

Debuff Master

Chapter 21

‘What disciple...? What nonsense is this old man spouting?’?

Siegfried was taken aback.

Since he already had a master, it was only normal for him to be astonished by the old man’s words.

‘Who the hell is this old man?’? Siegfried thought and used his Rune of Insight to check the old man’s information.

[Betelgeuse]

[Type: Named NPC]

[Race: Human]

[Level: 361]

[Titles: Sword Emperor, The One Who Splits The Mountains and The Sea, Five Star Heaven.]

The large old man wasn’t as strong as Deus, but he was a very high leveled NPC. In fact, he was not only high leveled, but he had surpassed all of the current rankers, with the highest ones hovering around Level 300.

It seemed that his title as the Sword Emperor wasn’t just for show, after all.

“Kekeke!” Betelgeuse let out a laugh before saying, “Did you see it, my disciple? Have you finally realized who I am?”

He seemed to have realized that Siegfried used the Rune of Insight on him.

“You might be aware of this by now, but... if I were to brag about myself for a bit... I’m the Sword Emperor! The Sword Emperor! *Hahaha!* I’m the boss of the Five Star Heaven! *Kuhahahaha!*” Betelgeuse said before boisterously laughing.

The Five Star Heaven referred to the five stars above the Nürburg Continent, and this was also the title they gave to the five people who had reached the pinnacle.

The self-proclaimed boss of the Five Star Heaven—Betelgeuse—was an old veteran who scoured through the Nürburg Continent his entire life in search of ways to sharpen his skills.

Then, one day...

"I have finally created my own set of skills! Kuhahahaha!" Betelgeuse exclaimed with raucous laughter.

After training and honing himself his entire life, he had finally created his own set of skills! However, the joy from his accomplishment lasted only for a while as a thought passed through his head.

'Hmm... I'm already 120 years old... so I think I will need to have a disciple before I croak and kick the bucket. It's a waste if these skills don't get passed on to the next generations. Yes, it will truly be a waste...?'

The fact that he did not have someone to pass his skills weighed heavily on his mind, and this was all because he was so focused on training himself his entire life that he never had the luxury to build personal relations with people.

"Alright! Let's get a disciple!" Betelgeuse exclaimed.

He decided to find himself a successor since he did not want the skills he dedicated his entire life to create to be buried along with him after his death, and that was why he immediately set out once again to scour the continent for his heir apparent.

However, finding a disciple wasn't as easy as he thought it would be.

"Hmm... that guy is good at utilizing his mana, but his combat sense is atrocious..."

"That guy has excellent combat sense and mana control, but his body is a mess. Those people are bound to hit a wall and their growth will eventually plateau..."

"Hmm... all the qualities are there but... no, there's no passion."

Betelgeuse's standards were simply too high for anyone to meet, and he found it difficult to find someone who satisfied his requirements. This person failed because of this, and that person failed because of that. This kept going on and on until ten years had already passed since he first set out to find a disciple.

His repeated failure to find a disciple made him start to think that he should start looking for a coffin and a burial site instead, as he was already too old.

'I will die from old age before I can even train my disciple at this rate... damn it! I should have just settled for that guy from a while ago!' Betelgeuse thought as he decided to look for the ones who *barely* failed his standards.

However, it was already too late...

"What? That guy became that person's disciple? Damn it!"

“He’s gone? Where did he go? What? He became a Royal Knight?”

“She died? How? Hit by a carriage? Damn it!”

The disciple candidates he previously dropped on his list had all disappeared.

“T-This is getting serious...! I will need at least twenty years to properly train a disciple, but I’m already 130 years old! Twenty years is stretching it!” he nervously exclaimed.

Even though reaching the pinnacle of Master meant extending their lifespan, there was still a limit to a person’s lifespan. Becoming 150 years old was already testing the limits of mortality.

However, it would be a different story if he reached the realm of Grandmaster...

“Disciple... I need to find a disciple... I should just go ahead and settle for anyone who seems fine!”

In the end, Betelgeuse decided to just find any suitable candidate to pass down his skills before he croaked and kicked the bucket.

However...

“L-Look at that fella...!” he exclaimed in surprise and delight.

He was walking along the roads of some backwater rural province when he found a young man fighting against a pack of Mutated Wolves all by himself. The scene attracted his eyes.

“*Wow!*” Betelgeuse could not help but exclaim in admiration at the young man’s movement.

