]

The Sovereign of Destruction. If it was 'him', then the betrayer would be dealt with quite swiftly.

However, the Sovereign of Frost growled angrily at its comrades.

[We might be on the run, but do not forget that we're kings of our own armies. How long will you cry out for the Dragon Emperor to come and save you?]

The dagger that stabbed into its shoulder – the wound inflicted from that encounter was no ordinary physical injury, but one that directly bruised its ego. The Sovereign of Frost had a score to settle with the Shadow Sovereign.

[If we wish to remove him from the picture, then now is the chance as he is still a human. Lend me your aid. I shall make sure to send him back to the void.]

Even though its resolution was unwavering, one of the Sovereigns still stepped away.

[I shall not partake in this venture.]

Another Sovereign brought up the incident of the King of the Demons, Baran, who unwisely went up against the Shadow Sovereign and disappeared from the spot, as well.

[I do not wish to end up like the Sovereign of the White Flames.]

[...Cowards.]

The Sovereign of Frost clicked its tongue as two of its comrades disappeared from the view. Out of the five kings that had gathered, only three remained. A muscular giant of a figure threw a question at the Sovereign of Frost.

[Where's the proof that he's still a human being?]

As if it was waiting for this chance, the ancient White Phantom showed the dagger that used to be stabbed into its shoulder. Its tip was gleaming in a greenish hue.

[Poison has been applied to the blade.]

More precisely, it was the poison of a Manticore. It might not be effective against Sovereigns, but it was still a fatal substance powerful enough to rot away the flesh of the regular denizens of the Chaos World just from simple, innocuous contact.

That man had coated his blade with the poison in preparation of the future events. It was indeed a meticulous and smart thing to do, but it was also not the Shadow Sovereign's original style. This was the clear evidence that the human was in charge of that body.

The Sovereign of Frost respectfully asked the two remaining comrades.

[Are you with me on this one?]

Its powers were about the same compared to the Shadow Sovereign, who was still a mere human. However, if two other Sovereigns supported its cause, then it was sure of subjugating the human Shadow Sovereign.

The two remaining 'kings' exchanged glances between each other before nodding their heads.

[I shall aid you.]

[We shall kill the Shadow Sovereign.]

The Sovereign of Frost swore in its heart that it'd teach the true meaning of terror to that puny little human responsible for wounding its shoulder with a dagger.

The corner of the ancient White Phantom's lips curled upwards.



Chapter 204 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

To fill the vacant Association President's position, an executive-level meeting was held among the Vice-President and the chiefs of various departments, as well as directors from the regional branch offices.

Over thirty members filled up the large conference room.

Even though these people boasted societal authority exceeding the directors and managers of regular parastatal entities or large corporations, all thanks to the Hunter's Association, the complexions of every single one present today were clouded by deep anxiety.

As this heavy atmosphere bubbled on, a couple of unimportant topics were discussed to bring everyone up to speed on what was happening around the globe.

"...Looks like it's time to decide on who'll follow in the footsteps of our late President."

Finally, the time had come. Along with that declaration from the Vice-President, nervous tension brushed past the expressions of all the attending staff members.

Gulp.

Even the sounds of saliva being swallowed could be heard here and there. This moment could decide the fate of the Hunter's Association, after all.

The number of Hunters were increasing, while the Gates appeared more frequently now. All these people forming the core of the Association's command structure knew full well that the instability of their organisation could lead to the nation itself becoming unstable as well.

"Well, then...."

The Vice-President, in charge of leading the proceedings, closed the documents in front of him before the topic could get on the way. This gesture signalled that the words written on these pages were insignificant compared to what was about to be discussed.

"After a lengthy, in-depth discussion between the board of directors and myself, we decided to nominate Chief Woo Jin-Cheol as the new

Association President.”

The person in question, Woo Jin-Cheol, hadn't been told before the meeting, so rather understandably, he raised his head up in great surprise. He quickly looked at the Vice-President.

‘But, why me....?’

His eyes were silently asking this question, and as a reply, the Vice-President stared straight back while pulling the head of the microphone closer.

“Chief Woo has learned what the job entails by serving our late Association President from the closest vantage point. Not to mention, he possesses more than adequate power to make other Hunters acquiesce, as well.”

Those were all undeniable facts.

The late Association President Goh Gun-Hui deeply appreciated Woo Jin-Cheol, the man who willingly chose to work for the Association despite receiving many scouting offers from major Guilds. And the Chief of the Monitoring Division was rank A, infinitely close to the threshold of ‘S’.

If only his magic energy evaluation numbers were a bit higher, the Association would've been blessed with its second rank S Hunter alongside Goh Gun-Hui.

He possessed four years of on-field job experience and also possessed powerful abilities that easily exceeded regular rank A Awakened, too.

There were no opposing voices on whether or not he was fit to command countless other Hunters affiliated with the Association.

The staff members initially began murmuring to each other after the nomination of Woo Jin-Cheol was made, but soon, they grew calmer from the Vice-President explaining the executives' decision.

Unfortunately, the man in the spotlight still couldn't really accept this outcome.

“I'm lacking in several key areas to take on that role. Not only are there executives holding higher offices than mine, aren't I too young to hold such an important office?”

He was only in his mid-thirties. No one here would disregard his four years of experience in the Monitoring Division, but still, he was far, far too young to lead an organisation of this magnitude as its leader.

At least, that's what Woo Jin-Cheol believed.

“We have you, the Vice-President. What about the directors of the executive board? Directors from the various regional branch offices?”

Woo Jin-Cheol looked at the faces of all these powerful men and asked the Vice-President once more.

“There are this many excellent candidates present, so why am I being nominated as the replacement for the late Association President, sir?”

“Fuu....”

The Vice-President turned his head away to his side and sighed out softly under his breath. He did expect to run into this sort of resistance. However, he didn't count on that resistance to come from Woo Jin-Cheol himself.

The Vice-President switched his mic off. The official stance of the board of the directors had been communicated in full by now. So, it was time to get to the meat of the matter, the unofficial stance.

The mic being switched off prompted the attending staff members to pay even greater attention. The Vice-President opened his mouth.

“No personnel within the Association, including myself, possesses the ability to persuade South Korea's greatest combat potential.”

The greatest combat potential 'affiliated' with the Hunter's Association – there was no need to mention that person's name as everyone present could already picture his face.

“He has clearly demonstrated the extent of his powers in Korea, Japan, as well in the United States. It's already happened, but well, without a doubt, the Hunter's Association would not be able to function properly without his presence.”

The 'Special Authority-rank' Hunter, capable of shifting a country with his individual power, had to kneel before Seong Jin-Woo. How could a measly little Association demand anything from someone like that?

The only thing they could do was to politely make a request and wait patiently for a reply. That was all.

Just like how the Association President Goh Gun-Hui was able to rescue the Jeju Island raid team by borrowing Hunter Seong's power, the organisation needed someone, a line of communication as it were, to request for his aid once more in the future.

And the closest person to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo currently working for the Association was Woo Jin-Cheol. That alone was enough of a qualification.

The Vice-President had spoken his opinion on the subject matter to the

board of directors, and they, in turn, agreed with his analysis. And now, the staff members sitting inside the conference room were also nodding along as well.

“Just like how it is with Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, we can’t force you to make this decision, Chief Woo.”

The power was with the Hunters. The Vice-President declared that he wanted to make that distinction crystal clear.

“That is why, will you not accept our nomination in good faith and be our leader moving forward?”

Everyone was now looking at Woo Jin-Cheol. A brief bout of silence later, he finally opened his mouth, still aware of the expectant gazes prickling his skin.

“I....”

“Hul....”

Jin-Woo was unaware that he just muttered out a gasp that his little sister used to make rather often. He was flipping through the articles found online through his phone, and his hand movements became faster.

[The new master of the Hunter’s Association, following in the footsteps of the late President Goh Gun-Hui, is President Woo Jin-Cheol!]

He was momentarily surprised and worried after seeing that Chief Woo’s name appeared as the number one real-time search result, but now that the confusion was cleared up, his racing heart began to slowly calm down.

It was a welcome piece of news, after all. To think that Chief Woo, a personal friend, would climb up to the position of the Association President.

Jin-Woo formed a smile and congratulated the man in his mind before shutting the device’s power off and chucked it lightly behind him. An ant Shadow Soldier standing there just barely caught it.

Jin-Woo watched the ant stuff the phone in a bag and warned the creature.

“Your predecessor was much better at stuff like this than you. You gotta bring your A game from now on, okay?”

Yu Jin-Ho was too busy performing the role of the Vice-Chairman of the Guild and couldn’t accompany him this time, so this ant Shadow Soldier was elected to replace him as the luggage carrier. As if the creature was feeling sheepish about his new role, he continuously bowed while scratching the back

of his head.

“Okay, good.”

Jin-Woo chuckled and lightly tapped the soldier on his shoulder before turning around to leave. He had finished eating lunch, so it was now time to recommence with the hunt.

But then...

“Hah-ah.... It’s these guys again?”

Jin-Woo scratched his forehead as he scanned the dense forest of trees dyeing his view a sea of green.

Only a short while ago, there used to be a village right here before it got trampled on by the Giants. But to think, it now resembled the Amazon rainforest....

One didn’t even need to be able to sense magical energy to realise that something was very wrong with this sight, indeed.

However, it seemed that regular animals weren’t suspicious of this forest, as various traces of them being devoured could be seen here and there. Jin-Woo stared at the bones of the dead animals and the flies buzzing around them before clicking his tongue.

He then picked up a stone from the ground and threw it at the forest.

Swish-!!

It was no longer a plain stone, though. No, it was a stone thrown by a rank S Hunter – no, by Jin-Woo of all people.

Smack!!

The stone accurately struck where the face of the tree-type monster was. The creature’s closed eyes shot wide open. It began frowning angrily and stood up from the spot to run straight at him.

“Kiiieehk!!”

It seemed that you’d get p*ssed off after getting hit by a rock whether you were a person or a plant.

Jin-Woo summoned out the ‘Demon King’s Short Swords’ and rushed forward. The huge tree creature swung its thick branches at the approaching human.

‘So slow....’

This monster was indeed, far too slow. Jin-Woo leisurely slid past the two

branches currently being used like fists and took a closer look at the tree's 'face'.

The tree monster was struggling to spot him with its eyes.

'Even its reactions are poor.'

Whenever the branches smashed the ground, the earth was deeply gouged out, but even then, Jin-Woo was still clicking his tongue.

'Compared to how big it is, its power is nothing to write home about.'

The monster looked tough and powerful because of how large it was, but when compared to the Giant-type creatures of similar size, its power simply lagged far behind. But then again, maybe this was the trade-off for it being very sturdy.

Jin-Woo gripped the shortswords tightly as the blades sliced and diced past the trunk of the tree monster.

"Kiiiiechk, kiieehk!"

The monster kept screaming in pain but it didn't want to go down at all.

'Violent Slash!'

Sword slashes pouring out at once like a buckshot stabbed and sliced and ripped into the tree monster.

Dududududududu!!

"Kiiiiieehk!!"

The monster actually squeezed its eyes shut at the continuous barrage of attacks and flailed its 'fists' around in a frenzy. Jin-Woo evaded those attacks and approached the body of the monster again before sending his shortswords back into his 'Inventory'. He then clenched his fist tightly.

The muscles of his right arm expanded in an instant as magical energy flooded there in a great quantity. And then, he punched out just once.

WOO-JEECK!!

The tree was folded in half as it got flung away.

"Kiiiehck?!?!"

The creature tumbled around on the ground as a painful scream exploded out from its mouth. Even then, it began dragging its broken body back towards Jin-Woo again.

"Huh...."

This thing possessed truly shocking durability, that's for sure. These tree monsters, spotted for the very first time here in Japan, boasted a frightening level of endurance. Only after Jin-Woo beat the living daylight out of the creature for the umpteenth time did it stop moving altogether.

“K-kiechk...”

The dying tree moaned out a short gasp of death and spat out some kind of a liquid possessing an unbearable stink.

“Euhk.”

Jin-Woo covered his nose up.

What irritated him more than the monster's tenacious vitality was this atrocious stink.

While the 'Yu Jin-Ho replacement' ant soldier diligently dug through the monster's remains to find its Magic Crystal, Jin-Woo shifted his glare towards the forest where the same type of monsters were in hiding.

‘And I'm supposed to repeat the same thing over and over again.....’

Just how long ago was it since the dungeon break occurred nearby? A deep frown etched on his forehead as he stared at the monsters that had already formed a dense forest.

The thing was, though – humans were intelligent creatures.

Jin-Woo had fought against these monsters and now knew what their weaknesses were. So, he came up with a plan.

‘I knew something like this would happen. Good thing that I had them on standby.’

Jin-Woo grinned and summoned out a few Shadow Soldiers.

“Hey, come out.”

As if they were waiting for that summons, Fangs and the three Magic Soldiers emerged from the shadow. As it turned out, Jin-Woo made the correct call to have these guys on standby even though he sent others out on their own expeditions.

“Okay, begin!”

As soon as Jin-Woo issued his order, Fangs quickly grew into his usual massive size and spat out his trademark pillar of flames, while the remaining three Magic Soldiers also began their spectacular fire magic show.

Kuwaaaah!!

Boom!! Ka-boom! Bang!!

Flames rapidly spread out, causing the tree monsters to twist around and scream out in pain.

“Kiiieehk!”

“Kiehk!”

“Kiiiiiaaahk!”

These flames were ripe with magical energy and easily burned their targets into ashes, even though these trees weren't dry, to begin with. Even that liquid with the terrible smell was quickly evaporated by the heat, so Jin-Woo standing at an adequate-enough distance could spectate on this sight in a relaxed manner.

Jin-Woo smiled as his plan came together rather perfectly. In the meantime, the System's messages kept on piling up in his vision.

[You have defeated the enemy.]

[You have...]

[You have...]

Countless messages climbed up non-stop in his view.

The monster's rapid rate of reproduction might sound like bad news to some, but actually, it was a good thing for him. It meant that his experience points earned would be higher.

And sure enough, a cheerier-than-usual mechanical beep went off in his head.

Tti-ring.

[Level up!]

‘That’s what I’m talking about!’

Jin-Woo tightly clenched his fist. To confirm the increases in his Stats, he quickly summoned up his Status Window.

‘Stat Window.’

Tti-ring.

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 133

Class: Shadow Sovereign

Title: Demon Hunter (extra 2)

HP: 78,230

MP: 136,160

Tiredness: 3

[Stats]

Strength: 308

Endurance: 307

Agility: 316

Intelligence: 321

Perception: 298

(Available points to distribute: 0)

His level was now sitting on 133.

Thanks to his soldiers currently doing their things throughout the whole of Japan, the quest to raise his level was progressing rather quickly. All those countless monsters pouring out from the Gates were proving to be a boon for Jin-Woo.

Almost all of his Stats had exceeded 300, with the sole exception of Perception, which still required two more points to reach that mark.

‘I’m going to spend all the points from tomorrow’s Daily Quest on Perception.’

Jin-Woo grinned brightly as he closed the Stat Window.

The war that the King of Giants had spoken of, as well as the scheme ‘they’ had cooked up as mentioned by the late Association President Goh Gun-Hui – Jin-Woo had no clear idea what any of them could be.

However, it didn’t matter, did it?

All he had to do was to prepare as much as he could so he’d be ready for any and all eventualities. Meaning, he should focus on diligently raising his levels.

But then – Beru was supposed to lead the ant battalion and kill the monsters in a location far from where Jin-Woo was, but he suddenly got in contact with his master.

[Oh, my king.... May I be permitted to address you regarding a certain matter?]

“Mm?”

Why was Beru calling him up all of a sudden?

Jin-Woo was puzzled by this occurrence and quickly sent Beru a response.

‘What’s the matter?’

[“...Contact the Korean Hunter’s Association. They will put you through to me.”]

After Jin-Woo’s press conference was broadcast to the rest of the world, countless requests and inquiries began inundating the Hunter’s Association.

Most of them belonged to the top Hunters from other countries. Some of them even came to visit Korea in secret just so they could speak to Jin-Woo and get his advice.

Germany’s best Hunter, Lennart Niermann, was one of those.

‘Even the Special Authority-rank and a top-ranked Hunter got done in by those things. How can I be safe from them, then?’

He possessed an outstanding sensory perception as well as a good deal of modesty. He thought that, rather than shivering away in fear, he’d place his faith in Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s declaration, the one about him possessing a way to defeat the unknown monsters.

And that was why he decided to travel to South Korea.

Stepping foot into the Incheon International Airport, he breathed in the Korean air that had this different flavour to it compared to that of Germany’s or America’s.

‘So, this is what Korea smells like....’

Feeling somewhat excited by his first trip to Asia, he spoke to the clerk manning the immigration checkpoint in a clearly-eager voice.

“Is this Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s country?”

“Pardon? Ah, y-yes, it is.”

The clerk got flustered and nodded his head. Lennart Niermann formed a satisfied smile. He’d soon be able to have a chat with the world’s strongest Hunter.

He ended up missing Jin-Woo by a hair’s breadth during the banquet at the end of the International Guild Conference. But to get another opportunity like this! Just thinking about it made his heart flutter in excitement.

He took a deep, deep breath to rein in his wildly-racing emotions, but then, a huge, hulking man standing close behind him spoke up in irritation.

“Hey, if you’re planning to waste time here, get out of my way.”

Thick veins suddenly popped up in Lennart Niermann’s once-peaceful face.

Who dares to...!

How could anyone speak so rudely to him, one of the best Hunters in the entire world??

‘I shall fix your attitude for good today!’

The German Hunter took off the sunglasses he wore to hide his identity and turned around.

“Look here, friend! What you said just now, you think you can repeat word for word straight to my face?”

Lennart Niermann stood with a heavy frown etched on his face. The man in front of him, taller than the German by at least a head, took off his own sunglasses and growled menacingly.

“Get. The. F*ck. Out. Of. My. Way.”

Lennart Niermann immediately recognised who this burly man was and his expression hardened like a rock right there and then. He hesitated before opening his mouth.

“P-please, go ahead first.”

Thomas Andre used his wide shoulders to brush past the German Hunter and stepped into immigration control. The act of apologising was the job reserved for Laura following him from close behind.

That was a bona fide Special Authority-rank Hunter. The airport’s workers felt their breathing becoming much heavier and harder after seeing the actual Thomas Andre, often referred to as the world’s top Hunter.

What a giant he was; it was not for nothing that people attached the nickname of ‘Goliath’ to him.

Thomas Andre discovered the face of the immigration officer rapidly turning pale and put the sunglasses back on before forming a genial smile.

“Is this Mister Seong’s country?”



Chapter 205 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

[Oh, my king.... May I be permitted to address you regarding a certain matter?]

Beru contacted Jin-Woo out of the blue.

What did the most powerful Shadow Soldier, tasked with leading the ant battalion to kill monsters far away, want to say to his master?

‘What’s going on?’

Jin-Woo inwardly asked him. Beru then cautiously sought out permission from his master.

[May you be gracious enough to drive the prey to this servant’s location?]

Drive the prey to his location?

The ‘prey’ Beru was talking about was, of course, monsters that roamed outside of the Gates after the various dungeon breaks took place. It implied that the former ant king wished to take care of all the monsters by himself.

Even Greed couldn’t compare to Beru in terms of power, although they were supposed to be in the same Commander-grade. So, it was unlikely that his subordinates started a rebellion or some such and he wanted to do things alone now.

Jin-Woo pondered the reason for this request for a bit, but then, a certain possibility quickly entered his head.

‘Could it be....??’

[Every time I defeat a prey, I can feel a sensation similar to ‘moulting’ throughout my entire body, my king.]

As he thought! His guess turned out to correct.

‘Moulting’, Beru said. Meaning, he was about to break through to the next stage.

Ever since his inclusion into the Shadow Army, Beru stood at the forefront, always, and fought off more enemies than anyone else. And finally, he was being rewarded with an opportunity to advance to a higher grade.

When recalling how much stronger high-grade soldiers like Igrit and Iron

became after the advancement.....

‘...This is wonderful news.’

Beru was already strong enough to toy with rank S Hunters even before he became a part of the Shadow Army. His current grade, too, was the highest among all of his existing Shadow Soldiers.

‘Does this mean I finally get to see the grade above ‘Commander’?’

Jin-Woo was getting really curious about just what kind of changes Beru would go through after his stats jump up greatly via his advancement. He quickly replied to his ant soldier, no doubt anxiously waiting for his king’s answer.

‘Alright. Let’s do it.’

[Oh, I thank thee, my king. I shall send back the ant battalion to your side right away.]

‘No, there’s no need.’

Jin-Woo smirked to himself. Of course, Beru wouldn’t be able to see the expression his Sovereign was making, since they were dozens upon dozens of kilometres away.

‘Shadow Army.’

Jin-Woo called out, and his soldiers, almost 1200-strong, responded back to him simultaneously.

From Igrit, in charge of leading the knights, Fangs leading the High Orcs, Jima leading the Nagas, No.6 leading the giants, Tank leading the Ice Bears, and even Greed leading the leftover soldiers.

He thought he could hear their loud roars. Every single one of them began focusing all of their attention on Jin-Woo’s summons. He sensed their tension oh-so-clearly, even this far away.

While enjoying this feeling of satisfaction, Jin-Woo issued his new command.

‘Everyone, withdraw.’

[...!!!]

‘I want you guys back.’

The moment his order was given, the entirety of the Shadow Army began moving again. Soldiers all reverted back to their shadow state and rapidly headed in the direction where Jin-Woo was waiting for them.

[Oh, my king.... Why have you recalled your loyal soldiers?]

Jin-Woo replied with a chuckle at the surprised-sounding Beru.

‘From here onwards, only you and I will defeat the remaining monsters.’

This seemed to be the best option available in order to speed up Beru’s advancement.

Just like how a high-levelled player helped out the lower-levelled friend in a game, he was planning to fight alongside Beru and greatly speed up their hunting speed, gifting a whole bunch of experience points to his subordinate in the process.

He was going to ‘power level’ Beru, in other words.

There were still quite a few areas where dungeon breaks had occurred, so if the two of them went around clearing them, the required level cap would be met pretty soon.

Of course, as the ground they had to cover was vast, the efficiency of this method fell far behind the one with sending out his soldiers to sweep the enemies clean, but Beru’s advancement was the priority here.

[Oh, my king....]

Beru couldn’t finish his sentence, his voice overflowing with emotions.

‘Hah. This guy.’

Seeing that his emotions had become richer as time went on, there was little doubt that he had been hiding in the shadows watching TV the whole day when he was supposed to protect his mother and Jin-Ah at home.

As the recalling of his shadows was just about complete, Jin-Woo asked the question to his soldiers.

“Is there anyone else beside Beru who feels that their advancement is just around the corner?”

Perhaps inevitably, there was no reply. It wasn’t easy to advance to the next grade, after all. And one would need an excellent perception to sense the approaching advancement, too.

There was a reason why only Beru could sense his own advancement out of all his Shadow Soldiers.

Just as his thoughts arrived at this point...

Shururuk....

As Beru stood there, itching to go on the intimate solo hunting with his

liege, yet another Shadow Soldier emerged from the ground next to him.

While a look of disappointment flashed on Beru's face, Jin-Woo's own expression brightened up even more.

“Nice.”

As he would do normally, Igrit politely knelt down on one knee.

Jin-Woo always felt kinda uncomfortable with Igrit's unyielding dedication to the formalities, but still, seeing the gesture again after a long while made him happy regardless.

Igrit's advancement – that too, was something he had been looking forward to, wasn't it?

“Alright. Let's get started.”

Jin-Woo summoned the 'Demon King's Short Swords' and smiled deeply.

What an amazing rate of reproduction this was – it hadn't been that long, yet new sprouts were rising up from the scorched-black remains of the tree monsters.

“Kiiiehk!”

“Kiihk!”

There were around 40 or so dungeon break locations left to clear in Japan beside this one.

Every second and every minute was precious if these three were to clear them all.

Within the Ah-Jin Guild office.

For Yu Jin-Ho, this office had become far more comfortable than his own place. But right this moment, it felt as if every passing minute was as agonisingly long as an hour. He sneaked a glance at the clock hanging on the wall.

It said, '16:10 PM'.

It had been over two hours since 'that man' had shown up here.

Gulp.

Worried that his unconscious saliva swallowing had made too much noise, Yu Jin-Ho quickly sneaked a glance at the unannounced guest to the side. Unfortunately, his gaze ended up meeting the guest's eyes hidden behind a

pair of sunglasses. The big man replied with a refreshing grin.

Yu Jin-Ho forced his stiff facial muscles to form a grin of his own, or something that roughly resembled one, and hurriedly averted his gaze elsewhere.

Thick sweatdrops formed on his forehead. He then hurriedly pulled out his poor phone and tried to call his dear hyung-nim, but it was a waste of time.

Ring.... Ringgg....

It had been two days since the last communication with hyung-nim. For some reason, he wasn't picking up his phone at all. Even today.

“...”

“...”

Yu Jin-Ho lowered his phone and closed his mouth real tightly. It was the same story for other employees of the Guild.

These talented individuals who chose to work for the Ah-Jin Guild after seeing its potential were all overwhelmed by this awkward atmosphere and, as if they had made a promise to do so, resolutely maintained this heavy silence.

Of course, none of this was their fault. No, anyone who found themselves in a similar situation would react in the same manner.

Especially so, when the man sitting on a chair by the corner of the office happened to be one of the most powerful Hunters in the entire world, who also was happened to be known as the man with one of the shortest fuse in the world.

Not only that, the owner of this office was the very man who beat this Hunter to a pulp and sent him to the hospital. So, how could anyone be able to smile and jovially chat amongst themselves in front of this man?

He was, of course, Thomas Andre.

The Hunter standing on top of the world had come to visit Ah-Jin Guild to meet Jin-Woo. All thanks to that, the Vice Guild Chairman Yu Jin-Ho and his employees had no choice but to deal with this unannounced guest and consequently, felt like they were dying a little bit with every passing second right now.

Yu Jin-Ho began wondering whether he should attempt contacting hyung-nim one more time or not, but then...

Shururuk...

The automated door to the Guild slid open.

The heads of every single employee, including Yu Jin-Ho, instantly snapped in that direction.

Right away, his eyes grew wide. Yu Jin-Ho jumped up from his seat in sheer joy and spoke in a voice that contained the desperate pleading hearts of everyone working for this Guild.

“Hyung-niiiiim!!”

‘I was wondering why there were so many reporters camping outside, but this....’

Jin-Woo helplessly stared at Thomas Andre grinning back at him.

Looking at that expression, the American didn’t seem to be hung up over what happened before, so what brought him all the way out here? Funnily enough, though, it was Yu Jin-Ho who welcomed Jin-Woo way before Thomas Andre could.

“Hyung-nim!! Why couldn’t I get a hold of you for so long?!”

“Well, uh, I was busy.”

“Hang on a minute, now that I see your clothes.....”

Yu Jin-Ho faltered and stopped moving. Jin-Woo’s clothing bore countless pieces of evidence of the harsh battles he must’ve gone through. It was like looking at hyung-nim after he concluded his Giant monster hunting trip.

‘If hyung-nim was fighting non-stop, to the point he couldn’t contact anyone for two days straight, then.....’

Just how many monsters were sent back to hell by hyung-nim’s shortswords? Trying to imagine the carnage brought up a nasty case of goosebumps on his skin.

It was at this point in time that Thomas Andre stood up leisurely from the chair to walk up to Jin-Woo. Since he was such a big dude, to begin with, he didn’t need to take that many steps to close the distance between him and his target.

Soon, the American stood before Jin-Woo.

‘Heok....’

‘No, hang on. They aren’t going to fight again in here, right?’

The Guild employees were unaware of these two’s current relationship, so

understandably, they were busy swallowing nervous saliva as their eyes locked onto the two men standing before each other.

The sounds of their racing hearts were so loud that Jin-Woo's ears were actually aching right now from the noise assaulting him.

“Mister Seong.”

Thomas Andre extended his hand first. Jin-Woo grinned and held the offered hand to shake it. The two men shared a brief greeting that way.

But then, the smile on Thomas Andre's face was wiped off in an instant.

How....

‘How could this be??’

For some reason, the American felt that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was different from before. It was only by a little bit, but this Seong Jin-Woo was different than the one he met back in America.

Was it because the impression had changed?

For sure, Jin-Woo's attire back when they first met, or when they were in the banquet, was remarkably different from his current duds, which were in a really sorry state.

However, a certain sense of ‘sturdiness’ unrelated to clothing could be felt from him right now.

In a word, it was ‘strong’. Back then, he was strong, but now, he came across as even stronger. However....

‘Can something like that even happen....?’

No, it couldn't – at least not according to his common sense.

Thomas Andre's ultra-sharp senses allowed him to detect Jin-Woo's change that came about from levelling up, but he lacked the knowledge to decipher just what he was sensing here.

As the American was swimming within his confusion, their handshake came to an end and Jin-Woo asked him the question.

“What brings you to Korea?”

“Oh, that.”

Thomas Andre recovered his wits and formed another smile.

“Didn't I promise you before? I told you that I'll buy a meal once my arm heals up.”

He raised his completely-healed left arm and waved it around.

“And, also....”

Jin-Woo sneaked a glance at the clock on the wall. It was almost half past four in the afternoon. The time was obviously too late for lunch, but it was also a bit too early for supper.

“There’s still a lot of time left before dinner time, so.... Hang on.”

Jin-Woo asked for Thomas Andre’s understanding and hurriedly walked over to Yu Jin-Ho. Now that he knew the American’s business with him wasn’t as urgent, he decided to prioritise on the matter that required his greater attention first.

“Can you find out for me the biggest Gate currently opening up in Seoul?”

Yu Jin-Ho’s eyes went extra round after hearing Jin-Woo’s request.

“Hyung-nim, will it be fine as long as it’s a big one?”

“It’s fine if someone has booked it already, so find one that’s a high-enough rank.”

“Got it, hyung-nim.”

Yu Jin-Ho typed away on the keyboard at the speed of light and searched for the relevant information before a bright expression formed on his face.

“Hyung-nim, I found a particularly dangerous rank A Gate.”

“Oh, really?”

“However, the Hunters Guild has called dibs on it already.”

Contrary to Yu Jin-Ho’s expectation, though, Jin-Woo didn’t look disappointed at all.

“It’s fine.”

He didn’t care who had the raid permit or not.

As a matter of fact, Jin-Woo thought that explaining himself would be easier now since he knew someone from the Hunters Guild, and that brought about a smile to his face.

Jin-Woo prepared to leave the office with cheery, airy steps, before turning around to address Thomas Andre.

“Ah, I’ve got an errand to run so I’ll be going out for a little while. As for the promised meal, let’s talk about it after I return.”

“.....”

Jin-Woo left the flustered American behind and disappeared from the office like a passing breeze. Thomas Andre dazedly stared at the doorway the Korean Hunter had disappeared through, before loudly bursting out with laughter.

“Ahahaha. Isn’t this....”

What else could he do?

What Jin-Woo was doing might come across as inconsiderate, but then again, it was Thomas Andre who showed up totally unannounced, to begin with. In fact, he should have expected that a Hunter on the level of Seong Jin-Woo would be even busier than himself.

“In that case.... I’ll be staying here.”

Thomas Andre left behind the contact details of the hotel he was staying at with Yu Jin-Ho before vacating from the office himself.

“Whew.....”

Yu Jin-Ho spat out a sigh of relief as he stared at the empty space once occupied by the American’s hulking figure, but then, nearly jumped in fright after sensing another presence right next to him.

“Heok?! You were still here, too??”

It was rather lamentable that Lennart Niermann, who had arrived in the Guild office long before Thomas Andre did, had no grasp on the Korean language. Even then, he was pretty sure of Ah-Jin Guild’s Vice-Chair completely forgetting about his presence until now.

“I even made a prior appointment, too.....”

Realising that even someone like himself, used to being treated like a VVIP back in Germany, could end up being forgotten to this extent, his head slowly drooped towards the floor.

Unfortunately, what else can he do now when even the one and only Thomas Andre left the office without any complaints?

Whether it be a monster or a Hunter, you only had one life, after all.

“...”

Lennart Niermann stood up with no energy whatsoever in his body and jotted down his own contact details on the small corner of the memo Thomas Andre left behind.

The elite assault team members of the Hunters Guild were in the middle of getting ready for the raid, but Jin-Woo's sudden entrance stole away their focus and they could only concentrate on him now.

Noisy, noisy....

Cha Hae-In was the only one to get a heads-up from him, so she was able to remain collected, at least compared to her colleagues.

“You want to borrow our dungeon? Did something happen?”

“It's as I said before. I'd like to borrow the dungeon if it's at all possible.”

Having seen another familiar face after what felt like forever, Jin-Woo formed a bright smile of genuine happiness.

On the other hand – he hadn't contacted her for a long time and yet the first thing he said after abruptly appearing before her, was about borrowing a dungeon that her team was about to raid.

Cha Hae-In was about to get angry, but seeing how happy Jin-Woo was, she ended up averting her gaze elsewhere, instead.

While she stood there in hesitation, unable to think of something to say, Choi Jong-In quickly ran in and addressed Jin-Woo. The Master of the Hunters Guild was waiting for the latter's arrival, actually.

“Seong Hunter-nim!”

The explanation had been concluded quickly enough.

Jin-Woo was proposing to kill every single monster inside the dungeon, barring the boss itself, and he even promised not to touch anything else. There would be no Guild Master worth his salt who'd reject this deal.

The thing was, Choi Jong-In had been greatly worried about his people getting injured inside this high-ranking Gate, so he welcomed this offer with both of his arms raised up high.

Of course, the members of the raid team themselves were also welcoming this development, although they were careful not to show it outwardly.

Jin-Woo immediately headed towards the Gate.

Before he could go far, though, someone tugged at his sleeve so he turned around to see who it was. He found Cha Hae-In and her blushing cheeks there, asking him in a hushed voice.

“What will you do inside the dungeon?”

“There’s something I need to test inside. One of my summons has gone through a change, you see.”

One of his summons, he said.

Cha Hae-In recalled the two summons she fought against in the Association’s gymnasium – Igrit and Beru. They were far too strong to be labelled as mere summons. She was supposed to be a rank S Hunter, yet those two could easily threaten her life.

Did something change regarding those two and he wanted to test them out now? Cha Hae-In became really curious and whispered in an even more hushed voice.

“In that case.... Can I go inside with you and take a look, too?”

Jin-Woo heard that question containing just a tiny bit of ulterior motive and resolutely shook his head.

“It’ll get far too dangerous. I’m planning to let him run amok, you see.”

Jin-Woo cut her off, his expression one of seriousness. Cha Hae-In nodded her head and didn’t press any further.

Jin-Woo left behind her longing gaze and jumped into the Gate.

[You have entered a dungeon.]

The same message he saw so many times popped up again. Jin-Woo hurriedly summoned Beru, on standby within his shadow.

‘Come out.’



Chapter 206 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

After Jin-Woo left, the elite members of the Hunters Guild fought against each other to become the first one to enter the dungeon.

“H-hey! Stop pushing me!”

“This dungeon ain’t gonna run away, so there’s no need for all this craziness!”

Rumble, tumble-!

Just what did the one and only Hunter Seong Jin-Woo want to test out that he even resorted to borrowing a rank A Gate someone else had already booked? Not only that, a Gate with a difficulty that had clearly gone up drastically?

Hunters quickly stepped on the dungeon’s floor and scanned every corner with their curious eyes. But soon, their expressions turned into ones of pure shock and astonishment.

Literally, they were facing a river of blood!

The corpses of monsters, ripped to almost unrecognisable shreds, formed a road of blood. And this ‘road’ seemed to continue on forever into the darkness on the far side.

The Hunters were all rendered speechless and couldn’t even dare to go in any deeper.

“Look.... Look over there.”

One of the Hunters ribbed the person next to him with his elbow.

The victim of the elbowing attempt shifted his dazed gaze towards the location being pointed out and gradually, his jaw almost hit the floor at the unbelievable sight waiting for him there.

Just what kind of force could make a monster get embedded in the ceiling of the dungeon in such a grotesque fashion?

Considering that the walls of these dungeons were made up of materials incomparably harder than any regular caves, that was one seriously shocking sight to behold, indeed.

“That’s all for my dinner plan tonight, I guess....”

Hunters with weaker stomachs saw this scene of utter slaughter and their complexions turned paler than a sheet of paper. What surprised them even more, was the fact that monsters of the dungeon measured to be at the top end of rank A had been killed off in such a state in less than ten minutes.

A female Hunter muttered to herself, her expression still one of pure shock.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.... He didn’t even look like the type, but this is just....”

The deeper the group entered, the clearer and clearer for them to spot the signs of the overwhelming violence; she had been a Hunter for almost five years now, but never once did she witness the walls of a dungeon destroyed to such an extent before.

Another male Hunter scanning the interior of the dungeon responded to her muttering.

“What do other people call this? Unleashing the inner beast? Or something like that?”

Cha Hae-In slowly shook her head after hearing that. None of this was the handiwork of Hunter Seong. She had witnessed his fights from up close several times already, so she was pretty certain of this.

The Jin-Woo she knew was a Hunter who preferred to end his enemies as cleanly as possible. It was artistic, even.

She was enthralled by the beauty in the way he controlled his skills the first time she saw him fight.

If that was the case....

‘...The one capable of doing this among Hunter Seong’s summons is...’

It was right then – she recalled the head of the ant monster screeching at her with its mandibles wide open, causing a chill to run down her spine.

That creature was the peak existence of vicious cruelty!

Didn’t Jin-Woo say it? That one of his summons had gone through a change. Just what kind of a change did that ant monster go through, then?

Cha Hae-In left behind her colleagues still being shocked by the remaining traces of Beru’s activity found throughout the dungeon, and quickly exited from the Gate. However, Jin-Woo was nowhere to be seen by then, even though he left only a few minutes ago.

“Why does he have to be so fast....”

Cha Hae-In scanned her surroundings and murmured with a cheeky pout. And she had so many things to ask him, too....

‘I’m sure there will be another chance.’

She sighed so softly that it wouldn’t even frighten a butterfly settling down in front of her. A subtle smile formed on her face as she slowly turned around to re-enter the Gate.

Jin-Ah killed her footsteps and sneaked like a crafty little cat to close in her mom busying washing dishes.

Clink, clink....

Either mom didn’t hear her daughter’s footsteps, or maybe she did hear them but decided to pretend that she didn’t, she didn’t react to Jin-Ah closing the distance. And then, in the end...

Jin-Ah got close enough to hear her mom’s breathing before hugging her tightly.

“Mom!”

Too bad for all of her efforts, though, her mother didn’t seem to be surprised at all. She simply responded with a gentle voice.

“Are you feeling bored?”

“Ng, I am. Oppa doesn’t want to come home, and Mom doesn’t want to play with me~.”

While mom was sleeping in the hospital, Jin-Woo performed the role of the substitute mother to his sister. To help Jin-Ah focus on her studies, he did his best to act as the sole breadwinner and took care of all the chores around the family home.

To her, he was her sibling, her parent, and at the same time, her friend.

That was why Jin-Ah often missed her oppa’s presence around the family home as he grew busier and busier every day.

Every single one of her fellow countrymen knew her oppa’s face and his name by now, but what was the point if she couldn’t really get to see him anymore?

And so, here she was, trying to fill the hole Jin-Woo had left behind with her mom and her warm words of encouragements.

“Still, it’s great to have you around, Mom.”

Jin-Ah buried her face in her mom's back and formed a happy smile. Although she couldn't see her back, the mother carried a similar expression as the daughter and continued cleaning the dishes.

Jin-Ah clung to her mom's back like a cicada holding onto a tree for a while before opening her mouth.

“Mom? Let's move house.”

Flinch.

Mom's hands momentarily stopped moving before resuming their actions. A smile formed on her lips again.

“Do you want to move to somewhere else?”

“Yeah.”

“But, what will we do? Mom really likes this place, you know.”

“Why do you like such an old apartment?”

Jin-Ah lightly rebuked her, but mom simply smiled back and her hands continued to move briskly.

Actually, Jin-Ah knew why her mom didn't want to leave this old apartment. She knew the reason why her mom still persisted in staying here while paying the monthly rent, when her oppa was making the kind of money that regular people would never get to touch in their lifetime.

She was still waiting for her missing husband, her children's father. She was hoping that, maybe one day, he'd stumble back here.

Jin-Ah couldn't remember much about her father now and felt that waiting for him was a waste of time. But, her brother hadn't mentioned moving house again after he heard mom's reasoning.

“Still, I like this apartment.”

Mom gently persuaded her daughter again, prompting Jin-Ah to spin on her heels to leave, her cheeks puffing up unhappily.

“Che.”

“Don't be like.... Ah!”

Mom quickly turned around and looked at Jin-Ah with a face that said, 'I forgot!'; she had just remembered that the weather forecast warned of rainfall later in the evenings.

“Sweetie, can you take the washing from the veranda and bring them in?”

“Mom, you only call me sweetie when you need me to do stuff.”

Still, she didn't mind being called that, as evidenced by her happy humming as she made her way to the veranda.

As befitting of Jin-Ah, who was more or less an expert at performing chores like this, she quickly took down the washings and placed them in the basket.

But then....

Her rapid hands suddenly stuttered to a halt. She realised that the sky above had darkened even before she noticed it.

“...Uh?”

Did the rain clouds arrive already?

Naturally, she raised her head up to look above. And her eyes opened incredibly wide next.

The basket filled with washed clothes fell out of her hands.

“M-Mooooom!!”

His hands were soaked with sweat.

The Association President Woo Jin-Cheol looked down on his wet palms before hurriedly rubbing them against his blameless pants.

How long had it been since he felt this nervous? He'd actually prefer to enter a Gate on the brink of a dungeon break. That would be easier on his stress level.

“You don't have to be that tense, Association President Woo Jin-Cheol.”

A certain high-ranking official who had invited Woo Jin-Cheol to the Korean Presidential residence – the Blue House – formed a rather slimy grin.

How could a proper conversation be held when the guy supposed to meet the holder of the highest office in the country was this nervous?

The official understood full well that climbing up to such a high office at a young age must've been quite burdensome, but even then, he prayed that there wouldn't be any 'mistakes' committed during the meeting itself.

“My apologies.”

Woo Jin-Cheol's smile was just a tad stiff but he still nodded his head. As a gesture of encouragement, the official patted his back a couple of times.

Soon, the door to the special guest room opened and the president of the country these two men were waiting for strode in while flanked by several of his retinues.

“Mister President!”

“Sir!”

Woo Jin-Cheol and the government official both stood up from their seats.

“Ah, ah. It’s fine. Please, take a seat. I’m okay either way. It’s not like I’m someone that impressive, anyway.”

The President of Korea, Kim Myung-Cheol, cracked a light joke to disperse the nervous atmosphere and settled down on his seat.

Once the president of the nation found his seat, the government official and Woo Jin-Cheol settled down as well, in that order.

The president’s gaze shifted immediately in Woo Jin-Cheol’s direction.

“I’m sure you’re really busy with the matters of the Association right about now, Mister Association President.”

“Well, uh... not as much, sir.”

His lips might have denied it, but the dark circles beneath Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes were expanding their territories every single day.

He began wondering how did the late Association President Goh Gun-Hui manage to survive all this workload with his unhealthy body. Woo Jin-Cheol’s level of respect for him had deepened even further after his passing.

But that was probably why he really wanted this uncomfortable get-together to end as quickly as possible.

“Excuse me, sir.... Why did you ask me to come by today, sir?”

“Uh-huh, this guy!”

The high-ranking government official tried to warn Woo Jin-Cheol as the latter tried to jump straight into the meat of the story, but then, the President stopped him.

“Indeed, it’s not right to keep the Association President here for too long when he took time out of his busy schedule to come and see me.”

Not beating around the bush, and keeping it simple when it comes to the main topic; President Kim Myung-Cheol didn’t mind the speedy progress of discussions at all.

“In that case, allow me to get to the topic right away. The reason why I

asked you, the Association President, to come here is because....”

For the briefest time then, Woo Jin-Cheol’s senses of a high-ranked Hunter caught on to the fact that the country’s president was trying to read his current mood.

This led to him having a certain premonition. No doubt, the other man was getting ready to ask him for a rather troublesome favour.

Sure enough – as if he also felt a bit sheepish about this, President Kim smiled awkwardly and began explaining himself.

“I heard that you and Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim enjoy a particularly close relationship.”

Woo Jin-Cheol immediately corrected that faulty rumour.

“I am indeed an acquaintance with Seong Hunter-nim, but our relationship is not as close as you think, sir.”

“Huhuh, is that so.”

“Yes. It was actually the late Association President Goh Gun-Hui who enjoyed a close-knit relationship with Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

Woo Jin-Cheol nodded by himself, recalling the moment when Goh Gun-Hui expressed his desire to knock back a few cold ones with Hunter Seong.

President Kim pondered something in silence for a bit, before carrying on.

“Even still, you are in a position to communicate readily with Seong Hunter-nim, yes?”

“Oh.... Yes, I am.”

“In that case, may we ask you for a favour, Association President Woo?”

As expected...

Woo Jin-Cheol inwardly thought, ***“Here it comes,”*** and replied with a begrudging tone of voice.

“What kind of a favour are we talking about, sir?”

“Because of Seong Hunter-nim’s sky-high acclaim, we were wondering if we could use him as a public relations ambassador for the country. With a slogan similar to, ‘Hunter Seong Jin-Woo makes the Republic of Korea safe’.”

President Kim ended his words there and grinned brightly.

Here was a proudly Korean Hunter strong enough to teach the American

Special Authority-rank Hunter a lesson, not to mention important enough to make the Hunter Bureau be at his beck and call, too.

There was no way that the financial and the political world wouldn't take notice of such a person's actions.

Kim Myung-Cheol was planning to use his position as the country's president to reel Jin-Woo in to his side before anyone else could.

In the beginning, as the public relations ambassador of the nation, and then, gradually build up a friendship with him over time.

As his fame as the world's strongest Hunter soared higher, being his 'friend' would prove to be one of the most powerful cards anyone could possess.

As for the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol, his role was to become the bridgehead to facilitate that purpose.

Of course, Woo Jin-Cheol wasn't naïve enough to not realise what the ulterior motive of President Kim was.

'You called me here to talk about something like that?'

Woo Jin-Cheol felt all his nervous tension dissipate. And then, he began to get angry, wondering about why he had to get involved in this kind of crap as soon as he occupied the position of the Association President.

'...So, he thinks I'm easier to push around.'

Indeed, he wasn't Goh Gun-Hui. The late Association President performed the role of a breakwater of the Association, but with him gone, the figures of the financial and political world were now focusing their attention on him, instead.

They were telling him to serve their interests.

The funny thing was, though – Woo Jin-Cheol was getting angry, sure, but at the same time, he also felt rather relieved, as well.

In the past, the late Association President Goh Gun-Hui often mentioned this – the Hunter's Association needed to create the right kind of atmosphere for the Hunters to do their jobs.

And this incredibly important role wasn't just for the sake of the Hunters, but for the sake of everyone else, as well.

When his thoughts reached up to that point, Woo Jin-Cheol became much more relaxed than before. A natural smile even crept up on his face, too.

Unfortunately for President Kim, though, he misinterpreted that smile and

began laughing alongside as well.

“Huhuhuh. It seems that Association President Woo is quite a sensible man, unlike a certain someone. Very good. I’d be very appreciative if you do us this small favour. This isn’t just for my benefit, wouldn’t you say?”

He said ‘unlike a certain someone’. It didn’t take a genius to figure out just who the president was talking about. Woo Jin-Cheol soundlessly gritted his teeth and spoke up.

“Indeed, the late Association President was an amazing gentleman.”

“That’s right. Very true. He was a great gentleman, but also just as stubborn and inflexible, too.”

“I’m very different from the late Association President.”

“Huhuhuh! Indeed, you are. The Hunter’s Association should change accordingly with the times. It’s no good to be tied to the ideals of the past forever.”

A cold grin floated up on Woo Jin-Cheol’s lips as he began glaring at President Kim.

“How long do you think it’ll take me to kill every single person in this building, including all of your bodyguards?”

“W-what was that?!”

The high-ranking official jumped up from his seat, but he was frozen stiff immediately from the dense killing intent emitted by Woo Jin-Cheol.

Never mind low ranked Hunters, a rank A Awakened would prove to be an existence even more lethal than any known savage beasts to a normal civilian.

Regular people would be utterly powerless when facing against a tiger or a bear out in the wilderness, so how could the same people be able to deal with a rank A Hunter?

“A few hours? No. I think it won’t even take a few minutes.”

Woo Jin-Cheol watched the complexions of the two men listening turn paler and paler with every passing second and calmly addressed them.

“In that case, how many men do you think you’ll need to stop me when I start rampaging around? I wonder. If you were to mobilise every single police officer and soldier stationed within Seoul and defend until my magical energy reserve bottoms out, then, well, I think you can somehow save yourselves.”

Woo Jin-Cheol drawing this incredibly horrifying picture with a calm

expression only served to heighten President Kim's terror even further.

“Y-you.... But, but, why....”

The politician wanted to say something, but this dense killing intent constantly weighed down on his lips and he couldn't utter anything that resembled words.

“However, what if it was Hunter Seong going on a rampage, instead of me? How many men do you have to mobilise to defend against him?”

Was it because of all this murderous intent emitted by Woo Jin-Cheol?

President Kim was instantly overcome with a nasty case of goosebumps spreading all over his body after imagining Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, capable of hunting down those Giant monsters alone, suddenly starting to hunt down people, instead.

Woo Jin-Cheol figured that this was enough of terrorising the two men and withdrew his killing intent.

“Such a thing doesn't happen, because every Hunter out there focuses solely on what a Hunter must do.”

Hunters needed to operate in the sphere of Hunters. Meanwhile, politicians needed to stay within their bubbles.

Making the world go around the correct way – that was the creed of the Hunter's Association, nay, of the late Association President Goh Gun-Hui.

Woo Jin-Cheol stared straight into the frightened eyes of President Kim and firmly warned him.

“I have no thoughts of sullyng the ideals of the Hunter's Association as established by the late President Goh Gun-Hui, sir. And of course, I expect you to cooperate with us fully.”



Chapter 207 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Was there any reason to doubt him?

President Kim confirmed that Woo Jin-Cheol was being dead serious and hurriedly muttered out an answer, not even giving himself enough time to spin this situation to his advantage.

“O-of course. A Hunter needs to do a Hunter’s job. My thoughts were too rash. It was a slip of the tongue on my part.”

Woo Jin-Cheol watched the pale-faced president nodding his head non-stop, and stood up from his seat to leave. Even after he was long gone, though, both the president and the high-ranking government official couldn’t get up from their seats, their legs having turned to jelly a long time ago.

“...”

“...”

Only now did they awake to the reality of how scary the existences called Hunters could be.

“Did something good happen in there, sir?”

As the car was about to drive away, the escort driving the vehicle asked Woo Jin-Cheol sitting in the backseat.

“Does it look that way to you?”

“Yes, sir. It does.”

His escort was also an agent of the Monitoring Division.

Woo Jin-Cheol glanced at the baby-faced newbie, effectively his junior from the same department, and ended up recalling his own newbie days and he let a content smile sneak up on his lips.

“Well, it feels like I’ve performed the duty of the Association President for the first time since I got the job, that’s all.”

Woo Jin-Cheol reclined against the back of the seat that Goh Gun-Hui used to occupy. He then looked back fondly at the late Association President, who would’ve been sitting in places like this, out of everyone’s gazes and earning

the ire and hatred of many powerful men in high places, all for the sake of other Hunters.

‘...What a relief.’

Thanks to Woo Jin-Cheol’s angry-looking eyes and his large frame, he was used to being hated and feared already. If that was part of being the Association’s President, then he’d gladly accept it.

The moment he decided to take over from Goh Gun-Hui, he had prepared himself to a certain extent for this kind of rubbish, anyway.

“Where should we go next, sir?”

“...To the Association.”

He dearly wanted to go home and take a break, but he actually came running here after abandoning his job back in the office. He still had a mountain of work to go through.

“Then, we’ll get going, sir.”

The escort seemed to understand Woo Jin-Cheol’s mind as he stepped on the accelerator. The vehicle carrying the two men easily slipped out of the Blue House’s grounds.

How long had passed by like that?

Woo Jin-Cheol drifted off to sleep while staring at the passing scenery, only to abruptly wake up again. He could see an endless ocean of cars filling up the road, not going anywhere fast.

Even though Seoul was infamous for its clogged roadways, such a traffic jam seemed improbable in the middle of a weekday.

‘Did another Gate pop up in the middle of the road again?’

Feeling a bit worried now, Woo Jin-Cheol scanned his surroundings. Unfortunately, the overall atmosphere of the road seemed far too suspicious for something as simple as that. In fact, all the drivers had stopped their cars and stepped outside to look up into the sky.

It wasn’t just the drivers, either.

Even the pedestrians on the sidewalks, people on the zebra crossings, every single one had come to a dead stop and was looking up at the sky above their heads. That included the escort in the driver’s seat, who was also craning his neck forward to look at the sky.

‘What on earth is going on here....?’

Now feeling genuinely alarmed, Woo Jin-Cheol quickly grabbed the escort's shoulder and shook him around.

"Hey. What's going on?"

"A-Association President..."

The escort spoke with a trembling voice, leaned out of the way and pointed up at the top of the windscreen.

"T-there, sir..."

In an instant, Woo Jin-Cheol's expression stiffened.

Were his eyes playing tricks on him?

No, if that was the case, then everyone shouldn't be looking at the sky with the exact same expression etched on their faces. He didn't want to believe what he just saw, but just like with everyone else on the road, he leapt out of the car.

His eyes weren't lying to him.

Woo Jin-Cheol dazedly stared at the sky before a look of pure, unadulterated shock took over his face.

"How... how can something like that be....?!"

The result of the test proved to be very satisfying. Jin-Woo's steps taking him back home were cheerier than ever before.

Beru had become really strong. A lot stronger than his initial expectation, even.

It was unfortunate that Igrit couldn't advance, but Beru's advancement alone was already an excellent result. Without a doubt, the elites of the Hunters Guild should be unable to shut their slack jaws from the spectacle laid out within that dungeon by now.

Jin-Woo imagined Cha Hae-In and her wide-open eyes, and a smirk formed on his lips.

It had been a while since they saw each other and he wanted to talk to her for a bit longer, but regrettably, he still had guests waiting for him. Jin-Woo pondered his options between Thomas Andre and Lennart Niermann before giving the American the call first.

He could pretty much guess what the German was here for, but he simply couldn't figure out what the Hunter ranked No.2 in the world was thinking of

by showing up unannounced like this.

The call got through in no time at all.

Worried that Jin-Woo would cut him off again, Thomas Andre was quick to pour out what he wanted to say.

A gift?

“What the heck. If you had something like that, you should’ve told me earlier.”

Jin-Woo spoke to the American half-jokingly and half-seriously, but then, he was suddenly faced with silence from the other side of the line.

A short while later, Thomas Andre spoke with a kind of voice belonging to someone suppressing his swelling emotions.

“Wherever it’s convenient for you.”

Too dangerous?

Jin-Woo was left puzzled for a moment then, but still, told Thomas Andre that he’d be there soon and ended the call.

‘Hang on... It really can’t be a bomb, right?’

Of course, it couldn’t be. It’d be far more effective than an explosive to attack personally if you were a Special Authority-rank Hunter.

Jin-Woo began regretting a bit at the fact that he forgot to ask what kind of a gift it was. It was then, Beru suddenly began addressing him.

[Oh, my king.]

‘Mm?’

[May I be permitted to fight against that foreigner?]

‘.....’

Jin-Woo pondered that for a little while, before shaking his head as if to get rid of the distracting thoughts.

What was he even wondering about here?

Sure, he was really curious as to find out just how far Beru’s powers had been enhanced, but there was no way he’d let his Shadow Soldier fight against Thomas Andre.

He didn’t want to see either the American get hurt or see Beru get destroyed. Their personalities meant that the fight would definitely not end with someone getting a bit bruised.

‘Even then....’

Still, being able to ponder such a possibility attested to how much Beru had grown compared to before. In fact, the former ant king’s desire to test his own enhanced body could be heard so clearly in his voice.

‘Beru?’

[Please bestow unto this lowly servant your wisdom, oh, my king.]

‘There should come a time when you’ll be free to test your limits as much as you want. So, there’s no need to be rash.’

[This servant shall take it to heart, my king.]

‘And also, you gotta stop watching those historical dramas on TV. Your speech has become really weird lately, you know?’

[This servant shall heed my liege’s....]

‘Just say ‘Yes, I will’, okay? Say, ‘Yes’. Just ‘Yes’, nothing more.’

[Yes.]

Very good.

Now that he finally told Beru what was on his mind, Jin-Woo happily headed off to the meeting location with Thomas Andre.

“Oh, Mister Seong! You probably have no idea how long I waited for this moment.”

Thomas Andre welcomed Jin-Woo into his hotel suite with open arms.

It was true that you’d feel great about receiving gifts, but the joy of giving itself shouldn’t be underestimated, as well.

From the time Jin-Woo mentioned that he needed new shortswords to up until now – Thomas Andre had been counting the days he’d get to hand over the greatest weapons ever made, sleeping within his Guild’s storage, to his new friend.

He didn’t simply fly all the way to this distant foreign land for no reason at all.

How would the guy Thomas Andre personally acknowledged as the world’s best Hunter react when he sees these two bad boys?

Along with a big bout of anticipation bubbling in his heart...

Snap!

...Thomas Andre snapped his fingers, prompting his 'bodyguards' to bring out a large box covered in a sheet of fabric.

Even if it was ostensibly a gift, Jin-Woo didn't really want anything, to begin with, so he stared at the box with disinterest, but then, as the bodyguards got closer and closer, his eyes became equally sharper and sharper as well.

'What's this....?'

Wuoung.... Wuuuuoung...

Something inside that box was resonating with his magical energy.

Thomas Andre easily caught the changes in Jin-Woo's expression and inwardly punched the air.

'That's what I'm talking about!'

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo would recognise the weapons, while said weapons would recognise their new owner; Thomas Andre predicted that they would naturally recognise each other, and as expected, he was proven right, at this moment.

It was possible that these weapons had been hiding inside the Scavenger Guild's storage unit where not even a strand of outside light entered, biding their time just for this very moment.

Tack!

The box was placed on the coffee table between Thomas Andre and Jin-Woo.

"This here is my repayment for the favour you've shown to my Guild members and to myself."

Thomas Andre grasped the corner of the fabric and carefully pulled it away.

Shururuk....

The sheet slid off smoothly and revealed what it had been hiding all this time. It was a see-through case underneath. And within it were a pair of shortswords stabbed into a large reptilian scale.

No, hang on – could they even be called shortswords?

Jin-Woo grew doubtful almost immediately.

The blades of these weapons were definitely shorter than a longsword's, yes, but then again, they were so much longer than a regular shortsword's, too.

However, what caught his attention wasn't the puzzling length of the shortswords themselves. No, it was actually their ice-white blades.

Jin-Woo was familiar with the concept of crafting blades out of non-metallic materials. As a matter of fact, the very first weapon he acquired inside the first instant dungeon was the 'Poison Fang of Kasaka'.

Thanks to the memories of that time, Jin-Woo could guess just which monster's fang was used as raw material to craft this pair of shortswords. Besides, there was only one creature capable of emitting this kind of aura from a part of its remains.

"Kamish..."

Jin-Woo involuntarily whispered that name out, prompting Thomas Andre to shake his head while clapping his hands, feeling impressed.

"To think, you'd correctly guess the base material used for these guys just from one look."

Jin-Woo's guess was correct. But then, because he was right, he became puzzled about something else.

"Hang on, I thought Kamish's remains were in safekeeping with the Hunter Bureau....?"

"Because the American government wanted the intact corpse, we gave up on that monster completely. We got something else even more valuable than money from that deal, anyway."

Thomas Andre recalled the raid back then and grinned meaningfully.

"However, Kamish's biggest and sharpest fang.... When that thing tried to bite me, I yanked out one such fang, and it was given to me as a souvenir."

The problem was, there were no Awakened capable of crafting weapons out of stripped materials from a d*mn Dragon.

...Besides one single man, that was.

Thomas Andre added that, with the master craftsman responsible for the creation of these two genuine masterpieces having passed away due to old age, there would never be another weapon crafted out of the Dragon corpse in this world again.

"The fang's length wasn't nearly long enough to make a proper longsword, so they were made into shortswords back then. Who knew that decision would pay off now?"

Thomas Andre recounted the situation of all those years ago, his expression remaining bright and cheerful. He then leisurely took away the clear case and pushed the scale with the shortswords stabbed into it in Jin-Woo's direction.

“And now, these are yours.”

Finally, the best weapons in the world had met the best owner in the world. Thomas Andre did his darnedest to calm his fluttering heart and studied Jin-Woo's response.

The latter pulled one of the shortswords out.

Shuwuk.

As if the weapon was waiting for it, it came off without any resistance whatsoever.

Tti-ring.

The mechanical beep went off in Jin-Woo's head as soon as he grasped the shortsword and he quickly swallowed his saliva. Shortly afterwards, the detailed explanations on the weapon popped up in his view.

‘WHAT?!’

Jin-Woo doubted his own eyes right away.

This couldn't be real.

He was completely taken aback by the nonsensical attack value of this weapon and hurriedly summoned out his current main weapon, the 'Demon King's Shortsword'.

[Item: Demon King's Shortsword]

Rarity: S

Type: Shortsword

Attack: +220

A shortsword taken from the Demon King, Baran. Using two 'Demon King's Shortswords' will activate a set effect.

Set effect 'Two Becomes One': Extra attack power equal to the current Strength Stat will be added to each shortsword.

This blade's attack power would shoot way past the 500 mark when his current Strength Stat of over 300 was added on top. He had always thought that such a set effect would make this shortsword plenty useful for his cause.

But then, the attack value of the new shortsword in his hand was.....?!

Jin-Woo compared the stats for both shortswords and began freaking out inwardly.

'...How can this even be possible?!'



Chapter 208 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo's gaze was fixed to the shortsword crafted out of Kamish's fang. Its utterly unbelievable attack power could be seen floating above the weapon.

[Item: Kamish's Wrath]

Rarity: ??

Type: Shortsword

Attack: +1,500

Top quality shortsword fashioned from the sharpest fang among the Dragon's teeth by the expert's hands.

The blade's sharpness has no equal in this world; it also boasts excellent sensitivity towards Mana, and can become greatly strengthened depending on the wielder's capability.

The explanation seemed to go on forever. However, nothing besides the attack damage entered his eyes.

'1,500?! Just the pure attack damage??'

Never mind any added options, just the base damage dealt was 1,500.

As much as 1,500!

After recalling that the higher attack damage would make it easier to slice up the enemy, Jin-Woo couldn't even begin to imagine just how scarily effective this shortsword was going to be.

'N-no, hang on. Was there any weapon with 1,500 attack damage in the Store, to begin with?!'

Jin-Woo was so excited by the shortsword's attack damage, he hurriedly summoned the Store's interface without paying any mind to all those eyes studying his every move.

Obviously, it was quite a bit embarrassing to compare this bad boy to the shortswords being sold there, so he went straight to the section with broadswords, which boasted the highest attacking power among the blade-type weapons.

‘Huh....’

The most expensive broadsword’s attack damage barely cracked past the 1,000 mark. Even if this weapon was sold in the Store, it was still a broadsword boasting 1,000 damage, but a measly little shortsword was 1,500.

‘Hang on. Just purely from the perspective of the attack damage, won’t it be the same thing as me wielding two broadswords in each of my hands?’

The weightiness of the shortsword could still be felt through his palm.

He raised his head, his desire to cut something up with this thing powerfully stimulating him. That’s when he spotted Thomas Andre forming an awkward smile after having read Jin-Woo’s mind. The American shook his head.

“Whoa there, Mister Seong. Even if I activate my reinforcement skill to increase my defence, that blade will still cut me down. I hope you ain’t thinking of killing me with my own gift, right?”

Of course, Jin-Woo wasn’t thinking of doing that. He replied to Thomas Andre’s OTT exaggeration with a chuckle and focused back on the shortsword.

‘It’s got excellent sensitivity towards Mana, is it?’

Mana was another name for magical energy. To find out what the ‘excellent sensitivity towards Mana’ could even mean, Jin-Woo poured a tiny little amount of his magic energy into the blade.

And when he did....

“Heok....”

The bodyguards were supposed to refrain from making needless noises, but one of them couldn’t hold back and gasped out in pure astonishment. He quickly covered his mouth, but no matter – no one scolded him, anyway.

Because, everyone else’s attention had been stolen away by Jin-Woo’s shortsword to such an extent that they failed to notice his faux pas just now.

“Oh, my god.....”

Thomas Andre had experienced all sorts of craziness in his life, but even he couldn’t hold back his shocked gasp from leaking out of his mouth. From Jin-Woo’s hand, from the entirety of the shortsword itself, a blackish aura was slowly rising up, that was why.

‘This shortsword is.... It’s responding to my magic energy.’

It wasn’t just the aura rising up from the weapon; that weightiness of the

shortsword seemingly filling up his palm had also vanished in an instant. As if it was all a lie from the very start.

The weapon had become lighter than a feather.

‘Holy cow....’

This weapon even allowed its wielder to control its weight as he willed it.

Wuuong, wuuong...

The shortsword ‘Kamish’s Wrath’ began vibrating as if to greet its new owner. Jin-Woo’s heart began pounding even harder as he grasped its hilt.

Ba-thump, ba-thump!!

He really wanted to fight with this weapon. He really, really wanted to use it right now. Although, he couldn’t really figure out whether this was the shortsword’s will, or his own desire speaking.

Jin-Woo calmed his palpitating heart down and stabbed the shortsword back to where it used to be.

Stab.

That brought about the end to the blade’s vibration.

The black aura had been oppressing Laura and the bodyguards to the extent that they couldn’t even breathe properly, but now that the overwhelming aura was gone, they were able to finally gasp for fresh air.

Thomas Andre stopped looking at Jin-Woo and shifted his gaze over to her.

‘You still think I made a mistake?’

Thomas Andre’s meaningful gaze prompted Laura to shake her head quickly. As long as these shortswords were to be pointed in the direction of the monsters and not other humans, Thomas Andre’s decision should be seen as irrefutable.

The weapon would find its rightful owner. Even as a regular person who couldn’t sense any magical energy, Laura understood what was going on here in an instant.

Now that his judgement was proven correct, Thomas Andre began grinning quite refreshingly.

‘So, how do you like my present, Mister Seong?’

The most extreme of all emotions would always be expressed not in words, but through one’s actions. Jin-Woo quietly lifted his thumb up real high.

“Hahaha-!!”

Thomas Andre felt pleased as punch and leisurely clapped his hands to express his joy.

These shortwords were the proof of their friendship. He didn't feel a shred of regret for using them if he was able to get on Jin-Woo's good books.

Rather, it was Jin-Woo who was feeling burdened by this gift.

“Is it really okay for me to receive something like this for free?”

“What do you mean, for free?”

Thomas Andre erased that semi-permanent smile off his face and formed a serious expression next.

“Actually, I think it's a cheap price to pay for the lives of my Guild members as well as myself.”

This was how Thomas Andre expressed his plea of ***“Don't refuse my gift and just say yes.”***

Since Jin-Woo had already heard the particular way Thomas Andre expressed himself from Laura, he simply chuckled and replied to the American.

“In that case, thank you. I'll gladly accept them.”

“If you're willing to do that, well, I'm happy, too.”

As the atmosphere between the two Hunters standing at the very apex of the world grew warmer and more cordial...

...Jin-Woo and Thomas Andre both stopped moving at the same time.

Laura and the bodyguards didn't even have the chance to panic at the sudden stiffness in the two men's expression, because Thomas Andre opened his mouth before they could.

“Mister Seong, just now, that...”

Jin-Woo briefly nodded his head. That ominous sensation that brushed past his backside – Thomas Andre must've felt something quite similar to that.

It came from the sky. As if they had a prior agreement, both men shot up from their seats and quickly stood next to the window.

“...”

Jin-Woo spat out a gasp. Thomas Andre discovered the same thing and his eyes visibly quaked. Just how could a thing like that appear in the middle of

the sky?!

The American Hunter stared at the massive Gate floating up high in the sky and muttered loudly.

“I can hardly believe this. I’ve never seen a Gate that huge before.”

Even the Gate that spat out Kamish wasn’t as big as that b*stard up there. The thing was, though, Jin-Woo had seen a Gate with similar dimensions before – within the ‘data’ the stone angel statue played for him back then.

He saw winged soldiers pour out in their droves from a Gate high up in the sky.

The massive size of the Gate covering the heavens above the city of Seoul was almost an exact match to the Gate he saw within the data. Just from recalling the sight of all those soldiers painting the sky silver, Jin-Woo felt this shudder, a jolt, buzzing from the back of his neck.

‘Hang on. Could it be that the identity of the massive amount of magisphere pooling in Seoul’s sky is that thing?’

Jin-Woo became utterly speechless. Even Thomas Andre, even Laura, and even their bodyguards, all of them failed to close their slack jaws.

And as a heavy, powerful silence descended on everyone in the room, the gigantic Gate that suddenly manifested itself in the sky continued to gently ripple about, as if to swallow everything that was down below.

Right below the airborne Gate.

The residents of the city formed a literal sea of people below it, knowing that there was no danger of a dungeon break as the Gate had been generated not too long ago. They raised their smartphones and busily snapped shots of the portal dyeing the heavens black.

It was the first-ever Gate to form in the middle of the sky. And its gigantic size was unprecedented, too.

Although no one knew what would come out from there and should all be terrified as a result, people still couldn’t rein in their curiosity.

There were quite a few members of foreign press mixed among the crowd. Their cameras were working at full capacity to capture the scenes of this packed gathering of people

[Yes, I’m currently standing right below the giant Gate that has covered the entirety of Seoul’s skies, and....]

[The Gate you see before you is the biggest one ever recorded since monsters began appearing....]

[As you can see behind me, the crowd spectating on the Gate itself are carrying bright expressions, but....]

[...This is Nick Powell from BBN News.]

Reporters from various nations carried serious, even grave, expressions and spoke their mother tongue towards the camera lenses.

Japanese people had been interested in the ongoings of South Korea for a while now, so a certain TV station even scheduled a special program to report extensively on the ‘Gate above Seoul’s skies’.

As for the expert invited to share his insight on the program, it was none other than Doctor Norman Belzer who had been studying the irregular phenomenon in the sky for a long time.

After the brief introduction by the emcee, Doctor Belzer grasped his microphone.

“I have been warning the relevant authorities about the unknown mass of energy gathering in the various spots in the atmosphere for a while now. The giant Gate appearing in the skies of Seoul is merely the beginning, I fear. We will be seeing Gates just as horrifying as that one over the skies of many other countries in the future.”

The emcee’s shoulders flinched greatly.

“Ehhh?! What you’re implying there is, Doctor, there are more than one or two places with such ominous phenomena in the world?”

“That’s what I’d like to emphasize today.”

The scientist then went on to explain again what he told the Hunters participating in the International Guild Conference. He had a duty to inform the public of the dangers, now that his subject of research had bared its fangs for real.

Indeed, Seoul was just the beginning.

The magisphere was still being amassed above the skies of the remaining eight spots even now.

The scientist proceeded to reveal the nine locations with the help of the satellite images, leading to many gasps of shock and pained moans to leak out from the audience seats.

Some felt relieved by the fact that Japan was not among the list, while

some were left deeply shocked by the imminent threat the neighbouring nations had to face.

The emcee listened to Doctor Belzer's explanations with a gloomy, heavy expression, before asking the scientist.

“Doctor, you have been researching the Gates and monsters for a very long time, am I correct?”

“You’re correct.”

“In that case, can you tell us your opinion on what would be the smartest response we can come up with in this situation?”

Not just the audience members present, but even all the viewers at home watching their TV sets, leaned forward to pay closer attention to the good scientist's next words.

Unfortunately for them, what he said was something everyone could say, too.

“We can only pray.”

He shifted his gaze over to the audience members and continued on.

“We can only pray that this unprecedented event doesn't end in tragedy.”

Even as the expressions of the audience members became graver, the scientist carried on with his explanation.

“However, there is this one thing. One piece of news that can't be considered bad.”

Doctor Belzer's words, coming in just before the broadcast was about to end, managed to change the emcee's expression. Hoping to brighten the sorrowful, gloomy mood of the studio even by a little bit, the emcee quickly asked the scientist with an expectant face.

“What could that news be, doctor?”

“It's rather fortunate that the location of the Gate just so happens to be South Korea.”

Did this doctor hold some sort of personal grudge against Korea or something?

Noisy, noisy...

Doctor Belzer's shocking declaration left the audience members in noisy confusion.

The expression of the Chief Producer of this program hardened in an

instant, fearful that one wrong move now and he might end up with a broadcasting accident big enough to cause a serious diplomatic incident.

Fortunately enough, the feared event didn't materialise. The scientist quickly added more explanation before the misunderstanding could get any deeper.

“South Korea is the home of one of the greatest Hunters, someone who has already stopped a couple of world-ending calamities all by himself.”

Everyone present here definitely knew who that Hunter was.

“Yes, I'm talking about Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, who has removed every single ant monster from Jeju Island, and then killed all the Giants in Japan.”

The spot where the most amount of magisphere concentration could be found also happened to be where the world's best Hunter lived. Doctor Belzer felt that this was no simple coincidence.

“If he can't stop that Gate, then no Hunter alive will be able to do so, either. And that is why, when viewed from the world's perspective, we should be thankful that the first Gate to open up is in South Korea.”

Should they feel glad, or console their neighbours, instead?

As the Japanese audience members couldn't decide what to feel, the scientist emphasized his point once more.

“What I'm saying might come across as cold-hearted and callous, especially when Korea is facing a grave crisis, but the truth is, the world doesn't need to feel pity for the Korean people.”

Ah, so the broadcasting accident had finally happened!

The Chief Producer began tearing his hair out, but then, as if to mock the poor man, Doctor Norman Belzer formed a deeply meaningful expression and ended his explanations.

“If we ever come to the situation where we must pity the Koreans, then that means there will be no humans left on this planet to console each other anymore.”



Chapter 209 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The biggest Gate ever to open up on Earth so far had been the one in the United States of America, where Kamish came out of. However, the one in front of everyone's eyes was easily over ten times that.

Was there a need to even measure its rank in such a case?

Unfortunately, someone had to do the job and so, the Hunter's Association had to dispatch a helicopter up there.

The aircraft was being populated by employees who were also Hunters. This was done out of fear that the bodies of the regular employees would not be able to endure against the magical energy emitted by the 'Super-massive Gate' and break down if they got too close.

Tatatatatata....

Pilot and co-pilot, as well as two Association employees, were riding on the helicopter as it flew ever closer to the Gate.

Would being sucked into a black hole feel like this?

Within this shaking hunk of metal flying in the sky, one of the employees stared intently at the gigantic black circle drawing ever closer and asked.

"Senior, have you ever seen anything like that before?"

The sun had set already, and they had to rely on the spotlights attached to the helicopter, but the sheer massive scale of this terrifying Gate still entered their sights with no problem.

The senior employee shook his head.

"No, never. I'm sure no one in this world has seen a Gate this big before."

The entire world was in a great upheaval over this single Gate. Such a thing wouldn't happen just because this particular one appeared in mid-air.

Actually, the world was freaking out by the unbelievable scale of the Gate along with its unique location of being in the air.

If only these employees knew that even Thomas Andre had to doubt his own eyes – they wouldn't even have shared the dumb conversation about

anyone seeing a Gate like that before.

Gulp.

While the two men's gazes were stolen away by the Gate and dry saliva continued to slide down their throats, the helicopter arrived near the destination and gradually slowed its rate of ascent.

The co-pilot informed his passengers.

“Getting any nearer than this will endanger the helicopter.”

The employees mouthed their understandings and finished getting ready to measure the Gate. Now originally, one would have to stand right next to a Gate in order to measure its rank. However, doing that wasn't necessary this time around.

As soon as the switch was turned on, the measuring device went 'Pop!' and stopped functioning immediately. It was proof that the device couldn't handle the level of magic energy leaking out from the Gate.

It was also an expected result, too.

“Senior?”

The employee trying to manipulate the device looked up at the senior employee. The latter nodded his head to express his agreement. The junior employee opened the communication line in order to report the findings to the Association.

It was at that moment that the senior employee staring outside suddenly cried out.

“Be careful!”

The junior employee jumped up in fright and quickly scanned his surroundings.

“W-what was that?!”

“I, I thought I saw something resembling a monster outside....”

“Eh? A monster came out already??”

A monster emerged from a Gate that had appeared less than a day ago?

Such a thing couldn't happen, but the senior employee witnessing this phenomenon was one of the high-ranked Hunters in the country. Neither the pilots nor the junior employee were in a position to criticise him and ask him if he was sure of what he saw.

But then, sure enough....

“Over there!”

The senior employee accurately pointed out again what he saw earlier.

It was also around this time that the urgent voice of the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol came out from the headset the junior employee was wearing.

“S-sir, it’s a monster! We spotted a large monster near the helicopter!”

“But, uh... I don’t think it’s an ordinary monster, sir.”

“N-no, sir. The thing is, Association President, uh... There’s a person riding on top of the monster.”

It was then, an image of a certain man that really rode around on the back of a monster entered Woo Jin-Cheol’s head and his voice got cut off for a moment there.

“Hold on, sir. Yes, I can just about make it out.”

“Excuse me?”

The junior employee opened his eyes wider and pressed his face tightly against the window to take a closer look at the monster, before crying out in surprise and asking back.

“H-how did you know that, sir?”

Kkkiiiiieehk-!

Jin-Woo riding on the back of the Sky Dragon Kaisal drew closer to the Gate. Once he got near its bottom, the d*mn thing looked more like an endlessly-stretching lake rather than an actual Gate.

What a near-overwhelming size it was.

A regular Hunter wouldn’t have been able to endure this extraordinary amount of magical energy leaking out from the Gate itself, but Jin-Woo remained unaffected and aloof, starting from the moment he decided to check this thing out personally, all the way up to this point in time.

He could see that the Association’s helicopter far below had begun descending to the ground, perhaps assessing that it was too dangerous for them now.

Jin-Woo watched the aircraft for a little while before he got even closer to the Gate itself.

Above his head, in the distance where his hand could reach, the Gate, with

its maws wide open towards the ground below, floated in eerie silence.

Of course, the portal's surface was still blocked off by the black screen so he couldn't see what its inside looked like.

'.....'

If he reached out to touch it, would he be able to enter it, or would he get sucked in like a Red Gate, or...?

Jin-Woo cautiously extended his hand out.

'I most likely need to enter it and solve the problem before this Gate breaks open and monsters start pouring out.'

With a little bit of expectation bubbling noisily in his heart, he pressed the tip of his hand against the Gate's screen.

'What the...?'

For the first time ever since becoming an Awakened, he encountered a rather strange situation. He couldn't enter the Gate.

His hand couldn't enter the Gate as it got blocked off by the black screen. It was as hard as a solid wall.

'If it was a regular wall, I could've broken it down, but....'

He pushed with everything he had, but this 'wall' didn't even budge.

Knock, knock....

Jin-Woo knocked on the screen next, and his lips closed shut in a straight line.

'It's different.'

A Gate where Awakened couldn't pass through. Indeed, this one was different from all the other Gates that preceded it. If so, would the things waiting inside be different from everything else that had emerged before?

'Whatever the case may be....'

Whatever came out – his family and friends were below this Gate. He had no plan of letting them easily get past him.

'I now possess the Stats I've raised up until now and the brave soldiers that will fight alongside me.'

When his thoughts reached there...

Waaaaaah-!!

He thought he could hear the uproarious cheers of the soldiers hidden in his

shadows echo in his ears.

Ba-thump-!

Anxiety and anticipation alternated in his heart. Ever since he became the 'Player' and received the powers of the System, Jin-Woo believed that there was a reason, a purpose, for his existence.

If that was the case, then could it be that he was meant to stop this calamity?

'What rubbish am I even thinking about now....?'

Jin-Woo chuckled and brushed aside his needlessly grim determination before pulling his hand back from the Gate.

It was then. The Hunter-issue smartphone, which he left on in the vibrate-only mode, suddenly began writhing around inside his pocket. The caller was from the Japanese Hunter's Association.

Jin-Woo had asked them for a favour earlier, so he quickly answered the call.

"Please speak."

Jin-Woo glanced down at Seoul's skyscrapers, now small enough to resemble toy building blocks, and grinned to himself.

"There's no need for that. Actually, I'm somewhere pretty high up at the moment. Anyway, have you found out what I asked you about?"

Unlike how he usually was, the employee from the Japanese Hunter's Association blurred the ends of his sentence. Could something have happened in Japan on a day like this?

The answer from the employee was completely out of Jin-Woo's expectation, however.

'...!!'

After he killed off the Giants, he had been spending most of his time raiding dungeons in Japan, so this news came across as a bolt from the blue.

"Not one new Gate has appeared?"

The employee hesitated before continuing on with a voice thickly laden with his own vexation.

It had been about three hours since this super-massive Gate had appeared in the air. What were the odds of every Gate in the entire world all 'coincidentally' vanishing at the same time?

‘...It’s not a coincidence, obviously.’

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened. His stiffened face looked up at the Gate again, and in the meantime, the Japanese Association employee asked him again.

“...”

It was a bit troubling to honestly answer that.

Well, he couldn’t really come out and say that he just wanted to test the shortswords boasting 1,500 attack damage he got from Thomas Andre as gifts before this uselessly huge Gate opened up, now could he?

In that case...

“We don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow so someone needs to plant an apple tree, don’t you agree?”

Jin-Woo gave out an evasive answer and left the guy on the other side of the line to interpret it in any way he liked, before trying to end the call there.

“Yes?”

As if he was feeling embarrassed, the employee hesitated greatly before continuing on.

Jin-Woo quietly listened on to his confession.

As his story got longer and longer, his voice became more and more tearful as well.

People who got trampled by the Giants. Cities were burned down. Screams echoed around in the air. The despair that couldn’t be forgotten.

Those nightmares happened only a few weeks ago.

The employee had witnessed the calamity from up close and that was why he knew; he knew that such things should happen to no one.

Jin-Woo heard his pleas and confidently replied back.

“That will not happen.”

He wasn’t making a promise. No, it was much closer to him making a resolution. The reason for him diligently maintaining his growth up until this moment was the same.

It was now time to show the results of his hard work.

The employee heard Jin-Woo’s reply and quietly laughed.

“You don’t have to praise me that much. I don’t have any other hobbies

besides hunting down monsters, so I was planning to continue to visit Japan as long as there are monsters still running loose in this world.”

The employee thanked Jin-Woo for ably improving the atmosphere that threatened to get untenably heavy, before saying his ‘heartfelt’ goodbye.

“Of course.”

Jin-Woo pocketed the Hunter-issue smartphone. He then quietly stared at the Gate that was preternaturally quiet as if this was the calm before the storm.

‘If this thing’s duration is the same as dungeon breaks from other Gates, then...’

There were around six days left. Jin-Woo’s two eyes glowed softly within this darkness.

“....Let’s go down.”

Kiiiahk-!!

The Sky Dragon carrying Jin-Woo energetically flapped its wings and made its descent.

About a day later, other people also detected the changes; Gates had disappeared.

New Gates stopped being generated right after the super-massive portal appeared in the skies above Seoul! There was no way to tell whether this was a good or a bad thing, but still, those welcoming this change did exist.

And that would be the Hunter’s Association, currently being led by Woo Jin-Cheol.

With a deeply tense expression, he read the report being handed in and made a decision.

“Call every Hunter in our country to Seoul.”

“Sir? But, that will be too dangerous.”

“If we do that and a Gate we failed to discover goes to become a full-on dungeon break, then...”

“How about we summon only around half of the Hunters and leave the rest to.....”

Woo Jin-Cheol heard the incoming rush of objections and angrily slammed down on the conference table.

SLAM!

The shoulders of the people attending the emergency meeting flinched from this display of a high-ranked Hunter's anger.

Woo Jin-Cheol shouted out loudly.

“Do you all believe we have the necessary leeway to worry about unseen dangers right now?”

With that, everyone inside the conference room stopped talking at once. Woo Jin-Cheol pointed to somewhere beyond the walls of the room.

“We’re facing an unprecedented calamity right now. We don’t know whether we can stop that d*mn thing or not even after we pour out everything we have at our disposal!”

Woo Jin-Cheol roared out and scanned the faces of the attendees.

“I shall take full responsibilities if incidents take place in other districts. Even if you tell me to give up my entire wealth, I will. If you tell me to put my life on the line and fight, I’ll gladly do so.”

No one could argue against Woo Jin-Cheol's grim determination.

In a case where the opinions differed during the life-threatening situations inside dungeons, the leader of the raid team would even resort to killing the insubordinate team member.

It was because the incorrect decision made by a few could drag everyone else to their doom. In the outside world, such an action would be seen as a crime, but it was a different story altogether when inside a dungeon.

Raids weren't a kids' garden tea party, but true warfare where everyone involved had to put their lives on the line to win, And right now, that war was about to spill outside the dungeon and onto the world.

Woo Jin-Cheol wasn't a slack Hunter who would entertain opposing arguments when every second counted.

“Summon every Hunter in the country to Seoul immediately, please. As long as they can fight, do not leave anyone behind.”

And so, under the direct order of the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol, the Hunters of the Republic of Korea began heading to the city of Seoul.



Chapter 210 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

An unusual scene was playing out; the roads had become a confused mess as the citizens tried to evacuate from Seoul, while the Hunters were trying to enter the city in order to protect it.

People living in the districts directly below the super-massive Gate, the ones predicted to bear the brunt of the damage, heeded the warnings issued by the Hunter's Association and the government, or even their own logical reasoning, and escaped from the city in droves.

Jin-Woo watched the TV news, busy covering the evacuation efforts and spoke to his mom.

“Mom, don’t you think it’ll be for the best if you and Jin-Ah go somewhere else?”

“Our area isn’t even one of the evacuation zones, you know.”

Mom had no thoughts of leaving Seoul at all, it seemed.

Jin-Woo’s home, the old apartment, was located far, far away from the centre of Seoul. If monsters invaded this place, then that meant the defensive line of the Hunters had crumbled, and that would also signify Jin-Woo’s failure to defend the frontline, too.

Mom believed that the flames of danger would never reach here.

Jin-Woo also grinned but didn’t say anything else.

Unlike him and his mom sitting around a low coffee table located in front of the couch, Jin-Ah was sitting on the couch itself with her knees drawn up. She glanced at her older brother and asked him.

“Don’t you have to go, too?”

She was talking about the nationwide Hunter summons. However, Jin-Woo was a Seoul resident, to begin with. He wasn’t really included in that summons.

“The Hunters on TV are from other regions and they are trying to report to the Association that they have arrived in Seoul.”

“Ohh.”

Jin-Ah nodded her head while receiving a plate of sliced apples from her mom.

In reality, Jin-Woo had been feeling frustrated by the fact that he had no choice but to dazedly spend his time at home under the current circumstances.

He wanted to raise his level, but there were no monsters to fight. He wanted to enter the instant dungeon, but he hadn't seen a single special key as his reward ever since the architect of the System died.

His family certainly enjoyed him spending more time at home, but Jin-Woo really wanted to strengthen himself even further in order to prepare for any and all eventualities.

'Should I not do the daily quests and enter the penalty zone or something?'

It sounded like a good idea, but at the same time, not really.

First of all, he had no clue what might come out from that Gate in front of his eyes, yet he was thinking of entering the penalty zone where unknown monsters were lying in wait?

'Even if the odds are low....'

If there was one in ten thousand, no, one in ten million chance that something could happen to him during the penalty quest, then he wouldn't be able to deal with what might happen on this side.

He had no reason to take on two different types of risks right now. And so, that idea was dismissed.

In the end, he'd have to look for another way to test out the 'Kamish's Wrath' shortswords somehow.

What should he do?

As Jin-Woo pondered his options, a certain scene fledted in and out of the TV screen. It was of the Hunter's Association HQ building, as shot from a flying helicopter.

That's right.

'Should I use 'that'?''

The corners of Jin-Woo's lips arched up, his eyes gleaming rather suspiciously. He pulled his smartphone out and tapped one of the saved numbers.

Ringgg.... Ringggg....

As usual, the call was promptly answered only after a couple of ringtones.

“Looks like I should start referring to you as the Association President from now on, don’t I?”

Woo Jin-Cheol chuckled sheepishly on the other side of the line before brushing past the issue.

After sharing simple greetings, Woo Jin-Cheol figured that now would be a good time and his voice instantly became serious.

With the current situation being what it was, all of Woo Jin-Cheol’s nerves had been sharpened to a noticeable degree. How could he be not tense when the country’s most influential Hunter suddenly gave him a call?

“Well, it’s nothing serious, actually....”

Woo Jin-Cheol, still very tense, audibly swallowed his saliva.

‘Even if it’s not a serious matter to Hunter Seong, it might be a grave one for us. No, because he doesn’t sound that concerned, it could very well be incredibly bad news for us.’

As this short bout of silence drifted in between the two men, Woo Jin-Cheol did his best to calm his frayed nerves and paid closer attention.

Jin-Woo nonchalantly asked for a favour, since it really was nothing serious.

“Can I borrow the Association’s gymnasium for a little while?”

Even though he was really busy, Woo Jin-Cheol personally came out to greet Jin-Woo.

“As you can see.... This is the situation of our gymnasium.”

Jin-Woo scratched the side of his head.

In his quest to find a quiet place that was also out of people’s prying eyes, he thought that using the Association’s gymnasium would be a good idea, but it was currently housing the Hunters that had gathered in the city.

He saw the stuff being carried by their hands and belatedly remembered what was hidden within the storage of the gymnasium.

“Are you giving weapons to the Hunters that lack proper equipment?”

“Yes. The late Association President Goh Gun-Hui had prepared them for a rainy day like this.”

Jin-Woo's head nodded by itself.

This was a sight he wanted to show to those detractors who pointed fingers and criticised the Association for storing all this expensive equipment in a dark corner and letting them rot away.

These Hunters came across as grimly determined as they equipped their handed-out weapons and armours.

It was then.

A physically-imposing Hunter struggling to push his arms and legs into a set of armour coated in magic energy raised his head and by chance, met Jin-Woo's gaze.

“Uh?”

He was taken by surprise after witnessing the presence of the greatest Hunter, a man he only got to see on TV screens until then.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo??”

“What was that?”

“Hunter Seong is here?”

Hunters filling up the gymnasium all simultaneously looked behind them. And sure enough – just like what that big Hunter had said, there he was, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo in his full glory, standing alongside the Association President and studying them without saying anything.

The noisy interior was suddenly enveloped in silence. The atmosphere became deeply heavy in no time at all. The overwhelming presence that couldn't be transmitted through TV screens flooded out from this Hunter at the top of his game.

It was only natural that one's heart would start palpitating when doing nothing but staring at a person who was standing at a realm that one couldn't even hope to reach.

Ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump!

The expressions of the Hunters facing Jin-Woo all began to glow. Gazes filled with envy and respect flew in from everywhere. Only now did he realise the reason why Woo Jin-Cheol wanted to show him this sight when explaining it over the phone would've been sufficient.

Everyone gathered here were lower-ranked Hunters who found it hard to prepare their own expensive magic energy-infused equipment.

The new Association President was hoping to rally the lower-ranked

Hunters, who should have been mentally strained by the sudden summons, by showing them the single greatest ally they had on their side right now.

His calculation was proven true since renewed vigour seemed to have seeped into the eyes of these Hunters.

Jin-Woo couldn't help but chuckle softly at Woo Jin-Cheol's smart thinking. Well, the latter had been leading the Monitoring Division for quite a while, after all.

Meanwhile, Woo Jin-Cheol had been scratching the back of his neck as if he was embarrassed about his intentions being seen through. He suddenly asked a probing little question.

“By the way, Hunter-nim. Why did you want to borrow the gymnasium?”

Jin-Woo pretended to pull something out from his pocket, when he was actually taking it out from his Inventory.

“I want to use this.”

Woo Jin-Cheol tilted his head in confusion as he looked at the plum-sized seed resting on Jin-Woo's palm.

“This... What is it, exactly?”

“When you plant this on the ground, a monster resembling a tree will pop up. I wanted to test something with it.”

“A monster will pop up?!”

Jin-Woo looked at Woo Jin-Cheol's wide-open eyes and nodded his head.

The tree-type monster would spit out a seed in its death throes. Failing to destroy this little seed meant that a new monster would sprout in the same spot again.

He figured that it was inefficient to repeatedly hunt these monsters since their defences and vitality was so tenaciously high, so he proceeded to destroy all the seeds. However, he stored this particular seed from the boss tree monster in his Inventory, thinking that maybe, he'd find a use for it later.

Jin-Woo took to calling these monsters 'Armoured Tree', trying to imply that they were as sturdy as if they were wearing metal armour.

“If it's that guy, wouldn't it be the best target to test out these new blades of mine?”

The problem was...

“Under the current atmosphere of unease, many people will freak out

from the sight of a moving monster out in the open.”

Woo Jin-Cheol spoke up in a worried voice. Jin-Woo agreed with him.

“That’s why I was looking for a quiet, reinforced location out of people’s eyes, but this....”

Civilians had no access to the Association’s gymnasium, and its hardness was second to none, but it was impossible to use it now in this situation.

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze back over to the Hunters.

Even now, many Hunters holding tightly the weapons given to them by the Association and were glancing in his direction while trying to psych themselves up.

“Well, what with the situation like this....”

He could go to one of the uninhabited areas in Japan and use the seed there, but then again, the distance he had to fly was quite far, and as for using the skill, ‘Shadow Exchange’, he thought it’d be a waste.

Who could say what might happen in Korea during the two hours of cooldown time? That was why Jin-Woo was about to turn around to leave, but Woo Jin-Cheol had come to a decision by then, so he spoke up with a resolute voice.

“Very well.”

“Excuse me?”

“The afternoon schedule for the gymnasium today will be cleared out for you, Hunter-nim. Compared to everything you’ve done, something like this doesn’t even qualify as a special privilege.”

The late Association President Goh Gun-Hui even went as far as to change the related laws for Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. He argued that no one would be able to ask an excellent Hunter to put his life on the line to fight for them when they were unwilling to even do such small favours.

And now, as he was the new Association President, how could it make any sort of sense if he couldn’t even lend out a measly gymnasium for a few hours?

“Will that really be fine?”

Jin-Woo worriedly asked, but Woo Jin-Cheol simply grinned.

“I may not look it, but I am still the man in charge of this place. I get to decide when to open or close this building, you see.”

Woo Jin-Cheol clapped his hands and gathered the attention of the Hunters, before speaking out loudly.

“Who’s in charge here?”

“I-it’s me, sir!”

Jin-Woo watched an Association employee hurriedly run over here from the far end of the gymnasium and thought to himself that, didn’t matter whether a job title sounded awkward or if it suited a person, the job itself needed to be a high enough position at the end of the day first.

In a certain top luxury hotel in Seol.

There was a man wordlessly looking down at the cars trying to escape the city clogging the streets below from his suite’s window. He was Thomas Andre. Laura quietly approached him from behind.

Her hands were grabbing onto the travel case filled with her luggage.

“Master, will you still not leave with us?”

“That’s right.”

Thomas Andre lightly tapped the window with his finger. He was pointing at the Gate.

“How can I leave behind something that big and beautiful and run away?”

“It is big, but... beautiful, sir?”

Thomas Andre’s eccentricity was well-documented by now, but for him to say that horrifyingly huge and ominous Gate was beautiful....

Just as Laura, his manager, was feeling puzzled by his declaration, he turned around to look at her.

“Anything that makes your heart palpitate is beautiful.”

He placed his hand on his own chest to confirm his heart pulsating there. Ever since he saw the Gate, his heart had been racing non-stop with nary a sign of fatigue.

“From the Dragon spitting out flames, that massive Gate, and even the power of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, all of them are beautiful things to me.”

He couldn’t be understood by normal logic. Laura shook her head helplessly, but still, couldn’t hide her smile, either. Thomas Andre lowered his hand away from his chest and grinned brightly.

“Besides, all Gates have disappeared, so what’s the point of going back now?”

“However.... the Hunter Bureau is getting worried, sir.”

Worried, she said.

Thomas Andre began chuckling at the notion of someone being worried about his well-being.

“What a funny notion that is, worrying about me. Is there any place safer than right next to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?”

Even Laura forgot what she wanted to say after hearing Thomas Andre’s words. It was no secret that the Hunter Bureau had asked Seong Jin-Woo to protect the world’s top-ranked Hunters.

Thomas Andre smiled back at the clearly-speechless Laura and turned away from her. He stared at the Gate that had exceeded the classification of ‘huge’ and entered the realm of ‘super-massive’. It floated high up in the skies above Seoul, its surface quietly rippling.

“If that thing’s not stopped here, then there will be no future for us, anyway.”

A calamity that even Seong Jin-Woo may not be able to stop would occur eight more times around the world.

Who would be able to stop them? Thomas Andre himself? Or, China’s Liu Zhigeng? Maybe other Special Authority-rank Hunters?

What an absurd notion that was.

“That’s why I wish to witness everything.”

Thomas Andre’s gaze drifted off towards Laura’s reflection on the glass and a smile floated onto his lips again as he spoke.

“I wish to witness whether this will be the curtain call of human history, or the beginning of a new chapter.”

Inside the empty gymnasium.

Jin-Woo walked to the middle of this large structure.

‘Okay, this should be good enough.’

Jin-Woo put the seed down on the floor and poured some water on it.

A seed and water – these two were the only things needed for a monster to

sprout even without soil or sunlight. He had confirmed this many times already.

Wududuk, Wududuk...

Accompanied by the sounds akin to bones twisting around, the seed rapidly expanded and became a tree.

“Huh.”

No matter how many times he saw it, this process remained a spectacle, that’s for sure.

What an outrageous vitality this was, one so strong that the number of these tree monsters would never decrease even if the surrounding environments were barren and infertile.

Jin-Woo leisurely stepped back to the distance he thought was safe.

“Kiiiehk! Kiihk!”

The ‘baby’ tree continued to grow larger until it regained its original appearance. Eventually, the seed had transformed into a monster so big that its head nearly touched the gymnasium’s ceiling in less than five minutes.

“Kiiiehkk!”

Jin-Woo didn’t pay any mind to the screech of the monster tree reverberating around within the interior and calmly summoned the newly-upgraded Beru.

‘Come out.’

Beru’s figure smoothly emerged from the ground.

[Oh, my king!]

Beru’s new and improved appearance was indeed eye-catching; rather than the usual insect-like exoskeleton, his entire body was now outfitted with the snug-fitting black armour, which made him look even more ‘substantial’ than before.

Was that all?

The black smoke rising up from his body became even more noticeable as well, and now, rather than looking like a haze, it looked like black flames burning up, instead.

That overflowing power!

Jin-Woo confirmed Beru’s information window one more time.

[Beru Lv. MAX]

Marshal Grade

This grade is equivalent to the head of the army and only one such being can exist. If another Shadow Soldier also reaches this grade, the hierarchy must be decided.

‘So, the only ones that can potentially challenge the Marshal Grade right now is Greed, who is currently a Commander Grade, and Igrit, who’s only a step away from entering the Commander Grade himself...’

Jin-Woo inwardly thought that the competition between the three of them for the grade of ‘Marshal’ should be quite entertaining, before gesturing at Beru with his chin.

“Beru, attack that creature with everything you have.”

Everything he had – Beru increased his physical size as per the command given to him by his liege.

Kiiiiiiiieehk!

Screech of the genuine beast!

The armours also naturally transformed to match the enlarged body. Beru soon became twice his original size and began striding forward with loud, thudding footsteps.

His steps gradually picked up speed until he broke into a full-on sprint and he pounced on the Armoured Tree.

Ka-boom!!

Beru’s eyes widened in surprise.

The attack he poured in his entire being couldn’t sever the tree monster in half, only managing to dig in as deep as his wrist, instead. For Beru, capable of ripping rank S monsters into pieces as if they were jokes, this was one hell of a fluster-inducing event.

But then again, such a sight was befitting of the ‘Armoured Tree’ specialising in defence against pretty much all physical damage, barring the magic attacks.

That was enough of a warm-up. Jin-Woo recalled Beru after achieving a satisfactory result.

“Step aside.”

Beru quickly moved aside.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo summoned the pair of ‘Kamish’s Wrath’ from the Inventory.

Shuwuk...

Two shortwords as long as regular swords appeared in the grips of his hands.

‘Nice.’

Kuueehhk!

The Armoured Tree was searching for the culprit responsible for the hole in its tummy, before inadvertently discovering Jin-Woo’s presence and began to slowly run towards him.

So, so slow....

Seriously speaking, this thing had no other redeeming qualities other than its high defence.

Indeed, there was no doubt about its defensive capability. But, how well would these two shortwords work against that stupefying defence?

The blackish aura starting to spread out from the ends of his hands instantly enveloped the blades.

‘What I need is the destructive power, right?’

When his thoughts arrived there, the two weapons suddenly became rather heavy as if there were thousands of weights attached to them. They were so heavy, in fact, veins began bulging on Jin-Woo’s shoulder muscles as he tried to endure against this increase in weight.

‘The attack damage of 1,500.... Let’s see what it feels like.’

Jin-Woo made up his mind to fight, and the blades of the two Wraths began to shiver in unison.



Chapter 211 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The Armoured Tree's 'roots' zealously shook around as it approached Jin-Woo. He watched the monster as he reverse-gripped the pair of 'Kamish's Wraths'.

'For the time being, just a light little nudge.'

The shortsword in his right hand drew a diagonal line upwards.

Swish-!

Along with a sharp air-splitting noise, something fell to the ground with a thud.

".....M-mm?"

The Armoured Tree looked down. One of the thick branches it used as its arm had been severed cleanly and was rolling around on the floor.

Then, the monster discovered the cut wounds with tree sap oozing out like blood next. Its 'facial expression' became tearful and it shrieked out a screech that kind of sounded like a scream.

"Kuueeehk!!"

The thing was, though, someone's pain could also be someone else's enjoyment, too. After slicing off the concrete pillar-like branch/arm of the Armoured Tree in one hit, Jin-Woo's surprised eyes were now locked onto his shortsword.

'Wowsers.'

He only swung it lightly once, yet the end result was already this amazing. No matter how many times he stabbed with the Demon King's Shortsword, he couldn't properly damage the Armoured Trees. But now, he sliced off the 'arm' of the boss Armoured Tree as if it was made out of tofu?

Should he say it felt terrific in his hand just now?

Buzzzzz....

His heart began racing again after sensing the vibration of the ultra-sharp blades, something he hadn't felt for a long time.

[Oh, my king!]

Beru, standing and watching quietly from the far back, urgently called out.

‘Don’t worry, I know.’

Jin-Woo relaxedly answered before his head shot up.

The Armoured Tree’s expression had changed from tearful to hatred in the meantime, its eyes wide open and glaring as it raised its left arm, no, its left branch up high.

It was as if the monster wanted to slam down as hard as it could and squash him to death, but unfortunately, its opponent today was a really bad match-up.

Jin-Woo quickly swung the ‘Kamish’s Wrath’ one more time before the branch moved.

Slice!

“Ku-uuuhuk!”

Suddenly losing both of its arms, the Armoured Tree looked up into the sky and screeched out.

‘Very good.’

Jin-Woo lightly nodded his head.

He was now done with confirming the destructive power of the two shortswords when swung lightly. And now, time to confirm what would happen when they were swung with all his power.

‘These things supposedly have excellent compatibility to magical energy because they are made out of a Dragon’s bone, right?’

Jin-Woo’s right hand began gripping the hilt of the shortsword even harder.

Just a little bit more.

A bit more, a bit harder.

Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed down to a slit. When he focused the magical energy in his entire body to his right hand, the blackish aura subtly billowing around the blade became even more violent until it began to almost go out of control.

To Beru’s eyes, it looked as if the aura was utterly distorting the surrounding space.

‘How could this be!’

The former ant king unconsciously took a step back before catching himself doing that. Even though he knew that the intent to battle wasn’t

directed at him, this magical energy was so chill-inducing that it forced him into a retreat.

Beru looked down at both of his trembling hands.

‘Oh, my liege....’

Beru had never felt any other emotion beside absolute loyalty for his Sovereign until now, but for the first time ever, he felt sorry for the tree-shaped monster.

Meanwhile, the Armoured Tree had no idea what was in store for itself and simply screeched out in pure rage.

“Kuuuuueeeeh-!!”

The bloodshot eyes of the tree monster were, of course, locked in the direction of Jin-Woo’s face. The Armoured Tree’s maw suddenly widened like an entrance to a building.

Just as the b*stard tottered unsteadily and leapt towards Jin-Woo’s location in order to swallow him up, he released his magical energy gathered at the tip of the shortsword held in his right hand.

‘Go!’

Just like his command given to Beru, with everything it had!

From the tip of his toes, his legs, his waist, his shoulder, and even his wrist – his entire body was used to slash out with all his might.

And the end result was....

‘...Uh?!’

The man who swung the shortsword himself realised that something had gone very wrong just then.

‘Ehhh?!’

Kagagagagagahk!!

The black aura shooting out from the tip of the blade split into several thick strands, and as if a gigantic, terrifying beast took a swipe with its claws, everything in front of him was swept away in one go.

Jin-Woo’s dynamic vision that could split a second into dozens, hundreds of smaller units and detect the change within, clearly caught the moments of the aura utterly ripping the Armoured Tree to shreds.

‘Oh, my god!’

The destructive power didn't stop there and continued on forward to leave behind horrifying scars on the wall and the floor of the gymnasium.

“Huh-uh....”

Jin-Woo was rendered completely speechless.

Tumble, drop....

Thud.

Bits and pieces of rubble began falling from the gymnasium's wall, now scarred by what looked like claw marks, and eventually, it couldn't endure the weight and began crumbling at the same time.

Creak, crumble...

Boom!

The gymnasium's wall, reinforced with magic energy in order to facilitate unhindered activities of Hunters, couldn't endure against one single attack and ended up crumbling apart.

Jin-Woo looked at the piled-up debris of the wall as sheer astonishment filled his heart.

“It's supposed to get stronger depending on the wielder, so this is what it can do?!”

The weapon to wield magical energy, crafted from the Dragon's remains. This claim was for real.

“Oh, my king!!”

Beru was so moved by the display of his king's power that he urgently dashed out to kneel in front of Jin-Woo.

“This humble and weak servant can't hide his deep, heartfelt emotions from his liege's bottomless, limitless power!”

“....”

It seemed that Jin-Woo really needed to block the historical drama channel on TV for the time being. It'd be sad news for his mother, who enjoyed watching those dramas, but still.

Of course, it wasn't as if he couldn't understand the reason for Beru's overexcitement. Jin-Woo's own heart was pounding away from this power that exceeded his wildest imagination, after all.

The scale of destruction the 'Kamish's Wrath' left behind – would a Dragon large enough to cover the sky attacking at full power cause such

annihilation?

Jin-Woo clicked his tongue while studying the ripped-to-shreds remains of the Armoured Tree, the ghastly pile of debris that was once a wall, as well as the floor with deep gouges in it.

‘Do I need to change the name of the shortswords from Kamish’s Wrath to Dragon’s Claws or something?’

Of course, this level of destruction was only possible because it was him wielding the weapon, but still.

It was then. Along with the rather pleasant mechanical beep of ‘Tti-ring!’ a new System message suddenly popped up.

[Will you change the name of ‘Item: Kamish’s Wrath’ to ‘Item: Dragon’s Claws’?]

Jin-Woo was taken greatly by surprise by this unexpected response from the System.

‘I can also change the name?’

He hurriedly retracted his command, and only got to breathe a sigh of relief after confirming that the name of the shortswords wasn’t changed.

“Whew....”

That might have been a big problem!

If the original crafter learned that his artefact’s name was swapped from ‘Kamish’s Wrath’ to ‘Dragon’s Claws’, he’d be spinning his grave non-stop.

Just from hearing it, both his hands and feet were curling up from all that cringeiness.

Jin-Woo couldn’t help but chuckle at the ever-unchanging unfriendliness of the System.

In any case, he was satisfied by the power of the new weapon. Both in terms of sharpness or destructiveness, these shortswords easily exceeded his previous weapons by a great deal.

A pleased smile formed on his lips as he alternated his gaze between the two ‘Kamish’s Wrath’ shortswords before storing them in his Inventory.

‘Well, now that the testing is over....’

...It was time to take care of the aftermaths.

Jin-Woo had been drunk on the power of his new weapons, but he eventually came back down to earth. And after he saw the crumbled wall of

the gymnasium, he felt his own heart crumble to pieces as well.

He borrowed this place for a little while, yet he messed it up to such a degree.

...What was he supposed to do now?

Jin-Woo deeply deliberated on his options before contacting the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol on the phone.

“Uhm, Association President? Please, I want you to stay calm and listen to what I have to say. You see, I have around three hundred ants that do really fantastic work, and....”

Three days since the Gates had disappeared.

Jin-Woo, who used to allocate a lot of his time to raiding dungeons, was spending his recent days at home with nothing much to do.

While he lay on top of his bed, he continued to spin around ‘Kamish’s Wrath’ just above him.

Exactly like how a fidgety student would spin around a pen, Jin-Woo had been using ‘Ruler’s Authority’ to deal with his boredom.

Of course, there would always be a disruptor to any given situation. His little sister was heading to the bathroom, but then, she suddenly swerved in her direction and yanked open the door to his room. Jin-Woo instantly stored his shortsword in the Inventory and pretended that nothing was amiss.

“Oppa, you were playing with your knife again, weren’t you?”

Technically speaking, he was refining his control over the skill, ‘Ruler’s Authority’, but well....

But, to the worried eyes of his sister, it looked like nothing more than a dangerous fooling around of a bored guy.

“Nope.”

Jin-Woo denied everything as he had already hidden all the evidence away. Jin-Ah’s eyes narrowed down to a slit. She was unconvinced, but there was nothing she could do.

If her oppa, the best rank S Hunter there was, decided to really, really hide the evidence, how could she, a powerless regular person, ever find out the truth?

She glared at Jin-Woo with suspicious eyes for a very long time, before

letting a groan escape from her mouth.

“Oppa?”

“Yeah?”

“If you’re that bored, how about going out for a while? I mean, it’s been such a long time since you’ve been resting at home like this, right?”

His little sister suddenly began saying stuff that their mother should be saying, instead. Jin-Woo smirked and closed his eyes as if he wanted to go to sleep.

“I don’t have anywhere to go, you know.”

“Don’t you have someone to meet? Like, your friends?”

Friends, she said. His eyes opened again after hearing those words that vaguely resonated with him. Many faces fled in and out of his mind, but only one remained particularly vivid among them.

Since all Hunters were forced to take a break, for the time being, her situation wouldn’t be so different from his own, right about now.

Besides, didn’t he tell himself to treat her to a hearty meal to atone for his sin? That thing, when he inadvertently took a peek at her naked form after unwisely using ‘Sensory Sharing’ through the Shadow Soldier inserted into her shadow?

In normal times, not only him, but even she too would’ve been far too busy to meet up, but the story was different now. She might even be twirling around a sword or something out of this sheer boredom seemingly no one could overcome, just like how it was like for him.

This would be a good opportunity to get rid of that debt in his mind.

“Good thinking, sis.”

Jin-Woo suddenly leapt up from the bed and stood before her, prompting Jin-Ah to flinch and take a hasty step back.

“W-what the heck?”

“Excuse me.”

Jin-Woo expertly slid past her and headed straight into the bathroom.

Jin-Ah quickly detected that her oppa’s expression was now rather suspicious and quickly asked him as he was about to enter the bathroom to wash himself.

“What now? Where are you planning to go?”

He grinned brightly and replied back to her.

“On a date.”

“That’s enough for today.”

Cha Hae-In’s hands stopped swinging the wooden sword.

She had been training so hard that her white ‘dobok’ had been soaked through with her sweat and clung onto her figure. She turned around to face her instructor.

He was an elderly man wearing an aged dobok. This man, who was missing an arm, gestured to her that she should take a seat.

Cha Hae-In wordlessly nodded before politely kneeling down on both knees and placed the wooden sword beside her.

This old man was her teacher.

As she was a rank S Hunter, there were very few people who could catch up to her physical abilities, but she still needed corresponding techniques that could maximise her physical status.

That’s why she chose this out-of-the-way kendo dojo, and whenever she found herself with some free time, she came here to polish her ways with the sword.

Her teacher, Song Chi-Yeol, found her drive to never waste a single day quite praiseworthy. He settled down in front of her and spoke.

“I can’t help but sense that, lately, Lady Hae-In’s blade contains a trace of hesitation.”

Cha Hae-In heard her teacher’s voice and raised her head. Her expression was stiff. As their gazes remain locked in this position, Song Chi-Yeol quietly carried on.

“I’m worried that, by chance, you have developed a sense of fear in your heart.”

Cha Hae-In couldn’t answer.

Song Chi-Yeol was a Hunter like her and, even though he operated a dojo, he still went out to hunt down monsters whenever the Association requested his participation. And so, he could very well understand where her fear was coming from.

The Gate that none had seen before. And no one also could tell just what

kind of unimaginably terrifying monstrosities would emerge from there.

Just because one was strong, that didn't mean they couldn't get scared.

No, on the contrary. They felt to their bones the kind of fear that normal, powerless people couldn't feel precisely because they were strong.

Song Chi-Yeol closed his eyes as if he was reflecting back on his past and slowly nodded his head.

“I’m sure you’re scared. Indeed, why shouldn’t you be? I also felt the same way. Of course, the monsters that I fought can’t be compared to those you have fought, but when I lost my arm.....”

It was then.

Cha Hae-In’s Hunter-issue smartphone, the one tucked away in the corner of the dojo so it wouldn’t get in the way, began ringing loudly.

“A Hunter should answer her phone, yes?”

“Forgive me, instructor.”

Cha Hae-In briefly bowed her head before running over there to pick up the phone. And then....

Song Chi-Yeol had been waiting for her to end the call so he could continue on with his story, only to see that Cha Hae-In’s expression was getting brighter and brighter with every passing second.

‘Mm....?’

She was definitely trying to hide it, but since she was usually so expressionless in her everyday life, even Song Chi-Yeol could easily spot the changes in her expression.

She ended the call and cautiously walked over to his location.

“Uhm, instructor-nim, I.... There’s an appointment I need to get to, so I should go.”

Her cheeks were flushed warm. Seeing her eyes now filled with vitality, Song Chi-Yeol realised that his thoughts were off the mark. The hesitation evident in her sword wasn’t born from fear.

“Indeed, you should. Of course, you need to.”

Song Chi-Yeol dazedly nodded his head and gave her his permission.

“Well, then....”

Cha Hae-In’s goodbye was kept brief and she left the dojo in light, cheery

steps. He stared at her departing back and belatedly, a gentle smile floated up on his lips.

“Ah, so that’s what it was.... Indeed, that was the reason.”

Huhuh....

While wondering who the lucky fella receiving the love of such a wonderful and fine young woman could be, an expression of contentment floated up on Song Chi-Yeol’s face, one that was just as happy as his valued disciple had shown.



Chapter 212 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Hey, isn’t that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?”

“Where? Where??”

“Hul.... It really is Seong Jin-Woo.”

It was the weekend and many people came to visit a certain theme park. They all recognised Jin-Woo’s face among the visitors and stared at him with eyes filled with amazement.

“Who’s the lady next to him? Is she his girlfriend?”

“Hold up.... Isn’t she Hunter Cha Hae-In from the Hunters Guild??”

“Hul! This is huge!”

“What the heck? Are the two of them dating now?”

There was a woman next to Jin-Woo. She was famed for always maintaining a clean short hairstyle to ensure that nothing would hinder her movements.

She was Cha Hae-In, of course. She slightly lowered her head as if she couldn’t really get used to all the attention from the people surrounding them, and whispered in a small voice.

“Do you enjoy going to places like this theme park?”

Jin-Woo replied with a grin.

“It’s not that I enjoy it, but I wanted to come here at least once in my life, you see.”

Cha Hae-In stared at Jin-Woo’s current child-like expression with his previous ice-cold demeanour when slicing up monsters nowhere to be seen. Only then did she realise how fast her heart was racing right now.

Too bad for her, the man walking alongside her just so happened to be truly exceptional among the rank S Hunters. Cha Hae-In’s cheeks flushed red by a lot after realising that he must’ve heard her pounding heart as well.

She tried to divert Jin-Woo’s attention, even if only by a little, by changing the topic of the conversation.

“If you wanted to come here, then why me....”

“Miss Hae-In is the only friend I have.”

“Pardon?”

Since when did she become friends with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?

She racked her brain trying to recall the memory she clearly didn't possess before she unconsciously looked up. That's when her eyes locked onto Jin-Woo's rather mischievous grin.

“You know, in front of that strange stone statue....”

‘Ah, that day.’

Back on that day when she and her colleagues entered the dual dungeon to rescue Jin-Woo, that angel statue asked her the question, didn't it?

It seemed that Jin-Woo remembered that brief exchange.

“You were listening back then?”

“Well, yeah. Somehow, I could hear you. I have better-than-average hearing, you see.”

She felt a tiny bit wronged here somehow, but she knew that even back then, she ended up being saved by him rather than saving him, instead.

It was then she became conscious once more of just how many times Jin-Woo had saved her life.

“By the way.... What was the identity of that strange dungeon?”

She had been waiting to hear his explanation on this one ever since that day. Unfortunately, he figured that now wasn't the right time to tell her.

“Can I tell you later when I've managed to properly sort out my own thoughts first? Even I can't tell what's what at the moment.”

Cha Hae-In nodded her head to say that she understood.

When their conversation entered a bit of a lull, Jin-Woo began taking a look around their surroundings.

“Excuse me! Please look over here!”

“I'm your biggest fan!”

Just like when a celebrity was walking on a busy street, people crowded around the two like a swarm of bees and were busily snapping away with their smartphones.

Jin-Woo's face was far more well-known to regular people than some

superstars nowadays. That was because, regardless of which TV channel they tuned into, they would always play clips containing Jin-Woo's face ever since that super-massive Gate appeared in the air.

If this was any other day, he'd simply smile and let it slide. However, he didn't feel like having his day off being disrupted like this, especially when he had a company.

'Come out.'

The moment Jin-Woo issued his command, his own retinue of bodyguards willing to work their butts off for absolutely nothing revealed themselves.

They were none other than Igrit and the elite knights.

Around thirty or so knights emerged from his shadow and surrounded both him and Cha Hae-In in a protective cordon. They walked in perfect synch with their boss's pace, too.

Igrit was especially proactive as he personally went around wherever cameras flashed and wagged his finger to warn the would-be paparazzo.

Meanwhile, Cha Hae-In became even more flustered by the fact that they were now being escorted by a cordon of well-armed knights.

"Wouldn't doing this be even more eye-catching?"

"Well, as long as we aren't bothered, isn't it fine?"

His words carried this inexplicable persuasive power and Cha Hae-In found her head nodding all by itself. Truth be told, she really did feel somewhat better now that all those gazes pouring down on her had disappeared.

When she thought about it, she couldn't remember the last time she went out for fun with a relaxed mindset.

It had already been almost two years since she became a Hunter. During this period, not even once did she take a day off to relax.

She always remained tense and wasted each hour feeling nervous – on days she wasn't participating in raids, she'd be worried about her colleagues, and when she was in the raid, then she'd be worried about making mistakes.

But for today....

'...It's a different story when I'm with him.'

A man she can depend on.

When she was with Jin-Woo, it felt as if she no longer had to meet the expectations of her comrades that depended on her and could go back to being

just a regular woman living her life.

She took one step closer. Her cheeks blushed a little more as her body grew closer to Jin-Woo even before she had noticed it.

'His scent.... I can smell it.'

Jin-Woo watched her complexion get so much brighter and belatedly reflected on his shortcomings.

'I should've done this earlier.'

He scanned the theme park's various rides, before pointing at the roller coaster falling at a scary speed from a dizzying height and asked her.

"Should we get on that one?"

"Okay."

Since she answered too easily, Jin-Woo felt unconvinced and pointed at another ride.

"How about that one?"

"It's okay, too."

"In that case, how about the one next to it?"

"That's also okay."

"Everything's okay??"

"Yes. They are all okay."

Jin-Woo stared at the excited face she made during her answers and simply chuckled to himself.

'What the heck. I guess I wasn't the only one who wanted to come here.'

Since she didn't seem to hate this place, Jin-Woo's mind could relax even further now. He lightly grasped her wrist and led her to the nearest ride.

"Well, then. Why don't we ride all of them?"

Unfortunately....

It wasn't as fun as he imagined.

"Kyaaahk! Kyahk!"

"Whoa-!!"

As luck would have it, Jin-Woo got to sit on the very front of the roller

coaster. While the people behind were screaming their heads off, he spectated on the passing scenery without feeling much of an excitement.

‘Huh? That kid’s gonna drop his ice cream pretty soon. Oopsie, I knew it. Hold on, the food court was over that side? But, it’s still too early to buy dinner, so....’

Hmm....

Even though the roller coaster was rushing forward at full tilt, everything seemed to have come to a crawl, like extreme slow motion, to Jin-Woo and he was feeling really bored right now.

If he was allowed to, then he thought that he could stand up straight until the ride was over and he’d be unaffected in the slightest.

‘....’

