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[The King of Dragons and the Monarch of Destruction, nods.]

That was the correct answer. He didn't know how the Dragon King came to this conclusion, but the tree that Seo Jiwoo desperately clung to while struggling in her dream was definitely the 'World Tree.' At that moment, a realization flashed through Suho's mind.

'I understand how she reawakened... The same way as Vulcan.' Suho recalled the legend of Vulcan that he heard from Esil.

'Vulcan, the Demon of Greed'

Demons were broadly classified into two categories. Demons with intellect and demons without intellect. Demons with intellect didn't even consider those without to be their own kind and treated them as insignificant creatures. Among them, Vulcan clearly belonged to the latter. The lowest-ranking class that crawled abjectly at the bottom of the demon world, licking up the scraps left by others.

'A bug that only wriggled with instinct' That was Vulcan's true identity.

But he was very lucky. Although he was born weak and lowly, he kept hiding to avoid becoming prey to the strong. And he quite accidentally discovered a fragment of the 'World Tree'.

Crunch!

He instinctively broke off a branch and greedily devoured the leaves attached to it. And at that moment.

Crack!

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

'...He evolved into a demon noble.'

Suho was certain. Vulcan, who evolved from a low-level creature to a demon noble in an instant by eating the leaves of the World Tree. And Hunter Seo Jiwoo of the Blue Dragon Guild, who found the World Tree in a dream and reawakened as an S-rank Hunter. There was clear commonality between the two.

'It's exactly the same principle. Hunter Seo Jiwoo must have evolved just like Vulcan.' Suho felt like he was finally understanding the principle behind people reawakening, which was a very rare phenomenon worldwide.

* * *

A while later, only Seo Jiwoo remained in the Association gymnasium, the other Hunters left to conquer the dungeons they had scheduled. She stayed to get some clues about the Eternal Sleep Disease. Suho summoned the Dragon King.

"Ragnar."

"Beep?" At Suho's call, a small, cute-looking lizard appeared from his shadow.

"No... Antares. I have something to ask." At that moment, Ragnar's foolish eyes shone solemnly.

[The spirit of 'Antares' possesses the Priest's body.]

"Yes. Ask away. You are now qualified." The Dragon King Antares raised his lips arrogantly, as if he had been waiting for the question.

"Qualified... I see." At those words, Suho recalled the advice his father's illusion gave him in the Dragon King's world.

– Suho, I can tell you the location of the World Tree. But the way there will not be easy.

It wasn't just Antares who wandered through the dimensional gap while fighting wars; Sung Jinwoo did the same.

– But it would be very dangerous for you to stand before the World Tree at your current level. So for now, focus on increasing your strength.

– Antares will tell you the rest.

With those words, Sung Jinwoo's illusion disappeared after manipulating the system to create a job change quest for Suho. Thus began the Dragon King's trials. And after overcoming two of them and obtaining the 'Qualification of the Dragon King,' Suho finally achieved the minimum level of strength required to ask about the World Tree.

"Where is the World Tree?" Suho didn't mind if Seo Jiwoo overheard this conversation.

This kind of story was useless information to those who weren't 'qualified' and was only relevant to him. No, rather, if Seo Jiwoo, who had encountered the World Tree, listened too, there was a possibility that he could get some useful input from her. But Seo Jiwoo

had a strange expression on her face as she watched Suho pick up Ragnar to talk to the Dragon King.

"I heard you were a summoner before reawakening... but why are all your summons so cute... ahem." Seo Jiwoo unconsciously reached out her hand as if to pet the small lizard, but then hurriedly withdrew it. That's how cute despite their ferocious expressions all the summons Suho had shown so far were, including Beru. It was a situation where it was easy to mistakenly assume Suho was an incompetent summoner before he was reawakened as a combat type.

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'Still, his summons are all extraordinary.' Suho definitely had something special compared to ordinary summoners. Even if they looked weak in appearance, all of Suho's summons were intelligent beings who could understand human speech.

'Such summons are definitely rare and they have sufficient strategic use...' Under Seo Jiwoo's gaze, Suho continued his conversation with the Dragon King Antares.

"Where is the World Tree, you ask?" Antares smirked and answered Suho's question.

"The World Tree is everywhere and nowhere."

"I don't want to hear that kind of wordplay."

"It's not wordplay. It's literally true." Looking at Antares' mischievous smile, something suddenly occurred to Suho.

"Don't tell me... the void? Are you talking about the dimensional gap?"

"Yes. You're quite sharp. What do you think connects the gaps between dimensions that are far apart from each other? That's what the World Tree does."

"Tell me more precisely." At Suho's blunt words, the Dragon King replied in a meaningful voice,

"So, in short, it's like this. The World Tree has its roots in the Sea of The Afterlife, and its trunk stretches widely throughout the universe. And the fruits that grow on its branches are where the soldiers of heaven led by the Rulers are born." Suho pondered over those words.

Roots in the Sea of The Afterlife.

Trunk throughout the universe.

Fruits bearing the Rulers' soldiers.

'If the Rulers' soldiers are born from the fruits of the World Tree, then Vulcan's evolution and Hunter Seo Jiwoo's reawakening after encountering the World Tree are certainly possible.' Suho nodded in agreement. However, considering the vast scale of the universe, finding the trunk of the World Tree that stretched throughout was literally like reaching for the stars.

And there was another problem.

"The dimensional gap is highly volatile. Even if you revisit a place where the trunk of the World Tree was once found, the probability of finding it there again is extremely low."

"I see. If that were the case, demon nobles like Vulcan would have been continuously born. Then there's only one way to find it." Suho finally understood what Antares was trying to say.

"Are you saying to find the roots rather than the trunk?"

"Yes, that's right. It's a much more reliable and convenient way. Finding the pillar of the World Tree that stands tall in the Sea of The Afterlife. Would be much easier than looking through the volatile void." Antares nodded with a satisfied smile.

And at those words, Suho's gaze suddenly turned to Seo Jiwoo, and he muttered, "Then, if you fall into Eternal Slumber..."

"Yes. If you contract what you humans call the Eternal Sleep Disease, your soul will wander the Sea of The Afterlife forever, even if your body doesn't die... Just like us." Antares' expression turned a little bitter as he said those words. The expression 'us' he used. In other words, the 'Sea of The Afterlife' was the world where dead Monarchs drifted in eternal rest.

"The Sea of The Afterlife is the abyss itself where the souls of the entire universe fade into nothingness. It's a deeper and darker spiritual universe than the shadow world ruled by the Shadow Monarch. He can use his power to freely retrieve dead souls from that deep sea and turn them into his army, but there are those his power doesn't work on."

"Souls contaminated with mana or the souls of Monarchs."

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"Yes."

Suho suddenly recalled the world of dead Monarchs that he sometimes visited with the [Unknown] skill.

A world of white emptiness with nothing. The dead Monarchs who sat lonely in the middle, waiting for Suho. But that world was only a temporary dwelling. Whenever Suho

left that place, that white world would be dyed in deep darkness from afar. In retrospect, that phenomenon was the souls of the Monarchs, who were momentarily awakened by Suho's power, sinking back into the Sea of The Afterlife where they originally belonged.

"So, in the end, when Monarchs die, they fall into Eternal Slumber?"

"It's a similar principle, but also different. We don't have bodies to return to in the first place. That woman was lucky to encounter the World Tree rooted somewhere and return to her body, but it's impossible for us Monarchs who don't have them in the first place."

[My liege. You can use the Holy Water of Life to awaken someone who has fallen into Eternal Slumber.] At Beru's timely advice, Suho also realized why the World Tree was one of the ingredients for the Holy Water of Life. In the end, if he could just make it, he could cure the ever-increasing number of Eternal Sleep Disease cases worldwide. But what was the conclusion...?

"Okay. I understand that I have to go to the Sea of The Afterlife to find the World Tree. So how do I get there?"

"How? You can go right away if you die. You are the son of the Shadow Monarch but you can't even do that?" Antares chuckled.

Suho nodded nonchalantly and taunted.

"You useless evil spirit. Return Ragnar's poor body and go back to the Sea of The Afterlife."

"W-wait...!" Antares panicked.

Next to him, Beru gleamed with a pious and holy expression, crossing his hands in the shape of a cross.

[I will help you. I recently learned how to exorcise evil spirits from movies.]

5

"S-stop! I was just kidding! I was just about to tell you!"

"I do feel a little sorry for Ragnar."

[I think so too. Why don't we gather the soldiers and decide by vote whether to give Ragnar freedom or not?]

"No, please listen to me! Y-yes! It's Eternal Sleep Disease! I know why that woman fell into Eternal Slumber!"

"What?!" As Antares shouted urgently and pointed at Seo Jiwoo, who had been quietly listening to Suho's conversation, her eyes widened.

"Is that true? You know why I, no, we fell into Eternal Slumber?!"

"It's true! I know for sure!"

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"Three seconds." At Suho's words, Antares shouted desperately,

"The Nightmare Bud! You were hit by the power of that weed that bloomed in the Sea of The Afterlife!"

"Nightmare Bud?"

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When humans are excessively exposed to mana, there are three main reactions:

One. They adapt and awaken abilities.

Two. They are insensitive to mana, and nothing happens.

Three. They can't adapt to mana and die.

The third one was 'Eternal Sleep Disease.' A phenomenon of losing one's soul and the body dying. If life support devices didn't exist, those who couldn't adapt to mana would have perished. In short, Eternal Sleep Disease was a kind of out-of-body experience.

At the same time, it was medically similar to a brain-dead state. So fortunately, it was possible to buy time to prevent the body from declining by using life support devices. Of course, the probability of the soul returning to the body in that state was more than 100 times lower than that of a brain-dead patient regaining consciousness. But Suho knew of another phenomenon very similar to this...

It was Mist Burn.

When those who couldn't adapt to mana inhaled the blue mist flowing from Gates for a long time, their bodies would eventually burn up, turning them into Mist Burns, and they would die painfully. This phenomenon was very similar to Eternal Slumber in principle, but there was a crucial difference.

Mana properties.

What the Outer Gods wanted was invasion. They seemed to intend to completely burn this dimension by gradually increasing the number of Mist Burns from within the Earth. So they mixed a terrible poison called blue mist into the mana flowing into Earth. That's why those who couldn't adapt to mana and directly inhaled the blue mist ended up in an even more serious state than Eternal Slumber, where not only their souls died, but their bodies burned as well. But there actually were other entities who wanted to kill humans, even if they weren't Outer Gods.

"...That is the 'Nightmare Bud.'" Antares continued his explanation with an expression that seemed to have aged decades due to Suho and Beru's threats.

"It's not just the World Tree that grows with its roots in the Sea of The Afterlife. All sorts of strange weeds grow there, feeding on the various souls floating around." Suho's expression hardened.

"There are weeds that grow by feeding on souls? Then what happens to those souls?"

"What happens? They're already dead; what more could they lose? They just lose some of the nutrients remaining in their spiritual bodies and float around again. Of course, there are all sorts of weeds, and some of the greedier ones even cling to souls and become parasites."

"Parasites on souls..." Seo Jiwoo's face was growing paler beside Suho. It was because what was coming out of Antares' mouth was something that could have happened to her as well.

"Especially among them, the Nightmare Bud is much more aggressive. They even cross over to other dimensions and directly extract souls from living beings."

"Why? Why would they do that?" Seo Jiwoo was now speaking formally to Antares, who quite pleased with that, replied with a mischievous smile,

"It's probably because those souls are much fresher than the ones that have had their nutrients sucked out and stained by other weeds. They're connoisseurs, despite being weeds."

"...!" Seo Jiwoo's face turned ashen.

Suho asked,

"So you're saying that if someone is affected by that Nightmare Bud, they fall into Eternal Slumber even if they are an Awakened person?"

"Yes. It's even better if they are Awakened. For them, the more nutrients a soul has, the tastier it is, and they can suck on it for much longer."

"..." At this point, Seo Jiwoo realized just how lucky she was.

No matter how much she tried to recall the fragmented memories of her dream, there was nothing she did in that black sea. She just struggled instinctively in a state of hazy consciousness. And she just happened to bump into the roots of the World Tree.

"If, if I hadn't met the World Tree then... what would have happened to me now..."

Antares chuckled at Seo Jiwoo's muttering, her face now almost like a corpse.

"What would happen? You would have been eaten by the World Tree instead of the weeds."

"...What?!"

"What?" This time, even Suho's eyes widened at the unexpected remark.

"Why are you surprised? That's why I said it from the beginning. It's not just the World Tree that grows with its roots in the Sea of The Afterlife. The World Tree is just the biggest weed there. And it's a damn... weed planted directly by the Absolute Being." Antares muttered while grinding his teeth, as if an unpleasant memory had surfaced.

[A weed planted directly by the Absolute Being...] Muttered Beru, eyes gleaming with realization.

"It seems like this is going to be a long story."

From here on, it was a story that Suho already knew from Beru. But at the same time, it was a story with a slightly different perspective. Because the Dragon King, the Monarch of Destruction Antares, was one of the few beings who knew the beginning of this universe.

