

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 301 - Chapter 299

Chapter 301: Chapter 299

Five years ago.

Woo Jinchul had already noticed the changes in the world.

"...He didn't come in today either?"

"No, sir."

Jungbu Police Station, Violent Crimes Unit office.

Detective Sung Jinwoo's desk had been empty for days. But his colleagues didn't show any worry or concern. Because this wasn't unusual. Detective Sung Jinwoo was an elusive person and often disappeared like this. But despite that, he was 'untouchable', not even receiving a reprimand, let alone writing a single report. For a public official, this was an extremely exceptional case. But it was only natural.

A secret backer?

Was it because Chief Woo Jinchul was supporting him? No... it was simply because his performance was outstanding. Who would reprimand a Violent Crimes detective who was good at catching criminals? Especially when Detective Sung Jinwoo disappeared and returned, he always brought numerous felons with him. Most of them were those that other departments, or even other regional police stations, had practically given up on investigating. That day was always a day for the entire Violent Crimes Unit to have a dinner party. As if expecting him to show such eccentricity again, none of Sung Jinwoo's fellow detectives worried about him, even though his seat had been empty for days. They were too busy cleaning up after the criminals he caught to worry about the living legend of the Jungbu Police Station Violent Crimes Unit.

Detective Sung Jinwoo was great, but the problem was that he only caught criminals and left all the troublesome paperwork to his subordinates. Of course, he shared the credit with his subordinates who did the paperwork, or even gave them the entire credit, so he was a truly unpredictable senior. There was a reason why there were rumors that he was doing this as a hobby. But despite that, there was one person worrying. For some reason, this time, Chief Woo Jinchul's expression was a bit dark as he looked at Detective Sung Jinwoo's empty seat.

'...It's taking him a particularly long, this time.' Woo Jinchul knew that catching criminals was just an excuse for Sung Jinwoo to disappear for days. Actually, he would have been struggling alone in a place no one knew to protect the world. And he only caught a

few hidden criminals on his way back because he couldn't return empty-handed. But in recent years, The number of times Sung Jinwoo disappeared has been increasing. Of course, each time, it wasn't for long, but... He had a feeling that this time... his leave would be longer.

"Huff." Woo Jinchul looked out the office window and up at the sky and he spoke as if sighing,

"Let's mark it as vacation this time."

"Yes? But Detective Sung didn't apply for vacation..."

"I'll authorize it myself."

"...Yes, sir."

Was there any other option? When the police chief himself said he would take care of it.

Thud

The door closed, and Woo Jinchul sat alone and sighed deeply. And he thought of Sung Jinwoo, who would be fighting something that threatened humanity's survival somewhere in the world even at this moment. And he firmly believed that he would eventually return, as always. Smiling as if nothing happened. ...Just like he always did. But why...?

'It feels different this time.' Even though he knew Sung Jinwoo's power, Woo Jinchul felt a strange anxiety this time. Why were ominous premonitions always right? Not days, but months. Not months, but a year, two years... No matter how much time passed, Sung Jinwoo didn't return.

'...I should prepare myself.'

Woo Jinchul's eyes hardened as he looked at his empty seat covered in dust. Of course, even at this moment, he wasn't worried about Sung Jinwoo's safety. At least for Woo Jinchul, Sung Jinwoo was a god, no, an even greater existence. He couldn't even imagine the possibility of Sung Jinwoo being in danger. Rather, he focused on how formidable the enemies who were keeping him for so long were. And as time passed...

* * *

About two years ago, Woo Jinchul's premonition finally came true.

'The Cataclysm'

Bang—!

When the news that the first Gate was discovered in Seoul came, Woo Jinchul took action without hesitation. The moment of the Cataclysm, when Earth connected with other dimensions. While the leaders of countries around the world were in chaos, Woo Jinchul didn't panic. At least for him, this wasn't the first time, was it?

'First, awakening.'

The process wasn't difficult since he had already experienced it once. The alien energy flowing from the Gate into the atmosphere, He skillfully grasped that 'mana'.

Flash—!

He immediately awakened as an A-rank Hunter, just like before.

'The total amount of magic power is the same as before. Is this my limit?' Woo Jinchul, after gauging his own magic power, immediately assessed the situation. He didn't even entertain the vain hope of awakening as an S-rank this time. Since he was a thoroughly rational person, he only thought about and planned how to utilize this situation.

'So they awaken the same as in the previous world, depending on their magic power aptitude. This is rather good. It reduces errors.' He knew exactly what he could do and what he had to do.

"I need to create the Association first."

Woo Jinchul immediately put his plan into action.

'In the previous world, the Association was organized when Chairman Go Gunhee awakened as an S-rank Hunter. But unfortunately, Chairman Go has already passed away.' In the end, the only one who could fill Chairman Go Gunhee's role in the current world was Woo Jinchul himself. Moreover, he was already the one who became the Association President in the previous world. It wasn't a difficult task since he had already done it once. However, if there was a problem,

'I am not Chairman Go Gunhee.' Chairman Go Gunhee, the head of a large corporation, organized the Association with his vast funds and power. But Woo Jinchul didn't have that. With just a police chief's authority, he couldn't even compare to those with real power.

'But I have the memories of the past.' Woo Jinchul was living his second life thanks to Sung Jinwoo. And thanks to being much older than back then, he had enough experience and wisdom.

'Depending on how I use them, my memories are no different from knowing the future.' Woo Jinchul was fundamentally a righteous person, but he wasn't a pushover. Knowing that personality well, Chairman Go Gunhee also assigned him to the 'Hunter

Association Surveillance Department.' And due to the nature of that Department, they dealt with a lot of confidential information...

'Even if the future changed, the past remained the same. The corruption committed by those in power and the second and third generation chaebols decades ago is also the same.' Woo Jinchul also remembered all the information he handled back then. But since it was corruption from decades ago, incidents that were thoroughly forgotten and covered up, he couldn't take any action as a 'police chief.'

'...But if I'm a 'Hunter,' it's a different story.' The current situation was the era of the Cataclysm, where lawlessness was rampant. This meant that it was a world where it was difficult to deal with criminals even if they broke the law, but conversely, it also meant that an era had arrived where criminals could be 'punished regardless of the law.' In that sense, the first thing Woo Jinchul did was take out the corruption data of politicians he had collected over the past few years using his position as police chief. And he neatly organized them into files, appropriately linking them to the depravity that had been covered up decades ago. And he went straight to the Prosecutor's Office and influential politicians, presenting those files.

Thud—!

"Minister, could you spare me a moment?"

"Wh-what? Who are you! How dare you... This is...!"

"Ah, I've put the guards outside to sleep. No one will come even if you scream."

"...?!"

