

Mana 31

Chapter 31 - Gradually moving forward

I watched the flash of lightning disappear on the horizon and went around the arena to look for the hunting squad members. Some were knocked out cold but they all had only minor injuries. With the strength of a rank B hunter, wounds like that would heal after a long night sleep or a few healing spells

The crowd was calming down as the defeated hunters got up and left the arena. I said my goodbyes to the hunters that were already up and moving and left, all my attention on getting stronger by farming dungeons until the strength of rank A wasn't far away from me

I passed by the overcrowded exit with people rushing about and walked out of the coliseum, making my way back to the military complex. After passing through all the checkpoints, I didn't go back to the living quarters and went straight toward the [Mangrove Swamp]

Strength was respected in this city, I didn't plan on hiding in the shadows for too long. I'll show them a glimpse of what I can do while still hiding a major part of my strength to account for any unknowns. Because of the incoming threats of beasts though, there would be no use hiding my strength as it would gradually be shown in time

I thought about turning on [Stealth] and disappearing from everyone's eyes when I first entered the dungeon alone, but decided otherwise. Unless a peak rank B hunters similar to the ones I found in the coliseum coincidentally happened to pass by when I activated the skill, I should be able to control the information of how frequently I enter this dungeon by choosing when to turn [Stealth] on and off to be purposefully seen

I will go in the first time without hiding, and turn on [Stealth] when I inevitably beat the dungeon in record time. I'll keep myself hidden during these times so that my impossible clear time will be kept under wraps

I showed my ID to the confused guards patrolling around the dungeon as they watched me with increasingly shocked expressions go towards the dungeon and disappear from their sight

"What?! He went in by himself?"

Magnar abruptly stood up while listening to the report that just came in. The gears in his mind were turning as he asked himself if he had struck gold with this hunter while seeing this show of confidence, or if he had miscalculated entirely and wasted some resources. His impassive look came back to his face as he thought, "Only time will tell"

At another location in one of the luxurious hotels in Star City.

A man was fuming from a phone call he just received. He was a veteran rank B hunter that was halfway through becoming rank A. He was already holding two rank A skills, and needed just one more to fully be considered a legitimate A ranker that could dive into the highest dungeons known

A book that had dropped recently and was in the possession of Lightning Hand was supposed to go to the next rank B hunter on a list. His name was at the top of that list. Yet Lightning Hand had played around with the book and gifted it to some random rank B by making up a competition in the middle of the day

He couldn't even look at the direction of the rank A hunter that recklessly gave the skill away, but he could definitely go after that rank B hunter who received it. He thought of this as he pulled out his phone to dial another number.

In the unfortunate event that the hunter dies...He will still get his hands on that rank A skill

I appeared on that same patch of land surrounded by murky green waters all around me. The rushing of alligators could already be felt the moment I entered. This time around, there would not be any games of keeping one alive to rest or relax.

I let out a cheeky smile as I prepared to get started. This will be a constant and relentless fight all the way through without a second wasted.

The first order of business...was checking out [Flight]

My body slowly began lifting off the ground when the skill was activated, following my thoughts while slowly rising. If I thought about moving up, I moved up. Any direction I wanted and I could do it in a heartbeat.

I hovered a few meters in the air and enjoyed the feeling when the alligators reached the small patch of land and jumped up with their wide jaws open

I looked at these fumbling alligators below me and decided to get started. This time around, I won't be stopping. I'll bulldoze through everything with as much power as I can without worrying too much

I didn't even start off like usual by casting the skills gradually while watching these monsters die. A [Miniature Tornado] appeared at the center of the alligators, and then another two appeared to their left and right, and they kept on increasing

The rotating forces of the [Miniature Tornado] shredded the hard scales of the alligators as if they were paper and turned them to mincemeat, very quickly turning the scene below into a mixture of blood and gore

The first barrier was released and more alligators were rushing where I was, but I would not wait for them. I commanded my body to fly forward, testing the speed of the skill for the first time. The result? Fast. How fast I didn't know as I didn't even know how to measure myself, but I was able to get to the point where the first barrier disappeared in a few seconds just as the new alligators were rushing in. If I could put it into words then just as fast as a car speeding down a highway, if not faster

[Miniature Tornado] was cast once again, as multiple swirling vortexes appeared and shredded everything on site. The next minutes passed like this, with me flying around the [Mangrove Swamp] casting [Miniature Tornado] on every beast that I saw.

It wasn't long before the last barrier was broken and the huge slumbering TITAN rose up. What met it were constantly replenishing [Miniature Tornado], where a new one would appear the moment one disappeared

ROAR!!!

The large rank B beast that required multiple rank B hunters to hunt it could put up no defenses or cast any skills on the face of multiple and never-ending disastrous tornadoes, quickly letting out a roar before dying.

...I breathed out loudly as I controlled my breathing to calm down. This was how I would start to do things from now on. I won't care too much about the thoughts of others and their reactions, not if I continue with such rapid progress. This whole dungeon took me what, 30 minutes or slightly more? I wouldn't let it go this time around

I had already been collecting the rank B [Core]s as the monsters fell, and I did the same when the huge TITAN was shredded and dropped more of them and a rank B skill book. I recalled how [Solael's Castle] had a chance to drop a higher rank skill even though it was a rank C dungeon, and wondered how many times I had to repeat the rank B dungeon [Mangrove Swamp] before a rank A skill book dropped

My eyes shined with excitement as I looked forward to this while I stayed in the air and absorbed the rank B cores right away.

The skill book dropped this time around was [Curse of Slowness], a curse type skill I haven't come across before that majorly slowed down the speed of the enemy it hit. I didn't know when I would use this but I absorbed it anyway. I would take in all that I can and think later.

As soon as the [Core]s dropped in the dungeon were absorbed, I reached out to the green crystal that had risen and was transferred outside the monolith with [Stealth] still active. The [Core]s from one dungeon run were nowhere enough to have me reach the peak of rank B [Vitality] and [Strength] attribute without diving a few times even if I was doing it solo

The higher you rose, the more cores of equivalent rank you needed to raise your attributes. The [Focus] cores that weren't useful to me would all be sold later

I went towards one of the square doors of the monolith as I disappeared inside once again. This time, I will continue to dive into this dungeon even after the sun sets

Chapter 32 - A Challenge

My dungeon diving that was filled with vigor continued for the next few hours. On the 10th dungeon run, I had maxed out my [Vitality] and [Strength] attributes by absorbing all of the cores that dropped, bringing me to the peak of rank B

I only dived 3 more times after that before calling it a night. I was lucky enough to receive an [Item] or [Skill Book] on every single one of those 13 runs, with all of them being rank B. Even though everything randomly dropped, I was able to pick up one defensive skill similar to [Arcanist's Sphere of Protection] that was called [Golden Halo], which when cast would form a halo of light around my body that rejected any attacks directed at it

One was an offensive Mage skill called [Doom Bolt], which called forth a dark red lightning bolt that had even higher damage than [Miniature Tornado] as it could stun the TITAN of [Mangrove Swamp] with one hit. The only downside was that it was a single target skill

There were 3 skills that required specific weapons to be cast so they would be left out to be exchanged later, and the remaining 5 skills were support skills that buffed me in all sorts of ways. [Light Foot] and [Windrider] both collectively increased my speed by 100%, increasing how quickly I moved and flew to an insane degree.

[Rigorous] increased the effects of all defensive skills by 50% and [Shadow Veil] was another skill similar to [Stealth] and [Camouflage] that I was confident once I had this activated, only rank A hunters would have a chance of noticing me. The last skill that came out in these first 13 runs, [Wild Heart] was my favorite as it increased the damage all my skills dealt by 50%, continuing to make the damage of my skills even deadlier and causing rank D skills to still be somewhat usable even at this point

Not a single rank A skill was in sight even after these 13 dives, disappointing me but also making me even more expectant for when one actually drops.