He did his very best to suppress a yawn trying to break out and sneaked a glance behind him. Beyond Igrit and a couple of knights sitting immediately behind him – they wanted to ride on the roller coaster for some reason – he could see the regular people screaming and enjoying themselves.

From every single muscle on their faces, he could feel the sensation of thrill and joy they were experiencing right now. He also heard their racing hearts, pounding away hard enough to seemingly explode at any second.

On the other hand...

Jin-Woo placed his hand on the chest to feel his heart beating as normal and broke into a slight grin.

Honestly, it was a lot more exciting to jump up high in the sky with everything he had so he could punch that titanic god statue in the face.

‘What about back then when I was being chased around by those centipedes in the penalty zone?’

It was hundreds, no, ten thousand times scarier than right now.

‘Oops.’

Jin-Woo quickly shook his head in order to get rid of the useless thoughts.

‘I came here to relax, yet here I am, thinking about monsters.’

He began wondering if this was an illness or something. Around at the same time, he discovered his companion with a similar sort of expression on her face sitting next to him.

Smirk.

He couldn't help but chuckle here. Jin-Woo asked Cha Hae-In as she continued to swim in her dazed thoughts.

“Is it not fun playing around here?”

“Ah.... No, it's fun.”

Since her conversation partner possessed sharp hearing, she found it convenient that she didn't have to shout at him.

“Then, why haven't you screamed at least once so far?”

They had already ridden on five different attractions so far. All of them could be described as top thrill rides to normal people, but she hadn't even muttered out the common ***“Ah!”*** once yet.

She too was a rank S Hunter. Maybe not as extreme as Jin-Woo, but she had also surpassed the realms of normal people by a wide margin as well. Suddenly, he felt rather relieved by the fact that he wasn't the only one so far removed from the other people here.

It was then.

He was tempted to show her the world that he saw.

Beru sensed Jin-Woo's desire and hurriedly began dissuading him.

[Oh, my king... It might be too dangerous for this woman.]

‘It'll be fine. Besides, I'll put you in charge of catching her if she falls off. If you fail to do so.... You know already, right?’

[...Your wish is my command, my liege.]

Now that the voice of dissent had been suppressed, Jin-Woo spoke to Cha Hae-In next.

“Instead of this, do you want to ride on something really exciting?”

“Something.... really exciting?”

After the roller coaster came to an end, Jin-Woo led the still-puzzled Cha Hae-In out to a large plaza.

Whoa-!!

The theme park goers saw the cordon of black knights guarding the two of them and gasped out in sheer amazement. But then, their gasps soon turned into shocked screams.

“Heok!!”

“What is that thing?!”

The crowd was pushed back by the Shadow Soldiers. And on the now-created open space, a large, black monster suddenly rose up from the ground. It flapped its massive wings and screeched loudly towards the sky.

Kiiiiiaahhkk-!

It was also Cha Hae-In's first time seeing the Sky Dragon up close, so her response wasn't all that much different from the regular spectators.

"O-oh my god...."

Jin-Woo gestured towards Cha Hae-In, her eyes still resembling round dots from sheer amazement.

"Hurry, come on up."

She realised that Jin-Woo had already climbed up on the back of the Sky Dragon and became utterly flabbergasted.

"You... you want me to ride that creature??"

"I told you, didn't I?"

Unable to watch on any longer, Jin-Woo activated the skill 'Ruler's Authority' to pull her in.

"Ah?!"

She gasped out in shock again as this unseen force dragged her in. However, that reaction wasn't what Jin-Woo was hoping to see from her. Indeed, this was merely the beginning.

Even though her lips hadn't closed from the shock yet, he made her settle down right behind him and issued a command to Kaisel.

"Go up."

Kiiaahk-!

As if it was waiting for that, the Sky Dragon flapped its huge wings and began rising up in the air.

Cha Hae-In looked down as the crowd below gradually grew distant and swallowed her saliva. For sure, the sense of tension she felt right now was on another dimension when compared to being on those theme park rides.

Almost instinctively, her arms went around Jin-Woo's waist. Once they got high enough that the spectators below couldn't be seen anymore, her voice grew louder as well.

"E-excuse me?"

“Yes?”

“Why is that ant following us?”

Jin-Woo craned his neck to the side and looked down to spot Beru rising up just below Kaisel’s belly. Seeing how determined the former ant king’s expression was right now, he couldn’t help but break out in a soft chuckle.

“He’s the lifeguard!”

“Eh??”

“Hold on to me tight. We’re going to fly now.”

“Ehhhh??”

Was there a reason for more explanation now? Because he definitely could feel an incredible amount of pressure being exerted by Cha Hae-In’s arms wrapped around his waist.

‘What the heck. A regular guy would’ve been folded in half!’

But, this showed how scared she must’ve been feeling right now. Jin-Woo had half succeeded in his mission and spoke loudly with an excited voice.

“Kaisel, go faster! Faster!”

Kiihahk!

As Kaisel began flying at its fastest speed, Cha Hae-In’s screams, heard for the very first time today, resounded out right behind him.

A smaller-scale Dragon was splitting the air as it speedily flew forward.

Swish-!

Riding on top of Kaisel, Jin-Woo and Cha Hae-In were able to fly into places where one wouldn’t normally survive unless one was a rank S Hunter.

They entered the storm clouds where rain and wind wildly lashed out; they flew so close to a mountain range that they could almost touch it; they even flew past the seemingly-endless field of snow.

But the most beautiful sight still had to be watching the setting sun on top of the ocean.

Kaisel gradually slowed down.

Accompanied by the chilly wind brushing past their cheeks, the two of them watched the sun slowly disappear below the distant horizon, the skies being dyed in the amber-orange hue.

Just like the coloured sky, Cha Hae-In's eyes as she took in the spectacular sight also gently glowed in that orange hue. Abruptly, she felt curious and just had to ask him.

“Mister Jin-Woo.”

“Yes?”

“Even though you can experience stuff like this, why did we go to that theme park first?”

“That theme park, well....”

Jin-Woo fell into reminiscence and slowly told her the reason.

“That’s where the Gate my dad went missing opened up.”

“Oh...”

If his father failed and the dungeon break really happened back then, the theme park would have ceased to exist. Yet, it was full of people today.

At first, he resented his old man for leaving behind his family in that manner, but now, he felt as if something warm had filled up the void in his heart after he witnessed all those smiling families having a fun day out in the theme park.

That was enough for him.

“That’s why I always wanted to go there at least once.”

Jin-Woo's voice sounded lonely for some reason and Cha Hae-In wordlessly hugged him from behind. Her warmth was transmitted through his back.

She spoke to him again.

“Thank you.”

Her sudden thanks prompted him to look behind him, but since she was pressing up close to his back, there was no way he could see the expression on her face.

“Pardon me?”

“I wanted to.... say thank you for everything. You’ve been helping me out all this time, so....”

Through their bodies pressing against each other, through her warm breaths tickling his neck, and from her powerfully beating heart, he sensed from her what she wanted to say.

Indeed.

This was enough for him.

Jin-Woo smiled softly and commanded Kaisal to head in the opposite direction.

“Where are we going now?”

Cha Hae-In sounded somewhat rueful as she asked him. Jin-Woo replied with a smile.

“There’s something I want to show you.”

The destination they got to after a lengthy flight wasn’t Korea, but Japan.

More specifically, an area designated as a restricted zone. Which meant that there was not one soul to be found here. Even the wild animals were driven away by the horrible auras oozing off from the monsters and thus no one lived in this area.

In this expansive forest where not even the breathing of a small animal could be heard, Kaisal slowly made its descent.

Kiihkh-!

The Sky Dragon lay flat on the ground and Jin-Woo climbed off first. He turned around to assist Cha Hae-In next.

“Be careful....”

Even before he could reach out, though, she jumped lightly and easily landed on the ground, before shrugging her shoulders. Jin-Woo had momentarily forgotten what her job was and could only chuckle again.

“Where are we....?”

She had been experiencing some extraordinary sights for almost the whole day today, and so, she expectantly began scanning her new surroundings with curious eyes.

However, besides the near-endless sea of trees, she couldn’t see anything particularly interesting out here.

Jin-Woo sneakily bought a blanket from the System’s Store and laid it down on the ground before opening his mouth.

“There’s no fun if I let you in on the secret already, so why don’t we lie down first?”

“Ehh?”

Did she hear him wrong??

Unfortunately, there was no way that a rank S Hunter’s hearing would hear such a clear enunciation of words incorrectly. Besides, Jin-Woo was already getting ready to lay down on the blanket, anyway.

“Please, hurry.”

Seeing how nonchalant he was in his invitation, Cha Hae-In’s heart began pounding as if it was about to explode.

“Are, are you.... being serious?”

She simply had to confirm his intentions one more time.

Too bad for her, perhaps, he didn’t show not one bit of hesitation as he nodded his head in a determined way.

It was her turn to hesitate, but in the end, she approached the blanket. Jin-Woo confirmed this and slowly laid down first. Soon, she too lied down next to him, and as if she had made a big decision about something, she straightened her legs.

“I’m... ready.”

Jin-Woo looked at Cha Hae-In murmuring with tightly closed eyes and replied to her.

“In that case, please open your eyes.”

When her eyes creaked open just a bit, he wordlessly pointed at the night sky above.

....Towards the cascading light of the stars.

“Ah.....”

Cha Hae-In gasped out inadvertently after looking at the stunning parade of the starlight filling up the heavens.

Beautiful.

Could she be able to describe this spectacle with any other words besides ‘beautiful’?

Jin-Woo was pleased by her response and smiled in satisfaction.

“I arrived here to deal with a dungeon break and ended up looking at the night sky.”

Back then, he felt just too fatigued and wanted to lay his weary body down

and close his eyes to rest. But, because the surroundings were so bright, he couldn't go to sleep.

He got irritated and opened his eyes and that's when he got to see this brilliant echo of stars enveloping the sky.

Just seeing them made his heart melt down that night.

“I thought that it'd be wonderful to share this night sky with someone else, you see.”

The only thing filling up this still forest with nary a squeak of sound was the endless river of starlight.

Jin-Woo wanted to share this feeling, this moment, with someone else.

Fortunately, the result of his desire was this strong sense of relief. He felt relieved by the fact that there was someone close by who could also feel what he had felt then.

And his heart, once hardened and lumpy, seemed to soften and become untangled now.

But then, this happened.

‘Uh....?’

He felt the warmth of Cha Hae-In's hand climbing up on top of his own.

“Can I... hold your hand?”

But, she was already holding it, though?

Jin-Woo smiled before shifting his hand to interlock his fingers with hers. The cold yet smooth hand of a woman filled his palm up.

So still, so quiet....

Countless starlight sparkled and rained down, as the heads of two young people slowly became one.



Chapter 213 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

day.

The news of various Hunters had taken over the sports newspapers from the likes of actual athletes or celebrities a long time ago. And on this particular day, a rather sensational headline found itself on one such publication's front page.

[Seong Jin-Woo and Cha Hae-In go to a theme park; birth of the strongest couple?]

The articles contained many large photos of the two people in question visiting a theme park, taken by various smartphones. The last image was of them riding on a large monster to fly off to elsewhere.

The personal affairs of these two Hunters were supposed to be protected and couldn't be reported to the public, but the boss of this particular newspaper went mad from this massive breaking news and, even under the threat of sanctions, decided to release the article nonetheless.

Of course, the response had been tremendous.

The 'scandal' concerning two rank S Hunters whose names everyone could recognise brought about renewed vitality to the psyches of everyone who was fatigued by the constant stream of articles related to the super-massive Gate in the sky.

The world's greatest Hunter and Korea's best female Hunter were dating. Obviously, people would display an incredible amount of interest in this matter.

Especially online, where the story of the two Hunters was spreading out with an even more rabid intensity.

↳ Seong Jin-Woo Junior LOL

↳ It's not official that they are dating, yet look at all these idiots jumping to conclusions. Tsk, tsk.

↳ Going by that example, you think we got Seong Jin-Woo because his parents were both super duper top Hunters? You sound like a little kid who don't know how Hunters awaken their powers.

└ Even then, doesn't those two dating make you feel excited?

└ I wish it was true. Them having a marriage argument will be an epic encounter that flattens their surroundings. LOL

└ This. ㅇㅈ

└ I hope TV stations will stop playing special reports on the Gate now.

└ Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim, Cha Hae-In Hunter-nim, whether it's a super-massive Gate or a super-duper-massive Gate, please stop it for us!

“Tsk, tsk.”

The Chairman of the White Tiger Guild, Baek Yun-Ho, clicked his tongue and folded close the newspaper in his hand.

He wondered why Hunter Cha Hae-In's eyes were gleaming suspiciously whenever she looked at Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, and so, this here was the reason.

However, he wasn't clicking his tongue because the two of them were going on a date.

“Look at this headline. It's complete rubbish. What do they even mean, strongest couple?”

Section Chief Ahn Sahng-Min, sitting near his boss and his rather displeased expression, asked him while sounding puzzled.

“What's the matter, sir? The way I see it, Hunters Seong Jin-Woo and Cha Hae-In would definitely be worthy of the title of 'strongest couple'.”

“Doesn't matter who Hunter Seong Jin-Woo dates, we'll still get the 'birth of the strongest couple' anyways, so what's the point of attaching this sort of a headline?”

‘Eh?’

Now that it was said out loud, that certainly sounded logical.

Ahn Sahng-Min began placing all the female Hunters he knew next to Jin-Woo in his mind, and began nodding his head at Baek Yun-Ho's opinion.

Even if Hunter Seong was dating that high school girl Hunter, he just couldn't think of anyone capable of winning against them. None at all.

The female high school Hunter might be not much to write home about, but well, her partner would be too much of a cheat, after all.

“You're completely correct, Chairman.”

“Yes, I’m telling you.”

Ahn Sahng-Min nodded his head again and began sipping the coffee he bought from the vending machine not too long ago. He slowly shifted his gaze outside the window.

“By the way, this issue with fine dust is really getting serious, sir. I’m actually scared of opening the windows nowadays.”

Ahn Sahng-Min frowned and got up to close the half-open window. However, Baek Yun-Ho stopped him from doing so.

“Hang on.”

“Sir?”

Baek Yun-Ho stood up from his seat and walked over to Ahn Sahng-Min, before opening the window wide to reach outside.

“This.... This isn’t fine dust at all.”

The feeling he got at the tips of his fingers was icy cold.

This was actually a fog. Not only that, a fog that carried this extreme coldness, bitter enough to make one’s bones shiver.

“This is weird.”

It was only around the middle of Autumn, but to think, there would be a wintry fog enveloping the entirety of Seoul. At that moment, he felt this creepy chilling sensation brushing past the back of his neck.

Baek Yun-Ho’s eyes changed to that of the ‘Eyes of the Beast’ and he glared outside the window. He muttered to himself, his expression hardening gradually.

“Something... something feels really off.”

Jin-Woo was the first one to open his eyes.

Hae-In must’ve been exhausted from yesterday as she hadn’t woken up from her sweet slumber yet.

Just how long had it been since he greeted the morning together with someone else?

Jin-Woo cautiously got up to make sure not to rouse Hae-In and walked over to the nearby forest.

‘It was definitely around here....’

He found the stream he used the last time he was here and washed up. After he was done, he walked back to where Hae-In was still asleep but then....

He discovered something strange and his steps came to an abrupt halt.

‘What is this....?’

There was this small tree with new buds sprouting up. One might be tempted to say that it was a plant commonly seen anywhere, but the thing was, its leaves were gently shimmering in a silvery colour.

It was a tree never before seen on Earth, in other words.

And sure enough, this strange tree was emitting a very faint amount of magical energy, something only Jin-Woo’s level of sensory perception could have picked up on.

‘It’s not from our world.’

The plant’s magical energy emission was different from that of a monster’s, so it clearly wasn’t one. Jin-Woo observed the tree for a little while longer, before raising his head to discover more of the same silvery leaves here and there.

It was such a contrast to the sight of regular surrounding trees all drying up gradually.

‘Even the ground... is changing.’

Was this also the part of the Rulers’ plan? Or, was it more like the after-effects of monsters pillaging the land?

Jin-Woo scooped a little bit of soil and smelt it, before rubbing his hands together to scatter it away little by little. Even the falling soil contained a minute trace, a scent, of magic energy.

Maybe it was only the humans that hadn’t noticed the truth yet. It might be that this world had become deeply mired in the magical energy already.

It was at this moment, he sensed Cha Hae-In’s movement from afar as she slowly woke up from her slumber. Jin-Woo dusted his hands and stood back up.

It was indeed important to worry about the consequences of the transforming world, but there was something even more important than that right now.

And that would be to calm Hae-In down, when she’d no doubt start panicking after realising that he wasn’t there. Jin-Woo deliberately made some noises as he approached her. She quickly discovered him and let out a

soft sigh of relief.

He smiled and greeted her.

“Good morning. Did you rest well?”

Her complexion reddened for some reason. She replied while averting her gaze away from him.

“....Yes.”

Jin-Woo sent her a puzzled look, prompting her to sneakily raise her head.

“Where were you coming from?”

Hae-In’s question sounded cautious. He used the towel around his neck to rub his still-moist hair and replied.

“I was washing myself, actually.”

Now that he thought about it, she must’ve wanted to clean herself just as badly, too. Especially with all that ocean breeze – even a little bit of exposure would leave behind plenty of salt on one’s skin.

‘Still, I can’t let a young lady wash herself in a place like this....’

Jin-Woo pondered his options for a bit, before a smile floated up on his lips. Going to ‘that place’ would solve the issues of both taking a bath and breakfast in one go.

“I know a hotel with a killer breakfast nearby, so how about going there for our meal?”

Although she didn’t verbalise her answer, Hae-In must’ve felt really hungry, because she immediately nodded her head, her lips firmly closed shut.

Jin-Woo reached out to her and helped her to stand back up, before summoning Kaisal out again.

Kiiiaaahk!

Hae-In tilted her head while looking at the Sky Dragon unfurl its wings.

“But, didn’t you say it was nearby?”

“Well, it’s about a five-minute distance if I run with everything I have, so.... Would you like to run alongside me, then?”

Five minutes at Jin-Woo’s top speed; Hae-In quickly calculated just how far that would be in her head, and without saying anything, she climbed on the back of Kaisal.

‘Yup, it’s great that she understands me so quickly.’

Jin-Woo grinned and took his place in front of her. Kaisal flapped its wings and flew up.

The Koreans had seen Kaisal fairly often on TV so their reactions were not as severe, but he wondered how the Japanese staff of the hotel would react after seeing his ride.

He prayed that the chef working this morning wouldn't be too frightened. Meanwhile, Kaisal slowly began heading in the direction of the hotel.

'It' suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

The first person to discover 'it' was a middle-aged man who got evaluated as a rank B Awakened in the Hunter's Association only a few moments ago.

Thud.

The man ended up bumping shoulders with 'it' appearing suddenly before him in the middle of the busy street and stopped walking right then.

“What the....?”

The man raised his head while chasing after the silhouette of the shadow. There was a big, hulking man of over two metres tall standing right before him.

This dangerous sense of wild beast oozed out from the man wearing some sort of leather clothing. No, rather than just some 'sense', this man was a wild beast personified.

Since the man's huge physique was so eye-catching, the gazes of the passersby quickly focused on this person, and the middle-aged man that had run into him.

“What's this? Are they going to fight?”

“Wow! Look at that man's size. He's no joke. Even Mah Dong-Wook would take a bow, man.”

“By the way, that uncle must've lost his mind. He might end up in the hospital at this rate.”

Even though the street was filled with people, there was this heavy silence descending on it. That's what the middle-aged man thought after becoming the centre of attention of the passersby.

Now normally, he'd have apologised and stepped aside, but he was a different person compared to the past.

He'd no longer suffer the ignominy of kowtowing before his superior or be ignored by his junior workers.

'I'm a rank B Awakened now.'

Not only that, among the upper tier of the rank B, too. There was no need to act subservient towards a 'regular' person like this who only relied on his massive frame.

The middle-aged man carefully put down the bag of documents on the ground and roared out at the top of his lungs.

"Oii! You're supposed to apologise when running into someone!"

Once his agitated heart began racing away, he felt his magical energy moving vigorously from within every inch of his body.

Cells in his flesh were telling him.

That he was alive.

That he was ready to start a new life as a Hunter.

Perhaps suppressed by his spirit, the beast-like man didn't say anything while standing rooted in the same spot. The middle-aged man saw this reaction and became even more excited.

"You think everything will be over just because you're standing still looking at me like that? If you made a mistake, you're supposed to admit to it and start begging for forgiveness to the person you've wronged.... Ah?! Ah, aaah!!"

When the huge man grabbed the middle-aged man by his head and lifted the poor man up, the passersby watching began screaming at the top of their lungs.

"Ah!! Ah, aaaaah!!"

Thick, reddish veins bulged on the head of the middle-aged man as he was being squeezed.

A bear. No, a tiger; a lion, a shark, a crocodile, a poisonous snake – which predator existing on this world was capable of frightening a human being to this degree?

The fear of the predator ingrained into humanity's DNA caused the middle-aged man to wet his pants.

"Ah..... Ah....."

And eventually...

CRACK!

Accompanied by the sounds of something shattering, blood and brain mass splattered to everywhere.

“Kyyyaaaaahhk!!”

The huge man didn't stop there; he began to voraciously devour the sagging, lifeless body of the middle-aged man on the ground.

“He, he's eating that man!”

“U-uwaaaah?!”

“Wha-what the hell is this?! What's going on?!”

The noisy meal time came to an end in an instant. The huge 'man' wiped the corners of his mouth, still dirty with bits of flesh, with his hand while slowly standing back up.

A wild beast.

Not even a hint of intelligence could be seen behind the eyes of the huge man. They definitely resembled a wild beast's eyes now.

While many people screamed and ran away, there were just as many who had failed to recognise the severity of the situation and continued to spectate on the next actions of this huge man.

This 'wild beast' roared out towards the humans around it.

[Listen well, you lowly humans! Starting from now, I will hunt all of you down!!]

The thunderclap-like roar paralysed all who listened. They stood there on the spot shivering, tears rolling down their cheeks.

Before anyone had noticed it, sharp fangs were jutting out gloriously from the huge man's mouth.

[My fangs and claws will mercilessly rip apart the flesh and skin of you weaklings!]

It was the King of Beasts. The roar from the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs baring its sharp canines reverberated loudly against the entirety of the streets.

[I dare you to come and stop me!]

The Association President Woo Jin-Cheol finally received the report on the 'horrifying being' that appeared in the middle of the city without any prior

warning.

“How many victims so far?”

“At the moment, it’s impossible to tally the number of the dead, sir.”

The ‘thing’ was first spotted in the district of Myeong-dong and while moving in a straight line, the creature proceeded to kill every human it laid its eyes on.

“When taken into account the direction this creature has taken, its destination could be...”

“.....It’s the Hunter’s Association, isn’t it?”

Woo Jin-Cheol bit his lower lip and clenched his fists.

“We’ve got our hands full worrying about the d*mn Gate right now, but just where did such a monster even.....”

Unfortunately, there was no time to stew in his anger right now. No, he had to come up with a solution to stop that thing somehow.

“What about Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

“We still can’t contact him.”

“God d*mn it...”

He cursed out involuntarily.

Only a few minutes ago, he heard the news that a Guild stepped forward to stop this monster only to be annihilated without being able to do anything.

The only consolation right now was that the creature moved at a slow pace as if it was waiting for someone to show up. But still, it didn’t take a genius to figure out that, as long as it was not stopped soon, the total number of victims would end up being astronomical.

In such a situation, the fact that the country’s most powerful combat force couldn’t be reached was probably the worst news imaginable.

‘If things go wrong, even the country can....’

Woo Jin-Cheol gritted his teeth as he kept his mouth shut, his determination firming up. It was then, a welcome piece of news came at his way.

“Association President!”

Woo Jin-Cheol shot up from his seat as an Association employee burst into his office without permission.

“Did you get in touch with Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim??”

“No, sir. That’s not it. However, I just learned that a world-class Hunter staying nearby is getting ready to stop the monster!”

“What? Really? Who is it?”

“That is....”

Ranked as the number one in the German Hunter community, Lennart Niermann, could sense the aura of the monster approaching closer as it dyed the streets red with blood.

‘Will I... be able to win?’

Even though he was doubtful, as a Hunter, there was no way he’d ignore the screams of terror coming from the innocent citizens.

And when he took a look at the brightening expressions of the escaping citizens as they recognised him, the Hunter ranked twelfth in the American Hunter Bureau’s ‘Hunter Point’ list, Lennart Niermann was overcome with this great weight of responsibility bearing down on his shoulders.

Yes, it was not a matter of whether he could do it or not. No, he simply had to do it. That was the purpose, the duty, of a Hunter.

‘Maybe....’

The reason why he ended up staying in Seoul was probably the trickery of fate so that he could stop that monstrosity with his own two hands.

Lennart Niermann formed a grave but determined expression and undid a couple of buttons on his shirt. Just as he was about to take his step towards the monster that finally revealed itself at the far end of the street....

A heavy voice came from behind him.

“Get out of the way.”



Chapter 214 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Jin-Woo's smartphone began ringing off the hook as soon as he entered the reception range.

'From the Hunter's Association?'

His expression hardened when he confirmed who the caller was. Could something bad have happened while he was away for a bit?

He quickly answered the call.

"Yes, it's me, Seong Jin-Woo."

He sensed that something was definitely wrong after hearing the urgency in the Association employee's voice. Feeling suspicious, he quickly asked.

"What happened?"

A problem serious enough to make the leader of the Association personally step up?

Jin-Woo realised that the matter at hand couldn't be a simple one and wordlessly waited for the reply. The distinct connecting signal tone soon ended, and as if he had been desperately waiting for the call, Woo Jin-Cheol hurriedly answered the phone, his anxious voice leaking out from the speaker.

"I was outside the reception range until a moment ago."

Perhaps because of being contaminated by the frequent dungeon breaks, it was almost impossible to contact outside when within that vast ocean of trees.

However, he thought it was more than sufficient enough to leave behind his Shadow Soldiers with those whom he wanted to protect. That's what he believed.

'Could the super-massive Gate have opened up while I was in the forest?'

But, there should have been at least two more days left still?

All manners of hypotheses bubbled up in Jin-Woo's mind and just before he could urge Woo Jin-Cheol to spit out the truth, the latter told him the greatly simplified version of the current crisis.

Tumble.

Jin-Woo had been feeling energised after enjoying a rare break from the action. But now, he felt as if his heart had fallen to the pit of his stomach.

“How big is the size of the monster horde??”

‘Just one?’

Currently, all Korean Hunters had gathered in Seoul.

They were summoned to the city in order to fight against the potential dungeon break from the super-massive Gate, so they should be on their toes, getting ready to move at a moment’s notice.

On top of that, the Association was even supplying weapons to those Hunters lacking in proper equipment, too.

‘But then, they are getting destroyed by a monster that suddenly appeared out of nowhere?’

As Jin-Woo fell ever deeper into confusion, Woo Jin-Cheol hurriedly continued on with his explanation.

“What about its current location?”

Could this be chalked up to being mere coincidence?

The moment Woo Jin-Cheol mentioned the name of the ultra-luxurious hotel where Thomas Andre was staying, Jin-Woo felt this sense of creeping unease tickle him in his throat.

Sure enough....

The Association President’s voice speaking the American’s name was filled to the brim with anxiety.

But, that couldn’t be.

Just in case, Jin-Woo had left a Shadow Soldier behind with Thomas Andre. The order issued to the soldier was to ‘send a signal right away if something strange is sensed in the immediate vicinity’.

But then, the target for protection started fighting alone against a monster capable of wiping out a Guild and yet, there was no signal?

‘...Hang on.’

Only now did Jin-Woo realise something was off.

The signals coming from the Shadow Soldiers spread throughout Seoul were extremely weak. As if something was interfering with the transmission.

‘What is going on?’

An enemy possessing incredible power, a Special Authority-rank Hunter fighting it, and finally, signals being blocked off.

Could it be?

One distinct possibility popped up in Jin-Woo's head. He asked in a hurry to confirm.

“Association President! Did that monster possess a shadow?”

“Please, confirm if that monster has a shadow!”

Woo Jin-Cheol's voice seemingly got cut out for a moment, then – before continuing on with greater urgency.

‘Oh, my god.’

Jin-Woo recalled that the Ice Elf attacking Goh Gun-Hui also didn't possess a shadow and loudly cried out.

“You must never let Thomas Andre fight that monster!”

There was a good chance that the monster had been aiming for Thomas Andre all along.

Time was of the essence right now.

Jin-Woo realised that he had no need to listen to any further explanation and tried to activate ‘Shadow Exchange’ with the Shadow Soldier attached to Thomas Andre.

Tti-ring.

Accompanied by a rather ominous-sounding alert noise, a clear holographic message suddenly popped up in his view.

[The designated Shadow Soldier cannot be located.]

Jin-Woo tried several times more, but it was the same story.

Tti-ring, tti-ring....

[The designated Shadow Soldier cannot be located.]

[The designated Shadow Soldier cannot be located.]

‘How could this be!’

Jin-Woo began freaking out, his expression gradually hardening like stone.

‘My soldier... has disappeared?’

The Shadow Soldier he needed to use as his coordinates for the skill ‘Shadow Exchange’ had disappeared without a trace, somehow.

He couldn't detect any trace of that particular soldier at all.

And he could now definitely sense that the connection he shared with the soldier attached to Thomas Andre had been severed, just like when he sent some of the soldiers back to the void.

The cancellation of the Shadow Soldier independent of his will??

A confused-sounding voice leaked out of Jin-Woo's mouth next.

“What the hell has happened here?”

Lennart Niermann heard the weighty voice coming from behind him.

“Get out of the way.”

The German had experienced a similar sort of situation before, but the emotion he felt right now was quite different compared to back then.

“Thomas Andre!”

The giant of a man large enough to block out the sun, that's Thomas Andre. Lennart Niermann's expression brightened the moment he discovered the American standing behind him.

Thomas Andre wordlessly walked past Lennart and slowly went up ahead.

Even those screaming people running away from the scene recognised the Special Authority-rank Hunter and his hulking physique, and their steps all gradually came to a stop.

“He, he's that American Hunter.....”

“T-Thomas Andre??”

“It's the Goliath! THE Goliath!!”

Even the first rate Hunter Lennart Niermann felt his heart pound excitedly when seeing Thomas Andre's broad back as he walked forward. So, how would the regular people feel, when they were desperately fleeing in terror from the monster's dense killing intent?

“Ah, ah!”

“Oh, dear lord! Thank you!”

Some people even began plopping down on the ground from the sense of relief robbing their built-up tension, knowing that one of the world's best Hunters had come to save them.

Meanwhile, Thomas Andre angrily shouted at the other Hunters nearby

who were all frozen stiff from the powerful pressure emitted by the unknown monster.

“Stop standing around like idiots, and start evacuating these citizens, you b*stards!”

The roar from the Special Authority-rank Hunter was more than enough to blow away the stifling pressure dulling the thought process of the other Hunters.

They understood his intention through that thunderous roar and began grabbing those citizens that had fallen behind to drag them far away from Thomas Andre. Lennart Niermann also cooperated with the evacuation of the powerless citizens along with his Korean counterparts.

The American stood tall in the middle of the street as if to protect them. And that ‘monster’ slowly made its way over in his direction.

The Special Authority-rank Hunter took off his sunglasses, his eyes narrowing to a slit.

“...”

What he saw was a beast covered in blood. Although it vaguely looked like one, there was simply no way that thing was a human being.

Veins bulged on Thomas Andre’s face as he spotted the bits and pieces of the victims strewn messily about behind this ‘beast’.

“A stinking beast who doesn’t know its place has rampaged around for far too long.”

As if to mock Thomas Andre’s rage, the ‘beast’ bared its fangs covered in bits of flesh in a toothy grin.

Putting down a crazed animal was a universal truth, no matter where one was from. Thomas Andre’s eyes became incomparably murderous right away.

“Reinforcement.”

His muscles transformed like armour and his already-hulking physique grew larger and larger than before. As far as one’s physical size was concerned, he was a step larger than this monster.

To find out the gap in the strength, Thomas Andre rushed towards his target.

A tank!

People watching and sensing the ground tremble every time he took a step forward instinctively pictured a powerful tank.

The beast smacked its lips at the appearance of a new prey and made its move as well.

Two giants closed their distance in an instant and stood before each other. At first, they exchanged glances studying their new opponent, and soon, they squeezed their muscles laden with massive magical energy while roaring out at the same time.

Two monstrous beings and their fists powerful enough to crush concrete like tofu began exploding out like bullets towards one another.

Boomboomboomboomboom!!

This exchange of fists relied solely on brute force with no consideration towards any type of techniques. Hunters watching on were left absolutely awestruck by this spectacle.

Just being kissed by one of those fists would result in instant death for these Hunters. But these two were trading such lethal blows without even taking a breather, without even bothering to block them, as if these punches were just light probing jabs.

'It's working.'

Thomas Andre grew sure of it now.

Pow!

His punch caused the beast's head to spin to the side. This heavy sensation of impact got transmitted to his left hand. This attack definitely worked.

After losing to Jin-Woo, the Goliath felt his confidence had plummeted somewhat, but through this dogfight, he felt it growing back again.

Boomboomboomboomboom!!

The continuous stream of powerful punches pushed the beast gradually backwards. Grabbing hold of this opening, Thomas Andre's fearsome full swing of his fist floored the b*stard right into the ground.

Kwa-boooooom!!

Kwa-jeeeeeeek!

The beast was shoved away as the concrete below split apart from the sheer force. The creature smashed into the side of a building and demolished its wall; only then did it finally stop moving.

Other Hunters watching on punched the air and celebrated, but the person responsible, Thomas Andre himself, didn't display any hints of joy.

‘No, that was wrong. It wasn’t... as deep as I wanted.’

The thick dust cloud spread out, obscuring the vision. However, he could still sense the presence of the beast emitting the dense murderous intent from beyond the collapsed debris of the building.

Swish-!

Swiiish-!!

Suddenly, heavy hunks of metal flew out from the dust and at Thomas Andre’s location. He smacked these flying cars away from him and quickly activated the skill, ‘Capture’, to yank the beast hidden from his sight closer to his position.

Wuuwoong!

The resisting beast was brought right up to the American’s nose; he immediately activated his strongest skill.

“Demolition!!”

Muscles on both of Thomas Andre’s arms ballooned up until they nearly popped. He slammed down on the ground with everything he had.

KWA-BOOM!!

The horrifying shockwave arising from the ground pummelled the beast.

[Kuuwahhh!!]

The beast cried out in agony as it was flung into the air before it came crashing back down.

Thomas Andre seized upon this chance and jumped on top of the monster, before proceeding to rain down his fists laden with an unbelievable amount of magic energy.

Skill ‘Power Smash’!!

Boomboomboomboomboom!!

Waaaah!!

The citizens watching the battle between the Goliath and the beast from afar with anxious minds all began raising excited cheers. Even the Hunters began breaking out in relieved smiles as well.

No matter who saw it, this fight now had a clear victor. It was an overwhelming victory befitting the Special Authority-rank Hunter, often referred to as the world’s best.

However....

Thicker and thicker drops of cold sweat began forming on Thomas Andre's forehead even as he mercilessly pummelled the beast down below.

'What is this?'

What was this anxiety, born from this sensation of a noose gradually tightening around his neck the closer he got to his victory?

Each and every one of his attacks was landing splendidly, and the beast being floored down below wasn't showing any signs of resistance.

So, why....?

'Why do I feel this anxious, even though I'm clearly in an advantageous position?'

Fairly quickly, though, Thomas Andre got to discover the source of his anxiety.

It was the eyes.

From the very beginning of the fight right up until now, the beast had been looking at him with the exact same apathetic eyes, even going so far to completely disregard the indiscriminate outpouring of his attacks.

It was as if the thing was mocking him, telling him to try and give his best shot.

Grit.

The Goliath was thoroughly enraged and raised his interlocked fists up high.

His shoulder muscles expanded in an instant, and thick veins bulged on his skin. Horrifying amounts of magic energy flowed into his shoulders, arms, wrists and fists, emitting a bone-chilling aura at the same time.

With this, it'd be the end.

Could this beast reopen those eyes again after being struck by 'Demolition' right in the epicentre of the skill?

With everything he had, Thomas Andre slammed down both of his fists.

"Demolition!!!!"

It was then.

He clearly saw it.

He saw the beast close its eyes for the briefest of brief moments before

opening them to reveal that those eyes, previously resembling that of a human's, now fully resembling a wild predator's.

Grab.

The beast leisurely raised one hand up to easily stop Thomas Andre's two fists swung down with all his might.

“.....??”

The American looked at his hands, now held tight and couldn't be pulled back at all, and felt a chill run down his back.

[Even though you're a mere puppet of a Fragment, you managed to drag out this much power.]

The sounds similar to a predator growling caused Thomas Andre's expression to crumble.

“***What was that?***”

Right at that moment.

The black hair of the beast began to grow longer and longer as its colour changed to white.

That wasn't all; the nails resembling awls grew lengthier as well, while its fangs grew sharper, too. Soon, whitish fur covered its entire body.

‘***A Werewolf?!***’

Unfortunately, there never had been a single instance of a white Werewolf making its appearance in ten years of humans going on raids.

“***You.... Just what is your true identity?***”

Thomas Andre threw that question out as he felt this ominous chill from the disgusting, vile magical energy oozing out from the beast's eyes.

Too bad, the creature didn't bother to answer him and proceeded to shatter the bones in the human's hands with nothing but sheer physical strength.

Wuduk!!

“***Wuuuuaahk!!***”



Chapter 215 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Unbridled astonishment!

The strongest Hunter screamed out and everyone else in the vicinity couldn't hide their shock and astonishment.

The helicopter dispatched from the TV station flying in the air filmed in its entirety Thomas Andre suffering in great pain.

Right in the middle of Korea's capital city, Seoul, where the focus of the world had gathered due to the appearance of the super-massive Gate – to think, a Special Authority-rank Hunter trying to stop a monster was screaming out in pain like that?

“How can this be....??”

All those watching the two being's fight, whether in the location itself or through various screens, prayed fervently in their hearts that this wasn't the end of this battle.

Too bad, the 'beast' snatched and then, slammed Thomas Andre's wrists into the ground as if to mock their prayers.

BOOM!!

It then climbed on top of Thomas Andre, reversing the previous position.

“Keo-heok!”

Blood spewed out from the Goliath's mouth as he bitterly resisted even with his broken hands, but now that the beast had fully revealed its true powers, he was unable to endure against his opponent's physical prowess.

The beast stomped on Thomas Andre's face and roared loudly into the sky.

Kuuwaaaaahhh-!!

The horrifying howl loud enough to tear out the eardrums of everyone listening reverberated like a thunderclap in the city's streets.

A predator didn't fight. It simply hunted its prey.

The Hunters nearby were overwhelmed by the howl containing an inconceivable amount of magical energy and began kneeling down one by one from the closest position to the furthest back.

As for Thomas Andre, the closest one to hear the howling, his eardrums had ruptured and blood leaked out from his ears.

The beast smirked derisively.

[Are you scared now?]

One of the joys a hunter could derive from the process of hunting was seeing the prey shiver in fear.

However, Thomas Andre didn't give up. He clenched his messed-up fist with great difficulty and threw a counterattack.

Pow!

Quite unlike before, when they exchanged many crippling blows earlier, the beast's head didn't even rock once.

The wall.

He looked into the disinterested eyes of the beast glaring down at him and began picturing an imposing wall stretching endlessly into the sky standing tall to block his path.

He had felt something similar to this once before.

What a strange thing this was; for a moment there, Thomas Andre thought he saw Jin-Woo within the beast's glare.

'But, how come....?'

He didn't have any chance to sort out his confusion, though, as an attack from the beast rocked his head violently side to side, the ground underneath caving into a crater.

BOOM!!

"Keok!"

That was just the start of the onslaught, though.

Boomboomboomboomboom!!

Just like how he had done, the beast began raining down powerful attacks from above. As if to teach the human what true attacks looked like, the vicious punches continuously slammed down without mercy.

Boomboomboomboomboom!!

Thomas Andre's lips continued to issue pained grunts over and over again, unlike back then when the beast simply withstood his punches.

"Keo-heok!"

It was then; the beast, in the midst of enjoying the pain of its prey, discovered something odd just beyond the human.

[...??]

The beast stopped its attacks. What it was glaring at, as if to bore a hole into it, was Thomas Andre's shadow.

[I see that there's a rat hiding in there.]

Stab!

The beast stabbed its hand deep into the shadow and grabbed 'something' within the subspace.

Paht!

When the creature pulled its hand out, an ant soldier hiding inside the human's shadow was dragged out along as well.

The beast stood upright again. The ant soldier, its neck tightly grabbed by the powerful grip, desperately struggled but the monster didn't even budge from the spot.

“Kiiiiehk!”

This one was a soldier belonging to the Shadow Sovereign.

It was impossible to destroy an immortal soldier like this one through regular means. However, the creature holding onto the ant's neck was no ordinary being, either.

The Sovereign of Beastly Fangs was a higher existence. It simply focused the energy inherent within the spiritual body to erase this ant soldier from the very fabric of existence altogether.

“Kiahk!”

The ant soldier spat out a short death throe and turned into dust, returning to the void beyond. The beast grinned as it watched the grey ash scatter in the air.

It was then.

Thomas Andre got up and positioned himself behind the beast before anyone had noticed it. He then wrapped his arm around the creature's neck and secured his grip with the other arm.

If he lacked teeth, then he'd bite with his gums, instead!

His hands may be broken, but his arms and shoulders were still fine. Thick veins bulged on his arms as he poured in all his might to exert enough

pressure to crush a steel beam in one breath.

“Pant, pant....”

Thomas Andre continued to gasp out breathlessly and concentrated on this final attack.

There would be nothing left after this. His eyes shot wide open in concentration as he clenched his teeth, fully knowing that he'd get killed if he missed this chance.

Wududuk, wuduk....

He heard the displeasing noises similar to bones being crushed into powder. If that was the sound of the enemy's neck breaking, then there was still a chance of victory here.

‘...I've done it!’

Unfortunately, the incoming rush of pain had been slightly delayed by the adrenaline coursing through his body. Thomas Andre bore the full brunt and screamed out in agony.

“Wuaaaaahhk!!”

The beast shattered the American's arms locked onto its neck with nothing but sheer physical hand grip. It then grabbed his head with both hands before proceeding to slam him down on the ground.

THUD!

Viewers watching this scene through their screens saw the Goliath's arms dangling around and quickly averted their gazes. It was a scene they simply couldn't bear to watch with their eyes open.

Too bad, the horrifying scene didn't stop there and continued on. The beast pounced on the sprawled Goliath and began biting him.

The predator's mealtime had begun.

Dozens of sharp, knife-like fangs began tearing into Thomas Andre's skin and made a mess out of his flesh.

“Euh-euhk! Wuaahk!!”

He didn't give up until the end and continued to desperately struggle, but it was obvious that he had no chance in hell right now. His blood poured out and the bits of his flesh flung into the air.

“Wuuuaahk!”

Seeing this horrendous, sickening sight, the other Hunters supposedly

guarding the location began backtracking inadvertently in terror.

As for the regular people that had bet their hopes on the Goliath, they had scattered away in fear a long time ago after seeing the incoming end result.

However, something unexpected happened then; among the ranks of the hesitating Hunters, one man dashed forward like a bolt of lightning and ran straight towards the beast.

Boom-!!

The monster had been drunk on the victory and the taste of its loot, so it got caught unaware and was struck cleanly by this unexpected attack, which resulted in it getting flung away.

It was none other than Lennart Niermann. Germany's best Hunter quickly stood next to the grievously wounded Goliath.

Thomas Andre recognised Lennart and somehow managed to squeeze out his voice.

“Run... away....”

However, Lennart shook his hardened face.

“I’m also a Hunter, you know.”

‘...Although I’m far weaker than you.’

Back when he Awakened his powers and made up his mind to become a Hunter, Lennart had promised himself this one thing – that he'd never turn his back on a comrade.

Sure, they might not even be in the same team, but from Lennart's perspective, Thomas Andre was an exemplary comrade who was fighting against a common enemy.

Didn't matter what the American thought of him, because as a Hunter, the German simply couldn't back away from this situation.

‘However.... Just staring at that thing face to face is making me break out in cold sweat here.’

Lennart watched the beast's expression crumple unsightly after its mealtime had been unceremoniously interrupted, and his own legs began turning to jelly right then.

Seeing him shiver like that, Thomas Andre opened his mouth again.

“You... will... die....”

He knew that already. Of course, Lennart knew that.

He didn't even have his equipment with him. And his strongest one-hit-kill trump card, the skill 'Charge', only managed to shove the beast away.

Germany's best Hunter?

12th in the world rankings?

He knew better than anyone that such things had no meaning in the current situation.

Even then...

'...I don't regret anything.'

Even if this moment turned out to be his last, he'd still choose exactly the same over and over again. Rather than the life of a coward, he would choose to go out in a blaze of glory!

'I'm not wrong. I am not wrong!'

Lennart continued to psyche himself up as he glared at the massive power gradually running faster and faster towards him.

'I'm definitely not wrong!'

He locked his eyes on the chill-inducing maw of the beast opening up wide as the monster closed the distance in an instant. Lennart summoned up every ounce of energy and swung his fist.

For a very moment there, the life he led up until this moment flashed past him like a revolving lantern. He didn't even work that hard yet this incredible power was handed to him, allowing him to live an overabundant and perhaps undeserved lifestyle.

But, he did live a happy life, didn't he?

That's right, he did.

A grin floated up on Lennart's lips as he saw the beast's throat approaching ever closer.

Indeed, he was not wrong. Right up until the end, he didn't live an embarrassing life.

Just before the beast's maw swallowed his head, Lennart quietly closed his eyes, thinking that there would be no more need to open them again.

But then!

Kwa-boom!!

A sudden noise of explosion coming from his front shocked Lennart and he

quickly opened his eyes.

‘What was that?!’

The beast struck by his fist was flying away in a straight line for dozens of metres before rolling ungracefully on the ground. The asphalt cracked up into pieces, cars were blown away, and street lights were bent in the middle.

“Uh?”

‘Was I this strong?’

Lennart dazedly stared at his fist, only to realise that someone was standing right next to him.

“Uh, uh??”

Confirming that man’s face, Lennart joyfully cried out in a half-tearful voice.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!”

He was cutting it really close.

If he hadn’t attached a Shadow Soldier to Lennart Niermann when the German came to the Guild office, would he be able to make it in time, even?

After confirming that the Shadow Soldier attached to Thomas Andre had disappeared, Jin-Woo searched for another one near the location and activated ‘Shadow Exchange’. But to think, that Shadow Soldier just so happened to be the one in Lennart Niermann’s shadow.

Thanks to that, he got to save the lives of these two men.

Jin-Woo hurriedly checked Thomas Andre’s wounds and breathed a sigh of relief. The American’s wounds looked pretty serious, but thankfully, he’d be able to survive.

He must’ve had no more energy left to even speak, as Thomas Andre could only quietly look up at Jin-Woo. The latter also remained silent but nodded his head as his reply.

He silently thanked the Goliath for his courageous effort in stalling for more time.

When he turned around, his ears were filled up with Lennart’s emotional voice.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!!”

“Thank you for stopping that b*stard. My apologies, but can you evacuate Thomas to somewhere safe?”

Jin-Woo politely asked in English, and Lennart nodded his head energetically. Compared to fighting that monstrosity, this job sounded so much easier.

“Ah, yes! You don’t have to worry about that one.”

The German cautiously lifted Thomas up and hurriedly distanced himself. Meanwhile, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the beast raising its body up.

Tangible, horrifying, murderous intent oozed from the creature. He sensed power on another realm compared to other monsters from the b*stard.

‘I knew it....’

His guess was on the money.

This thing possessed a similar sort of aura to the Ice Elf he met earlier. It was, indeed, one of the Sovereigns that were hunting down the Hunters.

However, what was going on here? Unlike with the Ice Elf, this thing showed no signs of panic. No, more than that – even though its fight had been interfered with, it looked composed, nay, relaxed, even.

‘But, why....?’

Did it possess a calm personality, to begin with? Even though it looked half man, half beast?

While Jin-Woo was stewing in his confusion, the beast emerged fully from the building’s debris and walked leisurely over in his direction.

It was sloshing something in its mouth before spitting whatever it was to the floor. They turned out to be its broken fangs.

The beast glared at Jin-Woo who managed to break off several of its fangs with just a single punch and didn’t even bother to disguise its surprise.

[So, it was for real. The smell of the Shadow b*stard is mixed in among that human’s scent.]

The beast sniffed the air noisily and asked as if it had discovered something rather amazing.

[But then.... how can a human manage to bring out the power of a higher existence to this degree?]

‘I raised up my levels, that’s how. You dumba*s.’

Rather than choosing to solve the b*stard’s curiosity, he summoned the pair

of 'Kamish's Wrath', instead.

He had a lot of things to ask this Sovereign. But, the Q&A session could only take place after the battle was over and he had grasped the right to decide the creature's fate.

Glance.

Jin-Woo glanced at the traces of the victims still visible here and there in the street and an ice-cold murderous rage began overflowing out of his eyes.

But, then....

....The voice he hadn't forgotten yet suddenly resounded out right from next to the beast.

[It's possible that the architect has found a way. Well, the business dealings between the Shadow Sovereign and the architect started a long time ago, after all.]

The thin, fog-like smoke suddenly coagulated into a singular mass before morphing into a humanoid shape.

'Isn't that...?'

It was the ancient Ice Elf. The Sovereign of Frost, hiding its presence as a fog until now, had finally revealed itself.

Jin-Woo realised that the fog wrapped around the city was not a natural phenomenon the moment he came in contact with it.

And this time, it was from his behind.

[In that case, I can eat the corpse of this human, right?]

A weird female voice harsh enough to grate his ears came from behind him, and Jin-Woo quickly looked back.

And that's where he discovered a spectacle that made him doubt his own eyes.

Bashushushu....

A horde of insects poured out from the sewerage and began merging into one to assume the shape of a humanoid female.

[I really want to find out what a fellow Sovereign tastes like, you see.]

Jin-Woo's expression hardened, now that he found himself suddenly surrounded by his enemies. And then, he realised it.

They gagged his Shadow Soldiers by confusing the signals not because

they were worried about their hunt being disrupted by him. No, they did that in order to hide the fact that there were more than one of them here.

In other words, this was a trap. A trap laid out in the entirety of Seoul in order to box Jin-Woo in.

Sure enough, the System finally recognised the severity of the situation and urgently sent out warning messages.

[The King of Snow Folk, the Sovereign of Frost has designated you as an enemy.]

[The King of Beasts, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs has designated you as an enemy.]

[The Queen of Insects, the Sovereign of Plagues has designated you as an enemy.]

Enemies possessing power on another scale altogether, and three of them to boot, too! His Black Heart, sleeping quietly until now, began to pound away madly at the entrance of these three incredibly powerful foes.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!

‘Isn’t this....’

....Good?

The corners of Jin-Woo’s lips arched up.

These things were thinking that they had managed to surround him, but the thing was, he wasn’t alone. In reality, they were the ones surrounded now.

Jin-Woo kept his senses ultra-sharp in order to not miss their movements and summoned out his army that’d surround his enemies.

‘Come out!’



Chapter 216 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

New York, London, Shanghai, Paris.

Besides these cities, others around the world were all experiencing the phenomenon of their streets being draped in eerie silence right now. People had stopped walking and found themselves unable to tear their eyes away from the many electronic screens installed here and there.

Those large screens were continuously showing the breaking news regarding the horrifying tragedy unfolding in the capital city of South Korea, Seoul.

Because of the super-massive Gate's presence, the world's attention had been focused there already, so it was only normal that the news spread around like a wildfire.

TV stations in many countries interrupted their regular programming to broadcast live the current situation unfolding in Seoul.

Once the sight of a cityscape dripping with blood as filmed by the camera lens from the sky, the viewers around the world recoiled in sheer horror.

Seoul was one of the biggest metropolises in the entire world. But with such a city lying in ruins like that, it implied that their safety couldn't be guaranteed even within their own cities.

The tragedy of Seoul didn't feel like an incident happening in some distant country, but something that was happening to them personally.

Was that the reason why they felt relieved when Thomas Andre stepped up to put an end to the monster's rampage? The obviously-excited foreign correspondents, after their cameras caught the sight of America's best Hunter, began crying out his name repeatedly as if they wanted to damage their own vocal cords.

The viewers gathered their hands in prayer and with one heart, cheered Goliath on. And that was why the streets were filled with elated cries every time Goliath roughed up that beast-like monster.

“Yes! More! More!!”

“Destroy that thing! Goliath, kill that thing dead!!”

“Send it to hell!!”

Unfortunately....

The cheering and elated cries filling up the streets soon morphed into shocked silence as Goliath’s fists were shattered, his arms were broken, and his blood and flesh were spilt onto the ground.

The viewers’ arms raised up high in the air slowly lowered back to their sides. Some even began wordlessly shedding tears as they watched humanity’s best warrior being horribly destroyed like that.

It was as if the time itself had frozen.

People rendered utterly speechless by the overwhelming shock couldn’t even hear their own breathing. If this was a dream, then they wanted to wake up right about now.

Too bad, though, that the screen kept transmitting the images of Goliath and his pained screaming over and over again. The expression on the viewers’ faces changed to that of even greater despair.

It was then.

A lone Hunter jumped out from somewhere and blew away the beast.

No, there were two of them. A black-haired man appeared without warning right next to the Caucasian Hunter.

Not just the viewers, but even the news anchors couldn’t figure out what was going on and failed to hide their confusion.

Just what had happened?

Who were those two people?

It happened far too quickly, and also, the camera was filming from too far and couldn’t capture their faces properly.

However....

The anchors saw the black soldiers filling up the streets in the blink of an eye and cried out until their voices turned hoarse.

[It’s Hunter Seong Jin-Woo! Hunter Seong Jin-Woo has finally made his entrance!]

[We don’t have to see his face! You can block out his name! Even then, we know who it is! Those black soldiers, that’s 100% Hunter Seong Jin-Woo!!]

[The Goliath might have fallen, but the baton has been handed over to

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo! His summoned creatures have surrounded the monsters!]

Waaaaah-!!

The viewers all around the world punched the air and cried out in elation once more as they watched the black soldiers completely cover up the streets of Seoul.

Especially the Americans, their unified roars were so loud that their cities seemed to rock from the noise itself. It was understandable, since they had lost one of their Special Authority-rank Hunters through tragic circumstances recently, and when even Thomas Andre found himself in danger, they had all fallen into a deep pit of mental shock.

Besides, the total number of views online for the Jeju Island raid featuring Jin-Woo had already surpassed 2 billion. Meaning, pretty much everyone knew his name by now.

And so, the whole world had begun chanting his name.

“Hey, hang on a minute! I know who that other Hunter is! Yeah, I know that guy! He’s Germany’s Lennart Niermann!”

This guy, who wished to boast about his discerning eyes, couldn’t help but get swept away by the atmosphere and started chanting ‘Seong Jin-Woo’, his hands raised up high in the air.

The focus of the whole world was now on Jin-Woo’s back.

The Shadow Army surrounded the three Sovereigns in a circle.

On top of the streets now darkened by the shadow with the help of the skill, ‘Sovereign’s Territory’, the army’s morale had hit its highest peak.

‘So, how about it now?’

Jin-Woo scanned the faces of the three Sovereigns. They carried rather amused expressions.

The female giant, created out of insects, took a sweeping look at the streets filled with Shadow Soldiers and chuckled derisively.

[So, this is the new Shadow Army, is it?]

[The overall number isn’t bad, but even then, they are nothing but a bunch of riffraff.]

Looking unconcerned in the slightest, the Sovereign of Frost took a step

forward.

Fuu-whoop...

It sucked its breath in lightly before spitting out horrifyingly cold air that spread out everywhere in an instant.

Kwajeeck!

And in just one moment, everything standing on the ground became frozen ice sculptures. Even the Shadow Army was no exception.

‘How can this be?!’

Jin-Woo confirmed that his soldiers had all frozen up and his expression hardened gradually.

The power of the Sovereigns that rendered the soldiers useless in one stroke – he had experienced something like this before, when he was facing off against the Sovereign of White Flames, Baran, back in the Demon’s Castle instant dungeon.

If there was one glaring difference between then and now, that would be him having to face three enemies instead of one.

The soldiers trapped within the ice couldn’t be freed even with his ability to store them back in his shadow.

[Your pitiful soldiers won’t be able to take a single step outside the prison I have manifested.]

The Sovereign of Frost sounded confident of its victory after imprisoning the Shadow Army.

However, Jin-Woo’s killing intent didn’t waver for a second even under the current situation.

“You.”

The tip of the Kamish’s Wrath held in his right hand was pointed at the Sovereign of Frost.

“You will definitely die today.”

The war potential of the Shadow Army always had been supplementary to his own. It was too bad that he couldn’t rely on his soldiers now, but even then, he wasn’t thinking of letting that Sovereign of Frost leave here alive.

After all, he had a score to settle with that b*stard,

[...]

Perhaps the Ice Elf felt the aching from the wound on its shoulder inflicted by Jin-Woo the last time, since its expression crumpled unsightly rather quickly.

[You insolent b*stard!]

The creature then raised its arms as if to lift something up, and suddenly, Golems made out of ice rose up from the ground.

At the same time, the queen of the insects whistled loudly. The corpses of humans lying strewn about all began standing up as well.

Kwa-duduk, kwa-duduk, kwa-duk!!

The bones and joints of the corpses repeatedly twisted and shifted around until finally, they resembled monstrous spiders crawling on all four legs.

‘Undead?’

...No, those weren't undead at all.

What moved the corpses were strange little parasites that had bored into the brains of the dead humans. Jin-Woo sensed the minute level of magic energy emitted from the parasites wiggling around inside the heads and he shifted his gaze over to the Queen of Insects.

[You think we killed all these humans indiscriminately for no reason?]

The Queen had inseminated the eggs of a very special parasite within the corpses of all the humans the beast had murdered.

Golems and parasites.

Jin-Woo stared at the enemy's army that couldn't be turned into Shadow Soldiers upon their deaths and realised how much his opponents had been planning for this day.

“Fuu-woo....”

He controlled his breathing.

The Golems and the animated corpses waltzed right past the frozen Shadow Soldiers and slowly encircled him. Meanwhile, he focused on the sounds of his heart quietly pounding away.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump....

On his path to get here, he had encountered countless dangerous situations.

At this moment, as he closed his eyes, his extremely-honed senses accurately read and picked up on even the most minute movements his enemies made.

He could do this.

Just like how it had always been.

‘...They’re coming.’

He opened his eyes only to be greeted by the sight of the spider-humans pouncing on him. As the time slowed down, the pair of ‘Kamish’s Wraths’ roared out in sheer anguish.

Sliiiiice-!!

In an instant, every spider-human leaping in the air was bisected.

Boom!

Jin-Woo lightly kicked and leapt away from the punch of a Golem pounding down on his original position and searched for his primary elimination target. That would be the Sovereign of Frost, of course.

That b*stard was currently shouting at its Golems with an enraged face. However, it was impossible for these slow and lumbering things to catch up to Jin-Woo’s speed.

He used ‘Ruler’s Authority’ to fling himself at the Sovereign of Frost. Like a bullet, he flew forward in a scarcely-believable velocity.

He closed the distance in an instant. The Sovereign of Frost was panicking. Jin-Woo swung his shortsword with great power.

His aim was the skin on the b*stard’s face that resembled the bark of an aged tree.

Unfortunately....

CLANG!

Just before the Kamish’s Wrath could split the creature’s face in half, something really hard blocked the trajectory of the blade. The beast, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs, responded to Jin-Woo’s attack with lightning-quick reflexes and blocked the shortsword in time.

[You think such a puny metallic toy can wound me in the slightest?]

The beast toothily grinned, its disgusting teeth full of blood and flesh now on full display. However, Jin-Woo also replied with a smirk.

‘The human’s laughing?’

Even before the beast had the time to sense the ominous foreboding, ‘Kamish’s Wrath’ was suddenly enveloped in the black aura.

Slice!

The beast's wrist that rightfully boasted incredible hardness was cleanly severed from its arm. The creature's eyes opened wide.

It barely dodged the tip of the blade by leaning its torso backwards, but still, a lengthy and bloody line was drawn upon its chest.

It was then, Jin-Woo picked up on some powerful energy above him and he quickly looked up.

'...!!'

The Queen of Insects had formed a giant fist out of magical energy and was in the midst of slamming it down.

Swoooosh-!!

As he landed on the ground, Jin-Woo activated the skill 'Ruler's Authority' to shove away the Queen's fist. However, the force behind that attack was much greater than he anticipated and he could only barely stop it.

Boom!!

The invisible shield made out of 'Ruler's Authority' clashed against the Queen's fist and created a powerful shockwave that swept away the surrounding spider-humans.

Unfortunately, the number of animated corpses that still managed to rush at and pounce on his position far exceeded those who were swept away.

Jin-Woo stepped on the head of one spider-human and leapt up in the air. Then, he focused his magic energy in the 'Kamish's Wrath'.

BUZZ-!!

The black aura condensed on the vibrating blade began distorting the surrounding space.

In that moment...

"Uwaaah-!!"

Jin-Woo roared out powerfully as he swung the shortsword with all his might.

Kagagagagagack!!

The magical energy concentrating on the end of the shortsword split into dozens upon dozens of slashes and swept away all the enemies right below him.

The Dragon's Claw!

The ranks of Ice Golems and spider-humans were halved in an instant from that single attack.

Unfortunately....

Swish-!

Jin-Woo quickly shifted his head to the side to find a large palm already arriving right in front of his nose. It cast a giant, dark shadow on his face.

'D*mn it.'

Realising that the attack was coming in at an unavoidable angle, he decided to raise his guard up, instead.

The Queen of Insects swatted Jin-Woo as if it was a human swatting a fly out of the air and slammed him into a building nearby.

BOOM!!

The impact force from that was so severe that another building across the road shook hard from the vibration.

Jin-Woo emerged out from the debris of the fallen building and keeled over to the floor to spit out a heavy gasp.

"Keo-heok."

He felt dizzy.

Vzzzzz.....

Loud buzzing tinnitus assaulted his ears. His breathing quickened and his vision grew just a bit fuzzy. However, he had no time to stay here and catch his breath.

As soon as he raised his head, he spotted thousands of ice arrows floating up dozens of metres in the air above his head, all of them being the handiwork of the Sovereign of Frost.

Jin-Woo stood back up and stopped breathing for a moment there. And almost right away, the ice arrows filling up the sky shot down accurately to his current position.

Faster, faster!

Jin-Woo swung his shortswords and deflected away the magic arrows raining down without any break or gap in-between.

He was so fast that several afterimages began overlapping on top of one

another.

‘However, just how long will you be able to withstand our combined attacks?’

The Sovereign of Frost continued to fire the arrows endlessly as a sly grin floated up on its lips. When this human b*stard’s movement slows down even for a second....

It was then.

Stab!

[.....??]

The Ice Elf’s quaking eyes looked down to confirm the shortsword stabbing deeply into its chest. The liquid staining its hands was its own blood.

When it raised its head to look, the insolent human was glaring right back at the Sovereign, having had enough leeway to throw one of his shortswords even in the midst of deflecting all the ice arrows.

The burning rage, hot enough to boil all the blood in its body, rushed up to the Ice Elf’s head.

[You d*mn human! How dare a measly little human wound a Sovereign like me!!]

Pah-ahhck!

Jin-Woo rapidly recalled the shortsword out of the creature’s chest.

He struck the b*stard in the heart. Such a wound was more than enough to kill any regular humanoid creature, but unfortunately, that didn’t seem to be a mortal wound to the Sovereign.

Still, that brought about an end to the rain of ice arrows. He firmly grasped the returning ‘Kamish’s Wrath’ and grinned toothily at the Sovereign of Frost.

“I told you, didn’t I? You won’t be getting out of here alive.”

[Kuwaaaahhh!!]

The Sovereign of Frost, thoroughly enraged while controlling its Ice Golems; the spider-humans controlled by the Sovereign of Plagues; and finally, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs that had regenerated its severed wrist.

The latter moved its new wrist this way and that to test it out, before summoning out its own sword from the subspace, just like Jin-Woo had done.

All of their movements were caught in one go within Jin-Woo’s vision. He grasped both Kamish’s Wraths tightly and calmly collected his breaths as his

enemies rushed at him again.

It was then.

Kwajijijick!

Accompanied by the noise of something solid splitting up, he was greeted from behind by a voice that sounded so much more brilliant to his ears today.

[My kingggggg!!]



Chapter 217 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Only a few minutes ago.

Beru always prided himself as the most loyal subject to his king. But now, after getting trapped within the ice prison of the Sovereign of Frost, he realised what the taste of sheer powerlessness was like.

Was I really this weak?

Why did I continue to grow stronger? For what purpose was it?

Beru felt so pathetic by the fact that he couldn't do anything while his liege was being besieged by his enemies. However, there was nothing the former king could do.

The Sovereign of Frost was an existence on another level compared to Beru. And he didn't possess the requisite power to escape from this magic. All he could do now while trapped in ice was to pray that his liege would be safe.

Fortunately, his liege wasn't pushed back at all, even when facing off against transcendental enemies.

'As expected of my liege.... This lowly slave can only be moved by your greatness.'

Beru was so emotionally moved by his master's display of power that tears overflowed from his eyes as he continued to watch Jin-Woo's battle.

But then, the disadvantage of numbers gradually tightened around the neck of his liege. The progressively-worsening cycle of attacks and defences of the enemies began pushing Jin-Woo back and Beru desperately struggled against his restraints.

'My king!! My king!!!'

And finally, Beru watched as Jin-Woo was sent flying by the Sovereign of Plagues' large palm and slam into a wall.

The king was in danger. The king was in danger. The king was in danger!

'I must protect my king.'

Snap.

Something inside Beru's head snapped loose. The empty void where his reasoning used to be was replaced by the 'emergency mode' designed to protect his king.

“Kiiiiieehk!”

Beru's expression crumpled to resemble a frightening devil as he screeched out loudly.

Arms, shoulders, neck, chest, thighs, calves, ankles! Every part of his body ballooned up at the same time and began pushing away the block of ice imprisoning him.

Crack, craaack!

The seemingly-inescapable ice prison began to develop several large cracks. Beru shook his entire body.

Kwa-jeeck!

The ice prison could no longer contain the power of the ant soldier going crazy inside and its surface cracked even more so. Even in the midst of this, there was only one thing in Beru's head – the thought of rescuing his king.

Kiiiiieehk!

He poured out all his strength and twisted his body, causing a big crack to run down the ice block.

Kwa-jijijik!!

He used his sheer physical strength to prise out the gap even further and extricated himself from the ice prison. Beru then disregarded everything else while flying straight towards Jin-Woo's side.

“My kingggggg!!”

“Beru!”

Even before he felt happy at his master looking back at him, all those little nicks and scrapes on Jin-Woo's body entered Beru's vision first. They were caused by the insect woman when she smacked his liege into the building just now.

A mere insect woman dared to lay her hands on his king!

She dared to touch his king!!!

“Kiiiiieehk!!”

Beru's anger reached a new height and he flew directly at the Queen of the Insects. The thunderous screech of Beru reverberating throughout the

battlefield that used to be city streets rendered the Sovereign of Frost quite surprised.

[A measly Shadow Soldier managed to break free of my binding magic?!]

Such a thing shouldn't even happen. It took a closer look at Beru's power in the 'emergency mode' for a second there and spat out a gasp of shock next.

This power didn't belong to some 'measly' Shadow Soldier at all.

[How did a mere human manage to rear up a Marshal grade being?]

Each and every single one of the soldiers with 'Marshal' grade acting as the Shadow Sovereign's hands and feet could be considered as destruction personified.

The Sovereign of Frost couldn't have imagined that it would see a Marshal grade creature today and failed to hide its astonishment. In the meantime, Beru had arrived right before the Queen of Insects, the target for his unquenchable rage.

[I must punish an unruly child that can't even recognise his own mother!]

“Kiiiiehhk, shut up, you crazy wench!”

[What did you say?!]

The resident of the Chaos World and the master of all insects living there, the Sovereign of Plagues got triggered by the former ant king's statement.

Vuuwoong!

Beru ably dodged an attack from the Insect Queen and took aim at the centre of the insects swarming together to form a single body before screeching out with his magical energy.

“Kyaaahk-!!”

The former ant king's thunderous roar forced the insects to fall off from the Queen's body in an instant, causing the real body of the Sovereign of Plagues hiding within to briefly reveal itself.

It was a humanoid female with rotting, distorted skin, and a pair of empty eye sockets filled with wriggling maggots.

The Sovereign of Plagues displayed violent rage against the detestable former ant king that dared to bare its fangs at its original owner.

“Kiiiiaahhk!!”

The screech from the Insect Queen resounded out loudly enough to tear

asunder the heavens, and Beru was forced back with no way to block the attack.

He was pushed far, far back before he managed to regain his balance and floated back down to the ground.

“Kiiechk, kyahk, kyaahk.”

While Beru was shaking his head left and right, a heavy groan leaking out of his mouth....

The Queen of Insects had managed to recall the bugs back to rebuild its giant body once more.

‘Okay, that’s good.’

Jin-Woo nodded his head after watching the exchange between those two.

Of course, he knew that Beru wouldn’t last long. The enemy was far too strong for that. However, if he could just steal away the attention of one of these three....

While Beru was fighting against the Queen, Jin-Woo shifted his eyes back to the other two Sovereigns. The tension hidden within their eyes was transmitted in the air, and he could clearly sense it.

The amount of time Beru could buy him wasn’t much.

So, move faster than anticipated!

Jin-Woo dashed towards the Sovereign of Frost with all his power.

Kwagagagagak!

The impact force from each and every one of his steps destroyed the ground below. The Sovereign of Frost glared at Jin-Woo making a beeline towards him and created a sharp ice spear between its two hands.

But, just before he collided with his target, Jin-Woo abruptly changed his direction and leapt towards the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs, instead.

[.....!!]

The Sovereign of Beastly Fangs was getting ready to counter the moment Jin-Woo attacked its fellow Sovereign, but it flinched in nasty surprise at this stunning movement.

By a mere whisker, the beast managed to block Jin-Woo’s shortsword by nothing but sheer primal instinct. Its eyes shook hard.

Jin-Woo could only click his tongue as their blades remained locked like this.

'Che.'

He was planning to fatally wound this beast-like thing after making it assume that he was aiming for the ancient Ice Elf, instead. The reflexes of the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs were faster than Jin-Woo's expectation.

However, it wasn't as if it was a total waste of time. He sensed the creature getting flustered just then.

'I must push this b*stard back like this.'

In the blink of an eye, he gripped the Kamish's Wrath in reverse grip and rained down a barrage of powerful attacks.

The horrifying sounds of air tearing up resounded throughout the area as the ultra-sharp blades left behind countless cut marks in the surroundings.

Clang!! Khang! Claaang!! Cah-hang!! Clang!!

The beast became fully occupied with defending against Jin-Woo's short swords. Step by step, the creature was pushed back as it gradually lost out to his speed. The look of panic began clouding its face.

But then...

Jin-Woo sensed this sharp killing intent right behind him and urgently tilted his torso out of the way. The Sovereign of Frost thrust its ice spear and it slid past the location where his waist had been, barely missing him.

The ancient Ice Elf had entered the fray between Jin-Woo and the beast.

For the brief moment their eyes met, Jin-Woo discovered this incredibly heavy enmity from the eyes of the Elf b*stard.

Grit.

The grating noises of grinding teeth leaked out from Jin-Woo's mouth.

He slapped away the ice spear with his short sword and quickly closed the distance as the Sovereign of Frost's posture crumbled from the after-effects of the weapon shaking loose in its grip.

Swish-!

He swung his blade, hoping to slice up the arrogant eyes of the creature, but regrettably, he missed by a hair's breadth. Instinctively pulling its head back to escape the danger, the expression on the ancient Ice Elf crumpled into something unsightly.

'Too bad, but...'

What followed after the attack was to defend. Jin-Woo ably blocked the

beast's blade as if he knew it was coming.

CLANG!

Blocked again by a whisker; however, there was no time to sigh in relief after blocking the attack. The Sovereign of Frost grasped its spear again and commenced with its counterattack. The beast, too, came at him with its own barrage of attacks.

At the back, the Sovereign of Frost.

From the front, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs.

Scary attacks from the two monsters possessing powers on another level rained down on him.

However...

Clang! Claaang!! Clang, clang, clang!! Claaang!! Claaang! Clang, clang, clank, clang, clank, clang!!

Two lengthy shortswords flashed about like bolts of lightning to either block or deflect all attacks coming from the two monsters.

Jin-Woo's movements had now firmly surpassed the limits of one's vision and they resembled just one long afterimage. It even looked as if he was blending into the already-blurry shapes of the two Sovereigns.

It went without saying that he couldn't possibly have seen every single attack coming in from his front and back, and respond to them in time with nothing but his eyes.

However, he could see something else, and that was the flow of each incoming attack. Things like pre-movement, the eyes, breathing, muscles twitching, the direction of magic energy, etc.

His sensory perception pushed to the absolute limit didn't miss out on a single little thing and accurately read each and every one of the enemies' attacks.

'...I can see it.'

That was why, just a little bit more! If he could go a little bit faster and surpass these b*stards...

'Faster, faster, faster, faster, faster!'

As the countless hits were exchanged, he got faster and faster. The complexions of the two Sovereigns fighting Jin-Woo hardened more and more.

‘But, how.... how could this....?!’

‘It’s impossible! This human can’t be fully utilising the power of the Shadow Sovereign!!’

But that wasn’t it. Their enemy had exceeded the limits of humanity and was evolving further and further right before their eyes. That’s when the two Sovereigns remembered it – the fear they held towards the strongest king that ruled the Chaos World.

And this happened around the same time.

Pah-ahck!!

Jin-Woo crossed blades with the weapons of both Sovereigns and then, with nothing but his physical strength, shoved them both far away.

[...!!]

[...!!]

Shock and astonishment quickly dyed the expressions of the two Sovereigns.

Lennart Niermann was sure of it now.

He was sure that there was no one else around here that could chase after the battle of those three with their bare eyes except himself, as long as the grievously-wounded Thomas Andre remained lying on the ground while being treated by the Healers surrounding him.

Even then, he couldn’t clearly chase after Jin-Woo’s movements with his eyes.

“....”

Only sighs of admiration kept leaking out of his mouth.

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was not being pushed back by an inch even though he was fighting against the ‘beast’ that subdued the Special Authority-rank Tanker with brute strength, as well as a monster that froze up the vast ground with a single breath.

And soon, Hunter Seong’s shape simply melted into thin air and only the series of unending metallic clangs reverberated around the battlefield.

It was as if there was a violent storm whipping about only around where he was.

“What....”

Thomas Andre couldn't win against his curiosity, roused up from all those suspicious explosive noises, and had to ask.

"...What is going on?"

Lennart murmured with disbelieving voice, unable to tear his gaze away from Jin-Woo.

"It's as if..."

If the monsters capable of destroying the world were engaged in an almighty dogfight, would it create a situation similar to this one?

"...I'm looking at the end of the world."

Lennart spat out his genuine thought stewing in his head, not even bothering to dress it up in fancy words, and shook his head. The sole silver lining in this dark cloud was the fact that one of the three happened to be on the side of humanity.

It was then.

"Kiiiiieeeeehhk!!"

Jin-Woo heard Beru's scream and his head snapped in that direction.

The former ant king was being trampled under the Queen of Insect's foot and was putting up a desperate struggle to escape, but it was proving to be inadequate.

At that moment, Jin-Woo's eyes widened. Magical energy was leaving Beru's body and his existence was gradually thinning out.

'Could that be how the soldier attached to Thomas's shadow was erased, too?'

Jin-Woo quickly slapped back the attacks of the two Sovereigns and tried to summon Beru back to his shadow.

Unfortunately....

[The designated target cannot be called back.]

[The designated target cannot be called back.]

The System repeated the same message over and over again like a dumb little parrot. Jin-Woo's expression hardened.

He couldn't afford to lose Beru like this. That guy was one of his most precious soldiers and at the same time, the greatest fighting power within the

Shadow Army.

‘If Beru disappears and stops distracting the Queen of Insects, then this precarious balance will break down.’

This problem was also linked to his current battle as well. Jin-Woo once more shook off the ice spear and the blade heading his way and dashed towards the Queen of Insects.

Since the Queen was far too focused on destroying the most powerful Shadow Soldier, it discovered Jin-Woo’s approach a little too late.

[Human!!!]

Just like what Beru showed him, he concentrated his magical energy in his throat.

“Uwaaaah-!!”

His loud yell, carrying a horrendous amount of magic energy, slammed into the insects wrapped around the Queen and blew them away. After its true visage was revealed once more, the Queen failed to disguise its fluster.

[Kyahk!!]

It hurriedly spat out a green-coloured liquid onto Jin-Woo’s face, but he simply activated ‘Ruler’s Authority’ to deflect it away. As for the obvious poison remaining in the air, his passive buff easily neutralised it.

[Effects from ‘Skill: Strong Poison’ have been detected in the surrounding air.]

[Effects of ‘Buff: Detox’ will now commence.]

[3, 2, 1.... Detoxification has been completed.]

The powers of the Sovereign of Plagues couldn’t threaten Jin-Woo in the slightest, and she was already within his attack radius. In that brief moment, a cold gleam flickered within his eyes.

‘Just now, the Sovereign of Frost didn’t die when its heart was pierced.’

There was a good chance it’d be the same story for this Sovereign of Plagues, too.

In that case – since he had no idea where this creature’s weakness was, he might as well continue to attack until he found it. Jin-Woo got even closer until he was within touching distance to the Queen of Insects and gripped his shortsword real tight.

‘Violent Slash!’

Dududududududududu!!

The blades rained down like buckshots on the Queen of Insects and turned the creature's entire body into a torn rag in an instant.

[Aaaaaahahk?!?!]

However, the maggots wiggled and tangled with each other inside the monster's body to quickly restore its body.

'Regeneration?'

It wasn't a problem, though. If it possessed an ability to regenerate its body, then all he had to do was continuously pour out attacks that surpassed the rate of regeneration. That was all.

Jin-Woo chased after the Queen of Insects being knocked back and activated the skill, 'Violent Slash', over and over again.

Dududududu!! Dududududu!!

[Aahahahaaahk!!]

The 'Kamish's Wraths', carrying the jet-black aura, fired out without a single break like a gun with infinite ammo.

"Uwaaaaah-!!"

He activated 'Violent Slash' with all his might, repeatedly, until he completely disintegrated every little bit of flesh that the Queen of Insects could potentially regenerate.

And eventually....

[You have killed one of the Nine Sovereigns, the Sovereign of Plagues, 'Querehsha'.]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

[Level up!]

...

.....

The ecstasy of level-up messages filling up his vision still felt great.

'Nice!'

However, when recalling the fact that he still had two more enemies aiming for his neck, he couldn't lounge around feeling happy for himself.

Jin-Woo urgently tried to turn around towards the direction of the intense murderous intent in order to defend himself, but...

...His enemy was just a little bit quicker.

While he was preoccupied with killing the Sovereign of Plagues, someone rushed towards him and extended its long hand. Five separate strands of sharp wind blew in from behind his back.

Stab!

Jin-Woo discovered five claws plunging past his chest.

‘...’

The beastly Sovereign had completely transformed itself into a Werewolf and accurately stabbed Jin-Woo’s back with five blade-like claws on its right hand. All five had penetrated through his vital point. Jin-Woo’s body froze up at that moment.

Drop.

Clang...

The pair of ‘Kamish’s Wraths’ fell from Jin-Woo’s hands.

The Sovereign of Frost stood before him. Icy cold air spun and coagulated in the Ice Elf’s hand and created an ice dagger.

[This is the end.]

The ice dagger stabbed Jin-Woo in his belly.

Stab!

Beru had barely regained his consciousness by then and cried out in anguish.

“M-my king!!!”

The ant soldier forced himself to stand back up on his unsteady legs but Jin-Woo simply shook his head at him. Even then, Beru extended his claws and tottered ungainly towards the Sovereign of Frost.

“Kiiieehk!”

The despair and sorrow Beru felt was being transmitted in full to Jin-Woo as well. And that was why he didn’t want to see his ant soldier get erased at the hands of these Sovereigns.

Just before Jin-Woo could issue an order to return, it was now the turn of Beru to shake his head as tears fell from his eyes.

However, Jin-Woo still had Beru return to his shadow. Against his will, the former ant king reverted back to the shadow form and quietly merged with his master's shadow.

Completely assured of its victory now, the ancient Ice Elf began moving that tree-bark-like skin to form a contorted grin.

[Is this as far as you can go, human?]

The b*stard leaned in closer to whisper in Jin-Woo's ear.

[In that case, I guess you won't be able to see it, then. You will not get to see the moment our armies set foot in this world. When that happens, the corpses of humans will form mountains, and their blood will form endless rivers.]

The Sovereign of Frost distanced itself from Jin-Woo's ear and stared at his hardened expression before forming an insidious grin.

[However, this country you grew up in will be different. I shall personally freeze every single human on this land and make sure they suffer eternal hell, all because you walked among them. I shall ensure that they enjoy an existence neither living nor dead for all eternity.]

The icy coldness spread out from the dagger stabbing into his belly and froze up Jin-Woo's body. As the icicle reached up to his face, his eyes continued to emit flames of sheer anger.

Even then, the Sovereign of Frost was smirking derisively.

[Yes, resent me endlessly in your death. That, too, will serve to please me even more.]

The Ice Elf yanked the dagger out and immediately, stabbed it into Jin-Woo's heart. The icy blade oozing whitish light easily shattered his rib bones and accurately penetrated his heart.

Stab!

The Sovereign of Frost confirmed that the human's heart had been destroyed and pulled the dagger out. Jin-Woo powerlessly collapsed to the ground.

His head clattered on the hard surface and he felt this crippling vertigo. At the same time, he sensed his two enemies getting further away from him.

'Not yet....I can still....'

He tried to move again, but he didn't possess a single bit of energy left to even lift a finger. Along with the abrupt loss of all senses, his consciousness

rapidly dimmed.

And everything he could see and hear became submerged within inky darkness.

The human's heart finally stopped operating.

When that happened...

On top of the unmoving Jin-Woo, several System messages began floating up.

[HP of 'Player' has reached '0'.]

['Player' has died.]

['Player' is in possession of the 'Black Heart'.]

[You have met all the requirements for 'Passive Skill: (Unknown)'.]

['Passive Skill: (Unknown)' has been activated.]

The Skills information window opened up by itself and a small change occurred to one of the Skills within the blinking 'Passive' column.

[Skills]

Passive Skills

Shururuk....

[Skills]

Passive Skills



Chapter 218 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Are you awake now?”

After hearing that familiar voice, Jin-Woo quickly opened his eyes. He saw a white ceiling, and the smell of disinfectant stung his nose. Although the sensation of the hard bed kissing his back was different, he could easily tell just where he was.

This was a hospital.

But, didn't he definitely feel the sensation of his heart shattering when the ice-cold dagger stabbed into his chest?

‘Even then.... I’m still alive?’

Jin-Woo raised his upper torso up.

He immediately spotted two men standing near his bed, making anxious faces as if they had been waiting for him to regain his consciousness for a long time. One of them was someone Jin-Woo knew very well.

“Association President Woo Jin-Cheol! The Sovereigns..... No, what happened to those monsters? How am I still alive?”

Woo Jin-Cheol shared confused looks with the fellow agent of the Monitoring Division next to him, took his sunglasses off before addressing Jin-Woo.

“There are three things I must tell you.”

He pulled a chair close to the bed and settled down. The junior agent quickly stepped behind him.

“Firstly, I’m not the Association President, but the Chief of the Monitoring Division. Secondly, we are here to ask you about the animated stone statues. And finally....”

A powerful glare oozed out from Woo Jin-Cheol's scrutinising eyes.

“....How do you know about me? Have we met before, somewhere?”

“H-hold on, wait! You said something about animated stone statues?!”

“After we received the report from the survivors and arrived on site with the White Tiger Guild, it was already....”

“No, no. Hang on. That’s not it....”

Jin-Woo quickly cut Woo Jin-Cheol off and shook his head in dumbfoundedness. Several emotions, impossible to describe in words, rushed in.

Could it be....?

Jin-Woo raised his head and stared at the ceiling.

He was thinking that it was an oddly familiar sight ever since he opened his eyes, but he really was back here.

‘Makes sense why it’s so familiar....’

He spent almost two weeks in this place, after all. This was the VIP patient room provided by the Hunter’s Association.

He was back in the hospital room where he opened his eyes for the first time after barely managing to survive the dual dungeon incident. Thinking back to what Woo Jin-Cheol said just now, it didn’t seem like the location wasn’t the only thing here that was the same.

‘But... how can such a thing even be possible?’

Jin-Woo remained utterly confused and dazed, leading Woo Jin-Cheol to cautiously ask him.

“....Are you feeling alright?”

Jin-Woo’s head dropped lower and he massaged his temples as a migraine gradually crept in. He didn’t forget to wave around his hand as a gesture to tell the others to not to worry about him.

“I.... Can I be left alone to organise my thoughts? Please hurry up with measuring my magical energy so we can end this quickly.”

Woo Jin-Cheol stared dazedly at Jin-Woo with an expression that roughly said, ***“How did you know that we have been suspecting you going through a Re-Awakening?”*** before he quickly shook his head as if to get rid of all the distracting thoughts.

“We’d like to hear what happened inside there before we proceed. If you have seen something strange before losing your consciousness....”

“Like I told you before, I don’t remember anything.”

Did they ever meet and converse with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo before?

No, never.

Definitely not.

As a man of the Monitoring Division, Woo Jin-Cheol never forgot the face of a Hunter he met, even if it was only one time. And his memory definitely didn't hold information on anyone with the name of 'Seong Jin-Woo'.

'Looks like his memories are all jumbled up from going through a serious mental shock.'

Woo Jin-Cheol decided as thus while looking at Jin-Woo's current condition. In that case, he figured that he might as well finish what he came here to do and return as soon as possible. He addressed his underling next.

"Bring it here."

The junior agent heard the order and brought along the miniature magic energy measuring device.

'Hah....'

A helpless chuckle leaked out of Jin-Woo's lips as things played out exactly like his memories.

"All you have to do is to place your hand on this magic crystal for a little while."

"Okay."

The measuring process ended quickly thanks to Jin-Woo's cooperation.

However, Woo Jin-Cheol began frowning greatly as he tried to confirm the results. He prodded the device several times before shifting his gaze over to the junior agent.

"Why isn't the device working? Didn't I tell you to check it before leaving the HQ?"

"Pardon me?"

The junior agent couldn't hide his fluster and hurriedly inspected the device from this angle and that, but obviously, nothing changed by doing that.

The device that was operating perfectly up until just now suddenly switched itself off as soon as it touched the hand of the subject. And it didn't want to work again.

'Tsk.'

Woo Jin-Cheol quietly tutted at the mistake of his junior agent and apologised to Jin-Woo before asking for his understanding.

"Looks like there has been some sort of mistake on our part here. Do you mind waiting for a little bit? We should be able to go and fetch a new device"

very soon. This process must be performed during the investigation of this incident, and we ask for your coopera....”

Even before his words came to an end, Jin-Woo nodded his head. Woo Jin-Cheol led his junior agent and left the hospital room. However, he only took a few more steps before coming to a stop. He turned around again.

‘What’s going on?’

Jin-Woo raised his head slightly when Woo Jin-Cheol acted a little differently to how he remembered it.

The Chief of the Monitoring Division stood before the bed and asked.

“By any chance.... Are you aware of the punishment in store for being a fake registrant?”

“...”

“I’ve met my fair share of high-ranking Hunters in my life. However, I’ve never met any Hunter with eyes like yours. If you’re hiding something, now’s the time to....”

“I’ve nothing to hide.”

Jin-Woo cut him off again. Woo Jin-Cheol wordlessly studied the man sitting up on the bed before politely bowing his head.

“We’ve inconvenienced you.”

Jin-Woo watched Woo Jin-Cheol leaving the hospital room’s door and inwardly thought that he definitely better suited the role of the boss of the Monitoring Division rather than that of the Association President.

Besides all that, though....

“....Status Window.”

He wasn’t surprised in the least by the message floating in the air and took a look at the Status Window displaying his current level.

Name: Seong Jin-Woo

Level: 146

Class: Shadow Sovereign

Title: Demon Hunter (extra 2)

HP: 93,300

MP: 155,720

Tiredness: 0

[Stats]

Strength: 324

Endurance: 320

Agility: 340

Intelligence: 340

Perception: 321

(Available points to distribute: 0)

Reduction in physical damage: 65%

Reduction in magical damage: 44%

[Skills]

Passive Skills

Active Skills

[Class-specific Skills]

Active Skills

‘My level’s gone up a lot since the last time I took a look at it. Is it because of the experience points I earned after killing the Sovereign of Plagues?’

That wasn’t all, either.

Everything he had stored in his Inventory until now was also waiting for him as they always had been. He even spotted the pair of ‘Kamish’s Wraths’ resting quietly on the very first column of the Inventory and formed a hollow smile.

He had somehow returned to the beginning with everything he had achieved so far.

‘Well, the Shadow Soldiers aren’t here anymore, but...’

But, his army could be rebuilt in no time at all. Since he had retained all of his prior abilities and memories, he was confident of doing a better job this time around.

However....

....Just how did this happen?

Why was this thing happening?

Although he was given the second go at life here, all sorts of possibilities

fleeted in and out of his head and he couldn't be happy about his current situation at all.

Jin-Woo carefully combed over his memories, wondering if he had overlooked something, before his head rose up.

'Should be here soon....'

As he expected; just like how he remembered it, his little sister pounced into the hospital room with excellent timing.

"Oppa!!"

After she lost almost all of her school friends at the hands of the Orcs, there always had been a shadow cast on her expression even when she was smiling. But, right now, there was no hint of such darkness on her face.

Jin-Woo's heart softened from seeing her expression and he tightly hugged her.

"O-Oppa??"

Jin-Ah was planning to urge her oppa to give up being a Hunter when he regained his consciousness, but now that she lost her initiative to him, she became rather flustered, instead.

"What's going on? What's gotten into you? Did you hit your head?"

Eventually, her oppa ended the hug and grinned refreshingly. Seeing him behaving like this, all thoughts of anger dissipated from her mind and she could only tilt her head this way and that with a puzzled look on her face.

She couldn't put her finger on it, but her oppa seemed somewhat different from the normal. Now that she took a closer look, she kind of got the impression that her oppa had grown a lot taller since the last time she saw him a few days ago.

While Jin-Ah was falling deeper into confusion, Jin-Woo was able to use this lull to organise his thoughts better. He then began thinking about things he needed to do, step by step.

A short while later, he lightly chased his little sister out and changed his clothes before stepping outside the hospital room himself.

Since these clothes were his old ones, they didn't fit his size now, and because he had survived a life or death situation, their condition was at their absolute worst, as well. But what choice did he have?

He certainly couldn't walk around the city in a patient gown now, could he?

Jin-Ah watched her brother walk right past her in hurried steps and called

out to him.

“Oppa?! Where are you going now?”

“To the Hunter’s Association.”

“Why there??”

“To tell them I’m giving up being a Hunter.”

“Really???”

Jin-Woo looked back at his little sister and her wide open eyes.

“I know that you asked permission to leave from your school to come here, so you should go back now.”

“Whaaat-?!”

Jin-Ah watched on with an expression gradually becoming even more confused as her oppa’s back disappeared from view.

The Association employee confirmed the re-evaluation test results once more and continued to rub his eyes over and over again.

It had been two years since Cha Hae-In’s appearance, hadn’t it?

The employee looked up at the tenth Hunter to reach the ‘unable-to-measure’ category in Korea and his complexion paled greatly. Since Jin-Woo’s outward appearance looked so wretched like a pauper, the employee was dismissive about this young man, but to think, he turned out to be a genuine rank S Hunter.

“T-the device we have right now can’t measure your magic energy level, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

“I know. But before we do the re-test, I’d like to speak to the Association President first. Will that be alright with you?”

“Y-you mean, the Association President??”

“Yes.”

Jin-Woo was already familiar with the re-evaluation procedures. The Association employee became dazed by this request for a meeting with the Association President and picked up the phone to make the call.

“Y-yes, yes. That’s correct. He’s definitely ‘unable-to-measure’. Understood. Yes. I shall give him the message.”

Indeed, the Association President agreed to meet this young man.

“I, I shall escort you to the office of the Association President....”

“I know where it is already. Thanks for the offer, but it’s okay.”

Jin-Woo bade a short goodbye and walked straight to the elevator. The employee looked at his departing back with an expression of utter loss.

‘How can an outsider know where the President’s office is?’

Too bad for the employee, the elevator stopped on the correct floor where the Association President’s office was.

“Heot....”

The employee watched the floor display of the elevator with a worried expression before gasping out softly in surprise.

Ting....

Jin-Woo stepped out of the elevator and immediately discovered a familiar face walking past him in order to enter the lift. He turned around to address this man.

“Excuse me.”

The man pressed the ‘door open’ button to stop the elevator when Jin-Woo turned to look at him.

“Are you talking to me?”

“You haven’t disclosed the fact that you possess the ‘Stealth’ skill. You’re an upper-rank Hunter, but your name wasn’t on the list of those under the Association’s strict management.”

The Hunter affiliated with the Monitoring Division, Kahng Tae-Sik’s expression hardened instantly.

“But how....?”

“Someone will ask you to avenge his daughter soon. I don’t care what happens to the criminals. However, if the innocent Hunters get hurt in that incident, you will die by my hands. Understand?”

Jin-Woo emitted just a little bit of his killing intent, causing Kahng Tae-Sik to flinch and reach into his waist. However, it wasn’t there.

Kahng Tae-Sik continued to rummage around his waist for a while before finally realising that his knife had disappeared.

“You looking for this?”

Jin-Woo casually tossed a knife up and down before handing it back to him.

Kahng Tae-Sik quickly recognised that Jin-Woo was on a completely different level compared to all the other Hunters he had been dealing with so far and wordlessly took the knife back.

“You get only one warning.”

Knowing that this young man could easily dissect him into tiny little pieces if he wanted to, Kahng Tae-Sik slowly nodded his head while pocketing the knife. And then, he asked a question as Jin-Woo turned around to leave.

“Look here, man.... Just who are you? Have we ever met before?”

Jin-Woo didn't bother to reply and quietly continued to make his way to the Association President's office. After this mysterious man went away, Kahng Tae-Sik looked down at his cold sweat-soaked palms and lifted his finger away from the 'door open' button.

“....Feels like I've been entranced by a phantom, doesn't it?”

‘Association President....’

Jin-Woo's steps came to a halt.

Goh Gun-Hui, still alive, was sitting behind his desk going through his documents right now. Jin-Woo stood by the doorway and stared at the Association President with eyes filled with nostalgia.

Meanwhile, Goh Gun-Hui chuckled good-naturedly.

“Although you opened my door with so much confidence, it seems that you're a bit lacking in spirit there. It's fine for you to come inside, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

Goh Gun-Hui stood up from his chair and walked out in front while suggesting that they take a seat on the couch. He settled down on the couch opposite of Jin-Woo and asked the younger man.

“Would you like to sit down?”

Abruptly, the current Goh Gun-Hui overlapped with that of the Goh Gun-Hui he met for the first time and Jin-Woo's expression stiffened for a brief moment. He stood there with an expressionless face for a second or two, before settling down as well.

“Thank you. I will.”

Goh Gun-Hui studied the young man before him and spoke up first.

“Seeing that you came to see me right away after your re-evaluation test,

may I assume that you know about the ‘normal’ procedures?”

“Yes, basically.”

“In that case, let me not beat around the bush and be direct with you.”

“Before that, I’d like to make a deal with you first, Association President.”

“A deal?”

Initially, Goh Gun-Hui felt rather flustered by this young man, who was acting as if he knew he’d be a rank S Hunter from the beginning. However, being spunky was an excellent weapon wielded by the young, was it not?

For some reason, Goh Gun-Hui didn’t find this young man in front of his eyes dislikeable at all. Maybe that was why he didn’t bother to hide the smile naturally floating up on his lips and paid attention to Jin-Woo’s words.

“What is it that you want from us, Hunter-nim?”

“Please, change the regulations so that even the summoned creatures called out by the Hunters are counted as raid team members.”

“You want me to change the regulation.... That’s a rather difficult request, isn’t it? I expect an attractive offer from you, powerful enough to sway my mind.”

Jin-Woo took his time before making his reply.

“I will kill all the ants on Jeju Island.”

Right now, replenishing his army took precedence over everything. And Jeju Island was practically crawling with the finest quality monsters ready to be turned into Shadow Soldiers.

As long as this offer was accepted, not only would he get to solve the issue of filling up the ranks of the Shadow Army, he would also be spared from the headache of not having usable members in the future as well.

Before he woke his mother up with the ‘Divine Water of Life’, he wanted to finish this part of the job first.

However, what Jin-Woo said came across as a desire to kill himself to Goh Gun-Hui’s ears.

“Don’t say something that nonsensical, young man!”

Such a reaction was fully expected. Jin-Woo didn’t lose his cool and calmly released all of the magical energy resting within himself for a very brief moment.

A bottomless and vast power defying all attempts to estimate its true scope spread out from Jin-Woo's body.

The truly strong could recognise a fellow strong being; the Association President, often called the 'sky above the sky' shook his head in utter disbelief.

“How.... Just how.... What on earth... is this?”

He powerfully shuddered. Never before in his entire life had he felt this amount of magic energy emitted from another human being.

A Special Authority-rank Hunter? No, this power had far surpassed their levels. The Association President simply couldn't bring his slack jaw to a close.

“I can take care of all the ants on Jeju Island.”

Didn't Goh Gun-Hui once say that doing so was his life's wish?

The older man was about to chide Jin-Woo for being immature and reckless, but after seeing the resolute expression on Jin-Woo's face, his own expression quickly changed as well.

“Are you... being serious?”

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

“This is something only I can do. Please, leave it to me.”

Jin-Woo took a long sweeping look at the corpses of ants strewn about from one end of the land all the way to the other side. And he looked below his feet where Beru, no, the ant king's corpse was resting quietly.

It hadn't been that long since he had seen his loyal soldier, but Jin-Woo yearned to hear Beru's voice busily calling out to his king again. So, he quickly shouted out towards the ants.

“Rise up.”

When he did, Shadow Soldiers rose up from the shadows of every single ant he could see. Beru was among them, too.

“Oh, my king....”

Jin-Woo took in the sight of several thousand ants kneeling all around him and slowly nodded his head. A brand new army was here.

The new Shadow Army, starting from the most perfect state imaginable, swore their loyalty to their new master.

However...

After talking to his new soldiers, he became sure of it.

“...Let’s stop this.”

Even though a new Shadow Army had been created, there was this gaping hole in his heart that didn’t want to fill back up.

Beru looked up with worry, but Jin-Woo knew that even that expression and emotion were all a lie. And that was why his heart ached even more so as he looked at his soldiers.

Thick veins popped up in his throat as he loudly yelled out.

“I know all of this is just an illusion! Why don’t you stop this charade and reveal yourself?!”

This illusion was incredibly life-like. Because of that, there had been some moments that he dearly wished for this thing to be his true reality. However, there was no hiding the emptiness in his heart that seemed to grow larger and larger the longer he spent inside this illusion.

That was why....

“Hurry up!!”

Jin-Woo loudly roared into the empty sky above, before finally realising that a change had taken place – that time had frozen still.

The gazes of every single ant soldier and their raised heads were directed towards him. For a moment there, he felt goosebumps break out on his skin from receiving all those mechanical stares.

It was then.

Below his feet, the Sovereign’s Territory, a jet-black shadow rapidly spread out. Everything touched by that shadow all vanished without exception. Beru, the soldiers, corpses, the ground, the sea, and finally, even the sky itself.

Soon, the entire ‘world’ became submerged in shadow. No, everything simply transformed into darkness, instead.

Only then did a weighty, heavy voice come at him from a place within this darkness.

[As long as you want, you can live in this world for all eternity. It will be the same as you never waking from the most wonderful dream.]

Jin-Woo searched for the voice coming from an unknown direction and made his reply.

“Are you telling me to stay trapped within this illusion you have created?”

[No. I did not create this world. You are responsible for its creation.]

“I created this world?”

Jin-Woo was about to reply with **“Nonsense!”** but sensed something approach him. It was his rear.

He quickly spun around. Sure enough, someone was walking closer from within the impenetrable darkness.

This figure was kitted out in this exquisite black armour that no other Shadow Soldier could even hope to match. And he also emitted an utterly shocking amount of pressure that no other living being Jin-Woo ever met possessed.

He found it hard to open his mouth when he came face to face with this figure. This being spoke to him.

[This world was created when your desire to fix all the mistakes you’ve made so far was added to my own power. This place is the world of death. Meaning, this is my true territory.]

Jin-Woo finally realised then.

He finally realised that this dark world he was standing in had been gently and invitingly embracing him all this time.

‘So, this is the eternal rest, is it....’

Death.

If so, the man who claimed this world on the other side of consciousness as his territory had to be....

Jin-Woo wanted to hear the answer straight from the man’s mouth and asked the question.

“And you must be....?”

The man in the black armour slowly walked closer to Jin-Woo.

[I have been watching you for far longer than you can imagine. You, who had always been striding close to death, yet always had been resisting bitterly against it.]

‘You’ve been.... watching me?’

Eventually, the man stood right before Jin-Woo and stared with those black eyes that seemed to suck everything in.

[I am the record of your bitter struggle. I am the evidence of your resistance. I am the reward of your pain. I am death, I am eternal rest, and I am also ‘terror’.]

Every word he spoke reverberated weightily within Jin-Woo’s soul.

All those memories of him struggling hard to survive despite his weakness fled in and out of his mind like a revolving lantern, and made his heart palpitate faster.

The figure reached down and grabbed Jin-Woo’s hand and placed it on his own armoured chest.

That’s when Jin-Woo’s eyes widened in shock. He could definitely feel ‘it’ beyond the thick metal armour plate.

How could he not recognise it?

How could he not recognise the vigorous pounding of the heart that he always got to hear by concentrating just a little bit harder?

How could he not recognise the sounds of his second heart, the one where he had no clue where it was beating from?

It was the Black Heart.

The Black Heart was powerfully beating within this armoured figure’s chest.

[I am....]

The figure quietly finished his words.

[...You.]



Chapter 219 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The words of ‘I am you’.

Since he had been exposed to the Black Heart, Jin-Woo could understand the meaning behind those words.

He looked to his right.

Suddenly, a massive tree the size of several dozen skyscrapers bound together rose up to pierce the heavens above.

He looked to the other side next.

When his head turned to the left, a maglev train suddenly emerged from the distant darkness and shot past his position in the blink of an eye. These two appeared out of nowhere simply because Jin-Woo wished to see them.

In other words, something was created from nothing.

[That’s right.]

The Shadow Sovereign addressed him.

[Within my territory, you can do anything you want.]

“Because you and I possess the same power?”

The Shadow Sovereign nodded his head. His gaze shifted over to the giant tree Jin-Woo created. In an instant, the tree’s size decreased and changed to a single little flower commonly seen everywhere.

Although this power to create and change worlds was limited to the Shadow Sovereign’s territory, Jin-Woo still ended up letting out a sigh of admiration.

This omnipotent power had become his now. Jin-Woo briefly closed his eyes before opening them up, and that prompted a field of flowers to bloom before his feet and spread out in all directions.

It was the same type of flower as the one the Shadow Sovereign created by changing the tree.

Was this the result of the excellent Perception, or because he was connected to the Shadow Sovereign? Jin-Woo could sense the Sovereign feeling satisfied while looking at the field of flowers.

The Sovereign shifted his gaze over to his human counterpart.

[I have been looking forward to this moment, this meeting with you, for a very long time.]

The Shadow Sovereign officially introduced himself.

[I am the Shadow Sovereign. I am the King of the Dead, ruler of death's power, and an administrator of the deepest part of the darkness.]

Awesome, dignified presence oozed out from the Sovereign. However, Jin-Woo didn't feel scared even though true death capable of reducing any living being into a shuddering mess was right before him.

This being was him. He felt his emotions soar higher after meeting another version of himself.

Finally.

Finally, he could ask that one question stuck in his head, not wanting to let him go ever since the System became a part of his life.

“Why.... was I chosen?”

Why did the System choose him as the ‘Player’? Was it because he managed to survive the dual dungeon that day?

No, it couldn't have been. He believed that there had to be another reason. And this was the moment that his question might get an answer.

[I shall show you.]

The Shadow Sovereign slowly extended his hand towards Jin-Woo's forehead. The moment that forefinger touched him, the entire world changed.

[This is our beginning and the end. And also, your beginning.]

Would there ever have been a moment in history that so many people in so many countries screamed out at the same time?

In that cruel moment when the monster's dagger penetrated Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's chest, people held their heads or screamed their lungs out. What came to visit them after the screaming was silence as heavy as blocks of steel.

Grief-stricken gasps escaped from the lips of everyone watching Hunter Seong Jin-Woo powerlessly crumble to the ground.

“Ah...”

First, it was the Special Authority-rank Hunter, Thomas Andre. And now,

even Seong Jin-Woo had fallen.

If so, who else was left?

There was no one.

Knowing full well that there was no one else left to stop these monsters, the expressions of people began hardening like stone.

And then, a short while later.

Shortly after the cameraman cried out in panic, even the transmission got cut off.

The super-massive Gate floating above the skies of Seoul, and then, the monsters that appeared out of nowhere to continuously murder the top-ranked Hunters in the world. The viewers around the world couldn't erase the thoughts of 'Are we seeing the advent of the world's end?' out of their minds.

In the midst of all the shock and panic, people couldn't move away from the front of their screens even though the transmission had been cut off for a long time now.

The filming helicopter, now frozen solid and smoke pouring out from the side, crashed back to earth. The Sovereign of Frost withdrew its hand, having successfully destroyed the annoying flying contraption.

Its gaze shifted over to Jin-Woo next. The creature's ice-covered lips bobbed up and down to announce Jin-Woo's status.

[His life has come to an end.]

The eyes and the ears of the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs confirmed the death of his prey. It could not sense any hint of life from the subject at all.

They managed to succeed in stopping one of the most powerful kings from turning into an unwelcome variable in their plan. Their eyes were now swimming in the ecstasy of victory.

However, this wasn't the end of their work. Not yet.

The two Sovereigns raised their heads and their glares simultaneously locked onto Thomas Andre, currently evacuated a good distance away.

Lennart Niermann flinched nastily after sensing their gaze.

“D*mn it...”

He had to prepare himself to lose his life just from trying to fend off one beast-like humanoid creature, but now, there was an Ice Elf on a similar level

as the beast to contend with, too....

‘How did Hunter Seong Jin-Woo manage to fight against them....?’

His heart rate got faster and faster. The thing was, he was the only Hunter capable of buying even a second of time against those two monsters.

Lennart took a deep breath.

“Hey, man.... Hunter Seong’s presence vanished just now. Can’t you tell me what’s going on?”

Thomas Andre, his wounds not even half-healed yet, threw out a question.

Lennart forced his unwilling lips to part.

“He’s....”

It was then.

The two Sovereigns walking leisurely over in Lennart’s direction simultaneously looked behind them.

[.....!!]

[.....!!]

Something impossible happened, just then. From the body of the human whose heart was confirmed to be destroyed, they could hear vigorous, pounding heartbeats.

But, how?

How could such a thing be possible?

The two Sovereigns exchanged disbelieving gazes with each other. And then, the absolute worst possibility entered their heads next. They had been overlooking this crucial fact until now.

[Can it be....?]

These two thought that, by killing the human host, they would also get to extinguish the Shadow Sovereign within, too. Just like how they themselves would die after taking over their hosts.

However, their opponent this time was the King of the Dead. There was no guarantee that death, supposed to treat everyone equally regardless of who, would be applied to him in the same manner.

The end of one could also become the beginning for someone else.

[No...! We can’t let this happen!!]

They had to stop this at all costs.

They had to stop the descent of the true king via this fake death.

Their expression turned utterly pale before they reacted almost instinctively. Two Sovereigns instantly closed the distance to Jin-Woo and reached out with their long claws and ice spear.

In order to completely destroy the body that'd act as the tool of the King's descent, they poured in their entire magical energy into their weapons.

Unfortunately....

A figure hidden in 'Stealth' lightly landed on the ground before them and his shortswords blocked the claws and the ice spear quite ably.

The Shadow Sovereign hadn't regained his consciousness yet. In that case, who could this being be?

[.....??]

The two Sovereigns couldn't hide their shock and fluster after their desperate attacks were defended against.

The owner of the shortswords undid his Stealth and finally revealed himself. It was a figure cloaked in a hood. A pair of eyes gleaming in pure golden light were glaring at the Sovereigns from below the hood.

"From here on, none shall touch this child."

In another world.

Light and darkness existed in an age where nothing else yet existed.

The Absolute Being split the light and created the Emissaries of God. As for the darkness, it was split to create eight Sovereigns.

Heeding the command issued during their birth, the Sovereigns born to destroy worlds and the Emissaries born to maintain the worlds began killing each other's soldiers over and over again.

At the end of the lengthy war.

Fatigued by the constant and unending war, the most bright Fragment of the Brilliant Light asked the Absolute Being.

'Oh, our Absolute Ruler.

Why does thee not aid thy most faithful subjects fighting in thy honour?

Why does thee ignore thy subjects' pain?

Doth thee really not hear the screams of countless soldiers dying for thy

honour?

Aid us.

Lend us the strength to extinguish our opponents. We shall cut off their heads and offer them as the tribute to thy glory.'

However, the Absolute Being didn't reply back to the Fragment.

It was at that moment the Fragments came to a realisation. And that would be the truth of the battle between themselves and the Sovereigns being nothing more than a form of entertainment to the Absolute Being. And that their Ruler didn't wish for the battles to end.

Now knowing that the war would never end as long as the Absolute Being continued to exist, the Fragments fell into despair. The despair they felt transformed into rage, and rage soon morphed into hatred.

To end this meaningless war, they unsheathed their blades.

It was the start of the rebellion.

Jin-Woo witnessed the endless march of the soldiers spanning the cosmos itself.

"Oh, my god...."

However, a group of soldiers suddenly appeared from the distance and blocked the march. The Shadow Sovereign next to Jin-Woo pointed at the Fragment of the Brilliant Light with six wings, standing in front of the blocking group.

[That was the me of the distant past.]

He was the sole Emissary of God who stood up against the rebellion of the other Emissaries. In the end, though, the pitiful number of soldiers he led powerlessly fell before the united armies of the Emissaries.

The Fragment of the Brilliant Light never lost his absolute loyalty until the end. He died watching his brave subordinates get swept away by their enemies.

He thought that this was the end.

But when he reopened his eyes within the embrace of the darkness, he came to realise that the Absolute Being had hidden a certain power inside of him.

For that eventuality when everything went wrong, the Absolute Being had hidden a truly fiendish power capable of ending everything, inside its most loyal slave.

And so, floating within this endless abyss of darkness, the Sovereign of Death had finally opened his eyes towards his power. He tore off the remaining traces of his wings, all burnt away from the battle, and crafted brand new armour out of the surrounding darkness.

[ARISE-!!]

Souls sleeping within this abyss heard the call and swore eternal allegiance to their new king.

He led his brand new army and made his return. But when he finally came back, everything was already over.

The remaining Fragments of Brilliant Light had killed the Absolute Being and called themselves the new gods, thus assuming the position of the 'Rulers'. And using various tools containing the might of the Absolute Being, they hunted down the Sovereigns.

When the King of Giants, the Sovereign of the Beginning, Reghia, was captured, the balance between the two sides collapsed and the remaining Sovereigns realised the severity of the situation.

It was at that moment that the Shadow Sovereign extended his hands to them. To combat their common enemy, every existing Sovereign combined their forces.

And in this manner, the war between seven 'Rulers' and nine 'Sovereigns' continued on, forever.

The longer this war continued on, however, the greater the army of the Shadow Sovereign grew. Time was on his side.

Thanks to his brilliant achievements, it seemed as if the victors of this long, long war would be the Sovereigns.

However, it wasn't only the Rulers fearing the might of the Shadow Army that had grown, unbeknownst to all, to equal the Army of Destruction led by the King of Berserk Dragons.

Two Sovereigns feared the Shadow Sovereign. The Two of them were the Sovereign of White Flames and the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs. They aimed for the back of the former Emissary just as the war was drawing to a close.

It was at this point that Jin-Woo got to witness again the scenes he saw within the 'saved data' back in the dual dungeon. The armies of demons and beasts joined hands with the armies of the Rulers and pounced on the Shadow Sovereign and his army.

And that resulted in him being driven to near-annihilation.

But then, the King of Beasts, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs ran away to save its own life, while forsaking its own soldiers. Meanwhile, the King of Demons, the Sovereign of White Flames, Baran, had to pay the ultimate price.

The words Jin-Woo couldn't understand; when he heard the words of the dying Baran, his eyes shook around really hard back then.

And then, above his head – four angels with six wings slowly descended from the sky. That was where the video playback of the 'data' Jin-Woo watched came to an end.

The four Rulers soon surrounded the Shadow Sovereign, who no longer possessed enough strength to command his own Shadow Army. The Sovereign must've figured out what the inevitable result of this fight would be and discarded his sword to the ground.

But, if those Rulers had killed the Shadow Sovereign back then, how could the existence of this Shadow Sovereign even be explained?

Jin-Woo swallowed his dry saliva and paid even closer attention, to what could possibly be the end of the Shadow Sovereign.

But then....

The Rulers began kneeling before the Shadow Sovereign one by one. And a short while later, the six-winged angel kneeling in front raised his voice.

[Please, it's time that you forgive us, oh, greatest Fragment of Brilliant Light.]



Chapter 220 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The Rulers were asking for forgiveness from the Shadow Sovereign.

They occupied an overwhelmingly advantageous position. As long as they willed it, they could have sent the Shadow Sovereign back to the empty void, yet they wished to make up with him, instead.

This was their own way of showing their respect towards a comrade, born together at the same time, as well as the greatest warrior who once stood at the forefront with his Army of Brilliant Light, in the war against the powers of the Sovereigns.

Although the Shadow Sovereign was never their leader, his comrades nevertheless respected him greatly.

And that was why they ignored the command from their leader, the 'brightest Fragment of Brilliant Light', to get rid of the Sovereign and instead chose to kneel before him.

[We no longer have any reason to fight each other.]

The enraged voice of the Shadow Sovereign resounded throughout the land next.

[What do you mean, there's no reason??!]

The Sovereign reached down and grabbed the collar of the Ruler asking for forgiveness and yanked him up by force.

[Have you not harmed my liege with your swords and spears?!]

[He was our master as well.]

[That is precisely why your crimes are even more heinous!]

The Rulers maintained a courteous attitude, even towards the enraged Shadow Sovereign.

[You know better than anyone what we felt in our hearts when we raised our banners of rebellion against our master.]

The Shadow Sovereign raised his head and discovered that the silver-clad winged soldiers had gathered around them before he had noticed it, and they were looking in his direction with worried expressions etched on their faces.

These were truly loyal soldiers.

How could he not know what they felt, watching their comrades die at the hands of their enemies? It was him who led these soldiers in countless battlefields and shed blood in honour of their master, after all.

[We only wished to end this war. That was all.]

The Sovereign's grip holding onto the Ruler's collars loosened just a tad.

[And finally, we have the opportunity to do so.]

[That's right. You can finally end this war.]

The Shadow Sovereign let go of the Ruler, picked up his discarded sword, and made the angel grip the weapon's hilt.

[Strike me down with this sword.]

And then, he looked at the other Rulers and shouted out.

[Pierce my heart with your spears! That is the end that you so desperately seek! With this act, you shall finally become the victor of this war!]

But, the sword powerlessly fell from the Ruler's grasp and clattered noisily onto the ground. No one else tried to push forward their spears against the Shadow Sovereign. Only the pleading voice came back his way.

[Please, find it in your heart to forgive us.]

Unfortunately, their earnest plea struck the Shadow Sovereign more painfully than any weapon known to man.

After he lost his subordinates, after he lost his master, and after he himself was trapped within the darkness, the only thing that motivated him to carry on were the thoughts of revenge.

The desire for vengeance helped him to endure until now.

He had led the army of the dead with the singular thought of making these Rulers pay for their transgressions.

But now, how could he continue to hate those asking for his forgiveness in order to save their own soldiers from this endless cycle of warfare?

After all, both he, fighting to protect his master, and these Rulers, who fought to keep their subordinates alive, were victims of fate's cruelty, were they not?

The truth, that these kneeling angels weren't his detestable enemies, but comrades who went through hell together, began tearing at his heart mercilessly now.

With that, the sole reason for his existence gone, the Shadow Sovereign cried out towards the others as if he was vomiting blood.

[Come! Kill me!]

Everything shall end here.

He'd rather return to the embrace of the void and rest for eternity while forgetting everything that had happened.

[Hurry!]

None of the Rulers moved an inch.

No, they remained kneeling on the ground, their heads pressed to the floor, just like how it was from the beginning.

The Shadow Sovereign raised his head up next.

That prompted all the silver-clad soldiers in the air, still remembering the greatest warrior ever to grace the heavens, to place their fists where their hearts were and lower their heads.

[.....]

Although they had to fight against him because of the differing ideals, they still hadn't forgotten about their admiration towards him in their hearts and consequently, they paid their utmost respect.

The number of such soldiers utterly dominated the entire sky. And when all of them lowered their heads, the Shadow Sovereign stopped silently watching them and turned around to leave.

The Sovereign of Death left the scene just like that, and afterwards, he completely vanished without a trace. Meanwhile, the combined forces of the Sovereigns, now that their own armies had been greatly depleted by the internal conflict of the three Sovereigns, met with a resounding defeat at the hands of the Rulers.

The defeated remnants escaped to the crack between dimensions with their remaining forces. Jin-Woo watched the Sovereigns and their defeated army escaping through the enormous Gate and became utterly dumbstruck.

'The scale of the defeated remnants were that big....?!'

He couldn't even begin to imagine just how many soldiers from both sides had to be sacrificed for the sake of the Absolute Being's entertainment.

He kind of understood where these Rulers were coming from when they rebelled against their master's rule.

But, it was then.

The Shadow Sovereign that secluded himself from the worldly affairs, appeared before the other Sovereigns again.

When the Shadow Sovereign and the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs ran into each other, others became extremely tense that another violent clash might take place, but due to the intervention from the Dragon Emperor, the feared event didn't come to pass.

[Now is the time to replenish our depleted forces. I understand the history between you two, but I shan't allow a fight to take place.]

The Dragon Emperor then accepted the Shadow Sovereign back to their fold once more with open arms.

Jin-Woo swallowed his nervous saliva as he watched the Dragon Emperor in humanoid form. He was aware of the fact that the figure before his eyes was nothing more than a fragment of the Shadow Sovereign's memories, but still....

'So, this guy is the King of Berserk Dragons, the Sovereign of Destruction....'

The insane level of power oozing out from nothing more than just a glare even made Jin-Woo's teeth clatter.

Having evacuated to the crack between dimensions, the Sovereigns avoided the Rulers' detection and searched for a new world where they would nurture their army again.

Countless galaxies and planets flew past Jin-Woo's eyes. And eventually, the footage came to a stop right before a certain planet.

He unconsciously let out a gasp.

"Ah...."

It was a beautiful blue planet shining all alone within the darkness of space. It was Earth.

Through their concerted efforts over a long period of time, the Sovereigns succeeded in tunnelling a portal from the crack between dimensions, to Earth that existed in another dimension.

And thanks to the entrance of unprecedented enemies, mankind couldn't avoid the fate of being annihilated.

Jin-Woo's expression hardened as he watched the cities get reduced to smouldering rubble, as first seen inside the 'Demon's Castle' instant dungeon.

“Is this what will happen in the future?”

[No. This is a record of the past.]

Jin-Woo’s eyes quaked powerfully from that unexpected answer. But, his shock could linger around only for a short while. Because the Shadow Sovereign continued on with his explanation.

[The Rulers belatedly detected the movements of the Sovereigns and sent their armies, but by then, everything had already come to an end.]

If the purpose of the Sovereigns was to destroy, then the role of the Rulers was to maintain the worlds.

Naturally, the Rulers grew angry at the fact that the thugs of the Chaos World they failed to eradicate the last time managed to bring down yet another world.

In order to right the wrong, they resorted to activating a certain tool of God that they themselves had prohibited from use.

The tool of God was called ‘Chalice of Rebirth’ – an item they made sure to steal first as their top priority from God’s storage, just before they started their rebellion. It was an incredible item that could reverse time by around ten Earth years.

‘Ten years?!’

Jin-Woo’s eyes shot wide open.

Could this be pure coincidence that the number of years matched the time when Gates began generating out of thin air, and Hunters appeared to stop them?

[It is as you suspect.]

The Rulers did their best to rescue other worlds, but Earth was simply too fragile to host the battles between themselves and the Sovereigns. This planet with no magical energy couldn’t endure against the mass-scale battles.

Didn’t matter who won in the end between the Rulers or the Sovereigns, the result waiting for this planet remained the same. After going through several cycles of war and the destruction of the planet, the Rulers came to a drastic decision.

If saving everyone was impossible, then make sure that some would still survive and continue the life on this planet.

“If so, does that mean....?!”

[Gates are the process to create humans that would survive the collision

of two forces. That's how much the Rulers wanted to guard humanity.]

