

## H. Academy 141

### Chapter 141 32.7 - Mid-terms

It was said that there was a reason why humans always adapted to the environment and evolved continuously.

It was because they were programmed for the sake of 'survival.' It is their natural instinct.

When faced with the unknown, that instinct would awaken.

After all, the unknown, the thing that the brain can never comprehend, is the thing it wants to destroy.

The feelings in Reiner's mind could be explained in such a manner.

"What is this?"

Feeling the crimson aura oozing from their target, he asked himself.

Astron Natusalune.

The last-ranked student of the academy.....The student with some random rumors floating about him.....

The student was their target for some reason, even though he was such an insect that he didn't deserve their time.

He thought Astron was someone who offended the wrong people when the order to kill him in the mid-terms came. Even though the operation was risky, they thought they could easily kill him and leave the place.

However, the scene in front of him was something he would never expect.

SWOOSH! With a sudden burst of speed, Astron's body shot forward monstrously.

He shouldn't have been able to move, let alone lunge like that. The injuries he sustained and the corrosive attribute of the Ruinscreechers should have been eating him from the inside.

But, as if to prove him wrong, his dual daggers danced in the air, their crimson aura trailing behind them.

SWOOSH! SLASH! Each strike became a deadly flurry as he moved with animalistic grace and precision.

"This is crazy," Reiner mumbled.

The way the guy was moving was insanely efficient as if he was already experienced in the act of killing.

"No. He was born to kill."

The crazed smile on his face when he was moving was proof of that. Even though he was a demon contractor, he never once made such a face when killing people.

'His smile reminds me of him.'

The Ruinscreechers were caught off guard, their enhanced ferocity no match for his newfound speed.

SLASH! SLASH!

Blood sprayed through the air as he carved through them with ruthless efficiency. It was a dance of death in the darkest of moments.

With each strike, the crimson energy entered the monsters' bodies, and something strange happened.

The crimson energy circulated in the monster's body and slowly returned to the boy. The Ruinscreechers fell one by one.

But the strange thing was that the monsters' bodies slowly started losing their color.

"SCREECH!"

The monster's scream in agony echoed in their heads as if to remind them that they were here for a mission.

'What am I doing?'

Reiner immediately composed himself.

'This mana is affecting me.'

And he realized. The crimson aura released by that guy was affecting him, disturbing his thoughts by evoking something primal.

'I was scared.'

As he realized that fact, anger enveloped him. He didn't know what this guy's deal was, but he was angry at the fact that a mere human, a mere student, dared to make him scared.

"That guy is crazy....I want him so bad....I want to kill him; I want to see what expression he is going to make."

Hearing this annoying girl's voice made the anger inside him boil more.

"Fucking bastard." He mumbled, looking at the cockroach before him.

Astron's injuries were getting healed whilst the color of the monsters' skin was slowly turning grey.

As if he was sucking their vitality.

"Annie, attack him."

The immediate reaction came from Reiner as he started manipulating his demonic energy.

"Don't order me, you fucker."

SWOOSH!

The girl took a cautious step forward, a menacing scythe clutched in her hand, and suddenly she appeared right before him. With immense precision, she lunged at Astron, her sights set on his throat.

The swiftness of her attack was impressive, but Astron was prepared for their imminent assault, his body enveloped by a swirling, crimson energy that had transformed him into a killing machine.

SWOOSH! Astron's heightened instincts and agility enabled him to deftly sidestep her deadly strike. Her scythe narrowly missed its intended target as it whistled past his neck.

"Ah....It is so good." The girl laughed heartily as her scythe continued to attack the boy.

CLANK! CLANK! CLANK!

The scythe met with the crimson-coated blade as sparks flew. The girl's demonic energy met with the crimson-colored mana, creating a unique spectrum of color.

Meanwhile, Reiner first compressed his demonic energy, activating the skill he got after contracting.

「Demonic Materialization. Blades of Hell. 」

The skill unleashed his demonic energy, fashioning shadowy, tentacle-like blades that rapidly propelled toward Astron with murderous intent. Their speed was so fast that it was incomparable to the Ruinscreechers before.

Dash.

SWOOSH! However, Astron was also no longer injured. Since he had already sucked the vitality of the monster and his injuries were healed, the crimson thoughts in his head were also cleared to a certain extent.

But even then, something was fundamentally different. The beastly instinct was still there, harboring inside him.

The desire to kill and spill the blood was still there, but right now, he was able to keep more of his sanity.

He instinctively leaped backward.

Astron's enhanced agility allowed him to evade the first wave of Reiner's demonic onslaught, narrowly dodging the lethal blades that sought to end him.

'I am getting out of mana.'

He thought, but the girl didn't give him the time.

"Come here, play with me more."

SWOOSH! 「Seal of Death」

She immediately appeared right before his face, her scythe charged by the demonic energy.

CLANK!

He deflected the scythe with his dual daggers. However, things were never meant to end here. The demonic energy spread through the environment.

"Kurghk!"

And following that, an eye appeared right behind him, and blood started spilling from his inside.

"How is it, do you like my gift? ~Slurp" With a cruel and sinister grin, the girl reveled in his pain, even licking his blood from her fingers. "Ah....You taste good." The sadistic pleasure she derived from his suffering was evident in her malevolent expression.

However, because he was injured once again, the crimson mana around him got stronger.

'I need to replenish my mana back.'

He knew he had to replenish his energy. With the way things were going, he wouldn't be able to continue using his mana anymore.

Mana coursed through his veins as he attempted to use the last reserves of his crimson mana to push the girl back.

「Common Dagger Arts. Final Technique. Serpent's Dance」

SWOOSH! He bolted towards the girl, his daggers moving rapidly like a serpent.

CLANK! CLANK!

His dual daggers clashed forcefully with her menacing scythe. It seemed, for a brief moment, that he might succeed in creating some breathing room.

"Ah...So good...." SHATTER!

But just as victory appeared within his grasp, suddenly, something unexpected happened. The blade he was holding in his hands to clash with the girl shattered, unable to overcome the battle.

"Huh?"

Something wasn't right about the dagger. It was something that was provided by the academy; it wasn't a weapon that would easily break under such a force.

Therefore, he didn't consider the possibility of the weapon breaking; he never did, and the shock of his dagger's abrupt destruction left him momentarily frozen, his crimson aura momentarily wavering as his instinctive reaction was delayed.

"Ah....I love it, I love this expression so much...."

In that crucial moment of hesitation, the girl seized the advantage.

STAB! Her scythe, radiating with sinister energy, pierced forward and found its mark. It drove through Astron's chest with a gruesome, penetrating force.

"Argh!"

Astron's cry of agony echoed through the chamber as the ghastly scythe pierced his body.

Even though his mental strength was high, something about this girl made it different.

His vision blurred, and a searing pain consumed him as he felt the cold, malevolent metal tear through flesh and bone.

"Do you like it? My attribute, corrosion...."

The girl's malevolent smile remained as she pressed forward, savoring the sensation of Astron's lifeblood splattering onto her as her scythe remained embedded in his chest.

"Burghk!" @@novelbin@@

Blood spilled to the ground from his mouth once again, but this time, there was no crimson mana to support him. He had used his last resources in the fight, and now his mana reserves were depleted.

'I need to grab the potion.'

Even though his consciousness was about to slip away, he didn't give up.

SWOOSH! However, both the girl, Annie, and Reiner knew what he was thinking.

SLASH!

The black blades traveled in a second and immediately slashed his right arm, containing the bracelet given by the academy.

"Arghk!"

SPURT! THUD!

With a groan, his arm severed as blood started spilling to the ground.

His consciousness was slipping away as the darkness threatened to claim him.

"Let's fini-"

Just as Reiner was about to confirm that Astron was dead, suddenly, a voice came from his earbuds, startling him.

[Reiner, Annie! Someone is coming to our location. We need to get out of there, now!]

The moment he heard it, he immediately tensed up. While trying to kill him, they spent so much time, and now their identity was at risk.

"We are leaving. He is dead anyway. And, boy, Lady Miller sends her regards."



Without spending any more seconds in the place, both Annie and Reiner immediately left the place, leaving the boy lying on the ground with a pool of blood formed underneath him.

CRUNCH!

Though, neither did they hear the crunching sound, nor could they see the small green-coated needle on the girl's clothes....

Chapter 142 32.8 - Mid-terms

"Well, it seems some of the students have already cleared their dungeons and finished the exams." One of the VIPs, a man with a clean suit and impeccable aura surrounding him, exclaimed.

As the practical test continued in the dungeons, some students had already cleared the trials and finished their exams.

"Check, the names of the first finishing students for each dungeon and record them." The VIPs commanded their assistants to make sure everything they wished was ready. "I don't want any mistakes."

All the students who finished emerged victorious, showcasing their talents and abilities.

The observers and VIPs, watching the live feeds and discussing the students' performances, couldn't help but express their thoughts on those named characters.

"Victor Blackthorn.....was as expected....He dominated the higher-ranked dungeons with his strategic raw power alone. He's a prodigy, that's for sure."

"Indeed, Victor is a force to be reckoned with. Blackthorns never disappoint."

"Though the Middleton twins didn't fall short either. Lucas and Julia proved their worth with exceptional teamwork and adaptability. They complement each other perfectly."

However, even between the VIPs, there was a clear difference. Some of them had a different special room that no other had.

"What do you think, patriarch?"

Inside the room filled with luxury services, a man was sitting watching the screen.

"It is decent." The man's chestnut hair fell to his shoulders, and his cold eyes were targeted on the screen where a student was walking alone.

Behind him were corpses forming a mountain.

"....." The butler behind him didn't say anything, but he knew even the word 'decent' was a compliment coming out of this man. The position he held and his temperament...

All of this made him into such a person that he no longer expressed extravagant emotions. Sitting on the peak of the world,

"Is there any progress related to the investigation of Kaiser?" The man opened his mouth again as the words continued to spill.

"We are utilizing everything we can, but we have yet to reach anywhere."

TAP! TAP! With his eyes still on the screen, the man tapped on the chair's arm.

SWOOSH!

And then he immediately stood up.

"Survey that woman. Make sure she doesn't do anything stupid."