"In the beginning... there was the 'Absolute Being' who created our universe."

"..." Antares narrowed his eyes and reminisced about a very old memory. Even now, the Dragon King's appearance was that of the small and cute Ragnar, but his deep eyes exuded the dignity of someone who had lived for countless years.

"The Absolute Being planted the World Tree in the Sea of The Afterlife when he created this universe, and its purpose was to balance the world."

"Balance the world?" Seo Jiwoo, who didn't know the details, tilted her head.

On the other hand, Suho nodded. He had already heard about the war between the Rulers and the Monarchs from Beru, so he had some understanding.

"...You said the Rulers' soldiers are born from the fruits of the World Tree?"

"Yes. It's because of those damn fruits!"

Grit

Antares gritted his teeth with an angry expression as he recalled that time.

"Because of those fruits of the World Tree, the war between us Monarchs and the Rulers could never, ever end! Whenever we gained even a slight advantage, the World Tree would instantly bear fruit and increase their forces!"

"..."

Seeing the Dragon King's genuine anger, Suho recalled the illusion that Beru showed him when he first returned from outer space. The fierce war that had continued since the beginning of time.

"We fought countless battles against the Rulers' army in that war, gaining victories and suffering defeats. There were endless sacrifices in the process, but the war never stopped, no matter how much time passed. No, it couldn't have ended. In the first place, the Absolute Being's only pleasure was watching that pointless war."

...So whenever one side gained even a slight advantage, the Absolute Being would intervene and restore the balance of the war. Using the World Tree.

"The World Tree had more than enough nutrients. The souls of those who died in the war flowed directly into the Sea of The Afterlife and gave strength to the World Tree. And the Absolute Being had the power to create the soldiers of heaven from the fruits."

[And now that the Absolute Being is dead, the soldiers of heaven are no longer born from the World Tree.] Beru interrupted the story that seemed to be getting longer and pointed out a very realistic problem.

[My liege, even as we speak, the forces of the Outer Gods are gathering in greater numbers from various universes. On the other hand, the Rulers' forces are only decreasing, and there's no way to replenish them. This is all because the World Tree is no longer bearing fruit.] Beru didn't care about the human souls wandering the Sea of The Afterlife.

The World Tree growing by feeding on souls and bearing fruit was a natural thing that had been going on since the beginning of time. It was the cycle of the universe, the

fundamental principle that maintained this world. So it was a very serious problem that they were being invaded by Itarim at the moment when that balance was broken.

"What about my father's army?"

[Of course, the King is holding strong. He's killing Itarim's soldiers and extracting their shadows to replenish his forces. But even then, only the small fry increase; the high-ranking apostles of Itarim cannot be extracted.]

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"You mean they don't have shadows to extract, like the Monarchs."

[Yes. That's why the decreasing number of soldiers of heaven is a disadvantage to us in the long run. And there's no way to make the World Tree bear fruit again. Only Itarim have that ability, and in the first place, the biggest reason why the Itarim of the outer universe are invading us is because of the World Tree.]

"I see. The World Tree, which grew by absorbing all the souls of our universe as nutrients, would be the most nutritious food for the Outer Gods."

"...?"

The flow of the conversation was gradually going far beyond the scope of Seo Jiwoo's knowledge. She had a complicated expression, full of questions but unsure where to start. But Suho wasn't interested in satisfying her curiosity. He focused on what she considered most important. Waking up her colleagues who had fallen into Eternal Slumber with her.

'It will all be resolved if I can just make the Holy Water of Life. And to find the World Tree, which is an ingredient, I have to go to the Sea of The Afterlife.'

Suho asked Antares, "So you're saying that I can go to the Sea of The Afterlife by using that Nightmare Bud?"

"Yes. The Nightmare Bud forcibly induces an out-of-body experience and drags the soul to the Sea of The Afterlife. But even if you succeed in going there, it won't be easy to return. You'll have to wander around that vast sea until you find the World Tree, just like that woman experienced. Perhaps forever."

"Well, let's think about that later. For now, the situation is complicated, so let's take it one step at a time. Hunter Seo Jiwoo?"

"...Ah, uh?"

"Is that double dungeon where you and your colleagues fell into Eternal Slumber still there?"

"No, it's long gone."

"Did you conquer it?"

"No. We actually discovered the double dungeon by chance after conquering that dungeon. And after we fell asleep inside, other people found us and rescued us."

"So the Gate closed after that."

"Yes. The Gate closed because the dungeon was already conquered. It had nothing to do with the double dungeon."

"Hmm, I see." Suho organized his thoughts for a moment and then asked Seo Jiwoo,

"Then can you tell me the location where that Gate opened? I need to go there myself."

"You're going there yourself? But the Gate is already closed...?"

"Yes. Even if the Gate is closed, there might still be traces of the double dungeon. And if I'm right, then probably..."

[You're considering the possibility that the double dungeon is a Void Gate.]

"That's right." Suho nodded confidently at Beru's words.

"Let's go there before public opinion allows us entry to North Korea."

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

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Seo Jiwoo briefly returned to her guild before guiding Suho to where the double dungeon was. The reason was to instruct the PR staff on the groundwork to support Suho's advancement into North Korea. Meanwhile, he began taking care of things one by one. First of all,

"I'll have to actively utilize the Shadow Exchange skill from now on."

[That's a good idea.]

Thanks to the recent incident in India, the effectiveness of the Shadow Exchange skill had been properly proven.

"Since we don't know when and where traces of the Cult of the Outer Gods will be found, it will be convenient to spread shadow soldiers everywhere."

[As expected, you're brilliant! Now that you have enough shadow soldiers, it will be easy to move around if you scatter the small fry everywhere. Of course, my Liege was able to spread his domain throughout the Earth, so he didn't need to do that. Sadly you have no choice but to run around since you're lacking.]

"..."

Beru was sincerely cheering for Suho, alternating between praise and criticism, but the critique stung a little. Anyway, Suho took the opportunity of the S-rank Hunters gathering at the Association to naturally assign soldiers to their shadows.

'Strange. Even S-rank Hunters don't notice the presence of soldiers dwelling in their shadows.' Of course, they would spot them if they came out, but when they just quietly followed in the shadows, it would be difficult to notice anything unless someone had exceptionally good senses. But Suho wasn't satisfied with this.

"Let's send them to other countries in advance."

[Oh? How do you plan to do that?]

"We can send them along in the shadows of flight attendants."

[Kieek! As expected, you're brilliant! Running around...!]

"Be honest. You're just making fun of me, aren't you?" But Beru had already disappeared into the shadows.

* * *

Thus, Suho sent numerous shadow soldiers on a free trip around the world using airplanes. And when they landed at their destination, the shadows naturally followed the passengers' out of the plane and began to wander around each country. He didn't send them one by one but several at the same time, scattering them even within the same nation.

'Since I have a lot of soldiers anyway, let's spread them out as widely as possible to find traces of 'them'.' But he didn't intend to let them just wander around idly.

'Focus on shady or dangerous places or other locations where villains are likely to be. And if you find them trying to harm people, you can deal with them.'

Suho didn't mind if the soldiers were revealed to people in the process. Because of the live broadcast from China, the apostles of Itarim, who knew about the shadow power, would have already figured out that the owner was Korean. In this situation, it was better for the soldiers to be revealed in various countries, making it difficult to pinpoint his exact location.

"And assuming the fact that our base is Korea has been exposed, let's spread even more here. We need to protect our family."

[You're really going to become a full-fledged vigilante. It reminds me of the old days.]

Sob...

Sob...

[You've grown up so well.]

Beru cried with emotion. He looked extremely proud that Suho was carrying out exactly what Sung Jinwoo had been doing, even though no one taught him.

* * *

The next place Suho headed to was the Pyeongtaek Dungeon.

[Pyeongtaek 3rd Dungeon]

[※]

[Entry prohibited except for Woojin Guild]

This was the dungeon where he had a conflict with the Black Tortoise Guild, and where the Gate to the demon world that served Esil was open. Since the magical beasts living there were all demons who followed her, Suho bought the entire land in this area and managed it instead of conquering the dungeon.

"Come out, everyone." As soon as he entered the demon world, he brought out the demons he had brought from India in his shadow.

"Thank you so much, Suho." Esil expressed her sincere gratitude with great emotion.

This had a meaning beyond simply increasing the number of her subordinates. The more demons a demon noble had under their command, the stronger they became.

Whoosh!

Numerous bloodstones from the demons flew towards Esil. And when she opened her eyes again, having fully absorbed the energy.

Rumble!

The aura emanating from Esil's entire body was significantly different. She smiled brightly at Suho.

"Can you feel it? I've regained all of my original power. It's all thanks to you, Suho."

"Hmm. Is it about S-rank by human standards?"

"Can't you be a little more impressed...?" Esil was disappointed by Suho's bland reaction.

But he couldn't help but feel a little regretful. Of course, compared to when he first met Esil, who was skinny and dying, her dignified appearance was a welcome sight. But from his experience so far, the reality was that the power of an 'ordinary S-rank' wasn't of much help in fighting the apostles of Itarim.

"Can you get even stronger than this?"

"...Not everyone gains power by fighting like you do."

"You said demons are a race that gets stronger by devouring each other."

"That's true, but there's definitely an innate limit. To surpass that, I have to devour a demon much stronger than me, but at this point in time, there's no one like that in this universe."

"So you're saying that you have to rip off the World Tree or something, to get stronger? Like Vulcan did..."

"I'm telling you, Vulcan's case is special. But there's a much easier and more orthodox way. It's to become the Demon King."

Suho showed interest in Esil's confident words. He needed the 'purified blood of the Demon King' to make the Holy Water of Life anyway. And it was an ingredient that could only be obtained if Esil became the King of Demons.

"When can you become King?"

"Well. King..." At Suho's question, Esil narrowed her eyes and looked beyond the sky of the demon world.

The sky cracked and torn due to the dimensional gaps. Beyond that, ominous energy surged as if foreign enemies could pour in at any moment.

"A king is someone who reigns and protects. That's why we demon nobles have lived for ages, growing and protecting our territories. That was growth and survival for us."

Suho tilted his head.

"Protect? Protect from whom...?"

"This entire world."

"What?" When Suho asked back, Esil looked around the demon world with a slightly bitter gaze and said,

"The Dragon King said that this 'Nightmare Bud' thing drags human souls to the Sea of The Afterlife, right? But as you know, the souls of demons don't go there when they die. I guess the Nightmare Bud wouldn't be interested in us demons either."

"Yes. When demons die, their souls wander the demon world and are reborn as new demons somewhere."

"Yes, but... What does that mean...? The demon world is both a home and a prison for us demons. No matter how much we try to escape, we're eventually forced back here." Suho's eyes widened at the unexpected words.

"The demon world is a prison?"

"Yes. Why else would they call the place where demons live hell? The demon world is a kind of giant fish tank. It traps our souls and makes us fight endlessly. Just like the Absolute Being of the past. That's why I've gathered this much power, so soon... a crisis will come. And we have to prove that we have the right to survive on our own."

Rumble!

An ominous thunderclap sounded in the sky.

"If I protect this territory at that moment, I will gain the right. The right to become King."

* * *

Meanwhile,

The S-rank Hunters were gathering their strength for Suho. Or rather, they were being squeezed by Yoo Jinho.

"Now that we've received the approval of five S-rank Hunters, the first step for conquering North Korea, all that's left is public opinion." Chief Director Lee Se-hwan gave a briefing.

'National Vote' This was a special procedure created by Association President Woo Jinchul, and it had a few distinct characteristics compared to other general votes.

One. Every Korean citizen, 'regardless of age or gender,' is given the right to vote.

Two. They can only cast a 'no' vote, not a 'yes' vote.

Three. If more than half of the Korean population votes against it, he cannot go to North Korea. (Invalid votes or abstentions are considered approval votes)

The most unique thing here was, of course, the first clause.

'Regardless of age or gender' This meant that even a newborn baby had the right to vote, and the voting rights of minors could naturally be exercised by their legal guardians or caregivers. The reason for this clause was, of course, that they were responsible for the safety of their children as guardians. And that meant that if public opinion felt even a little uneasy, countless parents could vote against Suho going to North Korea two or three times over, including their children's share. That's why public opinion was really important.

"...So, in the first place, this national vote is a procedure created for opposition. It's a clause that embodies Association President Woo Jinchul's firm will that you shouldn't go to North Korea." After finishing his explanation, Chief Director Lee Se-hwan took a deep breath and looked at each of the gazes focused on him.

CEO Yoo Jinho.

The S-rank Hunters.

Famous figures representing South Korea were gathered in one place for a single person, Sung Suho.

Gulp. Chief Director Lee Se-hwan swallowed dryly and continued,

"Actually, in most cases, it's normal to oppose it." And he displayed the internet public opinion on the screen.

"This is the opposing side's position. It's an obvious statement, but at the same time, it's a reasonable one."