There were 3 [Item]s that dropped along with the skills, 2 of them being [Scale Armor] and a [Fanged Sword]. [Scale Armor] was a rank B item that had vastly better defenses than the rank C [Igneous Armor], so I changed those right away

[Noah Osmont][Occupation: Hunter]

[Vitality: 250+40]

[Focus: -]

[Strength: 250+60]

[Skill(s): [F][E](D-Flames of Torment-100)(D-Safeguard-57)(D-Danger Sense-100)(D-Rough Skin-100)(D-Fleeting-100)(C-Arcanist's Sphere of Protection-100) (C-Camouflage-100) (C-Aura of Haste-100)(C-Explosive Rune-100)(C-Life Essence-100)(C-Increased Penetration-100) (C-Regeneration-88) (C-Whirlwind-89) (C-Smite-95) (C-Gracefulness-100) (C-Precision-100) (C-Adamant-100) (C-Sharpen-100)(C-War Cry-100) (C-Retaliatio-100)(C-Kings Rage-100)(C-Military Tactics-100) (C-Unpredictable-100) (C-Elemental Damage-100)(B-Giant's Strength-75) (B-Stealth-67) (B-Miniature Tornado-23)*(B-Golden Halo-13)*(B-Doom Bolt-7)*(B-Lightfoot-12)*(B-Windrider-12)*(B-Rigorous-11)*(B-Shadow Veil-11)*(B-Wild Heart-10)*(A-Flight-5)*]

[Equipment: (3x C-Ring of Storage)(C-Fiery Boots)(C-Fiery Helm)(B-Scale Armor)*]

My panel looked vastly different from a few days ago, and something I hadn't focused on caught my eye. Without my knowledge, my [Strength] attribute had already exceeded the common standard of rank A. The [Core]s dropping from rank A dungeons could bring your attributes all the way to 300. Because I always kept a few skills that added attributes active, I gained a bonus that most people have temporarily and made it permanent

Because of this, my [Vitality] attribute already neared the 300 cap and [Strength] already passed it with 310 even before I absorbed any rank A [Core]s. Just the thought of this was thrilling, as I was already catching up to the rank A hunters, even if I barely had any rank A skills and items

The disappointment of not gaining any rank A skills from the first day of rushing through the dungeon lifted as I felt the increased force and strength of my body.

I transferred out of the dungeon for the third time today while not hidden, and received a standing ovation from soldiers that had begun gathering the moment I cleared it alone and 'came out' 2 hours later.

It was a big deal to the army as these were things only those standing as rank A hunters could attempt, and they had just effectively sided with such a person. Vice Admiral Magnar came out from the throngs of soldiers and look at me with a hard to read expression and then said

"I underestimated you, I apologize"

I laughed off the Vice Admiral's apology and pulled out the extra [Scale Armor] and [Fanged Sword], along with one of the rank B skill books I didn't use that dropped in the dungeon

"I was unlucky enough to receive loot that didn't fit me at all in these three dungeon runs" I kept the lie going and was planning on selling these to the military, or better yet exchange them for skills that I wanted from their inventory

The Vice Admiral looked at the items and skill with a thankful expression before his face turned dark

"I'm thankful that you came to our city and are already contributing to the cause as much as you can, but it seems we might have just brought trouble to you."

I was surprised at the Vice Admiral's words and asked "What happened?"

He looked at me briefly before sighing and continuing "A Death Match has been issued and confirmed between you and Hunter Andrei Nikolaev. Tomorrow is the set date for the match."

What?!

This was a complete surprise, as this was something I had never thought to find myself associated with. Death Matches were set up between high ranked hunters that had irreconcilable differences. The Empire didn't want it to be a habit for its peak hunters to kill one another, so deathmatches were instituted if two hunters found themselves at a point where the only way to solve their issues was to fight

The matter was to be taken seriously though, so before the match could be issued both the hunters had to agree to put their lives on the line. Only then would the match be confirmed.

So why the hell was a match involving me that I had no idea about confirmed?

Seeing my angry expression, the Vice Admiral seemed to have confirmed something. "I heard what happened at The Coliseum today, the issue seems to have arisen from there. Andrei, the son of The Blessed Empire's Admiral Chekhov, was next in line to be receiving the rank A skill that Lightning Hand was transferring"

Things quickly began clicking after hearing all of this. I was still irked and asked, "So because he's the son of an Admiral, he can target someone else entirely, call for a match, and just get to bypass the rules of Death Matches?"

The general looked down with an apologetic tone as he continued "They cannot touch Lightning Hand for his actions unless they want to cause a fight between the peak powers of the Empire, so targeting you was the easiest thing for them. This is why I have to apologize to you, me bringing you to Star City indirectly put you in the middle of this"

I thought about this new situation and then asked "So what happens if I attend that deathmatch tomorrow and the other guy ends up dead?"

I was fairly confident in my strength and didn't plan on losing to someone who should have yet to be rank A, what I was worried about were the repercussions from it. There was a difficult expression on the Vice Admiral's face as he said nothing

I looked at this and at the soldiers around me that were listening in and saw the anger and resignation on their faces. To them, I was a strong hunter that just began clearing [Mangrove Swamp] by himself multiple times a day. This meant there would be more resources flowing into their department

Yet, this hunter was now about to be taken away. Nobody had to say what would happen if the son of the Admiral of the Empire were to be killed in broad daylight, even if it was in an arena match. None of them saw a way for me to come out of this. The Vice Admiral's voice rang out again, "I've made multiple calls to friends and higher-ups, but nothing worked. Admiral Chekhov has many people among the higher-ups and his pull is strong. The match cannot be rescinded. The one who doesn't show up will also be blacklisted"

I nodded at this and laughed to ease the tension, "Haha, there's no need for all that gloominess. We still don't know who will still be alive tomorrow. Tell me about this Andrei Nikolaev"

Attributes: Vitality 250 +30 from Life Essence,+10 from Military Tactics=290. Strength 250, +50 from Giant's Strength, + 10 from Military Tactics = 250+50+10=310

Chapter 33 - An Approaching Disaster

The Vice Admiral dispersed the gathering of soldiers and took me back to his office to continue discussing the matter. Andrei Nikolaev was the son of one of The Empire's Admirals. He was following his father's footsteps and neared rank A in power, having 2 rank A skills and needing just one more to be qualified and listed as rank A

So the ticket he was expecting to receive to become one of the peak powers of the world was given to someone else and now he was using his connections to get it back.

I had no qualms fighting and even taking the guy out, as this would even mean I get to receive one of his rank A skills when he goes down, but I couldn't stop thinking of the consequences thereafter. I looked to the frowning general that seemed to be using every last brain cell to think and asked "What are the possible fallouts in the case that Andrei Nikolaev dies tomorrow"

His head shot up as he heard this question from me and said "The full rage of Admiral Chekhov who has thousands of soldiers under him, and he himself is a rank A Hunter"

I listened to this and asked again "Or?"

"As we need to be conserving our strength and increase our battle power with the threat of beasts coming down on us, the strength of rank A hunters is important and there cannot be a confrontation between them"

I nodded my head as I heard this and replied with a smile "Then it isn't a problem, as long as I have power rivaling rank A, I can take care of anything that comes my way"

I looked to the Vice Admiral in front of me as his eyes glowed when he heard this. He seemed to think before replying "If that's the case, then there's another call I can make that can handle the fall out happening tomorrow"

With the discussion being over, I left the office holding a folder that held more information on Andrei Nikolaev as I made my way to the living quarters. There was only food for me to enjoy this time around as I had to focus on understanding the skills I just gained today and prepare for something momentous tomorrow

I wasn't fearful of what would happen when the son of an Admiral died. This thought passed in my mind, making me realize just how far I had grown in such a short span of time. Admirals were at the top of the food chain in the Empire, and now I was in a position where I could be facing one sometime soon

I was eating the exemplary food on the table as I ran simulations in my head for the battle to come. Because of keeping skills that drained a huge amount of energy but gave a great momentary boost in power active all the time, my attributes already met those in the A rank category

That wasn't to mention all the skills that increased my overall defense, speed, casting and attack speed, evasion, and overall damage by huge percentages. These skills layered on top of active defense skills like [Arcanist's Sphere of Protection] and the recently acquired [Golden Halo] made me realize just how strong I currently was

Even though nothing was tested, I doubt a single rank B could get through my defenses, and maybe I would be injured from the attacks of a rank A hunter. The classification of having three rank A skills before being coined a genuine rank A hunter was to satisfy the high pedestal that rank signified

Only those that were truly strong could be considered in that rank, and having the versatility of using 3 rank A skills affirmed that.

