

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 171 - Chapter 170

Chapter 171: Chapter 170

Boom! Black smoke billowed. A tremendous shockwave rippled out from where Suho's fist landed.

[Kaaaaaaaah!] Javier's pained screech pierced through the air. The screams emanating from his massive, heaving body. And with that, Suho's relentless assault began.

Boom! Thud! Each blow was a heavy attack. Suho's fists, clad in the gigantic gauntlets, began to mercilessly pummel Javier.

[Y-you bastard-!] Javier didn't just take the hits. Dozens of giant tentacles lashed out from all directions, fiercely striking Suho's body. But he didn't block, enduring all the monstrous attacks with his bare body, focusing solely on attacking, and attacking again.

'A head-on fight.'

Even the Tenacity skill couldn't completely nullify all the pain. It hurt when he got hit. His insides churned. A surge of blood rose in his throat. His HP was steadily decreasing but Suho didn't stop. He had no intention of stopping his attacks.

This was a test.

His father was watching.

3

He had been given permission to go all out, to leave the aftermath to his father.

'So I'll show him how I overcome the challenge he set.' Suho tore through the tentacles wrapped around his body with sheer force and continued his attack on Javier even more fiercely.

Boom!

Strength. And Tenacity. A fierce exchange of blows, with neither side giving an inch. The scene was completely different from ordinary hunters' raids. It was like a bloody battle between two monsters. And they had one thing in common...

They weren't alone.

Kekekekekeke! Skeletons swarmed from all sides, trying to hinder Suho.

He ignored them and focused solely on attacking Javier. Because his side was employing the same strategy.

Whew- Crash! Que's spear pierced through the air and struck Javier's eyeball.

[Aaaaaaaaagh!] Enraged, Javier grabbed Que's body and mercilessly crushed it.

Then.

Bam! The tentacle that had pulverized Que also ruptured.

[Harman uses Skill: 'Thorn of Pain' on all Shadow Soldiers.]

[All pain and damage Que receives is shared with the attacker.]

[All damage taken by the Shadow Soldiers is reflected.] Of course, the results weren't exactly the same due to differences in defense and health, but it still cost Javier a tentacle. Moreover...

Splat! Javier's wound was forcibly torn open, and black blood gushed out like a fountain.

[Skill: 'Damage Amplification' increases the damage taken by The Demonic Illusionist Javier.]

Javier gritted his teeth as he tried to stop the bleeding. On the other hand, Harman mocked him with a wicked grin. Joy and sorrow intersected between the two.

[You traitor to the demonic spirits! You call yourself a great sorcerer, yet you have no shame...!]

Bam! Suho's attack exploded on his jaw once again.

[Keuk! You're quite... strong, but it's useless!] Growled Javier through clenched teeth. He was distracted by the unexpected series of events, but that didn't change anything. Thanks to the enhanced magic from the illusion of Sung Jinwoo, Javier was overflowing with confidence.

[Kehehe! Unleash all your power! The more you do, the more exhausted you'll become, while my magic power is constantly being replenished! Khahahahaha!] His maniacal laughter echoed through the sandstorm.

[I am invincible within this magic circle!]

"Invincible, huh..." Suho responded with a grin.

He didn't know much about magic like his father, but he could roughly understand.

"You're continuously extracting magic power from the hunters trapped in the illusion, right? Treating them like batteries?" Suho chuckled and continued.

"That's why I sent most of my soldiers somewhere else."

'To remove the batteries.'

* * *

"Ugh... Ugh..." Countless hunters were struggling, trapped in the illusion.

The S-rank Lim Tae-Gyu was still embracing his wife and crying, but his hot tears evaporated the moment they flowed out. Due to the relentless heat he was on the verge of collapse with severe burns all over his body. He wanted to die here with his wife, but his magic power was keeping him alive.

[Honey, I want to live. I need more mana.] And his wife, nestled in his arms, whispered to him with a gentle smile.

[I need it.] And she tightened her grip on him with both arms. As if she wouldn't let him go until his magic power ran out.

[Honey, let's die together this time.] Lim Tae-Gyu thought it was fortunate that he had a lot of mana, as long as any remained this illusion wouldn't end. He knew that his death awaited him at the end of this path. But even that brought him peace, thinking of it as atonement for his wife. The burning pain in his body was also beautiful. His wife's gentle voice, whispering in his ear, how long had it been...?

1

[Honey, let's die together thi...]

[What are you, a broken record?] Tsk.

Suddenly a tongue click came from the empty air. And then a horrible sight unfolded before Lim Tae-Gyu's eyes.

Slash! His wife's neck was severed.

[Ah.]

"...What?" In an instant, Lim Tae-Gyu's eyes widened in shock.

Thud! His wife's head tumbled on the ground. So easily.

Fwoosh! It disappeared in blue flames, as if it was a lie.

At the same time, countless cracks began to appear all over his wife's body, which Lim Tae-Gyu was still holding. Then it began to crumble and disappear from his arms.

"No... No... No..." Lim Tae-Gyu knelt in front of her ashes, hands flailing helplessly.

In his vacant eyes, a figure slowly materialized.

Shadow Assassin, Kira.

He was looking down at Lim Tae-Gyu, tongue-clicking, with the dagger that had killed his wife dangling in his hand.

[Pathetic. An S-rank hunter, captivated by an illusion of memory. All for the sake of love.]

2

"...You bastard!" The moment the murderer revealed himself, Lim Tae-Gyu's once empty eyes turned bloodshot and filled with rage.

His strong hand immediately reached out and grabbed the assailant by the throat. Kira's neck snapped, caught helplessly in his grasp. But even then, he didn't die.

[Hmm. As expected of an S-rank.] Instead, he mocked him in a calm tone.

1

[If you have this much strength left, why don't you go find your son instead of wasting time on me?]

"...!" Lim Tae-Gyu's eyes widened at those words.

[If yours was like this, what do you think your son's worst memory is?]

"...!" At the mention of his son, the light returned to his eyes, which had been filled with madness.

"N-no! Dogyoon...!"

[He's there.] Without hesitation, Lim Tae-Gyu ran in the direction Kira pointed to.

The Shadow Assassin, left behind, watched his retreating figure and shrugged indifferently.

[...Well, there are parents like that too.] Why did it feel like only he had bad luck with family?

[Anyway, good luck catching him. That guy... I couldn't keep up with him.] With those words, Kira's body dissolved into thin air once again.

1

And he began hunting the illusions of other hunters, mercilessly killing them. Without any regard for the will or emotions of those suffering from them.

* * *

Lim Dogyoonon was running away.

As always...

This time, from the illusion of his mother chasing him.

[Dogyoon...]

"Aaaaaaaaah!"

[My son...]

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

He ran and ran with all his might, just like when he trained with Ammut. Lim Dogyoonon's agility had already far surpassed that of an E-rank hunter. But the illusion he had created was also chasing him at the same speed.

The memory of his mother chasing him, always hot on his heels. That image, deeply ingrained in Lim Dogyoonon's memory, was reflected in the illusion.

Watching the fierce and endless pursuit unfolding within the sandstorm, Kira gave up on rescuing Lim Dogyoonon early on. He decided it would be more efficient to save other hunters first. So he left Lim Dogyoonon to his father, Lim Tae-Gyu.

"Oh, no..."

As Kira intended, Lim Tae-Gyu couldn't help but wear a despairing expression when he found his son.

"How..." His son was being chased 'just like back then.' By his own mother.

And 'just like back then,' Lim Tae-Gyu was faced with a choice. The situation where he had to kill his wife by himself to save his son.

Of course, he knew...

Thinking purely rationally. The answer was the same as back then. Now, it was even easier since it was just an illusion of his wife... No, maybe not easier. Even back then, his wife had already turned into a monster. But sometimes, even when you know the answer rationally, it's hard to make a decision.

"Dogyoon...!" But just like back then he didn't hesitate.

Swish! Lim Tae-Gyu's body shot forward. Chasing after his son running far ahead.

'But what is this?' The speed was no joke.

'How?! Dogyoon is only an E-rank hunter!' The gap was closing, but this was definitely not an ordinary running speed for a lower class hunter.

2

"Keuk!" Worried that Dogyoon might finally get caught and killed, he aimed his bow. And targeted the heart of his wife's illusion, chasing within a hair's breadth behind his son. No, that wasn't his wife.

'It's a Mist Burn.' A person turned into a Mist Burn was no longer human. It was a monster.

'That's all!'

Swish! The bowstring was released, and a magic arrow shot out.

It pierced the Mist Burn's heart.

"Huff! Huff!" Finally stopping his run, Lim Dogyoonon turned around, gasping for breath.

"F-father...?" His eyes widened in surprise.

Relieved, Lim Tae-Gyu collapsed on the spot. But his eyes were still watching his son.

"...Are you hurt?" Along with the rising relief, tears welled up in his eyes for some reason.

And another illusion was watching the whole scene from above.

"Hmm." 'Sung Jinwoo' was observing Lim Dogyoonon with an intrigued expression. To think he would witness something like this.

'...An E-rank hunter. No wonder he feels familiar.' He chuckled.

Suddenly, his hand manipulated a new magic circle in the air.

And then, click.

He opened a 'gate'.

[Would you like to enter the Shadow Dungeon?] (Y/N)

1

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 172 - Chapter 171

Chapter 172: Chapter 171

[You have entered the Shadow Dungeon.]

[Iron Body Training Ground.]

Ammut, who had been leaning against a wall deep within the pyramid, slowly opened his eyes.

[...An uninvited guest has entered.]

Whoosh! Suddenly, a dimensional door opened, and an overwhelming presence stepped into the Shadow Dungeon.

[But why?] Despite being an intruder, there was nothing unnatural in the process. 'He' opened the door as if entering his own house and appeared before Ammut, completely at ease.

[Who are you!?] Ammut bared his teeth at the man.

The moment the giant crocodile-man rose, an immense pressure weighed down on the man. But he seemed completely unfazed by that kind of intimidation. Instead, he looked at Ammut with an intrigued gaze and nodded.

"You are the Crocor Ammut, aren't you?"

[...] Ammut hesitated at the strange aura emanating from this man.

The man wasn't looking at him while speaking. His gaze rested above Ammut's head, as if something were there.

[Could it be you...] Ammut belatedly noticed that the black energy flowing from the man strangely resembled Sung Suho's, and his eyes lit up.

[...Are you the Shadow Monarch?]

"No, not exactly... To be precise, I am something similar to him."

"You of all people should be able to tell, right?"

[What?]

[What are you talking about?] Ammut frowned at the vague answer. But even with that reaction, the illusion of Sung Jinwoo only met his eyes and gave a faint smile.

"So, magically speaking, I'm a being similar to you."

[...] Ammut's eyes widened at those words.

As if expecting this reaction, 'Sung Jinwoo' calmly turned his head and looked around. His gaze pierced through the magic circles of Kandiaru engraved in this pyramid.

Flash! Pat! Pat! After his look, the numerous magic circuits carved throughout the pyramid flickered and emitted beams of light.

[Could you be...]

The illusion of Sung Jinwoo, appreciating the results of his short work, opened his mouth: "Yes. Like you, I am a fake soul manifested by magic. There are nicer terms like avatar or NPC, but in the end, they all mean the same thing."

1

[...] Ammut's appearance reminded Jinwoo of the Demon King Baran, whom he had encountered on the top floor of the Demon Castle dungeon long ago.