[Reasons for Opposition]

If the number of S-rank Hunters decreases, the safety of our citizens will be threatened.

We're concerned that other countries will try to poach strong Hunters.

In the first place, what's the point of reunifying with North Korea in times like these?

It will only increase the land we have to protect and won't be of any help to Korea. ...

"And this is the position of those in favor." He displayed another screen.

[Reasons for Support]

Doesn't everyone remember the COVID-19 days?

The Cataclysm happened suddenly, who can guarantee when this situation will end?

We need to unify the Korean Peninsula before that time comes.

If there are any survivors still alive in North Korea, we need to rescue them as soon as possible. ...

"Even if we put aside other political reasons, we're also concerned about the last one."

Ma Dongwook stroked his bushy beard and clicked his tongue.

Baek Yoonho also nodded with a serious expression.

"If there are survivors there, we need to rescue them before it's too late."

"However, it's more efficient to conquer the dungeons that have appeared in South Korea instead. It's more important to take care of our own people in South Korea than to meddle in the North. Ahem. But that doesn't mean I'm against it." Hyeonmoo Gang habitually refuted Baek Yoonho's words, then quickly glanced at CEO Yoo Jinho and subtly changed his stance. Since he had already agreed to Suho going to North Korea, his personal opinion didn't matter.

"Ahem. Anyway, if we have the support of large guilds like us, public opinion will easily turn around. If we can just alleviate people's anxiety, they won't actively oppose it."

"That's right. Trust us."

"We'll take responsibility and control public opinion the moment the vote begins."

With virtual reality training at stake, the S-rank Hunters were more than ever appealing to CEO Yoo Jinho. But he, acting as Suho's representative, remained expressionless amidst all those gazes.

"So."

Flinch.

Everyone tensed at his chilling words.

"Are you saying that you're going to participate in our company's beta test with just that? Empty-handed?"

"Ahem!" The S-rank Hunters were hit where it hurt, they blushed and replied to Yoo Jinho's words.

"No, not empty-handed...!"

"Our guild's support is worth...!"

"Ah, let's stop with the unnecessary talk since we're all busy people. In the end, you're just saying you want to play the game for free. And receive all the publicity, brand value, and training benefits that come with it for your guilds." At Yoo Jinho's words, sighs escaped the S-rank Hunters' lips.

"...Then what do you want from us?"

"As you know, our Black Tortoise Guild is in a difficult situation these days and lacks funds. We were recently hit with a huge tax bill."

"Our Reaper Guild is already bankrupt."

"Now we can finally have a proper conversation." As they finally surrendered, a smirk appeared on Yoo Jinho's lips.

"I don't need money. I'm only concerned about one thing. Suho's safety. What can you offer him?"

"You want Hunter equipment, not money?"

"What kind of weapon do you need? I saw earlier that Hunter Sung Suho seems to be a tanker, do you need armor or...?"

"Would you also accept magic crystals or magic stones?"

"We have some rune stones in our warehouse..." As they continued to speak, Yoo Jinho's smile widened.

"Good. Let's see what you have. We'll let Suho choose."

"..." At that sight, the same thought came to the minds of Korea's S-rank Hunters, the protectors of the country.

'...What a robber.' He was a bully like no other.

To think playing a game would be this difficult. All they could do was sigh.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 234 - Chapter 233

Chapter 234: Chapter 233

Starting one day, 'Vigilantes' began operating simultaneously across the globe.

– Kyaaa!

– He-here's a body...!

One by one, bodies started turning up in alley corners. Upon receiving reports from citizens and dispatching personnel, the police and Hunter Association revealed to the world that they were all wanted villains. According to the findings, the corpses were all undeniably vicious criminals. Some were petty crooks or ordinary Hunters with lesser offenses, but later investigations revealed that they had been committing heinous crimes in secret. There was one peculiar thing about this process. The Vigilante always had a habit of leaving a note on the bodies of the villains after killing them. The note briefly stated the name and criminal record, making it much easier for the police to identify the victim. Its meaning was clear.

– The Vigilante is helping the police do their job!

And similar reports from citizens followed one after another.

– ...

– Vigilante! Operation begins in Brazil!

3

- Vigilante! Finally in Canada too!
- Death Note Killer! Arrives in the Philippines!

6

– ...

This craze spread like wildfire, quickly hitting the world. Reporters were busy publishing dozens of articles every day. There were two reasons why people around the world linked the incidents happening in physically distant countries under the name 'Vigilante.'

One, as mentioned earlier, was the note, also known as the 'Death Note,' that was always attached to the bodies.

1

The other was that the eyewitness accounts of the Vigilante from the survivors who barely escaped the villains were all the same.

– I saw a black shadow.

That was all they said. The interviews were all the same, with people repeating the same thing, unable to properly recall the Vigilante's appearance, leading people to one conclusion.

– The Vigilante is presumed to be a large organization, not a single individual!

This was no longer a single person's deviation or revenge against villains. It meant that the Vigilante was a group moving collectively with the same purpose and sense of justice.

– What is the true purpose of the transnational vigilante organization?

– Vigilante cleaning up villains around the world!

– (Debate) Questioning the vigilante's right to commit serial murders with their own sense of justice, ignoring the law!

– What is justice! Do villains even have human rights!

– Asking the opposite! The Vigilante is only punishing Awakened criminals! The police still have the same job, and the Vigilante is a police officer solely for the Awakened!

- (Breaking News) The rapidly declining crime rate of villains around the world!
- What is the public's opinion?

* * *

"Heh. The world is buzzing with excitement."

It was truly an ironic situation. The International Hunter Association was holding daily debates on whether to consider the Vigilante a villain or grant them the right as a villain hunter. But it was a waste of time. Nothing would come from arguing when nobody even knew who they were. Of course, that was only on the surface... There were people here who knew the mastermind behind all these incidents.

"Adam, did you see this? Our Suho is really making a move." Thomas Andre chuckled.

He was reading the Vigilante articles that were constantly popping up, lying leisurely on the sofa. His expression was like that of a proud grandfather watching his grandchild's talent show, making Adam White, the head of the Hunter Bureau in the United States, sigh with a troubled look.

2

"My ability to feign ignorance has its limits. Some are already saying that the Vigilante's appearance seems to be the black shadows that showed up in the Chinese video."

"Oh, Adam! Don't try so hard and just go with the flow! It's only a matter of time before it's revealed that the Vigilante is related to Sung Suho."

"Haa..."

Adam White couldn't help but sigh again at those irresponsible words. If it weren't for Thomas Andre, the Hunter Bureau would have already approached Suho. But the US couldn't go against his wishes. Why...?

'Thomas Andre... is getting stronger.' Adam White clenched his sweaty fist and looked at him lying down like a lord and drinking tomato juice.

Currently, it was publicly known that Thomas Andre was arrested by the US Hunter Bureau for the murder of Christopher Reed. And on the surface, he was engaged in a legal battle with the Hunter Bureau involving numerous lawyers.

The first trial...

The second trial...

But it was all a staged show. Meanwhile, Thomas Andre was secretly tracking down the Outer Gods Cult with the Hunter Bureau.

Operation name: Federal Dark Hunter (FDH).

The results were quite good, considering the carelessly chosen name. They had already found several hideouts of the Outer Gods Cult hidden in the US and even personally caught and killed their priests. But there was something strange. Every time Thomas Andre killed a priest... he grew stronger. After realizing this fact, Adam White was, to be honest, terrified.

'I can't believe it even when I see it. A Hunter who grows stronger the more he fights... No, it's a little different from that...' Adam White, who had been watching him from the closest distance, corrected his thoughts.

'Recovery rather than growth. Thomas Andre seems to be recovering his original power the more he fights the Outer Gods Cult.' There was a basis for this thought. As you could see from various Awakened people, ordinary hunters felt a sense of elation when their power suddenly increased. They even tended to be intoxicated by it. But Thomas Andre's reaction was a little different.

'This man is delighted as his power grows. With an expression like he's returned home.' That was something Adam White couldn't understand at all. And the realm of incomprehension often gave birth to fear and terror. At the same time, it was also true that he was extremely reassured that this man was still on the side of the US.

'One thing is certain.' As the head of the Hunter Bureau that protected the US, Adam White was clearly aware of one fact.

'This man already possesses power that surpasses that of an ordinary S-rank Hunter.' If Thomas Andre ever turned against them, the US would have to face a conflict on the level of a nuclear war.

2

"...So how long do we have to suppress the information?"

Thomas chuckled and replied to Adam White's question, shaking off his various thoughts.

"Until Suho gives the signal, of course."

"And when will that be...?"

"I think it will be soon." The answer came in a calm voice, from his secretary, Laura. She was looking at the Korean news on her tablet. It was truly amazing. Just a few days

ago, Korea was the noisiest country with the Vigilante issue. But trends changed quickly.

"The Korean public is no longer interested in the Vigilante. They're all talking about North Korea."

"North Korea?"

"It seems to be an issue related to Hunter Sung Suho as well." Adam White also nodded, showing interest in the Korean news.

"Hmm. The major large guilds in Korea are all supporting Hunter Sung Suho. They're claiming that with this level of ability, it would be good to send him to North Korea to help the Association President."

"Some are arguing that the large guilds are colluding to push a Hunter who could become a competitor to North Korea."

"Heh. North Korea... Suho wants to run wild, I see." Thomas Andre smiled meaningfully, understanding Suho's feelings. He looked as if his hands were itching to run wild himself, so Adam White felt a great sense of anxiety and hurriedly said,

"It won't be as easy as it sounds. If you only consider the safety of your own country, the stronger the Hunter, the more disadvantageous it is to send them to North Korea."

"Yes. For those reasons, public opinion is currently divided between those in favor and those against, and there's no sign of it leaning towards one side. It seems like he won't get approval to go to North Korea without a decisive turning point."

"Turning point..." Thomas's eyes turned playful as he listened to Laura's accurate analysis of the situation.

"I think I know what that is."

It was at that moment. Thomas Andre's phone rang.

"We have a call from Hunter Sung Suho." As Laura spoke, Thomas sprang to his feet. And as soon as he answered, he grinned.

"Adam, this is it." Thomas, with a smirk on his lips, made eye contact with Adam White and said,

"Link the Vigilante and Sung Suho."

"...I see."

There was no need for further explanation. Adam White, a shrewd man who had been through the political arena, immediately realized what he had to do. He nodded and immediately summoned the Bureau staff.

* * *

A while later.

Foreign media began to cover the connection between Korea's hero who saved India and the Vigilante. At the same time, information about Sung Suho began to be slowly released in Korea. And all of a sudden, public opinion began to shift...

– (Video) The real reason why large guilds tried to send Hunter Sung Suho to Association President Woo Jinchul?

An invisible hand influenced the algorithm. And all the people of Korea could see Suho standing side by side with thousands of black shadows in that video.

– What! Those black shadows!

– They're all Vigilantes!

– ...!

People who had witnessed the Vigilantes around the world began to recognize them simultaneously.

– Then who is that Hunter with the Vigilantes?!

– What's his relationship with the Vigilante!

– That man is a Korean Hunter?

– Isn't it dangerous to leave that man alone in Korea?

"As expected of Adam. This should be enough."

Thomas Andre smiled with satisfaction, seeing the rapidly changing atmosphere.

"An opportunity to kick Suho out to North Korea."

* * *

Overnight, all of Korea's public opinion began to focus on 'Sung Suho'.

– Sung Suho, the hero of India! Who is he!?

– Sung Suho of the Woojin Guild! The reason why the Association has been hiding his information until now?!

Flash! Flash! Flash!

And at this moment. Reporters swarmed Suho like bees, flashing their cameras blindingly. Behind them, Yoo Jinho was asking Suho with an expression like that of a parent watching their child wander off alone,

"...Are you really okay with this?"

"Of course."

Sung Suho, who suddenly became the center of attention and pressure from public opinion was now attending the official press conference hosted by the Association.

Beeep!

After a while, with a sharp ringing sound, the noisy reporters' voices stopped. A cold silence. In the midst of that, Suho calmly grabbed the microphone to answer the questions.

What they were curious about was Suho's identity. Before answering, he briefly recalled the tasks he was currently facing. These were quests he created himself, not by the system.

[Protect Esil's territory in the demon world.]

[Reward: Obtain the 'purified blood of the Demon King' when Esil becomes the Demon King.]

[Investigate the Nightmare Bud with Hunter Seo Jiwoo.]

[Reward: Go to the Sea of The Afterlife where the 'World Tree' is located.]

[Go to North Korea.]

[Reward: Fast level-up.]

The first two were quests to obtain the ingredients for crafting the Holy Water of Life, which he had to accomplish to save his grandfather, Sung Il-hwan. Currently, his body was in an unstable state due to the numerous Starpieces embedded in it. There was a risk that dimensional cracks might suddenly appear and tear him apart. To restore his condition, he had to make the Holy Water of Life as soon as possible.

However, to complete the first two quests, it was advantageous for Suho himself to become stronger than he was now. That meant it was also important to go to North Korea and diligently level up.