They couldn't help but be bewildered by Woo Jinchul's unannounced visit. Encountering famous people with power or money was quite difficult. Naturally, they didn't meet just anyone, nor did they waste their precious time on something that wasn't beneficial. Especially since no one wanted to be involved with the police. Even if Woo Jinchul was the police chief, it was basic etiquette to contact them in advance and make an appointment through their secretary to meet an influential person. But that was before the Cataclysm. Now was an era where force reigned supreme over power and money. Especially in the early days, when there weren't many Awakened yet, the bodyguards of influential people were just ordinary people without any magic power. Although the term villain hadn't been properly established yet, what Woo Jinchul did wasn't much different from the villains he arrested later.

Woo Jinchul, visiting the politicians without warning, pushed up his black sunglasses with a meaningful smile. He presented the old data he organized and put a collar on their necks.

"Minister, wouldn't it be quite troublesome if this information leaked to the press?"

"Wh-what...! How can a police chief commit such an outrageous act and not fear the consequences?! And what effect would this outdated information, past the statute of limitations, have now...!"

"Yes, you're right. Everything you're saying is correct. But..." The smile that had been on Woo Jinchul's face disappeared.

A memory suddenly came to mind. The history forgotten by everyone now. The time when he became the Association President after Chairman Go Gunhee in the previous world. He was immediately summoned by the president and received a request, or rather, a demand, to use Sung Jinwoo as a promotional ambassador for national prestige. First, a promotional ambassador, And then, President Kim Myungchul gradually tried to exploit Sung Jinwoo's name politically...

– Hehehehe, unlike with someone, I can reason with you, Association President Woo Jinchul. Yes, I would like you to put in some effort, Association President Woo. This isn't just for my benefit.

'Unlike with someone.' It wasn't difficult to figure out who he was referring to. Woo Jinchul gritted his teeth silently and said,

– Former Association President Go Gunhee was a true gentleman.

– Yes, yes. He was too principled for a gentleman.

– I am very different from Association President Go Gunhee.

– Hehehe. That's right. The Hunter Association should change like that. How long should it be bound by old rules? – Woo Jinchul was dumbfounded by the president's proposal. And he was angry that he was caught up in this mess as soon as he became the Association President.

'...They must be underestimating me.' Because he wasn't former Association President Go Gunhee. Now that the one, who had been acting as a breakwater for the Association, was gone, the political world immediately targeted him. They wanted him to work for them. But... Woo Jinchul found himself feeling relieved as well as angry. Association President Go Gunhee always said, That the Hunter Association should create an environment where Hunters could focus on their work as Hunters.

'...And that's not just for the good of Hunters, but also for those who aren't Hunters.' Recalling those memories, Woo Jinchul slowly raised his magic power in front of the Minister of National Defense.

Rumble—!

"Y-you... what are you...?!"

The minister couldn't help but be terrified as the building shook as if it would collapse from Woo Jinchul's magic power. The man he thought was just a police chief was suddenly emitting the aura of a giant predator.

"Minister." Woo Jinchul calmly spoke to the minister, whose face had turned white, The same words he said to President Kim a long time ago.

"How long do you think it would take me to kill everyone in this building, including your bodyguards, if I wanted to?"

"You!"

The minister jumped to his feet, but his body froze from his killing intent. Woo Jinchul didn't overestimate his power. Just an A-rank. With this meager power, he was nothing but a fly before those great Monarchs or Rulers. But at least... among fellow humans, the power of an A-rank Hunter was a disaster. How could a human, helpless even against a tiger or bear, possibly handle an A-rank Hunter?

"A few hours? No, it wouldn't even take a few minutes." Woo Jinchul calmly continued, looking at the minister who was turning pale from his killing intent,

"Then how many people would it take to stop me from rampaging? Well, perhaps if you mobilize all the police and soldiers in Seoul and endure until my magic power runs out, you might be able to stop me somehow." Woo Jinchul's calm expression as he spoke those terrible words further fueled the minister's fear.

"J-just... why..." He wanted to say something, but his lips wouldn't move properly, suppressed by the killing intent.

"In that time, I could kill you, the minister, and then your family one by one. Ah, of course, I'll only kill those who committed wrongdoings in the past, as recorded in this document."

"...!"

"And as you said, I just have to run away until the statute of limitations expires."

"J-just... what do you want from me?" The terrified minister finally succumbed to his threats. At that moment, Woo Jinchul's killing intent disappeared, and he adjusted his black sunglasses grinning.

"Hmm, well. First, help me establish the Association... And one more thing." Woo Jinchul took out a strange stone from his pocket.

"I'm trying to collect these, would you mind helping me?"

"Wh-what is that?"

"It's called a 'rune stone', although no one knows about it yet."

Thus, with the 'consent' of various politicians, the Hunter Association was quickly established. And after that, Woo Jinchul kept his promise with them and spared the lives of those who committed corruption in the past. But only their lives. After everything was over, they were all imprisoned in the Jisan Prison that Woo Jinchul created.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 302 - Chapter 300

Chapter 302: Chapter 300

3

Originally, it would have been absolutely impossible. To create an association that united all the Hunters in a country, one had to go through considerably complicated political and economic processes. It wasn't something a mere police chief could handle. It was possible in the previous era only because Chairman Go Gunhee himself was the head of a large corporation. But... Was it because he pursued a too moderate approach? It took too long for the association to be established, And in the meantime, countless meaningless sacrifices occurred due to uncontrolled villains.

Woo Jinchul, who remembered all that, decided to use a more radical and aggressive approach this time. This wasn't simply because of the problems mentioned earlier. He was someone who had already experienced the world on the verge of destruction, someone who clearly remembered all those disasters that were absolutely beyond human control. He wasn't in a position to be picky about methods.

'This is a world without Hunter Sung Jinwoo. Can I fill his shoes?' Just that fact alone showed how heavy the burden of responsibility Woo Jinchul carried was. After the Cataclysm, he couldn't sleep a single day without pills. How could he close his eyes peacefully and lie in bed when he felt like the Monarchs would tear through the sky at any moment?

'Filling his shoes was impossible from the beginning... Then what can I do?' Woo Jinchul desperately tried to remember. What Sung Jinwoo wanted. What the world should be like when Sung Jinwoo, who was away, returned. And then he found the answer.

'Not to hold him back when he returns. That's the best I can do. At the very least, I shouldn't become a hindrance to him.' To do that, he first needed the power to completely control the Hunters. It had to be a Hunter Association with greater control than the Hunter Association led by S-rank Hunter Go Gunhee. But he was only A-rank. It was impossible to make the S-rank Hunters who would appear in the future obey the Hunter Association's orders through ordinary means.

'So I'll force it. By any means necessary.'