Baran, the Monarch of White Flames, the King of Demons. He was the only monarch among those Jinwoo had faced who wasn't actually alive. More precisely, Baran had already been killed by the first Shadow Monarch, Ashborn, before encountering Sung Jinwoo and only his soul was recreated by Kandiaru's magic and used for leveling up by the System. However, the Demon King created in this way was nowhere near his original power. This was because the 'Primordial Darkness,' the source of the monarchs' power, was absent.

"I'm curious. How long have you been trapped in here?"

[Growl.] At those black eyes that seemed to see through him, Ammut chuckled and opened his mouth.

[I don't know. I can't tell the flow of time here.]

"Do you want me to kill you?"

[What? Kehehe. That's the funniest joke I've ever heard.] Ammut scoffed self-deprecatingly at those words. And then.

Bam! He swung his giant arm and smashed the wall beside him. Bricks crumbled, creating a massive hole. But strangely, after a while, the broken wall began to repair itself.

[See?] Ammut's eyes met Sung Jinwoo's.

[Even if you were the real Shadow Monarch, I cannot die. Because this place is both my tomb and myself.]

"Magic that automatically repairs itself even after being destroyed, huh." Sung Jinwoo nodded at those words, his gaze deepening.

But even if it were impossible for him in this form, bringing death to Ammut wouldn't be a difficult task for the 'real' him. However, since he hadn't asked with the intention of actually killing him, the illusion of Sung Jinwoo decided not to interfere any further. It was more important to confirm things about this place first. About this pyramid, which didn't exist in 'Sung Jinwoo's' memory.

...This place was, so to speak, Kandiaru's legacy. There must have been various experiments in the process of developing the Leveling System, and this pyramid was undoubtedly one of them. But what was curious was how this massive magical device ended up inside Sung Suho's shadow.

'A system that automatically repairs itself even after being destroyed.' Jinwoo soon realized the reason.

'...Could it be that the incomplete System, having lost its original purpose, is moving on its own trying to fix itself?'

In fact, the Leveling System had lost its objective a long time ago. Because it had already achieved its goal. In that situation, a new player named Sung Suho reactivated it. And the system began restoration...

To its original form.

No, to be precise...

'Is it modifying itself to fit the changed circumstances?' The original purpose of The System was, of course, to turn the player into a vessel for the Shadow Monarch. But Suho could never achieve that goal.

'Then what was the system trying to achieve?'

'Could it be creating the job change quest itself?'

The Leveling System was improving itself to achieve Suho's job change. That's what the illusion of Sung Jinwoo was convinced of. All the results of analyzing the existence of the NPC Ammut and the magic circles engraved in this pyramid pointed to that.

1

...Upon realizing that fact, he couldn't help but let out a hollow laugh. He was anxious yet excited about what kind of job his son would get. In the end, it wasn't much different from the worries of ordinary parents.

"I know what I need to do."

However, the moment 'Sung Jinwoo' smiled after organizing his thoughts, his body flickered, and his form began to disperse. Like a radio signal losing its frequency.

Ammut, who had been watching blankly from the front, chuckled and spoke.

[You're better than me. To be able to move freely, even for a moment, outside the realm of magic. But it seems that's as far as you can go.]

Flicker. The illusion of Sung Jinwoo looked down at his flickering hands, as if they were about to disappear any moment, and muttered.

"I guess so. It's time to go back. I've confirmed everything I needed to."

As he gestured in the air, a system message appeared: [Would you like to exit the Shadow Dungeon?] (Y/N)

Seeing him turn without hesitation and walk towards the door that had appeared, Ammut asked.

[But why did you come here in the first place?]

"Why, you ask? I came to see if I could support my son in any way."

[Hmm? And were you able to help?]

"Yes. A lot."

[For example?] At Ammut's question, the illusion of Sung Jinwoo reached out and touched the air.

Flash! With this one gesture, the magic circles engraved in the pyramid began to emit light all at once.

Sung Jinwoo spoke to Ammut, who stood still as always in the center of it all.

"Ammut, I've linked your soul trapped here to your true soul in the Sea of the Afterlife. Just like my illusion is now."

[...What does that mean?]

"It means you can now become a Shadow Soldier whenever you want."

[...]

Sung Jinwoo gave a mischievous smile to Ammut, who widened his eyes in realization of what those words meant, and continued.

"You don't want to rot in this prison forever, do you? In that case, become my son's soldier..."

"Ah, but to do that, my son needs to be..."

[Strong enough to take me in... Much stronger than now!]

Crack! Ammut's expression suddenly became incredibly motivated, and he clenched his giant fists. He grinned fiercely, banging his hands together.

[Leave it to me. I'll double, no, triple the intensity of the daily quests from now on.]

6

"...Make sure to give him potions while he trains." Sung Jinwoo felt a bit uneasy at his overflowing enthusiasm.

5

But if Suho could endure that training and take in the real Ammut as a Shadow Soldier...

His army would undoubtedly become tremendously stronger than it was now.

"Ah, and one more thing."

Snap! As Sung Jinwoo snapped his fingers, the magic circle he had manipulated beforehand began to activate.

Rumble!

[...] Ammut looked bewildered as the entire pyramid suddenly shook as if it were about to collapse. Being one with it, he realized that the pyramid was growing in size.

And then a black beam shot straight up from its pointed center. The light pierced through the dimensional wall and extended directly towards the distant universe.

[What are you doing?!]

"This is a kind of insurance. It has nothing to do with you, so don't worry about it." With those words, Sung Jinwoo returned to where he had come from.

[Huh...] Ammut just stared blankly at the spot where he had disappeared, with a dejected expression.

'How can a mere illusion possess such power...'

2

During his long life, Ammut had occasionally thought about something.

'What if, like the Iron Monarch, the strongest monstrous humanoid, he himself, had also participated in the war? Maybe we could have won then.' But now he realized...

[Nothing would have changed.]

1

* * *

[You have exited the Shadow Dungeon.]

The moment Sung Jinwoo returned to Suho's side. The battle was slowly coming to an end.

Crack! Crunch! Boom! Suho's strong hands tore through all of Javier's tentacles and grabbed the neck of his main body hidden within the illusion.

[Keuk. How can this be...]

The true form of Javier, the Demonic Illusionist who boasted so much about his magic, was nothing more than a pathetic skeleton. Between the white ribs, his soul was emitting beams of sinister light.

[This can't be happening...!] Javier gritted his teeth and glared at Suho.

Thanks to the Shadow Assassin Kira's efforts, the hunters bound by the illusions were gradually being freed. As a result, Javier's seemingly infinite magic power finally ran out, and his illusions gradually lost their strength.

But even after finally grabbing his neck, Suho hesitated to deliver the final blow. The reason was obvious...

"What are you doing? Finish it."

"...Father." Suho's eyes wavered at the sight of his father, who had approached him at some point. His smile was pleasant, but what came out of Sung Jinwoo's mouth was the same reprimand as before.

"Just kill him. Don't worry about your dad."

Squeeze. Suho's lips tightened as he forced his hand through Javier's ribs and destroyed his soul.

Bam!

[The Demonic Illusionist Javier, has been defeated.]

[You have leveled up!]

[You have leveled up!]

[You have leveled up!]

[You have leveled up!]

[You have leveled up!]

1

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

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[Quest Complete.]

Power surged through Suho's entire body. A whopping five level-ups. It seemed that the vast amount of magic power Javier had absorbed from other hunters had been converted into experience points and granted to him.

[Quest completion rewards have arrived.]

[Would you like to check the rewards?] (Y/N)

Instead of checking the rewards, Suho frantically looked around for his father's illusion.

"Father...!"

Swoosh! With Javier's death, the sandstorm that had covered the area, along with all the illusions he had created, scattered like dust and disappeared.

The illusion of Sung Jinwoo wasn't much different. However, even as his body dispersed and vanished, he remained calm.

"Don't make such a fuss. I'm just an illusion" Then, he slightly raised his head to look at the sky and continued.

"The real me is doing well up there. Although I've been a little busy recently... Since someone has been away"

["Kieeeeek! My King! This disloyal sinner stands before you, seeking your forgiveness...!"]
At those words, Beru swiftly prostrated himself and began to wail.

4

[I desperately want to return, but I lack the magic power to do so!]

"It's fine. If that's the reason you can't return, then I'm relieved." Although Sung Jinwoo was currently an illusion, his consciousness was linked to his real self through their connected souls. By utilizing Javier's magic in reverse, he had turned his illusion into a kind of avatar, an incarnation of the real Sung Jinwoo. Thanks to this, the real Shadow Monarch in space was now aware that Beru, whom he had sent to Earth, had safely released Suho's seal. He had been worried that the shadow ant might have encountered some obstacles and hadn't reached Suho yet, but that concern was now

alleviated. More importantly. Sung Jinwoo's gaze fell upon the small Beru, lying flat on the ground, and he spoke.

"I think it would be better for you to stay on Earth for the time being."

[Kieeek?! B-but is that alright?] Beru's eyes widened in surprise.

The war in outer space was fierce, maintaining a delicate balance. Therefore, his absence as a legion commander would undoubtedly place a tremendous burden on Sung Jinwoo.

[Without me, the balance of the war...!]

"Ah, it's fine. I recently acquired a capable soldier."

1

[...] Beru froze in place, his mouth agape at Sung Jinwoo's shocking answer.

1

"Of course, it would be better if you could return quickly, but it seems like things on Earth aren't as easy-going as I thought." Even while speaking those words, Sung Jinwoo's body was already half dispersed.

"I don't have much time." He turned his head and looked at the remains of Javier, whom Suho had just killed. Only thing left was a skeleton with shattered ribs and a message floating above.

[Mana is contaminated and cannot be extracted.] Looking at the system notification, Sung Jinwoo explained to Suho calmly.

"Among the demonic spirits, there are occasionally those whose mana can't be extracted." Suho wore a disappointed expression at those words. But as Sung Jinwoo had said, Javier's soul similarly to the souls of demons couldn't be extracted. It meant he couldn't be turned into a Shadow Soldier like Harman.

"Anyway, since you can't utilize this one." Sung Jinwoo reached out his dispersing hand and grabbed Javier's soul.

"I'll make use of it."

Swish! Javier's contaminated soul was caught in his hand and forcibly pulled up. Then, as if sensing his impending fate, he began to let out bloodcurdling screams.

[Kaaaaaaaaaaaah-!]

[How dare you-!]

[This is impossible...!]

"I already told you. For me nothing is impossible." Sung Jinwoo smirked, looking at the dark shadow struggling to escape from his hand.

5

Javier's soul trembled with intense humiliation. A mere illusion born from his own magic had, in turn, captured his soul!

"You should know that mages of the demonic spirit race, who have accumulated magic power for a long time like you, are excellent materials for magic themselves." With those words, Sung Jinwoo used Javier's soul to cast one final spell.

Swish! Suddenly, a net-like magic circle spread from his hand, tightly binding Javier's struggling soul.

Kaaaaaaaaaah...! The magic circle began to tighten and compress, becoming smaller and smaller. And as Javier's screams grew fainter and eventually ceased. A fist-sized jewel was held in Sung Jinwoo's hand.

"Here, a gift."

[Item: 'Javier's Soulstone' acquired.] Suho looked at the jewel his father handed him with a puzzled expression.

"What is this...?"

[Item: Javier's Soulstone]

[Acquisition Difficulty: ??]

[Type: Jewel]

[A jewel created by compressing a soul.]

"It's insurance, just in case. Put it in your inventory."

"Insurance?"

"Yes. Watching you fight makes me... concerned about something" Sung Jinwoo looked at Suho's face with a wry smile.