'Yes, to save my grandfather... this is the fastest way.' With that resolve, Suho calmly surveyed the silent reporters gathered to see him and smiled.

"Hunter Sung Suho! We want answers!" Just then, one of them had courageously asked a question. Then, voices erupted from everywhere simultaneously.

"What is your relationship with the Vigilante?!"

"Are you the leader of the Vigilante, as the rumors say?!"

"What is your true identity?!"

"..."

At that moment, a miscellaneous item from his inventory suddenly appeared in Suho's hand. Yes, this was the surest way. The embarrassment would be brief, but the effect certain. He put on the Item: 'Crow Mask' and closed his eyes tightly before speaking.

"I am... the Beast King Crow."

4

"...!"

Flash! Flash! Flash! Flash!

At that moment, camera flashes exploded towards Suho once again. The identity of the Beast King Crow, known as a mysterious villain or hero, was finally revealed to the world.

– (Breaking news) The real reason why large guilds tried to send Hunter Sung Suho to Association President Woo Jinchul?

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 235 - Chapter 234

Chapter 235: Chapter 234

It would be tiring to list all the things that Association President Woo Jinchul had accomplished in the past two years. And as many achievements as he had, there were numerous nicknames and modifiers attached to his name, one of which was the 'Villain Detector.'

- It's really amazing.
- How does Woo Jinchul catch villains so well? Does he have some kind of special skill?
- Rumor has it that he can predict who will awaken among those with a criminal record?
- Ah, that's nonsense.
- No, it's true. Would Woo Jinchul be called the Villain Detector for no reason?
- Doesn't everyone know how Jisan Prison was created?

Jisan Prison was a detention center specializing in villains, established by the Hunter Association two years ago under President Woo Jinchul's strong anti-villain policy. But in fact, in the early days of the Cataclysm, it wasn't originally that kind of place. It was a prison where even ordinary criminals with long sentences could go, not just villains. But then something amazing started to happen there. Normal criminals that Association President Woo Jinchul personally put in Jisan Prison began to awaken one by one. At first, everyone dismissed it as a coincidence. But when most of the inmates eventually awakened, people couldn't help but be astonished once again.

- Maybe Association President Woo Jinchul has a skill that allows him to know in advance who can awaken and when.
- That's a bit of an exaggeration. If that were possible, the Hunter Association would have sought out those people in advance and registered them.
- Still, it seems certain that he can at least tell who will become a villain. It's a fact that he's good at catching them.
- Maybe he developed that kind of eye after a long career as a police officer?

There were many opinions like this, but no Korean citizen doubted the fact that Woo Jinchul was good at identifying those who would become villains. So it was only natural for people to say this:

- Then what about Hunter Sung Suho?

The Hunter Association announced that he was an S-rank Hunter. And Sung Suho himself publicly declared that he was the Beast King Crow who had been active while wearing a mask. People who learned of this fact were busy talking about Sung Suho whenever they gathered.

– I wonder if Woo Jinchul would be able to tell if Sung Suho is a villain or not just by looking at him?

– No, why would Sung Suho be a villain? Haha.

– He is the hero of the Loktak Field who saved India! Our National pride!

– That's why it's even more suspicious.

– That's right. Why would he go to India in secret and wander around someone else's field dungeon?

– Maybe he's actually a criminal?

– Haha. It's a fact that he's already a criminal. In the first place, an S-rank Hunter crossing the border without permission is a violation of international law.

– Well, it's a happy ending in the end, but from India's perspective, it was no different from a declaration of war.

– He even confessed that he's the Beast King Crow himself this time.

– There must be a reason why someone who's an S-rank Hunter had to hide his identity and operate like that? Isn't it because he has a guilty conscience?

– Wow, then is he really a villain?

[...The era of great confusion has arrived.] Beru chuckled as he watched the noisy public opinion.

As he predicted, the numerous pieces of information about Sung Suho that hit South Korea were throwing the world into chaos. Lim Dogyoon, who was watching the tablet with Beru, looked at Suho with a very nervous expression.

"Suho, no, Guild Master. Are you really okay with this? The atmosphere is so... public opinion is increasingly portraying you as a suspicious person." Lim Dogyoon felt like he had become the vice president of a failing company with dark secrets to be exposed. It was unfair.

"People are really going too far! He only hid his identity, he hasn't done anything wrong so far, so why does he have to be called a villain?!"

Suho chuckled and shrugged at Lim Dogyoon's fuss.

"Why are you so upset? I did do something wrong. An S-rank Hunter going to India without permission is a really serious crime."

"True, but Thomas Andre came to our country before! No one said anything then!"

"I heard later that Thomas paid a huge compensation fee because he was sorry."

"Can everything really be solved with money?!"

"Yes, most things..." The last words were spoken by Yoo Jinho, who just entered the room.

"Suho." He smiled at Suho and said,

"This should be enough, don't you think?"

Suho smiled too.

"Yes. It's perfect. With this level of suspicion, I don't think anyone will oppose me going to North Korea."

"Yes. In fact, the atmosphere now is that another S-rank Hunter should take responsibility and take you to Woo Jinchul for verification. And that the Association President should personally take you around and do some good deeds in North Korea to reassure everyone that you're not a villain... I just finished reading the comments."

"Thank you."

Flinch. Lim Dogyoon suddenly realized a shocking truth from their conversation and his eyes widened.

"W-wait. Are you saying that this public opinion atmosphere is all intentional...?"

Yoo Jinho stretched his neck from side to side and shrugged at Lim Dogyoon.

"Well, we used our employees to do some minor comment manipulation."

"...?!" Lim Dogyoon's expression was like that of a child who just found out that Santa Claus was actually their dad. He realized just how enormous the 'minor' things that the CEO of Ahjin Soft was talking about were.

[The vote has begun!] At Beru's words, everyone's gaze turned to the voting screen simultaneously.

"There are... almost no opposing votes."

"We'll have to watch the voting results until tonight to be sure, but..."

"Yes. It seems like we succeeded."

A meaningful smile appeared on Suho and Yoo Jinho's lips at the same time. The number of opposing votes was increasing in real-time, but the speed was insignificant. They had tried various ways to sway public opinion just in case, but the fact that it was this effective meant that the public was actually feeling a strong sense of anxiety about Sung Suho.

"Well, it's only natural. I don't think you need the warning, but be carefull, just in case." Yoo Jinho patted Suho's shoulder and continued in a relatively light tone,

1

"It's only been two years since the Cataclysm. Even though Hunters are fighting for humanity, it's still unsettling for ordinary people to have those who suddenly turned into superhumans around them. It will take at least... five years for the masses to adapt." Since it was Yoo Jinho, who had the memories of the past era, speaking. That minimum of five years was probably accurate.

"Good. Then we can just wait until tonight for the voting results. Shall we go take care of other things in the meantime?"

[I'll follow you!] As Suho stretched and looked at him, Beru quickly climbed onto his shoulder.

Just then, he received a call from Hunter Seo Jinwoo.

5

"Hunter Sung Suho, I've arrived. Where are you now?"

"I'm almost there." Suho quickly answered, even though he hadn't even left yet.

The double dungeon where they contracted Eternal Sleep Disease. He had made an appointment to meet Hunter Seo Jinwoo, who promised to tell him the exact location of that place. It wouldn't take long to get there anyway.

"Dogyuun, Uncle. I'm going somewhere. Please text me when the voting results are out."

"Huh?"

"Yes, go ahead." Lim Dogyoon was flustered, while Yoo Jinho waved with a relaxed smile.

[Using Skill: 'Shadow Exchange'.]

At that moment, Suho's position was switched with that of the shadow soldier in Seo Jinwoo's shadow.

* * *

"Hello."

"...?!"

Seo Jinwoo, who was holding her phone, couldn't help but step back in surprise as Suho suddenly approached her.

"H-how?!" It was natural for Seo Jinwoo to be surprised.

'What? I didn't even sense him approaching? Could he be an assassin type, not a tanker?'

'No way...?' When he sparred with Ma Dongwook, Suho was undoubtedly a tanker. A combat type who focused on strength and durability. On the other hand, Seo Jinwoo, unlike Ma Dongwook, was an agile dealer who fought using quick movements and powerful skills. And she was an S-rank.

'How could he deceive my senses and approach me...?' She was confused.

She knew he had extraordinary abilities from the moment she first saw him at the Association, but Suho was like an onion, with layers upon layers. But as if not caring about Seo Jinwoo's surprise, he calmly looked around and spoke,

5

"Hapjeong Station. You said you contracted Eternal Sleep Disease somewhere around here."

2

"Yes. I asked the Association to temporarily block public access to this passage."

There was a 'Under Construction' sign around Hapjeong Station. Citizens were using other ticket gates after crossing the street, but there weren't many complaints. Since it was something the Association was doing, they were more concerned about the

possibility of a Gate appearing and hurriedly evacuated. Thanks to that, Seo Jinwoo guided Suho, retracing her memories on the quiet street.

"Back then, the Gate was open along these stairs, but now it's just an ordinary subway station entrance. Even in a place like this... can we find any clues?"

"We'll have to look for them now." As he answered, Suho's gaze swept down to his shadow.

"Harmakan, come out."

[Yes, Master.]

"Kyaa?!" At that moment, the giant shadowy magic spirit, Harmakan, suddenly rose from Suho's shadow. And Seo Jinwoo couldn't help but scream this time.

[Hmm.] He greeted Suho and then glanced down to meet Seo Jinwoo's eyes, she couldn't help but tense up with an eerie feeling.

"Hunter Sung Suho...?" She managed to speak in a calm tone, but her voice inevitably trembled.

'What! What is this summon? At least A-rank, no, S-rank? This is the first time I've felt such an eerie feeling from a summon. Wasn't Hunter Sung Suho reawakened as a tanker?'

She was confused. For Seo Jinwoo, who had only seen Suho's cute summons, the energy emanating from the newcomer that appeared before her was enough to bewilder her.

[Harmakan Lv.5]

[Elite Knight Rank]

As Suho's level increased, the summons who fought alongside him also leveled up. Anyone alive couldn't help but feel an eerie feeling from Harmakan, who was the Grand Shaman of the Demonic Spirits.

'Don't tell me that wasn't actually a dungeon break?' The thousands of shadowy magical beasts that stood beside Suho in Loktak, India, suddenly came to Seo Jinwoo's mind.

It seemed like the Association should have been more thorough in their verification process. It was a huge misjudgment to assume that he was definitely a tanker just because he suddenly had a contest of strength with Ma Dongwook.

"Hunter Sung Suho... just what... are you?"

"I'm the Beast King Crow." Suho replied jokingly, but Seo Jinwoo couldn't take it as a joke anymore.

"Beast King..."

'Yes. That's right!' The disaster that happened in the Magok Field before. The unknown Hunter who overcame all the trials there and gained the power of a king. The fact that he was Sung Suho now had a different meaning.

"I see. Hunter Sung Suho, you gained the power of a king in Magok and reawakened..." It was chilling. It felt like all the puzzle pieces were finally falling into place.

'He's not someone who was lucky enough to escape Eternal Slumber like me, but someone who reawakened in a completely different way. And he even overcame tremendous trials.' Seo Jinwoo's eyes trembled as she looked at Suho. Who, without noticing glanced at Hapjeong Station and ordered,

"Harmakan, she said there was a double dungeon here. Can you confirm it with your ability?"

[I will do my best.]

Whoosh!

At that moment, a magic circle began to unfold around Harmakan. This was a legacy of Kandiaru that he discovered by chance in the demonic spirit world long ago, and Harmakan was able to become incredibly strong by earnestly studying this ability. It was also thanks to this ability that he was able to rise to the position of Grand Shaman from a mere chieftain.

[Instance Dungeon has been created.]

Instance Dungeon. A large-scale magic circle that creates a 'reverse world' by distorting the existing dimension. This ability was to distort the dimensional gap and create a world beyond it.

Ding!

Harmakan respectfully offered the key created by magic to Suho.

[Item Acquired]

[Item: Dungeon Key]

[Acquisition Difficulty: E-rank]

[Type: Key]

[A key that allows you to move to the Instance Dungeon.]

[Can be used at Exit 3 of Hapjeong Station.]

3

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 236 - Chapter 235 Chapter 236: Chapter 235

[Even after a wound heals, a scar remains. The space where the dimensional wall once cracked, can be reopened by following its trace.]

Until now, the instance dungeons created by Harmakan didn't require keys, but this time was an exception. While previous instance dungeons unfolded as hidden spaces centered around Harmakan, this time it was a spell that reopened a scar left on the dimensional wall.

Snap!

Suho held the golden key handed to him by Harmakan towards Exit 3 of Hapjeong Station.

Whoosh!

In that moment, the air rippled around the key, and mana surged, forcefully splitting the dimensional wall.

"A... a gate?!" Seo Jiwoo's eyes widened in shock at that sight.

"Oh my God! It's a real gate!"