Possible plans continued forming in my head as to how this whole thing would end and soon I felt confident enough to face whatever came at me these next few days. I wouldn't sacrifice my sleep because of it though and wrapped myself up in the silk bed sheets and fell asleep

In the skies above the Empire.

A dashing woman with golden hair was comfortably lying on top of a huge flying beast. She held a bewitching smile on her face as words dripping with honey left her lips. "Little Magnar is redeeming his one favor for a rising hunter...just who could you be to catch the eyes of one of the few sane men in the Empire?"

She was a veteran rank A hunter that was just below the renowned Steel Mikhail. Her flowing golden hair and the huge beast she flew on would cause mischief anywhere she went. She was now heading to Star City

Morning of the next day.

News had spread all over Star City of a main event Death Match that would be occurring in The Coliseum during the day. The two hunters participating each held rank A skills, making them on the cusp of breaking through to the exclusive position of a rank A hunter

The one coming out of it alive would most likely be the newly born rank A hunter to appear in Star City

The excitement was palpating as all the seats had already been reserved and taken in a few hours, packing the Coliseum to its limits. Those who couldn't watch were left with turning on their TVs and watching the commentators describe the two figures that would be fighting as the main event

One was a known hunter in the Empire, the son of one of its Admirals and a peak hunter that was bound to be given the rank A title in no time, Andrei Nikolaev. The other was a rising rookie with an empty track record, becoming known just recently by winning a free for all match against other rank B hunters, Noah Osmont. New information came in that this character is able to dive and complete rank B dungeons alone, but this news was not yet verified

There were a few friends watching the live feed of the packed arena and listening to the commentators when one spoke with a bored expression

"Why are you guys even looking at this match as something exciting? This is obviously just another show of power from those assholes at the top, bullying that rising hunter to get what they want" (Friend #1)

"Hey! You didn't get to see the free for all match yesterday, that new guy blew away the Golden Tank and the Flaming Witch as if it was nothing!" (Friend #2)

"Haha, no way a random nobody will even touch a hair on Andrei, we're just gonna watch another bloody fight today. I just hope he lasts long enough and the match isn't cut short!" (Friend #3)

The bored friend listened to this as he shook his head despondently while thinking, 'Nothing has changed at all since the advent of the apocalypse'

The fight was set to be happening in a few hours. Figures were alerted around the Empire of this impending match. Some didn't care, others were angry at the loss of a potential rank A hunter that would be happening for no reason. Others were just carefully waiting to see what new waves would be made from this fight

Chapter 34 - A Show of Strength

Morning of the next day, Vice Admiral Magnar had put up an entire regiment together to escort me to the Coliseum. It wasn't as much for protection as a show of support as we rode from the military sector towards the grandiose amphitheater

I was touched with the support Magnar was showing, whether it was purely coming from him as a person or because he knew I would give back to them even more after this ordeal was passed.

The streets were busier than usual, and military trucks rolling through them didn't help it. We arrived at the Coliseum that seemed to be impossibly even louder than the day before, with people screaming to get in and hunters almost becoming overwhelmed

Most of the members of the regiment were stationed outside while me, a few key figures and Magnar went through another door to an expansive room that overlooked the arena below

There was a fight going on currently where two rank C hunters were working as a team against a rank B opponent, the fight going fairly well with the use of their teamwork

Drinks and food were quickly brought in as many of the people packing the arena today were waiting for the preliminary matches to finish and for the main event to begin.

Magnar and I were discussing the hunter I was going to face today in detail. From the known information, he held 2 rank A skills. One of them was a defensive skill that made him nearly impenetrable to damage when it was activated, but only lasted for a minute and he had to wait for 10 more before initiating the skill again

The other was a rank A skill that there wasn't a lot of knowledge on, but it was known to be an area of attack skill with a high mana cost that dealt significant damage. Even after knowing these things, I wasn't too worried. I will definitely be careful and watch what he does, but I was that confident in the multiple skills I was layering on myself and the fact that my attributes most likely surpass his because of some of my skills

The only thing I was remotely worried about was the casting of the rank A skill, as none of these skills are a joke. With my percentage boosted defenses and skills, I was predicting the most the rank A offensive skill would do is injure me. I would have the [Regeneration] skill ready to cast in case I took damage from the skill head on

The hour was quickly approaching as the crowd cheered when one match ended and another began as we enjoyed the food in the reserved space. Magnar continued to have a worried look on his face as he seemed to be looking to the sky every now and then, as if waiting for something

The cheers of the crowd reached its peak when an announcer's voice rang out in the Coliseum

"PEOPLE OF STAR CITY! ARE YOU READY FOR THE BIGGEST MATCH OF YOUR LIVES?!"

The announcer's voice was drowned out as soon as his word finished as the crowd screamed

YEAAAH!

The announcer continued with a calmer tone

"Then without further ado, I give you the contestants of this Death Match...Andrei Nikolaev...and Noah Osmont!"

The cheers continued as a burly man jumped down from another location in the coliseum. The man had a cold expression on his face. His body was wrapped with a purple robe and he held a frozen staff with his right hand. This was Andrei Nikolaev

He was the first hugely built mage I had seen, standing there with an imposing gaze that looked ahead.

I rose from my seat and slowly drifted down towards the arena, levitating slightly above 2 meters from the arena floor as I looked down towards Andrei. His imposing gaze became fierce as he saw this and I laughed while flying towards the podium where the announcer was at

The crowd was already screaming at their peak as they saw this. My voice rang out loud and clear towards the announcer

"I just want to confirm something with everyone as witnesses, what is the outcome of a Death Match?"

The announcer heard this and fervently replied, his voice ringing out through the Coliseum once more.

"The match ends in DEATH! With death, the feud is over, and the possessions of the other party are all yours!"

YEAH!!!

The crowd continued screaming as the announcer said this. I nodded my head and landed on the arena floor, watching the enraged mage standing opposite to me who couldn't wait to rip my face off

"Match, START!"

The fight began with cheers as Andrei moved first, pointing his staff towards me and casting a skill that formed 5 spinning dark orbs that flew towards me.

I used [Flight] to evade the balls coming after me, my speed being fast enough to watch them as they whizzed by me and smashed onto the high walls, exploding into a mass of darkness

I wanted to test the guy out as I cast my newly gained [Doom Bolt]. A large streak of red lightning quickly formed and crashed down towards Andrei, his expression quickly changing as his body was enveloped with wind elements and he rapidly disappeared from his location.

BOOM!

The lightning bolt was abnormally powerful as it blasted apart the grounds of the arena. This was a rank B skill boosted by many active support skills, its power becoming more terrifying.

Andrei appeared at another location in the arena, his face turning abnormally serious as he looked towards me.

