

My Infinite Mana System

Chapter 41: Stopped - My Infinite Mana System

I paused mid-step, my body instinctively bracing as I turned my head slowly, my gaze locking onto the person who had grabbed me.

A soldier.

His uniform was standard issue, dark combat fatigues, a reinforced vest, and a communication earpiece tucked into his ear.

His posture was firm, disciplined, yet his eyes carried a flicker of uncertainty as he studied me.

The moment he saw my expression, calm but wary, he quickly removed his hand from my shoulder, taking a step back.

"Apologies," he said, his voice measured. "Didn't mean to startle you."

I didn't say anything at first, just held his gaze.

His grip hadn't been aggressive, but there was something in the way he stopped me that made me curious.

Was he trying to warn me?

Stop me?

Or did he simply not believe I was capable of handling what was out there?

The soldier straightened his posture, his face hardening with authority.

"Listen, kid," he started, his voice firm but not unkind. "Only hunters or experienced awakened should be handling this situation. It's dangerous, and we don't know what might come out of that portal. If you're just a civilian, I advise you to return to your seat and wait until the situation is under control."

I didn't react.

No flicker of emotion.

No change in my expression.

I just stared at him, my face blank, unreadable.

The soldier's brows twitched in frustration.

His fingers flexed slightly, like he was restraining himself from grabbing my shoulder again.

"Did you hear what I just said?" he asked, voice sharper now. "This isn't something to play hero with. You'll only get in the way."

I continued to look at him, silent, unmoving.

The more he spoke, the more obvious it became, he had already decided that I wasn't a hunter.

That I was just some reckless fool about to walk into a death trap.

His frustration was almost... amusing.

The soldier let out a slow breath, his frustration evident as he rubbed the back of his neck.

He must have realized that I wasn't going to respond to his warning, so he changed tactics.

"You don't get it, do you?" he said, his voice lower now, more serious. "Portals don't just appear randomly on train tracks. This isn't normal. In fact, something like this has never happened before."

That caught my attention.

Never?

Not even once?

The soldier must have noticed the slight shift in my expression because he pressed on.

"I don't mean rare. I mean impossible. portals appear in places with high mana concentration, known danger zones, or spots that have been marked as unstable. But this?" He gestured vaguely towards the front of the train, where the portal was said to be located. "There was nothing there. No signs. No warnings. It just... appeared."

I remained silent, digesting his words.

"If this was a normal portal, we'd have some level of expectation. We'd know what monsters to anticipate based on the mana fluctuations. But this thing?" His jaw tightened. "We don't even know if it follows the usual ranking system. For all we know, it could be something entirely new."

Now that was a troubling thought.

A dungeon outside the standard classification.

One that couldn't be predicted or measured.

Something like that... could be disastrous.

The soldier's words lingered in the air, heavy with the weight of the unknown.

A portal with no classification?

One that had no warning signs before appearing?

If that was true, then whatever was on the other side wasn't something to take lightly.

I exhaled, then finally spoke.

"Then maybe it's a job that needs to be handled."

The soldier's eyes snapped to mine, narrowing in confusion.

"Of course yes but... what?"

I didn't repeat myself.

Instead, I held his gaze, letting my words settle.

His stance shifted slightly, no longer just that of someone giving a warning but of someone reevaluating the person in front of him.

He wasn't stupid.

He had probably been trained to read people, to recognize when someone wasn't just speaking recklessly.

"You're saying that like you're supposed to be the one handling it," he said carefully, watching my expression.

I didn't answer directly, but I didn't deny it either.

His frown deepened.

Then, as if piecing things together, his eyes flicked over me again, scanning for something, gear, a weapon, anything that marked me as a hunter.

"Wait a second," he muttered, realization dawning. "Are you an awakened or hunter?"

The question was expected, but it still made me pause.

So, what exactly was I supposed to do or say in this kind of situation?

The soldier's question hung in the air, waiting for a response.

I could have explained it.

Could have given him the answer he was looking for in words.

But instead, I reached into my jacket pocket.

Evidence is better than words.

The moment my fingers wrapped around the handle, the soldier tensed.

His posture shifted, weight shifting slightly backward as his instincts kicked in.

His hand twitched toward his waist, likely where his weapon was holstered.

Slowly, I pulled the dagger free.

It wasn't anything extravagant.

Just a simple blade, small enough to be concealed but sharp enough to do its job.

But in that moment, it was enough to make the soldier take a step back, his eyes flicking between the weapon and my face.

"Chill," I said evenly, holding it in a loose grip. "It's just a dagger."

The soldier didn't look convinced.

His fingers were still twitching slightly, but he didn't draw his own weapon.

Instead, his narrowed gaze locked onto mine, as if reevaluating everything he had assumed about me up until this moment.

"You didn't answer my question," he said. His voice was careful now, not quite as dismissive as before. "Are you an awakened or hunter?"

I turned the dagger slightly, letting the train light catch along its rusted surface.

Then, finally, I met his gaze again and gave him a simple answer.

"I am a hunter."

Chapter 42: Prove You Are A Hunter - My Infinite Mana System

The soldier's gaze flicked between me and the dagger in my hand, his expression darkening with skepticism.

His posture hadn't fully relaxed, and I could tell his grip was still hovering near his own weapon.

"That thing looks like it's seen better days," he remarked, eyes narrowing at the worn blade. "If you really are a hunter, then where's your gear? Your weapon? Your identification?"

"This is my weapon" I said, simply turning the dagger in my hand.

The edge was chipped in places, the handle slightly worn from use.

It wasn't exactly a relic of power, but it was enough for me.

The soldier, however, didn't seem convinced.

"Or," he continued, his voice carrying an edge of suspicion, "Maybe you're not a hunter at all. Maybe you're just some lunatic who is using that dagger to kill people. A criminal taking advantage of the situation."