'What? Is it really?! Is this even possible?' She was already stunned several times today to the point that her heart hurt. A gate had suddenly appeared in a previously empty space! Witnessing such an unbelievable sight right before her eyes, Seo Jiwoo alternated her gaze between Suho and Harmakan, mouth agape.

"Hunter Sung Suho... you are really..."

"Well, shall we go in?"

Seeing Suho looking at her with a nonchalant face after doing something so outrageous, she decided to give up on thinking. He stepped towards the gate, and as his figure half-disappeared in the air, Seo Jiwoo finally came to her senses and urgently shouted.

"W-wait! I didn't bring any weapons because I didn't know this would happen...!"

[Just go in. Nobody asked for your feedback.]

1

Push.

"...!" At that moment, Harmakan pushed Seo Jiwoo's back, and she ended up stepping into the gate following Suho in confusion.

Whoosh!

"...!" With just one step, another world unfolded before her eyes.

A message popped up in front of Suho.

[You have entered the instance dungeon.]

But Seo Jiwoo couldn't see it. Instead, her vision was filled with the eerie landscape of Hapjeong Station, transformed into a jungle.

"..."

Vines were sprawling over the walls, and the stench of decaying corpses was overpowering. A chilling wind, like the wails of ghosts, blew from afar. Seo Jiwoo looked back instinctively.

"A wall... has appeared?"

Thud! Thud!

She knocked on the invisible barrier. It was indescribably creepy that beyond, the peaceful outside world, still basked in warm sunlight, was spread out. It seemed that this place and the outside world were different spaces. She tried to force her way out but it was impossible. Harmakan, looking at Seo Jiwoo, spoke in a dry, mechanical tone.

[Give up. To leave this dungeon, you must either defeat the boss monster or use a hearthstone.] He pointed at himself and grinned meaningfully.

[For the record, the boss monster is me.]

"..."

Amid all the confusion, at least one thing seemed clear. Not only did this summoned beast look sinister, but it also seemed to have a nasty personality.

'No, correction.'

[Kiieeek! You sluggish human! Do you intend to make the little lord wait?!]

"..."

This ant summon, though cute in appearance, had an extremely bad personality as well.

2

[Kiieeek! Can't you move faster?!]

"Alright, alright." Eventually, unable to withstand Beru's beseeching, Seo Jiwoo carefully followed Suho, who was already descending the stairs ahead. But no matter how powerful a hunter is, One always fears the unknown.

Gulp.

As they descended the stairs, the eerie landscape of the Hapjeong Station dungeon began in earnest, which made Seo Jiwoo swallow dryly. Passing through the restroom, they entered the underground shopping center. The stores were old, broken, and reminiscent of ruins. Under the dim fluorescent light, the ruined stores and deserted passageway gave off a gloomy feeling.

Flicker, Flicker.

Several fluorescent lights were flickering, nearing the end of their lifespan.

Stepping on the weeds growing abundantly over the broken tiles, Seo Jiwoo followed Suho, glancing around with an uneasy expression.

'...This is my first time in a dungeon like this.' It seemed that unlike typical dungeons leading to another dimension, the entire Hapjeong Station had become a dungeon.

2

'I can't believe something like this is possible...' Seo Jiwoo had met many high-ranked hunters before, but Sung Suho was the first of his kind. The more she learned about him... the more incomprehensible his abilities seemed. Sticking close, Seo Jiwoo asked with a worried expression.

"Hunter Sung Suho sir, what are we going to do here?" Regardless of age difference, formal speech started to come out naturally.

"We created the dungeon, so now we're going to find a double dungeon inside it. Since you said you didn't conquer the double dungeon previously, there might still be traces of it left somewhere around here ." Suho answered while calmly scanning the surroundings.

"...I see." Easier said than done. To find a double dungeon, they first created a dungeon. However, that logic was hard to follow with Seo Jiwoo's common sense.

"But this place is completely different from the dungeon my team and I conquered back then. Do you think the double dungeon I found at that time still exists here?"

"That's what we're about to find out."

Harmakan answered confidently.

[There's a good chance. Though this place was created differently, it follows the scar on the dimension, so if there are traces of the dimensional gap here, that's where the double dungeon will be.]

And there was one more reason why Harmakan was so confident. There was an unfamiliar presence here, despite the fact that this dungeon was created by him.

Shiver!

"...!"

In the silence, there suddenly came a feeling of being watched from somewhere.

Crash!

At that moment, Seo Jiwoo's face, expressing frustration and bewilderment until now, was replaced by the sharp gaze of an S-rank hunter.

"There!" As soon as she caught the presence. With an afterimage that made her body look stretched like taffy, Seo Jiwoo shot forward.

Boom!

Even without a weapon, an S-rank hunter's body is already a war machine in itself.

Boom!

Seo Jiwoo's fist smashed through a wall, grabbing the 'thing' hiding behind it by the neck rather than killing it. The thing struggled to escape her grip, but it was futile against S-rank hunter's strength.

"Keek, keek...!"

"What the... what is this?" Its appearance was strange. Seo Jiwoo's eyes widened as she saw the monster's form. And just then.

Crash!

The shop window behind Suho shattered, and other creatures emerged.

"Keek, keek, keek!"

Hiss!

Sharp thorns gleaming with blue poison attacked Suho's back at tremendous speed.

[The Queen of Insects, the Plague Monarch, licks her lips.]

Querehsha awakened. But only reacting to the poison, the creature that lunged wasn't actually a bug.

"What are these things?" Instead of confronting the attack, Suho casually raised his hand and grasped the air.

'Ruler's Authority'

"Keerk?!"

The unidentified monsters that were attacking, struggled in the air as if caught in a snare. Suho seeing the creatures caught by his invisible hand, called Harmakan with an intrigued expression.

"Harmakan, what are these?"

[Interesting. They're not my creations.] Harmakan replied with a gleam in his eye.

Beru even tried biting them but spat out in disgust.

[They taste awful. They don't seem to be proper demonic beasts either.]

"Looks demonic though."

"Keek, keek!"

The monsters that suddenly appeared looked bizarre. Suho frowned.

"What should we call these...?"

"Plants?"

Purple vines entangled like tentacles into a doll.

"A half-finished doll, perhaps?"

Some had octopus-like legs, while others had tentacle-like roots spreading out. In short, a mess. The one common feature was that they had human-like skulls atop their heads, resembling helmets.

[???

Even the system that usually identified monsters without fail couldn't recognize them, displaying question marks above their heads.

"Plants mimicking skeletons? Or sprouts growing from skulls?" What should he call these?

'This is a job for the Dragon King.'

[The spirit of 'Antares' descends into the priest's body.]

Ragnar appeared with arms crossed over Suho's shadow.

"Ask anything."

"Antares, are these creatures perhaps the Nightmare Buds?"

"No, these are just nameless weeds. Not every weed has a name."

"So, are they from the Sea of the Afterlife?"

"Probably. These half-formed creatures are not among the residents of the Chaos World."

'Residents of the Chaos World' This term referred to ordinary monsters that had appeared on Earth so far, residents of another dimension ruled by the Monarchs. But even the Dragon king, who ruled the Chaos World for a long time, had never seen monsters like these.

1

"These creatures have no special names and look half-finished. We call them 'Residents of the Rift' as a whole."

"Residents of the Rift?" Suho tilted his head at the unfamiliar term.

Antares shrugged and explained.

"Actually, calling them residents is a compliment. They're just dimensional trash drifting through the Rift."

"Dimensional trash?"

"No, residue is a more accurate term. Literally, they are remnants, not the creation of an absolute being but leftovers abandoned by the creator."

Keek! Keek! Keek! Keek!

'Did they understand Antares's words?' The weeds held by Suho trembled and screamed.

"They seem angry at your words."

"Angry? That's amusing. These things can't feel emotions." Antares snorted at Suho's words. He looked at the trembling weeds with utter disdain.

"These things have no intellect, no soul. Being unfinished creations, they drift through the rift driven only by the instinct to devour life."

Keek! Keek! Keek!

The hollow cries of soulless weeds echoed throughout the dungeon created by Harmakan. Antares looked around with a smirk.

"Anyway, there must be a hole somewhere in this dungeon where these weeds came through, what humans call a double dungeon."

But finding that place didn't seem easy. If these weeds had souls, he could make them shadow soldiers to guide him, but extracting shadows from soulless leftovers was impossible. However, there was always a way.

"...Why are you all looking at me like that?" Seo Jiwoo suddenly felt a chill.

Everyone's gaze was blatantly fixed on her. Not only Suho, the Dragon Monarch, Harmakan, and Beru but even the captured weeds. The skull-like heads on the weeds turned towards Seo Jiwoo, staring at her with hollow eye sockets. Seo Jiwoo instinctively realized what role she was going to play.

"Am I the bait?"

The Dragon Monarch Antares, who made eye contact with Seo Jiwoo, nodded solemnly.

"The Nightmare Buds are the greediest of weeds. Any prey they missed would be a mouth-watering bait for the Residents of the gap."

[That's why I said from the start. You won't need to step in willingly.] Harmakan, standing behind the Dragon King, also sneered at Seo Jiwoo.

"You, damn...!"

Just then.

Keek! Keek! Keek!

The dungeon of Hapjeong Station started to fill with countless weeds targeting Seo Jiwoo. Simultaneously, Suho's fists were enveloped in scorching flames.

Fwoosh!

Boom!

Black flames from the heart of the Dragon King lashed out like a whip, incinerating the weeds in an instant. In the blaze, Suho's eyes shone intensely.

"Protect Hunter Seo Jiwoo! Beru, let's track where these things are coming from!"

[At your command! Kiieeeek-!] Beru, grinning widely, leaped after Suho, who was charging ahead. And then, suddenly...

"Keek?!"

Harmakan lifted Seo Jiwoo over his shoulder, saying. [Don't worry. I will protect you until the end.]

"You... I told you I wanted to bring my weapon...!"

[Ha, no need to bother.]

Harmakan, the war chief of the demon race and master of the instance dungeon, spoke decisively. [Variables are unacceptable. Just think of it as a kidnapping.]

"...!"

He was a perfectionist.

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 237 - Chapter 236

Chapter 237: Chapter 236

Screech! Screech! Screech! Screech—!

Unidentified magical beasts covered the walls and ceiling of the ruined Hapjeong Station like vines. The sight was like a scene from an unpleasant nightmare. Seo Jiwoo gritted her teeth.

'I should have brought my gauntlets from the car!' As an S-rank Hunter, she felt extremely embarrassed to be protected like this without being able to do anything.

"Why are you protecting me so much?!"

[Be quiet.] Harmakan absolutely wouldn't allow Seo Jiwoo to fight. This wasn't simply for protection.

[It will help Master if you stay still.]

"Help? Does Hunter Sung Suho have another purpose?"

[Heh. Purpose.] Instead of responding to Seo Jiwoo's frustrated reaction, Harmakan just laughed.

What was the purpose?

'It's to level up, of course.'

Harmakan chuckled. Originally, those nameless weeds without even souls wouldn't have given Suho any meaningful experience points. But here, it was different. What was an Instance Dungeon in the first place? It was a magic circle developed by the great mage Kandiaru to help players level up. Therefore, regardless of their original identity, within this space, they were all merely monsters that existed to give Suho experience points and die.

'So, my role is to completely eliminate any factors that could steal even a little bit of Master's experience points in this battlefield.' With that sense of mission, Harmakan thoroughly controlled Seo Jiwoo so she wouldn't act rashly. She was a little touched by his devotion.

"This is the first time someone has protected me like this since I reawakened..." The memory triggered thoughts of her late grandfather. But the emotion was fleeting.

This grandpa, no, Harmakan, was a fundamentally wicked demonic spirit.

[Alright. If you want to fight that much, I'll give you a chance.]

"...!"

Flash!

A sinister magic circle suddenly unfolded from Harmakan's withered fingertips. And within it, an ominous-looking full-body armor appeared.

[It's an evil spirit armor. I'll let you fight if you wear this.]

"...It looks really creepy. It's not cursed armor or anything, is it?" As Seo Jiwoo looked at him with distrustful eyes, Harmakan chuckled and created two more sinister magic circles in the air.

[Don't worry. It was originally armor for evil spirits, but I modified it so that humans can wear it too.]

"Ah, evil spirits?" Harmakan tried to soothe Seo Jiwoo, who became even more apprehensive.

[Heh. You're easily scared. There might be some side effects for ordinary people, but it will be fine for an S-rank Hunter like you.] Harmakan grinned, swallowing the words 'probably.'

"Haa. Alright. I can't let Hunter Sung Suho, who came here at my request, suffer alone." Seo Jiwoo finally nodded, feeling like she was making a deal with the devil.

[Good thinking. I've always wanted to try putting this on a human.] And the devil grinned.

"Wait... Wh-what?!!"

Clank—!

It was too late. The evil spirit armor swallowed Seo Jiwoo bewildered by Harmakan's last mutter, whole. And he added a few more spells on top of that, as if he had been waiting.

[Seo Jiwoo equips Item: 'Evil Spirit's Armor'.]