I returned the stare back and said "Don't get scared now, I'm just getting started"

I wanted to enrage this man as much as I could. The angrier he got, the more mistakes he would make, and the easier I can take him down. The main challenge was what would be happening after he fell

His serious face became red as he seemed to have made up his mind. I smiled at this and cast a [Miniature Tornado] towards him while also casting [Doom Bolt] to descend on him once again

He watched these deadly skills coming towards him as his body began shining in a golden light, his skin rapidly adopting a color and sheen similar to a statue

Rank A skill [Regal Armament] was cast. The golden skin shone in the light as the [Doom Bolt] struck down and the sharp winds of [Miniature Tornado] neared

Cheers rang out in the arena as these iridescent colors appeared on the arena floor

BOOM!

Another loud explosion resounded in the arena, and when the dust cleared, a golden man was still standing there, matchless

I looked at this and prepared all my attention. If he has already cast his defensive skill that only lasts a minute, he should then be planning to let out the deadliest attacks in this one minute

I didn't seem to be wrong as his staff began glowing hazy white, and the [Danger Sense] that hasn't activated in a while dimly began ringing

Chapter 35 - A Show of Strength II

Andrei looked at the confident face of the man in front of him as a swirling mass of winds were coming and another red lightning bolt was crushing down.

He wanted this man who had taken something that should have been his to die as quickly as possible, but his power seemed to be greater than anticipated. He wouldn't back down though, as his father was watching this fight. He had to prove to himself and to his father that he deserved the title of rank A. He deserved to join those standing at the peak, he just needed to take the skill back from this man!

The rage inside him calmed a bit when he thought back to the lessons from his past and acted, casting [Regal Armament] right away.

The skills struck him, and he only felt a stinging pain on his skin as they disappeared. This was the power of rank A skills, something no normal hunter would be able to get their hands on. Andrei came out unharmed and moved quickly before the timer of the skill ran out

He barely had half of his mana remaining, which might be enough to cast the next rank A skill that would obliterate the confident hunter in front of him into nothing once or twice. He raised his staff, and [Frigid Impermanence] was aimed towards the area with the hunter at its center

BOOM!!!

An explosion of ice erupted out from the location where Noah was, utterly destroying one-fourth of the arena floor and sending nearby spectators screaming from the impact and shock waves thereafter. This was the terror of rank A skills, their damage was unmatched.

Andrei breathed heavily as he looked at the epicenter of the explosion where the hunter was nowhere to be seen. Had he done it? Had he finally grabbed the chance to reach the peak?

He looked for the hunter's body before he sensed danger and looked up, seeing the man floating in the air. There was some blood gushing out from his right thigh that was rapidly closing up at high speed

Seeing the man was still alive, Andrei moved to cast the rank A skill one last time before Noah recollected his wits. He only had a few seconds remaining with [Regal Armament], and already felt another two red lightning bolts smash into his skin seconds after he saw Noah floating in the air

'Just how many of these can you cast?!'

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Andrei was trying to get the position of the man that was rapidly moving in the air as more lightning bolts crashed down on him, not giving him a moment of rest as the stinging pain gradually became unbearable

Feeling that he had only a few seconds left before the skill's time ran out, he cast [Wind Escape] once more, moving his body to another location where he got the chance to aim at Noah again and cast the skill once more using all his remaining mana

[Frigid Impermanence]!

BOOM!

Another resounding explosion filled with ice elements rang out causing the screams of those who were near and the cheers of those that were far. The blast this time occurred in the air, sending shock waves that damaged the eardrums of hundreds of people in the audience

Andrei rapidly moved his eyes while roughly breathing and holding onto his staff as support. Was he finally dead?!

Despair slowly filled his face as he saw the same man back down in the arena floor. His armor tattered, and it seemed like he received minor cuts that were already healing.

'How? How?! I'm sure the skill hit you head on!'

He was rapidly thinking about what to do now that all his energy reserves were gone and the golden skin he had on was rapidly fading. He looked to the man with the same confident face that was now flying towards him as he finally became scared for his life and unwillingly looked towards a certain area in the audience stands

"Father!"

His voice rang out loud and clear, as if it was his last resort.

A booming voice then rang out that drowned the cheers of the audience

"Spare him."

The voice was calm, and yet resounded in the ears of every single person in the Coliseum. A red streak of lightning had already formed and was heading down towards Andrei when it stopped. He breathed out a sigh of relief as he saw Noah come to a stop and look towards where his father was

He sighed in relief and disappointment at not being able to take this hunter down, but at least his father was here to make sure he won't lose his life. He wanted to get up and go, but still felt the bolt of lightning not too far from him still hanging in the air

The voice from the stands rang out again. "The match is over."

A heavily built man with a low fade had risen up from the stadium, staring down at Noah who was holding his hand in the air, as if that was the only thing keeping the red lightning from striking down

Andrei regained his calm as he saw the figure of his dad coming out and rose up, he would be...WHAT!

A deep sense of dread and fear arose in him as he felt his scalp tingling and then began burning. The red streak of lightning had struck down!

BOOM!

...

Silence.

There was a shock to all the people that were watching the match, whether it be in the arena or those watching at home. Because they knew the figure of the man that had risen up. That was Admiral Chekhov. Why was he in Star City? What just happened? The hunter Noah finished the Death Match, but what made him so bold to defy the words of an Admiral? What...would happen now?

The silence remained as the body of Vice Admiral Magnar began shining and he began to move. Noah looked towards the location where a pile of burnt flesh lay and flew in, reaching for the glowing skill book that appeared and the staff that was in the hands of the dead Andrei Nikolaev

A bubbling power was rising in the stands that made people begin to scream and rush out of their seats for the exit.

Those watching at home were shocked at the turn of events and appearance of an Admiral that should not be in Star City. He was normally stationed in the capital of the Empire, and rarely came back to visit his home town.

The powerhouses that were coincidentally watching quickly began making calls to people that were near the city. A catastrophe was about to break out.

Vice Admiral Magnar was still looking towards the clear sky as he looked for something that wasn't yet there and shook his head, preparing to see if talking would work. He wasn't able to get near the arena before a pained scream rang out as mad power exploded from the stands

"YOU BEAST!!!"

Chapter 36 - Collision

Vice Admiral Magnar watched the next events unfold in shocking fashion as Admiral Chekhov seemed to have forgotten everything around him as he erupted with power that launched him towards Noah as if he was a missile

The body of Admiral Chekhov was leaking purple light as his fist reached Noah, the impact smashing him down into the arena floor.

The more surprising thing was seeing Noah fly out a second after, his equipment tattered but his body seeming perfectly fine

The purple light surrounding the Admiral formed into a purple disc that he stood in the air with. Feeling the strength of that blow and the power emanating in the field, Magnar stopped going forward as he knew he would only lose his life if he came by. He only had rank B strength after all

What he didn't understand was how much he had underestimated Noah. How was he able to stand against the strikes of multiple rank A skills and still be able to stand against an A Ranker? The surprises this man kept bringing out were too numerous

But if he had already reached this level, it was a great thing for the future of the Empire. This fight had to be stopped. He was about to look at the masses of people scrambling to get away from the Coliseum when Chekhov moved once again, this time the purple light forming into a spiked fist that rushed toward Noah

Vice Admiral Magnar looked at this as he wished the person he called to get here as soon as possible.

WHIZZ!

The huge spiked purple fist rushed through the air with a grating sound as three red lightning bolts smashed into it, dissipating its form. Noah didn't seem to be done as three more rapidly rotating tornadoes rushed where the Admiral was

Chekhov looked at the incoming mini-tornadoes and waved his hand, a purple blade forming which split the rotating winds apart as if they were paper. The field calmed down after this trading of attacks, Chekhov was still bubbling with anger and grief but was gradually calming down. More purple swords were forming beside him as he spoke

"Yes he was in the wrong, but he didn't deserve death." His rage seemed to have been reignited as he finished his words and the purple swords around him began to vibrate

Noah watched and then pulled out the new skill book he had obtained before the purple fist came crashing down on him. The glistening book was on his hand for only a second, before he brought it near his body and it was dissolved in colorful lights that went inside

Admiral Chekhov looked at this happening and became even angrier, screaming out while commanding his large vibrating swords to rush forward "If you had shown your level of power, none of this would have happened! My son would not have called for a Death Match, we would have simply waited another week for the next skill book and moved on. This is your fault!"