Bang—!

"Wh-who...!"

Bang—!

"W-Woo Jinchul?!"

...Just like that, day after day, the leaders of Korea's political and economic worlds received sudden visits from Woo Jinchul. Even in the midst of that, Woo Jinchul was fair and unbiased. He visited all political parties equally. Anyhow, every political party had a similar ratio of corrupt figures, so as long as he kept the order, he could maintain the balance. It also minimized the chaos in the political situation.

Bang—!

The door suddenly shattered.

"Hello. My name is Woo Jinchul."

Bang—!

"Hello. I'm Woo Jinchul."

The moment the man with black sunglasses barged into their office,

"Hello. You know me, right?"

"...!"

All the politicians who saw Woo Jinchul had the same expression, 'The time has finally come,' and closed their eyes tightly. Rumors about Woo Jinchul had already spread widely. Through the network of those who committed corruption together. But what could they do even if they heard the gossip? What could they do?

"You recently tripled your personal bodyguards? I see you've heard the rumors about me."

"Th-that's..."

"I'm curious who you heard it from... Who is it...?"

...Gulp.

There was nothing they could do. They could only turn pale and swallow dryly. No matter how many bodyguards they hired, they couldn't stop Woo Jinchul's visit. They were helpless even after spending a fortune to hire 'Awakened' bodyguards. It was only natural. The world didn't have Hunter ranks yet, And even if they hired a large number of Awakened as guards, those guards didn't even know if they were C-rank or B-rank. Even if there were dozens, or even hundreds of those, they couldn't be a match for Woo Jinchul. Moreover, even if there happened to be another A-rank Awakened among those guards, it wouldn't change anything.

'A newly Awakened A-rank?'

It was a great insult to compare an inexperienced A-rank who didn't even know how to use their power to Woo Jinchul. First of all, Woo Jinchul was the section chief of the 'Surveillance Department' of the Hunter Association, who dealt with countless Hunters in the previous era.

Whoosh— Thud—!

"...Keuk!"

Woo Jinchul suddenly grabbed the bodyguard who appeared behind him without a sound by the collar

with one hand and threw him to the ground. He opened one eye in surprise.

"Hmm? This one is quite something. Where did you recruit such a useful assassin-type Awakened?"

"...H-how?"

The assassin-type Awakened, who tried to ambush him from behind, couldn't help but panic. Woo Jinchul's sharp eyes, beyond the black sunglasses, saw through his stealth skill. But he calmly replied to the assassin-type Awakened, who was looking up at him with a dumbfounded expression,

"Don't be too disappointed. I recently learned a new 'Danger Perception' skill, so I won't be caught off guard so easily. But Minister? Is this all you prepared?"

"...I'll cooperate with the Association."

"That's a wise decision. Was it that hard to just say that? It would have been easier for everyone if you had just answered when I asked over the phone."

"I apologize..."

"Well, I understand. If you became the Association President yourself, it would be quite convenient to use that overwhelming force politically, wouldn't it? It's certainly tempting. But as I've always said, I have no intention of getting involved in politics." Woo Jinchul firmly emphasized his belief as he threatened the politicians one by one.

Hunters in the Hunters' realm,

Politicians in their own realm.

To make the world run properly that was required, it was the belief of the Hunter Association, no, of Chairman Go Gunhee.

"All I want is one thing. To allow all Hunters to focus solely on their duties as Hunters."

"...Hunter...?"

The one who quietly muttered the name 'Hunter' that came out of Woo Jinchul's mouth was none other than the assassin-type Awakened who failed to ambush him. Woo Jinchul glanced down at him with a strange smile.

"In that sense, I'll take this Awakened with me. His skills are wasted as just a bodyguard for a politician. For your information, this isn't a request."

"...Do as you please."

The politician, left alone in his office, sighed deeply as he watched Woo Jinchul disappear, dragging the assassin-type Awakened with him. The rumors were true. If there were any useful Awakened among the bodyguards of the politicians Woo Jinchul visited, he would 'kidnap' them for the Association. It was absurd that such a lawless person would create an association to eliminate 'villains'.

...Just like that, the Hunter Association was smoothly established with the histrionic agreement of both the ruling and opposition parties. And Woo Jinchul proudly became the first Association President. The process was very unconventional and fast. Thanks to that, South Korea became famous as the country that recovered from the 'Cataclysm' crisis and stabilized its society the fastest in the world.

So much so that other countries visited the Korean Association non-stop to learn about the system and Hunter laws they created. Woo Jinchul's Association was able to

systematically capture villains who were drunk on magic power and rampaging, and even created a special detention center for them. Moreover, as the Association's control became stronger than in the previous era, it could prevent unnecessary battles caused by conflicts between Hunter guilds. And on top of that, since they could immediately respond to Gates as soon as they appeared, it allowed the citizens to safely return to their daily lives. In the process, Woo Jinchul gained tremendous support from the citizens, but conversely, there were also many who became hostile towards him. Since the process of creating the Association was unconventional, there were quite a few who held grudges against him. Especially those who knew that Woo Jinchul had all their corruption data in his hands spent a lot of money to secretly assassinate him. But... None of those attempts worked on Woo Jinchul.

Bang—!

"Hello, Mayor."

"H-how?!"

"Ah, dear. You seem surprised. I recently acquired a skill that makes me immune to most poisons."

4

"...!"

"Arrest him."

Thud Thud—!

The politician who attempted to assassinate Woo Jinchul was arrested and dragged away by the Hunters at the Association President's command. The world was still lawless as the Association had just been established, so assassination attempts like this were common. But surprisingly, none of them worked on Woo Jinchul.

'Just how many skills does that guy Woo Jinchul have...!' It was maddening for those who were hostile towards Woo Jinchul. There was no way to deal with him. There were even rumors that Woo Jinchul had over a hundred skills. And surprisingly, those rumors were becoming closer to the truth. In real-time...

No one knew the reason or the method yet. The establishment of the Association was simply incredibly fast, And the world was still in the early days of the Cataclysm. People didn't know about 'rune stones' yet. In the first place, the number of rune stones released into the world was extremely small. And even if someone luckily obtained a 'rune stone,' they didn't even know that they had to break it with their hand to learn a new skill. Those who instinctively sensed that it was a precious item didn't break it but kept it safe without a scratch. Because they didn't know how to use it in the first place.

The only cases were when someone accidentally broke a rune stone inside a magical beast with their weapon while hunting and learned a new skill.

'...But these good times will soon be over.'

People weren't stupid. It was just a matter of time. All Hunters would soon learn about rune stones. So Woo Jinchul took advantage of this brief period of chaos and gathered as many rune stones as possible to get ahead of everyone else. The more he did that, the more skills he could use. But even then, he was still an A-rank Hunter, And Woo Jinchul knew his limits well. He wasn't a Hunter who grew stronger through battles like Sung Jinwoo. But...