A ripple of murmurs spread through the nearby passengers.

I could feel the weight of their stares pressing against my back, their uncertainty turning into quiet judgment.

I met the soldier's gaze without flinching.

"That's a hell of an accusation to throw at someone who just stood up to help."

He didn't back down.

"I've seen people like you before. People who think they can slip through the cracks, pretend to be something they're not."

I let out a slow breath, keeping my grip on the dagger relaxed.

"If I was a killer," I said, my voice steady, "You wouldn't still be talking."

That made him pause.

The tension between us thickened, stretching the silence.

I sighed, slipping the dagger back into my jacket pocket.

Clearly, flashing a worn-out blade wasn't enough to convince this guy.

His hand still hovered near his own weapon, and the tension in his stance made it clear he wasn't backing down anytime soon.

Fine.

If steel wasn't enough, maybe something else would be.

Reaching into my other pocket, I pulled out a small glass vial filled with a shimmering blue liquid.

The moment the potion caught the dim train lights, a few gasps rippled through the nearest passengers.

The soldier's eyes flicked to it, his frown deepening.

"A potion," I said, holding it up between two fingers. "Not exactly something an average civilian would carry around, wouldn't you say?"

He didn't look impressed.

If anything, his suspicion only deepened.

"Anyone can buy a potion," he said flatly. "Just because you have one doesn't prove anything. Hell, for all I know, you could've picked it up off some black-market dealer in an alley."

I scoffed, shaking the vial slightly, watching the liquid swirl inside.

"Right. Because black-market dealers are just handing out good potions to random nobodies."

"Depends on what kind of nobody you are," he shot back.

I clenched my jaw, exhaling through my nose.

This was getting annoying.

No matter what I did, this guy refused to acknowledge the obvious.

What, did I need to start casting lighting just to prove a point?

This whole truck and everyone in it would get erased and it will be my fault for mistakenly killing them.

And he might not still be convinced if I show my power, he might just counter it by simply saying, 'that doesn't still prove anything', but I can simply reply by saying, 'didn't they mention that they need an awakened or hunter', but he would just simply counter by saying, 'they asked for experienced one, and I don't look experienced'.

This is frustrating.

"You're really reaching now," I muttered. "I stood up when no one else did. I have a weapon. I have a potion. And yet, somehow, in your mind, that just makes me more suspicious?"

The soldier didn't flinch.

"You're missing the key point," he said, voice sharp. "None of this proves you're a hunter. It just proves you came prepared."

I stared at him for a long moment, then shook my head.

"Unbelievable."

He crossed his arms.

"You want to be believable? Show me something real."

I let out a long sigh, rubbing the bridge of my nose as the weight of the situation settled in.

This entire back-and-forth had been completely unnecessary, hadn't it?

Here I was, pulling out daggers and potions like some suspicious lunatic, when I could've just taken the easiest route from the start.

My Hunter's ID card.

The realization hit me like a slap to the face.

Of course, I had a way to prove my status.

Every hunter was issued an official ID by the government after passing their evaluation.

It was standard protocol, something that couldn't be forged or bought on the black market.

It had my rank, my abilities, everything.

And I'd completely forgotten about it.

I exhaled sharply, shaking my head.

Even he is an idiot for not asking for it.

"You've got to be kidding me," I muttered under my breath.

The soldier arched an eyebrow, clearly waiting for me to say something.

His arms were still crossed, his stance rigid, like he was ready to detain me at any second.

He probably thought I was running out of excuses, that I'd finally hit a wall in whatever shady act he assumed I was pulling.

I met his gaze and, without another word, reached into my inner jacket pocket.

This time, instead of another weapon or mysterious item, I pulled out a sleek black card.

The second I held it up, the tension in the air shifted.

The soldier's eyes locked onto the ID immediately, his entire demeanor changing in an instant.

His previous skepticism wavered, replaced by something more cautious.

He took it from my hands, probably to get a closer look, I could see him scanning it, searching for any signs of forgery.

"You're serious," he muttered, reaching for the card hesitantly.

He turned it over in his hands, inspecting every detail, the embossed lettering, the official insignia, the unique serial number tied to my registered status.

"That good enough proof for you?" I asked, voice dry.

The soldier exhaled, handing it back.

"Would've been a lot easier if you just showed this from the start." The soldier muttered barely hearable, while inspecting my card.

After the soldier finish inspecting my Hunter's ID, he handed it back to me,

I took the card from him, and slipped the card back into my pocket.

His posture straightened, and his expression shifted from skepticism to something resembling respect, though there was still a trace of embarrassment lingering beneath it.

"My apologies, Mr. Quovar," he said, his voice suddenly much more formal. "I didn't realize you were an official hunter. But If you had just shown this earlier, we could have avoided wasting time."

"If you had just asked about it from the start, would've also been a lot easier" I replied.

The soldier chuckled, and said.

"Yeah, I guess we both are at fault"

I resisted the urge to sigh again.

No kidding.

Instead of responding, I simply gave a small nod and turned toward the train exit.

Enough time had been lost already.

The situation outside wasn't going to pause just because I got caught up in some unnecessary interrogation.

The portal was still out there, its nature unknown, and whatever threat lurked beyond it wasn't going to wait patiently for me to arrive.

I took a step forward.

Then another.

I was just a few strides away from stepping off the train when...

"Wait."

I stopped mid-step, shoulders tensing as I clenched my jaw.

You have got to be kidding me.

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Chapter 43: Concern - My Infinite Mana System

Slowly, I turned back to face the soldier, who had raised a hand, stopping me once again.

There was something in his eyes now...

Concern?

Hesitation?

Maybe even doubt.

"What now?" I asked, my patience running dangerously thin.

The soldier's expression remained tense as he lowered his raised hand, eyes studying me as if he were still processing something.