"Understood, master." The butler bowed as he prepared the man's coat and suit.

"And increase the security around Victor and Jane. There is a possibility that they will also target them."

With those words, the man started walking out of the room, his expression nonchanging.

But, the butler who had been following this man for years knew.

The fact that he was showing special treatment to Victor was already a sign of him making his decision.

And that meant the road ahead of this young man meant to be thorny.

Turning his head to the screen once again, his eyes locked into the walking young man.

"Young master...Hope you don't break."

Those were his last words.

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For most guilds and cooperations with high standings in the social structure of the Valerian Federation, the mid-term exams were the place for scouting talents.

They would fight for high-ranking students who performed well and came from relatively amicable backgrounds.

However, not every VIP here had such a standing.

There were some who barely qualified to enter here and didn't have the necessary power to compete with big shots.

That was the case for the young entrepreneurs in the VIP room watching the low-ranking students.

"Lark Whitehorse, huh?" Contact him after the mid-terms end.

"Check the name of this swordsman. If possible, offer him a contract immediately."

Conversations buzzed, and phones continued to ring as the young entrepreneurs tried to acquire personnel for their businesses.

But, there were also some who trusted their eyes to find hidden gems.

They were the ones who would find the gems that would go unnoticed between the shiny success of high-ranking students. Even though the possibility was low, if such a thing happened, they would be able to save a lot of money and manpower.

That was the case for the young woman as she continued to watch monitors displaying students' progress.

In her hand was a simple notebook that wasn't electronic, and there were some names written there.

And on the top was a name [Astron Natusalune] written.

She was eager to see how he would perform in the lower-ranked dungeon.

However, just as Astron was about to confront a group of monsters, the footage abruptly cut to a black screen.

Furrowing her brows in confusion, she quickly glanced at her assistant. "What just happened? Why did the footage go dark?"

The assistant scrambled to check the technical equipment, pressing buttons and trying to restore the image. However, nothing had changed, and the assistant made sure that the equipment was working just fine.

"I am not sure, ma'am. It seems to be an issue from the broadcasting room and something related to signal."

"Signal?"

Hearing the assistant's words, the woman pondered for a second, and she looked around for other cameras.

There, everything was fine, aside from the one she was watching. @@novelbin@@

"Contact the academy and make sure they fix this issue."

"Understood, ma'am. I'll get on it right away."

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Inside the control room of the Arcadia Hunter Academy, the staff were monitoring the live feeds from various cameras placed throughout the dungeon. It was essential to ensure the safety and performance of the students during their practical tests.

As they focused on their screens, one of the staff members received a notification on their computer. It was a notification coming from the VIPs. Those problematic privileged ones.

"What do they want, again?" The staff mumbled.

"VIP's again?"

"Yeah."

"Nah.....They will probably complain about the quality of the videos again.....Do they think this is a movie or something?" His friend sighed as he remembered the certain time when a young rich kid caused a scene here.

However, brows furrowed as they read the message: "Camera feed failure reported in Dungeon {B-3}, code {D-LR37}."

Quickly, the staff members checked the connection, and as it showed on the screen, they could see the camera was down.

He turned to their colleague. "We've got a camera issue in code D-LR37. The feed is down."

The colleague responsible for camera maintenance sighed and immediately began troubleshooting the problem. "Alright, let's check the connection and see if we can bring it back up."

The control room staff knew that the camera issues needed to be addressed promptly to maintain the smooth flow of the practical tests and ensure the safety of the students. The woman in charge was already losing her mind after the recent incident, and now all eyes were on them.

The Valerian Government was already trying to pressure the academy using the recent incidents as a shackle.

"Something is wrong."

As the camera maintenance expert and their colleagues began to investigate the issue with the camera feed in Dungeon B-3, it became evident that something was blocking the signal.

"The signal is getting interfered."

It was a situation they had encountered before, during the recent joint dungeon training. Something that almost caused the academy to close.

"What?"

The room buzzed with concern as the realization sunk in. The joint dungeon training event had been plagued by mysterious signal disruptions, and now it seemed to be happening again during the mid-term practical exams.

One of the control room staff members spoke up, his voice tinged with unease. "This is starting to feel like déjà vu. We had these signal disruptions during the joint training event in Dungeon B-3, and there was an attack. Is there a possibility of it being a technical problem?"

"Sir. This can't happen. We checked every piece of equipment before the test started, and we were sure that everything was working.

"Then, it is most likely that someone is intentionally interfering with the broadcasts."

The concern in the control room was palpable as they considered the implications, and the leader of the team immediately took action.

"Check if someone is in the area, and contact the dungeon guardian. Send a healer and instructor immediately. We can't afford to wait."

Deliberate interference with the camera feeds was a serious issue, as it could jeopardize the safety of the students and the integrity of the exams.

He knew there was a possibility that only something related to technical issues was happening, but he knew his career was at risk.

When everyone's eyes on the academy, if such a mistake was made and one of the students lost his life, things would no longer be as easy to cover as before.

"Understood, sir."

Immediately, one of the workers contacted the healer team.

"Sir! One student's watch stopped working, and we can't get any data from them."

"Who is the name?"

"Astron Natusalune sir."

The leader of the control room team turned to the staff member who had reported Astron's watch malfunction. "When was the last data received from his watch?"

The staff knew that they needed to act swiftly to identify and resolve the interference, as well as to ensure the safety of the students participating in the practical tests.

The staff member checked the records and replied, "It was approximately two minutes ago, sir."

'Two minutes.'

The man thought. It was enough time to endanger the life of the student, especially if the said student was one of the weakest ones. He could see the profile of the student on the screen, and he could see the implications.

'It was the right choice to send the team.'

The leader then inquired, "Has any other student reported watch issues or malfunctions?"

The staff member shook his head. "No, sir, as of now, Astron Natusalune is the only student whose watch is not working."

The leader nodded, deep in thought. The situation was becoming increasingly peculiar, and they needed to figure out what was happening with Astron's equipment and the interference with the camera feed in Dungeon B-3.

'I really hope nothing does happen.....'

The man silently prayed for the safety of the student as he looked at the black screen.....

## Chapter 143 32.9 - Mid-terms

For the students of the academy who were in the category of non-combatants, the mid-term exams were conducted in a different way.

They would be tested in their specialty.

That was especially the case for the healers. Since they wouldn't be able to solo explore the dungeon and lacked self-sustaining, their test was attending to the wounded students after they were teleported as a safety measure.

Sylvie Gracewind was going through the same procedure.



She stood among her fellow healer students, awaiting the arrival of the wounded students who would soon be teleported to the designated exam area.

The room was set up to resemble a makeshift triage center, and the atmosphere was one of focused intensity.

'You can do it, Sylvie.' She tried to calm herself down as she breathed in and out. It was very hard for her to look at the wounds and stay calm. Even though she had been in fights before, she had a hard time whenever she saw a wound.

And it was also her first time getting tested while she was healing others.

"Ah.....I am so nervous."

"Me too."

Some of the students were talking amongst themselves.

TOK!

At that second, the instructor appeared.

"Guys, come on, get ready. The test is started."

The atmosphere was tense, as this was a critical part of their mid-term exams. The healers' task was to diagnose and heal the injured students effectively and efficiently.

WROOM!

At that exact second, suddenly, portals appeared one by one as the students started appearing.

"Ahhh...My arm."

"Arghk..."

As the first group of wounded students materialized in the exam area, the overseer instructor, a seasoned healer herself, addressed the group. "Remember, students, your ability to diagnose and heal these injuries will be closely observed. Speed is important, but accuracy is paramount. You must also communicate with each other and prioritize your treatment."

The injured students, some with simulated wounds and others with makeup indicating their injuries, groaned in pain as they arrived. They had been briefed on their roles and what to expect during the exam.

Sylvie and her fellow healers moved quickly, assessing the wounded students. "This one has a fractured arm," a fellow student noted, pointing to a student with a realistic-looking injury.

Sylvie nodded and replied, "I'll take care of that. Someone check on the girl with the gash on her leg."

The overseer instructor watched closely, evaluating the students' diagnostic skills and their ability to apply healing techniques. "Remember, it's not just about mending wounds. You need to consider the overall well-being of the patient. Are they in pain? Can they move comfortably? How are their mana circulated? Are there any mana disturbances in the core? These are things you must address."

As the injured students arrived and the overseer instructor's words echoed in Sylvie's ears, she felt a surge of nervousness wash over her. She knew the importance of this exam and that the instructors were observing her every move.

'I can't make a mistake.'

The pressure was immense, and her hands trembled slightly as she assessed the first injured student. However, the gruesome scene of the student's bone pointing out from his elbow wasn't something that needed to be diagnosed.

First, with her mana, she diagnosed the student, scanning the part where the mana was gathered.

It wasn't a widely known fact, but awakened who were subjected to the mana over countless years would have their body adapted to it. And because of that, when their body got injured, the mana would be supplied to that direction naturally and would increase the healing.

"His arm is fractured. The bone is broken from two different breakpoints."

She quickly assessed the situation.

"Please put your arm this way."

Her patient pointed out the fractured arm, and Sylvie knew she had to act quickly. But when she tried to channel her mana to begin the healing process, she found herself struggling.

The mana refused to flow as smoothly as she'd practiced. It was as if her nerves were interfering with her ability.

Sweat formed on her brow as she continued to attempt the healing. The injured student winced in pain, and another student voiced their discomfort. "Hey, could you be a bit quicker?"

'I am trying.'

Sylvie felt a pang of frustration, but she tried not to let it show.

"Haaaaah...."

She took a deep breath and focused her thoughts.

At least she tried to. However, things weren't working as she wished. She activated her trait, and her mana started moving as she directed.

'First, blocking nerves.'

Her mana moved, blocking the nerves. The procedure was going to be painful, and the patient might not have the necessary willpower to resist it.

'Then, move the bone.'

And then, she started moving the bone. Her mana covered the bone like a thread, and then she diligently started moving it.

From outside, one could see the miraculous scene as if the time was rewinding. The bone followed the trajectory of the thread as it entered the arm.

'Now, connect the bone.'