Only then did Jin-Woo finally realise it.

He realised the reason why these Rulers stayed behind the scenes and quietly let the process take place without getting in touch with humanity, even if they knew that there was a calamity coming.

'Humans capable of surviving in the changed world are.....'

If humanity learned that everyone in the world would die soon with the sole exception of the small number of people referred to as Hunters, would the human societies be able to function properly ever again?

No, hang on. Jin-Woo inwardly shook his head.

He finally heard the reasons for the Gates and the Hunters after this lengthy tale. However, the one thing he really wanted to hear about, he still hadn't heard the answer yet.

As if he had read Jin-Woo's mind, the Shadow Sovereign gestured with his hands and the surroundings changed completely again.

[The higher existences, such as Rulers and Sovereigns, are able to perceive the change in the flow of time created by the tool of God.]

Even if they couldn't do anything about it, said the Sovereign afterwards.

While the Rulers busily tried to fix their mistakes several times, the Sovereigns also began modifying their plan continuously, as well.

...Until the tool of God couldn't be used anymore.

"Hold up.... Are you telling me that there's a limit to this 'Chalice of Rebirth'?"

[There are no such things as infinite power. Just as the Absolute Being capable of creating the universe was eliminated by his own creations, no power lasts forever.]

There was a hint of this tangible bitterness in his voice and that prompted Jin-Woo to turn his head towards the Shadow Sovereign before he had time to even notice it.

"I'm asking you because it was brought up first, but, how can creations kill the creator?"

[It is not too different from you dying at the wiles of the machines you have created.]

That sounded logical. Even if machines were created for the sake of

humanity's convenience, they could still harm humans depending on how they were utilised. It was a similar sort of reason as to why humans feared artificial intelligence they themselves had created.

[We were created to fight, and our powers were more than enough to bring down our own master.]

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Soon, the figures of several familiar Sovereigns appeared around Jin-Woo and the Shadow Sovereign.

[The Sovereigns had a 'light-bulb' moment from the methods employed by the Rulers.]

And that would be to copy the method of the Rulers, that lent the portions of their powers to various humans and had them kill monsters, in order to spread magic energy throughout the planet. Sovereigns would also 'borrow' the bodies of human hosts to descend on the world and bring their armies far earlier than what the Rulers had been expecting.

[They plan to use the magical energy spread around the planet by the Rulers and turn the entirety of Earth into one large trap.]

"To devour the Rulers' armies coming to aid humanity in one go...."

[That's right.]

For a Sovereign possessing incredible power to cross over into this world, it needed a host body.

Sovereigns searched for and found suitable hosts for themselves one by one.

However, only the two, the Sovereign of Destruction and the Shadow Sovereign, the possessors of two indescribably enormous powers, couldn't find human hosts with a physique that could handle their powers.

[It was around that time when the greatest wizard, working under one of the Kings, came to me with an offer. He said that he'd find me a suitable human host.]

The 'Architect'. This wizard, referred to as the Architect by the Sovereigns, promised to aid the Shadow Sovereign's descent to this world for the price of turning him into a true immortal.

Since he was already somewhat interested in the ongoings of the human world, the Shadow Sovereign agreed to this offer. Unfortunately, no human alive could handle the power of 'death'.

[The human with high sensitivity towards magic energy. The human with an overwhelmingly superior physical condition. The human with amazing mental faculty. All of them couldn't handle my power and either became mentally crippled or died.]

No living lifeform could become a vessel for death itself.

The contract with a Sovereign – this act possessed a meaning on a whole different realm compared to other types of promises. Obviously, the Architect became rather anxious as time ticked by.

While the Architect was sweating buckets trying to locate suitable candidates, the Shadow Sovereign actually went ahead and found himself a potential host first.

“...”

Jin-Woo raised his head.

As if there were hundreds of monitors displaying all sorts of varied and colourful images of him, his past self doing various things appeared in all directions.

[I saw you. You, who always accompanies death so closely yet still desperately escapes from its grasp every time.]

He had been working as a Hunter for four years.

Jin-Woo was ranked E. Not only that, at the bottom of the lowest rank, too. Yet, despite experiencing the life-threatening dangers of dungeons every day, he didn't stop entering them. It was all for the sake of his mother and his little sister.

He sacrificed himself for his family and desperately struggled on. The records of the past four years were all preserved in their entirety within the Shadow Sovereign's memories.

[The Architect opposed it, but I still chose you.]

The Shadow Sovereign was now pointing at Jin-Woo, and seeing that unwavering finger, he felt his heart race faster and faster.

The Sovereign did say it before, didn't he?

Those words weren't describing Jin-Woo's life after he had become a 'Player'. No, it was about his life before he got to enjoy the benefit of the System. Every one of those words rang weightily within his chest once more.

[The anxious Architect agreed to carry out my wish, and in the end, he lured you into his grand plan.]

The dual dungeon, the test of his survival, and then, the ‘Player’.

All of these were part of the plan of the Architect to create a suitable vessel for the Shadow Sovereign.

[As your world continued to repeat itself, the Architect got to observe humans closely. And he created a system based on what humans enjoyed playing and were also good at, in order for you to adapt to my great powers.]

What humans enjoyed playing and were also good at, he said.

Jin-Woo knew right away what that thing was as soon as he heard the Sovereign. It was none other than video games.

Here was the reason why the System designed to manage the ‘Player’ possessed such a similar layout to a video game.

And Jin-Woo was the lone successful case among all the test subjects.

[The System the Architect created by borrowing my power slowly changed your physique step-by-step to better suit me.]

“But then, you betrayed the Architect, didn’t you?”

Jin-Woo recalled the sight of the angel statue jumping up and down in fury while busily crying out that the other Sovereigns had been deceived back inside the second dual dungeon.

The puzzling thing was, why did the Shadow Sovereign deceive the one he was in contract with, and choose Jin-Woo, instead?

He simply had to ask for clarification here.

“But, why?”

[.....]

For the first time ever, the Shadow Sovereign hesitated. He looked to be agonising over something, and Jin-Woo didn’t press him for an immediate answer.

Eventually, the Sovereign opened his mouth again.

[Because... I wanted to.]

Compared to how lengthy his deliberation was, that answer was way too simple. Strangely enough, Jin-Woo couldn’t hold back his chuckle, though.

[Perhaps, I enjoyed the time I spent with you far too much and didn’t want to lose ‘you’.]

Rather than erasing Jin-Woo's ego and taking over his body, the Shadow Sovereign had chosen to assimilate with him, instead. Meaning, he chose to become a part of him.

And the end result was....

The Sovereign slowly raised his hands and grasped the sides of the helm covering his head, lifting it up slowly. And, as the face hidden beneath it was finally revealed, Jin-Woo's eyes gradually widened.

'....!!'

It was his own face.

The Shadow Sovereign possessed the exact same face as him.

But, was that all?

Jin-Woo's gaze dropped back down to himself only to discover that the surrounding darkness had wrapped around him to form new armour.

The appearance of the armour was exactly the same as that of the Shadow Sovereign. It was as if they were looking at their mirror reflections and they continued to gaze at each other.

[I have become you, and you have become me.]

'I am you.'

That was the undeniable truth, with not an ounce of falsehood within.

[It won't matter who gets to control our body, whether it's me or you.]

Because... they were the same person now.

[And that is why... I shall give you the opportunity. Now, choose.]

The Shadow Sovereign raised his left hand and all those faces Jin-Woo missed seeing appeared one after another.

[You can enjoy eternal rest inside this beautiful dream you have created within the territory of death.]

First, it was the face of the gently-laughing Association President Goh Gun-Hui, followed by his young-looking mother well before she collapsed from the illness. And finally, even the scene of his much younger self that existed within the time now long forgotten, drew up in the darkened surroundings.

[However, if you don't want that....]

The Shadow Sovereign lowered his left hand raised the right one, instead.

In an instant, all those faces disappeared, only to be replaced by a humongous Dragon flying in from the darkened sky high above. And then, an army entirely consisting of countless Dragons following after it to incinerate every city they could find.

[...You shall return to reality and fight them.]

Jin-Woo stared at the Army of Destruction led by the Dragon Emperor with a hardened face before making his reply.

No, he asked a question, instead.

“Why did you run away to another world with the other Sovereigns when you had no desire to fight against the Rulers?”

[Because... there was no place for me to remain anymore.]

The Shadow Sovereign was a Ruler and at the same time, a Sovereign. And he couldn't find the place he could call home with either group. That was why he chose to wander in other worlds he was not originally a part of, hoping to find his place.

Hearing the Sovereign's answer, Jin-Woo finally made his decision.

“My answer is the same.”

An imperceptible smile had already floated up on the Sovereign's face even before Jin-Woo made his reply.

“This is not where I belong.”

[...Very good.]

The Shadow Sovereign nodded, saying, ***[That's why I chose you.]***

“Does this mean I won't ever get to see you again?”

[I shall be taking my eternal rest. And as the new Shadow Sovereign, you shall live an eternal life. Surely, there won't be a reason why we have to meet again.]

Despite saying those words, there was the look of a relieved man on the Sovereign's face. Finally, the time of rest had come after an eternity of waiting.

Jin-Woo watched the Sovereign genuinely feeling happy for himself and bade his last goodbye.

“I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity.”

[.....]

For a brief moment there, a look of wistful longing brushed past the Sovereign's expression before disappearing altogether.

[With your death, your powers have become complete. As for how to return, its....]

Jin-Woo stopped him there.

"I know."

Because... I am you.

A smile floated up on the Shadow Sovereign's face as the time of departure drew near. After a long, long journey, he had reached a place he could rest now.

The Sovereign addressed Jin-Woo.

[This is our farewell.]

He took a step back and wordlessly stared at Jin-Woo nodding his head.

Two words that would allow him to be reborn as the perfect Shadow Sovereign left his lips in a low, hushed voice.

"Rise up."



Chapter 221 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The System's familiar female voice rang in his head the moment Jin-Woo uttered 'Rise up.'

['Rise up.']

['Player' Nurturing System delete code has been entered.]

[The System will now be deleted.]

Jin-Woo was now bestowed with the true power of the Shadow Sovereign, which meant that the System was now rendered irrelevant to him. So, it began deleting itself.

He felt as if he was saying goodbye to a nanny that looked after him since his childhood. He then suddenly thought of a question and asked the Shadow Sovereign.

"How did you include the female voice in the System?"

[...That's actually the architect's voice.]

The Sovereign was a bit dumbstruck by Jin-Woo's sudden question, but eventually, added more explanation.

[That creature was from a hermaphrodite race. It's possible for them to produce both male and female voices.]

"...."

He often wondered who the owner of that clear and cool voice was every time it accompanied the System messages, but to think, it was the same dude all along.

Feeling a bit sheepish, Jin-Woo averted his gaze, prompting the Shadow Sovereign to chuckle under his breath.

"Kuk, kuk."

'I also enjoyed watching that part of you, too.'

This man was indeed worth betraying the architect's promise, even though trust was one of the most important things for the Sovereign. A small hint of sorrow briefly flashed past his eyes.

In the meantime, the System continued on with deleting itself step by step.

[All limitations imposed on the power 'Player' possesses has been lifted.]

[With the removal of the limitations, every Shadow Soldier of 'Marshal' grade enjoying the authority of the Sovereign will regain all of their original powers.]

[Marshal grade soldier Igrit's powers have been restored in full.]

[Marshal grade soldier Beru's Stats have been enhanced greatly.]

[The former Shadow Sovereign, 'Osborne', is returning to the world of eternal void.]

Jin-Woo silently listened to the messages before raising his head. He found the Shadow Sovereign, despite facing his own end, staring back at him with serene eyes.

Jin-Woo was able to understand all the pain and suffering the Sovereign had gone through because of the memories of the distant past shown to him within death's territory. His goodbyes were, therefore, genuine and heartfelt.

'Goodbye, my king.

I pray that you find the peaceful rest you dearly wished for so long in the land of eternal sleep.'

Finally, even the System message signifying farewell popped up.

[Will you really delete all System and System-related functions?]

Two icons of 'YES' and 'NO' blinked in the empty air.

Jin-Woo shifted his gaze, one last time, to the Shadow Sovereign. Even until the end, the former angel hadn't lost that content smile of his.

Because, that would be the lasting image engraved in his heart, after all.

That was why Jin-Woo also smiled back.

With a smile, he issued his final input to the System.

"Yes."

RUMBLE!!

A powerful wind pressure being generated at the same time with an explosion of light forced back the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs and the Sovereign of Frost. The former regained its posture first, its brows quivering.

[A Fragment of the Brilliant Light....?]

The body of the robe-wearing enemy was now burning in golden flames. That light was the symbol of the Rulers.

This b*stard was, without a doubt, a human that borrowed their powers. However, why were the Rulers aiding one of the most powerful Sovereigns out there, the Shadow Sovereign?

The Sovereign of Frost cried out.

[The worst calamity imaginable is approaching us through the body of the human you're trying to protect! Are you planning to bring the apocalypse to this world by your own hands??]

“.....”

The man wearing the robe didn't even bother to reply. No, instead of an answer, he simply brought up both of his short swords near his chin, clearly getting into a stance to fight. That was as good a sign as any of his intent.

The Sovereign of Frost's expression hardened after confirming this man's decision once more.

Its current opponent had borrowed the powers of the Rulers and activated Spiritual Body Manifestation. But, a human's body couldn't withstand a god's power.

Unlike with the Sovereigns who had completely taken over the host's body and ego, the one borrowing the Ruler's power would soon crumble into dust and disappear.

'Even then.... He'll risk dying just to aid in the Shadow Sovereign's revival?? Just what are the Ruler b*stards scheming now...?!'

The Sovereign of Frost looked at the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs. They exchanged suspicious gazes. There was no time. The beast-like man, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs, nodded its head.

Instantly, the two Sovereigns split left and right to approach the robe-wearing man from both sides, before raining down a ceaseless barrage of attacks.

The claws of a beast and the spear made of ice tried to tear into the robe-wearing man countless times, but as if he was well versed in combat, he easily countered and repelled all incoming attacks with expert movements.

He would let the ice spear slip past him or block against the claws, but never forgot to throw out his counterattacks every now and then, as well.

This was the action of a warrior that survived a nonsensical number of battlefields throughout his life. A truly troublesome opponent, in other words.

An enemy possessing great strength and technique disregarded his own life to block the advance of the two Sovereigns.

BOOM-!!

The robe-wearing man blocked the weapons that carried incredible amounts of magical energy belonging to two Sovereigns, and then, shoved them away once more.

The Sovereigns landed some distance away, correctly judging that it would be quite difficult to get a desirable result in time, at this rate.

Tap, tap.

As if the robe-wearing man had no purpose other than protecting the vessel of the Shadow Sovereign, he only stood his ground and didn't chase after the Sovereigns.

[...Just what is your true identity?!]

The Sovereign of Frost was left dismayed and puzzled, but the robe-wearing man remained silent as usual.

It was then.

The Sovereign of Beastly Fangs suddenly reverted from its Werewolf appearance back to its human form and spoke up.

[I'm done with this.]

The sharp fangs peeking out of its lips went back inside, and its long claws also changed back to those of regular person's nails. As it turned around to leave, the Sovereign of Frost hurriedly cried out to stop its comrade.

[We've come this far, yet you wish to leave now?! Are you insane!!]

[Can't you sense it?]

The Sovereign of Beastly Fangs shook its head.

It possessed sensory perception far exceeding the norm and after picking up on the subtly-changing atmosphere, its body shuddered ever so slightly.

[The surrounding Mana has begun crying out. Soon, the Shadow Sovereign will arrive.]

The gaze of the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs went up to the sky before shifting back to the Sovereign of Frost.

[I'm taking my leave.]

[But, you promised to attack the Shadow Sovereign with me, did you

not?!]

Veins bulged on the neck of the clearly-agitated ancient Ice Elf. Too bad, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs remained rather collected in its reply.

[My promise was only applicable when the vessel remained a human. However, the real thing is about to come, so there's no more reason for me to stick to our promise.]

[Even then, how can a King of all beasts run away with his tail between his legs?!]

The Sovereign of Beastly Fangs was triggered by those words and it angrily grabbed the collars of the ancient Ice Elf.

[You can't understand me because you've never tasted the true power of the Shadow Sovereign, oh, Sovereign of Frost!!]

Back then, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs got to witness the depths of the Shadow Sovereign's powers when he faced off and survived against six huge armies consisting of the beast army, demonic army belonging to the White Flames, and lastly, the armies of the four Rulers.

Such a monster was about to show up here, so who cared about one's dignity in such a situation? It was fine if others ridiculed the Sovereign for hiding behind the Dragon Emperor. It'd do anything if it meant surviving until the end.

It made the correct call to abandon its former comrade, the King of Demons, the Sovereign of White Flames, and to escape from the battlefield back then.

And now, it was not daring to risk encountering the real deal while trying to kill the Shadow Sovereign's vessel.

The Sovereign of Beastly Fangs was the King of Beasts, whose power was founded upon the abundant life force of the surrounding creatures. And the power of death, capable of eating into that life force, was the most fearful and frightening thing in the universe.

Indeed, there was no time to waste its breath here. It sensed the terror of death approaching ever closer with every passing second, and quickly released the collars of the ancient Ice Elf to generate its personal Gate.

[I shall pray for your fortune.]

With that departing words, the beast quickly stepped into the Gate.

The Sovereign of Frost clicked its tongue unhappily as it watched the Gate gradually shrink before completely disappearing from the view.

[What a foolish b*stard.]

How could a fool that runs away in fear, even when there was a nearly dead prey right before its eyes, be deserving of the title of the Chaos World's best hunter?

The Sovereign of Frost's thoughts remained the same as before – the Shadow Sovereign had to die, no matter what. And the prey was as good as tip-toeing on the precipice's edge. Nothing would change just because a hindrance suddenly showed up.

Indeed, there was no reason to borrow the hand of a coward. Deciding such, the Sovereign of Frost activated its own Spiritual Body Manifestation.

Although its stamina would greatly be consumed by maintaining this form, as this wasn't the world it originally belonged to, there was a need to get the result as soon as possible before the Shadow Sovereign really made his appearance.

[Taste the terror of the bitter frost, you weakling!]

The Sovereign of Frost transformed into a gigantic ice storm that instantly covered up the land. The violently thrashing blizzard slammed into everywhere!

After morphing into an actual storm, the Sovereign of Frost coldly glared at the robe-wearing man below and roared out like a thunderclap.

[This is my true power!!]

Tens of thousands of ice spears created out of crystallised Mana in the air began raining down like falling snow. Each spear carried enough power to kill a person in one shot. That was how extremely terrifying this attack was.

Cars still remaining in the roads were swept away like worthless toys and buildings were torn apart by the blade-like winds. However, the robe-wearing man didn't even budge from his spot and protected Jin-Woo behind him with all his being.

Countless wounds began appearing on the man facing off against the endless barrage of ice spear blizzard. The Sovereign of Frost didn't let up with its attacks, not even for a second.

[My soldiers!]

From the snow that had piled up to one's knees, ice humanoids created from the magical energy rose up one by one. And soon, they numbered nearly several thousand!

[Attack.]

The ice humanoids heard the command of their Sovereign and pounced simultaneously at the robe-wearing man. He desperately resisted against these humanoids by slicing them and shoving them away.

Unfortunately....

Stab!

He was struck on the shoulder by an ice spear and wobbled unsteadily on his feet.

“.....”

Even in the midst of this, the ice humanoids were still rushing at him relentlessly. The man forcefully strengthened his legs and gritted his teeth.

The mysterious man tenaciously hung on, and the Sovereign of Frost decided to once more enter the fray itself. It transformed into a crystallised form of sheer coldness and, while emitting white smoke from its entire body, it gallantly strode over to the man.

[Get out of the way!!]

Its loud roar prompted the ice humanoids to quickly scatter. The Sovereign of Frost stood before the man and opened its maw real wide.

Incredibly cold energy began gathering within its mouth next.

The air began freezing up. Ice even formed on the chin of the man visible underneath the hood.

At this rate, things would get very dangerous. The robe-wearing man understood this. However, if he tried to evade this attack, it'd hit Jin-Woo still lying on the ground head-on.

The man displayed no hints of evading even when facing off against the horrifying murderous intent oozing out from the Sovereign of Frost.

The facial expression of the Ice Elf crumpled unsightly.

‘A measly human simply borrowing the powers of a higher being through sheer luck dares to form such an insolent face at me!’

Finally, the horrifying aura of coldness was fired out from the mouth of one very enraged Sovereign.

KUWAAAHH-!!

The man crossed his arms in an ‘X’ to defend against the blast of cold air. Rather obviously, his arms had to bear the brunt of blocking the entire attack and they became frozen in an instant, unable to move again.

And then, truly vicious attacks continued on the man now unable to offer any resistance.

Pow! Pow!! Pow!!! Pow!!!!

Every time the Sovereign of Frost smacked the man, his upper torso visibly staggered. However, he never took a step back, not even once. Blood trickled down his legs and formed a pool beneath his feet, but he continued to endure.

[How dare a measly little human....?!]

The Sovereign of Frost tilted its shoulder and raised up its right arm up very high. In an instant, cold air gathered around the arm and transformed into a gigantic ice block.

‘Now, let’s see if you can withstand this!’

The Sovereign of Frost was planning to not only crush the man, but the vessel of the Shadow Sovereign lying behind him, too. It roused up its entire magical energy to slam down the block of ice.

Vuuu-woong!!

The man watched the shadow of the falling ice block grow ever larger and raised both of his frozen arms above. Even if his arms shattered, even if his body was crushed, he must protect Jin-Woo.

He dragged out every ounce of power granted to him by the Ruler and his body glowed in the most brilliant golden radiance.

And finally...

BOOOOM-!!

...There was a collision.

Strangely enough, although there was a collision, he didn’t feel any impact force from it at all.

‘What is....?’

The man opened his closed eyes and discovered someone else standing before him.

‘...!!’

This figure was kitted out in jet-black armour. And then, there was the blood-red mane extending from the top of its helm all the way down to its back.

It was none other than the faithful servant of the Shadow Sovereign, Igrit. He defended against the massive block of ice before roughly shoving it away.

The Sovereign of Frost had to doubt its own eyes after that attack was perfectly defended against.

[Igrit?!]

If the Marshal-grade Shadow Soldier made his appearance, then that could only mean....!

The ancient ice Elf flinched nastily in surprise and hurriedly shifted its gaze to the spot behind the robe-wearing man. Sure enough, the unconscious man who should've been lying there could no longer be found anymore.

Finally...

Finally, the Sovereign of Frost understood what the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs had said before running away.

The atmosphere itself was trembling. Mana, the magical energy densely packed in the air, was resonating with the entrance of a transcendent existence.

Igrit turned around and politely knelt down and lowered his head.

Kiiiiieehhk!!

Beru, having appeared alongside Igrit, screeched out loudly as if to announce the return of his master, and quickly knelt down while facing the same direction.

And between the two, Jin-Woo calmly walked out.

He took a sweeping look around the messily destroyed surroundings and threw a question at the Sovereign of Frost.

“Did the beast run away?”

[.....]

Only after facing off against the true Shadow Sovereign did the ancient Ice Elf realise the reason why the King of Beasts made its hasty, scared escape earlier.

Even though it was the Sovereign of all things existing within the cold, it was still trembling pitifully before the lord of death standing before it.

Jin-Woo continued on.

“....I didn't permit it.”

The Sovereign of Frost couldn't understand what he meant and reflexively asked back.

[What was that??]

“I didn’t give my permission for it to run away.”

[What are you even on about...?]

Jin-Woo didn’t even give the ancient Ice Elf enough time to get flustered and simply closed his eyes. He rapidly expanded his sensory perception to his surroundings in search of the unique magic energy signature belonging to the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs.

The range of his perception exceeded past the border of South Korea in an instant and enveloped the whole planet.

He was deeply confident that, as long as the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs didn’t escape to the gap between dimensions and remained hidden somewhere on Earth, he’d located that b*stard no problem.

And his confidence was not proven to be baseless.

Jin-Woo smiled refreshingly and opened his eyes after discovering the presence of the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs.

“Found you.”



Chapter 222 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

While Jin-Woo had his eyes closed to focus all of his attention on searching for the escaped beast, the Sovereign of Frost had intuitively sensed it. It was an opening left by the Shadow Sovereign.

Such an opportunity would not come around a second time. Even if there was a huge gap in individual strength, how dare he take his eyes off his enemy?

Avoiding death would be impossible if this chance was left ungrasped.

It was facing unavoidable death right now. In order to struggle free from the shadow of death taking large strides towards itself, the Sovereign of Frost decided to bet everything on one final move.

'I must end everything with this one hit.'

Its right arm slipped behind its back and Mana began gathering there in a large lump. It then proceeded to create the most powerful spear of ice it had ever created.

Every ounce of energy dragged up by the desperation it felt would be contained within this attack!

A terrifying amount of magical energy was being forcibly concentrated on the ice spear. The power gathered was so great that the ground beneath the Sovereign wielding the spear froze up in pure white while issuing cracking noises.

Just before one would be tempted to wonder whether the Sovereign's right arm grasping the spear had expanded far too much or not...

The spear was fired out with the velocity of a bullet and tore straight through the air.

Whoooosh-!!

At the same time, the ice humanoids received orders from their master and pounced on Jin-Woo like a nest of enraged fire ants.

Whoooosh-!

Moments before the spear aiming at his forehead could penetrate into his face...

....Jin-Woo opened his eyes.

“Found you.”

Simultaneously, the time flow of the surroundings came to a standstill as if the ‘pause’ button had been pressed on the playback. No, actually, the time had slowed down to such an extent that it almost looked as if it had come to a standstill.

The ice spear’s shaft spinning at a scarcely-believable speed was definitely getting closer, albeit only an inch at a time. And behind that, he could see the Sovereign of Frost’s rather deeply distorted face glaring in his direction.

Was that all, though?

He even could see the faces of every single ice humanoid surrounding him from all sides pouncing on him.

This was the scope of the Shadow Sovereign’s vision once he got ready for battle. His ability to perceive that had reached the realm that no other human being could ever hope to touch upon, and made it as if everything around him had come to a dead stop.

Jin-Woo was like an alien invading the world of a paused video and relaxedly scanned his surroundings.

This feeling...

‘Haven’t I felt something similar to this before....?’

When could that have been?

He slowly combed through his memories and eventually recalled that moment when he was about to die from the assaults of the stone statues.

Indeed.

Back then, time had come to a standstill as if everything had been paused, too.

‘Ah, so I had already possessed the power of the Shadow Sovereign in me, even then.’

Only now that he got to unlock the full powers did he realise once more just how long the Sovereign had been watching him. Jin-Woo continued to check out his vicinity and soon, discovered the backs of his two Marshal grade soldiers.

‘Ohhh....’

Even though the time had seemingly frozen, both Beru and Igrit were

moving in to intercept the enemies, albeit very slowly. This was as good evidence as any that their agility had reached an incredible height now.

Jin-Woo studied them in happiness before remembering that there was a spear coming his way.

‘Oopsie.’

Like an insect studiously crawling forward, the spear was continuously closing the distance bit by bit. To stop the weapon’s advance, Jin-Woo used one of his powers.

‘Ruler’s Authority.’

This was one of the Shadow Sovereign’s powers, although he trained on using it proficiently while thinking that it was merely a skill.

The moment he activated ‘Ruler’s Authority’, he got to see the Mana dispersed throughout the surroundings suddenly rush in and wrap about the ice spear.

Once caught in the magical energy, the weapon lost all forward momentum and stopped in its tracks.

He got to see for the first time how the skill ‘Ruler’s Authority’ worked and he couldn’t help but softly sigh in admiration.

‘Ah, so it was not an invisible hand or some such.’

No, it was more like ‘invisible Mana’. Simply put, Mana moved according to the will of the skill’s activator. Jin-Woo’s eyes could capture the movement of Mana so clearly now, when it was impossible to do so in the past.

‘Nice.’

Now that his sensory perception had reached the peak, he could definitely pick up on the flow of Mana surrounding his vicinity. As he observed its flow, his eyes sparkled brightly.

This was the end result of the Rulers trying so hard to fortify this world. A world once devoid of Mana was now overflowing with it. And as the inheritor of the Shadow Sovereign’s powers, he was given the right to freely wield this energy with nothing but his will.

Ba-thump, ba-thump.

His heart raced faster as he sensed the surrounding Mana breathe.

‘...Let’s do this.’

Jin-Woo broke past the slowly-moving time and approached his two

Marshals before resting his hands on their shoulders.

“There’s no need for you guys to step up here.”

Beru and Igrit heeded their master’s order and immediately stopped moving. Jin-Woo stood before them.

He’d now maximise his control of Mana that he trained whenever he had the time through ‘Ruler’s Authority’. He took a sweeping look at the ice humanoids and deeply breathed in and out once.

The emotion still filling his chest was the gratitude towards the Shadow Sovereign welling up from deep inside his heart. Also, gratitude for teaching him how to control his powers through the System’s guidance.

Jin-Woo was done focusing on himself and controlled the Mana in the air at once. In that blink-of-an-eye moment, the space around him tumbled.

Wooo-woung-!

It truly was for just a moment.

In an instant, a powerful wave of Mana, starting from Jin-Woo as its centre, crashed out and swept away the huge masses of ice humanoids trying to pounce on him.

The Sovereign of Frost also detected the violent storm of Mana rushing at it.

[...!!]

It hurriedly spread out an ice barrier to protect itself.

Once the violent winds of Mana went past, the Sovereign quickly undid the barrier and it was greeted by the sight of debris, belonging to the ice humanoids, scattered everywhere. The powerful pulse of Mana had destroyed them all. Even the blizzard storm clouds it had summoned were gone, too.

This was the power of Shadow Sovereign.

[But... but how!!]

The Sovereign of Frost shivered from shock after witnessing the true power of the Shadow Sovereign, formerly the greatest Fragment of the Brilliant Light, as well as one of the most powerful Kings in existence.

The wall.

The completely insurmountable wall.

Didn’t the gap between it and him seem far too great?!

Jin-Woo took a look around himself and nodded his head at the rather satisfying result before locking his gaze with the frightened eyes of the ancient Ice Elf.

Flinch!

He could sense that creature shivering even at a distance away.

He still had a score to settle with that thing. Jin-Woo recalled the face of the late Association President Goh Gun-Hui and his expression became colder in an instant. However, he wasn't the type to expose his emotions that easily.

The enemy he wanted to kill the most would be disposed of at the very end. He'd make sure that the opponent would get to enjoy enough time to shiver in terror from the unavoidable death.

Jin-Woo raised his voice.

“You shall be the last.”

Suddenly, Jin-Woo's figure slowly submerged into the shadow beneath his feet.

“Until I go and catch that beast, you stay and quietly wait, okay?”

As soon as the TV's broadcast got cut off, the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol slammed his fist down on the desk.

Bang!

The final scene before the live footage got cut off was the one of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo powerlessly crumbling to the ground after getting struck by those two monsters.

Watching that scene play out, Woo Jin-Cheol felt as if his whole world had come crashing down. If only this desk wasn't an item that Goh Gun-Hui had used, he'd completely smash it into pieces with one punch.

Woo Jin-Cheol's clenched fist trembled greatly.

All the other subordinate employees present within the President's office and watching the broadcast with him shut their mouths up as well. Heavy silence permeated in the office now.

However....

The Association President Woo Jin-Cheol knew better than anyone that he shouldn't be wasting time here like this. He quickly threw out a question.

“How many Guilds are on site now??”

“All five major Guilds have arrived on site, sir.”

Woo Jin-Cheol stood up from his seat and urgently issued his new order.

“Our Monitoring Division will go, as well. And I’ll accompany them, too.”

“But, it’ll be far too dangerous, sir!”

“You think being dangerous or safe is important in our current situation?!”

Woo Jin-Cheol shot a scary glare, immediately rendering those employees trying to persuade him not to go utterly speechless.

The Republic of Korea had just lost its final line of defence, Seong Jin-Woo. Meaning, there was no more room to retreat. Every Hunter had to cooperate to kill those monsters, otherwise, there would be no future left for anyone anymore.

Woo Jin-Cheol hurriedly put on his jacket before raising his head to spot the real-time footage being transmitted from the CCTV camera, currently shown live, right next to the giant TV screen.

This camera was pointing to the sky 24 hours a day. It continuously streamed the sight of the super-massive Gate floating above the skies of Seoul. Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes staring at the screen trembled for a moment then.

‘Perhaps....’

Perhaps, the nation of Korea was already doomed.

His heart tumbled to the pit of his stomach. Even if they got lucky and were able to kill those monsters, they would suffer grave casualties. Could they be able to deal with that nonsensically humongous Gate with the remaining Hunters, no, more accurately, without the presence of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo?

Just from thinking about the monsters in the city centre and then the super-massive Gate in a row, the despair he so desperately tried to deny rushed in like a tidal wave.

However, Woo Jin-Cheol forcibly shook his head.

Even if tens, hundreds of thousands, no, the entire population of Korea thought the same as he did, someone still had to step up and fight. The powers Hunters possessed were precisely for that purpose.

Woo Jin-Cheol gritted his teeth to shake off all unnecessary thoughts from his head. He was about to step outside his office when one of the employees hurriedly called out to him.

“Sir!!”

Woo Jin-Cheol looked behind him. Not at the employee calling out to him, no, but at the large TV screen with the news anchor urgently speaking to the viewers.

[Everyone, one of our cameras have finally reached the site!]

Maybe the camera was positioned on a rooftop of a high-rise building, because the scene now on screen was being filmed from a great distance away. But, that alone was enough.

The blizzard covering up the city was being dispersed by some kind of an unseen force.

Feeling rather agitated now, the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol brushed past all the employees that had stood up from their seats and rushed to the front of the giant screen.

Once the icy fog was blown away, it became possible to see clearly the figures standing on the street.

There were five people. No, make that four people, plus one creature.

Among them, the man standing before a certain ant soldier was someone Woo Jin-Cheol was quite familiar with.

“It’s Hunter Seong Jin-Woo!!”

Woo Jin-Cheol shouted out unbeknownst to even himself. Other employees saw the shattered remains of the ice humanoids strewn about around Jin-Woo and roared out in elation.

Waaaah-ah!!

Not only was Jin-Woo, who looked to be dead for sure, standing upright completely fine, he even seemed to have pushed his enemy into a corner as well, so how could they hold back their cries now?

Indeed, tears even threatened to break out of Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes.

There was only one enemy now; the sole creature of ice seemed to be terrified out of its skull, because it was completely rooted to its spot, unable to even move an inch.

No one could tell just what transpired within that blizzard, but the situation had done a complete 180 now.

He didn’t need to hear it, but Woo Jin-Cheol knew that the attention of the entire world was focused on this very same footage being broadcast.

Just with what method would Hunter Seong demolish that monster now? The Association President Woo Jin-Cheol's face was quickly filled up with anticipation as he watched Jin-Woo.

But then....

Jin-Woo seemed to be saying something to the monster, before he began submerging below his feet and disappearing from the site.

‘....???’

The expressions on the employees hugging each other to celebrate gradually hardened.

Eventually...

....Jin-Woo completely vanished from the battlefield.

The cameraman must be panicking as well, as the camera kept moving this way and that in order to locate Jin-Woo. Unfortunately, not even his hair could be seen now.

“Huh.....”

Woo Jin-Cheol couldn't hide his fluster and rubbed his mouth. Yet another bout of heavy silence descended on the office of the Association President.

After returning to the hideout located in a jungle somewhere, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs' teeth began clattering.

That aura of death gradually tightening around its neck. What a regretful thing it was, wasting time arguing with the Sovereign of Frost and delaying its escape from that place.

Back when it was out hunting Brazil's greatest Hunter, Earth was nothing more than a hunting ground filled with weak prey. The beast had been drunk on the feelings of freedom after leaving behind the dreary, boring gap between dimensions where there was practically nothing fun to do.

But now...

Who'd have thought that the Shadow Sovereign had descended to this world with a malicious plan up his sleeve? Unless they were talking about the human masquerading as the King of the Dead, fine, but the beast definitely didn't want to fight against the real Shadow Sovereign.

If one wanted to stop that guy, then one needed power far exceeding him. One needed the Sovereign of Destruction.

‘Now that things have turned out this way, I have no choice but to hide here and quietly wait until the Dragon Emperor shows up....’

The beast lied down on the bed made out of leaves and branches.

When it did, several wild beasts of the Chaos World, referred to as monsters by humans, gathered around and laid down around the Sovereign’s feet.

These wild beasts possessing powerful magical energy were none other than the Sovereign’s royal guard. They purred and rubbed their faces when their King began stroking them.

But then, the Sovereign sensed something was off and stopped stroking the heads of its pets in his comfy reclined position.

‘Mm....??’

The furs on the pets had all stood upright.

The sixth sense possessed by all animals; the inexplicable sensation travelling down the back of its neck caused all sorts of goosebumps to break out on the Sovereign’s body.

It wordlessly shifted its gaze over to the same spot where the nervous beasts were glaring at, before its own eyes narrowed down to a slit. The shade of a tree several steps away was wavering noticeably, that was why.

The voice thickly laden with despair leaked out from the mouth of the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs after picking up the scent of death quickly permeating into its hideout.

“Could it be....?”



Chapter 223 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The beast's eyes opened wider. 'Something' was slowly rising up from that wavering shade of a tree.

'Is that the human...?'

Or, was it the real Shadow Sovereign?

It couldn't quite figure out the true identity of its opponent yet. However, the presence of the enemy all five senses of the beast had picked up were identical to that of the man who drove it to the edge of the cliff all those years ago.

Didn't matter what his identity was, this man now possessed the perfect, complete power of the Shadow Sovereign.

'He chased after me all the way to here?!'

The terror of death seemingly had invaded deep into the beast's bone marrows, and as a result, the creature trembled greatly in pure fear.

And when Jin-Woo's entire frame completely emerged back into the world...

Growl....

One of the savage beasts bared its fangs to threaten Jin-Woo in order to protect its master before quickly dashing forward. This monster, although outwardly feline in appearance, possessed three red eyes. It was also known to be one of the most vicious creatures even in the Chaos World.

Roar!!

The monster opened its jaw wide to reveal dozens of knife-like fangs that coldly reflected the light.

Jin-Woo disinterestedly stared at the predator dashing towards him. It seemed to possess as much magic energy as a boss from a rank S dungeon. If it was in the past, even he'd have to pay attention, but now, it didn't pose any threat whatsoever.

But before that...

Boom!

Even before he could decide on what to do next, the savage beast suddenly lost its head and its four limbs sagged down to the ground.

The culprit was none other than the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs. It leapt in an instant and destroyed the savage beast's head. Then, it quickly extracted its fist stuck deeply to the ground.

'Why did he kill his own soldier...?'

When Jin-Woo stared at it with puzzled eyes, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs got low to the floor and bowed its head. And then, words spoken with a trembling voice leaked out from its mouth now facing the ground.

[Oh, Shadow Sovereign, this King of Beasts does not wish to enter into a conflict with you. I pray that you forgive this one's transgressions and accept me as your ally.]

This was the instinct of an animal in full display. When facing against an opponent that couldn't be beaten and also, escaping from it was impossible, then one should bow one's head.

The beast's instincts were quite strongly recommending this course of action. Since the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs possessed the characteristics of a wild animal, it readily discarded its dignity and pride to stay loyal to the demands made by its instincts.

[Not too long from now, the Dragon Emperor will lead his army to descend on this land. During that time, my beast army and I shall aid you in your quest.]

The beast had assumed the most subservient posture it could.

Whimper... Whimper.....

The savage beasts behind the Sovereign were all frozen stiff in their terror and had sprung a leak, wetting the ground with their p*ss.

To these wild, untamed creatures that lived for their own continued survival, the aura of death walking ever closer was the most terrifying thing imaginable.

Jin-Woo briefly observed the King of the Beasts and its lowered tail before coming up with a reply.

"Fine."

The Sovereign of Beastly Fangs was feeling really nervous, but upon hearing that easy answer, it began smiling inwardly. And that smile soon crept up on its face directed to the floor, as well.

What a foolish man!

‘That b*stard is not the real thing.’

The real Shadow Sovereign would never forgive the one who had betrayed him once before, and not to forget, someone who tried to eliminate the vessel prepared for his descent to this world.

Thanks to this human’s kindness and stupidity, the beast was able to buy some time.

How could it obey this man’s words when this human, no, this prey was busy emitting a delectable scent mixed in among that of the real Shadow Sovereign’s?

Indeed, all it had to do was to pretend as if it was on the Shadow Sovereign’s side and wait until the Sovereign of Destruction’s arrival.

‘When the time comes, I shall personally rip your corpse apart and gnaw on your bones.’

So, how could the beast not break out in smiles right now? With a bright face, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs raised its head again.

[I swear my loyalty to.....]

As it did, it ran straight into the chilling glare, as cold as ice, and leapt back greatly from sheer fright. As a matter of fact, the level of fright it felt was so great that it had leapt back dozens of metres in one go.

Jin-Woo coldly addressed the beast and its pale complexion.

“Before we do that, though, we should settle our debt first.”

The beast squeezed out some words with a hardened expression.

[Debt? Could you be talking about the past....??]

In the past, the Sovereigns of White Flames and Beastly Fangs tried to stab the Shadow Sovereign in the back. Jin-Woo had seen that treachery through the recollection of the former Shadow Sovereign. However, that had no relevance to what Jin-Woo was about to do right now.

From the subspace that the System designated as ‘Inventory’, he extracted one Kamish’s Wrath.

Shururuk....

While grasping the blade tightly with one hand, Jin-Woo pointed to five spots in his chest with his thumb on the free hand.

“Five wounds where claws have pierced past.”

The horrifying pain from that moment was still vivid in Jin-Woo's mind.

“Withstand five attacks from me, and I shall forgive you.”

That was the same thing as telling the beast to survive five fatal attacks.

It was at this point that the beast finally realised that Jin-Woo never planned to let it go from the beginning. The Sovereign of Beastly Fangs roared out in a final show of its pride.

[You dare...!! How dare you toy with me, the King of Beasts!!]

The Sovereign of Beastly Fangs activated Spiritual Body Manifestation and rapidly transformed into a gigantic wolf. Although, it was incomparably smaller than the one from the Shadow Sovereign's memories, perhaps owing to the fact that this wasn't the creature's original world. Still, the King of Beasts wielded enough power to destroy this world and then some.

Now thoroughly enraged, the giant wolf loudly howled at the Shadow Sovereign.

[My life will end here today, but you too will not live for long!]

Whoosh-!

It was right then, a strand of chilling wind brushed past the face of the huge wolf. Searching for the presence of Jin-Woo that had simply vanished from its view, the creature quickly took a look behind.

And that's where he was, having moved there before the wolf had noticed it. He slowly turned around to face the monster.

“The first hit.”

The wolf then saw it.

It saw the horrifying black aura rising up from Jin-Woo's entire body. This guy, he wasn't the fake. His movements completely matched that of the Shadow Sovereign.

Gulp.

Unbeknownst to itself, the wolf swallowed back its dry saliva.

But, then....

With an audible 'plop', something fell to the ground.

For a moment there, the wolf forgot what kind of a monster was standing before its eyes and lowered its gaze. What fell to the ground was a huge ear.

The wolf's ear, cut off from its head, now lay on the ground next to its own

feet like a hideous item of gore. And then, blood exploded out like a fountain. What visited after all of that was intolerably cruel pain.

The wolf gritted its teeth and raised its head back up and discovered that Jin-Woo was holding yet another shortsword.

One weapon in each of his hands.

Jin-Woo held the pair of 'Kamish's Wraths' oozing out black aura and delivered his final judgement on the giant wolf.

“Four more left.”

Literally, enemies on all sides.

After Jin-Woo disappeared from the scene, the Sovereign of Frost was left stuck in a rock and a hard place. It'd be logical to escape if there was no chance of victory. But then, the gaze of the ancient Ice Elf landed on the two Marshal-grade soldiers belonging to the Shadow Sovereign.

‘Forgetting about the ant b*stard busy treating that human puppet of the Rulers, this....’

The remaining one was a huge problem.

It was none other than Igrit, also referred to as one of the two wings of the Shadow Army, who was keeping a close eye on the Sovereign right now.

This black knight's nickname was the 'Knight of Death'. He was the greatest knight there ever was, accompanying the Shadow Sovereign to participate in many battlefields and killing countless enemies in the process.

One of the opponents that needed to be kept an eye out for was standing right in front of the Ice Elf.

‘But then again....’

The ancient creature was not some measly little soldier, but a Sovereign. If it fought with everything it had, then bringing down two Marshal-grade soldiers wouldn't be difficult at all.

No, the real problem was with these two possessing immortality-like abilities. They would continue to regenerate infinitely until the Shadow Sovereign ran out of his power.

This was really bad news, considering that the Sovereign of Frost had to waste a lot of its stamina by activating its Spiritual Body Manifestation.

On top of that, if it decided to attack these two soldiers, then their master

would be alerted to its actions. All Shadow Soldiers were connected to the Shadow Sovereign. Even if one succeeded in defeating the Marshal-grade soldiers, that would only serve to summon their master over here.

That had to be prevented at all cost.

‘That’s why....’

The Sovereign of Frost spun around in order to quickly generate a Gate to facilitate its escape.

Swish-!

But then, Igrit appeared out of nowhere to block the escape attempt. He slowly shook his head and lightly tapped the hilt of the sword sheathed on his waist.

‘Don’t do anything foolish.’

Even without saying anything, his words came across loud and clear.

Swish-!

The Sovereign of Frost quickly swivelled its head around and discovered the ant standing on the other side, his maw wide open to screech out loudly.

“Kiiiiieehhk-!!”

The meaning of this particular ant standing here, when he should have been healing the arms of that human....

...The gaze of the Sovereign of Frost shifted over to its front and caught the sight of the saboteur, now completely healed, walking in closer.

[These b*stards....!]

The Ice Elf shuddered in rage as the enemies surrounded it once more.

[Mere b*stards like you dare to....!!]

The angry voice of the furious King rocked the ground. The world began freezing again, and the storm clouds gathered up in the sky.

[How long do you think you lot will last against me?!]

Igrit unsheathed his sword, Beru’s claws extended in full, while the robe-wearing man held his shortswords tightly.

However, the event of these four colliding didn’t happen.

The first one to sense the change was, once more, the Sovereign of Frost.

[....!!]

When its gaze hurriedly shifted over to a certain direction, others followed suit as if they had a prior agreement. The shadow there was rippling noticeably.

The Sovereign of Frost needed just a little bit more time, that was all. It bit its lower lip in vexation.

[Shadow Sovereign!!!]

In a spot of ground a bit of distance away, Jin-Woo emerged from the shadow.

‘This is so convenient, not being restricted by the cooldown now that the System is gone.’

All restrictions on his abilities had been unshackled. That allowed him to return to this spot in an instant. Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to the Sovereign of Frost over yonder.

He then lightly threw something in his hand in the direction of the Ice Elf. The Sovereign caught that object drawing an arc in the air, before its eyes trembled greatly from shock.

[Isn't this....?!]

It was an ear belonging to a giant wolf.

The Sovereign only knew of one wolf large enough have an ear this big.

[It's only been a few minutes since you left, yet you already killed the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs?!]

The Sovereign of Frost cried out in sheer panic, but Jin-Woo didn't even bother to make his reply. He simply summoned his two shortswords like how he had done with the beast earlier, instead.

On the blades crafted out of the Dragon's teeth was the still-fresh blood from the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs.

The ancient Ice Elf flinched greatly as the hostile intention from a truly powerful individual locked down on it. The two Marshal-grade soldiers and the robe-wearing man confirmed the black aura rising up from Jin-Woo's shoulders and quickly retreated to the rear.

Jin-Woo gripped the hilts of the two weapons tightly. He had already given this creature enough time. And now, he was going to collect the debt.

The Sovereign of Plague, the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs, and now, the Sovereign of Frost. The deaths of these three would serve as Jin-Woo's warning to other Sovereigns.

The Ice Elf watched as Jin-Woo dashed forward as if he was gliding on a smooth surface and urgently fired out multiple arrows of ice in a last-ditch attempt.

[You b*stard!!]

Of course, these arrows of magic were still fatal if struck, even though they were created in a hurry. Countless arrows, each one too powerful even for a rank S Hunter to survive, shot towards Jin-Woo in droves.

Dudududududududu!!!!

The Sovereign of Frost did everything in its power to prevent Jin-Woo from getting any closer.

[Uwaaaah-!!]

Too bad, Jin-Woo's hands were quicker than those arrows raining down. He swatted away all the ice arrows aiming at him and yet, his dashing speed hadn't decreased at all.

[Uwaaaaaaaaah-!!!!]

Dududududududududu!!!!

Ice arrows were generated and fired out from the front of the personification of the frost, their numbers too innumerable to count, yet...

...Yet, Jin-Woo was able to break through their barrage and stand before his target.

Stab!

Jin-Woo accurately drove the Kamish's Wrath into the shoulder of the Sovereign of Frost – on the exact same spot where the dagger had struck in the past. He did that to remind the creature about the late Association President Goh Gun-Hui.

[Kuwaahhk-!!]

Suffering from the pain on an incomparable scale than the last time, the Sovereign of Frost's head rose up high as it screamed at the top of its lungs.

Before the second shortsword could strike it, though, the Ice Elf hurriedly gathered the cold air in its mouth and fired it out. Jin-Woo reached up and simply covered its mouth.

Kuwaaaahh!!

Just as the cold blast of air unable to break free of his hand went on a rampage inside the Elf, Jin-Woo reverse gripped his other shortsword and

stabbed it deep into his opponent's chest.

CRACK!!

He heard the sounds of its ribs breaking and its heart being penetrated cleanly. It was the exact same attack that he suffered not too long ago.

[Kuwaaaahhkh-!!]

However, Jin-Woo knew that such an attack wouldn't be able to kill the Sovereign of Frost, since he had prior experience of killing two other Sovereigns.

"The beast died on the fourth attack."

The chilling light shone coldly in Jin-Woo's eyes.

"How long will you be able to endure?"

Terror filled up the eyes of the Sovereign of Frost as it looked down at Jin-Woo.

This man was the Sovereign of Death.

Weren't those eyes the exact same as the merciless warrior that slew all the enemies he came across in an endless battlefield?

Only now did the Ice Elf realise just who it offended, and began shuddering from the crippling fear.

Shortly afterwards, the shortsword stabbing into the creature's heart sliced down lower and tore the Sovereign's body into a rag.

[Kuwaahk!!!]



Chapter 224 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Was there any other time in history that the whole world cheered on with one voice?

Jin-Woo vanished and then reappeared again shortly afterwards only to stab his shortsword into the chest of that Sovereign of Frost. It was precisely at that moment that everyone watching punched the air with both of their fists and roared out in elation, as if they all had been waiting for this chance.

Waaaaaaah-!!

They all despaired in the false knowledge that humanity's greatest Hunter had died at the hands of monsters, so that spectacle proved to be the best gift imaginable to them.

Some passionately chanted Jin-Woo's name out loudly.

Some began shedding tears.

Some tried to console those shedding tears.

And they watched together as a lone Hunter from Asia took care of the monster that threatened all of mankind.

Indeed, all of mankind.

The moment the Special Authority-rank Hunter Thomas Andre fell, and one of the top-ranked Hunters in the world, Lennart Niermann, tried to step up in his stead, these monsters had become far greater than the calamity of South Korea.

No, the situation had transformed into a grave crisis that directly impacted everyone else's lives.

After all these years, people still hadn't forgotten about the terror of watching the Dragon 'Kamish' swallowing up American cities, one after another.

No one alive wanted a repeat of that horrifying event. And that's why every viewer, from all corners of the globe, went so wild at Jin-Woo's victory.

It was as if they were trying to wash away the frustration and fear they felt while watching the best Hunters in the world continue to fall.

Waaaaaaah-!!!

Every time Jin-Woo attacked the Sovereign of Frost, the viewers roared out again and again.

And finally.

When that monster with seriously tenacious vitality finally toppled over and turned into grey-coloured ash before scattering away, the roaring cheers of the viewers reached their absolute peak.

Waaaaaaaahhhh-!!!!

Their combined roars rocked their respective cities.

Anchors tasked with relaying the breaking news were also shouting out at the top of their lungs, no longer caring whether the cameras were filming or not.

Breaking news pieces announcing the end of the battle continued to stream out of their TVs, but....

Seong Jin-Woo! Seong Jin-Woo! Seong Jin-Woo!!!

....But, the excitement and elation of the people showed no signs of dying down at all.

And then, there was this one man. There was this one particular man who was perhaps far more elated than anyone else on this planet. And that was none other than the current Association President, Woo Jin-Cheol.

His gaze was firmly fixed to the TV screen, even though he was surrounded by his fellow employees of the Association busily bear-hugging each other and cheering out in pure happiness.

He had discovered something from the live feed and his eyes trembled greatly.

‘Could it have been....?’

He hurriedly yanked his smartphone out and, with trembling hands, he searched for and played a certain video clip saved on his device.

He had watched this footage so, so many times. It was the footage of the late Association President Goh Gun-Hui being murdered, taken by the CCTV cameras inside the President’s office.

There was an unknown man captured in the footage.

That man appeared and disappeared too quickly within this grainy footage, so Woo Jin-Cheol couldn’t be sure, but now that he took a second look, didn’t

this mysterious creature look almost like the monster that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had killed just now?

Even the scenes of the frozen floor rapidly melting away were an exact match.

‘In that case....!!’

Only then did he realise just what kind of enemies Jin-Woo had been fighting until now. It was the murderer of the late Association President.

And then, Woo Jin-Cheol recalled the conversation he shared with Jin-Woo back when the latter came to pay his respects to the late Goh Gun-Hui. A powerful jolt travelled down his entire body.

[“Thank you. Thank you for being there for the final moments of the Association President.”]

[“....I’ll kill that b*stard.”]

[“Excuse me?”]

[“The monster that murdered the Association President. I’ll definitely hunt it down. You can save your thanks until then.”]

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo hadn’t forgotten about that day’s promise. And now, the monster responsible was dead. By his hands.

Woo Jin-Cheol’s nose became reddened and he raised his eyes, now wet with thick tears, to look at the TV screen. The camera was zooming into Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s face, looking somewhat tired now.

Woo Jin-Cheol could more or less understand what that expression signified. From somewhere deep within, a powerful emotion welled up uncontrollably. From here onwards, the late Association President should be able to rest in peace.

Woo Jin-Cheol recalled the memories of Goh Gun-Hui, a man he greatly respected, and inwardly muttered his gratitude towards Jin-Woo.

‘.....Thank you very much, Hunter-nim.’

The Sovereign of Frost reverted back to humanoid figure after its Spiritual Body Manifestation had been undone. It slowly turned into the grey-coloured ash.

The debt of the late Association President Goh Gun-Hui, as well his own, both of them had been settled in full now. Jin-Woo coldly looked at the Sovereign of Frost scattering away before turning around.

The two Marshal-grade soldiers waiting in the distance until the end of that foolish Sovereign's punishment approached Jin-Woo.

“....”

Even though he had now completely regained his original power, Igrit still maintained his reserved personality and he politely paid his courtesy to his master. However, quite unlike him....

“Ohhh, my kiiiiinggg!!”

....Beru expressed his unreserved joy of being able to see his master again with his entire being.

Jin-Woo lightly tapped the big ant soldier and his two tearful eyes on the shoulder before taking a sweeping a look around his vicinity. There should have been one more person here. That man wearing the tattered robe was nowhere to be seen, though.

“Just who was that man, anyway?”

Beru was far too moved by his own emotions to reply properly, so Igrit answered Jin-Woo's puzzled inquiry.

“While you lost your consciousness, he protected you with all of his being, my liege.”

Jin-Woo was taken by great surprise after hearing Igrit's thick, manly voice for the first time, ever. But that lasted for only a short while. He formed a puzzled expression again.

“He protected me?”

“Yes, that is correct.”

Unlike Beru, Igrit was probably not that familiar with human languages, so they were currently conversing in what was referred to as 'monster language', which was actually the common tongue of the Chaos World.

However, there was no problem understanding each other at all.

In any case – did that mean a man he had never seen before was protecting him?

Jin-Woo had been having a Q&A session with Igrit in the common tongue of the Chaos World, as if he was a native there, before abruptly discovering something and walking over to it.

It was a certain item that had fallen to the ground.

‘Isn't this....?!’

As he picked this item up, his eyes trembled rather imperceptibly.

The robe-wearing man sought shelter behind the exterior wall of a half-destroyed building and plopped down to the ground while pulling his hood back.

His hair and beard covering his face were unkempt and messy as if he had never bothered to trim them at all.

He was Seong Il-Hwan. And he was leaning against the wall while spitting out heavy, laboured breathing.

“Hah-ah, hah-ah.”

He then raised his left hand that had lost all feeling now.

Sure enough, his hand changed its colour to grey and was slowly disintegrating into dust from the tip of his fingers. This was the inevitable result of accepting the powers of a god with the body of a mere human.

However, even though he was experiencing unimaginable pain, he still formed a satisfied expression.

“It’s done....”

With this power, he managed to protect Jin-Woo. Now that his son had completely inherited the powers of the Shadow Sovereign, Jin-Woo would prove to be a great asset to humanity.

That’s why it was done now.

Seol Il-Hwan stopped looking at his gradually-disappearing hand and powerlessly leaned his head against the wall to close his eyes.

The Rulers had entrusted their powers to him and asked him to stop the Shadow Sovereign. He had been helplessly trapped within the gap between dimensions after the Gate closed up and thus was left with not much of a choice.

As a proxy of the Rulers, and as their emissary, he returned to Earth with an important mission to accomplish.

Unfortunately, Seong Il-Hwan couldn’t carry his mission out.

Even though he knew that the worst calamity in human history was hiding within that boy’s flesh, how could a parent kill his own child?

All he could do was to observe Jin-Woo from a place just out of his detection.

And as he continued to delay his mission, the opinions of the Rulers that had been focused on stopping the advent of the Shadow Sovereign gradually began changing.

And eventually....

‘The Brightest Fragment of Brilliant Light’ sent him a brand new mission.

[Protect the Shadow Sovereign.]

The Rulers had finally realised that they needed the Shadow Sovereign possessing his full powers if they were to stop other Sovereigns and their nefarious scheme.

There was no one else besides the Shadow Sovereign on Earth that could defend against the Dragon Emperor and its Army of Destruction before the soldiers of heaven could arrive later.

It was a huge gamble, considering that no one knew whether the Shadow Sovereign would side with mankind, or with the other Sovereigns.

And the result came out pretty quickly.

Jin-Woo remained on the side of humanity, and the Shadow Sovereign approved that choice.

The newly-reborn Shadow Sovereign was, simply put, Jin-Woo himself.

It was worth risking Seong Il-Hwan’s life in order to protect his son, in other words.

“.....”

Although it was unfortunate that he couldn’t even say a simple hello to his son he hadn’t seen in ten years, no one alive was qualified to take a child’s parent away twice. Even if that person just so happened to be said parent.

So, quietly disappearing like this was in Jin-Woo’s best interest. Seong Il-Hwan looked down at his body slowly disintegrating into ash and consoled himself as such.

It was then. He heard the familiar footsteps from nearby.

Seol Il-Hwan hurriedly got up and used his still-mobile right hand to pull the hood back and hid his face.

A certain someone stood before him, then.

He didn’t even have to take a look to know just who it was standing before him like this. It was Jin-Woo.

Even though here was the son whose name he so wanted to call out to, he

still resolutely brushed past Jin-Woo's side while hiding his face with the hood.

However, Jin-Woo turned towards the departing man and asked.

“Did you honestly think I wouldn't have noticed it if you went away like this?”

Halt.

Seong Il-Hwan's steps came to a halt.

But, how....?

He turned around towards his son, only to spot a certain item thrown by Jin-Woo slowly flying at in an arc towards him.

Grab.

What Jin-Woo returned was a shortsword. It was Seong Il-Hwan's own shortsword that he ended up dropping after his left hand became useless.

He stared at the weapon for a moment or two, before raising his head. Jin-Woo was staring back at him with reproachful eyes.

Jin-Woo could still remember quite clearly that particular shortsword.

When he was a young boy, he got found out while playing around with his father's shortsword and received a scolding worth remembering.

Only now did Jin-Woo consciously realise why his own weapons had been set as shortswords when the previous Shadow Sovereign swept through the battlefields with a longsword, instead.

It was all because of the memories he had of his father.

Influenced in part by his memories, the dungeons generated by the System ended up presenting Jin-Woo with daggers and shortswords as his main weapons all this time.

His hushed voice continued on.

“Are you going to leave again without saying anything, Dad?”

‘Dad’.

That one word dug deeply into Seong Il-Hwan's heart and he had to remove his hood.

His right hand was slowly turning into ash as well.

His son flinched greatly after realising the state of his hands, but Seong Il-Hwan formed a thin smile as his reply and spoke.

“I didn’t want to show you this sight.”

Jin-Woo understood that a body turning into ash after exhausting all life force couldn’t be saved no matter what. He hurriedly tried to get closer, but Seong Il-Hwan raised his right hand to stop his son.

His left arm had scattered away in dust and only his shoulder remained by then.

Jin-Woo hesitated, before remaining in his spot, and asked his father.

“Then, what about you, Dad?”

“.....?”

“Didn’t you want to see me again? Dad?”

Surely, he could still use his right hand for the time being, so how come...

Jin-Woo’s question caused Seong Il-Hwan’s raised arm to slowly go back down.

“I wanted to see you. Always.”

...To the extent that, even if you couldn’t see me, I still felt happy from the fact that I could see you from far away.

Jin-Woo finally came closer to his father until he stood right before his face. Seong Il-Hwan reached up with his remaining hand to gently touch his son’s face.

Thick tears falling from the boy’s eyes wetted the back of his hand.

‘This foolish father wasn’t able to do anything for you, yet despite that, you have....’

“...Grown up so well.”

Jin-Woo opened his mouth.

“Is this the Rulers’ doing? Are they throwing you away after using you?”

A scary amount of rage could be felt in Jin-Woo’s voice now.

Seong Il-Hwan shook his head, though.

“They only gave me an opportunity to make a choice. I chose to protect you, that is all. And that choice was not wrong.”

And now, even his remaining right hand was turning into ash and scattering away.

“I wouldn’t have minded talking to you for a little bit longer, but....”

And he wanted to stay here for a little bit longer, too....

He had done something reprehensible.

He ended up making a boy say goodbye to his father not once, but twice now. He tried so hard to hold back, but in the end, tears began flooding out from Seong Il-Hwan's eyes.

“I’m sorry for not being a good father to you.”

Those were his last words.

Shururuk....

Seong Il-Hwan's body, all his lifeforce exhausted from fighting against the Sovereigns, turned to ash. Jin-Woo hurriedly tried to embrace his father's body slowly crumbling away, but....

What remained in his palms wasn't a person, but grey-coloured powder.

Eventually.

In the spot where Seong Il-Hwan once stood, nothing remained.

Something from deep inside angrily welled up in an uncontrollable burst. Jin-Woo couldn't hold it back anymore and in the end, raised his head towards the sky and roared out loudly.

“Uwaaaaaah-!!!”

When he did, the Mana in the atmosphere reverberated.

The sky, the air, the ground – they all cried.

And soon, Jin-Woo's mouth began emitting the heavy, grave voice similar to other Sovereigns.

[Hear me, remaining Sovereigns!!!]

If all these events were set in motion simply because the Sovereigns decided to settle on Earth, then....

Then, I shall make them pay an unforgettable price for that.

I shall definitely make it so.

His voice infused with Mana was carried in the airflow and spread out to the rest of the world.

[You shall all pay for today's events, without exception!]

The roar of the enraged Shadow Sovereign shook around both the heaven and earth.

[Are you listening, Sovereigns?!]

On this day, one human who inherited an unparalleled power decided where his abilities should be used on his own accord.

This was the moment that the true opening curtains of the war had gone up.



Chapter 225 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Should this be called good fortune?

Jin-Woo's voice could be heard all around the world, but he wasn't speaking in the language of humans. The majority of people thought that it was some kind of thunder rumbling in the sky. Theories on why everyone heard the exact same noise were quite colourful and varied, though.

However, such a matter didn't pose a single problem, since the world was still celebrating – and felt relieved by – Jin-Woo's victory.

It was the same story in the actual battle location.

Hunters had been nervously on standby in a location just a bit away from where the battle took place. When they heard that the monster had been taken care of, they couldn't hold back and roared out in elation.

The two men in charge of the two best local Guilds, Choi Jong-In and Baek Yun-Ho, also spat out sighs of relief and looked at each other with wide grins.

“Hey, Chairman Baek. I thought your complexion wasn't so good a few minutes ago. I wonder if you have settled down now?”

“Representative Choi, I think you need to wipe your cold sweat first before worrying about someone else.”

“I have a spare ‘cheongsimhwan’ on me, so if your heart is still fluttering badly, you can always ask me for one.” (TL note at the end)

“Aigoo~. You sweated so much. Why don't you use this handkerchief to wipe your face first?”

The Masters of two Guilds that competed for the top spot in the local ranking started a rather pointy war of nerves. However, they could joke around in this manner only because the situation had been resolved now. Actually, these two couldn't even swallow their saliva out of sheer nervousness until only a few minutes ago.

But, that was understandable.

Weren't they being thrust into a battle against monsters powerful enough to treat Special Authority-rank Hunter, Thomas Andre, like a toy?

Not only their lives, but even those of every single Guild member were at

risk. And the two Guild Masters, as well as every Hunter, summoned here under the emergency call-up were all thinking of the exact same thing.

That would be: if Hunter Seong Jin-Woo lost here, then it'd be no different than them all dying today.

Now freed from the intense pressure, these two men could express their happiness under the banner of waging a war of nerves.

The smiling Baek Yun-Ho sharing banter with Choi Jong-In looked beyond the latter's shoulder and his gaze stopped moving then.

“Uh....”

Choi Jong-In also followed after that line of sight and looked behind him. There was a lone man walking out from the centre of the ruined city.

Jin-Woo, having concluded his battle with the Sovereigns, quietly walked towards where everyone was.

Other Hunters discovered him one by one. His entrance immediately brought a bout of silence upon this place, once populated by loud cheers and happy yells.

The only noise coming from the surroundings were the wails of sirens, from the ambulances hurriedly arriving on the scene.

‘It’s Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.’

‘That man, he....’

The mood in this place had become oppressed by the sharp aura oozing out of Jin-Woo's eyes, even though it was clear that the battle had ended in his favour. Not one person dared to open their mouths after seeing him like that.

The battle he fought had to have been incredibly intense because there was a hint of shimmering heat rising up from his shoulders even now.

But, why did the following events unfold as they did?

When Baek Yun-Ho met Jin-Woo's gaze, the former sent his greeting with a bow. That was the beginning; as if they were saluting a soldier coming home after a very dangerous mission, Hunters all bowed their heads in Jin-Woo's direction one by one.

Pure respect.

How could they not feel a sense of respect for a fellow Hunter capable of fighting on that level?

They all expressed their genuine gratitude and paid their respects, not

because someone told them to, or because they were mindful of the surroundings.

Jin-Woo observed their show of respect, and....

‘.....’

...He walked wordlessly past them towards the spot where the familiar-looking van had been parked.

Thomas Andre was about to be loaded into an ambulance and Lennart Niermann was guarding his side. Both men watched Jin-Woo’s departing back.

Lennart spoke with a worried face.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo didn’t look so happy.”

Thomas had received emergency treatment by the Healers and his condition had improved by a lot, so he could at least nod his head to express agreement.

“Yeah, he does look that way.”

“But, how come? He managed to beat those powerful monsters and survive.”

Only other Hunters would know what a Hunter was going through. That feeling of sucking in the outside air after clearing a high-difficulty dungeon couldn’t adequately be described in mere words.

So, why was Hunter Seong’s expression so gloomy like that?

Lennart’s question was answered by Thomas, actually.

“He probably isn’t happy with how the fight against those b*stards went down.”

“.....!!”

Lennart was deeply shocked by that reply.

Jin-Woo had displayed movements that had far surpassed the limits of a human being, yet he looked gloomy because he wasn’t happy with his performance?

How could such a thing even make sense?

As if he knew what his German counterpart was thinking of, Thomas Andre nodded his head and continued on.

“I also can’t believe it, but.... Most likely, during the fight itself, he must’ve felt disappointed by how many close shaves he had to experience.”

‘Aah, back then.’

Lennart recalled the moments when Jin-Woo’s chest was stabbed by the claws of the beast and let a low gasp escape from his mouth. Also, he remembered his own vision darkening in despair the moment when that ancient Ice Elf stabbed Jin-Woo with a dagger, too.

However, didn’t that happen because the enemies were simply too powerful? Never mind taking on both of them at the same time, how many people in this world could last as long as he did when fighting just one of them?

Lennart’s thoughts reached up to there and he shook his head.

‘No, that’s not it...’

For sure, the thoughts of being defeated because the enemies were tough belonged to regular Hunters, such as himself.

Maybe, ‘winning’ was a matter of course for a bigshot possessing strength like Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, and they probably focused more on how they won their battles, instead.

Now that his train of thoughts arrived here, Lennart felt a chill crept down his spine next. As he stood there in shock, Thomas added one last thing.

“He’s one really scary dude, that Seong Jin-Woo.”

“.....I completely agree with you on that one.”

After Thomas finished his deduction, he got taken to the hospital. During the ride, though...

‘I made the right decision not to throw a tantrum inside his office back then.’

...Lennart was busy telling himself never to become Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s enemy.

Screeech-!!

Ah-Jin Guild’s ‘Bonggo’ came to a screeching halt, and a young man in the driver’s seat climbed out from the vehicle.

Yu Jin-Ho saw Jin-Woo getting beaten up by the monsters on TV and jumped into the van to rush to the battle location without any concrete plan.

And even though his sensory perception hadn’t been as enhanced as those of the higher-ranked Awakened, he immediately spotted Jin-Woo among the sea of Hunters populating the location and tearfully ran to his destination.

“Hyung-niiiiiiim-!”

Jin-Woo watched Yu Jin-Ho running towards him with a flood of tears gushing out of the boy’s eyes, and the murderous anger oozing out of his own eyes softened just a tad.

Meanwhile, Yu Jin-Ho used the momentum of the running to tightly hug Jin-Woo. Now, normally, the latter would find dealing with this a bit annoying so he’d step aside like flowing water, but today was different.

Jin-Woo simply chose to gently pat Yu Jin-Ho’s back as the boy clung onto him and cried his eyes out. It was as if the warmth he felt from someone genuinely worrying about him managed to slowly melt his frosty heart.

Maybe, it wasn’t Yu Jin-Ho who needed consoling, but he himself? A thin smile formed on Jin-Woo’s lips.

Yu Jin-Ho finally managed to calm down and lifted his messy tear-and-snot smeared face away to ask a question.

“Hyung-nim, are you alright??”

“No, I’m not alright.”

“EHH??”

Yu Jin-Ho jumped up in sheer shock, his eyes opening wider. Jin-Woo then wordlessly pointed to his shirt, now deeply stained by tears and snot.

“Heok!!”

Yu Jin-Ho hurriedly used his sleeves to wipe his eyes and nose before lowering his head.

“I’m really sorry, hyung-nim. I was so happy to see you unhurt, so, like....”

Jin-Woo chuckled softly.

This kid, back then or now, he was one hell of a character, that’s for sure. But then, he was now a true ‘dongsaeng’ with a quicker wit than anyone when it came to Jin-Woo’s matters.

Yu Jin-Ho did his best to suck in his tears and spoke with a bright face.

“Hyung-nim, I knew this might happen, so I prepared a new set of clothes you can change into.”

“New clothes??”

Jin-Woo took a look at himself. And he clearly saw the messed-up state of his clothing from top to bottom after going through the intense battle against

the Sovereigns.

“Well, if you return home looking like that... I’m sure your mother would be very worried, right? That’s why I got you some new clothes to change into.”

‘Huh.’

When Jin-Woo looked at him with praising eyes, Yu Jin-Ho wiped the bottom of his nose and tried to hide how happy he was.

“Let’s go, hyung-nim. Allow me to drive you back home.”

Jin-Woo thought about that for a minute, before nodding his head.

‘Mom and Jin-Ah must’ve been watching the TV as well, so I should prioritise putting their minds at ease before doing anything else.’

While Yu Jin-Ho was climbing up into the driver’s side, Jin-Woo turned around and took one last look at the centre of the city, the place where a life-or-death battle had taken place not too long ago.

Many people had rushed in there to take control of the situation, and he could see them doing their best to do their jobs.

Jin-Woo had gained quite handsomely out of that rubble.

‘First of all... I guess I should also prioritise finding a device that allows me to communicate even in the middle of that forest.’

He couldn’t repeat a mistake like this one ever again.

The biggest gain for today had to be ‘these’, though. Jin-Woo looked at the pair of shortswords his father had left behind. It was as if there was a hint of a person’s warmth remaining in their hilts.

‘Dad....’

As Jin-Woo remained still in his spot, he could Yu Jin-Ho’s cautious voice floating towards him.

“Hyung-nim?”

Jin-Woo lightly kissed the hilts of the daggers and stored them in the sub-space before belatedly climbing into the passenger’s seat.

“Okay, let’s go.”

“Yes, hyung-nim!!”

The long, long day was drawing to a close.

In the end, the Hunter's Association had to announce the identities of the monsters that appeared in Seoul as 'Unknown'.

However, there was no doubt about the scale of devastation those creatures left behind being truly enormous. Countless people either died or were gravely injured; the number of collapsed buildings or destroyed cars were too numerous to count.

However, not everything could be seen as a loss.

Should one call this case a blessing in disguise?

What happened was, they found a way to deal with an unexpected danger.

Especially so for Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's incredible power that he displayed to the world during his fight – it managed to change the mindset of the world's denizens in one breath.

And that changed mindset was immediately put to action. The symptom of this change, however, started off from a country that no one quite expected it to happen from.

That evening.

To discuss the handling of the aftermaths of the monsters appearing in Seoul, as well as the potential responses against the super-massive Gate, the current Association President Woo Jin-Cheol paid a visit to the Blue House.

With topic at hand being what it was, President Kim welcomed him rather courteously. After sharing a brief greeting, Woo Jin-Cheol asked his question first.

“Shouldn't it be better for you to evacuate to the outskirts of Seoul, sir?”

The president of the nation hesitated with his answer, his expression looking complicated before he spat out a long sigh.

“I admit that I treated you rather badly the last time. I'd like to apologise to you about that. However, I implore you not to look at me as a man who had forgotten what responsibilities he has to shoulder. May I remind you, I am still the president of this nation.”

He continued on, although he carried the face of a man experiencing fear, yet at the same time, trying to overcome it.

“If I run away without saying anything, how badly will the citizens be shaken up? I do not wish to see my name being recorded as a blemish on our nation's history.”

Woo Jin-Cheol thought of President Kim as yet another career politician

who was only interested in raking in more votes, but having heard this rather unexpected reply, could only let a wry chuckle out of his mouth.

One could accuse that as being a disrespectful gesture but, as he had already committed a transgression against Woo Jin-Cheol, the country's president didn't raise any objections.

“Alright.”

Woo Jin-Cheol pulled out the prepared data and got ready to get going with his presentation. But then, an employee working in the Blue House hurriedly entered the office and whispered something into the president's ear.

“What?? Are you being serious?!”

The president responded by shooting up from his seat with a disbelieving face. The employee replied with a very serious expression.

“Yes, sir. Mister President, how should we proceed next?”

“For now, let the call through. I shall personally speak to him.”

The employee promptly presented a smartphone to the president that was already connected to the mystery person on the other end of the line. The leader of South Korea took over the phone, and a voice that pretty much all Koreans were familiar with came out from the device's speaker.

That voice belonged to the leader of North Korea. The South Korean President couldn't immediately understand what the other party was talking about and tilted his head this way and that.

“What... do you want to aid us with?”

“.....!”

North Korea was the signal flare.

The neighbouring nations had only displayed a tepid reaction towards the request for cooperation even with the appearance of Gate boasting an unprecedented size. But now, their attitudes did a complete 180 in an instant.

This was the conclusion various nations came to after watching the battle between Jin-Woo and the 'Unknown' monsters.

The ill fortune of Korea wouldn't simply end in Korea alone. Which Hunter belonging to a country would be capable of stopping a calamity that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo couldn't stop?

From the closest nations – North Korea, Japan, China, Russia – and to the far-flung nations such as America, Germany, Britain, and France, their Hunters hurriedly set off for Seoul in order to make it in time.

There was only one thought within their minds.

‘We need to aid Hunter Seong Jin-Woo and block the super-massive Gate, no matter the cost.’

The notion of Jin-Woo being their final defence line had been instilled within them after witnessing his feats.

And now, not just South Korea’s own Hunters, but the entire world’s were gathering in the capital city of this small nation in East Asia.



Chapter 226 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Dawn, when everyone was in a deep sleep.

Jin-Woo travelled back to the sea of trees located in Japan, still remaining as a no-entry, prohibited area, after experiencing the dungeon break of the Giant-type monsters.

He didn't come here to raise his level or to look at the stars in the sky, though. But then again, it must've been the memories of the night before, because when he took a look at the night sky, he naturally remembered Hae-In's face.

Jin-Woo stopped by his family and assured them he was fine and quickly returned to the hotel in Japan. Cha Hae-In had already understood the reason why Jin-Woo had to disappear on her like that, just before they were about to share a meal together.

She knew better than anyone what would've happened if Jin-Woo didn't rush back to Seoul. Her expression as she tried to hide her anxiety remained etched in his memory for some reason, though.

'...Let's get started.'

Jin-Woo took a look around him. Just like before, the stillness of the forest, with not a single living soul in it, greeted him. There was something he had to do in this place.

Jin-Woo sought out a suitable open ground and soon located one. He summoned out a portion of his Shadow Soldiers next.

'Come out.'

Jin-Woo's shadow expanded out greatly and his soldiers appeared on the ground. They were none other than the new additions to his army.

Jin-Woo tasted a mixed bag of emotions as he studied them. For the first time ever, he ended up breaking his own rule yesterday, one that he religiously adhered to since the very beginning.

These new soldiers were, before yesterday, all regular people. No, they were victims who were murdered by the Sovereigns.

Hundreds of soldiers, created from the regular people dying unjustly, as

well as Hunters who tried to save them, now stood before their new master. He broke his own rule of never using innocent souls as his Shadow Soldiers.

And that was why Jin-Woo wanted to ask for their cooperation in this place.

‘Until this war is over, lend me your strengths, everyone.’

To protect their families, their lovers, their friends and their homes from those b*stards.

‘I promise to return you to the eternal rest once the battle is over.’

Although they were the dead beings forced into expressing their absolute loyalty through the Shadow Sovereign’s ability, they still retained their individual egos.

Jin-Woo’s sincere heart and desire were transmitted to every single one of them. Their eyes under the helms, covered by the darkness of the dawn, contained flames of hatred and rage towards the monsters that made them this way.

They realised this crucial fact – that they were now given a chance to exact revenge on those creatures with their own hands. And the one that gifted them this opportunity was the Shadow Sovereign standing right before them.

‘We shall fight alongside our liege!

We shall never let those monsters rape and pillage our land and our families!’

Such desires were being engraved in them now.

The stronger the Shadow Sovereign became, the greater the enhancement to the abilities of the Shadow Soldiers. Unlike in the past when he was borrowing the powers of the Shadow Sovereign through the System, Jin-Woo now inherited it completely and thus, the Shadow Soldiers created by him could not be underestimated at all.

Jin-Woo made one more request to them.

‘Lend me your strength.’

Their Sovereign made a request, and the Shadow Soldiers immediately replied back. They raised their fists up high and from their open mouths, the death throe-like horrifying roars exploded out.

Wuuuuuuahhhh-!!!

The roaring started from the front row, but gradually shifted to the rear like the receding tides, and eventually, the entirety of the summoned Shadow

Soldiers were crying out towards the sky.

Aaaaah-!!!

Their resentment-laden screams seemed to shake the earth itself. With this, the Army of Death had finished getting ready.

Jin-Woo's eyes as he scanned them, flickered in a cold, murderous glare.

Definitely.

He'd definitely make the Sovereigns pay.

The roars of the soldiers filled with hatred continued to echo out for a long, long time afterwards.

The day before the dungeon break from the super-massive Gate was to take place.

It had been two days since the System disappeared. Jin-Woo was getting acclimatised by the absence of Daily Quests now. Many things had become convenient for him ever since restrictions put in place by the System had gone away, but there was also a few things that made life rather difficult, as well.

One such difficulty was the 'Store'.

Jin-Woo summoned out a bottle of healing potion originally stored in his 'Inventory' and stared at it as if to bore a hole through the darn thing.

'.....'

As it turned out, every item found in the Store had been created out of the Shadow Sovereign's powers. It was basically magic, where one would create something with Mana.

So, the theory went that, since he had inherited the Shadow Sovereign's powers, Jin-Woo should be able to create the same types of items as long as he willed it, but....

He quietly closed his eyes and began picturing the healing potion inside his head. When he did, he could pick up the movement of Mana.

'Concentrate, concentrate....'

Unfortunately, Mana busily moving around failed to gather and coagulate before scattering away in the air. It was a failure.

Jin-Woo spat out a sigh and opened his eyes again. It seemed that the threshold of creating something out of magic was still out of reach for him, for now.

‘I guess I need to practice for a bit longer.’

It was then.

The smartphone resting on top of his desk began vibrating and issued the ‘du-du-du’ noise.

“Hello. What can I do for you?”

Jin-Woo settled down on his bed and answered the call.

Woo Jin-Cheol must’ve been working day and night, thanks to the mass-scale incidents that kept happening one after another, because his voice came across as a bit hoarse on the phone.

The estimated time for the dungeon break was literally right around the corner. From the perspective of the Association, they would’ve liked to get some advice from Jin-Woo, arguably the core combat force of the upcoming raid.

Since Jin-Woo didn’t have anything on his schedule anyway, he agreed to it without hesitation.

“I shall see you there.”

Click.

He ended the call and got ready to leave, but then, Igrit abruptly addressed him.

[My liege.]

‘Mm?’

Jin-Woo was yet to get used to Igrit’s voice. Still, he paid attention to the black knight’s trademark heavy and courteous tone.

[There is something I’d like to speak to you about.]

day.

Every TV station around the world stopped with their regular programming to broadcast live the unfolding situation in Seoul.

Some stations chose to broadcast the situation as it unfolded in the regular news format, while some others invited experts in the field and asked for their opinions.

One of the largest broadcasters in the States, ‘Hunter Channel’ went with the latter route and had invited experts in.

The broadcast soon got underway; one of the experts spoke in clear reminiscence as they looked at the live footage of the Hunters completely filling up the Gate's location.

“Do you know how long it has been since that many Hunters from various countries have gathered in one spot?”

The emcee smiled and replied.

“I’m not sure.... Since Guilds with different nationalities join forces together to go on raids often, I’m guessing that it must’ve been pretty recent.”

The expert shook his head.

“It’s been over eight years. Eight. And it’s now approaching the ninth year mark now.”

Eight years.

Everyone watching the broadcast heard those words and immediately recalled the gigantic monster that terrorised humanity back then. The emcee wasn't an exception, either.

“You say eight years.... Are you saying that this spectacle would be the very first time since the ‘Kamish’ raid?”

“Yes, that’s correct. This would be the first time that Hunters from five different nations or more got together, post-Kamish raid.”

Back then, the greatest Hunters alive from every corner of the globe stepped up to aid the United States of America, only to be annihilated and out of hundreds of them participating, only five managed to survive. They then became the ‘Special Authority-rank’ Hunters.

To all those countries that had lost their top Hunters, that day's losses were indeed incredibly difficult to bear.

“Ever since that day, every nation refrained from interfering in the problems of other nations.”

That would be an obvious result. No one alive would've wanted to see the Hunters from their own countries lose their lives for another country.

Sure, there had been infrequent occurrences of Guilds from different nations joining hands for their mutual benefits, but this many Hunters gathering together in such a huge scale to aid another country would be a very rare thing to see.

“In that case, Doctor, could you possibly be saying that Hunter Seong

Jin-Woo from South Korea will bring together the world's Hunters, torn apart by the entrance of the Dragon Kamish?"

"That is correct."

Perhaps finding the long-winded explanation rather laborious, the expert took a deep breath first before continuing on afterwards.

"It all started with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo solving the calamity of Japan's dungeon break."

Before that happened, though, Japan stepped up to help out with the problem on Jeju Island, but as everyone knew, the result of that venture was a complete disaster.

If the story ended there, then that would only add weight to the opinion that one shouldn't be interfering with the problems of other countries. However, everything was turned on its head after Jin-Woo stepped up to eliminate the Giants that had made their appearance in Japan.

Even though there was the historical baggage between the two countries, as well as the dastardly scheme Japan's Association had cooked up, a Korean Hunter still willingly rolled up his sleeves to aid his neighbours, didn't he?

"Most likely, all the gratitude and admiration the Japanese citizens feel towards him can't be put into mere words."

Japan was able to survive the crisis all thanks to Jin-Woo's aid. With that, the unwritten rule of not interfering with another country's matter, in order to protect their own Hunters, had been broken for the first time.

What he did was to instil the sense of confidence of 'I can do this' into the Hunters. And a few days ago....

"Everyone watching the scenes of Hunter Thomas Andre falling must've sensed it then."

Which living Hunter would be able to stop those monsters?

"And Hunter Seong Jin-Woo showed them what the answer was."

However, the next problem facing them seemingly featured an even higher difficulty. If Hunter Seong Jin-Woo fell, then who out there would be capable of stopping the calamity?

Although there was a thin smile on his face, the emcee couldn't form an answer to that query. The expert answered for him, instead.

"There's no one. Indeed, there is no one capable. In other words, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo is the final line. If he falls, then everything will end."

At that moment, many countries thinking that the super-massive Gate floating in the skies above Seoul was South Korea's problem only, quickly came to a realisation.

If the Koreans couldn't stop that Gate, then next would be North Korea, then either China or Russia, and eventually, the rest of the world. Now, the super-massive Gate had become the common enemy of the entire world.

This was the result achieved by a lone Hunter from Asia.

The expert was about to explain that they needed to overcome this upcoming calamity first if that result was to proudly bear its fruit. However, at that moment...

“Ahh! Look, just now!”

The emcee had been listening attentively to what the expert was saying but he saw the urgent prompts from the director and jumped up from his seat.

The gazes of the experts quickly shifted over to the live feed, as well.

The live footage now displayed the super-massive Gate opening its maws wide.

“Oh, my god....”

Everyone present within the studio became utterly speechless from the imagery that easily surpassed their imaginations.

The air began trembling.

Tens of thousands of Hunters surrounding the spot just below the Gate held their breaths and waited. This was a memorable spectacle, this sight of countless Hunters waiting for one single moment to happen.

The close-quarter type Hunters quietly waited for their turns, while those capable of attacking at long distances got ready to fling out pre-emptive strikes at a moment's notice.

Arrows laden with magical energy and various spells ready to be cast were aimed at the sky.

Taut tension filled up the atmosphere.

And then... Whenever the gazes of these Hunters stopped glaring at the Gate above and lowered to the ground, they would all look at one place without fail. That would be Jin-Woo's back.

Standing at the furthest front, Jin-Woo was glaring up at the sky with a

sombre expression.

With every passing second, the dungeon break was approaching closer and closer. He could sense their aura now.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump.

The Black Heart, replacing his destroyed human heart, powerfully pulsed within his chest to let him know of the current situation.

Of course, the hearts of other Hunters were pounding away restlessly, as well. It was all because of the nervousness seemingly oppressing everything.

However, the emotion Jin-Woo was feeling at the moment was quite different from theirs. He was doing his best not to lose his composure and waited for the approaching final hour.

Hae-In, standing next to him, saw his expression and whispered to him.

“I think it’s my first time seeing you so tense like this, Mister Jin-Woo.”

“Really?”

Jin-Woo smirked to let her know that it was nothing. Hae-In also formed a light smile as a reply and looked back at the Gate while unsheathing her blade. She too had sensed that the beginning of the life-or-death battle was here.

‘Soon....’

However, she was mistaken about something.

Jin-Woo placed his hand on his chest and silently closed his eyes. He felt the pounding of his heart. The emotion welling up in his chest was neither nervousness nor terror. No, it was excitement.

“T-they are coming!”

“The Gate’s been opened!!”

Finally, the Gate began opening up.

The wall separating this world and the Gate disappeared and certain ‘things’ staying within finally began pouring out in endless droves. These creatures completely blotted out the sky in no time at all.

The Hunters below became completely dumbfounded by the number of descending creatures that seemed to be at least over one hundred thousand.

“But, how... how can that many monsters... at the same time?!”

“There, there are just too many!!!”

Gasps and screams thick with despair exploded out from here and there.

All those ‘certain things’ must’ve been under the influence of gravity-reduction magic, because they all landed on the ground very slowly.

“Attack! Hurry, attack!”

“Everyone, attack!”

Before those things land on the ground, they should try to reduce their numbers, at least by a little bit. Hunters sensed that their opportunity was here and began making their moves.

Magic spells ready to cast gleamed brightly from their hands and bowstrings aimed at the sky were all pulled taut. Tankers raised their shields up right near their chins to get ready for close-quarters combat with those descending things.

But then, before the concentrated firepower from the Hunters could pour out, Jin-Woo loudly yelled out.

[Nobody move!]

Jin-Woo’s will, carried by Mana, was clearly transmitted to even those Hunters who didn’t know any Korean. And it made everyone stop what they were doing.

‘But, why?’

‘Why did he stop us from attacking?’

Even though tens of thousands of Hunters were staring at him with eyes that screamed, ‘I don’t understand’, Jin-Woo simply repeated what he said.

[Everyone, don’t move.]

Woo Jin-Cheol watching from the distance hurriedly wiped the sweat off his forehead.

If they don’t attack now, then those creatures would land safely on the ground. When the battle breaks out in that situation, the Hunters out in front could get sucked into the attacks fired from the back.

Meaning, incidents of them worrying about the friendly fire would happen when they were already in a numerical disadvantage.

One of the subordinate Hunters working for the Association quickly approached Woo Jin-Cheol and looked at his boss with a worried expression.

“Association President...”

It was now time to make his decision. His head screamed at him to send out

the word to start attacking, but in the end, Woo Jin-Cheol decided to trust Jin-Woo.

“Everyone, do not fire!”

“Do not fire!!”

Woo Jin-Cheol was put in charge of commanding the Hunters. So, rather understandably, they became quite dazed and lowered their hands when he began telling them not to attack.

‘Just what are they thinking now?’

‘They want to engage those things on the ground instead of hitting them first with ranged attacks? Against that many monsters???’

As confusion and terror began whipping up around the battlefield....

Eventually, those creatures landed on the ground.

The number of black monsters completely filling up the sights of the Hunters were so great that one’s mind would grow faint just from the sheer scale.

From the gathered swarm of monsters, one particular being began walking out towards them. Jin-Woo, too, stepped forward.

Just what was going to happen from here onwards?

Hunters couldn’t even breathe properly and closely watched Jin-Woo.

‘.....’

‘.....’

Jin-Woo stopped walking, and the ‘monster’ also stopped walking as well.

And then....

The ‘monster’ looking at Jin-Woo suddenly knelt down on the ground. And at that moment, the soldiers behind it also knelt down at the same time.

Chut.

The spectacle of a hundred thousand-plus soldiers bowing their heads at the same time carried an incredible, overwhelming shock value.

After a short bout of silence passed, the ‘monster’ kneeling right out in front raised its head and spoke.

[Grand-Marshal Bellion, here to humbly greet the Sovereign with his Shadow Army.]



Chapter 227 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Fifty thousand or so Hunters from all corners of the globe, here to defend against the super-massive Gate, watched dazedly as the black monsters began kneeling before Jin-Woo.

“Jesus.....”

This sea of soldiers wrapped in black armour or black smoke seemed to go on forever. Every single one of these creatures possessed an incredible amount of magical energy, but there was something else that made the gathered Hunters doubt their own eyes even more.

“T-that, that, that! Could that be?!”

“Right at the end there, you see what’s right at the end there, right?”

“.....Yeah, I can see it.”

Hunters pointed to the back of this army of black soldiers, their complexions paling greatly. More specifically, they were pointing to the three black Dragons at the back of the army who were obediently lowering their heads before their owner, as if they were house-trained pets or some such.

The gathered Hunters were now rendered completely speechless after discovering those Dragons being the part of the line-up of these black soldiers.

The Dragon that appeared for the first, and last, time in human history had been ‘Kamish’. That one creature alone managed to wipe out almost every single elite Hunter alive back then, and the whole world was in danger of being thrust into a horrifying conflagration of destruction.

Seriously now, would people begin calling that Dragon with a name carrying the meaning of ‘undying flames’ for no good reason?

And so – only one such creature was enough to threaten the very existence of the human race, yet there were three of them now. It couldn’t be helped that the Hunters gathered here to fight these things felt as if all of their energy was quickly abandoning them.

Just what would have happened if they decided to clash against this army? Hunters imagined the potential combat situation against these black monsters

currently in bowing positions and felt goosebumps rapidly spread throughout their bodies next.

And at the same time, they grew really curious about the real identity of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, standing before them as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Jin-Woo swept his gaze over the Grand-Marshal Bellion and the seemingly endless number of Shadow Soldiers kneeling behind their leader.

‘So, this is the real Shadow Army....’

What Igrit said was right.

His black knight asked for an audience and spoke to Jin-Woo in his usual dignified manner yesterday.

[My liege, the Shadow Army has concluded all of their preparations.]

Jin-Woo needed a bit of time to completely digest those words. That’s how surprising it was to him.

That was why he was in a dilemma.

He knew better than anyone here regarding the matters with the Sovereigns and the Rulers, as well as the truth behind the Gates. But the thing was, he himself wasn’t certain about the overall narrative, so there was no way he’d be able to convincingly explain what was happening here to everyone else.

No, it was an impossibly tall order to convince every one of these Hunters coming from all over the world to stop the Gate before it turned into the worst calamity in human history.

And also....

In the one-in-ten-thousand case, no, make that one in ten million chance that Igrit’s information was faulty, could he be able to handle the fallout from that?

That was why Jin-Woo decided to wait.

He decided not to make up his mind until he could confirm the truth with his own eyes first, and waited until the Gate opened up. And the result of that was now kneeling before his eyes.

Jin-Woo inwardly swallowed his saliva and scanned his soldiers. Although he was not responsible for raising these soldiers, he could still sense that every single one of them was connected to him.

It was a complicated network, connected like a spiderweb. And through this network, the level of sheer joy they felt at reuniting with their master was

fully transmitted to him.

‘This is the inheritance the former Shadow Sovereign had given to me....’

These creatures were all swearing their loyalty to their new master. Just like how quickly their hearts were racing, Jin-Woo’s own chest was as well, now filled up with powerful emotions.

That’s right.

He took a brief look at the Dragons at the back before returning his gaze to the front of the army.

The Grand-Marshal Bellion.

This guy certainly possessed a suitable amount of dignity and strength, fitting for the title he carried. There was a trace of torn-off wings on the back of his armour, though.

‘Two pairs of wings....’

Jin-Woo recalled that regular silver-clad soldiers possessed a pair of wings, while the Rulers had six wings, and from that fact, he could roughly estimate the level of Bellion’s capability.

Jin-Woo focused his sensory perception and the light within his eyes gleamed brightly.

With that, he could take a gander at the truly humongous reserve of magical energy the Grand-Marshal chose to hide because of the presence of his liege.

‘As expected....’

Because he possessed this much power, he was indeed qualified to lead a Shadow Army that contained even Dragons.

Jin-Woo raised his head.

The Shadow Army. The king wishing to go to war had finally regained his soldiers.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump.

Jin-Woo took a long, hard look at his soldiers as his heart raced faster and faster. The thing was, those kneeling before him weren’t the only Shadow Army, now were they?

If these guys were the soldiers that belonged to the former Shadow Sovereign ‘Osborne’, then Jin-Woo too possessed his own loyal soldiers, as well.

'Come out.'

Even more Shadow Soldiers materialised from behind Jin-Woo at his beckoning. Their numbers had already ballooned to near two thousand by now.

Beru, Igrit, Greed, No. 6, Fangs, Iron, Jima, Tank, etc., all filled up the space behind Jin-Woo. And then....

Chut.

....They too knelt down and lowered their heads, just like the Shadow Soldiers that came out from the massive Gate. Every single Shadow Soldier, surrounding him from both sides, swore their allegiances in silence.

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Finally, the separated Shadow Army had become whole.

A powerful force capable of standing up against the enemies and their armies had been completed. Things seemed to be unfolding quite smoothly right now.

However, Jin-Woo could feel quite a few gazes flying in his direction, stabbing him rather painfully on his neck, and he just had to take a look behind him.

'.....'

'.....'

That's where he discovered tens of thousands of Hunters standing there staring at him, along with hundreds of reporters risking their lives to record the historic battle that was supposed to take place here.

Understandably, all of them were sporting the same sort of expression that screamed, ***"Just what the hell is going on here??"***

'Okay, so now....'

As a sort of reply to their frozen-stiff expressions, Jin-Woo formed an awkward smile.

'....How am I supposed to explain this?'

Quite obviously, the whole world was in an uproar.

Well, every single monster emerging from the super-massive Gate started kneeling before Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, and this shocking scene was broadcast live to the entire world, so the pandemonium breaking out was

rather understandable.

Viewers were watching on with anxiety and dread as the Gate opened up, so it was quite hard for them to drag themselves out from the pit of heady mental shock, akin to someone smacking them unexpectedly in the back of their noggins.

Pretty much every single online community went into a heated frenzy over this matter.

↳ Horsesh*t.... I heard from somewhere that well over a hundred thousand monsters came out from that Gate.

↳ What the hell. How can summons pop out from a Gate? You should start spewing things that make sense.

↳ Oh? Why don't you, good sir, enlighten us, the ignorant masses, then?

↳ First of all, they all look exactly like Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's summons, don't they? But still, how can summons come out of a Gate?

Many displayed the reactions of disbelief, but there were also a few who viewed the incident in a different light.

↳ For real. ㅇㅈ.

↳ If they were, we'd all be dead by now. I saw an interview and they say there were three Dragons in the horde, too.

↳ Three Dragons LOLLOLOL So f*cking crazy. LOLLOL

↳ Kamish comes out, sees them, he be like, **"Nope"**, goes away ROFL

↳ What are you even talking about? Kamish died almost nine years ago, so how can that thing come out and goes away again?

↳ The commenter above mine, whoooosh. You must be a delight in dinner parties.

Meanwhile, TV stations continued to repeatedly broadcast the same shocking scenes from back then, and did their best to analyse and come to a suitable conjecture.

Unfortunately, there were no experts on this planet capable of convincingly explaining away the event of summoned creatures, not monsters, that belonged to a single person and even contained Dragons, coming out from a Gate boasting an unprecedented size.

"Huh-uh...."

"As to figure out how something like that can happen, even I...."

“Mhmm...”

Every single one of them was at a loss and could only shake their heads. They even spat out astonished gasps at the recorded footage of a hundred thousand-plus summoned creatures kneeling before Jin-Woo played over and over again.

Anyone could tell that was the sight of those creatures acknowledging who their master was. Some quarters in the world even raised the idea of calling Jin-Woo with a nickname of ‘Demon King’ because of that memorable scene alone.

Indeed, Jin-Woo was emitting the kind of manly aura befitting the title of ‘Demon King’ as he was being surrounded by all those black soldiers.

Soon, experts collectively defined this incident as....

....A miracle.

“Although this event unfolded in a shocking and unexpected manner, there is little doubt the end result is a fortunate one for all of us.”

“It’s fortunate, you say?”

“Can you see how many monsters, no, summons there are on screen right now?”

The expert pointed towards the Shadow Army displayed on the screen. Beyond Jin-Woo standing before them, one could see a nearly-infinite number of soldiers busy bowing their heads.

The emcee didn’t think too deeply about it as he began counting with his eyes before dry saliva automatically slid down his throat from that outrageous number on display.

One didn’t even need to bring up the fact that there were three Dragons included in this army. That was how horrifying the overall number was.

“If our Hunters were to fight those things, then it would no longer have been the issue of whether we’d win or lose. No, the remainder of humanity would have been counting the hours until those creatures get to the other side of the planet and completely exterminate us, instead.”

The emcee’s head nodded all by itself.

“Fortunately, they are summoned creatures of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo. And it seems that he can control them just fine.”

Regrettably, though – that remained a conjecture at this stage.

“Only Hunter Seong Jin-Woo knows the truth.”

That was where the expert ended his explanation. With rather excellent timing, the screen now displayed the very last scene from that event, the one responsible for causing everyone to be so astonished like this.

“Right here, this moment.”

Jin-Woo was taking a sweeping look at the other Hunters before he literally slid into his own shadow and disappeared without a trace.

That’s how he vanished from everyone’s sight.

The emcee helplessly shook his head before adjusting his glasses and continued on.

“The protagonist of this chaos, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo – just where could he be right now?”

The Korean Hunter’s Association was inundated with telephone inquiries, lodged seemingly by the entire world. Their only reply so far had been, ***“We don’t know, either.”***

That, though, was like adding fuel to the already burning flames of interest for the event the world had laser-focused onto. The emcee stared straight into the camera with a still-excited face and addressed the viewers at home.

“We can only pray that he returns as soon as possible to clarify all the questions that continue to burn a hole in our heads.”

Jin-Woo put aside the curiosity of many, many people for the time being and made his way to the sea of trees in Japan. This vast expanse of abandoned land was just about the perfect place to observe the movements of the entire Shadow Army.

Jin-Woo stood at a far distance, while the 130,000 plus army was split in two and stood on either side of a vast field.

‘Start.’

He issued his order inwardly, prompting the two columns of armies to powerfully rush towards each other.

Dudududududu-!!

The sounds of their feet pounding on the ground seemed to rock the earth. The distance between the two columns of rushing soldiers closed up in an instant, and just before they were about to clash head-on....

....Jin-Woo shifted the platoons that fell behind in the rush right behind the other column and had them surround the opponents in this mock battle.

Was that all?

In a location where there was a shortage of soldiers, he sent reinforcements. When some soldiers were left isolated, he simply unsummoned them and brought them back out in an adequate-enough location. The smoothness of his actions was like a river flowing to the ocean.

Deployment and manipulation of soldiers based on the experiences of battles he fought so far also applied to this hundred thousand-strong great army, as well.

“That’s enough.”

Jin-Woo spoke in a soft voice but that was still enough for the Shadow Soldiers to hear his will. They all came to a standstill in an instant.

Chack!

Their movements were in perfect synchronisation. After stopping this mock battle, Jin-Woo took a look to his side.

“So, what do you think?”

The Grand-Marshal Bellion spoke in an amazed, admiring tone of voice.

“I’ve never thought about mobilising the forces in this manner. I can only express the emotions of awe and shock, my liege.”

It seemed that, to Bellion, controlling the combatants in this manner was a fresh concept to mull over, even though he had roamed countless battlefields with the former Shadow Sovereign.

Especially the part about utilising the aspect of freely summoning and unsummoning Shadow Soldiers – that part left him with quite a pleasant surprise.

Igrit had been with Jin-Woo since the beginning and was perhaps the most familiar with how their master fought, so he proudly opened up his chest just a little bit wider.

Jin-Woo smirked softly while watching the black knight and his growing nose for a bit. He had to stop and pick up his phone, though, when the device suddenly went off noisily inside his pocket.

Vuwooo... Vuwoooo....

“Hey. What’s up.”

According to Yu Jin-Ho, calls inundated not just the Association but the Ah-Jin Guild as well after Jin-Woo went and disappeared on everyone without saying a word, leading to the phone lines temporarily breaking down.

“....My bad. Can you hold on for a bit longer until I properly organise my thoughts first?”

After hearing Yu Jin-Ho’s smiling voice coming out of the phone, Jin-Woo also formed a smile.

“Yeah. I told them I’ll be home after cooling my head a little bit.”

Jin-Woo pocketed the phone after ending the call, but a heavy, lengthy sigh slowly escaped from his mouth as he did so.

He knew that he shouldn’t be avoiding ‘it’ like this. However, in order to explain the Gates and his Shadow Soldiers, then naturally, he had to speak about the matters of the Sovereigns and Rulers, as well.

Soon, soldiers of the Sovereigns would pour out from the eight remaining Gates. How was he to go about telling others that the entire world would be turned into a fierce, bloody battlefield?

In order to give himself some time to think, he simply had to get away from there.

He thought that this was for the best.

Just a little bit longer.

He wanted humanity to enjoy peace even for a little bit longer.

‘I’m sure I can delay this for a few more days.’

Jin-Woo kept telling himself this; meanwhile, Beru sneaked closer to him and spoke in a serious voice. He had been rather quiet for some reason lately, though?

“Oh, my king....”

“Mm?”

Jin-Woo turned around to look at Beru kneeling on the ground, his head lowered deeply towards the ground as he opened his mouth.

“I beg of thee to bestow unto me an opportunity to compete for the position of the Grand-Marshal.”

“The position of the Grand-Marshal, you say?”

But, didn’t they already have a Grand-Marshal?

Jin-Woo felt puzzled by this, before abruptly recalling the System’s information on the highest grade of Shadow Soldiers available.

‘In that case, could he be....?’

Sure enough – Beru raised his head.

“As a Marshal of the army, I’d like to challenge the Grand-Marshal Bellion.”



Chapter 228 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

When the System was still around, it did mention something about what Beru was talking about. There could be only one occupying the position of the general of the army.

So, Soldiers that recently reached the Marshal grade must establish a hierarchy with the one before it – didn't the System say something like that?

If he were to assume the general of the army was the Grand-Marshal, then indeed, Beru, as the recently-promoted Marshal, possessed the qualification to challenge Bellion.

Perhaps befitting an ant-type monster familiar with living in a large community, Beru wanted to establish the proper pecking order between the Marshals, it seemed.

'Marshals going at it, huh...?'

Just to make sure, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze over to his other Marshal, Igrit, but the black knight politely declined the proposition. It seemed that he wasn't interested in establishing the hierarchy between the Marshals at all.

Unsurprisingly, once the black knight quietly took a step back, the other guy to catch Jin-Woo's attention was Bellion standing next to him.

The current leader in charge of the army 130,000-strong was Bellion right now. Only Jin-Woo was above him in terms of hierarchy, as the master of the army itself.

After meeting his liege's gaze, Bellion bowed his head slightly.

Since he was in the presence of his master, he had lowered his posture as much as possible, but still, he was a good head taller than Thomas Andre. This giant calmly answered his boss's querying eyes.

"I shall follow your will."

Follow his will, he said.

Jin-Woo formed a slight smirk at Bellion's answer.

His voice was, of course, very humble. However, it wasn't all that difficult to read the underlying message that he'd face the challenger head on, as long as his master gives the permission.

Jin-Woo sneaked a glance behind him, and Beru standing there had already extended his claws while visibly burning with fighting spirit himself. He must've also read the message, too.

“Kiieehk!”

While Bellion was doing his best to mask his magic energy as much as possible, Beru was the opposite and didn't hold back any of his horrible magic energy emission.

‘Hmm....’

Jin-Woo pondered for a moment or two before making up his mind.

“Alright.”

He knew pretty much everything there was to know about Beru, but Bellion was a different story. Knowing the extent of his combat prowess would prove to be an invaluable data in deploying the army correctly in the future.

It was also obvious that Jin-Woo's heart would sway towards allowing the challenge to go through.

“However, I shall be the one judging when to end the bout.”

After receiving his master's permission, Beru's expression was now overflowing with ecstasy. Moved almost to tears, his eyes began sparkling brightly as he cried out.

“I am humbled and deeply honoured by your inscrutable.....”

“Stop it.”

“....I thank thee, my king.”

On one side, Beru celebrating his opportunity. On the other side, Bellion calmly getting ready for the upcoming challenge.

It was as if these two were the plucky challenger going up against the incumbent champion in a sports movie. But before these two could start duking it out for real, there was something Jin-Woo had to confirm first.

He summoned out a single 'Kamish's Wrath' and loaded a bit of black aura on its tip. Then, he lightly swung it towards the forest.

Kwa-jajajajajajak!!

The black 'howl' shooting out from the shortsword swept up a portion of the forest. However, the damage wasn't as severe as he thought. Jin-Woo nodded and stored the weapon away.

‘With this much....’

It seemed that he didn't need to worry about the surroundings getting destroyed unduly during the battle of the two Marshals. The ground had been hardened sufficiently enough by the condensed Mana and it would survive the upcoming warfare without a doubt.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo gazed at the earth with a somewhat lonely expression before raising his head. His eyes were already filled back up with anticipation as he looked at his two Marshals.

“Well, then....”

Both the Grand-Marshall and the newbie Marshal waiting for their master's order nodded their heads simultaneously.

“We are ready, my liege.”

“Give us your order, oh my king!”

Jin-Woo chuckled and addressed the two.

“Get to your positions.”

Meanwhile, back in the Korean Hunter's Association.

The activities taking place inside the Association's emergency response conference hall were a lot more bustling than before, even though the so-called emergency situation had come to an end yesterday.

“The international media is still hounding us, demanding us to release an official statement already, sir!”

“The American Hunter Bureau is requesting us to release the information on Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim's current whereabouts!”

“The Seoul Metropolitan Fire & Disasters are asking us if it's okay to bring back the evacuated citizens.”

“The Hunter Channel's famous ‘The Jimmy Show’ wants to interview Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim....”

“Jimmy or whatever can kiss my a*s!! If he's able to, tell him to find the guy and try his luck there!”

The number of calls flooding the Association was inconceivably high. It was a small miracle already that their phone lines hadn't broken down yet.

As for the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol, even though he breathlessly issued one order after another, he also didn't forget to spit out

groans repeatedly as he stared at the stacks of official inquiry documents on his desk.

“Fuu-woo....”

The things he had to do was as tall as Mount Tai at this moment. No, hang on – if it was only as tall as that legendary mountain, that would have actually been preferable.

The thing was, Mount Tai had actually formed a long-a*s mountain range, and after overcoming one mountain, he’d be facing another one, and another one after that, and yet another one was waiting for him....

His work had piled up to the extent he couldn’t see the end now.

It was so serious that even he was feeling dizzy from the craziness of it all when he was supposed to be a rank A Hunter!

But then – Woo Jin-Cheol was busy shaking his head to get rid of this drowsiness, until he ended up hearing something spoken by a subordinate that simply could not be overlooked, no matter the circumstances.

“Just why did Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s summons have to come out from there....”

This employee’s words were tinged with a certain amount of dissatisfaction. Woo Jin-Cheol’s drowsiness was driven away in an instant. He immediately made this employee stand at attention before him.

“In that case, do you, Mister Seong-Won, think it would have been better if monsters came out from that super-massive Gate yesterday? Is that what you’re saying?”

“Pardon me, sir? Ah, no, that’s not....”

The subordinate couldn’t hide his fluster. Woo Jin-Cheol let his sharp scolding fly, regardless.

“If the phone calls you’ve been receiving until now weren’t about TV stations asking for interviews but relatives of the deceased Hunters asking for the news of their loved ones, do you really think you can continue working with just the thoughts of things being too hectic for you?”

The subordinate employee couldn’t even meet Woo Jin-Cheol’s glare.

Even if you were nominally an employee of the Hunter’s Association, as long as you hadn’t worked out in the field, you’d never really understand it.

They would never understand just what Hunters had to go through during emergency situations.

They would never understand just what kind of things unfolded and got buried inside dungeons, enshrouded in the darkness where no one could see you.

Going through all the potential scenarios that could've gone down during the raid of the super-massive Gate, what happened yesterday was easily the best result one could ever hope for.

Over one hundred thousand monsters popped out, but no one got injured. Nothing was destroyed. Not only that, all those monsters were absorbed into Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's fighting force.

Just who could've imagined it?

Indeed, no one could've dreamed such a result that far exceeded one's expectations.

That was how Woo Jin-Cheol got to endure, with a smile on his face, all these mountains of work that probably required him to go through a few sleepless nights to finish.

But to think, there was an employee of the Hunter's Association busy complaining about yesterday's events just because his body became a bit fatigued.

How could he even dare to say something so nonsensical?

If Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was present nearby, Woo Jin-Cheol would've stepped up to slap some sense into this employee well before the young Hunter had a chance to get angry.

That was how deeply Woo Jin-Cheol understood what Jin-Woo was going through.

The Association President temporarily stopped his employees, and while taking a sweeping look at them, he began speaking with a loud voice.

“I know full well how flustered you all are after Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim suddenly vanished on us.”

However, there must've been a good reason why Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had to disappear on them like that, when he was a man possessing a strong sense of responsibility.

“In a way, the person most confused by yesterday's event could very well be Seong Huner-nim.”

Didn't someone say once that, with great power comes great responsibility?

Some line from a movie Woo Jin-Cheol watched a long time ago kept

repeating itself in his head. However, that line helped him to imagine the weighty burden now pressing down on Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's shoulders.

'I've been around Hunter-nim for a while now, but yesterday was the first time seeing him that tense.'

Indeed, Jin-Woo didn't seem to know what was about to take place next.

It didn't matter who, anyone in his shoes would've thought of quickly getting the heck out of there when the Gate one was ready to die defending against instead suddenly began spewing out his own summons. What's more, they then began swearing their allegiance out of nowhere.

Who could be foolish enough to point the fingers of blame on him?

Right now, the Association's job was to share the load until Hunter Seong Jin-Woo finished sorting out his confusion and returned to explain the current situation.

The Association had to perform the role of a sturdy, dependable shield for Hunters, regardless of the time or the circumstances.

"If we at the Hunter's Association can't even understand what Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim is going through, just who else will??"

The employees listening to the passionate speech from their President forgot all about their fatigue, the corners of their eyes moistening quickly.

As for the employee complaining like a little kid because summoned creatures came out from the Gate, he lowered his head to Woo Jin-Cheol and apologised as his own nose reddened considerably.

"I'm sorry, sir. I was being thoughtless. I am truly sorry."

Woo Jin-Cheol wordlessly patted this guy on the shoulder and had him return to his post before sitting back down.

"Fuu-woo...."

He only shouted for a little while, yet there were at least twice as many documents as before piled up on his desk now.

'.....'

He shifted his gaze away from the stacks of paper, his mind still worried about Jin-Woo who'd no doubt be stuck in all sorts of dilemmas even now.

'I wonder, what is Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim doing now?'

With a bright face, Jin-Woo got to a distance quite far from the two

Marshals.

Igrit came to stand next to him.

Other Shadow Soldiers also spread out into a giant circle and created enough room for the two Marshals to move about unrestricted. Standing on the opposite end of that circle to his opponent, Beru extended his claws until they couldn't be extended anymore and screeched out loudly.

“Kiiiiieeehk-!!”

Meanwhile, Bellion wordlessly unsheathed the sword mounted on his hips. So far, he seemed to be a type of swordsman similar to Igrit, but then...

‘Mm...?’

Jin-Woo's gaze was fixed to Bellion's sword now. The blade looked rather uniquely-shaped.

‘Hang on, can I even call that a blade?’

As a matter of fact, the blade resembled the body of a centipede in that it was made up of dozens of connected sections.

As if they were done with their preparations, both of them looked at Jin-Woo simultaneously.

“Begin!”

The moment the signal was given, Beru dashed forward immediately.

“Kiiiiieehk-!!”

He closed the distance with a stupendous turn of speed and powerfully swung his claws; Bellion proceeded to block and let the attack slide past him, and then, as Beru's momentum took him further away, the current Grand-Marshal spun around to face the distancing ant soldier.

It was then.

‘.....!!’

Jin-Woo's eyes widened.

Bellion pointed with his sword and it suddenly stretched out like a long snake to fly towards Beru.

Shushushushu-!!

Beru urgently spun around and reflexively slapped the blade away.

CLANG!!

That was just the beginning.

Bellion used his sword like a whip and rained down a barrage of incredulous attacks at his target. The flexible body of the blade, carrying an enormous amount of Mana, danced and writhed according to its wielder's desire to pummel the ground and air surrounding Beru.

BOOM!! BANG!! BOOM! BANG!!

On the other hand, all Beru could do right now was to concentrate all his being to barely defend against the attacks.

“Kiiiieehk!”

While watching Bellion's attacks that had clearly surpassed the limitation imposed by the sword-type weapon, Jin-Woo imagined what would happen if it was him facing that barrage.

When he did, everything seemed to slow down to a crawl. Even then, even within this slowed-down time, Bellion's sword remained dangerously fast.

Jin-Woo's expression became even more serious.

His eyes, now emitting cold glare, followed and caught each and every slap and swish of the unpredictable sword dance. Upper left, right side, upper left again, then lower left, and to upper right....

...The him of his imagination evaded all the attacks and was standing before Bellion.

And then, he cut the soldier down. In Jin-Woo's imagination, Bellion's neck rolled to the ground. It only took a blink to get to that point.

Bellion momentarily sensed this chill-inducing feeling of his neck being cut off and flinched grandly as he took a look in Jin-Woo's direction.

‘Oops...’

He ended up being a bit carried away after discovering a rather interesting weapon; meeting Bellion's rather panicky gaze, Jin-Woo replied with an apologetic expression. But that only lasted for a moment.

Beru didn't miss this opening and viciously slapped the irritatingly-tenacious blade away, before dashing towards Bellion like a bolt of lightning.

“Kiiiieehcck!!”

STAB-!

Unfortunately – against Jin-Woo's own expectation, the one to stab his weapon in the midriff of his opponent was Bellion.

What an unexpectedly fast motor reflex!

On top of that, a scary power capable of destroying everything with each attack. This was Bellion, the soldier who wasn't left wanting for anything as the Grand-Marshal of the Shadow Army.

'...Still, one should never let one's guard down.'

It was a wee bit uncool to talk about one of his soldiers in this manner, but well, the truth was, the biggest plus point of an insect was its tenacious vitality.

Sure enough, Beru suddenly expanded its body size even with a sword stuck to his belly. He swung his humongous fist down on the head of his opponent.

KWA-BOOM!!

The power behind that punch was so great that a part of Bellion's helm broke off and scattered black smoke in the air.

"Kiiieehk!"

Almost right away, Beru followed up with his second attack. No, he tried to.

Beru's wrist was caught by Bellion's powerful grip just in time. The ant soldier tried to use his physical strength to yank his arm out, but too bad, the Grand-Marshal didn't even budge an inch.

In the meantime, Bellion cocked his free arm backwards. An enormous amount of Mana quickly gathered in that cocked arm.

A moment later.

BOOM-!!!

Beru's chest was punched powerfully and he flew backwards in a straight line. The shockwave generated at the same time from his flying figure swept up the forest surrounding him, and the trees were yanked out of the ground from their roots and all, before being flung away to the sides.

A long and straight path suddenly got carved out within the sea of trees.

"Kiiieehck!"

Beru hurriedly unfurled his wings to stop his body from being flung away endlessly. Unfortunately, just as he somehow managed to steady himself, Bellion had already arrived right before his face.

That was followed by a powerful slam towards the ground!

KWA-BOOM!!

Like a meteor crashing into earth, a huge crater caved in on the ground and Bellion lightly landed inside.

In the middle of this crater, Beru was hurriedly getting up to respond to his opponent. Now normally, any ol' regular enemy would have been torn to bits and shreds by now, but he had managed to withstand several of these attacks already.

Swiiiiish-!

Bellion used the back of his hand to slap away Beru's claws and just like that, smacked the ant soldier right on top of his head.

BOOM!!

That was the beginning of a dogfight.

Boom! Bang! Boom! Booom!!

Beru's attacks were only on the level of briefly disrupting Bellion's balance, but...

BOOM-!!

....Bellion's attacks each carried fatal power behind them.

Craaaack, crack!!

Cracks formed on Beru's exoskeleton as if they were about to shatter at any given moment.

"Kiiiehk!"

Even then, Beru desperately resisted until the end, not showing any hints of giving up on this fight. He tried to chomp down on Bellion's shoulder, but the latter simply pushed away the former before grasping Beru's neck.

Kwa-jeeck!!

Now rendered immobile, Beru writhed his entire body to free himself, but Bellion remained unmoved. The latter simply concentrated Mana once more on his free arm so he could attack for the last time and end this fight.

A horrifying amount of Mana, more than enough to easily shatter the head of a Dragon in one hit, gathered around and distorted the space around his arm.

With this, it'd be the end.

Bellion's cocked fist soon flew out towards Beru's face.

But, Jin-Woo reached out and grasped the deadly fist before it did, since he

didn't want to see Beru's head explode today.

Grab!

"That's enough."

Bellion realised that it was his liege stopping his fist and quickly withdrew his attack.

"My liege."

The Grand-Marshal hurriedly knelt down and bowed his head.

'...You did well.'

Jin-Woo praised Bellion with his eyes for not holding back anything and displaying his prowess like that. He then walked over to Beru collapsed on the ground.

"Kiieehhk, my king, I, I... kiieehk! I can still..."

"...."

Jin-Woo studied the faltering, unsteady Beru with pitying eyes before asking him out of genuine curiosity.

"Hey, Beru. Why are you so dead-set on the position of the Grand-Marshal?"

"Kiiehk, I, only, I wish to, become the Grand-Marshal and always stand next to my liege..."

Beru couldn't continue on due to his grief-stricken mind. Jin-Woo scratched the side of his head and offered up his reply.

"The Grand-Marshal can stand to my right, while you can stand to my left, right?"

"...!!!"

Only then did Beru realise that he could still stand next to his liege without being the Grand-Marshal, and his eyes opened up extra-round.

