

H. Academy 31

Chapter 31 Chapter 8.2 - Art Manual

The moment I woke up, I found myself in a realm bathed in an ethereal moonlight glow, but small shadows were also covering the environment.

Before me stood a figure, unlike anything I had ever seen, clad in otherworldly attire that seemed to shimmer with celestial energy, it looked like myself, but at the same time, it was not.

A weird feeling of connection enveloped me the moment my gaze was focused on the enigmatic figure.

My thoughts were solely focused on the figure, as it excluded a precise and swift killing intent that I had never been subjected to before, but after a second later, the killing intent left the place, making me feel relaxed.

His face was covered with shadows, his only silhouette could be seen even under the light of the moon. It looked enigmatic and indecipherable. The enigmatic presence radiated an aura of power and mastery over death.

In his hands stood a dim moonlight energy, moving endlessly, but it contained no form. Then the figure started moving with fluid, grace, and precision.

First, the figure produced a pair of gleaming daggers, the blades so sharp they seemed to cut through the very fabric of reality. With unparalleled agility, they launched a flurry of silent, deadly strikes, each one finding its mark with deadly accuracy.

In the next part, the enigmatic figure's hands blurred with motion as they produced a set of gleaming chakrams. These circular blades seemed to hum with mysterious energy, and the figure twirled them with mesmerizing skill. With each movement, the chakrams left trails of moonlight, creating an almost hypnotic dance.

With a burst of energy, the figure imbued the chakrams with celestial power. They glowed with radiant light as they were launched with deadly accuracy.

The spinning blades sliced through the air, homing in on their targets like guided missiles. No enemy could evade their trajectory, and each strike found its mark with lethal precision.

As the dream unfolded, the figure's form shifted once again, and they now held a sleek and elegant bow in their hands. Drawing the string back, they seemed to merge with the very essence of the moonlight. The arrows they released were no ordinary projectiles; they carried a celestial force that propelled them with incredible speed and accuracy.

Each arrow found its target with uncanny precision, striking vital points and disabling foes without fail. The figure moved with a calm and focused demeanor, and each shot was delivered with unwavering accuracy. It was as if they could see into the future, predicting the movements of their adversaries before they even made them.

Next, the enigmatic presence transformed yet again, this time holding weird-looking weapons, one short and one long. I understood that they were guns; even if their design looked surreal, I somehow knew.

With swift and fluid movements, they demonstrated unparalleled proficiency in firearms. The bullets fired from the gun were not metallic but created solely from the mana itself, creating a dazzling display of ethereal projectiles that found their way unerringly to their intended targets.

The rifle shots were equally impressive, the figure hitting distant marks with pinpoint accuracy. Each shot seemed to carry the weight of the moon itself, delivering devastating force upon impact. The figure moved like a shadow, blending seamlessly with the darkness, making it impossible for any adversary to track their movements.

Entering the shadows and exiting, producing clones, manipulating the shadows to distract and bind the enemies....

And at the end, the figure became one with the shadows in his hands, weapons of destruction....

As I watched the figure perform with these deadly weapons, each transition between them was seamless, like a symphony of destruction conducted with perfect precision. The dream granted me a glimpse into the pinnacle of weapon mastery, a realm of skill and power that I could only aspire to achieve.

Then a name sounded inside my head.

'Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy.'

And following that, I lost consciousness once again, but I knew this time it was for me to wake up in the real world.

"Urghk-"

I woke up with a heavy stinging pain in my head as I looked over my room.

"The process is finally finished, huh?" Mumbling like that, I stood up. I was unconscious for almost two hours, and the evening was approaching; the sun was about to set.

'I missed the lecture.'

And I had missed the afternoon lecture about the dungeons and monsters, but it was fine for now since the instructor didn't take any attendance normally.

Walking to the bathroom, I threw myself into the shower to get rid of the stiffness of my body while taking a cold shower to cool my head off.

The moment the cold droplets of water hit my body, I shivered, but my brain also started working at its normal speed.

'Let me take a look at my status.'

The moment I thought that, a panel appeared before me.

?Name: Astron Natusalune

?Occupation: Weapon Master (level 1)

?Talent Limit: 6

?Passives:

- Vengeful Bane

?Attributes:

Variable Attributes:

- Strength: 1.5

- Dexterity: 2.1

- Agility: 2.0

- Constitution: 1.4

- Intuition: 2.2

- Magical Power: 2.6

- Mana Capacity: 1.8

?Traits:

- Perceptive Insight (Unique)(Unchanging)

- Lunar Enigma (????) (Growth Type) (Stage 0)

- Shadowborne (Legendary) (Growth Type)(Stage 1)

?Arts:

- Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy (????)(%8)

?Skills:

- Dash

- Keen Eye

?Body Imprints:

Looking at the panel, I could see the art section was changed. The dagger mastery and the non-armed combat mastery had disappeared, and in its place, only one art remained.

'Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy'

It was the same name that I felt in the dream.

The reason why I wanted to obtain that easter egg was for a reason simple and basic.

Because that book was actually a grimoire.

A special book descended from the heavens.

And it had one simple functionality.

Giving the user a type of combat art that was designed for them.

Based on the user's goal, their identity, their powers, bodies, strengths, their intellect, their personalities....The book would consider everything and, in the end, would give the user the combat art that was specialized for them.

To be honest, at first, between all those things that were happening suddenly, I forgot about this easter egg. And later on, when I remember it was at the class where Eleanor White was talking about weapons, so I had no way of grabbing this.

But, the moment I got the free time, I immediately grabbed the book.

In any case, that was the reason why I wanted this book that hard.

And the dream I had and that enigmatic figure that showed me those combat styles were actually the product of this grimoire.

However, I don't know why my other art disappeared from their places. In the game, no such thing happened as the other arts would also remain under the tab.

'Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy....Let me take a look.'

Art: Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy

Description: The art that was bestowed by the grimoire and specialized for the user Astron Natusalune. Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy is a rare and powerful trait attained through a celestial encounter, bestowing the user with unparalleled mastery over the types of weapons specialized in killing.

By mastering Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy, the user gains the ability to seamlessly switch between different weapons and unleash deadly techniques unique to each weapon type. Their movements become fluid and graceful, embodying the essence of a true weapon master, whether it's a bow for precise ranged attacks or twin blades for swift and agile assaults.

The celestial gift of Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy grants the user an innate understanding of each weapon's intricacies, allowing them to adapt their combat style to any situation. As they tap into the moon's power, the weapons become imbued with lunar energy, enhancing their damage and effectiveness.

However, to increase the mastery of the art, the user must master all types of different weapons suited for the techniques of the Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy.

The moment I read the context shown to me on the panel, I knew why my other arts and masteries disappeared.

'Because this art contains the dagger mastery and any other type of weapons.'

There I realized the last phrase of the description.

"To increase the mastery of the art, the user must master all types of different weapons suited for the techniques of the Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy," I mumbled. "That must mean the weapons the figure in the dream had shown to me."

Realizing that there was only one thing I needed to do.

'If utilizing this art means I need to train with different weapons, then so be it. I am not backing down.'

Just like that, I got out of the shower and looked at the clock.

'It is 6 PM, huh? Pretty late.'

Walking into my room, I looked at the box. It was a suitcase with a black color. From the box alone, you could see the quality of the material itself. After all, it was something that was used by the student of one of the best Hunter Academies in the world.

That must be the Bow that the academy provided to me. Immediately grabbing the box, I opened it up. There, a bow revealed itself.

The bow had a sleek and elegant design, crafted with precision and attention to detail. Its black color shimmered under the room's light, giving it the atmosphere of a deadly weapon. The limbs of the bow were made from a durable and flexible material, indicating that it was a compound bow capable of impressive power and accuracy.

The grip of the bow was wrapped in a comfortable, leather-like material, providing a firm and secure hold. It felt like a natural extension of my hand, and I could tell that it was designed for ease of use and maximum control. The sight on the bow was adjustable, allowing me to fine-tune my aim to perfection.

'As expected, entering the academy was the right choice.' I thought.

Running my fingers along the bowstring, I could feel its tautness, hinting at the strength and force it could unleash. The string itself appeared to be of high-quality material, designed to withstand the stresses of continuous use without fraying or losing its tension.

Examining the riser, I noticed it was made from a lightweight yet sturdy material, ensuring that the bow would be easy to carry and maneuver. It also had various attachment points for accessories like stabilizers and quivers, giving me the option to customize and optimize my archery. After all, the main point of Compound Bow was its modernity.

And being able to add some custom arrangements was what made it more complex.

But, while I was examining the bow, suddenly, I felt a weird feeling in my stomach.

GROWL

And as the sound of growling came from my stomach, I knew it was time to leave the room. After all, with a new weapon and a new art, the only thing I could do was to improve myself...

Just like that, I made my way toward the cafeteria, after grabbing my bow and daggers, making myself ready.....

Chapter 32 Chapter 8.3 - Art Manual

Life in the Academy was more lively on weekdays than on weekends. Since the students are allowed the leave academy grounds on weekends, most students would either visit their families or would hang out with each other.

After all, considering the range of ages for the students, it made sense that they wanted to socialize with each other. But that was not the case for the weekdays. Almost all of the students would stay on the academy grounds unless special permission to leave were granted to them.

CHATTER CHATTER

That was the reason why the cafeteria was filled with the sounds of chatters. After stepping up into the cafeteria and grabbing a meal, I made my way to the corner table and started eating all alone.

Though at the same time, I was listening to other students talk with each other.

"Hey, have you guys decided which club you're going to apply for?" At that moment, I heard an interesting topic.

'Ah, right... Now it is time for the clubs...' I thought to myself.

"Clubs? Right, one month has passed, hasn't it?"

Since the Arcadia Hunter Academy allowed cadets to participate in club activities after one month had passed, some cadets would forget about their existence.

"Yeah. What do you think? Which club are you going to apply for?"

Clubs in this academy have a huge variety of ranges. Considering the number of students for each year, it made sense that there were huge numbers of clubs. After all, as the last ranked student, I was ranked 2450, and knowing there were five grades for the academy, there are at least 10k students on this campus, excluding the 4th and 5th rank interns.

"I'm thinking of joining the Combat Tactics Club. They say they focus on honing your strategy and tactical skills. It could be useful in the future."

Starting from the Combat Tactics Club, strategist monster takedown, there were several theoretical and combat-related clubs out there.

"Combat Tactics Club? That sounds pretty intense. I was considering joining the Elemental Mastery Club. Being able to harness different elements in battle sounds cool."

"You guys should check out the Adventure Explorers Club! They go on exciting quests and explore mysterious places. It's like living in an action-packed fantasy world. As a sophomore, I am really regretful that I didn't choose that club."

"Hmm.... But I think the Martial Arts Club is the way to go. I've seen some of their members in action, and they're like martial arts masters. Plus, you get to learn self-defense techniques. They even said there was a Master Level Hunter that would come every year."

"Oh, I've heard good things about the Elemental Mastery Club! But I'm leaning toward the Stealth and Infiltration Club. Imagine being like a shadow, sneaking around undetected."

Then, there were clubs that required more practical skills, just like these.

"Stealth and Infiltration? That's intriguing, but I'm more interested in the Robotics and Gadgets Club. Building cool gadgets and machines sounds like much fun."

But that was not all. There were some clubs formed by the engineering department of the academy, magicians, and many others.

The academy encouraged students to join the clubs since, from the statistics alone, they could see the improvement, and that made sense. No matter how serious your education is, every student needs time to refresh themselves, after all.

'If I am correct, Ethan should be joining the Adventure Explorers Club and Spear Legacy Club.' Even though in the game the option to join any of the clubs of the player's choice was given, there were two exact choices in the game player would have to join no matter what.

One was the Spear Legacy Club, where the player would increase their Spear Skills and learn new Movements on their arsenal, and the other one would be Adventure Explorers Club for the sake of opening into the open world and exploring the things that could be shown.