As she concentrated, she had almost positioned the bone perfectly, and now the only thing that needed to be done was to make sure the bone was connected properly.

"Almost there," she whispered to herself, her concentration unbroken.

She was on the verge of connecting the bone, restoring the patient's arm to its previous state.

The pain, discomfort, and frustration from earlier seemed distant as she neared the completion of the healing process.

But just as she was about to make that final connection, a sudden and vivid flashback overwhelmed her. The scene before her shifted, and she was no longer in the examination room but in the dark.

There stood a fractured arm, with a little boy clutching it. Before him was a disgusting demon with its mouth wide open.

The trauma of that moment flooded back, triggering a visceral reaction. Sylvie's hands trembled, and her mana wavered.

"AAAAAH!"

The connection she was about to make faltered, and the patient gasped in pain as the bone remained partially out of place.

"Sylvie, what are you doing?" The overseer instructor's voice was filled with concern, but at the same time, there was a slight disappointment in her voice.

She snapped back to the present, her breath heavy and rapid.

"Haaaah...Haaaah.....

Her eyes met those of the injured student, who was clearly in distress from the sudden interruption.

"I... I'm so sorry," Sylvie stammered, her face flushed with embarrassment and shame. She couldn't look into the eyes of the patient.

Her trauma had momentarily paralyzed her, and it had real consequences on the patient she was meant to heal.

The overseer instructor stepped in, her touch steady and reassuring as she completed the healing process Sylvie had begun.

The overseer instructor observed Sylvie's distress and she understood Sylvie wouldn't be able to continue like that.

She gently placed a reassuring hand on Sylvie's shoulder. "Sylvie, take a moment to compose yourself. You can try again after a second."

Sylvie nodded, her voice barely above a whisper. "I'm sorry."

Meanwhile, the patient who had experienced the interrupted healing process was less forgiving. His anger and frustration got the best of him. He clenched his recently healed arm and glared at Sylvie.

"You almost made it worse! Are you even qualified to be here?" he snapped, his voice laced with irritation. "We're supposed to trust you to heal us during the actual exams?" @@novelbin@@

Sylvie's face turned even redder, but this time, it was not because of the shame but because of anger.

'What do you know about me, huh? Do you think it is easy?'

Sylvie took a step back, her anger and frustration simmering beneath the surface. She was aware that the patient's outburst had some basis, but she couldn't help but feel the injustice of it all.

It wasn't as if she wanted to be haunted by traumatic memories during an exam.

As she watched from the side, the other healers continued to tend to the wounded students with skill and precision.

And when the students were leaving the location, most of the time, they had refreshed smiles on their faces while talking with their friends.

Sylvie couldn't help but feel a pang of jealousy.

'Why can't I be like them? Why does it have to be so difficult for me?' she thought bitterly.

The healing trait she possessed had been a part of her life for as long as she could remember. But instead of seeing it as a gift, she often viewed it as a burden.

Because people always assumed she would treat them without ever thinking about her. They never cared about how she felt, if she was scared or anything.

Just like that patient who poured his anger on her. It was always her fault whenever the treatment didn't work, as she was obliged to succeed every time.

-THUD!

At that second, as Sylvie was resenting the world, suddenly she was startled by the sudden entrance of a woman.

She appeared rushed, but her position was indicated by the instructor's sign on her uniform.

She was scanning the room as if she was looking for something. Soon, her gaze fell on Sylvie, who was currently not attending to any patients.

Before she could react, the instructor approached her with a sense of urgency. "You! Are you available right now?"

Sylvie blinked, her resentment momentarily replaced by surprise. "I... Yes, I'm available. But..."

The instructor didn't allow her to finish her sentence. She quickly produced an order from the control room, her tone serious. "The control room has sent me to request your presence. We have a situation in dungeon B-3, and you're needed immediately."

Following that, the instructor immediately grabbed her in a princess carry.

"Kyaaaaa-!"

Sylvie was surprised as her eyes widened in the sudden action.

"Sorry for the inconvenience, girl. But, bear with it for a while."

SWOOSH!

And following that was the time of her life...

Chapter 144 32.10 - Mid-terms

"Sorry for the inconvenience, girl. But, bear with it for a while."

With those words, Sylvie suddenly felt flying.

SWOOSH!

Following that, she almost lost her eyes. The moment the instructor dashed forward with Sylvie on her shoulder, the speed was so fast that the wind cut the corner of her eyes.

As Sylvie was being carried by the instructor, her mind raced with a flurry of questions and concerns. She felt an adrenaline rush as the instructor swiftly made her way through the corridors, heading towards dungeon B-3.

The urgency in the instructor's movements and the gravity of the situation sent shivers down her spine.

Breathless and anxious, Sylvie finally mustered the courage to speak. "What's happening in dungeon B-3? Why am I needed there?"

The instructor's voice was tight with worry as she responded. "We've received reports of suspicious activity in the dungeon. The signal interference is a significant concern. There's a possibility that the lives of students in that dungeon are at risk."

Hearing this, Sylvie couldn't help but remember what happened in the joint dungeon exploration and the berserk-going monsters.

Students almost lost their lives because of that, and that experience was something she had never wanted to go to again.

"Does that mean-"

"Yes. There might be demon contractors. Even though we normally can teleport the injured students to the healing room, right now, the dungeon [B-3] is not working properly, and neither can we teleport inside, nor can students teleport outside."

As they reached the entrance of dungeon B-3, Sylvie's heart raced with a combination of fear and anticipation.

But before the instructor could enter, they were met with the sight of other combat personnel already moving inside, accompanied by a group of vigilant guards.

"Senior Rachel."

The guard immediately acknowledged the instructor as he bowed his head.

"We have been informed that some students were in a dangerous situation."



"Can you locate them?"

"Yes. GPS and surveillance are working properly. Only spatial teleportation is disturbed."

"Situation?"

"There are no deaths, but some students are getting pushed back by the horde of monsters."  
@@novelbin@@

"Potions?"

"You may leave. I want no deaths, am I clear?"

"Clear."

"Good."

SWOOSH!

The instructor wasted no time and immediately rushed towards the location where Astron Natusalune was last seen.

And the personnel and guards followed the instructor's lead.

As they entered the dungeon, the first thing Sylvie felt was her insides turning up and down. And because she was getting carried by the instructor at a rapid pace with a weird posture, it was very severe.

"Burghk!"

On the way, she couldn't help but throw up.

"Bear with it; we are almost there."

Just as the instructor said, in almost two minutes, they had reached their destination. They didn't encounter any monsters on the way because the instructor was way too fast for them to follow their lead.

They reached the location where the last signal had been detected, and the instructor came to a halt. She seemed to be trying to sense something, her expression tense.

"There's a barrier here. I can't sense anything inside it."

Sylvie's unease grew as the instructor mentioned the barrier. It was clear that something unusual was happening, and they needed to proceed with caution.

"S-should we enter here?" She slightly stuttered as she felt the fear once again.

"Yes, we should."

"B-but...."

"Don't worry. I am strong."

With those words, the instructor extended her hand, and a soft, pale light emanated from her palm. With a gentle push, the barrier began to shimmer, and they could now see what lay beyond.

"Huh?"

And the scene that unfolded before them sent shivers down Sylvie's spine.

As the barrier dissipated, the sight that unfolded before them was one of horror and despair.. There were signs of battle all around the place.

Blood was everywhere. Bodies of monsters were scattered around, and even though Sylvie didn't know what they were, the arrows stabbed on their body made it obvious that they were dead.

However, the thing that got their attention was none of them.

In the center of the barrier lay a young man, his form battered and bloodied. His black hair was matted with dust and dried blood, and his body bore numerous injuries and lacerations.

A pool of crimson had formed around him, stark against the cold dungeon floor. But the most gruesome sight of all was the young man's right arm, severed at the elbow as if forcibly chopped off.

"Burghk!"

Sylvie couldn't contain her nausea welling up as she threw up once again. She was already feeling unwell, and now that she had seen such a sight, she couldn't hold it in.

"Calm down." The instructor said as she patted her. The instructor was also looking around for any signs of attackers by expanding her senses. She was vigilant.

However, after a second of sensing around, she finally nodded her head. Then she rushed to the body's side, rushing Sylvie as well.

"Hufff.....Hufffffff..."

As Sylvie attempted to regain her composure by taking deep breaths, her eyes darted around the scene of devastation.

The dungeon was in a state of chaos, with signs of battle all around. The cold, oppressive atmosphere was suffocating, and she could see jagged cuts on the dungeon floor, evidence of a fierce struggle.

Blood was splattered across the walls, and the lifeless bodies of monsters were scattered haphazardly, their deaths marked by arrows and wounds.

And as they instantly reached the student, the instructor immediately took his pulse and checked his wounds.

"He's in critical condition. We need to act fast."

But something wasn't right. This person.....Sylvie knew him. These features, this skin, this hair....

Everything was just familiar.

"Astron....."

The person lying on the ground was the edgy boy.....

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When someone asked Sylvie what she thought about Astron, she would probably say he is someone unique.

And, it was not because of how he acted, how he looked, or anything. There were plenty of students who didn't like to associate with others and stayed as a loner.

There were also plenty of people who were good-looking to a certain extent. Even in the Hunter Academy, there were prestigious people whose looks could not be matched with others, and Astron was certainly not on that level of looks.

He wasn't strong either, as he was ranked last.

Therefore, the reason he was unique was not because of them.

It was because of the feelings he held underneath.

Sylvie had a special talent stemming from her [First Lord's Authority].

She could see the emotions people were hiding underneath.

When she first saw Astron in the school, the hatred on his color palette was so dark that it was an amount she had never encountered before.

She asked herself. What might have caused this? What might have possibly caused such amounts of sadness for such a young person?

Those questions led to intrigues, and they led to her wanting to know more about him. It was not in the form of attraction, but rather, it was a curiosity.

Then, she saw him getting bullied and getting beaten. He was the weakest, and she knew it. Thus, she helped as much as she could, sometimes healing his wounds from a distance or using her trait to relieve his pain even a little.

However, because she wasn't proficient enough, her help wasn't much, and it would hardly be noticed.

But then, he changed. Something inside him fundamentally changed. The sadness and hatred in his heart were pushed back by something different. Something empty.

Indifference it was. Like a barrier covering his feelings, the fluctuating emotions he felt rather stagnated, pushed back underneath the barrier of grey.

"I will erase your existence, just like I will eradicate your kin."

She still remembered the words of that time—the cold voice that sent shivers down her spine.

After that, it was their sparring. There, he spoke words that she didn't want to hear.

Things that she didn't want to remember, the memories of that time.....

He made her remember those feelings, so she distanced herself from him immediately.

It was a cowardly act, but who could say something to her about her life anyway?

But then again, as the life in the academy went on and on, things changed. She joined more practical lessons explorations with her team, and she enjoyed the school life she had.

Hanging out with her friends, using her traits to help people, and joining clubs.

She was in the same club as Astron, but as if to show respect for her choice of keeping the distance, he never once said anything. Never approached and did his own thing and attended the club.

As if a cold barrier had formed, she felt a distance that didn't exist before, and she knew it was her own choice.

But those thoughts soon shattered just last week when he explained the question. At that time, she felt the distance between them was a little closer, and the barrier between them was lifted.

And as she saw him studying, his meticulous work concentration, it became evident to her that he was also actually trying his best, just like her.

And now, that person was lying on the ground was the very person she knew, and his life was in her hands....

Chapter 145 32.11 - Mid-terms

"He is in the critical condition; we need to act fast."

The instructor said, but Sylvie's mind was somewhere else.

"Astron."

As Sylvie mumbled, looking at the scene before her eyes, she couldn't help but feel the chills down to her spine.

The missing arm, the scars on his body....Everything was so severe and brutal that it was the first time she had felt this way.

She.....

Felt scared....

Like she was in a trance, the visions of that time once again overlapped with the visions of her past.

The boy lying on the ground was changed with another.

It was the same blood, the same fishy smell, the same rough breathing, and the same thinning light connecting the boy.

'No.....No....Not again.....'

Without her noticing, her breathing got rougher. The world started spinning, and her heart started beating rapidly.

"Haaaah...Haaaaah..."

It was as if the past had collided with the present, and she couldn't discern between the two.

However, as Sylvie was having a panic attack, the instructor knew they didn't have much time.

After all, she already had fed a potion to this young boy, but his injuries must have been so deep that even the potion wasn't working properly, and its effects were nowhere near enough.

And this was one of the reasons why she brought the healer girl with her.

As the instructor turned her head to Sylvie, she immediately recognized Sylvie's distress and the urgency of the situation.

'Tch. Why is this girl having a panic attack now.'

She couldn't help but click her tongue inwardly.

'If I knew his injuries were this severe, I would have brought the exam overseer with me.'

The boy's condition was too severe for a student to treat. But it was what it was.

'We can't afford to waste any more time.'

Without hesitation, she reached out and, with a swift but gentle motion, delivered a sharp, almost stinging, tap to the back of Sylvie's head.

THUD!

"Snap out of it!" the instructor commanded, her voice firm. "You can't afford to freeze up now. This is your moment. You are a healer, and you can save a life."

She didn't know this girl's name, neither did she know her rank. But now, the girl was the healer they had right here, and that was it.

"Ughk-!"

The unexpected physical contact and the instructor's stern words jolted Sylvie back to the present with a groan.

"I-I am sorry."

The chaotic whirl of her thoughts began to subside, and guilt started to come again.

"Tch. Girl, I don't need your apologies, neither does he."

The instructor approached Sylvie.

"It seems you know his name." Gesturing towards Astron, she continued. "Astron Natusalune, rank 2450, and known to have a weak body constitution. I heard his reputation wasn't good, and he was ostracized."



It wasn't known how she knew about those things, but it didn't matter to Sylvie. "Even with all those things," the instructor continued, "he was still there, trying to prove himself by fighting against the monsters." She pointed to the defeated creatures surrounding them. "Even though he was probably targeted by Demon Contractors, he is still trying to cling to life. Despite all these injuries, even with all the pain he probably felt, he didn't give up and is still fighting."

With those words, the instructor appeared right before Sylvie's eyes, her hand landing on Sylvie's shoulder.

"Don't you think it's a bit unfair to him that now the only hope he has is actually having a crybaby moment? Do you think you're the only one who has experienced something heartbreaking in this world? Grow up, girl, and do what you must. I will be waiting for you."

With one last pat on Sylvie's shoulder, the instructor walked away, leaving Sylvie alone with the injured young man. @@novelbin@@

Sylvie, left alone, looked at Astron.

"I, I..."

Words got stuck in her mouth as she looked.

THUMP! THUMP!

Her heart still raced from her earlier attack, but strangely, at that exact second, maybe thanks to the instructor's words, she remembered a moment.

"You need to get a grip on yourself."

The words this very boy had spoken to her before. At that time, she felt like he was intruding on her space, and who was he to speak like that without knowing her?

"This level of fear will make you a liability, not just to yourself, but to your future party members. If you can't control your emotions in a combat situation, you'll be a burden, and that's dangerous."

He probably didn't say it because he thought he would be her party member. But now, those words started crashing down.

"If you're not willing to confront your weaknesses head-on, then perhaps you should reconsider being a part of the academy."

If she wasn't in the academy right now and if it was another healer right here, wouldn't they be able to save him?

'What if I wasn't here? What if someone else was there, someone better?'

Self-hatred, anger towards the world, responsibility and fragility.....

All of those were in her heart right now.

"Sylvie."

But the words kept coming to her mind.

"You know, by behaving like this, you can never go anywhere."

She looked at her hands.

"Grow up, girl. And do what you must."

As those words sank in, she looked at the boy lying on the ground.

"You are escaping from your past. Don't you think it is about time you accept this as it is?"

"Accept...." She mumbled.

"If it is you, my sister, you can do it." As the silhouette of the young boy overlapped with the lying one, she could see a smile on his face.

The smile that knew she could do it.

"You are right."

And that was it.

"I need to do it."

Sylvie clenched her fists and bit her lip, forcing herself to look at the scene without fear.

"I won't run away anymore."

The restraints she had put on herself, the fear she had.

Her heart was still beating fast from all those things.

TAP!

But she took the first step.

She accepted everything as it was, and at that second, tranquility came into her heart. As if her power was now flowing more smoothly than ever before, she could feel everything more clearly.

The small light that was emanating from him, his vitality.

"Haaaah....."

Taking a deep breath to steady herself, Sylvie reached Astron, sitting in front of him.

And immediately began to assess Astron's condition more closely. His breathing was shallow, and his pulse was weak.

The severed arm was a grave concern, and his body bore multiple lacerations and contusions from the battle.

'Five ribs were broken, internal bleeding on lungs, and he had already lost insane amounts of blood.'

Even for Sylvie, who studied healing, it was unclear how he was still able to preserve his life. With this amount of injuries, he should already have been dead.

But, as she continued her analysis, she found the answer.

'Huh? What is this?'

Inside his body, a foreign substance was flowing. The blood he had been losing continuously was also being refreshed, as if something was trying to repair his body, but it couldn't, as the body had already been shattered to pieces.

'Is this a potion?'

She wondered but immediately discarded the question because this was not the time to ponder about such things.

'I will start.'

The diagnosis was complete, and it was now time to start the healing.

"Haaaaah....."

With one long breath, she steadied her resolve and activated her trait.

'I will save you, no matter what.'

Her green eyes were filled with determination; her whole focus was on the boy before her.

'First, I need to close Lacerations.'

She thought as she started using her mana to mend multiple lacerations and contusions on Astron's body.

This step was important because while she was working, she needed to ensure that he didn't lose any more blood than now.

'It is moving differently.'

It was a lot different from when she was just healing other people. Her mana and trait, which she lost control was now steady.

'I can do it.'

With precise and gentle movements, she encouraged the torn flesh to reconnect, closing the wounds.

'Now, stabilizing the broken ribs.'

Sylvie then turned her attention to the five broken ribs. She used her mana to gently realign the fractured bones. And, because Astron was an Awakened, his ribs were stronger than any average person's.

But that also made it harder and required a more delicate approach to move the ribs.

It was a delicate process, ensuring that they were in their proper positions to heal correctly. As she worked, she could feel the bones knitting back together.

'I did it.'

She thought as she finally put all the ribs back together.

'But, it is still not enough.'

The most dangerous part was still there. The internal bleeding and his internal injuries were the most severe ones.

His inner organs were damaged, and they required immediate action.

Sylvie concentrated her healing energy on the damaged tissues, coaxing them to stop bleeding and promoting the body's natural healing processes.

At this point, she no longer had any thoughts inside her head, as she moved her mana instinctually by the feeling.

It was the first time she was attending an internal injury, which was something that wouldn't be expected from a freshman healing student.

In their curriculum, such things were in the second year of the academy; however, right now, for Sylvie, such things didn't matter.

As if something, someone, was guiding her, she moved her mana hypnotically.

However, at that second, suddenly, the light she could see in Astron disappeared.

"NO!"

It meant he lost his life.

"NO!"

She shouted, her heart feeling like it was squeezed to death.

"NOOOOOOOO!"

An agonizing, guttural scream erupted from Sylvie's soul, echoing throughout the confines of the dungeon.

Chapter 146 32.12 - Mid-terms [Prologue]

"NOOOOOOOO!"

'You can't die, you can't die, you can't die, you can't die, you can't die, you can't die, you can't die.'

Sylvie's mind was locked in a harrowing chant of desperation. Over and over, the mantra repeated, 'You can't die, you can't die.' Each word is a fervent plea, each iteration an attempt to fend off the looming abyss.

With closed eyes, Sylvie bit her lip so fiercely that blood welled up and dripped onto the ground, but the pain was inconsequential. It was the pain within her heart, the unbearable squeeze of despair, that consumed her entirely.

The girl who had finally found her resolve was about to fail once again.

'You can't die, you can't die.'

Like a broken doll, she repeatedly willed inside her head to open her eyes. Her hand slowly moved to the cheek of the lying boy, and as she touched his skin, she felt the coldness.

'You can't die, you can't die.'

And then, without Sylvie's conscious awareness, a radiant aura began to emanate from her being.