A second later, he spoke again.

"Do you even know where the portal is?"

I exhaled slowly, resisting the urge to roll my eyes.

Was that really his concern right now?

"Yeah," I said, keeping my tone level. "I heard the train announcement. It's ahead, past the railway stop, near the tracks. Doesn't sound too hard to find."

The soldier still didn't look convinced.

He shifted his weight slightly, glancing toward the exit as if debating whether or not to physically stop me again.

"And what if another soldier questions you out there?" he pressed. "You think flashing your ID is going to be enough?"

I shrugged.

"Should be. I'll just show it again if anyone asks. Problem solved."

The soldier let out a sharp breath, clearly frustrated.

"Look, I get that you're a hunter, but this isn't a simple situation. This isn't just some ordinary checkpoint where flashing an ID gets you through. We don't even know what kind of portal this is. For all we know, it could be high-ranked, and no one's prepared for that yet. Showing a card isn't going to magically make everything fine."

I met his gaze, holding it for a long moment.

He wasn't wrong.

Portals that appeared out of nowhere, especially on a railway, were rare.

The uncertainty of its rank made it even riskier.

But the alternative?

Sitting back and waiting while who knows what came spilling out or is inside delaying me from being able to meet him until it resolved and the damn train can be allowed to move?

I wasn't interested in waiting, I needed to try my ability.

"I'll handle it," I said simply.

The soldier's jaw tightened like he wanted to argue further, but I was already turning away.

I had wasted enough time, and nothing he said would change what I was about to do.

I stopped just before stepping off the train, turning my head slightly toward the soldier who still seemed reluctant to let me go.

His brows were furrowed, his lips pressed into a thin line, and the tension in his posture hadn't eased in the slightest.

I sighed.

"Look," I said, my voice even, "if they deny me entry, then fine, I'll leave. I won't argue, I won't push my way in. I'll just walk away and let you guys handle it."

The soldier blinked, surprised by my sudden shift in tone.

I tilted my head slightly.

"And of course, that means if anything unexpectedly comes out of that portal... that's on you guys." I let the words sink in, watching as his fingers twitched slightly at his side. "And if it's something you can't handle, if people start dying because you guys didn't accept me rather you look down on me, well, that's not my problem, is it?"

A flicker of uncertainty crossed his face.

I shrugged.

"Seems fair to me. You want me gone? I'll go. You want me to step in? Then stop wasting my time."

I could see the conflict in his expression, the way his instincts told him to keep pushing back, to keep following protocol, but at the same time... there was doubt.

The kind that settled in when the weight of responsibility started pressing down.

The soldier exhaled through his nose.

"Tch." He took a step back, rubbing his forehead as if trying to will away a headache.

I had no intention of sticking around for another debate.

But as I stepped off the train, I heard him again, louder this time.

"Wait!"

I didn't.

"You don't even have any assurance if they'll let you through!" he called after me, his voice laced with frustration.

I kept walking.

Behind me, the murmurs of the other passengers grew fainter as I moved further from the train.

The soldier, however, wasn't done yet.

I could hear his hurried steps as he followed.

"You're seriously just going to ignore me?" he demanded, his boots crunching against the gravel beside the tracks. "What if they turn you away? What if they don't accept you because of your... you know, rank"

I sighed through my nose but didn't slow down.

"Then, just like I said, they would have to handle the problem themselves."

I could feel his glare burning into the back of my head.

"Damn it, that's not the point! You can't just—"

But I could.

And I did.

I didn't need his permission.

I didn't need his approval.

I had already made my choice.

Whether they let me through or not wasn't my concern.

For now my concern was reaching that portal and trying out my new ability and going to rest.

And if this guy wanted to keep arguing?

That was his problem, not mine.

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Chapter 44: Arriving - My Infinite Mana System

The crunch of gravel beneath our boots was the only sound between us.

The soldier was still following me, but he'd given up on talking.

Maybe he'd realized I wasn't going to entertain another argument.

Maybe he just didn't have anything left to say.

Either way, both were good.

The silence stretched between us, thick and unyielding.

I didn't care.

If he wanted to keep trailing behind me like a shadow, that was his problem.

I wasn't going to be the one to break the tension.

The night air was cool, but the weight of his presence made it feel heavier than it should've.

Every now and then, I could feel his gaze flick toward me, probably expecting me to say something, to explain myself, to justify why I was walking toward a dangerous portal like it was just another step on my path.

But I didn't.

I didn't owe him an explanation.

So we kept walking, side by side yet miles apart.

The eerie glow of the portal was visible before we even arrived.

A faint shimmer in the air, warping the space around it like a mirage, casting an unnatural light onto the ground beneath it.

Even without stepping closer, I could feel it, the quiet hum of energy, the subtle distortion in the air that sent a shiver crawling down my spine.

We weren't alone.

Two soldiers stood ahead, stationed near the portal, their posture rigid, their hands hovering near their weapons.

Their eyes locked onto us the moment we came into view, wary and alert.

The one who had followed me here, who had spent the past several minutes alternating between skepticism and frustration, picked up his pace, moving ahead to greet them.

I didn't.

Instead, I slowed my steps, taking in the scene with measured caution.

The ground near the portal was disturbed, marked by heavy boot prints and tire tracks from military vehicles that had likely been stationed here earlier.

The air carried the faint scent of ozone, mixed with the earthy dampness of the terrain.

It was clear that whoever had been here before had taken the situation seriously.

The two stationed soldiers shifted slightly as my escort reached them, their gazes flickering between me and him, waiting for an explanation.

I could already tell they were questioning why a random civilian, one without a visible weapon or the telltale gear of an experienced awakened, was approaching a high-risk anomaly.

I could hear them talking now, though their voices were low.

Standing a short distance away, I kept my posture relaxed, but my senses were sharp.