'But I don't know what he will choose aside from those.' I thought. After all, there was no player that was controlling him right now, and even if there was, I had no way of knowing without getting close to him, which I wasn't planning to do.

A hero-like person was not something I liked.

In any case, the time for the clubs coming meant one simple thing to me.

'The main events of the game will start soon.'

That was the appearance of the main events. The first month of the academy was basically the tutorial, so there weren't many events that affected the storyline. But after this moment, things would slowly be turning hectic.

Though I didn't care about what the storyline was about, neither did I care about the main characters.

'I am going to kill every demon that will appear; that's it.'

With that thought, I stood up, finishing my meal. There was still quite a lot of time until the clubs started their work, so I only needed to train.

Just as I was about to leave the cafeteria, I felt a stinging gaze on my back, only to see a girl with fiery red hair looking at me with an irritated expression on her face.

"Tch." Seeing me looking at her, Irina clicked her tongue, though I just ignored her and went my own way.

Entering the same shooting range I had used to train before, I grabbed my weapon from the bag.

<Please set the number of targets.>

And the same robotic voice welcomed me.

"Twelve," I mumbled, increasing the number of enemies.

<Choose your training difficulty.>

<You can choose from stage 1 to stage 9.>

"Stage 2," I spoke, and soon the lighting went off.

And following that, a bunch of blue-colored insect-type monsters appeared.

'Then, the only thing left for me is to train.'

With that thought, I recalled the posture of that enigmatic man I had seen in that dream when I got my art. It was imprinted on my brain, and knowing how my trait worked, it didn't seem abnormal.

SWOOSH SWOOSH

The arrows passed through their skins as I made use of the compound bow's strength.

"CREEK!"

This time for some reason, the moles shrieked and attacked me with more strength, but I didn't stop firing the arrows.

"This is quite fun?" I didn't know if it was the bow or it was the feeling of my art, but the more I fired the arrows, the more I felt satisfied.

Just like that, I kept firing arrows, and firing and firing....Until I got tired. After all, it was the time for the training.

SWOOSH SWOOSH

As the training time was about to reach its end, I found myself still surrounded by a few remaining blue insect-type monsters. The adrenaline coursing through my veins urged me to push a little further, to test the limits of my newfound skills.

I drew another arrow from my quiver and nocked it on the bowstring. The monsters were closing in; their glowing blue eyes fixated on me. I took a deep breath, focusing my mind on the lessons from my dream.

'Keen Eye.' With my command, the skill activated, showing the weak points of the enemies. And without enhancing my arrow, I released the string.

SWOOSH THUD

Time seemed to slow as I released the arrow, and it flew with deadly accuracy, hitting its target right between the eyes and killing the mole.

But the remaining monsters were quick and agile, swarming around me.

'Dash.' Activating my other skill, I felt my speed increase.

I deftly dodged their attacks, my body moving with newfound grace and precision. With each arrow I released, another enemy fell, but more kept coming.

I moved gracefully, weaving through their attacks and firing arrows with incredible speed. The monsters seemed relentless, and my arms were hurting slightly from the constant training I had been doing for almost 3 hours, but I refused to back down. This was something necessary, after all.

SWOOSH SWOOSH

With every arrow that struck its mark, I could feel my confidence growing. It was as if the essence of the enigmatic figure from my dream was guiding my movements.

Finally, the last monster fell, and the shooting range fell silent. My breathing was heavy, and I was covered in sweat, but a sense of triumph washed over me.

<Ding! Stage two shooting training completed. New record: 1 minute 20 seconds.>

The moment the training time reached its end, I looked at my score with a satisfied smile. The number of enemies increased, but the time wasn't much, even after I was close to reaching my limit.

'Let's stop for now.' With that thought, I left the training grounds, returning to my room since the sky was dark and not many people were on the training grounds anymore, and considering the time, it was normal.

'11 PM. I should get a rest.'

With that thought, I reached my room and completed another painful sequence of body tempering by my potions, and returned to my bed.

'Right.... There was this book...' On the bed, the book I borrowed from the library got my attention.

It was the book that was inside the Arcane Arts section.

'Moonstruck Convergence: A Tale of Celestial Mana.'

Let me talk about these Arcane Arts for a bit first. As you all know, this world has the setting of modern times. There are cars out there, guns out there, computers, and many other things.

The reason for that was the fact that the citizens of this world accessed the mana later than any other race that came after the day of Nexus Convergence. Therefore, they used needed to develop themselves to hold a candle to them since all other races had their own way of using the mana they had developed.

And one of them was named Arcane Arts, where the mana was harnessed in a unique and ancient way. Unlike the modern approach of using mana, thanks to the status window and skills, the Arcane Arts approached the mana differently.

It was more about conveying one's will to the world and relying on a deep connection with the natural flow of mana in the world. But, this had its own restrictions.

For instance, at the start of the game, while forming your character, if you haven't allocated quite a lot of points into the innate mana affinity trait, you wouldn't be able to use Arcane Arts.

It was like, one needed to be talented at using mana at their own will, or at least a type of mana which they had an affinity with.

In the modern approach, you could just learn how to form a spell from a magician by doing the required steps shown on records, but in terms of Arcane Arts, you would be forming your own steps in a way. You would be using the mana on your own accord without a predetermined path, giving you more freedom but at the same time making it a lot harder.

And that required a good connection with mana and a lot of practice to master, which in the end, made the world abandon this discipline. After all, the more people came into the world, the more systematic everything became.

Wasn't that the definition of Modernity?

In any case, I was intrigued by the unique and ancient approach of Arcane Arts for some reason. And I had nothing to lose aside from some sleeping time, so I opened the book "Moonstruck Convergence: A Tale of Celestial Mana."

The pages were filled with beautiful illustrations and intricate diagrams that depicted the movements of celestial bodies and their relation to mana, as a bunch of texts started appearing one and another.

'For some reason, those characters look familiar.'

There were some weird characters that didn't belong to the alphabet that was used, but I felt like I had seen them somewhere, though I couldn't remember where.

'It is strange.' And it was strange, considering my memory was quite good.

Though, I decided to let these thoughts go as I kept reading the book until the urge to sleep finally came....

Chapter 33 Chapter 9.1 - Black Market

The first class the next day was another theoretical class.

"Today, we will start the second unit of the Mana Theory Class." The voice of the instructor entered my ears. He was not someone that was a named character in the game, though we would see him as a 'Professor' from time to time.

"As we have previously learned, mana is the fundamental essence that permeates our world and all living beings....."

He kept mumbling about the things related to mana, but at the back of the row, I was not listening to him at all.

First of all, the theory he was talking about was something I knew. At least, I knew its main essence since I looked at the course book for a while, and it didn't take too long for me to grasp its essence. As an engineer, it would be weird if I was not good at theory, at the very least.

And the professor was bad at teaching...He may have been good at academics and research, but he certainly was not good at teaching, as his speech was interrupted by himself again and again, making it hard for me to focus.

'In any case, I can study on my own later.' With that thought, I started thinking about what I should do for the future.

'I need money first and foremost.' My bank account was about to hit bottom, and if I was planning to use guns, I needed to be able to afford its expenses.

There were several ways to make money, and the most basic thing for a transmigrator would be buying stocks, as knowing the future of the game would help.

But that also meant I needed funds to invest in stocks first.

'I can solve it by borrowing money from the academy.' I thought.

Each student had their own right to borrow money up to 30000 Valer, which was enough to buy a high-grade gun artifact.

But at the same time, there was no way that I could spend the money I got with a loan in such a way. I knew I needed to invest in stocks, and borrowing money and investing in them looked like a good idea.

'I don't know the details of the stock market too much, but there were quite a lot of small details that would affect the stock market.' I was a nerd that liked to play the games into the details, but even I didn't care about the stocks too much since, as a player, I would rather grind some monsters for money than deal with stocks in a game.

Just like that, I started recounting the small details I had seen in the game to find an opportunity to invest in.

'Hmm.... If I remember correctly, there was a side quest where we would be called by a random girl to join her guild in a dungeon exploration since they were in need of help. And being the good-natured character he is, Ethan would help the girl, and then their guild would suddenly rise in ranks with the help they received.' I thought.

It was a common side quest to help some random NPC to increase the player's reputation and have one more ally for the future. Even though Ethan would help the girl, he wouldn't join her guild, of course. But the girl would still raise their funds and then repay him with her money. The reason she asked Ethan was since, at first, his rank was low, it was easier to talk to him, and she also knew Ethan was a good-natured kid.

I turned my gaze to the girl that was sitting on the front-right side of the classroom to see the girl, and she was there.

She had a basic school uniform, but even in that simple attire, she managed to stand out as I could see some guys looking at her.

Her name was Emily Anderson, and she had long, flowing chestnut hair that cascaded down to her shoulders. Her eyes were a deep shade of blue, like the tranquil sea on a sunny day. When she smiled, her whole face lit up, and it was hard not to notice the warmth and kindness in her expression.

But my eyes could perceive what others couldn't. Her uniform, which would be arranged in a stylish way, showed small signs of neglect. Even though she looked stylish, she didn't have any type of ornament on her body at all, though, on her ears, a small hole could be seen for earrings. She was caressing her wrist from time to time, showing that she used to wear bracelets.

Her eyes looked quite tired, and her hands were filled with calluses. I could even see her flinching from time to time when the wind from the windows blew, touching her arms. It was evident that she was injured on her arm, but she was trying to cover it.

From all these alone, I could infer that she was in dire need of money and had no one to ask for it. In the game, she had already used her loan from the Academy, and she was still in need of money.

'Going with her is the best option.' I thought. '30k or 40k investment would be enough, and I should also join their dungeon exploration.'

I had already looked at the guns that I could buy with my money, and there was quite a good amount of those that I could make use of on the internet, though I was planning on checking the black-market and junk artifact collectors first.

Just like that, I started implementing my plan.

And the most important thing was to observe the girl and strike at the most optimal time. There was still a good amount of time for this girl to seek help now, but considering she was the closest opportunity, it was what it was....

"Student Astron, are you listening?"

Though firstly, I needed to deal with the instructor that didn't like me....

Just like that, the days went on until the weekend came.

As the last rays of the Friday afternoon sun streamed into the classroom, signaling the end of the week's final class, Professor Williams, the History and Lore instructor, stood up from his desk and addressed the students.

"All right, everyone, before you head off for the weekend, I have a small assignment for you," Professor Williams announced with a warm smile. "As you know, we've been discussing ancient civilizations and their impact on our world. For this assignment, I want each of you to pick one civilization that we've studied so far and research an aspect of their culture, art, or technology that intrigues you the most."

"You'll have the entire week to work on this," Professor Williams continued. "On next Friday, each of you will present a short presentation on your chosen topic, and feel free to use any visual aids or props to enhance your presentation."

He glanced around the room, making eye contact with each student. "Remember, the goal of this assignment is not just to learn about the civilization itself but to understand how their advancements or cultural contributions have shaped our world today. So, choose wisely and make your presentation engaging!"

"And one more thing," Professor Williams added, "I encourage you all to have fun with this assignment. History is not just about memorizing dates and names; it's about discovering the stories of our past and how they have influenced our present."

"Have a great weekend, everyone," Professor Williams said, waving goodbye to his students. "And remember, history is an adventure waiting to be explored!"

With that, everyone in the classroom was dispersed as he left the classroom with a smile. However, that wasn't the case for students, as everyone booed after he left.

"Sigh...What a boring class..." I heard Julia speaking with her cheeks puffed. Beside her were Ethan and Irene.

"I know. Let's get this over with. I don't want my grades to drop too much." Julia added while putting her head on the desk.

"Anyway, what are you guys going to do on the weekend?" Irene asked, especially looking at Victor sitting in the front. Though, the said person's eyes were not on her but on a different girl.