His rage was palpitating as his purple sword neared Noah's position

BOOM!

A resounding explosion rang out after, the purple swords being destroyed by the explosion, leaving behind a wide area where ice elements were still fluctuating. [Frigid Impermanence] was cast once again, but this time from the hands of someone else.

Magnar looked at this site with incredulousness, questioning the mana reserves of the man that kept on throwing spells left and right.

Calmness seemed to have returned on Admiral Chekov's face as his mind seemed to be made up, numerous purple spiked fists and sword beginning to appear around him.

At this time though, a sultry voice rang out in the destroyed Coliseum.

"Haha, Chekhov, you're actually planning on going all out in the middle of a city?"

Unknown to everyone, a huge black eagle that was boasting more than 5 meters in size was suspended in the sky. A woman with flowing golden hair sat atop this eagle

Magnar soon felt elated at this person's arrival that signified the end to the mess today. He saw Admiral Chekhov's expression change to that of annoyance in the midst of anger and pain as he spoke, "Why are you here?"

The woman laughed mischievously as her eagle neared the floating Noah in the sky. She looked at this foreign hunter before speaking "Now where has someone like you been hiding all this time?"

The woman atop the eagle pulled her eyes from Noah and observed the destroyed arena while continuing, now with a stern tone "I came to resolve any issues from the peak powerhouses of the empire that should not be fighting amongst themselves during this time of crisis"

Chekhov didn't seem to mind as the woman ignored him and he looked towards the man that stood calmly in the air. He knew that he would not be getting anything resolved. The man before him had risen to a position no lower than him, and seemed like he was only getting started.

The thing that caused him even more pain was the utter stupidity of the entire affair. None of the things that occurred were necessary. If only his son had just swallowed his anger and waited. If only he knew about the person he set up a match with. If only...

He was a smart man and knew not to go down the path of destruction. There were many more people depending on him. This conflict will end here. The damage done now was already too much and he didn't want it to continue further. He gave a tired sigh as the purple disc below his legs moved towards the destroyed arena. He tenderly looked at the remains of his son and bent down to pick up what remained, and quietly flew away.

I observed the woman in the air with great interest as she stood on the menacing black eagle. I had recognized that huge eagle from clips I had seen in the past.

My heart was still pounding from the battles that had just finished while watching the sad figure of Admiral Chekhov move away

I wasn't remotely sorry for the death of Andrei. He came after me, knowing full well the Death Match would result in death. He was okay with this, his people were okay with this, and those that cleared and issued the deathmatch were okay with this. They just got wrong which person would be dying.

The thrill of withstanding the destructive damage of [Frigid Impermanence-Unstable and destructive ice elements erupt in a specified 5-meter area] and then gaining the skill myself was hard to describe. The fact that this skill dropped and not the one that turned his body golden meant it was at a higher level than the usual rank A skills

Back then, I was even skeptical of being able to withstand the power of the Admiral that had decided to come to the city to watch his son. Did he really think I would stop in the middle of the match just

because he said so? If it was me from a few days back who still held a few rank C skills, maybe I would have stood down.

But I knew my power would near if not rival a rank A with all the boosts I was receiving from skills and had also received many rank B skills that emboldened me to make the gamble of obtaining another rank A skill by taking out Andrei, and it worked.

The Admiral's attacks were ferocious and damaged the [Scale Armor], and after bypassing [Arcanist's Sphere of Protection] and [Golden Halo], they could barely just leave cuts and bruises on my body, similar to the devastating damage of [Frigid Impermanence]

I was curious about the skill that allowed the Admiral to form those spiked fists and swords, but that would have to wait as I watched the woman turn her attention to me. She spoke in that melodious voice of hers that demanded attention

"I'll be the first to congratulate the newest rank A hunter of The Blessed Empire, Mr. Noah Osmont. I'm known as Elizabeth, but you can call me Liz"

I tried not to get taken in by her cadence as I smiled and said, "Thanks for stepping in, I wasn't sure I could hold on any longer"

Her figure shook as she let out another laugh and said "Really? You seemed inexhaustible, like you could go on for an entire day"

I shook my head at these words and looked at the coming Vice Admiral that was shouting directions to members of the regiment to help those who were injured and calm the chaos around the arena

"Oh, you have little Magnar to thank for my appearance here today, he called in a favor from long ago and used it for you" She said as she watched him come over

I looked towards Magnar. I was actually very thankful for the continued help from this Vice Admiral, and was planning on doing my best to bolster his forces in the coming days. I flew down as the huge eagle also descended to meet the Vice Admiral that was looking towards us with a delighted expression

Chapter 37 - Calmness

Magnar was happy that he had gained someone with rank A battle power as his ally, and couldn't hide it as he talked to me and the rank A hunter with the huge beast that had stepped in to end the fight

If the fight had continued, I was pretty confident of coming out on top, but it would have taken quite some time. I could keep on casting my newly gained rank A skill until the Admiral was tired out, but the chance was gone. I also wasn't planning on going around and making it a habit taking down famous hunters everywhere I go

I knew there was a grudge between me and the Admiral now, but I wouldn't go out of my way to kill him for it. He was a peak powerhouse of the Empire, and would be needed for the battles of the future with these unknown enemies. Unless I could become strong enough to be able to do everything by myself, I won't go around snuffing out others with similar power to me. If he ever comes for me again though, that is a whole different matter

The rank A hunter Elizabeth left after we spoke for a few minutes, saying she now had to go deal with other matters that popped up because of this, and that she would come by when she was free. My gaze lingered on her slightly as she flew away on the black eagle

It was now nearing the evening, and more soldiers and hunter medics were on the scene helping those that were injured from the aftermath of the battle. I wasn't sure when the Coliseum would be open for business after this

After giving out orders and leaving someone else in charge, I left with Magnar in tow back to the military sector. I was planning on spending the remaining hours of the day diving in [Mangrove Swamp], feeling more pressed to clear the dungeon and luckily obtain other rank A skills

Going to the highest-ranked Dungeon at the empire's capital, Blessed City, wasn't an option as a team of A rankers led by Steel Mikhail was clearing it. Unless I rapidly increased my power to be able to rival multiple rank A hunters, I wouldn't touch that dungeon alone as of now

Farming rank B dungeons for the possibility of a rank A skill dropping was the safest and most efficient way, as I would also pay back Magnar by giving him the items and skills I wouldn't need while grabbing some from their inventory.

This was also what some of the rank A hunters spent their day doing, clearing rank B dungeons repeatedly in the Empire's capital and other core defense cities. Every now and then a rank A skill would drop, and this was the case for the [Flight] skill that Lightning Hand was holding on to.

Why he did what he did by giving it away still eluded me, but I would find out in time now that my power was matching his. Whether it was with malicious intent or out of the goodness of his heart didn't matter now that it allowed me to get another one so fast with the rapid progression of events. The events these past few days played in my head as I asked myself if there was actually a conspiracy, or just unintended effects from one man's actions

The Vice Admiral went to handle communications for the incident today and I went into [Mangrove Swamp] once again.