It wasn't hard to hear them, not when their conversation carried over the otherwise quiet air.

"Who's that?" one of the stationed soldiers asked, his voice edged with suspicion as his gaze flickered toward me.

His grip on his rifle didn't tighten, but the readiness in his stance told me he was prepared for trouble if it came.

"The only awakened who responded," my escort answered, sounding just as unimpressed as before.

There was a brief silence.

Then a scoff.

"You're joking."

"Wish I was." The soldier who had followed me here exhaled, rubbing his temple as if the situation itself was giving him a headache. "Train stopped because of the portal, announcement went out asking for any hunter or experienced awakened on board. No one else moved."

A pause.

"Except him."

I could feel their eyes on me, weighing, judging.

It was a reasonable reaction.

I didn't exactly look the part.

No expensive armor, no weapons visibly strapped to me, not even a proper tactical vest.

Just an ordinary jacket, dark clothes, and a dagger I had barely bothered to reveal earlier.

If I were in their position, I wouldn't be convinced either.

The weight of their stares didn't bother me.

I had felt worse, endured worse.

But the silence stretching between us carried a familiar skepticism, the kind that came when people measured you against their expectations and found you lacking.

"Are we sure he's actually a hunter?" one of the stationed soldiers asked again, this time more openly doubtful.

His eyes scanned me from head to toe, as if he was trying to spot something, anything, that would confirm or deny my capabilities.

"His ID checks out," my escort replied, though he didn't sound particularly thrilled about it.

That caught the soldier's attention.

"So he really is one?"

The escort sighed, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Yeah, but—"

There was always a "but."

"But?" the soldier prompted, arms crossing.

"But he's only D-rank."

The words hung in the air, heavier than they should've been.

And there it was, that familiar shift in expression.

The barely restrained disappointment.

The glance exchanged between the two stationed soldiers, as if that single piece of information had lowered their already minimal expectations even further.

"A D-rank?" one of them muttered, almost under his breath. "You're kidding."

I could hear the unspoken words behind that reaction.

A D-rank wouldn't be enough.

A D-rank wasn't worth relying on.

A D-rank wasn't the kind of awakened they had hoped would answer the call.

I stayed silent, letting them come to their own conclusions.

It wasn't my job to convince them.

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Chapter 45: Delay - My Infinite Mana System

The doubt in their voices was as clear as the cold night air.

"We should wait for a higher-ranked hunter to arrive," one of the soldiers suggested, his tone edged with unease.

He wasn't even trying to be subtle about it.

"No offense, but a D-rank? Against an unknown portal? That's just asking for trouble."

The other soldier nodded in agreement.

"Yeah. No telling what's gonna come out of that thing. If it's something high-level, throwing a D-rank at it is like throwing a rock at a tank."

My escort, the one who had brought me here, shifted uncomfortably but didn't argue.

He had been skeptical from the beginning, and even now, after confirming my identity, he wasn't defending my ability.

He just stood there, probably wondering if he had made a mistake bringing me along.

But for me, I made a mistake allowing him to follow me.

I could walk away.

Let them stand here, waiting for some imaginary higher-ranked savior.

Let them assume I wasn't capable.

But there was something frustrating about their dismissiveness, about the way they spoke as if I wasn't even standing right in front of them.

As if my presence was just some inconvenience to be corrected.

I exhaled slowly, keeping my expression unreadable.

"So, your plan is to wait?" I asked, my voice even. "Just stand here, hoping someone stronger shows up before the portal spits something nasty onto the tracks?"

The first soldier frowned.

"It's the safest option. If we let you go in and something way above your level appears, you'd just die, and then we'd have to deal with whatever comes through anyway."

"Then you deal with it," I said simply.

That made him hesitate.

I could see the flicker of doubt in his eyes, not about me, but about the situation.

He knew the longer they waited, the more unpredictable this portal could become.

There were no guarantees that a stronger awakened would get here in time.

The second soldier crossed his arms, still unconvinced.

"Even if we let you through, what exactly are you going to do? You don't have the gear, the weapons, or even a team. You're alone, and no offense, you don't exactly look like much."

I met his gaze without flinching.

"Looks can be deceiving."

His lips pressed into a thin line, but he didn't have a counterargument.

Because at the end of the day, they didn't have anyone else.

And whether they liked it or not, I was the only option they had but they didn't notice it, or just simply refuse to.

The soldiers exchanged glances, silent but clearly communicating something between themselves.

Their reluctance was palpable, thick in the air like a fog that refused to lift.

Finally, the one who had been the most skeptical sighed, shifting his stance.

"Look," he said, rubbing the back of his neck, "before we let you anywhere near that portal, we need to inform our base and register your intent to enter."

His words were carefully measured, as if he was trying to make it sound like a standard protocol rather than a deliberate delay.

I stared at him, unimpressed.

"Register my intent?"

"Yeah," the second soldier chimed in, nodding. "It's procedure. We can't just let someone, especially a D-rank, walk into an unknown portal without reporting it first."

His tone was neutral, but there was something in his eyes, a hesitation that told me he wasn't entirely convinced this was necessary.

I resisted the urge to sigh.

"So, let me guess. This involves calling in, waiting for a superior to approve it, filling out some paperwork, and by the time we're done, whatever's inside that portal might have already stepped out?"

The first soldier hesitated. "It's not—"

"Not that complicated?" I cut in, arching a brow. "Or not that urgent?"

He exhaled sharply, clearly irritated but unable to argue.

He knew I was right.

The longer they stalled, the worse the situation could get.

Yet, they were still clinging to bureaucracy, to protocol, to anything that would justify their hesitation in letting someone like me handle this.

"Look," the second soldier said, trying to sound reasonable. "It's just a precaution. If something happens to you inside, we need a record that you went in willingly. If command approves, we'll clear you to proceed."

I crossed my arms, tapping a finger against my sleeve.