"Julia, my guild found a new dungeon yesterday.... It is ranked slightly lower... What do you think? Should we explore together?" Victor said, his eyes were looking at Julia with brightness.

"Okay, I am in," Julia answered with a smile, not understanding what her answer implied. She was a bit air-headed when it came to these types of things. She probably just thought about how she would swing her sword.

"Okay, we can arrange the meeting time later," Victor answered. His serious face was filled with a smile.

However, seeing Victor blatantly ignoring her didn't make Irene happy. With her sly fox mind, she butted in. "Then, I am coming too."

"No, it is-"

"Sounds good. I wanted to see a magician using magic for a long time; why not show it to me."

"Jul-" Victor was about to refuse, but Irene didn't let her be.

"Okay. Inform me when you are going to leave." Irene approached Julia with a smile of her own, but I was familiar with that smile. I saw it in the dungeon, after all.

I could also see Ethan wanting to go to the dungeon with them, but he was too weak to tag along with them for now.

"Ethan, do you have any plans?" At that moment, Lucas butted in as he poked absent-minded Ethan.

"I am going to train."

"Come on, let's hang out in the city." Though in the end, he couldn't convince the workaholic protagonist.

"No. I am going to train."

"Sigh...."

As they were talking amongst themselves, I stood up and left the classroom. With the appearance of the weekend, I could finally leave the academy grounds.

I had trained non-stop all week while also using the ingredients from the game to maximize my training, and the results were pretty bright.

?Name: Astron Natusalune

?Occupation: Weapon Master (level 1)

?Talent Limit: 6

?Passives:

- Vengeful Bane

?Attributes:

Variable Attributes:

- Strength: 1.4 -->1.5

- Dexterity: 2.1 --> 2.2

- Agility: 2.0 --> 2.1

- Constitution: 1.4 --> 1.5

- Intuition: 2.2

- Magical Power: 2.6

- Mana Capacity: 1.8

?Traits:

- Perceptive Insight (Unique)(Unchanging)

- Lunar Enigma (????) (Growth Type) (Stage 0)

- Shadowborne (Legendary) (Growth Type)(Stage 1)

?Arts:

- Lethal Arsenal Ascendancy (????)(%9)

?Skills:

- Dash

- Keen Eye

?Body Imprints:

My strength, dexterity, agility, and, most importantly, constitution increased. In a way, it was one of the most important stat for me.

Right now, I have reached the average stats of a normal adult for all of my stats. But, that being said, an average adult couldn't run at 20 km/h speed; thus, my constitution being average didn't mean it was good.

In any case, for a ranger, that was enough for now. For the past week, I have been observing Emilia and how she behaved, her condition, etc., and for now, I have quite a good amount of time to make some money on my own.

Reaching my room, I started preparing for the weekend trip I was about to do.

Opening my watch, I checked my bank account and saw 40.864 Valer on there.

Wednesday, I made an application for the student loan, and the academy responded at a fast speed immediately.

And here it was. My money that I would use in order to get some good equipment. The academy lets the students use the weapon supplied by them outside, but one would also be using the same weapon on the exams, joint training sessions, and assignments. Therefore, if you lose your weapon, then you are basically dead....Until you buy a new one which is 100k Valer each for normal weapons.

And this guy on my back is more expensive than normal weapons because it values around 125k....

In any case, that is the reason why most of the students prefer using their own weapons outside of the academy, but I don't care too much about it.

This is a risk I need to take for now.

Just like that, I left my room heading to the train station of the Arcadia Train station.

On the way, I found out that it was the same guard that let me out last Friday, and seeing me getting out again, he put on a knowing expression.

"Family, right?"

'Family, huh?'

"Yes." Though, I didn't bother with his misunderstanding and nodded in response.

"Good...Passing time with your family is good, but make sure to come before the curfew on Sunday."

"Thank you, sir." With a nod, I left the academy grounds not long after, reaching the train station.

Thanks to the fact that the Hunter Academy students were allowed to travel anywhere without paying, I booked a seat for the Ariopolis, where the place I aimed located.

Just like that, my weekend started fast.....

Chapter 34 Chapter 9.2 - Black Market

What is the most common reason for artifacts to be sold at a lower price than normal?

Finding the answer is not that hard.

First and foremost, why one needs to sell the item at a cheaper price should be the question. When you rack your brain a little bit, you can see that either said person did obtain the item by abnormal means or the item is damaged.

But both of them open the same door.

The item can not be sold in legal ways. Therefore a place for the sake of illegal trade should be created.

And that place has one simple common name.

'Black Market.'

A place for such things to be sold.

That was the place I was making my way towards right now. Of course, there are several Black Markets that one could have access to. Even inside the capital, Arcadia City, there are two different Black Markets, each ruled by a different society. There was also a special virtual black market called 'Crimson Enchantora.'

But, being in the capital meant they were under the eyes of the Federation. Therefore their security was tight, which meant it was hard for me to enter there. My strength was also quite low, so choosing a less crowded place would be optimal.

And mostly, the items there are more expensive than this place. Capitalism is everywhere, not that I minded.

In any case, that was why I was in the Ariopolis – a city that was 4 hours of train ride from the capital.

The black market.

A place that resembled the demon world. The chaotic world of the demons was where this place was.

A world separate from the realm of laws and morals, where Villains and Heroes could coexist because they were ruled under the iron fist of the strong.

That's where I found myself now.

Guests were required to wear masks when entering the black market to conceal their identities. As a precaution, the measure was taken to prevent government agents from tracking down anyone who may have infiltrated the location.

But at the same time, I knew this was all a fa?ade. There was no way that a random mask could hide one's identity from the eyes of those with special skills that were solely devoted to tracking others. You could fake your face or hide, but you also needed to be careful about your mana imprints, small DNA traces, and many other small details that you would be tracked, thanks to.

Ensuring that my mask was tightly secured, I stood before a massive metal door.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

I knocked on the door three times.

-CREAK

Moments later, two bulky individuals in neat suits emerged from behind the door. The amount of pressure they were giving was nowhere close to the Headmaster or Instructor Eleanor, but it was still high for my fragile body.

But that didn't mean it was something I had never been subjected to. No, different from what you would expect; I was subjected to such an aura before by the Hunter Friends of Aaron, the Hunter that brought me to the orphanage and trained me before entering the academy.

In any case, two bulky guys scanned my body for a little while, but they soon furrowed their brows.

"What are you here for, kid? It is not a place for little kids like you." one of the bodyguards said, underestimating me based on my appearance.

Thought that was to be expected since even I would doubt myself in a place like this with such a body.

"I heard from a passing bird that you were looking for entertainers," I replied, using the first part of the secret code.

The two bodyguards exchanged glances, seemingly intrigued by my response. I was pretty sure none of them expected I would know something like this. "Entertainers, huh? And what kind of entertainment can you offer?" the other guard asked, crossing his arms.

"I'm a skilled musician and dancer."

The bodyguards looked at each other again, their expressions now more curious, as one of them put his hand into his pocket as his hands touched the button. "Impressive. We could use some entertainment around here." He said with a smile.

"Show us what you've got." And the other guard made a motion to attack at that exact moment, trying to scare me.

-SWOOSH!

Seeing him moving, I instantly grabbed my dagger from my belt and swung it into my right side while maintaining eye contact with the bodyguard.

-CLANK!

Deflecting a flying small dart aimed at my neck.

"Ho..." The bodyguard that just tried to scare me smiled. "All right, kid, you can go in."

Just like that, they let me enter the black market.

'Just as I expected.' I thought.

The secret code was split into three parts. Two of them were with words, and the last one with the body.

If you didn't know the existence of the dart, you would be dead since that dart's presence was almost nonexistent, and the poison contained was a special position only a handful of people had access to its antidote.

As I stepped inside the black market, I was immediately struck by the contrast between its modern appearance and the illicit activities that transpired within its walls. The place resembled an underground mall, with a labyrinth of narrow alleys filled with stalls and booths selling all sorts of questionable merchandise.

Neon signs and flickering lights adorned the walls, casting an eerie glow over the bustling crowd. The air was thick with the scent of exotic spices and the acrid smell of electronic gadgets. Strange, otherworldly music blared from hidden speakers, adding to the surreal atmosphere.

The stalls were adorned with holographic displays showcasing their wares - from illegal weapons and advanced technology to rare collectibles and mysterious data chips. Each vendor seemed to be competing to catch the attention of potential customers, calling out their deals in a blend of different languages. In the end, even though only one language was spoken in the federation, the languages of the past didn't disappear, and there were some who spoke such.

As I moved through the crowded alleys, I saw a diverse mix of people and creatures, some wearing stylish and futuristic outfits, while there were some with eccentric antic outfits like robes of magicians, assassins, or armors of knights. There were even cybernetically enhanced humans, augmented with mechanical limbs and glowing implants. Beside them were beings with glowing tattoos, their appearance hinting at some form of genetic modification.

Despite the sleek and modern aesthetics, the black market had an unmistakable undercurrent of danger. Enforcers dressed in dark, cyberpunk-style armor patrolled the area, keeping a watchful eye on potential troublemakers. It was clear that this was a place where the law was bent, and the powerful thrived on the fringes of society.

Even though it was such a place, it was also supported by the government. After all, even though it was a space filled with evil destruction, that meant the appearance of another place like that. Therefore rather than destroying this place, it was better for the government to have more and more access to its functions for the future, and they knew it better.

Hidden within the market were virtual reality booths and holographic projections, offering illegal experiences and shady dealings in the digital realm. The clandestine nature of the transactions was enhanced by the use of encrypted data transfers and blockchain technology, making it nearly impossible to trace. In a world where both magic and technology existed, entertainment was never limited to physical pleasure one would get just by mixing their body.....

The smell of some effective drugs entered my nose. Even though they were unfamiliar, at the same time, they were easy to discern since I could feel my body shaking slightly even after only smelling them from afar.

-MUSIC

As I ventured deeper into the heart of the market, I noticed concealed entrances leading to secret backrooms and hidden lounges. The place was like a high-stakes casino, where every move had consequences, and trust was a rare commodity.

I adjusted my mask while also constantly controlling my mana to never leak. I got gloves on my hand.

In any case, deciding to let go of my observation, I headed to the place I had in my mind. If one reason for me to come here were this place being cheap, the other would be a special person working here.

And not long after, I reached my desired location. Neon lights of various colors illuminated the area, drawing me closer like a moth to a flame. This was the street where the artifact sellers congregated, and it was always preferred by the veteran players who knew where to look at for artifacts.

I could see a lot of weapons out there, ranging from swords, bows, staffs, axes, spears, whips, katanas, daggers, knives, and guns.

'Crescent Alley.' I thought. It was a street that was bending constantly; thus, you couldn't see the end from the start. It was a place for unknown blacksmiths and thieves to sell their products.

I could see a katana displayed in a good fashion; it was made from the horn of a Black Rhino, a special material that was hard to come by.

But seeing the price tag on it, I knew it was a scam.

'100.000 Valer for a sword on the backstreets.... What a scam.' I thought. But that didn't mean everything here was like that.

For those that could discern good products from bad ones, in other words, for those with good eyes, it was actually a good place.

And my eyes were quite special for this case.

Just like that, I started looking at the artifacts while also looking for a person, though I didn't mention his name.

As I continued down Crescent Alley, my eyes scanned the various artifacts displayed by the vendors. I was specifically on the lookout for a high-grade gun artifact, something that could complement my skill set. The challenge was to find a reliable seller amidst the sea of scammers.

One stall caught my attention, with an array of guns showcased prominently. The seller, a tall man with a greasy smile, immediately approached me. "Looking for something, kid? I got the finest guns in the market!"

I examined the guns, and they did seem of good quality, but experience had taught me to be cautious. "What's the price for this one?" I asked, pointing to a sleek, black pistol.