My speed at clearing the dungeon had increased even more with the advent of [Frigid Impermanence] as it cleared droves of alligators the moment it was cast. This area of effect skill exploded with a destructive blast of ice elements that completely destroyed anything in their range. Something that was noteworthy of mentioning was the [Adept Staff] that I took from Andrei, as it slightly boosted the damage of skills when it was equipped

After using [Frigid Impermanence] for a while, my mind was filled with ideas on how to improve its damage even more after I recalled some rank B skill books I had seen in the military inventory that I read through before

The idea floating in my mind was to find support skills that were providing boosts specific to the skill type to further increase the damage. An example was a [Lightning Penetration] skill I had seen before that amplified damage dealt by lightning type skills. If I could absorb and keep active cold type support skills, it wouldn't be too far of a dream for the [Frigid Impermanence] skill's power to exceed rank A. As for the rank beyond A...well nobody knew of this as of right now

I was able to clear the dungeon rapidly, making the number of times I've dived into it 18 times in the last 6 hours. It was nearing midnight so I was planning on calling it a night. The rate at which I was clearing the dungeon was still kept hidden as I only turned off [Shadow Veil], [Stealth], and [Camouflage] after every hour, making it seem as if I had cleared the dungeon only 6 times

This was still an unbelievable clear rate that every time I visibly transferred in and out, the soldiers standing guard would cheer.

I gained a variety of [Skill]s, [Item]s, and a ton of [Core]s, but I wasn't lucky enough to get anything of higher rank from the dungeon. The useful skills I could learn reduced, as many were either weapon-specific for Knights or Berserkers. Some support skills like [Giant Strength] and [Windrider] had even dropped again, giving me duplicate skills that I couldn't absorb

Only two usable rank B support skills came out of these 18 runs, one being [Emboldened Ferocity- An imposing presence emanates from you, granting increased damage to affected foes] and [Eagle Eyes- Focus your eyes to view as far a mile around you]. The remaining were rank B [Item]s that fully upgraded me from the lower-ranked items I had been wearing.

[Noah Osmont][Occupation: Hunter]

[Vitality: 250+40]

[Focus: -]

[Strength: 250+60]

[Skill(s): [F][E](D-Flames of Torment-100)(D-Safeguard-57)(D-Danger Sense-100)(D-Rough Skin-100)(D-Fleeting-100)(C-Arcanist's Sphere of Protection-100) (C-Camouflage-100) (C-Aura of Haste-100)(C-Explosive Rune-100)(C-Life Essence-100) (C-Increased Penetration-100) (C-Regeneration-100) (C-Whirlwind-95) (C-Smite-98) (C-Gracefulness-100) (C-Precision-100) (C-Adamant-100) (C-Sharpen-100)(C-War Cry-100) (C-Retaliatio-100)(C-Kings Rage-100)(C-Military Tactics-100) (C-Unpredictable-100) (C-Elemental Damage-100)(B-Giant's Strength-88) (B-Stealth-77) (B-Miniature Tornado-45)(B-Golden Halo-33)(B-Doom Bolt-37) (B-Lightfoot-23)(B-Windrider-23)(B-Rigorous-22)(B-Shadow Veil-22)(B-Wild Heart-21)(B-Emboldened Ferocity-3)*(B-Eagle Eyes-3)*(A-Flight-11)(A-Frigid Impermanence-5)*]

[Equipment: (3x C-Ring of Storage)(B-Scale Armor)(B-Adept Staff)*(B-Dual Coated Boots)*(B-Striking Cap)*]

The addition of items besides the staff was a helm that was in the form of a baseball cap and heavy boots that shone a dark green color. Both provided increased defenses and protection

I carried the rest of the [Core]s, [Item]s and [Skill Book]s in my storage rings and went to the Vice Admiral's castle. I thought about everything he had done for me before deciding to trust him a little bit more about my strength

When the door of the office was locked and it was just me and him, I took out more than 20 things that were filling up the space in my rings along with a glistening pile of stones. These were a collection of items, cores, and skills from today's dives and yesterday's. The Vice Admiral looked at the items in shock as he gave me a questioning look

"I clear the dungeon much faster than what I am currently showing. I continue to want to keep the extent of my strength a secret though, so I will be counting on your discretion as we go forward. This is also my way of thanking you and giving back for what you've been doing for me recently"

Magnar looked at me with an unreadable expression before he got up and bowed his head towards me. I reached out to stop him as he began talking

"You are somebody that has already surpassed someone of my rank, thank you for treating me the same way even now" He kept his head down as he continued

"Just the resources you have taken out right now surpass what our department usually gets in a week. This may not seem like much to you, but it is a tremendous help to us and will enable us to raise multiple rank B hunters. Confidentiality is a must, so you can be sure that nothing about this will come to light, and everything will be distributed discreetly"

I listened to the older man that was bowing in front of me before I pulled him up. I smiled and said to the Vice Admiral, "We're all in this together. We'll face the approaching enemies together and make sure lives are not senselessly lost like when all of this began"

I was saying this more to myself as I was reminded of the deaths of my parents and many more people at the hands of these beasts. I reminded myself once more that I was doing all this to never experience the feeling of cowardice and powerlessness again. If continuing to grow my strength was the way to do that, then I will continue rising until I reach an unshakable position

Magnar gave me a light smile as his sight turned to the many things I had taken out, shaking his head in an amazed expression as he laughed and said, "It's been a tiring day for you, go ahead and relax. I'll order for even more food and...other delicacies for you to enjoy back in your quarters."

I shook my head with a smile as I heard this and said "I'll also need your help acquiring specific skills that may still be in your inventory"

I let him know of the skills I saw before that I wanted to grab now, and also told him to keep a lookout for any other cold type support skills that other hunters brought in. He nodded boisterously that he would have everything for me tomorrow morning and for me to go take a break for now

I left the Vice Admiral's office and went to relax after a very long day.

Chapter 38 - Irreversible changes

The night was a hazy blur and passed by in a blink. I woke up the next morning feeling invigorated as I saw the sight in front of me while feeling the colors and boosts of multiple activated skills that seemed to fill my body with inexhaustible power.

If I didn't have [Stealth] and [Shadow Veil] activated at all times, people would just see a mass of colors and defensive layers surrounding me at all times

I freshened up and left the living quarters to start this day early, planning to be holed up in the [Mangrove Swamp] for the remainder of the day to see exactly how many times I could clear it before a rank A skill would show itself

I flew through the clear skies and arrived at the huge monolith, which seemed to have turned to a shade of light blue after I cleared it so many times.

That day, I spent my entire time diving and I was able to clear the dungeon more than 40 times. Forty. That number did not seem realistic, and something like this had never occurred in the past. Nobody had the unending stamina to do what I did repeatedly for an entire day

One good thing came out of it, as I was finally able to receive a rank A skill from this dungeon. My next rank A skill was [Guardian Light-A light that cures injuries, ailments, and diseases descends down]. It wasn't a defensive or movement skill that I was thinking about, but it was an amazing skill nonetheless. Its usefulness would be even more apparent whenever the time comes where I get injured again

Also, besides my original three rank C [Ring of Storage], I was able to get an additional drop of these rare rings, this one even being rank B and holding a much larger space that was now holding a ton of [Item]s, [Core]s, and [Skill Book]s from the past 40 dungeon runs

I was leaving the dungeon for the last time today to sift through the useful skill books and those that I would be giving away. Most of the items that dropped were duplicates of [Scale Armor] or the other items that dropped in this dungeon before

I placed my hand on the green crystal and transferred to the outside world once more. I nodded to the guards and was about to head towards the Vice Admiral's office when I felt the ground start shaking

The tremors were emanating behind me and I turned back to see the huge dungeon monolith that was now a light fade of blue... had cracks spreading out from the middle.

Oh shit

The cracks expanded as the tremors got even stronger, and the huge monolith began trembling before an explosion ran out

BOOM!

A huge blast was sent out as I was flung away and any hunter soldiers that were near were heavily injured. I had watched the huge monolith of the [Mangrove Swamp] expand with cracks and then implode. When the dust cleared, there was an empty space where the monolith used to be, only a small shimmering crystal lying at the center

I looked at this with my mouth wide open. What the hell did I do now?! I was trying to calm my emotions as I went forward to observe the shimmering crystal that remained from the monolith when I was suddenly met with a searing headache

AAH!

I screamed out loud as I clutched my head and felt this pain that threatened to make my head explode. In my agony, a few faint words rose up in my mind that I could barely make out

[...Move...Faster...]