'I have to become stronger. Stronger than anyone else.'

To fill Sung Jinwoo's shoes, he had to become stronger somehow. At least strong enough to not lose to humans. So the method he came up with was monopolizing rune stones.

'If I can't increase my magic power, I can just increase the type and number of 'skills,' can't I?'

It was only natural that the more skills you could use, the stronger you were, even with the same A-rank. That was why 'rune stones' were traded at astronomical prices among the Hunters of the previous era. But while people in the world still didn't know the value of rune stones, ...Woo Jinchul had already become the only A-rank Hunter in the world who could use that many skills. Of course, only a handful of people within the Association knew about this. Among them, Hunter Choi Jongin, who had been with him since the early days, knew Woo Jinchul's true power well. ...And the side effects that came with it.

Crack...

And now, Suho was also witnessing that result.

Just an A-rank. The result of cramming too many skills into a vessel with a limited capacity... Woo Jinchul was currently dying. And this was a condition that couldn't be cured even by the best Healer. This wasn't an injury; it was just the process of his vessel breaking.

2

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



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Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 303 - Chapter 301

Chapter 303: Chapter 301

Rumble—

Somewhere in outer space, far away from Earth, In the middle of the battlefield where the war against the Outer Gods was raging, A man in jet-black armor, commanding the armies, suddenly muttered while staring into the distance,

"...I wonder if the chief is alright."

As the war against the Itarim continued, those he left behind on Earth occasionally came to mind. And among them, the one he was most concerned about was 'Chief Woo Jinchul.'

[Who are you worried about?]

One of the Rulers, commanding the angels beside him, asked.

[Family? Or a friend?]

"A comrade. The only colleague who shares the old memories with me."

[A human with memories of the previous era... If that's the case, he must be playing a big role in this chaotic time, so why are you so worried?]

"...Because he might overwork himself."

[Hmm?]

Sung Jinwoo couldn't help but smile bitterly at the Ruler's question.

1

"He's that kind of person."

How could he not be worried? As a comrade in the past, and a colleague in this world, Having spent so much time together, Sung Jinwoo, who knew Woo Jinchul's personality well, couldn't help but worry about him.

Woo Jinchul.

He was the human who knew the most about the truth of this world. It had already been decades since he regained his memories of the past. Moreover, even while working as a police officer with him, he knew that Sung Jinwoo was fighting off invaders from other dimensions whenever he was away. So he always approved his leave or half-day off with appropriate excuses. Woo Jinchul was a reliable boss as a workplace superior and a colleague whose friendship deepened even more as they spent two lives together.

But... sometimes, knowing too much was also a poison. Woo Jinchul knew from a long time ago that Sung Jinwoo was still fighting off extraterrestrial invaders in this world as well. No, he knew that extraterrestrial invaders were still targeting Earth in this world as well. Even though a global Cataclysm didn't happen like in the past thanks to Sung Jinwoo, He knew all too well that this peace could shatter at any moment and return to how it was back then. That fact caused great anxiety in Woo Jinchul's heart. It was literally PTSD. He was a veteran who vividly remembered the near end of the world, which was much worse and more terrible than any human war. But fortunately, Sung Jinwoo was always by Woo Jinchul's side. Because of that, whenever Woo Jinchul had small talks with him, he would jokingly say what he would do 'if such a world came again.'

– Hunter Sung. If such a world comes again... I'll do this. No, maybe it would be better to do this. Since Chairman Go Gunhee has already passed away, to take his place...

Of course, it was really a joke back then. Everyone had those kinds of 'what if' imaginations when chatting. But Sung Jinwoo already knew... Whenever he made those jokes and imaginations, Woo Jinchul's eyes were more serious than ever. And as proof of that, he had decided to stay a bachelor for the rest of his life. It wasn't that he declared celibate or anything. But no matter how old he got, he didn't seem to have any thoughts about marriage or children. When he asked him about it one day, Woo Jinchul's answer was this:

– Hunter Sung. Do you know? I'm actually an orphan. I don't know who my parents were. I don't have any children either. But living like this... it's been good in many ways. Do you know why?

– Well. Why?

– No weaknesses.

– ...

– No family to become hostages. That's how I was able to become the section chief of the Surveillance Department in the previous era. I wasn't afraid of any repercussions, no matter how much resentment I incurred from villains. – Woo Jinchul brought up old memories with an expression as if he had swallowed bitter medicine.

– ...It happened often. The families of colleagues or subordinates being targeted by villains in retaliation.

The Surveillance Department of the Hunter Association. As he said, the Hunters of the Surveillance Department, who managed bad Hunters, were always exposed to danger.

– What can we do even if we're Awakened? What can we do even if we're A-rank? If they secretly attack our homes and retaliate against our helpless families, that's it.

Woo Jinchul clearly remembered the eyes of the villains caught and arrested by the Surveillance Department Hunters. Those venomous eyes weren't just a simple warning to watch out at night.

Villains.

They were criminals, but before that, they were superhumans with tremendous power. Even ordinary criminals committing retaliatory crimes were terrifying, but if villains with superhuman powers took revenge... It was a true tragedy. Killing an entire family? The villains' revenge didn't stop there. There were cases of Association Hunters who suffered terrible retaliation beyond imagination. If the Association was underestimated by the villains, truly terrible things would happen.

– So we couldn't help but hesitate even if the villains just threatened us with words. Especially those with wives and children. But those threats didn't work on me. Because I didn't have a family to become a weakness.

– ...Is that why you're not starting a family this time as well? Because you're a police officer?

– Haha, I guess so. Somehow, I've become a Violent Crimes detective again. Although the degree might be different, it's still a job where repercussions are scary.

– Don't do that, Chief. This time, date and get married. If you have a family, Chief, I'll protect them without sparing any means, even if I have to use all my soldiers.

– Haha, those words alone are very reassuring. If the Shadow Army personally protects them, I really wouldn't have to worry about any repercussions. But... Do you know? – Woo Jinchul subtly looked around and whispered a hidden truth only Sung Jinwoo could hear,

– Actually, I'm just unpopular. Whenever I go on blind dates, they all say my eyes are too scary, chug their coffee, and quickly pack their things.

4

– ...Chief, when's your birthday? I'll buy you some luxury sunglasses.

– Haha. Thank you.

Countless small talks that started seriously but ended with a rather bitter conclusion. Looking back, Sung Jinwoo and Woo Jinchul's relationship was always like that. Colleagues who happily beat up criminals together and returned to the police station to share instant coffee. Sharing trivial daily lives. Looking back, all those insignificant moments were memories. Especially when fighting non-stop in the vast outer space like this, those memories occasionally cleared his stuffy head.