"Fine. How long?"

The two soldiers exchanged another glance, this one more uncertain.

"Uh... should be quick," the first soldier muttered, but even he didn't sound convinced.

I shook my head.

"Yeah, that's what I thought."

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Chapter 46: Wait - My Infinite Mana System

The air was heavy with tension, a quiet standoff between myself and the soldiers who clearly didn't want me near the portal.

I watched as the one who had accompanied me stepped away from his colleagues, his expression strained, like he had been assigned the unfortunate task of delivering bad news.

He stopped a few feet from me, straightening his posture before speaking.

"Listen, Mr. Quovar," he began, his voice carefully controlled. "We're going to need a little time to report this situation and get authorization. It's just standard protocol, nothing personal."

I stared at him blankly, letting his words settle in the space between us.

He was lying.

All of them are.

It wasn't even a particularly good lie.

The way he avoided direct eye contact, the slight shift in his stance, he knew I wasn't buying it.

Still, I let the silence stretch, forcing him to continue.

"It won't take long," he added quickly, mistaking my quiet indifference for patience. "Once command gives the go-ahead, we'll clear you to approach the portal."

I didn't respond immediately.

Instead, I shifted my gaze to the other two soldiers, who were doing a poor job of pretending they weren't watching us.

Their body language said everything, they were stalling, hoping that if they dragged this out long enough, someone more qualified would show up to deal with the situation.

I sighed internally.

Typical.

"Alright," I finally said, my tone flat.

His shoulders relaxed slightly, as if he had expected more resistance.

"Good. We just need you to wait here for now."

I nodded once, but I didn't move.

I wasn't about to argue with them, not because I believed their excuse, but because it wasn't worth the effort.

They didn't want me handling this, that much was obvious.

And I had no doubt that if I pressed too hard, they'd just find another reason to delay.

So, I waited.

But not because I trusted them.

No, I waited because I wanted to see how far they'd take this lie.

We didn't say anything again.

The soldier stood there, waiting, expecting some kind of reaction, maybe frustration, maybe impatience, maybe even gratitude that they were "handling" the situation.

But I gave him nothing.

Just the same blank stare, my expression unreadable, my posture relaxed as if none of this concerned me in the slightest.

Because it didn't.

I had done my part.

I had shown up.

I had proven my identity.

I had made my intentions clear.

If they wanted to waste time playing bureaucratic games instead of dealing with the portal, that was on them.

Not me.

If things went south, if that swirling abyss of energy spat out something nasty, something they weren't equipped to handle, then that was their failure, not mine.

The soldier shifted uncomfortably under my gaze.

"We'll let you know once we get a response," he said, his voice slightly stiffer than before.

He was aware now that I wasn't buying their excuse, and it unsettled him.

Still, I said nothing.

After a brief pause, he exhaled through his nose and turned away, walking back toward the other two soldiers.

They exchanged a few words in hushed voices, likely discussing me, maybe questioning whether I was going to be a problem.

I wasn't.

I wasn't going to argue with them.

I wasn't going to plead for permission to do the job.

I wasn't going to explain myself further.

If they let me in, fine.

If they didn't, also fine.

Their choice.

Their consequences.

Chapter 47: Time - My Infinite Mana System

Time dragged.

I wasn't counting the seconds, but I could feel each one.

Long, stretched-out moments that passed with the steady rhythm of my breathing, the occasional shift of my weight from one foot to the other, and the distant hum of energy vibrating through the air like a warning.

The portal hadn't calmed.

If anything, it had gotten worse.

The pressure in the air had turned dense, like walking through molasses, and the crackling sound of raw power pulsing from the tear in space was more than just noise, it was *felt*.

Deep in my bones, humming beneath my skin.

The world near the portal felt thinner, more fragile, like it could be ripped apart at any moment.

Still... no one came.

No high-ranking hunter.

No backup.

Just the same three soldiers, stationed like brittle statues, pretending like they had control over the situation when it was obvious to anyone paying attention that they didn't.

I could tell they were losing patience.

Or maybe it was hope.

I didn't blame them.

The soldier who'd walked with me kept shifting his stance, arms crossed tight over his chest, lips pressed into a line.

The other two weren't much better, tension in their shoulders, low voices exchanged like they thought I couldn't hear them.

They looked at me when they thought I wasn't watching.

Whispered.

Glanced toward the portal, then back at me, over and over.

Probably trying to decide what to do.

I didn't care.

They'd made their choice when they stalled.

I wasn't going to stand here all day pretending to care about their silent deliberation or their nervous glances.

My job was simple, I answered the call.

I came.

I waited.

If they didn't want help, that was on them.

Another surge rolled off the portal like a wave of static heat, and this time, even the soldiers flinched.

One of them let out a low curse, barely audible over the rising hum of the portal's energy.

The very air around it seemed to shimmer now, warping slightly, like it was cutting into the fabric of existence itself.

I sighed quietly and reached into my coat, fingers brushing against the smooth surface of my ID.

Not because I was going to show it again, but because I was done.

This wasn't worth standing in the open for any longer.

If they wanted to wait until something crawled out of that rift and tore them apart before admitting they were in over their heads, then they could do that without me.

I'd find somewhere to crash, somewhere away from this mess.

Somewhere I didn't have to stand like a fool under a sky that felt like it was about to split open.

As I turned slightly, already preparing to walk away, I caught them whispering again.

No doubt trying to decide if they should stop me, beg me to stay, or continue pretending they had this under control.

They hadn't made a move yet, and that told me everything.

They were scared.

Hesitating.

Hoping someone stronger would magically show up and make the problem disappear.

I didn't blame them for being afraid.

But I wasn't going to wait here until their indecision got someone killed.

I didn't say a word as I stood.

No goodbyes.

No final looks.