1

He wanted to explain more, but no words came out of his mouth. The future was unpredictable. A son follows in his father's footsteps, but their paths are never the same. His son's future was for him to choose and decide...

'For now, it's better to cheer him on than give him unnecessary nagging.' Sung Jinwoo dismissed the countless words that came to mind.

"So, Suho." And with his dispersing hand, he grasped Suho's shoulder and said.

"I leave this place to you."

"Yes, Father." Suho nodded heavily, his eyes burning quietly.

Sung Jinwoo, seemingly satisfied with that gaze, smiled faintly. At that moment, his body completely crumbled. And even the hand that had been patting Suho's shoulder scattered and disappeared like light dust. At that moment, the entire sky seemed to collapse.

4

[The Instance Dungeon is being deactivated.]

Shatter! Harman's barrier began to disappear.

Then, as the boundary crumbled, the figures of the civilians who had been outside the barrier finally appeared. At the same time, the hunters who had been swallowed by the sandstorm returned to the sight of the civilians. And moments later, cheers erupted from the crowd.

"The monsters are all gone!"

"Wow!"

"There are no skeletons left!"

Hearing the loud cheers, the hunters finally grasped the situation. They realized that the grueling battle lasting the entire day was over. But the reason why their expressions showed both relief and exhaustion was because they knew all too well that they had done nothing here today.

'Sung Suho...'

While they were struggling, trapped in the illusion. Only one person was active. That young hunter had fought the boss monster alone and ultimately claimed victory. Everyone had seen it with their own eyes.

'Hunter Sung Suho.'

'Woojin Guild.'

As the hunters' gazes all turned towards Suho, standing tall in the center, the civilians' eyes naturally followed. And Beru was very pleased with those awestruck stares.

[Young Master, why don't you wave? Everyone is looking up to you.]

2

"...No need." Suho seemed lost in thought.

He couldn't feel good after seeing his father, whom he had met after so long, disappear before his eyes again. But he had no intention of dwelling on these thoughts forever. He had things to do, didn't he?

"Esil!" At Suho's call, Esil, who had been out of sight for a while, waved from somewhere on the beach.

"Suho! I found it!" Everyone had forgotten the purpose of their mission amidst the sudden appearance of the boss monster, but Suho's Woojin Guild was still diligently following the objective.

"You found the Gate?!"

"...!" At Esil's shout, everyone looked in that direction with surprised expressions.

'Oh right!'

'Come to think of it!'

'We were looking for the Gate?!'

They had somehow managed to defeat the boss monster, but Suho's guild was originally just a gate search team. And while everyone was dealing with that boss monster. Esil, the only one away from the scene, had finally found the Gate hidden somewhere on this beach.

"Well done." Suho finally smiled, seeing Esil waving from afar. Then, he turned his gaze to look for the other guild members.

"Are you alright?!"

"Healers, this way!"

"Medics! Medics!"

Healers from the Hunter Association and medical personnel were already rushing around, treating the injured. In particular, their only S-rank hunter had noticeably severe burns. But Lim Tae-Gyu himself didn't seem to care about such injuries. Rather...

"Please treat my son first."

"This is Hunter Lim Tae-Gyu's son?!" The medical staff was surprised by his words.

Lim Tae-Gyu patted the back of Lim Dogyoon, who had collapsed from exhaustion beside him, and answered with a warm gaze.

"...Yes, my precious son." He was truly relieved that he was able to save him amidst this terrible disaster.

But today was different from 'that time.' His son didn't look at his father with fear like he did back then. And he didn't run away from him anymore.

"Dogyoon, are you okay?"

"No. I'm not okay." Lim Dogyoon simply got up, holding Suho's hand with a relieved expression. Then, he extended the other hand to his father, and said.

"How about you father? It must've hurt a lot"

"...This kid."

'Who's worrying about whom?' Lim Tae-Gyu chuckled, seeing his son worried about his burns, and got up, taking his hand.

The inside of the Gate Esil had discovered was already empty. It seemed like Javier had devoured all the living creatures within it. Still, the amount of dungeon minerals inside was considerable. And the ownership of all these resources went to Woojin Guild, led by Suho. Of course, this wasn't stipulated in the contract, but it was thanks to Lim Tae-Gyu relinquishing all the rights he was supposed to receive. However, there was one problem: Time...

With all the monsters gone and the boss monster dead, the time this Gate would remain open was extremely short. To mine the ores and get out within that short time, a tremendous number of miners needed to be deployed at once. But that wasn't a problem for Woojin Guild at all.

"Arise."

Countless Shadow Miners rose from Suho's shadow all at once. They rushed into the dungeon with pickaxes and shovels, starting to mine the ores at an incredible speed.

"This is unbelievable..." Witnessing the marvelous sight, Lim Tae-Gyu's jaw dropped.

He knew Sung Suho was a summoner, but had no idea he was capable of summoning so much at once. He then approached Lim Tae-Gyu and earnest negotiations began.

"Do you have any spare dungeons in the Reapers Guild? The more dangerous, the better."

"...Now I understand why Dogyoon became so good at running away."

3

"Ah, that's..."

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 174 - Chapter 173

Chapter 174: Chapter 173

Suho immediately began negotiations with Lim Tae-Gyu. Originally, his plan was to buy back at a low price the dungeon raid licenses that the Reaper Guild, struggling with a lack of manpower, couldn't handle. However, there was a significant obstacle: their financial situation was much worse than Suho had anticipated. Lim Tae-Gyu had already sold off all the licenses his guild possessed.

"...So you're saying there really aren't any left?"

"Yes."

"Not even one?"

"I told you so." Lim Tae-Gyu explained the situation with an embarrassed expression.

"Our guild decided to operate as a small mercenary group for a while. Most of the money from selling the raid licenses went into equipment."

"..."

Suho flinched slightly at this part. The A-rank weapon Lim Tae-Gyu had lent him before going to the Glacier dungeon, the 'Reaper's Bow (Replica),' had been taken by Sirka, the Ice Elf who left with his mother, and there was no way to return it.

Fortunately, Lim Tae-Gyu had no intention of asking for the bow back. He had lent it to Suho in the first place because his son was a member of Woojin Guild, and he wanted to ensure his safety, even if only slightly. He had been willing to keep lending it as long as Lim Dogyoon was in the guild.

"Well, this works out well. Now that you're a guild master too, let me give you a brief explanation of guild management. Dogyoon, you're the vice president, so listen carefully too." Lim Tae-Gyu gave them some very practical advice. The main point he emphasized was, of course, 'money.'

"Monopolizing an entire dungeon requires a significant amount of investment. The biggest expense is, without a doubt, the raid license." In other words, to win the fierce bidding wars between guilds, the more funds they had, the better.

"But buying the raid license isn't the end. You have to recoup your investment from that dungeon, right? And that requires even more money."

"Labor costs?"

"Yes. You catch on quickly. It seems you're no longer a newbie." Lim Tae-Gyu nodded and continued his explanation.

Labor costs. Or in other words, the cost of hiring external contractors like mining and collection teams was also quite significant. Of course, most of those people were E-rank or D-rank, so their fees weren't high. But there weren't just one or two of them, and more importantly...

"You have to pay those people their daily wages in cash when they finish their work. But if the guild's funds are tight because of buying the dungeon raid license, you might not be able to afford hiring contractors."

No matter how great a hunter was, cash didn't just magically appear as soon as they entered a dungeon. Only after selling the monster corpses, magic stones, and minerals obtained from the raid would the money be deposited into their account. But even after mining the materials, they couldn't sell them right away. It took at least two days for everything to go through, and sometimes several more.

"From here on, it's the realm of real business, completely separate from monster hunting."

His explanation was entirely correct. But Suho didn't need to worry about such things. From now on, his uncle, Yoo Jinho would handle such miscellaneous tasks.

"But." There was a reason why Lim Tae-Gyu was bothering to explain all this.

"...It seems you don't need to hire contractors like the other guilds." While wearing a deeply dejected expression his gaze turned to Suho's Shadow Soldiers, who were mining frantically.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!

Kuang! Kuang! Kuang! Kuang! Kuang! Kuang! Kuang!

[Second group! I can see your slacking! If we fall behind the first group in quantity, I'll kill you myself!]

[Kieeeeek! How dare the eternal second-in-command try to stand up to me!] Said Beru with a bewildered expression.

[Keuk! That damn second-in-command!] Que and Beru were supervising the Shadow Miners, engaging in a mining competition.

Lim Tae-Gyu couldn't hide his dejected expression at the intense and impressive scene.

"...I knew you were a summoner, but I never imagined your skills were this impressive."

While his own guild was failing in real-time, the sight of this one flourishing was simply disheartening. But it was a complicated feeling, a mix of jealousy and pride, since his own son was Woojin's vice president. Of course, if he found out that Que, who was mining enthusiastically in front of him, was the one who ruined him, he might cough up blood on the spot. Sometimes, ignorance was bliss...

'Hmm. But could Suho conjure this many summons before?' He couldn't help but wonder...

'Could he have been hiding his power back then? He had no reason to, though.' Lim Tae-Gyu hadn't yet reached the realization that Suho was a special hunter who grew stronger through leveling up. Such a thing was far beyond the realm of his imagination.

Suho nodded and asked: "So you're saying you really don't have any raid licenses left. Then, could you do me another favor?"

"What kind of favor?"

"Woojin Guild currently has 1 billion won in funds. Since we're already in Busan, could we buy a dungeon from the Knights Guild with this money?"

"You're asking me to act as an intermediary? That won't be a problem." Lim Tae-Gyu readily nodded at those words.

"In fact, they might be hoping for the same."

His prediction was accurate. Lately, there have been quite a few troublesome dungeons in Busan. That's why even the Knights Guild was experiencing a manpower shortage severe enough to hire several mercenary groups, including the Reapers. Therefore, they would likely be able to acquire the dungeon raid license at a fairly low price.

"But are you sure about this?"

"About what?"

"All the reporters in Busan are flocking to Haeundae, wanting to interview you because of this incident. And even the Busan city government is..."

"Ah, that's fine. It's not a big deal." Suho shrugged nonchalantly.

* * *

"Thank you so much!"

"...Hmm?" Park Jongsoo, the president of the Knights Guild, was shaking Lim Dogyoon's hand with a bright smile.

"Thanks to the efforts of Woojin Guild, this incident was resolved smoothly!"

Wooooooooooooo-! Cheers erupted, directed mainly at him.

'...Eh?'

"On behalf of the city of Busan, I present this plaque of appreciation to Vice President Lim Dogyoon of Woojin Guild as proof of our gratitude for resolving this incident."

"...?" Lim Dogyoon was bewildered as he received the reward from the mayor of Busan.

Flash! Flash! Flash! Flash! Camera flashes exploded from all directions, blinding him.

'Who am I?' Lim Dogyoon thought to himself.

'If someone asked, I would answer that I'm the vice president of Woojin Guild.'

'Where am I?' Busan City Hall. In the middle of a ceremony awarding a plaque of appreciation. The center of all the spotlight.

Haeundae, the beach in front of Busan, was one of the core areas of the city. If it collapsed, Busan could suffer economic damage in many ways. So when Woojin Guild, which had resolved that dangerous situation, said they would 'specially' stay and help raid more dungeons in Busan, even the mayor of Busan personally appeared to express his gratitude.

Of course, the 'plaque of appreciation' they received was a useless item that couldn't even be sold in the secondhand market. But it had its own significance. Woojin Guild was now officially recognized by the mayor of Busan as a trustworthy guild and could operate freely within the city.

"It seems President Sung Suho is very busy. Since the award ceremony is over, shall we move to our office? We have the contract regarding the dungeon raids ready."

"...Yes."

"Ah, but I heard that Vice President Lim Dogyoon is Hunter Lim Tae-Gyu's son? You're quite handsome, just like your father." Lim Dogyoon, suddenly surrounded by high-ranking officials, followed the Knights Guild master with a lifeless expression. His energy was being drained in real-time.

* * *

Meanwhile a crisis of a completely different nature was looming over Suho.

"What the..." Once he had entered the Shadow Dungeon for his daily quest, he couldn't help but be startled.

Ammut, his 'gym coach', the master of the Iron Body...

[Kehehe. Can you feel the difference in power?]

...was twice as big as usual! The pyramid was bigger too! And for some reason, an ominous black beam of light was shooting up from the top. But the biggest problem was that Ammut wasn't just bigger.

Rumble...

[Then let's begin the training.]

"Wait a minute. The atmosphere feels a lot different from usual."

[Ah, don't worry about it. I already got permission from your dad.]

'Permission from who?!' He was worried! The state of the gravitational field pressing down on his entire body was also very ominous!

1

At that moment, Beru, standing at a distance, nodded with a very pleased smile.
[Hardships in youth are worth seeking out. The rewards will surely be...]

'The rewards are the same anyway!' Suho grimaced and started doing push-ups.

Crack!

"Ugh!" And both his arms broke instantly.

Whirl! Then, bandages flew in and wrapped around his limbs, and today's training officially began.

"Kaaaaah...!"

[Kehahahaha!]

Thus began the torture, no, training, that was twice as intense as usual.

1

['Skill: Tenacity' has leveled up!]

[Physical Defense +140% -> +160%] The Tenacity skill, which had been silent even during the hand-to-hand combat with Javier, leveled up in an instant.

And a while later. Suho, who sprawled on the floor like a rag, limbs tattered, received his rewards.

[The following rewards are available.]

[Reward 1. Status Recovery]

[Reward 2. Stat Points +5]

[Reward 3. Random Boxes x2]

"...The rewards increased?" The daily quest, which originally gave +3 stat points, now gave +5. And there were two random boxes.

But for some reason, he wasn't grateful at all.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 175 - Chapter 174

Chapter 175: Chapter 174

Afterwards, the Knights Guild handed over the raid licenses for three mid-level dungeons in the Yeongnam region, including Busan to Woojin Guild in exchange for 1 billion won. The fact that they gave them up for so cheap showed how grateful they were to Suho for his help. Moreover, the Knights Guild even offered an unprompted favor.

"I noticed that Woojin Guild doesn't have a healer yet. While you're active in Busan, we'll provide you with one of our most skilled ones."

"A healer? No, there's no need to go that far..." Lim Dogyoon, buried in the contracts Suho had handed over, initially tried to decline President Park Jongsu's offer. However, Lim Tae-Gyu, who was helping with the contract process, readily accepted the proposal.

"Is that skilled healer you mentioned, perhaps Hunter Lee Joohee?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"Oh." Lim Tae-Gyu looked quite surprised. Then, he whispered in Lim Dogyoon's ear.

"Definitely accept. Hunter Lee Joohee will be a great help. In many ways."

"Huh? In many ways...?" Lim Dogyoon was puzzled.

1

Lim Tae-Gyu, without even waiting for his son's reply, stepped forward and grabbed President Park Jongsu's hand with a grin.

"Thank you for your consideration. As expected of the Knights Guild's reputation, you even take care of such minute details."

"Oh, no, it's nothing. Hunter Lee Joohee volunteered herself."

7

"Ah... As expected of Her."

"...?" Lim Dogyoon was still confused, unable to grasp the situation.

'Anyway, it means the Knights Guild is giving us a discount on the dungeon and providing a healer, right?'

It was proof of how valuable Haeundae, which Suho had saved, was to Busan. And so, Woojin Guild, led by Suho, officially began its activities. However, not all hunters were as welcoming as the Knights Guild...

"Hey, did you hear? The Knights Guild handed over three mid-level dungeons to Woojin Guild? And at a bargain price too."

"Seriously? Then why did they compete so fiercely with us in the bidding?"

"No matter how much they contributed in Haeundae, this is unacceptable!"

"If they were short on manpower from the start, they shouldn't have claimed the dungeons. Or at least they should have given our guild a chance first."

"If the Knights Guild had done their job properly in Haeundae in the first place, there wouldn't have been any need to bring in mercenaries from outside, right?"

"As expected, large guilds are all about size, not substance."

Complaints began to erupt from the small and medium-sized guilds in Busan that had been overshadowed by the Knights, the largest guild in the region. It was a kind of territorial dispute. But their complaints weren't entirely baseless.

The Haeundae incident that the Woojin Guild resolved. Countless people had witnessed this serious situation firsthand, but hunters from other guilds were busy raiding other dungeons at the time. So most of them only learned about the incident later through the news. A disaster seen through a screen couldn't have the same impact as one witnessed in person. And now, with news of even the mayor of Busan personally presenting a plaque of appreciation, they couldn't contain their anger.

"Seriously, what the hell is Woojin Guild that they're causing such a fuss?"

"They're a new guild with only three members, right?"

"Geez. The guild master is a C-rank hunter, and the vice guild master is an E-rank? That's ridiculous."

"So what did they actually do?"

"That foreigner named Esil found the Gate's location at the end of the video?"

"They say Sung Suho defeated the boss monster, but the video doesn't show how he did it"

...The fact that the main battle took place inside the instance dungeon created by Harman fueled their dissatisfaction. And as a result...

"Hold on." There were people blocking the way of Woojin Guild, who had rightfully purchased a mid-level dungeon and arrived at the Gate to raid it.

"Hmm?" Suho looked at them with a puzzled expression. They were unfamiliar faces.

"Guild Master." Lim Dogyoon quickly whispered in Suho's ear.

"They're famous hunters in Busan. Their names are..."

"What's the matter?" Suho asked them while listening to Lim Dogyoon's explanation. Then, the massive hunter in the middle of the group stepped forward with a hostile expression, baring his teeth.

"Hey..."

"Just a moment! Hunter Noh Joongi, you can't do this here! This dungeon belongs to Woojin Guild!" The Hunter Association staff from the Busan branch, who were managing the Gate, were flustered and blocked the hunters who had suddenly intruded. Then, the massive hunter, Noh Joongi, glared at the Association staff who were stopping him.

"I know. Do you think I can't read?" His gaze briefly flicked towards a nearby sign.

[Gwangalli Gate]

[Entry prohibited except for Woojin Guild]

Gritting his teeth, he glared at the Association staff again with a hostile aura.

"Is this allowed by the Association?"

"Excuse me? What do you mean...?"

"I'm asking if it's okay for the Association to break its own rules." Noh Joongi scanned each member of Woojin Guild one by one. Guild Master Sung Suho, Lim Dogyoon, and Esil.

"Hah. This is ridiculous. Just three people? Since when was it acceptable to raid a mid-level dungeon with such a small number of people?"

"That's right. The minimum number of raiders is at least 10, isn't it?"

"This is a clear violation." The other hunters Noh Joongi brought along also chimed in, raising their voices as if they had been waiting for this moment.

'They came prepared.' Suho chuckled at the sight.

Hunters' protests were on a different level compared to those of ordinary people. With Noh Joongi at the forefront, they channeled their mana, expressing their discontent, causing the surrounding air to tremble ominously.

"P-please calm down for a moment..."

The problem was that the Association staff who had to endure this energy were non-awakened office workers. They were struggling to even breathe under the pressure emanating from Noh Joongi and the other hunters. It was then...

"S-sorry...! I'm a bit late...!" The B-rank healer Lee Joohee, sent by the Knights Guild, arrived at the scene.

"...Huh?" The heavy air instantly lightened, and the hunters' energy disappeared as if by magic.

"H-Hunter Lee Joohee?"

"Ms. Lee Joohee, what brings you here?" They recognized her and their eyes widened in surprise.

"Ah! It's been a while. I'm so glad to see you all looking healthy." As Lee Joohee bowed in greeting, flustered, they waved their hands dismissively.

"Oh, Ms. Lee Joohee. What are you doing! We should be the ones greeting you!"

"Have you been well, Ms. Lee Joohee?"

"I heard you joined the Knights Guild. But what brings you here?"

"Ah, I heard Woojin Guild doesn't have a healer, so I came to provide support for a while."

"...!"

"Hmm?" Suho's eyes lit up. With Lee Joohee's sudden appearance, the situation began to take an unexpected turn.

"Guild Master Sung Suho, I apologize for being late." Lee Joohee approached Suho and apologized politely once again.

"No, it's alright. You're only a few minutes late."

"And actually, there's something else I'm sorry about. On my way here, I came across a traffic accident scene, so I used some of my mana to heal the emergency patients." Lee Joohee apologized sincerely once more.

It was a grave mistake for a healer to waste magic power before a dungeon raid. However, if the reason was to save emergency patients, no one who knew Lee Joohee's usual character could criticize her for it.

"Ah, you haven't changed."

"As expected of Ms. Lee Joohee..."

"Ahem."

Especially... The hunters in Busan who had once received free healing from her when they were newbies with no money or connections, remembered her very well. Lee Joohee, who had been active as a freelance healer until relatively recently, had been indiscriminately healing the injured since the beginning of her career. It was no wonder she was called the 'Saint of Busan.'

1

"Ahem."

"Keuheum." The hunters, who had come in full of anger, now hesitated in front of Lee Joohee with awkward expressions.

'Ah, so this is what he meant by being helpful in many ways.' Lim Dogyoon finally understood what Lim Tae-Gyu had said, seeing the atmosphere shift.

"...B-but still!" Noh Joongi closed his eyes tightly and spoke again.

"Illegal is illegal!" The other hunters, avoiding Lee Joohee's gaze, also raised their voices once more.

"The minimum number of raiders is a rule set by the Association!"

The limit on the number of people was a safety measure for hunters. It was a rule established by the Association to prevent hunters from recklessly entering dungeons and losing their lives.

"How can you sell such a dangerous dungeon to a small guild like this?!"

"Ah, you don't have to worry about that."

"...Hugh?"

Finally realizing the situation, Lee Joohee smiled brightly and quelled their complaints. "It's true that there's a minimum number of raiders, but when that rule was created, Chairman Woo Jinchul of the Association specifically included an exception."

"...What is it?"

Looking at the frowning hunters, Lee Joohee suddenly had a thought. Chairman Woo Jinchul. A remarkable figure who had always taken extraordinary steps since the Cataclysm. Could it be that his foresight had anticipated even a situation like this from the beginning?

2

"The number of summons is also included in the raid party count." As soon as Lee Joohee finished her explanation, Suho spoke up as if he had been waiting.

"Arise."

"...!" At that moment, shock filled the eyes of all the hunters.

Countless summons rose from the ground, centered around Suho. The powerful aura emanating from the Shadow Soldiers, their entire bodies rippling with jet-black smoke, exploded in all directions. Overwhelmed by their fierce presence, Noh Joongi, who was at the forefront, flinched and almost stumbled backward. But suddenly the small ant, Beru, poked his head in front of Noh Joongi's face and unleashed an incredibly ferocious aura.

[Kieeek!]

"Eep...!"

Thud! Noh Joongi fell on his butt.

"Well then." Suho turned away from them, dumbfounded and seated on the ground. He looked at the Gate in front of him, shimmering with an ominous blue aura, and gave a faint smile.

"Shall we begin?"

* * *

[Level Up!]

[Level Up!]

It took Woojin Guild only three days to conquer all the mid-level dungeons they had acquired. Including the time spent mining.