"Hmm?" Suho, who was fighting in front, turned around with a puzzled expression at the system message that suddenly popped up.

[Harmakan uses Skill: 'Thorn of Pain' on Seo Jiwoo.]

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

[Harmakan uses Skill: 'Exploitation' on Seo Jiwoo.]

[Recovers hp equal to 2% of the damage Seo Jiwoo deals to the opponent.]

And there stood Seo Jiwoo, equipped like a Death Knight, staggering with a pale face. She felt like throwing up.

"...Ugh. I feel nauseous."

[Oh? Is that all? A weak human would have probably died or fainted.]

2

"You scammer...!" Seo Jiwoo clenched her fists at the sight of Harmakan nodding in satisfaction.

[Now, go out and fight. This armor is an artifact that reflects the damage received and recovers health as you attack the enemy.]

"What?" Seo Jiwoo's eyes widened at those words, and she looked down at the evil spirit's armor she was wearing.

[Experience the effects yourself.]

As Harmakan pushed Seo Jiwoo's back, she was propelled forward and attacked the enemies in a trance.

Boom!

Seo Jiwoo's fist shot out like a cannonball and directly hit the skull that the purple vine was wearing on its head.

Crack...!

[?? has been defeated.]

['Seo Jiwoo' offers 100% of the experience points as a sacrifice.]

At that moment, messages popped up in front of Suho. The experience points Seo Jiwoo gained were transferred directly to him through the 'evil spirit's armor.' She still had a nauseous expression, but Harmakan's experiment was successful.

[For the glory of Master.] Suho couldn't help but chuckle as he saw Harmakan bowing deeply towards him from afar.

'Those magic spirits...' After all, it was Suho who instructed Harmakan to try modifying the evil spirit's armor. As it was originally a cursed armor that strengthened its power by tormenting evil souls. And it was only recently that he asked him to devise a way to make it wearable even by others. But he didn't expect Harmakan to suddenly put it on Seo Jiwoo. And She was something else too...

"This armor... is amazing!" Seo Jiwoo's performance, having inadvertently become a Death Knight, was beyond imagination.

Boom!

Crash!

Bang!

She was unleashing monstrous strength everywhere, surprising even herself. In fact, Seo Jiwoo had been struggling to adapt to her suddenly increased power after reawakening. She was different from Ma Dongwook, the S-rank tanker famous for his strength and durability. She was a dealer. Her strength increased tremendously, but her defense couldn't keep up with that monstrous power. This meant that when Seo Jiwoo punched, the opponent would get hurt, but so would her own fist. In short, gauntlets and armor inevitably wore out the more she fought. And all the money she earned was spent on repairing equipment or buying new weapons. But the evil spirit's armor was sturdier than any Seo Jiwoo had ever worn. And on top of that, there was Harmakan's buff that recovered health as she dealt damage.

"I feel like throwing up, but I can't stop." Seo Jiwoo was fighting with all her might for the first time since reawakening.

"I need to step up my game too." A strong competitive spirit appeared in Suho's eyes as he saw that.

[Using skill: 'Giant's Armor'.]

Whoosh!

The black flames burning from the Dragon King's heart mixed with the shadow's energy and engulfed Suho's entire body.

Crack! Crack...!

A full-body armor covered in black flames.

The purple vines that were approaching to attack Suho were startled by the intense heat and retreated. But it was too late...

Flare—!

The Dragon King's flames spread tenaciously along their vines and burned their entire bodies.

[?? has been defeated.]

[?? has been defeated.]

[...]

Seo Jiwoo marveled at the sight.

'He really was a tanker! And a fire-attribute tanker, the strongest ability!'

Suho, who had been surrounded, had suddenly turned into a living disaster.

[Kieek! How impressive! Master has become a living meat shield!] Beru also clapped his hands in joy at that overwhelming majesty.

2

"That's a compliment, right?"

[Of course, it is! But don't forget the objective!]

"I know."

Their current goal wasn't to annihilate the weeds, but to find the hole they came from.

"Open a path."

Suho held two of Vulcan's horns, eyes gleaming.

[Using Skill: 'Storm of Black Flames'.]

A new skill that evolved from Storm Slash after obtaining the Dragon King's heart.

Rumble!

A storm of black flames raged from the two swords.

[?? has been defeated.]

[?? has been defeated.]

[?? has been defeated.]

[...]

[Level Up!]

And a path opened.

"...Oh my god." Seo Jiwoo's jaw dropped. Following the path of fire that Suho unleashed in a straight line, numerous vines were scattered as ashes. She could see the vines hesitantly reappearing at the end of that wide-open passage.

"Is this that way?"

Suho immediately ran forward. So Seo Jiwoo followed after him.

Boom!

Repelling the small fry attacking from both sides with her fists. And finally...

"...Found it."

"The double dungeon."

An ominously shimmering dimensional crack finally appeared before them.

"So this is where they were crawling out from." Antares clicked his tongue as he watched the purple vines emerging from the dimensional crack.

"The residents of the gap are always like this. They hide like mice, and then they spread their roots and sprout whenever they get a chance, like weeds. This hole was probably opened by the Nightmare Bud. And other weeds are following through."

Listening to Antares' explanation, Suho glared at the other side of the crack with burning eyes.

"What's the probability that this is the Sea of The Afterlife?"

[Extremely low. But it will at least be a shortcut.]

[My liege. Are you thinking of going in now?]

"Of course. My grandfather's life is at stake." Suho looked at Seo Jiwoo and asked politely,

"Hunter Seo Jiwoo. It might be a little dangerous, but would you mind coming in with me?"

"Of course. I never dreamed it would be like this, but I also want to save my colleagues from the Eternal Sleep Disease." Seo Jiwoo nodded with a determined expression, meeting Suho's eyes.

"Then let's go in."

They stepped into the dimensional crack without hesitation.

Flare!

Burning the residents of the gap that were still crawling out.

* * *

Meanwhile...

Rumble!

The sky of the demon world was ominously shimmering.

"...Is it time?"

Esil, the master of this territory and the only demon noble, stood on a high hill, staring at the sky with gleaming eyes. Actually... She didn't know much about 'how to become the King of Demons' either. All she knew was what she had heard from her father when she was young. Even then, her father probably wouldn't have known the specifics.

'Even when my father was born, Baran already was the King of Demons.'

Baran, the King of Demons, the Monarch of White Flames. He was the one who ruled over the demons for a very long time. But was there anything eternal in this universe? Even the Absolute Being, The Creator, was killed by his own servants. A very long time ago. Before 'Baran' became king, another demon ruled the demon world. And when that king died and disappeared in the war with the Rulers, Baran, who was a demon noble at

the time, proved his qualifications as king and succeeded to the throne. That method was the 'trial' that Esil knew of.

Rumble! Crackle!

But it didn't matter if she didn't know the details. Because her instincts as a demon noble were whispering the most important thing to her.

"My fellow demons who follow me! Listen!" Esil stood up resolutely and raised her voice.

"Esil Radiru, the only demon noble and master of this land, commands you!"

At her resounding voice, all the residents of the demon world looked up at the sky. And all they could see were 'white flames' descending in strands, tearing and shredding the sky of the demon world. Like 'weeds' taking root in dry land without an owner. Esil grabbed her spear, pointed it forward, and shouted,

"Rise and fight! The time of trial has come!"

Screech! Screech! Screech...!

At that moment. Purple roots began to squeeze through the cracks in the demon world. Obsessive gleams erupted from the eyes of the skulls they wore on their heads. Even the ignorant demons who didn't know about the King's trial instinctively realized, sensing the ferocious aura.

"It has begun!"

"It's the trial!"

"The demon world is being contaminated!"

If they couldn't endure this moment, they would eventually be devoured. No, not only them but the entire demon world would be consumed whole. So to prevent that...!

"We need a king." Someone muttered.

A world without a king was mortally endangered by this. Weeds always grew in a land without an owner. The moment they saw those vines, the demons instinctively realized their name.

"They're the residents of the gap..."

"The residents of the gap are after us...!"

And that unrest spread, leading to fear and terror. In the end, everyone's gaze was fixed on the qualified leader, the pure-blooded demon.

"I am Esil, the eldest daughter of the Radiru family." And the pure-blooded demon gladly accepted the wishes they longed for. Esil declared her name before the purple wave that invaded the demon world. But at the same time, she couldn't help but feel a tinge of regret.

'At a time when Suho is away...' But it was alright. This was something she shouldn't rely on anyone else for in the first place. If she couldn't overcome the trial with her own strength, how could she gain the right to become King? Therefore, suppressing her fear, Esil declared confidently,

"I will be your king."

Swish!

And Esil's voice, as she raised her spear and shouted, overflowed with confidence.

"Arise! My Death Knights!"

Ooooooh!

At her command, numerous demon knights clad in the Item: 'evil spirit's armor' rose resolutely behind Esil.

2

...To be honest, Esil thought it was okay to get a little help.

4

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



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1/12/24

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 238 - Chapter 237

Chapter 238: Chapter 237

Has she ever found plants creepy in her life?

Flowers.

Leaves.

Stems.

Fruits.

Greenery and beautiful trees that were refreshing just to imagine. The beauty of Mother Nature, full of life. Those phrases were completely inapplicable to the residents of the gap who invaded the demon world.

Screech—!

Plants were plants, but... The sight of those weeds twisting and contorting their vines, desperate to imitate humans, was undeniably creepy.

4

Crackle! Crackle! Crackle!

Their structure was similar to a kind of planter. If the skulls they wore on their heads were upside-down flower pots, the numerous purple vines extending from beneath them crawled on the ground like octopuses. But as the battle began in earnest, those vines intertwined and twisted, clumsily imitating two arms and legs, trying to walk on the ground. The demons felt an eerie sensation at that sight and attacked them.

"The residents of the gap are imitating us!"

"Stop them! Don't let them!"

Why...? From the moment the trial began, the demons were instinctively disturbed by the rising discomfort. This feeling of disgust was the same for both demons with and without intellect. It was strange, wasn't it? The demons had been living without even knowing the name 'residents of the gap.' But the moment they saw them, they instinctively realized their name. As if they had known it all along.

'These guys are strange...' Esil was the one who felt the most ominous and wary of this fact.

For demons, 'instinct' was directly linked to survival, a sense that should never be ignored. Especially since knowledge that wasn't even in their memories suddenly surfaced, it meant that it was information engraved in the blood or souls of demons...

"Kyaaak...!"

"...!"

"Everyone be careful! If you touch these guys, your mana will be sucked out!"

But there was no time to ponder. Just then, she could see the demons who clashed with the residents of the gap at the forefront retreating in a panic. The purple vines that wrapped around their bodies were sucking out their mana.

"Get out of the way!"

Slash! Slash! Slash!

Just in time, the demon knights clad in the evil spirit's armor sprang forward and tore the vines wrapped around their brethren without hesitation. But the weeds were tenacious.

Screech!

The torn vines twisted in the air like snakes and wrapped around the bodies of the demon knights.

"...Where do you think you're going?!"

Fortunately. The evil spirit's armor they were wearing prevented their mana from being sucked out even if they touched the residents of the gap. The armor that at Suho's command, Harmakan specially modified to be used by demons, was doing its job. But the veins moved even more tenaciously and finally found the narrow gaps, stabbing their sharp thorny tentacles into them!

"Th-these guys...!" The demon knights felt a dizzying sensation and hurriedly tore them off, then shouted at Esil,

"Lady Esil! Be careful!"

"These guys not only suck mana, but they also inject a strange poison with their thorns!"

They truly were like mosquitoes. No, even worse, they were a combination of the unpleasant aspects of mosquitoes and leeches. If you touched or brushed against the vines, your mana would be sucked out. And if you were stabbed by the thorns, an unknown poison would infiltrate you?

"Damn them. I'm going too!"

Clank!

Just in time, Esil also equipped the evil spirit's armor and sprang forward.

"Die!"

Whoosh! — Crack!

The demon horn spear launched from Esil's hand pierced and shattered their skulls. Then, the vines that were growing like flowers from the flowerpot, from those skulls lost their strength and fell to the ground. Confirming this, Esil gave a resounding order.

2

"The head is their weakness! Aim for the head!"

1

The demons relayed Esil's words to others still fighting.

"Everyone, aim for the head!"

"The skull is their weakness!" Following the order, the demons rushed to smash the heads of the residents of the gap.

"If you wear the armor, your mana won't be sucked out even if you touch their bodies! Death Knights, lead the way and be careful of the thorns!"

"We don't know what kind of poison it is! Don't get stabbed by the thorns!"

Crack!

Smash!

Tear!

The skulls were helplessly shattered by the demons' attacks. And the battle began in earnest. But even though they found the weak spot, the clash didn't go smoothly. In the first place, there was a huge difference in numbers. Enemies that poured in endlessly through the dimensional crack. Esil gritted her teeth.

'I should have gathered more demons...!' She was frustrated. If this was the demon world of the past, they would never be outnumbered like this. But what could she do?

The current demon world was torn apart and drifting through the dimensional gaps, if she had gathered all the demons scattered in those fragmented pieces of dimension...!

