

After Ten Millennia in Hell

Chapter 12 - Second Awakening (1)

Oh Kang-Woo looked with great interest at the message that had just popped up in front of him.

'Second Awakening Trait, huh?'

Kang-Woo opened his status window and checked out his new Trait.

[Second Awakening Trait: Insatiable Hunger (Rank: C)]

[Effect: The Player can absorb even more Demonic Energy from a target using Authority of Predation.]

'This is... ' Kang-Woo's eyes lit up.

The rank of the new Trait he had unlocked wasn't high, but that wasn't important. The notable thing was that it had the power to fill up Kang-Woo's store of demonic energy faster, which was what he needed the most.

"Good." Kang-Woo smiled in satisfaction with his new Trait.

His First Awakening Trait was the same one he used to have in Hell, but the Trait that he acquired was different upon his Second Awakening. The new Trait, Insatiable Hunger, and the stats that rose with his level were things he hadn't had before.

'By using the power of a Player, I'll be able to become stronger much faster than before.'

Kang-Woo smiled. He was enjoying the fun of growing stronger for the first time in a long while.

"Then... should I check how effective the new Trait is?"

Kang-Woo extended his hand expectantly toward the dead Hobgoblin. Black smoke emerged from his hand and covered the corpse.

'The smoke got thicker.'

Was that because of the Trait?

Crunch!

The Authority of Predation completely enveloped the Hobgoblin and began devouring its corpse. Just as Kang-Woo had expected, there was more demonic energy inside the Hobgoblin than in the normal Goblins.

After he had almost finished devouring the Hobgoblin's corpse, a blue message window popped in front of him.

[Activating the effect of the Trait, Insatiable Hunger.]

[Absorbing even more Demonic Energy.]

"Wow."

When the message window appeared, the amount of demonic energy he was absorbing increased by around ten to twenty percent. It might not seem like a lot just going by the jump in percentage, but Kang-Woo didn't think it was little at all since it was free demonic energy.

'This means that the more demonic energy a monster has, the more free energy I'll be able to absorb.'

Furthermore, this Trait would become even more useful as Kang-Woo hunted stronger monsters because the extra demonic energy was a percentage of the initial amount rather than a fixed amount.

Riiing.

[Demonic Energy has risen by 3.]

The amount of demonic energy he'd obtained from killing one Hobgoblin was more than what he'd gotten from killing dozens of Goblins.

Of course, it was in part due to the effect of the Trait, but judging by the huge difference, it seemed like higher-ranking monsters had more demonic energy than lower-ranking ones.

'Killing higher-ranking monsters is the answer.'

If the difference were smaller, horde hunting might be more effective. However, judging from what had just happened, it was clear that killing one higher-ranking monster was far more effective.

'If I remember correctly, the higher a stat gets, the more difficult it becomes to raise.'

Increasing stats was similar to leveling up. Going from a stat of 1 to 2 was easy, but taking it from 10 to 11 required more effort. In consideration of that, he was lucky that his demonic energy stat had increased by three points just by killing one Hobgoblin.

Kang-Woo smiled with satisfaction while looking at his demonic energy stat, which had reached 19.

'Should I test it?'

His demonic energy stat had increased by five points in total since clearing out all the monsters in this area, so he wanted to check out how much the demonic energy that he possessed had increased.

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and began drawing out the demonic energy inside his body.

"Hmm...?"

He suddenly frowned.

Considering that his demonic energy stat had risen from 14 to 19, his demonic energy should have risen by 1.3 times. Even under the assumption that the effect of the stat was further amplified the higher it got, the maximum increase should have been around twofold.

Yet...

'Threefold? No... it's more than that.'

The amount of demonic energy flowing out of his body was incomparable to before today's hunt. It was an amount that couldn't be explained by the five-point increase in the demonic energy stat.

'What happened?'

Despite the explosive increase of demonic energy, Kang-Woo couldn't just be happy about this when he didn't understand the reason for it.

After all, gaining power with an unknown source was like a ticking time bomb. An optimistic thought such as "it's good, so it doesn't matter" was dangerous.

Kang-Woo stood in place and focused his attention on his body. A few moments later, he noticed why his demonic energy had suddenly increased so much.

'The seal on the Ten Thousand Demon Core has gotten weaker.'

The unknown force that was restraining his power had gotten weaker, and thanks to that, the boundless demonic energy that had been lying dormant was starting to leak.

Of course, the amount of demonic energy that he had access to now was nothing compared to the full amount in the Ten Thousand Demon Core, but it was still a lot compared to before.

'Is it because of the Awakening?'

Players awakened every ten levels. Kang-Woo had surpassed Level 10 after defeating the Hobgoblin, and thanks to that, he had achieved his Second Awakening.

There had been no major changes other than the Awakening, so there wasn't a more plausible cause for the Ten Thousand Demon Core's weakened seal than that.