"...I am honoured by..."

"Stop it."

Leaving behind Beru and his emotion-induced tears filling up his eyes, Jin-Woo stood back up and spat out a helpless sigh. But then...

Another Shadow Soldier silently approached him. It was none other than Igrit, who had been listening to the conversation between Jin-Woo and Beru without saying anything.

“My liege, may I be granted an opportunity to challenge....”

As Igrit cautiously asked, Jin-Woo quickly replied as if he was expecting this already.

“You can stand behind me.”

“...!”

Igrit couldn't finish the rest of his sentence due to his liege's keen insight.

“Is that so... In the end, the Shadow Sovereign has become our enemy.”

The Dragon Emperor, currently in a humanoid form, was receiving the reports from the Sovereigns that had already descended to Earth. Only their voices softly echoed within this eternal darkness.

“I see. Fine. I shall deal with him personally. None of you make a move. We must prevent any further losses.”

The Dragon Emperor had fully analysed the situation and ended the connection to the Sovereigns.

Soon, there was no more sound.

This world, the gap between dimensions where nothing existed, was quickly filled up by empty silence. To the Sovereigns, this place was no different from hell itself, as there was nothing here to destroy.

That was why...

That was why, the Sovereign of Destruction, born from the darkness with a singular purpose of destroying every single existence, did its hardest to escape from this place.

And finally, the day it'd taste the fruit of its labour was literally around the corner.

The Dragon Emperor turned around and issued its command towards the darkness behind it.

“My troops. Ready yourselves for war.”

When it did, dozens of Ancient-grade Dragons, hundreds of Dragons, and tens of thousands of Dragonewts hidden within the darkness shot out heated glares from their eyes and roared out in unison.

Waaaaaaahhhh-!!



Chapter 229 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Late at night.

Jin-Woo climbed up a nameless hill and settled down on its summit. The bright moonlight illuminated the sea of trees below.

Under this pale light, he could see the Shadow Soldiers going about their business after he granted them free time to do whatever they wanted.

The first thing that caught his attention was Fangs who had already gigantified himself, and the three Dragons.

Dragons, carrying serious expressions, conversed in hushed tones with Fangs for a bit, before whispering something else amongst them. And then, the biggest Dragon stepped out of the group.

‘What are they trying to do now?’

He could see that every other Shadow Soldier in the vicinity of the four giants scatter away in panic and thought that the mood was getting a bit suspicious over there.

Soon, though, that big Dragon spat out a long pillar of flames into the sky.

Kuwaaaaaaaah-!!

Fangs smirked after checking out the thickness of the flames and took a step forward as well.

Kuuuuoooooh-!!!

An enormous pillar of flames exploded out from his mouth and rose up high to brightly illuminate the dark night sky. While the High Orcs were whistling and cheering on from the distance, the Dragon’s shoulders sagged visibly as he turned around to slink away.

It seemed that they decided to bet on who possessed the stronger flame attack.

However....

‘Isn’t it cheating to use the Bead of Avarice during such a bet?’

Perhaps knowing that he was in the wrong, Fangs was trying to sneak his Bead of Avarice back into his pocket. His gaze met Jin-Woo’s at the last

second, though, and he began scratching the back of his head as a sheepish grin formed on his face.

Jin-Woo chuckled good-heartedly at Fangs's thick skin and waved his hand about to signal that there was nothing to worry about.

Fangs grinned and bowed his head towards his liege several times.

What a peaceful sight this was.

Too bad, Jin-Woo wasn't feeling as content as his outward facial expression implied.

'.....'

He raised his head towards the sky. He could faintly sense the beings from another world getting ever closer to this planet.

He felt their ominous intentions.

He also sensed their strengths.

Jin-Woo's perception, now pushed to unfathomable heights, buzzed and stung from the stimulation received – even if it was only on the level of perceiving blurry, indistinct things beyond the thick veil of fog right now.

'It's unknown just when their approach will become distinct enough for me to see.'

The fact that the battle against them couldn't be avoided weighed heavily on his mind. Jin-Woo fell into deep thought before raising his head again.

Something kept tugging at his mind so he took a closer look, only to find his ant soldiers busy carrying stuff like lumber or stones around.

'...And what are they trying to do now?'

Before he could summon Beru here to ask for clarity, a voice came from behind first.

"It seems that they wish to construct a small-scale lodging that my liege can use to rest more comfortably."

This voice, too smooth for a dude with such a huge physique, belonged to the Grand-Marshal Bellion. Jin-Woo didn't look back and simply nodded his head.

"I guess it was Beru's idea."

The only Marshal in the Shadow Army capable of passionately doing something that no one asked him to was Beru. On the other hand, Igrit did everything asked of him perfectly. As for Bellion....

‘...I wonder.’

Jin-Woo knew practically next to nothing about Bellion. The sole bond tying him to Jin-Woo was the former Shadow Sovereign.

Naturally, he was inclined to learn more about his new Grand-Marshal in depth. Perhaps his thoughts had been transmitted, because Bellion wordlessly approached his master and stood behind him.

“My liege. May I inquire as to why you haven’t recalled the soldiers back into your shadow?”

Jin-Woo replied, his eyes still surveying the soldiers.

“I figured that they might be feeling too caged up. I mean, you guys had been stuck inside the place called the gap between dimensions for a long time before arriving here, right?”

“.....”

Bellion didn’t say anything for a while as if that answer was a bit beyond his expectations. So, Jin-Woo spoke to him first, instead.

“Aren’t you saddened by the fact that you won’t be able to meet the former Shadow Sovereign.... Osborne, again?”

Jin-Woo was painfully reminded of what it felt like to lose someone precious to you only a few days ago while watching his father disappear.

Bellion’s emotions should be similar to that. It wasn’t difficult for Jin-Woo to understand the sense of loss the loyal Grand-Marshal must’ve been feeling.

“I’ve been protecting the former liege’s side from the moment he decided to stop the Rulers rebelling against the Absolute Being. And after he acquired the power to rule over death, I was the very first one to volunteer to become his loyal soldier.”

Bellion explained himself in a calm manner, his voice unwavering.

“I have spent almost an eternity acting as his support, but not even once have I ever questioned his decisions.”

“That’s not what I was asking you about.”

Jin-Woo pointed out accurately to his soldier that he was asking about something else. Bellion took a bit of time to ponder his answer before revealing how he felt with a bit of hesitation.

“I haven’t yet given any thoughts on how I feel, my liege.”

“That’s why I’m giving you this chance. Come on. Take your time and

think about it.”

“...”

What ensued was a lengthy, weighty silence.

From this silent answer, Jin-Woo could sense Bellion’s true feelings. Although no words had been spoken, he heard enough to know already. Only then did he look behind at Bellion.

“I wish to know more about Osborne from your perspective. Would you like to tell me?”

“But, my liege. It might be a very long story.”

“That’s perfect. I was actually in need of a long story to kill some time until I felt sleepy, you see.”

Jin-Woo returned his gaze to his front, and Bellion quietly settled down next to his Sovereign.

“This event happened back when I was still a fruit of the World Tree.”

“A fruit?? You were... a fruit?!”

“Every single soldier of the heavens is born as a fruit on the branches of the World Tree. It is a truly gigantic tree large enough to blanket the entire sky with its branches alone.”

“Huh-uh.....”

As Jin-Woo focused on the story with an incomparably grand opening, the night continued to wear on.

Just before sunrise.

Before the darkness had the chance to completely lift up, Jin-Woo was leisurely jogging within the forest. He had developed the habit of running for ten kilometres every morning since from a long time ago.

He knew very well that there was no more Daily Quest available to him, yet his body moved on its own volition regardless.

While drinking in the crisp, cool air of the forest draped in the dawn’s light, Jin-Woo finally finished sorting out his thoughts.

‘...I should go back.’

He should inform the world on the existences of the eight massive armies that might arrive on this planet at any time now. He needed to tell them that

the real war was just around the corner.

Unfortunately, he wouldn't be able to guarantee the safety of everyone. He also couldn't promise whether the world would be able to retain its former appearance or not, either.

That was how stupendously powerful the Dragon Emperor was, as seen from the memories of the former Shadow Sovereign.

The Dragon Emperor and the Army of Destruction led by that guy reduced just about everything before them to piles of ashes. And such creatures set their sights on Earth as their next target to destroy.

That was why, not only him, but the entire world needed to prepare themselves.

The System didn't need to inform him but he still stopped his running precisely on the tenth-kilometre mark. This was yet another habit ingrained in his flesh after doing the Daily Quest almost every single day.

The truth was, though, habits weren't the only things ingrained in his body now. He learned so much about fighting, and also, inherited incredible power to boot.

The final gift left behind by the Shadow Sovereign, who yearned to return to the eternal rest, had now transformed into 'opportunity'.

Jin-Woo turned towards the direction where the rising sun's rays were pointing at. From the ridge of a distant mountain, the morning sun was greeting yet another day.

Jin-Woo was now able to use Shadow Exchange freely. The first place he headed to was inside the building where the Ah-Jin Guild was located.

He chose not to enter the offices straight away, in consideration of his employees' hearts tumbling down to their pits in shock, but thanks to his actions, he ended up running into an unfamiliar woman stepping outside the office's entrance, instead.

Although she was unfamiliar to him, it was as if he had seen her somewhere before, too. She must've felt the same, because, just as they were about to brush past each other, she abruptly turned around and engaged Jin-Woo in a chat.

“Uhm, excuse me. By any chance....”

“...?”

He wordlessly stared at her. She flinched for some reason and while saying **“Never mind”** she hurriedly escaped out of his view.

‘Well, she was a bit anti-climatic, wasn’t she?’

Jin-Woo entered the Ah-Jin Guild offices next.

“Uh?”

“Eh???”

Every single employee froze stiff with their eyes wide open as if they had just seen something they shouldn’t have.

‘Should I have said good morning while walking in or something?’

With things being like this, there was no point in him entering from the outside of the offices, now was there?

Even before someone had the chance to scold these wayward employees for making such faces when their boss had stepped into the office....

...Yu Jin-Ho finally discovered Jin-Woo and rushed towards him with a bright expression.

“Hyung-niiiiim!!”

Before sharing that welcoming greeting, though, Jin-Woo decided to solve his curiosity first.

“Who was that lady walking out of the office just now?”

He was about to add **“She seemed way too familiar”**, but then, Yu Jin-Ho’s reply easily solved the mystery and there was no need to say anything else.

“Ah, her? She’s my older sister, hyung-nim. I’ve been avoiding answering my family’s phone calls, and she barged in here as a result. By the way, did she inconvenience you or some such....??”

“No, nothing like that.”

That was why she came across so familiar – she was Yu Jin-Ho’s sibling. Jin-Woo glanced back at the office’s exit and nodded his head before asking again.

“What brought her here, though?”

“Oh, that....”

Yu Jin-Ho hesitated for a bit before speaking up while cautiously studying Jin-Woo’s reactions.

“Remember, hyung-nim? I was standing next to you just before the

super-massive Gate opened up.”

“Yeah, you were.”

“Looks like that scene was caught on camera, hyung-nim.”

Jin-Woo roughly figured out what happened next in his head.

“My family wants me to hand in my Hunter licence and quit doing dangerous stuff since I’ve become the Vice-Chair of the Ah-Jin Guild.”

As he thought. Since the Guild’s Master, Seong Jin-Woo, was already a Hunter, there was no strict need for its Vice-Master Yu Jin-Ho to stay as a Hunter, as well.

There was a point to what the boy’s family said out of a genuine concern for his welfare. However, Jin-Woo already knew what was on Yu Jin-Ho’s mind, so he didn’t even try to convince the kid.

‘I’m sure he’d say something similar to him wanting to remain as a Hunter and stand next to me.’

Sure, Jin-Woo was responsible for sorting out most of their troubles, but still, they had gone through many life-or-death struggles together and that made Yu Jin-Ho come across as quite praiseworthy in Jin-Woo’s eyes. He reached out and quickly ruffled up the boy’s hair.

“H-hyung-nim?”

Jin-Woo left behind the flustered Yu Jin-Ho and headed into his office so he could change out of the clothes he’d been wearing for the past few days.

“Hey, I’m gonna use the company car for a bit.”

“Oh? Should I drive for you, hyung-nim?”

“Nah, it’s fine. I’ll be quick.”

“Where are you headed off to, hyung-nim?”

“The Hunter’s Association.”

Yu Jin-Ho urgently tried to stop Jin-Woo as the latter took the keys, but...

“Huh? Hyung-nim, there are reporters camping outside....”

‘...So it might get really annoying’ – that’s what he wanted to say, but Jin-Woo had already escaped out of the office by then.

And sure enough, reporters sacrificing their sleep and food for that one chance at a scoop were camping outside the building and waiting for Jin-Woo to show up, their faces looking wane and gaunt like a crowd of zombies.

Just as their wait had been long, their reaction after discovering him was unbelievably explosive as well.

“Hunter Seong!! It’s Hunter Seong!!”

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo has shown up!”

“Is the camera on??”

However, they couldn’t continue yapping for long.

“Uh, uh??”

“Eh, eh??”

They all looked down at themselves with expressions of someone not understanding what was happening to them, before shifting their gazes this way and that.

Only then did they realise what was going on. They realised that, not just themselves, but everyone nearby was floating up in the air about ten centimetres off the ground.

“B-but, what the....?!”

Fortunately, this sudden bout of suspicious flight didn’t last long.

“Heot!!”

The reporters were all settled back down on the ground at the same time. Too bad for them, Jin-Woo was long gone by then. They quickly exchanged flustered gazes with each other, before waves of helpless laughter broke out.

“Ha, hahah....”

“Well, I’ll be.”

A phenomenon that rendered them speechless; they now had one more thing to add to the article about Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.

Jin-Woo drove ‘Bonggo’ straight to the Hunter’s Association.

He had called Woo Jin-Cheol ahead of setting off, so he wasn’t surprised to see the Association President and the employees waiting for his arrival outside the building.

But, then...

‘...What’s going on here?’

The look on Woo Jin-Cheol’s face was rather suspicious. It was the same story for the employees next to him.

While Jin-Woo was climbing out of the van, Woo Jin-Cheol urgently walked over to him and asked with a trembling voice.

“Seong Hunter-nim.... By any chance, have you heard of the breaking news yet?”



Chapter 230 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

‘...This is so strange.’

Yu Jin-Ho’s older sister, Yu Jin-Hui, was returning home empty-handed due to her little brother’s stubbornness. As she was driving home, though, she suddenly pulled up to the side of the road and cautiously parked her car there.

Screech.

That man she ran into while exiting the Ah-Jin Guild offices...

‘...Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.’

There should be no one in South Korea who didn’t know what he looked like. So, even though she had never met him in person until now, it was easy to explain why it felt as if she did.

Someone who didn’t sweat over such things would have accepted that explanation and move on. However, she was the eldest daughter of Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan, a man famed for never forgetting a face after meeting a person only once. Although not as sharp as her father, she too didn’t forget a person’s face that easily.

The contour of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s face, the one she briefly glimpsed while raising her head as they brushed past each other, came across as distinctly familiar.

‘Just when would that be....?’

She combed through her memories until her eyes inexplicably grew extra large.

‘Could it have been then?’

Back then, in front of the hospital.

There was that time near the entrance of a certain hospital where her father had been admitted to, when a man possessing the same facial contours brushed past her.

Why didn’t she recognise him back then?

Could it have been because her mind was in a mess after her father had collapsed earlier in the day?

‘Right, definitely.’

The man leaving the hospital that day simply had to be Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.

And a short while later, she received a phone call telling her that her father, diagnosed to never open his eyes again, had precisely done just that.

Was she even allowed to treat this as a mere coincidence?

Yu Jin-Hui’s entire body was suddenly overcome with a case of powerful goosebumps. She quickly pulled out her smartphone and began dialling her father’s number.

Beep, beep, beep...

But, before she could finish dialling his number, her fingers came to a stuttering halt.

‘What am I even trying to do here....?’

Just because she ran into Hunter Seong Jin-Woo in front of the hospital that day, she somehow ended up linking him to her father’s miraculous recovery.

What a grand delusion this was.

Yu Jin-Hui could only scold her logical reasoning that seemed to have taken a leave of absence for a moment there with a long, long sigh. She was about to start the car again, but then...

...With excellent timing, her phone went off.

[Secretary ahjussi.]

After confirming who it was, a smile floated up on Yu Jin-Hui’s lips. Without a doubt, her dad became curious about the result of her visit to the Ah-Jin Guild and asked the ahjussi to find out from her.

‘Back then or even now, Father just can’t be honest with the matters of his kids, can he?’

Yu Jin-Hui swallowed back her laughter and answered her phone.

“Hello?”

And so, the conversation proceeded exactly as she imagined it would. But then, just before it was about to end, Yu Jin-Hui thought it’d be a good idea and quickly asked Secretary Kim.

“Ah, ahjussi? By any chance, is dad a close acquaintance with Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

Secretary Kim's surprised voice came out from the phone's speaker next.

At this unexpectedly intense response, Yu Jin-Hui panicked slightly and ended up replying while feeling a bit lost.

"It's nothing in particular, but, I remember seeing Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim exiting from the hospital on that day, you see. I was wondering if he was also there to visit dad while he was admitted there."

"Y-yes. Just before I got the call to inform me that dad had woken up, we brushed past each other in front of the hospital."

"No, I'm pretty sure. I couldn't remember who it was because I wasn't thinking straight back then but now.... But, why do you sound so agitated like that, ahjussi?"

He didn't say the usual 'goodbye, speak to you soon', but 'will call again later'?

'Did I say something wrong?'

Yu Jin-Hui tilted her head in confusion. Before she could put her phone down, though, it rang noisily again. She confirmed who the caller was and her brows rose up just a little.

'...Dad is personally calling me?'

Only after seeing the number for Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan on her phone's screen did she realise that this matter couldn't be simple at all.

Could it be that her father's recovery and Hunter Seong Jin-Woo were related in some way, just as she imagined earlier?

She cautiously answered the call.

"Dad?"

Beijing International Airport.

The biggest and busiest airport in the whole of China was now bustling even more than ever before, all thanks to a huge throng of people present today.

There was only one reason for this. The best of the best Chinese Hunters that went to lend aid to the Koreans were coming back home today, that was why.

It would be the same story in other countries as well, but at least in China, the highly-ranked Hunters were treated as superstars famous enough to

summon up a sea of adoring fans wherever they showed up.

And it went without saying that the leader of the support team, the Hunter ranked as Seven-Star, Liu Zhigeng's popularity couldn't be described with mere words alone.

One of the reporters doing her job surveying the atmosphere of the airport spotted Liu Zhigeng and raised her voice.

“Ah! There he is! Liu Zhigeng Hunter-nim has entered the airport's interior!”

Waaaaah-!!

His fans filling up the airport cheered on loudly. While holding his now-trademark pair of longswords in one hand, he waved his other hand lightly towards his adoring fans.

Kyaaaah~!!

Liu Zhigeng's dignified atmosphere that simply oozed the charm of an older man caused the much-younger female fans to bounce up and down and even scream in uncontrollable excitement.

The special team of Hunters followed after their leader and quickly entered the airport next.

Waaaah-!!

The gasps and cries of awe emitted by many onlookers, moved by their emotions after witnessing the Hunters they only got to see through TV screens until then, quickly filled up the airport's vast interior.

Meanwhile, the reporter looked into the camera with the green light switched on.

“Our proud Hunters are now entering the airport, having returned from their trip to support South Korea.”

As her bright expression alluded to, the overall result of this trip was being seen as satisfactory from the Chinese government's point of view.

They got to claim that they didn't forsake their neighbouring nation's troubles and also got to save their face when their elite Hunters volunteered to fight against the super-massive Gate in Seoul's skies.

Was that all?

With this particular matter resolving in the way it did, not one Hunter from the special team travelling to lend their support got hurt. They saved face, and also earned some practical benefits, too. Two things rolled onto their lap, so to

speak.

Many Chinese clapped their hands in admiration at Liu Zhigeng who personally persuaded China's top Hunters and formed this special team.

However, there would always be those with dissatisfaction regardless of where it was. There were quite a few who tried to slander Liu Zhigeng or South Korea through the anonymity of the internet.

Comments that contained rather toxic contents even at a casual glance filled up the live broadcast's ticker tape being updated in real time at the bottom of the screen.

The reporter, subbing for many people and their curiosity, stood before Liu Zhigeng to do her job.

“Many people are cheering you on for your brave decision, Liu Hunter-nim. On the other hand, those questioning why we had to aid the Koreans are also quite a few in number as well. By any chance, do you have anything you'd like to say to them, Liu Hunter-nim?”

Liu Zhigeng took his sunglasses off and glared at the reporter.

“Who is walking around spewing something that stupid?”

“Pardon?”

Not paying any heed to the reporter and her wide-open eyes, Liu Zhigeng continued on with what he wanted to say.

“Are their heads nothing more than decorations? Can't they read a map? Don't they know which country is next if you move your eyeballs up from Korea?”

“Ah....”

“One Giant monster that wasn't stopped in Japan crossed the sea and almost made it onto the Chinese mainland. I heard that the audience rating back then rewrote the history books, so surely, they must've seen it, too.”

Liu Zhigeng glared straight at the camera next.

“What I am saying here is that something similar could've happened, but on a far, far greater scale. I and my comrades agreed with that notion and we went there to prevent that from happening.”

Liu Zhigeng's torrent of harsh language put an immediate end to the stream of toxic comments.

He continued to speak, his voice rising up higher and his glare getting sharper as if he was addressing the toxic commenters directly.

“If there are people still spewing crap like that, then tell them this. I, Liu Zhigeng, am not confident of stopping an event that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo also failed to stop. That’s why we went there to help him out, so if you’re unhappy about that, why don’t you try and catch monsters with your own....”

Liu Zhigeng continued with his tirade which made his supporters really happy, but then, he abruptly stopped talking for some reason. Could it be that he finally realised the camera was rolling?

Of course not.

Liu Zhigeng was probably the only person in the whole of China capable of pouring out insults and swearing on live TV without worrying about repercussions. But then, someone like him had been rendered utterly speechless as he took a look outside the airport.

Just what could have happened?

The first person to look was the reporter. up were the Hunters and their supporting staff behind Liu Zhigeng. And eventually, everyone gathered here in the airport – their gazes all shifted to the outside.

And after witnessing the change, their eyeballs began quaking greatly.

Liu Zhigeng would never get shocked by any ordinary little thing, but he couldn’t stop a soft gasp of surprise leak out of his mouth.

“Oh, my god.....”

Above Beijing’s skies, a massive darkness was slowly descending.

“Seong Hunter-nim.... By any chance, have you heard of the breaking news yet?”

Jin-Woo shook his head.

After the ‘raid’ of the super-massive Gate, he headed straight to Japan and made it back to Korea only a little while ago before coming to the Hunter’s Association straight away. He didn’t have any opportunity to check out the news or any mass media coverage, really.

Besides that, if something serious happened while he was away, Yu Jin-Ho would’ve informed him the first thing after he entered the office.

Seeing how grave the expressions on the faces of the Association employees, even Jin-Woo’s own expression hardened.

“Did something happen?”

Woo Jin-Cheol pulled his phone out and showed him the real-time footage being recorded right at that moment.

Eight super-massive Gates all revealed themselves in various parts of the world. Half in fear and half feeling mystified by this development, people were filming these Gates and uploading the footage on social media. Breaking news poured in from all parts of the world.

Gulp.

The sound of Woo Jin-Cheol swallowing his saliva rang out loudly from Jin-Woo's side. He didn't mind that and continued to watch each and every one of the video clips.

“Hunter-nim... Could these be also....?”

“No, definitely not.”

Jin-Woo quickly cut him off. He made sure to drill home the point that these new Gates had no relations to him whatsoever.

Woo Jin-Cheol had been secretly hoping that these Gates would also end up as nothing too serious, so his complexion darkened fast enough to be noticed in real time from that grim reply.

What if hundreds of thousands of monsters poured out from all those Gates, just like how it had been with Seoul?

Isn't that the same thing as announcing the end of humanity?

While Woo Jin-Cheol shuddered from the enormity of it all, Jin-Woo finished watching the footage and spoke to him.

“Let's change our location first.”

“Ah, yes.”

They quickly got to the Association President's office and settled down on the couches facing each other.

“You said you had something to tell me....?”

Woo Jin-Cheol cautiously spoke, and Jin-Woo replied to him immediately.

“Association President. Do you trust me?”

Woo Jin-Cheol nodded his head.

“Yes, of course, I trust you.”

“In that case, I hope you will believe everything I'm about to show you.”

“Excuse me?”

Just like how the former Shadow Sovereign had done, Jin-Woo reached out with his index finger and placed it against Woo Jin-Cheol's forehead. The moment his finger touched, darkness filled up the older man's eyes, and countless images brushed past within his vision.

“Heok!!”

Jin-Woo showed the necessary amount of information to the Association President and nothing more. That would be – the Rulers and their plans, as well as the Sovereigns. And then, the armies those Sovereigns were summoning to this world, as well.

“Pant, pant, pant....”

Woo Jin-Cheol had witnessed the powers of these Sovereigns with his own eyes now. Once the images stopped flashing by, he began gasping out breathlessly.

“This, this can't be.... Just how can such a thing....”

Woo Jin-Cheol had believed 'it'.

He believed that God had gifted special powers to a small number of selected individuals in order to safeguard humanity. He believed that this was precisely the reason why Hunters had to fight against the monsters and protect other people.

But, if everything Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had shown him was true, then....

He had been too arrogant. He had made a grave mistake.

Hunters, no, the 'Awakened' were simply the process of cultivating a small number of humans that might survive the aftermath of the true war about to take place.

This was not a war between humanity and Sovereigns. It was a war between Sovereigns and Rulers, two organisations boasting unimaginable might. Indeed, it was they who were going to fight.

However, a huge variable entered into this fray in the form of a certain man.

And now, with the armies of the Sovereigns arriving much faster than expected to this planet, mankind had only one being they could place their hopes on – the unexpected variable.

“How can this be....”

Woo Jin-Cheol's fingertips trembled as he raised his tear-filled gaze.

“Seong Hunter-nim.... Are you planning to fight these things? All by

yourself?”

Even if the enemy possessed a powerful force, he couldn't just give up without trying something first now, could he? At least, Jin-Woo had never lived his life in that manner.

That was why he quietly nodded his head.

“Yes.”

Woo Jin-Cheol wanted to help him in any shape or form, so he quickly asked.

“In that case, what should we... No, what should I do to help you, Hunter-nim?”

Now that the expected question came out, Jin-Woo calmly replied with the answer he had thought of before arriving here.

“Can you gather the representatives of the world in one location, please?”



Chapter 231 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The Director of America's Hunter Bureau, David Brennan, was about to go insane with frustration at the moment.

“What did the Korean Hunter's Association say??”

“They haven't made any official announcements yet, sir.”

“Then, what the hell are you here for?!”

“...S-sir?”

But, didn't the director summon him into the office? The subordinate could only stand there and blink his eyes. The director's irritation shot up to the top of his head and he loudly yelled out.

“Aren't you supposed to get a reply from the Korean Association President, even if you resort to wringing his neck?! Isn't that your godd*mn job?!”

“I, I'm sorry, sir!”

“Get the hell out of here and find out what the f*ck is going on! Right now!!”

The director chased the Chief of the Intelligence Department out of his office, but, as if his anger hadn't cooled down at all, he continued to seethe for a long time.

The super-massive Gate, judged to be much bigger than the one that appeared in Seoul's skies, had shown up in Canada, an allied nation that shared a border with the United States of America.

It'd not take much time for the flames of destruction spreading from Canada to reach American soil.

In the best possible scenario that he could think of, this Gate crisis would also end in a similar fashion to the one in Seoul's sky. And if the monsters Hunter Seong Jin-Woo commanded fell out from there, then that would be even better.

‘However, the real problem is....’

The one holding all the answers, Hunter Seong himself, as well as the

Korean Hunter's Association, had been keeping mum until now.

Three hours passed by since the super-massive Gates appeared in various parts of the world. Meanwhile, the American government was demanding an answer from the Hunter Bureau.

'To think, one of the greatest intelligence agencies in America, the Hunter Bureau, has no choice but wait for a reply from the Korean Hunter's Association....'

Just who'd have imagined that such a thing could happen? No wonder the director was anxiously jumping up and down on his spot.

Beep.

The director continued to spew out one sigh after another before noticing that there was a bleeping light on the phone. He snatched the receiver up and barked at it.

"What is it?!"

"Tell him I'm not here."

SLAM!

The director slammed the receiver down as if he was throwing it away and dazedly stared at the ceiling. But then, the Chief of the Intelligence Department, the guy he just chased out, breathlessly rushed back inside the office.

"Director!"

"How dare you crawl back into my office already!!"

The director yanked the receiver up in order to throw it, prompting the chief to quickly raise his arms up.

"T-the Korean Hunter's Association has sent us a communique!"

Almost instantly, the director's expression did a 180, with a bright smile now etched on his face.

"You see!! All you had to do was just do it!"

The director put the receiver down and approached the chief.

"Okay, so. What did they say?"

"Ah, well, the thing is.... They said that, if we want to learn more about the super-massive Gates, we should go to Korea right away."

"..."

Both the director and the Chief of the Intelligence Department wordlessly stared at each other. They remained standing face to face like that for a bit.

Finally managing to grasp hold of the thin thread of his reasoning, the director muttered out a question.

“Who? Who should go there?”

“They say it doesn’t matter, as long as it’s a representative designated by the government.”

“.....”

At that moment...

Beeeeep.

The director noticed yet another light blinking on his phone and picked the receiver up.

Click.

He quickly put the receiver down and addressed the Chief of the Intelligence Department with a determined expression.

“Tell them I’ll be there.”

“Sir?”

Since the chief seemed to be confused by something, the director began enunciating every single word so his subordinate could understand him just a bit better.

“I. Will. Go. To. Korea. As. America’s. Representative!”

Representatives from every country that received the summons issued by the Korean Hunter’s Association quickly climbed aboard the waiting planes.

What an astonishing change this was.

Less than two years ago, Korea’s overall Hunter strength was so pathetic that they even lost a newbie rank S Hunter to America. But now, they were summoning the leaders of the world to their doorsteps.

No, only a year ago, they couldn’t even take care of the dungeon break on their own territory, Jeju Island, and became a laughing stock in Japan.

But then, with the entrance of a Hunter who had far surpassed the classifications of upper, top, elite, or whatever, and stepped into the ranks of transcendence, everything changed.

The man who made every monster pouring out from one of the super-massive Gates obey him; if it was that man, then he might be able to explain the identity of these super-massive Gates covering up the skies all over the globe.

With that, understanding what happened a few days ago would also come about naturally as well.

The keys to everything were held by just one person. The problem here was, they couldn't use force or concessions to coax the keys out from their opponent this time.

Just who would be able to use force to make him talk, for instance?

Even if you could do something about his individual combat power that defeated a Special Authority-rank Hunter, there was the small matter of a hundred thousand-plus summons right behind him waiting for their turn.

It was an impossible task, in other words.

That was why bigshots perfectly suited for representing their countries such as presidents, prime ministers, premiers, ministers, directors of Hunter-related government bodies, as well as leaders of various Hunter's Associations, were making a move after the Korean Association requested them to come.

“Has there been anyone else informing us of their intentions to come?”

“No, sir. It's still 152 countries, as reported in the morning's briefing, sir.”

“Okay.”

The Association President Woo Jin-Cheol was personally going through every single report detailing the progress of the situation. The emergency response conference hall outfitted for the raid of the super-massive Gate was coming in handy even now.

“Sir, the representative from Hungary has just touched down in the airport.”

“Who's coming from Hungary?”

“Their President, Yadessi Arnor, has personally come, sir.”

“D*mn....”

When an important dignitary from overseas came for a visit, a person holding a similar office was supposed to go out to welcome him. That was the established etiquette.

Unfortunately, the Hunter's Association simply lacked the leeway to mind

such etiquette every single time at this moment. Association President Woo Jin-Cheol formed a rueful expression for a little while before issuing new orders.

“Guide him to a suitable hotel.”

“Yes, sir.”

The Association employee replied crisply and was about to turn around to leave, but then, it felt as if he was hesitating about something else. So, Woo Jin-Cheol stopped poring over the documents to raise his head again.

“Mm? Is there something else?”

“Uhm....”

The employee deliberated for a bit more before he summoned up enough courage.

“Sir, what did you hear from Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim yesterday inside the President’s office? I’ve never seen you so pale before, you see.”

The thing was, this employee got to realise for the first time that a person’s complexion could pale to that extent after looking at Woo Jin-Cheol’s face yesterday.

Just what sort of a conversation did they share? The employee simply couldn’t forget that look on his boss’s face for the whole night, so, although he knew he was being impolite, he still had to ask and satisfy his curiosity now.

Sure enough, Woo Jin-Cheol’s expression hardened like a rock.

“S-sir, forgive me. I asked you something unnecessary....”

“No, it’s not that. I am not feeling unhappy about you asking me.”

It was just that, he ended up recalling the scenes that unfolded from Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s fingertip, that was all.

The army of frenzied Dragons rushing out from the other side of darkness. And then, a truly humongous Dragon following after them.

It was so huge, in fact, it seemed to move so slowly as if time had come to a standstill, even though it was flying at a similar sort of speed compared to the rest of the Dragon army.

It possessed an incredible aura that not even the combined might of every single Hunter in the world attacking together at the same time could even scratch. And then, that overwhelming pressure it emitted, something that might easily burn away everything in the world with merely a single breath.

That creature possessed both of those.

Simply looking at it made him dizzy.

He didn't want to ever face that thing, regardless of the level of power he could gain, regardless of the promised reward at the end waiting for him.

'I can't do it....'

Because of that, he respected Hunter Seong Jin-Woo even more as the latter wasn't planning to run away but rather, stay and fight, even though he knew that such creatures existed.

'Wait, now that I think about it, what is Hunter Seong Jin-Woo doing right now?'

There was still some time left before the representatives of the various nations would arrive.

Woo Jin-Cheol suddenly became curious as to how Jin-Woo would spend his downtime, so he called out to the employee turning around to leave his office.

"Oh, by the way. Do you know where Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim is at the moment?"

"Currently, we believe that he's resting within his family home, sir."

"Ta-da!"

Jin-Woo placed the pot of piping-hot kimchi stew he cooked himself on top of the dining table. Jin-Ah's expression brightened in an instant.

"Wow, smells so good!"

On the other hand, mom looked rather apologetic for letting her busy son cook her food like this.

"I should've done this, you know...."

Jin-Woo grinned and replied in an unhurried manner.

"I just wanted to show you the cooking skills I got to polish in the last couple of years, Mom."

Jin-Woo pleaded and persuaded her, and finally managed to wrestle the control of the kitchen away from his mom. This was his ambitious end result.

Swept up by her son's continuous encouragement that she should have a taste, his mother smiled and picked up her spoon.

“Fuu-.”

She carefully blew on the hot stew and placed a spoonful inside her mouth. Her eyes opened into a round shape almost right away. Jin-Ah began boisterously yapping on from her side.

“Mom, how was it? It’s really good, right?”

“Oh my goodness.”

Seeing how his mom looked surprised, Jin-Woo couldn’t help but strut around a bit.

“I also didn’t know that oppa had a talent in cooking, you know? Mom, try this one, too. Oppa is really good at making side dishes.”

While his sister was relentlessly praising his cooking skills while even forgetting to wipe the bits of rice off her lips, Jin-Woo noticed that his mother’s expression was slowly changing for some reason and carefully asked her.

“Mother?”

She gently set her spoon aside and asked back.

“Jin-Woo.... Isn’t there something I should be worried about?”

Jin-Woo did his very best to maintain a bright expression and played dumb.

“What do you mean by that, Mom?”

“Your dad, he used to prepare meals for me whenever he was planning to participate in dangerous missions, you see.”

“...”

Her son had never done something like this, even when he was about to head to Japan in order to deal with those Giant monsters, or even when that gigantic Gate opened up in Seoul. But now that he did, his mom began to get worried all of a sudden.

A woman’s intuition – no, it was more to do with a mother’s intuition, instead.

‘Like father, like son, is it. I even resemble him in things like this, too....’

Jin-Woo very briefly spat out his complaint that wasn’t really a complaint in his head and shook his head towards his mother.

“There’s no such thing, Mom.”

Whether she wanted to remain as a source of strength for her son as he tried

to force a smile on his face, or maybe she really bought his excuse, it was hard to tell. But still, she smiled in reply and picked up her spoon again.

Jin-Ah had been observing the conversation between her oppa and her mom while lightly biting the end of her spoon, before breaking out into a grin herself and resuming her meal.

Around the time the meal was coming to an end...

[My liege.]

....He heard Bellion's voice.

[As you have commanded, soldiers are now in position.]

'Got it.'

As if he was waiting for this chance, Beru also raised his voice.

[Oh, my king. The lodging specifically prepared for you has been completed as well.]

'.....Sure thing. Thanks.'

He didn't ask it to be built, in the first place, though.

Jin-Woo finished receiving the reports from his Marshals and slowly got up from his seat.

"Thanks for the meal."

But then, his hands reaching down to pick up the empty plates came to an abrupt halt after sensing the noises coming from the outside.

'Footsteps of four people....'

He could also hear their hearts racing wildly from excitement, too. Although such categorisation didn't mean anything to him, all four of them were not Hunters but regular people.

'What could this be?'

Surely, there wouldn't be any insane robber wanting to attack the house of a rank S Hunter, now would there?

Also, the entrance of the apartment building was being guarded by the agents from the Monitoring Division due to the consideration from the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol, so no reporters could come up here, either.

Jin-Woo couldn't figure it out, and soon, his ears were greeted by the sounds of the doorbell.

Ding-dong.

“Let me answer that.”

He quickly dissuaded his mother from getting up and headed over to the front door.

Clunk.

The first thing he saw after opening the door was three well-built young men kitted out in black suits as if they were from some intelligence agency or some such.

‘Doesn’t look like they are from the Hunter Bureau, though....’

Jin-Woo scanned their attire briefly before calmly asking them.

“Can I help you with something?”

When he did, the trio of well-built young men stepped aside and another man standing behind them slowly moved to the front.

“Seong Hunter-nim... I apologise for coming to see you unannounced like this. But, can I speak to you in private for a little while?”

Jin-Woo recognised who it was and his voice rose up a little.

“.....Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan?”



Chapter 232 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

His heightened emotion was all-too-clear to see on Chairman Yu's face.

Regardless of what he wanted to say, it shouldn't be discussed here. Jin-Woo remembered his mom and little sister, and took a quick look towards the dining table, before shifting his gaze back to Chairman Yu.

“...”

The older man was anxiously waiting for Jin-Woo's reply. After a short deliberation, the latter's lips finally parted open.

“If it's somewhere private to quietly talk, then, well....”

Chairman Yu's expression brightened and a genuine smile quickly formed on his face.

“Allow me to guide you to such a place. Shall we get going, then?”

Jin-Woo went back inside the apartment and told his mom that he'd be out for a bit, put on his coat, and made his way down to the lobby of the building while being accompanied by Chairman Yu and his entourage.

And as expected, the front entrance of the building was occupied by the reporters that had set up a camp there. Most likely, the three well-built young men were Chairman Yu's bodyguards here to overcome the wall of the reporters.

As for those said reporters, they were far too busy shouting out angrily while pushing and shoving against the Monitoring Division's Hunters protecting the entrance.

“What the hell?? How can this make sense? It's fine for the Chairman of Yujin Construction, but we aren't allowed to go inside?!”

“He's a guest coming to visit Hunter Seong Jin-Woo? Why can't reporters be guests, too?! We're also guests from now on!! We're guests!!”

“Aaah, is that so? The biggest financial supporter of the Hunter's Association is okay, but reporters are not, is that it?!”

The reporters crazily pushed and shoved forwards as if they were planning to stampede past the wall of humans were it not for them being Hunters and not regular people.

“Step aside!!”

Things were so bad that the Hunters of the Monitoring Division looked rather pitiable right now.

“Didn’t Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim announce that he won’t do any interviews?!”

“Hey, over there! Step back!!”

“If you wish to visit Hunter-nim’s residence, you must go and obtain a permit from the Association first!!”

Since they were up against regular people, they couldn’t resort to using their real strengths, so the agents from the Monitoring Division could only sweat profusely under the current circumstances. Jin-Woo studied them with sympathetic eyes and eventually, extended his hands out.

“Uh, uh-uh??”

The reporters began floating up into the air.

“S-save me!”

This time, forget about ten centimetres, Jin-Woo lifted the reporters ten metres up in the air. When he stepped outside the entrance, Hunters quickly bowed their heads to welcome him.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!”

“Hunter-nim!”

Compared to these Hunters who didn’t get too surprised by what was happening – as if they were familiar with this whole thing already – the eyes of Chairman Yu and his three bodyguards went extra round from the sheer unbridled shock.

“O-oh, my god....”

The businessman’s gaze was fixed to the reporter helplessly flailing in the air. He could see their complexion paling greatly, too. For the first time ever, Chairman Yu felt sorry for these people, even though he often times felt sick and tired of dealing with them in the past.

The person in charge of this batch of the Monitoring Division’s agents walked over to Jin-Woo and although there was a troubled expression on his face, his lips began forming a smile, as well.

“Hunter-nim... If you keep doing this, it’s going to come and bite us in the rear later.”

“Well, they were getting a bit too noisy to be left alone, you see.”

“Haha.”

The reporters were continuously shouting something out, but even before anyone had noticed it, a barrier made out of magical energy was surrounding them to cut off all sounds made by their mouths.

The person in charge looked up at them for a little while, before asking Jin-Woo.

“How long will you keep them up there this time?”

“I’m thinking about something like five minutes, so that they can cool their heads up there.”

The Hunters from the Monitoring Division burst out in laughter after hearing his declaration to rewrite the existing record.

Wahahahah-!

“Hey! Hush!”

The person in charge did his best to suppress his own laughter and chided his subordinates before replying politely back to Jin-Woo.

“I pray that you make sure no reporters are harmed today.”

“You don’t have to worry about that.”

It’s been a while since he had become a master in ‘Ruler’s Authority’, or the technique to move Mana to influence an object. Even if he wasn’t here, the Mana would safely lower the reporters at a later time.

‘Nothing I can do about them feeling a bit sick, though...’

However, not only did they try to barge into his home even though his private details were being protected, they even tried to raise a huge ruckus as well, so this level of a warning shouldn’t pose a problem at all.

Screech.

Soon, the waiting limousine Chairman Yu brought along came to a stop before them, and both him and Jin-Woo climbed into the back seat.

The vehicle smoothly glided forward and headed off to Chairman Yu’s private residence.

Chairman Yu guided Jin-Woo to the drawing room of his mansion, which should probably be the quietest place they could talk in. They settled down on

the couches while facing each other.

“I’d like not to be interrupted during my chat with Seong Hunter-nim.”

“Understood, Chairman.”

After he sent away everyone near their vicinity, Jin-Woo broke the ice first.

“How did you find out?”

There shouldn’t have been any evidence of him helping Chairman Yu out. So, where could he have made a mistake? As Jin-Woo stared with a curious gaze, Chairman Yu began telling him the truth of what happened.

“My daughter saw you leaving the hospital on that day.”

If it was Chairman Yu’s daughter, then....

‘Ah.’

Jin-Woo recalled Yu Jin-Ho’s older sister, the one he ran into in front of his Guild office. He thought that she looked kinda familiar back then. But to think, she was the same person as the one he walked past in front of the hospital that Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan had been admitted to.

Realising that the actions he thought were watertight had been undone by a simple coincidence, Jin-Woo could only form a helpless smile.

At the same time, Chairman Yu was carefully studying Jin-Woo’s expression, and after seeing that smile, he felt greatly relieved.

‘What a relief.’

Even if the deed was done out of goodwill, Jin-Woo tried to hide it so Yu Myung-Hwan was inwardly worried that the young Hunter would get angry at him for exposing the secret like this. He wouldn’t even be able to look the other party in the eye if he somehow ended up displeasing his life’s saviour.

Thankfully, contrary to his worries, Jin-Woo didn’t look unhappy at all. Indeed, what a wonderful turn of events this was for Chairman Yu.

“As I expected, it was you, Seong Hunter-nim.”

“Yes, it was.”

Jin-Woo didn’t try to deny it.

The moment he heard the answer straight from the person, Chairman Yu’s eyes, locked onto Jin-Woo, shook about greatly.

Up until now, he lost count of just how many people had tried to get in his good books because they wanted something from him. Some of them didn’t

even bother to put in any effort whatsoever and simply reached out, hoping to get a hand-out somehow.

But then, what about this young man before his eyes?

He saved a person's life. No, he saved the life of the top executive of the biggest corporation in the country, yet he wasn't asking for anything in return.

If Chairman Yu's daughter didn't see him and simply walked on by, he would never have found out how he recovered from that illness for the rest of his life.

Yu Myung-Hwan was famous for being a poker face, but just this once, his expression betrayed how emotionally moved he was.

"But, why....?"

He had to say something in order to suppress his overwhelming emotions.

"Why did you help me?"

Back then, even though the demand for a helping hand was made, accompanied by a huge financial incentive, Jin-Woo simply rejected it while saying that he didn't possess such powers.

So, what made him change his mind, then?

Yu Myung-Hwan brought Jin-Woo here pretty much to ask that one question, even at the risk of offending him.

Ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump....

His heart was beating faster and faster as time went by; every passing second felt as long as ten minutes before Jin-Woo chose to make his reply.

And that he finally did.

"I judged you to be a trustworthy person, that was why."

".....!!"

At that rather unexpected answer, Chairman Yu's brows rose up higher.

"But... What does that mean?"

"If you were the type of person who did whatever it takes to accomplish your goal, then I wouldn't even have considered risking it for your sake."

"By that, you mean.... Is it because I never tried to use my son, Jin-Ho?"

"That's correct."

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

As expected of the leader of a global corporation, Chairman Yu instantly figured out what Jin-Woo was trying to say here.

It was true that Yu Myung-Hwan did possess the one trump card that could have made Jin-Woo act. And that would be his son, the Vice-Chair of the Ah-Jin Guild – Yu Jin-Ho.

However, after his proposal was rejected, he didn't obsessively cling on and cleanly backed away. Meaning, he believed in Jin-Woo's words of not possessing the cure.

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth – Jin-Woo religiously adhered to this principle so, to Yu Myung-Hwan who believed in him, he replied in kind as well.

Although, it did take a bit of time to figure out whether the businessman was worthy of his trust or not.

'Still, I didn't make a wrong decision.'

Jin-Woo formed a grin.

At the same time...

Drip....

A single teardrop trickled down Yu Myung-Hwan's eye.

"I'm not sure how to express my gratitude to you."

He quickly wiped the tear away with the back of his hand and stared at the young Hunter with a determined expression on his face.

"Please, allow me to repay this debt, even if it's only half, no, half of that half. I beg of you."

Only by doing this, the debt of gratitude he felt in his heart would lessen just a tad. Yu Myung-Hwan quickly carried on.

"Is there anything you'd like, Hunter-nim?"

"It's not that I want something, but..."

Yu Myung-Hwan's ears perked up right away. If Hunter Seong Jin-Woo wanted money or something else, he was planning to do everything in his power to make it happen.

However, Jin-Woo's answer was a bit different to what Yu Myung-Hwan had been thinking of.

"If something ever happens to me.... Can you look after my mother and my sister?"

That was his reply after a short bout of hesitation.

To prepare for the worst-possible-case scenario that may or may not happen, Jin-Woo asked for the favour of his family being taken good care of. He may have already amassed enough money, but unfortunately, money wouldn't be able to protect them from certain things.

Surely, Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan would prove to be a dependable buffer during those times.

"...Are you really okay with only that, Hunter-nim?"

"Yes, I am."

It was difficult to imagine something untoward happening to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, but since he decided to say yes to whatever demand the young man would make, Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan didn't even hesitate and nodded his head right away.

"I give you my word."

The lengthy conversation had come to an end here.

"Well, then...."

Jin-Woo tried to get up to leave.

Yu Myung-Hwan watched him and felt rueful about the fact that their conversation had come to an end. He then belatedly realised how much he liked this young man named Jin-Woo.

If Hunter Seong Jin-Woo could become a part of his family.....?

Never once did Yu Myung-Hwan entertain the idea of using his beloved daughter as a tool in an arranged marriage, but he still found himself asking the question anyway.

"By any chance, are you dating someone at the moment?"

If it was this young man, then he'd not feel short-changed by giving away Yu Jin-Hui – for the first time ever, Yu Myung-Hwan had met a young man who made him feel this way.

Too bad, though, Jin-Woo grinned brightly as his reply.

"Actually, there is someone I like."

"Oh...."

It was then, Yu Myung-Hwan realised that he just asked a really embarrassing question and his face reddened visibly.

That was how impressive this young man was.

However, Chairman Yu wasn't someone who'd obsess over things he couldn't obtain. He soon raised his head back up and with a smile on his face, bade him goodbye.

“I shall pray that the promise I made today won't ever come true in the future.”

Jin-Woo smiled in reply and stood up fully from his seat.

“I'll do my best to make sure of that, too.”

Now that all of his Stat values had reached their maximum attainable limit, the only area left to improve was his ability to command his Shadow Army.

Jin-Woo returned to the entry prohibited area in Japan in order to get his final preparation ready.

The uninhabited sea of forest stretched on forever in his view.

Grand-Marshal Bellion had split the Shadow Army to three separate groups as per Jin-Woo's instruction and assigned the commands of each to himself, Igrit, and Beru.

Jin-Woo nodded his head while looking at the three separate groups of his soldiers below the hill. He guessed from the aura emitted by the soldiers below that a great deal of thought had been given to creating the balance of strengths between the three groups.

The Grand-Marshal bowed his head after meeting Jin-Woo's gaze. It seemed that this guy was also the perfectionist-type like Igrit.

On the other hand....

‘This guy....’

Jin-Woo turned around to take a gander at the so-called ‘lodging’ built on the summit of the hill.

“Beru, get over here. Now.”

Whooooosh-!!

Beru dashed forward from the bottom of the hill right up to the summit in the blink of an eye and knelt down before Jin-Woo.

“Oh, my king!”

“Head, floor.”

Even before those words finished coming out of his king's mouth, Beru quickly rammed his head on the ground. Right away, Jin-Woo yelled out.

“How can you call this a small ‘shelter’? Am I supposed to take a break inside that?! Setting aside its size, is this even a shelter, to begin with?!”

“Kiiehhk...”

Beru cowered from Jin-Woo's loud shouting and replied with the voice of a guy being wrongfully accused.

“For a lodging befitting my king, at the bare minimum, it must be....”

“.....”

Jin-Woo slowly massaged his forehead. He had completely overlooked the small fact that ants specialised in building ‘houses’.

Indeed, he should've seen just what the human-sized ants possessing greater physical strength than superhumans might end up creating in the name of a mere ‘house’.

He slowly raised his lowered face and ended up being overwhelmed by the dignified air of the so-called ‘small shelter’ once more.

A massively-tall fortress built out of white stone – so it could be spotted pretty easily from afar – stretched from this part of the land all the way to over there. It was also dizzyingly tall that, while trying to see where its roof was, his neck actually began aching instead from looking up for too long.

Jin-Woo's head pulsed painfully again after witnessing the fruit of the ants' unnecessary devotion. He didn't even order them to do this, yet here they were.

He roughly massaged his temples before groaning out and asked another question.

“What about that black flag flapping around at the end of this castle.... That, just what were you thinking when putting that up there??”

It was then, Bellion hurriedly ran to where his master was and suddenly planted his head on the ground alongside Beru.

Boom!

Jin-Woo was rendered speechless for a while and alternated his dazed gaze between Bellion and Beru. He slowly turned around and shouted out.

“My soldiers! Now, commence with the combat drill!”

With that, the thunderous roars of the Shadow Soldiers powerfully

reverberated throughout the land.

Waaaaaaaaaahhh-!!!



Chapter 233 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

One day. Two days. And then, three days.

It had been three days since the super-massive Gates revealed themselves to the world. Civil unrest quickly broke out in the countries with the Gates and their neighbouring nations, and they grew more violent with each passing day.

That was because none of these countries had come up with a viable response yet.

The enraged mob of citizens filed out onto the streets and went on violent demonstrations to force their governments to come up with a countermeasure.

Meanwhile, news stations emphasized the severity of the situation by continuously showing the alternating images of the demonstrators, growing in number every day, and the giant Gate floating silently high up in the sky.

This was a completely different spectacle compared to when the super-massive Gate first appeared in South Korea. The experts were quick to figure out why things unfolded differently there. The reason was pretty simple.

On one hand, the quick-witted response from the Korean Hunter's Association had played a part. As soon as the Gate appeared, they summoned every single Hunter in the country to the capital city.

The other part had to do with the psychological sense of security felt by the Koreans from the fact that their country possessed the greatest Hunter alive that surpassed all Special Authority-rank Hunters.

One of the experts invited to speak in a specially-organised TV show said this in front of the camera.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo almost single-handedly took care of two rank S dungeon breaks. Ants and Giants – in a span of a single year, he pretty much resolved two of the most infamous incidents in history with his own hands.”

There was no need to even bring up the Giant-type monsters of Japan; the world's attention was already boiling red-hot during the Jeju Island ant raid.

What more could be said on that subject when the TV station awarded with

the exclusive broadcasting rights had reputedly earned revenue equalling the last three years' profit in one go?

Nod, nod.

The emcee's head nodded all by itself while the expert lightly tapped his temple with his index finger.

“And that’s why the Korean citizens naturally believe this in their minds. They believe that, regardless of the danger threatening them, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo will show up and deal with it.”

That was precisely the reason why, even after a super-massive Gate appeared on the skies of a capital city with over ten million souls living in it, people were able to remain relatively calm about it.

The expert emphasized until his throat was hoarse that the existence of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was an immeasurable blessing to the Republic of Korea and its people.

Unfortunately, it was obvious that not every nation on Earth would be blessed with such luck. The number of truly excellent Hunters was very low, and they were not spread out evenly, either.

Many nations within the territory of influence of those super-massive Gates possessed pretty lacklustre Hunter systems, so it was only obvious that the unrest would continue to grow larger.

It reached the point where people were demanding vociferously that more high-ranked Hunters should be hired at the cost of forking out higher taxes, even if it was just one more combatant being added to their defences.

Meanwhile, many governments could barely hide their shock when many wealthy folks, the very same ones that gnashed their teeth come tax collection season, pledged to support them financially.

And so, as the sense of impending crisis continued to heighten, the bigshots representing their respective nations gathered in the capital city of Korea, Seoul, to answer the request of the Korean Hunter's Association.

What they wanted from this trip was just one thing. And that would be to find out the information regarding the eight super-massive Gates that appeared simultaneously all around the world.

Since the information was to be provided by Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, the man who managed to achieve a rather unbelievable result from the first super-massive Gate, their expectations were understandably huge.

“Whew-woo....”

A certain man spat out a hushed sigh. It was none other than the director of the Hunter's Bureau, David Brennan, who had opted to travel to Korea after being harassed by his own president. He dabbed away the cold sweat soaking his forehead with a handkerchief and took a look at the faces of everyone sitting around him.

'...So many of them came.'

Presidents, government ministers, Guild Masters, Chairpersons from various Hunter's Associations.....

The director of the Hunter Bureau knew the faces of most of these people. They indeed were all bigshots that just their names alone would be enough to get them recognised by everyone in their respective nations.

While seeing the flashes of nervousness in their faces, the director wiped the sweat pooling at the edge of his chin.

'Regardless of who it is, everyone's feeling the heat, huh.'

They may all look calm and collected on the surface, but they also knew that inwardly, every single one of them here was anxiously stomping their feet. Well, even the director himself was feeling the same way, after all.

How wonderful would it be if Hunter Seong Jin-Woo stepped forward to say that **"This Gate crisis should end painlessly and there's nothing to worry about"**?

If only he could deliver that message to the higher-ups; the POTUS busy pressuring him would instantly back off, then. It would be a wonderful opportunity to restore his damaged pride, in other words.

However, if the truth was completely the opposite, then....

The director felt his heart tumble to the pit of his stomach. He swallowed back his dry saliva and confirmed the time. His wristwatch was precisely pointing at 02:55.

Five minutes remained until the announcement time.

Tick, tock....

While listening to the ticking of the second hand that sounded unusually loud for some reason today, the director raised his stiff face.

Around the same time.

Having finished inspecting the Shadow Army just now, Jin-Woo asked Bellion next to him.

“What happens to the armies with no Sovereigns leading them?”

“Marshals of those armies will take over the command of the soldiers in place of the dead Sovereigns.”

He proceeded to add more explanation that the army of Giants was being led by its Marshal instead, after their king had been captured by the Rulers.

Jin-Woo nodded his head in understanding. A total of eight Gates appeared around the world. The phenomenon of Gates for Sovereign-less armies being generated could be explained now if the Marshals were commanding them.

It was then, another question abruptly popped up in Jin-Woo’s head.

“If I die, do you get to command the Shadow Army as its Grand-Marshal?”

Bellion shook his head.

[Our lives are tied to yours, my liege. If you pass on, we will also return to the void.]

As long as their master’s head was attached to the right place, not one soldier’s life would be extinguished – the strong point of the Shadow Army was the loyalty of its soldiers that moved only for the sake of their master while not even caring about their own lives.

But, if one were to flip that around, the moment their master was met with a serious problem, then the Shadow Army would be finished right then and there.

‘.....’

The pros and cons basically worked in the same manner as two sides of a coin. Depending on the situation, the good could become bad, while the weakness could become a strength, instead.

Surely, his enemies wouldn’t overlook that point, now would they? Didn’t that mean he could exploit that, too?

‘.....’

Jin-Woo fell deeper into his thoughts, and a glint briefly flickered in his eyes. A different voice then addressed him from the other side.

“My liege.”

It was Igrit.

“We do not stand a chance in a full-scale war, my liege.”

A baritone voice filled with power and conviction, spoken in a low, deep

tone. It'd been a while since he started conversing with Igrit, but Jin-Woo still hadn't really gotten over that voice.

Seriously now, he was kitted out in that lightweight, agile-looking armour, so why did he have to possess such a manly voice??

According to Igrit, he was supposed to be the greatest knight ever in the history of humanoid creatures, before he got reborn through the powers of the previous Shadow Sovereign, so it wasn't all that hard to understand where that ultra-high level of manliness in his voice came from, but still...

'What am I supposed to do about this sense of disharmony....?'

Whether he knew about Jin-Woo's predicament or not, Igrit continued to calmly speak of his concern.

"Unlike the former Shadow Sovereign, who grew doubtful about the battles against the Rulers and stopped shoring up his army, other Sovereigns didn't hold back and continuously enhanced and increased the scale of their armies."

"How big do you think is the difference in the combat force?"

This time, Bellion replied.

"We can not be certain, but it could be well over one hundred times larger."

Only Beru had no way of knowing the scale of other armies, so he quietly listened to the conversation of his master and the other Marshals.

Jin-Woo's expression stiffened.

Didn't that mean, in the best-case scenario, his enemies possess over ten million soldiers?!

"Hundred times, huh...."

Jin-Woo mulled over the numbers before replying in a low voice.

"I never was planning for all-out, full-scale warfare, anyway."

What he meant here was that he never entertained the idea of full-scale warfare while discarding the advantage of his army, where one could become 'all', or that 'all' could revert back to being one.

Even now, Jin-Woo's mind was continuously picturing the battles taking place in the future. After a short bout of silence....

Brrr... Brrr....

Jin-Woo pulled out his smartphone vibrating noisily inside his pocket.

He answered the call, but even before he could say something, the familiar voice came out from the device's speaker.

“Ah, yes. Hello.”

Before answering that, Jin-Woo quietly looked behind him.

The hints of heavy fighting were everywhere; the ground that was horrifyingly torn up, gouged out, and blown to bits extended as far as his eyes could see. All those trees forming the green forest, the sea of trees, had evaporated without a trace.

This was the end product of the Shadow Army fighting a mock battle after splitting up into three groups. The earth fortified by Mana had been completely overturned from horrifying impact forces.

The Japanese Hunter's Association was warned beforehand by Jin-Woo and so, they got to watch the destruction of the entry prohibited area through their spy satellite. All those watching, though, simply couldn't hide their shock at the collision of enormous amounts of magical energy captured by their satellite.

The power they witnessed, that was the true strength of the Shadow Army. And Jin-Woo also got to witness that strength.

Through this experience, he got to accurately assess the depths of his army's combat prowess. The end result was completely satisfactory.

Jin-Woo stopped looking behind and shifted his gaze back to his front. Over one hundred thousand soldiers were kneeling on the ground in front of Jin-Woo, waiting for their liege's next command and not even moving a muscle.

When Jin-Woo's reply didn't arrive even after a long pause, the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol cautiously inquired over the phone.

The corners of Jin-Woo's lips arched up and he replied as matter-of-factly as he could.

“Ah, yes. I've just arrived there now.”

“You've arrived? But when....?”

Woo Jin-Cheol had ordered his subordinates to inform him the moment Jin-Woo arrived in the venue, so he had asked back in a puzzled voice while turning around. But at that very moment....

He got to discover Jin-Woo standing right behind him.

“Keok!”

Woo Jin-Cheol unwittingly spat out a surprised gasp and blinked his eyes for a moment there, before a helpless grin formed on his lips. He quietly pocketed his phone away.

“...I guess that question has lost much of its meaning now. You know, asking you where you are.”

Jin-Woo reciprocated that smile and shrugged his shoulders once as his reply.

Currently, they were standing inside the waiting room of the auditorium. Beyond that door, representatives from various countries filling up every available seat were waiting for Jin-Woo’s entrance with bated breaths.

Woo Jin-Cheol confirmed the current time. The clock on his phone’s screen informed him that there were still two minutes left until the announcement time. Meaning, there was a little bit of time left.

He felt this unexplainable sense of ease and raised his head.

“Hunter-nim, are you really planning to tell the truth to these people?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Once they learn of the truth, there could be huge unrest breaking out everywhere. And more than a few nations won’t be able to deal with such unrest.”

“I know that.”

That would be an obvious development. Even the Rulers knew that things would unfold this way and hid their intentions right until the end.

However, even if everything were to come to an end through the upcoming event, shouldn’t one know what’s happening to them, at least?

‘I mean, it’s one hell of an unfair thing not knowing what killed you, isn’t it?’

That’s why Jin-Woo decided to tell the truth to everyone. It wouldn’t only be him that might need time to prepare themselves in the heart, after all.

Seeing Jin-Woo’s determined expression, the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol could only nod his head.

“I see. If that’s what you’ve decided, then....”

Jin-Woo walked past Woo Jin-Cheol and approached the door leading to the auditorium, but then, the latter discovered something and hurriedly called

out.

“Excuse me, Hunter-nim!”

‘...??’

Jin-Woo turned around with a confused expression, and Woo Jin-Cheol formed a sheepish expression as his reply and opened his mouth.

“There are quite a lot of reporters waiting for you outside.”

“...Oh.”

Jin-Woo looked at his current duds.

He had been staying in the entry prohibited area for the past few days to control his soldiers, so the state of his clothing was rather wretched at the moment.

‘What am I to do now....?’

The thing was, though, he didn’t want to make a big deal out of a simple matter like changing clothes by moving to another location, etc, etc.

But then, he couldn’t buy whatever outfit available in the Store anymore and change into that, as he had done in the past.

‘...Hang on a bit.’

Buy clothes from the Store?

With the System gone, he could no longer utilise the services of the Store, but the power that the System used to sustain itself belonged to the Shadow Sovereign, to begin with.

In that case, creating clothing and putting it on was, theoretically speaking at least, eminently possible for him. At that moment, Jin-Woo recalled the sole clothing type he should be able to create right now.

Shu-ahahk!

In the blink of an eye, the waiting room was suddenly filled up by the black smoke, and as if it was alive, it quickly enveloped Jin-Woo’s body.

“Heok?!”

Woo Jin-Cheol jumped up in fright and took several steps back in a hurry. As his brows shot up real high....

The black smoke had transformed into a set of jet-black armour on Jin-Woo.

“How about this?”

Now normally, Hunters always made sure to wear armour in order to protect themselves from the monsters and their preternatural powers.

When these extraordinary-looking equipment were added on top of a powerful Hunter like Jin-Woo, an overwhelming pressure seemed to automatically ooze out from him.

Woo Jin-Cheol was completely suppressed by this amazing aura and could barely move his lips to make his reply.

“It’s... it’s really something else.”

Jin-Woo formed a thin smile.

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Jin-Woo turned back towards the door and slowly entered the auditorium. Almost in an instant, all unimportant noise disappeared within the venue.

‘Hunter Seong Jin-Woo....!!’

‘He’s finally here.’

The attention of every single one gathered here focused on one man standing on the rostrum, Jin-Woo. He took a sweeping look at their faces and calmly organised several thoughts currently crisscrossing inside his brain.

He was here to inform these folks on what was to come – about the arrival of eight great armies desiring the destruction of this world. Also, the fact that each and every one of these armies being made up of soldiers from the Chaos World, ones that humanity would find very difficult to fight against.

‘.....’

They were waiting for the official announcement with those anxious expressions etched on their faces. After learning of the truth, though, what would their expressions change to next?

The tension tightening around their hearts was transmitted in full to Jin-Woo and his own expression darkened as a result.

“...”

Everyone held their breath and listened to his voice. The auditorium might have been quiet before, but now, it was even quieter than ever.

A short while later – Jin-Woo didn’t need the aid of a microphone and simply loaded Mana to his vocal cords to speak.

“I know that things will become incredibly difficult for everyone.”

His voice seemed to softly ripple within the eerily-silent auditorium.

Jin-Woo's ears could pick up on the noises of representatives swallowing their dry saliva along with their violently pounding hearts.

Funnily enough, the louder their heartbeats became, the calmer Jin-Woo's own heart got. The light shining in his eyes became more determined than before.

'...Am I actually feeling calmer than before?'

From a certain moment on, Jin-Woo had completely regained his composure. He calmly addressed his audience with these closing words.

"However, no one alive will be able to avoid fighting the upcoming battle. Those creatures will appear before you, and they will try to destroy everything you hold dear."



Chapter 234 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

How were they supposed to take this?

Once Jin-Woo's lengthy explanation came to an end, an uncontrollable fluster floated up on the faces of representatives. Even the carefully-chosen contingent of reporters forgot their jobs and were too busy looking at each other's reactions.

Noisy, noisy....

The auditorium that used to be draped in eerie silence was now filled up with loud chatter in an instant.

Eventually, someone unable to beat back his fear-filled curiosity and shouted at Jin-Woo.

“Y-you, you expect us to believe that story?!”

How could anyone believe the story of horrifying creatures capable of destroying everything on this land creeping every closer to this planet?

That voice of an elderly man was now filled with a palpable sense of desperation.

“Evidence.... Show me the evidence! Without that, I won't ever believe you!!”

“T-that's right!”

“Aren't your claims far too absurd to be believable?!”

“Out of the blue, you tell us that hundreds of creatures similar to Kamish will show up, but how can that even make sense?!”

Humans, when facing a reality that they couldn't deal with, would automatically resort to denying it or get angry as their defence mechanism. These representatives from various nations wilfully forgot about the many miracles Jin-Woo had shown them so far, and directed their furious words of denial towards him standing on the rostrum.

Too bad for them, just one swish of his hands was enough to silence them immediately.

“Heok!!”

“.....!!”

Dozens of Gates suddenly appeared right behind Jin-Woo.

Using the powers of the Sovereign, he generated several tens of Gates, which were basically a doorway connecting different dimensions.

‘I don’t need to create Gates since travelling through shadows is faster for me, but still....’

There should be nothing more efficient for making these people understand than this method. He could generate Gates the size of a person without breaking a sweat.

Jin-Woo stopped looking at the Gates and shifted his gaze to his audience.

Sure enough, not a single person out of the gathered representatives, reporters, and even the staff members of the Korean Hunter’s Association, who trusted in Jin-Woo’s words implicitly, could close their slack jaws shut, never mind averting their gazes elsewhere.

“Those.... Aren’t those all Gates?”

“B-b-but, how can such a thing even be....??”

‘Hunter Seong Jin-Woo can create Gates, and not only that, several of them at the same time in front of all these people?’

The eyes of everyone present began trembling powerfully, as if there was an earthquake happening right now.

The director of the Hunter Bureau, David Brennan, continued to rub his eyes in utter disbelief. He was someone who personally witnessed the Dragon ‘Kamish’ take its first step in this world as the dungeon break unfolded, but even then, he just couldn’t believe this.

‘As I thought, it’s working.’

Jin-Woo was satisfied by their reactions after witnessing the powers of the Sovereign and closed the Gates behind him.

As if what happened only a second ago had been a hallucination, every single Gate simply vanished without a trace, faster than the witnesses could blink.

‘Ah, no!!’

At the same time, a reporter was hit with a sensation of his heart tumbling to the pit of his stomach. He quickly asked the other reporters next to him.

“H-has anyone taken pictures of those Gates?? Doesn’t matter if it’s a

camera or a phone, did anyone record that phenomenon??”

“...Ah!!!”

Reporters began despairing right there and then, some hugging their heads while some spat out painful groans. It happened too fast, and they were all too stunned out of their minds, so they had momentarily forgotten to take the visual proof of what happened here.

As if the unrest unfolding within the ranks of the reporters was the signal flare, voices of shock and fluster exploded out from all corners of the auditorium next.

Noisy, noisy....

Loud noises shaking one’s eardrums filled up this huge open interior. But, then...

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo!!!!”

The British representative suddenly shot up from his seat and managed to attract everyone’s attention via his shrill cry.

“Could it be that you’re one of them?! The creatures that appeared from the first super-massive Gate, weren’t they summoned here to kill us all, to begin with?!”

His utterances caused pretty much everyone here to freeze up instantly. They unwittingly ended up imagining the worst possible situation, that was why.

A vague, formless fear of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo being on the enemy’s side began spreading among the hearts of these people like an infection. Well, didn’t he just display the power to create Gates that drove so many humans to their deaths and grips of terror right before their eyes?

“.....”

Jin-Woo wordlessly stared at the British representative for a while. Only then did the Briton finally realise the mistake he just made.

If Hunter Seong indeed was on humanity’s side, then this man sure made an a*s of himself due to his fear, but if the opposite turned out to be true, then didn’t that mean it’d be really difficult for him to keep his life now?

“Ah, uh, well.... Of course, I, uh, unreservedly believe in you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim....”

The complexion of the British representative paled in an instant and the ends of his sentence progressively got smaller and smaller. Jin-Woo spat out a

sigh as if he found this whole thing idiotic.

“Fuu.”

He did what he came here to do. Jin-Woo didn't particularly feel the need to plead with these people, asking them to believe him.

“Whether you believe my words or not, whether you accept my words or not... That's your choice. I've finished saying my piece, so everyone, make up your own minds now.”

Reporters sensed that the announcement had come to an end, and that allowed them to finally free themselves from the stupefaction they were trapped in due to the continuous assault of one shock after another. Soon, camera flashes urgently exploded forth.

Click, click, click, click, click!!

Jin-Woo took one last sweeping look at the audience members and just as he was about to turn around....

...David Brennan, the director of the American Hunter Bureau, finally decided to break the silence he had been maintaining until then and raised his hand up high.

Jin-Woo recognised him, of course, since they met each other before. He pointed the American out.

“Director Brennan?”

With a hardened expression on his face, the director slowly stood up from his seat. There was no one present here who didn't know the name of the leader of the Hunter Bureau, so almost immediately, another bout of silence descended on the auditorium.

“It's been a while, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

He politely bowed his head, and Jin-Woo reciprocated that gesture with a bow of his own. The director continued on from there.

“I understand now what will come out those Gates.”

The hundred thousand-plus black monsters that poured out from the first super-massive Gate. Thankfully, they turned out to be the subordinates of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo who had 'coincidentally' inherited the powers of a Sovereign. And he immediately had them submit to him.

And now, today in this place, the truth about other creatures scheduled to make their entrance not being friends of humanity had been revealed in full. In that case, how was mankind supposed to respond to this?

The director tried to calm his shuddering heart and cautiously asked his question.

“What should we do next?”

Jin-Woo quietly studied the director for a little while, before slowly shifting his gaze to take in the faces of every single person present within the auditorium.

Through his eyes, he could feel their worries, anxiety, nervousness, fear, shock, confusion, etc. Indeed, his sensory perception that had far surpassed the limits of a human didn't always prove to be helpful, especially in a situation like this one.

A short while later.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo made up his mind and gave them the best advice he could think of.

“I pray that you get as far away from those Gates as humanly possible. As far as you can. I hope that you evacuate to the furthest location you can find, even if it's only by a little.”

The ripples caused by the information Jin-Woo provided were enormous.

It was none other than Jin-Woo who provided the info. A man who created an unbelievable spectacle with the first super-massive Gate and shocked the entire world, had provided them with this knowledge.

People heard the warning about the invasion of huge monster armies that humanity would never be able to fight against, and struck by fear, they began doing whatever they could to distance themselves as far away from the Gates as possible.

Every road was clogged up by evacuating vehicles. Every avenue was filled with ear-bleeding honkings of car horns.

Didn't matter which newspaper one clapped their eyes on, Jin-Woo's visage and the three accompanying words below dominated every single front page.

Those words were enough to mobilise the entire world.

The thing was, though, when the movement of people become huge in scale, it was only natural that the opposition to that movement would also gain following, as well.

It wasn't as if everyone believed in Jin-Woo's words. Especially so for

someone like this Canadian Hunter named Jay Mills, who confidently declared his objections. Incidentally, Canada's Gate was observed to be the largest of the eight super-massive Gates.

“Tell him that he can take his horsesh*t story and shove it.”

Invited to say his piece on a program on ‘Hunter Channel’, the Canadian Hunter began bad-mouthing Jin-Woo in front of the esteemed panel of experts sitting in the studio.

“If I knew Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s personal contact number, I’d have said the exact same thing, eh. If, by any chance, someone who knows him personally is watching this show, I want you to repeat what I just said here. Okay?”

The emcee quickly assumed the standard broadcaster’s smile in order to cool down the heated atmosphere.

“Whoa, there. Let’s all take a breather, first. Even still, Seong Hunter-nim is one of the very best Hunters in the world, isn’t he? Should we really ignore the warning issued by a Hunter of his calibre?”

Jay Mills’ Hunter ranking was only about 17th on the list. Even when considering the fact that he was a relative newbie who only started his Hunter career three years ago, there was no way he could be compared to Jin-Woo.

He himself already had acknowledged that difference of class between them. Regardless....

“Yes, of course, Seong Jin-Woo is an incredible Hunter. He possesses enough power to destroy Thomas Andre, and then, all those summoned creatures, too.... However, just because he’s an incredible man, that doesn’t mean everything he says is credible, am I right?”

“In that case, do you have any evidence that contradicts what Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim has said?”

Jay Mills smirked derisively.

“Oh? What about Seong Jin-Woo, then? What evidence does he have?”

While the emcee was left searching for a suitable response, Jay Mills stared straight into the camera and spoke up.

“This is what I think. Seong Jin-Woo was standing right in the front of the Seoul Gate, wasn’t he? And that’s why all those scary black things knelt down after seeing him standing there. If it was a different Hunter and not him, who knows if those monsters would have submitted to that person, instead?”

Veins began bulging on the Canadian Hunter's neck as he raised his voice – as if he was addressing Jin-Woo who should be at home watching the program.

“Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, you may have scared other people away with your bullsh*t, but let me tell you this. You won't get to monopolise all these Gates. Why? Because, I am not scared by you. Not even by a little bit.”

Beep.

The Association President Woo Jin-Cheol switched the TV off.

He quietly put the remote down and shifted his gaze over to where Jin-Woo currently sat.

“Hunters are gathering around Jay Mills in Canada as we speak. It seems that the nations possessing strong Hunter systems, such as India, are preparing for their own raids.”

Jin-Woo didn't say anything and simply nodded his head.

The choice was theirs to make, to begin with. As for him, he now needed to focus on the upcoming battle against the rest of the Sovereigns.

“The United States government is keeping a close eye on your next move, Hunter-nim. No, hang on. I'm sure it's not an exaggeration to say under the current circumstances that the entire world is watching your every move.”

Woo Jin-Cheol got their conversation going like that and cautiously steered the topic to what he wished to talk about.

“What will you do now, Hunter-nim?”

He worked really hard to control his pounding heart while observing for any change in Jin-Woo's reaction.

‘I must not become a hindrance in Seong Hunter-nim's decision-making process.’

Actually, he had hidden something from Jin-Woo just now.

And that would be the fact that SOS requests towards Jin-Woo had been flooding in from all corners of the globe. The truth was, the Association was finding it hard to function properly because of all the incoming calls right now.

Amidst of those, the Americans – who shared a border with Canada, which was an unfortunate event in this case – were desperately requesting for Jin-Woo's aide, so much so that it even made outside observers feel pity for them.

The role of the Hunter's Association was to help with Hunters so they could focus their whole beings in hunting down monsters.

Woo Jin-Cheol didn't say anything so as to not go against the principle the late Association President Goh Gun-Hui always emphasized. He chose to wait for Jin-Woo's decision, instead.

Too bad, Woo Jin-Cheol's consideration as he anxiously waited for an answer had been betrayed somewhat, as Jin-Woo already made up his mind on what to do next a while ago.

'It's simply impossible to fight against all eight armies at once.'

In that case, he needed to get rid of the one that threatened South Korea first, where his family was staying. As for the remaining Sovereigns, he would deal with them later.

Because, the longer the fight dragged on, the better the odds of his victory would get, that was why.

'First of all....'

Jin-Woo raised his head and spoke to Woo Jin-Cheol.

"I'll be heading off to China."



Chapter 235 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

[Hero of the Republic of Korea, we welcome you to China!]

[1.5 billion people send their gratitude! Thank you very much, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!]

[For the continued and everlasting friendship between Korea and China!]

Large placards written in Korean – so Jin-Woo would be able to understand them – were hung up on various places of the airport.

Liu Zhigeng, here to welcome Jin-Woo personally, frowned somewhat while glaring at the placards plastered all over the place. There were so many of them here, he could hardly see an empty spot on the building itself.

It wasn't as if he didn't like the contents of those placards. Oh, no.

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo choosing China over other nations with super-massive Gates in their territories was, without a doubt, something to celebrate as far as the Chinese Hunter was concerned.

He was tasked with taking the lead in the fight against the monsters that would pour out from that massive Gate in the sky, so he felt a massive amount of gratitude to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo for being here.

His problem, though, was with the totally different attitudes his own countrymen showed him back then when he stepped up to aide South Korea. That was what pushed his annoyance level to a dangerous height.

Even now, the memories of those times still remained vividly in his head.

'Don't these people understand the concept of shame??'

All those fellow Chinese citizens who pointed at him and berated him for being a traitor, were currently busy praising and cheering Jin-Woo in one voice and one heart.

So, it was only obvious that Liu Zhigeng wouldn't look at those placards plastered all over the airport in a favourable light.

'If I hadn't dragged our Hunters and made the trip down to Korea, would we even have the face to greet Hunter Seong Jin-Woo today....?'

Liu Zhigeng inwardly clicked his tongue and turned around towards the aeroplane touching down in the airport just beyond the window.

He could already tell. Hunter Seong Jin-Woo was riding in that plane.

The sole Seven Star-rank Hunter of China, Liu Zhigeng, felt a sensation chilly enough to make all the hair on his body stand up emanating from that plane. There could only be one person in the entire world who could pressure him to this degree.

Sure enough – the message of Jin-Woo finally arriving reached the ears of high-ranking government officials as well as executives of the Chinese Hunter’s Association waiting around. They hurriedly rose up from their chairs and began raising an almighty fuss.

‘This isn’t right.... Doing things this way is wrong.’

His already-displeased mood due to the placards had become even sourer after watching these people making noise like this. Weren’t they the same idiots who raised their voices and loudly opposed him when he said they needed to help the Koreans?

Indeed, these people would’ve done anything to stop him from going to Korea if he wasn’t the Seven Star-rank Hunter – if he wasn’t the one and only Liu Zhigeng.

It simply wouldn’t do for these pigs to welcome a warrior risking his life to fight for this land. Liu Zhigeng’s expression hardened, and he spoke to his personal gopher.

“Deliver this message to the premier. I’m cancelling this charade of a planned welcoming party, and I shall take full responsibility for greeting and guiding Hunter Seong.”

“Sir? B-but, these people are....”

The gopher took a look behind at all the important politicians and executives, his hesitation easy to see. Meanwhile, the folks in question overheard the conversation and began coughing uncomfortably to clear their throats.

Smirk.

Liu Zhigeng broke out in a smirk and stood before these people.

“I’d like you folks to disappear from my sight right this moment. Is there anyone here with a good reason why you can’t do that?”

These high-ranking politicians and executives from Hunter’s Association knew how crappy Liu Zhigeng’s personality was, so as soon as his words

came to an end, not one person chose to remain and hurriedly escaped from the waiting area.

Liu Zhigeng scanned the now-empty waiting area in satisfaction and reverted his gaze back to the gopher.

“How about now?”

“Yes... Yes! I shall immediately send the word to the premier!”

While the gopher was hurriedly operating his phone, Liu Zhigeng walked over to the ‘Arrival’ gates where the travellers were now pouring into the airport.

“Over there! Hunter-nim has arrived!”

“Take his pictures!”

Click, click, click, click, click, click!!

Reporters, waiting the whole day in order to occupy the best position possible to snap their shots, spotted Jin-Woo in the distance and almost immediately, countless camera flashes went off simultaneously.

He was looking around his vicinity after feeling puzzled by the atmosphere of the airport which seemed slightly different from what he’d been told before arriving here.

‘Weird. Didn’t they tell me that close to a hundred government officials were here to greet me....?’

Not just him, but the accompanying Korean Hunter’s Association employee was also scratching his head in confusion. They were also getting rather greatly flustered too, since the Chinese Association’s employee that was supposed to guide them around was nowhere to be found, either.

But, with great timing, a familiar face walked over from the distance and a happy smile floated up on Jin-Woo’s lips.

“Liu Hunter-nim.”

“Seong Hunter-nim.”

As befitting the warriors getting ready for battle, these two shared short but manly handshake. The first person to ask his question was Jin-Woo.

“By the way.... What about the other people?”

Liu Zhigeng listened as the Association employee tasked with translation passionately did his job, and grinned brightly while replying to Jin-Woo’s inquiry.

“Ah, that. You see, Chinese people can be quite impatient at times. They couldn’t wait for that long and decided to go home, so I’m now tasked with guiding you around.”

For some reason, Jin-Woo began thinking that quite a hefty chunk of how that situation came about had been omitted here, but as he didn’t dislike Liu Zhigeng as a person, he decided not to pursue this issue anymore.

The Chinese Hunter felt relieved that Jin-Woo didn’t display any signs of displeasure, as well. He quickly assumed the role of guiding the group to the airport’s exit.

“It’s this way.”

They couldn’t take many steps, though, as Jin-Woo came to an abrupt halt first. That meant Liu Zhigeng had to stop, too.

A portion of that massive Gate covering the sky could be seen through the clear glass wall of the airport.

“So, that thing is....”

....The super-massive Gate appeared in China.

Jin-Woo stared at the Gate with a hardened expression, and Liu Zhigeng stood next to him with a solemn expression.

“I can’t deal with something like that alone.”

If it was something impossible for him, then there was no need to even mention other Chinese Hunters. That was why he felt so elated after hearing of the news of Jin-Woo’s decision to come here.

He wanted to express his gratitude to his Korean counterpart, even if only by a little bit. He pondered carefully about this issue, before speaking with a voice filled with his heartfelt sincerity.

“I can’t speak for the rest of China, but I, Liu Zhigeng, swear to never forget your help in this matter.”

As the hour of the Gate’s opening approached closer and closer, breaking news from the affected nations around the world continued to fly in.

[Hunter Seong Jin-Woo chooses China!]

[Both Japan and Russia decide to support Hunter Seong Jin-Woo....]

[Planes carrying Hunters scheduled to depart in the afternoon today....]

[On the other hand, the white-coloured fortress discovered near Japan’s

sea of forest revealed to be unrelated to these Gates....]

[Finally, five hours before the dungeon break. Will Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's warning come true? Or....]

Jay Mills began swearing almost right away.

“Both Japan and Russia are way too busy flattering Seong Jin-Woo, eh.”

Why would those two countries try to help China? It was bleedingly obvious.

Weren't they trying to get some brownie points with Seong Jin-Woo and ask for his help when they find themselves in grave danger later on?

How weak.

China, Japan, Russia – they were all too weak.

How could anyone call those people Hunters when they couldn't even protect their mother nations with their own powers?

‘Compared to them, how great are we?’

Canadian Hunters had willingly gathered here in order to protect their land.

‘We did not waver in our convictions.’

The crap about getting as far away from the Gates couldn't make these great Hunters of Canada waver and falter. Jay Mills proudly looked at tens of thousands of Hunters who had voluntarily gathered here to participate in the raid.

Waaaah-!

Their fighting spirit seemed to pierce into the heavens. Regular people standing quite a bit of distance away were also sharing these Hunter's sentiments as well.

[We shall never give up on Canada!]

[Wanna run away? Not us!]

[Our Hunters will protect our land and our lives!]

Citizens carrying around pickets of all sizes and various colours were cheering on the Hunters.

Jay Mills stared up at the super-massive Gate floating high up above his head and became convinced of his victory.

‘Regardless of which monster shows up from there, we can win this!’

He felt really pumped up and, while turning around towards the other

Hunters, he raised both of his fists up high. He was then greeted by a loud, energetic roar.

Waaaaaah-!!

The preparation on the Chinese side had been completed as well.

Just like how it had been like back in Seoul, a raid team consisting of several nationalities was surrounding the ground right below the Gate. The biggest portion of that force was made up of, as one would expect, the elite Chinese Hunters which numbered well over one hundred thousand.

As befitting a nation boasting the highest number of Hunters in the populace, the upper-ranked Hunters carefully selected for this raid alone numbered over a hundred thousand.

Jin-Woo had warned them before that monsters far too difficult for humans to fight against would fall out of the Gate in droves. However, looking at the headcount of over a hundred thousand Hunters gathered here, a certain thought of ***“Maybe, we might stand a chance here”*** began germinating within their heads.

As if to remind them that they were being far too optimistic, Jin-Woo summoned out his Shadow Soldiers.

‘Come out.’

The wide-open space behind Jin-Woo deliberately left unoccupied was instantly filled up by the 130,000-strong Shadow Army.

Guoooooh....

The nearby Hunters couldn’t even breathe properly from all the spooky aura oozing out from these summons. Cold sweat drops rapidly formed on the foreheads of the humans.

‘The gap between our strengths... It’s too much.’

‘Things like them are going to fall out from the sky? Right here?!’

‘No freaking way....’

This was an overwhelming fear.

The highly-enhanced sensory perceptions of these upper-ranked Hunters were warning them of the dangers posed by the beings that had appeared before them. Even Liu Zhigeng, who’d hardly get surprised by what life would throw at him by this point, gasped out in shock as well.

“All these things.... Are they all your summoned creatures, Seong Hunter-nim?”

Jin-Woo nodded his head. As their master, he could clearly sense the burning fighting spirit of his Shadow Soldiers finely honed like a sharp blade.

‘Nice.’

Jin-Woo looked up at the sky. There were only a few minutes remaining until that Gate opened up. He needed to achieve victory here and convert as many creatures of the Chaos World into his Shadow Soldiers and absorb them into his army.

That would be his first step in this war.

The noisy, bustling vicinity instantly became dead quiet with the entrance of the Shadow Army. They all could sense it – that the moment of bitter battle was just around the corner. The weighty nervousness began pressing down on the shoulders of the waiting Hunters.

Gulp.

Jin-Woo swallowed his dry saliva.

Out of the eight armies, which one would come out this Gate?

It was then.

“My liege.”

Bellion informed his master that the time had come and Jin-Woo replied in a low voice.

“I know.”

Liu Zhigeng witnessed Jin-Woo sharing a conversation with his summon as if it was the most natural thing in the world, and opened his eyes real wide in surprise.

“Hunter-nim, is it possible to converse with your summons....??”

It was at that point that Beru determined Liu Zhigeng had come, unnecessarily, too close to his liege and in the blink of an eye, blocked the Chinese Hunter’s path.

Growl.

An overwhelming killing intent leaked out from this ant-shaped soldier.

“Heok!!”

Liu Zhigeng flinched in nasty surprise and hurriedly distanced himself. Jin-

Woo watched this scene unfold and unhappily smacked the back of the rather-agitated Beru's head.

“Hey, he’s an ally.”

Beru bowed his head non-stop to his master and stepped aside. Jin-Woo apologised for his soldier instead.

“Sorry about that. He’s a bit on edge because of the upcoming battle, you see.”

“It’s... It’s fine.”

Right there and then, Liu Zhigeng decided to give up on trying to understand Jin-Woo using logic.

That was because he got a fairly strong premonition just now that he'd never be able to understand the Korean Hunter with his common sense.

It was then.

“It, it’s opening up!!”

Someone shouted out loudly. Everyone's head snapped up towards the sky.

The light shining in Jin-Woo's eyes transformed. Just as that unknown person had shouted out, the Gate's gigantic mouth was slowly opening up. The choking tension began tightening the chests of everyone below the Gate.

However, even though the Gate was now fully open, nothing happened.

The one most surprised among the crowd was Jin-Woo. He focused his perception but discovered that there was not a single presence beyond the Gate itself.

Meaning, this particular Gate was empty.

‘What the hell?!’

A chill suddenly brushed past the back of Jin-Woo's neck.

Could he have....?

Something he had overlooked until now; one certain possibility he hadn't yet thought of abruptly entered his head. And the ominous foreboding gradually morphed into a certainty as time continued to tick by.

“Huh?”

Hunters also began realising that something was wrong here.

Liu Zhigeng turned to look at a Hunter charged with communication next to him and urgently asked his question.

“What about other locations?”

“It seems to be the same story with other locations. They say nothing has happened so far.”

“In that case, are all these Gates empty, to begin with?”

“That... uhm... I don’t...”

Liu Zhigeng’s head swivelled to the side again. His gaze stopped by at Jin-Woo. Unfortunately, the Korean Hunter’s expression had hardened to such a scary degree that he couldn’t even dare to ask for a clarification anymore.

Was he making that face because his prediction turned out to be incorrect?

No.

That emotion on display wasn’t as simple as that.

The one and only Liu Zhigeng couldn’t even dare to get close to Jin-Woo, simply because he felt greatly shaken up by the unrest bubbling within the latter’s emotions.

‘I... I made a mistake.’

Realising the error in his judgement, Jin-Woo bit his lower lip.

Why....

Just why did he treat the Sovereigns as simple creatures?

‘They should have anticipated that I’d try to utilise the advantages of my Shadow Army.’

If his thoughts were correct, then....

Jin-Woo raised his head, quickly walked past Liu Zhigeng, and asked the communication Hunter.

“What about Canada??”

“Pardon?”

Unable to hold back his agitation, Jin-Woo’s voice got louder.

“Tell me what’s going on in Canada!!”

Around the same time, the Gate also opened up in Canada as well.

Strangely enough, nothing happened here as well, just like with other locations. Hunters rousing up their fighting spirit for the upcoming raid tilted their heads and busy glanced at each other in confusion.

“What’s this?”

“But, weren’t the monsters supposed to rain down from there?”

“Did Seong Jin-Woo really bullsh*t us all?”

It was then.

Jay Mills discovered something strange in the distance and quickly shouted out towards other Hunters.

“Silence!”

Rather fitting for the strongest Hunter present today, his warning that carried a great deal of magical energy managed to shut the mouths of every Hunter here.

Now that the surroundings had become silent once more, Jay Mills began glaring at the Gate again.

As he suspected, he hadn’t seen it wrong. A certain humanoid figure was leisurely making its descent. That was the only thing that came out of the Gate so far.

‘No, hang on. It’s not a humanoid figure. It’s just a.... person?’

Jay reconfirmed the appearance of ‘something’ that lightly made its landing. He stopped other Hunters from rushing past him and he alone walked towards the landing spot.

Gulp.

He unknowingly swallowed his saliva after sensing this heavy tension in the air.

The closer he got, the better he was able to see his opponent. It was a middle-aged man with reddish-black hair and beard.

As for his attire, this man was kitted out in the most gorgeous metallic armour that boasted an arresting blend of silvery and reddish colours, extending from just below his neck right down to his toes.

Jay finally arrived there and stared at this unknown man.

[Are you the king of this place, then?]

Even though this mystery man didn’t open his mouth, his voice resounded out within Jay’s head. Naturally, he could understand the meaning of these words as if it was his mother tongue being spoken.

Jay’s heart began racing really fast now.

“I knew it! Yes! I knew sh*t would go down like this!!”

Here was the reason why Seong Jin-Woo could turn all those soldiers coming out of the first Gate into his pets. They had been in secret communication like this, that’s how!

“That d*mn lying con man, I knew it’d be like this! I bloody knew it!!”

Now that his prediction had come true, the inside of his head began filling up rapidly with sheer joy.

He failed to cool down his excitement and raised his fist up high towards other Hunters. They also raised their fists up and cheered on energetically.

Waaaah-!!

Jay turned around towards the mystery man again.

The latter was quietly waiting for an answer even then.

‘So, the process is, it asks the first person it sees if he’s a king, and if the answer is yes, it submits to him, is that it?’

It was unknown whether this mysterious man was a human or a monster. Jay Mills studied ‘him’ as the corners of his lips arched up.

“What if I am?”

Since he was the leader of all the Hunters gathered here, it’d not be an exaggeration to call him a ‘king’ now, would it?

His voice was filled with his strong self-confidence.

But then...

[It seems that b*stard isn’t here.]

When the mysterious man opened his closed his eyes, the irises of a lizard hungry for blood blinked ominously from within.



Chapter 236 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“T-the situation in Canada is still...”

The Hunter in charge of communication stuttered like a broken clock. Jin-Woo, feeling genuinely frustrated now, pulled out his smartphone, instead.

There was only one person who could give him the most accurate information as quickly as possible. Jin-Woo searched through his contact list before tapping on the contact number of the Special Agent in charge of the Hunter Bureau’s Asia Branch, ‘Adam White’.

With the current timing being what it was, he was briefly worried whether his call would get through or not, but then...

A really tense voice came out from the phone’s speaker. There was no time to mouth a proper greeting, so he jumped straight to the main topic.

“Adam? Can you tell me what’s happening with the super-massive Gate in Canada...”

It was then – he heard a loud cheering of ***“Waaaah-!!”*** coming out from the phone’s speaker, as well.

Although it was a soft, almost inaudible background noise even his highly-developed hearing could barely catch, that was more than enough for him. Jin-Woo urgently asked over the phone, his expression harder than a stone now.

“Where are you right now??”

“And why are you even there in the first place?!”

Jin-Woo’s voice cracked up from agitation, and that caused Adam to reply in a surprised voice, quite obviously failing to hide his fluster.

Adam White then added that his current location was quite a distance away from where the Canadian Hunters were, so if something bad were to happen, he should be able to escape relatively easily.

Hearing that explanation, Jin-Woo was suddenly overcome with sheer frustration that couldn’t be described in words.

‘The things I’ve warned everyone of....’

None of these people seemed to have understood the scale of the enemy just yet.

However, Adam still being unscathed could mean that his prediction was wrong. Jin-Woo collected himself and calmly asked his next question.

“What about the Gate...? Has there been any changes yet?”

What a relief that was.

Even after taking into consideration the world pointing their fingers of ridicule and blame at him for his warning being false, he could still breathe a sigh of relief.

“Fuu...”

His prediction seemed to be wrong.

But, then this happened.

After hearing Adam’s voice that sounded uneasy for some reason, a creeping dread travelled down Jin-Woo’s spine. Why did his ominous forebodings always have to come true?

Adam quickly explained the current situation.

Jin-Woo’s heart that regained its calm a few seconds ago began racing faster and faster again.

‘Just one... person?’

All the hair on the back of his head stood up. Jin-Woo’s voice rose up really high.

“The hair colour!”

Adam said that his current location was quite far away from the Hunters. In that case, it’d be impossible for him to see the creepy eyes of that non-human creature.

“What is the hair colour of that person??”

Adam’s voice of borrowing special equipment from an agent nearby could be heard for a brief moment then.

Oh my god.

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened.

“Adam! Run away from there, now!! Doesn’t matter if it’s a car, whatever, get on it, and escape from there right now!!”

Before Adam could ask what was going on here...

KWA-BOOOOOM-!!!!

A loud explosion so horrifying that its brutality could be heard even through the phone's speaker resounded out next.

Adam's voice had transformed into a scream now.

“ADAM!!”

As if he had regained his wits for a brief moment there from Jin-Woo's shout, Adam began muttering in a tearful voice.

“Adam! Adam, listen to me! It's going to be alright, so start running now! You gotta escape from there as soon as possible!”

Jin-Woo tried to calm Adam down, but unfortunately, the American agent seemed half-crazed by then.

Even though he began sobbing softly, he still explained everything he could see and hear to Jin-Woo as if doing that was his final duty.

The emotions of sorrowful determination could be heard from his voice.

Jin-Woo couldn't just sit back and listen anymore; despite the risk, he connected his senses with the Shadow Soldier inserted into Adam's shadow.

When he did, he got to see the spectacle the American agent got to see, as well.

It was as if he was seeing the scenes of the apocalypse.

From the wide-open Gate, messengers of death and destruction were pouring out in droves, dyeing the heavens black. The skies and the ground were being rapidly filled up by horrifying monsters. The roars of beasts rocked the world, and the flying creatures and their powerfully-beating wings dominated the sky.

Hunters gathered here to fight against them had all been turned into ash even before the creatures landed on Earth from a single flick of the Sovereign of Destruction's hand, who had arrived before everyone else.

The remaining people were trying to run away in pure pandemonium, but unfortunately, their odds of escaping from there seemed pretty dismal at this point.

‘Even still...’

He should be able to save one person... Adam White.

The High Orc Shadow Soldier currently being controlled by Jin-Woo reached out and grasped the wrist of the deeply-terrified Adam.

“U-uwaahk!”

He screamed out in fear after seeing that High Orc kitted out in black armour, but he soon saw the shadow of a familiar man within the eyes of this monster.

“S-Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim??”

There was no time to explain the situation. That could be done after he had been safely transported out of there. Still possessing the High Orc, Jin-Woo got ready to drag Adam White into the shadow below his feet, but then...

...Something approached them before anyone had noticed it and grabbed the shoulder of the High Orc real tightly.

Swiiish.

The High Orc looked back in a hurry and spotted a middle-aged man with a pair of bizarre reptilian eyes glaring in his direction.

[Where do you think you are going, oh, child of Shadow?]

The middle-aged man opened his mouth wide. A truly gob-smacking level of power suddenly began gathering inside his mouth, then.

Wordlessly, Jin-Woo shifted his gaze back to Adam.

At that moment, as if he had realised something just then, Adam White stared deeply at Jin-Woo – no, more correctly, the High Orc Jin-Woo was controlling.

“Hunter-nim, I....”

KWWUAAAAHHH-!!!

The Breath attack pouring out from the middle-aged man’s mouth erased the Shadow Soldier completely out of existence.

“Keu-heuk!!”

Jin-Woo was beset with the sensation of his entire being set on fire and his body powerfully shuddered from the cruel pain.

He was connected to the High Orc with his mind only, so he could escape from there no problem, but it was a different story for Agent Adam White.

The American man’s final moments Jin-Woo saw.....

Recalling Adam’s eyes as he turned into scorched ash in the flames, Jin-Woo began gnashing his teeth in pure rage.

BOOM!!

He slammed his fist on the ground, causing the world to shake like the advent of an earthquake.

'God d*mn it....'

He should've expected it.

He should've guessed that, once the enemy knew they were going to face off against the Shadow Army – which got stronger the longer the battle wore on – they would then try to decrease the number of the potential battle locations down to an absolute minimum and gather their combat force into one chosen location, instead.

The Sovereigns even went so far to generate all eight portals as if they were sticking to their original plan.

'They gathered their forces in the Gate that's the furthest away from me.'

What a painful oversight on his part this was.

His plan of increasing his Shadow Soldiers while other locations were being attacked and then make his counterattack went down the crapper in a spectacular fashion now.

Liu Zhigeng realised from Jin-Woo's expression that something terrible had happened and cautiously approached the latter's side.

"Seong Jin-Woo Hunte...."

It was then.

The Hunter in charge of the communication belatedly received the news and, with a completely pale face, hurriedly ran towards the duo.

"H-hunters.... Canada, Canada is...."

The rest of his sentence didn't need to be heard at this point.

When Jin-Woo glared upwards, the Gate covering up the sky was already disappearing from the view as if it had served its purpose now.

A lone Shadow Soldier and a human standing next to it both evaporated into ash. This was the power of the Breath of Destruction capable of erasing even the soldier of immortality.

'.....'

The Dragon Emperor looked at the results of its actions, the piles upon piles of ash beneath its feet, with a great deal of satisfaction and soon spun on its heels.

It now saw the soldiers of the Chaos World, trapped within the gap between dimensions and unable to wield their powers properly for far too long, enjoy their freedom with reckless abandon like fish meeting water.

The Dragon Emperor slowly closed its eyes and opened its arms wide to enjoy its own freedom.

The pounding heartbeats of all living things....

And their dying screams....

The noises of all creations being destroyed continued to ring out like a wonderful symphony.

It was then.

RUMBLE-!!

Accompanied by Ancient-grade Dragons powerfully landing on the ground, two other Sovereigns gently landed in front of them. Right behind them, there were several Marshals of the invading armies.

Every single one of them politely knelt before the strongest Sovereign in existence, the Dragon Emperor.

The creature in the appearance of a middle-aged man formed a meaningful smile. The Mana trembling within the atmosphere was finally theirs. Mana let loose in this world in order to fortify it served to also enhance the strengths of those who could wield it.

Indeed, their 'preparation' had been completed now, as well.

“KUWAHAHAHAHA!!!”

The Dragon Emperor let out a roar of laughter powerful enough to shake the land and shouted out towards the monsters still pouring out from the Gate.

[Destroy everything! That is the one and only glorious mission bestowed upon us!]

Hundreds of Dragons flew above its head next, and vicious flames rained down from their maws to burn away every single thing on the ground.

Kuwaaaaahhh-!!

The director of the Hunter Bureau, David Brennan, found himself sitting alone in his office with all lights switched off.

While ignoring the endless streams of reports flooding in to his desk as well as the incoming calls from the higher-ups, he slowly sipped a glass of

expensive alcohol he'd been saving for his oldest daughter's wedding day.

Inside his darkened office, images inside the muted TV screen flickered and danced. Monsters could be seen briefly in those images.

He knew why the TV station covering the breaking news was playing the exact same footage over and over again.

'Because they are all dead by now.'

...Just like every single Hunter Bureau agent sent there to support the Canadian Hunters.

Not one person would have survived that.

Hunters, agents, reporters and cameramen filming the scene.

Every one of them, dead.

Thankfully, though, a cameraman risked his life and did his job, resulting in short footage that at least helped everyone with understanding the scale of the enemy's invading force.

"It's all over!!"

The director suddenly yelled out like a mad man.

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo wasn't exaggerating back then.

Dragons alone numbered in the hundreds. Behind those, Giants, beasts, and insect-like things rushed out like tidal waves. They were creatures of calamity that mankind simply could never fight against.

He now understood the reason why Hunter Seong Jin-Woo repeatedly told everyone in no uncertain terms to distance themselves as far away from the Gates.

This world was now over.

But, still....

"What a crazy b*stard!"

Didn't Seong Jin-Woo go to China with his summons in order to fight against creatures like that? How could he even think about fighting against them when he knew that such monsters existed?

If it was at all possible, David Brennan wouldn't have minded cracking open the Korean Hunter's head and take a look at his brain.

'Before that, though, I should crack my head open into several pieces first.'

Huhuh....

Evidently finding something really funny now, the director formed a grin and pulled out a single photograph from his inner jacket.

It was a photo of himself, forming a clearly-annoyed expression, as well as his daughter wearing a party hat.

‘This was when she was around sixteen, wasn’t it?’

If only he knew that she’d become a victim of a dungeon break a year later, then he’d have taken lots more photos like this one, even if that meant giving up on his job.

Thinking about there being only one photo containing both him and his daughter, made this father’s chest numb from his belated shock and sorrow.

Sip.

Yet another glass became empty.

After burying his daughter, he never expected to crack open the lid of this booze, but here he was. He smacked his lips in bitterness and shook the bottle around a little.

Before he had noticed it, it was almost half-empty now.

“Right.... It’s all over.”

Almost half of Canada had been wiped off the map the last time he bothered to listen to the reports. That was only a rough estimation, though.

No one could know for sure how fast those creatures were marching towards the United States.

The director angrily loosened his tie.

“I won’t die by your hands.”

Back then, he swore on his daughter’s grave that he’d get his revenge against the monsters, that he’d not die at the hands of these d*mnable things. At the bare minimum, he’d go out from this world in his own terms.

Such a determination filled his head and he was soon standing next to the window sill where the distant ground below could be seen.

The chilly wind was brushing past his sweat-soaked forehead.

‘...I hope that my daughter is waiting for me where I’m about to go.’

He squeezed his tearful eyes shut and was about to leap to the ground, but then....

....Someone suddenly grabbed his shoulder.

“Heok?!”

He nearly jumped out of his shoes from sheer fright and quickly looked back with his eyes wide open, only to discover a man with a very familiar face standing there.

“H-Hunter S-Seong Jin-Woo???”

As the director’s face paled like a man seeing a scary ghost, Jin-Woo quietly spoke to him.

“I’m looking for something.”



Chapter 237 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

What could he possibly be looking for when the world was facing certain annihilation? No, besides all that, was the man in front of the director's eyes the real Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, to begin with?

Wondering if he got too drunk and was seeing things, the director roughly shook his head from side to side.

But, Jin-Woo's figure became even clearer and in focus from that action, leading the director to realise that the man in front of him was not a figment of his imagination.

His intoxication flew away in an instant and his voice rose up an octave.

“W-what are you looking for?”

“The Rune Stone.”

Jin-Woo told the director precisely what he was here for.

“The Rune Stone from Kamish, give it to me.”

“.....!!”

His surprised lasted only for a short while; the director reflexively shook his head.

“As you may well know, Hunter-nim, the Kamish's Rune Stone is the Hunter Bureau's.....”

That was when his words came to a choking halt.

This d*mn work-related habit of his. What about the Hunter Bureau? So what? Never mind the Bureau, the whole of the United States of America was about to go up in flames, so who cared about a measly little Run Stone now?

‘Looks like I haven't fully woken up from the booze yet.’

The director loudly slapped his cheeks with his palms. After his skin reddened up from the stinging impact, he finally felt as if his brain was getting in gear.

His once-blurry eyes regained their focus as well.

He then arrived at a certain conclusion that to the Hunter Bureau, no, to the

entire United States of America, the reason why Jin-Woo wanted the Rune Stone in the first place was far more important than its financial value.

A short bout of deliberation later. The director asked cautiously as to not sour Jin-Woo's moods.

“I can definitely give you the Rune Stone, but why do you need it?”

Without a single shred of hesitation, Jin-Woo replied back.

“I’ll use it as a tool for my counter-attack.”

Through the eyes of the System, Jin-Woo got to confirm the ‘Skill’ sleeping within the Rune Stone in question pretty early on. It definitely contained a certain power of a Dragon.

There was a reason why he showed no interest whatsoever to this Rune Stone until now, though – this Skill had a rather serious drawback.

Meaning, it was a power he didn't need.

‘However.... The story has changed now.’

After descending to the ninth underground floor of the Hunter Bureau's HQ, the director and Jin-Woo now stood before the reinforced glass case that housed the Rune Stone in question.

Rather than through the System, Jin-Woo only needed his eyes and senses this time to accurately decipher the Skill contained with that little ‘stone’. It was as exactly as he remembered it.

A ‘Skill’ that boasted a truly horrifying power. The seriousness of the current situation should be more than enough to offset the drawback of such a horrifying power.

Ba-thump. His heart pulsed softly in approval.

The director wordlessly stared at the Rune Stone before asking his question.

“Hunter-nim, you once told me that the monsters of the dungeons were sent here by the beings called the Rulers, didn't you?”

“Yes, I did.”

“In that case, what are these Rune Stones found inside the bodies of the monsters?”

“They are gifts from the Rulers to enable humanity to hunt monsters down more efficiently.”

What the Rulers wanted was to spread Mana around this world through violent clashes between monsters and mankind. The sacrifices made by humans were simply a side-effect, not their true end goal.

Indeed, these Rune Stones – stones inserted into the monsters so, upon their deaths, their powers could be sealed within – were the sign of the Rulers' consideration towards mankind's monster hunting.

And so, Kamish's power was stored within this stone.

Jin-Woo took hold of the Dragon's power that would play the crucial role in his fightback.

The director tensely observed Jin-Woo grasping the Rune Stone tightly and swallowed his dry saliva.

“Truly.... Can you truly stop the monsters with that thing?”

“Well, I should at least give it a shot.”

Even at this very moment, the armies led by the Dragon Emperor were repeating the actions of destroying everything in their paths and advancing forward before stopping to destroy some more.

Thanks to the Mana from the Rulers fortifying the planet, the marching speed of the Army of Destruction had been pegged back somewhat, but that would only last for a short while.

Soon, every inch of this land would be engulfed in the conflagration of war. He simply couldn't sit back and watch as the world crumbled, now could he?

The powers of the Shadow Sovereign that they feared so much – they tried to cowardly hit him from behind and prevent that power from blossoming, but now, it was time to show them what this power in the hands of a measly little lifeform was capable of achieving.

“I'm planning to do everything within my power.”

The unwavering will within Jin-Woo's two eyes left a powerful impact on the director's heart.

Seeing that this young Korean Hunter wasn't trying to avoid fighting the enemy, even though he knew full well their frightening scale, the older American man realised how pathetic he was behaving not too long ago when his mind was still filled with thoughts of running away and nothing else besides.

‘I wanted to go to where my daughter was? You stupid son of a b*tch....’

He felt so, so ashamed of himself. And also, he wanted to witness this

young man's battle right up until its conclusion, regardless of how everything would play out.

"I know I have no right to ask you of this, but.... Please, I beg of you. Please, stop those b*stards, those monsters."

The director bowed his head deeply as tears trickled down his face again. Maybe, what he really wanted to avoid was not his impending doom, which would most likely be at the hands of the monsters.

No, the truth was, he simply lacked the courage to witness his countrymen getting killed and pillaged by these abominable monsters when he was supposed to be the leader of the Hunter Bureau, a man whose job was to be at the forefront, leading the Hunters in the battle against humanity's enemies.

Even if it was nothing but a straw, it didn't matter.

Just a single strand was enough at this point.

If there was one glimmer of hope, then he'd do anything to grasp it.

His emotions had morphed into hot tears as they flooded out of his eyes. Jin-Woo wordlessly grabbed the director's shoulder.

"..."

That single gesture felt a hundred times more reassuring than any words for the director. He belatedly wiped his tears away.

"I ended up showing you something pretty disgraceful. My apologies, Hunter-nim."

Jin-Woo waited for a little while until the director regained his calm before opening his mouth.

"There is something else as well. I'm looking for a person now."

Jin-Woo followed after the director and entered a certain apartment building near the Hunter Bureau's HQ.

"You had her stay so close by?"

"We at the Hunter Bureau believe that the things we're supposed to protect should always be within reach, you see."

Perhaps their destination wasn't high up, the director chose the stairs, instead. Just as his back was getting soaked by the sweat, they stopped at a certain door on the fourth floor. The director turned about to look at Jin-Woo.

"We're here."

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

Knock, knock.

There must've been some sort of a security arrangement, because rather than pressing the doorbell, the director lightly knocked on the door twice, instead.

A short bout of silence later.

An agent confirmed the face of the director through the peephole and opened the door.

“.....Director??”

The agent frowned slightly at the strong stench of booze stinging his nose, before belatedly discovering Jin-Woo standing behind his boss and jumped up in surprise.

“...!!”

Should one call this a piece of good fortune when the agent didn't immediately yank out his firearm, just like back when they met him for the first time?

The agent instinctively reached down to his waist after spotting the unfamiliar visitor, but perhaps he recalled the events of the past, a flustered expression quickly bloomed on his face, instead.

“S-Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim?”

The agent wasn't even given a chance to think about why the world's most powerful Hunter showed up here, because the director simply led the visitor straight into the apartment.

The other agent waiting on standby greeted the director.

“Where is Madam?”

“She's waiting for you inside. Heok!”

Like his partner that opened the door, this agent also jumped up in surprise after seeing Jin-Woo here.

“S-sir, this gentleman....?”

“Hunter-nim wishes to speak to the Madam, so I guided him here. Can you inform her that Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim is here to speak to her?”

“....Understood, sir.”

It was then.

“....I didn’t expect you to pay me a visit during such times.”

As if she was waiting for Jin-Woo’s arrival, the door to her room opened up and the Madam slowly walked out.

It was none other than Madam Norma Selner.

Currently, she was acting as the ‘Upgrader’, capable of enhancing the strengths of Hunters to their maximum potential, but before she awakened her powers, she used to work as a psychic.

Jin-Woo took a step forward and politely bowed his head towards the middle-aged woman.

“Please, this way.”

She guided him into the room. The director standing behind Jin-Woo also tried to come in, but Madam Selner stopped him with a gentle voice.

“I believe that Seong Hunter-nim would want to speak to me in private. Am I wrong?”

She looked behind her and asked, prompting Jin-Woo to nod his head. It was as she said. The director spat out a couple of fake coughs and began fixing his attire a little as the room’s door closed shut.

She closed shut the door completely and slowly turned around to face Jin-Woo, patiently waiting for her at the corner of the room.

The moment she took a look at his entire being, she failed to stop the shocked gasp from bursting out of her mouth.

“Oh, my gosh!”

He looked completely different from the last time she saw him.

“You are.... You’re not the same person as the one I know.”

Her eyes began trembling fearfully.

Back then, the darkness had been hiding deep, deep within him somewhere, but now, he had become the perfect darkness itself. She could clearly see the power of ‘death’ enveloping Jin-Woo. However, he quickly shook his head and corrected her misunderstanding.

“I’m still the same person you know, Madam. Except that I’ve become one with the darkness you saw inside me.”

“Ah, ah....”

Which words in the known vocabulary would be adequate enough to describe this truly wondrous development? The power of a god, now dwelling

inside a human being!

She studied just the tail-end of that incredulous power leaking out of Jin-Woo and continued to gasp out in pure admiration. Her slack jaw didn't want to shut close for a long while, but eventually, she did recover her wits somehow.

“Looks like.... I don't possess the necessary power to help you, Hunter-nim.”

No, could there be someone possessing an ability capable of helping this man out in this entire world? Because... he had already transcended the limitation of humanity.

The thing was, though, Jin-Woo was thinking of something else. He cautiously approached the still-terrified woman and asked her.

“Madam, you said that you can glimpse into the future, yes?”

“To a certain extent, yes....”

“In that case, can you tell me about my future?”

Before he was about to enter the battle properly, he wanted to see the end through her eyes first. He thought that, regardless of what she saw, he'd be more relaxed going in.

Madam Selner hesitated somewhat before she nodded her head slowly. She reached out and grasped both of Jin-Woo's hands and closed her eyes.

To look deeper into the inner workings of the darkness – she needed a big dollop of courage for that.

However, she couldn't dare to refuse the request of a warrior about to go to war against the foes that required a far greater level of courage than hers. No, the level of courage required would be so great that it defied all attempts to compare it.

The time flew past as if it was merely a moment and, when she finally opened her eyes, uncontrollable tears began trickling down her cheeks.

“You... Are you really going to carry all that burden by yourself?”

“....”

Jin-Woo didn't answer her.

“But, how can it be.... How can just one person carry all those terrible burdens.... Are you going to sacrifice one to save everyone?”

Jin-Woo's expression brightened.

“Sounds like I can at least get that far. That’s a relief.”

“What do you mean, you’re relieved?! No one will be able to remember you. You’ll end up fighting a lonesome battle all by yourself!”

Jin-Woo let go of her hands as she tried to dissuade him. Back when he made up his mind to fight, he was already prepared to go that far. He took a step back from Madam and bade farewell in a dignified manner.

“I’m sorry for coming by unannounced and asking you for something like this.”

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim!!”

Even before her earnestly pleading voice came to an end, Jin-Woo slid into the shadow beneath his feet and disappeared from there.

The agents outside were taken surprise by her cries and hurriedly rushed into the room, but he was long gone by then.

‘.....’

Just like back when he was searching for Yu Jin-Ho, Jin-Woo climbed back up on top of the tallest building in the city and expanded his sensory perception as much as he could.

At the far, far off distance, towards the far end of the land up north....

...He felt the presence of so, so many monster soldiers that couldn’t even be counted anymore, making their march south. There seemed to be almost no presence of life beyond the advancing army.

Meaning, they had become prey of the denizens of the Chaos World.

Min Byung-Gu, Goh Gun-Hui, Adam White, and even his own dad.

Faces of many people who became sacrifices in this war against those creatures fleeted in and out of Jin-Woo’s mind.

Pure anger.

Anger gradually welling up from the depths of his chest began dyeing the Black Heart. Jin-Woo closed his eyes and began searching for the Dragon Emperor’s aura within that massive army.

As it turned out, it wasn’t all that difficult to spot the centre of the mass of ‘power’ that raged on like a violent storm and swallowing up everything in its wake.

‘...*Found you.*’

Jin-Woo saw the Dragon Emperor.

At that moment, the Sovereign of Destruction also saw Jin-Woo.

That sharp sensory perception that swept past it – there could only be one possessing senses like that. The Dragon Emperor abruptly came to a halt and glared in Jin-Woo's direction.

Its demonic snake-like eyes didn't shy away from the darkness in the distance for a long while. It had finally sensed the presence of the true enemy that could threaten its existence over yonder, that was why.

'.....'

'.....'

The Shadow Sovereign and the Sovereign of Destruction glared at each other while transcending past the distance itself. The latter bared its fangs first.

[I am right here!]

Its terrifying roar as loud as hundreds, no, thousands of lightning bolts exploding at the same time resounded throughout the entire planet.

[Tens of millions of your kin have died already! So, how long are you planning to hide like this?]

Murderous glare flickered for a moment within Jin-Woo's eyes.

'Don't you worry. I'll see you soon.'

And when I do....

Jin-Woo swallowed back the words he wanted to say and submerged quietly into the shadow.



Chapter 238 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

If one were to transplant ‘Hell’ to Earth, would it resemble something like this?

The skies were filled with thick black clouds that showed no signs of abating. The ground below was, in turn, filled with blood, screams, ashes, and acrid stink.

Sovereigns were born from the darkness with the sole purpose of destroying everything, and so, they proceeded to systematically erase any semblance of light and life from this world.

The Dragon Emperor stood in front of them. It stepped proudly on top of the city now reduced to ash and swept its gaze all over its surroundings.

‘What is going on with that b*stard, I wonder?’

After that brief stare-down, the Shadow Sovereign went into hiding and didn’t appear again, even until now.

When he used his sensory perception to reveal his existence, the Dragon Emperor took that as the sign of the Shadow Sovereign finally declaring war.

And that was why, for the first time in an extremely long while, the Dragon Emperor’s heart that went dormant while wandering within the gap between dimensions had begun beating powerfully once again.

Finally, one of only a few enemies that could truly threaten its life had bared his fangs at it. The true war was at hand.

To the ‘Sovereign of Destruction’, the sight of the battlefield filled with sheer, uncontrolled madness from all parties involved was pretty much the same thing as a marvellous gift from the heavens.

Could anything be compared to the pure joy derived from the battles?

Too bad, the event it had been waiting for didn’t materialise.

The Shadow Sovereign vanished without a trace and showed no signs of appearing again even after a nation of his kin had been annihilated completely.

Of course, it’d be no different than killing himself to fight against the combined army of the Chaos World that easily numbered in the ten-plus

millions with just over one hundred thousand of his servants.

However, if he was planning to run away from the get-go, he wouldn't have tried to threaten the Dragon Emperor even at the risk of exposing his current whereabouts.

'...Could he be aiming for something else?'

The Dragon Emperor grew more anxious as time continued to pass by.

Now that they had no clue when and where the Shadow Sovereign would begin his assault, the soldiers under the Dragon had no choice but to move at a much more cautious pace. Obviously, their marching speed had slowed down to a crawl as a result.

The Dragon Emperor wanted to get rid of all the nuisances bothering them as soon as possible and get ready for the battle against the Rulers, so without a doubt, the current situation was proving to be rather annoying.

Could it be....?

'...He's waiting for the annihilation of his kin so he can convert them all into his Shadow Soldiers?'

However, turning humans who didn't know how to wield Mana into his soldiers wouldn't be much help against the Army of Destruction. Surely, that bastard would know of this fact, too.

It was then.

A voice interrupted the deep deliberation of the Dragon Emperor.

"Humans are coming, my liege."

One of the Ancient-class Dragons acting as its bodyguard informed it of the incoming attacks of the humans. But, didn't all the humans of this nation capable of wielding Mana, 'Hunters', die? If so, what could this be?

The Dragon Emperor formed a puzzled expression and raised its head, and with excellent timing, countless missiles rained down from the sky.

BOOOOOM-!!!

This was the final struggle of the weak creatures, so pathetically meaningless that even the Sovereign of Destruction felt sorry for them. Humans knew that their weapons not imbued with Mana couldn't even touch a single hair on the Army of Destruction, yet they stubbornly refused to give up.