– Anyway, Chief, I'm serious. If you have a family, I'll definitely protect them, even if I have to use all my troops... So please try to start a family this time. – Woo Jinchul couldn't help but ponder for a long time at Sung Jinwoo's sincere words.

– Alright. But, since I'm receiving so much... Hmm. What can I do for you? – He couldn't help it. There was nothing he, a mere human, could do for Sung Jinwoo, who already had it all.

– Ah! Then how about this? It shouldn't happen, but... just in case, if you happen to be away for a long time, Hunter Sung, I'll protect your family.

– Huh? Are you sure? It's grounds for disciplinary action for a police chief to use his subordinates for such personal purposes.

– Are you really worried about disciplinary action? If such a day comes, the world would already be on the verge of destruction. – Woo Jinchul truly shuddered at those words, having already experienced the world on the verge of destruction once. But as time passed... Now that the world they jokingly talked about had become reality, Sung Jinwoo realized Woo Jinchul's sincerity once again.

"...He seems to be overdoing it."

Sung Jinwoo, who briefly peeked at the situation on Earth through illusion magic, learned about Woo Jinchul's actions over the past two years. And surprisingly, he was actually... keeping all the promises he made. Creating the Association, becoming the Association President, And even creating an Association with far greater power than the one established by Chairman Go Gunhee, succeeding in stabilizing the chaos in South Korea at a rapid pace. But Sung Jinwoo couldn't help but smile bitterly as he imagined how much hardship he must have gone through in the process.

Chairman Go Gunhee was the head of a large corporation, an S-rank Hunter, and even a vessel of a Ruler, possessing tremendous power. On the other hand, Sung Jinwoo could imagine what kind of path Woo Jinchul, who was just a police chief, had walked to fill that role, no, to do even better than that. He had already heard it countless times.

– Just in case... If I become the Association President... If that day comes... No, it shouldn't come, but...

His numerous plans muttered like a lament towards him whenever the Violent Crimes Unit had a dinner party... Of course, every time, Sung Jinwoo knew it wouldn't happen, but he always answered his drunken ramblings seriously.

– It won't work. If you have too many skills, your vessel won't be able to handle it and will break. It's a bit different, but I've seen my father die that way once.

– I know. Even Chairman Go Gunhee was chosen as a Ruler's vessel, but his body was too old to handle that power. Even so... If such a day really comes, I'll... I will do my best. Because I don't want to experience that despair again.

– ... – Sung Jinwoo couldn't say anything as he listened to Woo Jinchul's repeated drunken ramblings.

And he realized once again. Sometimes, knowledge was poison. Forgetting was a blessing given to humans, And remembering the experience of absolute despair and the end of the world... Meant dragging out the terrible trauma that had been deeply buried.

– ...You'll forget if you just sleep well. Take him home.

– [Yes, Master.]

– Hunter Sung...! Don't erase my memories again like last time! It's an order as your superior...!

– ...

Yes. Actually, Sung Jinwoo tried to erase Woo Jinchul's memories several times for his sake. But it was no use. Having already formed a deep connection with Sung Jinwoo, The flashbacks of the previous era were no longer mere fragments of memories. Because the events involving the king who ruled death, the great Shadow Monarch Sung Jinwoo, were engraved deep within his soul, beyond his human body... Sung Jinwoo, feeling concerned as he thought of Woo Jinchul, turned his gaze back to the fierce battlefield and muttered,

"Well, he'll be fine for now. I took some measures just in case."

2

* * *

Flash—!

[Item: 'Javier's Soulstone' is activated.]

"Huh?"

At that moment, Suho's inventory, who was before Woo Jinchul, opened on its own, and one of the items Sung Jinwoo prepared popped out. And it seeped into Woo Jinchul's body, which had cracks forming from the excessive skills acquired.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 304 - Chapter 302

Chapter 304: Chapter 302

Although he was currently on a leave of absence, Suho was an art student. The times when he pondered in front of a canvas with brushes and pencils in hand. The moments when he mixed paints to create colors, sculpted pottery, and contemplated the meaning of his works. All those times occasionally gave him a unique perspective. And in this moment, Suho suddenly recalled the Japanese pottery repair technique he presented in class.

'Kintsugi'

Nothing could be perfect. Breaking, shattering, cracking. That was life, art, and human existence.

– ...Kintsugi means 'golden joinery,' a Japanese craft technique where shattered pottery pieces are joined with lacquer and then gold powder is applied along the cracks to repair them.

– What philosophical meaning does that technique hold? – The professor's voice, echoing in the lecture hall, was vivid.

Suho moved on to the next slide of his presentation.

– The Kintsugi technique contains the meaning of 'embracing the scars and imperfections, not hiding them, and accepting even those as part of beauty,' beyond the simple concept of repairing an object. It gives the lesson that we can embrace the wounds and flaws we experience in life and move forward through them...

– That's correct. You've prepared well for your presentation. – The professor nodded with a faint smile.

– An art that doesn't restore something to its perfect, new state, but rather makes it more beautiful by filling the broken parts with gold. It's just like our lives. – And he continued his explanation.

– A vessel is bound to break someday. We too, in the storms of life, are sometimes hurt, cracked, broken, and even collapse. But is there anything perfect in the world?

And in this moment, it was only natural for Suho to recall that day's memory.

– ...To finally love even that imperfection. To accept the scars accumulated in our souls as their own beauty. And those accumulated scars of life are the true history of our struggles...

'Golden joinery'

It wasn't just a simple repair, but a sublimation through scars...

Flash—!

Just as those words described, Woo Jinchul's entire body was enveloped in a golden barrier before Suho's eyes.

[Such high-level magic...!] The one most surprised by this was the shadow demonic spirit, Harmakan.

Javier's Soulstone. The magic circle of Sung Jinwoo contained within, that mystical golden light, was running through the cracks that were spreading throughout Woo Jinchul's body.

Whoosh—!

It was like the roots of a tree, spreading its branches, Like an intricately crafted spider web, Like the hands of a craftsman repairing a broken ceramic. Sung Jinwoo's barrier began to meticulously stitch together Woo Jinchul's cracked vessel, the history of his struggles, with golden thread.

[Javier's Soulstone begins 'Skill Reconstruction.']

1

[Skills are being reconstructed into a new system.]

Just like a ceramic being reborn by the hands of a craftsman, Woo Jinchul's vessel was slowly changing. Those alterations were truly amazing. The numerous skills that had been excessively injected into him, on the verge of exploding, began to melt and merge into a new form one by one.