"...This is unbelievable!" Their astonishing speed shocked Noh Joongi and all the other hunters in Busan.

* * *

And around that time. In the United States.

"Hmm. I should let Sung Suho know about this." Thomas Andre, the president of the Scavenger Guild and the strongest S-rank hunter in the United States, leisurely took out his phone.

1

"Thomas?"

"Oh. You picked up right away."

Hearing Sung Suho's voice from the other end, Thomas Andre grinned and said:
"You've become quite famous in Korea these days, haven't you? We're both busy, so let's get straight to the point."

A subtle light shimmered around Thomas Andre as he spoke on the phone.

"First of all, your mother said she found something in the Tomb of the Berserk Dragons and asked me to pass it on to you. Laura also got a high-grade magic stone, so I sent them together. They should arrive soon." Cha Hae-in, who had decided to stay longer in the Tomb of the Berserk Dragons, had arranged to send the items through the Scavenger Guild, which was working on Fasad Island.

"And also." Thomas Andre glanced at the corpse he was holding by the collar with his other hand, the one not holding the phone, and continued.

"I just killed an Apostle of Itarim."

10

"...!"

The ground where he was standing had a massive crater, as if a meteorite struck there. The corpse he was holding crumbled into pieces and scattered like ashes.

Swish.

And the ashes transformed into light particles and seeped into Thomas Andre's body.

"Who was it?"

"Just as we suspected." Absorbing the power, Thomas Andre looked at the face of the hunter he had killed.

"Christopher Reed."

11

He was a man who had been a national-level hunter in the United States in his past life.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 176 - Chapter 175

Chapter 176: Chapter 175

In the past, before the Shadow Monarch Sung Jinwoo turned back time on Earth. There existed hunters who held the title of 'the Strongest,' a title given to only five individuals worldwide.

'National Level Hunters.'

This title literally symbolized absolute power, where one person's authority rivaled that of an entire nation. It was a glorious title bestowed only upon hunters possessing immense power that couldn't even be measured by the term 'S-rank.'

However, the reason these five were given such a grand title was far from glorious. Humanity's worst disaster. The first S-rank Gate and the boss-level monster that emerged from it. 'The Dragon Kamish.' This Red Dragon was a monster of tremendous power, capable of wiping out the entire western United States upon its dungeon break. At the time, the USA offered massive rewards and summoned the strongest hunters from around the world, just barely managing to kill Kamish. In the end, only five survived. A single monster had killed almost all the world's top hunters. If it weren't for their sacrifice, the country of the United States would surely have been erased from the world map. Therefore, the USA promised to treat those five who saved their nation's fate not as individuals but as nations themselves. And this is said to be the origin of the term 'National Level.'

4

But there was one curious fact here. National Level hunters had something in common. Well, to be exact, four of them, excluding the healer from the Kamish raid, all possessed the same skill. 'Telekinesis'. The ability to exert force on an object without physical contact. There had been many strong individuals before and after the Kamish raid, but only these four in history possessed such an ability. So the Hunter Management

Bureau, at the time the only ones aware of their common trait, even considered 'telekinesis' as a requirement for becoming a National Level hunter.

2

But now, many years later. Suho knew the true nature of the 'telekinesis' they possessed.

[Skill: Ruler's Authority]

That power was none other than the result of the 'Rulers' dwelling within the bodies of those ordinary S-rank hunters. In other words, the four hunters had become National Level only by borrowing the power of the higher beings. They, who possessed vessels capable of accepting the Rulers, were the most likely to be taken over by the Apostles of Itarim this time as well. Just like Thomas Andre in the Glacier dungeon.

* * *

"Thomas Andre, you are under arrest for the murder of Christopher Reed." While he was on the phone with Suho, numerous fully armed hunters had approached and surrounded him.

The United States Hunter Bureau. The most powerful organization in the US had been dispatched to stop Thomas Andre's rampage. However, despite being vastly outnumbered, it wasn't him who was feeling tense.

"Ah, hold on a second. As you can see, I'm in the middle of an important call." Thomas Andre gestured casually towards the people surrounding him and continued his conversation with Suho leisurely.

1

"..."

"Gulp."

On the other hand, the Bureau's hunters who had completely encircled him wore determined expressions. The person they were trying to arrest was none other than the United States' strongest hunter. That person had killed Christopher Reed was also one of the S-ranks representing the United States.

'Why would someone like Thomas Andre suddenly do something like this?'

'There's nothing to gain from killing an S-rank hunter.'

'With the effort he put into this, he could have earned astronomical amounts of money by entering a dungeon. Why?'

The Hunter Bureau, unaware of Itarim, couldn't help but be bewildered by Thomas Andre's sudden actions. It wasn't that there had never been fights between S-rank hunters before, but it was unprecedented for them to fight to the death like this. This was because the creation of the Hunter Ranking system eliminated the need for hunters to engage in meaningless power struggles.

How many more dangerous monsters they had hunted.

How many more dungeons they had conquered.

The Hunter Ranking, which converted these various experiences into points, was the only indicator recognized worldwide. So hunters, instead of wasting their energy on fights they didn't even earn money from, started focusing more on dungeon raids.

'But why?' No matter how much they thought about it, they couldn't understand why Thomas Andre had suddenly killed Christopher Reed.

It was then.

"Thomas Andre."

Suddenly, the hunters parted to the left and right, and a man walked through the gap. An elderly gentleman with neatly combed hair. Surprisingly, unlike the other hunters, he wasn't armed at all.

"Chief..."

"It's dangerous!"

"Ah, it's alright." He waved off his subordinates who were trying to dissuade him from his reckless action.

Step by step. He walked towards Thomas Andre.

Even the Goliath himself couldn't help but pause the call at his appearance.

"Adam White." Recognizing his identity, Thomas's lips curled up in amusement.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of the Hunter Bureau Chief's visit?"

"...Thomas Andre. Please cooperate with the investigation." At those words, Thomas Andre's grin widened even further.

"And what if I refuse?" He chuckled, revealing his teeth.

Despite his provocative words, Adam White, the chief of the Hunter Bureau, only sighed softly instead of raising his voice. His gaze swept over the completely devastated land around them. Just a few hours ago Christopher Reed's luxurious mansion stood here.

But now...

'It's like a nuclear bomb went off. Is this what happens when two S-rank hunters fight?' The saying that S-rank hunters were like walking weapons was definitely not an exaggeration. Adam White gave a wry smile and politely asked Thomas Andre once again.

"If you refuse, what can we do? We'll just have to ask you more earnestly. Everyone here is someone's precious child or parent, I also have a wife and children to take care of."

"Huh." At Adam White's words, Thomas Andre let out a sigh, as if the air had been let out of him.

"You're still a boring guy."

"Despite what you see, I'm usually considered a funny guy."

"That's probably just a facade for appearances sake. Even my subordinates burst into laughter whenever I crack a joke."

Even despite watching the two exchange lighthearted banter, the hunters surrounding Thomas Andre weren't able to even breathe properly. They knew... If Thomas Andre were to, for whatever reason show any signs of aggression and the situation escalated, they would never see the sun rise again.

"..."

"..."

A brief silence fell, and Thomas Andre's and Adam White's gazes met in the air. To some, it was just a fleeting moment, but everyone here felt like an eternity had passed.

"Well, alright." Thomas Andre finally chuckled and raised both hands in surrender and the corpse of Christopher Reed he had been holding this whole time dropped to the ground with a thud.

Crumble.

Surprisingly, the moment it touched the ground, it broke into pieces like burnt charcoal. Everyone's eyes widened at the sight. But they also let out sighs of relief, realizing they wouldn't have to fight the person that did this to one of the most powerful hunters in the US.

As if nothing happened Thomas Andre spoke to Suho on the phone again. "You heard that? Well, that's how things turned out. So, I won't be able to handle guys from other countries for a while."

'Other countries?' Adam White's face turned pale upon hearing those words.

Seeing his surprised look, Thomas Andre grinned and added another comment for Suho. "It was okay with Chris since he was American, but other countries are a bit trickier because of political issues."

"Ah, I see. That makes sense." Suho agreed and nodded on the other end of the phone.

The people who had been National Level hunters in their past life were still S-ranks now. For someone like Thomas Andre to go to another country to deal with them was practically equivalent to the United States declaring war on that nation.

"That's all I had to say. I'll send you detailed information about Christopher Reed separately."

"Alright. Thanks for your hard work."

Click.

The call ended.

"May I ask who you were talking to?"

In response to Adam White's question, Thomas Andre grinned and slung his muscular arm around his shoulder. "Adam, since we meet again after so long, how about buying me a burger on the way? I'm starving after using all that power."

"...I'll buy you a combo."

"Haha. As expected of the Chief, you're generous. Buy some for the guys behind us too while you're at it. They all look a bit pale."

"Alright." Adam White smiled wryly and agreed to all demands.

* * *

Thus, after Thomas Andre was willingly arrested by the Hunter Bureau. His secretary, Laura, visited Korea with the gifts she was supposed to deliver to Suho.

"Laura, how's Thomas doing?"

"You don't have to worry about our boss. He's the type who thrives wherever he goes." She responded nonchalantly to his concern.

From the US perspective, keeping Thomas Andre locked up for too long was not profitable. If the income an S-rank hunter earned from dungeons decreased, the corresponding tax revenue would also decrease.

1

Also considering the country's safety if some dungeon related disaster happened, the US government had no choice but to pressure the Hunter Bureau to release Thomas Andre. It wasn't like he had massacred civilians; he had only killed a hunter of the same class. In fact, with one less S-rank hunter, He had become even more essential.

"Besides, our boss never intended to kill Christopher Reed in the first place. He actually visited him to present our flagship product, the Detox Potion."

The spring water from the Echo Forest. The antidote obtained from the holy land of the Ice Elves was so effective that it could even restore Thomas Andre's mind, which had been possessed by an Apostle of Itarim. They wanted to give it to other hunters who had been National Level in their past life to prevent similar incidents. That was the plan Suho and Thomas had devised from the beginning.

"But there seems to have been a slight accident in the process of delivering the Detox Potion to Christopher Reed."

"A slight accident?" Suho made a dumbfounded expression at those words. He couldn't imagine what kind of 'slight' accident could lead to the death of an S-rank hunter.

"I also brought a report related to that, so it would be faster for you to see it yourself. But remember it's classified information from here on."

Laura handed Suho a USB drive. And she also had the staff bring the other items she was originally supposed to deliver to Suho. A moment later, two sturdy special bags appeared before him.

"Are these the ones?"

"Yes. This one contains the high-grade magic stones you requested. And this one... contains the item Cha Hae-in found in the Tomb of Berserk Dragons."

"..." Suho was silent for a moment, looking at the large bags Laura had handed him.

[Young Master, I sense an unusual energy.] Beru, who had appeared beside him at some point, also had a cautious expression.

Click. Suho opened the bag from his mother first. Of course, Cha Hae-in had already informed him about its contents.

'A dragon's egg...'

Finally, the bag was opened. And inside, as he had been told, was an item about the size of an ostrich egg... But the problem was the system message that popped up the moment Suho's hand touched it.

Ding!

[Item: 'Kamish's Egg' acquired.]

4

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



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[Kamish's egg?!] Beru exclaimed in surprise, causing Suho to ask with a puzzled expression.

"Why? Do you know that name?"

[Of course I do! Kamish is...!] Beru passionately explained everything about the Red Dragon...

After hearing the whole story, Suho nodded. "I see. So it's the egg of the Dragon my father encountered when he was young."