'...This is getting boring.'

The brows of the Dragon Emperor quivered slightly. Anxiety morphed into annoyance, and soon, annoyance transformed into anger.

[None of you step forward.]

The Dragon Emperor warned its underlings not to make a move and for the first time ever since setting foot in this world, revealed its true appearance.

These fighter pilots had flown here while risking their lives in order to buy time, however little it'd be, for the civilians to evacuate. But then, after seeing the truly nonsensical size of the personified calamity approaching them, every single one of these brave men and women became completely speechless.

“Mommy....”

The terror and shock of these pilots only lasted for a brief moment. Soon, the breath of pure destruction fired out in a straight line from the jaw of the calamity, swallowing up all of the fighter jets in the air.

Kuwaaaaah-!

In less than one minute. The lives of these pilots couldn't even buy one minute and their sacrifice was ultimately in vain.

Unfortunately, the Dragon Emperor wasn't satisfied by these humans' sacrifices and raised its head to spew out a terrifying roar at the heavens.

KUWAAAAAAHHH-!!!

That was the Sovereign of Destruction declaring war against the Shadow Sovereign.

Jin-Woo also heard that roar.

His eyes, closed in stillness so that he could organise his thoughts, quietly opened up.

‘...It's time.’

The moment his eyelids lifted up, the sight of the 'lodging' Beru had constructed immediately entered his view. Darkness and silence seemed to have taken over the dominion of this needlessly humongous room.

Was it because the current atmosphere resembled the moments of eternal rest? Jin-Woo didn't dislike the combination of darkness and silence as experienced within this empty, wide-open space.

He felt guilty about scolding Beru initially after clapping his eyes on this white fortress for the first time back then, so he quietly summoned the former

ant king to his side.

“Hey, Beru. Thanks.”

Beru had been silently waiting in Jin-Woo’s shadow until then. He sneaked his head out of the darkness below to speak.

“Oh, my king....”

“Yeah, I know.”

Jin-Woo cut off Beru’s sentence even before another word could be uttered. This time, Bellion rose up to the surface from the side of the ant king.

“It’s far too dangerous, my liege.”

Even Igrit emerged from below too, as if he was waiting for this chance. He knelt down and lowered his head, his voice sounding earnest.

“I share their opinions, my liege.”

All three Marshals were trying to dissuade Jin-Woo from enacting his plan. Wordlessly, their master studied the trio.

Shadow Soldiers would never die unless their Sovereign was killed off. Which meant that they would always worry about the safety of their Sovereign first and foremost.

However, sometimes one had no choice but to make a move even though he knew of the dangers waiting for him on the other side.

For Jin-Woo, this was one such occasion.

“Osborne.... The former Shadow Sovereign said that he liked this aspect of me.”

That would be the aspect of him willing to tackle the seemingly-dangerous problem head-on first to see what’s what, even though he looked cold and calculating on the outside.

Jin-Woo continued on.

“If he was in the same situation as I am now, what would he have done?”

“...”

Bellion recalled the past actions of the former Shadow Sovereign and realised that he couldn’t readily provide an answer.

Osborne, the former Shadow Sovereign, was someone who stepped up all by himself to try and stop the rebellion of every other Fragment of the Brilliant Light marching forward to kill their creator, the Absolute Being.

If it was him, he'd never give up on his duty regardless of the situation facing him. Once Bellion's thoughts arrived there, he raised his faltering head up high.

Jin-Woo was smiling back at him.

'They... resemble each other.'

Jin-Woo's face overlapped with that of Osborne's in Bellion's eyes, just then.

'As expected.'

Bellion lowered his head again and made an earnest pledge towards Jin-Woo.

"I shall accompany you till the end, my liege."

It seemed that other Marshals shared his sentiment because they no longer bothered to dissuade Jin-Woo.

Perfect.

"You should've come out like that from the beginning, you know."

Jin-Woo grinned refreshingly at them.

He felt that there really wasn't much time remaining, and pulled out his phone from the pocket. This might prove to be his last chance to speak to his family.

'.....'

In the end, though, he couldn't bring himself to tap the 'Call' icon. He thought that, if he heard the voices of his loved ones now, he'd not be able to take another step forward.

That's the feeling he got.

Crack!

The crushed phone slowly fell from Jin-Woo's hand.

It'd be perfectly fine to delay listening to their voices until the end of the upcoming battle. Jin-Woo reaffirmed his resolve and summoned the pair of Kamish's Wrath from the storage within the subspace.

And then, he tore the T-shirt he was wearing to create long ropes and wrapped them around his hands holding the shortswords. His weapons shouldn't slip out of his grasp during the battle, but in reality, he was doing this to rouse his fighting spirit up.

The rope made out of his torn T-shirt tightly secured the shortswords in his both of hands.

His firm, well-developed torso muscles, fully on display now that his top was gone, quivered and writhed every time he breathed deeply in and out as if they were alive.

‘Alright, good.’

The heightened sensation before the battle quietly made its descent on his shoulders. His heart was steadily pounding away, too.

Jin-Woo always liked this heightened sensation spreading throughout his entire body just before he was about to step into a dungeon.

Both his mind and body were prepared now.

Fuu....

He let a soft sigh leave his lips, and chilling light began shining from deep within his eyes.

The plan he ran countless simulations of in his head raced past his mind one more time. He could not afford to make any mistake from here on.

His expression now reflected the weight of his determination. His Marshals, having read their liege’s will to fight, nodded their heads in unison.

Jin-Woo spoke with a determined voice.

“Let’s get going.”

Inside the office of the Korean Hunter’s Association President.

Woo Jin-Cheol was busy recalling the sage advice his grandfather had left behind some time ago.

If he wanted to figure out the severity of an incident, then he’d have to take a closer look at the expressions of the news anchor.

His grandfather had personally experienced and survived the war and various calamities that came to visit Korea in the past, so he knew what he was talking about. After placing a very young Woo Jin-Cheol on his lap, he said these words.

Woo Jin-Cheol was studying the expression of the female news anchor and muttered softly without even consciously realising it.

“...When the anchor is trying to maintain a calm expression.”

In cases of truly calamitous events, news readers would try to prevent the unrest and agitation blooming in the hearts of the viewers at home by doing their best to project how calm they were.

His grandfather always told him not to miss the moment when such grim determination would be shown on live TV.

And sure enough, the lady anchor of the TV news was ably maintaining a calm expression as well as a level voice to report on the events unfolding in North America – exactly as his grandfather had warned.

[...When all contact with the Hunters stepping forward to stop the advance had been cut off, the American government has urgently mobilised all of their military forces to buy enough time for civilians to evacuate.....]

Woo Jin-Cheol squeezed his eyes shut.

He just didn't feel confident of continuously watching the unfolding tragedy happening on the other side of the planet.

Through Jin-Woo's memory, he had witnessed the grand scale of the enemy's invading forces. He was being serious here – that was a calamity nothing in this world could defend against.

The nation boasting the greatest combat strength, the United States of America, was crumbling helplessly at the hands of those d*mn monsters. And right now, the only thing humanity could do was to pray for a miracle.

Unfortunately, just what kind of a miracle would it have to be to stop those creatures?

Imagination filled with ominous foreboding and terrible imagery continued to bubble one after the other in his head as if they had formed a long, unbroken chain. Woo Jin-Cheol slowly shook his head, hoping to get rid of those distracting thoughts.

A miracle, was it?

'Now that I think about it...'

It had been already over three days since all contact with Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had been cut off.

Woo Jin-Cheol got to clearly see Jin-Woo's ability to create dozens of Gates, back when the representatives of the world's nations had gathered in one place. As long as he wanted to, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo would be able to escape to another world.

It could very well be that he had already evacuated to somewhere safe by now. But, even if he did that, who here could criticise his decision?

It was either fight against ten million soldiers born for the sake of destruction with no one else but himself, or escape to somewhere far away, where their hands didn't reach.

Even if it was Woo Jin-Cheol making this decision, he wasn't confident of choosing the former over the latter.

So, all that remained was to truly pray fervently for a miracle.

“Please, I beg of you. Don't....”

Although there would never be a reply, Woo Jin-Cheol still looked up at the ceiling of his office and whispered softly.

“.....Don't forsake us.”

But, it happened right then.

“...???”

Woo Jin-Cheol jumped up in shock and his gaze was locked onto the TV immediately.

There was an earthquake erupting within his eyes now.

“Uwaaaahk!!”

The best air force in the world, the United States Air Force that proudly boasted the history of zero defeats, didn't fare any better compared to their Canadian counterparts when subjected to the power of the Army of Destruction.

BOOM!!

A fighter jet's engine was destroyed in an instant and its pilot hurriedly attempted to eject from the plane.

As this pilot made his rapid descent towards the ground, he began screaming out in despair as he watched his friends and colleagues getting massacred in the blink of an eye.

“No!! Nooo!!”

Boom!! Bang! Ka-boom!

Booming exploding noises and flashes of fireballs filled up the sky.

The pilot continued to cry out the names of his dying friends even as the disorientating chaos pushed his head into a dizzy spin.

The ground approached at the rate of knots. Just before he was about to

become a flat pancake, his parachute unfurled itself in time.

He messily tumbled and rolled around on the ground several times before coming to a stop. He then emptied the contents of his stomach from the extreme case of dizziness.

“Blergh, blergh....”

Were the tears pooling on the edges of his eyes the result of the pain wracking his body, or because of the resentment he felt at his own powerlessness?

Unfortunately, he wasn't given a lot of time to consider that dilemma.

Even though the surroundings were filled with the acrid stink of blood and stinging fumes of chemicals, monsters still managed to sense the breathing of a lifeform from far away and began rushing towards his location.

The pilot hurriedly cut himself loose from the parachute's straps and yanked out a pistol mounted on his hips.

“Die!! Die, you sons of b*tches!!”

Blam! Blam!! Blam!!! Blam!!!!

Several ear-piercing gunshots echoed in the air, but as expected, they were simply inadequate to slow down the monsters by one bit.

Click, click, click....

Now that he ran out of bullets, the pilot instantly began regretting his actions. He should have reserved the last shot for his own final moment.

His hands powerlessly sagged to the ground.

The very first monster to arrive his location as he stood there dazed and numb was a denizen of the Chaos World that resembled a giant cockroach.

Shashashashak!

After seeing the insect-type monster utterly filling up his view, all strength in the pilot's legs abandoned him and he sunk down to the floor.

A despairing moan leaked out of his mouth.

“D*mn it....”

Right at that moment....

kwagagagagahk!!

All those insects rushing at him were suddenly torn apart at once as if a claw from a gigantic creature took a swipe at them.

“Jesus Christ?!”

His tearful eyes anxiously sought out the origin of that miracle. And soon, he found a single Asian man gently landing in front of his eyes.

Although it was only his back, the pilot found it not too difficult to guess this man’s name by looking at the pair of uniquely-shaped shortswords in his hands.

“Seong Jin-Woo.... Hunter Jin-Woo Seong??”

Jin-Woo took a look at the pilot behind him.

There was an incredibly intense scowl on his face that made it hard to tell whether he was an ally or an enemy. But, his eyes definitely said, ***“Run away, now!”***

Sure enough, a horde of monsters far outnumbering the ones that got killed was rushing towards them from the distance. The pilot’s voice rose up an octave just then.

“Even if it’s you, Hunter Seong, you can’t do this alone....”

That was as far as his words could go.

KWA-GAGAGAGAHK!!

Jin-Woo furiously swung Kamish’s Wraths, resulting in the monsters to get torn apart into bits and pieces like dolls made out of paper. Having successfully bought more time, Jin-Woo looked back at the pilot again.

“Go, now!”

“Ah, y-yes!”

The pilot finally managed to ungainly push himself off from the ground and he began running away using everything in his power. Jin-Woo briefly watched the back of the departing man, before shifting his gaze back to his front again.

He had cut down dozens upon dozens of enemies with those two attacks, but that was like shaving a tiny piece off a massive iceberg.

Enemies hundreds of times greater in number seemed to have latched onto the smell of combat that had taken place here.

This would be the first steps of the war. His first victims would be with these insect-type monsters.

Fuu....

Jin-Woo sucked in a quick but deep breath, and in the direction of the

Chaos World's soldiers rushing towards his location, he spat out the two words that would become the turning point in this war.

“Rise up.”



Chapter 239 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

“Rise up.”

As soon as Jin-Woo issued his command....

Kiiieehk-!!

All those insect monsters that got torn to shreds just now stood back up as new Shadow Soldiers.

In the past, he also revived monsters that got killed during the battles and added them to his stock of soldiers, but these new additions were on a different scale altogether compared to those guys.

Quite far removed from the recent past when the System suppressed the powers of the Shadow Sovereign and resulted in the creation of Shadow Soldiers that were weaker than their living counterparts, Jin-Woo was now the bonafide King of the Dead, and the restrictions of the System no longer affected him. He could create the perfect Shadow Soldiers at will now.

Kiiehk!

These soldiers were so much stronger than when they were still alive. Black smoke rose up vigorously like flames from their bodies. It was pretty obvious that the stronger the soldiers of the Chaos World, the stronger his Soldiers extracted from their shadows would be.

And so, this would be how the unparalleled power that tried to destroy this world ended up becoming the noose that tightened around his enemies' necks.

Jin-Woo issued his first command to these new soldiers, overflowing with fighting spirit.

‘Go rampage to your heart’s content.’

Kiiiiieeeeehkkk-!!

The insect-type Shadow Soldiers madly rushed towards the incoming waves of Chaos World’s forces. Jin-Woo also dashed forward, as well.

He instantly overtook the insect-type Shadow Soldier at the very front of the pack and leapt into the midst of the Orcs unfortunate enough to be marching at the forefront.

Keu-hahk!!

The panicking hordes of Orcs, as well as Ogres standing here and there among them, blindly swung their weapons in a hurry, but the odds of those hits landing on him were zero.

Jin-Woo evaded every attack pouring in from all sides with consummate ease before swinging his shortswords. Like being sucked into the centre of a whirlpool, the hapless Orcs were swept away in one go without any mercy.

Every time he sliced down, the black aura shooting out from his blades utterly tore through not just the Orcs, but the ground they were standing on, too.

Simply put, it was a hellish storm.

The headcount of Orcs decreased a lot faster than the screams exploding out from their mouths could be heard.

It was then. A tall shade was suddenly cast above Jin-Woo's head. He raised his head to look.

Guooo....

A Giant-type monster, so humongous that tilting one's head to look might actually injure one's neck, was busy glaring down at him. And it was also in the middle of raising up high a pillar of stone that matched the length of its arms.

It must've devoured innumerable humans while getting here because the blood of its victims had dyed the vicinity of its mouth dark red.

Jin-Woo's brows creased up. Even before the creature could smash down its stone pillar, he made his move first. In the blink of an eye, he arrived right below the Giant's groin area and swung his reverse-gripped Kamish's Wrath with a crap-ton of power.

SLICE!

The black aura dancing around on the edge of the blade cleanly severed the Giant's thick ankle.

Wuh-uh-uh-uh-uh!!

Suddenly losing one of its ankles, the Giant's body tilted to one side and it cried out in alarm before its balance eventually broke. That humongous body tipped over to its back and soon, gained momentum as it crashed down to the ground.

Ka-boom-!!!

Countless monsters located behind the Giant couldn't evade in time and were crushed to death quite unexpectedly by that huge falling body.

up was the turn of the Shadow Soldiers.

As the Giant lay on its back breathing heavily in pain, the insect-type Shadow Soldiers quickly began climbing up on the creature.

Shashashashak-!!

The Giant struggled mightily to shake off the insects, but too bad, they reached the panicking creature's face in no time at all. And soon, their ravenous feeding time began.

Uwuuuuhhh-!!

The screaming Giant's convulsion ended pretty quickly. However, that wasn't the end for this Giant, not by a long shot. Once more, the Shadow Sovereign issued his command.

“Rise up.”

When he did....

Wu-uh-uhhh....

to the corpse of the Giant with its face mostly gone from the insects and their vicious bites, a Shadow with the exact same height slowly rose back up. Not just this guy, but other Shadow Soldiers began crawling out one by one from beneath this gigantic shadow, too.

These new Shadow Soldiers created out of the Orc remains were already outfitted with their own weapons. Their hostile eyes were now glaring at their former, still-alive comrades.

In no time at all, over one hundred of Chaos World's forces had been absorbed into the Shadow Army.

Wuuuung....

When the Giant soldier made its move, the enemies flinched greatly. Ignoring them for now, it bent all the way down to the ground where the original's body lay, unfurled the dead monster's fingers, before yanking back the stone pillar for itself.

That was how the massive object had become the new weapon for the Giant soldier.

Tumble, duduk....

Clumps of soil clinging onto the stone pillar tumbled and fell to the ground.

As if not being able to swing its pillar while still alive was its greatest regret ever, the Giant soldier cocked that enormous weapon behind it and got ready to take an almighty swing.

Only then did the soldiers of the Chaos World realise just what kind of authority their enemy possessed.

Stagger, stagger....

These monsters used to enjoy fighting in this so-called war, but now, they all began taking retreating steps in fear. Their unchecked terror travelled through the air of the battlefield and got transmitted in full to Jin-Woo.

He roared out in the languages of the Sovereigns towards these creatures.

[What are you all scared of?]

After all, his counterattack had only just begun. It was indeed far, far too early to feel fear from only this much. A murderous, chilly glare flickered within Jin-Woo's eyes.

In that moment...

WHOOSH-!!

The stone pillar powerfully swung by the Giant soldier brushed past and swept away every single enemy in its path as if they were mere small toys.

Kwa-ga-ga-ga-gahk!!

Immediately after Jin-Woo made his entrance to the battlefield.

The Dragon Emperor, having never let its guard down once, finally detected the presence of the Shadow Sovereign.

'Towards the eastern front.'

Right at the eastern end of the gigantic army spreading out with itself as the centre – that was where the Shadow Sovereign decided to make his appearance.

Although a bit later than their leader, the Ancient-class Dragons as well as other Sovereigns also eventually detected the Shadow Sovereign's movements.

The King of Demonic Spectres, the Sovereign of Transfiguration, addressed the Dragon Emperor respectfully.

[We should lead all of our forces and....]

However, the latter raised its hand up and abruptly cut off the words of the former.

The Emperor's underlings formed various puzzled expressions.

The one who waited for the entrance of the Shadow Sovereign with the greatest anticipation was the Sovereign of Destruction right before their eyes. So, why did it choose not to make a move even after the much-awaited enemy had finally signalled the earnest beginning of this war?

Even at this moment, the forces of the Chaos World were rapidly morphing into the Shadow Army's soldiers.

The anxiety felt by the Sovereign of Transfiguration, currently occupying the body of a short-statured middle-aged man, forced it to open its mouth, but before any words could be spoken, the Dragon Emperor voiced his opinion first.

[The Shadow Army.... Can you see where the Army of the Dead is?]

Even though they were separated by an incredible distance, the Emperor of Dragons didn't miss the crucial fact that the Shadow Sovereign's loyal soldiers were not present within his shadow.

'But, that can't be....?'

The Sovereign of Transfiguration hurriedly closed its eyes shut.

At the Eastern battlefield – a large illusory eyeball created using magic appeared in the air just above the location where the Shadow Sovereign had begun his warfare.

This magical eye took a sweeping look at the battlefield.

'....!!'

It was as the Dragon Emperor had said.

The Shadow Sovereign was freely roaming through the middle of the battlefield as the storm of blood raged on, but not one single hint of the army that should have been hidden within his shadow could be detected.

The Sovereign of Transfiguration opened its eyes and looked at the Dragon Emperor and discovered that the latter's glare was now half-made up of rage and unanswered questions.

'Just what....?'

What was the Shadow Sovereign thinking of by stepping into the battlefield without the army to protect him?

At a casual glance, this seemed to be the most perfect opportunity to eliminate him for good. However, they simply couldn't mobilise the entire army when it was unknown what their enemy was scheming right now. In a way, doing precisely that might be the true aim of the enemy, to begin with.

Anxiety akin to a veil of fog clogging up one's vision grabbed hold of the Dragon Emperor and it couldn't readily make its next move. One of the Ancient-class Dragon worriedly called out to its master.

[Oh, my Sovereign....]

The Dragon Emperor shot a glare at its servant, and all of the Ancient-class Dragons lowered their heads.

Having silenced them all with nothing but sheer intense pressure, the Sovereign of Destruction shifted its glare back towards the eastern battlefield, where Jin-Woo was going on a rampage at the moment.

The number of the Chaos World's soldiers were decreasing at a noticeable rate. And at the same time, that b*stard's own forces were increasing rapidly.

The decision needed to be made right now. The quicker the better.

Too bad, the Dragon Emperor couldn't readily make a choice when the battlefield's direction was unfolding in an unexpected direction through one man's actions that seemed to defy all attempts to predict what his next moves would be.

The Dragon Emperor's brows creased up.

'Shadow Sovereign.... Just what is it that you're aiming for?'

From a certain point onwards, Jin-Woo gave up on consciously cutting down on the vast sea of enemies. There were simply far too many of them for that.

The number of his own allies was increasing at a rapid pace, but still, the scale of the enemy forces was just so ridiculous that it almost rendered all of his actions so far inconsequential.

'Fuu.'

After he sucked in a deep breath, Jin-Woo entrusted himself not to his logical reasoning, but to his senses. When he did, reflexive movements that seemed to have transcended the limits of human anatomy began repeating as if he was a machine created solely to murder and destroy.

Just one strike from him tore through hundreds of monsters. And then,

“Rise up!!”

Then, hundreds of new Shadow Soldiers joined his army. Like a gigantic tsunami wave crashing and swallowing everything up, the Shadows gradually dyed the battlefield black.

Every time Jin-Woo moved, black waves rumbled and rose up from the ground.

“Uwahhh-!!”

A thunderous cry filled with Mana exploded from Jin-Woo and it proceeded to knock down all the monsters standing in the frontline of the battlefield.

Their eardrums must’ve blown up because blood was trickling down from their ears; as the creatures grunted out in pain and failed to orient themselves properly....

....Shadow Soldiers pounced on them without mercy.

Screams of monsters reverberating from all corners completely filled up the battlefield.

And so, just how much time went by in this manner?

Jin-Woo finally detected the approach of existences quite different from the forces of the Chaos World that he’d been fighting so far.

He raised his head to spot hundreds of Sky Dragons, as well as Dragonewts possessing humanoid appearances riding on top of them, completely blanket the sky above.

‘Is the Army of Destruction finally making its move?’

However, he still couldn’t sense the presence of the Dragon Emperor yet.

Not yet, huh?

There was no need to be disappointed, though – because, he had plenty of time on his hands, after all. Besides, if that b*stard was reluctant to make a move, then all he had to do was to give it a good enough reason.

Kiiihak!

The Dragonewt flying at the front of the pack let out a loud shriek which in turn made every single Sky Dragon change their heading and rush towards Jin-Woo’s location.

At that moment, determination filled up his eyes.

The reason for the Dragon Emperor to make a move? He’d create that

through his overwhelming power that these measly underlings were incapable of dealing with.

Jin-Woo reached out with both of his hands towards the Sky Dragons descending towards him.

‘Ruler’s Authority!!’

As if to squeeze dry the heavens itself, he strengthened his grip and dragged ‘something’ that eyes could not see. Mana in the atmosphere answered the will of the Shadow Sovereign next.

Without a single exception, hundreds of Sky Dragons buzzing towards him like a swarm of bees were caught by the invisible hands and were slammed down to the ground.

KWA-GAH-GAH-GAH-GAH-GAHNG!!!

It was a spectacular sight to behold.

The earth rocked violently from the Sky Dragons seemingly endlessly crash landing to their deaths.

What a truly absurd level of power this was. Even Jin-Woo himself got stunned by this display of the Shadow Sovereign’s power that was no longer restricted by anything.

Unfortunately, he didn’t have time to stew in his surprise for long.

A Dragon that was previously hidden from his view by the swarm of Sky Dragons revealed itself. And he witnessed a cluster of energy gathering in the flying creature’s jaw.

‘...!!’

Sure enough, the horrifying Breath of a Dragon made up purely of flames fell from the sky.

Kuwaaaaaaaah-!!

Having accurately fired the Breath attack on the target, this Dragon then increased its altitude.

The enemy’s presence couldn’t be detected. Could the human have been melted away by its Breath, then? Thinking that it had reached a safe-enough altitude, the Dragon stopped flying up and looked down at the ground to confirm the fate of the Shadow Sovereign.

The raging flames died down, and the black smoke dissipated, but...

...But, not a trace of the Shadow Sovereign could be seen anywhere.

‘Where is he...??’

It was then.

A presence could be felt on top of the Dragon’s head. A chill-inducing sensation brushed past the back of this creature’s neck, but by then, it was already too late.

Even before the Dragon could look up, Jin-Woo standing on its head stabbed down with ‘Kamish’s Wrath’.

Kwa-jeehck!!

Sharp black aura shooting out from the tip of the shortsword penetrated clean through the Dragon’s head and exited from underneath its chin.

Rather obviously, the dead flying lizard lost its ability to stay airborne and helplessly fell towards the earth.

The ground rapidly closed in, and eventually, collided with the Dragon.

BOOM-!!

Jin-Woo lightly jumped off from the head of the unmoving, sagging Dragon and while walking towards the approaching enemies, spoke without even bothering to look behind him.

“Rise up.”

Just like that, the Dragon and hundreds of Dragonewts began rising up again right behind him.

The Dragon Emperor also felt it.

Its own army shouldn’t even be compared to the ragtag bunch calling themselves soldiers that belonged to other Sovereigns. But now, a portion of its proud army had been lost to the Shadow Sovereign.

With that, the situation was now beyond the point of wait-and-see in regards to whatever schemes the b*stard had cooked up. The event of the Army of Destruction being swallowed up by the Shadow Sovereign must be prevented at any cost.

[We shall strike him down.]

The Dragon Emperor issued a new order to the Ancient-class Dragons waiting for their chance to participate in the war.

[All of you shall accompany me.]

And just in case, it issued a different command to the Sovereign of Transfiguration.

[You shall remain here and prepare for the possible surprise attack by the Shadow Sovereign.]

[It shall be done.]

Hundreds of Gates connected to the battlefield in the east suddenly materialised in front of the Dragon Emperor and the Ancient-class Dragons.

‘I shall not let you escape.’

With that thought in its head, the Dragon Emperor and its eyes burning in the flames of rage disappeared into the Gate. Right behind it, the Ancient-class Dragons also entered their respective Gates.

Finally, the Army of Destruction, shrinking back and not doing anything until now, was forced to make their move after the Shadow Sovereign successfully managed to provoke them.

Quite unlike in the east where the violent storms of power were on a collision course, a comparatively quieter battle was coming to an end on the opposite side, on the western front.

The American military that had set up their final defensive line here was tragically being torn apart by the fangs and claws of the monsters.

What these soldiers had bet their last hopes on were the weapons used by the Hunters. Unfortunately, there was simply no way that these regular people could effectively use the Hunter-issue weapons that were originally designed for raid situations.

And so, the American military rapidly crumbled away in defeat.

“Uwaaahk! Uwaahk?!”

The role of the marauding army’s spearhead for the western front was also given to the insect-type monsters that possessed great agility and sharp senses.

Shashashashak...

The insect monsters quickly closed in on the human soldiers.

Blam, blam, blam, blam, blam!!

These creatures completely ignored the barrage of bullets and pounced on the humans to tear them apart.

“Uwaahk!!”

The survivors retreated and continued to fire away with their guns, but as expected, their actions were completely ineffective. However, it was even more unimaginable that they would suddenly start swinging swords around to fight these insect monsters now.

While they found themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place...

Kiieek.

The insects, having finished their feast on the human soldiers, swivelled their heads towards the next wave of prey. It was now the turn of the survivors.

The platoon commander’s expression hardened as he took a look at his soldiers to the side. They were nodding their heads back to him.

From the moment they learned that this mission was simply a ploy to buy enough time for the civilians to evacuate, they all had prepared themselves for this moment.

The platoon commander pulled out a hand grenade. This little modern-day explosive might not be able to kill these enemies, but on the flip side, they couldn’t avoid becoming food for their enemies, either.

The platoon commander yanked out the safety pin.

The insect-type monsters sensed that the atmosphere had turned weird from the human’s action and while screeching out loudly, they madly pounced on the platoon commander.

Kiiiiiaaahhkk-!!

His eyes grew wider as he watched the insects swarm towards him. It truly happened in the blink of an eye.

These insects arrived right before his nose in less than a breath. Just before their sharp mandibles split open wide to swallow him up...

....A certain figure stepped before the platoon commander faster than any of the insects could and took the hand grenade away, while blocking the attacks of the monsters with his bare back.

The commander could only look up in a total daze at the man blocking his view, who was also at least a good two heads taller than he was.

“T-Thomas Andre???”

Thomas winked and spun around towards the insects before shoving the grenade into the open mouth of one of them.

Although there wouldn't be any tangible damage suffered by the d*mn thing from the grenade, but, it still should get really surprised by a strange object suddenly entering its gut like that.

The corners of his lips arched up as a rather humorous situation played out in his head. Meanwhile, he swung his massive fist and easily blew away the head of that insect.

Kwa-boooooom!!

The dead headless insect flew away and landed far away.

“Oops.... That thing's not gonna get surprised now, is it?”

As Thomas stood there scratching the back of his head, top-ranked Hunters urgently rushing forward from somewhere behind him began their desperate struggle against the insect-type monsters.

Kiiiieehk!

Kiiaaahk!

Painful screeches of dying insects noisily rang around. The surviving soldiers quickly recognised who these people coming to their aid were and bright expressions filled up their faces.

“I-it's the Scavenger!!”

“They're Hunters from the Scavenger Guild!”

“Ah, ahh!! Thank you, Lord!”

As befitting a Guild consisting of truly exceptional Hunters, the current situation was resolved in no time at all. However, they didn't have any breathing room whatsoever as yet another wave of monsters was madly rushing towards them.

Thomas Andre's ultra-sharp glare swept across the incoming enemies.

Orcs, Ogres, Trolls, Minotaurs, Cyclops, etc....

All of them were monsters commonly seen inside dungeons. No matter how many of them were here, they didn't pose any challenge to him.

‘Except....’

In the middle of this sea of weaklings, there hid a nonsensically powerful being. Just like how other monsters were scared by Thomas's presence, he too couldn't make a move because of that one presence.

Eventually, this creature slowly walked to the front of the horde, as if it was done observing the situation.

[You're the human from that time, aren't you? The weakling vessel of the Rulers, almost driven to death by the Sovereign of Beastly Fangs.]

The King of Monstrous Humanoids formed a sinister grin.

The Sovereign of Beastly Fangs did indeed possess powers of a predator, but basically, it was more specialised towards hunting down its prey, instead. However, this particular King was different from its now-dead comrade in that it ruled over Monstrous Humanoids such as Orcs and Ogres, and its speciality was in up-close-and-personal physical confrontations.

So, it was quite obvious that it'd find this human acting so flippant when he had only a pathetic little bit of strength to fall back on rather humorous to behold.

The King of Monstrous Humanoids, the Sovereign of Iron Body, began unleashing its enormous Mana reserve.

Pressuring the opponent's fighting spirit through aura alone. This was a display of confidence from the Sovereign, implying that it could easily kill off a measly human like Thomas Andre in a heartbeat.

But then....

[....?]

In stark contrast to the Hunters behind him with their rapidly-paling complexions, the vessel of the Rulers didn't seem to lose his relaxed demeanour at all.

The Sovereign began to wonder if this human had some sort of a scheme, a trick up his sleeve, but then...

"....So, this much should be enough, right?"

....Thomas Andre muttered to himself.

When he did, the darkness suddenly spread out from beneath his feet and in the blink of an eye, completely covered up the land.

The Sovereign's brow quivered greatly.

'Shadow....?'

This was, without a doubt, the skill belonging to the Shadow Sovereign.

The odd thing was, though, if he was here, then there was no way that the King of Monstrous Humanoids would have missed the source of that enormous power.

At that moment, a familiar voice suddenly rose up from right behind

Thomas Andre.

[It's been a long time, oh, King of Monstrous Humanoids.]

The Grand-Marshal Bellion sent his greeting in a polite yet still threatening tone of voice. And right behind him, over 130 thousand Shadow Soldiers, hiding within Thomas Andre's shadow while patiently biding their time, were rising up above the ground at the same time.



Chapter 240 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The elite Shadow Soldiers numbering over 130 thousand that managed to survive the last war under the guidance of their Sovereign erased their presence as much as possible and hid within the human's shadow.

It was a trap.

Now suddenly finding itself coming face-to-face with the Shadow Army, the Sovereign of Iron Body felt this dizzying sensation of being sucked into a quagmire.

'They got me.'

Currently, the army manning the western battlefield didn't possess enough power to face off against the Shadow Army. Not only that, the ones leading this Army of the Dead were Bellion and Igrit, so the Sovereign in charge now had to worry about its own neck, instead.

Most likely, the Shadow Army – no, the Shadow Sovereign, was aiming for this result.

'...I need to let them know.'

The Sovereign of Iron Body urgently tried to communicate with the Dragon Emperor. However, some kind of 'power' was blocking its attempts to send the word out.

'Could it be....??'

Did the Shadow Sovereign plan this far ahead?

The Sovereign of Iron Body hurriedly activated its sensory perception to locate the source of the 'power' interrupting the contact with the other side. When it did, it discovered a certain High Orc Shaman standing next to Igrit, diligently murmuring out some kind of an incantation while holding onto something small in his hand.

'...!!'

That d*mn creature's spell was disrupting all forms of communication with the other Sovereigns.

The spell from the Commander-grade Fangs, now that he had experienced a rebirth as a true Shadow Soldier, as well as borrowing the power of the Bead

of Avarice, was more than strong enough to perform that role.

Grin.

Fangs blushed slightly when his gaze met that of the king he used to serve. Even then, he didn't try to stop casting his spell.

The King of Monstrous Humanoids, the Sovereign of Iron Body felt as if it was being made fun of after looking at Fangs' smile. An uncontrollable rage welled up from deep within.

[You pathetic insects dare to...!!]

No, hang on – this tactic was not something the Shadow Sovereign would have cooked up, never mind his Shadow Soldiers. Indeed, this was not how the Shadow Army conducted its business; this army used to proudly announce the approach of unavoidable death right in front of their enemies every single time.

This was....

'...A human's way of thinking.'

The current Shadow Sovereign, the human, had perverted how the war was supposed to be fought. Didn't he possess any pride as a Sovereign?!

Now thoroughly enraged, the Sovereign of Iron Body expanded its muscles. As his body ballooned up to a near-bursting size, thick veins bulged up on its various muscles.

The Sovereign of Iron Body roared out.

[That b*stard is not qualified to be called a Sovereign!]

It then arrived right in front of Fangs in less than a blink of an eye, but its path was suddenly blocked off by Beru.

Boom-!!

The former ant king grabbed both hands of the Sovereign and began a contest of pure physical strength. He glared at the enemy and growled in the language of the monsters.

[What you said just now.... Retract it. Or else, you shall pay a heavy price for the sin of insulting my liege.]

As a reply, the Sovereign of Iron Body exerted enough power to twist and yank off Beru's arms while shouting out even louder than before.

[How dare a measly little soldier try to stop a Sovereign!!]

And when that happened....

Kiiieeehhhk-!!!

An ear-splitting screech exploded out from Beru's mouth as his entire body quickly expanded to double his previous size.

The Dragon Emperor saw it.

It saw the corpses of countless soldiers of the Chaos World that died during its brief period of hesitation, as well as the number of Shadow Soldiers that matched those that had fallen.

Figurative flames erupted out from the Dragon Emperor's eyes as it strode outside the Gate. The end of its glare was locked onto Jin-Woo, currently swallowing whole a portion of the Chaos World's army after becoming a literal giant storm in their midst.

The man...

'That b*stard must die!!'

The Dragon Emperor didn't even have the necessary time to transform back to its original appearance, so it hurriedly fired the Breath of Destruction, instead.

Kuwaaah-!!

A flash of light flared brightly in the distance and Jin-Woo, even though he was in a trance-like state while butchering the forces of the Chaos World, didn't miss that blink-and-miss-it moment.

'It's him!'

Jin-Woo's figure vanished from the spot. Right afterwards, all the soldiers of the Chaos World as well as the new Shadow Soldiers were exposed to the Breath and got incinerated without a trace.

Kuwaaaaahhhh-!!!

Jin-Woo made his timely escape and settled down on a location not too far away.

Ending its Breath attack, the Dragon Emperor glared right at him. Countless Gates opened up behind it and through them, Ancient-class Dragons and Dragonewts revealed themselves.

And so, the King of Berserk Dragons, the Sovereign of Destruction, had entered the fray. What appeared now alongside it was the main portion of the Army of Destruction.

Forces capable of destroying this planet in one day had been mobilised in their entirety just to deal with the lone Shadow Sovereign. And in front of them stood the King of Kings, the Sovereign that lorded over other Sovereigns – the Dragon Emperor.

‘...’

Jin-Woo had to quickly swallow back his saliva after sensing the truly vast, seemingly-limitless sea of power from the Dragon Emperor.

At once, every single Shadow Soldier still fighting against the forces of the Chaos World stopped and retreated according to his new command. Just like the army of Dragons choosing to stand behind the Dragon Emperor, the Shadow Soldiers also stood right behind Jin-Woo.

The leader of the Army of Destruction formed a mocking grin.

[Are those pathetic soldiers everything you possess?]

There were several thousand Shadow Soldiers hurriedly ‘recruited’ to his cause after killing the enemy forces. However, he was facing off against nearly ten million soldiers, hundreds of Dragons, and most importantly, the truly dangerous existence called the Dragon Emperor.

Of course, Jin-Woo knew full well the differences in the size of their armies. That was why he chose to enact this plan from the get-go.

“Advance!”

Jin-Woo had his Shadow Soldiers, initially brought to one location, march forward again. An expression of confusion floated up on the Dragon Emperor’s face.

‘He saw my soldiers, yet he wishes to confront me head-on?’

Those were the actions of an insane fool!

As if to mock the Dragon Emperor’s suspicion, the Shadow Soldiers simply rushed forward towards their enemies. Dragons immediately fired powerful, vicious flames at them.

Huwaaaaa-aahk!!

With that, Shadow Soldiers were enveloped in flames before disappearing away like expendables, with nary a hint of regeneration happening among them.

Almost instantly, the Dragon Emperor realised that these were simply decoys to buy time.

‘Where is he....?!’

It quickly expanded its sensory perception. The Shadow Sovereign was using his shadow to escape to somewhere.

Seeing this shameful sight, the Dragon Emperor formed a mocking grin. It seemed that the human b*stard was planning to slowly shave down the forces of the Chaos World by repeating the tactics of hit-and-run, but he had made one crucial oversight, something he had failed to consider.

And that would be the fact the leader of the enemy's forces could chase after him no problem. The Dragon Emperor easily traced Jin-Woo's shadow now being connected to the western front.

'There you are!'

It'd never let him get away.

The Dragon Emperor quickly generated a Gate connected to the exact spot where Jin-Woo had fled to and jumped in without hesitation.

Just as it took the first step out of the Gate....

'.....'

...It was greeted by the sight of the 130,000-strong great army surrounding it.

That wasn't all.

Jin-Woo had been waiting for the Dragon Emperor's arrival and spoke in a calm voice when it did show up.

"....Rise up."

Just one command and every single creature belonging to the Western portion of the Chaos army that were killed at the hands of the true Shadow Army rose up as new Shadow Soldiers.

The Dragon Emperor took a sweeping look at the Shadow Soldiers that now numbered well past two hundred thousand and spoke.

[Is this what you were aiming for?]

Draw your enemy to the battlefield of your choosing and establish the upper hand – since the Shadow Army was facing an overwhelmingly disadvantageous number of enemies, the current tactic could be seen as a must, but still, a mocking grin didn't want to leave the face of the Dragon Emperor.

[How laughable.]

It finally understood what the scheme of the Shadow Sovereign was.

Although the process of uncovering the plot resulted in the loss of the western portion of the Chaos World's army, that was not a large cost to bare as long as the Shadow Sovereign could be killed here today.

'Even losing half of all the soldiers would not be a loss.'

'Fear' would bloom in one's heart when one couldn't predict the events of the future. But its opponent had been laid bare here.

[Oh, Shadow Sovereign.]

The Dragon Emperor chuckled and looked back at Jin-Woo.

[You must've thought that only I was capable of chasing you down, but...]

'You are wrong.'

In reality, there stood a certain Sovereign that could be seen as the greatest sorcerer in the Chaos World waiting right behind the Dragon Emperor.

Not too long afterwards, the Sovereign of Transfiguration waiting for the surprise attack from the Shadow Army created countless Gates that connected two battlefields.

Before long, a seemingly-endless number of soldiers from the Chaos World poured out before the measly two hundred thousand or so Shadow Army.

'So, how do you feel now?'

With this, your plan has been smashed to bits.

Your miscalculation will result in your death today.

The Dragon Emperor stared at Jin-Woo with a triumphant expression on its face.

[This is your defeat.]

However, Jin-Woo grinned as his reply.

He actually smiled right back at the Dragon Emperor and his satisfied expression.

'He got suckered in.'

Indeed, the Dragon Emperor had acted exactly according to his will.

The King of Berserk Dragons, of course, didn't miss that brief flash of a smile on the human's face.

'...He smiled?'

Sure enough – the summoning of the Shadow Soldiers was cancelled in an

instant, and they all got sucked into the dark shade below the Shadow Sovereign's feet.

Just what was this human thinking?

Withdrawing his soldiers now was no different from trying to kill himself. If he had no soldiers to buy him time, then he'd not even be able to escape to somewhere else, either.

Even if he didn't want to lose his precious Shadow Soldiers, no one would've taken him for a fool who would expose his back to his mortal enemies while hurriedly scurrying away!

Before Jin-Woo could do something else, the Dragon Emperor closed the distance first. At the same time, the entirety of the forces of the Chaos World also pounced towards Jin-Woo's direction.

The gazes of tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of soldiers still breathlessly emerging from the Gates were locked on Jin-Woo and Jin-Woo alone.

It was then – just as the Dragon Emperor arrived right before Jin-Woo's nose and reached out towards him...

....At that moment, Jin-Woo's eyes changed to resemble a Dragon's.

Only then did the Dragon Emperor realise that something had gone terribly awry.

[You....!!]

A moment of stillness came and went.

‘....’

From Jin-Woo's mouth, a loud and vicious roar exploded out. It was the cry from the soul that pushed every single being near him, every single being weaker than him, into a state of pure despair!

[Kuwaaaaaaahhh-]

It was the Dragon's Fear. The vilest and cruellest Skill of Dragons he learned from Kamish's Rune Stone. He hadn't been interested in it since its powers didn't differentiate allies from enemies, but now...

‘But now, it's different!’

The skill that drove hundreds of elite Hunters gathered to hunt down a Dragon to the pits of hell had now been used against the Dragons, instead.

[-Aaaaaaaahhh-!!!]

Just like how Kamish had done to the human Hunters all those years ago, the Shadow Sovereign froze up all the soldiers of the Dragon Emperor, too.

There was no being alive that could break from the effects of Fear produced by the near-bottomless supply of Mana belonging to the Shadow Sovereign, save for one lone individual, and that would be the Dragon Emperor.

After making every single one of the enemy forces freeze up in an instant, Jin-Woo reached out and grabbed the Dragon Emperor's arm next.

[You b*stard...!!]

The brows of the King of Berserk Dragons crumpled.

Jin-Woo gripped the arm tighter as a grin suffused on his lips.

“You, come with me for a sec.”



Chapter 241 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The circular shadow spreading out from beneath Jin-Woo's feet rapidly grew large enough to swallow up the Dragon Emperor. The creature's expression hardened.

'From the beginning, had he been aiming for this....?'

From the moment he appeared in the battlefield all alone, directing the Shadow Army behind everyone's back and mopping up the western front, and finally, even drawing the Dragon Emperor to here – were all of those just for the sake of this moment?

Although this human was its enemy, the King of all Dragons couldn't help but admire the meticulousness of the Shadow Sovereign.

At first, he created a situation where it simply had to make a move, and through what looked to be a pretty obvious tactic to lower its guard, then finally, by relying on an unexpected hidden card, he eventually got what he was aiming for.

'...To think, he'd actually use Dragon Fear here.'

The Dragon Emperor formed an expression of someone suffering from a sucker punch. Jin-Woo's grip on the creature's arm tightened after witnessing that unmistakable expression.

'I did it.'

There had been no mistakes so far. A couple more steps, and then...

Soon, the shadow swallowed up both Jin-Woo and the Dragon Emperor.

The darkness blinding them quickly rescinded and they re-emerged at the pre-selected destination.

Having succeeded in his endeavour of inviting the Dragon Emperor to the true battlefield of his own choosing, Jin-Woo quickly distanced himself away from his opponent.

And now, finding itself in a location very far away from its underlings, the creature began scanning the surrounding scenery with mystified eyes.

[And this is....?]

“A place on the opposite side of the world from where your army is.”

Truthfully, it was a bit incorrect to call it the exact opposite side, but regardless, that’s how far they were now.

They were in Japan, a land where an enormous amount of Mana had densely permeated into its every pore after the King of Giants died.

The land and atmosphere fortified by Mana should be able to withstand much of the potential impact forces resulting from his battle against the Sovereign of Destruction.

Once a massive sea of forest, this location now resembled a barren wasteland stretching endlessly beyond the horizon, all thanks to the concerted efforts of his Shadow Soldiers cutting down the trees present here.

What particularly drew one’s attention was this huge white-coloured fortress built up on the top of a hill. The Dragon Emperor pointed at it with a black flag flapping in the wind on top.

[Is that your castle?]

“...Something like that.”

[For a castle of the Shadow Sovereign, its size is fairly lousy, isn’t it.]

Why did Jin-Woo briefly feel apologetic to Beru all of a sudden? Of course, there was no reason to get suckered into his enemy’s pace now, was there?

Jin-Woo threw out a genuine warning at the Dragon Emperor, currently looking rather relaxed despite the situation – it was unknown whether that was because of its sky-high confidence, or it was simply trying to bluff him.

“Well, I think that building’s just about the perfect size to commemorate your death today.”

Only then did the gaze of the Dragon Emperor fix on Jin-Woo. He didn’t try to avoid meeting that glare.

[...]

The King of Berserk Dragons stopped looking at the human and closed its eyes for a moment while trying to communicate with its underlings.

Sure enough, not a hint of their signal could be captured. Some creature borrowing the power of the Shadow Sovereign was using a spell to interfere with all forms of communication.

The Dragon Emperor grew conscious of the fact that his human enemy had prepared everything from the beginning in order to perfectly isolate it.

It slowly opened its eyes again and found the entirety of the Shadow Army surrounding it from all sides.

A battle that should have been ten million against one was suddenly turned on its head to become two hundred thousand against one, with the 'one' being a completely different person.

The Dragon Emperor had been surrounded.

[So, this is it.... A battle where either I survive or fall, until my soldiers pinpoint my current location.]

However, its expression was not as gloomy as one would hope for in the current situation.

The thing was, although it didn't mind the types of battles where it'd use the overwhelming numbers to completely massacre its enemies, it also found the exact opposite of that situation quite enjoyable too, where it'd get to overwhelm the enemies alone.

In short, it was an existence born solely for warfare.

It was the incarnation of destruction, one who would not mind its own demise if it was all for the sake of blood, screams, madness, and destruction swirling in a dizzying storm of warfare.

That was why the Dragon Emperor could smile brightly.

[Allow me to show you the real thing.]

At the end of those words, that smile vanished from the creature's face.

Jin-Woo also sensed something at the same time. His senses that had far surpassed the limits of a normal human continuously rang loud warning bells.

Shiver.

Along with a chill running down his spine, goosebumps broke all over his skin.

It was then. Like a scene from an unrealistic movie, a truly frightening roar scary enough to stop one's heart just from hearing it exploded out of the Dragon Emperor's mouth.

Khayaaaaaaaah-!!

This was the Dragon Emperor's Fear, the ruler of all Dragons. The level of terror previously never experienced before slammed into the Shadow Army like a massive shockwave.

AAAAAH-!!

A seemingly endless chain of ripples began shaking the atmosphere. Even the ground quaked violently.

As the shaking akin to an earthquake rocked the world, Jin-Woo detected an extreme amount of terror, pain, and confusion from his soldiers and he urgently brought them back inside his shadow.

AAAAAH-!!!

During that process, vicious dizziness assaulted him and he wobbled unsteadily for a moment there.

The Dragon Emperor finally ended its roar. The corner of its lips curled up after seeing how pale Jin-Woo's complexion was.

[That was the real thing.]

The true Dragon's Fear.

Jin-Woo roughly shook his head in order to get rid of that attack's horrifying impact. Meanwhile, the Dragon Emperor addressed him in a calm manner.

[When you grabbed my arm, I could've easily shaken you loose.]

However, there was a reason why it didn't. It continued on.

[It's only because you impressed me with your efforts to trap me.]

Jin-Woo stared at the Dragon Emperor praising him with a suspicious glare. However, there was not a single hint of ridicule within that serious light shining from its eyes.

[That made me want to speak to you in a quiet place as two Sovereigns on equal ground.]

Jin-Woo's breathing, disrupted by the Dragon Fear just now, finally reverted back to being normal. He quickly righted his posture, his vigilance remaining high.

The Dragon Emperor continued to address Jin-Woo and his tightly-shut mouth.

[If you have inherited the previous Shadow Sovereign's memories, then you should know this by now.... Our real enemy is not this land, but well beyond the sky up there.]

It was referring to the armies of the Rulers. The first and the last ultimate command given to them was to annihilate all Sovereigns born from the darkness.

Quite obviously, the Shadow Sovereign wouldn't be an exception.

[I originally thought of disposing of you first and then get ready to fight them. However, I changed my mind after seeing how you conduct your battles. You possess a different set of skills compared to Osborne. And from your skill set, I foresaw our glorious victory.]

The Dragon Emperor extended its hand out towards Jin-Woo.

[If you take this hand, then I shall do as you want.]

His gaze slowly lowered towards the extended hand.

[If you wish to save your family, so it shall be. If you wish to save your nation, then that shall be done. If you wish for me to leave this land, fine. My soldiers and I shall quietly withdraw from this world.]

Jin-Woo gaze briefly lingering on the hand gradually rose up again until it stopped at the Dragon Emperor's face. The creature was carrying an expression full of compassion.

[You shall become the master of this world. Become a master of this whole planet, not just that small castle on the hill. You amply possess the qualification to do so. All you have to do....]

A gentle smile formed on the Dragon Emperor's lips now.

[...Is to take my hand.]

Once we cooperate and defeat the forces of the Rulers, not only you and your family, even your country – no, even more than that, everyone living on this land will gain peace and freedom.

That was the promise the Dragon Emperor was making here.

[So, how about it? Shadow Sovereign?]

Did he get enticed by the offer? A thin smile slowly spread on the face of the Shadow Sovereign as he quietly listened to the tempting words.

The King of Dragons also formed a smile of its own.

[Will you join me?]

Too bad, Jin-Woo's reply was rather curt in nature.

“Don't make me laugh.”

The Dragon Emperor's expression hardened after hearing that pointed retort.

“You want me to trust a b*stard with the eyes of someone that can barely

hide its desire to kill me?”

[Haha.... Euh-hahahahaha!!]

The King of all Dragons grasped its forehead and guffawed for a long time. Its laughter must've contained Mana, because every single wave of sound emitted by the creature caused a powerful reverberation within Jin-Woo's heart.

When it finally took its hand away from its forehead, both of its wide-open eyes had changed to that of a reptile's.

[I just can't seem to hide these eyes of mine.]

Appeasement attempt had ended in failure. If conning the other party didn't work, then the remaining way was to destroy him with everything it possessed.

The Dragon Emperor finally revealed its true self. A hostile aura that couldn't be concealed anymore flooded out from its body.

[Bet everything you have and attack me, oh, Child of Shadow!!]

Jin-Woo's eyes widened in shock.

In an instant, choking heat rushed into his face. He quickly retreated to a far-off distance, his gaze still locked onto the unbelievable event unfolding right him.

A mountain of raging inferno suddenly materialised in front of his eyes.

If a sea of boiling lava gained sentience and willingly morphed into the shape of a Dragon, would it look like that?

Jin-Woo watched this appearance of a Dragon made up of endlessly-burning flames and immediately recalled the outer shell of the Demon's Castle instant dungeon that was also burning in perpetual flames.

A battle between a living 'castle' and a man.

It wouldn't be too surprising for anyone to get scared by this incomparable pressure, but Jin-Woo calmly grasped the pair of Kamish's Wraths.

BOOM-!!

When the Dragon Emperor took one step, the world rocked viciously.

'It's coming!'

The massive Dragon was trying to stomp him to death, so Jin-Woo quickly evaded that and ran to create some distance before summoning up the Sky Dragon 'Kaisel'.

Kiiaaahk!

His mount was already getting ready to take off, so as soon as it emerged from the shadow, it flew up into the air. Jin-Woo quickly climbed up on its back.

Kaisel rose up as fast as it could; Jin-Woo then had his ride change directions and descend towards the Dragon Emperor's location. As if it was waiting precisely for that, the Dragon made up of flames fired a Breath of Destruction.

“Go down!!”

Almost at the same time as the blinding flash of light exploded forth from the Dragon Emperor's jaw, Kaisel descended at the rate of knots. The flames capable of erasing everything – the chill-inducing white beam of light brushed past right above Jin-Woo's head.

Kuwaaaaah-!!

Kaisel followed after its master's instruction to descend closer to the Dragon Emperor while barely managing to side-step the Breath continuously pouring out towards it.

Fuuuwoo....

Once the Breath attack came to an end, Kaisel was already near the head of the gigantic flame Dragon. Jin-Woo gathered every drop of his Mana while riding on the back of his mount.

‘You did well, Kaisel!’

The gathered Mana flowed into the Kamish's Wrath held in his right hand. The black aura danced and tumbled about as if to signal that it was ready for that final strike.

With everything in his power – Jin-Woo swung his sword containing all of his might towards the Dragon Emperor.

SWIIIISH-!!

The black aura that looked capable enough to tear through anything in a single breath split up like the claws of a predator and took a powerful swipe at the head of the flaming Dragon.

Kwa-gah-gah-gah-gah-gah-gahk!!

However...

‘...How can this be?!’

Jin-Woo's brows shot up high.

There wasn't even a scratch on the creature's flaming scales; instead, the unscathed Dragon Emperor began raising its head towards him.

Jin-Woo's expression crumpled.

'Is it Breath again?'

He got ready to quickly descend again in case another round of Breath of Destruction came at his way, but he was greeted by an ear-splitting roar, instead.

Kuwaaaaaah-!!

Dragon Fear!!

Jin-Woo had developed some amount of immunity after experiencing it the last time, but it was a different story for his Sky Dragon. It couldn't withstand the roar from the Dragon Emperor and froze up in mid-air.

Not even giving him any time to un-summon Kaisal, in came the ruthless beam of light signalling true destruction spat out by the King of all Dragons.

RUMBLE-!!

Even though they were in a free fall, Kaisal still twisted its body to push Jin-Woo away to a safer location, and collided head-on against the Breath of Destruction with its body.

"NOOO!!"

Jin-Woo cried out as he watched Kaisal disintegrate in an instant, not even leaving behind ash in the process. Utterly disregarding his wishes, the Sky Dragon was erased from existence without a single trace.

Grit.

Jin-Woo bit his lower lip and fired Mana out from behind to fly into the chest area of the Dragon Emperor in an instant. And to make sure he wouldn't fall off, he grasped tight the scale of this nonsensically humongous creature.

Chiieeiik!

His palm was instantly scorched by the ultra-high temperature.

"Euh-euhk!!"

Jin-Woo gritted his teeth and raised up the Kamish's Wrath held in his other hand up high above his head. The shortsword held in reverse grip was enveloped in the dancing black aura.

Crack!!

The blade stabbing down with all his might managed to break past the scale. But that was all it could do.

Crack! Crack! Crack!!

No matter how many times he lashed out, all he could do was to leave behind small, inconsequential nicks on the Dragon's flesh just below its scales.

It was then. Sensing this ominous chill creep up behind his neck, Jin-Woo hurriedly took a look behind him.

‘.....!!’

The giant arm of the Dragon Emperor was swinging closer to his location. To dodge that, he unhesitatingly jumped down.

He didn't suffer any impact damage when landing on the ground due to his Mana, but then, without giving him a break, yet another round of the Breath of Destruction poured out from above.

Kuwaaaaahhh-!!!

Somehow managing to evade that merciless attack once more, Jin-Woo breathlessly panted hard.

“Hah-ah, hah-ah, hah-ah....”

He rained down so many attacks, yet the Dragon Emperor remained standing, imperious like the legendary Mt. Tai. It possessed the level of defence and attack power that not even Giants could match up to.

He realised that he couldn't subjugate this Dragon by relying on the same tactics.

‘I need stronger power....’

Indeed, he needed an even stronger power – the power that might bring down a giant covered in thick armour with nothing but bare hands.

Just like how an insect small enough not to be noticed by one's eyes couldn't do much about a human being, one needed to become a mountain if a mountain was blocking his path.

It was then.

‘Hang on.... Armour, is it?’

A certain possibility flashed by like a bolt of lightning in Jin-Woo's head.

If he could manipulate the power of darkness to create regular-sized armours, then couldn't he also be able to create something much larger and thicker than that, too?

When his thoughts reached that far...

...The shadow beneath Jin-Woo's feet suddenly began growing much larger.

[...??]

Even the Dragon Emperor noticed this change.

The blackish liquid bubbled and rose up from that shadow to wrap around the Shadow Sovereign, layer upon layer, his size abruptly increasing at an alarming rate.

'What is this human b*stard trying to do now?!'

The thing was, answering its instincts took priority before satisfying its curiosity.

Just before the Dragon Emperor got ready to fire yet another round of Breath of Destruction towards that unidentifiable black mass, it felt the sensation of something poking softly at its back.

'...??'

It quickly took a look behind.

Fangs had been hiding in a distant corner to perform the communication-disrupting spell but to aid his Sovereign, he had grown into a giant to fire his own pillar of flames at the back of the Dragon Emperor.

Once their gazes met, the Bead of Avarice powerlessly fell from Fangs' grip.

Tumble, roll....

The massive Dragon's murderous rage was now redirected to the scared and trembling Fangs.

[How dare a measly b*stard like you....!]

The Dragon Emperor shifted the direction of its head.

And naturally, the aim of the Breath was shifted towards Fangs, as well.

Just before the attack capable of erasing everything could be fired from the Dragon's maw....

A humongous black shadow that had risen up high into the sky, before

anyone had noticed it, viciously punched the head of the Dragon Emperor.

KA-BOOOM!!!!



Chapter 242 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

As it was being shoved away by the enormous impact force coming from the side, the Dragon Emperor saw it.

It clearly saw a gigantic shadow tall enough to touch the skies standing there proudly. And perhaps trying to reject an existence that shouldn't even exist in the first place, thousands, no, tens of thousands of black lightning bolts could also be seen violently roiling and crackling beyond the shoulders of this black shadow.

'...Spiritual Body Manifestation?'

No, that couldn't be right.

The Shadow Sovereign used to be one of the Fragments of Brilliant Light. He didn't have any other 'hidden' form to activate, and how he appeared was how he looked.

However, how could the current Shadow Sovereign assume such a massive form right this moment?

Kwa-gah-gahk!!

The Dragon Emperor pushed down hard with its legs, causing a thin layer from the ground to peel off like the skin of an apple, as its gigantic body came to a stop.

'Could it be....?'

When a certain theory brushed through its head, the eyes of the Dragon quaked in sheer surprise.

'The b*stard.... Could he be summoning the power of death to the surface world?'

But, how could that be?

How could a man who used to be a normal human not too long ago control the power of death to such an astonishing degree?

[So, that's how it was.]

Another sigh of admiration left the mouth of the Dragon Emperor.

[You have spent a lot of time on the border between life and death,

haven't you?]

There was a reason why the previous Shadow Sovereign, Osborne, chose to hand all of his power over to a measly little human being. This particular human had been continuously fighting a bitter battle against himself right up until he inherited this power.

All for the sake of his life.

The Dragon Emperor had been looking down on the current Shadow Sovereign just a tad in comparison to his predecessor but now, he felt renewed respect for its human opponent.

[...]

And then, it reflected on itself for even thinking of manipulating the weakness of humans to pit him against the Rulers earlier.

'Without a doubt.... This human must die. As expected, he's far too dangerous.'

While the Dragon silently glared at its opponent, the giant Shadow Sovereign was also doing the same thing in silence.

Having become this gigantic Shadow Sovereign, Jin-Woo shifted his surprised gaze lower to his hands that had also grown into a size easily exceeding his own imagination.

'This.... Is this really me?'

He tried to move his fingers. The ginormous body that had become the darkness itself began moving according to his will. It wasn't just his body that had grown huge, though.

From deep within his gigantic frame, the kind of dizzying power that defied all attempts to estimate how big it was gushed out infinitely. He had truly become a mountain in order to bring down another mountain.

Jin-Woo raised his head back up again. And there it was – the personification of Destruction rushing towards him.

BOOM-!!

Violent flames and black lightning bolts scattered in all directions.

Jin-Woo propped his body with his legs extended to his rear and stopped the charge of the Dragon Emperor.

Their physical strength was about evenly matched!

An even contest of strength briefly played out before the Dragon suddenly

bit Jin-Woo on his shoulder. Crimson-red flames danced around the bitten part. Jin-Woo didn't panic, though, and proceeded to grab and yank at the Dragon's horn to pull the creature's head away.

And then, one more punch to its face!

Ka-boom!!

This time, though, the Dragon Emperor wasn't pushed back.

Kuwaaah-!!

Almost as soon as it was shoved back, the Dragon pounced towards him again, before opening its huge maw wide to take a big bite of Jin-Woo's side.

“Keuh-eeeeuhk!”

For the first time since he began fighting against the Dragon Emperor, Jin-Woo couldn't hold back and spat out a pained cry.

Boom! Boom!! Boom!!!

He used his elbow to smack down on the Dragon's head several times, but the creature still lifted him up in the air and began shaking him around without mercy.

An incredible pain akin to his waist being snapped in half rushed up from below.

“Kuwaahk!! Keuh-eeeeuhk!!”

Deciding that enough damage had been inflicted on its enemy, the Dragon Emperor threw Jin-Woo to the ground.

THUD!!

That was followed by another round of Breath of Destruction pouncing on him. When the conflagration-like Breath swept by, one of Jin-Woo's arms had vanished.

However, he didn't scream in pain. He just gritted his teeth. He instantly closed the distance and shoved his remaining hand deep into the Dragon Emperor's jaw.

Rip, riiiiip!!

Along with the thick leather being torn apart, the Dragon Emperor's huge tongue was ripped out of his throat.

[Kuwaaaaahk!!]

Rather than blood, crimson lava exploded out from the torn wound of the

creature's tongue.

The Dragon writhed in pure agony. Jin-Woo took this opportunity to punch the head of the creature. The lengthy maw was spun to the side as lava spilt in all directions.

The Dragon Emperor glared at Jin-Woo with its vertical-slit eyes and rammed into him with its horns.

The battle's flow see-sawed between the two over and over again.

BOOM-!!

Whenever the two collided, the ground quaked and the heavens screamed. Every plot of land being showered by the falling flames was scorched black; every square inch being struck by the black lightning bolts was ripped apart without mercy.

A desperate battle ensued.

From the sideline, Fangs witnessed the battle between two Sovereigns with dazed eyes.

At this grandiose yet frightening spectacle unfolding right before his eyes, the High Orc Shaman was left completely flabbergasted, unable to turn his head away nor close shut his slack jaw.

What if...

...The Absolute Being created these beings in order to witness a fight of this magnitude? If that was the case, the High Orc Shadow Soldier thought that he might sort of understand the reasoning behind that decision.

Indeed, the battle between these two was no doubt a world-ending calamity but, at the same time, it was a spectacular once-in-a-lifetime event as well.

Tears slowly fell from the eyes of Fangs as he continued to take in the sight of two god-like beings colliding with everything they had.

The power of Destruction and the power of Death smashed into each other, writhed around, and shook the world to its very core.

Jin-Woo clenched his fist even harder.

Boom-!!

It was working.

It's working, it's working, it's definitely working!!

Each of his punches, issuing shock waves that tore apart the air every time he threw one, landed on their targets with scary accuracy.

Boom!! Bang!! Thud!! Kwahng!!

The Dragon Emperor struck out with its sharp claws, brushing past him and hitting the empty air.

WHOOOOSH-!!

Jin-Woo took a step back to evade the attack before pushing forward on his tiptoes to slam his shoulder against the Dragon and shoved it to the ground.

KA-BOOOOM!!!!

He then quickly mounted the toppled Dragon Emperor. What followed next was the continuous stream of vicious punches.

BOOM!! BOOM!! BOOM!! BOOM!!

Brutal attacks rained down from above, without a single break in-between.

BOOM!! BOOM!! BOOM!! BOOM!!!

Lightning bolts, sparks of flames, and the screams of air being torn endlessly reverberated throughout the land.

Unfortunately, it was clear to see that just one hand was not enough to land that one fatal blow.

He concentrated all of his Mana to the remaining hand, but as if he was stuck inside a dream, his strength continued to seep out of him the longer he continued on.

‘What’s going on?’

Jin-Woo’s expression hardened gradually.

Not too long afterwards, the Dragon Emperor also noticed the change taking place in Jin-Woo. Its clawed hand shot up to grab his fist.

Grab!

It happened too suddenly. Jin-Woo got flustered as he couldn’t pull his fist back. Meanwhile, the Dragon Emperor addressed him.

[This is the difference between our experience level!]

Jin-Woo’s eyes widened considerably.

“Uwaaaahk!!”

The Dragon pierced into Jin-Woo’s side with the claws on its remaining free hand and spat out its mocking words filled with laughter.

[Didn’t you know that maintaining a large body wastes an unimaginable amount of stamina?]

After completely immobilising Jin-Woo, another round of horrifying energy began gathering and swirling inside the Dragon's maw. The Breath of Destruction was being readied to put an end to this battle.

'This is the end....!'

The Dragon Emperor was sure of its victory now.

However....

Just before the Breath was ready to fire, a new arm suddenly sprouted out from Jin-Woo's shoulder missing a limb.

'He still had that much energy left?!'

The Dragon was stunned but knew that it was still impossible for a different victor to emerge from this situation.

Soon, a blinding light formed inside the maw of the Dragon Emperor. It was then – Jin-Woo shoved his newly-generated arm inside that maw.

'Uwaaaaah-!!'

And then, he scrounged up every ounce of energy and concentrated it to his hand.

Wuuong-!!

Accompanying an incredible impact force, powerful blinding light blanketed the surroundings.

Eventually, the light receded and silence descended on the land.

*

Jin-Woo reverted back to his human form from the giant shadow. He lay sprawled on the ground and panted heavily.

'Pant, pant, pant....'

His entire body was burning up as if flames had scorched him. He was covered in wounds from head to toe. His current status was an utter mess.

He did his absolute best to control his heavy breathing while sucking in a lot of air. A short while later, he forced his fatigued body to slowly stand back up.

Just beyond the veil of thick fog kicked up from the explosion, someone was making its approach towards him. Jin-Woo could only marvel wryly as the Dragon Emperor, in its human form, revealed itself.

'What a monster....'

The Dragon b*stard was not okay either, but compared to Jin-Woo's own condition, it was noticeably better off.

[You are a very tenacious b*stard, aren't you?]

'That's my line.'

Too bad, Jin-Woo wanted to save the energy required to make that retort so he had to swallow back his opinion. Instead, he wordlessly summoned the pair of 'Kamish's Wraths' and held them tightly.

The Dragon Emperor also unsheathed its sword as well.

Shurung-!

Even though it no longer possessed enough strength to maintain its Spiritual Body Manifestation, the King of all Dragons still scrounged up every little bit of remaining energy in order to kill the human for good.

Jin-Woo, too, held his rough breathing back and gritted his teeth.

The Dragon Emperor arrived before him in just one step and swung its longsword at him. The pair of shortswords and one longsword clashed and clanged chaotically.

Every time sparks flew off from their clashing blades, sweat and blood sliding off their wielders' bodies rained down on the surroundings.

It was then.

Crack!

One of the Kamish's Wrath shattered after its edges had been badly damaged from attacking the Dragon Emperor's toughened steel-like scales earlier.

'.....!!'

He managed to tilt his body in time to let the longsword cutting down diagonally brush past him, but that resulted in him losing balance for a brief moment.

The Dragon Emperor didn't miss that opening. It thrust forward its weapon in the blink of an eye and penetrated Jin-Woo's midriff.

Stab!!

Even in the midst of the torrent of terrible pain, he gritted his teeth and swung the shortsword held in his other hand towards the neck of the Dragon.

Too bad, just before his blade could reach the Adam's apple belonging to the Dragon Emperor, the creature grabbed the weapon with its bare hand. The

black aura wavering around the blade was blocked by the reddish-black aura of the Dragon.

A mocking grin floated up on the creature's face.

[Did you truly believe that the shortsword fashioned out of a Dragon's tooth can actually hurt this body of mine, the Dragon Emperor's?]

After declaring confidently as so, it pushed the hilt of the longsword with even more power. The weapon sunk deeper into Jin-Woo's midriff and he vomited out a mouthful of blood.

"Keo-heok-!!"

The Dragon Emperor pushed Jin-Woo off with its foot and pulled the longsword back.

Jin-Woo ungainly rolled along the ground and barely managed to stop himself. Just before he could force his body up, the Dragon Emperor arrived right in front of him and pointed the tip of its blade at his throat.

'.....'

His actions came to an abrupt halt at the weapon that was uncomfortably close to his vital point. The Dragon Emperor chuckled as it addressed him.

[Don't you find it funny?]

Not even once doubting that it'd end up as the victory, the Dragon in human form looked down at the face of its helplessly cornered enemy.

[A battle between the flame born from the darkness and the darkness born from the light. However, this battle is finally drawing to its conclusion.]

Jin-Woo readily agreed with the Dragon Emperor's assessment.

"You're right. Its conclusion is around the corner."

[Oh-hoh.]

The Dragon formed a half-puzzled and half-satisfied expression and scanned Jin-Woo's grievously-wounded body, before asking him a question.

[Have you decided to give up on the meaningless resistance now?]

It was then.

He seemed energyless and defeated, pretty much ready to give up, but in an instant, the light gleaming within Jin-Woo's eyes changed.

[....!!]

The Dragon Emperor urgently thrust the blade forward. To its great surprise, however, Jin-Woo unexpectedly pushed himself forward instead of dodging backwards.

The longsword brushed past his artery with barely a hair's width. The skin on his neck sliced off and blood splattered out like a fountain, but it wasn't a fatal wound.

'I can do this.'

By paying the price of a grievous wound, Jin-Woo got near the Dragon Emperor's vicinity. He then summoned his father's shortsword stored in his 'Inventory'.

The Dragon's eyes widened.

Even before the creature could decipher this new turn of events, Jin-Woo's shortsword stabbed deeply into his enemy's chest.

KWA-JEECK!!

The blade penetrated past the chest armour and stabbed the Dragon's heart.

[Kuwaaaaaah-!!!]

Not yet.

Not over yet!

Jin-Woo knew all too well that this much of an attack wasn't enough to kill a Sovereign. Even he himself was continuously fighting on with the types of injuries that would have killed any normal human being, after all.

Jin-Woo yanked the shortsword out and activated the skill 'Violent Slash'.

Dudududududududu-!!!

Countless attacks stabbed deeply into the Dragon Emperor's body.

One more time!!

Dudududududududu!!!

[You... you b*stard....!!!]

Shockingly enough, even though it was being subjected under the barrage of countless attacks, the Dragon Emperor still raised its sword up.

An earthquake erupted within Jin-Woo's eyes after seeing that.

The Dragon, inflicted with heavy injuries on its chest where various holes could be seen, began deflecting Jin-Woo's shortsword. The longer his skill was deployed, the faster the Dragon Emperor's speed became, as well.

This was the display of the might possessed by the strongest creature borne out of darkness for the sole purpose of destruction. Cold sweat drops formed on Jin-Woo's forehead as he was gradually pushed back in the one area he felt most confident in – his speed.

[Khayahk!!]

The Dragon Emperor spat out a beastly howl and shoved Jin-Woo away. The force was so strong that he thought his wrist broke just now.

'Keu-heuk!'

By the time Jin-Woo regained his balance, the Dragon was already right before his eyes. Unlike before, though, the creature didn't repeat the same mistake of staying its sword.

The weapon penetrated past his Black Heart.

"Keok!!"

Jin-Woo felt the burning pain shooting up from his chest. His breathing tightened and he couldn't even voice his pain anymore. All strength abandoned his legs and automatically, he knelt down on the ground.

Plop.

As if its anger hadn't been cooled down, the Dragon Emperor viciously roared out towards the sky.

Kuwaaaaaaaahhh-!!!

It transformed into a Dragonewt-like form that was halfway between a human and a Dragon's appearance before anyone noticed it, and extended its claws out in order to attack for one last time.

A growling-like voice leaked out of the Dragon's mouth.

[You b*stard, I shall rip you apart piece by piece and feed you to my Sky Dragons!]

If trying to show courtesy and give the Shadow Sovereign a death fitting for a king was a mistake on its part, then the Dragon Emperor would bestow a cruel and miserable death that would make up for that mistake many times over.

'I shall show you what happens to the one daring to obstruct me, the King of all Dragons, at the end!'

The Dragon Emperor raged on with such thoughts filling up its head. It bared its lengthy fangs and continued to roar on. But then...

....Out of the blue, a loud chorus of vigorous warcry exploded forth from the heavens.

Waaaahhhh-!!

The Dragon Emperor raised his head. It was greeted by an unbelievable spectacle just then.

The army of the Rulers, the soldiers of the heavens were endlessly pouring out from a gigantic Gate that wasn't there before. Their flapping wings began filling up the gloomy, clouded sky with the colours of whitish silver.

'Impossible...!!'

The Dragon Emperor inwardly freaked out.

Without a doubt, there was no Gate when it arrived here. So, just from where did that Gate come from, and how could the soldiers of heaven enter this world so quickly?

One would need an incalculable amount of energy to open up a portal connecting this world to the other side. So how....

When its thoughts reached that far, the Dragon Emperor looked down with its trembling eyes at Jin-Woo on the ground, currently panting heavily on his knees.

[You b*stard.... The reason why you attacked me with everything you had from the beginning was to....?!]

It wasn't the difference in experience levels, but he had been working towards this end result from the very beginning? To call the allies from the other side by tearing the space up with the collision of two great sources of power?

Up until now, the Dragon Emperor had been guessing what Jin-Woo's scheme might be through its own world view. The reason for attracting the attention of the army of the Chaos World, the reason for bringing it to this desolate location...

The Dragon took that as the human not wanting their battle to be interrupted by outside factors. But as it turned out, the Shadow Sovereign had a different goal altogether.

Even then...

[Even then.... You couldn't have any other way to communicate with the Rulers....?]

The Dragon Emperor couldn't finish its sentence.

There was a way – the vessels of the Rulers.

Weren't there still a few vessels, connected to the Rulers through the lending of their powers, left on this planet? And that was how the Fragments of Brilliant Light were able to prepare a Gate in this location.

[.....]

The Dragon Emperor glared at Jin-Woo.

Just for that one-in-ten-thousand chance, he had chosen the method where even if he lost the fight, he'd still win the war before starting this battle.

It was a complete defeat for the Dragon, who only focused on the fight in front of its eyes and nothing else.

Jin-Woo, barely managing to hold back the dizzying pain from all of his wounds, formed an energyless smile.

“It was you, wasn't it?”

[.....?]

“It was you who told the Sovereigns of White Flames and Beastly Fangs to ambush the Shadow Sovereign from behind.”

[...Did the Sovereign of White Flames run its mouth off?]

Rather than answering right away, Jin-Woo looked up at the sky filled with innumerable winged soldiers. He lowered his gaze back down to the Dragon Emperor a little later and formed a grin.

“Osborne wanted me to pass along this message.”

Jin-Woo slowly unfurled his middle finger. The Dragon Emperor exploded in pure rage just then.

[You b*stard!!]

The deadly-sharp claws rushed towards defenceless Jin-Woo kneeling down on the ground.

Too bad, those claws couldn't reach him, instead getting blocked off by six beautiful wings gently embracing Jin-Woo's figure.

The Dragon Emperor stopped its actions and withdrew its claws. It looked at the figure that blocked its attack and spat out a pained grunt.

[The most Brilliant Light....]

The Dragon raised its head next.

From above, six angels, each with three pairs of wings, slowly descended

all around the creature.

Indeed, the conclusion of this battle had been around the corner. The Dragon Emperor recalled that brief conversation he shared with Jin-Woo, and began forming a self-mocking smile.

[...This is the end.]

Soon, the spears belonging to the Rulers penetrated the Dragon Emperor from all directions.



Chapter 243: Chapter 243

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

The desperate and gruelling battle between the two Sovereigns also left its mark up in the sky, as well. Ash, scattered into the heavens from the aftermath of the fight, quietly fell like snowflakes.

Jin-Woo watched the grey ash settling down on his shoulders one by one and lifted his head up.

From the distance far away, somewhere above him – the soldiers of the Rulers utterly blanketing the sky were moving to another location via countless Gates.

The spectacle of tens of millions of soldiers all marching in unison according to their Rulers' bidding was truly an overwhelming spectacle to behold.

Their aim was to completely eliminate the remaining forces of the Sovereigns. Now that not just the Dragon Emperor, but several other Sovereigns, had died, there was no chance in hell that the Army of the Chaos World would be able to survive.

That was why the soldiers of the heavens were marching forward to announce the end of this war that had been going on for far too long.

Jin-Woo felt his chest become numb for some reason while watching their deployment. While he was stewing in his emotions, the 'most Brilliant Light' finished giving commands to its soldiers and returned to where he was.

A truly beautiful lifeform that no known expression in human language could adequately describe folded its proudly-unfurled six wings at once, after landing in front of Jin-Woo. Other Rulers also landed behind the 'most Brilliant Light' one by one.

It studied Jin-Woo's current condition. At a casual glance, he seemed to be any other regular human being.

'However, this lone human managed to bring an end to the war between us and the Sovereigns.'

Who could have imagined such a thing?

Who could have thought that the curtains on the eternal war, with

seemingly no end in sight, as designed by the Absolute Being, would be closed by a weak existence in a world so far away?

At the least, this angel had never imagined it.

And that was why its initial surprise had morphed into pure respect for Jin-Woo's accomplishments.

[You have ended our war. I do not know how to even properly express my gratitude.]

“...”

Jin-Woo wordlessly looked at the ash falling from the sky before shifting his gaze to look at the Brilliant Light.

“There's a favour I want to ask you, although it might come across as a bit too big for a gesture of saying thanks.”

[A favour...?]

The Brilliant Light formed a slightly puzzled expression.

The power of the Shadow Sovereign could very well be on the same level, no, maybe even greater than its own. However, such a being was asking for a favour?

As if to lessen the confusion within the head of the Brilliant Light, Jin-Woo answered first before the obvious question could be asked.

“It's something only you can do.”

The angel with six wings nodded its head.

[If it's within my power to make it happen, I pledge to aid you to my fullest.]

The Shadow Sovereign played an important role in killing the Dragon Emperor and the Rulers now owed him a large debt of gratitude that couldn't easily be repaid. There certainly was no excuse not to do fulfil his favour.

However, a rather difficult favour came out from Jin-Woo's mouth.

“One more time.... Can you use the ‘Chalice of Rebirth’ one more time?”

The Brilliant Light felt a shock akin to someone hitting it at the back of its head. Even the other Rulers standing behind it couldn't hide their astonishment.

As their leader, the Brilliant Light simply had to confirm it again.

[Did you ask me for the usage of the ‘Chalice of Rebirth’, and to reverse

time once more?]

“That’s right.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head and explained himself.

“And after reversing the time flow, I’d like you to not send anything to Earth. I shall kill the Sovereigns, and their armies, in the gap between the dimensions.”

The Brilliant Light was left flabbergasted by what Jin-Woo wanted to do after the time reversal and couldn’t immediately say the words stuck in his mouth.

‘Alone... He wishes to fight this war all by himself?’

Jin-Woo had heard the explanation on the ‘Chalice of Rebirth’ from the former Shadow Sovereign.

Even if the tool of God was used and time was reversed, the higher-beings such as Rulers and Sovereigns would keep their memories. In that case, since he had inherited the power of the Shadow Sovereign through becoming one with Osborne’s ego, his current abilities wouldn’t disappear.

Jin-Woo was planning to take this power, as well as his memories, and willingly enter the gap between dimensions.

[You wish to fight them all by yourself?!]

The Brilliant Light spoke in a disbelieving voice.

[But, why do you want to do that? We have used the ‘Chalice of Rebirth’ many times before, but never did we achieve a result better than this.]

‘.....’

Jin-Woo looked down at his father’s shortsword and calmly made his reply.

“Far too many lives were lost during this battle. I just wish to bring them back, that’s all.”

If it meant he could bring them back by reversing time itself, then Jin-Woo was fully prepared to fight the Sovereigns one more time.

The Brilliant Light closed its eyes to give itself some time to think, and suddenly realised that it did empathise with Jin-Woo’s answer. Regardless of what, though, reversing time remained a very dangerous action to take.

[The ‘Chalice of Rebirth’ is nearing its limit. In case you fail in your objective, it is likely that we won’t be able to reverse the time itself.]

Those words implied that a future far more cruel and horrible might be in

store for this world. Meaning, the current development might be the best end result for everyone.

[If you wish for it, you could remain in the memories of everyone, forever, as a hero who has single-handedly stopped the invasion of the Sovereigns. But, instead....]

An all-too-easy to see sorrow suffused on the expression of the Brilliant Light.

[The battle you wish to start will be remembered by none except yourself. If you are defeated, annihilation awaits. And even when you emerge victorious, no one will celebrate your accomplishments.]

The six-winged angel confirmed Jin-Woo decision for the last time.

[Even then, do you still wish to turn back the time?]

Before he answered, Jin-Woo quietly closed his eyes and thought of the important people in his life. The eyes of the Shadow Soldiers inserted into their shadows allowed him to see them in real time.

His mom and young sister were holding each other's hands with worried faces, anxiously watching the news coming from Japan on their TV.

Cha Hae-In had her eyes deeply closed as if she was ardently praying to someone. Meanwhile, the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol was also watching the news broadcast with tearful eyes.

Jin-Woo felt their heartfelt emotions and a certain corner of his chest warmed up gradually. And when he opened his eyes, his mind was already made up.

"I'm going back."

...To those people who still remained, and even to those who were no longer here.

The faces of Association President Goh Gun-Hui, Adam White, and his father all brushed past his mind. Lots more people besides them were sacrificed in this war. Jin-Woo swore that no one else would be lost ever again.

The Brilliant Light clearly saw his unwavering determination.

[.....]

The reason why the Rulers went as far as to use the 'tool of God that should never be used' and save this world was because this planet was originally unrelated to their ongoing war.

However, a denizen of this world and a hero who saved it came to a decision. He said that he'd save not just a portion, but the entire world with his own powers.

And that he'd bear that burden all by himself.

For a moment there, the angel thought the face of the former Shadow Sovereign had overlapped with that of Jin-Woo's just now.

It was the face of its stubborn comrade that refused to step aside even though the soldiers of heavens completely blanketing the skies threatened him so he could protect its master, the Absolute Being.

He might have been a scary enemy, but at the same time, the angel greatly respected him.

'...They resemble each other.'

A thin smile formed on the lips of the Brilliant Light after recalling Osborne's face.

[I understand. I shall pray for your success.]

"Hold on."

Jin-Woo quickly asked a question.

"What will happen to my Shadow Soldiers that didn't exist in the past?"

For instance, soldiers like Beru.

Osborne's original soldiers would still remain within his shadow, sure, but what about others like Greed who was a human named 'Hwang Dong-Su' back ten years ago, or Beru, who didn't even exist back then?

The Brilliant Light explained according to what it knew.

[Those that ends up being overlapped with the time flow of the past will be erased, while those that don't will remain as they are.]

That meant that Beru would continue to exist, while Greed would disappear. He could now hear the soldiers crying out in sorrow from inside his shadow.

Jin-Woo bade his goodbyes in his mind to those soldiers about to part ways with him and raised his head up with a smile.

"I'm ready."

The Brilliant Light summoned out the 'Chalice of Rebirth' from subspace and nodded its head.

[I pray that your courage will save your world one more time.]

*

The blinding light enveloped the entire world.

A small, easy-to-miss article about a middle school student who went missing after leaving behind a letter with the words ‘I’ve something to do’ appeared on the corner of a certain local newspaper.

And about two years later.

The world became noisy for a brief moment after the middle school student who went missing suddenly came back home completely fine, as if everything had been a dream. But everything soon returned to its usual calmness, as it should.

And then, time marched on, quietly.

No incidents of Gates, monsters, or Hunters stepping forward to hunt those monsters ever happened again.

Yu Jin-Ho found himself in the middle of a freshman welcoming party but his expression remained quite stiff.

The enticing odour of pork belly strips sizzling on the grill coming from here and there tickled his nose, but thanks to how tense he felt, he just couldn’t work up his appetite at all.

But, how could this be?

Although he was hiding his family background, for the time being, he still lived a life fitting for the last born son of a wealthy ‘Chaebol’. For some reason, though, this diner specialising in the frozen pork belly didn’t feel unfamiliar to him.

‘But, how come?’

Yu Jin-Ho tilted his head this way and that, leading one of his university seniors to lightly tap him on the shoulder.

“Hey, Jin-Ho? C’mon, man. Loosen up, dude. Someone might think you’re being led into a slaughterhouse or something.”

Yu Jin-Ho got flustered and his voice naturally rose higher.

“N-no, that’s not it, Senior!”

“What I’m saying here is, stop doing that for the time being, alright?”

The senior guffawed mischievously but then, sneakily withdrew his laughter.

“Ahh, right. I think, you know, it’ll be prudent to behave yourself in front of ‘that’ senior, just in case. We have this really scary senior in our faculty, you see.”

“Heok.”

Yu Jin-Ho’s expression stiffened a lot worse now.

“You know, that kind of a guy? He doesn’t just punish or discipline the juniors for no reason, but just by standing next to him, his incredible charisma is so.....”

If one were to talk about such a person, Yu Jin-Ho also knew someone like that pretty close by, too.

He briefly recalled his father’s face, often referred to as the CEO of Iron Blood, before roughly shaking his head in order to get rid of the distracting thoughts.

Perhaps he was getting properly drunk now, the senior began talking enthusiastically about this mysterious and scary ‘senior’ all of a sudden.

“Hey, you know that athlete named Cha Hae-In?”

“Uhm.... Are you talking about Cha Hae-In who became really famous not too long ago as the idol of the athletics world?”

“Right, right. Her. That Cha Hae-In is the GF of our scary senior, you see? Aigoo, here he comes.”

The senior jumped up from his seat after seeing a certain man enter the diner and hurriedly bowed his waist.

“Senior-nim, thank you for coming!”

“Senior-nim!!”

“Senior-nim!”

After seeing the polite, disciplined greetings of his seniors, Yu Jin-Ho realised that the drunk senior hadn’t been exaggerating a thing until now. With the entrance of one single man, the atmosphere of the noisy, boisterous freshman welcoming party changed instantly.

The useless nervousness he felt right now was good for nothing other than to make his dry saliva slide down his throat quite painfully.

Gulp.

The thing was, though – an unlucky man would supposedly break his nose even when falling on his butt. Yu Jin-Ho couldn't even raise his head from all the fear he felt, but for some reason, that scary senior in question settled down on the spot right next to him.

'Ah..... Dear senior-nim, why did you have to choose the spot next to mine when there are so many available elsewhere?!'

Yu Jin-Ho spat out a sigh deep inside his heart, his head still lowered in dejection, but then, that scary senior suddenly presented him with a glass filled with a clear liquid.

"Take a cup from me."

To think, a glass of booze given to a freshman was not one of those tiny little soju cups but an actual glass cup??

Yu Jin-Ho thought that this action was as expected of a hardcore senior and cautiously took the offered cup, hoping to not make any mistakes here.

'I'm actually not that good with alcohol, though....'

He squeezed his eyes shut real tightly and forced the liquid down his throat. But then, his eyes shot open wide in surprise and he ended up asking a question at this unexpected development.

"S-senior? Isn't this soda?"

"It is."

That supposedly-scary senior was making an expression that was definitely not scary at all as he shook around a soda bottle.

"Why don't you and I drink this, instead?"

For an unknown reason, the senior was forming the face of a person running into someone he really wanted to see after a long, long time of separation.

"Oh, and Jin-Ho? I'm gonna feel really bad about myself if you keep calling me senior this and senior that, okay?"

The senior filled the empty glass up with soda and spoke in a friendly tone of voice.

"From now on, call me 'hyung'."

"Eh?"

"What, you don't want to?"

The once-affectionate eyes of the scary senior suddenly changed to

something far more serious. Yu Jin-Ho instinctively straightened his back and energetically shouted out his reply.

“N-no, I shall, hyung-nim!!”

‘...Huh?’

After involuntarily spitting out the words ‘hyung-nim’, Yu Jin-Ho suddenly grew puzzled by how they felt so familiar to his tongue.

‘Besides... Hang on, have I ever told the senior what my name is before?’

He continued to tilt his head this way and that, and in the meantime, the senior lightly clinked their glasses.

“Cheers.”

For some reason, Yu Jin-Ho realised that grin on the senior’s face was not unfamiliar at all; the corners of his eyes grew reddened with moisture as he energetically clinked his own cup with the senior’s once more.

“Yes, cheers!!”

Yu Jin-Ho’s somewhat dissatisfied voice came out from the phone’s speaker.

Jin-Woo replied with a grin.

“I’ve got a small errand to run today, you see. Ah, that’s right. Hey, Jin-Ho?”

“There’s this really important matter I gotta take care of first, so can you sub for me during the afternoon class? Thanks.”

Jin-Woo distanced his ear away from the voice desperately calling out to him and ended the call.

Click.

Jin-Woo raised his head and caught the name of the hospital written in large font right before his face.

‘Seoul Il-Sin General Hospital.’

There was someone he had to meet staying in this place.

He stopped walking for a bit to fix his attire. Then, just as he took a step towards the hospital, a rather familiar face brushed past him.

He didn’t mean to get noticed, but perhaps because his gaze had lingered

on for a moment too long on her, she stopped and turned around to face him.

“...?”

It was Ju-Hui.

The rank B Healer who got scared often but still entered the Association and did her best so that the power given to her wouldn't be wasted.

She used to be like that, but now, she was staring at Jin-Woo with the appearance of a regular university student. He ended up forming a gentle smile after realising just how well not being a Hunter suited her.

Ju-Hui intensely studied Jin-Woo for a long time before she opened her mouth in a hesitant manner.

“Uhm, excuse me...? Have we met somewhere before?”

The words of happy greeting rushed up all the way to the tip of his tongue. However, he chose to shake his head, instead.

“No, I don't think so.”

And then, turned around to leave without looking back.

For a little while there, Ju-Hui tilted her head this way and that as she looked at Jin-Woo's departing back before she too continued on her path. He heard her distancing footsteps and formed a satisfied expression.

He had protected her.

He had protected the peaceful everyday lives.

Whenever he ran into the evidence of peace created from his sacrifice, it felt as if he had reaped the benefits of all his hard work.

That was why....

‘That's enough for me.’

....That was enough for him.

Jin-Woo stood before the entrance of the hospital and took a look at his left palm with untreatable burned skin. He then slowly stepped inside the building.

If someone asked him about this wound, he'd always reply like this:

That he got this injury while saving the world.

When the doctor in charge walked into a hospital room, a certain patient lying on the bed gestured at him to come closer.

“Can you... help me sit up, please?”

The doctor hurriedly ran up to the bed and cautiously helped the upper torso of the patient lying on his back to sit up.

“Thank you.”

It was then, the doctor spotted a wooden bottle he had never seen before on top of a table next to the patient’s bed.

“What is this, Chairman?”

The gaunt patient, as thin as a desiccated tree, painfully coughed and wheezed before making his reply.

“A young man gave it to me just now.”

The doctor formed a flustered expression.

This was a VIP patient’s room in the hospital, which meant that there were two guards constantly manning the front entrance. No one could enter without express permission from the doctor himself.

But just who managed to sneak in here to leave behind that bottle?

“It is a truly strange thing, indeed.... However, what that young man told me was even more incredible.”

That young man told the tale of a time now long overwritten, when the patient used to battle ‘monsters’ alongside him. The young man continued on and said that he came to visit him with this gift as a thank you for everything that happened back then.

“And then, he just simply vanished. As if he was a mirage, as if he was never here, to begin with.”

If it weren’t for the physical evidence, even the doctor in charge wouldn’t have believed it. But there it was, the gift supposedly left behind by that young man.

While the doctor stood there wondering how should he respond in a situation like this, the patient’s trembling finger was now pointing at the wooden bottle.

“Give it... to me.”

The doctor picked the bottle up and placed it in the patient’s hand. The old man sitting up in the bed studied the bottle and chuckled.

“He said that, as long as I drink what’s inside this thing, my disease will be completely cured as if being washed away. Huh-huh.”

“C-Chairman. You can’t possibly be believing in the words of a....”

“I’m tired.”

The Chairman cut the doctor off.

“Let me ask you this one thing. Even if I don’t drink this, how long do I have left anyway?”

“....”

The doctor couldn’t make his reply.

Even now, the absolute best that modern medicine had to offer only barely managed to keep the patient breathing, that was all.

At this point, one could even claim it a miracle that he was still alive.

The ‘Chairman’ lightly tutted as the doctor was unable to say anything.

“If I drink this and things go wrong.... I want you to write this down on my gravestone. Chairman Goh Gun-Hui, buried in this place, having never given up, and fought against his illness right until the end.”

“Mister Chairman....”

As a doctor, he knew it was his duty to stop this, but he couldn’t bring himself to do so when Chairman Goh Gun-Hui formed a determined expression on his face while opening the lid of the bottle.

He then began drinking the liquid inside with some difficulty.

Gulp, gulp.

After making sure that every drop had entered his throat, Goh Gun-Hui began recalling the face of that young man who left this bottle behind. He recalled those eyes, specifically.

Goh Gun-Hui felt that it was definitely worth it to trust a man with such a powerful pair of eyes.

And then...

Once he finished drinking every drop of this medicine...

Ba-dump.

Ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump.

His dying heart began pounding healthily once more.

His heart... was beating again.

[Only I Level Up – Fin.]

Author's afterword

Hello, everyone. It's Chugong speaking.

Actually, after I wrote 'hello everyone', I've been stuck deliberating on what to write next for almost ten minutes now. But, it's as expected.

If the afterword at the novel's completion is a letter from the author, then as I thought, there can only be one thing I should say.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank you from the depths of my heart for following these lacking words of an untalented wordsmith, for liking and following them, and for waiting patiently as much as you liked them.

We're at the end now.

A few of you have expressed your worries that the end has come too abruptly, but honestly speaking, this conclusion had been planned from the very beginning.

Things like Jin-Woo reversing time, Ju-Hui that made her appearance at the beginning of the novel appearing again at the end, or even him healing Goh Gun-Hui's illness, all of these.

Although, I did add the reunion with Yu Jin-Ho a bit later on after writing the diner scene between Jin-Woo and him, thinking that it'd be fun.

And so, at the end of the almost-250-episode-long march, **[Only I Level Up]** has come to an end in this fashion.

When I asked other authors on what they felt after ending their novels, they all said that it was a mixture of relief and sorrow, but why do I not feel any relief, just sadness?

Even as I write this afterword, tears threaten to break out my eyes.

I can't even act my age, it seems.

I might be feeling sad for some reason, but truth be told, I'm thinking of taking about a week off before coming to visit you again with a series of side stories.

I pray that you will all remain unscathed until then!

And since I'm writing this afterword, I might as well burn some page real estate and take this opportunity to express my gratitude towards those who helped me to make **[Only I Level Up]** a success: my greatest partner, Goh

Dong-Nahm Deputy Manager-nim, Lee Seok-Won Associate Editor-nim, who helped me in various ways, as well as Author Leltree, the rising star of our Unique Team.

In all honesty, I thought it'd be awkward to thank just two people so I added Author Lel as well, but after I did that, I was reminded of me whining to him over the phone whenever I got stuck in the writer's block and now I feel really apologetic about almost forgetting him.

I'm really sorry, Leltree!

And so, I'd like to announce once more the end of *[Only I Level Up]* created out of 10% whining, 39% hard work, and 50% love from all of you, dear readers.

One more time, I'd like to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Although it was quite tough during the writing of this novel, I still found the journey very enjoyable because of you, my readers, who chose to accompany me on this ride.

I shall prepare even more thoroughly and come back to you better than ever before next time.

Everyone, stay healthy, and farewell!



Chapter 244 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 1

When you're taking a stroll on a street, ask this question to any student you run into. Ask them what kind of job they would like to have in the future.

A hundred times out of a hundred, you'd get one of these three answers.

One, a famous Hunter; two, a staff member of a major Guild; and three, an employee of the Hunter's Association.

If a kid you talked to was a bit slow in the head, he or she would end up wasting each day wishing to become a famous Hunter.

A kid smarter than the above example would want to get a job in a major Guild that paid you according to one's abilities.

The smartest cookies of the lot would choose to become an employee of the Hunter's Association, where one would still get paid as much as the large Guilds while being treated as a quasi-government official which lessened the danger of getting unceremoniously fired from the job.

Me? I was a smart cookie.

A very smart one, to boot.

And perhaps that was why when I announced my intentions to join the Hunter's Association, both Mom and Dad were saddened somewhat, which was a bit different than how other parents would have reacted.

Dad wanted me to become a prosecutor, and Mom preferred to see me become a doctor. Of course, as the only son in the family, it wasn't as if I didn't know my parents' wishes of seeing me follow after their career choices.

However, I too had my own dream. And that dream played a big part in me choosing to become an employee of the Hunter's Association.

Those words were thrown my way by none other than the Chairman of the Association, Goh Gun-Hui, as I sat in the interview room with a stiff-as-rock face.

I was busy scolding myself for messing up almost all of the questions asked by the interviewers because of how nervous I had been. But, when I heard that question piercing into my brain and waking me up in an instant....

The light shining in my eyes changed.

At least, I remembered replying to that question with a determined look flashing up on my face.

My voice rose up while saying that I wanted to become a member of the Association and stand on the side of those people that protected Hunters.

Was I mistaken back then when the still-nervous me heard the soft gasps of “**Wow**” coming from my side and to my front?

But, one thing’s for sure – I distinctly remembered seeing a nearly-imperceptible smile on the face of Association Chairman Goh Gun-Hui as the corners of his lips arched up slightly.

That was how I became an employee of the Hunter’s Association, a job that others would certainly die for. Putting my parents’ slightly lonely farewells behind me, I set off from the hometown that I grew to love and came to Seoul, where the HQ of South Korea’s Association was located.

I felt totally over-the-moon because I’d successfully taken my first step in fulfilling my dream of becoming a member of the Association that protected Hunters.

I even had this vague expectation clouding my mind, wondering if everything was going the way I wanted them to.

Unfortunately for me, though, my beautiful image regarding the Association was shattered into a million little pieces on the first day of work. My thoughts of something still remaining that only I could do for the sake of Hunters was completely wrong.

It had already been over nine years since the Awakened, Gates, and monsters began appearing in this world.

The society had already entered a period of stability after experiencing many failures as well as countless trials and errors. And as a newbie member of the Association who had taken his first baby-steps in said society, there was not a snowball’s chance in hell that I could have my say in it.

Since my initial goal was to help Hunters out, I was assigned to the ‘Support’ department accordingly, but what waited for me there were all sorts of unrewarding miscellaneous tasks.

And that was me being kind here. In reality, it was no different than taking care of the mess left behind by the Hunters affiliated with the Association.

Indeed, it was always something like this.

Even if it was low-ranked Gates worth not much money, someone still had

to deal with it. But, the number of Hunters were limited, so their needs and wants had to be met no matter what.

In an unlucky chance that someone lodged a claim against Hunters, a pretty awful day would wait for me, but if the Hunter with a claim against him suddenly decided to leave the Association, then....

As I ran around all over the place trying to put out all these fires, I grew disillusioned at the reality that was just too different from my imagination, and as I become more and more fatigued, I also became used to my situation, as well.

And so... on a certain day.

As I was listlessly spending time, a phone call came at my way.

Ringggg.... Ringggg....

I spat out a long, long sigh while looking at the phone ringing off the hook, and wondered just which dear Hunter-nim was calling me this diligently to lay out his or her complaints. I reached out and picked up the receiver.

As soon as the plastic touched my ear, a seriously agitated voice exploded forth from the speaker.

I had no idea what this guy was talking about, but first things first – which was to apologise.

“I’m terribly sorry, Hunter-nim. There must’ve been an error during the formation of the raid team. Can you please tell me what happened in detail?”

The call was one-sidedly cut off there.

I put the receiver down while repeatedly recalling the spelling of the word ‘patience’ in my head, and then, began collecting data on the Hunter the person on the phone spoke about before any sort of claims could be lodged.

Just like how varied the reasons were for demanding one’s raid party member to be changed – such as disagreement over the leader’s decision, they didn’t like each other, or didn’t fight as well as one hoped, etc – such requests were made quite often so I never really paid much attention to the specifics until now.

But then...

‘Mister Seong.... Mister Seong.... His name is Jin-Woo, right?’

I saw the record of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo and soon realised that something had gone really wrong here.

‘Huh....??’

His rank was only ‘E’. As for the amount of magical energy he possessed, it was right at the bottom of the rank E, too.

‘Hey, his magic energy emission is no different from a regular person’s, isn’t it??’

As expected, his record was full of all the instances where he ended up getting injured.

“Oh, my god.”

I closed his file in stunned amazement, my heart wildly pounding away.

This... This was definitely wrong.

If I pretended that I didn’t see his story and move on here, he’d really die not too long from now.

It was at this point when I recalled the declaration I made back in the interview room.

Hunters risked their lives for the regular citizens, but who risked their lives for the sake of these Hunters?

My head nodded all by itself.

For the first time ever since I started working for the Hunter’s Association during this past year or so, I finally found what I needed to do.

The first thing I did was to seek out a senior officer.

Unfortunately, neither my immediate superior officer, or the officer above him, or even the person above that guy, wanted to get involved in a matter that could potentially prove to be too much trouble for what it’s worth.

Eventually, I had to seek out the Chief of the ‘Support’ Department.

“Sir, this is a matter concerning a person’s life. It’s not going to get solved by itself when we continue avoiding reality like this.”

Chief was forming an expression of a deeply concerned man after seeing the junior agent suddenly transform from a well-behaved kid who worked hard without complaints to the current me.

However, I didn’t stop voicing the things that needed to be said out loud.

“What if that Hunter dies during a raid, sir? What will we say to his surviving family members then?”

“Uh-huh, you shouldn’t say anything so unlucky....”

“That’s how much Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s life is in danger, sir. Please, take a look. This is his hospital admittance record. It’s already a miracle that he managed to survive until now.”

“....”

For a while there, Chief wordlessly scanned the data I brought along before raising his head.

“So, what you’re saying is that we need to do something as the Association and stop Mister Seong Jin-Woo acting as a Hunter, is that it?”

“Yes sir, that’s correct.”

Because he’d definitely die in the end if he continued to act as a Hunter.

“Fella, I hope you’re aware of this Hunter’s backstory while telling me all this.”

I nodded my head.

His mother was currently admitted to the intensive care unit. I knew that she’d not survive for another day without the aid of the life-support machines.

And I also knew that he worked for the Association in order to receive financial support for the hospital fees.

“But, sir. Patients struck with the Eternal Sleep Disorder will never wake up. Surely, we can’t let a living person march to his grave for the sake of a dead person, don’t you agree?”

Even now, countless people were dying because of the illness, the Eternal Sleep Disorder.

It was indeed a regretful thing, but we just couldn’t continue to drive him into death traps over and over again for his mother’s life. We needed to save him, at the least.

Even though Chief did his best to dissuade me and change my mind, I didn’t back down from my decision.

In the end, Chief had to nod his head.

“Alright, fine.”

My expression brightened quickly, only for the Chief to add a stipulation first.

“Except that you will personally be responsible for changing Hunter Seong Jin-Woo’s mind. If he willingly decides to stop, then we shall do so.”

I had already made up my mind about that. Indeed, I've never even entertained the idea of forcibly kicking him away without his consent, to begin with.

Even though I was facing perhaps the most difficult hurdle...

“I understand.”

...I still nodded head at the Chief, my expression full of determination.

Seriously now, have I ever been so committed to something to this degree in my life before? I was preparing so much data that I ended up asking myself that question.

This wasn't to make a grand announcement in front of higher-ups nor to pass a difficult examination. No, it was just to persuade one single Hunter named Seong Jin-Woo.

‘He’s twenty-three years old... he’s younger than me by six years.’

Thanks to my meticulous preparation, I felt reasonably confident of my chances today. Well, I had in possession plenty of evidence and records of him driving himself towards the jaws of death, more than enough to chide him for his reckless actions.

I was planning to go through each and every one of these records to argue my case why he should stop being a Hunter. I was even prepared to lecture him that one needed to value one's life as much as one valued the life of his mother.

Clink.

The door of this cafe opened and a face that I only saw through the file photos stepped into the establishment. When I saw him in person, though, I froze up solid on the spot.

He scanned the cafe's interior before spotting me. He cautiously settled down on the seat opposite mine.

“H-hello, there.”

He greeted me first. I couldn't say a single thing I've been preparing in my head, though.

“It's not as if we haven't tried to do the same thing.”

Chief pushed forward a shot glass filled with soju and I swallowed it one

go, my expression scrounging up afterwards.

Whether it was because of the bitter taste of the booze, or maybe my heart felt heavy, I didn't know why my expression refused to loosen up.

“Even then.... Sir, still, this isn't right, you know? That was just wrong, sir. He's a young kid, only 23 years old, so his eyes shouldn't look like that.”

I honestly thought that, at the very least, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo would show up to the meeting place with an expression filled with unfounded confidence, believing that he'd always survive no matter what, or with a look of a scared person searching for someone, anyone, to help stop him.

And I felt confident of persuading him regardless of where his mental state was in.

However, Seong Jin-Woo was different. He seemed to have completely acknowledged the predicament he was stuck in.

There was this thin smile on his face implying that, although he was shivering away in fear, he somehow barely managed to overcome it.

So, how could I push someone's back towards a corner, to the precipice of a cliff, when that person had barely managed to overcome his fear?

I just couldn't do that.

And also, I came to realise that I shouldn't bad-mouth my superior officers just because they failed to do something that I, too, had failed to do.

Chief didn't say anything while filling up the shot glass, but then he quietly asked me a question.

“Fella. Why did you join the Hunter's Association?”

“I...”

That moment when I began thinking about helping Hunters out for the first time – my head dropped a little and recalled the events of that fateful day.

“When I was young, I saw a certain news broadcast, sir. It was about a Hunter who ended up being trapped inside a Gate while trying to save his comrades from getting stuck like him.”

I recalled seeing the grounds of a theme park, a place where people were supposed to smile and have a good time, now filled with Hunters soaked in blood from head to toe as they lay there helplessly while moaning in pain.

Back then, I became really curious.

My parents couldn't answer my question, and that was when I made up

mind. If no one could help them, then I shall be the one to do so.

I shall do everything in my power to make sure that Hunters don't get injured or die.

“But now, even I became the same as the rest, sir.”

I failed to become that source of support, strength, to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo who was facing a deadly crisis in his life.

There was nothing I could do for him.

I scolded my uselessness with such thoughts. Meanwhile, Chief studied me for a moment or two before putting down his shot glass.

“What if you still have something you can do?”

“Pardon me?”

I raised my head up.

Chief reached into his bag and pulled out a file containing information on a high-ranking Awakened. He then placed it before me.

“You see, there are people who Awakened as a high rank but due to not being interested in monetary gains, they chose not to become Hunters.”

“....??”

“How about helping the Hunters affiliated with the Association by persuading these folks to join us?”

My mind snapped awake from that and I looked down at the file.

“Rank B Healer Hunter Yi Ju-Hui....”

An upper-rank Healer!

If someone like her joined the Association, then surely, she'd be able to save people from dying or suffering from heavy injuries. Even a weak Hunter should be able to fight to his heart's content without being worried about his safety.

For a moment there, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo's face I saw earlier brushed past my mind. My eyes were sparkling brightly, causing the Chief to gently chuckle and speak up.

“So, how about it? Are you interested?”

I stopped staring at the file and nodded my head energetically.

“Yes, sir. I am!!”



Chapter 245 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 2

Ash continued to fall from the sky like snowflakes.

Jin-Woo bade farewell to his Shadow Soldiers as their time to part drew near, and without a shred of hesitation, turned around to face the leader of the Rulers.

“I’m ready.”

The ‘Brightest Fragment of Brilliant Light’ summoned out a stunningly beautiful chalice, its expression slightly sorrowful. Jin-Woo’s eyes shone with interest when he saw that artefact.

‘So, that’s the Tool of God that can turn back time, the Chalice of Rebirth....’

Gulp.

Dry saliva slid down his throat all by itself right after he realised that the moment when everything was over and would begin anew had arrived. Jin-Woo’s face was filled with tension. Seeing him like this, the Fragment of Brilliant Light asked him one more time.

[Truly... will you not regret this decision?]

It had spent aeons fighting against Sovereigns and knew better than anyone how heavy the burden a war of this magnitude imposed on one’s soul was. Meaning, it understood full well the weight of that burden this Shadow Sovereign was about to bear all by himself.

The second Shadow Sovereign, Jin-Woo, nodded his head.

He won the first battle. The second battle should be that much easier. He had to ensure that would be the case.

He formed an expression half-filled with grim determination and confidence. The Brilliant Light also nodded its head.

This man’s drive to save all those lost in this war – how could this angel not know his determination when it too raised a flag of rebellion against its master, the Absolute Being, all for the sake of countless subordinates that died during the course of this everlasting war?

[I pray that your courage will save your world one more time.]

The Fragment of Brilliant Light made a heartfelt prayer and flipped the Chalice of Rebirth around. When it did, light filling up the Chalice poured down onto the ground, gently and gradually soaking it.

The most blinding veil of light slowly began enveloping the whole world.

Everyone – injured soldiers waiting in the battlefields, their families learning of their fate through TV, those praying for the safety of their loved ones, those with pale complexions after hearing ominous news broadcasts, those dropping their heads lower in despair....

In their houses, inside their cars, inside hospitals, inside schools, inside their workplaces....

Everyone saw the blinding light gently permeating through their windows.

Eventually, the whole planet became awash with pure light.

And then, the light silently blanketing the whole world, quietly dissipated and disappeared without a trace, just like when it first appeared.

Morning.

Past the closed eyelids, the rays of morning sun signalling the start of yet another day could be felt. Jin-Woo kept his eyes closed for the time being and while lying on his back, stroked the familiar material of the bed sheet.

Although he wasn't fully awake yet, his perception that had far surpassed the boundaries of a human being could pick up on the unfolding situation of his immediate vicinity with ease.

'Jin-Ah is coming out of the bathroom after washing up, the smell of the boiling stew, sounds coming from the cutting board, and then, the air in my room with this familiar smell....'

This was his home.

He had returned back home.

Jin-Woo's heartbeat began quickening bit by bit from the realisation. He then heard his mom's voice through the closed door.

"Jin-Ah? Can you go and wake your brother up?"

That's right.

His little sister Jin-Ah really liked sleeping, as befitting a growing girl of her age, but oddly enough, she always woke up early in the morning. And

almost always, Mom would ask her to go and wake her oppa up every day like this.

“Okay!”

After realising that the memories of the childhood he dreamed of reliving were now playing out so vividly in front of his eyes, a wide grin quickly floated up on Jin-Woo’s face.

Clunk.

“Oppaaaaa...”

Before his sister could fully open the door, he slowly pushed himself up from the bed.

“Uhh? When did you wake up?”

She stared at his already-awake figure with wide-open eyes, and Jin-Woo formed a deep smile as his reply. In front of his eyes stood Jin-Ah, who hadn’t lost her friends to the monsters yet.

Jin-Woo stood up from the bed and walked past his sister to enter the living room.

“Son? You’re up?”

Mom stopped preparing breakfast and looked behind her after hearing his footsteps. From today onwards, he’d never get to see the sight of her trying her hardest to escape from the clutches of the Eternal Sleep that no one could wake up from.

But, the most welcoming scene that he really wanted to see again was...

Jin-Woo heard the sounds of a newspaper page turning and quickly shifted his gaze towards the dining table. His father, waiting for breakfast to arrive by quietly reading the newspaper, felt his gaze and raised his head.

The moment their gazes met, Jin-Woo felt this rush of breathless emotion.

“Father...”

He muttered the word ‘father’ out unbeknownst even to himself.

Seong Il-Hwan formed a puzzled expression after hearing his son use a rather grown-up word when the boy always used the term ‘Dad’ up until now.

Did his boy wake up after experiencing a scary dream?

The young Jin-Woo now looked to be struggling to suppress his tears, so the alarmed Seong Il-Hwan quickly got up from his chair and approached his son.

“Son? What’s the matter?”

The voice of his dad, now coming from right in front of Jin-Woo’s nose. He could still vividly remember that feeling of his father scattering away like dust from his grasp, so this moment came across like a dream come true.

However, this was not a dream. No, it’s THE reality that he needed to protect, no matter what. Tears of happiness briefly welled up in his eyes, but soon enough, they were replaced by the gritty determination, instead.

Both his mom and dad were studying him with worried expressions on their faces. Jin-Woo forcibly changed his own expression and formed a grin.

“...I must’ve had a nightmare.”

Indeed.

His nightmare was over.

The nightmare was over, and his young sister, his healthy mother, and his father, who hadn’t vanished, were all here.

He was given one last chance to make everything right. And he swore never to let this chance slip through his fingers. He’d rewrite the future with his own two hands.

His eyes gleamed brightly as his resolve firmed up even further.

It felt like only a couple of days ago when he told himself that, but...

....A week flew by already.

Jin-Woo failed to grasp the right timing to enter the gap between dimensions until now. He rested his chin on his hand and dazedly stared outside his classroom’s window. Beru began talking to him from his shadow.

[Oh, my king....]

‘Yeah, I know.’

Indeed, he knew.

He knew that the Sovereigns desiring after this land were getting ready to deploy a gigantic Gate just beyond the blue sky above his head.

However, these last few days had been like a holiday for him, someone who had ended a big fight not too long ago. For a little while longer.... Wouldn’t it be fine for him to fully enjoy these peaceful times for a little bit longer? Especially as a reward for his hard work so far.

‘.....’

As he spent his time worrying about this and that, the much-welcomed sound rang around the classroom.

Ding-dong.... Ding-dong....

The bells signalling the end of school noisily resounded out from the speakers.

Kids all looked to be slowly wasting away until then, but renewed vitality suddenly seeped into their expressions. Going with the flow, Jin-Woo formed a bright expression as well.

Even if the inside was a young man aged twenty-four, no, twenty-five, his outer appearance was that of a child only fourteen years old or so.

The after-class goodbyes with the homeroom teacher came to a quick end in a heightened, noisy, and boisterous atmosphere. Soon, though, schoolboys sporting buzz cut hairstyles quickly crowded around Jin-Woo.

“Hey, Jin-Woo!”

“You’re stopping by at the internet cafe today, right?”

Jin-Woo checked out the excited faces of the kids and grinned softly before nodding his head.

“Oww yeah!”

“Hey, hey! Jin-Woo’s playing for our team today!”

“What? What’re you on about?! He played for your team yesterday already.”

“But, we also took in Jong-Shik too, you know. And he’s the worst player here.”

“Ah, ah, fine. We’ll take Jong-Shik and Min-Pyo too, so Jin-Woo is on our team.”

“Let’s decide with rock-paper-scissors!”

“Deal!”

Around this time period in the classrooms of the nation’s middle schools saw the boom in the RTS video game genre. Jin-Woo’s stunning reflexes and perception were more than enough to show these kids a whole new world out there.

For the middle school boys, top skills in a video game meant that you were the most popular kid in school. Just about every kid out there competed hard

to be in the same team as Jin-Woo.

The matches of rock-paper-scissors were supposed to be decided on the best out of three but soon morphed into best out of five.

Meanwhile, middle school girls, clearly not interested in the matters of video games, stared at the boys intensely competing in the warfare to steal Jin-Woo away with eyes reserved for looking at helpless idiots and left the classroom.

Also, right by the rear door of the classroom, there was this kid who kept stealing glances in the direction of the crowd while he belatedly packed his school bag.

He liked playing the video game like everyone else, but was no good in making friends. Such kids could only look on with envy at the rest of their classmates going around in groups like that.

Smirk.

Jin-Woo quietly smirked to himself.

He began noticing things that he wasn't conscious of before as a kid one by one. Was it because he was an adult now? Or, because of his perception that had exceeded the norms of humanity?

Even in this cramped space of the classroom, so, so many emotions swirled around and collided against one another to form a small world of its own.

In the meantime...

“Wow-!”

Kids who finally found themselves in Jin-Woo's team exclaimed out loudly without a shred of embarrassment.

Jin-Woo inwardly clicked his tongue.

‘This is why girls are looking at you like that....’

The victors of the rock-paper-scissors battlefield left behind the dejected kids and hurriedly crowded around Jin-Woo once more.

“Alright, let's go, Jin-Woo!”

Before he did that, though, he pointed to the back of the classroom.

“Hey, I want to form a team with him.”

“Uh?”

In the direction the boys turned their heads to, there was only that lone kid

packing up his bag in silence. He flinched from surprise after realising that everyone was looking at him, his eyes growing larger in panic.

“Uh....? Me?”

Jin-Woo replied back.

“Yup, you.”

At that moment, he found countless traces of agonising dilemma flit in and out of the boy’s expression. He just smirked again and asked.

“What’s the matter? You don’t wanna?”

“N-no.....”

The boy was now forming a shy but happy smile. Seeing that he was successful in his mission, Jin-Woo picked up his bag and spoke up.

“Okay, let’s go.”

The boy quickly picked up his bag and nodded his head.

“Y-yeah!”

Jin-Woo grinned brightly again.

For a little bit longer.

This feeling – just for a little bit longer.

‘If these moments that I’m living my life aren’t harming anyone, let me enjoy them at least for another day.

Let me stay for a bit longer....’

Jin-Woo’s steps taking him outside the classroom alongside his friends were cheery and light, but at the same time, also incomparably heavy as well.

The sun leaning against the mountain behind the school was already dyeing the sky amber. Jin-Woo came to a stop for a moment there and looked up at the heavens above, prompting his friends to call out to him.

“Hey, Jin-Woo? What are you doing?”

“Our spots in the internet cafe will get taken over at this rate!”

“These guys, trying to hurry me and all....”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m coming.”

Jin-Woo caught up to the rest of his friends walking a step ahead. They were noisily chatting about their famous victories soon to be written in history with voices full of anticipation.

Jin-Woo didn't really need to enter the conversations to sense their excitement and hear their throbbing heartbeats.

And so....

Under the skies dyeing in the colours of vivid copper, Jin-Woo walked on these streets with friends he met again after what felt like an eternity.

He walked with a wide smile still etched on his face.



Chapter 246 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 3

After entering the gap between dimensions, Jin-Woo developed a habit he never had before. And that would be jotting down things he saw and experienced on that day on a notebook.

He wasn't doing it with some lofty purpose of leaving behind the records of his bitter life-or-death struggle against the Sovereigns.

The gap between dimension was a perfectly 'empty' space, pretty similar to the land of eternal rest. Without battles against his enemies, this world of nothingness where only the eternal darkness existed would have been incredibly dreary and lonesome - he'd have difficult time trying to keep his sanity as a result.

However, his reason wasn't as simple as there being nothing to do in here.

Jin-Woo now possessed the experience of living the same timeline twice and because of that, realised something crucial – the perspective on an event would shift depending on when you were looking at it.

Meaning, after some time had passed, he might see some things he previously failed to notice.

And that was why he became rather curious as to how he'd feel after going through these records again when his memories started to fade away and grew indistinct in the distant future.

Would he become embarrassed that he left behind written records? Or would he feel regret, thinking that he could've done it better? Or, maybe even miss this war, although he felt almost completely fed up with it right now?

That was his reason for writing a diary whenever he had a chance.

Jot, jot...

Within this endlessly deep darkness, only the sounds of a pen softly scratching on the surface of a paper quietly rang out. As he continued to jot down the records of the day's events, a smirk suddenly formed on his lips.

'...Even still, I'm pretty sure I'll never miss the stuff that happened here in the future.'

Jin-Woo raised his head and caught the sight of the monster corpses too numerous to even count strewn about in the darkness.

Yet again, Jin-Woo tasted victory in the battle against the Sovereigns, and through this particular engagement, killed the ‘Sovereign of Transfiguration’ – the one that gave him the most headache so far.

It had already been 27 years since he entered the gap between dimensions. Finally, the closing curtains of this long, dangerous, and monotone warfare was in sight.

The only remaining enemies were the Dragon Emperor and its direct subordinates, the ‘Army of Destruction’. His heart briefly beat faster from knowing that he’d go home soon.

‘What a relief that the time flow in here and outside is different.’