Just a simple motion, quiet, deliberate, as I dusted off my jacket and turned my back on the portal and the soldiers who didn't know what they wanted.

Their hushed whispers continued behind me, fading with each step I took.

I didn't care what conclusion they eventually came to.

I'd waited long enough.

If disaster struck, it wouldn't be on me.

The energy of the portal still pulsed in the air, brushing against my back like a storm just waiting to explode.

But I didn't look back.

I walked.

The path was uneven, dry dirt littered with loose gravel, and the setting sun cast long shadows that danced with each breeze.

Trees lined the road like silent sentinels, their leaves swaying gently, untouched by the growing tension near the portal.

The further I got, the quieter everything became.

It was peaceful.

And I hated how much I appreciated that.

But unfortunately, the peace didn't last long.

"Oh damnit..."

Chapter 48: Walking Away - My Infinite Mana System

My stomach grumbled softly, breaking the silence and pulling me back to more mundane thoughts.

I hadn't eaten since I boarded that train.

I hadn't exactly been expecting to get thrown into a delay like this either.

Now that I was no longer waiting, my body had finally remembered its needs.

"What do I even *want* to eat..." I murmured to myself, voice barely louder than a breath.

Something hot.

That was the first thought.

Maybe a bowl of stew?

With tasty meat.

Not the synthetic stuff you could barely chew through.

Or grilled fish, if the town I stumbled into had a decent inn.

Somewhere with an old cook who didn't skimp on the seasoning.

That'd be nice.

Bread, too.

Fresh.

Warm.

The kind that was still soft on the inside with a crisp, golden crust.

And tea, warm smooth tea...

I found myself smiling at the thought, just a little.

It was strange, how quickly the mind could shift from life-threatening anomalies to cravings for delicious meals.

But that was the way things were now.

After the world broke and pieced itself back together with awakened powers, hunters and mysterious portals, everyone clung to the little things.

Something familiar.

Something comforting.

I shoved my hands into my pockets and kept walking, letting the wind carry the tension out of my shoulders.

I hadn't walked away out of pride or frustration.

I'd done it because I'd learned something valuable after surviving this long, since when I was a child till now, sometimes, the ones in charge don't actually know what they're doing.

Yes.

Their number one mistake is looking down on some lower ranks.

That's the problem of this world, they don't still realize that sometimes it isn't about rank.

It's about your ability, and what you are capable of.

It may sound a bit confusing to say, most people may not understand by just simply saying that...

Firstly, before you become a hunter, you have to be awakened first, but some people who awaken don't become a hunter, people like that probably don't want to risk their lives just for money, power or fame, those ones only register in the awakened association, which is always beside every hunter's association.

The awakened association isn't like hunters association, because all they do there is to register themselves, so the government and the association can monitor their activities, and ensure their not a danger to society, that's why it is compulsory for all awakened to register.

While the ones who awaken and decides to become a hunter, goes to the hunter's association just like I did and become a hunter, but unlike I did to become a ranked hunter you have to pass two test.

I only did one which was experience test, that experience test only test your fighting experience, ability control, and others that are related to that.

While the other is mana test, for mana test they have a machine which you would have to place your hands on and then it scales your mana capacity.

The two test then would determine your rank, but I only did one which was experience so my rank was only calculated based on experience.

Mana test isn't something you can skip, but the reason I wasn't tested was because the machine for testing mysteriously stopped working and it was the exact moment I awakened, I don't know why it happened like that, but neither do i care to know why, I was happy and took that opportunity the next day to register.

I could've been in a higher rank like C or probably B rank, mainly because I have Infinite mana which is literally rare, and also I didn't show my full potential, I was trained sometimes by my parents who were SSS-rank hunters before they died.

They didn't train me hard or teach me everything, actually they trained me in a easy way and didn't teach me that much mostly about mana control, fighting techniques and survival, there literally helped me throughout my life till now, but still it wasn't even at a normal stage just basic, probably because I was still young they didn't teach me everything, and now that I am already a hunter I wished they actually trained me hard.

Still I had to train more by myself, because basic things can't help me forever, the more I grow the more stronger things comes my way.

That's I really don't want to much people to know to much about my capabilities, most especially due to the association not being a safe place for people with potential.

I don't really know much about it but all I know is that, most high rankers don't like people with potential, it's a threat to them.

Because it's is not everyone who is in a high rank that awakened straight in their rank, they had to become more powerful to rank higher.

If I was tested to be a C-rank, I would've become the 20th global hunter to awaken straight as a C-rank.

Or if I was tested to be a B-rank I would have become the 5th global hunter who awakened as a straight B-rank.

Awesome right? But by now I would've been mysteriously found dead or missing.

Some of the hunters who awakened as a straight C-rank and B-rank, went missing mysteriously without being found till now, or informed of what happened, and the case are totally closed.

While some are still healthy and well and still enjoying fame and strength, not missing or anything of such, because they born from a rich, powerful, and influencial family, who might be high hunters or high people who have extreme connections.

That's the difference between a prey and a predator.

The high rank hunters who are shutting the non influential are predators, and the new high rank hunters are preys, no matter their strength, they're also people stronger than them, and unfortunately they're the ones after them.

I also heard that there are few probably 3 of them or more, who are non influential but are still alive, that's why I mentioned earlier it is not all low ranks that are to be looked down on, they probably have a ability that helps them to be able to escape, but I pity them actually, it must be very hard for them escaping people that literally rule this world.

While for the new high rank who has standard backing from their families are predators on their own, if predators and predators fight none would win, but it just depends on who is a greater predator, that's why even some influential new high ranks also still went missing, because the hunters who are after them are far greater than them.

That's the reason I prefer to be a low ranker for now until I've become powerful, and influential enough so I would be capable of protecting myself when I am tested again and said to be a high ranker, the test would begin again next year, since it is every year, so I need to get stronger by then.