'Does the seal weaken more every time I awaken?'

Kang-Woo's eyes lit up.

If so, that meant that he would be able to recover his old level of power just by leveling up mindlessly.

"Hmm..."

However, to confirm his theory, he had to reach Level 20 and achieve his Third Awakening first.

'I need to go to higher-ranking Gates.'

The necessary EXP required to level up increased with one's level, so he couldn't just keep hunting Goblins.

Kang-Woo picked up the mana stone on the ground and put it in his bag. Then he walked toward the Gate.

To access higher-ranking Gates, he had to raise his Player rank, and to do that, he had to sell mana stones.

'I even killed a boss monster, so I'm sure it will go up.'

Kang-Woo looked at the C-rank mana stone that he had received after killing the Hobgoblin. It had a darker color than the E-rank mana stones.

He had killed a group of Goblins and even a Hobgoblin alone, so there was no way his Player rank wouldn't go up.

After picking up all the mana stones, Kang-Woo walked out of the Gate.

His steps felt lighter leaving the Gate compared to when he entered it earlier. Perhaps, it was because his demonic energy had increased.

'With this amount of demonic energy, I'll be able to use a wider variety of Authorities.'

Kang-Woo felt good now that his options had increased. He used the Authority of Haste and sped toward the Mana Stone Exchange Center.

Rumble.

"Please exchange all of these for money. I'd also like an exchange receipt," Kang-Woo said when he arrived at the Mana Stone Exchange Center.

"..." The person at the counter flinched upon seeing all the mana stones that Kang-Woo had shaken out of his bag. The person then said, "Sixty-one E-rank mana stones and... one C-rank mana stone."

"How much can I get for these?"

"After subtracting the tax, E-rank mana stones sell for 36,000 won each, and C-rank mana stones sell for 2,570,000 won."

"Interesting."

That meant that Kang-Woo had earned almost five million won.

'Later on, in higher-ranking Gates, I'll probably be able to earn tens of millions of won easily.'

He now understood why Players were so glorified on Earth.

"Please give me your Player license."

"Here it is."

"Hmm."

The person at the counter frowned after looking at Kang-Woo's Player license.

"You need to give me the licenses of your other party members too," the person at the counter said firmly. The person was with the belief that there was no way that an E-rank Player had managed to gather this many mana stones.

"I don't have any."

"I'm sorry?"

"I hunted alone."

"You hunted all these alone?" the clerk asked in astonishment.

Kang-Woo nodded.

The clerk looked back and forth at the mana stones on the table and Kang-Woo.

An E-rank Player couldn't possibly get that many mana stones while hunting alone.

'He even killed the boss monster,' the clerk thought.

The fact that there was a C-rank mana stone among the E-rank ones meant that he had successfully hunted the boss monster of the Gate.

'Was he carried?'

Occasionally, some people would skip basic training and receive help from a high-level Player.

'That doesn't seem to be the case.'

Kang-Woo's clothes didn't look expensive, nor did he possess high-ranking armor or weapons. This was the opposite of the cases where low-level Players received help from high-level Players. They normally covered themselves with high-ranking equipment and weapons before beginning to hunt at a Gate.

'Is he someone from a rich family who wishes to hide his identity?'

That was the only explanation the clerk could come up with from the fact that a Player with an F-rank Trait had been able to solo an E-rank Gate.

'Let's not get involved with him.'

The basic rule of a salaryman was to never act rashly.

"Okay. Would you like to receive the money from the mana stones in cash, or should I deposit it into your account? As long as it's less than ten million won, you can receive it in cash."

"I'd like it in cash, please."

Kang-Woo figured out that the clerk didn't believe he had hunted alone, but the clerk surprisingly didn't do anything to correct him.

After a little while, the clerk came back with 4,766,000 won in cash and gave it to Kang-Woo. Then, Kang-Woo walked out of the Mana Stone Exchange Center.

'First, I should get a cellphone,' Kang-Woo decided.

To get used to life on Earth, having a smartphone was a necessity.

After entering a cell phone store and buying a smartphone, Kang-Woo called someone—Han Seol-Ah. He had gotten her phone number before parting with her at the Player Management Office.

[Hello?]

"Oh, Seol-Ah, it's me. Kang-Woo."

[Oh, I see you've bought a cellphone.]

"Yes."

[Fufu, I'll save your number right away. Where are you?]

"I'm near the Mana Stone Exchange Center."

[Are you going to come home right away?]

"No, there's a place I want to go. But I thought it would be good if you could join me, so I called you."

[Me...?] Seol-Ah asked in surprise at the sudden invitation. [Where do you want to go?]

"Seol-ah..."

[...Yes?] Seol-Ah answered nervously after sensing the graveness in Kang-Woo's voice.

She felt that he was about to say something very important.

Kang-Woo spoke to her with a very serious tone, "Let's go get some fried chicken."

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