'Danger Perception' and 'Poison Resistance' combined within Woo Jinchul and were reborn as, 'Survival Instinct,'

And 'Strength Enhancement' and 'Magic Power Focus' were sublimated into the essential power of 'Strength.'

...The skills that were scattered as dozens of fragments gradually became one, like puzzle pieces fitting together. In a natural form, as if it was meant to be.

[Skill Reconstruction complete.]

[A new skill system has been established.]

[The vessel damaged by skill overload is restored.]

"...It seems like this was Father's intention." Suho's voice quietly echoed in the silence that felt like time had stopped.

Just how far did his father see that day? Not even his main body, but a fragment.

Even with just that small fragment, Sung Suho's father, Sung Jinwoo, had made so many arrangements for those left behind on Earth. Without even using a single ounce of magic power, Using just the soul of a demonic spirit as material.

Whoosh—!

Finally, the golden barrier disappeared, and Woo Jinchul's figure was revealed.

"Are you alright?" Suho asked.

"..."

Woo Jinchul slowly raised his hands and looked at them. White palms without any cracks. Instead, faint golden patterns were engraved deep within his skin, like blood vessels. It was as beautiful as the golden seams of a ceramic that had endured a long time.

"...My body feels light." Woo Jinchul muttered.

The throbbing pain that had been following him since acquiring too many skills had disappeared.

"...It's like I have a new body." Woo Jinchul's words were filled with deep emotion.

The chaotic flow of numerous skills colliding and trying to tear him apart was now naturally connected as one. Like musical instruments that had been playing discordant

notes for a long time finally harmonizing into a beautiful melody. And he could tell without anyone saying anything. That this golden barrier was Sung Jinwoo's consideration for him. He might seem indifferent on the outside, but he knew the kindness within him, having spent so long together. So he dared to guess. Perhaps... Sung Jinwoo already knew, even from that distant outer space.

– Just in case... if you happen to be away for a long time, Hunter Sung...

That he was doing his best to keep the promise they made.

– I'll protect your family, Hunter Sung.

Creating the Association, becoming the Association President... The fundamental motive behind the path he had walked for the past few years.

– Huh? Are you sure? It's grounds for disciplinary action for a police chief to use his subordinates for such personal purposes.

Chuckle. Woo Jinchul smiled as he recalled that day's conversation. ...Looking back, that was it. The reason why he consolidated his power as the Association President in the first place. The reason why he desperately ran through his second life. At the root of it all was a very personal purpose. To protect Sung Jinwoo's family, as promised. To keep that drunken promise, he joined hands with CEO Yoo Jinho among the many others, And deliberately sent Kim Chul, the most trustworthy Hunter of the Association, to Yangpyeong as the branch manager.

[Don't let your guard down. It's just a temporary measure.] Beru's voice suddenly broke through his thoughts and reached Woo Jinchul's ears. He, who had always been by Sung Jinwoo's side, knew the identity of this magic.

[This barrier is a magic circle that the King researched with many demonic spirits a long time ago. It's a countermeasure to forcibly hold together a vessel that's on the verge of breaking. The research originally started because he didn't ever want to feel the helplessness of just watching Sung Il-hwan die again.]

2

But the research that started like that was used in a completely different situation. With Cha Hae-In.

[And when Lady Cha Hae-In was pregnant with the Young Master, as the presence grew stronger in her womb, Lady Cha Hae-In's labor pains also worsened. It even reached the point where her vessel was in danger of breaking.]

2

"...What? Me?" Suho's eyes widened at those words. He learned about his birth's secret in an unexpected situation.

[Yes. Just by carrying the Young Master, an ordinary human, Lady Cha Hae-In's vessel was already exceeding its limits day by day. That's when this magic circle was first used.] The purpose of the barrier was to restore a vessel that had reached its limit.

[The result was a great success.]

It was truly fortunate. The moment the magic circle enveloped Cha Hae-In, the labor pains disappeared, and her vessel was safely restored. That's how Sung Suho was barely born. But the situation was different from back then.

[Back then, the King was right beside her, continuously injecting magic power into that barrier. But now it's different. Without that support, that barrier itself is just a temporary measure. Although the crisis has been overcome for now, if you overdo it, the vessel will start to crack again.] A temporary measure. Although his tone was harsh, Beru was ultimately worried about Woo Jinchul.

[Don't increase your skills anymore. You could really die then.]

"Thank you for the advice, Beru."

[...It's not advice, it's a warning.]

"Thank you for the warning as well."

[...]

Woo Jinchul just smiled, understanding Beru's heart. And he looked at everyone around him, including Suho, and spoke, Pushing up the black sunglasses Sung Jinwoo gave him as a birthday present,

1

"Now that I'm healthy, shall we talk about work?"

Just like that, Suho sat face to face with Woo Jinchul for a long time, sharing the information they knew. And he handed over all the supplies he brought from South Korea. Woo Jinchul and his party, who were procuring supplies locally because they were running low, couldn't help but be surprised when a tremendous amount of provisions suddenly appeared before their eyes. Even Woo Jinchul, who was rarely surprised, was honestly bewildered this time.

This was because the supplies included not only those sent by the Korean government and the Association, but also the military supplies Yoo Jinho ripped out of the large

guilds' warehouses. Of course, the most useful weapons were already in the hands of Suho's shadow soldiers, but even the lower quality equipment was precious to Woo Jinchul and his party. Hunters' weapons were ultimately consumables. No matter how strong the sword or shield, if they repeatedly cut and broke the tough hides and hard bones of magical beasts, they would eventually be damaged and worn out. And there were no decent blacksmiths or forges in the apocalyptic North Korea. In the end, they had no choice but to wrestle with the magical beasts with their fists and feet.

"Thank you very much. Please tell CEO Yoo Jinho that I'll repay him greatly later."

"Tell him yourself."

"...What?"

Flash—!

Woo Jinchul couldn't help but be surprised once again. Watching the Gate created above Suho's shadow, And seeing South Korea beyond it.

"Let's all take a break."

"...?!"

Just like that, Suho sent the surprised Woo Jinchul and his party to Yangpyeong Hospital for treatment. If someone in South Korea saw that, there would have been a huge commotion, but thankfully, they all returned to North Korea early the next day without any fuss.

And during that one night, Suho had already cut down all the nearby Elvenwoods and sent them to the Sea of The Afterlife. Woo Jinchul, seeing that, nodded and decided on their schedule,

"Now that we've rested well, we'll take care of the remaining Elvenwoods in North Korea. Hunter Sung Suho, you should head straight to Russia. There are many more trees there..." And he handed Hasul over to Suho and said,

"Take Hasul with you. She'll definitely be helpful. Especially that scythe made of a starpiece... A doctor from Russia gave it to her, and it will be helpful to meet him."