Her strong emotions...Her trait was responding to that—the [First Lord's Authority].

In response to her desperate plea, a miracle unfolded. The lost light, like a flame reigniting from the embers, returned to Astron's body. The line between life and death blurred, and Sylvie lost herself in the process.

She didn't have any awareness about what she was doing as she simply used her mana like a madman.

Her hands moved, guided by an otherworldly force.

The internal bleeding slowly abated, and damaged tissues began to mend under her ministrations. It was meticulous work, precise and skillful, beyond what one would expect from a novice healer.

But Sylvie's healing wasn't limited to just the injuries she could see.

With her mana, yellow tendrils extended from her hands, reaching for Astron's severed arm. The reconnection was a complex endeavor involving blood vessels, nerves, muscles, and bones.

Her actions appeared as if a master healer was at work, performing a surgical miracle. She painstakingly ensured that every element aligned perfectly, leaving no room for error. When the arm was seamlessly reconnected, only one step remained.

The loss of blood Astron had suffered had rendered his internal organs nonfunctional, a critical condition that often led to death. Yet, Sylvie was beyond such limitations. A miracle, one of the rarest occurrences, was unfolding before her very eyes.

Her luminous mana enveloped Astron, suffusing his entire being. It was as though she were weaving together the threads of life, stitching the very essence of his existence back together.

As Sylvie's mana encompassed Astron's form and body, she channeled her power with unwavering focus.

The miracle unfolded before her, almost as if she were breathing life back into his frail body. It was a race against time, a desperate attempt to regenerate his lost blood and ensure his survival.

Gradually, she sensed the light returning to Astron's body, a sign that the life force within him was rekindling.

The coldness that had once dominated his skin gave way to a gentle warmth, spreading from her hands to every corner of his body. The sensation was like a rekindled ember igniting a fire.

'Ah....'



And because she felt the warmth in her hand, she slowly started coming to her senses. The trance she had slowly shattered as she felt the world once again.

'He is finally okay.'

She thought, a small smile tugging on her lips.

The moment Sylvie confirmed Astron's breathing had stabilized, she knew she had succeeded.

"Thank goodness...."

However, the monumental effort had drained her beyond measure. Her vision blurred, and her consciousness wavered.

"Astron...."

With the last remnants of her strength, she whispered Astron's name, her voice a fragile breath in the dim dungeon.

THUD!

Then, like a falling petal, she descended upon him, her chest rising and falling with the shallow rhythm of her breath.

Her journey to save a life had taken its toll, and Sylvie succumbed to the weight of her exhaustion, her body a fragile vessel of hope that had achieved the miraculous.

It was the day the future Saintess had been finally awakened.... ((N1))

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After she gave her encouragement to Sylvie, the instructor left her to calm herself. She was proficient in dealing with students, so she knew being with Sylvie wouldn't help her much.

'I hope she can make it.'

She thought. The girl clearly had a trauma in her past, something that was holding her back.

'I wish I had chosen someone more competent.'

She urgently picked someone in a hurry, thus she didn't have any chance to choose. And now, because of her negligence, the student Astron was in danger.

'I guess there is no need to regret it.'

However, contrary to her thoughts and assumptions, suddenly, she could feel the psions inside the barrier moving.

"She really did it."

There, the instructor turned her head and started watching the entire scene unfold with bated breath, witnessing the remarkable healing performed by the young Sylvie.

'I guess I owe her an apology.'

Her heart swelled both with pride and a little conscience as she saw the girl's determination and her innate talent for healing. "What is this?"

But as Astron's condition improved, she noticed something extraordinary happening.

A radiant pillar of light began to rise from Sylvie, extending high into the dark dungeon ceiling. It was a sight she had never seen in all her years of being a Hunter and instructing.

"This?"

Immense amounts of energy were spreading from the shiny light. Her eyes widened as she recognized the significance of the luminous pillar.

It was a clear sign that something extraordinary, something almost divine, had occurred. The instructor had known a lot of healers in her career, and she knew that such phenomena were not to be taken lightly.

The fact that the girl who wasn't able to move from fear just now was able to create such a phenomenon itself made it clear that she was someone special.

Someone with a different talent.

"Someone that could be one of the [Venerate] in the future."

And the moment she noticed that fact, suddenly she felt slight envy.

'I guess some people are born special.'

She couldn't help but shake her head after having such thoughts.

'What am I thinking? Am I a child?'

With a sense of self-reprimanding, she approached Sylvie, whose unconscious form lay next to the now-stable Astron.

"She really did save him."

She knew that the academy and the world at large would be forever changed by this event and the young healer who had saved a life in the most extraordinary way possible.

"I guess she can rest a little."

With that thought, she grabbed the two youngsters lying on the ground and started leaving the dungeon while looking at the sky.

"I suddenly wish I was young now....."

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It was said that when you are about to die, you would see your life flashing before your eyes.

The things you wanted to do, the things you wished to achieve, the things you had regretted—they would all come to your mind.

And as death approached, you would want to live; you would be scared.

In a world filled with countless powerful individuals, death would be everywhere, surrounding everyone.

Unless you are strong or prepared for it, it can take your life at any second.

And I know I am not strong.

Not strong enough to achieve my goals, not strong enough to avoid death.

Therefore, I was prepared for it, prepared for the dangers I would encounter.

Or not.

No, that was wrong; I was wrong.

I wasn't prepared enough.

I was arrogant.

I was careless.

Looking at the white ceiling, those were the thoughts that passed from my head.

'I almost lost my life.'

Remembering what happened in the dungeon, I clenched my hands.

'I was careless.'

The fact that just because nothing had happened in the game, I disregarded the possibility of demon contractors moving into the academy....

The fact that I was arrogant enough to think I could defeat all the students on my own...

Looking back at things, it all stemmed from my own actions.

'I should have known the things I did would bite me back.'

This world might have been based on a game.

But, from the moment I, as a variable, acted differently, things were bound to change.

"Lady Miller sends her regards."

The words of that bastard echoed in my head, the demon contractors.

"Miller."

The name was familiar; it was someone I knew pretty well.

"Dylan."

The leader of the bullies, the bulky kid who was played at the hands of a girl and became a simp.

"It must be his mother."

He was just an extra, a random character who acted like a bully. Thus, I thought if I erased him from this world, nothing would happen.

"They sought revenge."

But I should have expected it.

'Someone with such a personality is bound to take it from his parents.'

"Revenge."

The word that defined my sole purpose of living.

"If I die before doing that, for what reason she left this world."

At that time, I used a special mixture I had saved in the place of my teeth to stall time. I knew there might have been a situation where I couldn't access my spatial bracelet or grab a potion.

Thus, I pulled one of my teeth out and then put a pill there.

'If not for that, I would have died.'

Looking at the side, I could see my arm was attached to it once again.

'They must have brought a proficient healer for that.'

My arm was chopped off, and the demonic energy must have corroded that. Thus, without a high-ranking healer, I wouldn't have the arm with me.

As I looked at my hand, I remembered the fight.

The way the dagger broke, the way I was helpless when I didn't have the element of surprise on my side.

'I know what I am lacking.'

Now that mid-terms had finished, the academy would finally enter the break time.

'It is about time I get my weapon.' @@novelbin@@

The dagger broke, and I still couldn't utilize my trait properly.

'However, before that, I need to deal with some rats.'

Looking at the small green tendril connecting me, I clenched my teeth.

'Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.'

Chapter 147 Chapter 33.1 - Aftermath

"Oh, you are awake."

While I was pondering to myself, suddenly I felt someone's presence entering the room. It was a woman with a good posture.

'An instructor.'

Her uniform was changed to casual, and the nameplate was gone, but it was evident that she was a skilled individual from the way she carried herself alone.

Her hands were callused, and she had sharp-squinting eyes.

TOK!

"...."

I just looked at her as she came closer to me with her heels hitting the ground.

"I assume you have some questions in your head." She said with a smile. But her eyes were different. Even though she had a smile, I could see the questions lingering in there.

'She is quite good at hiding it.'

She was experienced at hiding her thoughts showing on her face, but that didn't mean they could escape from my trait [Perceptive Insight].

"You're in the healing room. You were in quite a predicament back there in Dungeon B-3, but thanks to a young healer, you're on the road to recovery."

Hearing her words, I nodded my head. I knew this was the healing room used for the general conveniences, and it wasn't the first time I was here.

However, one thing immediately got my attention.

'Young healer?'

It was that word. Even though the academy had mostly lessons related to combat, that didn't mean there weren't any healers.

However, they needed to be nurtured first for them to be useful enough. And the wounds I got weren't something that could be cured by an average healer.

My brows furrowed as I tried to recall the events leading up to my current state. "What happened?"

While asking, I remembered a shiny light that enveloped me when I was on the brink of that. I was desperately trying to cling to life, and that light had helped me for sure.

The instructor's smile persisted, this time being a genuine one. "You were saved by a miracle."



As if to press on her words, she stopped for a second as she pointed out the bed near mine.

"The healer, Sylvie, performed an extraordinary feat of healing that goes beyond ordinary skills. It's not something you see every day, but you're here, alive and well, thanks to her."

The moment she said that she waved her hand, and the mana immediately moved around, forcing the curtain to slide to the side.

As she did that, she revealed the figure lying on the bed adjacent to mine.

A girl that I was quite familiar with lay there with eyes closed, a gentle rise and fall of her chest indicating peaceful slumber.

Her blonde hair cascaded around her like a halo, framing a face that could only be described as a work of art.

'Sylvie.'

Delicate features, smooth skin, and a certain innocence that emanated from her aura made her undeniably captivating.

'Huh? Captivating?'

However, I soon realized something. My thoughts instantly wandered around to a place that wouldn't normally be the case.

I couldn't help but be drawn to the scene. The air around her held a serene energy, creating a sense of tranquility in the room.

'Don't tell me?'

It was as if she carried an ethereal beauty that not only healed physical wounds but also touched the depths of one's soul.

The instructor spoke with a tone of admiration, "This is Sylvie, the healer who saved you. Her skills are exceptional, surpassing what we typically see even among academy healers."

The words spoken by the instructor and the scene I had just witnessed made it very clear about what had happened.

'She had awakened her authority.'

[First Lord's Authority.]

It was her trait, something that only one person in the world could have. The thing that would make her the Saintess in the future and one of the holders of the [Venerate] position.

However, even then, the authority was still lying dormant underneath for the time being, and it was supposed to keep doing so. But now, it awakened.

An event that would happen when the first year of the academy ended.

'This will make the things troublesome.'

After all, the awakening of authority wasn't something that could be overlooked, and certain individuals were bound to feel it, too.

"You were fortunate," the instructor continued, her gaze shifting between Sylvie and me. "Not everyone gets the chance to be saved by such a remarkable talent. Consider yourself lucky, Astron."

'Lucky indeed.'

I thought as I contemplated the serendipity that had brought me to this room and the healer who had worked wonders to pull me back from the brink.

After all, I wasn't expecting Sylvie to come, but even then, my situation was so severe that, if not for Sylvie, I am not sure I could have come out unscathed.

In the worst-case scenario, I would have died, and in the best-case scenario, I would have lost at least my arm.

Even though healing is a thing, and potions as well, there are certain limits to that, and the demonic energy inside me would have kept eating me alive.

'This is a debt.' @@novelbin@@

Looking at the girl who was sleeping soundly without knowing the trial she would need to face from now on, I thought.

'And, I never forget my debts.'

If she was the reason I was saved, that also meant I was the reason she was awakened. Of course, this doesn't make me responsible for the future that she will need to face, but I am still indebted to her, and I will make sure to pay it back.

"It is kind of a fate, isn't it?" the instructor remarked, her voice carrying a thoughtful tone. Her gaze lingered on Sylvie, who was still peacefully asleep.

I turned my attention back to the instructor, waiting for an explanation.

"When I had heard about the possibility of demon contractors attacking the dungeon, I immediately rushed to bring a healer with me," she admitted, a slight smile playing on her lips. "And, when I entered there, I saw she was free sitting on the corner without any patient to heal."

The instructor said as she slowly approached the girl. "But, just a moment ago, when I asked the overseer why Sylvie was not healing any participants, the answer I got was very interesting."

"..."

"Dealing with patients, especially the more severe cases, seemed to take a toll on her for some reason from her past, and the overseer said it wasn't the first time something like this was happening to Sylvie. And, at that time when I entered, she was apparently taking a break because her trauma was triggered."

Hearing those words, I nodded my head. From the start, I knew what Sylvie had been struggling with, as she was one of the most important characters in the game.

Her background story was also given in detail, as she had a trauma because of a certain event she had witnessed.

'To think it led to such results.'

"So, in a way, you could say it was a twist of fate that led her to you," the instructor continued. "But, even the fate alone wouldn't be enough."

The instructor turned her attention to me with her eyes turning serious.

"I had seen a fair amount of people as a Hunter who couldn't overcome their past. But, this girl did when she was in the most uncomfortable position she could be."

The instructor's gaze bore into mine, her eyes searching for understanding. "Astron, why do you think Sylvie was able to overcome her fears when she was faced with a situation that triggered her trauma?"

"....."

I didn't answer as I didn't have one in the first place. Even in the game, the way Sylvie awakened wasn't shown explicitly.

She would have awakened her trait when she had returned to her hometown after the year of the academy ended, and as the player, we wouldn't see it.

But, if I needed to guess, the answer would be the scene triggering something inside her.

"The main reason she was able to overcome her trauma in that critical moment was you. It was your presence on the field."

Hearing those words, I raised an eyebrow in surprise. It was a genuine surprise coming from my heart since I couldn't understand.

I didn't interact with Sylvie too much, aside from some circumstances. Of course, I kind of encouraged her to get better at controlling her fear, but that was all. Aside from that, my interactions with her were limited.

"Me? But I only met her recently. How could I have such an impact?"

The instructor explained, "Sylvie is not only bound by a sense of duty and her unique abilities but also by genuine emotions. Do you think, if you were not the person on the battlefield dying at that time and were someone other, she could do it?"

When she asked it, I thought about it for a second.

'Certainly.'

If it was something that could be triggered by any other student, Sylvie would have awakened her trait a lot quicker in the game as well.

"You see it, don't you? She's fond of you, Astron. I am not sure about your relationship with her or what kind of past you have, but your presence became a catalyst for her to confront and overcome her trauma. Sometimes, it takes a specific person or a significant event to unlock such potential within ourselves. Sylvie found that in you."

I pondered the instructor's words, trying to grasp the depth of their meaning. But one thing didn't make much sense to me.

'Why is she talking about all those things all of a sudden?'

"So, what are you getting at with all of this? Are you suggesting there's some sort of connection between us that goes beyond the surface?"

The instructor looked at me with a deadpan expression for a second, as if I was some sort of idiot.

'What is this woman doing, now?'

The instructor's deadpan expression persisted for a moment before she sighed almost in exasperation. "Are you seriously not getting it, or are you just pretending not to?"

I furrowed my brows in confusion. "Getting what?"

".....Sigh..."

A long sigh escaped her mouth as the instructor looked at me, mumbling, 'This will get troublesome.'

FUSH!

Just as the instructor was about to say something more, suddenly, a movement occurred from the sides.

"Hmm....."

Chapter 148 33.2 - Aftermath

"Hmm....."

As the girl lying on the bed squirmed with a humming sound, both Astron and the instructor immediately turned their attention to the girl.

"..."

Both of them closed their mouth as they watched the girl. Sylvie stirred, her eyelids fluttering as she regained consciousness.

The instructor decided to postpone whatever she had on her mind, giving Astron a pointed look before turning her attention to the awakening healer.

"Ah, you're awake," she said with a gentle smile, her previous deadpan expression replaced by a more amiable demeanor. "How are you feeling, Sylvie?"

Sylvie blinked a few times, disoriented, and then seemed to remember where she was. "I... I don't know. What happened?"

Even though she had said those words, she seemed to have sensed the changes that had occurred both in her body and in her mind.

The instructor glanced at Astron briefly before answering, "You performed a miraculous healing on Astron. It seems your talents go beyond what I initially thought."

Sylvie's gaze shifted to Astron hearing those words, and there was a mix of emotions in her eyes—relief, surprise, and something else that was hard to pinpoint.

Even then, she kept looking at him intently as if he had done something bad.

And, with a hint of concern, she finally mustered the courage to ask, "Are you okay, Astron?"

Those words sounded simple and dumb at first glance, but for Sylvie, it was different. She had just witnessed the same boy before her almost losing his life.

She witnessed the severity of his wounds; she directly felt them.

So when she asked the question in such a manner, it was rather in the form of reaffirmation for yourself.

"...Yes....." Astron managed to get the word out of his mouth and nodded his head. "Thanks to your efforts." And he added.

But, the expression on his face was no strange to Sylvie. The same solemnity that he had was there, but he simply avoided her eyes.

And she could see the emotions underneath. Now that she had awakened her trait, she could see things in a lot more detail.

'He is concerned?'

She asked herself. The palette of colors was now showing a concern, but she couldn't understand it.

'And, he is angry.'

Of course, there was a hint of anger splattered in his heart, probably due to what happened inside the dungeon.

The hatred was also there, comparably a lot stronger than before.

But, even then, there was no fear or any remorse in his heart, as if he didn't regard his life.

'Why?'

She wanted to ask.

'Why don't you value your life more?'

But she couldn't since the instructor stepped in.

"How do you feel, Sylvie? Do you sense anything different in your body?"

The instructor observed the silent exchange between Sylvie and Astron, and then, with a gentle smile, she turned her attention back to the healer.

Sylvie took a moment to assess herself. Her hand instinctively went to her chest as if checking for something unfamiliar. There was a subtle shift in her expression, a realization dawning in her eyes.

"I... I don't know. It's strange," Sylvie confessed, her voice carrying a mix of wonder and uncertainty. "I felt this... warmth when I was healing Astron. It's like my power was different, stronger."



The instructor nodded knowingly. "Awakening your trait can bring about changes. It seems your potential runs deeper than you might have thought. The situation probably triggered the condition of your trait."

With her words, the instructor slowly rose from her seat.

"Now that I have confirmed about your safety, I shall take my leave." the instructor announced, her gaze shifting between Sylvie and Astron. "It's crucial that the higher-ups are informed about this development."

She moved towards the door, her movements graceful and purposeful. "Continue to monitor any changes in your condition, Sylvie. Astron, if you experience anything unusual, don't hesitate to seek help from the academy's medical facilities."

With those parting words, the instructor exited the room, leaving the two all alone, though a subtle smile was on her lips.

TOK!

As the door was closed, the room fell silent.

Both of them didn't talk as they just stayed in silence. Of course, the awkwardness was only for Sylvie since Astron seemed to be pondering about something.

But, even in that awkwardness, Sylvie couldn't forget what she had seen just an hour ago in the dungeon.

That scene was engraved in her mind.

'Why?'

Sylvie couldn't bear the silence any longer. The question burned in her mind, and the feelings she was trying to suppress leaked out and pushed her to break the quiet tension.

"Astron, why were you in such a state?" she finally asked, her voice carrying a mix of curiosity and anger. "What happened in dungeon B-3? Why were you so badly injured?"

Because she was reminded of that time, she felt angry at this guy before him.

Her eyes searched his face, trying to find answers and perhaps a glimpse into the thoughts that seemed to weigh heavily on him.

'Just why?'

The healing had been a success, but the aftermath left Sylvie with more questions than before.

This person's past, his feelings, his hatred and anger, the people targeting him in the dungeon.... countless things that were not normal.

"Don't you know?" The answer came not long after—an answer just like him.

'Again, a question as an answer.'

This habit of his always made her irritated because it felt like he avoided answering about himself.

'It is okay to talk about other people's past, but it is not okay to talk about yours....Tch!'

She remembered when he simply intruded on her personal space at that time, saying mean things.

But when she asked or when any people asked, he always avoided it.

"If I knew, would I ask?" she retorted, adopting Astron's style. A stoic expression remained on his face, seemingly unaffected by the role reversal. "You might," he replied casually, prompting Sylvie to question his evasion tactics.

"But, if I asked while knowing what happened, doesn't that mean I want to hear it from your mouth?" Sylvie countered. Astron's response was a simple yet frustrating "That's right."

"Then, shouldn't you answer?" Sylvie pressed further, refusing to let him sidestep the conversation. Astron's question of "Why?" echoed in the room, leaving Sylvie exasperated.

"Why? What do you mean by why?" she exclaimed, her frustration boiling over. The tension between them reached its peak, the unspoken weight of the recent events hanging heavily in the air.

"Why does it matter?" Astron replied with an air of nonchalance, his gaze fixed on the door. The approaching footsteps hinted at the arrival of others, and his trait [Perceptive Insight] allowed him to discern the possible identities. "Two girls," he thought.

Sylvie's frustration deepened. "Why does it matter? Because... because maybe I can help you!" she exclaimed, her voice tinged with a mix of concern and anger. But before she could express more, Astron turned his face to her.

"Help, huh.....This is so like you." Astron's voice held a hint of both sadness and bitterness. His purple eyes, for a brief moment, revealed a myriad of emotions, a fleeting glimpse into the complex tapestry of his thoughts and feelings. "But, Sylvie, you know what?" But before Sylvie could delve deeper, he shifted his gaze downward, focusing on his own hands.

"Some people are bound to walk their paths alone," Astron muttered, his voice carrying a weight that seemed to echo with the gravity of his words. "Because they lost their chance to walk with someone."

His expression remained unreadable, a mask that concealed the intricacies of his inner world, but even then, Sylvie could see the guilt taking over him.

'Who is that someone?'

CRACK!

But, before she could ponder about it any longer, the door swung wide open, revealing Sylvie's friends who had rushed in.

"Sylvie, are you okay?" Jasmine immediately jumped to Sylvie, coming to her side. Concern was etched on her face. "I just heard that you collapsed in the dungeon. Did something happen?"

With the appearance of her friend, Sylvie was overwhelmed for a second.

Don't worry, Jasmine. Everything is okay now," Sylvie assured her, attempting to project a sense of calmness. "They had a bit of an incident in the dungeon, and I went to save someone, but I'm fine now."

Hearing this, Jasmine backed away for a second, squinting Sylvie from back with her eyes.

"It seems you are really fine." She hummed herself and nodded her head as she looked at the Sylvie from head to toe. Jasmine's eyes widened with curiosity. "Wait, you went to save other students? What happened? Are they okay?"

Sylvie hesitated for a moment whether she wanted to explain what she had seen there or not, but then she decided not to.

"It was not many, just one student."

"Hmm....Do you know him?"

"It was Astron."

"Huh? Astron?"

"Yes."

"I see....Then, what happened to him?"

"He's... well, he was here a moment ago." Sylvie turned her gaze toward the bed, only to find it empty.

Confusion flickered across her face.

"Where did he go?" Jasmine asked, her eyes scanning the room.

Sylvie shook her head. "I don't know. He was just here." @@novelbin@@

Jasmine furrowed her brow, a sense of concern clouding her features. "He was here? What happened to him? And why did you go to save him in the first place?"

Sylvie hesitated again, grappling with the decision of how much to reveal. "There was an incident in the dungeon. I found him injured, severely injured. I couldn't just leave him there, so I tried to heal him."

Jasmine's eyes widened in surprise. "He was injured? How bad was it?"

Sylvie nodded solemnly. "Really bad. His arm was severed, and he had multiple injuries. I thought he was going to die."

"Severed arm? That sounds horrific. But you healed him?"

Sylvie nodded again. "It was... strange. I felt a different power in me like I could do more than I thought. And I did heal him. It was like a miracle."

At that exact second, another girl who had been there looked at Sylvie with a mix of awe and confusion. "A miracle? What do you mean?" Danielle said, with her eyes wide open.

Sylvie struggled to find the right words. "I don't know how to explain it. Something just clicked, and I could heal him in ways I never thought possible. But then, he left without saying much."

Hearing those words, the girl's expression behind Sylvie's body turned vicious for a second, and Sylvie didn't miss it this time.

'Huh?'

Different from before, she could now see it clearly. Something inside Danielle was obscuring her vision, masking the vicious feelings underneath.

'What is this?'

It was something that she hadn't noticed before, but now that she noticed, she couldn't shake the unease growing in her heart.

'Why is she?'

For the first time in her life, Sylvie realized her trait was never undeceivable, and that would be the start of one of the biggest deviations in the game.

#### Chapter 149 33.3 - Aftermath

Inside a room, two people could be seen looking at each other. One was an old man with a bulky body, his presence commanding the room.

"Is that all?" The man's deep voice resonated in the room.

The other one was the instructor, who had been watching what had happened in the dungeon at that time.

"Yes, that is all, chairman. The healer, Sylvie, demonstrated an unexpected surge in her abilities, successfully treating a severely injured student named Astron. The circumstances surrounding Astron's injuries are unclear, and he left the room shortly after being healed. Sylvie seems to have experienced an awakening of her trait during the healing process."

The academy's chairman, known for his wisdom and experience, listened intently as the instructor recounted the events in the healing room.

The chairman stroked his beard, his eyes reflecting contemplation. "Astron... It is that kid again."

The chairman was well aware of the name Astron Natusalune. After all, that kid was one of the reasons for his headaches in the recent past.

"Do you know him, chairman?"

The instructor asked, looking at the chairman with a curious expression. It was not normal for him to show interest in lower-ranking students, especially the last-ranked ones.

"Partially." The chairman's reply came in a slightly mysterious manner, but it also contained the tone of not wanting to explain any longer.

Understanding that the chairman didn't want to be asked anymore about this, the instructor decided to focus on the main topic.

"So, what do you suggest us to do?" She asked, looking at the chairman.

"I am not sure if the others have also sensed the change." The chairman mumbled, stroking his beard. His eyes shone slightly for a second, as if the mana around was converging to him.

"But, we need to be prepared. The era is changing." The chairman's gaze turned distant as if contemplating unseen threads of destiny. "And this is the first step of the change. The stars have already started their movement."

The instructor looked at the chairman but didn't say anything. Even though those words seemed like they came out of the mouth of a madman, she knew the chairman far had surpassed what was considered normal for humans.

After all, he was one of the holders of the [Venerate] seat and the sole reason why this academy was able to operate without the intervention of external powers.

"Even if they hadn't already sensed it, they will realize the changes soon enough. The girl needs to awaken her fate." With those words sinking, the room suddenly filled with an immense amount of mana.

TOK!

But, with a small hit of the chairman's baton, the mana gathered was dispersed.

"The authority of the First Lord...Many will covet it."

"Authority of the First Lord?" At this point, the instructor couldn't help but ask. What did the words 'First Lord' mean?

"Heh...." A small laugh slipped from the chairman's mouth as he heard this question. "Now, I understand." Turning back, he faced the instructor, looking at her with a small smile.

"There are things you shouldn't peek at." His words seemed arrogant, but the instructor knew what they meant.

"I understand." She nodded and bowed her head. "But what should we do about this situation?"

"What should we do...." The chairman looked at the documents on his desk. There was a special document which contained a picture of a yellow-haired girl.

"He is the catalyst of the girl's awakening. Therefore, he is the possible key for her path."

The instructor nodded, absorbing his words. "What do you suggest we do, chairman?"

"Their proximity is paramount," the chairman stated. "Arrange for Astron to stick with Sylvie. The currents of fate have already brought them together. We must ensure that they navigate this shifting landscape side by side. Their destinies are aligned, and the academy's future hinges on their journey."

The chairman rose from his seat, a sense of urgency in his demeanor. "Prepare for the convergence. The other [Venerates] may have their own pawns in play. Our moves must be calculated and decisive. The era of change has begun, and we shall navigate its currents to ensure the academy's survival."

With those final words, the room fell silent once more as the instructor prepared herself to leave.

"Understood, Father."

And, with that one last word, she disappeared.

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In the dimly lit room, draped in shadows, a man sat upon a throne made of ancient, ominous bricks.



-His eyes, dark and inhumane, conveyed a sense of boredom, yet within them flickered a subtle but potent essence of darkness.

-CRACKLE!

The torches crackled, making the room look like an ancient space.

As the air in the room thickened with an ominous aura, a figure emerged from the shadows behind the throne. Veiled in mysterious darkness, their face obscured, they approached the seated man with an air of reverence.

"It has appeared," the veiled figure murmured, their voice carrying a weight of foreboding. From his hands, a bunch of tendrils moved, revealing a small sphere made from glass.

"The prophecy we've been awaiting has begun to unfold."

The man on the throne shifted slightly, his eyes narrowing with interest.

"Sooner than what we have seen." The man's words echoed in the room as his eyes were fixated on the sphere. "This shouldn't have happened."

His eyes were pitch black and looked distant, as if he could see the things behind the walls of the castle where he had been residing.

The veiled figure nodded. "The threads of destiny are unraveling faster than foreseen. The Saintess's awakening had much more time, and we have been prepared accordingly. But this will change everything."

As the veiled figure spoke, they waved their hands, creating a bunch of silhouettes. One was holding a bow; the other was holding a sword. One had a hammer and shield; one was spewing fire from the staff she was holding. @@novelbin@@

Behind them was a small figure kneeling on the ground in the motion of praying.

"..." The man on the throne didn't reply, but he stood up. His eyes, peering through the skies, suddenly were narrowed.

Turning into the small silhouettes, his eyes were locked onto the black silhouette at the front, holding the spear.

"Something is different."

He mumbled.

"Something which shouldn't be here is here."

As if he was able to sense the future, the figure had goosebumps appearing all around his body.

TICK!

With his long claws, he touched the sphere. Following that, the mana smoothly moved to the sphere, converging into it.

As the mana flowed to the sphere from the top of the man's head, horns appeared as well, and his skin became paler and paler.

From a human, the figure revealed his true form, with its wings spurting from his back.

SWIRL!

Within the sphere held by the veiled figure, the scene unfolded once more.

Six distinct figures emerged, each wielding a weapon symbolic of their roles. One held a sword, another a bow, a third a staff, and the fourth carried both a shield and hammer. The fifth figure was in a prayer stance, and at the forefront stood the one with the spear.