I prefer to be a low rank, but not the lowest rank, it is the worst of all low ranks.

E-rank.

I'm glad I am not an E rank, because it would have been far more difficult than it is for me now.

Although they also look down on D ranks, but it is mostly if you stay as a D-rank, I mean like forever, but it's not that extreme like E ranks.

They are considered as mistake of a hunter, they are literally said to be powerless and has no meaning in the hunter's society.

That's why in this world only the strongest and the most influential can survive.

I looked back at the portal and the soliders a bit far behind me.

I know that this portal isn't something i should underestimate.

But if they didn't want help from a D-rank like me, that was fine.

Let them wait for someone higher-ranked.

Let them gamble with time.

I'd find shelter, something warm to eat, and maybe even a soft bed if the world was feeling kind.

And if I woke up to the sound of screams?

Well... I'd deal with it then.

But then I heard their voices...

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Chapter 49: Plea - My Infinite Mana System

"Hey! You! Wait!"

Their voices echoed from behind me, loud, rushed, and desperate.

I didn't break my stride.

Let them call.

Let them panic.

They'd made their decision when they let me stand there like a statue, measuring my worth against some invisible standard they themselves didn't even believe in.

They had their chance, and they wasted it.

"Mr Quovar! Please!"

That one voice, closer now.

The soldier who'd escorted me here.

His boots slapped against the earth as he jogged after me, matching my pace as best he could.

"Just wait a moment!" he said, breath hitching. "They, they said you can go in. They'll let you enter the portal."

I kept walking.

Not because I wanted to punish him.

Not because I wanted to act high and mighty.

I just... didn't feel like stopping.

Not when everything about this had already drained more time than it deserved.

"They'll allow you inside," he repeated, voice just a bit more desperate now.

A short laugh slipped from my throat, not amused, just dry.

I tilted my head slightly toward him without turning.

"Did I need your permission in the first place?"

That shut him up for a second.

His boots slowed, and for a heartbeat, there was silence between us, save for the wind that rustled through the trees and the faint hum of the distant portal still pulsing behind us like a heartbeat gone wrong.

Then he stopped.

I took two more steps before I halted myself.

"I... I understand," he said softly, head dipping slightly. "You don't need our approval. We're not trying to act like we have power over you. But please, please help."

There it was.

The honesty.

The humility.

The thing they should've shown the moment I got off that train.

I turned slowly, my eyes meeting his.

The moment our gazes locked, he flinched, not in fear, but like a man suddenly realizing how much weight the world might be asking someone else to carry.

He looked younger up close.

His face was tired, but not from lack of sleep.

More like the kind of tired that came from responsibility without authority.

The kind of man who followed orders but still had enough conscience to question them when it mattered.

I stood there, still, silent, watching the soldier with that same blank expression I always wore when my thoughts ran faster than my face could keep up.

I studied him, letting the silence stretch between us.

His shoulders tensed, probably thinking I was about to tear into him with words.

He had bowed his head slightly, probably thinking that humble posture would convince me.

And to be fair, it almost did.

But I wasn't some naive newbie who jumped into danger just because someone said "please."

Not anymore.

I could've said no.

In fact, the thought tempted me.

Just shake my head, tell him to get lost, walk away and find a warm meal and a bed before nightfall settled in.

That would've been the smart thing to do.

The safe thing.

But safe doesn't make you stronger.

And strength...

That's all that mattered now.

My eyes narrowed slightly, not at him, but at the thought circling in my mind, quiet but relentless.

This portal... it was one of my chances to test my abilities.

The thought of going in solo, without a team of strangers to hold me back or watch my every move, was almost too perfect.

No babysitters.

No rules.

Just me, my ability, and whatever waited on the other side.

And this time... I'd get to use it.

Not just toy with it or train in secret.

I could actually fight with it.

Push it.

Test the limits.

See what it could really do now that I had a grasp on the shape of it.

The opportunity was so clean, so undeniably ideal, that I almost felt suspicious of it.

Most people wouldn't hesitate.

Most would jump at the chance.

And that's what bothered me.

Because there *was* one drawback.

One possible, fatal variable I couldn't ignore.

What if whatever's inside that portal isn't just some unstable threat?

What if it's something I *can't* handle?

I'd seen hunters who thought their abilities made them gods.

Seen them walk into dungeons like they owned the place... and come out as broken bodies or not at all.

Arrogance gets people killed.

Overconfidence just makes it easier.

But this didn't feel like arrogance.

This felt like calculation.

I knew my limits.

I knew I was still learning.

But I also knew what I had was powerful, different.

I wasn't like the others who needed a team to survive.

My ability wasn't made for group tactics or coordinated strategy.

It was made for someone who worked alone.

This was the first time the system, or whatever twisted force gave me this second chance, lined everything up in my favor.

A solo portal.

No higher-rank hunters around to take control.

No one watching over my shoulder.

No one to slow me down.

I looked the soldier in the eye one last time.

He looked nervous.

Hopeful.

Scared.

He probably thought I was about to walk away again.

Instead, I let out a breath I didn't know I'd been holding and said.

"You sure?"

His head lifted slightly, surprised as he blinked.

"About what?"

"That you actually *want* me to go in. Not just because it's convenient now that no one better has shown up."

"I'm sure," he said, nodding. "No one else has come. And the energy from that thing, it's getting worse. We don't know how long we have before something bad happens, and we've got nothing but rifles and luck if it does."

I could tell he wasn't lying.

His voice wasn't sharp with pride anymore.

Just worry.

Maybe I should've walked away.

Maybe I should've let them stew in their own indecision.

But...

I sighed.

"Then stop acting like this is a favor."

He gave a nervous smile and nodded once more.

"Understood."

And just like that, the decision was made.

I turned, facing the direction of the portal, my expression hardening as the wind carried that pulsing energy toward me like a warning.

I walked again, this time heading back the way I came.

Back toward the portal.

Back toward whatever waited inside.

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Chapter 50: Entering - My Infinite Mana System

I walked alongside the soldier, the soft crunch of gravel beneath our shoes the only sound that broke the tense silence.

Every step we took, the massive, swirling portal loomed closer, its surface shimmered like molten silver, pulsating with an otherworldly light that seemed to breathe.

As we walked, I couldn't help but notice that I had walked a long distance away from the portal earlier.

Sigh

It's probably when I was thinking about food, well I can't blame myself my stomach caused it, it reminded me.

Beside me, the soldier kept his pace steady.

His stiff posture and alert gaze spoke of discipline and caution, a quality expected of someone in his position.

As we continued, I allowed my gaze to wander, and my eyes settled on the patch sewn onto his uniform, right over his chest.

The patch contains his name, which was written on it as 'Noah', and also his rank, which was 'First-Class Private'.

First-class private are stated to be higher than normal privates, which are the lowest rank in the military.

First-class private Noah.

The name rolled around in my mind as I observed him out of the corner of my eye.

He was young, but he has a hardened edge of someone who had likely seen more chaos than he ever wanted to.

I wondered how many times he had been in a situation like this, escorting a hunter towards something as unpredictable as this portal.

Ahead of us, two other soldiers stood at a cautious distance.

They shifted slightly as they saw us approach, their eyes flicking between me and Noah.

There was a tension in the air, a mixture of unease and probably shame, don't really know.

I didn't pay them much mind, my focus drawn to the portal itself, I didn't really pay deep attention to it earlier.

Stopping just a few feet away, I let my gaze roam over its ever-shifting surface.

Tendrils of mist-like energy curled and twisted, reaching out and then retracting as though alive.

Hues of silver, violet, and a dark, inky black swirled together in an ethereal dance, and the faint hum, almost like a heartbeat, resonated in the air.

I had seen portals before, but something about this one felt... wrong, just as weird as it is appearing in front of a train way.

Yet, I didn't bother much, since I have already agreed to enter, no going back.

Behind me, I caught a murmur of conversation.

"Won't he need a team before he enters?" one of the other soldiers whispered, his voice just loud enough for me to catch.

There was a hint of worry in his tone.

"He won't agree," Noah replied, his voice a calm but resigned murmur. "And besides, there aren't any hunters around. Or rather, none who are willing to go in. Isn't that why we agreed to let him through in the first place?"

He paused, his voice lowering just a bit.

"Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if there's a hunter on that train, but they're probably just too scared to come out. Judging by how strange this portal is... I can't blame them."

There was a moment of uneasy silence that followed his words.

I could almost feel the weight of their stares on my back.

To them, I was just a hunter who stood alone against something even some high rank hunters would hesitate to face.

I reached out, letting my fingers brush the very edge of the portal.

A faint, tingling sensation washed over my fingertips, a reminder of just how thin the veil was between this world and the unknown beyond.

Taking a deep breath, I stood firm, feeling the pulse of the portal beneath my touch.

"If you're waiting for me to hesitate," I called out without turning around, a faint smile playing at my lips, "you'll be waiting a long time."

Silence.

Then the faint shuffle of boots behind me.

No one dared speak further.

I had made my choice, and I had no regrets...

Regrets was for the weak.

The swirling, pulsating surface of the portal seemed to grow more intense the longer I stared at it.

The air around it shimmered, a strange mix of cold and warmth brushing against my skin.

Taking a deep breath, I steadied myself, feeling the rush of my heartbeat against my chest.

My hand clenched, then released.

There was no room for hesitation.

I stepped forward.

The world seemed to shift, a sensation of weightlessness wrapping around me as my vision blurred, colors twisting and bleeding into one another.

Sound vanished, replaced by a distant, rhythmic pulse, like the heartbeat of something ancient and vast.

For a brief moment, I felt as though I was floating, adrift of nothing, before a burst of light blinded me.

And then... silence.

Noah stood rigid, his eyes still locked on where Allen had been moments before.

The faint hum of the portal was the only sound until his communicator crackled to life.

He fumbled for it, quickly bringing it to his ear.

"First-Class Private Noah, reporting."

"This is Major Hargrove. Report on the situation immediately."

Noah straightened instinctively, his voice becoming sharp and respectful.

"Sir, the portal... Yes it is still under control."

A brief silence, then the Major's voice came again, firm but laced with urgency.

"Understood. Listen carefully, Private. The message has already reached several government officials and the Hunters Association. They have already contacted someone very important they could reach, and they're approaching your location as we speak. The area's distance prevented them from arriving sooner, but they should be there soon."

Noah's jaw tensed, his fingers tightening around the communicator.

"Understood, Sir."

The line cut off with a sharp click, leaving a faint echo in Noah's ear.

He slowly lowered the communicator, his eyes distant.

Beside him, the two other soldiers shifted nervously, their gaze fixed on Noah, searching for answers.

"What did they say?" one of them finally asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Government officials know. The Hunters Association knows. And they've already contacted someone I don't know who, but they're on their way," Noah replied, his tone flat, but the weight in his voice was unmistakable.

The soldiers exchanged uneasy glances, trying to process the sudden turn of events.

And then, as if struck by a collective realization, their eyes snapped back toward the portal.

"Wait..." one of them murmured, his voice thick with disbelief. "Where... where is he?"

Noah's eyes widened.

The spot where Allen had stood was now empty.

Only the swirling, ethereal mist of the portal remained.

"He's gone... He actually went in," the other whispered, a cold chill settling over his words.

They stared at the shifting portal, the uneasy hum filling the silence.

Somewhere out there, Allen was already beyond the veil, and whatever lay on the other side was now his to face alone.

And that's when they knew, they're cooked...

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