'These guys are weak individually. But there are just too many of them. Where have they been hiding all this time?'

"Kuhk...!"

In the midst of the fierce battle, the first casualty finally occurred.

"Grrr..."

The demon, entangled in vines and having all its mana sucked out, foamed at the mouth and lost focus in its eyes. At that moment...

Kiekek! Kihih!

A laughter erupted. It was clearly a chuckle coming from the skull... No, from the weed that succeeded in devouring a demon.

"...!"

At that moment, Esil finally realized it. The identity of the eerie feeling flooding her mind since the moment she encountered the residents of the gap, those unknown beings.

Whoosh—!

Suddenly, the vines wrapped tightly around the skull. Like real muscle fibers attached to a skeleton, they began to create a 'proper body'.

"...Oh my god." At that astonishing sight, gasps escaped the lips of all the demons, including Esil.

Yes. Something was strange from the beginning. Those creepy guys created arms and legs by weaving vines, imitating demons... But the moment they devoured their prey...

"Khit! Kihih!"

That nameless weed finally became a 'real' demon.

* * *

"...Is this the demon world?" Suho, who entered the double dungeon through the crack, opened his mouth in dismay at the sight of the magical beasts swarming before him.

"No, it's just a dimensional gap." The Dragon King shook his head.

"Then what are these demons?"

"What else? They're residents of the gap who devoured others and proved their qualifications to become demons themselves."

"...!" As the Dragon King said, there were swarms of purple demons gathered before them.

[Gap Demon]

[Gap Demon]

[Gap Demon]

[...]

Although name tags clearly saying 'demon' were floating above their heads, their essence was still weeds made of vines. Those octopus-like things that parasitized skulls had woven their vines to create muscles and transformed to look like anatomical models you would only see in a science lab. In terms of size and shape, they were closer to the form of demons rather than humans. There was even one with horns. The problem was that this wasn't just imitation in form.

[Title: 'Demon Slayer' buff effect is activated.]

[All stats increase by 40% when facing demon-type monsters.]

"They really are demons." Suho's eyes gleamed. The fact that the title effect, which only applied when facing demons, was activated automatically was proof that these weeds were real demons.

"They became demons by devouring demons?"

"Yes. It seems like the fragments of the demon world scattered in the dimensional gap were invaded by these guys. In short, they've been 'contaminated'." Antares' gaze towards the gap demons was full of disgust.

"As I said, the residents of the gap are scraps that the Absolute Being created and discarded. That's why these weeds always crave to become something. And the easiest targets are the souls of demons."

"Is it because the souls of demons can't go to the Sea of The Afterlife even when they die?" Suho seemed to know what would come next.

"No, the order is a little different. When a living being dies, its soul wanders the Sea of The Afterlife and is used as nutrients for the World Tree. That's the natural order..."

Kihihi! Kikikekek!

The conversation was interrupted, and the battle suddenly began. The Gap Demons began to surround them and attack from all directions.

"I'll take the rear!" With all sides wide open, Seo Jiwoo took the rear.

And Suho swung Vulcan's horns at the gap demons rushing in from the front.

Flare!

Rumble—!

But their reaction was quite different from the weeds they fought earlier. The weeds named [??] burned helplessly in Suho's flames, but the Gap Demons were dodging the attacks or even fighting back with weapons.

"Their response is exactly like real demons." It was curious, but that was all.

[Using Skill: 'Storm of Black Flames'.]

Rumble!

[Gap Demon has been defeated.]

[Gap Demon has been defeated.]

[Gap Demon has been defeated.]

[...]

As the battle intensified, the Dragon King Antares spread his short wings and landed on Suho's head. And he continued his explanation with a solemn expression.

"First, I should tell you about the World Tree. The World Tree grows and bears fruit by feeding on souls of the dead. And new souls are born from those fruits. The most beautiful and pure of them bear the Rulers' soldiers, and other fruits bear the souls of the many races you know."

"Reincarnation?"

"Well. Any term would be fine, but no one knows what kind of process happens within the World Tree. Since a dead soul becomes a nutrient and is reborn, no one can be sure if it's the same soul. Anyway." Antares looked at the gap demons and continued,

"As I said, among the souls that fall into the Sea of The Afterlife, there are quite a few that are caught and sucked dry by weeds before being eaten by the World Tree. We call that 'mana contamination'."

"...Mana contamination?" A strange light appeared in Suho's eyes at the familiar expression.

"Yes. One of the roles of the World Tree is to purify dead souls. But if they're caught by weeds without going through the process, they become contaminated. Then those souls can never return to the Sea of The Afterlife."

Kihihi!

Kikikekek!

"And they become demons like these guys. It's the moment when those who were nothing gain an identity..." Before Antares could even finish his words, something caught Suho's eye.

[Extraction is impossible due to mana contamination.]

[Extraction is impossible due to mana contamination.]

Seeing the messages floating above the corpses of the gap demons he had just killed, Suho realized the truth.

'Yes. I've always been curious.'

Whenever he fought demons.

Whenever he saw the message that their souls couldn't be extracted.

Suho was really curious about that.

'Why can't they be extracted?'

'Why can't the souls of demons be extracted?'

The more he thought about it, the less he understood. What was so different between the souls of beast-type magical beasts, insect-type magical beasts, and other races, and the souls of demons? What was the big difference? Why didn't the power of the Shadow Monarch, who ruled even death, work on them?

'Contaminated by mana? Contaminated by 'what' exactly?' If contaminated meant 'poisoned' it could be solved by detoxification. And if contamination meant 'filth', how nasty could they be? First of all, the souls of villains that Harmakan, a magic spirit, liked

were also evil souls, but they were extracted into shadow soldiers without any problems. Then why can't demons be extracted? But today, finally...

He understood the reason...

He understood what the souls of demons were contaminated by...

"Weeds are tenacious. They never give up on prey they've set their sights on." Listening to the Dragon King Antares' words, Suho remembered.

"The souls of demons cannot go to the Sea of The Afterlife because... They are already nutrients for the weeds, not the World Tree."

Demon world... From the beginning of time until now, demons have lived in a relationship of eating and being eaten by each other.

"Demons were originally... residents of the gap."

'It seemed like the trial that Esil is waiting for...'

'Is a test to see who was qualified to become a true demon.'

But then a system message arrived before Suho.

[A quest has arrived.]

Craftyprogamer

Edited by Something95, further edited by Silvct!

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1/23/25

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 239 - Chapter 238

Chapter 239: Chapter 238

In the quiet nothingness.

An endless horizon.

At the edge of a pure white world where even the flow of time has frozen.

[...]

The 'devil' finally opened his eyes.

[...]

The devil frowned.

'Where is this place?'

'Who am I?'

'How long have I been asleep?'

Everything was hazy.

[I am...]

Soon, his consciousness, which had been locked away, began to slowly rise to the surface. Memories of the past began to return and came together piece by piece. In the end, he finally succeeded in remembering himself.

'Yeah, I remember.'

[I am...]

[...Baran.]

5

Yes. His name is Baran. He was the pinnacle of all demons and the great king of demons who ruled the demon realm. However...

'Where is this place?'

'How did the once great me end up like this?'

[...]

At that moment, another thing popped into his mind from his subconsciousness. It was...
... his last memory, the conversation he had with 'him'.

– Why did you betray me? – A cold voice.

'I felt an instinctive fear at his words scolding me' But even at the moment of his death, the devil still bared his teeth.

- What a... shame. I could have done away with you.
- I asked why.
- Tsk, tsk.
- Why?
- Are you really asking because you don't know that? – At his question, the devil simply laughed.
- Tsk tsk tsk tsk.

The devil, who had been hanging his head for a while, shaking his shoulders and giggling like a madman, raised his gaze again. And at the same time, the laughter stopped. The strong hatred that had been suppressed burst out from his wide-open eyes.

[The King of Demons, the Monarch of the White Flame, opens his eyes.]

Whoosh—!

A cruel and intense killing intent engulfed the pure white world. But that was all. In this emptiness, there was no one to receive his wrath. Not even the small creatures that usually tremble and crawl on the floor at his killing intent.

No armies of rulers he hates.

Not even... that damn being that killed me.

Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaak—!

Realizing that vain fact, the devil raised his head and roared towards the sky. Countless blue sparks flashed from inside his wide-open mouth.

Crackle Crackle Crackle—!

An eerie flash of blue light enveloped the pure white world.

White flames falling from the empty sky.

Heavenly punishment falling from the empty sky.

In the midst of it all, the king of the demons howled in rage...

[Where are you! Shadow Monarch! Greatest Fragment of Brilliant Light-!]

Towards the damn being who made me like this...

[Come out, it is Me! The demon king Baran who betrayed you is here!]

But this is a world of nothingness. No matter how much he shouted, his voice became a hollow echo, floating in the pure white sky. But he did not give up. After all, the devil is persistent. The one who stood at the apex of the demon world, where struggling for survival was an everyday occurrence, that was the identity of the Demon King Baran.

'I don't know how I opened my eyes again, but since I woke up, I will just be faithful to my instincts as a devil.'

[If you won't come out, I'll go find you myself! It doesn't matter where you are! I'm Baran, the king of demons! Wherever I am, the demon realm is right here!] Baran raised one hand to the sky.

[All demons! Gather before me! Your king is imprisoned here!]

A unique power, inherited only by the King of Demons, manifested from his hand.

[Demon King Baran uses Skill: 'Army of Hell']

The forces of hell. This is the power to rally troops to where the Demon King is, regardless of where those that serve him are.

Flash Flash Flash—!

Dozens of magic circles were created above his head. They began to forcibly twist the dimensional wall to summon the demons. But it was impossible.

[Now! Everyone come out now...!]

None of the dozens of gates created in this way were able to summon demons. Because this was a world of nothingness. Among the words he shouted out, there was only one thing that came true.

Ding!

['Devil's Sanctuary' is activated.]

Baran failed to gather the demons, but his power succeeded in concentrating the demons who had lost their king and were wandering through the dimensional gaps in one place.

At the moment when Suho encountered the 'gap demons.'

* * *

At that time, Suho's eyes were shining as he saw the system messages that suddenly appeared in front of him.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

[Quest has arrived.]

[The King of Demons, the Monarch of the White Flames, opens his eyes.]

[Demon King Baran uses Skill: 'Army of Hell'.]

['Devil's Sanctuary' is activated.]

"The Demon King has awakened."

"What?"

"The devils' sanctuary has just been activated." When Suho's expression suddenly hardened next to him, Antares couldn't help but be embarrassed.

"Are you saying that Baran has woken up? I don't feel any energy." This was surprising and strange. In a situation like this, there was no way Suho would suddenly lie, but the problem was that the Dragon King himself didn't sense any signs. This was quite a blow to his pride.

'Is this how I was awakened as well? As expected of the Shadow Monarch's son.'

It's truly unique. When they encountered the gap demons, the king of the demons suddenly woke up from the dead. Can this really be called a coincidence?

'No way.' This image appeared in Antares' eyes as he gazed at Suho.

1

'As expected, he is a strange guy. The ability to reawaken dead Monarchs who have returned to nothingness...' Regardless of how this was possible, he felt satisfied that he had made the right choice to make this guy his successor. To accept his great power, one needed more than just ordinary talent; otherwise, they would be reduced to a handful of ashes.

1

Crackle Crackle Crackle—!

"Come to think of it, the cracks here are particularly... severe."

Antares quickly looked around and realized why this place was overrun with demons. Cracks that seemed to have been created by someone were gathering the residents of the gap here. It wasn't a proper gate, but if you look at the results, it's almost like using the 'Hell's Army', which was the power of the Demon King Baran.

"Hehehe. This is the demons' sanctuary. This is a great opportunity for the residents of the gap. Perhaps one of them will be the successor to the Demon King."

The qualification to become a demon king was not an opportunity given only to demon nobles born as purebloods. If you think about it, even the dregs of the 'not-yet-born' demons had a chance. How many souls these disgusting creatures suck, will determine how high of a demon they will be born as. And as far as the Dragon King knew, there were two places in the universe with the largest concentration of demons, other than this place. One was the territory ruled by the demon noble Esil Radiru.

'And the other one...' Suddenly, the Dragon King's gaze suddenly swept around.

Kihihik!

Kikikeke!

From one end to the other. Countless residents of the gap covered this land of cracks, leaving no space to step on.

A barren wasteland without a single drop of water.

A strange landscape with long, thin rocks of bizarre shapes jutting towards the sky.

The appearance of the residents of the gap covering it was all different. Just as those they had devoured were of various shapes and sizes. But regardless of that, their interest was fixed on one thing from the beginning... The swords held in Suho's hands.

[Item: Vulcan's Horn]

[Difficulty to acquire: ??]

[Type: Sword]

[Attack power +40]

[A sword made from the horn of the greedy demon Vulcan.]

[Empowered by Vulcan, it deals more damage.]

[Effect 'Destroyer': Increases physical damage by 300%.]