"Doctor? A scientist?" Suho tilted his head in confusion. But Woo Jinchul didn't know his identity in detail either.

"We don't know exactly who he is. He introduced himself, but we weren't in a situation to tell if he was telling the truth. It was before we even knew about the Cult of the Outer Gods."

"I understand. I'll have to go see him."

And that moment came sooner than expected...

* * *

The moment Suho crossed the Russian border,

Rustle...

Snow suddenly began to fall from the sky. But it wasn't snowing. It was a kind of... cell falling.

[My liege, be on guard!] With Beru's warning, those small cells gathered one by one and formed the shape of a woman before Suho and Hasul.

White skin. Pink hair. Her beauty was so faultless that it was almost eerie. The woman glanced at the scythe of harvest Hasul was holding and then greeted Suho in a cold but polite tone,

"I am the 47th doll of the Doctor. It's an honor to meet you, Mr. Sung Suho."

Her attitude was very polite, as if she had been waiting for this meeting for a long time.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 305 - Chapter 303

Chapter 305: Chapter 303

'Doctor'

The mysterious being that Woo Jinchul mentioned approached Suho sooner than expected. As if he had been waiting for him to arrive in Russia.

"...You said you're the 47th doll?" As Suho's eyes narrowed, the pink-haired woman politely bowed and replied,

"Yes. I am the ultimate toy that the Doctor perfected after 46 experiments. The Doctor sent me as a gift to express his goodwill towards you Mr. Sung Suho."

"Gift?" What did that mean?

Sensing Suho's rising suspicion, the woman tore off her own arm without a word.

Crack.

"...?!"

Whoosh—

Before he could even be surprised by the sudden action, the woman's arm regenerated in an instant, pink cells wriggling. The woman, who showed that shocking performance with an indifferent expression, introduced herself once again,

"As you can see, I'm the best toy and slave that can be repaired no matter how much I'm broken. It's a message from the Doctor, asking you to play with me to your heart's content, Mr. Sung Suho. Whether for stress relief or combat, you can use me for any purpose."

8

"..."

As Suho didn't answer, the woman tilted her head.

"Do you not like me? I was designed to have a fairly attractive appearance by human standards, but if there's anything you don't like, I can improve it."

5

"..."

Suho frowned instead of answering, at her tone that sounded like someone explaining the functions of an electronic product.

Wasn't this too suspicious? Not only did a guy he didn't even know suddenly offer him a gift, But that gift was the best toy-slave? How many people would be genuinely grateful to receive such a present out of the blue? Suho felt nothing but disgust and discomfort at the sight of the artificial human-like being. He was truly curious. Did that guy called 'Doctor' really think this would convey his goodwill? Didn't he know that this would only make him more wary?

'...Or is there some other purpose despite that?' Besides, Suho was more surprised by the woman's action of tearing off her arm without hesitation than by the fact that it reattached itself. That inhumanity of treating herself like a toy, wasn't it bizarre?

[My liege.] Beru was also extremely wary. He glared at the woman and muttered beside Suho,

[The energy of Itarim is densely concentrated. Like...] Beru's gaze shifted to the scythe of harvest in Hasul's hand.

[...That scythe made of a starpiece.]

The scythe of harvest.

A weapon made by melting down starpieces. Woo Jinchul said he received that scythe from the Doctor. And now, he could feel almost the same energy from the unknown 'test subject' made of condensed pink powder before his eyes. The meaning was clear.

"You said you're my gift?"

"Yes. Please accept me."

"Before I decide whether to accept or not, I need to know who sent this gift." Suho asked the woman with a stern expression,

"Is the 'Doctor' who created you an apostle of Itarim?"

"Yes." An immediate answer. Suho was speechless at the sight of the woman nodding obediently. He couldn't believe it was true.

"Why would an apostle of Itarim show me such favor?"

"The Doctor wants you to know that he has a different objective than other apostles."

"A different objective?"

[Kieek! My liege, don't be fooled by such lies!]

"Of course, it's natural for you not to believe it. That's why the Doctor offered me as a gift first. It's an expression of pure goodwill, that he has no intention of being hostile towards you, Mr. Sung Suho."

[Kieeeeeek?!] The woman's shameless reply truly dumbfounded Beru.

1

From his perspective, who had been fighting Itarim for a long time, he knew how absurd those words were. But Suho decided to try and get more information since the opponent initiated the conversation.

"Then what's the Doctor's objective? As far as I know, the apostles of Itarim came to invade Earth."

"Of course, the Doctor's purpose was the same as other apostles at first. But that was just him obeying the wish of Itarim, who created him, not his own will."

He noticed something strange. He couldn't feel any respect or faith towards the outer gods in the woman's calm tone as she mentioned Itarim. It was as if an atheist was talking about religion. On the other hand, the woman showed absolute respect only when she talked about the 'Doctor.' In a way, it was only natural. If the Doctor's creator was Itarim, the woman's creator was the Doctor.

"The Doctor has always been full of curiosity. So not long after arriving on this planet, while observing the natives, he began research instead of invasion." Pure curiosity? If he were to believe the suspicious woman's words, it meant this:

"He came to invade at first, but he's just watching because there are many interesting things here?"

"It's more accurate to say research and analysis than watching, but it's similar in the end."

"So? Why does the Doctor want to get in my good graces? Does he want a native to guide him around Earth?"

"No. Rather, hmm..." The woman chose her words carefully. And she continued her explanation, choosing the most polite expressions,

"The Doctor is very interested in this planet called Earth. Therefore, he no longer wants to be hostile with the Shadow Monarch, and he wishes to have a cooperative relationship with you, Mr. Sung Suho, the son of the Shadow Monarch, if possible."

"Cooperation?"

[Kieek?] From Beru's perspective, he was seriously contemplating whether Suho should continue to listen to these ridiculous words. And as if knowing his thoughts,

"Especially..." The woman recalled the Doctor's words.

– Isn't it interesting?

– Originally, all creations are made to carry out the maker's will, but the creations of this universe killed their creator of their own volition.

– Would you like to try killing me too? I am your Creator.

– Why can't you...? You useless things. Don't you have free will?

– You can't do it either? Then I will try this first.

"...Recently, the Doctor has been conducting research to defy the creator's orders with his own will."

Could this also be called research? Free will... Even the woman didn't know what the Doctor truly wanted or what he was trying to do. But it didn't matter what he wanted. She wasn't curious. She simply followed the orders of the Doctor, who created her.

"And there's a decisive reason why the Doctor gave up on the invasion."

[Kieek?] Beru tilted his head as the woman's gaze suddenly turned to him. And Beru's expression hardened at the words that followed.

Hardened, very, very much.