It was an understatement to call the young man *excellent*?since it would be more fitting to say that he was *flawless*.

“He is a greenhorn but—*wow!* His combat sense is awesome! Look at that, his decision-making ability is excellent as well. His mana control is flawless, too! *Ohh!* His body is also a gift from the heavens itself! *Wow!* This is amazing!” Betelgeuse exclaimed.

Everything about the young man satisfied his ridiculously high standards.

“It’s him! He’s the one I’m looking for! He shall become the disciple of this Betelgeuse!” he exclaimed in excitement and toward the young man.

The young man would surely accept his offer, but...

Grandpa Bukati and the hunters, who were NPCs, all exclaimed in surprise and awe when Betelgeuse revealed his identity.

“T-This can’t be! Are you really the Sword Emperor, Betelgeuse?”

“Oh my god!”

“He looks exactly like the Betelgeuse I’ve heard!”

“W-Why would a person like him be in this backwater province...?”

Their reactions were something Betelgeuse had expected since the name of the Five Star Heaven was like a free pass to anywhere on the continent. On top of that, a Level 300 individual was guaranteed a Marquis title, and they could even choose which kingdom they wanted to receive the title from.

However, Siegfried’s response was the complete opposite of Grandpa Bukati’s and the hunters’ expectations.

“So... what...?”

“*Hmm?*” Betelgeuse muttered in surprise before saying, “I’m the Sword Emperor, the Sword Emperor of the Five Star Heaven.”

“I heard you,” Siegfried nonchalantly replied as if the old man’s title wasn’t anything amazing.

“*Hoho...*” Betelgeuse let out a low laugh before he said, “You look like a greenhorn, so I guess you are too young to know what’s going on in the world. *Tsk tsk...* No wonder you had no particular reaction even after I told you that I was the Sword Emperor of the Five Star Heaven. It’s surely because you have no idea what’s out there. *Haha!*? Alright, let me explain!” Betelgeuse said.

“I know...” Siegfried replied.

“You know...?” Betelgeuse muttered in disbelief.

“The Five Star Heaven refers to the five Masters, right? There are only five Masters on the continent, and they are all extremely strong,” Siegfried said.

There was no way Siegfried wouldn’t know what was going on in the Nürburg Continent with his years of experience playing BNW.

‘I’m sorry but... aren’t you a step too late?’ he thought.

He would have hurriedly accepted the offer to become the Sword Emperor’s disciple without any qualms if it had been offered to him a few months ago.

No...

'I'm sure he wouldn't spare me even a glance if I were myself a few months ago...'

The only reason Siegfried was who he was today was thanks to the repeated tempering and quenching Deus had put him through, so there was no way that Betelgeuse would have even considered Siegfried; no, Han Tae-Sung as his disciple back then.

And the deciding factor behind his refusal was the fact that Siegfried already had a master, and he was a Level 999 Hidden NPC at that. Betelgeuse might be a Level 361 Named NPC, but he was nothing but a speck of dust compared to Deus.

Lastly, the Sword Emperor was not all that attractive to Siegfried after he had witnessed what a true supreme being could do.

However, there was no way that Betelgeuse would be aware of Siegfried's thoughts.

"You know? Then, why are you refusing? You can become *really* strong if you become my disciple! Your life will change if you become strong! You will earn a lot of money, and people will flock to you, and—women! Dozens of beautiful women will—" Betelgeuse retorted.

However, Siegfried interrupted him. "I'm aware of that, too. I'm aware of what becoming your disciple means."

"Then, why are you refusing such a great opportunity?!" Betelgeuse asked with a hint of denial in his voice.

"I am grateful for your interest, but I am already serving a master, so—" Siegfried said.

When Siegfried was about to politely refuse the Sword Emperor's offer, the Sword Emperor suddenly interjected.

"You can just leave that guy and become my disciple."

Siegfried was rendered speechless at the Sword Emperor's brazenness.

Leave his master?

Just because of someone like Betelgeuse?

"Sir..." Siegfried said in a low calm voice despite the astonishment.

"I apologize, but would you kindly refrain from making such remarks? My master is stronger than you are, and I have received the teachings to become invincible from my master as well. So, how can I abandon him and become your disciple?" Siegfried said.

“S-Stronger than I am? Is that true?” Betelgeuse asked, taken aback.