[Effect 'Demon Predator': The more demon souls you devour, the stronger Vulcan's power becomes.]

[Predated Demon Soul: Saturation]

"Why? Do you want this?" Suho, who noticed their greed, lifted Vulcan's horn slightly. Which resulted in a fierce reaction

Kekekeke!

Kihihi—!

Although they were wary of Suho's power, they couldn't overcome their instincts and attacked ravenously. In the face of that rough and barbaric greed, Suho could not help but chuckle.

"Yeah, I guess so. I must have fed a lot of demon souls to this greedy guy."

[Predated Demon Soul: Saturation]

Yes. Vulcan's Horns, where countless demon souls were highly concentrated. What would happen if this item fell into the hands of the residents of the gap? How strong of a demon could they become?

'At least a demon noble on the level of Vulcan. Or even higher.'

Perhaps they could even aim for the King. Especially since there was only one demon noble alive, Esil. It was truly a chance to turn their lives around.

"I was going to find the World Tree first, but it seems like I'll be getting the Demon King's blood before that." Suho snickered and checked the quest window.

[Quest: Trial of the Demon King]

[The denizens of the rift, who wish to become demons.]

[Have invaded the domain of the sole demon noble, Esil Radiru.]

[Sacrifice as many of them as possible to help Esil Radiru become the demon king's legitimate successor.]

[compensation : ??]

"The trial has already begun. Then I don't need to hold back, do I?" Suho's lips curled up. His gaze fell to his feet. The objective had changed. If the goal until now was to find the World Tree. From now on, it was just hunting.

[Use Skill: 'Monarch's Domain'.]

Now was time for slaughter.

Whoosh—!

Suho's shadow spread out from his feet in all directions. As if to fill the entire dimensional gap.

"Arise."

...!

That moment. At Suho's command, thousands of shadow soldiers rose simultaneously.

9

"Sweep them away. Don't leave a single one alive."

'Yes, the more sacrifices, the better.'

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 240 - Chapter 239

Chapter 240: Chapter 239

Survival is ultimately a struggle.

To not die.

To simply stay alive.

Kiekekekek!

That was life. And the hell that demons lived in.

Kihihi!

But even that hell was a luxury for some. For the residents of the gap who hadn't been born yet, it was a struggle, an opportunity, and a blessing to be born.

Kikiki!

Keke!

That's why they were demons who struggled just to be born. To do so, they devoured anything and everything within reach, whether it was a living soul or a dead one... They were the very essence of weeds, spreading their roots and thriving wherever they could find a foothold.

"With the king of demons gone, the weeds have multiplied so much." The Dragon King Antares clicked his tongue.

Has there ever been such a proliferation of weeds in the sea of the afterlife since the beginning of time? The number of residents in the gap seemed extremely alarming. Moreover, although they were just weeds, there were many powerful giants among them that grew like huge old trees due to the amount of nutrients they had absorbed.

"Even if they're weeds, with this much quantity, the next king could really be decided among them." The Dragon King spoke

At the same time the demon world ruled by Esil was under a massive invasion.

Kwaaaaah!

"Don't give up! Fight for our survival!"

Kyaaaaa!

Under Esil's orders, all demons were working together to stop the invasion.

Those who struggle to survive and those who struggle to be born.

The war between these two forces was truly fierce, a scene of utter chaos.

"But..." Antares, couldn't help but snicker as he thought of Esil, who seemed too weak and clumsy to become a king.

"She's lucky in many ways. If you're weak, it's a good choice to cling to the strong early on."

Yes. Thinking back, Esil was lucky in many ways. Because the residents of the gap, who should be invading the demon world, were being annihilated from behind.

[Keeeeeeeeek-! Fight! Suho's glorious army!]

"..." Antares stared silently at the tremendous spectacle unfolding before him.

[Kraaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!]

Even ignoring Beru, who was enthusiastically cheering from the front lines, the thousands of shadow soldiers that Suho raised were truly invincible. No one could stand in their way.

[...]

[Gap Demon has been defeated.]

[Gap Demon has been defeated.]

[Gap Demon has been defeated.]

[Gap Demon has been defeated.]

[...]

[Keeeeek! Yes! Keep pushing! To all the foolish ones who stand in our way! Bring great destruction!]

Oh, wait. It's not quite the great destruction.

"That's what I said when I was fighting against your father... Phew." Antares' forehead wrinkled as he felt a little embarrassed. However, he soon relaxed his expression and just softly sighed. He knew that there were no eternal enemies or allies in war. But to think...

How did he, the King of the Dragons and the Monarch of Destruction who fought against the Shadow Army until the very end, end up on the Shadow Monarch's side? Even the fact that he voluntarily chose the Shadow Monarch's son as his successor was a future that he had never imagined. However, because he was the King of Dragons, he couldn't help but sincerely sympathize with the residents of the gap who had to fight against these guys.

'They're truly formidable.' The Dragon King himself knew better than anyone else how frustrating it was to deal with an immortal army that never died.

Kiekekeke!

Kiihihihik!

Quantity? The number of residents of the gap gathered here was, at a rough glance, more than ten times that of Suho's army. And the tenacity with which they waged war was even greater. But they were truly... unlucky.

"To think they would run into Suho."

The Shadow Army, no, the shadow power, was a power specialized for war more than any other. On the other side, the more died, the more their forces decreased, but on this side, the more enemies killed, the more their forces grew! It was an incredibly reliable power for allies, but for opponents, it was an incredibly annoying ability. But, excluding the monarchs themselves, there was one race that the vile and annoying shadow power didn't work on... The 'demons'

"Originally, the Demon Race was the only opponent to the Shadow Legion. They were the only ones that could not be taken away by the Shadow Monarch even if they died." Antares looked at the corpses swept away by Suho's Legion, recalling the countless strategies he had devised using demons a long time ago. Even now, look...

[Extraction is impossible because there is no soul.]

[Extraction is impossible because there is no soul.]

[...]

A being like the Dragon Emperor could see.

The numerous system messages that were currently displayed before Suho's eyes. And as the text that appeared above the corpses of the gap demons said, it was impossible to extract them no matter how many he killed because they didn't have souls in the first place. Moreover, even though the souls of the demons they had devoured were leaking out of their bodies as they died, it was impossible to turn even those into soldiers.

[Mana is contaminated and cannot be extracted.]

[Mana is contaminated and cannot be extracted.]

[...]

What did this mean? The residents of the gap, the prospective demons, and the demons themselves were races that could compete with the Shadow Army if they had enough numbers. Of course, they had long been defeated and subjugated by the true Shadow Monarch, but Suho here was only half-baked compared to his father.

"... Yes. This amount of soldiers would've been enough to make a dent... Until a few days ago."

But now it was different.

Grumble!

"Because now Suho has my heart."

5

Oh dear. Weren't they truly unlucky?

Thump! Thump!

Fwoosh!

Even at this moment, the Dragon King's heart was boiling like lava in Suho's chest. The destructive mana emanating from it flowed into all of his shadow soldiers. The result was terrifying...

Kyaaaaaaaaaaaa—!

"Can mere weeds withstand my flames of destruction?"

It was literally black flame! Suho's shadow soldiers, who had always been covered in dark shadows, were now covered in hot flames. Due to the Shadow Army's enormous offensive capabilities, which included catastrophic fire damage, the residents of the gap were helpless even with an overwhelming numerical advantage. They were reduced to ashes, and forced to scatter.

[Hahaha! Burn! You cursed race!] Kira In particular, had an elitist mindset even in life, and was still the same after becoming a shadow soldier. Now that he had justification, he was like a fish in water, freely rampaging and pouring his overwhelming power onto the largest monsters among the residents of the gap.

Graaaaaa—!

Rumble!

Giant monsters, as sturdy as large trees, collapsed with agonizing screams.

The war was fiercer than ever, and the Shadow Legion was clearly at a numerical disadvantage. At this point, it was hard to tell who the bad guys were. Given the situation, the person trembling with fear here was none other than Seo Jiwoo, an ordinary S-class hunter.

"Oh, oh my god." She was trembling, her face looking like she was about to faint. She couldn't have imagined until this morning. That she would witness such an absurd situation with her own eyes.

"This is... an S-rank Hunter...?"

There was a faint voice echoing in Seo Jiwoo's mind, which had become completely empty. The greeting she gave to Suho when she first saw him.

"Wow, who were those guys just now? I heard you're an S-rank summoner, are those your summons?" Seo Jiwoo ended up holding her face.

'Why did I say something like that!'

'Why on earth did you say that!' Tears welled up in her eyes from the extreme shame. If she could, she would go back in time and rip apart her stupid eyes and mouth that found those cute summons adorable.

But the good news was that there was no one here paying attention to Seo Jiwoo's feelings. Well... There was one 'person'. Harmakan.

[Are you crying now?]

'Please pretend not to know... please!'

Seo Jiwoo felt a chill from Harmakan, who spoke to her in a seemingly indifferent and grandfatherly manner. The Shadow Demonic spirit Harmakan could glimpse the emotions of the soul.

[Your soul is noisy. Could it be that you have developed some kind of inferiority complex after seeing my master's abilities?] That didn't mean Harmakan was affectionate, he was just saying what he saw. And he whispered secretly in Seo Jiwoo's ear.

[Did you think you can overcome your inferiority complex by becoming a villain? The armor has good compatibility with blackened souls.]

"..." Demon or whatever, this guy was the worst.

[Hmm. The master's hunting is slowly coming to an end.] Harmakan rubbed his chin and looked around at his surroundings, which had become noticeably quieter. Corpses covered the battlefield filled with intense heat. Acrid smoke rising above them.

[Did you know? This is not ordinary smoke, but the souls of the demons they have consumed.] At Harmakan's explanation, Seo Jiwoo held her breath and covered her mouth and nose with both hands.

[Tsk. You're easily surprised. Don't worry, you won't become a demon just by inhaling this smoke. What's more important is where these souls want to go.]

"Harmakan! Beru!" Suho, commanding the battlefield at that moment, also realized this, turned around, and shouted.

"Trace where these demon souls are going!"

[Understood!] Beru sharpened his eyes and expanded his senses.

Harmakan also created a magic circle with his hands, not wanting to be outdone. Then, in the midst of this empty space, intricately mixed with numerous cracks, the souls of the dead demons were wandering through the air and flowing somewhere.

[Master. It's over there.]

[No, my liege! This way!]

"Two places?" Harmakan and Beru pointed in opposite directions.

Looking at them, Antares said, "Probably both are correct. There's only one place where the souls of dead demons can return."

The Demon realm. These souls would instinctively return to the demon realm.

"...But today, these souls have one more option." Antares smiled faintly and looked at Suho.

"The power of destruction I gave you is a powerful force that completely destroys even souls. And extreme destruction is not much different from 'purification.'"

"Purification?" It was a surprising statement. Antares' smile deepened, he was pleased with Suho's reaction.

"Yes. That means that the demons' souls that have been purified by burning in my mana can return to the sea of the afterlife."

1

"...!" The moment he heard those words, Suho's gaze quickly swept around. And among the thousands of system messages that filled his vision, he could pick out the ones that stood out.

[Mana is contaminated and cannot be extracted.]

[Target can be extracted.]

[Mana is contaminated and cannot be extracted.]

[Target can be extracted.]

[...]

"There! The extractable demon souls!"

The demon's purified souls were wandering around in the air, confused, gathering in a heap and rushing somewhere. Even at this moment, the shadow soldiers were thoroughly trampling and burning the gap demons, and the smoke flowing out from them further joined the group. That was the direction Beru was pointing at.

[Kihehe! I got it right!] Beru was very proud and raised his antennae.

Harmakan, recognizing defeat, lowered his eyes sullenly. But not all souls were purified by the power of destruction. It was not the residents of the gap that fought Suho's shadows, but rather the souls of the real demons that had been eaten, those were going in Harmakan's direction. It was an attempt to return to the Demon Realm. As a result...

Ding!

[You have completed Quest: 'Trial of the Demon King'.]

"Ah." Seeing the quest completion message, Suho realized that Esil's trial was over. As the residents of the gap were dealt with by Suho, Esil's territory successfully withstood the invasion.

"She's really lucky in many ways." Antares chuckled. In that terrible war, the entire universe bestowed blessings on the cowardly demon noble Esil Radiru, the only demon who crawled under Sung Jinwoo.

[Quest completion reward has arrived.]

[Do you want to check your reward?]

[Y/N]

"Check reward." Suho immediately confirmed the reward.

[You have acquired the Item: 'Baran's Horn'.]

"Baran's Horn?" A long devil's horn appeared in Suho's hand.

The moment he held it.

"!"

He suddenly felt a chill. A feeling as if someone was looking at you. This feeling was familiar.

[The King of Demons, the Monarch of White Flames, Baran, is watching you.]

It was then.

"Be careful of Baran-" Just as the Dragon King Antares was about to say something to Suho.

Ding!

[Passive skill '(Unknown)' is activated.]

Whoosh—!

Suho's shadow engulfed the world, and time stopped.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer