

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 2 - Chapter 01

Chapter 2: Chapter 01

"Do you really like ants that much?"

At Hankuk University Art Museum, painting major teaching assistant Lim Dogyoon made a disgusted face as he looked at Suho's work. Ant paintings were plastered all over one wall of the exhibition hall. Various kinds of sketches, including oil paintings and watercolors. The types were diverse, and the appearances of the ants were also varied. Teaching Assistant Lim attached the nameplate he brought to the wall below.

[Hankuk University Painting Department Assignment Exhibition]

[3rd Year Sung Suho]

"If we gathered all the ants you've drawn since you were a freshman, it would fill a truck. Why didn't you go to the Department of Entomology instead of the Art?"

"I thought about it, but there was no separate ant specialization."

"You only like ants, not other insects?"

"Yes. I've liked ants since I was young. When I saw a line of them, I would walk carefully so as not to step on them..."

"You liked them since you were young? Well, at least your taste is consistent." Teaching Assistant Lim chuckled and continued to look around Suho's paintings. Then he suddenly stopped.

"This one looks a little different." There was a humanoid ant painted with black shadows blazing.

"Hmm. The movement is dynamic and good. Did you draw a magical beast?"

"A magical beast? No way. It's just an ant that appeared in my dreams when I was young."

"Haha. You're something else. You even dream about ants? How young were you?"

"Before the Cataclysm."

The Cataclysm. It was a term that referred to the apocalyptic crisis that suddenly came to Earth two years ago. Mysterious Gates appeared all over the world and terrifying

magical beasts poured out from within, invading Earth. But fortunately, a very small number of people awakened to supernatural abilities, and humanity was able to barely overcome the crisis. That was just two years ago. When Suho was just twenty years old, a freshman in college. However the time when he had those 'ant dreams' was much earlier, during middle and high school.

"Anyway, you're a strange one." Teaching Assistant Lim chuckled and looked at Suho's painting again.

"But you really draw well. It feels like it's going to jump out of the painting and bite me. Seriously, I mean your painting is that vivid." Suho laughed inwardly at those words.

'It has to be.'

He wasn't exaggerating; the ant in the painting was his nightmare itself. It was a monster that appeared in his dreams during puberty and tried to kill him.

'...Looking back, it was a truly terrible dream.'

Suho recalled...

[Level Up!]

[Level Up!]

In that dream, Suho had to fight a life-or-death battle against monsters for no reason. Armored knights and ant legions endlessly blocking his path, and later even giant dragons. He leveled up like in a game when he killed those monsters. And if he died, it was a reset. He had to go back to the beginning and start everything over from level 1. The only way to escape that dream was to somehow survive and reach the last room. And after endlessly fighting like that, he barely managed to reach the end, but absurdly, the final boss's face...

'Resembled my father.'

Suho smiled bitterly, thinking that it was truly just a teenage dream. But at some point, he stopped having those dreams.

'That was probably... around that time.'

Yes, it was the summer of his first year of high school, to be exact. After his parents went missing, Suho's peaceful daily life crumbled.

* * *

Around that time, an ominous thing appeared in a corner of the museum building.

"You left it here?"

"Yes, senior. The teaching assistant said he kept it here."

Creak

The painting major students opened the storage room door to collect the exhibits. And their eyes widened as they saw 'it' inside.

"Huh?"

Crackle! Crackle!

A pitch-black hole was on the wall.

"Ugh! It's a Gate?!"

"Report it quickly!"

The students backed away in a panic. They were about to report about the situation with trembling hands, but their senior hurriedly stopped them.

"Calm down! It's clearly a closed Gate!"

"Ah, you're right. The blue mist isn't flowing out yet."

"Yes. It's still too early for a dungeon break."

"Haa. That was a close one."

The students breathed a sigh of relief as they grasped the situation. Dungeon break was a term that referred to the phenomenon of magical beasts pouring out of a Gate. But it didn't happen immediately after a Gate was created. First, 'blue mist' flowed out and contaminated the surroundings, and only then would the entrance unseal and the magical beasts come out.

"So it's still safe. Heh."

"S-senior. Why are you laughing like that? It's still dangerous, so let's report it quickly."

"You fools. Haven't you heard the rumor? You can become an Awakened if you inhale the blue mist?"

"Ah!" The juniors' ears perked up at the senior's words.

No one knew what exactly the blue mist was. But there was a rumor that had been spreading like an urban legend on the internet for a while. It claimed that the mist was actually vaporized magic power, and if you inhaled it, even an ordinary person could awaken.

"Isn't that just a baseless rumor?"

"It hasn't been proven false..."

"Hmm."

"Heh. So let's confirm it ourselves this time. Who knows? Maybe an S-rank Hunter will appear among us?"

"...!"

The juniors' eyes changed at the senior's words. The astronomical amount of money earned by S-rank Hunters came to mind. The corpses of magical beasts and dungeon ores became sought-after as new materials, Hunters were able to gather all these resources, so they were seen as a symbol of success and wealth. However it had only been two years since the Cataclysm. The method for awakening magical power remained a mystery.

"Besides, you guys know that Teaching Assistant Lim is an E-rank Awakened, right?"

"I've heard that. He always complains that he can't earn money because he's an E-rank Hunter. That's why he works as a teaching assistant during the semester."

"Tsk ts. You don't know anything. That's a deception, you punk. Do you have any idea how much he earns just by entering the dungeon as a miner, not even a raider?"

"How much does he earn?"

The senior whispered as if revealing a great secret, and the juniors' eyes widened.

"What? He earns that much?"

"Even though he's an E-rank?"

"Yes, you punk. Even the lowest-ranked Hunters earn that much if they're lucky. Are you really going to miss this opportunity? Huh?"

"Wow, Hunters are the best after all. But why is the teaching assistant still clinging to the school if he earns that much?"

"He earns money in the dungeon and spends it lavishly when doing art. And he gets a lot of exhibition opportunities by working in the teaching assistant's office."

"That's amazing."

The income of an E-rank was much more persuasive than the possibility of S-rank awakening, which was rarer than winning the lottery. Eventually, the juniors subtly lowered the hands that were holding their phones at their senior's continuous persuasion.

"Well, hmm. They say it's safe for a while even if the blue mist flows out..."

"Th-then should we wait a little bit? Just for a bit?"

"You guys are finally getting it. Life is all about taking chances. If we just take a sip as soon as the mist comes out and then report it, there won't be any danger."

* * *

A while later, dark blue mist finally began to seep out of the Gate.

Thud!

The building suddenly shook.

'Hmm?'

Suho, who was in the exhibition hall, looked up.

'What? Is it an earthquake?'

Something was strange. It felt like space itself was shaking. But Suho was the only one who felt the change. No one else in the exhibition hall noticed. It was then...

"Ugh."

A student walked into the exhibition hall. Teaching Assistant Lim, who was near the entrance, approached him and spoke.

"Young-chul, I told you to go to the storage room, what took you so long..."

"I-I... warned them."

"...Young-chul?"

"B-but the senior..."

"Park Young-chul?"

"The sm...oke."

'Something's wrong.'

Teaching Assistant Lim's expression hardened as he saw Young-chul's condition up close. His pupils were dilated and unfocused, And his mouth was muttering incomprehensible words.

"Park Young-chul? What's in your mouth?" At Teaching Assistant Lim's question, Young-chul finally realized his state.

Whoosh.

Blue smoke was seeping out of his mouth and nose.

"Th-this... isn't right. Ugh."

Young-chul panicked and covered his mouth with his hand. But that only made more smoke seep through his fingers. And then...

Flare—!

With a surge of heat, blue fire engulfed Young-chul's body.

"Teaching Assistant!" Suho, who was running from behind, grabbed Teaching Assistant Lim's body.

"Kugh! H-hot...!"

"...!"

Teaching Assistant Lim, who stepped back, widened his eyes. Young-chul's body was burning, enveloped in blue smoke.

"Kyaaaaa!"

"Wh-what is that!" The students nearby screamed in terror as they witnessed the horrifying sight.

Wail—!

A chilling siren suddenly blared from the school speakers.

[Emergency!]

The students began to murmur at the sudden sound.

[A Gate has appeared on school grounds!]

"...?!"

"A-a Gate?"

[The current location of the Gate is the art museum building...!]

"Shit! That's here!"

"Uwaaa!"

"Kyaaaaa!"

The chaos intensified. The students began to run in a panic. Having witnessed someone burning to death right before their eyes, they felt indescribable fear. However, that was not the only problem. Young-chul's body was burning right in the middle of the exhibition hall's entrance. They had to pass by him to get outside.

Flare—!

One of the students who ran ahead faltered at the intense heat.

'Is there another exit...?'

He hurriedly looked around, but there wasn't one. There was only one exit. And while the students were panicking...

[Graaaa...]

Something unbelievable happened.

"Huh?"

"Wh-what's happening?"

Young-chul's body, which had turned into charcoal, was getting up again. Enveloped in blue mist.

"W-wait. Is that...?" Teaching Assistant Lim's eyes widened.

"It's a magical beast! Get away from there!" He shouted urgently.

[Kraaaaaaaa!]

But it was too late. The blue mist magical beast, using Young-chul's body as a wick, swung its arm like a whip.

Crash—!

"Aak!"

The students' bodies were thrown to the ground, coughing up blood. And as the blue mist clung to their clothes, their bodies also began to burn.

"Uwaak! Fire! Fire!"

"Kyaaaaa!"

The students scattered in terror. Screams filled the air.

"Oh my god. It really was a Mist Burn..."

Teaching Assistant Lim hurriedly took out his phone. A Mist Burn wasn't something an E-rank like him could handle alone. Suho asked urgently as he sent a request for backup,

"Mist Burn? What kind of magical beast is that?"

"If you're hit by that guy..." Teaching Assistant Lim gritted his teeth.

"You'll turn into the same thing."

[Kraaaa!]

Just then, the bodies of the students attacked by the Mist Burn rose again, burning with blue flames.