“It is just as I said,” Siegfried said.

“Who is it?!” Betelgeuse shouted before asking amidst the astonishment, “Is your master one of the Five Star Heavens?”

“He is on a different level compared to them,” Siegfried replied.

“T-Then... Is it the Three Jewels, then?” Betelgeuse asked.

The ‘Three Jewels’ is the title conferred to the three Grandmasters on the continent.

“He is above them,” Siegfried said while pointing up to the sky.

That was right, Deus was closer to a celestial being beyond human realms. Masters and Grandmasters were people who had transcended the mortal coil, but they were nothing but normal humans in front of Deus.

“He is—” Siegfried started, but he was quickly shot down by the Sword Emperor.

“Liar, liar, pants on fire!” Betelgeuse retorted, “A human stronger than the Five Star Heaven and the Three Jewels? *Huh?* Can’t you tell a more believable lie?”

“...”

“Look at this punk treating me like a fool just because I favored him a bit. What? Is your master the Demon Lord or something? *Ha??* You can’t go around telling such lies, you know?” Betelgeuse added.

It seemed that the Sword Emperor did not believe a single thing Siegfried said, and it also seemed that Deus’ greatness was something unbelievable, even to a member of the Five Star Heaven.

“Stop coming up with excuses and just become my disciple will you? Hey, I’m not trying to badmouth your master or anything, but he probably lied to you since you are so gullible and innocent. After all, every master would want to look cool to their disciples,” Betelgeuse said, trying to convince Siegfried to change his mind.

“I have no intentions of doing that, so please go on your way,” Siegfried said with a colder voice this time.

‘I don’t think he is going to believe me even if I explained any further... but how dare he badmouth my master when he is only a Master? How does he plan to handle things?if my master?gets wind of what he said...?’ Siegfried thought.

There was a saying that a puppy would not be scared of a tiger, and this was a saying that fitted Betelgeuse perfectly well. However, his reaction was somewhat understandable since Deus' greatness was already in the realm of impossibility.

"Then, I will continue what I was doing," Siegfried politely said before he took his tools out from his bag and continued to harvest the Mutated Wolves' hides and fangs.

"What the hell is this guy...?" Betelgeuse muttered in disbelief while looking at Siegfried.

How was it possible for a man to be so direct and straightforward?

However, Siegfried's temperament did nothing but make him look much more favorable in the Sword Emperor's eyes.

'No, this just proves that he is a man of character. He got upset because I badmouthed his master. And the fact that he refused my offer and decided to remain with his worthless master is proof of his loyalty, and since he believed his master's baseless boasting, it shows that he's pretty innocent as well. Hoho... look at this guy... He's a real man!' Betelgeuse thought while looking at Siegfried with shining eyes.

A message suddenly popped up in front of Siegfried.

[Alert: The Sword Emperor Betelgeuse likes you!]

That was not the only message that popped up.

[Alert: The Sword Emperor Betelgeuse's Affinity with you has increased by +10!]

[Alert: The Sword Emperor Betelgeuse's Affinity with you has increased by +10!]

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The Sword Emperor's Affinity with Siegfried went up like crazy.

'What the hell...?' Siegfried's face crumpled. Siegfried was annoyed as he wondered, *'I'm busy, and I'm ignoring him right now, so why the hell did his Affinity with me increase all of a sudden?'*

It was pretty difficult to raise an NPC's Affinity with a player, so it was rare to receive a message alerting a player of an NPC's increase in Affinity with them.

Why?

That was because it would become too easy for the players to coax the NPCs if it were that easy to raise their Affinity with them, and since BNW strived to be as realistic as possible, they made sure that doing that would be difficult.

But despite all that, the fact that an NPC's Affinity with him had increased could only mean that the NPC was really interested in building ties with him.

It also meant that Betelgeuse's opinion of Siegfried was iron-clad.

'I hope he doesn't continue to cling onto me...'? Siegfried thought, annoyed. While he was deep in his thoughts, a roar reverberated from somewhere.

"Kruuuuwaaaaaaaaah!"

'What the hell was that?'

Siegfried immediately turned toward where the roar came from, and his eyes grew large the moment he saw the source of the roar.

"That's... a Mutated Tiger!" Siegfried exclaimed in surprise.

A large black tiger was rushing toward him in the distance.

Grip...!

Siegfried tightly gripped his steel rod as he prepared for the charging predator.