The vendor stroked his chin. "For you, young one, a special price! Only 80,000 Valer!"

I raised an eyebrow. "That's quite expensive for a pistol. How about this one?" I pointed to another gun, slightly more worn in appearance.

"Ah, that's a classic piece, my friend. Only 50,000 Valer!"

I feigned interest while internally scoffing at the blatant attempts to swindle me. "Hmm, interesting. Let me think about it."

Moving along the alley, I spotted another stall with an impressive collection of guns and rifles. The seller, a shifty-looking woman, greeted me with a sly grin. "Welcome, young one! Looking for some firepower?"

I nodded, keeping my guard up. "Yes, I am. Show me what you have."

She presented an array of guns, each one seemingly more impressive than the last. "This rifle here can pierce through any armor, and this pistol has an enchantment for improved accuracy."

I listened intently, examining the guns with a discerning eye. I knew all of the things she had stated was a scam. Most of the time, it was not the guns that would make the difference but the bullets. "And how much are they?"

Her smile widened. "For a talented young hunter like yourself, 90,000 Valer for the rifle and 60,000 Valer for the pistol!"

The prices were exorbitant, and I knew better than to fall for such tactics. "I see. I'll keep looking around."

"Tch!" Though the woman understood from my tone alone that I saw through her façade and immediately turned back.

I continued my search, wandering through the winding alleyways, dodging shady sellers trying to catch my attention with their flashy merchandise and false promises.

Just as I was about to move further, a weird-looking store caught my eye, and a weird feeling involved me at the same time.

'This place was not in the game....'

Chapter 35 Chapter 9.3 - Black Market

'This place was not in the game.' That thought entered my brain immediately after seeing the store.

It was a store that I was seeing for the first time. I knew this place quite well since I visited this place quite frequently while playing the game, and my memory was good, so I was sure.

Then the memories of the game came. The way the stores were scattered around made me remember the store, which was supposed to be here normally, after comparing the neighboring stores with the original.

"Ah, right....There was another store here...Though they were scammers too." I mumbled.

Deciding to check it off, I entered the store.

As usual, it was a simple and same-store filled with swords, bows, etc. However, my eyes didn't miss the small tucks of dust and the neglected-looking weapons.

'This place is going to be closed.'

I immediately concluded. It was obvious from the information before my eyes, and the information came from the game.

After all, a store that was neglected, coupled with a bunch of signs of attacking, I knew this store was on the verge of being closed.

In any case, as I perused through the selection, my eyes landed on a sleek handgun tucked away in a glass case.

It was like any other gun I had seen in the market, but at the same time, it was not. The craftsmanship was exquisite, and the design seemed to fit my hand perfectly. I could feel a strange connection to it as if the gun was calling out to me. It was probably the design since even though it was a handgun, it also felt aesthetic.

Pitch black color all over the pistol, but small engravings were over there, even though they were also pitch black colored.

Curious, I gestured to the store owner, a middle-aged man with a weary expression, to unlock the glass case. He was reading a book with a tired expression, like he wanted to get away from here as soon as possible.

He obliged, seeming surprised that someone was showing genuine interest in the gun.

"Ah, that one's a special piece, kid. Not many people appreciate its worth," he said, his voice tinged with nostalgia.

I picked up the gun, testing its weight and grip. It felt natural in my hand as if it was meant to be an extension of my arm. "What's the story behind this gun?"

The store owner sighed. "It's a custom-made piece forged by a master blacksmith who used to run this store. He poured his heart and soul into creating it, but then... well, he disappeared."

"Disappeared?" I raised an eyebrow.

"Yes," the owner continued, "He got mixed up with the wrong crowd. The villainous types who wanted to exploit his talents. They threatened him and forced him to create weapons for their nefarious schemes. But when he refused, they threatened him more, and then he vanished without a trace, leaving me here all alone."

"And now you're closing the store?" I asked, putting the gun back in the case gently.

The store owner nodded sadly. "Yes, I can't bear the pressure anymore. They keep coming back, demanding that I know the location of him, but I actually don't. And since they never believe me, they are always threatening me with this store. I no longer care since he is not here anymore."

Looking at him and the small scars on his arms, I could see he was attacked quite a lot of times. His nerves must also be on the edge since I could see his posture was scared. I could also sense the sorrow in the store owner's words.

Though, I didn't feel anything. I didn't care about a random person in the first place. I was here to take the weapon and leave; that was it. But that didn't mean I was going to miss this opportunity.

"I'll take the gun," I said, signaling the suitcase. "I'll make sure this gun continues his legacy." And added with a sad tone.

The store owner's tired eyes brightened with gratitude. "Thank you, young one. It brings me comfort to know that this gun will be in the hands of someone who understands its true value."

After all, it was that easy to fool a person who was constantly on the edge.

As he prepared to close the deal, I noticed the stack of bullets on the counter. "How much for the gun and the bullets?" I asked.

The store owner paused for a moment, then sighed. "Given the circumstances and the fact that I'm closing the store, I'll let you have both for 10,000 Valer."

And as expected, because he liked the way I spoke, he gave me quite a discount. Comparing this gun to the guns shown in other stores, I could easily say that it is valued at least 100k.

"Deal," I said with a smile and grabbed my smartwatch, paying for it immediately. Though the way transactions worked in this place was slightly different. First, you would put your currency in the form of crypto, and then it would transfer it. A special artifact that was the reward for the tower enabled it for a wider scale.

The store owner nodded, a mix of relief and sadness in his eyes. "Take good care of that gun, young one. It may be just a weapon, but it carries the hopes and dreams of its creator."

I assured him that I would, then left the store with the pistol and the bullets in the suitcase. As I stepped back into the Crescent Alley, I could finally put an end to the act.

'This is quite a good haul.' I thought, looking at the gun in my hand. I even got at least one thousand bullets in the suitcase, and it was damn heavy to carry, to be honest, but at the same time, it was fine. I also asked him if he had other weapons, but he said he couldn't sell me other weapons at lower prices because the person who would be buying the store would highly likely want to see the weapons inside. A gun might be overlooked, but other weapons wouldn't.

Just like that, I was left alone with 30k on my account.

'Now, let's grab the spatial artifact first.' I thought. I have been looking around not only for weapons but also some artifacts that would make my life in the dungeon easier.

I already had a tent which was enough for now, but carrying everything in my backpack was not a good idea for starters. And I knew a place to find a spatial bracelet and such artifacts.

Just like that, I made my way toward a less crowded and more discreet area. It was a place that had once been bustling with artifact shops and traders, but now, it was filled with discarded junk and forgotten treasures. This was the place where items that had lost their value or were considered defective were dumped.

With my knowledge from the game, I knew that hidden amongst the junk; there was a spatial bracelet that had been overlooked or deemed useless. Normally most of the time, the artifacts would always get defective by the sweepers that designed the find specific types.

But that spatial artifact was actually missed. It was because it had a special property of never being detected. I didn't know its origins, nor did the game reveal it before, but it was an artifact that was one of the most broken one's out there.

Because it was simply perfect for stealing unless someone didn't record you or they didn't have a special barrier that blocked the spatial transfer, and perfect for bringing special weapons into the academy. And finding it was also hard; you can even say it was an easter egg....

Just like that, I entered the junkyard and started tossing the metals around, looking for the bracelet.

CLANK CLANK CLANK

As I sifted through the piles of discarded items, my eyes scanned each piece carefully, looking for any hints of hidden treasures. Most of what I found was indeed junk – broken artifacts, scratched gadgets, and old trinkets that held no value.

TOK CLANK

But then, my eyes caught a glint of light buried beneath a pile of rusty metal. I carefully reached in and pulled out a small, tarnished bracelet. It looked like nothing more than a worthless piece of scrap, but I knew better.

Holding the bracelet in my hands, I activated my mana to inspect it further. As suspected, it was indeed a spatial bracelet hidden amongst the junk.

Looks like I found what I was looking for," I said to myself.

It was a good utilization of my knowledge from the game. Not only I acquired the artifact I had been looking for, but I also managed to buy a weapon at a low price.

With the spatial bracelet in hand, I quickly activated it, and immediately the bag on my back disappeared, entering the bracelet.

'That's good.'

Its design was also something that I liked, a pitch-black color with silver ornaments over it.

Feeling satisfied with my newfound spatial bracelet, I decided to leave the junkyard. I no longer needed to stay in this place after all.

Though before I left, I saw a couple of throwing knives buried under some swords. Even though they were not of high quality, I decided to bring them.

Who knows, maybe I would need them after all.

Just like that, I left the junkyard and continued venturing around the black market. After that, I bought a rope for emergencies, a belt that I would use, a bunch of special waterproof clothes, and another bunch of materials.

I also looked for the person I wanted but learned he had yet to make his appearance. I didn't know when he would come, so I decided to leave my ID to the personnel to make him notify me when that man came.

Of course, I didn't forget to give him some money.

In any case, that was how my black market exploration reached its end, though that didn't mean my job was done.

Since we were just starting.

After all, tomorrow was the day I would be stepping into my first dungeon. Though before that, I also needed a broker to help me sell the monster cores and bodies I would be getting. But that was not much of a problem since quite a lot of mercenaries who disliked getting traced constantly or those with criminal records would need such a thing as well.

And for such cases, the black market offered a service.

Dungeon exploration and special informant and broker service. Or others called it Hunter Agent, Hunter Manager or etc.

[Wildcatter] was the name of the organization. Essentially it was a word used for those who were searching for petroleum, but in the game, they used it for the organization that searched dungeons.

In any case, it was going to be my destination tomorrow, but I was actually quite tired. I had been wandering around non-stop for almost four hours, adding the train ride and all the walks I had done, so I needed a place to rest, which I did by leaving the black market and finding an inn to sleep. Grabbing the book I borrowed from the library, I started reading it until I fell asleep.....

Just like that, my day reached its end, and I drifted into depths of dreams....

Chapter 36 Chapter 10.1 - First Dungeon

The sun had yet to rise as I woke up early in the dawn. The cold breeze of the accumulated night welcomed me as I made my preparations for the dungeon. It was not my first time going into the dungeon, but it was my first time going there alone.

After getting ready and packing my belongings, including the spatial bracelet, I made my way to the black market once again.

The city of Ariopolis was a slight corner city, but at the very least, the developed technology was still there, and the society adapted to it too. Even though the sun had yet to rise, I could see people walking to their jobs, driving their cars to their jobs on the way.

Anyway, since yesterday, I grabbed myself the Black Market identification card, I did not repeat the same process, just showing the card was alone enough. Just like that, I entered the black market once more.

The bustling alleys were already alive with activity as merchants set up their stalls and customers browsed through the various goods.

Navigating through the crowd, I made my way to the headquarters of [Wildcatter]. The organization's headquarters stood out amidst the chaotic landscape of the black market. Its building was adorned with holographic projections that showcased its various services and achievements. Bright neon lights illuminated the facade, displaying the organization's name in bold letters that could be seen from afar.

As I approached the entrance, I noticed a mix of seasoned hunters, mercenaries, and traders coming and going. Some wore elaborate armor and carried formidable weapons, while others donned more discreet attire, blending in with the crowd. It was evident that [Wildcatter] catered to a diverse clientele, all seeking the expertise and support that the organization provided.

The guards stationed at the entrance were no ordinary personnel. They were skilled individuals, their aura giving off an air of experience and power. Each one scanned incoming visitors carefully, ensuring the safety and security of the premises.

I approached the entrance with confidence, showing my Black Market identification card to one of the guards. He glanced at it briefly before nodding and allowing me to pass.

Once inside, I was greeted by a bustling atmosphere. The lobby was spacious, with holographic screens displaying real-time dungeon data, mission requests, and ongoing transactions. The walls were adorned with images of renowned hunters who had completed exceptional feats, their names etched below each picture as a testament to their achievements. Even though almost all of them were aliases, that was their real identity in this place.