"It is still the same....." The veiled figure mumbled.

The man on the throne observed the familiar vision, his eyes narrowing as the image played out.

It was a depiction they had witnessed years ago—the prophecy of the Saintess and the guardians facing the horde.

"Wait...."

Yet, as the scene progressed, an unforeseen change disrupted the anticipated vision. A mysterious smoke enveloped the sphere, shrouding the figures in uncertainty. Behind the valiant six, a new silhouette emerged. This figure seemed to be different from the other six, as it didn't operate in the same way as them.

"What?"

The man's eyes widened in recognition, a mixture of curiosity and unease spreading across his features. The unexpected addition to the prophecy had stirred something within him as if something inside him was awakening.

It was a subtle sensation, something he hadn't felt for a long time.

'My intuition is warning me.'

As a being that was on the highest rank, that was something he hadn't felt for a lot long time.

"Something has altered the course of fate," he muttered, his voice carrying a cold murderous tone.

But, it was very hard to maintain the sphere's mana consumption. It was large.

TAP!

Blood was already dipping from the horned thing's nose. After all, playing with fate and time had its own restraints, even for a higher being.

"...."

In the sphere, an unexpected phenomenon unfolded.

The moon and sun converged, casting an eerie darkness upon the world. Within this obsidian tapestry, the newfound silhouette radiated a luminosity, seemingly kindled by the celestial bodies' intertwined dance.

The horned overseer sensed the symbolism inherent in this cosmic convergence. "Kin of the moon... One of them is still there," he whispered, the words carrying the weight of ages.

The veiled figure behind him spoke with a surprised tone, "Kin of the moon?"

The horned man's eyes gleamed with a cold intensity, the cosmic machinations within them calculating. "They should no longer be in this world. I ensured their existence was erased—their threads severed from the fabric of destiny."

The revelation puzzled the overseer, a flicker of uncertainty marring his typically stoic demeanor. The existence of the lunar kin.....

"An anomaly," he mused, his voice a low murmur.

It was a threat to his own plans....

"The deal is yet to be fulfilled...." He said as he walked back to his throne. "Find the child of the moon."

Those words were the last words echoing inside the castle, but somewhere in the world, a being with its claws piercing a human received the order.

"Kekekekekeke...It has been a while...."

Under the dark night, the figure laughed eerily.

"Was it seven years ago.....That girl was sure tasty...."

Chapter 150 Chapter 34.1 - First Step

"Everything is ready now."

Sitting on my bed, I looked at the things lying on the ground.

'My daggers are supplied back.'

Since the daggers given by the academy were broken, I didn't have a weapon to use. But that was immediately covered after I applied for another one.

The Academy certainly didn't lack money, let alone weapons such as the common daggers I used.

But that wasn't all.

'The ones they gave me are a higher grade.'

They probably did it to satisfy me, considering I almost lost my life because of the lack of the daggers' durability.

Other than that, they also gave me a bunch of potions and Valer to shut me up. After all, what was the best thing for any power holder to use?

I didn't refuse either since, at the end of the day, I was not planning to make this accident official.

'The government can't be trusted.'

Countless demon contractors have infiltrated the ranks of the human kingdom already, and if I didn't shut my mouth, it wouldn't be long before I was silenced in any case.

"Hufff..."

Looking at the scenery from my window, I readied myself.

The night had draped the academy in a blanket of darkness, and the only illumination in my room came from the soft glow of the moon. It was late, and the world outside my window was quiet, save for the occasional rustle of leaves in the night breeze.

With the daggers securely fastened in their sheaths, I rose from my bed, the cool floor meeting the soles of my boots. The air outside held a certain stillness, a perfect cloak for my nocturnal pursuits.

Tonight, I had a different kind of hunt in mind – one that would test my skills in the silent dance of shadows and one that would possibly determine the future path I would take.

'Let's test my skills.'

I had been training after coming to this academy, but I knew even from the start I was behind when it came to pure strength.

But pure strength was never meant to be my specialty.

Putting the [Unknown's Armor], I got from the Blackthorns' vault, I got ready for the following night.

CREAK!

The door creaked softly as I opened it, mindful not to disturb the dormitory's tranquility. My movements were deliberate, my steps silent, honed by the trait [Shadowborne].

HOWL!

The night welcomed me as I stepped into its embrace; the academy grounds now transformed into a realm where darkness and secrecy reigned.

My destination was evident: the place where the threads of my mana were directing me.

The moonlight painted a silvery path ahead, guiding me toward my targets.

I moved with purpose, a solitary figure navigating the shadows, blending into the night like an extension of it.

The location was evident. The threads forwarded me to one of the academy's facilities that were on the main campus. Having already memorized all of the academy's land and the map, I could already envision in which place they were gathered.

Of course, I had already expected them to gather in such a place.

After all, they were the rats of demons, the bastards that moved silently underneath the academy and worked for the enemy.

'They should be meeting at the backside of the research facilities.'

Even though Arcadia Hunter Academy was an academy that focused mainly on the students for combat, they also had a place for those noncombatants, and one of them was magic engineers.

SWOOSH!

Making my way rapidly in the area, I moved in the shadows. I wanted to make sure I had an alumni when this happened, and that was the reason why I had [Unknown's Armor] on me.

I was away from the eyes of the wards, mana-supplied formations, and the mana-detecting radars thanks to [Unknown's Armor]'s unique specialty.

And that also meant when I left my room, nobody noticed me, which would result in them assuming I had never left my room in the first place.

"Ah.....That was a good night....."

"Right....It had been a while since I had fun this much."

While I was moving alone, I heard some students talking to themselves. Two girls and two boys were walking together.

"Should we go somewhere quiet?"

It seemed they were celebrating the end of the exams, and most of the academy was like that. After all, the stress of the exams was common in the first place, and when it came to young people of the opposite gender hanging out together, what came next wasn't that hard to predict.

'Not my business.'

However, now was not the time to observe things. Pushing everything back into my head, I continued to move.

CHATTER! LAUGHTER!

Since the magic engineering facilities were at the backside of the academy behind the café and the gathering spots, the laughter of the students could still reach my ears.

But, at this point, I reached the entrance of the magic engineering district, marked by subtle wards and enchantments designed to regulate access.

The [Unknown's Armor] rendered me virtually invisible to the magical sensors and wards that safeguarded this area, though that wouldn't be the case for the higher-ranking ones.

Everything had its limitations, and even [Unknown's Armor] wasn't absolute. If it was, it wouldn't be rotting in the vault for this long.

'Two mana-reading devices.'

As I approached, I noticed the telltale signs of security devices meant to deter unpermitted entries, checking the information related to one's academy watch inside the database.

Mana-supplied formations shimmered in the air, their intricate patterns designed to detect and respond to the slightest disturbance in the magical currents.

These were layered, intelligent barriers that required finesse to bypass.



'I guess that is how they are hiding themselves from the eyes of the academy.'

There was a special position, Volunteer Research Intern, VRI. It was a position that you could get even as a combat-related student if you were interested in how the equipment works, etc.

And, that way, you would be able to have access to this place.

'The insider is really thorough.'

Considering they were still able to pull such a stunt even when all eyes were on the academy, it made sense that they had at least prepared themselves this much.

'But, that won't be enough to stop me.'

With a calculating gaze, I surveyed the security measures in place, looking for a certain location.

My innate trait, [Perceptive Insight], granted me an acute awareness of the mana threads woven into the wards. Each enchantment revealed its purpose and vulnerabilities to my discerning eyes.

'It is here.' @@novelbin@@

In the game, there was a certain location where the small point was only covered by a low-rank security device. It was an error from the developers, as it wasn't intended to be made, but the players exploited that fact.

Spotting the same pattern in the defenses, I immediately dived in.

SWOOSH! CIZZT!

I could see the mana-supplying generator, which would create high-voltage electricity and nullify the possible trespasser.

THUD!

And not long after, I fell to the ground, jumping over the electrified fences. After landing, I once again blended in the shadows, using my trait, and then started moving again.

However, not long after, I met with the first group. A bunch of researchers were talking to each other while drinking their coffee in the open field.

"Have you seen the recent advancements in the kinetic amplification field? The results are astonishing..."

"Yeah, I heard they managed to triple the efficiency without compromising stability. It's groundbreaking!"

The risky part was that I needed to get past this open field to reach my destination, but without stopping, I moved under the shadows created by the huge lighting above my head.

"Maybe we can somehow get an internship in Blackthorn's."

"Nah....We are in the wrong academy for that."

"....."

"Anyway, did you check the resonance destabilization matrix? We might need to recalibrate it for the upcoming experiment."

"I did, I did...."

Their voices faded into the distance as I swiftly moved past, my footsteps silent and movements synchronized with the rhythm of their conversation.

The open field became a transient stage where the researchers unknowingly played their parts, and I, the unseen spectator, continued my silent journey.

The threads of my mana guided me unerringly, weaving through the labyrinthine pathways until I reached the designated location.

'Here, huh?'

It led me to a weathered and neglected research building at the rear of the Magic Engineering District.

This forgotten structure stood in stark contrast to the state-of-the-art facilities surrounding it, appearing as though time had chosen to ignore its existence.

The exterior bore the scars of neglect, with crumbling walls and faded symbols of mana warding barely visible.

'I can see why they decided to use this place as a hideout and a meeting place.'

Others had clearly deemed this place unworthy, and the academy had seemingly cast it aside. Yet, the subtle tinge of mana in the air told a different story.

FLINCH! THUMP!

Goosebumps appeared all around my body as the familiar sensation of my heart speeding followed.

'Demonic Energy.'

A faint demonic energy was covering the whole space as if it was working like a ward to spot anyone approaching. It was so faint that, even with my high sensitivity to demonic energy, I hardly could feel it.

'They are playing it safe.'

It was evident that they would be prepared in case the patrol or any other researcher came to this place, and this was their countermeasure.

'And that countermeasure will bite you back now.'

I thought as I ignored the demonic mana waves. After all, the armor was doing its job for such a low-level one.

SWOOSH!

With a swift step, I entered the small building using shadows as a stealth, and there I could finally see my targets.

'Get ready to meet your end.'