Only around two years should have gone by on the outside.

Coming home after two years of absence, was it?

How much would Jin-Ah have changed? What about Dad? Mom? Were they holding up well? Should he have explained a bit better before coming here?

All sorts of worries briefly fled in and out of his head.

‘No, hang on.’

Jin-Woo shook his head as if to get rid of all distracting thoughts. Now wasn’t the time to focus his attention on how to decorate the last pages of his ‘diary’.

With excellent timing, Bellion walked closer and bowed his head.

[My liege, the surroundings have been tidied up. There are no living enemies left.]

Jin-Woo took a look around him.

The Shadow Soldiers had finished sweeping up the battlefield and massacred all the still-breathing enemies, and now, they stood in near-infinite columns as far as his eyes could see, silently waiting for his next command.

Guoooooh....

He had already given up counting the number of his current soldiers quite a while ago. With a chuckle, Jin-Woo closed the diary.

“Alright.”

He stored both the notebook and the pen within the subspace and

descended from the top of a hill made out of the monster corpses.

It was now the time – time to meet his greatest enemy. The one he so badly wanted to meet.

It was time to go and greet the ‘one’ who handed him his first defeat ever since becoming the Shadow Sovereign. The Rulers intervened and the end result was flipped on its head, but without a doubt, Jin-Woo did lose to the Dragon Emperor in that battle.

‘...I won’t lose again.’

A cold gleam dangerously flickered within Jin-Woo’s eyes.

His heart beat only softly when he thought about going home soon, yet now his eardrums were hurting from its vigorous, thunderous pounding.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!!

What if...

Jin-Woo focused on the sounds of his beating heart, only to begin wondering if there would come a day in the distant future when he’d really start missing this war.

He then wordlessly turned in the direction where the aura of the Dragon Emperor could be felt. And, along with the soldiers that would participate in the final battle....

“Rise up.”

From next to the countless dead monsters strewn about everywhere, an equal number of shadows rose up after hearing the command of the Shadow Sovereign.

Right behind Jin-Woo, his three Marshals, Bellion, Beru, and Igrit, plus many commanders, stood in an orderly fashion.

And behind them, the enormous army, more than large enough to cover an entire continent, quietly waited on standby for his next command.

‘.....’

Although this world lacked the flow of air, it still felt like a wind signalling the end of the war was faintly blowing around.

Jin-Woo quietly closed his eyes and took a deep breath. And when he opened his eyes, he uttered out the words that ushered in the end of this lengthy war.

“We march forward to attack the Dragon Emperor.”

The Dragon Emperor also felt it.

It felt that a truly gigantic horde with a scale that couldn't even be estimated heading in its direction.

Since when did it start?

When was it that the Shadow Sovereign, initially starting off with the repeated tactic of hit-and-run to shave away the massive Army of the Chaos World, began to openly hit his enemies with the full might of his army, instead?

The position of the army chasing him down had suddenly reversed and now, they were being chased down by him.

Out of all the armies that had been scattered around on their own, only the Army of Destruction remained. So, it wasn't all that difficult to guess where the attention of the Shadow Sovereign would land next.

The final, deciding battle.

Although the Dragon Emperor never imagined that the seemingly-everlasting war would end not with a grand battle against the Rulers but as a conflict between Sovereigns, it still believed that the upcoming battle would be a perfect finale nevertheless.

Indeed, didn't its blood boil from just remembering the battle against the Shadow Sovereign that took place decades ago?

'...'

The Dragon Emperor quietly stood still and glared in one particular spot. In the meantime, one of its subordinates cautiously approached it.

[Oh, my Emperor....]

The Dragon Emperor standing there with its arms crossed quickly replied.

[Yugumunt has died.]

After hearing the news of the Sovereign of Transfiguration dying, the subordinate formed a stunned expression before bowing its head again.

[That is why... perhaps it is advisable to move to somewhere more distant....]

[No.]

The Dragon Emperor bared its fangs as murderous aura rose up from its body in a red mist.

[I'm already sick and tired of running away. We shall fight the b*stard

right here.]

That man had spent over twenty years to hunt and whittle down the armies of the Sovereigns. So, he'd not even give his enemies sufficient time to regroup and reform their army.

If it was impossible to escape from his siege, then the Dragon Emperor would fight back head-on and decide everything. Now that would be a choice befitting of the King of Berserk Dragons.

[Get ready for battle!]

One command from their Sovereign and the Army of Destruction got ready to fight in an instant.

Kuwaaaah-!!

The Ancient-grade Dragons, Dragonewts, and the Sky Dragons they were riding on, all raised their heads up high and roared out.

'He's coming!'

The Dragon Emperor's head snapped in the direction where it just detected the movement of a gigantic power.

There was a clear reason why the Army of the Chaos World was defeated by the lone Shadow Sovereign.

'...Outstanding mobility.'

No one could even come remotely close to the mobility of the Shadow Army that could be summoned freely by their Sovereign whenever he felt like it.

No matter how close one was, the distance would grow in an instant, and no matter how far away they were, they could close the distance in the blink of an eye, too.

And right this moment, the Dragon Emperor was looking at the reason why the Sovereigns' armies had been so thoroughly defeated. The Shadow Sovereign slowly rose up from the darkness. And at the same time, millions upon millions of black soldiers lined up behind him.

The Shadow Sovereign!!

The fighting spirit emitted from the entirety of the Shadow Army standing behind him was so great that it even made the Dragon Emperor shudder from this slight sense of disgust for a moment there.

Two decades of war later, he had finally got himself the greatest army imaginable.

[Kuhahahaha!!]

The Dragon Emperor roared out with boisterous laughter after coming face-to-face with this incredible army.

[Amazing. Truly amazing, oh, King of Shadows.]

Fight the smaller number with overwhelming numbers – the situation back then when he first faced off against his enemies had now completely turned on its head.

[I never imagined that you alone would be capable of completely shaking up the entire army. Who would have thought that we'd arrive here?]

The Shadow Sovereign, currently outfitted in jet-black armour, wordlessly stared at the king of all Dragons.

The previous immaturity of the Shadow Sovereign had been replaced by this still weightiness and he emitted a much stronger aura than ever before.

Flinch, flinch....

The Dragon Emperor's body shuddered from excitement, as a truly powerful enemy stood before it.

It so desperately wanted to rip him into pieces.

It so badly wanted to rip him into several pieces and devour him.

The nature of a berserk Dragon began wiggling madly from within the Dragon Emperor. However, it was still too early to confirm whether this encounter was a celebration or a punishment. It wanted to enjoy this moment as it trembled from the anticipation for a little bit longer.

[I want to ask you one thing.]

Also, there was this thing it was quite curious about as well, which was rather convenient.

[Why did the Rulers use the 'Chalice of Rebirth'? Why did they revive all the dead Sovereigns and their soldiers?]

There was no doubt that on that day, the Dragon Emperor's life came to an end at the hands of the Rulers. The pain from the spears that pierced into its body was still vividly etched in its memory.

The grand army of the Chaos World would have crumbled pretty quickly after their leadership was lost through the Dragon Emperor's death. And with that, the lengthy war between the Sovereigns and Rulers would have come to its natural end. With the Rulers as the final victors.

It'd have been a perfect defeat for the Sovereigns, with not even a bit of room for any excuses whatsoever.

However, they went ahead and revived every Sovereign for some unknown reason, by reversing the time through the 'Chalice of Rebirth'.

Ever since that day, it tried to decipher the intentions of the Rulers over and over again, but failed to even come close to guessing the reason. That was why it simply had to ask the Shadow Sovereign, who was with them at the time.

And then...

[Because I wanted it.]

....That completely unexpected answer caused the brows of the Dragon Emperor to shoot up.

[What did you say...?]

Jin-Woo slowly spoke again, enunciating every word clearly so his opponent could understand him.

[I wanted to kill you lot with my own hands again so I asked them for the favour of using the 'Chalice of Rebirth'.]

Crazy son of a b*tch!

The Dragon Emperor somehow managed to suppress a torrent of swearing that rushed up to the tip of its tongue. To attack an army of over ten million-strong soldiers with just one hundred thousand combatants, he resorted to using a Tool of God to reverse time?!

Although it was a truly nonsensical declaration, but at least, it did resolve one of the questions burning up inside the Dragon Emperor's head.

The reason for the Rulers using the Chalice of Rebirth, and the Shadow Sovereign suddenly going on a rampage – these two matters were actually related, as it turned out.

[Haha.... Ahahahaha!!]

As if it found the whole thing too absurd, the Dragon Emperor shook its head helplessly and roared out in a burst of loud laughter.

The Shadow Sovereign wanted to fight the massive army of the Chaos World again on his own volition, and just as he wished, managed to succeed in driving his enemies to a corner.

This feat demanded a level of respect that transcended all types of respect. The Dragon Emperor had no other way to express its opinion on the Shadow

Sovereign who had managed to almost succeed in a challenge that seemed utterly impossible to accomplish in the face of it.

And he was now staring down on one final hurdle of that challenge.

Whether to devour, or be devoured.

For the first time ever, the Dragon Emperor became curious about the name of its opponent, the one that would either devour it, or end up getting devoured by it, instead.

[My name is Antares.]

The name bestowed unto it by the Absolute Being, but revealed to no one until now – the Dragon Emperor readily revealed its name to the Shadow Sovereign.

[That is my name. Remember it well.]

It did so, in order to learn the Shadow Sovereign's name.

With a sombre, serious expression on its face, the King of Dragons asked its question.

[What is your name?]

The Shadow Sovereign, Jin-Woo, decided to answer what could very well be the last-ever question of the Dragon Emperor.

[It's Seong Jin-Woo.]

And then, he spoke up in a tone of voice implying that there wouldn't be any further Q&A session after this.

[Is there anything else you want to say?]

The power of death in a pitch-black aura ominously quivered and rose up above Jin-Woo's shoulders.

The gap between dimensions was very similar to the world of eternal rest and it was rather easy to summon out the power of death in this place. The Shadow Soldiers that were resonating as one with their Sovereign's power also raised up their fighting spirit higher.

Uwaaaaahh-!!!

The entirety of the Shadow Army seethed and writhed. The corners of the Dragon Emperor's lips curled up as it witnessed this spectacle.

'Anything else I'd like to say, is it?'

Would there be a need for any further discussion when there was this grand

feast laid out before its eyes?

[...I don't have any.]

The Dragon Emperor transformed into a burning Dragon and stood before Jin-Woo, who also transformed into a humongous black giant as well.

A mountain against another mountain.

The two gigantic existences glared at each other just before the final battle. But, that lull only lasted for a moment.

Kuwaaaaah-!!!

The Dragon Emperor roared out loudly as if to shake the dimensions themselves, and the entirety of the Army of Destruction charged forward.

Jin-Woo was far quieter than his opponent as he simply pointed to his forward. Right away, near-ten million soldiers made their move.

At the same time, he too dashed forward towards the Dragon Emperor with everything he had.

The end of the lengthy war was here. He had been waiting with bated breaths this reunion with the Dragon Emperor just so he could witness the end.

A chilling ray of light began gathering within the Dragon Emperor's maw.

It was now Jin-Woo's chance to display the amount of growth he had gone through due to the experiences he earned before reversing time, as well as things he learned during this long war.

The flow of time slowed down to a crawl and only him and the Dragon Emperor remained within Jin-Woo's vision.

Just as the light of destruction exploded out slowly from the maw of a burning Dragon, Jin-Woo's fist enveloped in jet-black aura was thrust forward.

And so, light and darkness clashed once more inside the gap between dimensions.



Chapter 247 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 4

The entirety of the United States of America became rather noisy when a certain fortune-teller made an announcement.

“Not too long from now, the God of Death will descend on this land!”

Now normally, a prophecy like this, one better suited for a spot on a comic book cover, wouldn't have garnered any attention from the public. However, the big issue here was that this prophecy had been made by none other than Madam 'Norma Selner'.

Just who was this woman?

After abruptly opening her 'Heavenly Eye' around two years ago, she accurately predicted the death of North Korea's leader, terrorists kidnapping an aeroplane full of passengers, the stock market crash brought about by the sudden collapse of the housing markets, etc., and she had been the centre of many controversies for a while now.

And such a person made an announcement that implied the end of the world was coming, so it'd only be obvious that everyone would start freaking out.

Madam Norma Selner was also known as the 'prophet who is never wrong'. The mass media that saddled her with that label went into full-on panic mode and tripped over themselves to get an interview with her.

Too bad for them, though, she refused to speak to every reporter save for one person, who just so happened to be a personal friend of hers. It became known later that she had invited him privately and gave him a message.

And the very next day.

A gigantic black hole suddenly opened up in the skies of Seoul, one large enough to almost completely cover up the capital city. And Madam's prophecy dominated the headlines of every newspaper in the world.

Meanwhile, inside said Gate....

Jin-Woo could only let out a gasp of surprise after spotting the humongous sea of people, as if the humans of the entire world had gathered in one spot,

right below him.

“Huh-uh....”

How wonderfully moving would it have been if all those people were here to welcome him back? Unfortunately, Jin-Woo knew better than anyone that would not be the case and could only form a wry smile.

Soon, this Gate would open up. To all those watching on from the ground, this portal might be a source of sheer terror, but to him, it was an important doorway back home.

Home.

Jin-Woo’s heart was rapidly filling up with warm emotions from the knowledge that the pathway to his home that he missed so much would soon open up.

‘Now that I think about it, isn’t this my first time looking at the outside from the inside of a Gate?’

The outside world was in full display from inside the Gate. That was how Jin-Woo got to spectate on the sea of people below his feet. He placed his hand on the ‘wall’ of the Gate that separated the two spaces.

In the past, he needed to give it his all in the battle against the Dragon Emperor in order to break this wall down, but now...

‘Now, I....’

Jin-Woo lightly pressed down, causing minute cracks to form on the wall with sharp noises. If he pushed a bit harder, then this wall would surely break down without much resistance.

For a short moment there, Jin-Woo pondered whether he should do that and make his descent now or not, but eventually, he shook his head with a gentle smile on his face.

‘....No, I shouldn’t.’

People on the ground were scared already, so there was no need to alarm them even further. Besides, he’d been waiting for this moment for almost 30 years, so it was not a problem to wait for a few more days.

Jin-Woo carefully withdrew his hand, only to discover something else.

‘Hold up. Just who would think that this is the hand of a third-year middle school student??’

Indeed, he just realised that his hand was simply too big now. Having spent 27 years in the gap between dimensions, Jin-Woo had naturally become a

middle-aged man.

His physical age had already surpassed his own father's now. However, he'd been missing for only two years on the outside.

He needed to adjust his physical age to that of the outside one so that he could avoid the situation of people who knew him freaking out after seeing how much he had changed.

Although, he wasn't that keen on looking young to other people.... Hang on, maybe he was?

...In any case.

"I guess there's no helping it."

Jin-Woo grinned and looked down at his body before activating his powers. With him being able to perfectly control the powers of the Shadow Sovereign, the biological clock of his physical body posed no problem at all.

Soon enough, Jin-Woo's figure shrunk back down to that of a middle school student.

Shururuk....

The bearded face of a middle-aged man became that of a fresh-faced teenage boy with a bright complexion in no time at all.

The black smoke enveloped him for a brief moment and when it receded away, even the clothing had changed to the school uniform he wore on the day he went 'missing'.

'This should be enough, right?'

Jin-Woo formed a satisfied smile after confirming his new look, which was definitely that of a student no matter who took a gander at him.

Both his mind and body were now ready to go home and meet his family.

The only thing remaining was to wait.

'Two more days left....'

Even the wait until the Gate opened up proved to be something to enjoy to Jin-Woo, who was nearing the end of one hell of a long journey.

"Uh... Uh?? H-hey, it's opening up!!"

"The hole is opening up!!"

The crowd of people screamed and pointed at the Gate now beginning to open up.

Aaaah-!!

Kyahhack!

However, only the interior of the Gate connected to some other place was revealed to the waiting eyes outside. No feared events of scary things jumping out from there happened.

“...??”

“*What’s this?*”

“*It’s over, just like that?*”

The folks from all corners of the globe, here to spectate on the giant Gate, began murmuring in uncertainty as they watched the mysterious portal slowly dissipate.

In the meantime, Jin-Woo blended in with the completely-unawares crowd and upon arriving at a quiet, deserted street, undid his Stealth.

Since pretty much everyone was focusing on the disappearing Gate, none of them paid much attention to a middle school student that popped up out of seemingly nowhere.

Jin-Woo briefly observed the crowd of onlookers for a bit, before turning around to head towards his home.

It was precisely at that moment he discovered a young man holding an expensive-looking bouquet of flowers standing before him.

This man smiled brightly and addressed Jin-Woo.

“*Welcome back home safe and sound, Mister Seong Jin-Woo. Or, should I address you as the Shadow Sovereign, instead?*”

He had never met this guy before. However, he didn’t sense any malice from this unknown dude, either. So, he decided to lower his vigilance.

“*It doesn’t matter what you address me as.*”

Jin-Woo received the bouquet of flowers from the man and smirked softly.

“*Having at least one person welcome me back isn’t so bad, I guess.*”

He leaned in and took a sniff at the flowers before raising his head up again. The man spoke as if he was genuinely surprised.

“*Honestly.... I’ve never imagined that you would successfully finish your mission and return home like this. By the way, I see that your steps carry the weight of ten million soldiers.*”

The 'Army' was defeated, and without a single exception, the denizens of the Chaos World that made up its fighting force came under the influence of the Shadow Sovereign.

Jin-Woo now wielded the biggest fighting force when both the Sovereigns and Rulers were taken into account. He lowered the bouquet and asked the stranger.

"I'm sure you didn't come here to hand me this bundle of flowers, so... What does the emissary of the Rulers want with me?"

Quite different from the tone of his voice that could've come across as overbearing, his expression was filled with a relaxed composure.

A lion would never fear a lamb, after all.

His overwhelming strength, honed even further through the lengthy war, was more than enough to make this unknown man shudder slightly in fear, even though the latter already knew who he was dealing with today.

Indeed, it was the role of the lamb to fear the opponent, not the other way around.

Now faced with the dignified air of the Sovereign that was not too dissimilar to a king of all predators, the unknown man chose to politely lower his head first.

"The Rulers have sent you a message, Shadow Sovereign. Our conversation might take a while, so may I inquire if it's fine with you for us to go elsewhere?"

"Fine."

Jin-Woo walked past the smiling man and took the lead.

"I just remembered a place I wanted to stop by, anyway."

"..."

The unknown man wordlessly stared at the bowl of ice cream presented before him for a bit and raised his head.

"The place you wanted to stop by was an ice cream parlour?"

Sure, just because he became younger-looking, that didn't mean his tastes had changed, as well.

It was just that...

"Well, staying in a distant 'place' for a long time does make you hanker for something sweet, you see."

Jin-Woo replied with a grin and began scooping the delicious ice cream into his mouth.

This wonderful, refreshing coldness transmitted from his tongue. And then, followed by this thrilling sweetness.

Only now did it strike home that he had returned for real.

The unknown man tried to get to the main topic several times but Jin-Woo stopped him again and again. Only after he cleaned out the ice cream bowl did he open his mouth to speak.

“So, what did the Rulers say?”

The unknown man had been dazedly watching the Shadow Sovereign’s snack time until then. He hurriedly regained his wits and spoke up.

“Oh. First of all, they wish to express their genuine gratitude....”

“Why don’t we skip the perfunctory greetings and move on?”

The Rulers should not have any further business with this world, yet they still sent an envoy to speak to him like this. Jin-Woo deduced that the matter at hand must be something extraordinary, so he wanted to skip the opening remarks.

“Did a new problem pop up from somewhere?”

“No, not at all. It’s nothing like that. Rather, I’m here to speak to you because all the problems had been resolved, instead.”

Came to speak to him because all problems had been solved, he said.

The light in Jin-Woo’s eyes became even more serious. The unknown man greeted that sombre look and gulped down his dry saliva out of sheer nervousness. Still, one shouldn’t forget to perform one’s duty just because the other party happened to be quite a scary person.

The man opened his mouth with some difficulty.

“The Rulers, they.... They are worried about the potential side effects your powers might have on this world, Sovereign-nim. As you may well know, the powers you possess are not something this world can cope with.”

“....Okay, so?”

“Without the presence of Mana, this world is just too fragile. If it’s okay with you, we’d like to transfer you to a world that can take on your powers, Sovereign-nim.”

“Or, they can just go ahead and seal me up instead of transferring me

around, saving us from potential headaches.”

“Of course, that is an option....”

Bang!

Jin-Woo lightly slapped the table, causing the unknown man to flinch and stop his attempt to reply, his bright complexion frozen solid mid-speech.

The heavy voice of the Shadow Sovereign slowly came out of Jin-Woo’s mouth.

“So, they wish to get rid of me since I’m no longer useful, is that it? Because they fear the power that I possess?”

Jin-Woo maintained a smile, but the glare in his eyes was incomparable colder than before. The unknown man nearly jumped up in fright and quickly waved his hands around.

“N-no, that’s not true! I swear, it’s not like that!”

He then presented Jin-Woo with a certain newspaper he had prepared earlier. Jin-Woo took the paper and read the article dominating the front page.

That’s when he spotted a rather familiar face there.

The article was about a prophecy made by one Madam Norma Selner, who used to work as the ‘Upgrader’ in the previous timeline.

Jin-Woo’s brows quivered a little at the words ‘God of Death’.

“She wasn’t originally an exceptional soothsayer even back in the erased timeline. However, coming into contact with our world has changed her life a great deal.”

Jin-Woo’s gaze stopped at a certain part of the article, the part about when she had abruptly opened up the so-called ‘Heavenly Eye’. It was around two years ago.

Her ‘awakening’ matching up with the exact point in time he found himself after the timeline had been reset using the Tool of God couldn’t be chalked down to simple coincidence.

“So, what you’re saying is, my existence can potentially cause other changes like this one?”

“Yes, that’s correct, Sovereign-nim.”

Once Jin-Woo showed signs of calming down, the unknown man spat out a sigh of relief.

“The Rulers’ thoughts are to present you with a suitable location where

you can stay, if that's what you decide, with their intentions being to prevent the potential adverse change taking place in this world."

"..."

Jin-Woo leaned against the chair.

He still couldn't sense any malice from this unknown man. The Rulers connected to this man were making this offer out of good-will and other similar emotions.

However...

To think, he'd have to hear such news on the first day of his return.

Jin-Woo had been in a state of anticipation from the thoughts of going home, so he found it hard to hide how disappointed he was.

He definitely didn't want to discuss stuff like this right now. And he didn't bother to hide his thoughts on that matter.

"Can you come back some other time?"

"...I shall do so, oh, great Sovereign."

The unknown man performed a smart, courteous bow towards the greatest hero who brought to an end the war between Sovereigns and Rulers. The only thing remaining after the man had left was a black-on-both-sides business card.

Most likely, that signified the unknown man requesting him to call the number on the card when Jin-Woo had made up his mind.

He studied the face and the back of this card before stuffing it in the inner pocket of his school uniform, a bitter smile slowly spreading on his face.

The bubbles of anticipation and excitement from coming home had burst for good now. Many thoughts swirled in his head, almost making him dizzy.

'If all living creatures have a clear goal, a purpose in their lives....'

He was certain of one thing.

As the Shadow Sovereign, he had fulfilled his purpose after stopping the invasion of the Sovereigns, as well as making sure that no weird phenomena occurred on Earth.

Meaning, he had accomplished his goal.

So, the enormous power that served its purpose would only become a headache that was hard to dispose of, just like the nuclear waste at the end of its life cycle.

In that case – a question suddenly popped up in his head.

‘In the end, have I become an existence surplus to this world?’

When the chain of his thoughts reached there, he spotted a certain familiar face jogging past the ice cream shop. As if he was entranced, Jin-Woo got up, pushed open the front door, and stepped outside.

Without a doubt that moving forward, there would come many occasions in the future where he’d have to ponder whether remaining in this world was a good idea or not.

However....

‘As long as there is a reason for me to stay, even if it’s just one, then....’

A teenage girl kitted out in an athletics uniform stopped jogging and turned around to look behind her.

At the place where the scent she really liked was coming from, she discovered an unfamiliar teenage boy standing in front of the wide-open exit of an ice cream parlour.

‘What’s going on? Did ice cream smell this good before?’

The teenage girl tilted her head this way and that while glancing behind her, but in the end, she failed to solve her confusion and continued with her jogging.

Seeing her departing back, a brief smile formed on Jin-Woo’s face.

‘There are still people that I love in this world.

And also, those who love me, and those who used to love me exist in this place, too.

That is more than enough reason for me to stay here.’

Jin-Woo smiled and inwardly told himself to find other reasons to stay in this world.



Chapter 248 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 5

The first time I met ‘him’ was inside the irregular space created out of my liege’s power. My mission was to test the human about to enter this place.

Although my liege said that he wished to find out if this human was fit to become his vessel, I knew the truth, somehow.

I knew that this order might be the last one my liege would ever give me. My liege had lost all interest in warfare after forgiving the Rulers. From that point alone, I knew that he had harboured a deeper meaning in why he was so focused on this rather unremarkable human being.

I began guessing that I’d soon bid farewell to my liege. However, the command issued by my liege was still absolute. I had no thoughts of questioning his motives or changing his mind. All I could do was to comply with his command.

That was all I could do.

And so, after most of my powers were sealed away, I was made to stand all alone in the space where the testing of that human would take place.

‘Humans of this world call spaces such as this one dungeons, don’t they?’

At the far end of this imaginary dungeon shaped to resemble an audience chamber of a king’s castle, I saw a large throne. I combed through my fading memories of the time when I was still human and studied this place.

‘As expected.... You have certainly created quite a detailed stage with my liege’s power, haven’t you?’

I continued to touch and feel each large pillar lined up from the entrance to the plinth where the throne was and expressed my admiration towards the abilities of the architect, who had created all these.

As the fruit of this meticulous planning, that human’s body would continuously be modified to accept my liege’s power.

It was then.

I sensed the presence of someone approaching this place.

‘He’s here already....?’

I panicked at this unexpectedly fast arrival of the test subject and ended up sitting down on the throne.

However....

“....”

After I settled down on the throne, I began wondering if me sitting here would be seen as a bit ‘insolent’.

The consciousness of my liege had already taken root within the human I was supposed to test, so I couldn’t help but wonder if me sitting on a throne like this, in front of my master, would be seen as me being disrespectful.

‘....’

In the end, I judged that I should refrain from displaying any uncouth sight and hurriedly climbed off the throne to hide behind the nearest pillar.

Geuh-gugugugu-!!

With a truly gobsmacking timing, the massive entrance opened up, but thanks to the surroundings being too dark, that human failed to discover me panicking grandly like that.

What a relief that was.

It’d be no good to make this serious test my liege had planned out into a farce with my mistakes, now would it?

I inwardly spat out a sigh of relief and when the human was about ten steps away from me, I slowly walked out from behind the pillar to block his path.

‘....!’

Through the still air, I sensed his nervousness.

He was a young man.

Obviously, my gaze lingering on him couldn’t be described as favourable.

‘So, he’s the one my liege has chosen...’

Even if this mission wasn’t the final order bestowed unto me, I never planned to go easy during this fight. If I believed that he wasn’t qualified, I’d kill him with my own hands.

And so, as I stood there, igniting my fighting spirit...

...This young man suddenly clenched his fists tightly and put his dukes up.

‘....??’

Wait, could he be thinking of using his bare fists to defeat me?

I briefly thought about how praiseworthy his bravery was, for a human being. To fight him in equal conditions, I took off my cape and removed my weapons one by one.

‘...!!’

Why was he getting so surprised by every single thing I did, anyway? Sure, his eyes filled with drive were rather likeable, but did he possess the same level of abilities to match those eyes, I wonder?

So, time to check it out...

...And the results came out pretty quickly.

“Keo-heok!”

Plop.

Even though I was forbidden from bringing out my full power, he was already kneeling before me. What a disappointment that was.

However, just as I felt disappointed, I also felt an equal amount of relief. Because, if the one supposed to inherit the power of my liege turned out to be not qualified, then that meant my liege would remain as he was for a little while longer.

For the first time ever, and also for the last time, too, I felt relieved by my liege’s failure.

And then, I decided to bestow a fitting end matching the level of bravery this man had shown me even though he was a mere human being. I used the ‘authority’ briefly granted to me by my liege and dragged along the sword discarded to a distant location.

Cutting his head off in one go and sending him off on his way with minimal pain was what I planned to do. I figured that such a gesture would be the best form of mercy I could show this human.

Perhaps he had read my mind, he even presented his neck before me.

‘You made the right decision. Wisdom matching your bravery.... Although your loss is lamentable, there is no way other than this to change my liege’s mind.’

For the sake of the man choosing an honourable death, I performed the beheading. But then – he seemed to have accepted his fate without a struggle, but the light in his eyes changed abruptly at that moment.

Clang!!

My sword was blocked off by his hand, and instead, his dagger stabbed deeply into my face next.

Stab!!

Kuwaaaaah-!!

I was stunned.

Not by the fact that he managed to block my blade, no, but from the fact that he never gave up on his life right up until the end, even under the current circumstances.

Also, although it was for a brief moment, I saw the light coldly gleaming in his eyes and belatedly realised that it was uncannily similar to the light within my liege's eyes.

'Ah, ah... That was why my liege has...'

I completely lost all of my desire to fight, and was unable to respond to any of the continuous streams of attacks landing on me.

I was slammed into the wall, and...

Ku-waahng!!

....And, I was stabbed repeatedly.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Eventually, the metal protector surrounding my neck couldn't endure and broke off.

Crack!!

The strength he possessed, and then, the one I possessed – since this was a test to confirm whether he possessed enough of a qualification, I should possess higher stats than he did.

However, I still lost.

And quite obviously, too.

Was this the result of me underestimating him after seeing him as just another human being, or a miracle brought on about by his tenacious nature that didn't know the meaning of giving up?

As my consciousness blurred, I caught the sight of him raising both his hands up high to celebrate.

"Uwahh-!!"

Well, now. Since I began chuckling while watching him be like that, it

could only mean that I wasn't right of mind, no?

My consciousness blurred even further as my gaze drifted up towards the ceiling.

It was too dark up there, and I couldn't tell what these endlessly-stretching pillars were connected to. However, I was just a bit saddened by the thought that the distant darkness above seemed to signify my own growing distance away from my liege.

'Am I supposed to feel happy that my liege's choice turned out to be correct, or feel sad that I couldn't manage to change his decision....?'

I couldn't decide, and that's how I lost my consciousness.

That was... until that man came closer and shouted out 'Rise up' in my direction.

He really cherished me.

Was it because I was his very first soldier – no, technically speaking, not his first but someone very close to being one?

There were many occasions where I thanked him for the kindness I felt from him. And there were many things that remained etched in my memories, such as.... Indeed, that one time.

On a certain day, he said this to me.

"I'm sure you'll be able to talk once your grade goes up, right?"

How was I supposed to describe the state of my mind that nearly overloaded with emotions when I saw his bright smile? I wasn't sure of what he thought of me, but at least to me, he was my master, my friend, and my ally.

He and I overcame many battles together.

At times, against denizens of the Chaos World, sometimes against monsters of the instant dungeons, and sometimes, even against other Hunters.

When he was happy, I too was happy, and when he was struggling, I too struggled. And when he was sad, I also felt sad, as well.

I knew that the deeper my loyalty to him became, the longing towards my former master would get fainter and fainter. Despite that, though, I gradually grew to accept my new liege.

Of course, it was not always smooth sailing, either. There were moments that I was actually sweating buckets.

“Use this.”

Such as, when I fought against a much stronger female Hunter while still being under several restrictions, with only a sword that could shoot out some lightning bolts.

“Was the black knight you brought out really your strongest summon?”

‘.....’

I was even subjected to such insults, too.

And then, I even became a ‘roommate’ with a Shadow Soldier who possessed an abnormal fighting strength rather unexpectedly, as well.

Kiiiiieehhk-!!

‘.....’

Now I found myself saddled with a ‘roommate’ who, although very loyal by nature, his nature also happened to be quite vicious. You have no idea how badly I missed my dignified comrades from the past.

That’s how I felt when I met Bellion again. And if I were being honest.... when he taught Beru a lesson, I felt just a tiny bit refreshed.

Just a bit.

Too bad, my joy at reuniting with my old comrade didn’t last long.

Because, not much time passed by before Bellion became influenced by Beru’s antics, too!

[Look, Igrit. This black flag... if we plant it on top of this castle, don’t you think our liege will become happy?]

[...Are you being serious?]

[I don’t possess any skills to craft things like ants do, but if it is to make my liege happy, I’m prepared to do anything.]

[N-no, that’s not what I meant....]

[Kiiiehk-hehehet, is that the flag for our liege?]

[.....I give up.]

Of course, there was no need to even mention the reaction of our new master.

In any case, our boss’s powers became even greater after absorbing the original Shadow Army that had been patiently waiting for his summons from the gap between dimensions.

Contrary to my worries, he didn't treat the 'soldiers from the previous liege' any differently from his own, and after uniting under one banner, we were now fully prepared to sacrifice our lives regardless of what battle it was, all for his sake.

Our training time came and went way too quickly, and...

....And, our determination was fully put to the test in the war against the Sovereigns.

We fought with everything we had for his sake and successfully ended the war against the Sovereigns in our decisive victory.

When he was fighting against the Dragon Emperor, we watched with bated breath, this incredible life-or-death battle, from inside the shadow. The brilliant face-off of the two Sovereigns was so beautiful that I was almost overcome with emotions.

[Kiiehhk? What's this? Igrit, are you crying?]

[...Shut up.]

The entirety of the Shadow Army was up in arms inside our liege's shadow, thinking that a seriously dangerous moment was upon their master, but then, the armies of the Rulers opened up the doorway in the sky and decided to crash the party.

Waaaahhh-!!

We all cried out in elation after seeing the reinforcements blotting out the sky.

[You lazy bums, couldn't you have come a bit earlier?!]

[Wait, could they have deliberately waited until now to make us anxious as heck before making their entrance??]

[If I was standing outside, I'd have kicked their a*s*s already!!]

We were pouring out our complaints and dissatisfactions, but inwardly, we were celebrating our master's victory with great relish.

Unfortunately, we didn't get to sing our songs of celebration for long.

Because... our liege spoke.

“One more time.... Can you use the ‘Chalice of Rebirth’ one more time?”

He said that he wanted to reverse the time and completely erase any signs of Sovereigns and Rulers from this world he was living in.

Back when I was still a human being, I too had people that I wanted to

protect, so I could easily sympathise with his emotions. Maybe, I'd have chosen the same path if I was allowed to make the same decision.

I completely respected his choice.

Myself and my comrades were fully prepared to clash against any opponents once more, whether they be the armies of the Sovereigns or not, as long as it was for our master's sake.

Regrettably, though, not everyone was invited to this battle.

When we learned that some of us would disappear when the time was reversed, those soldiers that fell under that condition all plopped down and began to sorrowfully cry out.

All I could do was to console Iron who had been with us for a long time, Greed who got on the liege's bad books from the get-go and ended up going through a lot of hardships, as well as other wailing soldiers.

And so, the moment of farewells came to an end like that. We returned to the past and were gifted with a brand-new battlefield.

Our master became more and more adept at warfare, and following after our master's growth, we too, became stronger in turn, as well.

We faced several dangerous crises, both big and small. However, he grew even stronger every time he overcame them, to a point that it was getting harder to keep up with him.

That's how almost 30 years flew by.

All of our enemies were defeated, bar the 'Army of Destruction'.

The desperate clash of our liege against the Dragon Emperor.

While our master was fighting against the leader of the enemy forces, we faced off against the Ancient-grade Dragons.

One of them named Granodeh decided to engage me in a chat as I was mercilessly and crazily cutting down the army of Dragons.

[IGRIT!!! You were supposed to be one of the twin wings of the Shadow Army, yet you follow the orders of a Sovereign who is a measly human?! Are you not ashamed of yourself??]

Not even possessing enough energy to maintain its Dragonic form anymore, the b*stard had reverted back to a humanoid appearance, panting laboriously as it clutched the sword sticking out its chest. I ended up staring at the dying creature with dazed eyes for a long time after hearing its final words.

Indeed, I had forgotten it.

The moments spent with my new master had been so glorious that I had completely forgotten about the previous liege.

Since when did this happen?

Since when did the previous liege completely disappear from my mind?

Granodeh's breathing came to a stop a long time ago, and fierce skirmishes continued to break out all around me, but I just couldn't bring myself to leave this spot for a while.

I thought that my master was everything to me – but, in reality, he meant so little to me?

Such feelings of doubt caused the inside of my mind to blank out.

But then, this happened.

I heard a loud yell coming from somewhere that woke me up real fast.

“Igrit!!”

It was the voice of my liege.

I urgently raised my head to look. In the direction my gaze landed in next, I was greeted by a ray of blinding light.

‘Breath of Destruction!!’

The Dragon Emperor had spent most of its energy after battling my liege and reverted back to its humanoid figure as well. But, for some reason, it was firing a Breath in my direction.

No, wait.

That b*stard wasn't aiming at me. It just so happened that I was standing in the path of the Breath, that was all.

Indeed, I was rather unlucky. The truth was, most of the accidents happened because of some bad luck, and the victim at the end would lose his life. And it was my turn to become that victim.

Khuwaaaahh-!!

I realised that it was too late to do anything after seeing the ray of blinding light about to swallow me up. I couldn't even do anything and just stood there, frozen.

I resigned myself to my fate.

While facing the light enveloping my entire vision, I began thinking to

myself. Maybe this was... a punishment for completely forgetting about my pledge of allegiance to the previous liege?

'If so, then I shall gladly accept it.'

After all, I was a sinner, wasn't I?

And so, as I quietly waited for my final moments approaching me at the speed of light...

...In that blink of a moment, someone stood before me and extended his hand out to block the 'Breath of Destruction'.

Kuwaaaaahhhhh-!!!

His left hand was burning away from the horrifying attack of the Dragon Emperor, but he showed no signs of pulling away.

I watched him defending against the flames capable of burning away everything in the universe for my sake and even before I had realised it, I was calling out in desperation.

[My liege!!]

Once the Breath of Destruction came to its end, my liege turned to look at me with rebuking eyes.

'...!!'

Just like back when he loudly yelled out my name, I woke up again with a start just now. My liege scanned my condition for a moment or two, before dashing towards the Dragon Emperor again.

I too, raised up my sword in order to cut down the Dragonewts trying to surround me.

Clang!!

Blades clashed with blades once more to create flying sparks, and the Dragonewts being cut down by my sword screamed out in anguish.

'That's right.'

I had never forgotten about my previous liege. My loyalty to that person simply had been extended to my current liege, that was all.

How could me staying loyal with all my being to the inheritor the previous liege had personally chosen, be seen as a bad thing, a sin?

'I am a knight.'

I was a sword of my liege.

I was one of the twin wings that led the Shadow Army.

If a one in ten thousand chance occurred... if I were to face the moment where I had to part ways with the current liege, then I'd add the words of farewell I didn't get to say to the previous liege as well.

Every day I fought under my liege had been honour and privilege to me.

[Uwaaaahhhh-!!!]

I roared out viciously and pounced on the Dragons dashing towards my direction.

The lengthy war ended safely, and we all returned to the liege's homeworld.

Jot, jot....

My liege was focused on studying until late at night. Hidden inside his shadow and sharing his vision, I decided to offer my advice.

[My liege, the answer to the 14th question was not the first one, but the second option.]

“Ah, really? Thanks.”

Thanks to not being able to meet the minimum required number of school attendance days, my liege was unfairly expelled from this institution called 'middle school' and now found himself stepping into a brand-new battlefield, called 'GED'.

Although he maintained near-perfect score in every mock test he participated in, there were still a few problems that did slip through the cracks of inattention every now and then.

But, whenever something like that happened, just who was qualified to lend the liege his aid?

Grand-Marshal Bellion, who only had his huge physique and nothing else? Or Marshal Beru, who could legitimately claim to be pretty smart but ultimately, still a lousy insect at heart?

In the end, it fell upon myself to counsel our liege, as I had graduated the knight training school with top marks when I was still a human being.

“Hey, by the way, here, it says that the answer to the 14th question is... the first one? Igrit, can you really stake your life on the second one?”

My liege opened up the answer sheet and pointed out my flaw with razor-sharp accuracy. So, as befitting a knight, I owned up to it.

[It seems that my training is still quite lacking, my liege. I shall devote myself even further to my liege's cause.]

'.....'

I am my liege's knight.

My liege's sword.

The battlefield of my liege is my battlefield; now that he had stepped into a new war, it seemed that my glorious days would continue on for a little while longer.



Chapter 249 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 6

Every once in a while, Woo Jin-Cheol felt this inexplicable sense of loss in his heart. One heck of a weird thing this was, as if he had forgotten something really important to him.

However, no matter how hard he combed through his memories, he knew that he had definitely not forgotten anything. Only, the emptiness in his heart would grow larger and larger the more he thought about it, that was all.

“Hey, senior. What are you thinking about so deeply like that?”

The youngest detective in the unit asked him while handing over a cup of warm coffee taken from a vending machine. Woo Jin-Cheol shrugged his shoulders to say that it was nothing important and received the coffee.

“Thank you.”

Once this aromatic smell of coffee entered his nostrils, it felt as if the emptiness in his heart was filling up just a little bit.

His name was Woo Jin-Cheol, a fourth-year detective in the National Police Agency’s Violent Crimes Investigation Unit.

It wasn’t as if he lived a soft life where his mind would sway gently from the warm breezes of the incoming spring, but still, this sense of loss started chasing after him out of the blue, about three years ago.

When he mentioned this to his acquaintances, they all promptly reminded him with the cruel fact that he had no family to call his own, even though he was already at a ripe old age, and that must’ve been the reason for his restlessness.

Just like the bitter aftertaste of the coffee, Woo Jin-Cheol formed a bitter smile, too, and emptied out the paper cup in no time at all.

‘...That’s right.’

Didn’t someone say that a busy bee had no time to feel sad, or something like that? The best medicine to heal this trivial depression of his was, traditionally speaking, more work.

With excellent timing, Woo Jin-Cheol’s sharp gaze landed on the backs of

some men sitting in a line as soon as he stepped into the offices of the Violent Crimes Unit.

He crushed the empty paper cup with his hand and pointed at these three men with his chin.

“What’s their story?”

“Ah... those b*stards? Well, uh....”

Woo Jin-Cheol heard the youngest detective’s somewhat hesitant voice and walked over quickly to stand before them.

Sure enough....

These men’s facial complexions were whiter than snow as if they had seen something they shouldn’t have. They couldn’t even meet his gaze and continued to shiver like a lone leaf in the wind.

Seeing their faces, Woo Jin-Cheol began muttering to himself.

“It’s the Shadow Monster again...?”

It wasn’t all that rare to see criminals turning themselves in and confessing to their wrongdoings out of the sheer weight of guilt, or out of fear of getting caught.

However, it was a completely different story to see a bunch of hardened career criminals, scared sh*tless, begging the cops to throw them into jail cells as quickly as possible.

And for the last several months, the so-called ‘not rare at all’ spectacle repeated itself over and over again.

“S-Shadows.... The... the, the shadow stood up from the ground... and spoke to me. If, if I don’t turn myself in during the next 24 hours, I’ll end up regretting that I’m even alive.... D-detective, I’m a bad guy, so please, please! Throw me inside the slammer! I beg you!!”

They all generally retold the same story.

When similar situations kept repeating itself, the higher-ups got fed up and had ordered their underlings to get to the bottom of this matter right away.

Woo Jin-Cheol’s voice rose up higher.

“So, what you’re saying is, you all saw the Shadow Monster?”

“T-that’s right!! Right!”

Woo Jin-Cheol began writing up his report with the testimonies of these criminals, and when he got to the part called ‘the reason for turning oneself

in', he spat out a long, long sigh.

'How am I supposed to write a report about this, again?!'

His head began developing a migraine just from thinking about writing yet another report on the unbelievable story of the 'Shadow Monster' cursing people.

It was then.

Tap, tap.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder so he took a glance back, and that's when he spotted a senior detective standing behind him.

"Hey, Jin-Cheol-ah? Let the junior here take over writing up the report. Can you come to the conference room for a sec?"

'The conference room?'

What with the blindingly wonderful antics of the Shadow Monster reducing the number of violent crimes recently, there shouldn't be a need to use the conference room anymore, but he was being summoned there without a prior heads-up, regardless? What was going on?

The senior detective left behind the puzzled gaze of the younger officer and headed straight to the conference room; Woo Jin-Cheol tilted his head a bit before standing up from his seat as well.

"Senior, I'll take care of this."

"Good luck."

Woo Jin-Cheol encouraged the junior, now charged with finishing up the miscellaneous work, and headed towards the conference room along with other detectives.

"Pardon? You want to release the suspects back on the street?!"

"Uh-huh! Lower your voice, Detective Woo! Someone might hear us from the outside and get the wrong idea."

Woo Jin-Cheol asked again in a disbelieving voice.

"What do you mean by releasing the suspects back on the street, sir??"

"It's not 'releasing', but we just let one of them outside for 24 hours and observe what happens afterwards."

After listening to the opinion of the senior detective, one of Woo Jin-Cheol's colleagues formed a deep frown before voicing his own.

“Senior, I’m telling you, these bastards are talking bullsht after getting themselves high on drugs. This crap about monsters and whatnot, it’s definitely them having a new type of bad trip from the sh*t they’ve been taking.”

“But, their drug test came back negative, didn’t it? I personally went to Forensics to confirm it myself, didn’t I?”

“Well, that...”

“Besides, just because of some nasty side effect of a drug, these b*stards without any connection between them saw the exact same thing and decided to turn themselves in?”

“...”

In the end, the colleague shut his mouth as if he had nothing else to say. The meeting of the detectives continued on.

“The brass told us to get to the bottom of this a while ago, but look at us, we haven’t even gotten anywhere. What choice do we have? We gotta do something this drastic so that, at least, we can find us some clues.”

The detectives, initially unmoved and hesitant, began sneaking glances at each other and nodded their heads.

Since every single one of them saw the exact same type of hallucination, then there had to be some kind of a clue from the rubbish they were all spewing at the same time.

“So, like.... What I’m saying here is, let’s create an opportunity for them to continue spewing rubbish.”

Woo Jin-Cheol, quietly listening on until then, opened his mouth.

“But, what if something really does happen?”

“....??”

“....?”

The gazes of every detective seriously contemplating their next actions all shifted in Woo Jin-Cheol’s direction at once.

Smirk, smirk....

The corners of their lips began curling up next.

“Detective Woo, you believed in ghosts and stuff?”

“I didn’t take you for someone like that, but I guess our Woo Jin-Cheol has an unexpectedly sensitive side, doesn’t he?”

“Hahaha...”

Of course, Woo Jin-Cheol wasn't foolishly believing them, taking some nonsense story about monsters at face value. However – if everyone was seeing the same hallucination, then there should be a reasonable explanation for that, no?

For some reason, he felt this ominous foreboding that, through the testimonies of the suspects, he was now meeting some kind of a gaze that was staring straight at him from beyond the darkness.

He got this feeling that he shouldn't poke his nose in this matter.

The squad captain must've interpreted Woo Jin-Cheol's concerns in a different manner, since he said the following words while lightly tapping on the shoulder of his detective forming a worried expression.

“There shouldn't be any accidents, Detective Woo. We'll just take one suspect, place him inside a quiet storage facility somewhere and see if anything pops out. I mean, several burly and healthy officers will be watching him like hawks, so with what miracle will he escape from us?”

The squad captain looked at him with eyes that said 'You can't possibly be believing in this supernatural hocus pocus, can you?' and Woo Jin-Cheol could only nod his head in defeat.

That elicited a burst of manly laughter from the captain.

“Right. Let's say that 24-hour time limit elapses, and a monster does appear to do something to the b*stard. If that's the case, isn't that something we can also feel thankful for, in a way?”

These criminals were serious, vicious offenders who specifically targetted the homes of senior citizens to rob and even ended up beating a couple of pensioners to death just because the victims dared to resist.

The captain then spoke half-jokingly, but also half-seriously, that, rather than such b*stards staying in the slammer getting fed three times a day, it was only right that they got ripped to shreds by a monster.

“So, now we need volunteers....”

The captain shifted his gaze over to Woo Jin-Cheol and formed a rather sly grin.

“Detective Woo, you can sit this one out if you're still hesitant about it.”

“....”

Anyone who had lived in society for a while should already know this –

those words definitely meant ***“Don’t sit this one out”***.

Woo Jin-Cheol still felt unconvinced so he had to deliberate on this for a little bit, before eventually making his reply.

“No, sir. I shall come along as well.”

“D-Detective-nims!! N-no! You can’t! You seriously can’t! I’ll die!”

“Just be still. I told you, we have stuff to confirm.”

“I will die!!”

“Hey, man. Just who’s going to die here? Can’t you see us protecting you? Detective Kim? How long do we have until the 24-hour mark comes to an end?”

“Let me see.... I think roughly 30 minutes?”

“Is it? Uh-whew, it’s pretty cold tonight.”

The air of spring remained frigid and white steam rose up from the lips of the waiting detectives.

They were currently inside a quiet storage building, the time being in the middle of dawn. To observe the ‘change’ that might take place with their suspect, detectives were waiting around with nothing much to keep them company.

Only one among them – Woo Jin-Cheol – kept a close watch on his surroundings, his glare remaining sharp.

‘Something’s different....’

For some reason, the surrounding air felt different from the norm. It even vaguely felt like something he should never be near was approaching this location.

He prayed inwardly that this feeling would prove to be nothing but a simple fuss....

Woo Jin-Cheol sucked in the cold air repeatedly in order to calm his breathing that tried to get faster and faster.

And so – the hour warned by the existence called the ‘Shadow Monster’ slowly encroached upon them.

“Uhm.... It’s time now, everyone.”

“Really?”

One of the detectives took a look at his watch and stood up from his chair.

Tick, tock.

The 24-hour mark the suspect was strongly emphasizing earlier on had come and gone now.

“...”

“...”

Should one say that this turn of events was entirely not unexpected? Nothing had happened, and there was no sign of anything about to happen, either.

“What the heck?”

The detective with a short fuse began glaring at the suspect, prompting the criminal to stop shivering in fear and peek his head out before forming a dumbfounded expression himself.

“Uh....?”

Since there was no one watching anyway, the detectives surrounding the criminal began mercilessly shouting at him.

“Hey, you little sht! You assholes probably got high as a d*mn group, didn’t you?!”

“Stop wasting our time and just be clean with it, will ya? Why don’t you make all of our lives easier, ah?”

The suspect shifted his head this way and that while blinking non-stop, but when nothing happened even after a long time passed by, he began sheepishly scratching the back of his head.

“No, hang on, the thing was.... We definitely saw it, you see? Actually, there were four of....”

When his words arrived there...

Woo Jin-Cheol, who always stayed a couple of steps away from the group and watched the surroundings, quickly turned around towards his fellow detectives and urgently cried out.

“Get away!! Get away from there!!”

What was he trying to say now?

The faces of the detectives seemed to be asking that question as they looked at Woo Jin-Cheol, but then, they were all blown away on their backsides without warning.

“Uwahk!!”

“Keok!!”

Detectives rolled along the ground and, as if they had lost their consciousness just like that, remained dead-still in their sleep after coming to a stop.

Woo Jin-Cheol tried to run towards his colleagues, but after discovering something, his steps came to an abrupt halt. His irises were engraved with the images of ‘monsters’ slowly rising up from the shadow on the ground.

“Ah....”

He couldn’t say anything.

His breathing suddenly felt stifled, choked up.

These.... No, hang on, these things were definitely not human.

They were ‘insects’ that just so happened to possess the arms and legs of a human being; above their necks sat the head of an ant, rather than that of a human.

Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes quaked in fear.

‘There are three such monsters?!’

These suspects definitely didn’t see any hallucinations, nor were they suffering from adverse side effects of some strange narcotics, either. Their testimony had contained not one shred of falsehood, as it turned out.

“U-uwaaaaaahhk!!”

Now completely surrounded by these ant monsters, the suspect began screaming at the top of his head.

It was the most desperate, frightened, and sorrowful scream a human could emit. It was unmistakably the death throes of a dying man.

The ant monsters ripped the suspect apart without hesitation and began devouring him.

“Uwaaahk!!”

His scream didn’t last for long.

Only some splotches of blood and bits of flesh remained on the spot where the feast of ants took place.

Woo Jin-Cheol dazedly stared at that spectacle. And then, two of the ant monsters also discovered the dazed detective after ending their meal.

Kiiehk.

And their gazes were now fixed on him.

Woo Jin-Cheol thought of turning around in a hurry to escape, but his feet didn't want to move. His legs had frozen up solid and he couldn't lift them up at all.

“P-please....”

It was then.

The biggest ant monster with wings, situated behind the two other ants, stopped his comrades (?) from going any further.

The winged ant grabbed their shoulders and turned them away, and for some reason, he formed the kind of expression that said, **“Hey, nice to see you again”**. Heck, he even formed a grin, too.

“....??”

An ant... was smiling?

No, hang on a minute.

‘Never mind the fact that an ant is smiling – how the heck can I even tell that it’s making a delighted expression?’

It was so, so strange.

Even though he now found himself in this deeply horrifying, frightening situation, Woo Jin-Cheol was suddenly overcome with this sense of longing.

As if, there once had been a time that he was quite familiar with situations such as this one.

‘But.... How?’

Woo Jin-Cheol fell into a state of confusion and panic, only to realise that the ants were disappearing into the shadow.

“H-hey!! Hold on!! Wait!”

Too bad, despite how desperately he called out, the ant monsters were gone without a trace, in the blink of an eye.

By the time he ran over and stood above the shadow itself, there was not a single trace of them left anywhere.

He felt this sense of loss assaulting him again and bent down to slowly rub the shadow that the ants had disappeared into.

Just how long passed by like that?

“M-mm....”

Woo Jin-Cheol belatedly regained his wits after listening to his colleagues toss and turn behind him.

“H-hey, are you alright?”

He checked out their current conditions and quickly called the emergency services. Even after he did that, though – even when ambulances arrived on the scene to take his colleagues away to the hospital, his gaze remained fixed to the shadow.

“Brilliant!! Absolutely f*cking brilliant!!!”

The squad captain was, understandably, up in arms.

But, that was to be expected.

The suspect had completely vanished without a trace, while the detectives supposed to watch over the man were struck unconscious by something and couldn't remember a thing.

The captain looked at the two detectives covered in bandages here and there with their heads hanging low in embarrassment, and spat out a long sigh. He then shifted his gaze over to Woo Jin-Cheol.

“Detective Woo? What about you?”

“...”

“You called the ambulance, didn't you? Can't you remember anything?”

“My apologies, captain. When I came to, I saw my colleagues unconscious, so I just....”

“God d*mn it!!”

Captain pounded on his chest as if the frustration was about to kill him and sighed out again.

“Thankfully, this matter hasn't been reported to the higher-ups yet, so all of you, keep your mouths shut, okay? And you two, you got hurt by mistake while trying to investigate the gangs in the Guro-gu district. Got it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Yes, captain.”

Along with the energyless replies from the two detectives, this incident had come to its conclusion – for the time being.

The Violent Crimes Unit became rather quiet for a while afterwards.

“Senior? You know, you look a lot better nowadays. Did something good

happen to you lately?”

The youngest detective in the squad asked while handing over a cup of steaming coffee taken from the vending machine to Woo Jin-Cheol.

“Well, I wonder.”

Woo Jin-Cheol shrugged his shoulders as if to say there was nothing to see here and received the cup.

The thing was, though – the youngest detective’s words of something good happening weren’t entirely off the mark.

After that day, after meeting those ant monsters, it felt as if that emptiness in his heart had been filled by a little, for some unfathomable reason.

‘There’s definitely something here.’

Without a doubt!

The instincts of a veteran detective, no, the instincts of a human being named Woo Jin-Cheol, were telling him that there was definitely something there.

The youngest detective stole a glance over Woo In-Cheol’s shoulder to see what was on the pages of a small memo pad the latter was concentrating so hard on.

“Uh? Uhh? Senior? You’re still investigating that missing suspect incident? But, didn’t the captain say.....”

“I know, I know. It’s something I’m looking into in my spare time.”

Woo Jin-Cheol made sure that his junior wouldn’t run his mouth off and finished off his share of coffee. However, unlike in the past, the junior didn’t shut his mouth up immediately.

“Wowzers.... There are quite a lot of suspects turning themselves in because of the Shadow Monster beside our precinct, isn’t it?”

“....”

He couldn’t simply treat this young detective badly when the number of hopeful officers applying to join the Violent Crimes Unit was in decline lately.

Although he was slightly annoyed by this unnecessary attention, Woo Jin-Cheol still did his best not to show it and replied calmly.

“That’s what I heard.”

“Mm....”

The junior stared hard at the contents of the memo pad, before asking another question.

“Huh? Wait, why did the number of suspects turning themselves in suddenly decrease by a lot between the end of February and the beginning of March?”

After hearing that astute observation made by the junior, the veteran’s eyes gleamed brightly.

“Hey, can you think of something?”

“Ah, well, it’s actually nothing much, but.... My aunt used to run a small book rental shop, you see.”

“....Okay, so?”

“I just remembered that she used to whine about business going downhill during the end of February and the beginning of March, because the new school semester started around then, senior. Haha, it really was nothing much, wasn’t it?”

Perhaps he felt a bit sheepish, the junior scratched the back of his head with a smile. But then, he gasped out in sheer surprise when he saw Woo Jin-Cheol carefully jot down what was said on the memo pad.

“S-Senior??”

“Well, you never know.”

School opening, students, semester.

Those four simple words with no adjectives or modifiers attached were quietly added into Woo Jin-Cheol’s memo pad.

Meanwhile, in XX High School.

A day before the entrance ceremony for the new students, the headmaster of the school secretly summoned the teacher serving as the director of the students’ affairs department to his office.

“We’ll be welcoming a problem child in our school tomorrow.”

“Pardon me, sir?”

The headmaster pushed forward a set of prepared documents. The director of the students’ affairs scanned the profile of a certain student written on the document and tilted his head.

“His father is a firefighter, his mom is a regular housewife. His academic records aren’t too shabby, and I failed to see anything major with this child,

sir.”

“Uh-huh. This fella. Look at the bottom. Look at the details on his expulsion.”

“.....!!”

The student had run away from home for two years when he was only a first-year middle school student. Rather obviously, he was expelled from his previous school.

But then, he ‘completed’ the middle school diploma through GED and applied to enter their high school.

‘Not even as a high school freshman, but a child who just graduated from the elementary school ran away from home for two years?’

The director sensed the entrance of a powerful adversary and his eyes began quaking ever so imperceptibly. Meanwhile, the headmaster spoke in a hushed voice.

“What do you think? This student, do you think you can handle him?”

The director of the students’ affairs took a deep, deep breath and closed the file of this problem child.

Tap.

“Sir, you know very well already why I’m called the ‘Venomous Snake’. No matter what kind of a problem child he is, just leave him to me. I shall make sure to discipline him correctly so he won’t go around causing trouble.”

His eyes were now shining with a sense of duty and unbridled confidence. The headmaster nodded his head in approval.

“Very good, then. I shall trust your judgement in this case, Teacher Park.”

The expression on the headmaster softened after hearing the assurance straight from the mouth of the director. A thin smile crept up on the latter’s lips.

The fated encounter would take place the next day.

His heart was racing already from his determination to suppress the troublemaker in one fell swoop during the welcoming ceremony before the kid had a chance to start anything.

Extra Spin-off Beru’s Memories

Kiiiiieehhk-!!

Kiahk!

Kiiieehk, kiiiiieehk, kiihk, kiiiiieehk.

Khaahk, kiiieehh, kiihk.

Kkiiiiieehk!

Kiehhehehehehet~!

Kkieehhk! Kiiiaahk!

Kaahrurururururuk-!

Kihak.



Chapter 250 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 7

The high school freshmen were gathered in the school's athletics field for the entrance ceremony.

Noisy, noisy....

The new students used the gap created by the still-lax surveillance of the teachers to form small groups comprising of the graduates from the same middle schools and noisily chatted away.

It was then.

“Silence!!”

Like a lone shark scything its way into a school of sardines, the ‘Venomous Snake’, Teacher Park Gi-Sool, made his sudden entrance and shot a scary glare, prompting the new students to hurriedly shut their mouths up at once.

“Who dares to make a noise? Who??”

Rather unfitting for his name, Teacher Park Gi-Sool was in charge of the physical training. But, fitting for a man who competed in amateur wrestling in his youth, he was blessed with cauliflower ears, a thick neck, broad shoulders, as well as muscular thighs.

Everywhere Teacher Park Gi-Sool's glare landed, kids quickly dropped their heads lower. The war of aura – nerves – at the beginning of school life wasn't exclusively fought between the students, oh no.

If one took into consideration the potential atmosphere for the rest of the academic year, or even the classroom itself, then the war of nerves between the teacher and students would be far more important than the one taking place between the headstrong students.

And as far as his track record for this kind of war was concerned, ‘Venomous Snake’ Teacher Park Gi-Sool had never tasted defeat before.

Starting from ten years ago, when he took his first step into the teaching profession, last year, and the year before that too, never had he failed his mission. He was planning to extend the streak to this year, as well.

The school of sardines in front of the shark, no, the new students in front of

Teacher Park Gi-Sool couldn't withstand his fierce glare and quickly lowered their gazes.

All the noisy kids shut their mouths for good wherever he walked past. Meanwhile, his colleagues watching on from the sidelines could only look on with eyes of pure respect.

“As expected of Park Teacher-nim....”

“Looks like we can rely on the director of students' affairs for another trouble-free year, as well.”

Park Gi-Sool scanned the new students and their broken fighting spirit while forming a content smile on his face.

‘Right, that's how it should be.’

However, he couldn't be satisfied with this much of 'victory' yet. Not today. Didn't he already have a real target in mind for today, the one the headmaster personally entrusted him with?

As long as he didn't break that problem child's fighting spirit, then it'd be rather difficult to claim that he had performed his duty of guiding these students properly today.

Park Gi-Sool continued to scan the faces of the new students and eventually located the problem kid in question.

‘There he is.’

The moment he located his target, that content smile was wiped off from his face immediately.

Even at a casual glance from far away, one could tell that the boy was no ordinary challenge, what with his height far taller than his peers, the hints of firm muscles all over his figure, as well as powerful vitality that could be gleaned from his eyes.

‘So, that kid is Seong Jin-Woo....’

The thing was, an expert would be able to recognise other experts.

No matter how wild they were as a student, they all would become a well-behaved sheep in front of him before long. And in case the boy decided to show off with inadvisable bravado, then Teacher Park simply had to reveal just a wee bit of what was in store for unruly children.

There hadn't been a single problem kid that 'Venomous Snake' Park Gi-Sool failed to discipline properly. His confidence oozed out from every pore of his body like an actual aura.

‘Alright....’

....Time to get started.

Before that, though, Park Gi-Sool’s snake-like eyes quickly scanned the problem kid from top to bottom. And then, his eyes gleamed brightly.

‘That’s it!’

There was a black glove on one of the problem kid’s hands.

A teacher in the student affairs department couldn’t possibly ignore the problem kid violating the dress code, such as wearing hats or gloves, while standing in the middle of the athletics field, now could he?

Of course, it wasn’t as if he had forgotten about the small fact that the boy’s left hand had a serious scar and needed to wear a glove all the time.

Such a thing was already written within the student’s records, after all.

However, Park Gi-Sool needed a pretext, however small, to butt in and start his operation of breaking that problem kid’s fighting spirit.

Indeed, what could be a better pretext to scold a student than the violation of the school’s dress code?

Having discovered a suitable gap to dig in, Park Gi-Sool’s eyes gleamed sharply like a real venomous snake, and he quickly made his way over to the problem kid in question.

It seemed that the boy hadn’t sensed his approach yet, which was good. A surprise attack was very effective in breaking the enemy’s fighting spirit, after all.

Once he got close enough distance where a whispered name could be heard by the other party, Teacher Park Gi-Sool’s brows shot up as he got ready.

“Hey, you fool! Where do you think you are to wear a glo....”

The loud, energetic roar coming from Teacher Park Gi-Sool prompted Jin-Woo to turn his head around. And then, his eyes met Park Gi-Sool’s.

In that moment....

“Uh, uhhh....??”

....Teacher Park Gi-Sool saw ‘it’.

He saw the countless black monsters, standing seemingly endlessly behind this ‘problem kid’.

The entirety of the athletics field, filled with students, disappeared in

darkness from Park Gi-Sool's view, only to be replaced by the sight of a massive army of ten million soldiers standing in columns that stretched endlessly towards the distant horizon.

“Heok!!”

Teacher Park Gi-Sool was instantly shoved away by the absolutely overwhelming pressure and tumbled on his backside while loudly screaming out.

“Teacher-nim?!”

“Park Teacher-nim! Are you alright??”

Other teachers in the vicinity hurriedly rushed over there and supported Park Gi-Sool. His complexion was as white as a sheet of paper. He took another look at Jin-Woo, but by then, his view had reverted back to normal.

“B-but, how....??”

He roughly shook his head and blinked his eyes several times while the attention of the surrounding students began falling on him.

Noisy, noisy....

“Everyone, keep quiet!”

“Park Teacher-nim, maybe you're feeling unwell somewhere?”

Now being on the receiving end of the worried gazes of his colleagues, as well as unsettled looks from the students, Park Gi-Sool's face reddened up considerably from embarrassment.

“I, I'm fine.”

He shook off the support from his colleagues and quickly made his escape from the area.

Bellion hiding in his master's shadow quietly whispered to Jin-Woo while watching the departing man's back grow further away.

[My liege, that man must've...]

‘Yeah. It seems that he has seen you guys.’

Jin-Woo nodded his head.

There were some people who possessed far keener senses than other regular folks, although there weren't that many. Such people would sometimes – not very often, mind you – discover that Jin-Woo was a bit different from everybody else.

Just like now.

‘...Could this be one of the adverse influences I have on this world, too?’

He couldn't tell for sure. Jin-Woo recalled the pale, frightened face of the urgently-escaping teacher and tutted softly to himself.

It was then.

The speakers located in the athletics field issued ear-piercing static before commencing with the campus broadcast in earnest.

Jin-Woo stopped looking in the direction where Park Gi-Sool had disappeared to and shifted his gaze forward, just as the broadcast ordered everyone to do so.

It was a brilliantly sunny spring day.

Under the warm rays of the sun gently beating down on Earth, the headmaster's smooth forehead blindingly reflected the excitement these new students were feeling right now.

For a reason only known to him, Jin-Woo deliberately applied to a high school that was some distance away from his house. And naturally, he recognised no one in the new class.

‘Well.... Isn't that obvious?’

He scanned the faces of other kids without feeling bummed out about it, a smirk slowly creeping up on his face.

He was already well past the age where his heart would start beating nervously from the burden of sharing a classroom with kids he didn't know.

If it was him in the past, he'd start greeting others even while under the vicious assault of awkwardness, but now? It just felt too annoying, so he didn't even bother.

While other kids were busy scanning their classmates to see what was what, Jin-Woo simply took out a book he brought from home and opened it up.

Maybe spending such a long time in the gap between dimensions, where there was not a sound to be heard, had changed him somehow, because he gained a renewed appreciation for reading a book in quiet stillness.

Besides, even though they were ostensibly his classmates, there was the age difference of several decades to consider here, so what could he possibly say to these kids, anyway?

Indeed, it'd be more preferable to share a wordless conversation with a

good book, instead.

But then, just as he got ready to spend some quiet time with himself, someone actually approached him to engage in conversation.

“Uh-uhm.... Could you be...?”

The voice sounded a bit powerless. Jin-Woo raised his head towards where that voice came from.

The owner of the voice flinched a bit when their gazes met, but when he confirmed Jin-Woo’s face, he seemed to have gained a boost to his courage.

“Y-you are Jin-Woo from XX Middle School... Seong Jin-Woo, right?”

Who could this kid be? Jin-Woo’s eyes narrowed slightly.

‘Huh. He does look kinda familiar....’

However, they must not have been all that close, because he couldn’t immediately recall this boy’s name or things they did together. He tried to dig deeper into his memories, but then....

“Uhm, I....”

As if this sort of situation was a common occurrence for him, the boy with a rather faint sense of existence re-introduced himself without minding it at all.

“I’m Oh Young-Gil.... We belonged to the same class during freshmen year in middle school.”

“...Ah-!”

Hearing the name helped Jin-Woo to remember.

He was none other than the boy that kept glancing at the group of kids getting ready to go to the internet cafe with envious eyes. The boy with the buzz cut hairstyle had grown up to become a high schooler now.

His facial expression now half made up of amazement and delight, Jin-Woo extended his hand for a shake.

“Hey, good to see you, Young-Gil-ah.”

“Uhm.....”

It seemed that shaking hands was a gesture still too foreign for a boy just entering high school life, because Oh Young-Gil was hesitating somewhat on what to do next, but eventually, he cautiously grasped the offered hand with a sheepish expression.

“Y-yeah, me too....”

As they shook hands, Jin-Woo felt this great sense of relief coming from the boy. Indeed, one would certainly feel relieved after finding a familiar face, a friend even, when entering a new school and a new class.

Jin-Woo formed a warm smile so the friend he met after a long time could feel relaxed now. It must've been pretty effective, because Young-Gil grew just a bit chattier than before.

“You live around here? My family moved house to the area nearby.”

But, just as the boy's words reached there, Jin-Woo had no choice but to stop him for a bit, slightly peeved by the fact that he was unable to enjoy this unlikely reunion with a friend to its fullest.

“Hang on.”

Jin-Woo turned his head to the side, and that was when four kids who didn't look to be a nice sort, even at a casual glance, surrounded him and Young-Gil.

“Hee~ya, hey man. You must be somebody important, right? You even have a glove?”

The hooligans pointed at Jin-Woo's left hand and cackled among themselves. Meanwhile, Young-Gil's complexion grew gloomier at the rather obvious approach of these fools.

‘He's supposed to be a man, but he's just too timid...’

Jin-Woo found it rather unfortunate that his friend's expression was hardening like that and he shifted his gaze over to these four hooligans surrounding him.

The kind of faces and glare in eyes best described as worthless were the only things he saw.

These four might not have graduated from the same middle school, but they had been acting as local hoodlums for a bit and had become acquaintances as a result. After finding themselves in the same class, they took a look at the faces of their classmates and arrived at a consensus that there was only one hindrance to their plan of taking over this class.

And so, they were here to prod this potential hindrance a little and see what would happen. Other kids in the class were scared and couldn't even meet these four's glare, but in Jin-Woo's view, who had been fighting non-stop for almost thirty years, these four were....

....Quite adorable, actually.

The quartet, oblivious of how they were being judged, continued their mission to provoke Jin-Woo who had grown silent now.

“Hey, hey. Why don’t you take off that glove? I wanna try it on, too.”

“By the way, why did you put a glove on only one hand? Maybe, you have a Dark Flame Dragon on your arm, too?”

“Euh, euh, euh-! My hand! My right hand’s Dark Flame is roaring out!”

Ahahaha!

They must’ve found something really funny, because all four of them burst out into boisterous laughter. Seeing them react like that, Jin-Woo formed a derisive smirk at them.

When he did, the glare in the four hooligans’ eyes changed.

“Oh, you think this is funny?”

“Seriously, did this bastard plug his ears with crap or something? We told him to take the damn glove off, yet he ignores us?”

“What? What gives? You have a tattoo there or something?”

It was then.

From his shadow, Jin-Woo heard the extremely agitated voice of Beru crying out.

[Oh, my king!!! Grant me the permission so that I can tear the heads and limbs off of these fools and make sure they can never ever disparage you in this manner!!]

‘I ain’t giving you permission.’

[H-however!]

‘Stop it.’

Jin-Woo reprimanded Beru, and before the ant soldier’s rage could be fuelled even further, he took his glove off and showed the hooligans his hand. When he did that, a hideous burn scar starting from his palm to his wrist was revealed for all to see.

“...”

“...”

The quartet of troublemakers became speechless from the scar that implied a pretty serious tale even at a casual glance, before they began mouthing some vague excuses.

“T-this guy, we were just fooling around, so why are you getting serious?”

“H-hey, dude. Put your glove back on. I might have nightmares about it now.”

“Whoa...”

Perhaps realising that this should be enough, the quartet withdrew from there. Jin-Woo didn't say anything and put his glove back on, before powerfully stomping on a certain blotch of shadow on the floor sneaking towards the departing quartet.

‘What were you planning to do after catching up to them?!’

[K-kkiiehk-!]

Beru was really incensed by those kids that dared to insult his liege, but Jin-Woo was ultimately successful in holding back the irate ant soldier. He raised his head again afterwards.

Wasn't this good?

He had already killed all the enemies that bared their fangs at him back in the gap between dimensions. Enemies that threatened him inside dungeons also lost their lives, too.

However, this place was Seoul, the Republic of Korea, where there were no Gates and no monsters to worry about. This was a place filled with peaceful, everyday normal stuff.

Jin-Woo was enjoying to the fullest this peace he achieved with his own two hands, so such a little provocation was nothing more than minor stuff to simply chuckle over and forget about it.

And that was why...

‘I'm sure this much is fine.’

Jin-Woo's gaze shifted over to the back of the quartet.

When he did – the hooligans making their way to the rear of the classroom got tripped by the ‘invisible something’ and fell on their faces as a group.

Tumble, crash!!

Beru, currently being pushed down by Jin-Woo's foot, watched the boys tumble ungainly like that and shifted his dumbfounded gaze back to his liege.

[Uhm... Oh, my king....?]

‘I did that for a laugh. You know, so I can laugh.’

Since that was humorous, everything was fine now.

Jin-Woo smirked softly and settled down on his seat again after seeing the flustered expression of the female teacher, who just so happened to enter the classroom at that exact moment to discover that four of her students had fallen face-first on the floor.

With that, his high school life began for the second time.



Chapter 251 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 8

Ding, dong. Ding, dong....

From the elementary school kids who'd find the embrace of their mothers more comfortable than their respective classrooms, right up to those teachers with greying hair and only a little bit left on their clock until retirement...

...The sound of the end-of-school bell, capable of re-energising pretty much everyone who heard it, rang around noisily throughout the school.

Most of the kids in the classroom formed expressions of ecstasy as if they were about to fly away. Meanwhile, Jin-Woo, sitting among them, carried a carefree face as he greeted the end to his school day in this place.

“Everyone, don’t go home late because you want to hang out with new friends you made today, okay! Understand?”

Yees-!

After the token replies, half consisting of mischievous voices of the male students and the other half high-pitched tones of the girls were made, the classroom became empty in no time at all now that the day’s schedule had come to its end.

Jin-Woo deliberately took his time packing up his bag, before he spotted Young-Gil hesitantly and slowly approaching him like a full-bellied tortoise.

‘...?’

Jin-Woo stopped packing his bag when Young-Gil cautiously asked him a question.

“Uhm... I’m heading off in the direction of the ‘Gigamart’, but what about you?”

‘Ah, I guess he wants to get close to me.’

An easy-to-read relaxed smile formed on Jin-Woo’s face.

‘A minor favour shown when young can also become the start of a relationship later on like this, huh?’

Jin-Woo smiled for a little while, before shaking his head.

“Well, yeah, it’s in the same direction, but there’s something I gotta do first.”

“Oh....”

As Young-Gil stood there in disappointment, Jin-Woo lightly tapped the boy on the shoulder and grinned brightly.

“Let’s go.”

Not too long afterwards, both of them exited from the school building.

“What? Track and field club??”

Young-Gil asked with a surprised voice, while Jin-Woo nodded calmly as his reply.

“Yup.”

The reason why Jin-Woo chose this school, far from his home, instead of those nearby was because it was only this particular one that happened to have a track and field athletics department.

Young-Gil could only tilt his head when Jin-Woo replied that he’d join the track and field team from today.

‘Was Jin-Woo good at track in the past?’

He remembered hanging around Jin-Woo for only about a month or so. The memories of him playing that game really well were the only thing that came to the boy’s head, but he just couldn’t recall Jin-Woo doing anything particularly outstanding during physical training or club activities.

No, Young-Gil simply remembered Jin-Woo doing pretty much everything at his pace – which was leisurely.

‘A high school track and field club should be operated by only the talented students, though....?’

The boy suddenly felt worried about Jin-Woo and found himself unconsciously chasing after his friend. Meanwhile, Jin-Woo crossed the athletics field and approached the group of athletes loosening themselves up in the corner of the field.

“Mm...?”

Their attention soon shifted towards the incoming duo of freshmen. They initially expected the two to walk past them or change their heading, but their expectation turned out to be off the mark. The senior with the biggest physique took a step forward and ‘greeted’ the duo.

“What do you two want now?”

Jin-Woo briefly scanned the atmosphere of the team members and replied with a smile.

“I’d like to join the athletics club.”

The senior with big physique, the captain of the track and field team Choi Tae-Woong, alternated his gaze between Jin-Woo and a shorter kid with a rather unhealthy complexion.

“You wanna join the club?”

“Yes.”

“Both of you?”

Jin-Woo looked behind, and Young-Gil hurriedly shook his head.

“...No, just me.”

After seeing Jin-Woo’s continuously-smiling mug, the seniors grew interested and gathered around the freshmen.

“Ohh, what’s this? We have an applicant wanting to join us?”

“This is my first time seeing a freshman barging in here and wanting to join the team, though.”

“He’s not playing around, is he?”

Choi Tae-Woong scratched the top of his head and scanned Jin-Woo from top to bottom before asking another question.

“You a student-athlete?”

“No, I’m not.”

“Okay, you have experience running track in middle school?”

Although Jin-Woo was rather experienced in running all over the gap between dimensions to kill Sovereigns, that wasn’t something he could refer to as his middle school days, or running track competitively, so he could only shake his head with a wry smile.

“No, I don’t.”

The seniors in the athletics club were ready to welcome this enthusiastic newcomer right up until that answer. But now, their complexions were hardening drastically.

A freshman who hadn’t even run track competitively wanted to enter the athletics club comprised only of student-athletes?

Wasn't this kid taking high school track & field way too lightly?

One of the seniors blessed with a short fuse suddenly jumped into the conversation from the side.

“You haven't run track before, so why do you want to enter the team?”

Jin-Woo's reply was rather simple.

“There's someone I'd like to meet during the athletic meet, you see.”

She was still in the middle school division, but without a doubt, she possessed enough talent to participate in the regional competition.

Well, she used to be an excellent athlete before she had to give up on that dream after becoming a high-ranked Hunter, didn't she?

If it was an athletic meet featuring participants from both middle and high schools, then wouldn't he be able to naturally run into her there?

Jin-Woo judged that, rather than forcibly get close to her and insert himself into her life that way, this might be a far better approach for both of them.

However, judging from the expressions of the seniors, it seemed that they didn't share his thought process.

“Athletic meet....??”

The expression of the senior with the short fuse, Jeong Gu-Shik, hardened like stone. Even if one was to look down on running track, there was a line one shouldn't cross.

Jeong Gu-Shik's anger shot up to the top of his head and he was about to roar out some choice words to chase away the freshmen, but then, captain Choi Tae-Woong formed a grin and gave his permission.

“Fine.”

Jeong Gu-Shik looked back at his captain with an expression of a man failing to comprehend the situation.

“What?!”

“However, there is a condition.”

Choi Tae-Woong used an expression that said 'Be quiet' to defeat Jeong Gu-Shik, and pointed at a glasses-wearing student busy stretching his muscles over yonder.

“You see that friend over there?”

Jin-Woo followed after the pointing finger and nodded his head.

“Yes.”

“That friend is the worst runner in our team, a reserve from the second year. Meaning, you gotta at least beat that friend to earn the right to enter our team.”

That was a bold-faced lie.

Even before he heard the explanation, Jin-Woo had already analysed that particular second-year student’s abilities, and as a result, he began chuckling inwardly.

‘At first glance, that student’s thighs and calves look lean and thin, but they are actually hard and well trained. And confidence simply oozes from the rest of his body....’

Spying from the student’s steady, relaxed breathing or his upright posture, Jin-Woo knew immediately that he was looking at no ordinary athlete here.

Meaning, the third year seniors were trying to make fun of him. How could Jin-Woo not laugh when their intentions were so easy to read like this?

Jeong Gu-Shik also belatedly realised what Choi Tae-Woong was trying to do and quickly changed his expression.

“Ahh, right! You said that you’re aiming to enter the athletic meet, right? Well, in that case, a simple little admittance test like this is no problem for you, right?”

Jin-Woo didn’t like the way this guy was grinning slyly like that, but still, asked back in a calm manner nonetheless.

“That senior.... Is he really a reserve?”

“I guarantee it.”

Choi Tae-Woong replied in a confident voice, and the rest of the athletic team members had to try their best to hold back their laughter.

‘He’s a reserve, alright. Well, the truth is, he did finish third place in last year’s regional meet, but he sprained his ankle during winter training so he’s been demoted to a reserve spot, for the time being.’

If he were to get technical here, then Choi Tae-Woong wasn’t really, really lying by saying that the glasses-wearing guy was the worst ‘runner’ here due to the lengthy unscheduled lay-off, and that he was in the reserve spot because of the injury.

Jin-Woo then replied in an easy-going manner to captain Choi Tae-Woong and his insidious smile.

“Very well, I understand. Let me try.”

This b*stard, he fell for it!!

Not just Jeong Gu-Shik, but everyone in the athletics club shouted out ***“Hooray!”*** in their heads.

‘A guy who can’t even recognise the third-place finisher from the regionals last year wants to join the track and field team? Gimme a break.’

Choi Tae-Woong, standing in front of the group to deal with Jin-Woo, did his utmost best to hide his laughter threatening to break through his lips.

“Very good. However, just running the track like that wouldn’t be any fun, so.... How about this? If you win, you get to join the team, but if you lose, you do the team’s laundry and cleaning for one month, free of charge.”

“Sounds good.”

“J-Jin-Woo....”

Young-Gil tried to stop him, but Jin-Woo simply formed a smile that said: ***“It’s fine.”***

‘Let’s see how long you can keep that relaxed face of yours.’

Choi Tae-Woong looked towards the ‘reserve’ student and shouted out loudly.

“Hey, Sahng-In-ah! Looks like you’ll have to take to the track for this one.”

The ace of the team, Woo Sahng-In finished his stretching exercise and raised his body up.

“It’s not a problem.”

He took off his glasses and entrusted it to another member of the club, suspiciously ominous aura shooting out from his eyes. Jin-Woo held the senior’s fierce gaze while handing over his school bag and his jacket to Young-Gil next to him.

While the members of the track and field club were thinking that here was a chance to let a freshman taste the bitterness of life, Jin-Woo was deeply pondering inwardly just how seriously he should run so that the sheer mental shock his seniors no doubt feel wouldn’t be as high.

“Hey, freshman, are you ready?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Sahng-In, what about you?”

“I’m ready.”

Jin-Woo and Woo Sahng-Min stood side by side on the starting line.

The former assumed a posture that best optimised one’s ability to rapidly change directions and enter a battle at any time, while the latter assumed a posture solely designed for track competition.

This time, the team members didn’t bother to hide their ridiculing laughter at Jin-Woo’s weird posture.

“What the hell is up with this idiot?”

“And he still wants to join the athletics club? But, isn’t he a d*mn beginner who doesn’t even know anything about running track?”

Jin-Woo didn’t pay any attention to their mocking words and controlled his breathing.

“Ready?”

Soon, Choi Tae-Woong’s baritone voice signalling the start could be heard.

“Start!”

“Teacher-nim? How are you feeling now?”

“Ah.... yes, well....”

‘Venomous Snake’ Teacher Park Gi-Sool replied half-heartedly at his colleague’s question after they ran into each other on the corridor, and with hurried steps, he quickly walked past the confused-looking fellow teacher.

Park Gi-Sool’s crumpled expression easily spoke of his current mood.

‘I ended up making a fool of myself in front of all the gathered students today....’

He definitely must have made a mistake. Without a doubt, his strange hallucination was the fault of not eating a proper breakfast earlier today.

It felt as if every student was laughing at his expense. He quickly evaded their gazes and slipped into the teacher’s lounge, before spitting out a sigh rushing out from the deepest part of his chest.

“Fuu-woo....”

‘Should I smoke to take the edge off?’

Since almost every teacher was a smoker, smoking in the lounge was permitted, which meant that this place was like a safe haven for the current

Park Gi-Sool.

He stuffed a cigarette between his lips and stood next to the windows while lighting it up. Just as he mindlessly shifted his gaze down to the athletics field.....

....His eyes grew extra large and he hurriedly lowered himself below the windows while spinning around.

‘W-what the hell?! Why is that kid running around the track with the rest of the athletics club members??’

It was then, the director of the track and field team entered the lounge and discovered crouching Park Gi-Sool.

“Ah, Park Teacher-nim!”

Wondering if the dizzy spell from the morning had come back again, the director hurriedly ran over to Park Gi-Sool and helped him up.

“Are you alright? You sure you don’t need to stop by at a hospital?”

“I, I’m fine, thank you. Just feeling a bit dizzy, that’s all....”

Park Gi-Sool made an evasive answer before asking back.

“B-by the way.... Why is the student named Seong Jin-Woo running together with the kids from the athletics team?”

“Ahhh.... That? So, that student’s name is Seong Jin-Woo?”

The director took a look outside the window over Park Gi-Sool’s shoulder and formed a wry chuckle as if he still couldn’t believe it.

“It seems that a freshman just showed up and said that he wanted to join the team. Kids tested him out, and as it turned out, he has a talent, so they just couldn’t chase him away. Apparently, what they are doing now is to test his stamina.”

“H-his stamina, you say??”

“Yes. That’s his 20th lap already. Just watching him going around is exhausting, so I quit first and came up here.”

Sports, and sports clubs.

There was no better alternative to get rid of one’s overflowing hot-bloodedness of youth than sports.

Several thoughts crisscrossed within Teacher Park Gi-Sool’s mind, then. Student Seong Jin-Woo, the one he pre-judged to be a troublemaker, seemed to be trying his best to discipline himself by joining a sports club.

‘It’s possible that.... That I have been holding the wrong idea about him....’

Now that he thought about it closely, there was simply no way that a boy walking around with monsters would exist in reality.

Student Seong Jin-Woo was just another exceedingly normal learner still searching for a place to call home within the fields of academia and sports, after a lengthy spell of aimlessly wandering around in his life.

But here was a teacher busy going on about seeing monsters and phantoms and whatnot from a regular student like that.... The reputation of the ‘Venomous Snake’ had been thoroughly stained with this matter, indeed.

Park Gi-Sool chuckled meekly, stopped hiding, and stood back up.

‘That’s right.... I should look at him without judging him first. I’m sure that will help resolve all the misunderstanding.’

Seeing Park Gi-Sool form a serious expression before breaking into a chuckle, the director looked at him with a concerned face.

“Park Teacher-nim....?”

“Ah, no. It’s fine now. I don’t feel dizzy anymore.”

“Oh... In that case, that’s a relief.”

Park Gi-Sool successfully made the director withdraw and slowly turned around to look behind him. He could now see a boy, covered in sweat and running diligently around the track while being showered by the bright, warm spring sunlight.

How could anyone point fingers at such a boy?

He focused his gaze on Jin-Woo, currently running steadily and unflustered even after lapping the panting and breathless members of the track and field team several times already.

‘Indeed, this morning was....’

Too bad, even before he could celebrate himself...

....Without any warning whatsoever, Park Gi-Sool’s entire field of vision was dyed in black and the spectacular sight of the Shadow Army stretching on endlessly entered his eyes.

He nearly toppled over from fright, but he forced his legs to steady himself and gritted his teeth.

‘This, this is a hallucination. This isn’t real!!’

It was then.

A certain ant monster standing in the front-most row of the soldiers kitted out in black armour, gazed straight at him and opened its maw wide.

[Khak!!]

“U-uwaahk?!”

In the end, Teacher Park Go-Sool did fall on his butt and lost consciousness.

[...]

Within the subspace in Jin-Woo’s shadow, Igrit watched Beru’s action and used his elbow to rib the former ant king in the side.

[I told you to stop that, didn’t I?]

[Kiiehh.... That human can really see us, can’t he?]

Beru lightly scratched the side of his head and before his liege could order him to, planted his head firmly on the ground first.

Late at night.

Detective Woo Jin-Cheol and the youngest detective in the squad stopped by a diner that served ‘gopchang’.

Once enough alcohol entered their bloodstreams, stories they found hard to talk about during the day came out – mostly from the youngest’s mouth, actually.

“Excuse me, Senior Woo....?”

“Mm?”

“You’ve been investigating that missing prisoner case until now, yes?”

What was this guy trying to say here?

Woo Jin-Cheol tipped his glass filled with booze, his head beginning to develop an ache already.

Unfortunately, completely oblivious of his senior’s wishes, the youngest detective continued with his questioning time.

“That day... you really did see something, didn’t you?”

“What day?”

Woo Jin-Cheol played dumb deliberately, but the youngest simply grinned and replied.

“Eii, senior, you... You already know, don’t you? I’m talking about that day when the suspect went missing. Didn’t you really see something that day?”

This kid, he had this habit of catching people off-guard when they least expected it.

‘Well, that’s a good talent to have as a detective.’

Woo Jin-Cheol recalled his own newbie days and formed a slight chuckle as he replied.

“What if I did?”

“Really?”

The youngest looked to be adequately drunk until then, but his eyes suddenly began sparkling and his ears even physically perked up. That wasn’t so surprising, considering that the youngest was closer in age to being a student than a full-fledged member of society, anyway.

That was probably why he applied to the Violent Crimes Investigation Unit of the National Police Agency, reputed to be the worst paid but with the highest amount of workload.

Maybe the power of the booze circulating in him was to blame, or maybe, he just wanted to use this opportunity to get some stuff off his chest – Woo Jin-Cheol began speaking of things that he’d never even think about uttering in normal times.

“An ant.... Ant monsters.”

Gulp.

The noise of saliva sliding down the throat of the youngest detective could be heard from where he was sitting.

“Even I can’t tell for sure what I saw back then. In any case, those things looked like ants.”

“Ant monsters, is it? Are you saying that giant insects like ants came out?”

“No, not that. Well, they were ants, but....”

It was right then.

Just as Woo Jin-Cheol spoke up to there, a certain man unsteadily tottering about, as if he had one too many to drink, stopped walking past the duo and addressed them.

“T-those ant monsters, are they monsters with the heads of ants, but bodies that look like humans??”

The heads of the two detectives, Woo Jin-Cheol and his junior, raised up towards the owner of the voice.



Chapter 252 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 9

Didn't someone say that the ground would harden after the rain had fallen?

Now normally, people would grow much closer when they made up after a big fight. But then, the bond between young boys created through sweat and drive to succeed was far hotter and stickier than any old saying could intimate.

"One, two! One, two!"

As the early dawn's fog thickly covered the school's athletics field, every member of the track team was energetically roaring out their rallying cries.

"Hey, Jin-Woo! How about it? Isn't this doable?"

Before anyone had noticed it, Jin-Woo was now permitted to run alongside the captain of the team, Choi Tae-Woong. The former replied in a refreshing manner.

"Yes, it is doable!"

"Very goooood! One, two! One, two!"

Choi Tae-Woong raised his speed just a bit higher and shouted out.

"Our goal is to conquer the whole country!"

"Our goal is to.....??"

The members almost subconsciously chanted after their captain's words, but they quickly caught onto the fact that their warcry had changed and began questioning their leader.

"Hey, captain! I thought our goal was the overall win in the regionals?"

"Uh-huh!! You're aiming far too low in front of our new ace! Again! Our goal is to conquer the whole country!"

"Conquer the whole country!!"

"The whole country!!!"

Glance.

The captain glanced at Woo Sahng-In, currently running behind him.

“Hey, Sahng-In-ah, are you crying right now?”

“N-no, captain!”

“Don’t give up yet, ace of the second year! Although the ace of the team has changed, how can we conquer the nation without your aid?!”

“I... I shall do my best, captain!!”

“Very goooood-!! Conquer the whole country!!”

“The whole country!! The country!”

“Conquer the country! The whole country!!”

While the members of the team lapped around the athletics field, positively buzzing with a heightened fighting spirit, only Oh Young-Gil’s complexion was turning blue amongst all the runners present. The poor kid ended up following after Jin-Woo and inadvertently entered the team as well.

“Pant, paaant, paaant....”

Jin-Woo, running out in front, heard Young-Gil’s heavy, rough breathing and tutted inwardly.

He wanted to improve the boy’s rather feeble constitution, so he said yes to the idea of one-plus-one admittance to the athletics club, but this....

....It was only a matter of time before someone keeled over at the rate things were going.

But then again, it’d not be an easy task to let Young-Gil escape in this atmosphere when the fighting spirit of the seniors had reached a brand new height that they had never seen before.

Left with no choice, Jin-Woo loaded just a little bit of Mana and sent it behind him. Like dandelion seeds being carried in the wind, the lump of Mana gently floated in the air and entered Young-Gil’s nose and mouth.

“.....??”

The effects of Jin-Woo’s Mana were an immediate stamina recovery, as well as a temporary boost to one’s muscular endurance, reaction times, flexibility, and to one’s rate of stamina recovery, etc....

Basically, it was a comprehensive buff gift set, filled with his desire to help out a friend.

Since it was a gift set straight from the Shadow Sovereign who reigned over in another world as basically a god, the effects of the buffs were rather

incredible.

“Eh? Uh? Uhhh????”

Young-Gil’s eyes opened wider and wider as soon as he inhaled the comprehensive buff set.

‘Wha-what’s going on?! My body, it... It’s getting hotter?!’

Thick veins rose up on the boy’s legs as they powerfully kicked the ground away.

Paht, paht, paht!!

One by one, seniors running ahead of Young-Gil were left behind, and then....

“Ohh, ohh!!”

Then, Young-Gil’s solo sprint began in earnest.

‘N-no, hang on a minute...?’

Choi Tae-Woong was instantly impressed by Young-Gil who managed to shoot past ahead of everyone. The captain loudly shouted out in excitement.

“Look at our newbie’s fighting spirit burning up like that! How can us folks calling ourselves his seniors remain lukewarm when things are like this??”

“No, we can’t!!”

“Definitely not!”

“We chase after the newbie with everything we’ve got! Let’s go!”

“Let’s do it!”

“Let’s go!!”

Jin-Woo was inwardly worried whether he had given Young-Gil too much energy or not, but that only lasted for a brief moment.

The bright flames of the athletics team swept across the track today, as well.

While performing his duties of guiding incoming students from next to the school’s gate, ‘Venomous Snake’ Teacher Park Gi-Sool was keeping tabs on the track and field team diligently going through their morning training regime at a distance.

Contrary to his initial worries, it seemed that Student Seong Jin-Woo was getting used to the life in the track team without any problems whatsoever.

Heck, the headmaster even thanked Park Gi-Sool out of nowhere, too.

The only thing Park Gi-Sool had done so far was to watch Student Seong Jin-Woo until he fell or lost consciousness. He became so embarrassed that he'd rather become a potted plant that the headmaster was watering at that moment.

That happened earlier in the morning.

Park Gi-Sool tasted this bitterness deep within his core whenever he thought about the headmaster's high expectation of him versus his own pathetic situation where he couldn't even look Student Seong Jin-Woo straight in the eye.

And that was why... Because of his circumstances, he ended up getting p*ss drunk and unloaded all the useless stuff off his chest to a couple of people he'd never even seen before in his entire life.

'Now why did I have to go and do something like that....?'

Just from recalling that night's events, Park Gi-Sool felt like tearing out all of his hair.

A few days ago, in a certain diner he stopped by out of sheer frustration....

"T-those ant monsters, are they monsters with the heads of ants, but bodies that look like humans??"

With their conversation being interrupted rather rudely like this, the two men shifted their curious gazes at the same time towards Park Gi-Sool, and that helped the school teacher to sober up real fast.

"Ah.... What on Earth am I saying... I'm very sorry. Looks like I must be really drunk. Both of you, please don't mind me and carry on."

Park Gi-Sool politely bowed his head and turned around to head back to his own spot, but then, Woo Jin-Cheol actually called out and stopped him in his tracks.

"Excuse me."

The school teacher turned his alcohol-reddened face behind him and saw that Woo Jin-Cheol had gotten up from his seat to pull a chair closer to his own table.

"That tale of the ant monster.... Can you tell me more about it?"

Just where would anyone be able to safely tell the story of a teacher seeing strange things when looking at a student?

After being admitted to a mental hospital? Now, which parents would

entrust their kids to a teacher who frequented the mental health institution's hallways?

Park Gi-Sool had been silently suffering all by himself, unable to tell a soul what he saw, but now that he was given a chance, he came completely clean as teardrops formed at the corners of his eyes.

“You see, I am someone who teaches his students with his charisma. Charisma, you know? So, where can I possibly go and speak of these things?”

Still, he felt a bit more refreshed, a load off his shoulders, now that he got to say the things he wanted to say. With that, he was given enough leeway to take a gander at his surroundings.

Even though what he said sounded like a lame joke, the two detectives next to him were listening to his tale with serious expressions on their faces. It was at this point that Park Gi-Sool grew quite curious as to what these people's story might be.

“By the way.... Why were two police detectives like yourselves discussing stuff like monsters in a place like this diner?”

Woo Jin-Cheol exchanged glances with the junior detective before explaining their circumstances – minus the bit about him actually witnessing the real monsters, of course.

“...And so, the brass ordered us to look into this matter, but well, it's really difficult to even find a single clue, you see. Right now, I wouldn't mind grasping at straws if that will help us.”

Woo Jin-Cheol pulled out his business card and handed it over to Park Gi-Sool as he continued on.

“That's why, I'd like to stop by at the school sometime later on, but will that be fine with you?”

“Ahh, of course. Of course, we must help with the police's investigation. You can come and visit us at any time.”

And so, the booze-shared diner experience came to a rather friendly end in that manner, but now...

Some time had passed since then, and after thinking about it for a little while, Park Gi-Sool couldn't help but wonder if he had unnecessarily made the situation even worse than what it was.

‘How can a student have anything to do with the case of missing suspects...?’

Especially a boy who was wholeheartedly focusing on the club activities since early dawn?

Fearful that he might see another weird thing again, Park Gi-Sool couldn't stare for too long in Jin-Woo's direction, so he could only afford to sneak quick glances at the boy, instead. Eventually, he shook his head in resignation.

Then, he spoke to another teacher manning the school gate alongside him.

“Teacher Yun, my apologies, but I had a bit too much to drink last night and my innards are....”

“Ahaha, come on now, Park Teacher-nim. No need to apologise for that. Please, go back inside and take a break. I'll cover for you and keep an eye out here.”

“Mm, thank you.”

Before he went away, Park Gi-Sool took another quick glance at Jin-Woo and slunk off into the school building.

Only then did Jin-Woo shift his gaze towards the departing teacher, even though he hadn't shown any signs of noticing the glances right up until then.

‘.....’

Recently, a teacher was staring at him in a rather open manner. He couldn't just gloss over what was happening here. From inside the darkness of his shadow, Grand-Marshal Bellion's quiet voice entered his ears.

[My liege.... Wouldn't it be better to erase that human's memories and take away his abilities?]

Back when he returned home from the gap between dimensions, after ending the war – as Jin-Woo stepped onto the ground of his home, feeling rightly emotional about his return, a proxy of the Rulers showed up and left behind some advice of sorts.

He said that, even if it was only a tiny bit of the Sovereign's powers, it'd end up causing a humongous change to this world. And that was why Jin-Woo had been avoiding interfering directly unless it was something utterly necessary.

‘For now.... Let's just observe him for a little while longer.’

[I understand, my liege.]

Jin-Woo wordlessly stared at the entrance Teacher Park Gi-Sool had disappeared to, before turning around to leave himself.

The members of the athletics club who were heading off to the club room

before him were waving their hands towards him.

Woo Jin-Cheol found himself hesitating several times in front of the school gate.

It had been a week already since he was gifted an unthinkable piece of a lead in a gopchang diner. Starting from then, right up until now, all sorts of thoughts crisscrossed in his head.

He could have treated that testimony as a crazed teacher rambling on about some incoherent nonsense. However, every now and then, a link would suddenly be established between two seemingly unrelated cases and that would lead to an untangling of a dark web that seemed impossible to unravel initially.

‘The suspects that encountered monsters, and the monsters of a student that only one teacher can see....’

Woo Jin-Cheol found a vague link between these two disparate incidents. This was from the instincts of a detective, something that couldn’t be explained by logic.

However, there was a problem – there was a massive hurdle to overcome here. If there was indeed a link, then what should he say exactly to the student in question?

He couldn’t just bet everything on that drunken teacher’s words and start questioning this student named Seong Jin-Woo about monsters and stuff, now could he?

As for asking a question in a roundabout way, the nature of the question itself was too broad for that, too.

No matter how hard he practised it in his head, he just couldn’t picture the interview going down well at all. Woo Jin-Cheol pored at the memo pad containing detailed records of the investigation so far and spat out a long, long sigh.

‘It’d be a miracle not to be labelled as a madman while asking around these sorts of questions....’

At the end of a long, long dilemma, Woo Jin-Cheol turned around to leave. He might come back later after thinking up another pretext, but for now, it didn’t seem like the time was right.

And so, as Woo Jin-Cheol took steps to get out of there, he lowered his gaze to the ground without thinking much about his actions.

Shuk.

If it wasn't him, famed even among the fellow detectives for possessing a pretty keen pair of eyes, but someone else not as sharp, they would have missed a faint movement on the ground.

Without a shred of doubt, he noticed a blob of shadow move from the shade of a tree towards the school's wall.

He definitely saw it.

Goosebumps broke out all over his body and he hurriedly spun his head back towards the school.

'There is... there is definitely something here!!'

Woo Jin-Cheol's determination firmed up, then. He no longer cared if people pointed at him, calling him insane.

As long as he could find out the reason for this sense of loss that continued to plague him every now and then; as long as he could find out the exact cause why he felt his mind relax for a little while after encountering those ant monsters, then he'd not hesitate to pay any price.

With a hardened expression, Woo Jin-Cheol began walking towards the grounds of this high school.

At the same time.

Jin-Woo was spinning a pen with his fingers as he listened to the droning sounds of the geography lesson while the heads of many kids were dozing off all around him.

'Did he see the sentry I posted there?'

As expected of Woo Jin-Cheol, the former President of the Hunter's Association. He should no longer have any memory of his previous life, yet his sharp eyes must've remained intact.

Jin-Woo closed his eyes and recalled the very last image he had of Woo Jin-Cheol.

The image of him tearing up when Jin-Woo revealed his plans of waging war against the Sovereigns all by himself remained vividly etched in his brain.

Back when the late President Goh Gun-Hui died, the voice requesting for revenge also remained, unforgotten, in Jin-Woo's mind, as well.

Was that why?

Even though this 'visit' would prove to be rather troublesome in his efforts to maintain his current lifestyle of pretending to be a normal person, the smile

etched on Jin-Woo's lips didn't want to leave him all that easily.

Soon enough, the knocking on the classroom's door resounded out, followed by the surprised voice of the geography teacher.

“A d-detective?”

“It's not a big issue, actually. It's just that, I have some questions to ask a student named Seong Jin-Woo.”

Ohhh-!!

At the announcement that a detective had shown up, kids let out gasps of amazement and shifted their gazes to Jin-Woo.

The thing that was coming had come.

Jin-Woo's eyes remained closed throughout, but then, with that grin getting deeper, they opened calmly again.

At that moment, Woo Jin-Cheol was entering the classroom's door and his gaze met with a certain student's. Even though the geography teacher didn't specifically point the boy out, the seasoned detective knew that student was Seong Jin-Woo with just one look.

Ba-dump, ba-dump, ba-dump....

Woo Jin-Cheol's heart began pounding away, as if it wanted to explode.



Chapter 253 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 10

Woo Jin-Cheol led Jin-Woo to the end of the school corridor. He only stopped walking once they got to a distance far away from the classroom where their conversation wouldn't be overheard by someone else.

Jin-Woo, quietly following behind the detective, also came to a stop as a result. He sneaked a glance towards the classroom.

For some reason, this sense of distance he felt by being a student that was looking into the classroom from the outside seemed rather large.

Perhaps Woo Jin-Cheol was conscious of that too, because the first thing he did was to apologise to Jin-Woo who was still looking back at the class.

“Sorry about dragging you out in the middle of class like this.”

“No, it's fine.”

Jin-Woo held back the words of ‘I wanted to escape from there anyway because it was so boring’, in consideration of the teacher doing his best to teach the classroom full of kids.

Rather than say anything, Jin-Woo looked up at Woo Jin-Cheol, instead.

The detective was young.

Since Jin-Woo had changed his physique to match that of a high school freshman, Woo Jin-Cheol was now actually a good head taller than he was, with much broader shoulders, as well.

‘A guy who looked like he'd give a gangster a run for his money was actually working as a detective.’

A smile abruptly bloomed on his face after seeing a friend's face in what felt like aeons.

It had been years – no, decades actually, if he added the time spent wandering around the gap between dimensions – since he last saw the Association President Woo Jin-Cheol.

Even though Jin-Woo didn't want to show anything outwardly, there was not much he could do about his expression betraying him with a hint of

happiness.

‘.....?’

However, Woo Jin-Cheol was immediately beset with confusion after discovering the smile on the student’s face.

There would be only a handful of people alive who’d remain unflustered after suddenly being visited by a cop, and not only that, a detective with such a threatening face like his.

More than that, was there a reason to say anything else when the person in question was just a high school student?

However, this kid in front of his eyes was actually smiling.

‘This boy.... Something’s different about him.’

Woo Jin-Cheol felt it the moment he stepped into that classroom – this kid was different.

Thanks to his job being what it was, he had run into his fair share of murderers who killed many people, or gangsters that lorded over the backstreets with iron fists.

However, not even once had he meet anyone with a pair of eyes as calm as this boy.

‘How can a student possess eyes like that?’

Gulp.

Unbeknownst to him, Woo Jin-Cheol swallowed back dry saliva from all this tension in the air. Starting from the moment he saw the boy, his heart was still violently pounding away for reasons unknown to him.

To dissolve the many questions swirling and circling inside his head, Woo Jin-Cheol pulled out his memo pad and began looking into it.

“By any chance, Shadow... no, wait. Ants....”

Woo Jin-Cheol was looking at the contents of his memo pad, but no matter what he did, he just couldn’t form any coherent sentences. So, he pulled out a pen from his inner pocket, instead.

Jot, jot....

While Jin-Woo watched on with an interested gaze, Woo Jin-Cheol quickly drew something on the page of the pad and presented the resulting artwork.

“....”

Jin-Woo inwardly praised the detective's effort.

'This dude, he's actually a lot more talented in art than I thought.'

What Woo Jin-Cheol sketched just now was the general appearance of Beru.

Although it couldn't be called exact description, still, he got right the head of an ant, human-like hands and feet, the sharp claws, as well as the ant's wings on the back, etc, etc.

Anyone who knew what Beru looked like, they would recognise him from this drawing in an instant. Woo Jin-Cheol asked his question then.

"By any chance, can you think of something when you look at this image?"

Jin-Woo looked at the drawing for a bit before raising his head and spotted Woo Jin-Cheol and his slightly-blushing face. Even he should be aware of how ridiculous this whole thing must've looked.

But regardless of all that, he seemed to be desperate to recover the memories of things that happened to him, but were later taken away, even if that meant he'd have to resort to doing something like this.

Containing all of his desperation....

"...Do you know what this is?"

...Woo Jin-Cheol asked one more time.

Before the hints of embarrassment, as evident in the detective's voice, could grow larger, Jin-Woo quickly answered him.

"Yes."

Ba-dump.

Woo Jin-Cheol's heart powerfully rocked and pounded on his chest.

"Y-you know what this is??"

The detective's voice grew louder. But, Jin-Woo's expression was utterly calm in his demeanour, a complete contrast to Woo Jin-Cheol's.

"Yes."

Woo Jin-Cheol's eyes trembled violently.

Finally.

He finally found it.

His breathing quickened considerably, and his voice picked up just as the

greatly urgent questions flew out of his mouth.

“What is this ant monster? And what is your real identity?”

Jin-Woo took a step back in order to avoid the agitated Woo Jin-Cheol. The latter realised that he made a mistake and quickly calmed himself down.

“Ah, I got too carried away there for a second. I’ve been chasing after this case for a while, you see.”

One by one – he would dig into what this student knew, step by step. Didn’t he have to go through so much hardship to find this clue already? So, there was no need to be too hasty now.

Woo Jin-Cheol managed to tide over his pulsing heart with those thoughts and spoke up with a much more calm voice.

“Alright. So, you know something about the creature in this image?”

“Yes.”

Jin-Woo replied briefly with a nod of his head, before an ‘innocent’ expression formed on his face.

“Isn’t that a monster that pops out from one of those special effects dramas that kids like to watch? Like, Kamen Rider?”

“Ah...”

Woo Jin-Cheol was immediately overcome with this sense of despondency, akin to watching a sand castle he built all day long get washed away by a single incoming wave. A small but heartbroken sigh leaked out of his mouth.

Since his expectation had been great, the ensuing disappointment was just as great, too. His hand holding the memo pad naturally dropped lower.

He looked so fatigued right now, so tired that he couldn’t even hold that little pad up anymore.

For a brief moment there, he grew angry at this boy for needlessly stringing him along with his vague answers. But, well, what crime did this student commit exactly, when he spoke only of the things he knew about?

Woo Jin-Cheol forced a smile on his face.

“Thank you for your cooperation.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes. I spoke to your teacher, so there shouldn’t be any issues when you go back.”

Woo Jin-Cheol spoke up to here and was about to pocket the memo pad, but then, Jin-Woo quickly addressed him.

“That image of a monster, can I have it as a souvenir?”

The detective looked at the student’s bright expression, and a genuine smile floated up on his face. He opened his memo pad and stared at the sketch for a little while, before tearing the page out cleanly and handing it over to Jin-Woo.

“Here.”

“Thank you.”

As if he didn’t want to get arrested by any lingering emotions, Woo Jin-Cheol spun on his heels and jogged down the steps as soon as the student bade him goodbye.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo remained in his spot and listened to the detective’s footsteps echoing down the staircase. In the meantime, his shadow sneakily expanded to the side like spilt water and Igrit quietly emerged from there.

[My liege.]

“Mm?”

[Why... didn’t you tell that person the truth?]

Igrit retained his memories from back when he was still a human, and thanks to that, he knew better than anyone just how sad and difficult it was for a person to be forgotten from the minds of those he cared about.

And that was why he thought of the Detective Woo Jin-Cheol’s entrance as perhaps the most ideal opportunity that came knocking so far. Even if it was just one individual, wouldn’t it be a good thing for the Sovereign to let someone know how he had saved this world?

There was this distinct hint of rueful longing in Igrit’s voice.

Still, Jin-Woo shook his head.

“Being able to forget is supposed to be a god’s gift to humans, you know.”

Even if that was an artificially created result after using a Tool of God; Jin-Woo thought that he didn’t possess the qualifications to choose which memories to erase and which ones to keep.

Only a god should do something like that. That was why he decided to let

the former Association President Woo Jin-Cheol go in this manner.

[Are you sure about this, my liege?]

“Yeah.”

It was then, Jin-Woo abruptly looked down on his left hand.

There it was, the evidence of the Dragon Emperor’s powerful attack.

The burn scar on this left hand, earned from blocking the ‘Breath of Destruction’ head-on, couldn’t be healed no matter what he tried. An unpleasant memory that couldn’t be forgotten was rather similar to this scar – a wound that couldn’t be healed.

Even if the person in question wanted it, was there really a need to deliberately bring those painful memories back?

Right now, not a trace of pain and misery that was suffered at the hands of the monsters and Sovereigns remained in the memories of people living on this planet.

And that was why Jin-Woo didn’t want to let the memories of the past remain in the mind of the former Association President Woo Jin-Cheol.

[I understand, my liege.]

Igrit silently submerged back into the shadow, as if he accepted the explanation.

Jin-Woo remained standing on the spot looking down at the bottom of the stairs before turning around to enter the classroom.

Once the break came, the boiling interests of the kids finally focused on Jin-Woo.

Seriously now, just when would these kids get to experience a TV drama-like situation of a police detective suddenly barging into their classroom? It was only obvious that their unbridled attention would be focused on the protagonist of that tale.

Even the girls who were interested in Jin-Woo before but couldn’t say it outright hurriedly rushed towards him and soon, a rather sizeable horde of people formed around his desk.

“What happened just now?”

“Hey, Jin-Woo? Why did a detective-nim come to school??”

Jin-Woo grinned softly at the burning curiosity of his classmates and spoke of the fresh excuse he just cooked up on the spot.

“Well, he’s someone that I know, and he just stopped by to ask me about something, that’s all.”

“Wowsers, that’s awesome.”

“You’re an acquaintance with an actual detective?”

“Jin-Woo, I’m so envious, you know?”

Jin-Woo found it hard to keep his laughter in check as the kids’ interest began heading down a slightly unexpected direction.

‘Young-Gil-ah, why are your eyes sparkling like that now?’

Still, thanks to the detective-nim’s unannounced visit, it felt as if the invisible wall these kids felt around Jin-Woo had crumbled just a little. Girls took this opportunity to ask about those things they were dying to know.

“I heard from other boys that you got a killer body?”

“Really? Are you an athlete or something?”

“Ahh! I saw Jin-Woo running on the track with the seniors from the school’s track team the day before yesterday.”

“Wahh, look how broad his shoulders are.”

Kyahk, kyahk....

As the girls surrounded him from all sides, Jin-Woo began pondering how he should go about making them quietly return to their seats, but then...

The quartet of the hooligans found one person hogging all the attention quite displeasing and decided to interrupt the fun.

“Hey, you. Aren’t you getting really popular now? Even a cop came to see you and all.”

Once this quartet entered the scene, the boys quickly retreated to their seats, while the girls began to quietly back away.

A boy named Nam Joon-Shik, the one with the highest position within the quartet, began slapping Jin-Woo’s shoulder that played host to the curious touches of high school girls not too long ago. The corners of his eyes began curling up.

“Does me being mischievous like this count as school bullying? Are you going to report me to the detective-nim now?”

‘...It’s your hand that’s gonna hurt if you keep hitting me like that, though.’

Jin-Woo stared at the dumb kid with apathetic eyes, and sure enough, Nam Joon-Shik's complexion began reddening gradually when he realised that his hand hurt like hell, but despite his efforts, his target's reaction seemed way too lukewarm.

“Argh, just why the hell are this punk's eyes so sh*tty, man?”

Nam Joon-Shik then swiped everything away on Jin-Woo's desk. Textbooks, notebooks, and his pencil case, plus a couple of other things tumbled to the floor.

Ten million-strong Shadow Army hiding in Jin-Woo's shadow all roared out in anger after they witness this show of force from the teenaged fool.

The teen hooligan didn't stop there and reached out to grab the collars of Jin-Woo, whose complexion had hardened just then.

“What? You wanna have a go? You better loosen up while I'm still being civil, got it?”

It was then.

A massive arm suddenly pounced from above and wrapped tightly around Nam Joon-Shik's throat.

“Keok!!”

The hooligan grabbed at the thick arm as he began choking pathetically, and in the meantime, a familiar face revealed itself above the pale-faced kid.

“You have business with our beloved ace of the track and field club, boy?”

That face belonged to none other than the captain of the club, the third year senior Choi Tae-Woong, and he was being accompanied by another third year, the senior with a short fuse, Jeong Gu-Shik.

All four members of the quartet found themselves trapped in armlocks and headlocks of their seniors, their complexions paling gradually from the lack of oxygen.

Jin-Woo wordlessly got up from his seat and picked up the pencil case. Jin-Ah bought this case as a gift to commemorate his successful admittance to the high school, so these four hooligans wouldn't have gotten away scot-free if anything had happened to it.

He dusted the case and placed it back on the desk before asking his question.

“Seniors, what brings you all here?”

“We showed up to dissuade our ace from beating the living crap out of four idiots.”

“No, please. Be serious.”

“Ahahahat-!”

Choi Tae-Woong’s large framed quaked as he roared out in a peal of loud laughter before he continued on.

“I forgot to tell you guys that we were planning to hold a welcoming party for our new members later today, you see. You and Young-Gil both have free time today, right?”

Jin-Woo glanced at Young-Gil and the latter nodded his head.

“Yes, we do.”

“In that case, see you both after school.”

Still smiling, the seniors began leaving one by one, but then, Jin-Woo called out to them to stop their march out of the classroom.

“Seniors? Where are you taking those four still stuck under your arms?”

“Ahaha, these idiots?”

Choi Tae-Woong exchanged some knowing glances with Jeong Gu-Shik.

“Well, what should we do with them?”

“How about we do an easy lap around the track, captain?”

“Sounds goood!”

Soon afterwards, the loud shouts of ***“Conquer the whole country!”*** slowly got further away from the classroom’s interior.

Ding, dong. Ding, dong.

Several end-of-school bells rang around, and then, quite a few more bells later.

Jin-Woo stepped out of the school’s gate along with the rest of the track and field club members.

Young-Gil had now grown to appreciate the joys of sweating after getting used to the training regime of the club, although he did receive a few timely boosts from Jin-Woo every now and then.

While Young-Gil was listening to the advice of the seniors as he walked among them, Jin-Woo remained a step behind and eavesdropped on the unfolding conversations.

It was, without a doubt, a peaceful sight of a normal day.

Jeong Gu-Shik walking up ahead and turned his head towards Jin-Woo and asked.

“Ah, right. Hey, Jin-Woo? What was up with those idiots earlier in the day? Should we the seniors speak to them ‘nicely’ so they won’t start anything stupid later on?”

Jin-Woo replied with an unconcerned expression.

“Nah, it’s fine.”

“I’m not doing this because I’m worried about you. No, I just don’t want to see problems suddenly crop up and prevent you from participating in the regional meet because of those idiots.”

Jin-Woo grinned refreshingly.

“Don’t worry. I won’t let that happen.”

It was then.

Someone suddenly popped out from behind the shadow of the gate’s wall and called out to Jin-Woo.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

It was as if time itself had come to a standstill, just then. Jin-Woo froze up on the spot, and slowly shifted his head in the direction of that voice.

Detective Woo Jin-Cheol had been waiting for Jin-Woo until now.

The latter’s voice trembled slightly.

“But, how...?”

Having finally gotten his confirmation from Jin-Woo’s reply, Detective Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes began tearing up.

“As I thought... you are him.”



Chapter 254 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 11

“That image of a monster, can I have it as a souvenir?”

A few hours ago.

As a souvenir for his reunion with Woo Jin-Cheol, Jin-Woo wanted the sketch of Beru the detective had drawn up on the spot.

‘Well, it does kind of resemble Beru, so I want it because of that...’

Of course, a certain someone hiding in his shadow didn’t think the same as his liege, though.

[Oh, my kinggggg!! I beg thee not to fall for that shoddy and crude doodling of a plebeian!!]

Beru desperately pleaded with his liege that he was nowhere near that ugly in the sketch, but Jin-Woo simply let that whining enter one ear and go out the other.

In the meantime, Woo Jin-Cheol stared at his own drawing for a bit as if to let go of all his lingering attachments.

Soon, though...

Riiip...

...He cleanly tore the page off the memo pad. Woo Jin-Cheol extended his hand holding the drawing to Jin-Woo.

“Here.”

“Thank you.”

Jin-Woo gladly accepted the sketch.

And during that process, the detective’s hand briefly touched the tip of Jin-Woo’s finger.

It was surely nothing important in the grand scheme of things. However, massive events that left their mark in history books sometimes began with seemingly insignificant little things.

Woo Jin-Cheol turned around and hurriedly descended the staircase.

'I knew it, this whole thing was a dumb mistake.'

Regret was rapidly filling him up.

Because he got too hyped up from the prospect of finding a clue, he ended up doing something that he'd be unable to explain even to the youngest detective in the squad with a straight face.

The sense of embarrassment and regret rushed in like the incoming tides, now that this was all he had to show for his efforts.

'Stairs always feel so d*mn long only on days like today, don't they?'

Detective Woo Jin-Cheol bitterly muttered to himself as he climbed down the staircase, but then, his steps had to come to an abrupt halt.

'Mm....?'

He suddenly heard a voice from somewhere, that was why.

'.....??'

Woo Jin-Cheol froze up when a chill-inducing feeling crept up on his spine and he quickly scanned up and down where he was. He saw not one person coming down from the stairs or climbing up from below.

Classes were still ongoing, so the steps of the school were quite literally, quiet and still.

Woo Jin-Cheol tilted his head this way and that, before he tried to climb down the remaining few steps to the ground floor only to hear another voice again.

This time, it was his own voice.

'W-what the heck is this?!'

A person with an easily-scared personality would squat down or start screaming from fear by now. However, Woo Jin-Cheol wasn't one. He simply remained calm while he scanned his surroundings once more, before pulling out a memo pad and a pen as a sombre expression formed on his face.

'I'm suddenly hearing auditory hallucinations. Could it be that the sense of loss I feel or the ant monster I witnessed were evidence of something wrong with my brain?'

The end of a brief observation was signed off with a question mark scribbled on with his pen.

Woo Jin-Cheol felt rather weirded out now. He stuffed the memo pad inside his inner pocket and hurriedly descended the rest of the steps. And with a

speed far quicker than that, he escaped from the school building.

But then....

....Yet another auditory hallucination rocked the inside of his head.

“Euhk!!”