An hour after.

Tumultuous waves were spreading throughout the empire. News had just been transmitted to all the leaders and governments of various cities of an incident where a dungeon...had completely disappeared

This was the first-ever change to occur since they first began appearing. New dungeons could appear at any time, but there was never a case of them ever disappearing unless a dungeon break occurred. The more shocking news that was coming out was that...a hunter was involved in causing this!

Leaders from all over were scrambling to find the authenticity of these news. If any of this was true. If any of this could be replicated...Higher-ups who understood the current world were trembling in anticipation for the possible future

In a grand palace at the center of Blessed City.

There was a large hall lined with guards wearing golden armors. At the forefront was a striking throne that shone with a purple light. A person was sitting on this throne looking at the Admirals kneeling down below the steps

A feminine voice rang out in the large hall

"I want a thorough report about all the events surrounding that dungeon. By the end of the day, I expect to be briefed with all the information about that hunter as well."

The voice paused after this was heard before continuing

"Treat the hunter very carefully, he might just be what we have been waiting for"

On the throne was a figure fully covered from head to toe. A royal mask was hiding the face and an exquisitely defined crown lay atop their head.

A man whose body was crackling with lightning was just transferring out of a rank B dungeon when his phone began blowing up. He pulled the phone out in annoyance as he read to see just who would dare to bother him so much

There were multiple texts and missed calls from people he didn't wanna talk to all, but the things he was reading were giving him a shock.

"Get back to base soon" (Admiral X)

"What is your connection to the rising hunter of Star City?" (Amiral XX)

"Call me back. Now." (Admiral XXX)

Nothing he was reading from the texts was making sense. A name kept popping up that he didn't recognize, Noah Osmont. He was busy clearing dungeons and didn't even get the news of the deathmatch he inadvertently caused this same day. After reading some more and seeing a lot of the

questions were revolving about the event a few days ago where he handed the winner of an impromptu match a rank A skill, the name and person came together

The lightning was sparking out in an unstable manner the more he read on about what had just occurred. He was in shock as he thought "My impulsiveness actually led to something good?"

An incident had occurred that caused shock waves to spread not just throughout the Empire, but to the many allied countries in the United Federation. The news leaked out the moment it began spreading, other countries soon learning of this momentous affair

Delegates were assembled and tensions rose. The excitement was palpating. Everyone could feel it. A change was coming.

Chapter 39 - What are you?

I was looking at a glowing crystal after finishing the talk with an excited Vice Admiral over what had just occurred.

After the implosion of the dungeon monolith, there were many hunter soldiers that were badly injured, and I was able to see the versatility of my recently learned skill, [Guardian's Light]

When I directed this skill to the injured soldiers, whether it was a light scratch or deep wounds, they all began to heal in a few seconds before becoming as good as new. A few guards that were near death were also stabilized and brought back to health in a few seconds

The next hour after that was the most tiring time I had gone through these past few days. The first point was the only thing that was left behind as the dungeon disappeared. Information about its name was the only thing I could observe, everything else was unreadable. [Plane Crystal- <[*- _&<+>?]{>}]]@+}@<%]

A plane crystal...what are you and how can you be used?

I had tried putting in energy, crushing it, absorbing it, nothing had changed. Something even more pressing along with this was the episode where I had an excruciating headache, and whether I was hallucinating or not, I clearly saw the words "Move Faster"

I gave some thought to these new developments as I realized I might be in the middle of something much greater than what I knew. When I spent the hour discussing with Vice Admiral Magnar about everything that had occurred, this was the only thing on my mind. I told Magnar I needed some time to think, and here I was staring at this crystal while thinking about those words

Among the many possible hypotheses I had, one of the more likely ones was that there was a correlation between what I have become able to do, the blank [Focus], and now all of that was somehow weaved into whatever sent me that message while my head was splitting apart the moment I caused a dungeon to disappear

When the cracks spread throughout, it wasn't the normal dungeon break where monsters broke out, the entire monolith was just completely gone. My mind had already ascertained that it was around 40 times

I had cleared the dungeon before the light blue color became thinner and thinner, eventually exploding after

This meant as long as dungeons were cleared a specific number of times under a very short duration, there was a possibility of breaking them. I knew something like this was huge, as it would put me in the middle of this taking a leading role for the time to come. Nobody could clear dungeons as many times as me without tiring out. Unless many hunters formed tens of teams to target one dungeon, they wouldn't be able to match my rate

I was questioning why lower-ranked dungeons had not disappeared like this before, and came to the conclusion that different ranks of dungeons would require to be cleared a different number of times rapidly before the monolith would implode.

There were three rank B dungeons in Star City, and they were being cleared maybe 3 or 4 times a day by teams of hunters. Lower ranked dungeons in core defense cities like this one would be cleared in faster rates, with rank C being approximately 10-20 times, rank D 30+ times, rank E 40+, and rank F more than 50 times each day as there were more and more hunters each level down

These numbers were only normal for core defense cities, and would be even lower for the cities in the outer perimeter of the empire that had very few dungeons. An example was how Outer Bank X City only had its rank C dungeon cleared once every few days

But none of these lower-ranked dungeons had disappeared, meaning they required to be cleared even more times in a day before a case similar to [Mangrove Swamp] could repeat itself. This was only a theory and had to be tested. I had cleared this rank B dungeon so rapidly that it could not keep standing

Many questions came after that which made my head buzz. I took a deep breath as I stopped thinking for a bit. I would understand everything in time. What I needed to focus on now was simply what the words in my head said. Move faster. I already thought my rapid progress was monstrous, but I had to move at a much faster rate. I was planning how to start testing some of my thoughts when a light knock was heard

Sigh, didn't I tell them not to bother me for now? I stayed quiet and kept on thinking, but I soon heard the door clicking open and footsteps coming inside. You all really couldn't wait? I was about to berate the figure that was intruding in my living quarters but was stunned when I saw who it was. A sweet voice rang out mischievously as a woman wearing a red dress with a head full of golden hair came in

"You really are full of surprises aren't you?"

Elizabeth was trotting in like she owned the place, which might not be too far off as whatever access she had allowed her to enter my room with no problems. I looked at her calmly and replied

"I don't even know what happened myself" These words weren't completely false as there was a lot I didn't know.

The hunter that seemed to be in her late 20s or early 30s smiled and looked around the room as she said, "I would love to get a better idea about what happened. May I...accompany you for a discussion tonight?"

I looked at the woman whose every word she spoke seemed to have multiple meanings. I looked at the tight red dress she was wearing and the head full of golden hair. I continued to be alert so that I wouldn't be taken in by her pace and smiled. Sure. I'll bite

Magnar was not able to get a wink of sleep the entire night. He had spent a majority of it deflecting powerhouses from getting near a certain man and being grilled with questions. He wasn't fully successful though as someone had still slid through. He thought of a certain hunter as he shook his head and thought about all the collection of hunters that were staying in his base

He had been excited just like everyone else at the new development and was waiting to see how things would play out from here. Dungeons could be permanently erased. This was naturally good news, but it prompted another question that he didn't want to think about. Should they all be permanently erased? Should only some be erased and a manageable few left behind? Magnar was thinking of all the resources that came out of dungeons as these ideas clashed in his mind

Things got even more hectic as people from Blessed City appeared, making him feel like he was walking on eggshells. He tried putting all of this aside as he neared the quarters of a now-famous man and knocked

A moment passed before the door opened and a half-dressed man looked out. His upper body seemed packed with muscles as the abdominal muscles were so pronounced that it almost seemed they were fake. In the room, slender long legs of someone could be made out draped over the bed

Magnar looked at this and gave a smile, choosing his next words carefully. "...Sir, we'll be holding a forum with representatives from major cities to discuss the new developments and how to move forward from here"

He couldn't bring himself to talk to the man the same way he had been doing before. He was doing too many inconceivable things. The man seemed to shake his head before he spoke, "I'll be out in a moment"

Chapter 40 - How to destroy a dungeon

I was standing at the front of a room where a long oval table was situated, with many new faces sitting and expectantly waiting. Nobody in the room spoke when I walked in, and even now more people were taking their seats in a hushed manner

The Vice Admiral led me to a chair to the front of the room and stood behind me. I could see some familiar faces in the crowd that I recognized, one of them being the man that inadvertently propelled the sequence of actions these past few days, Lightning Hand. When he met my gaze, he gave me that same boisterous smile and laughed.