[Yes. Kamish was one of the prisoners captured by the Rulers during the Monarchs' war with them. So this must be an egg Kamish laid before going to battle.]

"Hmm. Maybe..." Listening to Beru's explanation, Suho had a strange feeling.

'Perhaps the dragon that hatches from this egg will become the successor to the Dragon Emperor,' he mused. With all he had experienced, such a possibility didn't seem far-fetched

Laura, who had been listening to Suho and Beru's conversation, relayed what Cha Hae-In had said when she handed over Kamish's egg. "Ms. Cha Hae-In suggested putting this in the Shadow Dungeon."

"That would definitely be wise." Suho nodded in agreement.

Cha Hae-In had pondered a lot about how to handle this egg after finding it in the Tomb of the Berserk Dragons. It felt wasteful to just break it. But leaving it in its original place was out of the question. In the end, she thought of Suho's Shadow Dungeon. She thought that no matter what kind of monster hatched from this egg, everyone would be safe as long as it stayed in the Shadow Dungeon.

It was a good idea.

"Thank you for letting me know. I think I'll do as my mother suggested with this egg." Suho expressed his gratitude to Laura, who then opened the second bag she had brought.

"And this is the high-grade essence stones you requested." Suho and Beru's eyes lit up at the same time. Unexpectedly, there wasn't just one high-grade essence stone inside the bag.

"You got three?"

"Yes. Of course, it wasn't easy. Since the number of high-grade essence stones available on the market is so limited, the bidding competition was quite fierce."

Two years into the Cataclysm. The hunter industry was still in its early stages, and there were countless things to develop, so there was always a thirst for resources. Especially high-grade essence stones obtained by hunters from dungeons were truly rare items. They were snatched up by the scientific community or the hunter industry as soon as they appeared on the market. So naturally, their prices were also quite high.

"They must have been very expensive. Thank you so much."

"Don't mention it. It's nothing compared to the value of our boss's life." Laura promised to bring more high-grade essence stones if she found any.

"...And now for the main topic."

Laura's expression turned serious as she glanced at her subordinates gathered around. As if on cue, the Scavenger Guild employees left the office.

"From now on, everything is classified information that could have serious consequences if leaked."

"Copy that, our guild members are all trustworthy."

"Understood."

After all, Suho's guild members consisted only of Lim Dogyoon and Esil, and they weren't the type to carelessly spread secrets. In fact, Suho had to stop Lim Dogyoon, who was subtly trying to follow the Scavenger employees out of fear.

"Dogyoon, you need to know what you need to know."

"No, I think it's okay if I don't..."

1

Lim Dogyoon was feeling anxious these days because the scale of Suho's activities was becoming increasingly unmanageable. But since he was in charge of most of the tasks except for combat, there was no way to escape. Esil on the other hand, seemingly unconcerned, just sat next to Suho. He then plugged in the USB Laura had handed him into the laptop, and it displayed the video files on the screen.

"Please watch this video." Asked Laura

"Christopher Reed?" The face that appeared on the screen was definitely Christopher Reed, the American S-rank hunter who had been killed by Thomas Andre.

"This is data we found during our recent investigation. It turns out he had been receiving regular psychiatric counseling since his awakening."

As Laura explained, the video showed Christopher Reed having a conversation with a therapist.

– I don't know why I feel so empty these days... I wonder if other Awakened feel this way too? – He had a very tired expression.

– Chris, the other Awakened I've counseled feel the opposite of you. They all seem elated and intoxicated by their newfound power. – The therapist spoke with a puzzled look.

– Then why do I alone feel this way?

– People... sometimes feel anxious when they experience a windfall that's too much for them to handle. You might feel better once you get used to your power.

– Are you saying it's because I became an S-rank hunter? Like suddenly winning the lottery? But, Doctor, the emotions I'm feeling are a bit different from that. – Christopher Reed continued to express his feelings with a serious expression.

Laura showed Suho the videos of his counseling sessions in chronological order. Most of the conversations in those sessions were similar.

– Doctor, I'm still anxious. I think I've become too weak.

– Why do you think that way? Chris, you're an S-rank hunter.

– I don't know. I've clearly reached the pinnacle of hunters, but I feel weaker than before. I want to become stronger.

"..." Watching the videos, Suho exchanged a serious look with Laura.

She nodded and said. "That's right. The emotions he felt are exactly the same as what our boss was feeling until recently."

Meanwhile, Christopher Reed's counseling videos continued to play in sequence on the screen repeating the same pattern.

– Doctor, I want to become stronger. No, I feel like I can become stronger. But I just don't know how.

– Doctor, I've been thinking about it. Could it be that I have some tremendous hidden potential? Beyond S-rank?

– Doctor, I...

But then. At some point, Christopher Reed's expression started to change, becoming confident.

– Doctor, I think I've found a way to become stronger.

– Chris, that's great news. But how?

– That's a secret I can't tell you. But I'm certain. If I use the method 'they' taught me, I'll definitely become stronger.

– Who are 'they'?

"They?" Suho also became curious.

At the therapist's question, all expression vanished from his face in an instant. A chill ran down the spines of those watching the video. His eyes were like those of a soulless

being. Christopher Reed, who had always received counseling with an empty and dejected expression, was now wearing a completely different look. Then, staring directly at the camera lens that had been recording the entire counseling session, he slowly curled his lips into a smile.

– I'm afraid I can't answer that. If I did, I might... Anyway, thank you for everything, Doctor.

Stopping the video, Laura provided further explanation. "After that session, he never visited the therapist again. Instead, he bought a luxurious mansion and started throwing parties and living frivolously."

It was common for hunters to indulge in sensual pleasures. It was a typical behavior of the newly rich, transcending gender and age, that had existed throughout history. But Laura, after thoroughly investigating Christopher Reed's seemingly normal behavior, discovered one strange fact.

"A significant number of people who were invited to his mansion went missing."

"M-missing?! You mean, murder?" Lim Dogyoon asked back with a frightened expression but Laura shook her head slightly and replied.

"Well, it would be considered murder, but the investigation revealed something different. A large quantity of Stardust was found in Christopher Reed's mansion."

"Stardust? You mean, the drug?"

"Yes, that's right. It's a mana booster that's quite widespread in Korea as well." Hearing this unexpected story, Suho's gaze turned to Esil.

Originally, Stardust was a mana booster developed by low-rank demons in an attempt to mimic Bloodstone, the exclusive ability of the demon nobles.

Esil nodded with a hardened expression. "It seems there are demons from our kind in that country as well."

In a way, it was natural. Even at this moment, the demon realm was drifting through the dimensional gap, torn into several pieces. And on a global scale, it was unlikely that the dimensional rifts connecting to those fragments were only happening in Korea. If this was the case, there was a high probability that demon factories existed all over the world, or in this case in the United States.

"Demon factories... I know quite a bit about Stardust. But the reason our boss killed him is actually different." Laura opened the next file.

"...?"

It was an image showing the interior of Christopher Reed's extravagant mansion, now destroyed and gone thanks to Thomas Andre. A brave reporter who risked his life sneaking into the burning ruin took the photo.

"According to that reporter, Christopher Reed seemed to have fallen into a strange cult at some point."

"A cult?" Suho asked back with a puzzled expression.

"Yes. And the very next day, that reporter suddenly disappeared from the face of the Earth without a trace. We assume he's probably dead, but we recently discovered a phrase he left behind."

Click.

Laura turned to the next page, and the phrase he left behind appeared on the screen.

[Outer Gods]

"...!" In an instant, the eyes of everyone, including Suho, widened.

"The Outer Gods Cult." Laura spoke with a heavy expression, looking at the words.

"It seems they call their religion by that name."

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



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Outer Gods

There were countless gods with various names on Earth, but as far as Suho knew, there existed no deity called by such a name. Except for one.

"Itarim."

[It seems the Apostles of Itarim have begun their activities on Earth in earnest.] Beru narrowed his eyes, glaring at the screen the name was displayed on.

"According to our investigation, Christopher Reed's mansion appears to have been used as a temple for the Foreign Religion Cult."

"A temple? Does that mean there was another Apostle of Itarim there?"

"We don't believe so. It seems that the Apostle of Itarim possessed only Christopher Reed's body; the rest were merely his followers."

Suho suddenly noticed something strange in Laura's words. "You said 'it seems'? You're not certain?"

"Yes. The others were all killed in the battle against our boss, so we couldn't confirm for sure. But the strange thing is, Christopher Reed seemed to grow stronger every time he killed one of his presumed followers."

"A situation similar to the Mad Tyrant." Esil, who had been listening quietly with her arms crossed, changed her expression.

"It seems our demons are being diligently bred somewhere. For a lot of different reasons." Esil Radiru, the sole demon noble, gritted her teeth with an indignant expression.

The ones who made Stardust were demons and its most important ingredient was also demon blood. In short, the Foreign Religion was thoroughly exploiting demons for their own purpose. And that was undoubtedly...

'To find vessels that can accept the power of Itarim and turn them into their pawns. And the most suitable candidates would be those who were National Level hunters in their previous lives.'

Suho looked at Esil and Lim Dogyoon and said, "Esil, did your subordinate demons hear anything about the Mad Tyrant?"

"Nothing useful. They didn't even know he was an Apostle of Itarim. But just in case, I'll go back and ask around again."

"Okay. I'll leave it to you. And Dogyoon."

"Yeah?"

"Please look into dungeons with demon-type monsters for our guild's future raids. If we thoroughly search Korea, we should find something."

"Got it."

Suho decided to eradicate ALL demon factories in Korea this time. If they did that, something would surely turn up, whether it was an Apostle of Itarim or the Foreign Religion.

"Laura, do you have any other information about the Foreign Religion?"

"Yes. We're still investigating, but they seem to be a secretive organization whose true nature is elusive. If they were just an ordinary cult, they'd have a large number of visible followers."

"Then let's reverse the order."

"Reverse?"

Suho recalled the conversation Christopher Reed had with the therapist. If his words were true, 'they' had approached him first. Then it was highly likely that they would approach others first as well. They might already be lurking nearby, waiting for an opportunity.

"If we linger near hunters likely to be targeted and keep an eye on them, wouldn't something turn up?"

"That's certainly true, but the problem is that our Scavenger Guild is in no position to interfere in other countries' affairs."

As Thomas Andre had told Suho directly, the Scavenger Guild had to lay low for the time being. But Suho had no intention of just waiting idly.

"I have another way."

"Are you planning to go yourself?"

"No. I have someone else to send." He answered with a grin.

* * *

"Suho! Thanks for the invitation! This is a housewarming gift!"

"How did you get here so fast?"

"I ran at full speed! Because Suho is my friend!"

Rio Singh, a B-rank hunter from the Asura Guild, rushed to Woojin Guild's office as soon as he received Suho's call. With both hands full of gifts. He greeted Laura warmly and then talked about his recent situation.

"I'm currently in charge of purchasing weapons from Korean blacksmiths and sending them back to the guild!" Rio Singh, who had been demoted to Korea and failed to recruit Suho, had not given up and had seized a new opportunity for himself.

"Korean weapons are of exceptional quality! I heard the Korean Hunter Association is supporting them, which is truly amazing!" His Korean had improved even further.

"But what did you call me for?" Rio Singh didn't think Suho would have called him for no reason. Moreover, with Laura from the Scavenger Guild also present, his instinctive business sense allowed him to guess Suho's purpose.

"Is it about the potion from the Echo Forest?"

"Almost."

"Rio Singh, we want to start selling the Detox Potion to the Asura Guild." Laura stepped forward and handed him a contract, formally proposing the business deal. After skimming through he nodded with a bright expression.