Woo Jin-Cheol gritted his teeth and covered both of his ears.

The voice he had never heard before and his own words that he never uttered before as well, began making a mess out of his mind. An intense bout of confusion crashed into him like an unstoppable tide.

“W-what the hell is this?!”

And then, out of all those voices swirling in his head, there was this one phrase that kept ringing so clearly in his head.

A name that didn't want to leave his head alone. The name of Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.

‘If it's Seong Jin-Woo, then.... Isn't that the name of the student I just met?’

He heard that patients suffering from mental disorders often came up with crazy stories that featured people from their lives. Could such a thing be happening inside his head now?

Woo Jin-Cheol walked forward as his body swayed unsteadily. He kept frowning in pain as a migraine viciously pounded away at his temples.

Even then, even if the inside of his head had become so complicated and messy to the point that he didn't know how to unravel all the tangled thoughts in there – every time he recalled the name ‘Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim’, it felt like the big hole in his heart was slowly filling back up for some weird reason.

Woo Jin-Cheol crashed down on a park bench and began murmuring repeatedly the name that continued to swim inside his mind.

‘Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, Hunter Seong Jin-Woo...

That name holds the clue.

I definitely know that name, Seong Jin-Woo.

I must remember it.

I must drag it out into the open.

I must find all the memories of him, and the reason why those memories

are erased from my mind.’

“Euh-euhk!!”

While still under an extreme case of a migraine, Woo Jin-Cheol fought hard to recall his memories and eventually, a certain scene popped up in his head.

“Association President. Do you trust me?”

“Yes, of course, I trust you.”

“In that case, I hope you will believe everything I’m about to show you.”

“Excuse me?”

The tip of a finger belonging to someone approached his forehead. The moment it touched his skin, darkness dyed his view for a short while but during that time, a countless number of images flashed past his eyes.

Those were the memories that connected the past, the present, and the future. And they contained the stories of Gates, monsters, Hunters, Rulers, and Sovereigns.

“This, this can’t be.... Just how can such a thing be....?”

Woo Jin-Cheol couldn’t finish what he wanted to say, and Jin-Woo, now the Shadow Sovereign, replied with a lonesome expression.

“Well, a higher being’s memories aren’t affected by the flow of time, you see.”

Indeed, a Sovereign’s memories easily transcended the boundaries of time itself.

“Pant, pant....”

Woo Jin-Cheol panted heavily and with great difficulty after emerging from the flashback of the ‘past’. For a short moment in time that no longer existed, his consciousness was connected to Jin-Woo, who was a higher existence.

And it happened then; memories sealed tightly away somewhere within his soul had been unlocked through yet another contact with Jin-Woo, and were brought back up to the territory of his consciousness.

“Oh, my god....”

The sense of emptiness that felt as if there was a hole in the corner of his heart slowly filled back up, and warm tears began trickling down from Woo Jin-Cheol’s eyes.

He then remembered the question he asked Jin-Woo after learning of what the latter was planning to do.

The answer to that question, it was right in front of his eyes now.

A young man whose name was unknown, walking past the park bench while listening to music through a pair of earphones; a pair of lovers brushing past him while whispering their undying love to each other....

An old man out to walk his dog, and people loosening their muscles near the exercise equipment in the park....

In this world, in this place, there were no Gates. No monsters. No battles.

Woo Jin-Cheol now bore witness to the miracle that man had created through his hands, this incredible peace, and thicker, hotter tears began flooding out from his eyes.

“Seong Hunter-nim, you... did it.”

Woo Jin-Cheol recalled the screams of so many people meeting their ends at the monsters and continued to weep for a long, long time.

‘...No, hang on. I, I shouldn’t be doing this.’

The veteran detective’s rough, calloused hands busily moved about to wipe away the tears.

Even if the entire world had forgotten about the truth, Woo Jin-Cheol had to go and tell Seong Jin-Woo that at least there was one person who knew the latter had battled for the sake of the world itself.

Such a sense of duty began welling up in his heart, but at the same time, a sense of uncertainty also entered him, wondering if what he was about to do was for the sake of that man.

‘He’s spending his time as a regular student now, having willfully forgotten about his past as a Hunter.’

If he wanted to remind Woo Jin-Cheol of the past, then there were ample chances to do so. Jin-Woo could’ve answered his questions, or just like before, transmit a whole section of memories through nothing but a fingertip.

However, the youth didn’t show any reactions when a detective showed up in this place through a series of coincidences, before quietly letting him be on his way.

Could it be that... he didn’t want his peaceful everyday life to be interrupted?

If that was the case, then wouldn’t them going back to their regular lives, while pretending to be none the wiser, be for the better for Hunter Seong Jin-Woo in the end?

Woo Jin-Cheol fell into a dilemma.

His dilemma grew heavier and harder to resolve and he remained stuck with it right up until students began leaving the school for the day. However, watching them cross the park one by one did help Woo Jin-Cheol with coming to a rather tough conclusion.

‘....Right.

Rather than me deciding this, let’s leave it to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo.

I’ll call out to him, and if he pretends to not understand me, then I shall respect his choice.

However.

Even if there is a small reaction, then I....’

Woo Jin-Cheol hurriedly returned to Jin-Woo’s high school. And then, he didn’t leave the side of the school gate even when no more students walked past him.

He was currently acting on this groundless assumption that Hunter Seong Jin-Woo hadn’t left the school yet.

And so, as he stood there for several dozen more minutes, while anxiously sucking on one poor cigarette after another....

“....I just don’t want to see problems suddenly crop up and prevent you from participating in the regional meet because of those idiots.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t let that happen.”

....He finally got to discover Jin-Woo walking out of the school gates. Feeling genuinely happy now, he took a large stride forward and called out the youth’s name.

“Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.”

Ba-dump.

Just how much courage did he require to mutter out those simple words? Woo Jin-Cheol felt his heart madly pound away and waited for Jin-Woo’s reaction.

Sure enough, the youth turned around to look, his entire body now completely frozen stiff. There was an expression of genuine surprise etched on his face.

“But, how....?”

The light in Jin-Woo’s eyes told everything there was to know.

Having finally gotten his confirmation from Jin-Woo's eyes, Detective Woo Jin-Cheol began tearing up once more.

"As I thought.... you are him."

The two of them moved to the park in the vicinity of the school, the very location where Woo Jin-Cheol recovered his memories.

Sunlight reflected on the gently undulating surface of a small pond located in the middle of the park, creating ripples of ripe gold.

Woo Jin-Cheol stopped walking around there and opened his mouth first.

"I hope I didn't cause a problem between you and your club seniors."

Jin-Woo formed a thin smile and shook his head.

"They are good seniors. Sure, their competitive streak can be a bit much at times, but...."

Woo Jin-Cheol asked Jin-Woo if they could speak for a while, and the latter had to ask his seniors for their understanding on this one. Since there was a prior engagement, the older kids could've easily gotten unhappy at this situation, but....

"Don't be too late!"

"Until you show up to the welcoming party, we're holding Young-Gil as our hostage, okay?"

"S-senior?!"

The seniors from the track and field team didn't sweat it and left for the party venue ahead. Jin-Woo recalled Young-Gil's tearful face as he got dragged away by the seniors and smirked softly to himself.

"Still, the life of my friend is hanging in the balance here, so I can't stay for too long."

Woo Jin-Cheol broke into a gentle chuckle after seeing the youth's expression that showed how much he was enjoying his current life.

"In that case, I understand. Let me get to the main topic, then."

The smile was gone in an instant from the detective's face after he finished those words.

"How long... how long have you been fighting against those creatures in the gap between dimensions?"

According to the records, Jin-Woo was missing for around two years.

However, Woo Jin-Cheol had seen the overall combat force of the Sovereigns through the memories of the Shadow Sovereign, and he knew that the two years were simply not enough to defeat them all.

Jin-Woo cautiously replied.

“27 years....”

The moment he heard that reply, Woo Jin-Cheol sucked in his breath.

To think, he had to fight against over ten million enemies for nearly 30 years in the gap between the walls of different dimensions, where not a single thing could exist....

Woo Jin-Cheol couldn't even begin to imagine how difficult and arduous the battles must've been. For a long while there, he failed to come up with something to say, but eventually, forced his lips to part just a little.

“.....You don't regret anything?”

Jin-Woo's reply this time was instantaneous.

“No, I don't.”

He could say this with absolute confidence.

“If I were to be given the same opportunity over and over again, I will make the same decision every single time.”

Everything that happened – from when he and his father went to a baseball game while holding hands during the latter's off day; the doenjang stew mom cooked with so much care and love; his little sister's smile, bright and unclouded by the fear of the monsters....

....All of these were precious things that couldn't be measured with any financial value.

If the price he had to pay for all of these things was to carry the weighty burden by himself, then he'd not hesitate to carry it over and over again.

“I don't regret anything.”

Woo Jin-Cheol heard Jin-Woo's composed voice and in that instant, felt his nose sting once more.

‘Thank you, Seong Jin-Woo Hunter-nim.’

He barely managed to swallow back those words that almost came out of his mouth. He knew that these simple words of gratitude could never convey his true feelings to Hunter Seong Jin-Woo, that's why.

He took a quick look at his wristwatch while thinking about the 'life' of the

hostage and raised his head.

“It looks like you’re living a wonderful life now.”

Jin-Woo smirked softly.

“It is satisfactory, yes. Well, other than my body not ageing anymore so I need to constantly modify my body shape, that is.”

‘Eternal youth and immortality.’

Hunter Seong Jin-Woo had now possessed god-like powers after becoming the Shadow Sovereign. However, even though he possessed such powers, he chose to live the life of a simple, normal person. If that was his decision, then...

“May I ask whether you thought about what you’d like to do in the future?”

“I haven’t thought that far ahead yet, unfortunately.”

“In that case.... How about, you know, joining this side?”

Woo Jin-Cheol displayed the police identification card inside his wallet.

“You mean... the National Police?”

“Recently, many hardened criminals visiting our offices are all whining about the exact same thing. They say that it’s hard to make a living with Shadow Monsters around.”

Jin-Woo studied the identification card for a while and returned the wallet with a grin on his face.

“But, if I become a police officer, other cops won’t have anything to do anymore, you know?”

“That’s precisely why we’re working very hard, you see – to create a world like that.”

He hadn’t changed.

From when he was the Chief of the Association’s Monitoring Division, and when he was the President of the Hunter’s Association itself, the expressions Woo Jin-Cheol had shown back then remained as he continued his life as a police detective now.

“I’ll think about it.”

Jin-Woo replied so and turned around to leave as he began to worry slightly about his friend’s safety. Woo Jin-Cheol quickly bade him goodbye.

“I shall wait for your favourable reply.”

“Please don’t. I heard that there’s a crap ton of work but the pay is pretty bad.”

Jin-Woo waved his hand as he walked away, and Woo Jin-Cheol smiled gently as his silent reply.

‘Lots of work, but rubbish pay, is it?’

A wry chuckle leaked out automatically from his mouth after hearing that wonderfully succinct assessment that left no room for a rebuttal. At the same time, he recalled the face of the youngest detective who actually volunteered to join such a squad out of his own free will.

‘Isn’t he off today, that kid?’

Well, so what if it was the junior’s off day?

While thinking that he’d just call out the youngest and treat the kid to a hearty meal, Woo Jin-Cheol politely bowed his head towards Jin-Woo’s departing back, now a faint silhouette in the distance.

As the only man who knew of that youth’s sacrifice, he stood for everyone in this world and expressed his gratitude, perhaps for the first and the last time.



Chapter 255 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 12

'That' suddenly appeared without any warning.

On a certain day in April, only a stone's throw away from May's doorstep, an American emergency call centre was blessed with a strange phone call.

It was not uncommon to hear about tourists getting lost. Since that was the case, the call centre operator figured that this call was from yet another poor stranded soul searching for a way out from the middle of the vast desert.

"Did you run into an accident, sir?"

"In that case, did something else happen to you, sir?"

The call centre agent got ready to connect the call to the emergency dispatch service while replying in a calm voice to make sure that the caller wouldn't start panicking over the phone.

"Is it something urgent? Should I dispatch the emergency personnel to your location?"

The caller's voice indicated that he was feeling really hesitant over something here, so just in case, the agent decided to confirm the caller's identity first.

As it turned out, the caller was actually a college professor, and judging from his family circumstances, or the past records of lodging emergency calls, he didn't seem to be the sort to make prank calls for fun.

"Sir, you need to describe the situation so we can dispatch the right kind of response personnel to the scene."

"Can you explain to me in detail what you see?"

It was at that point that the agent heard the caller take deep breaths over the phone's speaker.

There was a building in a desert about to topple over? The agent tilted his head this way and that before asking again.

"Where are these cracks exactly, sir?"

The voice of the caller hesitated for a long time again as if he still couldn't

believe what he saw, but eventually it did come out of the phone.

April.

This was the time when pretty much all students would find themselves with barely any free time, but for Jin-Woo facing mid-term exams and the track competition literally around the corner, it proved to be a great deal more hectic than usual.

As he was studying deep into the night, his little sister, Jin-Ah, entered his room while carrying a tray of sliced Korean melon.

“Oppa, Mom says you should eat these while studying.”

Jin-Woo was concentrating on the textbooks below the desk lamp’s light, and raised his head to greet her.

“What about Dad?”

“Dad is on night shift duty from this week again.”

Jin-Woo received the plate with melon slices neatly arranged on top and nodded his head. But then, he reached out to snatch his sister’s ponytail just as she was about to sneak out of his room.

“Stop right there.”

“Heok!”

Jin-Ah turned around to face him with wide-open eyes and he sternly asked her.

“Why are all these slices missing the soft middle sections?”

“I, uh, I don’t know....”

“You should say that while getting rid of those pips stuck near your lips.”

“Ahh-iinng...”

Jin-Ah formed an unhappy expression at the fact that she got busted, but he found her way too adorable when she acted like this and couldn’t hold back his own laughter.

He used his thumb to remove the pips from the ends of his sister’s lips and out of pure mischievousness, formed another stern expression.

“If you eat only the softer part of the melon again, I’m gonna make you eat nothing but the hard part for a whole day as punishment, okay?”

“Hiii-eeeng..... Okay.”

Jin-Ah turned around to leave with a tearful expression and he lightly

patted her on the head.

Currently, she was in her sixth year in elementary school. Jin-Woo had seen her grow up once before already, and pretty much anything she did came across as adorable to him.

Crunch.

He began chewing on the sliced melon piece and focused his concentration back on the questionnaire on the desk. When he did, though, Igrit began to offer his counsel once more, as he was still worried about his liege's academic success.

[My liege, the 24th question should not be tackled in this manner, but...]

'I'm going to check the answer sheet, then?'

[...Allow me to ponder this query for a little while longer, my liege.]

'.....'

It was rather commendable that he was so concerned about his master, but this....

'Oh, well. At least, I'm not bored during studying, so there's that....'

Crunch.

As the number of questions remaining on the questionnaire decreased, so did the number of sliced melon pieces on the plate.

Tick, tock....

And so, just how long had it been?

Abruptly, Jin-Woo sensed this chill and raised his head.

'What was that? Where?'

He shot up from his chair and shifted his head in the direction of where he detected that strange phenomenon. He closed his eyes and focused his perception.

....He definitely hadn't made a mistake just then. Right away, he imagined the worst possible scenario and his expression hardened as a result.

'Where is that business card....?'

He quickly dug through the pockets of his school uniform and pulled out a certain business card. It was none other than the one left behind by the envoy of the Rulers.

Jin-Woo quickly dialled the number and tapped on the 'Call' icon on his

smartphone. The call itself got through really quickly.

The envoy tried to greet him with a warm, welcoming voice, but Jin-Woo simply spoke up certain coordinates without any hints of emotion. And then, he added one more thing at the end.

“Is this your people’s doing?”

The envoy was stunned by his serious attitude and replied quickly.

“...”

The brief silence was soon shattered by the panicky voice from the other side of the line.

As expected – it wasn’t the absolute worst possibility, much to his relief. Still, it didn’t mean that the situation itself had become any better, though.

‘To Earth.... Someone, or something, is coming.’

Whether they held good or bad intentions, there was no way to tell for the time being. So, he should start preparing for either case right away.

Jin-Woo fell into deep thought as he stood there, still holding the phone, before he spoke to the envoy.

“Can you come and see me?”

He added that there was also something else he’d like to talk about and that prompted the envoy to reply as if it had been waiting for that all this time.

The meeting place was the cafe where Jin-Woo met Yu Jin-Ho for the first time outside the dungeon. He got there just in time and found the envoy already waiting for him by the corner of the cafe, having arrived a while ago.

After entering, Jin-Woo wordlessly settled down on the opposite side of the Ruler’s proxy. The latter only discovered the former’s presence after he appeared right in front of its eyes. The envoy performed a polite bow of the head.

With the situation being what it was, Jin-Woo went straight to the meat of the discussion.

“The things trying to get here.... Do you have any clues on who they are?”

“They are the ‘Outsiders’ that tried to step into my world not too long ago. They were beaten back by the Army of the Heavens and it seems that they have now set their sights on this world, instead.”

“Why are they trying to come here?”

“They are a race of giants that consumes the rocks found on a planet that can support lifeforms. They are referred to as a race of ‘Titans’ and are known for their evil nature even back in their own world. Their reason for coming to Earth should be rather obvious at this point.”

Jin-Woo leaned against the chair’s back and nodded his head.

“....So, they are not friends.”

“Yes, they are most certainly not.”

Now that he knew what their purpose was, the nature of his response had been decided, as well. However, there was something he still felt curious about.

“This didn’t happen before the Chalice of Rebirth was used, so what gives?”

Jin-Woo could only remember the Gates and monsters, but nothing about the attack of an alien race capable of ‘eating’ a planet. The envoy hesitated slightly with his answer before willingly admitting to it.

“Yes, you’re indeed correct. Actually, when I told you about them invading our world not too long ago, I was referring to the timeline that has been overwritten.”

“Meaning, the creatures that should have been aiming for your world changed their heading towards Earth, instead?”

“Yes.”

The envoy replied as thus, carefully observing any changes in Jin-Woo’s mood. Of course, he immediately figured out the reason for this change.

“I’m the cause.”

“Those creatures chased after the traces of Sovereign-nim, who possesses incredible power.... At least, that’s what the exalted Rulers believe happened in this event.”

Just like how one would rely on the light from the lighthouse illuminating the lone pathway to navigate the treacherous nighttime waters when you couldn’t see an inch in front of your nose, the race of ‘Titans’ had been led towards this small planet by the enormous power being emitted by the Shadow Sovereign.

The potential influence Jin-Woo’s powers would have on this world, the one that shouldn’t exist and shouldn’t remain – the part the Rulers were worried about had finally become reality.

Still, the Rulers felt that they owed Jin-Woo big time and thus, they weren't planning to sit back and watch another crisis unfold on Earth. The agent made sure to drive this point home.

“The exalted Rulers have already deployed the Army of the Heavens.”

Jin-Woo slowly shook his head.

“No, it'll be too late.”

Even if they started creating a tunnel connecting from that side to here right now, at a bare minimum they would still need a good few years to get here. By then, everything would be over.

In that case....

“I shall take care of it.”

‘...My soldiers and I will stop those b*stards.’

Jin-Woo was fully confident of defeating these new enemies if they were on the level of being driven back by the Army of the Heavens.

The voice of the Shadow Sovereign seemed to heavily press down on the envoy's shoulders and he nervously swallowed his dry saliva. Regardless which forces they were, none of them would prefer to have this man as their enemy. The Ruler's agent suddenly felt pity for this race of 'Titans' now.

By the way, if this meeting wasn't to ask for reinforcements, then why were they even here?

Jin-Woo replied as if he had seen through the agent's thoughts.

“What you asked me back then.... I thought it's about time that I tell you my answer.”

“Ah, ah. I see. You were talking about that matter.”

The Rulers made an offer to make available a location that the enormous power of the Shadow Sovereign wouldn't cause an issue. It seemed that he was able to come to a decision due to this crisis. The envoy nodded his head after seeing Jin-Woo's determination-filled expression.

“I understand what you're trying to say. As soon as this crisis is resolved, we....”

“I'm remaining on Earth.”

“...Pardon?”

The envoy's brows rose up after hearing that unexpected reply. However, Jin-Woo's voice remained composed, with just a hint of a grin etched on his

lips.

“You know, I still want to live here.”

He wanted to spend his time in this world populated by his family, friends, as well as others that he'd like to meet and talk to. After he ran into Association President Woo Jin-Cheol, no, Detective Woo now, he had finally realised what he wanted to do.

‘Well, it’s a bit cumbersome that he keeps calling me up so he can buy me food, but still.’

In any case, Woo Jin-Cheol was a good man. And that was precisely why that young detective being dragged around by him could carry a happy expression like that.

‘I’d like to be with those people.’

Jin-Woo thought that he'd like to be by their sides and be able to laugh along with them. The envoy spied on Jin-Woo's smile and replied with a sheepish smile of his own.

“Actually, I... I was getting really bored with staying in this world, you see. What a relief this is. Now I can finally return to my world as well.”

One year since that day. If one said it was short, then it was, but if one said it was too long, then it could be, as well.

The envoy's mission of remaining in this world to wait for the Shadow Sovereign's decision had finally come to an end. And seeing his expression, it was rather clear that the odds of him changing his mind were absolutely none.

“Well, then....”

While looking as if a load had been taken off his shoulders, the envoy stood up from his seat. He then bowed his waist towards Jin-Woo, no, the greatest hero who brought the war of two worlds to an end.

“I entrust this world to your capable hands.”

Jin-Woo stopped digging through his closet and scratched his head.

‘This isn’t good....’

He couldn't see a single piece of garment that could hide his face. But then again, he bought a hoodie and a baseball cap to hide his face riddled with scars he earned while working as a low ranked Hunter, so it was only obvious that they wouldn't remain anymore in the new timeline.

Left with no choice, Jin-Woo decided to create the clothing he wanted.

The black smoke quickly enveloped him and became thick like actual liquid, before transforming into a hoodie that he used to wear so much in the past. He pulled the hood up and stood before the mirror in his room.

‘How long has it been, me in this look.....?’

He experienced renewed reminiscence of the time erased, as the reflection was like looking at his past self. His lips exposed below the hoodie curled up into a grin.

“Nice.”

With this, his preparation was over. And his figure slowly submerged into the shadow beneath his feet.

Somewhere in the desert, west of the United States of America.

The American government sealed tight the surrounding area and invited every expert they could get their hands on to this place, but in the end, every single one of them failed to come up with a meaningful hypothesis.

“I wonder. Well, this could be....”

“I’ve researched many strange weather phenomena across the globe for over 30 years, but this is my first time seeing something like that.”

From the get-go, how could any expert, regardless of the numbers gathered, be able to explain the phenomenon of cracks developing in the atmosphere?

Crack, split...

Even as they dithered about, the empty sky was slowly but surely breaking apart bit by bit. Understandably, the American defence forces surrounding this area just in case something bad happened were very tense right now. If one were to exaggerate the scale a bit, more than enough combat forces had been gathered here to literally blow away a foreign nation.

The commander confidently spoke to the President of the U.S.A.

“Even if something pops out of there, Mister President, we shall take care of them. Yes, yes, sir. The scale of the crack has grown much larger since its initial discovery....”

While chatting on the comm device, the commander shifted his gaze over to the ranks of the soldiers without thinking too much and discovered a certain man walking closer to his position.

A man whose face was obscured by the pulled-up hoodie was walking straight towards the commander’s location.

“Who the hell is that guy? How the f*ck did he even enter here?”

“No, sir. Let me call you back a bit later, sir.”

The commander hurriedly ended the call and, along with his adjutants, quickly ran towards this unknown man.

“Excuse me! Who are you?”

This was a restricted zone secured by a water-tight cordon of soldiers, yet how could a normal-looking civilian waltz right in completely unhindered? Signs of irritation floated up on the commander’s face as an annoying situation suddenly came to visit him.

However, the man didn’t show any signs of fear, even though he was surrounded by heavily-armed soldiers. The uninvited guest coming to speak to the commander was, of course, Jin-Woo. And he certainly had something to say.

“Please, withdraw your troops from here. This place is dangerous.”

His English didn’t sound natural.

‘Is he a foreigner?’

The commander formed a deep frown and in order to put the fear of God in this uninvited guest, he shouted out at the top of his lungs.

“Do you have a death wish?! Do you seriously not know who is in real danger here?”

‘What do you mean by that, mister? It’s you, obviously.’

Jin-Woo knew that convincing these people with words would be impossible, so he released just a tiny bit of his power. When he did, the commander, his adjutants, as well as all the soldiers watching Jin-Woo floated up in the air at once.

“Uh, uhhh?!”

The commander became flustered and he quickly took a look around him. There was only one person with both of his feet firmly planted on the ground. Not only that, the vehicles, various machinery and equipment, and even heavy tanks were floating over a metre in the air.

Having witnessed something that couldn’t scientifically happen, the eyes of the commander began trembling hard.

“B-but, how?!”

Deciding that this much was enough, Jin-Woo brought them back down to the ground.

However, the first thing the commander did upon landing was to yank out his sidearm. His highly-agitated voice rang around loudly in the desert sky.

“What the hell are you?!”

Jin-Woo raised both of his hands up to his shoulders to clearly indicate that he didn't want to fight and calmly continued on with his explanation.

“Soon, enemies possessing similar powers as what you saw will emerge from that spot in the sky. And....”

He used Mana to take away the commander's sidearm and had it float over to near his head.

When the pistol suddenly began moving towards Jin-Woo seemingly on its own, the nervous soldiers quickly cocked their rifles and got ready to fire, but the commander was equally as quick to raise his hand to stop them from doing anything.

“Hold your fire!”

While he was busy calming his subordinates down, Jin-Woo used the 'invisible hand' to pull the trigger of the pistol now aimed at his face.

Blam! Blam! Blam!!

Bullets that failed to even touch Jin-Woo's body fell powerlessly to the ground. The gazes of the soldiers relying on their firearms until then were rapidly filling up with sheer astonishments and panic.

Jin-Woo could sense their hearts freezing up, too. He swept his gaze around and took in their eyes of shock and panic, before calmly continuing on with his explanation.

“Your weapons will not work against the incoming enemies.”

Soon after that, his gaze landed on the commander, still rooted firmly in his spot.

“Are you willing to watch the meaningless deaths of your subordinates?”

“What should.... What am I supposed to do, then?”

“Withdraw your troops from here as far as possible. I shall be the only one to remain here.”

“You alone...? Are you planning to fight against the enemies by yourself?”

Him alone, was it....

Jin-Woo didn't particularly feel the need to explain himself any further, so

he just nodded his head.

“...”

The commander shut his mouth and began weighing his options, but then suddenly, he yanked out his spare sidearm tucked neatly in the back of his pants and fired several shots at Jin-Woo.

Blam! Blam!! Blam!!! Blam!!!!

Every single bullet fired from the commander all tumbled to the ground powerlessly as soon as they reached Jin-Woo’s vicinity.

This man was a ‘monster’. No, at this point, wasn’t he more like a character from some mythical legend, rather than a simple monster?

The commander bore witness to the miracle that kept repeating itself and eventually lowered his weapon. He then spun towards his soldiers and shouted out loudly so that they could hear him.

“All personnel, pull-out!! We withdraw from here, as quickly and efficiently as possible!!”

The adjutants quickly relayed the commander’s new order to the rest of the defence force.

“Pull out, now!!”

“Pulling out!”

This well-trained army quickly distanced themselves away from the potential combat zone. Jin-Woo observed their withdrawal process before shifting his gaze over to the large fissure rapidly developing in the sky.

He could sense it now.

He could sense the intense greed of the enemies wanting to devour this land.

He could even sense their heavy breathing as if they were close by.

For the first time in a while, his Black Heart began pounding hard again to notify him of the entrance of new enemies. A grin formed on Jin-Woo’s face as he summoned his shortswords from subspace.

Soon, they would....

Craaak

Split, crack!!

The atmosphere rocked from an intense impact force and the dimension

finally split open. With that, giants seemingly made out of rocks stepped onto this land.

They belatedly discovered a small lifeform below their feet while emitting a thick amount of hostility towards them and began snorting in derision.

[What's this? Just you alone wish to stop us?]

This feeling – Jin-Woo closed his eyes to enjoy this stillness before the battle and slowly opened them back again.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump!

His heart was beating loudly.

He finally unleashed all of his powers and spoke up.

“Does it look like I'm alone to you?”

With that, his shadow extended in the blink of an eye to encompass the vast land behind him, and the Shadow Army of ten million rose up at once.



Chapter 256 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 13

Gooooo morning!!

...Was what I'd like to say, but there was no distinction between day and night in the world of shadows. So, I simply stretched my limbs without saying anything after waking up from my nap.

Yawn-!!

The sleep one could get inside this place, the 'territory of eternal rest', was absolutely the best, no two ways about it. Honestly speaking, the majority of the Shadow Army's soldiers would spend most of their downtime sleeping until our liege summons us.

I should be seen on the side of those who enjoyed napping, but today was a very important day and I just had to rouse myself up. Soldiers stretching their muscles to get ready for the day discovered me and began bowing their heads to greet me.

"Oh, hello, Fangs-nim."

"Sure, sure."

"Good day to you, Commander Fangs."

"Right, right."

I didn't want to show it, but heck, I couldn't help but feel good when this happened.

I came under my liege's wings relatively early compared to some other soldiers and after my various accomplishments were recognised, I now found myself in the position to command all the magic-wielding soldiers in the army.

The hierarchy within the Shadow Army was determined by how trusted one was by our liege, and that was why Ancient-grade Dragons were paying their respects to a mere High Orc Shaman like myself!

My Sovereign-nim, hooray!!

My exalted and great Shadow Sovereign-nim, hooray!!

‘Tsk, tsk....’

I ended up shouting out three cheers towards my liege again today due to the overwhelming gratitude I felt. While feeling happy and content, I headed towards the portion of the army comprising of ant soldiers.

Quite unlike other Shadow Soldiers, these ants didn’t seem to enjoy napping and were always doing something or rather to keep themselves busy. After finding me visiting their territory, they began bowing their heads in greetings.

“Huh-huhuh....”

I half-heartedly accepted their greetings and quickened my walking pace. If I were to be honest, I felt a wee bit scared by these ant soldiers, even though we were on the same side.

Because, well, not only were they the most vicious and cruel of all the Shadow Soldiers, but they were also scarily diligent with their given tasks, too.

Kkiiiek!

Kkiiiahk!

Whenever these ants screeched out those sounds containing meanings that were lost on me, I couldn’t help but flinch my shoulders just a little.

‘If it isn’t Beru Marshal-nim, just who would be capable of commanding this lot....?’

Thankfully, Beru Marshal-nim in question must’ve read my mind, because I didn’t have to walk far to meet him, who had graciously come out to greet me as well.

When our gazes met, though, his shoulders began quivering ominously.

“Kiiiehehehehet.”

“Ehehehehe.”

“Kii-hahahahat!”

“Ehehehehehet!!”

We stood face to face while laughing to our hearts’ content.

Judging from the expression on Beru-nim’s face, a very satisfactory item must’ve been created. So, it was only obvious that a big smile would form on my own face too, as it was me who entrusted the creation of that item to him in the first place.

Beru-nim quickly approached me and then, showed me the 'item' hidden behind his back.

“So, what do you think?”

I was so moved by my emotions that I ended up exclaiming out loudly.

“Hoh!!”

The item that I requested Beru-nim who possessed excellent crafting skills, with its creation even at the risk of inconveniencing him! A robe with a hood attached that resembled what our liege wore not too long ago had been completed and was waiting for me.

“Kii-hehehehet!”

“Ehehehehet!”

I threw off the robe on my body right away and put on the brand new one Beru-nim handed over.

The best!!

Was there a need for any other description than these two words?

I couldn't control my overflowing, heightened emotions and addressed Beru-nim with an abashed voice.

“I can't even imagine how should I go about repaying you for this, Marshal-nim...”

“Keh-hehehet. How can I turn a blind eye to your wish to become more like our liege? As long as you're happy, it's all good.”

“Yes, I am truly happy. So much so that I'm almost tempted to make it a duty of every Magic Soldier to wear this robe, Marshal-nim.”

“Kii-hahahahat!”

“Uwehehehehet!”

Beru-nim couldn't control his laughter for a long time, but then, he fixed his gaze on me as if he had discovered something else.

“That thing.... Wouldn't it be better to turn that item into a staff rather than walking around with it in your hand?”

What Beru-nim was pointing at was the 'Bead of Avarice' I carried in my right hand most of the time.

“Heuh.... Does that mean I can entrust you for this one as well....?”

I was sheepish, but still, I presented the Bead, but Beru-nim raised his hand

to stop me.

“I can’t help you with magical artefacts. Unless you bring me a living kin of the bearded Dwarves, then the story might change.”

“Ah.... I see.”

“Since we’re talking about it, how about entrusting the job with the bearded Dwarves? They might be pretty terrible at warfare, but they are still talented artisans, aren’t they?”

“.....”

I rubbed my chin and pondered this dilemma, and eventually, nodded my head.

“That is a good idea, Marshal-nim.”

“Kii-hehehehet!”

I bowed my waist 90 degrees to express my gratitude towards Beru-nim and his excellent work, before quickly making my way out of the ant’s area. This time, my steps took me to the area populated by my friends, the Dragons.

We grew quite close after comparing our firepower, you see. I explained to them my circumstances, and they willingly stepped forward to lend me aid. I chose the smallest of my friends and climbed up on his back.

There was only one reason why I chose this guy. Well, I was cursed with short legs so if I mounted a friend with a bigger body, I might have to suffer through the terrible pain of my groin being torn in half, that’s why.

Soon, my Dragon friend flapped its wings and flew up in the air. I pointed in the direction where the bearded Dwarves were residing.

We were currently inside the world of eternal rest. It was wide enough to be called infinite, and on top of that, there were ten million soldiers residing here, so some places could only be accessed after borrowing the abilities of my friends like this.

Flap, flap....

As the Dragon friend flew rapidly to our destination, I sneaked a glance below us and oh boy, there sure were lots of soldiers below us.

‘There is... Grand-Marshal-nim.’

Slap, slap!!

“Stand up straight, Titans!!”

Currently, Bellion Grand-Marshal-nim was using his long sword that could

be manipulated by one's mind like a whip to properly re-educate the newest additions to the army.

The newbies must've been fairly renowned back in their own world and that resulted in them still being influenced by their old habits, which meant that Grand-Marshal-nim would have to strictly discipline them for a little while longer.

“...Ah!”

Bellion-nim discovered me and my Dragon friend in the air and waved his hand at us, necessitating me to hurriedly bow my head to him as well.

After we flew past the location of the newbie training area, I spotted Igrit-nim. He was so immersed in studying that he failed to notice a Dragon flying above his head. We couldn't disturb Igrit Marshal-nim when he was being like this, so we did our best to get out of there as quietly as possible.

Kii-ahhk!

Once we put the areas with Marshal-nims behind us, my Dragon friend unfurled its wings even wider and increased his speed.

A truly wonderful scenery greeted us!

Countless Shadow Soldiers, now no bigger than ants in our eyes, went past in a blur below us.

Soldiers that were asleep; soldiers that were in the middle of training; soldiers noisily chatting away; soldiers playing cards to while away time; and even those soldiers busy grabbing at each other's collars, their voices getting louder still....

What a colourful bunch they were.

Indeed, soldiers of all varieties could be seen below my feet. It wasn't originally like this, however.

We were psychically connected to our liege's mind, and as his powers grew stronger and stronger, we began to grow closer in personality to him, as well. Meaning, we who only knew and desired wanton destruction were gradually learning more about our liege's human side.

The process of many new and different emotions of a human filling up our once-empty chests was quite a refreshing experience, that's for sure.

When our liege's heart begins to pound, even our hearts would go on a riot alongside it.

I liked my liege very much.

I could only express my gratitude to my liege who had shown me a new world that I never ever imagined experiencing before.

My Sovereign-nim, hooray!!

My exalted and great Shadow Sovereign-nim....

‘Eh?’

While I was unconsciously exalting my liege after being moved by my emotions once more, we had already arrived at the area populated by the kins of the bearded Dwarves.

Perhaps fitting for our comrades that enjoyed crafting things, they had managed to construct a proper village, what with houses and smithies, as well as other buildings dotting the landscape.

Flap, flap.

After my Dragon friend landed on the ground, I cautiously stepped down, my toes wiggling and searching for solid footing.

“F-Fangs Commander-nim!”

“Commander-nim?”

The bearded Dwarves discovered my sudden, unannounced visit and quickly gathered around before politely bowing their heads. I was pretty sure that they were flustered by my presence, since it would be very rare for a Commander to come visit this far-flung ‘frontier’ area.

I politely explained what my situation was to these very courteous folks. When I was finished, their Elder replied with a bright expression.

“Ah, I see.... Please, leave it to us. As a matter of fact, we were troubled by the fact that we couldn’t find a good place to use the divine timber our liege had bestowed upon us.”

“Hoh-oh!”

It seemed that the right material had been prepared already.

While I was being treated to a cup of warm tea at the residence of the Elder, other artisans gathered together to craft my new weapon.

“What do you think, Commander-nim?”

The Elder confidently presented a cool-looking staff and I cried out as another bout of emotions overwhelmed me.

“Hoh-ohhhhh!!”

I had no choice but to carry around the Bead of Avarice in my hand, but that beautiful thing glowing in bright crimson hue was now decorating the end of this great staff.

“Very good! It’s wonderful!”

My mood lifted up so much that I almost flew away from there. And as I took hold of the staff and assumed several different poses, the corners of the Elder’s lips curled up.

“The word wonderful would better suit the robe you’re wearing right now instead of the staff, Commander-nim!”

“Uwehehehehet! I see that you too have a great sense of fashion!”

I was able to leave the residential area of the kins of bearded Dwarves in utter satisfaction. I watched them wave their hands to bade me goodbye and raised my thumb up real high as my reply.

If, in the distant future, my liege asked me about the coolness of this staff, then I swore in my heart to mention their hard work in crafting this item.

I went back the way I came and returned to the area of the Magic Soldiers. The first thing I did was to summon all the Magic Soldiers under my command and showed off my new robe and weapon combo.

“It’s really cool, Fangs-nim!”

“It’s the best!”

“I can’t stop my tears from gushing out, Fangs Commander-nim!”

Rather obviously, praises kept pouring in from everywhere. It was the romance of all Magic Soldiers to wear cool-looking robes and hold cool-looking staffs, after all!

“Uwuhuhuhut!!”

I magnanimously shared my joy with the rest of the Magic Soldiers, and then, gifted the highest-quality robe I used to wear until recently to this one particular soldier busy clapping his hands who said a moment or two ago that he couldn’t stop crying.

“Thank you, thank you, Commander-nim!!”

“Uwuhuhuhut!!”

He was expressing his joy with his entire body and I lightly patted his shoulders. But it was at this point that my eyes caught the sight of a few big guys that I hadn’t seen before.

“And who you guys might be?”

The giants made out of rocks scratched the backs of their heads, and one of them spoke to me in an awkward voice.

“Bellion-nim ordered us to come to this place.”

‘Ah, ah. I see.’

It seemed that there were a few Magic Soldiers among the ranks of the new additions to the army. But then again, wouldn't such a big guy shooting magic spells around be a waste of his hulking.... No, hang on a minute, that wasn't something I could say with a straight face, now was it?

In any case.

There was this one process that all newbie Magic Soldiers had to go through if they were to be put under my command.

“There, there. Other Magic Soldiers, you're dismissed for the time being. The newbies, settle down there for a second.”

The rocky giants were so well disciplined that they politely knelt down on the spot and quietly waited for me.

“From now on, I shall describe in detail what I've accomplished during the first battle our liege fought against the horrifying enemy called the Dragon Emperor, and then, every achievement I earned during the ensuing battle within the gap between dimensions. Listen well, and then.....”

After I finished telling them the lengthy tale of my unforgettable history, I had the newbies still stewing in admiration towards me return to their respective posts. It was then that I realised my day had come to an end.

I sensed the encroaching embrace of Lady Sleep, so I unfurled the bedding, lied down on it, and let out an almighty yawn.

“Yawn-!!”

I liked wonderful clothes, cool weapons, or telling stirring heroic tales, but what I liked the most at the end of the day was to fall asleep. Especially for sleep that closed out a day like today, which was hectic, to say the least.

I pulled the duvet right up until my neck and slowly drifted into my slumber while being embraced in this wonderful warmth. But then, just as the sleepiness sneaked its way closer and carried me off to the land of dreams, someone suddenly began shaking my shoulders!

How dare he?!

How dare anyone try to disrupt the sweet slumber of Commander Fangs?!

My eyes shot wide open as I got ready to rip the idiot apart.

“...?”

Igrit Marshal-nim was quietly looking at me from near my head.

“I love you, Marshal-nim.”

“...I am also grateful for your sincere loyalty.”

“By the way.... What brings you here, Marshal-nim?”

I pushed my upper torso up and Igrit Marshal-nim pointed to the distant sky above.

“It’s about to begin. Didn’t we, the Commander-grade soldiers that serve our liege from close by, agree to cheer him on when the time came?”

“Heok!!”

I kicked the duvet off and hurriedly jumped up before raising my head towards the sky. Like a gigantic movie theatre, the sky morphed into a screen to share what our liege was viewing to the rest of us.

“Finally, is our liege about to meet Lady Hae-In?”

“That’s correct.”

“Uwohohohot!!”

So moved by the fact that I was allowed to share this historical moment together with my liege, I ended up crying out loudly. The rest of the Shadow Soldiers cheering on our liege then also raised their arms high up and roared out as well.

Waaaahhhh-!!!

When our liege’s heart pounded away, ours would pound away as well. I too raised my arms up high and joined in the chorus of soldiers’ roars.

Waaaah-!!

My heart was beating really loud now.



Chapter 257 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 14

Antares was my name.

I was the 'First Sovereign' born from the darkness, as well as the 'Strongest Sovereign'. I was the king that lorded over all Dragon-kind, an existence that signified terror and destruction.

That's right.

All those who knew me referred to me as the 'Dragon Emperor' as a sign of respect and awe.

However, something strange happened.

On a certain day, as I was getting ready to invade the planet called 'Earth' alongside the ten million-strong soldiers within our hideout inside the gap between dimensions....

...I opened my eyes to discover that I was now occupying the body of a human being.

'.....'

And rather inexplicably, I seemed to have retained all the memories of this human, as well. I quickly found a mirror in the corner of the room and took a look at myself, only to emit a shocked gasp.

'What's this? Why does this human's face look so feeble?'

Hah-ah, how pitifully pathetic this man was.

The name of this human was Seong Jin-Woo, a young man acting as a rank E Hunter in a nation called the Republic of Korea. It seemed that this human never gave up on being a Hunter, even though his pathetic level of abilities drove him to the moments of near death quite often.

'His reason is.... his mother's illness?'

Just as I began thinking to myself that such a measly little illness would be healed in an instant with my magic, the human's mobile phone suddenly began vibrating loudly.

Vrrr.... Vrrr....

I discovered the miniature electronic device angrily vibrating on top of a desk and picked it up. When I did, I was greeted by an urgent female voice coming from the other side of the phone line.

I tried to match this voice to the memories of my human body and soon, came across a result of 'Hunter's Association Employee'.

'Hmph.'

I was thinking of ending this call which was answered purely out of this body's habitual reaction, but then, what this female said towards the end got on my nerves somewhat.

'.....!!!'

Being 'late'.

The action of failing to meet the promised deadline because one lacked the ability to arrive on time. Meaning, this female just dared to ask me, the mighty 'Dragon Emperor' and the personification of omnipotent powers, that I'd do something which was the very symbol of incompetence.

Since this was completely unacceptable, rage quickly filled up my eyes.

"You.... Where are you right now?"

I concentrated for a bit to find the exact location where this insolent female was speaking from. My sensory perception spread out to envelop the entire city and soon enough, I found her coordinates.

"Found you."

Click.

The location was about 11 kilometres away in the human distance measuring system, and since it wasn't too far, I ran with all my might and arrived there in only a couple of seconds.

And then, I stopped right in front of that female Association employee as she began lowering the phone away from her ear, now that the call had been disconnected.

"Now, am I still late, woman?"

"H-Hunter-nim?!"

Perhaps she had sensed just a tiny fraction of my limitless power, because she began backpedalling with a deeply frightened expression etched on her face.

I reached out and grabbed her shoulders as to make sure she'd not get away

and asked her again.

“Tell me. Am I being tardy now?”

“N-no, not at all.”

“Very good.”

I released her as a look of satisfaction floated up on my face. I then swept my gaze around the surroundings to find a group of Hunters raising a bit of fuss.

Rather than focusing on these unremarkable individuals and their forgettable faces, I focused on the distinct aroma rising up from the paper cups they were holding at the moment.

“Coffee.... I also want to drink coffee.”

I turned around to look at the female employee with her rapidly-paling complexion, and she bowed her waist with all of her heart.

“I-I’m truly sorry, Hunter-nim. We ran out of coffee just now....”

“It’s not an issue.”

“Pardon?”

Even before she had the chance to raise her bowed head, I walked over to the closest human and snatched his paper cup away.

“W-what are you doing?!”

Gulp, gulp.

I swallowed the sweet liquid in one go and formed a crumpled expression, causing the flustered man who lost his coffee to me to jump up in fright and quickly flee from there.

“Hahah!!”

The one possessing great powers would take away what the weak possessed, that was the way of the Sovereigns. It seemed that such logic also applied to humans and that certainly made me feel rather refreshed.

“Mister Seong.... Isn’t he acting a little bit weird today?”

“Yes, his eyes today are a bit....”

“Well, I’ve been getting this really creepy, eerie feeling from him since he showed up here.”

Other Hunters were murmuring amongst themselves behind my back, but there was no reason to pay heed to the opinions of these lowly humans

anyway, so I outright ignored them.

“There, there. Since everyone is here, let’s get started.”

While the Hunters began stretching their muscles to get ready for the raid, I shifted my gaze towards the ‘Gate’ that these people were scheduled to enter.

‘...’

That place, it... was quite suspicious.

The Gates that appeared on Earth were, without a doubt, the ploy of the Rulers, yet.... Why was I picking up the aura of a Sovereign from there?

There was a need to investigate this. I glared at the Gate with eyes as sharp as a hawk and stood behind the Hunters getting ready to enter.

“I’m coming along.”

“O-of course, you do need to come with us, Hunter Seong.”

Perhaps they too had detected the eerie, chilling atmosphere oozing out from the interior of the Gate, because the Hunters were forming flustered expressions as well. I accompanied them and stepped past the portal.

Pow, bang, boom, thud!!

As I began pummeling the fake monsters placed here to hide the real purpose of this dungeon into oblivion, other Hunters began showing me their respect.

“Isn’t Mister Seong acting seriously weird today??”

“No, well.... Maybe the monsters of this dungeon are just too weak...?”

“But, I can’t see his movements. My eyes can’t follow Mister Seong at all....”

I took care of all the monsters in an instant and finally discovered a suspicious entrance.

“We go through here.”

“Hold on, we need to take a vote to decide on such issues...”

This man didn’t get to finish his sentence. Because he lost his consciousness from a single hit from me.

Plop.

I looked down at the collapsed old man before scanning the rest of the Hunters.

“Anyone else want to take a vote?”

“....”

The decision to enter the passage was unanimous. We walked the seemingly-infinite corridor and finally arrived at the giant door at the end.

“But, how can there be a door at the end of the cave?”

“Has there ever been a boss room with a doorway before?”

“No, this is a first....”

“This... wouldn’t this be too dangerous?”

Noisy, noisy....

The Hunters didn’t bother to hide their high level of anxiety. I too had detected the truly scary aura leaking out from the interior and agreed with their opinion that things could get dangerous.

That was why as soon as I opened the door, I grabbed the collar of a Hunter standing at the front of the pack and lightly tossed him inside.

“U-uwahk?!”

The thrown idiot flailed about unsightly on the floor, but contrary to initial worries, nothing happened. Only after confirming that it was safe to enter, I strode right in. The vast open interior waiting for me was decorated like an ancient temple.

“W-what is this place??”

Other Hunters belatedly entered behind me and began searching around, but they were wasting their time doing that.

I closed my eyes for a brief moment and focused my senses; soon, I discovered the b*stard that was basically the true puppeteer of this place.

“It’s that one over there.”

Hunters quickly gathered in front of an angel statue holding a stone tablet that I pointed at.

“Looks like something is written on the tablet?”

“Uh, uh? It’s the Rune letters!”

It seemed that a Hunter capable of reading the Rune letters were not present among us, so I read it out loud for them, instead.

“The Laws of the Karutenon Temple.”

When I did, though, someone suddenly pulled at my arm. I looked behind me only to find a young girl with a completely pale complexion standing

there.

“T-the god statue over there, it....”

“Unhand me.”

I shook off the girl’s hands and continued to read down the stone tablet.

“One, worship the god. Two, exalt the god. Three, prove your piety. Those who do not keep to these laws shall not leave this place alive.”

It was at that exact moment two beams of crimson light shot out from the eyes of the gigantic god statue sitting in a corner over there.

Zzzziinnng-!!

I didn’t even bother to dodge or block those beams and simply stood up proudly to clash face-to-face with the attack.

“You dare to belittle this Emperor with so little power?!”

I ridiculed the destructive power of the beams that didn’t even come anywhere remotely close to that of the Breath fired by an Ancient-grade Dragon, before stepping forward to display what true destruction looked like.

Kwahaaaaaahhh-!!

The ‘Breath of Destruction’ fired out in a straight line from my mouth completely blew away the head of the god statue.

“Now that is true power.”

That served as the starting signal. The statues lining up the walls of the temple like some decorations began rushing towards me while ignoring other Hunters.

“Keuh-hahahahaha!!”

What a bunch of arrogant dolls!

With nothing but my bare hands, I began smashing apart the heads of the statues pouncing at me one by one.

Boom! Bang! Boom! Kwa-jeeck! Ka-boom!!

“Too slow!! So slow!”

Hunters quickly lowered themselves to the floor in order to dodge the debris flying all over the place. Some of them even began crying out, too.

“Why! Why does it feel like there was another way?!”

“What was up with those laws or whatever just now?!”

Even before their desperate cries could come to an end, most of the statues were turned into nothing more than shattered rubble by my hands. It was only obvious, but well, they didn't even serve their role as a proper warm-up for me.

“Is that all you have??”

The angel statue with the stone tablet suddenly rose up from its seat and loudly shouted out, perhaps incensed by the fact that all of its careful preparation had been rendered useless by my power.

[Y-you b*stard, just what is your iden.....]

“Silence!”

I yanked the spear loose from the grip of a broken statue and threw it straight at the angel. In less than a blink, the spear penetrated through the neck of the b*stard and it collapsed down to the floor.

I didn't come here to converse with a fake. What I wanted to bring out was the true figure hidden behind the scenes!

“Reveal yourself, you coward!”

I got rid of all the hindrances and roared out loudly, and that prompted the headless god statue to quietly raise itself up off its throne.

Indeed, that's better.

The corners of my lips curled up as the sensation of boiling blood coursed throughout this body. The god statue strode closer and stopped right before me to look down.

[The Sovereign of Destruction, our paths were fated to cross like this. Here, in this place, I shall put an end to our ill-fated relationship!]

“Ha-ha!! Now that is an excellent idea!”

The god statue was rapidly enveloped in a jet-black aura and transformed into a gigantic shadow, and I unleashed all of my strength in order to contend with that massive hunk of power.

An ecstatic jolt coursed from the tip of my toes right up to the ends of my hair.

“Come!”

Our battle would not end that easily!

“Heok?!”

Jin-Woo hurriedly raised his upper torso from the bed.

He spotted the familiar bed, familiar wallpapers, familiar ceiling, and his old computer. He quickly took a look around and finally realised that the place he woke up was in his own room.

‘It was a dream?’

It was a truly rubbish dream where he had become the Dragon Emperor. No, should he say that the Dragon Emperor became him, instead?

‘Hold up....’

He hurriedly confirmed the current time with his smartphone and sighed in relief afterwards. There was still some time left before the beginning of the exams.

‘Now that I think about it... It’s been four years already since I got rid of the Dragon Emperor.’

Time flew by in the blink of an eye, and here he was, scheduled to take the College Scholastic Ability Test later today. Him having a crap dream like this was good evidence of how tense he felt right now.

Smirk.

Jin-Woo chuckled helplessly for a moment there before getting up from the bed. Today, he’d get to confirm the fruit of his hard work and determination of the past four years.

He had already decided on which university he wanted to go to. Because this one person he just had to meet would attend that institution later on.

‘What a relief that you aren’t so good with studying, Jin-Ho.’

Yu Jin-Ho.

Jin-Woo reminded himself of the name of the guy he dearly missed and pulled open the curtains covering up the windows to the side. The dusky aura of the dawn was gradually fading away outside.

‘I shall go there first and wait for you.’

Jin-Woo breathed in the winds of the early morning entering through the open gap of his window while thinking about the reunion that’d take place in the near future. It was at that moment when the door to his room was pushed open, accompanied by the loud, hurried footsteps.

“S-son, you know that today is the CSAT day, right?”

“Son, as your father, I can take you there, you know?”

His parents couldn’t catch a wink during the night, worried that their son

might end up missing out on this all-important exam because he woke up a bit late today. Jin-Woo looked at their haggard faces and gently smiled while nodding his head.

“I’m ready.”

[Let’s go, my liege.]

Jin-Woo soon stepped out of his home as Igrit, sounding tense for some reason, spoke words of encouragement.

What a refreshing morning this was.



Chapter 258 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 15

The United States of America, inside the official residence of the nation's president – the White House.

Several bigshots gathered in this iconic white building created for the President of the U.S. of A to live and work.

“....”

Every single one of these important government officials occupying a spot inside the briefing room all carried tense expressions. Among them, one person carried the gloomiest expression.

The American President continued to rub his face, wondering over and over again if he had made the right call.

‘Rifts formed on an empty sky, and unidentified objects began appearing from there.’

It was an unprecedented historical event. But, was it the right thing to handle this incredible event without saying a word to the public at large?

No, before that, did they even possess the capability to deal with ‘the objects that came out’ from there?

All he could do was anxiously wait for the arrival of the commander in charge of the operation. And, when the entrance to the conference room opened up and General Chester Harrison entered, the President quickly got up from his seat to welcome the military man.

“Harrison, just what the hell happened back there?”

The final report sent in from the location of the event was...

...That report, sadly enough, lacked the most important ‘how’ of that normalisation process.

That was why so many bigshots, including the POTUS himself, were nervously waiting for the arrival of the military man inside this conference room.

Chester mouthed a brief greeting to his boss and scanned the room for a

short while, and stood in front of the room.

“Rather than me trying to describe the situation to you, it’ll be far quicker to play the video contained in here.”

What he was holding was a small USB stick. The President grew curious about its contents in an instant and hurriedly nodded his head.

Not just him, though, but everyone present within the room was staring at the tense-faced general’s hand. He slotted the USB stick in the terminal and video footage began playing on the giant screen installed on the wall of the conference room.

“This is the footage captured by the surveillance drones and robots.”

Chester Harrison spoke those short introductory words and stood beside the screen while swallowing down his own nervous saliva.

He couldn’t even begin to imagine how these folks would react to the footage about to be played. Well, he’d seen it several times before coming here, and he was still unsure how to take it, even now.

However, what was really important here was that it did happen.

The evidence of that was contained within this USB drive, and as the commander in charge of this operation, it was his duty to reveal it to this gathering of higher-ups.

The beginning of the footage started off with the ‘cracks’ in the sky.

“Keu-heum....”

“Huh-uh!”

Several gasps of shocks came from here and there as giants seemingly made out of rocks emerged from the rift reminiscent of dimension itself shattering away.

If it weren’t for the heads-up they received in regards to the existence of those bizarre creatures, the inside of the conference room would’ve descended into pure chaos by now.

But the truly shocking scene happened after that. In front of terrifying giants, ones so scary that you’d forget to even breathe while looking at them, stood the lone figure of a person.

‘Judging from his body size.... a boy?’

‘An East Asian, maybe?’

The Secretary of Defense couldn’t hold it back anymore and pointed at the

screen while asking his questions.

“That man!! Who is that man?? Where were our troops, Harrison? And why was there a civilian standing in the middle of those creatures?!”

It was as he said; this footage wasn't a record that everyone in this room was expecting to see in which the mightiest army on Earth – the American military – smashed apart and drove back the creatures of another world.

No, this video was all about a lone, nameless man whose face they couldn't even see.

With excellent timing, the screen now showed pitch-black 'soldiers' suddenly rising up from the ground behind that lone man. General Chester Harrison, his gaze fixed to the screen until then, spoke as if he was letting out a pained moan.

“....I'd like to know that myself as well.”

“Does it look like I'm alone to you?”

When those words came to an end, nearly ten million Shadow Soldiers simultaneously lined up right behind Jin-Woo.

The number of Titans that emerged from the rift in the sky was around several hundred. So, it was ten million versus a few hundred. In any other normal circumstances, the 'ten million' should've easily overwhelmed the opposition with this number.

The problem today, however, was the fact that each Titan possessed powers equal to that of higher existences.

Ba-thump, ba-thump!!

Facing a battle for the first time in a long while, Jin-Woo's heart began pounding away quite loudly. He sent a mental communication to Fangs, currently in charge of commanding all the Magic Soldiers.

[There is no problem on this side, my liege.]

Not just Fangs, but all of the Magic Soldiers were entrusted with performing and maintaining magic spells to minimise the shock waves that no doubt would be generated by this battle.

He had no choice but to do this, since this world had no Mana, and it was simply far too fragile as it currently was.

Also, the uninvited guests came here with the purpose of literally devouring this planet, so they wouldn't go about flinging around unnecessarily powerful magic spells, either. Inevitably, the battle about to take

place would be a confrontation involving physical powers between allies and enemy forces.

A contest of pure raw strength, in other words.

Thankfully, he didn't dislike such a type of fighting, to begin with. A smirk formed on Jin-Woo's lips.

One of the Titans completely misinterpreted the meaning behind that smirk and in the blink of an eye, smashed its fist down in pure rage.

BOOM-!!

Too bad, the target – Jin-Woo – had already risen up in the air. He had lightly jumped up like a pole vaulter and settled down gently on top of the Titan's fist like a falling feather.

‘.....?’

This Titan's expression hardened and a sense of ominous foreboding crept up along its backside after seeing that smile etched on the human's face as he stood upright on top of its fist.

Sure enough, the human began dashing forward on top of the arm next.

Pah-bababaht!

His legs were moving so fast that even the Titans, possessing as much power as higher beings, couldn't react in time. And when they did, Jin-Woo was already well past this particular Titan's shoulder, heading straight to the back of its neck.

Soon, the shortsword held in his hand penetrated straight into the Titan's rocky neck.

[Kuwaahk!!!]

It was almost like scratching the paint of a car with a coin. While gripping tight the shortsword still buried in the neck of the gigantic creature, Jin-Woo ran towards the other shoulder, leaving behind a long, long line on the poor thing's skin.

Kwa-gahgahgahgahk!!

The black aura loaded on the blade cleanly separated the head of the Titan from the rest of its body.

Riiip!

Jin-Woo stood tall on the shoulder as the huge head rolled off its body, and he provocatively glared at the other Titans. He could sense rage, fluster, and

fear creeping up on their expressions.

One at a time....

Memories, as well as the feelings he had while hunting down the Army of the Chaos World in the gap between dimensions, floated back up in his head one by one.

He knew he had succeeded in breaking the fighting spirit of these creatures.

His original goal was the complete annihilation of the race of Titans. And so, he finally had his Shadow Army break out of its standby mode and enter the fray.

‘All personnel, advance!!’

The will to fight from the enormous army beginning to make its move could be felt from below.

Waaaaaaahh-!!!

‘It’s no good that their leader stops moving here, right?’

At least, that was not his style, the style of the current Shadow Sovereign. Jin-Woo’s sharp glare began searching for his next prey.

Flinch.

One of the Titans that met Jin-Woo’s glare flinched its shoulders.

The enemy that lost itself to fear would be the first one to be devoured. He pounced in that direction while swinging his shortsword, packed full of black aura.

This blade might not have been the ‘Kamish’s Wrath’, but Jin-Woo had been roaming the battlefield for 27 years already, and the control he could exert on the black aura was no longer dependent on the weapons he wielded.

The black aura spreading out from the end of the shortsword stretched out towards his front and completely sliced up the face of the frozen Titan.

Kwa-gah-gahk!!

The giant that got terrified by the overwhelming power of this small lifeform lost its life so easily like that. However, as it turned out, not all Titans were cowards like this guy.

Jin-Woo’s brows shot up in surprise. Right behind the falling body of the dead Titan with its torn-off head, he could now see other Titans throwing everything they had in order to kill him.

He used his ability to fly to dodge beneath the huge fist approaching him

from the front, while another one sharply digging in from his back was avoided by him flying up.

The skill, 'Ruler's Authority', had now been fully ingrained within his body and he could manipulate it without any restriction whatsoever. The thing was, though, the enemies and their abilities also surpassed his expectations, as well.

The fist of a Titan slammed down like a hammer, and Jin-Woo kicked it away, only to be greeted by the back of a hand flying in from the side. He quickly gathered his arms and got ready for the impact while crouching, to minimise the surface area of his body.

BOOM-!!

In order to ensure that he wasn't flung away, Jin-Woo yanked at the back of the Titan's hand that smacked him with Mana. In an instant, that huge hand was pulled towards him and his shortsword, swung without mercy, sliced off the creature's wrist in one go.

Slice-!!

The Titan grabbed its now-severed wrist and roared loudly to the sky.

[Kuwaah-!!]

Jin-Woo rapidly approached its neck and stabbed his weapon deep into where the creature's Adam's apple should be.

Kwa-jeeck!

One razor-sharp killing move later, and another massive physique came crashing on its backside. Jin-Woo kicked the chest of the toppling Titan and jumped up high, before slicing and dicing the hands of the Titans relentlessly reaching out towards him.

To his side!

He dodged the edge of the Titan's hand, swung with all of the creature's might, by flying up, which in turn helped him to find enough leeway to take stock of the current situation.

In that briefest of moments, Titans keeping close to his position crashed into him with their shoulders from both sides.

BOOM-!!

“...!!”

Trapped between the two humongous shoulders, Jin-Woo extended his hands to stop himself from being squashed and then, shoved both of the

Titans away with his raw physical strength. Like an unbelievable lie, those two huge figures were pushed away from him.

[Keu-heum!]

[How could he, with such a small body of his?!]

While there were Titans freaking out over the fact that they lost out in the contest of strength, there was also another Titan who was smashing down with its arm as if it was waiting for this precise moment.

While the palm swung downwards viciously as if to crush a bug to death....

“UWAHHH-!!”

...Jin-Woo spat out Mana with a terrifying roar to deflect it away.

The Titan got flustered by the invisible hand suddenly shoving its arm away, only to belatedly realise something.

‘...??’

It realised that there was a massive black fist flying straight in its face.

KWA-BOOM!!

The black aura concentrated on Jin-Woo’s right hand morphed into the arm of a giant before cleanly blowing away the head of the Titan. Soon, he transformed into a giant himself by enveloping his body with the black aura and proceeded to mercilessly destroy the Titans around him.

Like a group of starving wild beasts, the giant shadow and the Titans made out of rocks went on a crazed melee of pure chaos and confusion.

The end result came out pretty quickly.

Right in the midst of the Titans kneeling and collapsing to the ground, the black shadow giant standing tall was busy crushing an arm made out of rock with his pure physical strength after ripping it off from one of its victims.

Wu-duduk!!

Maybe they finally had enough of Jin-Woo’s fighting spirit, the Titans surrounding him began backing away one step at a time.

‘...?’

Jin-Woo scanned his enemies with puzzled eyes, but then, a Titan even bigger and sturdier-looking than all the rest confidently strode out from among them.

Strangely enough, though....

[Hoh-oh.]

The one to actually speak was a rather small lifeform standing on the shoulder of this particular Titan, instead.

[I now see that even a small planet on the outskirts of the universe can contain a pretty useful talent.]

It was a humanoid made out of rocks that looked like a miniaturised version of the Titans. It threw a rather insidious grin in Jin-Woo's direction.

[However, the mere fact that you need to increase the size of your body in order to enhance your power is a sure sign of how primitive your species is. On the contrary, we, the Titans, decrease in size when we need to fight with everything we have.]

The talkative creature had both its hands reach out before pointing back at itself as a wide grin formed on its face.

[Fu-hut. Of course, such a thing is only possible for the greatest warriors of the Titan race.....]

It was then.

Jin-Woo was forming an expression of ridicule as he listened to the fool talk, but then, his head quickly snapped to the side.

Flash!!

With excellent timing, a streak of crimson light flew in from behind Jin-Woo and utterly erased the so-called greatest warrior of the Titans from existence.

It was fired by an Ancient-grade Dragon, which was currently being ridden on by Bellion. The Grand-Marshal asked his boss in a bit of fluster.

[My liege, were you perchance conversing with that creature?]

Jin-Woo shook his hand to show that it was all good and shifted his gaze towards Bellion.

“You know, these guys seem to be way too arrogant for their own good, so it looks like you’ll have to pay them extra special attention later on.”

[Please leave it to me, my liege.]

The trusty Grand-Marshal bowed his waist politely before flying away to somewhere else, and Jin-Woo took a sweeping look at the remaining Titans.

Most of the invading rock giants' higher-levelled combatants had been destroyed by Jin-Woo, and as for the remaining ones, they were being

overwhelmed by the black tidal waves created by his Shadow Soldiers.

[Kuwaaaahhk-!!]

[Kuwahk!!]

Loud screams spat out by the giants made out of rocks completely filled up this nameless stretch of the desert.

“...”

“.....”

Utter silence.

Could there be any other words that could better describe the current atmosphere pervading within the conference room?

As if someone doused the entire room in icy cold water, it was eerily quiet in there.

The POTUS had become completely speechless after watching the footage. However, he did eventually regain his voice, albeit with great difficulty.

“That man.... Have you uncovered his identity yet?”

The general shook his head in silence.

The true monster capable of toying with those scary-looking monsters ended up saving the United States of America without anyone even realising it.

‘No, maybe the entire world....’

Unfortunately... if you flip the notion of a power capable of saving the world on its head, it also implied that the same power could destroy this world, as well.

The President realised that uncovering the identity of that mystery man, at the very least, should be their top priority and asked the bigshots present within the conference room.

“Is there any way to uncover and confirm the identity of that man from the footage? Anyone?”

They began offering up their opinions here and there, but they all agreed that it was realistically impossible to do so. But then....

“Indeed, it may realistically be impossible. When we are talking about ‘realistic’ means, that is, sir.”

The director of America’s Central Intelligence Agency, David Brennan,

raised his voice. The President quickly looked at him.

“.....Is there something you’d like to tell us, Director?”

Director Brennan cautiously spoke up.

“If a realistic approach is impossible, how about we employ ‘unrealistic’ means, instead?”

The bigshots around him tilted their heads, but Director Brennan simply formed a grin.

“We do have a way. A certain person who can inform us of the truths that no one would have known, through fantastical means.”

Could he be talking about...?!

Pretty much everyone living in the United States of America would’ve heard of her name by now. It was an open secret within the world of politics that she had been maintaining a special relationship with the CIA.

The President recalled her name and his brows shot up.

“What you’re saying is....?”

The Director replied confidently.

“That’s right, sir. It’s Madam Norma Selner. Just like before, she will help us with the right answer this time as well.”



Chapter 259 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 16

Once more in the United States of America, somewhere in the quiet suburbs on the outskirts of a city. A black saloon car gliding smoothly on a certain road finally arrived at its destination – a small, but cosy and inviting house, with a red roof.

Tap, tap, tap.

The ones climbing out of the vehicle was the Director of the CIA, David Brennan, and his two bodyguards. The director studied the red-roofed residence for a little while before issuing a new order to his underlings.

“You two, wait for me here.”

“But, sir...”

Since these two agents were charged with protecting him, that order was a rather difficult one to accept, but the director’s attitude remained unchanging.

“It’s fine, it’s fine.”

He waved his hand dismissively towards his underlings trying to dissuade him.

“Madam doesn’t enjoy noisy visits like this, anyway.”

Leaving behind his entourage by the car, the director walked alone towards the front door and began fixing his attire. Once he felt satisfied by his grooming attempt, he cautiously knocked on the door.

“Madam? It’s me, Dav....”

Even before he could finish introducing himself, the door opened up and a young African-American child peeked his head out. The director recognised Madam Selner’s grandson and crouched lower to match the boy’s eye level before patting the kid on the head.

“Is your grandma home?”

“She’s been waiting for you, bearded uncle, for a while now.”

David Brennan looked at the child pointing at him and couldn’t help but chuckle gently.

But, of course. Just who was the woman he came here to speak to?

The psychic, the prophet, the real 'Esper'.

Didn't matter which title was used, none of them would sound ill-fitting to Madam Selner, the world's pre-eminent soothsayer. That's who he came here to see today.

Of course, it wasn't as if he trusted her words in the beginning.

But then, she began solving serious problems that even the CIA, an organisation at the peak of the cut-throat intelligence world, had given up on with preternatural abilities, and the director had no choice but to stop suspecting her gift there and then.

She was the real deal.

'A true superhuman...'

So, predicting his unannounced arrival for someone like her would be easier than, say, changing the channel on TV with a remote.

Guided by the grandchild, the director was led into the sitting room where the Madam was waiting for him with a cup of warm tea on top of a coffee table. He politely greeted her.

"It's been a while, Madam."

"Good to see you, Dave."

The director raised his head.

The last time he stepped in here was about a year ago; he took a look around at the interior decoration of the sitting room that hadn't changed since his last visit before carefully parking his butt on one of the couches.

"Madam, you probably can't imagine how difficult our work has become ever since you announced your retirement."

One could say that the information on the past was of no value compared to the information on the future.

The CIA reaped a great deal of harvest by cooperating with Madam Selner, so the sense of loss the agency felt after she retired was indeed well above one's imagination.

The director might have spoken with a smile as if he was cracking a joke, but his genuine belief, hidden beneath the surface, could be heard if one paid closer attention.

Too bad, the Madam spoke composedly as if she was tiding a young child

throwing a tantrum for more cookies.

“Dave, I’ve already told you this, haven’t I? I can no longer see the future after that person arrived.”

“Ah....”

Was she talking about that story of the ‘God of Death’ again?

The director could only smack his lips wryly at the exact same answer she gave every time he asked her.

It was the story about how her powers became useless after an existence powerful enough to twist destiny as he saw fit had descended to this world.

The director forgot what he wanted to say next after remembering her reason for retiring, one that defied one’s attempt to understand through logic.

“....”

And so, silence weighed down between these two people.

David Brennan wondered how he should go about breaking this awkward atmosphere before his nose picked up on the enticing aroma of food.

“Madam, were you in the middle of a meal?”

She slowly shook her head.

“Actually, I have been entertaining another guest.”

“Ah.... I see.”

She didn’t enjoy meeting with people, yet she was with another visitor?

The director tilted his head slightly, but soon enough, made up his mind to stop beating around the bush. The smile on his face vanished next.

“In that case, I shall get right to the point and get out of your hair as soon as possible.”

When he said that, though, the Madam replied as if she was waiting for him.

“The answer to the first question is a ‘yes’, and for the second one, a ‘no’.”

“H-hang on....”

The director could only form a flustered expression when his questions were answered even before he had a chance to say them out loud. She grinned refreshingly.

“You wish to ask me how I knew about your questions if I can’t see the

future anymore, am I wrong?"

"...Well, no."

"Dave. The answers you seek from me are actually the matters of the past. I simply took a glimpse at a portion of the past and provided you with a suitable answer."

"Oh. Ohh..."

The director nodded his head, a soft moan leaving his lips. She carefully continued on.

"Well, then. Shall I provide you with proper answers to your questions?"

David Brennan pulled out a handkerchief and dabbed the sweat on his forehead.

"Of course. Please go ahead, Madam."

She then began with her explanations.

"That's right, Dave. I know just who it is that you wish to find out about."

Her answer to the first question was 'yes'. However, her answer to the follow-up question was 'no'.

"Unfortunately, I will not divulge any information on that person to anyone."

"But, Madam!"

The director's voice suddenly grew louder. He wasn't trying to threaten her or anything like that. It was just that his agitation got the better of him and he ended up shouting out.

"If it's you, Madam, then you should already know what he has done! We can't just let someone like that run around without a respo....."

It was at that moment that the Madam herself shouted out as if she couldn't hold it in anymore.

"I'm choosing not to say anything precisely because I know!"

This must've been the very first time seeing her like this.

The director didn't know what kind of expression he should form now after being confronted by the Madam's angry expression for the first time ever. Too bad for him, though, her angry voice didn't stop there.

"Director, are your eyes just for decorations??"

“Madam!”

“Didn’t you see the footage contained in that USB drive, then??”

“...”

Indeed, he did see it.

He saw the sight of a single human being not even taking a step back while standing up to those frightening giant monsters. The power that man possessed was scary and incredible, but it did rescue humanity back then.

“Would you believe me if I told you...that event wasn’t the first time?”

The Madam formed a serious, nay, a grave expression, and the director’s own expression froze up instantly.

“...”

There was another incident like that in the past??

The moment the director thought of humanity facing extinction-level threats multiple times in the past without him knowing about them, his entire body began shuddering uncontrollably.

But when he pondered it some more, he realised that such a case wasn’t so surprising anymore; even this event had been classified as a top-top secret by the U.S. government and, besides an extremely small number of people related to the matter, no one else knew just what happened or who did what on that particular day.

If that was the case, could he really come out and say with full confidence that no similar things happened in other countries as well?

‘Perhaps, just like what Madam has said, that man really.....’

The director rested his chin on his hand and began pondering something else before raising his head.

“No, I trust you, Madam.”

He only knew her for around three years, but for some reason, he’d sometimes get this feeling that he’d known her for a far longer time than that. That was perhaps the reason why he felt this sense of trust in her. One based on absolutely nothing but his gut feeling, really.

The Madam nodded her head in reply. The director cautiously asked her another question.

“That man from the footage.... Can you assure me that he’s not a dangerous individual?”

She answered him without a moment of hesitation.

“Yes, I can.”

He nodded his head again, alone this time, and as if he finally came to a conclusion, raised his head.

“In that case, I understand. I shall pretend that I never heard you talking about that man.”

The director rose up from his spot while forming a rueful but relieved face.

“Well, then.”

He bade her a short goodbye and turned around to leave, but her warm voice stopped his feet from taking another step.

“Dave, I’ve baked some cookies. Would you like some?”

“Oh....”

He spotted a bag of cookies in her hand, but could only decline the offer with a smile of his own.

“No, I’m fine. Thank you for your offer.”

Now that his official visit was over, his expression reverted to that of a regular, normal uncle. The Madam bade him goodbye with a gentle smile and called for her grandson to guide him to the car.

The child really liked this ‘bearded uncle’ for some reason, so he quickly rushed to the bearded David Brennan and hung on to the older man’s hand.

“I shall come again sometime later, Madam.”

“Be careful on your way, Dave.”

The director, his hand still being held tightly by her grandchild, finally left the residence, prompting the other guest hiding on the other side of the sitting room to emerge into the open.

“Huh. I don’t like that old man. Hey, grandma, should I go teach him a lesson for you?”

He was a giant of a man with slicked-back blonde hair. He took a handful of cookies out from the bag in Madam’s hand and shoved them inside his mouth.

“Thomas, I thought your competition licence will be revoked if you caused another incident outside the ring?”

Thomas grinned sheepishly and chewed on the cookies that filled up his

mouth.

Crunch, crunch....

“Well, that is...”

This man was none other than Thomas Andre.

Not many people knew that the current Heavyweight champion of the UFC was one of her very few friends that she chose to keep. If the reporters learned of this fact, they would jump up and down in sheer madness while clicking the shutters of their cameras non-stop.

He emptied out the bag of cookies in the blink but that didn't seem to fill him up at all, so he took the bag itself and tossed the cookie crumbs down his gullet next. When he was finally done, he opened his mouth to speak.

“Hey, grandma. Can I ask you a question?”

She grinned refreshingly and nodded her head. Thomas rolled the empty bag into a ball as he spoke.

“I'm sure lots of people die through accidents, not just someone like me.”

Especially with car crashes, where innumerable people would die almost every single day. However, almost none of them would receive a phone call from the Madam before that happened.

On that much-awaited off day, Thomas was climbing inside his treasured sports car so he could go for a crazy-fast drive through the back roads. And then, he became one of the very lucky few that did get that fateful phone call.

After answering her call, he hurriedly checked out the tyres of his beloved ride only to find a small nail stuck in one. Thankfully, he avoided getting into an accident, but if he started the car and drove away, then he'd have lost his life, just as how Madam had warned him.

Which meant that Madam Norma Selner was the saviour of his life.

Afterwards, Thomas grew close enough to her to share meals like this, yet what happened on that day still remained a mystery to him.

“Why did you save me on that day?”

Well, she couldn't possibly have been a fan of the UFC and that prompted her to quickly pick up the phone, so....

Thomas Andre always felt curious about why she went out of her way to help him.

“.....”

Madam Selner looked at him without saying anything after hearing his rather sudden question, before providing a belated answer to her friend, one of the top sports stars in the country.

“Because... you did many good things in your past life.”

“....I did?”

Thomas Andre, known as the ‘Bad Boy’ of the UFC, no, Devil of the Octagon, did what now?

He briefly wondered if this grandma ate something she shouldn’t have, but then, he decided not to say what popped up in his head after remembering that he owed her big time.

“Hohoh.”

Madam chuckled softly and shifted her gaze outside the sitting room window to stare at the black saloon driving away with the CIA’s director inside. Her grandson was waving his hand at the ‘bearded uncle’ until the car couldn’t be seen anymore.

The ‘relationships’.

Seeing that relationships of the past were being formed anew either consciously or subconsciously by the parties involved, perhaps this ‘fate’ was a real thing after all.

That’s how she felt right now.

After confirming that the director was gone for sure, Thomas plopped down on the very spot on the couch where the leader of the CIA once sat.

“Alright, then. Just what did the man in the video do that an uncle like him came to see you?”

Madam replied in a tone of voice belonging to someone busy putting up still-wet clothes on the washing line.

“He saved the world.”

“.....”

Sometimes, it was hard to tell whether this old lady was joking or was being dead serious.

‘Well, that’s why it’s so fun being around her, anyway.’

Thomas put on the pair of sunglasses he liked to wear all the time, and shifted his now-darkened gaze towards Madam Selner.

“In that case.... What would Mister Hero who saved the world be doing

right about now?”

Madam kept her gaze on her grandchild walking back inside the house, a quiet smile forming on her lips.

“Hmm, I wonder.... Maybe he’s enjoying his youth to the fullest somewhere?”

Waaahhh-!!

In the location of the qualifying rounds of the track and field competition filled with the heated cheerings of the spectators, featuring schools from all over South Korea.

When the captains of the two rival high school track teams came together on the field, perhaps unsurprisingly, proverbial flames began erupting from the eyes of both men.

“Oiii, Choi Tae-Woong! Looks like you’ve lost your way, doesn’t it!! You even let a freshman enter every type of competition, didn’t you!”

Jin-Woo’s school track team was now facing off against the pointed ridicule belonging to the captain of their long-time rival from Hwaseong Tech High, Joh Gi-Seok.

“I heard that your former ace, Woo Sahng-In, got injured and took a break for a few months. Did that result in your prowess falling so much that you don’t have a choice but to make a freshman your new ace??”

Joh Gi-Seok continued on with his provocation, but Choi Tae-Woong simply smirked brightly and grasped Jin-Woo’s shoulder.

“Soon enough, you lot won’t be able to close your mouths at the talents of this first year.”

“Heee~yah, rather than you guys breaking more records, you got better at cracking jokes, instead!”

Figurative sparks flew in all directions after these two’s war of nerves grew to an intense level. Meanwhile, Jin-Woo was scratching the side of his head with his index finger.

‘With things like this, it’s going to be difficult to stick to my plan of holding back so that I won’t get noticed....’

While Jin-Woo stood there showing just a tiny hint of how troubled he was, Joh Gi-Seok scanned him from top to bottom and received a great boost of confidence from his expression. The corners of the Hwaseong Tech High Captain’s lips curled upwards.

“Here’s the thing, though. What a funny coincidence this is, you know?”

Joh Gi-Seok turned around and gestured towards his team members; when he did, a big dude standing behind them strode forward with an expression filled pure, unbridled confidence.

“You see, we also got ourselves a freaky freshman, too.”

It was at that point that Jin-Woo ended up blurting out a surprised cry after seeing the face of this so-called freaky freshman.

“Uh?”

“Looks like your own freshman can sense it already, no?”

Joh Gi-Seok increased the volume of his voice while placing his hand on the shoulder of the newbie team member who possessed a physique that far surpassed the level of a regular high schooler.

“This kid here, he’s Hwaseong Tech High’s secret weapon, Kim Cheol from the first year.”



Chapter 260 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 17

The 'impulse'.

An overwhelming impulse, that's what Kim Cheol felt; this powerful impulse, strong enough to nearly blow his reasoning away, almost completely swallowed him up.

'But..... But how come I.....'

Why did he want to kneel down in front of a kid that he'd never seen before, a student from the same year, but from another school?

In that brief moment, if he didn't force his ankles and calves to be still with all his might, then he would've shown a pretty disgraceful sight to everyone.

Way too close for comfort, indeed.

Kim Cheol couldn't describe this situation in any other way. Still, he managed to overcome it somehow and wiped the cold sweat pooling on his forehead with the back of his hand.

It was at that moment that a really plausible theory popped up in his head.

'Could it be that.... I'm scared by a dude from the same year as me?'

If it was not that, then how else could he explain away this current situation where his breathing quickened up suddenly and he wanted to avert his gaze while all strength drained out of his legs, as soon he met his opponent's eyes?

Too bad, Kim Cheol simply couldn't accept reality as it was.

'Don't make me laugh!!'

By relying on his superior physique surpassing that of high schoolers, as well as physical strength that matched his size, Kim Cheol enjoyed incredible prominence during his middle school days. Yet here he was, getting scared by another kid in the same age bracket?

Such a thing was not possible. No, more than that, such a thing could not be allowed to happen.

"H-hey, Cheol-ah? What's wrong?"

“You feeling okay, my man?”

The seniors began showing concern for his well-being, and as his reply, veins bulged in Kim Cheol’s throat as he roared out.

“Nothing’s wrong, seniors!!”

‘That’s right, there’s nothing wrong with me!’

Kim Cheol convinced himself of this fact and powerfully nodded his head.

‘Right, I was suffering from a simple dizzy spell because I didn’t have a fulfilling breakfast. That must be it.’

In order to prove right the theory that he just cooked up on the spot, Kim Cheol slowly raised his head and stared straight at the freshman of the opposing school.

Although possessing a pretty well-trained physique, the first-year high school kid standing there was like a stalk of straw compared to himself. Finally regaining some sort of leeway now, a grin floated up on Kim Cheol’s lips.

Smirk.

‘...I knew it.’

Getting scared by a kid that might get knocked out in one punch from him? What an absurd thing that was.

Kim Cheol straightened his slightly hunched figure as the unbridled confidence from earlier on returned to his face.

The members of the Hwaseong Tech High’s track team were feeling worried from the sudden changes Kim Cheol was going through, but they regained their smiles after confirming that their ace had returned to how he was.

“Dayum, you surprised me there.”

“I’m telling you, our ace freshman really knows how to command attention.”

The seniors patted his shoulder to encourage him, and Kim Cheol replied with a confident smile before fixing his gaze back on Jin-Woo.

‘What a disgrace, why did a dizzy spell have to happen at the same time as looking into that guy’s eyes...?’

Kim Cheol began thinking that he needed to return this ill-timed disgrace he suffered back to his opponent tenfold somehow. The best method to

overturn an embarrassing situation was to suppress the other's spirit.

‘.....’

Only now did he notice that, even though he was glaring at the kid, this fellow first-year was being insolent by standing upright and shooting a glare right back.

Not once did Kim Cheol let a moron like that walk away in one piece until now.

“Hey, you.”

He lowered his voice and pointed to the rear of the athletic field with his chin.

“I’ve got something to say to you, so follow me to over there for a sec.”

Oh, ohh-!

While the members of the Hwaseong Tech High's track team whistled in excitement at their junior's spirited display, Jin-Woo's seniors were hurriedly blocking him from disinterestedly following after Kim Cheol.

“Jin-Woo! Listen to me, you mustn't commit murder!”

“You ain't thinking of spilling someone's blood on the day of the competition, right?? You gotta hold it in.”

“That's right, let's just think of it as saving a poor soul today and let that kid be.”

Jin-Woo chuckled and gently shook off the hands of his seniors.

“Don't worry, seniors. I'm sure nothing will happen over there.”

The seniors tried to confirm the safety of his 'opponent' once more.

“Really? There really won't be anything bad happening to that kid, right?”

“We're choosing to believe you.”

“That friend over there, he's definitely walking back here on his own two feet, right?”

Jin-Woo smiled brightly in order to put the worries of his seniors to rest and quickly walked over in the direction Kim Cheol had disappeared to.

‘.....’

The captain of Hwaseong's track team, Joh Gi-Seok, watched all of this unfold from the side and formed a disbelieving expression before walking up

closer to his rivals.

“You guys.... You all being serious right now?”

Choi Tae-Woong sneaked a glimpse at Joh Gi-Seok’s face before shifting his gaze back in the direction where Jin-Woo had gone off to and spoke up in a worried tone of voice.

“Don’t talk to me, man. I’m feeling really conflicted right now.”

Choi Tae-Woong had been watching Jin-Woo’s monster-like motor reflexes from a close vantage point, so all he could do now was to fervently pray for that fella named Kim Cheol to not try anything funny for his sake.

While walking after Kim Cheol, Jin-Woo’s anticipation grew just a tiny bit. Could it be that this kid also regained the memories of the past, too?

If that was the case, how would human ‘Kim Cheol’, and not the Shadow Soldier ‘Iron’, react to the memories of those days?

Unfortunately, it didn’t look like Kim Cheol had called him over here to discuss their past, judging from the light in the kid’s eyes as he turned around.

“Hey, you.”

The high school kid’s murderous eyes were now looking down on Jin-Woo.

“What, just because I’m wearing a school uniform while standing on the same field as you, you think I’m a pushover?”

Kim Cheol was getting riled up here, but well, the sight of him being agitated like this reminded Jin-Woo of him losing his crap back inside the Red Gate, which caused an unplanned smirk to break out in response.

Sure, he did get annoyed back then, but now, weren’t they all his cherished memories? Too bad, though, Kim Cheol didn’t remember a single thing from those days, and Jin-Woo’s smile didn’t go down all that well with him.

“You son of a b*tch!”

Kim Cheol’s rough hands reached out and grabbed Jin-Woo’s collars in an instant. When that happened, there was a chorus of ‘Waaaah-!!’ breaking out from his shadow, made by the Shadow Soldiers cheering out loudly.

[Yes, Iron is returning to us!]

[Welcome back, Iron!]

[My liege, entrust this lost sheep to me. I, Bellion, swear to re-educate him properly and ensure an event like this will never happen again....]

‘.....’

It seemed that there was a real need to teach his Shadow Soldiers about the ways of the modern world. Jin-Woo inwardly tutted and stared deeply into Kim Cheol's eyes.

Without a doubt, someone was challenging him right now, but maybe because the fond memories of the days when this kid was a loyal Shadow Soldier, Jin-Woo just couldn't bring himself to despise him.

No, rather than that, he grew real curious about whether Kim Cheol would regain all the lost memories if they came in physical contact here.

'.....'

The burly high school kid sensed something strange from Jin-Woo's eyes and inadvertently swallowed dry saliva.

'What's going on....?'

If this was in the past, he'd not give a d*mn about being disqualified from the track competition and have thrown a punch by now, since the other guy was seemingly making fun of him.

But, rather than emotions of anger or even the desire to settle the score, a different kind of feeling, thicker and purer than anything else, began to wiggle violently from the deepest part of his chest.

And as Kim Cheol stood there conflicted on what to do next, Jin-Woo slowly and cautiously grasped the boy's wrist right then.

The ends of his fingers touched Kim Cheol's skin.

When that happened....

"Uh....??"

Tears began flooding out from the boy's eyes.

He didn't know why he was crying all of a sudden, yet the tears didn't want to stop falling down. Soon, all strength abandoned his legs and he plopped down to the ground.

"B-but, why....?"

Kim Cheol looked up at Jin-Woo.

He was searching for an answer, but all he got in return was a rueful smile from the mysterious boy, instead.

'If the Sovereign's memories weren't shared in the past, then the memories won't come back even if we make physical contact, huh?'

Unless... he restored the memories forcibly, that was.

Jin-Woo recalled the faces of people he shared his memories with, in the now-erased past.

'Association President Woo Jin-Cheol, and...'

....And, Madam Norma Selner.

He thought about the distinct possibility that she might have also regained the memories from the erased timeline, and while wondering about that, he turned around to leave.

He no longer had any business with 'Iron', no, 'Kim Cheol'. Because... the kid was living as a 'human', and not as a Shadow Soldier, now.

But then, the boy on his knees called out to Jin-Woo and stopped him in his tracks.

"H-hang on..... Wait."

Kim Cheol wiped his eyes with his hands and hurriedly stood back up. His tears might have stopped, but his nose was still beet-red, but not caring about that, he squarely met Jin-Woo's gaze shifting back at him so he could speak, his voice choked up with thick emotion.

"This, is this.... what they call love?"

He was being swept up by the sudden torrent of powerful emotions that he had never experienced before. Although he was deeply mistaken about what his feelings were, he was dead serious right now as he had ever been in his life.

"..."

Jin-Woo stared at the boy for a long while in an utter daze, feeling like he's been struck hard in the back of his head. Eventually, a lengthy groan escaped from his mouth.

"....This won't do."

Indeed, he couldn't let some poor kid live the rest of his life confused about his sexual orientation like this, now could he? When Jin-Woo walked closer, Kim Cheol's cheeks blushed beet red like a maiden in love.

Unfortunately...

Snap!

All signs of cognition and emotion were wiped from the boy's face along with the sound of fingers snapping. Kim Cheol's eyes lost focus and became blurry. Jin-Woo stood in front of him and began inserting new memories to replace the old one.

“Okay, so.... You tried to provoke me, but then found out, coincidentally, that I was the son of your father’s friend’s friend’s friend and that’s how we got to resolve our differences.”

Kim Cheol dazedly nodded his head.

“Oh, and also....”

For a brief moment there, Jin-Woo recalled back to when the kid was still ‘Iron’ and was crying his eyes out as they were about to say goodbye, right before the Chalice of Rebirth was to be used. A thin smile floated up on his lips and he continued on.

“From here onwards, you gotta stop behaving like a bad person, alright? You were one of the guys who fought to protect this world, so be proud of yourself, man.”

“.....Yes, sir.”

After hearing a hushed, soft reply leaking out of Kim Cheol’s lips, Jin-Woo finally undid the hypnosis and let the boy be.

Snap.

“Uh.... Eh?”

Kim Cheol regained his consciousness and stayed rooted in his spot for a little while, utterly confused, only to belatedly discover Jin-Woo’s distancing back over yonder.

As if he was separating again from a friend he met after a long time, Jin-Woo waved his hand in a genial manner.

“Hey, see you again next time!”

“Uh.... O-okay.”

Feeling bewildered by this situation, Kim Cheol waved his hand and smiled along awkwardly as well.

‘Nice.’

Jin-Woo turned away from the kid’s direction, a happy grin forming on his face now. The unexpected encounter with an old comrade had come to a successful conclusion, but it was now time to search for that girl in earnest.

With excellent timing, he heard the announcement reverberating throughout the athletics field.

Somewhere at the far back of the athletics field, which was quiet and sparsely populated.

A young girl managed to get to the shade of a tree with some difficulty and plopped down on her butt there. Her shaking hands reached down to take off one of her shoes and her sock. Her swollen ankle testified as to what her current situation was.

She lightly bit her lower lips and glared at her ankle, before squeezing her eyes shut and leaning against the tree's sturdy trunk.

What a blunder it was.

Her shoulder was shoved away by another runner right next to her and that caused her to stumble ungainly during the race. She somehow managed to pass the first round of preliminaries even with this fairly heavy injury, but now....

Now, it was clearly asking for too much to compete again with her leg being like this.

'I'm furious....'

Indeed, she was.

This might be the last time she competed as a middle schooler, and so, she didn't want to end the day with an injury.

That was why....

'That's why... I should just carry on.'

This was a line of thought that could only be cooked up by the head of an immature middle schooler, who still hadn't shed the mindset of a child yet.

And it was the role of the adults to stop such a child from going down the wrong path since the dawn of time itself.

"You want to hide your injury?"

The girl flinched grandly after hearing the voice of a male student, walking out from behind the tree, that she failed to detect earlier. This mysterious male student didn't look at her, but instead, stared into the distance.

"Even though a certain someone competed in that condition, hurt her ankle even more and had to spend over a year to recuperate, but still ended up as a third-rate athlete and could only regret the decision she made today?"

The male student shifted his gaze back to the girl with her wide-open eyes and formed a refreshing grin.

"I was talking about a person that I know, actually."

Here was a strange guy telling her a strange tale. But the girl, Cha Hae-In, didn't immediately run away from here and instead, chose to observe the boy for a bit longer.

'Isn't he an athlete....? A high schooler, right?'

She could detect a hint of this nice scent coming from the male student for some reason.

As for the identity of that scent, the 'smell' of the purest Mana leaking out of Jin-Woo, as well as her possessing a unique constitution that allowed her to sniff out Mana, she'd get to learn about them much, much later on.

As Hae-In grew more flustered by the second, Jin-Woo crouched near her and carefully placed his hand on her swollen ankle.

"Ah...."

She flinched again for a moment there but didn't resist him all that much, either. And when his hand left her skin, her ankle was completely healed.

She raised up her shocked eyes and stared at Jin-Woo.

"Run without any regrets. You only have one shot, right?"

She shone so brightly as a rank S Hunter fighting against monster threats, but today, her sweating figure under the bright sunlight would shine just as wonderfully.

Jin-Woo smiled and tried to stand back up, only for his wrist to be grasped in a hurry by Hae-In.

"W-wait a minute."

".....?"

Could it be that a change occurred with the contact they made just now? Now facing off against Jin-Woo's curiosity-laden gaze, Hae-In's face flushed just a little.

"Excuse me, we.... Have we met somewhere before?"

She had to work up so much of her courage just to ask that simple-enough question that even her neck had turned beet-red by the time she was done asking it.

"Let's run."

"Eh?"

Hae-In visibly grew confused, but Jin-Woo maintained his grin.

“If you run against me and ever win, then I’ll tell you everything.”

“.....I saw you compete, oppa. I saw you coming in at first place in every preliminary race you entered.”

Jin-Woo smirked and stood back up.

“I’ll take that answer as you giving up.”

But then...

“I-if that’s the case!”

Cha Hae-In worked up her courage once more and made a suggestion.

“The record for the preliminaries about to take place in a bit.... How about you telling me the truth when I break that? Even if it’s not right now?”

Jin-Woo’s head lowered and did his best to suppress his chuckles.

‘Whether she’s younger or older, she’s still so pure.’

While briefly entertaining the idea of breaking the world record for the under-18 track event today, he nodded his head, a warm smile filling up his face.

“Alright, deal.”

Having successfully changed the condition of the bet, Hae-In formed a sunny smile as well.

‘Well, you ain’t going to be smiling later, though.’

Jin-Woo turned around and left her side for the athletics field while continuing to suppress his chuckles from breaking out.

On that day.

Under the bright spring sunlight, the world record for high school male athletes was shattered in what was supposed to be yet another ordinary preliminary race meet.

And the track team Jin-Woo was a part of defeated their rival Hwaseong Tech High on their way to achieving their goal of an overall first place finish.



Chapter 261 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 18

Since he didn't share his memories with them, Jin-Woo had not thought of the possibility of it happening, but the truth was, there were a few other people who were still connected to the higher beings on Earth.

And, out of them all, one person was quite lucky enough to have physical contact with Jin-Woo, who was a higher being himself.

A certain early morning.

“Son? What’s the matter?”

His son emerging from the room having just woken up looked like he was about to break down and cry, so Seong Il-Hwan reached out and gently grasped the boy's shoulders, only to be greeted by the spectacle of a different past playing right before his eyes.

It happened in the briefest of the brief moments that didn't even last a blink, but that was more than enough to tell the tale spanning several years that felt as long as eternity itself.

Tumble.

His final moments that caused his heart to tumble to the pit of his stomach flashed past his eyes. Then, the time wound back and the memories of how the present came to be played out in a panorama being played backwards.

The one and only tool of God that could cause a phenomenon like this, the 'Chalice of Rebirth'. Seong Il-Hwan knew of the artefact's existence through the memories of the Rulers, and after looking at the boy's current facial expression, he instantly realised that his son must've had reached some kind of a deal with the higher beings.

Indeed, Jin-Woo had decided to carry the weight, the cost, of the deal all by himself, regardless of how heavy it was. Seong Il-Hwan had to bite down on his lower lip in order to suppress his emotions and prevent them from bursting forth right then.

His efforts must've not been in vain, because Jin-Woo wiped away the tears threatening to break out and formed a smile.

“....I must’ve had a nightmare.”

At that moment, Seong Il-Hwan saw the powerful determination flicker for a blink of an eye on his son’s face.

But even then, no, even when Jin-Woo left behind a single note and disappeared from this world, he couldn’t even guess just what kind of ‘promise’ his son had made with the Rulers.

“....I’d never imagined that promise was to defeat the entirety of the Army of the Chaos World all by himself.”

Seol Il-Hwan recalled that very day and let out a helpless chuckle.

What if he got to find out about his son’s deal before the boy jumped into the gap between dimensions and disappeared? Would he have stopped Jin-Woo, or for the sake of the world, let the kid leave?

“Still, hasn’t he beautifully taken care of it?”

The envoy of the Rulers sitting on the opposite side of him smiled refreshingly.

Seong Il-Hwan had his lips firmly shut now, but he nodded his head regardless. Thanks to Jin-Woo’s sacrifice, this world was spared from the horrifying war that was supposed to tear through this planet.

But, when he thought about the terrible suffering his son must’ve gone through during those years, Seong Il-Hwan just couldn’t bring himself to smile anymore.

It had been almost one year since Jin-Woo returned from the gap between dimensions.

“My son....”

His hesitating voice was drowned out by the gently-flowing background music of the cafe they were in. The Ruler’s envoy sipped the half-remaining coffee with his straw as he unhurriedly waited for Seong Il-Hwan to continue on.

“What was my son’s decision?”

“The Shadow Sovereign has....”

The envoy discovered the traces of nervousness flit past Seong Il-Hwan’s face and formed a thin smile.

“....Chosen to stay in this world. He said that every minute and every second spent in this world is precious to him.”

Seong Il-Hwan inwardly spat out a lengthy sigh of relief.

The envoy emptied out his cup and silently placed it back on the table. He had to remain in this world until Jin-Woo made up his mind, but that role came to an end yesterday.

Which meant that it was time to leave. Seong Il-Hwan would be the very last guest he'd entertain before leaving this world for good.

Maybe that was the reason? Although he wasn't really the talkative type, he wanted to converse for just a bit longer today.

“Are you planning to continue deceiving Shadow Sovereign-nim.... no, your son?”

“That’s what he wants, no one remembering the past. So, yes.”

If what Jin-Woo wanted was the normal, regular family life, then as his father, Seong Il-Hwan was fully committed to continuing the charade until the end of time itself.

“I see. Like father, like son.”

The envoy smirked and nodded his head before raising his gaze a little higher.

“Once I leave, the Rulers will no longer interfere with this world.”

“I know.”

“Which means, this really is the end. With this world....”

The envoy scanned the interior of the cafe and spoke with an emotional voice.

“It has been fun. Truly. To be honest, right up until the Shadow Sovereign-nim made his triumphant return, I had been waiting with bated breath on what destiny had in store for us.”

The envoy held back slightly and didn't mention that even the Rulers didn't expect to see Jin-Woo succeed in his quest. Well, there was no reason to pour a bucket of cold water on this emotional farewell, was there?

Just before he bade his farewell and stood up to leave, the envoy addressed his guest once more.

“The Rulers express their unreserved gratitude towards not just Shadow Sovereign, but to you as well, Seong Il-Hwan-nim.”

It was unknown whether a result like this would've been achieved without his help. He fought for the sake of the Rulers, and he even suggested that the

higher beings cooperate with the Shadow Sovereign, too. Indeed, his role had been great.

The Rulers had decided as thus, and they prepared a small gift for him in return.

“By any chance, is there something we can help you with?”

When considering that the Rulers possessed incredible powers as well as various ‘tools of God’, this was akin to them saying, ***“We will grant any wish you have.”***

However, Seong Il-Hwan shook his head almost immediately.

“I have none.....”

But, that made sense. The envoy could understand where he was coming from. There was an existence on the level of a god living as family right next to him, so what was the point of voicing his wishes here?

“Well, then.”

The envoy bowed his head slightly and got ready to stand up, but then, Seong Il-Hwan belatedly said something else.

“Hang on.”

The envoy stopped and settled back down on the chair again.

“Is there something else....?”

Seong Il-Hwan pondered for a bit and spoke up with some difficulty.

“My memories.... Is it possible for you to erase my memories of the previous timeline?”

“Yes, it’s possible, but why would you choose to do so....?”

“Well, it’s unimaginably hard to keep pretending in front of a son with an amazing perception, you see.”

Seong Il-Hwan smirked once he was done. Again, like father, like son – his grinning face was almost a dead-ringer for Jin-Woo’s.

“And, also....”

Seong Il-Hwan lowered his gaze and fell into thought for a bit again, before continuing on with his words slowly.

“I also wish to become a regular dad who worries about his son’s welfare.”

He wanted to return to being just a simple father who felt anxious about his

son possibly coming back home injured in some way, and a father who sighed in disappointment at his son's exam results – a man who worried about his 'regular' son, in other words.

“To me, Jin-Woo isn't the Shadow Sovereign, but a precious son, you see.”

That was Seong Il-Hwan's small wish.

“I understand.”

If that was his reasoning, then it'd be no problem. The envoy smiled gently and granted Seong Il-Hwan's wish.

“Once you exit from this cafe, all memories of the previous timeline will completely be erased from your mind.”

As the envoy began performing the magic spell on Seong Il-Hwan, he whispered a goodbye so small that no one could hear it properly.

“You won't remember this, but still... I pray that you get to live a fulfilling life.”

Time continued to tick by.

On a certain cold winter morning.

The alarm set for six in the morning went off without a hitch and Seong Il-Hwan shot up from his 'sleep'. His wife woke up at the same time, too, and stared straight at him.

“What about Jin-Woo?”

“Yes, what happened to him?”

The couple quickly checked the time and breathed a collective sigh of relief after realising that it was still only six in the morning.

“Dear, what should we do? Should we go and wake Jin-Woo up?”

“No, there's still some time left until the beginning of the CSAT, so I think it should be fine to let him rest for a little while longer.”

“You're right. I can always drive him to the exam location with my car, anyway.”

“At seven.... Let's wake him up around seven, Dear.”

Seong Il-Hwan nodded his head at his wife's suggestion.

The couple anxiously waited for the needles of the clock to hit seven and when the fated time came, they rushed out of their bedroom to slam the door

to Jin-Woo's room wide open.

“S-son, you know that today is the CSAT day, right?”

“Son, as your father, I can take you there, you know?”

Their son seemed to have woken up not too long ago. He replied with a chuckle.

“I’ll get ready to leave now.”

After confirming that Jin-Woo left his room, Seong Il-Hwan hurriedly threw on his clothes and reached out to grab the car keys, only for his gaze to be stolen by the key ring – a gift from his son.

When he looked at this seemingly-handmade keyring shaped like a white-coloured castle with a black flag on top, a wide grin formed on his lips.

The weather was beautifully clear and crisp; it was a refreshing morning as the early rays of the sun gently seeped into the world.

The evening of the 24th of December.

Jin-Woo was walking on a street filled with the festive atmosphere of Christmas. He could easily spot the smiling faces of movie stars or top athletes proudly on display on the electronic advertising boards hung here and there.

‘The streets have changed a lot.’

Whenever Jin-Woo recalled the time when the streets used to be dominated by the faces of top-ranked Hunters, he still felt a bit awkward and disjointed.

But then, he spotted an advertising poster for a certain sports drink and broke out into a gentle chuckle. A rather familiar face was on it, that was why.

Just how many people lost their hair to stress while trying to take that one photo of her making a natural-looking expression?

‘The idol of the athletic world, is it....?’

Indeed, Cha Hae-In's smile on the poster was good enough to be called on the level of an idol.

She drew attention with her stunning achievements on the track, and eventually, the mass media caught onto her shining star as well. In a bid to boost the popularity of the track sports, the athletics organisation pleaded with her and this was the end result.

‘She never stepped in front of a camera even when she was a rank S Hunter, but now, she must perform the role of one of the most popular

sportswomen in the country....'

This future wouldn't have come about if he hadn't healed her ankle back then; a satisfied grin formed on Jin-Woo's face. She might be having a bit of a hard time trying to get used to the cameras, but it'd only get better with time.

Still smiling, Jin-Woo resumed his walk towards the meeting area.

He took a look around himself without thinking too much about it and discovered many young couples and their colourful clothing filling up the streets.

'Yup, I definitely am an examinee who recently finished his CSAT. Look how plainly dressed I am.'

Jin-Woo lightly tutted at his rather plain-looking clothes and sought out the nearest clothing store. With the time being what it was, the shops were all closed, but from the get-go, he wasn't planning to buy something, anyway.

Jin-Woo stopped walking in front of a mannequin kitted out in the coolest outfit inside the shop window.

Sha-ah-ahk....

The pitch-black smoke enveloped Jin-Woo's figure for a brief moment and his outfit had changed to the exact same thing as that mannequin's. He examined his new look through the reflection on the shop's window before asking his Shadow Soldiers.

"What do you think?"

Fangs, having developed an intense interest in all things fashion-related from some time ago, hurriedly replied first, maybe fearing that someone else might steal his limelight.

[You look amazing, my liege.]

"Alright."

Jin-Woo's steps became a touch cheerier than before and they helped him arrive at the place of his appointment in the proverbial blink of an eye.

Surrounding a massive Christmas tree installed in the middle of a plaza were many people searching and waiting for their companions to arrive.

Even though many of them were nervously glancing at their watches, the looks of happiness still could be gleaned from their expressions regardless, perhaps because today was Christmas Eve.

Unlike them, though, Jin-Woo was staring into the heavens above since he had more than enough leeway compared to them.

There were all sorts of ambient noises made by people walking on the streets, but Jin-Woo still could accurately distinguish the footsteps that mattered to him.

‘.....3, 2, 1.’

Just as that ‘kid’ arrived near his back, he turned around to greet her.

“Hey. You came.”

Hae-In was planning to take Jin-Woo by surprise, but could only sneakily lower her arms, looking a bit disappointed.

“Oppa, it’s like you’ve got eyes behind your back, you know?”

She seemed just a bit despondent, which was rather adorable as well, so he broke out into a soft grin. Hae-In pulled up the hood on her top to avoid the attention of the passersby, like how Jin-Woo used to do.

“Should we take a walk for a while?”

Jin-Woo’s suggestion was met by Hae-In’s brightly smiling face. She even nodded her head to emphasize her agreement, too.

As the two of them walked, they chose the less populated path whenever they came across a crossroad. Meanwhile, Hae-In’s eyes were growing really large after listening to Jin-Woo’s CSAT result.

“You got such a great score, yet you wanna go to that university? But, why?”

“Well, the fees are completely paid for by the scholarship, plus they are adding on the opportunity for me to study abroad, as well. Besides, there is this person I just have to meet in that place, you see.”

It was at that point that her ears perked up.

“Wait, that person isn’t a woman, is it?”

Her eyes narrowed to a slit, but Jin-Woo found her expression really adorable so he decided to string her along for a bit.

“Mmm, who knows.”

Her cheeks immediately puffed up.

To Jin-Woo, seeing her express her emotions so freely like this – something she didn’t do back when both of them were adults – proved to be a different but still wonderfully joyous occasion to behold.

Around then....

Tap.

Something fell gently from the sky and landed on the tip of his nose, followed soon after by wet coldness melting on his skin.

It was a snowflake.

He raised his head up to look and white specks began falling gently from the blackened sky. A White Christmas was coming, it seemed.

He silently stared at the falling snow only to recall the sight of settling grey ash after he defeated the Dragon Emperor. Ash as white as snow – no, snowflakes as light as ash silently descended on the land.

“Oppa? What are you thinking about?”

Jin-Woo smiled softly and tried to gloss over it.

“Nothing much.”

Well, it wasn't as if he could tell her that, while he was looking at the snow falling from the evening sky a day before Christmas, he was busy recalling probably the most dangerous enemy he had to fight in his entire life, now could he?

Hae-In formed a broad grin after listening to Jin-Woo's reply, then she brought up something out of the blue.

“Oppa, do you remember our promise?”

“What promise?”

“The one about you promising to answer everything when I win in a race.”

“Yeah, I do.”

Hae-In promptly pointed towards one of the trees lining up along the street.

“Well, why don't we make a bet, then? Let's see who will arrive there first.”

Jin-Woo couldn't help but chuckle after hearing her sudden challenge and asked her a question.

“What is it that you'd like to ask me?”

“Everything.”

“Everything??”

“What you're thinking about sometimes, whether it's a girl or a guy you want to meet in that university, and also....”

“Also?”

“...Also, about the time we met before that athletic preliminaries took place.”

“...Alright.”

Jin-Woo readily agreed to it and took his hands out from his pockets. The end result wouldn't be affected just because he kept his hands there, but still, he wanted to show her that he was taking this challenge quite seriously.

But then....

Hae-In had been staying a step away from his position until then, but suddenly walked in very close to wrap her scarf around his neck before asking him for a small favour in a whisper.

“Oppa, if you like me, don't move from this spot.”

“Wha?”

While he was getting flustered by this development, Hae-In began walking slowly towards the tree in question while looking straight at him. As for Jin-Woo himself, he couldn't hold back his laughter after realising that his defeat had been set in stone from the get-go.

“Hah....”

In the end, Hae-In succeeded in touching the tree first, and she lightly jumped in the air to announce her victory.

Meanwhile, his Shadow Soldiers watching the two lovers' competition with a great deal of anticipation and excitement began jumping up and down themselves in happiness as well.

[Heee-ya~, our liege has lost!]

[Wow, there are times when our liege will lose a challenge with so much at stake, too!]

[My liege, you did it wrong!]

[Kkiiiiehhk-!! Oh, my kinggg! It's not too late, so please get going now!!]

Jin-Woo was left stupefied and chuckled again while scratching the side of his head. He took a glance around the street and approached the tree as well.

Thankfully, he couldn't spot a single soul on this particular stretch of road, all due to the fact that they sought out only those paths with little foot traffic.

“Well, I won, right?”

Hae-In was waiting for his reply with an excited expression clearly etched on her face. Jin-Woo stopped before her smile and issued a dignified order to his Shadow Soldiers.

‘Shadows? Every one of you, close your eyes.’

[.....]

[.....]

While the soldiers were rightly feeling frustrated....

...Jin-Woo slowly brought his lips closer and gently locked them with Hae-In’s.

The white snowflakes continued to fall silently from the sky.



Chapter 262 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 19

The last side story: Twelve years later (1)

Within the ranks of the Central Region Precinct's Violent Crimes Unit, there was this one detective nicknamed the 'Phantom'.

The newbie detective joining the squad this year after passing the promotion exam, Lee Seh-Hwan, often heard this rumour while he was walking the beat as a patrolman.

The arrest rate of 200 percent!

The rumour went that, in front of this 'Phantom' capable of solving not just the cases in his own docket, but even the cold cases of the past, every single violent criminal or bloodthirsty thug would become a very well-behaved sheep in an instant.

To the officers patrolling these streets, this detective remained an object of pure respect, a real bonafide legendary figure.

Seriously now, the rumour even went on to say that, although he was eligible for a promotion, he wished to devote himself fully to fieldwork and refused to move up the career ladder. How hardcore was that?

'Anyone with some sense in them would definitely never refuse a promotion, obviously.'

In any case – even if only half of the rumours making the rounds turned out to be true, then the mystery cop was sure to be one hell of an investigator.

His fellow patrol officers were deeply envious of Lee Seh-Hwan joining the Violent Crimes Unit. Little did they know, he was currently swallowing back his nervous saliva while scanning the squad's office, wondering who this legendary detective from the rumours could be.

As befitting a group of detectives that clashed against seasoned criminals every day, they all carried manly, no-nonsense countenances. They began shooting sharp, probing glares in the direction of an unknown visitor to their ranks.

It'd not be all that awkward to call any one of these fine officers

‘Phantom’, indeed.

‘The light in their eyes are so....’

Lee Seh-Hwan gradually shrunk back from the powerful glares of the veterans and began inwardly worrying about whether he’d survive for long in this place or not.

“Ehh.... Are you that newbie joining us from today onwards?”

A voice came from behind without any prior warning whatsoever and Lee Seh-Hwan jumped up in fright. He hurriedly turned around and performed an excellent salute.

“Loyalty!”

“Ah, ah... no need to be that tense. We’re all one family now, right?”

The voice belonged to a middle-aged man carrying two paper cups filled with coffee standing right behind Lee Seh-Hwan. He kindly offered one of the cups to the still-nervous rookie.

“Here, it’s on me.”

“T-thank you very much!!”

Lee Seh-Hwan bowed deeply and received the coffee.

Instantly, he was greeted by the reassuring warmth that was kind of like a phone call from his family he dearly wished to see again after living alone for a long time.

Maybe that small first mouthful of the hot coffee helped him to relax?

Lee Seh-Hwan continued to sip on the hot beverage while cautiously studying the overall atmosphere of the surroundings, before asking the Senior who gifted him the drink.

“Excuse me... I went to speak to the Squad Captain, and he informed me that I’d be working together with Seong Detective-nim from here on, I was wondering...”

“Ahh, that ‘Phantom’ is your partner?”

“FUU-HEUP!!!”

It took almost everything Lee Seh-Hwan had to stop the coffee from spraying out of his mouth and nostrils.

“Well, we came up with that nickname for the guy because he’s supernaturally quick, you see? Dunno when it happened, but that name got stuck somehow and even the folks in other units began calling him that. I’m

sure you've heard of him too, right?"

"Y-yes, I have...."

Lee Seh-Hwan hurriedly nodded his head several times. A meaningful smirk suddenly crept up on the senior's face.

"The thing is, that coffee I gave you? It's meant for him."

The senior detective turned around to escape to the corridor, but then he stopped and pointed to the far end with his chin, a grin now firmly etched on his face.

"Speak of the devil. There he comes."

Unable to suppress his curiosity, Lee Seh-Hwan also quickly came out to the corridor himself and shifted his gaze in the direction where the senior was staring at.

That was when he discovered a certain man unhurriedly strolling towards his direction from the end of the corridor.

'That man is the legendary....'

Without a doubt, that man didn't seem to be in a hurry, yet he was already standing before Lee Seh-Hwan even before the rookie could fully regain his wits.

What an overwhelmingly intense pressure he emitted.

Lee Seh-Hwan was about average in height for a Korean male, but he had to physically look up at his new partner, the senior detective nicknamed 'Phantom', who was at least a head taller than himself. Almost instantly, the poor newbie felt stifled and it became hard to breathe from this inexplicable pressure emitted by the man in front of him.

'The Phantom of the Central Region....'

The reason why this detective was saddled with such a nickname wasn't simply because of his preternatural swiftness, oh no. Lee Seh-Hwan was sure of this fact after finally encountering the person in question.

"Senior."

"Ohh, hey man. Going out on a call?"

"Nah, it's nothing much, really. By the way, is he our new recruit?"

"That's right, he is. His name is Lee Seh-Hwan."

Jin-Woo bowed his head slightly to greet the senior detective standing next to Lee Seh-Hwan. He then spun the newbie around to face the other direction

and placed his hand on the completely-frozen junior's shoulder.

“Then, I shall go ahead and train the rookie.”

The senior detective with the face of a good-natured uncle continued to grin as if he found something quite amusing. He nodded his head to say yes.

“Sure, sure. Go ahead. Have a good day.”

Almost as soon as the greeting with the senior was over, Jin-Woo dragged the rookie cop he was now entrusted with to outside of the building.

‘H-he can’t be p*ssed off about me having drunk his coffee, right?’

When that line of thought popped up in his head, Lee Seh-Hwan ended up hurriedly asking a question.

“S-senior-nim?! W-where are we going?”

Rather than an answer, though, he got a question as a reply, instead.

“Why did you become a police officer?”

“Oh, that.... I....”

Lee Seh-Hwan hesitated for a bit before remembering his original dream, the goal, that he had forgotten about while working as a beat cop wrestling with drunkards and other idiots for the past few years.

“I wanted to catch the bad guys....”

“That’s right.”

Even though they were exchanging questions and answers, Jin-Woo didn't slow down his steps that continued to lead the rookie to their unknown destination. And he finally let go of the flustered newbie once they reached the end goal.

“We are going to a place where we can do exactly that.”

Lee Seh-Hwan raised his head, and Jin-Woo formed his now-trademark smile.

Grin.

It was a smile that eased the minds of all those who saw it. Jin-Woo looked at the shorter rookie with such a smile on his face before continuing on.

“That’s why I became a cop too, you see.”

Just those words alone, and Lee Seh-Hwan's heart began pounding quite violently.

Ba-dump.

How could one's heart not throb in moments like this as long as one was a police officer worth his or her salt?

“You coming?”

Lee Seh-Hwan heard the question with only one possible answer and replied with an excited face.

“Of course, Senior-nim!!”

Completely pooped out from chasing after criminals the whole day, Lee Seh-Hwan collapsed on top of his new desk and fell asleep. Jin-Woo was planning to dump the write-up of the testimonies of all the suspects they apprehended today to the rookie, but now....

Tap, tap...

He stopped jotting down on the report paper and quietly studied Lee Seh-Hwan, utterly lost to the distant lands of sweet slumber.

‘He said he had the experience of catching an armed robber bare-handed, didn’t he? Yup, it is fun training a rookie like this guy.’

A smile naturally crept up on his face now that a rather excellent seedling had joined his Unit.

“Hehehe.”

After seeing a smile blooming on Jin-Woo’s face, the suspect sitting on the opposite side of the desk mistakenly believed that the atmosphere had become rather friendly and formed a sly smile of his own.

That only elicited a hardened scowl from Jin-Woo, though.

“....And why the hell are you smiling?”

“I, I’m sorry.”

“Okay, then. up is....”

Just as Jin-Woo’s fingers touched the keyboard once more....

[My liege, may I suggest that such miscellaneous tasks be left to us, your loyal soldiers....]

....He heard the voice of Igrit coming from his shadow.

Indeed, it’d be convenient to utilise his soldiers.

Forget about training the rookies to arrest the suspects, he could just unleash his near-ten million soldiers and have them catch the bad guys. That would clean up the entirety of the Republic of Korea in no time at all.

However, what was he supposed to do about the extreme unrest and the fear from the public at large that would no doubt follow soon afterwards?

A suitable balance needed to be kept, regardless of what the job was.

That was why Jin-Woo did his best to control his powers, so as to minimise the impact against the society at large. And so, as the administrative work on these petty criminals was coming to an end....

....Although, the rookie still hadn't been able to extricate himself from the land of dreams yet.

Jin-Woo heard the voices coming from the corner of the office and ended up paying attention to the contents of the conversation.

“Detective-nim, please listen to me. Jin-Yi isn't a girl who'd willingly take her own life.”

“Look, miss. I understand how you feel. But, I already explained to you in detail, didn't I? All the evidence points to....”

“Please, please take a look at these texts messages! Do they look like something sent by a person planning to commit suicide three hours later??”

“Hah-ah.....”

Maybe it was because of the fact that the deceased's name sounded similar to his own sister's?

For a while now, Jin-Woo's mind kept wandering towards the conversation between those two people that didn't seem to be going anywhere fast.

The detective, now fed up by this 'heckling' ended up responding in an ill-tempered manner.

“Look here, miss! From the get-go, most suicides aren't planned out in advance but are done in the spur of the momen....”

“Do you mind if I take a look at the case?”

The detective flinched nastily when Jin-Woo approached him without any presence whatsoever.

Detectives were supposed to be able to suss out whether a person was guilty of a crime or not just by locking gazes with a suspect in the blink of an eye.

Such detectives couldn't detect his approach, so it was a small wonder that Jin-Woo was saddled with the nickname of 'Phantom'.

“Uhm, Detective Seong....?”

The detective formed a troubled expression while looking at Jin-Woo, before shifting his gaze forward, only to spot the expression on the deceased's friend now gaining a ray of hope.

'Ah....'

The detective instantly realised that things might get a bit complicated for himself, so he quietly asked Jin-Woo to step outside the office for a moment.

He handed over the related case files and pulled out a cigarette after they got there.

"Detective Seong.... I hope you aren't going to put me under the spot here."

"..."

Jin-Woo didn't pay any attention to the plea of his Senior and scanned through the files, only for his expression to harden to a scary degree.

The detective was about to light his cigarette up, but after sensing the aura oozing out from Jin-Woo, ended up taking a step back in surprise.

'He's like a different person when he's concentrating like this.'