The moment it seemed like everyone was there, buzzing voices rang out as the discussions began. The whole process took an entire hour and was filled with many boring arguments and discussions, but the core things to take out were the same. Much of the discussion revolved around the repeatability of erasing a dungeon, and whether we should be actively erasing them at all. Sparks began to fly when

these comments rose, as for some it was common sense to destroy the dungeons that could release monsters anytime if they weren't regularly cleared.

I didn't speak fully about my power, but people could make inferences about it after knowing the process that was required to completely destroy the rank B dungeon

I recalled the words that were urging me to move faster before I rose up from my seat, quieting the many voices in the room. I looked around me as I said, "I'll be moving to confirm everything with another rank B dungeon. Once the process is clear, we will know how to proceed from here on out"

I wanted to take a more active role in the world around me after seeing everything that was happening. My first step in doing that was to replicate what I did yesterday. There was still an army of monsters approaching from The Barrens, and who knows what else is lurking out there. I didn't know how much time I had before I was thrown into something else, so I was going to move fast.

I left the conference room to start acting on my plans as soon as everything wrapped up. Elizabeth was already up and moving, making it clear she wanted to come along. Having this rank A hunter with me would not be a bad idea, as it would provide another cover for how expansive my strength that allowed me to clear a rank B dungeon more than 40 times in a day was

The next target was one of the two remaining rank B dungeons in Star City, [Lion's Den]. Magnar and other officials moved to watch the development outside the monolith as we dived. Lightning Hand and other rank A hunters that had arrived in Star City were going to test the same thing by forming multiple teams to clear the third dungeon in the City, [Bullish Arena]

Multiple rank A hunters formed more than 10 teams that were filled with rank B's in the city and the groups moved in on the dungeons. The ones heading to [Lion's Den] would be me, Elizabeth, and a few other teams while the rest would go towards [Bullish Arena]

The goal was to meet the number of times I cleared the now extinct [Mangrove Swamp] and see if it was applicable to the rest of rank B dungeons. After this was understood, the tests would be expanded for the other ranks of dungeons

I was able to see the power of another rank A Hunter firsthand as Liz summoned the humongous eagle the moment we were transferred into [Lion's Den]. The eagle had flawlessly shining dark feathers that were as sharp as knives and piercing claws that brought fear onto the monsters that began appearing

We were located in a bleak grassland environment where multiple large lions were circling us. The eagle's imposing air was holding some of them back as the woman atop the eagle laughed in that alluring tone and commanded the eagle to move forward, its outspread wings acting as sharp blades that decimated everything in sight

I wasn't going to be left behind as my figure flew to the other groups of lions that were soon blasted away with an even stronger [Frigid Impermanence] that was now boosted by two new cold specific support skills I obtained from the military inventory.

[Greater Cold Penetration- Ignore the enemy's resistance as cold skills deal increased damage] and [Cold Fire- Cold type skills attach freezing flames onto the enemy] made the already damaging skill even more

destructive as any beast in its range of attack would be turned into meat and bones, with the cold spreading into the surroundings and attaching onto nearby beasts

Blue flames could be seen spreading to any beasts that were in the blast area as they screamed out painfully before their bodies were frozen cold.

[Lion's Den] was an expansive space of shrubs and grassland with dens on lions here and there. We had to fly around for more than 30 minutes blasting away hordes of lions before we were faced with the impossibly large TITAN that had a glorious lions mane flowing in the wind

Liz looked at me as her lips twisted up in a mischievous smile and said, "He's all yours, let's see how fast you can take it down"

She seemed to be enjoying herself as she gave me a thumbs up while lying on her stomach atop the flying eagle to watch the show. I looked at this figure as I recalled memories from last night before I quickly shook myself out of it and focus on the matter at hand

The lion instinctively felt the danger when I neared and moved back, barely evading the epicenter of the casted [Frigid Impermanence] as the freezing flames in the periphery jumped on its body. It stopped to let of a roar of pain, but it would be the last time the huge jaws opened as another [Frigid Impermanence] bloomed explosively from its head, cutting short the roar and blasting chunks of meat and brain matter into the ground

I ignored the cheerful sounds of clapping behind me as I picked up the [Core]s and [Item] that dropped from the boss.

We repeated this dungeon multiple times until a few hours later, on our 28th dungeon run something occurred. Throughout the runs, Liz had done nothing but summon the huge eagle that did all the work in dismembering the monsters that I began looking favorably to getting a powerful summoning skill of my own in the future so I could just sit back and watch someone else do the work for me

Her eagle would have been out of commission after the first few dungeon runs as its body was littered with injuries. If it wasn't for me casting [Guardian's Light] after every dive thereafter, the huge eagle would have had to be de-summoned and summoned again to be back in top shape. That summoning process took more than half of all energy reserves Elizabeth had, so she would usually dive into rank B dungeons a few times a day before calling it quits

She stopped being surprised at my constant casting of spells after the first few dungeon runs as her cheerful expression became more complicated. I wasn't too worried at showing some level of my power as I was confident in myself to withstand many of the things that could come at me, and I had to stop hiding if I wanted to move further into the future

The change that was occurring currently on our 28th dungeon run was our surroundings literally cracking as if they were glass. The lions in the den in front of us were disappearing as if they were dust as a green light spread out to cover the eagle and us as we disappeared from the dungeon halfway through. We were transferred to the outside world where we could see the imposing monolith with cracks all over

Anyone that was remotely close to the monolith moved back as many people got the chance to witness the destruction of another dungeon for the first time in history. It looks like the other teams were doing well enough to clear the dungeon more than 12 times after my team was on our 28th run. The team that finished the dungeon for the 40th time was the trigger that caused the instability where any remaining teams in the dungeon were ejected out and the eventual destruction we just witnessed

This was working proof that the theory was correct. Dungeons could be destroyed. I listened to the triumphant sounds around me as I turned my head to the woman beside me. We were both standing on top of her black eagle as the monolith exploded. I was surprised to find tears dropping from her crystal clear eyes as she watched the sight. She turned to me and talked in a serious expression for the first time since I met her

"You didn't expect to see me cry so soon?" She was wiping away the tears that kept on falling as she continued, "I don't know if you understand the full significance of what we are doing, but for many of us, it is liberation"

She looked forward at the sight of hunters hugging one another and said, "I have watched countless people die before me as I was forced to keep on going into these dungeons day in and day out. I felt like I would go crazy if I had to keep on doing this for the years to come. The only way I could cope without breaking down was to put on a happy face and keep on going"

She looked back at me as she said the next words. "So thank you for making something like this happen. Thank you, and please do not stop"

I watched the sight of the sorrowful girl in front of me as she tried to form a smile on her sad face before I let out a sigh and brought her head to my chest, making sure to remove the rough [Scale Armor] and place it into one of the storage rings beforehand. I didn't particularly have strong feelings of attachment towards this person as I had only met her for a few days now

Even the one night we spent together, I attributed it to just a fling from the growing interest around me. She was much more alluring than many of the women I had come across recently, but I always felt like she was putting up a face so I kept my emotions out of it. Her words repeated in my head as she sobbed. Liberation?

I already made up my mind long ago for what I was doing. There were too many things I didn't know, and much more that I didn't understand. Even without her reminder, I would not be stopping any time soon