It was a place that was very different from the guilds you would see out there. The luxurious entrances, the mighty feeling of guilds, none of them was there. After all, this place was the black market. People didn't come here because they liked the atmosphere....I mean, there were probably some that liked it, but the main idea here was not attracting customers. They would come on their own.

A central desk stood at the heart of the lobby, where a receptionist attended to incoming clients. She wore a sleek black suit, exuding an air of professionalism. Her eyes glanced up at me, and she offered a warm smile.

"Welcome to [Wildcatter]. How can we assist you today?" she asked politely, but I could see her squinting gaze narrowing down on me. She clearly was looking down on me but, at the same time, trying to sound polite.

That was something I got pretty familiar with over this last week, so I didn't care.

"I am looking for a dungeon to explore," I answered.

"Sure." The woman immediately snapped out of her squinting gaze and turned her attention to the computer. "What type of dungeon do you wish to explore, and what rank should it be?"

"Type doesn't matter much, but its strength must be in the range of low-intermediate rank-2," I answered.

Just as the way monsters were graded, the dungeon's grading system was the same. The monsters inside the intermediate rank-2 dungeon would have the strength of 2.5 stats average.

As the woman typed away on her computer, I looked around the bustling lobby, taking in the various displays and holographic screens showcasing available dungeon exploration opportunities.

"Here, these are the available dungeons right now." Then, the woman spoke as a holographic screen appeared before me, listing all the dungeons. "Keep in mind that these dungeons are subject to availability, so it's best if you make your decisions quickly."

Looking at the dungeons listed before me, I started reading the names. I studied the information and settled on one that seemed promising.

"I'll take the Verdant Forest," I said, pointing to the holographic image. It was a dungeon that was in a forest environment where the weather was warm and the conditions were not that extreme. And the conditions for entering were also not bad."

The receptionist nodded, seeming satisfied with my choice. "A wise decision. The Verdant Forest is a mid-tier dungeon known for its diverse ecosystem and formidable beasts. Will this be a solo expedition, or are you planning to join a party?"

"I prefer to go solo," I reiterated.

"Very well," she replied, jotting down my preference. "Please pay the entrance fee, and sign the contract here." As the woman explained, the way [Wildcatter]'s worked was the same as rental cars, etc. You would explore the dungeon, but first, you would pay a fee, and then you would be paying a portion of the monsters you have hunted inside the gate.

After I scanned and paid with crypto money, the woman nodded her head. "Your dungeon pass and expedition details will be prepared shortly. Please wait here for a moment."

After a brief moment, the receptionist returned with a small data card. "Here is your dungeon pass and all the necessary information for your expedition to Verdant Forest. You'll be using the teleportation gate number eight hundred sixty-four for your destination. Please proceed to the gate, and the system will recognize your dungeon pass," she explained.

Making my way toward the hall behind me, I looked around and observed the atmosphere.

The teleportation gates were a marvel of modern technology, allowing quick and efficient access to distant dungeons. Of course, most of the time, dungeons would appear randomly, and they even called gates from time to time. Therefore, these types of organizations would use teleportation gates to have access to dungeons, linking them to their entrances.

"Please step up here. This gate will take you to the gate hall."

The woman signaled the gate, and following her instructions, I entered.

WRRRR!

And following that, a sound of a vortex entered my ears, and a feeling of nausea came not long after. Because, in that brief moment, I felt my world turned upside down, downside up, and once again upside down.

But I held my nausea in and endured the feeling. It just had been a while since I entered a gate.

"Welcome to the Gate Hall."

The moment I stepped up to the gate hall, a crowded place welcomed me and the voice of another woman. This one also had a black suit and a professional aura surrounding her.

'So this is the gate hall of [Wildcatters].' I thought. The Wildcatters was not an organization that only operated in Ariopolis City, after all. They had access to dungeons everywhere. Therefore, the place I was in was overwhelming in many shapes normally.

A lot of gates were scattered all around the wide hall. At the same time, a swarm of people were walking. Hunters, businessmen, people who wished to travel secretly....A lot of types of people and deals could be seen in this place.

"Your destination is the eight hundred sixty-fourth gate. Please follow my friend here; he will show you the way." But before I could look around any further, the voice of the woman welcomed me.

Hearing her, I turned my attention to see a masked fellow waiting.

"Understood."

With that, I started following the man. He didn't speak, and neither did I. But while we walked, people around all gave greeted him first. It seemed this guy was pretty famous around here as he greeted everyone with a curt nod without talking. After walking almost for five minutes, we reached the gate with the number <864> on it. There weren't many people around here no more, most probably because this gate was on the weaker side of the spectrum.

An average rank for a hunter would be rank-5 and rank-6.

"You can scan your pass on the sensor here; then you may enter." The masked man spoke as he signaled the gate. I could see the small signs of footprints, and from the traces alone, I could infer that the last time this gate was used was 6 hours ago.

WRRR!

The gate before me was whirling violently at the same time a bunch of individuals were waiting and guarding the door, probably from those that wanted to brute force their way. They were also probably the ones that would enter whenever the person inside said a signal of distress.

<Gate 864>

"Hey there. Marcus"

Standing in front of the gate, a scruffy-looking man with messy black hair and a mischievous grin waved toward the person escorting me with a mask. I learned his name was Marcus.

Giving a nonchalant shrug to his greeting, not different from others, the man named Marcus turned around and prepared to leave.

"As quiet as ever, huh?"

With no response from Marcus, the gatekeeper turned his attention to me.

"So, you're the one heading into the dungeon?"

"Yes," I confirmed.

"Ugh, just when I thought I had some free time." The man spoke as he smashed the cigarette in his hands. He looked pretty relaxed and chill, different from all those people I had seen here.

"All right, come on. Follow me."

Walking with his hands in his pockets, the gatekeeper grumbled as he led the way toward the gate.

"Tom, Jerry, I've got a guest here, so open the gate."

The two white-clad guards blocking the gate didn't respond.

'They are his subordinates, huh? It doesn't seem like they respect him too much.' From their small body gestures, I could see they were uncomfortable looking at him.

"Ah, whatever."

Marcus handed a card to one of the guards, and after a brief swipe, the gate opened.

"Bye, Tom, Jerry. Don't mess with the girls when I am gone," The man joked, waving at the guards before stepping into the gate.

With a hint of amusement, he beckoned me to follow.

Entering the gate, the gatekeeper pulled out another cigarette from his pocket and lit it up. The smoke of the cigarette hit my face, and it was a strong one for those with strong bodies.

The urge to cough came, but I held it in and raised an eyebrow. The way this guy treated the customers was not professional at all. Filing a complaint was probably the best course of action.

Though, he only grinned in response as if he knew my thoughts.

"Don't worry; they're always like this. Just a bit introverted." I take it back; he didn't know at all.

I didn't reply, nor did I need to. Though I couldn't help but think they were simply ignoring him.

"Tch! You are one of those serious types, aren't you?" He grumbled and activated the warp gate.
"Let's see what you can do inside the gate." He spoke as he threw an annoyed gaze at me.

As the warp gate activated, I felt my body slowly lift from the ground. I watched as my surroundings blurred, and soon, the same whirlwind enveloped me, and the same feeling of nausea threatened me to come out.

Though I held it in.

Chapter 37 Chapter 10.2 - First Dungeon

TOK

The moment the whirlwind threw me out, my senses became slightly null, and a stronger sense of nausea came.

The reason for that was probably because we passed two different gates at the same time. One that would take us into the entrance of the dungeon and the other that would take us into the dungeon directly. Both of them were linked, so we hadn't stopped, but that also meant the traveling time was a lot longer with a stronger repulsive force.

"Grrr....." But, gritting my teeth, I held it in, resisting the reflex to gulp and vomit.

"Ho? You are pretty good for a first-timer." The man spoke, and hearing his voice helped me regain my control and made me remember that I was in the presence of another person. Turning my head, I saw a smirk on his face as he lit another cigar from his pockets.

"Tch!" I clicked my tongue inwardly while glaring at him. Was that bastard really clueless, or was he doing it knowingly? The smoke alone was enough to burn my lungs.

I wondered how they could inhale such a thing daily. Didn't they put any importance on their health?

Though I was the one to talk... Considering I was about to put my body in danger of death, I was in no position to criticize others, I guess....Everyone had reasons, probably.

"What? Wondering how I knew you were a first-timer?" Though he had taken my gaze for a different reason. "Kid. I have seen quite a lot of people like you. I am in this business for god knows how long..." With a boasting tone, he spoke, but I was really getting annoyed.

'Nobody wanted to hear how long you have been here. I can easily say that you are at least in your 15th year from your habits alone.' I thought, standing up.

"Sigh.... You are a weird one, aren't you? Anyway, I will leave now. You must have already read about the regulations.... You can stay here for at most ten days without checking out, or we will assume that you are in danger, and then we will send a rescue team. But that will result in the loss of your money, so it is your choice."

He said as he waved his hand. I nodded in response while getting myself ready.

"Then, good luck." With those last words, he left, making his way towards the entrance, leaving me alone.

Just like that, I stood there as I waited for him to leave.

"Haa...."

Then, taking my mask out, I breathed an air of refreshment and cooled my head. The air was fresh, and the scent of forest was all around me.

The dungeon was vast and teeming with life; unlike the sterile environment of the academy this time, I could see a faint life of wildness oozing from the forest. Tall trees with leaves in shades of green towered above, their branches forming a natural canopy that filtered the sunlight and cast dappled shadows on the forest floor.

The ground was covered with a layer of soft moss, and small, colorful flowers peeked out from between the undergrowth. The air was filled with the soothing melody of birdsong and the gentle rustling of leaves in the breeze.

But I knew it was nothing but an illusion. Because, behind that gentle breeze, my eyes could perk the signs of fighting. Even a faint smell of blood lingered around, showing a battle happening around here.

That meant even the entrance was not safe, though for now, I couldn't sense any presence of monsters.

As I took a step forward, the ground beneath me seemed to pulse with faint energy, and I could sense the presence of mana flowing through the area. It was a subtle yet unmistakable feeling, a reminder that this was no ordinary forest but a place where magic and danger coexisted.

The dungeon had a mysterious aura about it, an air of unpredictability that kept me on my guard. Every step I took felt like a journey into the unknown as if there were secrets lurking behind every tree and bush.

And that was because of the monsters that lived in this place. The information of which type of monsters habilitated this dungeon was already given to me by [Wildcatter].

There were three types of monsters living here.

'Harmonic Chatterers.'

It was the first type of monster. They were monsters that looked like monkeys, but since they came from a different world with mana, they evolved.

SHRIEK

Just as I was thinking about them, a loud shriek came from the forest.

It was their skill or classical characteristics. They are monsters labeled intermediate rank-2. Their physical affinity is not that strong, but they are known for their loud screams and sound attacks from range.

And they tend to wander around in groups.

Just as I was thinking about that, I sensed a presence of a couple of monsters beside me.

SWOOSH

Coupled with the leaves rustling, a monster rushed at me at a rapid speed.

It was a monster with dog-wolf-type features, but at the same time, it looked humanoid since it attacked me with his two arms raised.

I could feel the killing intent behind its attacks, but I was already ready for such cases.

CLANK

With my daggers raised, I blocked its paws immediately.

'I was planning to use the bow and my gun, but for now, let's deal with this first.'

With that thought, I imbued my daggers with mana. This time, the color of my mana was white different from the red color at that time. I didn't know what caused the color of mana to change, but I somehow felt different from that time.

If crimson-colored mana made me more bloodthirsty than this one made me swifter...

SWOOSH

The Kobold lunged at me again with a fierce-looking face, its claws aimed at my chest.

SWOOSH

I swiftly sidestepped, avoiding its attack, and counterattacked with a swift kick to its side. The creature staggered but quickly regained its balance, growling in anger.

"Grrr...."

SWOOSH

As it charged at me once more, it was time to end the monster. Kobolds were beginner rank-2 monsters and were weaker than most others, and their specialty was their speed.

But that also made them weak in terms of body health. When it comes to glass cannon fights, the first one to land an attack always wins. That was the basic rule most would know.

SLASH SLASH SLASH

With a series of rapid slashes, I slashed the Kobold in a second of time at least thrice, causing it to back off momentarily.

THUD

"Grrrrr...."

However, the monster was not easily deterred. It snarled and leaped back into the fray, attacking with renewed ferocity. But that was what I was waiting for. His legs were injured.

I was not mindlessly swinging my daggers but aiming at his natural weaknesses. His tendons were cut. Thus, his speed was lower, and his attacking posture was deterred. After all, a mindless monster could never know how to correct its mistakes.

"This is your end."

SWOOSH

With that, I lowered my center of gravity as I swiftly dodged the attack.

STAB

And then, I stabbed the monster with my dagger in my right hand. Blood spilled to the ground from his wound as the monster staggered once again.

"Auuu...." A scream of agony left its mouth, but I didn't care.

SLASH

Following my stab, I finished the monster with a clean cut on its neck, severing the monster's head from its body.

THUD SPURT

As the head fell to the ground, blood started flowing like a fountain, though I had already increased the distance.

'Good.... My dagger movements feel a lot smoother.' I thought to myself after seeing the kobold on the ground. The dagger that was given from the academy was certainly one of the best out there. Even though I coated it with mana, I still cut the monster swiftly.

'Though this one doesn't have a core.' Without caring, I stored the body of the kobold on my bracelet and started walking again.

It was time to make some money, and I was going to make the most out of this opportunity.

Just like that, I activated my skill [Keen Eye] and started observing the monsters around, locating every bit of them.

'For now, only kobolds do seem to be around. I guess the beginning area of the dungeon does have less mana concentration.'

The way Dungeons worked was actually pretty similar to the Ecology of Wilderness. Those who studied biology would know the term Species Distribution and the things that affect it.

Anyway, without diverging from the topic too much, the more mana that was concentrated around the place, the stronger monsters would occupy it, just like how capitalism worked. Strong would get stronger, and the weak could only eat dirt.

That was the same for this one. The outskirts of the dungeon had less mana concentration. Thus, the weaker monsters are occupied here, meaning kobolds.

With my [Keen Eye] skill activated, I could sense the presence of several kobolds scattered throughout the outskirts of the dungeon. They were hiding in the shadows, lurking behind trees and bushes, waiting for potential prey to come their way.

But, I was the shadows. There was a reason why I chose this dense forest as the dungeon. It was because I wanted to make use of my trait [Shadowborne]. While training in the rooms, I noticed that this trait was a lot stronger in the presence of shadows or darkness and weaker when it was daytime.

Thus escaping from the light enabled me to have a better stealth, basically.

I carefully moved through the forest, keeping my guard up and my senses sharp. As I spotted a group of three kobolds ahead, I decided it was time to put my new gun to the test.

Reaching for the spatial bracelet on my wrist, I retrieved the sleek black handgun. It felt reassuringly cool in my hand as I aimed it at the nearest kobold.

Taking a deep breath, I steadied my aim. The important thing for a ranger was always keeping your concentration and observing the changes in your surroundings.

With my posture ready to shoot, I imbued my mana on the bullet. Even though I couldn't see it, I could feel the mana enhancing it.

Then I pulled the trigger.

BANG!

The gun let out a loud report, and the bullet flew through the air with deadly precision. It struck the kobold in the chest, causing it to yelp in pain and stumble back.

BANG! BANG!

Before the other two could react, I fired two more shots, taking them down one by one.

The loud noise of the gunshots echoed through the forest, and I knew that I had alerted nearby monsters to my presence. But, before they could spot me, I was already blended into the shadows.

"Grrr...." "Grrr....." "Grrr..."

Sure enough, more kobolds emerged from the shadows, their eyes filled with rage and hunger.

But that only meant one simple thing for me.

It was the fact that more monsters appeared before me to kill.

"Huff...." Blended into the shadows, I repositioned myself, climbing on top of the tree.

'I need to train my environmental adaptation as well.' I thought, not happy with the speed of my climbing. But that was for a later time. After all, I couldn't do everything at the same time, right?

"Keen Eye."

My eyes were sharpened as I calmly aimed my gun at each one in turn. Perceiving their weaknesses and the pathways that were stimulated in my brain, I tensed my muscles.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Firing with deadly accuracy. The gun made short work of the monsters, and soon, the area around me was littered with defeated kobolds.

Seven of them were lying on the grounds, and I could sense more coming.

It was time to massacre monsters.....

Chapter 38 Chapter 10.3 - First Dungeon

As the sun slowly made its descent toward the horizon, I continued my relentless hunt, my gun and daggers becoming extensions of my body. With each encounter, I grew more skilled and efficient, taking down the kobolds with deadly precision.

The forest echoed with the sound of gunshots and the cries of defeated monsters. My [Keen Eye] skill allowed me to perceive their movements and weaknesses with clarity, giving me the upper hand in every battle. Even though guns were not supposed to be enough to kill the monsters, with my mana enchantment, every bullet passed through their defenses.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

More and more kobolds fell before me, their bodies piling up around me, and at some point, I could no longer see any more kobolds, which meant one simple thing.

'The first stage is about to be cleared.'

Most of the time, there were no stages or anything like levels in most of the dungeons, like games. However, the stage meant the sections of the dungeon where the monsters of the same strength resided.

Like, for instance, the place where I hunted kobolds was named the first stage or first district. Then the second stage would be where the monsters of a higher strength resided.

That was basically it. And me seeing no more kobolds here meant the dungeon would now enter the reproduction routine and would start spawning more kobolds.

In the game, the reason for this phenomenon was not detailly explained until the later stages of the game, but it doesn't matter what the reason is for now.

Anyway, every stage or district does have its own boss-type monsters. Of course, Kobolds also did have its own.

Chief Kobold.

A Peak Rank-2 monster and the strongest monster inside this forest.

'Dealing one on one with that monster shouldn't be too hard. But, the problem is their numbers.'

No matter how dumb monsters are, when the danger appears, they will have one simple response. They will group and defend themselves with numbers.

This is the way of the weak, basically, and every living being in nature knows that.

As the night approached, the forest grew darker, but I had been fighting with kobolds non-stop and was pretty much tired. Considering my low constitution, even using a gun while kiting the monsters was hard for me.

'I need to set up a camp.'

With the moon high above in the dark sky, I descended from the tree and found a suitable spot to set up camp. I gathered some dry leaves and branches to create a small campfire, providing both warmth and a source of light to keep the monsters at bay.

Taking out my tent from the spatial bracelet, I quickly set it up nearby the campfire. And I didn't forget to burn the incense that would erase the smell of meat and smoke.

Then, I ate the conservative food I had brought with me. Sadly, even though this was a forest, there was no monster that could be eaten after getting cooked for now.

Kobold meat tasted really bad, and it didn't offer any advantages to hunters making it blacklisted from being eaten most of the time.

Inside the tent, I laid out a blanket and made myself as comfortable as possible. My body ached from the constant battles, and I knew I needed to rest if I wanted to face Chief Kobold later on.

I settled down inside the tent and gulped a recovery increase potion. Different from stamina potions, recovery increase potions worked as supplements and made the natural recovery faster without not much external interference.

It was a lot better for future conditions and was suggested to use over the stamina potions because of lesser side effects in the long run.

Then, I closed my eyes, focusing on my mana to speed up the recovery process. Slowly, the fatigue started to ebb away as I let the mana flow through my body, soothing my tired muscles and rejuvenating my energy.

Though, I didn't forget to maintain my gun. After all, at the end of the day, a gun was a mechanical device that could be dysfunctional at any crucial moment, just like a sword that hadn't been sharpened for a while.

As the minutes turned into hours, I felt myself gradually regaining strength. I knew that midnight was the best time to strike Chief Kobold's settlement. The monsters would be at their weakest during that hour, and I could catch them off guard. Also, both of my traits are always suited to work at nighttime.

[Lunar Enigma] was related to the moon, and [Shadowborne] was related to shadows. Even though some may say that in the daytime, there were actually more shadows, it was also easier to spot them at the same time. Thus, utilizing shadows at night time was actually a lot easier.

I had also slept for a while, so my head was also feeling refreshed.

When midnight approached, I emerged from the tent, feeling revitalized and ready for the next battle. The campfire still burned brightly, providing me with enough light to navigate through the forest.

Silently, I made my way toward Kobolds' settlement. My [Keen Eye] skill was still active, allowing me to detect any movement in the darkness. The forest was eerily quiet, and the monsters seemed to sense the impending danger.

Before I set up camp, I first scouted the entire area, and at that time, I found out about the whereabouts of Chief Kobold or Kobold Settlement.

They had formed quite a good settlement in the midst of the trees. They even built some huts, though they were only primal.

The important thing was that they were showing the signs of civilization. They even had some patrols.

Therefore, the most optimal approach would be tiring them to death, ambushing them, or constantly poisoning them.

But, sadly, I was not that prepared. I had no way of knowing I would encounter such monsters. Thus, I didn't buy any poisons. However, I took a mental note to buy it for a later time.

'However, I can't use my gun. The monsters will be alerted if I do so.' With that thought, I decided it was time to use my bow.

After all, the bow was silent, and it actually supplied more firepower if utilized correctly. Its only downside was the firing speed....For now.

Activating my [Keen Eye], I started scouting the monsters and labeling their locations.

Their numbers were not that high.

'Twenty Kobolds and One Kobold Chief. Two of them are protecting the chief's hut, ten of them are mating, and the remaining eight are patrolling.'

I remembered that the kobolds would mate when the moon was full, and seeing this scene confirmed. It seemed, luck was on my side.

Taking out my compound bow from the spatial bracelet, I carefully nocked an arrow and pulled the string back.

I had been practicing with this bow for the last week inside the academy, and my posture had already started becoming swift and smooth. My body was really talented at Archery.

With a deep breath, I focused my mana on the arrow, imbuing it with a powerful enchantment. The arrow glowed faintly with green light, indicating the presence of the mana enhancement. Though, I didn't know what the color meant.

I took aim at the lone kobold patrolling near the outskirts of the settlement, and when I was sure of my shot, I released the arrow.

SWISH

The arrow flew silently through the air and struck the kobold right in the neck.

"Burghk-"

It let out a choked gasp, but the sound was barely audible in the quiet night. The enchantment on the arrow made it smooth for Kobold to die as its skin was pierced.

As the dead kobold fell to the ground, the forest fell silent once more. The soft rustling of leaves and the distant hooting of an owl were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the night. My [Keen Eye] skill continued to guide me, helping me locate the next target.

It was another patrolling kobold. Though this time, two of them were patrolling at the same time.

However, it didn't matter. I nocked an arrow on the bow and readied myself.

SWISH

Releasing the arrow, it flew with deadly accuracy and struck the first patrolling kobold in the chest. It let out a choked gasp before collapsing to the ground, lifeless. The second kobold turned to look at its fallen comrade, confusion evident in its eyes.

"Au-"

Before it could react and warn his comrades, I swiftly fired another arrow, hitting the second kobold in the throat. It fell to the ground, clutching at its neck, but it was already too late. The enchantment on the arrow had taken effect as the mana of the moon shone.

With the immediate threat dealt with, I took a moment to scan the area once more, ensuring no other kobolds had been alerted. Satisfied that the coast was clear, I continued my infiltration, using the cover of darkness to my advantage.