"I'm definitely interested in such a good offer. But what's this requirement? The guild master has to try it personally?"

"Yes. It's part of our promotional strategy. Our Detox Potion hasn't been widely publicized yet, so the fact that someone like the guild master of Asura Guild drank it personally would have a significant promotional effect."

"That certainly makes sense."

Rio Singh's eyes sparkled as he nodded at Laura's explanation. He had already been to the Glacier dungeon with them, so he knew very well about the effectiveness of the spring water from the Echo Forest.

"This is a huge business opportunity! I'll definitely get promoted this time!"

"You're not even hiding your true intentions anymore."

"Hahaha." Rio Singh laughed heartily and then contacted the Asura Guild master, successfully getting confirmation for the requirements.

And he immediately signed all the contracts Suho and Laura presented.

"This business is extremely important, so I'll have to go to the guild myself."

"Rio, while you're at it, could you do me a favor?"

"What is it? You've entrusted me with such a big deal, so I'll do anything for you, Suho."

"Be careful of your guild master."

"Our guild master? Why?" Rio Singh looked puzzled at the strange words. But Suho's gaze was too serious to dismiss it as mere nonsense.

Suho recalled the information he had heard from Beru. There were a total of five National Level hunters in the previous timeline. Excluding one healer, the names of the four who used the Ruler's Authority were as follows:

Thomas Andre of the United States

Christopher Reed of the United States

Liu Zhigang of China

2

Siddharth Bachchan of India

2

The first two had already been dealt with, leaving only two to check. And the one Suho focused on first was none other than the fourth. Siddharth Bachchan of India. He was the guild master of the 'Asura Guild.'

"A mysterious organization called the Foreign Religion might have approached your guild master, Siddharth Bachchan."

"Foreign Religion? What's that?"

"Remember what happened to Thomas Andre in the Glacier dungeon?"

"...!" Having experienced that situation together, no further explanation was needed. Recalling the image of Thomas Andre transforming into a giant Ice Dragon and rampaging, Rio Singh wore a troubled expression.

"Are you saying our guild master might end up like that too?"

"Nothing is certain yet. So when you go back to the guild, could you check on him?"

"Sure. But you should know that I respect our guild master a lot." Rio Singh boasted confidently and took a large supply of the Detox Potion to give to Siddharth Bachchan.

Meanwhile, Suho's gaze briefly glanced at his own shadow.

'Kira, follow him.'

Swoosh. His shadow lengthened, and the Shadow Assassin, Kira, slipped into Rio Singh's shadow.

Seeing this, Suho's eyes gleamed. It was an opportunity to utilize the new skill he had acquired after clearing the quest his father had given him.

* * *

[What? You found a dragon's egg?!] When Suho entered the Shadow Dungeon with 'Kamish's Egg,' the most surprised one was the Queen Bee, Arsha.

"Yeah. My mother found it in the Tomb of the Berserk Dragons and sent it to me."

[Oh my god. It's real...?]

Arsha felt a shiver as she looked at the egg in Suho's hand. Although it was too small to be a dragon's egg, the faint dragon energy emanating from it was real. That energy continuously stimulated Arsha's survival instincts. She looked at Kamish's egg with an uneasy expression and asked.

[Why... did you bring such a dangerous thing here?]

Suho shrugged and replied. "Of course I brought it because it's dangerous. It's safe here, isn't it? As my mother said, it will be more secure here than in the Tomb of the Berserk Dragons or on Earth. Besides, even if something happens here, at worst..."

[Growl?] Suho's gaze shifted slightly to the side as he spoke. The giant crocodile monster, Ammut, was there, baring his teeth with a ferocious grin.

[At worst, I can just eat it, right?]

"Hmm. This is definitely the perfect place..." It was very reassuring. Suho nodded in satisfaction.

"But don't actually eat it. This egg might be the last remaining descendant of the dragon race."

Beru also agreed with Suho's words and nodded.

[That's highly likely. The Dragon Emperor took all his dragons to war back then.]

He frowned, recalling the terrible war. 'Dragon Emperor' Antares, the Monarch of Destruction, the King of the Dragons, was the only monarch who had ever overwhelmed the Shadow Monarch, Sung Jinwoo. He was the undisputed strongest of the dragon race, and the Dragons he led were also an invincible army, each possessing immense power and magic. The Dragon Emperor was a true embodiment of destruction, willing to embrace even his own demise for the sake of war, a maelstrom of blood, screams, madness, and devastation. That's why Sung Jinwoo attacked his army even more relentlessly. Looking back, the Monarch of Destruction's power was even more astonishing. At the time, the Shadow Army led by Sung Jinwoo had already absorbed the forces of all the other monarchs. Yet, the Dragon Emperor fought a fierce battle against that massive immortal army until the very last moment. Of course, Sung Jinwoo ultimately emerged victorious, but it was undeniable that the Dragons were truly the strongest race.

[Although the rebirth of the Dragon Emperor's descendant is a bit unsettling...]

"Well, if we raise it as a 'pet' from a young age, there shouldn't be any problems." Saying that, Suho looked at the wolf that had been clinging to his side.

The Fang Wolf, Gray, tamed through the pet system.

Sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff.

Unlike Arsha, this guy was busy burying his nose in Kamish's egg and sniffing it with sparkling eyes.

Lick, lick, lick!

He even tasted it with his tongue. Meanwhile, his tail was wagging excitedly, making him quite an interesting thing to watch. It didn't seem like he actually wanted to eat it, but rather, he looked like he had found a fun new toy ?

[F-for now, just in case, I'll build a nest here.] Arsha started building a nest for Kamish's egg in a corner of Ammut's pyramid, using her worker bees.

Bzzzz-

Although it was called a nest, it was essentially a prison to confine the monster that could be hatched from it.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



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[Phew. This should be safe enough.] Arsha completed the nest and let out a relieved sigh.

Suho couldn't believe his eyes. "Is this a nest or a bunker?"

[Considering a dragon will hatch from this egg, this is actually not enough.] Arsha was still wary of Kamish's egg.

[Dragons are apex predators from the moment they come into this world. Red Dragon hatchlings in particular can breathe fire as soon as they're out of the egg. You wouldn't know, being human, but dragons....]

[Nonsense! Our little lord took to the skies as a babe!]

[...] Arsha had no choice but to shut her mouth at Beru's outburst. Come to think of it, Suho here wasn't normal either. No, in a way, he could be considered the most menacing one here.

'Sigh. How did I end up living in such a dreadful place...' Arsha bit her lip and sighed at the harsh reality she found herself in.

1

Suho asked her, "You seem to know a lot about dragons?"

[Information gathering is my specialty.]

Indeed, her ability to create numerous doppelgangers was perfect for gathering information. In fact, even at this very moment, her worker bees were scouring the country in search of villains.

"Then do you happen to know how to hatch a dragon's egg?"

[I've heard dragons periodically perform a baptism of mana to hatch their eggs.]

"Baptism of mana? What's that?"

[Simply put, it's a constant shower of mana. Hmm. Come to think of it... this egg is too small to be a dragon's egg. It's probably because its parents died early and it couldn't receive the mana baptism, so it didn't grow properly.]

Arsha's guess was spot on. Kamish's egg was the smallest one Cha Hae-In had found in the tomb of Berserk Dragons. Suho's expression hardened slightly at her words. "You mean this egg might not hatch?"

[I'm not sure about that.]

"Hmm. Baptism of mana..." Suho pondered for a moment after hearing Arsha's explanation.

"Then wouldn't it work if someone other than the parents infused mana into the egg?"

[There's no guarantee, but it would definitely help, wouldn't it?]

"Then I can do it too."

[Excuse me?]

Suho just grinned and placed his palm on the surface of Kamish's egg inside the nest. Then he slowly drew up the mana within his body and began to gently push it into the egg.

Fwoosh!

[Oh my. How can a human...] Arsha was once again amazed by his delicate mana control.

Considering Suho was human, this was truly a remarkable ability. While using mana was as natural as breathing for magical beasts, humans had only been able to use it for a mere two years. And Suho had awakened even more recently...

[Ahem. Our little lord was a prodigy from infancy. He took his first steps with the Ruler's Authority...] Beru puffed up his chest beside them.

Arsha was used to Beru's doting, so she tried her best not to look at him and spoke to Suho with concern. [Suho, I think you're doing it right. But even so, the effect will be minimal.]

"Why is that?" Suho asked as he continued to infuse mana into Kamish's egg.

[Dragons are a race with an innate abundance of magic power. Because of that the egg receives a tremendous amount of mana from its parents until it hatches.]

That's why the baptism of mana was also called a 'Mana Shower.' Even if the egg couldn't absorb all that immense mana, it was continuously flooded with it.

[I know you're amazing, Suho, but even if you infuse mana into the egg until you're exhausted, it's a drop in the bucket compared to a dragon's mana... Hmm?]

Gulp. Arsha felt something strange while she was speaking. For some reason, Suho's mana entering Kamish's egg... showed no signs of depleting. And at some point, Suho had started drinking something continuously.

Gulp. Gulp. Gulp.

[Item: 'Intermediate Mana Potion' used.]

[Item: 'Intermediate Mana Potion' used.]

[Item: Intermediate Mana Potion' used.]

"I have enough mana." A confident smile appeared on Suho's face as he drank mana potions non-stop. It was confidence backed by evidence. His gaze was fixed on his status window, which was constantly fluctuating in real-time.

3

[MP: 358/6,410]

[MP: 1,410/6,410]

[MP: 431/6,410]

[MP: 2,160/6,410]

"Even though I'm not a dragon, as long as I have gold, I can use mana all day long."

1

[Th-this is unbelievable...] Arsha was shocked and her jaw dropped at the sight. It was literally a mana shower! Suho's mana was endlessly pouring into Kamish's egg, giving it a baptism of mana!

[Kehet. Ahem. Our little lord...] Beru puffed up his chest again, seizing the opportunity to boast.

[...] Suho himself was just sitting there, so why was Beru taking all the credit...? Arsha wished someone would explain it to her.

Anyway, watching Kamish's egg endlessly absorbing his mana, Suho nodded. "Alright. From now on, I need to focus on earning gold as well." If he wanted to use mana on the level of a dragon, the cost of potions would be substantial.

* * *

Lim Dogyoon, a 'former' university administrative assistant, found himself doing similar work even after becoming a Hunter. The only difference was that the professor who used to give him difficult and demanding tasks had now been replaced by 'Sung Suho,' his boss.

"Let's see..." Lim Dogyoon took out his tablet PC, which he hadn't used since his days as a university assistant, and started writing in his work journal.

"The conditions Suho wants for the dungeons are..."

Scribble scribble.

1) Dungeons that might hide demon factories.

(Places where demon-type monsters appear?)

(Places with rumors about Stardust or missing people?)

2) Dungeons where we can earn a lot of gold.

(What's this? Places with lots of expensive materials?)

A brainstorming session ensued in Lim Dogyoon's head as he jotted down various ideas. And his eyes and ears were constantly searching for dungeons that met all those conditions, using every means possible. First, connections.

"Hello? Father, can you talk? If you're not busy, I have a few questions." He even called his father, with whom he still had an awkward relationship.

"Ah, hello? Is this Yoo Jinho's secretary's office? CEO Yoo said I could contact you if I needed anything. Yes. I need some information..." He even called the secretary's office of the great and powerful Yoo Jinho out of the blue.

"Ah! Vice President Baek Miho? This is Lim Dogyoon, the vice president of Woojin Guild! I was wondering if you could share some information about dungeons..."

That's right. Lim Dogyoon was usually quite timid. But when it came to work, the former assistant was capable of anything. And he achieved the remarkable feat of finding dungeons that satisfied all of Suho's requirements in less than an hour.

"Suho! No, Boss! I've listed the dungeons I found and uploaded them! I've even prioritized them according to my own criteria, so you can just raid them in this order!"

[Kiek? What's this? Has this coward ever been this competent?]

"Hehe." Lim Dogyoon felt an immense sense of relief at Beru's surprised reaction. Riding this momentum, he boldly conveyed his request to Suho.

"So, this time, I don't have to enter the dungeon, right?"

"What are you talking about? Of course you have to go in."

5

"..." Lim Dogyoon's face fell in an instant.

* * *

And so, Suho's guild began raiding the dungeons Lim Dogyoon had found, one by one, targeting the demon factories. They had plenty of money. A massive sum from selling all the dungeon resources they had mined in Busan had just been deposited into the guild's account. Suho used that money to buy the dungeons Lim Dogyoon found without hesitation and started raiding them immediately. Having already worked together in Busan, the Shadow Soldiers led by Suho were demolishing the dungeons at a dazzling pace.

[Level Up!]

[Level Up!]

The leveling speed wasn't bad either.

'It was a good decision to create a guild. Acquiring dungeons is much easier than when I was a freelancer.'

He didn't just level up while raiding dungeons. He sold the expensive materials obtained from the defeated magical beasts in the shop window and earned gold. He needed the gold not only for potions but also to buy defensive gear from the shop to increase his combat speed.

[Item: Superior Knight's Chestplate]

[Acquisition Difficulty: B]

[Type: Armor]

[Physical Damage Reduction +7%]

[Movement speed decreases if Strength is below 80.]

[Item: Superior Knight's Helmet]

[Acquisition Difficulty: B]

[Type: Armor]

[Physical Damage Reduction +6%]

[Movement speed decreases if Strength is below 80.]

He even bought items he had been coveting but couldn't afford due to his lack of Strength. The more he increased his defense, the less he needed to spend on potions, and the faster he could fight.

'Somehow, it feels like I'm becoming a full-fledged tanker.' Suho chuckled at his own fighting style.

Leading the Shadow Soldiers, he looked every bit like a necromancer, but in reality, he was taking on the role of a tanker, fighting on the front lines even more than his summons. And then the Shadow Soldiers following behind him would clean up the remaining magical beasts.

"...Should I call myself a 'Necro-Tanker'?" Suho chuckled and continued raiding dungeons.

3

In the process, they even discovered an actual demon factory. However, it was an 'ordinary' factory, so they couldn't obtain any information about the Outer Gods. Instead, they acquired the magic stones that were stored there as materials for Stardust, which all went into Beru's stomach. And once again, Suho repeated the process of drinking potions and infusing mana into Kamish's egg...

[Suho.] Queen Bee Arsha spoke to Suho with a serious expression.

[It seems my worker bees have found something.]

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



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Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 180 - Chapter 179

Chapter 180: Chapter 179

Lately, Queen Bee Arsha had been under a lot of mental pressure. And the reason why was obvious. Her main body was already held hostage in the Shadow Dungeon, her life practically in Suho's hands. On top of that, he was the priest of Querehsha Queen of Insects and the Monarch of Plagues, so she had to stay on his good side. The problem was, no matter how hard she tried to please him, there wasn't much Arsha could actually be useful in. All she could do was gather information using her worker bees... And even that was becoming less impressive now that Lim Dogyoon, whom she had considered a useless human, was suddenly displaying incredible work efficiency.

'To think I have to compete with that human!'

Was there ever a more humiliating situation? For Arsha, who had treated Lim Dogyoon as someone of a lower status than a worker bee, this was quite unpleasant. But what could she do? She had to come up with something to stay in Suho's favor... Well at the very least, she had to be more helpful than that human, who was at the bottom of the Woojin Guild.

'This won't do. I need to increase the number of worker bees as much as possible.' She had never thought she lacked subordinates, but she decided to increase their numbers tenfold.

'If they're just worker bees without combat abilities, I can increase them as much as I want!'

Arsha had never increased her worker bees in this way before. To protect herself as the Queen Bee, quality was more important than quantity. But now that her main body was residing in the 'safe' haven of the Shadow Dungeon, she decided to go for quantity over quality. And so, the number of worker bees under Arsha's control began to increase. The way she gained new subordinates was simple. She fed her royal jelly to ordinary worker bees living on Earth. What would be just a sip for a human could bring an entire hive under her control. And so Arsha's worker bees scattered all over the country.

'Until now, I only dealt with information about villains, but from now on, I'll select information about demon factories, Stardust, and the Foreign Religion!'

Buzz, Buzz, Buzz. The worker bees busily flapped their wings and began gathering the information Arsha requested. But because she hadn't given them any special abilities in order to increase their numbers they weren't intelligent. So, the Queen Bee herself, had to receive and analyze the information they gathered.

[Ugh. My... my head...] Arsha felt dizzy from the flood of information overwhelming her senses. But she didn't give up. Her pride as the Queen Bee wouldn't allow her to back down so easily. She desperately tried to cram and control the information sent by tens of thousands of worker bees into her mind. And then an unexpected phenomenon occurred...

[...] Suddenly, Arsha's consciousness, which had been controlling so many bees, burst and expanded.

[Ahhhhh...!] She collapsed on the spot, her whole body trembling.

Crack! A transparent shell peeled off her body.

[Queen of Insects and the Monarch of Plagues, observes the Queen Bee.]

"Hmm?" Suho, who was in the middle of his daily quests, looked puzzled at the sudden message from Queresha. His limbs were crushed, and he couldn't even lift his head, but the messages continued.

[Queen of Insects and the Monarch of Plagues, remembers the name of Queen Bee Arsha.]

'...Remembers Arsha's name?' This was the first time Queresha had directly mentioned Arsha's name.

Queresha was the Queen of all insects while Arsha was just one of them, a subordinate she didn't even consider particularly valuable. But now, Queresha suddenly remembered Arsha's name?

'I don't know what's going on, but does this mean Arsha is more likely to become Queresha's successor?'

[Forty-one.]

Suho stopped his thoughts at the sudden stern voice of Ammt and retorted. "Forty-two!"

[Your form is incorrect. Forty-one.]

"Ugh." Suho gritted his teeth and resumed his push-ups at Ammt's unwavering firmness. And by the time he barely finished his daily quest, Arsha appeared before him.

[Suho, it seems my worker bees have found something.] Arsha relayed the information she discovered with a slightly serious expression.

[There seems to be a strange 'superstition' spreading among low-rank Hunters these days.]

"Superstition? What do you mean?"

[After the Association classified Stardust as an illegal drug, more and more Hunters have been turning it into accessories and wearing it.]

"Accessories? What does that mean?" Suho looked puzzled, and Arsha continued her explanation seriously.

[They solidify Stardust like a stone and make it into a necklace. And whenever they enter a dungeon, they pray to the necklace.]

"...Pray?" Suho felt strange.

Stardust wasn't illegal as long as it wasn't consumed. But why would they go through the trouble of making it into a necklace and even pray to it? It wouldn't amplify their mana or anything.

"If it's what I think it is, I might have seen it on Hunternet recently."

Just then, Lim Dogyoon, who had fainted while training with Suho, woke up and crawled over to join the conversation. But he was able to sit up and continue his explanation, only after receiving a healing potion.

"Stardust was recently classified as illegal, so people who had bought a large amount for a lot of money were in trouble. They were suddenly stuck with a lot of bad inventory. And the Association had no obligation to compensate them for it. Moreover, now that people knew it was made by burning humans alive, no one wanted to consume it anymore. So, at some point, a trend started where people prayed to the necklace, saying they were comforting the souls of those who died in the horrific process of making stardust."

"Hmm."

"And now, there are even people who buy up Stardust, some stocked before it became illegal, make it into necklaces, and sell them. Doping with Stardust is illegal, but this is a kind of 'clearance sale' that started with a vaguely good intention. So..." Suho's expression remained serious throughout Lim Dogyoon's explanation.

'Commemorating the souls of the dead'. The intention itself was good. But the problem was the object of their prayers. The most basic ingredient of Stardust, the 'Blue Mist,' was the itarim's mana that dissolved the boundaries between dimensions. In other words, it was the main method of their invasion. And now people were praying to that Blue Mist?

"This... feels ominous."

[I also mentioned it because I thought it might be related to the Outer Gods in some way.] Suho nodded at Arsha's words. Looking back, there were no coincidences in matters like this. Especially when it came to the Itarim.

"Arsha, the Hunters praying to the necklaces..."

[My worker bees have already identified them.]

"No, I want you to find out who's selling the Stardust necklaces to those Hunters, not who the Hunters themselves are."

[Ah...!] Arsha's eyes widened at Suho's words.

[Understood! I'll find out right away.] Arsha quickly replied and sent a telepathic message to her worker bees spread across the country.

* * *

A while later.

[I found them.]

Since she has already identified the Hunters wearing the necklaces, it wasn't difficult to trace the route through which they acquired them. It wasn't even illegal, so nobody bothered to keep it a secret. But Arsha went a step further and investigated where the sellers were getting their necklaces from.

[There are many distributors, but they all get their Stardust necklaces from one region.]

"One region? Where is it?"

[Yangpyeong, Gyeonggi Province.]

"Yangpyeong?!"

[...]

[Kiek?] Arsha and even Beru, who was standing nearby, looked puzzled at Suho's intense reaction upon hearing the location.

[Little Monarch, is there a problem?]

At Beru's question, Suho sighed with a grave expression, pressing his forehead.
"That's... where my grandparents live."

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[Kieeeeeek?!]

* * *

Sung Il-Hwan. In Suho's childhood memories, his grandfather always smelled of smoke, a firefighter through and through. And he never quit his job, even when his son, Sung Jinwoo, nagged him to retire and rest. He worked alongside his younger colleagues as long as he was able to. Suho still vividly remembered his grandfather's retirement ceremony.

– Senior! You've worked hard!

–Thank you for your service!

–Thank you for your service!

His grandfather, stepping down from the podium after a long and dedicated career, received applause from all his colleagues and junior firefighters. Even on that day, the faint smell of smoke lingered on his uniform. After retiring from the job he had dedicated his life to, Suho's grandfather moved to the countryside with his grandmother, saying they would live a simple life focused on farming. Of course, it wasn't exactly the deep countryside; they hadn't left the Gyeonggi Province area. Yangpyeong was a place moderately distant yet close enough to Seoul, with beautiful natural scenery like vast plains and valleys. It was none other than Yoo Jinho who had provided Suho's grandparents with a comfortable house there.

'Of all places, it has to be where my grandparents live!' The thought that there might be a group related to the Outer Gods in that area made Suho's heart race.

But there was someone even more agitated than him - Beru.

[We have to go there immediately! This is a serious matter!] Beru finally remembered something he had overlooked.

'How could I! Why did I only think of it now!'

[This is entirely my fault! I deserve severe punishment, but there's no time for that now!]

"What's wrong? Is there something I don't know?"

Suho rushed towards Yangpyeong where his grandfather lived. Beside him, Beru answered with a grave expression.

[We've always assumed that the Apostles of Itarim would target high-ranking Hunters with the potential to become vessels for their power... But it might not be just them!]

"What do you mean?"

[Your grandfather was also a Hunter who received power from the Rulers in his past life!]

"..." At that moment, Suho ran towards Yangpyeong with all his might.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



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