The senior detective deeply sucked in the smoke puffed out from the lit cigarette as if to calm his trembling nerves.

The female victim was found inside her bathtub, having died of massive blood loss from a large cut wound on her wrist. The knife used to cut her wrist was recovered inside the bathroom, and perhaps unsurprisingly, only her fingerprints were found on the weapon, no one else's.

The file also said that, even though the deceased displayed a bright personality outwardly, she actually suffered from depression.

Not many other investigators would come up with a different hypothesis after looking at all the facts available in this case.

Jin-Woo returned the case file back to the detective assigned to the case.

"I don't see anything amiss."

"R-right. You think so, too?"

The detective received the files back with a somewhat happy-looking expression.

"However."

"H-however....??"

With a hardened face, the senior asked back while thinking, ‘Could he be...?’

“I shall confirm it myself, just in case.”

“Ah....”

The Phantom had sniffed a trail, it seemed.

While looking at Jin-Woo’s back as he walked over to the friend of the deceased waiting anxiously over there, the Senior detective roughly scratched the back of his head and complained in his head.

‘Doesn’t that guy ever get tired or something?’

The friend of the deceased, her gaze currently fixed to the ground, quickly raised her head after hearing Jin-Woo’s voice.

“I’m Detective Seong Jin-Woo. Can we talk for a moment?”

The friend nodded her head, her current grim expression seemingly a blend of new-found hope and sorrow.

“Yes!”

Inside a quiet, empty and owner-less home, a black shadow suddenly rose up. It was Jin-Woo.

He found himself in an apartment which was slightly too large for a woman to live alone. Her warmth from the time she was still alive could be felt from several corners of this apartment unit.

The current time was late at night.

The surroundings were pitch-black, but there was no need to turn on the lights because this was the same as broad daylight to Jin-Woo’s eyes.

He entered the bathroom, the place where she met her final moments. The thick smell of blood yet to be cleaned stung his nose. Jin-Woo stood before the bathtub and silently studied the very spot where the deceased prepared herself to die.

Seeing all the spilt blood, it was as if he could sense the pain of the woman.

However, he could only imagine what that pain was like, not actually feel the pain itself. What the deceased was feeling when she chose death, how painful it was as she lay here dying....

Those left behind would never know them.

Generally speaking, that was.

Jin-Woo crouched slightly and studied the blood splatters before recalling the last text message she sent to her friend. It was filled with her anticipation about the upcoming meeting with her friend.

Just like what the friend had said, that message didn't seem to be sent by someone getting ready to take her own life.

Most likely, the friend wanted to believe that she'd not choose to die without saying a single goodbye to her closest friend.

For sure, the ones left behind would never know what the dead wanted to say to them. Ordinarily, that would be true. Ordinarily.

However, Jin-Woo possessed a way to hear the voice of the dead.

'I needed the actual remains in the past, but now....'

Jin-Woo issued his command, and the blackened, coagulated blood reverted back to a crimson liquid and began trickling again. The blood splatter that remained as nothing more than grisly reminders gathered together to form a deep pit of boiling blood.

As if it was alive, the mass of blood continued to seethe and tumble as it grew larger and larger.

The Shadow Sovereign, the King of the Dead, then issued the absolute order that couldn't be refused at the remains of the deceased.

"Rise up."



Chapter 263 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 20

The last side story: Twelve years later (2)

A shadow of a woman, yet to shed the hints of her teen years, vigorously rose up from the thickly-coagulated clump of blood on the floor.

Chwa-ahck!!

Droplets of blood dripped from the ends of her hair as she took a look around her, her expression one of sheer confusion regarding her current situation. Eventually, though, she spat out pained moans.

[Ah.... Ah....!]

Indeed, it'd be quite painful for her since she retained the memories of her dying moments. Jin-Woo used the authority of the Shadow Sovereign and calmed the shadow for the time being.

“Don't be frightened.

The you of now has become an existence untethered from the boundaries of life and pain.”

The king's calming, warm voice helped the woman to compose herself gradually. Jin-Woo then created a new set to clothing for her sake and wrapped them around her figure since she appeared how she died – nude.

[Ah....]

She cautiously pulled the clothing on her shoulders tighter.

Her name used to be Seo Jin-Yi. He named the newly-revived shadow woman the same as back when she was still alive, and began asking his questions.

“Did you... willingly take your own life?”

The shadow woman, no, Seo Jin-Yi, nodded her head.

Jin-Woo placed one of his knees lower to the ground so he could match her eye level. He studied her expression and quietly asked her.

“Your reason?”

And when he did, her lips, frozen shut like a block of ice, cautiously parted ways.

[I....]

Ding-dong.

The doorbell resounded out rather late at night; a middle-aged man put a photo frame containing a picture of his daughter down on its original spot and looked away.

‘Who could it be at this late hour?’

He tilted his head this way and that while standing up from his seat, and walked over to the intercom.

The monitor on the device showing the scene outside the front door now displayed a man kitted out in a smart business suit standing there. The middle-aged man didn’t think too much about it and pressed the ‘Speak’ button.

Beep.

The man outside the door pulled out his ID badge and showed it to the camera.

The photo in the ID badge matched the face on the monitor.

The middle-aged man forgot that it was far too late in the day for a guest to show up like this when he heard the word ‘Detective’ and hurriedly flung the door open.

“Did the investigation’s result come out? How did my little girl die?!”

Jin-Woo quietly studied the face of Seo Jin-Yi’s father, Seo Gyu-Nam, before shaking his head.

“Nothing is certain yet, sir. However, I do have several follow-up questions I’d like to ask you regarding your daughter.”

The father of the deceased formed a somewhat disappointed expression when he heard there was nothing to report yet. Jin-Woo made a quiet demand towards the man.

“Can you come with me?”

Seo Gyu-Nam seemed to be in a dilemma, but soon enough, formed a grimly determined expression.

“Of course. If I can help in any shape or form in uncovering the truth of my daughter’s death, then I shall cooperate fully.”

He came outside and locked the door before turning around to face Jin-Woo.

“Let’s get going, Detective.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head once and turned towards a certain direction.

“This way.”

Seo Guy-Nam initially thought that they would go to the police station, but instead, they ended up in a cafe near his place. He asked the detective why they had to come here and only got a vague answer in the form of ***“We need a place to chat quietly”*** instead.

And so, Jin-Woo and Seo Gyu-Nam sat on the opposite side of the table. The former then began his questioning as the latter formed a heavy expression.

“What kind of a student was Miss Seo Jin-Yi usually?”

“Excuse me?”

“By any chance, was there anyone who might have been resentful towards....”

Seo Gyu-Nam belatedly realised the implication behind the question and hurriedly shook his hand around.

“No, no. Never. She was definitely not a child who’d go around doing things to make others hate her. She was really kind and pure and...”

Seo Gyu-Nam replied up to there before his head faltered and sounds of sobbing escaped from him.

How long did it go by like this?

The sobbing man’s shoulder’s stopped trembling eventually and he raised his head slowly.

“I, I’m sorry, Detective. I still can’t believe that my little girl left me in that manner.....”

“You must’ve cherished your daughter a lot.”

“Of course. I’m sure you know this already, but Jin-Yi wasn’t my biological child. That was why I cherished and loved her as much as I would’ve with my real child, no, maybe even more than that.”

His gaze lowered as he struggled to swallow back his sadness. He continued on.

“If only she told me when she was hurting, when it was getting too much

for her....”

Although Seo Gyu-Nam was displaying an intense emotional state, Jin-Woo was quite different in his attitude and kept an icy-cold gleam in his eyes from the beginning right until the end. He then pulled out his own smartphone from his inner pocket.

“While we were sifting through your daughter’s personal effects, we uncovered a certain sound file.”

“...Pardon?”

“Well, let’s listen to it first.”

Jin-Woo tapped on the play icon and let the voice of the shadow play out.

It was the testimony straight from her mouth about the tale of the horrifying abuse she suffered at the hands of her adoptive father, ever since she was a young child.

And as the testimony continued on...

Seo Gyu-Nam finally stopped acting like a sorrowful father who lost his daughter, his eyes constantly shaking from shock.

The girl deliberately chose to go to a university far away from home, believing that she was finally freed from the torment of her adoptive father, but then, when the b*stard got in contact with her again some time ago, starting with the text message saying ‘I want to see you again’, she chose to end her life, instead.

She might have taken her own life, but the culprit that drove her to that decision was someone else.

Tap.

Once the sound file ended its playback, Seo Gyu-Nam raised his head, his expression frozen-stiff now.

“Why... why did you play that in front of me?”

This middle-aged man could legitimately claim that he possessed quicker wits than most other people.

If the real goal of this meeting was to arrest him, then this detective would’ve shown up with a couple of other officers, slap the cuffs on him and be done with the whole thing just like that.

However, this cop didn’t take him to the police station, but to a local cafe, saying that they needed to have a quiet chat.

That was why Seo Gyu-Nam had a hunch that the detective in front of his eyes had a somewhat different purpose in coming to see him. As if to reply positively to that hunch, the expressionless detective finally revealed a toothy grin.

“You now have two options available to you.”

Options were available!

Seo Gyu-Nam clenched his fists tightly after hearing those words that sounded like the heavens extending a lifeline, just as a precariously dangerous situation was about to befall on him.

‘Yes!!’

Meanwhile, the detective carried on.

“First... You admit to your wrongdoing, go to the station with me, and confess everything.”

“And... the other option is?”

“Rather than admit to your crime, you pay an appropriate price, instead.”

Seo Gyu-Nam had to grit his teeth in order to suppress this powerful wave of jovial laughter gushing out from somewhere deep inside his chest.

‘Oh my goodness me.’

And the wise old ‘they’ said that, even if the heavens collapsed, there would always be a way out, didn’t they? Who would’ve thought that the detective who uncovered his ugly sins just so happened to be such an individual?

Seo Gyu-Nam had lived a pretty great life as a medical doctor. So, regardless of how much this pathetic policeman wanted, he knew he had the financial wherewithal to satisfy that demand.

Seo Gyu-Nam did his utmost best to stop the ends of his lips from curling up and asked back.

“How much are you asking for?”

“That is already enough.”

Jin-Woo formed a hollow chuckle and securely pocketed the phone.

He knew better than anyone just how many people regretted with their whole being the choice they’ve made just now. This middle-aged man trying his best to hide his laughter came across as utterly disgusting and ridiculous.

In an instance, Jin-Woo’s expression changed.

“Now, listen well.”

With the smile gone from his face, an aura so ominous and bleak oozed out from him, instead.

“In reality, this place you’re in isn’t the world you were living in. No, it’s a different world I simply mocked up to resemble the outside scenery.”

The land of the dead that no living soul could enter without the express permission of its master – the territory of the eternal rest. Jin-Woo calmly added that that was the name of the prison about to seal Seo Gyu-Nam away.

Of course, the middle-aged man became flustered at the suddenly-changed Jin-Woo’s attitude as well as at this strange, hard-to-understand explanation.

“E-excuse me, Detective-nim. I, I don’t underst...”

“Think about it carefully.”

Seo Gyu-Nam felt his breathing choke up from Jin-Woo’s murderous glare.

“Can you remember how you got here?”

Now that he thought about it....

As the chill ran down on his spine, Seo Gyu-Nam finally realised the oddness of his situation.

‘B-but, how....?’

Within this brightly-lit cafe, how was it possible that there was not a single soul around other than himself and this mysterious detective?

Even if you forget about other patrons, no, maybe even the actual owner of the place, shouldn’t there at least be one waiter or a clerk somewhere??

However, whether it was inside the building or outside of the glass wall, there was not a single trace of other people at all.

“Ah....”

Just as he finally recognised that something unexplainable had happened to him, everything vanished, just like that, leaving only the darkness.

The only items left within this inky-black darkness were the table, plus the two chairs. And of course, himself and the detective sitting on those chairs.

“U-uwaaaaahhk?!”

Seo Gyu-Nam shot up from the chair and hurriedly stepped back as his complexion paled instantly.

“W-who the hell are you?! Is this a dream? It’s a nightmare, isn’t it??”

The middle-aged man pointed at Jin-Woo in a confused mixture of anger and desperation. Unfortunately for him, his retreating steps couldn't go too far.

Thud.

Because he ran into something as hard as a wall, that was why. An inexplicable chill swept him up and his head slowly shifted towards his back.

That's when the 'wall' began moving.

No, it wasn't an actual wall, just a giant 'ant' standing stiffly like one, and it was moving now.

This ant creature shoved its head closer to Seo Gyu-Nam's face and quietly placed its unfurled index finger against its 'lips'.

[Shh....]

In that moment...

“Euph! Eu-euph...!!!”

Dozens upon dozens of ant arms reached out from the darkness and grabbed onto him, before dragging him deeper into the unknown.

He would now be subjected to horrifying torture from here onwards where he'd eventually beg for death, but too bad, he'd not be able to die that easily.

See, the thing was, the Shadow now tasked with his punishment was one of the greatest soldiers in the ranks, and at the same time, the greatest 'Healer' there ever was, too.

[Kkiihk!]

Beru bowed his waist to perform a smart greeting towards his liege, before melting back into the darkness.

‘.....’

Jin-Woo wordlessly stared in the direction where Seo Gyu-Nam had disappeared to, and slowly stood up from his chair. This time, not from his front but from behind, another figure watching the proceedings unfold while hiding stepped out of the darkness.

It was Jin-Yi.

Jin-Woo was well aware that, no matter how badly the guilty suffered, the victim's pain would never fully disappear. However, if such a thing could console the heart of the deceased just a tiny bit....

He walked over to her and placed his fingertip on her forehead to erase all

memories of her adoptive father.

[Thank you. Thank you so much, Sovereign-nim.]

The Shadow bowed her head many times to Jin-Woo afterwards.

Now that she was reborn as a Shadow, she instinctively understood what kind of a special existence he was, but well, Jin-Woo never planned to convert her into his Shadow Soldier, to begin with.

So, it was now time to return her to the void.

Just before their goodbyes, Jin-Woo asked her in a gentle voice.

“Is there anything else you’d like to say?”

The Shadow lightly shook her head, before going, ***“Ah!”***

[By any chance.... If it’s not too much trouble, can I ask you for a small favour?]

day.

Jin-Yi’s friend came to the station in the early morning to find out about any new development in the case. Jin-Woo found her first and took her to the corridor outside the office.

“By all appearances, the chances of the case being treated as murder is extremely low at this point. The investigation itself will close soon, as well.”

The friend looked at Jin-Woo with a disbelieving expression, before speaking up with the voice of a person clutching at a straw.

“T-truly.... There isn’t even one percent of any other possibilities??”

Rather than a verbal reply, Jin-Woo quietly nodded his head up and down. The friend’s head dropped towards the ground next.

She seemed to have a million things to say in her mind, but couldn’t say any one of them out aloud – her expression sorrowful but unwilling, she hesitantly spoke.

“That means, Jin-Yi, she....”

Jin-Woo studied her for a moment or two, before presenting her with a small gift box covered in a cute wrapper.

“This is?”

“The name written on the gift card is yours, isn’t it?”

“....It is.”

It was none other than a gift the deceased carefully handpicked and

prepared for the friend's birthday. The gift that would've never entered its intended owner's hands finally found its way to its rightful home.

“Jin-Yi prepared this....?”

“That's correct. I thought that Miss Jin-Yi would've wanted this gift to find its intended owner.”

“Ah.... Thank you....”

The friend thanked Jin-Woo wholeheartedly, her eyes tearing up uncontrollably.

If only the adoptive father's insidious text message didn't arrive at the victim's phone one hour before she cut her own wrist, wouldn't these two friends get to enjoy the birthday party as planned?

Jin-Woo felt complicated in his heart as several thoughts intersected within his mind and his gaze drifted away to the distance, only for him to feel the familiar vibration coming from within his pocket.

“Excuse me for a moment.”

He asked for an understanding from the sobbing friend of the victim, turned around, and answered his phone.

A voice he felt relieved to hear came out of the phone's speaker.



Chapter 264: Chapter 264

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Side Story 21

The last side story: Twelve years later (Fin)

Later that evening.

Jin-Woo headed to the local diner that he frequented with Yu Jin-Ho when they were much younger. Still did, as a matter of fact.

He felt the hints of determination, different from the kid's usual self, emanating from Yu Jin-Ho's voice on the phone. When Jin-Woo stepped into the diner, Yu Jin-Ho sitting anxiously by the table, easily visible from the entrance, quickly raised his hand up high.

“Hyung-nim!!”

After graduating from the university, Yu Jin-Ho continued to train in the art of running a business empire under Chairman Yu Myung-Hwan, which transformed his body and spirit into a proper man now.

However, he still came across as a little kid brother to Jin-Woo, even now.

“Hey, man.”

He greeted back with a chuckle and settled on the other side of Yu Jin-Ho. His gaze then scanned the soju shot glass in Yu Jin-Ho's hand, as well as the half-empty soju bottle for a brief moment.

‘This guy, he knows he can't handle alcohol, so why...’

It was unknown just what he was psyching himself up for like this, but without a doubt, Yu Jin-Ho needed a massive boost to his courage to do it, it seemed.

So, Jin-Woo asked.

“What's going on with you? You didn't even tell me anything yet.”

Yu Jin-Ho greatly hesitated with his reply, before pulling out a small box from his inner pocket and opened it up. A rather expensive-looking ring was stored in there.

“Hyung-niiim!!”

“What now?”

“This time, I’m gonna propose to Miss Jin-Ah for sure!”

Aaah.

‘That’s what this was all about.’

Jin-Woo was guessing that the kid got scolded by his little sister or some such and wanted to complain to someone trustworthy, but now that he knew the score, a smile automatically floated up on his face.

Yu Jin-Ho completely misinterpreted that smile, though, and a fierce glare of determination lit up within his eyes.

“Hyung-nim! I’m really serious this time! I’ll confess to her tonight! B-but, the thing is.... You think she’s going to like this ring?”

When Jin-Woo thought about how Jin-Ah always complained at home, wondering aloud just when the blockhead that was her boyfriend would come around to confess his feelings for her, he could picture her jumping up and down in happiness already, but well....

Jin-Woo deliberately left his words vague so the after-confession swelling of emotions could be even tastier for the couple.

“I wonder... I’m not very good with this sort of things, so....”

“Keuh-heuk.”

As if he felt tormented, Yu Jin-Ho dropped his head lower in agony before raising it back up again.

“I-it’s still fine, hyung-nim. Actually, I don’t know what she’d like to have anyway, so I prepared lots of presents in advance.”

And then, he began pulling out a large paper envelope out of the blue. What that contained was a blueprint of a building.

“Actually, there’s this new building about to be constructed in our company’s premises, so as soon as Miss Jin-Ah is done with her medical degree, we could build a hospit....”

“Hold up.”

Jin-Woo felt as if he had seen this blueprint lots of times from somewhere and quickly cut Yu Jin-Ho’s word off.

“By any chance, this building.... The estimated pricing is around 30 billion Won, isn’t it?” (TL: Around \$25 million USD)

Yu Jin-Ho was taken by surprise and his eyes opened up wider.

“What the.... Hyung-nim, how can you know that....?”

Well, it was obvious how – because it was the exact same thing.

...The same as the blueprint of the building offered as the compensation for making Yu Jin-Ho the new Guild Master back in the erased timeline, that was.

Jin-Woo worked hard to keep his laughter in check. Yu Jin-Ho saw that expression and his complexion reddened considerably as he tried to come up with a suitable excuse.

“Hyung-nim, this is the best I can do for Miss Jin-Ah at the moment because I’m still learning about this trade from my father, but I....”

“No, that’s not it.”

To stop Yu Jin-Ho’s misunderstanding from getting any deeper, Jin-Woo wiped the grin off his face and spoke in a far more earnest tone of voice.

“Listen to me, Jin-Ho.”

“Yes, hyung-nim.”

“There’s no need for you to give her lots of presents to prove yourself so hard like this. Because... you are a good man. All you have to do is be you. Just you.”

“....”

Jin-Woo’s opinion rendered Yu Jin-Ho completely speechless, but he began tearing up greatly.

“Hyung-nim....”

It was at this point that Jin-Woo belatedly remembered how this kid behaved when drunk and felt this ominous foreboding creep up on him.

And like clockwork, Yu Jin-Ho spoke in a tearful voice.

“Can I hug you just this one time, hyung-nim?”

“Nope.”

“Hyung-niiim!!”

Yu Jin-Ho failed to rein his emotions in the end, and pounced on Jin-Woo to embrace him, but the latter extended his hand and rather deftly stopped the former from getting too close.

Yu Jin-Ho struggled for a long time before finally regaining control over his emotions and settled back down on his spot.

“Sob, sob, sobbbb...”

He continued to sob away, though, and Jin-Woo could only smirk at this sight. Sure, this kid did have a bit of a moronic streak in him, but Jin-Woo knew the truth very well from what the kid had shown him during the moments of great life-or-death peril.

Back when they entered the rank C dungeon along with a bunch of con-men and were forced into making a decision, or when he was being tortured for information by a rank S Hunter blinded by thoughts of revenge, Yu Jin-Ho always chose loyalty over his safety.

He was a good kid, indeed. That was Jin-Woo's honest impression of Yu Jin-Ho after observing him from a close vantage point after all this time.

Jin-Woo poured soju into his own empty shot glass.

"Why don't we pray for your success with this toast?"

"Eh?"

Yu Jin-Ho raised his head to find Jin-Woo pushing forward his shot glass.

"If your proposal is successful, then we will really become family, you know. So, how about we share a toast while praying for your success?"

"A real family with hyung-nim....."

Yu Jin-Ho's expression was soon overcome with a great swell of emotions once more and he lifted his own cup up, only for his gaze to stop by at Jin-Woo's left hand.

He knew very well what was hidden behind that black glove, of course.

"Excuse me.... Hyung-nim?"

"Yeah?"

"If I'm not overstepping here, can I ask you about something?"

"Sure, go ahead."

Yu Jin-Ho sneaked a couple of glances at Jin-Woo's left hand before working up his courage once more.

"The scars on that hand.... What actually did happen to you, to get such serious scars?"

Those scars were so horrendous that just a casual glance would make people recall heart-wrenching pain in an instant. It must've been a rather serious accident for such a clear burn scar to be left behind like that.

Although Yu Jin-Ho found it pretty hard to ask this question up until now, he borrowed the powers of the booze to ask this rather difficult question.

“Oh, you mean this?”

Jin-Woo glanced at his left hand for a little while, before a smirk floated up on his lips.

“I got it while saving the world.”

Jin-Woo’s gaze had reverted back to Yu Jin-Ho by then. His reply was spoken as if it was nothing much to worry about, so the latter chuckled back lightly, too.

“Hyung-nim, you and your sense of humour....”

Jin-Woo also chuckled along as well.

Yu Jin-Ho belatedly realised that the shot glass had been stuck waiting for a while inside his hyung-nim’s hand and quickly raised his own higher.

“For the successful proposal!”

Jin-Woo brought his cup closer and prayed for the kid’s fortune as well.

“Yeah, for your successful proposal.”

Clink.

They clinked their shot glasses and emptied them in one go.

Yu Jin-Ho’s face went into a scowl at the bitter taste of soju, but unlike him, Jin-Woo could only form a wry grin as he put the empty glass down.

‘I’d love to get just a little bit drunk on a day like today, though...’

It was then.

“Ah, I almost forgot.”

Yu Jin-Ho must’ve recalled Jin-Woo’s family life after hearing the word ‘family’ since he suddenly began discussing precisely that.

“Is sister-in-law doing well?”

“Yeah, she’s well.”

“What about Soo-Hoh, though? I should really stop by soon to see how the boy’s doing nowadays. Has he started walking yet?”

Jin-Woo chuckled and shook his head.

“No, not yet. He’s only six months old, so crawling is all he can do for now.”

“That’s weird. I thought that a kid sharing your and your wife’s genes would start running around the moment he was born, you know?”

“What the hell. Is that how you think of me and her?”

“Ahaha.”

Yu Jin-Ho scratched the back of his head in a playful manner and Jin-Woo also chuckled as well.

But then, Yu Jin-Ho went ***“Oops!”*** and hurriedly spoke in a worried voice as he heard that the post-natal care was rather arduous for the newborn’s parents.

“Well, in that case, shouldn’t you go home as soon as possible?”

“Mm... Maybe I should?”

With good timing, Jin-Woo was also beginning to miss Hae-In and his son Soo-Hoh waiting for him back home after the word ‘family’ had been mentioned earlier.

A certain residence located in the outskirts of the city.

Arriving back home safe and sound, Jin-Woo parked his car in the vicinity.

Screech.

Although the house was unimaginably huge for a detective to afford with his government salary, no one suspected a thing since the person sharing the residence alongside him just so happened to be the idol of the sporting world that pretty much every South Korean had heard of before in the past.

However, only he and Hae-In knew the secret of this house not being built by the hands of humans.

When Jin-Woo stepped into the house, the first thing that greeted him was the sight of his two Marshals in the middle of a war of nerves.

Bellion and Igrit were glaring at each other without backing down an inch, apparently not ready to give up on their ground. Soon, Hae-In came out to the living room while carrying their son, Soo-Hoh.

“Dear...”

With a smile, Jin-Woo took over Soo-Hoh from Hae-In, and gently held him up. When he did...

“Ppa-!!”

Soo-Hoh broke out into boisterous laughter and extended his small hands towards him. The boy wanted to be hugged by his father, so Jin-Woo helped with that by embracing the baby against his chest, and then, pointed to his two Marshals with his chin.

“What’s up with those two?”

“Well, the thing is....”

Hae-In was fighting back to keep her own laughter from breaking out while hesitating with her answer, but Jin-Woo didn’t need long to figure out what was up with this situation.

Bellion shot back at Igrit with a harsh glare.

[What do you mean by we mustn’t teach our Lord Soo-Hoh the ways of the sword? Do you really think your suggestion makes any sense whatsoever, Igrit?!]

However, Igrit’s own fighting spirit didn’t lose out an inch, either.

[High academic success is the barometer of one’s capability in this world, Bellion.]

No one knew when or who ordered them online, but well, Igrit was holding home-schooling material for toddlers as he argued his case.

Jin-Woo watched the tightly-contested war of nerves between these two proud Soldiers and became utterly speechless. He stared at them with a dumbfounded face for a while, before he took a step closer to address them.

“You guys....”

The Marshals finally realised that their liege was right in front of their noses, hurriedly turned around to face him, and knelt down on the floor.

[My liege!]

[My liege!]

Jin-Woo tutted audibly at the two Marshals far too obsessed in the matters of the post-natal care and spoke to them.

“It’s fine whether you want to teach my son swords or maths, but let’s worry about that only after the boy learns to walk first, shall we?”

Bellion and Igrit stared at each other for a little while before bowing their heads down to Jin-Woo.

[That is a reasonable approach, my liege.]

[You are correct, my liege.]

“Alright.”

Jin-Woo grinned brightly while holding his son in his arms, and just like that, Soo-Hoh also grinned brightly in return, as well.

“Kkyah.”

Nobody would doubt that they were a father and son; Hae-In watched the two’s smiles that seemed like a carbon copy of one another and chuckled softly herself.

Around the time Lee Seh-Hwan, joining the Unit as someone’s potential successor, had gotten more or less used to the life as a detective, Jin-Woo was summoned by the Station Commander for a private chat.

The senior detective leaving the commander’s office before him carried a rather suspicious glint in his eyes, so it was unlikely that this chat would be about a pleasant topic, thought Jin-Woo. He entered the commander’s office after the senior detective left and walked over to his superior’s desk.

“Did you call for me, sir?”

The commander was looking out of his office window at the time; he didn’t turn around and addressed Jin-Woo in a quiet voice.

“I heard that you’re still interfering in other detectives’ investigations....”

As expected – the senior of earlier carried that look of ‘I told you so’ as he was leaving, didn’t he? Jin-Woo inwardly swallowed his fake cough.

The commander turned around towards Jin-Woo and formed a refreshing grin.

“Please, I beg you to not go overboard and make other detectives resent you, Seong Hunter-nim.”

The commander’s face was someone quite familiar to him. It belonged to none other than Woo Jin-Cheol, the youngest Station Commander in Korean history.

Of course, that feat was built upon the hidden fact that Jin-Woo played a key role in solving many of Woo Jin-Cheol’s cases.

Jin-Woo smiled and corrected his current boss’s words.

“I’m not a Hunter anymore, Commander.”

“Even still, it’s a lot more convenient for me to refer to you as a Hunter-nim.”

While saying those things, Woo Jin-Cheol scanned the documents on top of his desk.

“Did you know that the legal guardian of the suicide victim, her father, suddenly went missing a few days ago?”

“Really?”

“Rather coincidentally, every CCTV camera around the missing man’s residence stopped working at the same time.”

“Oh my goodness. How can such a thing even happen?”

Jin-Woo’s feigned innocence brought about a helpless chuckle from Woo Jin-Cheol. He then threw the documents into the nearby trash can.

“Whatever you decide to do, I shall continue to believe in you, Seong Hunter-nim.”

Jin-Woo heard Woo Jin-Cheol’s declaration of unreserved faith in him and as a gesture of thanks, bowed his head just a little.

Afterwards....

“Actually, I didn’t ask you to come and stop by because of that....”

Woo Jin-Cheol pushed forward a piece of memo paper that had been hidden in the corner of the desk until then. A name of a hospital, as well as a patient’s room number, was written on it.

“....I thought that you’d like to know.”

“What’s this?”

Jin-Woo asked back and Woo Jin-Cheol replied as if he was waiting for that.

“The Association President, no, Chairman Goh Gun-Hui is apparently in critical condition.”

This would be Jin-Woo’s second time coming to visit Goh Gun-Hui’s hospital room.

About ten years ago, he saved the older man’s life by using the ‘Divine Water of Life’ that he also used to save his mother’s life in the erased timeline.

And now, he was facing the gaunt Goh Gun-Hui once more as the latter found himself at the death’s doorstep. Since this was his second visit, the dying man didn’t get surprised by Jin-Woo’s unexpected appearance.

No, he simply nodded his head in the direction of the unfamiliar young man with a hood pulled up. He then tapped on the oxygen mask blocking his mouth.

Jin-Woo reached out and cautiously removed the apparatus, allowing Goh Gun-Hui to speak even though he wheezed heavily and laboriously in

between each word.

“Young... man, you came back again.... Actually, I.... I’ve been searching for you... all this time.”

Jin-Woo looked on at this sight with sorrowful eyes before raising his voice.

“If Chairman wants this illness to be cured, then....”

Even before he could finish saying that he could cure the illness one more time, Goh Gun-Hui shook his head first.

“I’ve... lived for a long time now. I did what I had to do during the ten years you gave me. That is enough for me.”

Back in the erased timeline, Goh Gun-Hui sold off his company and became the first President of the Korean Hunter’s Association. But in this timeline, he had been acting as the role model to all the other corporate leaders by taking the lead in various charity work. And he no longer wished for his life to be extended anymore.

What he really wanted, though, was not what everyone would’ve expected.

“Actually.... I have a favour to ask you.”

Jin-Woo nodded his head. And that’s when he was met with Goh Gun-Hui’s pleading eyes.

“You told me that there was a world where we fought side by side, didn’t you?”

Jin-Woo nodded his head again without saying anything.

“Can you tell me more about that world? I’d like to know more. What I looked like, what you looked like back then....”

“Those might not be the memories you’d like to recall, sir.”

“It’ll be alright. I only wish to regain the memories now lost, that is all.”

Jin-Woo confirmed the earnest desperation on Chairman Goh Gun-Hui’s expression and gently grasped the dying man’s hand.

When he did....

...The memories of the time now erased rushed into Goh Gun-Hui’s mind like a tidal wave.

“Ah, ah....”

Tears began flooding out from the older man’s eyes.

Meanwhile, Jin-Woo slowly pulled the hood back and revealed his face to the Association President Goh Gun-Hui. He tightly grasped the younger man's hands and confirmed the face now looking back as even thicker tears fell from his eyes.

“Hunter-nim, you have.... Again....”

Jin-Woo gently held the Association President's hand as the latter's breathing became harsher and noticeably more laborious.

Goh Gun-Hui's gaze shifted back towards the ceiling.

“I... I really... Along with young heroes like you....”

His voice now contained traces of his satisfaction.

Goh Gun-Hui was overcome with the genuine happiness gushing out from the deepest part of his heart, and as his tears continued to flow, he quietly breathed his last.

Jin-Woo also stood there with tears in his eyes, before reaching down to gently close the older man's eyes. Soon after, the life-support machines informed everyone involved of the passing of their patient.

Beeeeep-!!

By the time shocked doctors rushed into the room, the suspicious, uninvited guest had already left without a trace.

As Jin-Woo wordlessly walked the streets, electronic advertising boards installed here and there continued to display the breaking news of Chairman Goh Gun-Hui's passing.

Emotions of sadness could be spied on the expressions of many watching the breaking news.

Back then, or even now....

Chairman Goh Gun-Hui was loved by many, and even more paid their respects after his death.

‘Be well.... You were also a hero who sacrificed so much of yourself for the sake of the others.’

Jin-Woo stepped away from the populated streets and made his way towards those avenues with little to no foot traffic.

Every time the wind blew, leaves that lost their colours from the influence of the encroaching autumn fell in droves from the trees lining up the streets.

Soon, winter would arrive.

‘And then, spring will come again, too.’

Jin-Woo fell into a deep train of thoughts while looking at the scattering leaves, before belatedly realising that his phone was ringing off the hook inside his pocket.

The call was from Hae-In.

“Dear?”

As soon as he answered the phone, he was greeted by her incredibly urgent voice.

Could something have happened in their home, even though two Marshals were guarding it?? Jin-Woo’s own voice rose up higher at what seemed to be an unbelievable situation currently unfolding there.

“What’s the matter with Soo-Hoh?!”

When he did, Hae-In cried out as if she too couldn’t believe that it was happening, either.

“Eh?”

It was right at that moment that Jin-Woo recalled what Yu Jin-Ho said a few days ago.

He became completely speechless after recalling those words and stood dead still on the spot.

For some reason, laughter tried to break out of his mouth after hearing his wife’s panicky voice over the phone. For the time being, he decided that calming his wife down would be his first priority.

“It’ll be fine. Don’t worry too much about it.”

“I’ll teach Soo-Hoh how to fly step by step, soon.”

‘...Oops.’

Didn’t I tell her that before?

When he was dating Hae-In back in the now-erased timeline, he wasn’t all that adept at flying around so they used his Sky Dragon ‘Kaisel’ to travel, instead.

Jin-Woo finally couldn’t hold back and guffawed out.

The autumn leaves shook around in the wind and fell to Earth once more.

After autumn, winter would come, and afterwards, spring would greet the world. Everything had a beginning and an end, and a new beginning would

follow after the end.

However...

Clank, smash!!

....It seemed that the winter of his household was still a long way away.

[Only I Level Up, Side Stories Fin.]



Chapter 265 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Only I Level Up Recollections/After Stories

Part 1: Beru's memories

Inside a certain egg....

Before he was ready to hatch, Beru heard the voice of the Queen through the thick shell of his egg.

[For the sake of the kingdom.]

'For the sake... of the kingdom.'

[Make all the enemies blocking our path shiver in terror.]

'Make all the enemies blocking our path shiver in terror....'

He needed to become strong.

He simply had to be strong.

That was the very first duty bestowed upon Beru, still sleeping in an embryonic state. And then, the obsession of the Ant Queen wishing to build a prosperous kingdom resulted in the birth of a horrifying monster.

[Kkkieeehhk!!]

The young soldier ant shattered the eggshell, emerged from the confines, and screeched out loudly. The ominous and terrifying murderous intent oozing out from its two eyes didn't permit any comparison to other ant monsters in existence.

The Queen shuddered. It felt a powerful surge of emotions by this creature born from its efforts.

'If it's this child, then certainly, those humans wielding strange powers will be....'

The Queen's eyes sparkled in anticipation, but even before it could issue a new order to the greatest ant soldier that triumphantly emerged from the egg, Beru felt hungry, so he did what he wanted to do.

Grab.

The wrist of one of the worker ants aiding with the hatching process got

grabbed by Beru.

‘.....?’

Even before the worker ant could understand what was going on, Beru simply began swallowing and chewing on the hapless monster from its head.

Crunch, crunch....

[...!!]

The Queen was greatly taken by surprise at Beru’s unexpected behaviour, but it was suppressed by the powerful aura of the future king of the ants and couldn’t even dare to stop him.

Beru managed to erase all traces of its kin from this world in the blink of an eye and stood proudly before his queen. The bodily fluid dripping from his mouth looked rather grotesque.

‘The terror of our enemies....’

The thing was, the subject of powerful fear would also have the same effect on his own allies, as well. The Queen belatedly realised this fact and took a look around itself. The brave soldiers of the ant kingdom were shivering in fear.

The emotions they felt were transmitted in full to their Queen, the only one capable of exercising absolute control over them.

The newborn soldier definitely passed the test. As expected of the greatest soldier the Queen had produced – he was truly a masterpiece.

[Become even stronger.]

The Queen issued the next order to Beru, with an eye towards a full-scale invasion of the human’s lands.

[Stronger, until none can stand in your way.]

Beru proceeded to devour everything on the island. When there was a shortage of food, he didn’t even hesitate to devour his own kin. From tiny lifeforms on the ground like worms and larvae, all the way to large fish and aquatic mammals of the nearby ocean....

As Beru voraciously devoured every single life in front of his eyes, a new realisation dawned on him. Whether it be lifeforms possessing fatal poison or creatures with huge bodies, they all quaked in fear upon running into him.

‘Survival’ was the most basic, as well as the ultimate, goal of all living creatures. But, in front of an absolute being that could easily rip apart that goal into millions of pieces, the looks carried in the eyes of other lifeforms

were all roughly the same.

‘.....’

Beru got to confirm over and over again that he was indeed at the top of the food chain, and soon, arrived at a certain conclusion.

‘I am....’

I am created to be the greatest predator from the very beginning.

In that case....

Beru, submerged deep within the seawater, pushed his head out of the surface. He could see the land at the far end of the undulating ocean waves. A world different from the sea was waiting for him there.

‘Just how powerful will those humans be, those that mother is greatly wary of?’

He grew quite curious – curious about if there really were powerful beings that necessitated even a top predator like him to keep a low profile, curious about if his powers would work against them.

He shifted his gaze towards the mainland several times, but...

[It is still too early.]

The Queen was capable of monitoring Beru’s thoughts and its resolute voice would always stop him from acting out on his curiosity without fail.

Left with no choice, he vacantly stared at the distant land before slipping beneath the surface of the ocean again.

Indeed, he’d get to know when the time was right.

‘.....’

Beru heeded the Queen’s orders and waited for the right time to come with bated breath. And eventually, ‘they’ stepped onto his land.

For the first time ever, Beru was given a chance to test out his true capabilities.

And it....

“What, what the hell are you?!”

“Uwaaaahk!!”

...Wasn’t even a fight.

No, it was nothing more than one-sided hunting.

What a familiar sight it was to him.

Beru discovered ‘fear’ in the eyes of the dying Hunters and couldn’t hide his utter disappointment.

‘To fight against these weaklings, I...’

I had to wait for such a long time?

There was this smell of fear oozing out from the entire bodies of the prey. Beru got to reconfirm through these human Hunters that he still occupied the top rung in the food chain.

It was a letdown.

And so, as the lifeform standing at the apex of the ecosystem was about to define what he thought of the human race as a whole in his head...

For the first time ever, a human that didn’t fear him even when standing face-to-face appeared out of the blue. Beru’s heart began viciously pounding away after encountering a situation he had never experienced before.

‘This human.... He’s not scared of me?’

He felt it’d be somewhat of a loss to kill this human right away, so Beru tried to start a conversation.

“Are you the king of humans?”

When he did, the human replied back.

“....Huh, an insect that knows how to speak. Well, I’ll be.”

Maybe this would be the first time since then that a living creature looked at Beru with eyes that were filled with something other than fear.

Sparkle, sparkle....

‘.....’

Beru began shedding cold sweat drops as the young Lord Soo-Hoh, the son of his Sovereign, stared at him with rather hotly-burning eyes. So, he tried to escape from this uncomfortable atmosphere, but then....

“Anty, antyyy!”

He couldn’t endure it and flew up in the air, but then....

“Anty, antyyy!!”

The young lord would already be right behind him when Beru took a look behind to make sure.

‘.....’

Of course, as long as Beru wanted to, escaping from a toddler would not be an issue, but... Well, the problem here was that the toddler in question was his king's child.

What if he tried too hard to escape and that ended up harming the young lord somehow? How could Beru even take care of the aftermath, then?

“Antyyy!”

In the end, the responsibilities of looking after young Soo-Hoh alongside the child's mother, Hae-In, fell on Beru's shoulders, not the other Marshals.

“...”

After making sure that Soo-Hoh was asleep, Beru quietly returned to the 'territory of eternal rest'.

He slid silently into the shadow, and the world of infinite darkness spread out right before his eyes. Some people might call this place scary, but for Beru, this world under his liege's authority was a rather comfortable place to be.

While he made his way over to where the ant army resided, Beru fell into a deep pool of thoughts.

‘Why does our young lord continuously seek me out?’

...He just couldn't figure this one out.

He had always been the object of fear, and he felt that that fact hadn't changed even now. This question suddenly invading his head proved quite difficult to resolve, so Beru changed his destination. What could be more helpful in understanding the mindset of a human than a human's opinion on the matter?

His liege didn't like using humans as Shadow Soldiers, so there were almost no soldiers who started off as humans, but...

But, rather fortunately, there was one soldier Beru knew that started his life as a human. It was none other than Marshal Igrit.

“There is no way that our young lord will hate you.”

[.....??]

Igrit nodded his head and rapidly added further explanations.

“Here is an ant walking around that's much bigger than a person. It can fly and it can even talk, too. Just which child wouldn't like that?”

[.....]

Well, that was a fresh take on the matter, which he didn't consider before.

Beru headed back to the area occupied by the ant army while carefully digesting what Igrit had told him.

'The young lord likes me because I'm bigger than a person, I can fly, and I can even speak.'

If a person could like something with such simplistic reasons, then wouldn't that person also easily fall out of love with something with equally simplistic reasons, too?

Well, he certainly hadn't heard of humans liking bugs after entering their adulthood. When his thoughts reached that far, his mood seemed to sink just a little bit.

He was familiar with others looking at him with gazes of revulsion, but when thinking about how the young lord would also one day carry such a gaze, Beru grew just a little bit sad.

'.....'

Beru flying silently changed his heading once more. His new destination this time was the location of a certain construction project.

The bearded Dwarves and ant soldiers were ordered by Beru to construct a gigantic stone statue of their liege within this place, the 'territory of eternal rest'. When they saw the former ant king land near their vicinity, they all bowed their heads in unison.

The Dwarven Elder in charge of directing the project hurriedly ran over to welcome Beru.

"Marshal-nim, welcome back."

Nod, nod.

Beru observed the progress on the construction for a bit before asking the Elder.

[I wish to change the plan just a little bit.]

"Ehhht?!"

Maybe he felt all the hard work his men had put in would go to waste, the Elder hurriedly tried to dissuade Beru despite feeling rather scared of the former ant king.

"B-but, Marshal-nim, you planned to commemorate Sovereign-nim's upcoming 32nd birthday with this 'Divine Liege' statue, so from a few months ago....."

[No, no, no. I'm not saying I want to cancel the plan itself. I just want to change this part like so....]

The Elder quietly listened to Beru's explanation before nodding his head right away.

"Of course that is feasible. I think we will get a far grander result with this new plan, Marshal-nim."

[Khe-khek, very good.]

The atmosphere that seemed to be frozen for a bit had warmed up considerably now.

"Well, in that case, I should...."

Just as the excited Elder tried to continue on, Beru raised his index finger and placed it against his lips.

[I shall return after taking care of business first.]

"Hyung-nim, are we really doing this?"

"You fool.... What is it? You scared now that we came this far?"

"N-no, that's not it, hyung-nim."

A thug glared angrily at his underling sitting on the front passenger seat of the car, and shifted his gaze back to a certain residence over yonder.

It was a two-story private home standing all by itself in a rather deserted suburb, as if the owners wanted to avoid crowded areas.

That place belonged to Detective Seong Jin-Woo.

The thug had it confirmed it multiple times before coming here, so he was sure of it.

"Because of that son of a btch Seong Jin-Woo, our organisation got obliterated into thin air. We got hurt real bad by the bstard, so isn't it only fair that we leave an everlasting mark on him to balance the books??"

"You're right, hyung-nim."

The three underlings replied in a unanimous voice.

Very good.

"Listen well. We are a quartet of common house robbers now. As for the wife and the son of that detective, they got killed by the robbers breaking into their home in the middle of the day. Do you get my drift?"

"Yes, hyung-nim."

A sinister grin formed on the lips of the man they all referred to as ‘hyung-nim’.

To think, such a massive house didn’t have a single security system – wasn’t that exactly like declaring to the world ‘Come and swallow us up’ while washing their necks?

Indeed, it was a miracle that the house hadn’t been burgled yet.

“Stop shaking in your boots and don’t make any mistakes.”

The thug scanned his underlings and they nodded their heads.

“Let’s go.”

Tap, tap, tap, tap.

The four males exited the car and cautiously closed the doors. They scanned their vicinity and approached the residence before hurriedly clambering over the walls.

They had rehearsed what they had to do several times before, so such a wall didn’t pose any problems for these folks.

But then...

...Step!

Only four legs landed back on the ground.

‘...Where are the other two?!’

The thug hurriedly looked at the only remaining underling next to him. The latter shook his head.

Four jumped over the wall, yet only two landed back on the ground? What a bizarrely weird thing this was!

The thug quickly studied all around his surroundings, but when he looked to his side again, the remaining underling was gone without a trace, too.

‘These sons of b*tches, seriously now...!!’

The enraged thug briefly forgot where he was right now, and was about to roar out at the top of his lungs. But right before that, a hand approached him without being noticed and covered his mouth, hard.

[Shh....]

Right now was the young lord’s nap time. It must not be disrupted by a bunch of uninvited guests, no matter what!

Thankfully, Beru’s hearing could pick up on the calm, rhythmic breathing

of the young lord in the nursery. With a pair of satisfied eyes, he looked diagonally down to his side. The thug caught in his arms was trembling like a lone leaf in the wind.

“Euph.... euph, euphhhh!!”

There it was, that familiar light in the eyes.

The familiar emotion.

Beru certainly enjoyed the unreserved faith his liege had in him, or the young lord’s favourable feelings towards him, but this... This, as expected, felt just as good to him. The expressions of the weak prey caught before the glare of a predator would always be like this.

[Kiiik, kiiik.]

Beru didn’t hold back and revelled in the intense fear displayed in the thug’s eyes, before dragging the hapless victim away and disappearing from view. The screaming vanished very soon after from this world.

“What do you think?”

The Elder proudly presented the ‘Divine Liege’ statue.

This stone statue with their liege’s countenance boasted such a humongous scale that, in order to look at its top, one’s neck might develop a sprain if one carelessly tilted their head back.

Just to complete this masterpiece before the deadline, not only had every single bearded Dwarf pitched in, but all the ant soldiers also lent their aid.

[Kiikiik.]

Beru studied the statue of his liege with a very satisfied expression before confirming the last-minute change that had been added to it.

“Just as you commanded, Marshal-nim. There it is, on the left shoulder....”

Just like the Elder’s explanation, the left shoulder of the liege’s statue now played home to the figure of their young lord, sitting there with a bright expression.

The father and his son.

There was no doubt in Beru’s heart that his liege would be greatly pleased after seeing this grand and beautiful statue. And also, this statue would prove to be a deeply-meaningful present to the young lord if he ever gets to enter this world in the distant future.

Such certainty prompted Beru to roar out in laughter.

[Kkiiihehehehet~!!]

Following after the rejoicing Beru, the bearded Dwarves and ant soldiers also burst out into loud peals of laughter.

Wah-hahahahaha!!

“Kkyah-hah!”

He suddenly heard a cheerful cry of a toddler mixed among the raucous laughter.

[...?!]

Beru got stunned out of his shell and hurriedly looked back, only to discover a certain baby sticking close to his back.

“Annty!!”

Ah, ah.....

Should he say, like father, like son?

Seeing the baby Soo-Hoh who could now freely enter the ‘territory of eternal rest’ before anyone had the chance to notice it, the Marshal in charge of childcare, Beru, could only hold his head in agony.

[Khi-hahk!]



Chapter 266 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Only I Level Up Recollections/After Stories

Part 2: Until we meet again

“Thank you for coming in, Miss Cha.”

“Ah, yes. Hello.”

Hae-In stepped across the doorway of the kindergarten headmistress’s office with a tense expression on her face.

Soo-Hoh hadn’t had any contact with kids of his own age until he turned five years old. And today was exactly a week after the worried parents decided to send their son to the nearest kindergarten.

The preschool educational institution suddenly called her up, asking her to come for a meeting today. Hae-In was really worried that maybe something happened to Soo-Hoh, or her son did something wrong.

The headmistress guided her to the couch on the opposite side and Hae-In settled down on the cushion as her complexion became even gloomier than before.

The middle-aged headmistress could fully understand what Hae-In was going through right now. That was why she worked hard to find the gentlest voice she could come up with in order to not worsen the other party’s anxiety.

“It’s not something to be that anxious over, Miss Cha. It’s just that.... We have a few questions we’d like to ask you.”

“Ah, yes. Please.”

Hae-In nodded her head repeatedly with a hardened expression. The headmistress cautiously pushed forward a sketchbook.

“Here.... Would you take a look at this, please?”

Hae-In picked the book up as the headmistress continued on.

“It contains drawings by your son, Soo-Hoh.”

The white paper within said book featured a rather-cute looking ‘ant’ as drawn by a little child’s hands.

But, why was she being shown this? Hae-In couldn't immediately understand where this conversation was going and asked back with a puzzled expression.

“What’s the matter with this drawing....?”

The headmistress hesitated slightly before letting a soft sigh escape from her lips. She then began explaining herself.

“The class teacher-nim asked the children to draw their close ‘friends’, you see.”

“...Ah.”

Now that she looked at the drawing again, the ‘ant’ was standing on two feet. Only then did Hae-In realise that this was not a drawing of an ordinary ant, but Marshal Beru, instead.

“There are others after that page. When the class teacher-nim asked Soo-Hoh if he had any other friends, he drew those next.”

Hae-In flipped one more page.

There was a drawing of a humanoid figure with a strip of red plumage attached to his head while holding what was clearly a sword, no matter who saw it.

‘Igrit....’

Hae-In instantly recognised the protagonist of the drawing and slowly held her forehead with one hand. He might look like a trustworthy knight to those who knew him, but how would this situation look like in the eyes of strangers?

Her head began aching just from thinking about that.

After that page came the drawings of Bellion and his extending magic sword, as well as Fangs, busily putting on a magic show. Inevitably, Hae-In's head began developing a stronger migraine.

‘.....’

The headmistress interpreted Hae-In's speechless expression the wrong way and spoke in a worried voice.

“The next drawing is what Soo-Hoh drew as his family portrait.”

Flip.

The page of the sketchbook flipped again. What greeted her next was a drawing of herself, a man that seemed to be her husband, Jin-Woo, and

innumerable black figures standing behind them.

Soo-Hoh grew up from his toddler days surrounded by the Shadow Soldiers and he must've thought of them as his extended family now.

'This is how we look like in Soo-Hoh's eyes.'

Hae-In thought that this drawing contained her son's innocent but warm gaze, and her nose stung with emotions.

The class teachers couldn't understand the meaning behind these drawings and fell into a rather considerable amount of panic and came to the conclusion that there must've been some sort of a problem with Soo-Hoh.

And of course, that included the headmistress herself, the person responsible for asking Hae-In to stop by at the kindergarten today.

The middle-aged lady formed a pretty grave expression as she spoke.

"The final page contains Soo-Hoh's drawing of his 'home'. And the reason why I requested you for today's meeting, as well."

What kind of a drawing would it be this time? With a pair of nervous eyes, Cha Hae-In flipped to the last page.

There was a cosy little house.

A normal-looking house was standing erect in the middle of some land.

The problem with this depiction was that the ground below was completely painted black.

Over 70 percent of the sketchbook's real estate was dominated by the black colour.

"We've been caring for many children over the years, but never have we encountered such depictions of friends and family by a child until now."

The headmistress pointed to the black portion of the drawing and spoke in a calm voice.

"The homeroom teacher-nim asked Soo-Hoh why he drew the lower half of the house like this, and the boy replied that that's where his friends, his family, as well as his giant father, are staying."

'.....Giant father?'

That explanation was puzzling enough to make Hae-In tilt her head this way and that, but still, she could more or less guess how this drawing came about.

However....

“By any chance, do you know why Soo-Hoh is drawing these sorts of images?”

...It was really unfortunate that Hae-In couldn't reveal what she knew to other people. She could only shake her head.

“...As I feared.”

The headmistress nodded her head as if she understood the situation.

Initially, the kindergarten was fearful that Soo-Hoh was being mistreated at home, but they couldn't find any evidence of abuse from the boy's jovial, good-natured behaviour he displayed every day.

Although rare, things like this did happen occasionally – young kids drawing the world as they see it through their eyes.

“Maybe... It's possible that Soo-Hoh possesses a great talent for art.”

The headmistress convinced herself with this and smiled gently.

Hae-In stopped forming a gloomy expression, now that she knew the source of today's 'trouble', and smiled awkwardly, as well.

“Ah, yes. Yes.”

What a relief that it was not a huge matter. She could finally relax a bit.

However, these drawings weren't the end of the headmistress's business today. She again deliberated on whether she should speak of this or not, before coming to a difficult decision and raised her head.

The look in her eyes was far graver than when she presented those drawings.

“Miss Cha, actually.... There is something else I'd like to speak to you about.”

In the Central Region's Violent Crimes Unit.

After the results of the promotion examination had been announced, excited voices began resounding out and filled up the Unit's office.

“Senior-nim, congratulations on your promotion!”

“Congratulations!”

“You should buy us all a round, don't you agree, Senior-nim? No, hang on, Seong Superintendent-nim?”

Jin-Woo had to spend quite some time being surrounded by the rest of the Unit's detectives, and was only able to extricate himself after his partner, Lee

Seh-Hwan, finally showed up.

“Hyung-nim, shall we get going?”

“Yeah.”

Leaving behind the congratulatory words coming from here and there, Jin-Woo and his beaming smile escaped from the office.

Enough time had passed and Lee Seh-Hwan himself was a veteran detective now. He quickly congratulated his much-respected senior.

“Hyung-nim, congrats.”

Jin-Woo used a wordless smile to sub for his reply.

He and Lee Seh-Hwan shared jovial banter as they walked side by side, but then, the younger detective cautiously scanned his surroundings before sticking real close to his senior.

“By the way, hyung-nim.... Why did you accept the promotion this time? I mean, whenever the brass pleaded with you to move up the career ladder, you always refused them, so why now?”

Jin-Woo looked at Seh-Hwan from the corners of his eyes with a look that said, ***“What’s so important about that?”*** before breaking out into a smirk as he replied.

“I ran out of excuses for my refusal, you see.”

Seh-Hwan laughed out loud at that rather remarkable answer.

“You’re truly amazing, hyung-nim. I’m telling you.”

Although what he said sounded like a joke, Jin-Woo wasn’t joking here. Of course, Seh-Hwan knew that, too.

As it was the case with pretty much every profession out there, a detective would grow further and further away from field work the higher his rank became.

Jin-Woo wished to remain close to where the action was, and the higher-ups, especially Commander Woo Jin-Cheol, respected that. Unfortunately, that couldn’t go on forever.

Now that all excuses that could stop a detective with a stunning arrest record from advancing in his career had been exhausted, even Jin-Woo was left with no choice but to accept the examination result.

“Hyung-nim, don’t you have any goals or wants? I mean, like, better position or making lots of money, that sort of things.”

Money, was it?

If Jin-Woo said that once upon a time, he made more than enough moolah to b*tch-slap a huge law firm and their deep pockets in the face all by himself at a younger age than his junior partner, would the kid even believe him?

Too bad, Jin-Woo could only recall the days when he operated the Ah-Jin Guild alongside Yu Jin-Ho and swallow back the words dancing on the tip of his tongue.

‘Well, they’ve really become distant memories now, haven’t they...’

He could swim in the reminiscence of the past for only a short while, though. As he was about to climb into the car with Seh-Hwan, his phone began ringing loudly, so he pulled it out to take a look.

‘Mm?’

The call was from Hae-in.

After talking on the phone, Jin-Woo returned home earlier than usual, and after checking out Soo-Hoh’s drawings, could only chuckle softly.

“I had no idea that our son had such a wonderful talent in art.”

Amongst them, the drawing of Beru especially caught his eyes. There should be no other five-year-old child that can draw an ant this wonderfully in the world.

Jin-Woo looked at the drawing in happiness, only to be pricked harshly by Hae-In’s sharp glare and quickly withdrew his smile.

“Hm, hmm.”

After seeing her husband changing his attitude really quickly like that, Hae-In just couldn’t hold back her smirk from breaking out anymore. She then spoke to Jin-Woo as if she was trying to convince herself.

“It’s not a laughing matter, you know? Take a look at the very last page.”

“The last page?”

The last page in question contained Soo-Hoh’s final piece, named ‘My home’.

“Soo-Hoh said that the black ground is where his giant father is, so can you think of.... Why are you smiling?”

“N-no, well, it’s just that I remembered something funny. That’s all.”

Jin-Woo recalled the ‘Divine Liege’ statue standing in the middle of the ‘territory of eternal rest’ and couldn’t hold back his laughter anymore. Tears

even began sneaking out of his eyes, so he quickly wiped them off and closed the sketchbook.

Wouldn't it be fine to let this slide with a simple chuckle? Expressions containing such thoughts flitted in and out of Jin-Woo's face. Hae-In let a soft sigh out and relayed what the headmistress had told her earlier in the day.

“Other kids are apparently scared of Soo-Hoh.”

“....??”

A little bit of the smile on Jin-Woo's face went away, then.

“Other kids?”

Hae-In nodded her head with a worried expression before continuing on with her explanation.

“Their complexions change badly whenever Soo-Hoh tries to get close to them. Even when he has never bullied or shouted at them, but still.”

“....”

Now that was not something he could gloss over. Jin-Woo's expression hardened. The previous smile was long gone now. The thing he was worried about had really happened.

‘Children are....’

Young children were incomparably purer than adults. And he wasn't simply talking about their immature way of looking at things.

No, it was about the 'purity' of their senses.

Unlike with adults who, through logical reasoning and studying, got to overcome the primal instincts they were born with, children could feel the fear of death far more vividly.

The reason why other kids avoided Soo-Hoh was because they must've felt the shadow of death hovering above him.

‘The power of the Shadow Sovereign....’

It became Jin-Woo's, and that fact prevented it from becoming a full-blown calamity, but that was about it.

In reality, this power was a horrifying weapon that the 'God of another realm' hid inside its most loyal soldier in order to destroy everything it had created.

If the powers of the Shadow Sovereign he didn't mean to give to his son continued to grow within Soo-Hoh, then....

‘...It’ll be impossible to carry on with a normal life.’

At the very least, there was a need to seal that power away until Soo-Hoh reached an age where he could exert perfect control over it.

Jin-Woo’s gaze shifted over to all the photos hanging on the living room’s wall. The biggest one was the marriage of Jin-Woo and Hae-In; surrounding it were many images of their son.

And most of those photos were shot alongside Shadow Soldiers.

Soo-Hoh and his bright smile, as he rode on Beru’s shoulders and energetically yanking on the ant king’s two antennae.

Soo-Hoh busy escaping from Igrit who volunteered to become the boy’s home-school tutor, and then, Soo-Hoh busy performing a mock duel with Bellion using his toy sword.

There were so many others.

Jin-Woo quietly began storing them away in the subspace, one by one.

“Dear....?”

“Until Soo-Hoh can live among other people without any issues, I... I’m planning to temporarily seal away Soo-Hoh’s powers and his memories of the Shadow Soldiers.”

Soo-Hoh had to learn it.

He needed to learn how to coexist among regular people like a normal person, rather than with Shadow Soldiers.

Until then....

Just as the final remaining photo entered the storage within the subspace, Beru emerged from the ground after learning of Jin-Woo’s decision.

[Oh, my king....]

The heart of the Shadow Soldier, the one who looked after and loved Soo-Hoh like his own child, was transmitted in full to Jin-Woo.

However, the Sovereign’s decision was resolute. Realising that there was no way to change his liege’s mind, Beru’s head drooped to the ground.

As the former ant king’s gaze fell, a drawing suddenly entered his view. It was Soo-Hoh’s sketchbook pushed forward by Jin-Woo.

[This is...?]

‘It’s you, drawn by Soo-Hoh.’

Easily the best depiction of Beru he'd ever seen was drawn upon this white page. Thick teardrops formed on Beru's large eyes almost right away.

[My liege.... May I be permitted to say goodbye to the young Lord?]

Nod.

After receiving Jin-Woo's permission, Beru cautiously entered Soo-Hoh's room.

Creak....

The soft, rhythmic breathing of the deeply-asleep Soo-Hoh was like the sweetest and most soothing music to the former ant king's ears. He knelt down cautiously next to the bed, so as to not rouse the sleeping child from his nap.

[My Lord.... On behalf of all the Shadow Soldiers, I shall bid you farewell.]

His voice gently reverberated as if it was spoken within the dreams. In his sleep, Soo-Hoh shifted his body towards the location of the voice and mumbled softly.

“Boss ant.... boss ant....”

With an expression showing how proud he was of Soo-Hoh now being able to pronounce 'ant' more concisely compared to when the child was still chasing after him a couple of years ago, Beru bade his goodbye.

[It has been my honour to serve you, my Lord. Until we meet again next time, I pray for your good health....]

Beru lightly kissed the back of Soo-Hoh's hand perched at the end of the bed and stood back up. All the soldiers hidden within the former ant king's shadow also said their goodbyes.

[My Lord, even without me, I pray that you strictly adhere to your study schedules...]

[Please be healthy, my Lord.]

[Sobbbb, sniff, waaaail, waaah....]

With the goodbyes now over, Beru looked behind him. Jin-Woo was there, nodding his head.

He wordlessly walked over to his son and carefully pulled the blanket up to the boy's chest, tucking him in. Then, he placed his palm on the sleeping child's forehead. Powerful magical energy very briefly hovered near his fingertips before leaving him behind.

When Soo-Hoh opens his eyes again, all of his extraordinary power and memories would be gone.

‘Have a good dream, son...’

Jin-Woo lightly kissed his son slumbering away like a baby angel and left the room, quietly closing the door behind him.

That night, Soo-Hoh dreamed of ants and knights and Orcs dancing happily together with him.



Chapter 267 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Only I Level Up Recollections/After Stories

Part 3: Approach

Spin, spin....

The radar of a boy named Lee Eun-Cheol, a recent addition to the ranks of high school students, began spinning around.

A brand new school, a new classroom, and new classmates.

The eyes of Lee Eun-Cheol, sitting right at the back of the class, as he scanned the atmosphere of the place remained harsh, predatory. With just one glance, he quickly judged who was beneath him, and who was qualified to be his friend.

The laws of the jungle reigned supreme in this world called the classroom.

Even back in his middle school days, Lee Eun-Cheol ruled the roost with his fists. To his eyes, the majority of his classmates looked like a bunch of easy prey. Almost without exception, those that met his glare all quickly averted their gazes.

‘...How lame.’

However, there was a dude that walked closer to him with a grin on his face, instead.

‘That’s Jo Seong-Ho.’

He was one of those ‘friends’ who did his thing in the neighbouring district. Also, they ran into each other every now and then while sharing casual booze with his other friends, too.

“You were also here?”

“Yeah.”

They greeted each other and shared news on their particular circle of acquaintances while measuring each other up, but that only lasted for a short while.

Jo Seong-Ho had heard the infamy of Lee Eun-Cheol plenty of times before, so he lowered his head first and got under the latter’s wings.

“Take care of me from now on, alright?”

Lee Eun-Cheol smirked deeply and grasped Jo Seong-Ho’s extended hand. They might be in the process of establishing their hierarchical positioning at the moment, but a guy like this would be classified as a ‘friend’.

And so, as he was about halfway done with establishing the hierarchical relationship with the rest of the class, there was this one guy who kept getting on Lee Eun-Cheol’s nerves for some reason.

He wasn’t some model student who sat right in front of the class, nor was he a punk trying to show off while sitting at the back, either.

It was a strange kid who sat in the middle and didn’t even bother to avert his gaze away when their gazes collided.

There would always be one like this guy in every class – a dimwit who didn’t know his place and needed an ‘incident’ to figure who was on top and who was at the bottom.

That punk was looking behind him, right at Lee Eun-Cheol, before sighing out, as if he found this whole thing ridiculous, and reverted his gaze back to his front. Obviously, the high school thug couldn’t take that lying down anymore and stood up from his seat.

Dururuk...

The noise of the chair dragging against the ground loudly rang around the classroom. Of course, the gazes of the whole class were instantly focused on Lee Eun-Cheol.

The boy enjoyed all the attention and, while feeling pretty good about himself, strode right over to the dimwit who didn’t know his place.

“Oii.”

Just as Lee Eun-Cheol reached out to grab the punk’s shoulder and turn him around, a tackle came in from a rather unexpected quarter.

“Hold up.”

After confirming that it was Jo Seong-Ho that grabbed hold of his wrist, Lee Eun-Cheol opened his mouth.

“What now?”

There were distinct signs of displeasure thickly melted into the voice, and that caused Jo Seong-Ho to nervously swallow his dry saliva.

“We went to the same middle school. If you can help it, you shouldn’t bother him.”

“.....Same school?”

Just because they went to the same school, he was trying to protect the punk?

There could be two potential reasons for that. One, a reason that couldn't be brought up but still forbade anyone from touching this punk.

Or, they were looking down on Lee Eun-Cheol.

The high school thug's expression hardened instantly and he began lightly kicking the chair of the 'punk' that didn't even bother to turn around in the middle of this commotion.

“Hey, hey? Who the hell are you? Why don't you say something? Don't you have a mouth?”

Jo Seong-Ho's complexion paled really quickly and tried to jump in front to stop this. Lee Eun-Cheol's patience ran out then and he slapped the latter's hand away while shooting a fierce glare.

“You, come with me.”

As Lee Eun-Cheol left the classroom, two of his underlings that graduated from the same middle school followed after him, too. He stopped right at the doorway and looked back. His eyes caught Jo Seong-Ho sweating buckets, while the 'punk' didn't seem to care one jot either way.

Grit.

A chilling murderous aura filled up Lee Eun-Cheol's eyes.

“Keo-heok!”

Jo Seong-Ho and his messed-up face were tottering unsteadily on his feet. Maybe that didn't satisfy him yet, Lee Eun-Cheol's glare remained frigid and murderous.

He shoved Jo Seong-Ho against the wall before asking his question.

“Who the hell is that punk? Just who is he that you're trying to protect him?!”

The wounded boy breathed heavily and painfully before spitting out saliva mixed with traces of blood to the ground. He then raised his head, his expression one of fatigue.

“He was the strongest in our middle school.”

“...??”

Lee Eun-Cheol's head tilted to the side.

This kid, did he lose his mind after getting smacked around for a bit?

It was a well-known story that Jo Seong-Ho and his gang had completely conquered his middle school. However, he shook his head and emphasized his point.

“We couldn’t even lay a hand on that guy. I stepped forward today, cuz I was scared that something might go wrong here, too.”

Initially, Lee Eun-Cheol wondered what kind of horse crap this was, but Jo Seong-Ho’s eyes were far too serious for something like that.

‘This son of a b*tch... He’s being serious?’

But, that couldn’t be.

If there was a scary b*stard like that, then there was just no way that a rumour wouldn’t have gotten around.

The name of the punk in question was Seong Soo-Hoh.

Lee Eun-Cheol lived in this neck of the woods since his elementary school days, but he had never heard of that name before. Besides, what could a nerd like that do to him, anyway?

Lee Eun-Cheol’s rage shot up right to the top of his head after realising that Jo Seong-Ho dared to make him look bad in front of others just because of a punk like that.

Smaaaack!

Lee Eun-Cheol’s full-blooded swing caused Jo Seong-Ho’s head to spin to the side. The smacked cheek swelled up in red colour.

The high school thug had apparently learned boxing since from a young age, and perhaps because of that, his arm strength couldn’t be treated as a joke.

However, what Jo Seong-Ho truly feared was something else.

It was around the time when he was silently enduring against the barrage of violent attacks from Lee Eun-Cheol. He discovered ‘that’.

‘.....!!!’

The thug stopped throwing punches only after spotting that Jo Seong-Ho’s eyes had grown super-large from surprise. He turned around to look behind him.

From the distance, that nerd was leisurely strolling towards here.

Jo Seong-Ho dropped his head lower as if he didn’t want to meet the gaze

of the one walking closer and spoke in a quiet murmur.

“Just... apologise to him. That’s my serious advice to you.”

“This stupid son of a b*tch...!”

Lee Eun-Cheol grabbed the back of Jo Seong-Ho’s hair to shake the boy’s head around, but the latter simply kept his mouth shut. Just as the former was about to spit out another round of abusive words...

The source of the problem itself, Soo-Hoh, finally stood before them.

Maybe it was because of Jo Seong-Ho’s prior warning? Even Lee Eun-Cheol, who would attack first and ask questions later quickly took a couple of steps back and warily glared at Soo-Hoh.

Although not short, when compared to either himself or Jo Seong-Hoh, this nerd wasn’t all that tall. His physique also seemed exceedingly ordinary.

His neck and wrists revealed outside of the school uniform looked a bit firm, but it didn’t seem like the boy had trained professionally or something.

The more he looked, the less Lee Eun-Cheol believed Jo Seong-Ho’s words.

Utterly ignoring the bullies, Soo-Hoh stepped closer to Jo Seong-Ho and studied the latter’s messed-up face.

“Tsk, tsk.”

The sounds of tutting automatically leaked out from his mouth as if he felt rather rueful about this matter. Soo-Hoh then addressed the boy.

“Hey, Seong-Ho.”

“.....Yeah.”

“Let’s pretend that you also did this. I mean, this much is already enough for self-defence, right?”

Jo Seong-Ho unhesitatingly nodded his head.

“Okay, let’s do that.”

What were they trying to pretend here?

Lee Eun-Cheol listened to this exchange with a puzzled expression etched on his face, but that soon morphed into an angry scowl.

“Oii.”

As he reached out to grab Soo-Hoh’s shoulder to turn the nerd around, a sudden flash of light blinked right in front of Lee Eun-Cheol’s eyes.

Thud!

The unconscious Lee Eun-Cheol fell hard to the ground. Almost at the same time, the two underlings guarding the leader's back also blacked out, as well.

Thud, thud!!

'What a scary b*stard....'

Jo Seong-Ho could only watch on in utter disbelief. If it weren't for his excellent dynamic vision honed through exercises and training, then he'd not have seen those stunning movements.

One hit in the face of Lee Eun-Cheol, and one hit each in the vitals of the two underlings – those attacks were machine-like in their accuracy, yet savage in their nature, like a wild predator.

Back when he 'mistakenly' tried to get Seong Soo-Hoh riled up, he ended up wondering whether such power could actually belong to a human being or not.

But after that, his middle school life became quite stress-free, contrary to his initial expectations.

While looking at the collapsed and unmoving Lee Eun-Cheol and his gang, Jo Seong-Ho scratched the back of his head.

'.....'

The high school thug's nose was broken, while the two underlings had their bones broken.

The rumours should spread around quickly; the rumours of the one and only XX middle school's Lee Eun-Cheol getting beaten up by YY middle school's Jo Seong-Ho, that was.

Even the thug himself would keep his mouth shut over this matter, since that rumour would be far more preferable than to let the world know that he got taken out by some no-name regular student.

'Well, then....'

Once more, another notch had been added to his records of victories.

Since this was a win someone handed over to him, Jo Seong-Ho felt rather embarrassed about this whole thing. As he remained swimming in several complicated thoughts, Soo-Hoh walked up closer and extended his hand out.

"Now that things have come to this.... Well, I'll be in your care in this place too, alright?"

Jo Seong-Ho sheepishly scratched his cheek before wordlessly shaking the offered hand.

Well... It wasn't such a bad trade, this.

“Wow, Jo Seong-Ho took on those three?”

“I thought his aura was really something else when I first saw him, so it's no surprise.”

“I heard that he learned judo since young and was pretty famous in his neighbourhood.”

Thanks to the news of Lee Eun-Cheol and his goons getting shipped off to a hospital, the atmosphere of the entire classroom had become rather heated real fast.

More than that, Jo Seong-Ho was now being treated as a hero even, after it emerged that he was trying to protect another kid who graduated from the same middle school as him.

Although it was the start of a new school year and the kids all felt a bit awkward and unsure of each other, this topic worked wonders and broke the ice nicely. Even then, Soo-Hoh was dazedly staring out at the sky outside all by himself.

The end of the school day wasn't that far away, and the blue heavens above were gradually dyeing in the hues of rich amber.

For some reason, yawns kept threatening to break out so he was having a hard time suppressing them.

‘...I'm bored.’

Indeed, he felt bored, restless.

Recently, he often yawned for no discernible reason and felt bored more frequently than ever before.

And there was this vague, distant feeling that he used to know ‘things’ that made his heart race and surprised him at every turn. Whenever he was beset with such feelings, it became harder to endure against this sense of boredom.

Dururuk...

The door to the classroom slid open. The gazes of the kids all shifted over to the rear door. Jo Seong-Ho didn't display much of a reaction and returned to his assigned seat.

Ohhh-!

Kids were looking at his wound-filled face with gazes of envy and respect. Without a doubt, the top dog of this classroom had changed from Lee Eun-Cheol to Jo Seong-Ho.

“Hey, hey.”

Soo-Hoh remained disinterested as he continued to stare outside the window, only for his attention to be brought back to reality by someone poking him on his back. He looked behind him to find a female student with a neat appearance there trying to talk to him.

“The friend saving you came back looking like that, so aren’t you going to go and say hello, at the least?”

“....I already did.”

“Oh. Okay.”

The girl heard his curt reply and as if she got embarrassed by this exchange, hurriedly opened her textbook to hide her face. Meanwhile, he reverted his gaze back to the skies outside.

‘So bored....’

The sun was creeping closer to the horizon.

The school day was finally over.

While everyone was hurriedly trying to escape from this institution of learning, only Soo-Hoh remained standing by the window to look at the athletics field outside.

Other students were filing out of the school’s front gate. He didn’t like the melee of confusion like that. His mom always laughed and said that he was exactly like his father in that regard.

He read the book he borrowed from the library before raising his head back up, thinking that maybe he should start heading back home now. There was no one else besides him in the classroom.

Soo-Hoh leisurely packed his bag and slung it over his shoulder.

It was fine to be relaxed and laid back, but if he were to waste any more time than this, he’d definitely arrive home late for dinner, and that would mean he’d have to face the wrath of his mother.

It’d be a relief if the story ended there. If the news of his mom getting angry reached his father’s ears.....

‘Euk, d*mn it. I imagined what would happen to me.’

Soo-Hoh was overcome with a nasty case of goosebumps and hurriedly shook his head. Just how old would his father have to be before he wasn't so scary anymore?

Seriously now, he got this sneaking suspicion that, even if his father ended up becoming an old man, Soo-Ho would still never win against him.

He shuddered once more and quickly headed to the rear door of the classroom. But, when he tried to open it....

'The door.... doesn't want to open?'

If it was locked, then there was no way this thing wouldn't budge like this, since it was none other than himself tugging at it. The door showed no signs of moving, as if it was a wall, to begin with.

'What's going on?'

Soo-Hoh's eyes grew rounder and this time, he ran to the front door and grabbed its handle. But it was the same story here, too.

Now thoroughly shocked, he quickly ran to the window and took a look outside. That was when a truly unbelievable spectacle manifested itself before his eyes.

Every single student leaving through the school gates; students exercising on the field, cars passing on the road, pedestrians walking on the pavement, and even the kicked ball flying in the air.....

....Everything had come to a dead stop.

'But, how can something like this be....?!'

Soo-Hoh clenched both of his fists real tight and slammed at the window with all of his might.

Boom!

Too bad, the window not only didn't shatter from the impact, but his fists also bounced away from it as if he was hitting a rubber wall.

'....!!!'

It happened then.

Soo-Hoh retreated from the windows and while taking hurried steps backwards, he tried very hard to figure out what was going on in his head.

And that's when 'it' appeared.

Soo-Hoh's head snapped towards the black circular 'hole' that appeared out of nowhere at the back of the classroom. It was no bigger than the size of a

volleyball, but it rapidly grew larger and larger until it was big enough for a single person to walk through.

It was basically a doorway of darkness, so dark that it felt like he was being sucked in.

Regular kids might have been scared out of their wits by this development, but... Rather than crying out or screaming, Soo-Hoh placed his hand on his chest, instead.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump.

His agitated heart was pounding away in exhilaration.

Maybe.

Just maybe, it was possible that he was waiting for something like this for a long, long time.

‘Mom said that I resemble my dad all the time, doesn’t she?’

If it was his father, then... What would he have done?

The answer was pretty obvious, though.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump....

Because his pounding heart was already making his legs move.

Soo-Hoh stood before the ‘Gate’ and touched its surface.

Bzzz.... Bzz....

Although there were some sparks of electricity, he didn’t feel any pain. No, he felt so much better instead, as if he was returning to his hometown that he had to leave behind a long time ago.

There was this strange, vague sense of deja vu as if he had already entered a place like this one before.

Soo-Hoh slowly but carefully regulated his breathing. His wildly-beating heart finally regained some calmness and the inside of his head seemed to clear up.

‘Good.’

A brief flash of a grin formed on his face.

And then, he jumped inside the ‘Gate’ without a moment’s hesitation.



Chapter 268 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Only I Level Up Recollections/After Stories

Part 4: Forward! Forward!

Soo-Hoh walked through the tunnel-like darkness and after emerging from it, took a look around himself. He was now in a passageway of an ancient-looking structure.

The only source of light illuminating this place was a lit torch on one of the walls.

‘What is this place....?’

Because of the low lighting conditions, his eyes narrowed to a slit so that he could get a better look at his vicinity.

The way back... was blocked off.

Soo-Hoh felt around the solid wall blocking his rear and shook his head eventually. He couldn't sense any sort of empty spaces behind this wall.

‘So, there is no other way besides forward, huh?’

The flames of the torch wavered around. He took it off the wall and illuminated his front.

When he did....

“Wow.”

He was greeted by the sight of weapons arranged neatly on display on either side of the passageway.

A longsword, shortwords, a bow, a spear, a mace, etc....

A truly vast array of weapons were endlessly stacked against the walls in this still darkness, as if to wait for their rightful owner to come and pick them up.

Soo-Hoh dazedly looked at them before swallowing back his saliva.

What could possibly be the reason for these weapons to be here? Well, it was rather obvious, wasn't it?

‘I need to choose....’

His gaze became far more circumspect than ever before.

He didn't know why he was transferred to this place, but if his guess was right and the exit was at the end of this passage, then the weapon he chose right now would serve as a trustworthy companion on his journey.

But, something felt weird.

Why did it feel like his senses were being enhanced?

His heart that didn't beat too fast while hanging out with his friends or checking out a game they suggested he should play, was now pounding away like crazy.

As he observed each weapon on display, Soo-Hoh's eyes shone from the light of excitement.

'Alright...'

He took a close look at all the weapons lined up right till the end, and then, returned to the beginning to study them for a bit more. A few interesting hopefuls caught his eye, but in the end, there was nothing better than 'it', or so he decided.

After putting the torch back up on the wall behind him, he cautiously put 'them' on both of his hands.

Clank, clank.

They were a pair of steel gauntlets that fit him snugly as if they had been crafted with him in mind. Unlike other weapons that required some amount of familiarity in order to effectively use them, his two fists were without a doubt, the most familiar and most powerful weapon he possessed.

'This is it.'

As if he found the gauntlets greatly to his liking, he began folding his outstretched fingers one by one again and again.

When he was done fooling around...

Rumble-!!

Torches lining up the walls in front of him and all around him lit up all at once. A long, long passageway now greeted him.

A corridor resembling a secret pathway of an ancient castle seemed to stretch on forever and ever towards the other end.

Something was about to begin here. Soo-Hoh did his best to calm his wildly-pounding heart, before his eyes spotted a pair of shortswords resting

next to where he found his gauntlets.

But, his gaze lingered on only for a brief moment.

'...Who'd use weapons that look so weak?'

For some reason, that pair of shortswords looked saddened somehow as Soo-Hoh's cautious steps left them behind in the darkness.

Soo-Hoh carefully tread through the corridor.

"Is anyone here?"

He raised his voice and called out, but there was no reply whatsoever. No, he couldn't even sense any presence of living people at all.

And so, just how long did he walk like this?

It wouldn't be too surprising to get worn out by being continuously vigilant like this, but Soo-Hoh still kept his senses ultra-sharp and didn't let up his wary observation of the surroundings.

He could see the lit torches and sparks of flames dancing on top of them hanging on the walls. He could also see the old-fashioned architecture of this place, as well as metallic suits of armour lining up on the side of the wall with nary a gap between them.

'Am I in some kind of a basement of a medieval castle or something?'

His curiosity on where he was and why he was summoned here grew greater and greater the longer he advanced forward.

But then....

'Hold up.'

Soo-Hoh felt this ominous chill creep down his spine and he quickly went back the way he came to stand before a certain suit of armour. For some reason, the positioning of this armour seemed a wee bit different from when he walked past it a few seconds ago.

'This.... Wait, did it really have its sword raised up in the air like this before?'

He was pretty sure that its weapon was pointing down to the ground the last time. Soo-Hoh tilted his head and took a step forward, only for the sword of the armour to slice down in a straight line.

Clang!

If he hadn't raised the gauntlet and urgently block the blade in the nick of time, his head might have been split in half just now.

“What the hell??”

The suit of armour didn't even give Soo-Hoh any chance to feel stunned by this development; it dropped its sword and pounced forward to strangle him with its bare hands.

Boom!! Bang! Kwang!!

His gauntlets soon issued several urgent, thunderous booms, and not too long afterwards, the suit of armour with its helmet destroyed stopped moving altogether.

“Pant, pant, pant....”

While pushing away the collapsed suit of armour with his foot, Soo-Hoh breathed roughly and quickly. Thankfully, he didn't suffer any damage from this encounter, but his heart was pounding away so hard that it felt as if it'd explode at any time.

‘Hold up!’

What if this wasn't the only suit of armour that could move? And what if every single one of them wanted to harm him? All those inanimate armours he walked past earlier without thinking too much brushed past his mind.

That wasn't the end of his troubles, though. There were already so many of them in front of him, and there were even lining up along the length of this corridor, too.

And sure enough...

Clank, clink!

Accompanied by the chorus of metallic joints creaking and groaning, the suits of armour began descending from the platforms one by one. The various weapons held in their hands seemed to glow in chilling grey under the light.

“Ah...”

....Maybe I should've selected that mace?

Soo-Hoh swallowed back the small waves of regret rushing in and clenched his fists tightly. It was around that time that the suits of armour rushed his position.

BOOM!

When he brought down the very last suit of armour, he got to hear that announcement again.

[Level up!]

[Current level: 19.]

“Fuu....”

Soo-Hoh bent down and exhaled a large gulping of air before raising his body up again. Every time he heard that message, all of his fatigue seemed to get washed away in full. That wasn't the only change, though.

After regaining control over his breathing, he threw a straight jab in the empty air.

Shuuuck-!!

His fist flew out like a bullet. Not only that, his entire body was overflowing with this unexplainable power.

“I get it now.”

It was simpler than he thought.

If he defeated these living suits of armour, then his level would go up, and the higher his level got, the stronger he'd get, too. And quite obviously, he'd be able to bring these monsters down much more easily as a result.

Simple, yet a powerful perpetual cycle, indeed.

Soo-Hoh looked behind at the corridor he'd been waking until now. Large piles of armours broken beyond repair or recognition were strewn about here and there. He licked his lips a bit.

‘This sucks....’

It'd been so much nicer if he could raise his level just a bit higher here. He wanted to get stronger just a bit more.

Unfortunately, every road had an end.

Soo-Hoh looked at the giant doorway now blocking his path. His senses had matured greatly as his level rose up and they helped him to detect the presence of a powerful figure behind the door.

That was why he felt rueful about levelling up even more.

He closed eyes and took a deep breath just like how his father had taught him and reached out towards the door to push it open with both hands.

Creak....

The heavy-looking door opened up.

The sight of a huge room resembling a castle's audience chamber greeted him next.

As he followed along the rows of pillars set at a close interval on either side of him, he soon arrived at the deepest part of this chamber where a tall throne stood proudly above a raised plinth.

Soo-Hoh was frozen stiff with nervousness in an instant.

Because there was another monster suit of armour sitting on the throne. But he felt a strength on another dimension altogether from this b*stard compared to other monsters he encountered so far.

'That's it....'

The existence that emitted a goosebumps-inducing aura he felt outside the door, it was precisely this guy. The 'monster' slowly got up and took one step at a time to descend the stairs below the throne.

It was a black knight.

The knight boasting a strand of red plumage attached to its helm finally made its way down to the ground. Just the faint aura emitted from that creature made his skin tingle and shiver from nervousness.

However, Soo-Hoh began smiling for some reason. An electrifying sensation thrilling enough to make all the hair on his body stand up wrapped around his entire being.

Shurung....

The knight began unsheathing his sword.

'I'll attack first before that sword is fully drawn out.'

But, just as he got ready to dash forward, the black knight was already standing right before his nose. A brilliant flash of light shone from the sword swung by the creature just then.

"....Uh??"

That bright, blinding light filled up his view.

"Heok!!"

Soo-Hoh hurriedly raised his body up.

Still incredibly tense, he scanned his surroundings but he failed to see the

black knight anywhere. No, he wasn't even in the same chamber where that monster was.

Somehow, he was teleported back to the starting point.

'What the heck was that?!

He lost all strength on his legs and plopped down on the ground.

'I thought I was really going to die.'

He felt deeply spooked when recalling the moments of the black knight unsheathing its sword. He really, really thought that was the end for him.

"Besides all that, do I need to cross this corridor again?"

Feeling quite unhappy now, Soo-Hoh got up from his spot only to realise that something had changed from his first attempt. And that would be the lit torches on the starting point.

Rumble-!

Out of those, there were three with blue flames burning on them, but now he realised that one of them had gone out.

Could that be a coincidence?

No, it wasn't.

Weapons by the starting point, his level that rose up after killing monsters, his body that grew stronger as his level rose up.

Not one of them could be called a coincidence.

Soo-Hoh had a moment of epiphany just then.

'It's not that I was going to die, but...'

There was no such concept as either pain or death inside this strange place, but those blue flames substituted for his remaining opportunities.

If all three flames went out, then.... For now, it was hard for him to imagine what kind of a result waited for him.

'In that case....'

....I gotta be more meticulous.

The glare in Soo-Hoh's eyes grew even more vigilant compared to the first attempt.

One more time. But he'd not mess up his chance this time around.

Boom!

He made up his mind as he blew away the monster suit of armour busy pouncing on him.

“Uwaaaah-!! Uwaah!!”

Finding himself forcibly returned to the starting point once more, Soo-Hoh rolled around on the ground while clutching his head. Of course, he wasn't doing that because of an injury or crippling physical pain.

He was just p*ssed off by the fact that he ended up throwing away yet another chance. He pounded on the ground as tears formed on his eyes. That's how deeply he felt hurt right now.

After he somehow calmed the raging firestorm in his heart, he raised his head a bit to look, and to no one's surprise, the number of lit blue torches had decreased by one. Now, there was only one remaining.

‘That black knight, he’s just too powerful!!’

There simply was far too great a gap between him and that creature, and it was more than enough to call it a cheat, that the ‘balance’ of this trial was definitely broken. With things like this, he'd never be able to defeat that b*stard.

“Uwaaaah!!”

Soo-Hoh rolled around on the ground once more.

He did that for a while. Eventually, he grew tired of doing that, so he stopped and leaned his back against the wall before shifting his gaze over to the corridor.

It was unknown just from where those suits were being summoned, but well, they had returned again and were manning their stations once more.

“Aren’t you guys sick and tired of this already?”

Soo-Hoh even felt happy to see those monster armours after seeing them for the third time like this.

“Hah-ah....”

He spat out a lengthy groan one after other, but then...

“...Uh?”

....A lightbulb went on in his head.

He raised his head and looked at the armours once more.

‘When did those things reappear again?’

Initially, he figured that the monsters reappeared simply because he was sent back to the starting point. However, what if that was wrong and they regenerated after a certain period of time?

Ba-thump.

Ba-thump, ba-thump, ba-thump....

A new ray of hope seemed to be within his reach.

‘Okay, let’s try it out.’

Soo-Hoh beat up the monster armours near the entrance and destroyed them before returning to the starting point. He sat down with his back leaning against the wall and observed for any potential changes to the monsters.

After some time had passed by...

Plop, plop.

The ‘dead’ monster armours suddenly turned into sand one by one and got absorbed into the ground. And then, Soo-Hoh’s eyes grew wide after he saw what happened next.

‘.....!’

The sand suddenly gathered above the platforms the monsters used to stand and transformed back into the suits of armour.

“Yees!”

Soo-Hoh clenched his fists real tightly.

Finally, he found the right answer.

The only existences that could aid him with his levelling up thankfully respawned after a fixed period of time.

Didn’t that mean he should crazily level up by smashing these monsters apart until he could actually follow the movements of that horrifying black knight?

A grin floated up on Soo-Hoh’s face as he stood back up.

Funnily enough, the monster armours flinched ever so slightly after they saw the figurative sparks of flame burning within his eyes.

Level 70.

No matter how many times he hunted these monsters down, his level didn’t

want to rise beyond that. However, this should be more than enough.

Blackish aura was slowly rising up Soo-Hoh's shoulders. He didn't know what these strands of black smoke might be, but he could tell one thing for sure.

And that would be the fact that his body was currently overflowing with this incredible energy he found hard to fully control yet.

He unhesitatingly pushed open the door to the chamber where the black knight was waiting for. Unlike the first two fights, the monster kindly came to greet him by the door's vicinity.

Soo-Hoh grinned deeply.

“Were you waiting for long?”

Rather than a verbal answer, the black knight unsheathed his sword, instead. For some reason, it felt as if this knight was smiling.

Feeling confident after managing to push his level all the way up to 70 somehow, Soo-Hoh unleashed all of the magical energy gathered within his body without holding back.

The ground trembled and pieces of rubble began floating in the air.

“Now, it's my turn.”



Chapter 269 Fin.

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Only I Level Up Recollections/After Stories

Part 5: Conclusion

(TL: One more chapter to go!)

There were around 30 metres between him and the b*stard.

‘...Let’s do this.’

Soo-Hoh concentrated and in an instant, the flow of time around him seemed to slow down to a crawl, allowing him to see and discover all those little things he hadn’t noticed before.

For instance, the sword swung by the black knight. And then, that blue-coloured arc of lightning from the tip of that sword flying towards him in a straight line with a ‘flash’.

‘So, that’s what it was!!’

Finally, he got to see what the powerful attack that ended the fight was, even before he could do anything the last two times. His agility and perception, raised up much higher than before through levelling up, were pushed to their absolute limits.

He dodged the streak of light flying right into his face and took a step forward.

Taht!

Just one leap, and in that one moment, the distance between him and his target decreased in half by roughly around 15 metres.

Flash!!

The second lightning brushed past the top of his head by a hair’s width.

The black knight had quickly changed his posture after sending out the first attack to follow up with his second. Soo-Hoh felt amazed at his opponent’s quick reaction as he took another step forward.

Taht!

The distance between them disappeared in the next instance.

Kwa-du-duk!

Soo-Hoh clenched his gauntlet-covered fist tightly.

'Now you are in my range.'

Flinch.

It looked as if the black knight tensed up greatly just then, and his emotions travelled through the chilly air to cling to Soo-Hoh's two cheeks.

While inwardly thanking the level up system that pushed his abilities to such an incredible height, Soo-Hoh punched forward, hard.

Shhhwiiii-eek!

His fist had broken past the level of a bullet and was more like a cannon shell now, as it crashed into the face of the black knight.

Kwa-boom!!

The knight urgently raised his sword to block the incoming gauntlet but in the end, he was powerfully shoved away with both of his feet briefly leaving the ground.

Kwa-jijijjik!!

The ends of the black knight's boots broke the stone tiles on the floor and left behind two lengthy gouges as he got shoved back. By the time he finally managed to stop his seemingly-endless travel rearwards...

'...!!'

He realised belatedly that there was a stone pillar behind him.

'D*mn it!'

The black knight became flustered and quickly shifted his gaze back to his front. But then, Soo-Hoh was already there, blocking the view.

'Could he have.... that attack was meant to force me into this very area?'

The black knight was left greatly stunned by his opponent's smart thinking, but still, reflexively moved his sword in the meantime. The aura oozing off the blade as reflected in Soo-Hoh's eyes emitted a chilling blue light.

The boy held his breath for a moment there and smacked the knight's blade slicing down diagonally with the back of his hand, currently safely protected by the metal gauntlet.

He then took a powerful step forward.

Soo-Hoh managed to reduce the distance between him and his opponent to

zero before swinging his fist one more time. This attack landed squarely on the black knight's chest.

Kwa-boom!!!

Now normally, the knight should've been flung away by the force, but he crashed into the pillar behind him instead, and the structure's surface cracked up grandly.

What a shocking destructive power that was.

However, what was even more shocking was the fact that an attack carrying such destructive power didn't end with just one hit. Soon after, Soo-Hoh's barrage of fists rained down on his target.

Dudududududu-!!

The black knight, no, Igrit continued to sigh in admiration inwardly as he blocked and deflected Soo-Hoh's non-stop barrage of attacks, which kind of reminded him of his liege's skill.

'So, this is the power of the young lord, even if he's not 100% yet?'

His father, becoming one with a godly being, while his mother, a rank S Hunter once upon a time in a now-forgotten timeline. Born from these two people, the sleeping potential within Soo-Hoh easily exceeded Igrit's imagination.

Kwa-jeeck!

The sturdy armour began breaking and falling off bit by bit under the barrage of merciless attacks. Igrit pushed his speed to the limit, but it was still not enough to defend against every single attack raining down on him.

And eventually...

Clang!!

The sword barely withstanding against Soo-Hoh's blunt attacks finally broke while issuing a loud noise.

That was the end.

Igrit watched the shattered remnants of steel fly away and instinctively sensed that this battle was now over.

But then, this defeat also quickened his pulse to a great deal compared to before, just like back when he fought against Jin-Woo all those years ago in a place similar to this one.

Meanwhile, Soo-Hoh loaded his fist with his magical energy for that final

shot.

Wuuuong-!!

The surrounding Mana in the air rippled like waves on the lake's surface and spread out visibly. And then....

KA-BOOM!!

The fist fired forward like a cannon shell left behind a large, empty hole where the black knight's abdomen was. The knight collided with the pillar again and slowly slid down. And then, he stopped moving altogether.

‘.....’

Soo-Hoh cautiously poked the slumped black knight before finally releasing his tightly-held breath.

“Hah-ah!!”

He won.

He fought and won against a powerful enemy that he thought he could never win against in the beginning. Joy began welling up from the deepest part of his chest like a tidal wave.

However, rather different from his expectations, there wasn't all that much of a change.

‘Maybe... this isn't the end?’

He slowly looked around his surroundings and belatedly discovered that, in the distance, a brand new Gate had been generated by the foot of the stairs leading up to the tall throne.

His eyes grew super-large.

It was the exit!

He didn't know why he ended up in this place, but still, he couldn't help but smile brightly after realising that this bizarre adventure was about to come to its conclusion.

Soo-Hoh hurriedly ran towards the black hole in happiness and threw himself inside. Just like back when he was entering this place, he passed through a long tunnel of darkness, and after opening his eyes.....

“Kkiiiiieehk!”

“Khhiigegegek!”

“.....”

....He found human-sized ant humanoid monsters busy screeching out here and there.

“Pant, pant, what kind of ants are this crazy?!”

Soo-Hoh looked down in utter disbelief at the unmoving corpses of ant monsters he managed to defeat just now.

For some reason, he liked ants from a young age so he always cautiously avoided lines of worker ants if he happened to come across one so that he wouldn't step on them by mistake. But now, he felt rather remorseful of his past actions.

That was how powerful and obstinate these ant monsters were. Those armour monsters couldn't even be compared to these guys at all.

‘Still, if I were to look for the silver lining in all of this, then....’

His level that seemed to have gotten stuck began climbing up quickly again after he hunted these ant monsters down.

Sha-shak, sha-shak...

He could hear the shuffling footsteps of the ant monsters coming from somewhere. Soo-Hoh was successful in regaining control over his heavy breathing by then. He tightly clenched his fists and got ready.

Kwa-du-duk!

“Khiieck!”

“Kahk!”

Remembering the lessons learned during his battle against the black knight, Soo-Hoh made sure to focus on raising his level higher by clearing out every single nook and cranny of this cavern.

And so, screams of ant monsters continued to resound out from all corners of this complicated cavern system with a maze-like layout.

How long did he roam around this cavern in this fashion?

‘Alright....’

When he reached the point where his level didn't want to rise up even after defeating the ant monsters, Soo-Hoh headed towards the last chamber in this cavern and entered it.

As it turned out, it was a giant, open chamber. An empty space, in other words.

There was not one strand of light inside the boss chamber, but Soo-Hoh's

senses had already far exceeded that of a regular human and he had no problem maintaining his vision.

‘Just how big is the master of this place that it has to be this large?’

Just as he began to get worried ever so slightly....

He finally discovered a humanoid ant monster with its back turned towards him. Unlike the others he fought so far, though, this particular guy sported insect-like wings.

‘Is that guy the only thing in this chamber?’

The overall atmosphere of this open space was rather similar to the one found in the chamber with the black knight. However, Soo-Hoh couldn't sense any sorts of power from that ant creature, which was quite different from the knight boss of before.

Was it powerful, or a weakling?

Soo-Hoh tilted his head this way and that and while being as sneaky as possible, he cautiously approached the creature.

When he got close enough to think that he was in range now, the ant monster suddenly turned around to face Soo-Hoh without any prior warning.

‘Heok!’

Soo-Hoh flinched and quickly took a step back.

It wasn't because he got scared, though. No, he just got surprised by the unfolding situation, that was all. But, it couldn't be helped, really. The thing was, the ant monster turning around was crying non-stop.

It was sobbing so sorrowfully that, even though he knew the creature was a monster that he couldn't converse with, Soo-Hoh just couldn't bring himself to attack first.

But, why did this happen?

It'd only be normal to feel rather weirded out when looking at an insectoid creature the size of a grown man standing on two feet while thick teardrops fell from its eyes.

But, Soo-Hoh wanted to console this ant monster instead, for some inexplicable reason. That's what he felt then.

Too bad, such a compassionate thought could only last for a brief moment. Soo-Hoh sensed an incredible aura from the creature bursting forth and hurriedly leapt a good distance away.

‘....??’

As if it was trying to get a hold of its emotions, the ant monster wiped the tears away with the backs of its hands.

‘Oh my god....’

Meanwhile, Soo-Hoh was stunned by the incredible power oozing out from his new opponent and inadvertently sneaked a look down at the hair on his arms standing up.

This ant, it was on another scale altogether compared to other ants or that black knight he fought so far. His entire body began shuddering.

‘Uh....?’

Suddenly, a huge shadow drew upon him and he raised his head up to look, only to find that the ant monster had closed the distance and was standing right in front of his nose.

Its body had ballooned up to over double that of its previous size and then, it screeched out a horrifying cry next.

[Kiiiiieeeeehhk!]

What a relief it was.

Indeed, there was no other way to say it than what a relief.

While lying on the ground completely exhausted, Soo-Hoh continued to think that way.

The winged ant monster was a truly frightening opponent, for sure. But, for some reason, the ant couldn't attack him whenever they were locked in critical moments, apparently feeling conflicted about something.

But, thanks to that, he was able to bring down the ant somehow, even though the task proved to be really arduous in the end.

“Euh, euh....”

While goading and twisting his aching body, Soo-Hoh pushed himself up. As his reward for bringing down a powerful enemy, a new Gate had been generated over yonder.

Before leaving, he confirmed his current level.

[Level: 99]

His level stopped climbing at 99. Now, normally, most games would treat ‘99’ as the max level attainable.

‘I’m sure I can go home for real now.’

Soo-Hoh’s heart pounded away noisily as his expectations grew. He then gladly jumped into the awaiting Gate. And when he opened his eyes....

“Mm? Mmmm??”

“Growl.....”

...He got to discover giants and dragons filling up his view, as far as his eyes could see.

“Hah...”

It was the case of ‘one mountain after another’.

While making figurative mountains out of the corpses of giants and dragons, Soo-Hoh continued down the path laid out on this seemingly-endless plains.

His level remained stuck in 99.

Although his stats didn’t rise higher, he was now able to control his powers far more smoothly and expertly after going through countless battles. His incredible strength, and technique to control them, gave Soo-Hoh a rather healthy boost to his confidence.

A short while later, he discovered yet another black knight guarding the end of the path.

‘.....’

Unlike the previous black knight with a red plumage attached to its helm, this new guy boasted a much bigger physique, and there were traces of broken wings on its back, as well.

It was incredibly powerful. So much so that, it must’ve been far stronger than the winged ant monster he fought earlier. However....

‘...That guy isn’t my real opponent.’

Soo-Hoh was sure of this.

Why? Because, a certain existence that made him think that it was the real deal was flying silently in the air above his head, that was why.

Soo-Hoh picked up on that figure’s enormous presence and raised his head high. When he did...

[Kkiiiaahk-!!]

The Sky Dragon flying in the air roared out loudly. The scene of a lone

figure jumping off from its back happened right afterwards.

The figure of a person fell for what felt like an eternity before lightly landing on the ground, causing the earth below to cave into a big crater while kicking up an almighty dust storm in the process.

BOOM!!

Soo-Hoh swallowed nervously.

'That guy's the real deal....'

The unknown figure, his face hidden behind the hoodie pulled down low, emitted this intense pressure that even made breathing difficult.

When he made his descent, the black knight stopped unsheathing his sword and took several steps back as if to say that he'd not participate in the upcoming fight anymore.

'I knew it, the real enemy is this guy.'

Soo-Hoh tried to stop his legs from shaking anymore from this choking pressure. This was the first time an actual person and not a monster had appeared in here so he simply had to say something.

"Excuse me!"

He tried to engage the mysterious figure in conversation, but the lips visible below the hoodie only maintained a simple grin, choosing not to return any verbal replies.

"Argh, seriously man...."

Soo-Hoh gave up on talking to the figure, but then, his eyes went extra-round after discovering something else besides.

'Isn't that....?'

For the first time during this journey, the Gate had been generated even before he defeated his enemy. Its location was behind the man wearing the hoodie.

'Which means....'

This could very well be the final hurdle.

As long as he could defeat that man, he'd be able to go home.

When that conclusion popped up in his head, Soo-Hoh's body moved instinctively.

It moved under the influence of his overall stats that had reached their

absolute limit, as well as the combat abilities that had evolved to allow him full control over those stats.

Ba-thump, ba-thump!!

While feeling the explosive beatings of his heart...

Taht! Taht! Taht!!

Soo-Hoh broke past the speed of sound and rushed to the front of the man in the blink of an eye. His enemy was literally right in front of his nose.

Within this distance that none could possibly dodge an attack, a fist that couldn't be withstood even if blocked flew straight into the mystery man's face.

Too bad, the man only had to lean his head back slightly and easily let the attack slide by him.

It happened then.

Inside this world of slowed-down time, Soo-Hoh got to see the uncovered face of the man, revealed for a brief moment under the hood.

“....Dad?!”

The mystery man smirked gently.

“Still too early.”

Soo-Hoh's eyes grew wider as they caught the sight of the man's palm closing in on his face faster than the speed of light.

The boy squeezed his eyes shut.

And soon, the light completely blinded him.

“Heok!!”

Soo-Hoh shot up from his chair and hurriedly took a look around him.

He was back inside his classroom. The empty, still air of the after-school hours had permeated into this now-familiar place.

He wiped the cold sweat pooled on his forehead.

‘What a weird-a*s dream that was.’

Did I play way too many games or something?

After wandering around lost inside a strange dungeon, he ended up running into his own father as its final boss....

What an embarrassing crappy dream that he wouldn't dare to tell anyone

for, like, ever. He was greatly relieved that it was nothing but just a dream.

He spat out a sigh of relief and turned around, only to find a female student frozen stiff like a block of ice behind him. She got surprised out of her skull after the sleeping Soo-Hoh suddenly shot up from his spot, actually.

He wanted to break this awkward atmosphere somehow, so he started talking to her first.

“Uhm, weren’t you supposed to go home?”

Now that he took another look, it was the same girl sitting behind his spot that poked him in the back earlier in the day.

“I’m supposed to do the classroom duty this week, so... I gotta lock the doors first before leaving....”

The female student stuttered and took pauses between her words, but Soo-Hoh replied as if it was nothing to sweat over.

“Want me to help?”

“Eh?”

The girl got flustered for a moment there at the unexpected offer, but eventually, shyly nodded her head.

“...Thanks.”

Around the same time.

Jin-Woo stood on the rooftop of the same school building alongside Beru and Igrit.

Igrit was the first to speak.

[My liege.... Isn’t it fine to restore the young lord’s powers now?]

They had performed the same test a few times before, but today was the first time the young lord reached as far as the Sovereign’s footsteps. Igrit wished to give Soo-Hoh full passing marks after the boy displayed wonderful progress during the examination.

Jin-Woo replied with a grin on his lips.

“What would’ve happened if I tried to fight the Dragon Emperor from the get-go while believing in the powers that I possessed at that time?”

Igrit shook his head.

What Jin-Woo wanted to teach Soo-Hoh was precisely this. No matter how powerful one was, one should consider escaping when facing a situation

where the victory wasn't a certainty.

It was not a sign of bravery to jump in head-long against a powerful enemy without a plan.

'Indeed, it's just a reckless, foolish bravado.'

Even when knowing that he couldn't win, Soo-Hoh still challenged Jin-Woo, regardless. His courage might be laudable, but from the perspective of his father, that was a rather worrisome result.

'Too early.

Right, it's still too early for him.

However, Soo-Hoh is a smart kid, so he'll soon figure it out.

He'll learn that he needs to adjust his powers according to the situation at hand.'

[Young Lord....]

Beru looked at a sheet of an old paper with him drawn on it, the edges of his eyes reddening up with tears once more.

Drop, drop....

Jin-Woo lightly patted the shoulders of despondent Beru before walking closer to the guardrail to take a look at the school grounds below. He could see the back of his son leaving the school gate along with a female student from his class.

Jin-Woo rested his chin on his hands and watched Soo-Hoh walk further away, before a grin floated up on his face.

"It's been a while, so should I take my family out for dinner later today?"



Chapter 270: Chapter 270

Source: WEBNOVEL

REPORT

Only I Level Up Recollections/After Stories

Part 6: Goodbye

(TL: Here it is, the very last chapter.)

[The sibling conmen duo of Hwang Dong-Seok and his younger brother Hwang Dong-Su that caused an uproar in the country have been arrested earlier today....]

Beep.

The TV located inside the Violent Crimes Unit that spat out the news was turned off. Jin-Woo put the remote down and picked up his coat while standing up, prompting Seh-Hwan next to him to stop the administrative work and ask a question.

“Uh? Hyung-nim, you’re leaving already?”

“Yeah, I’ve got a prior arrangement to attend to, so I’ll be going home early today.”

“Yessir.”

Jin-Woo replied with a smile towards his partner performing a playful salute and escaped from the office. Seh-Hwan watched his boss’s back disappear from view and chuckled slightly while crossing his arms.

“It’s so strange. Hyung-nim always goes home early on this day every single year....”

....Hang on a minute.

He shifted his gaze over to the calendar stuck on one of the walls and a certain thought popped up in his head.

“Ahh, so that’s what it was. Today is....”

Baek Yun-Ho spat out a low sigh, his face a mess of black soot and dirt.

“Fuu....”

Not too long ago, he and his crew managed to put out a massive wildfire raging near a residential area. This victory came about after over 50 fire

engines and firefighting helicopters, as well as 800 or so brave firefighters had been mobilised.

Baek Yun-Ho took a look around him. He could see his fatigued colleagues lying or squatting on the ground here and there. However, not one of them carried gloomy expressions. Some of them grinned brightly or raised their thumbs up real high when their gazes met.

Whenever that happened, Baek Yun-Ho also raised his thumb up as his reply.

No one died or got injured while they successfully reined in the fire. That should be seen as a real miracle in the scene of such a large-scale blaze.

Even though they were deeply fatigued and left with no energy whatsoever after battling the flames for the whole night, they used their expressions to cheer each other up and celebrate their success.

Baek Yun-Ho also felt deeply pleased about this outcome.

It was then.

“Ouch, that’s cold.”

He got startled by the sudden coldness touching his neck skin and took a look to his side to find Captain Seong Il-Hwan holding a bottle of ice-cold water.

“Thank you, sir.”

Baek Yun-Ho bowed his head slightly and took over the water bottle. Seong Il-Hwan settled down next to him and wetted his throat with a different bottle.

The veteran of a hundred battles.

Or, the greatest captain in history.

Didn’t matter what you called him, it didn’t sound ill-fitting with Captain Seong. And as his nickname had alluded to, he had displayed unparalleled brilliance in today’s event, too.

Baek Yun-Ho was proud to be in the same crew as Seong Il-Hwan. Heck, all these bits of soot stuck on his face felt like medals of honour to him, even.

‘One day, I...’

He sneaked a glance at his respected senior from the corners of his eyes, before pouring down the remaining cold water over his head.

“Pu-haah.”

Now he felt like a living person again. The stuffy heat clinging onto him felt as if it got washed away, starting from the top of his head.

But then....

“...Ah.”

....A scene from the past suddenly entered Baek Yun-Ho’s brain.

The side profile of a face he saw back then!

“Captain!”

Seong Il-Hwan’s eyes opened wider as he turned to look at his junior.

“Yeah?”

Baek Yun-Ho hurriedly carried on.

“You know, that the large-scale blaze in Daesung Building three years ago.... You still remember that, Captain? Our team got trapped in there and almost died, didn’t we?”

“Yeah, I remember.”

Back then, Seong Il-Hwan and his crew were steadily losing their consciousness after being trapped within the blaze, but a mysterious stranger appeared out of nowhere, like some kind of a fantasy, and helped them to survive the ordeal.

This mystery man rescued the isolated firefighters before disappearing without a trace, leading some to question whether the folks that day saw a mass hallucination at the same time or not.

“Actually, I saw the side profile of that man for a brief moment before I passed out, you see.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“Yes. But that guy looked so much like.....”

Unfortunately, Baek Yun-Ho didn’t get to finish what he wanted to say.

Because Seong Il-Hwan had ripped open a packet of bread he brought along with the water bottle and pushed the resulting chow in Baek Yun-Ho’s mouth, that’s why.

“Euph, euph??”

Baek Yun-Ho chewed through the bread and tilted his head.

“Captain?”

Seong Il-Hwan didn’t try to answer with verbal replies and grinned as he

bit into his own bread.

And, as if to cool down the heads of the firefighters fatigued by all that heat, a gentle breeze blew in from somewhere and brushed past their hair, ever so softly.

Inside a conference chamber located on the top floor of a certain high-rise building.

“Chairman?”

“....”

“Sir, are you alright?”

Yu Jin-Ho barely managed to suppress the corners of his lips trying to rise up to the heavens above.

“Yes, I’m fine. Well, then. Let’s continue....”

Yu Jin-Ho fished through the documents placed in front of him before raising his head up to see the faces of his employees filling up the conference chamber. He formed an embarrassed grin and asked them a question.

“Uhm, what were we talking about just now?”

“...”

The expressions of these employees hardened for a short while after they all realised that their boss hadn’t heard a thing they were talking about for the past 30 minutes of the meeting.

However, they calmed themselves and got the meeting going again.

“Sir, we were informing you that we need to come up with a new title for the virtual reality video game our company is about to publish.”

“Ah, that’s right. Right.”

Yu Jin-Ho nodded his head, but then, couldn’t hold it back anymore and shot up from his seat to loudly cry out towards his employees.

“Everyone, my wife is pregnant!! It’s already the sixth week, apparently!!”

His face was filled with an uncontrollable amount of joy right now. The inside of the conference chamber was filled with a sudden silence. But that lasted only for a brief while.

Soon, documents were flying in the air and at the same time, employees were crying out in cheer as well.

“Congratulations, sir!”

“Congrats, sir!!”

“Finally, our Chairman has become a father!”

Yu Jin-Ho did a lap around the conference chamber and high-fived all of his employees jumping up and down in joy as if this news concerned themselves.

His absolutely lovely wife, his soon-to-be-born baby, and his game development company that was making a killing year after year....

How could the world be this beautiful to his eyes right now?

‘Heot!!’

During the middle of his lap of celebration, Yu Jin-Ho had a moment of sudden, powerful inspiration. He climbed up on the conference table and confidently made a declaration to his employees.

“The Beautiful World!!!”

Quite obviously, the gazes of all the employees gathered on him.

“Excuse me?”

As they began doubting their ears, Yu Jin-Ho oh-so courteously proved that their hearing wasn’t faulty.

“That will be the title of our new game! Let’s go with the “Beautiful World’!!”

The joy-filled conference chamber was enveloped in a sudden bout of silence.

“....Are you serious, sir?”

Yu Jin-Ho replied without a moment’s hesitation.

“Of course. The name ‘Beautiful World’ fits our game that will virtually recreate reality as close as it can, so.... Ahh? What are you all doing?? Hang on a second, everyone!! I, I might fall, you know??”

The employees began to tussle with Yu Jin-Ho desperately in order to pull him off the top of the conference table. In the midst of his struggle, his gaze inadvertently shifted outside the window.

‘H-hey. Feels like something flew past just now, didn’t it?’

Too bad, the feelings of having seen something got erased from his head in no time at all after he found himself under the crossfire of his employees’ holy

crusade to stop him.

“Sir, you should rethink this....”

“The fate of our company hangs in the balance with this game, siiiir!”

“I mean, it’s not really a ‘Beautiful World’, is it, sir??”

“You’re being too much, you know?!”

Even though his naming sense was being mercilessly shot down and trampled on by his employees, Yu Jin-Ho still felt really happy regardless.

‘Hahaha.

Fine, what if I’m no good with naming stuff?

The world is still really beautiful and all, isn’t it?’

Yu Jin-Ho stared outside the window as the sunlight poured in through the glass, and muttered to himself.

‘In that case, should I ask Jin-Woo hyung-nim for the baby’s name, instead?’

[The chairman of Ah-Jin Soft, Yu Jin-Ho – the miraculous tale of the young and successful entrepreneur who rejected the inheritance of a Chaebol!]

Slice, slice....

The chairman’s office of the Yujin Construction was filled with the sounds of a pair of scissors cutting through a newspaper. Chairman Yu Myung-Han only raised his head after he was finished with decorating his scrapbook’s pages.

“Were there any other articles?”

Secretary Kim, one of his hands full of newspapers, shook his head side to side.

“....I see.”

Chairman Yu Myung-Han closed the scrapbook, his current expression filled with dissatisfaction.

“He rejected the position I created for him, and he instead starts a game company, of all things.... Tsk, tsk.”

Secretary Kim wordlessly glanced at the corner of the chairman’s desk.

That was where he could see the thick pile of newspapers with all the articles related to Yu Jin-Ho cut out. More than that, they were worked on

personally by none other than the Chairman himself, too.

‘.....’

Secretary Kim had to dry cough in order to hold back the laughter rushing out from the deepest part of his chest. It was then – the Chairman’s head shifted towards the window.

“....?”

Secretary Kim walked over to the windows himself and looked outside while asking his boss.

“What’s the matter, sir?”

“No.... It’s nothing.”

They were currently on the top floor of a tall skyscraper. It was not possible for ‘something’ to go past here, anyway. No, even if something did, it must’ve been a small bird or another creature similar to that.

Yu Myung-Han shook his head and handed the scrapbook over to Secretary Kim. The latter politely took the book and placed it back on the office’s bookshelf.

There were four such books on the shelf already.

Chairman Yu Myung-Han’s precious secret collection that no one knew about beside himself and his Secretary was steadily growing larger every day.

On a peaceful stretch of a road after school.

Soo-Hoh had grown close to the girl from the same class before long, and now, he found himself in the midst of an important challenge to decide who’d get to carry the school bags home with her.

“Rock, paper....”

The girl’s look of concentration only added to the weightiness of this confrontation. And the hour of judgement soon arrived.

“....Scissors!”

The girl went with ‘rock’, so Soo-Hoh had to change his original choice of ‘paper’ to ‘scissors’ at the last second. This was the combined effort of his extraordinary dynamic vision and motor reflexes.

“Heck yeah!”

The female student celebrated her victory and while forming a pleased expression, pushed forward her school bag. Soo-Hoh smirked softly and slung the bag over his other shoulder.

“You know, you really suck at rock, paper, scissors.”

“Tell me about it.”

“What will we do with a guy who sucks at it so bad??”

“I’ll just learn it from you, that’s all.”

Soo-Hoh smiled and strode forward while carrying bags on both of his shoulders.

“H-hey, wait for me!”

The two of them chatted about this and that as they walked side by side on a quiet back street. But, out of the blue, Soo-Hoh stopped walking and raised his head up towards the sky.

‘...?’

The girl followed suit and also looked up, but she couldn’t see anything else, other than the floating clouds silently drifting away as if they were spectating on the two teenagers.

“What’s wrong? Is there something up there?”

Soo-Hoh stared at the sky for a while before looking back at the girl with a light chuckle.

“Nah, it’s nothing.”

[Kiiiiaahk-!]

A Sky Dragon flew freely and unrestricted in the air while screeching out joyously. Hae-In riding on the creature’s back asked in a worried voice.

“Dear, will this really be alright?”

“Yup, it’s fine.”

Jin-Woo went on to explain that he used magic to erase all presence of their ride, Kaisal, so no one should be able to hear or see them flying.

“Hold on tight, okay?”

Hae-In heard her husband’s smile-filled advice and her arms tightly wrapped around his waist gained renewed strength. Taking that as the go-ahead, Jin-Woo immediately raised their travelling speed.

[Kiiiahk!]

Kaisal’s wing speed increased noticeably and they rose higher and higher until they broke past the layer of heavenly clouds above. The sight of an endlessly-stretching blue world spread out below their feet.

‘Just a little bit further!’

Kah-ahhak!

Kaisel flapped his wings even more vigorously.

Higher, even higher!

The two passengers were being protected by magic, which meant they could fly up to the part of the sky that was much closer to outer space rather than that of the planet’s atmosphere.

They were soon greeted by the spectacular sight of a giant sun rising past the outline of Earth.

Hae-In leaned her head against her husband’s shoulder and watched this mesmerising spectacle unfold in this quiet, still sky, a warm smile floating up on her lips.

Jin-Woo had been waiting for this chance, so he quickly seized it and pulled out the present he had readied earlier. Her eyes grew large after seeing it.

“Dear...”

It was a special necklace he asked the bearded Dwarves to craft, as those guys happened to be rather handy with things like this.

Jin-Woo gently placed the beautiful necklace shimmering under the sun’s rays around the neck of his wife.

The Shadow Soldiers watching and cheering on from his shadow all roared out in exhilaration at this wonderful conclusion of their liege’s perfect wedding anniversary event.

Waaahhh-!!

Unfortunately, just before Jin-Woo’s and Hae-In’s lips, gradually closing in, could bridge the last couple of inches....

...He had to break the mood first and speak to her instead.

“Dear, looks like you’ll have to go back first and wait for me. I’ll be home as soon as possible.”

This was already their 16th wedding anniversary, so Hae-In knew oh-so-well what was going on when Jin-Woo said those things.

“Come home soon, okay?”

Jin-Woo nodded his head and issued a new order to Kaisel. The Sky Dragon changed his heading towards Earth and quickly distanced itself.

He wordlessly watched the back of his wife getting further away before turning around. Sure enough, a part of the space in the distance began distorting and tearing up before icy-blue 'fog' began oozing out from there.

It emerged after disintegrating the wall between dimensions and revealed itself, before coagulating in one point to form a large figure.

Jin-Woo recalled what the envoy of the Rulers had told him all those years ago.

'He said that an existence possessing great power can act like a magnet and attract horrifying beings from other worlds, didn't he?'

There was no need to question just who that blue-fog monster came to visit today.

The tear in space grew, so did the number of blue fog clusters at an alarming rate. Hundreds? A few thousands? It could even be a few tens of thousands.

"Fuu...."

Just as he would do, Jin-Woo closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

Would his son take over this role in the future?

Who knows.

But, when Jin-Woo pictured that scene in his head, he realised that it wouldn't be so bad at all.

'A father and son duo facing off against enemies together....'

As a grin formed on his lips, he opened his eyes.

The countless blue fog clusters had completely emerged from the gap in dimensions and, upon discovering Jin-Woo's presence, began emitting intense, horrifying malice towards him.

The electrifying tension felt just before the battle travelled from the tip of his toes to the rest of his body.

'Nice.'

His own preparation was now complete.

And eventually....

Kuwaaaahhhh-!!!

Those 'things' that acted under one will chose to eliminate the detected threat. As they moved towards Jin-Woo's location...

....He spoke with a smile on his face.

“Rise up.”



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