First, I dealt with all of the remaining kobolds around the settlement. It wasn't that hard; it only took me a bunch of arrows to kill them. Though, I didn't forget to pluck them back.

Then, silently, I moved from tree to tree, making my way closer to the settlement. My [Keen Eye] skill helped me identify the kobolds' positions. Slowly but steadily, I closed the distance, taking care not to make any noise that could give away my presence.

Once I reached the outskirts of the settlement, I hunkered down and observed the kobolds' activities. It seemed that they were indeed preoccupied with their mating and were not on high alert. This was the perfect opportunity for me to strike.

After all, I could hear disgusting moans of the monsters, and as a person that had never been into Bestiary, it made me want to vomit.

Normally while dealing with such tropes, one would first kill the mobs and then one-versus-one the remaining ones. But, at this point, that was almost impossible to do since the monsters were too close to each other, and they would be alerted.

Therefore, there was one simple course of action that would be needed to be taken.

Killing the Chief Kobold first.

And I actually got the perfect opportunity for it. While I was moving around, I scanned the whole area to find a good spot to attack. And it didn't take me too long for me to find one.

I found a tall tree with thick foliage that offered a clear view of the chief's hut.

With the utmost stealth, I climbed up the tree and positioned myself on a sturdy branch. From this hidden perch, I could see Chief Kobold clearly, still seated on its makeshift throne, surrounded by the other kobolds.

"Keen Eye."

Activating my skill, I observed the monster's weak points. Its heart was located on the right side of his chest, but there was one more place that was marked.

'This must be his core.' It was his core. There were monster cores in this world, but most of the time, they would only be found on rare occasions or on boss monsters.

'The core is a no-go. It will fetch for a good prize.'

There were also several other weak points around the body.

My heartbeat slowed down as I notched an arrow on my bow, readying myself for the shot.

The most important thing for a ranger was to keep calm in every scenario.

Taking a deep breath, I focused my mana on the arrow, imbuing it with an additional enchantment for maximum impact. For the last week, I have been trying to improve my mana usage, and I got more familiar with it.

The arrow shone bright green, as well as I felt my mana pouring into the arrow. This was the reason why bows were used more frequently because one could enable more mana into the arrows.

Though, I had yet to understand why the colors of my mana changed constantly. I couldn't understand the reason; thus, I decided to leave it for a later time.

Time seemed to slow down as I steadied my aim, waiting for the perfect moment. The kobolds continued their revelry, oblivious to the imminent danger. This was my chance.

SWISH

As Chief Kobold leaned back, letting out a guttural laugh, I seized the opportunity. Without hesitation, I released the arrow, watching it soar through the air with deadly precision.....

This was the start of the fight....

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SWISH

As Chief Kobold leaned back, letting out a guttural laugh, I fired the arrow at that moment.

THUD SPURT

The arrow struck Chief Kobold right in the chest, and it let out a pained howl. However, even though I had struck him on its vital point and my arrow was channeled with huge amounts of mana, I couldn't kill him in one strike. It was as expected since it was a boss monster and the distance was quite far away.

"GRRRRRRRR!"

The other kobolds turned their heads in confusion, trying to comprehend what had just happened.

I was also confused momentarily. For some reason, the kobold was shining bright green as if it was marked with something, but I couldn't understand what it was.

A tendril of green color was connecting me to the kobold as if it was showing me where it was. But, it was not the time to stop. I needed to attack the monster, after all, before they could react.

SWISH

Thus, before they could raise their guards, I fired another arrow, this time hitting Chief Kobold in the shoulder.

"ROOOOOOAAAAR!"

Then I proceeded with firing another three.

SWISH SWISH

It roared in agony, prompting the other kobolds to panic. However, the arrows I had released followed the trajectory of the green color I could see. Like my body instinctively knew where to shoot.

'What is this?'

A lot more questions arose from my heart, but it was not the time to ask questions. It was time to attack.

With the element of surprise on my side, I continued to rain arrows down on Chief Kobold, targeting its vital spots. Its health steadily decreased with each well-placed shot. In a matter of ten seconds, I had already fired five arrows, and three of them hit.

The other two had missed since the kobold leader managed to get out of the throne he was sitting on and took cover instinctively.

The other kobolds began to scatter, their confusion turning into fear. They searched for the source of the attacks but couldn't pinpoint my location.

After all, I was covered with shadows, and they could never see where I was. But to fire, I needed to get out of the shadows, which made it hard for me to attack without getting detected randomly.

"AUUUUU!"

"HOWL!"

"SNARL!"

Their snarls and howls filled the settlement as all of the other kobolds that were busy with mating were also alerted.

RUSTLE RUSTLE

Inside the forest, they started looking for the attacker, using their noses to find my stench. But they were spending their efforts futile. I had already used a stench-erasing perfume for such cases.

However, another interesting thing caught my eye. The kobold leader was behind the hut, and my vision was blocked.

But, after the last arrow hit, the same green tendrils of small lines were connected once again.

'I am sure now. For some reason, I can mark the monster with my arrows.'

I had no time to rack my brain to understand why it was since the Kobolds were scattered around looking for my traces. However, the tendrils of green lines were showing me the location of the Kobold Chief.

He was staying in the same place, probably trying to get rid of his injuries.

"Dash."

SWOOSH SWOOSH

Without wasting any more time, I quickly repositioned myself to get a clear shot at the Kobold Chief while activating my skill.

With shadows forming around me and my speed increasing, I found a spot where the hut wouldn't obstruct my arrows, and the green tendrils of lines connected me to the boss monster once more.

With the Kobold Chief lying wounded on the ground, I took one final arrow from my quiver and nocked it on my bow. The green lines of connection still guided my aim, and I focused all my mana on this last shot.

I steadied my breathing and honed in on the target. The Kobold Chief's labored breathing filled the air as it struggled to stay alive.

SWISH

With a deep breath, I released the arrow, and it sailed through the night air with deadly accuracy.

THUD SPURT

The arrow found its mark, piercing through the Kobold Chief's skull with a sickening thud.

"GRAAA-"

The boss monster let out a gurgled cry before falling silent, life extinguished. I could see the monster had reached its demise, and it was no longer alive.

The other kobolds, witnessing the fall of their leader, froze in terror. They had seen their once mighty Chief succumb to my relentless assault, and fear took hold of them.

What was the most primitive emotion for any living being?

It was fear.

And at that moment, all the kobolds around me felt the fear they had never felt for the first time.

"Grrr....." "Snarl...." "Auuu...."

Making a lot of fearful voices, the kobolds tried to get away, scattering around. But there was just no way that I could leave those kobolds that would become my source of money to leave like that.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Seizing the opportunity, I swiftly drew my pistol and fired at the remaining kobolds. The gunshots echoed loudly through the forest, signaling the end of their reign of terror and the start of mine.

At this point, there was no need for me to hide my traces anymore, as the first stage was already cleared. No monster could rival me here unless monsters from deeper parts of the forest came.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

One by one, the kobolds fell to my shots, and soon, the forest was once again quiet except for the echoes of my gunfire that lingered in the air.

As the echoes of my gunshots faded away, the forest fell into an eerie silence. The scent of blood hung heavy in the air as the remaining kobolds realized they were trapped with no means of escape.

Their once fearless leader lay dead on the ground, and the fear that had consumed them now turned into madness. Their snarls and howls grew louder, filling the settlement with a cacophony of rage and desperation.

Even though there was a settlement, not every kobold was actually living there, as I could see another bunch of kobolds came and joined the group.

I watched as they bared their teeth, their eyes wild with fury. They knew they couldn't defeat me, but they had reached a point where survival instincts took over, and they were willing to throw themselves at me in a desperate attempt to overpower and kill me.

'What a good parent you are.' I thought. The reason why half of them turned to me while the other half stayed on the backside was pretty obvious.

They were trying to protect their children. But, it was just a futile effort that came from the depths of their programmed instincts. After all, even if I hadn't killed them, another bunch of Hunters would come and do the job for me.

"Come on then, if you dare," I said. But for some reason, I felt like my voice was colder than usual. It carried an air of confidence and authority that seemed to stop them in their tracks, if only for a moment.

SWOOSH SWOOSH

But that moment was all I needed. With my daggers in hand, I launched myself at the closest kobold, my speed, and reflexes enhanced by my activated [Dash] skill.

The kobold lunged at me, but its attack was clumsy and uncoordinated. With a swift movement, I dodged its strike and plunged my dagger into its chest, ending its life in an instant.

The other kobolds roared in a fury and rushed toward me, but I moved like a shadow, deftly avoiding their attacks and striking them down one by one. My enhanced agility and reaction time allowed me to anticipate their movements and counter with deadly precision.

Their desperation only fueled my determination. I had come prepared for this, and I refused to be overwhelmed by a pack of rabid monsters.

I left everything to my instincts, and the vision that I had seen at that time seemed like it took over my body as my body moved swiftly, like a man that was born to kill.

BANG! BANG!

In between the close-range combat, I skillfully switched between my daggers and pistol, taking down the charging kobolds with deadly accuracy. The sound of gunshots echoed through the settlement, mixing with their desperate cries.

The madness in their eyes seemed to intensify with every fallen comrade, and they became more ferocious and reckless in their attacks. But it was in vain. I was a hunter, born to hunt.

I was the vengeance born from the moon; I was the one whose sole reason was to pluck the demons from this world, whose whole reason to live was killing and extracting vengeance.

In the future, I would be facing stronger and stronger demons.... There was no way I was going to let myself be overwhelmed by a bunch of nobodies.

THUD THUD THUD

One by one, the kobolds fell until only silence remained. The once bustling settlement was now a graveyard of defeated monsters.

"Grrraaaa...." "Shriek!"

HOWL

As the last kobold fell to the ground, a strong wind blew at that moment, carrying the smell of blood and dead bodies.... It seemed like the moon shone bright red for a second, like the blood on the soil of the forest.

Then the moon was covered by clouds of dark color, and my vision was obscured by them.

THUD THUD

Following that, the rain started pouring heavily, wetting my clothes. It was a mana rain, and I knew it was not the time to reminisce about the thing that was happening here. Mana rains were the types of poisonous rains which, in the end, made it important to be protected from them.

"Huff.... Huff... Huff...."

Breathing heavily, I stood amidst the fallen kobolds, my heart pounding with the adrenaline of battle. It was a fierce and brutal fight, but I emerged victorious in the end.

"Fucking hell...." I mumbled, my heart beating getting slower and calming down.

With the immediate threat gone, I took a moment to survey the area. The forest had returned to its quiet state, but the scent of blood and death still lingered in the air. The fight was over.

However, my job had yet to be finished.

Grabbing the cloak, I got for these types of situations and put it on. The sound of rain droplets pushing the cloak entered my ears, and I started picking my haul up.

As I retrieved my arrows and wiped the blood from my daggers, I couldn't help but wonder about the strange green lines that had connected me to the Kobold Chief. It was a mysterious power that I

had never experienced before, but at the same time, I instinctively knew how to use it, like someone was guiding me.

'It was related to the color of my mana. Then, was it because it was green?' I asked myself. I didn't have definite answers, and I was tired of thinking for a while. I needed to rest, not because I was tired physically, but because I was tired mentally.

I mean, I was also tired physically, but potions could cure that. The mental part was something different.

Walking around the forest, I collected the bodies of the dead kobolds one by one until only the boss monster's body remained.

Chief Kobold was larger and more muscular than the others, with sharp claws and teeth that showed his position at the top of the Kobold hierarchy. Its body was covered in scars and battle wounds, evidence of the many battles it had fought to maintain its dominance over the settlement as well as the evolutions he passed.

Its fur was a deep shade of brown, and its eyes, once filled with arrogance and cruelty, now stared lifelessly into the dark sky. I took a moment to study its body, noting the different characteristics and features that set it apart from the other kobolds.

With the grim task done, I retreated to a drier area, setting up a makeshift camp under the shelter of a large tree. I sat by the campfire, the rain still pouring down around me, and took a moment to catch my breath.

The adrenaline rush from the battle had subsided, and now exhaustion weighed heavily on my shoulders. My muscles ached from the intense combat, and my mind was filled with memories of the fight.

It was normally time to grab another recovery potion, but since I had cleared all the monsters here, I could use another thing.

Grabbing the vial from my bag, I looked at the mixture I made in order to increase my training efficiency.

"GULP!"

Gulping it in one go, I endured the pain all around me as I sat on the ground.

"Kurgh-"

After a second of squirming and crawling, the effects of the potion subsided.

Taking out some rations from my bag, I began to eat, replenishing my energy. The sound of raindrops hitting the leaves above provided a soothing rhythm, and I felt a sense of peace despite the violent events that had just occurred.

I decided to rest for a while before continuing deeper into the dungeon. The rain showed no signs of stopping, and it wouldn't be wise to venture out in such weather. I entered the tent and made myself comfortable.

Lying down on the damp ground, I closed my eyes and let my body and mind rest. Just like that, the first day in the dungeon reached its end....

Chapter 40 Chapter 10.5 - First Dungeon

After resting for a while and sleeping, I was now ready to go again.

'Stage 1 is cleared, and it will take at least one and a half days for the dungeon to respawn the monsters.'

That was how things went most of the time.

If the dungeon's mana level on one side was dropped by killing the monsters inside, then the dungeon would try to replenish those sides by cutting down on the mana supply of other parts.

In a way, it followed the principle of equilibrium from chemistry.

'Then, the only thing left for me is moving forward.'

I still had at least 6 hours more before I needed to clock out, thus I wanted to make the most of the time I would be spending here.

'Considering the amounts of Kobolds I had hunted, I think I made around 40k Valer alone.'

I thought. It was the amount of money I had borrowed from the academy.

'But that is only if I exclude the expenses of coming here.'

Instantly calculating the amount of money I would be spending and needed to cut off, it became evident that my haul was around thirty-five thousand.

Even though I got a bracelet that could breach any type of detection, I still needed to show some sort of haul so that I wouldn't look suspicious.

But a little and young hunter like me would be expected to hunt at most ten kobolds in this amount of time, and that would make them cut off around one or one point five thousand Valer.

And that was fine. However, aside from that, I also needed to buy some other bullets, potions, clothes and etc. That was the reason why being a hunter was not a free job.

The pay was good, but at the same time, it was expensive. Hunters are always putting their life on the line, so to protect them, they would never spare any money.

At least, that is what it is advised.

'And there is no way I could just use the arrows given by the academy, and arrows are a lot more expensive than bullets.'

Since arrows occupied more space and more material, making them with good mana conducting material was alone expensive.

Anyway, that was about to become my haul, but I still had more time, so I started venturing deeper into the woods.

The mana rain had finally subsided, leaving behind a fresh scent in the air.

The dense vegetation became even thicker, and the shadows of the tall trees stretched across the forest floor. The sound of my footsteps was muffled by the soft moss that covered the ground.

WUSH WUSH

As I walked cautiously, I noticed a change in the atmosphere. It was as if the forest itself held its breath. The chirping of birds and the rustling of leaves had ceased, replaced by an eerie silence.

Then, I heard it - a low, rhythmic sound, almost like a soft melody. It was a sound I had never encountered before, and I strained my ears to listen more closely. It seemed to be coming from deeper within the woods.

Immediately I understood the source of the sounds.

'To think that they would try to lure me there first.'

Harmonic Chatterers.

As I previously mentioned, they were a type of monkey-based monsters that were labeled as rank-2 intermediate monsters.

Even though their physical strength was weak, they had a rather different type of strength.

'Sound mana.'

They were known for their sound affinity, and their musical abilities were said to have strange effects on those who listened. Some hunters spoke of being mesmerized by their melodies, losing track of time, and wandering deeper into the forest, never to return.

However, I still decided to investigate the source of the strange sound. As I moved closer, the sound grew louder and more distinct.

'From the looks of it, they are not directly aiming at me. I think their focus on somewhere else.'

I concluded.

From the small traces that was on the ground and those marks on the trees, I could infer that the place I was in was commonly used by these monkey-types of monsters.

'But, it is mostly used for scouting and patrolling. This place is not their home.'

However, because the traces were rather faint, I could infer that not everyone used here every time of the day.

MELODY

Then the melody continued to enter my ears, whispering softly. It was trying to mess with my head, and if I was subjected to the sound longer, I would be seduced as well.

Then, slowly amplifying my mana into my ears, I blocked the sound affinity mana entering my ears.

SHRIEK SHRIEK

Thus resulting in pure sound coming.

It was an ugly shriek that one would expect from a monster. I could finally see their true colors.

'Hmm....But they are a lot louder. They really want to gather someone's attention.'

I was confident in my hiding abilities, which meant there was another group of people there.

I stealthily made my way toward the source of the sound, careful not to step on any twigs or make any noise that could alert the Harmonic Chatterers to my presence.

As I approached, I saw a clearing in the forest where the sound was originating from.

Peering through the dense bush, I saw a group of five individuals standing in the clearing.

They were armed and seemed to be seasoned adventurers. Their gear and weapons indicated that they were experienced hunters.

In front of them were the Harmonic Chatterers. They were swaying rhythmically as they played their melodies, and the hunters seemed to be mesmerized by the sound.

'Hmm? Are they pretending like they were bewitched by those monsters?'

Looking at their small body language, I thought. No person would shake his hands or grip their weapon with a lot of strength when they were bewitched. And they would also tense their muscles.

'Smart decision.' From their looks alone, it was not that easy to gauge their strength, but unnecessary conflict could prove to be fatal in this place filled with villains and criminals.

SHRIEK SHRIEK

As the Harmonic Chatterers approached, their swaying and melodies became more aggressive. The hunters were prepared for this and activated their own skills to counter the monsters' attacks.

One hunter lunged forward, utilizing their swift swordsmanship skill to strike at the Chatterers with lightning speed. Another activated their defensive stance, using a skill that created an impenetrable barrier to protect themselves and their allies.

Despite the monsters' agility and sonic attacks, the hunters' skills allowed them to dodge and deflect the incoming strikes. At the very least, they didn't seem like they were struggling.

They worked together quite well and efficiently, covering each other's weaknesses and exploiting the Chatterers' vulnerabilities.

The leader of the adventurers performed a tactical maneuver, using a skill that temporarily enhanced their senses. With this heightened awareness, they could anticipate the Chatterers' moves and plan their counterattacks more effectively.

It was a skill that I knew—Enhancement Zone.

A skill that enabled others as well as the user to move more sensitively.

As the battle continued, the hunters adapted their strategies based on the monsters' behavior. They used their unique skills to disrupt the Chatterers' attacks and create openings for powerful strikes.

However, that was just how it looked at first sight.

When I looked deeper and observed their fighting, I could easily infer their mistakes. The number of enemies was high, but rather than conserving their energy; they were using all their strength trying to finish this as soon as possible.

That was not a bad tactic if you could finish the battle fast.

Sadly they were not able to.

Moreover, their formation was bad from the start. They basically had four vanguards and one rearguard, but none of them tried to protect the rearguard; thus, the archer at the back was struggling to find effective shots.

"HEY, COVER ME!"

"FUCK ADRIAN! CAN'T YOU SEE THOSE MONSTERS!"

And when the strategy and brain part leaves the equation, the remaining ones would be the advantage of the monsters.

"SOMETHING IS CO-"

SHRIEK!

But just as the tide seemed to be turning in favor of the hunters, the Harmonic Chatterers unleashed a devastating sonic wave that caught them off guard.

"AAAHHH!"

The adventurers cried out in pain as the sound waves struck them, disorienting and staggering them back. The Harmonic Chatterers took advantage of this moment of weakness and lunged at the hunters.

'Hmm.... Their stats are around 1.7 to 2.5. But, in close combat, your stats need to be a lot higher. Especially if you are not used to using your weapons.'

I concluded after seeing the confrontation. My trait lets me see the essence instantly and take a grasp of it, and it was very helpful in this situation.

"I will take care of it; get my back." The Hunter, who looked like the leader of the group, shouted as he started channeling his mana.

CREAK SWOOSH

Following that, a wall of earth rose from the ground. It was a common skill for tankers that was widely used.

As the earth wall rose from the ground, the leader of the adventurers shouted to his teammates, "I will take care of it; get my back!" He stood in front of the wall, prepared to face the Harmonic Chatterers head-on.

The other hunters quickly took his command to heart and formed a defensive formation, protecting the archer as she took a few steps back to find a better vantage point. The remaining three hunters tightened their ranks, preparing to hold their ground against the approaching monsters.

However, as they readied themselves, I noticed that one of the hunters was missing from the group. It seemed that in the chaos of the battle, one of them had already made a hasty retreat.

'Cowardice.' I thought. 'A pretty common act one would display when they are in front of danger.'

The leader of the adventurers unleashed a powerful attack, using his Enhancement Zone skill to enhance his speed and strength. He clashed with the Harmonic Chatterers, striking them with precision and skill.

His teammates did their best to support him, landing hits whenever they could and defending against the monsters' attacks. But the monsters were relentless, their sonic waves becoming more intense and disorienting.

"Stay focused! We can do this if we work together!" the leader shouted, rallying his remaining teammates.

But the odds were against them, and their fatigue was starting to show. The monsters were wearing them down, and it was clear that they were losing their advantage.

Then, in a moment of desperation, the archer called out, "I can't get a clear shot! I need to reposition!"

The leader acknowledged her plea and gave the order to retreat. The hunters fell back, regrouping near the earth wall that the leader had created.

"We need to find cover and catch our breath," the leader said, panting heavily. "Adrian, where the hell did he go?"

"He ran off during the chaos," one of the hunters replied, frustration evident in his voice.

The leader gritted his teeth in frustration, but he knew they couldn't dwell on it now. They needed to focus on surviving and finding a way to defeat the Harmonic Chatterers.

As they caught their breath, I could see the exhaustion and fear in their eyes. They were skilled Hunters, but even the best could be pushed to their limits in the dangerous world of monsters and dungeons.

'It is a pity. Next time make a better judgment.'

I thought. I could help them, but that would simply mean I would lose the only advantage I had.

'Also, I don't care.'

I neither cared about the people here nor the monsters.

I was not a hero that would save the world. I was here standing on this tree for the sake of vengeance; that was it.

The leader clenched his fists, determination filling his eyes. "All right, we can do this. Stick to the plan and watch each other's backs. We'll make it out of this alive."

His teammates nodded, and their resolve reignited. They readied their weapons, preparing for another round of battle.

Though in the end, this was not enough.

Their fatigue accumulated too much, and the number of monsters did not decrease to the amount they could deal with.

"We can't keep this up much longer! There are too many of them!" one of the hunters shouted in frustration.

"Stick to the plan! We need to regroup and find a better strategy," the leader replied, his voice determined.

Their plan had seemed solid at the beginning, but as the battle wore on, it became clear that they were outmatched.

"Damn it! We can't hold them off any longer!" the leader growled, frustration and exhaustion evident in his voice.

One by one, the hunters fell, their bodies succumbing to the injuries and exhaustion. The archer tried her best to pick off the monsters from a distance, but she, too, was eventually overrun.

The leader of the group fought bravely until the very end, but in the face of the overwhelming onslaught, he, too, was brought down.

As the last hunter took his final breath, the Harmonic Chatterers ceased their attack. Their bodies swayed rhythmically as they emitted an eerie melody, seemingly celebrating their victory.

Though their victory was not going to be long, as every bit of them had already taken the position I had envisioned.

"Everything is set."

BANG!

And I started with a shot of gun.....