1

"After learning that you, Marshal Beru, The Butcher of Armies, have personally descended upon this planet, the Doctor's mind was made up."

3

[Hmm.]

"I heard from the Doctor that if you wanted to, Marshal Beru, you could slaughter all the apostles who arrived on this planet in an instant."

1

[Hmm.]

Beru just scoffed with an arrogant and fearsome expression, his arms crossed, at the continuous remarks. The words he had dismissed as nonsense were finally starting to make sense.

"But the reason why you're just calmly watching the situation unfold must be to train the Shadow Monarch's son and deploy him as a new force in the war."

2

[Not bad. Quite insightful for an apostle of Itarim.]

...Nod

Could he do anything else? All Suho could do here was nod with a serious expression. Well, although there was a slight misunderstanding, it wasn't entirely wrong. Regardless of the minor details, it was true that she made a prediction quite close to the truth.

"In that sense, the Doctor requests cooperation for a mutually beneficial cause."

"Cooperation? What does he want?"

"The Doctor wants to thoroughly research and analyze this planet. Naturally, that requires considerable time. But the problem is that other apostles are still damaging this world while the Doctor is researching it."

"Wait. Don't tell me..."

"Yes, that's correct." As Suho's eyes widened, realizing the point of her words, the woman nodded.

"The Doctor wants all the other apostles who interfere with his research to disappear. By your hand, Mr. Sung Suho."

"...!"

[...]

Even Beru couldn't help but be surprised this time. Of course, he knew. The Itarim had temporarily allied with each other against the common enemy, Sung Jinwoo, but in the end, they were in a relationship of monitoring and competing with each other. The winner takes all. They were invaders who crossed the distant dimensional wall to monopolize the vast amount of masterless mana remaining in this universe.

Then what about the apostles under them? Those who served the same god would cooperate, although their methods might be different. But apostles who served completely different gods could openly impede each other like this, or engage in a secret power struggle. To the point of directly requesting murder.

"So he needs a proxy to fight for him. While he hides in a safe place himself."

[He seems like a very wicked and cowardly bastard.] Beru pressured the woman with a displeased expression.

[If he's going to make such a request, he should come and prostrate himself, that's the etiquette on this planet.]

"Please understand. The Doctor hates leaving his lab."

[He's a coward.]

1

"...Rather, he believes it's more efficient to leave the task of gathering information outside to us and focus on his research."

"So he's a coward and a shut-in."

1

"..."

Beru and Suho, who were mocking him in turn, were quite the comedic duo. As a result, the woman, who had maintained an expressionless face, finally showed some emotion. Ignoring her slightly twisted mouth, Suho pointed at Hasul's scythe and asked,

"Then I'll ask while we're at it. Did your Doctor make this scythe too?"

"...Yes. Although it's a failed product, it was given to humans to keep the Apostle of Paradise in check."

"And the Apostle of Paradise just watched?"

"Yes. Apart from the power struggle between apostles, since they were on the same side with a common enemy on the surface, there was no justification for other apostles to stop the act of handing over Starpieces to humans or contaminating them."

"...Am I contaminated?" Hasul looked at the scythe of harvest in her hand with a disgusted expression.

But the fact that she didn't let go of the handle despite that was strange. And the woman, test subject No. 47, who heard Hasul's words, stared into her eyes and spoke,

"That's not contamination, it's called 'evolution,' test subject No. 13."

Hasul's expression froze at those strange words.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 306 - Chapter 304

Chapter 306: Chapter 304

"I-I'm... a test subject?"

The scythe in Hasul's hand trembled slightly. She realized something strange. The woman who introduced herself as the 47th doll was clearly Caucasian, and it was difficult to find any resemblance to Hasul, who had a typical Asian appearance. But there was a strange similarity in their indifferent gaze, monotonous tone, and atmosphere, something she couldn't quite put her finger on. And Hasul vaguely felt it. The emotion that followed was doubt.

'Since when?'

Since when did she have this kind of personality? No, what kind of person was she originally? Everything was confusing. But unlike Hasul, who was confused, Suho was calm.

"Just what kind of misunderstanding is this?" Suho suddenly reached out towards Hasul.

Whoosh—

"...Ah?"

The Ruler's Authority.

The scythe of harvest in Hasul's hand automatically floated up and flew towards Suho's hand. Hasul hurriedly reached out, but her hand that was holding the scythe was weak, surprised by the word 'test subject.'

Whoosh— Grab

Suho, who snatched the scythe of harvest with one hand, spun it and gauged its energy.

[My liege, it's an unclean item. I'll take it.] Beru, worried about any potential contamination, quickly took the scythe of harvest from Suho's hand.

Beru had been feeling an unknown discomfort since he first saw this weapon in Hasul's hand. The fact that the scythe of harvest was made of a Starpiece wasn't enough to explain this strange feeling. Beru glared at the scythe of harvest and the woman with narrowed eyes.

[I never imagined it would be something like this.]

"I agree."

Suho also frowned and glared at the woman.

"That test subject No. 13, you're talking about this scythe, right?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"...!"

Hasul's eyes widened as the woman nodded obediently. Beru's entire body blazed with killing intent, and he puffed up one arm as if to grab the woman's head.

[How dare you try to insult us.]

"I apologize. I had no such intention. I was just faithfully answering the question." The woman bowed her head with an elegant posture despite Beru's killing intent. And she pointed at the scythe of harvest that Beru was holding and explained again,

"That scythe, test subject No. 13, is one of the countless masterpieces the Doctor created, a weapon for extracting contamination."

[Extraction? Not contamination?]

"Yes. Test subject No. 13 was created to secretly steal the energy of the 'fruit' that the Apostle of Paradise is collecting. So he handed it over to a suitable person among the humans wandering in his territory."

"Stealing the power of the fruit?" Suho's eyes sparkled.

The woman's words contained surprisingly important information. It meant that the apostles of Itarim weren't just checking each other, but also stealing each other's power.

"Yes. The person herself would have vaguely noticed, wouldn't she?" The woman glanced at Hasul's entire body and asked,

"Didn't you find it strange? You've eaten the fruit of Elvenwood countless times, but unlike other villains, you're still not contaminated."

"...Ah." Hasul's mouth opened slightly.

Come to think of it, why didn't she realize it until now? Recently, when the harsh winter struck the villains' city, When Alfheim went on a rampage, All the villains living there had their bodies mutated, covered in hard bark as the power of the fruit accumulated in their bodies went out of control. In other words, they were 'contaminated.'

At this point, Suho also realized something. The information window that popped up when he first picked up the fruit clearly said it was a 'contaminated' fruit. But looking back, Hasul was the villain who ate the most fruits. A Reaper, no less. In North Korea, where there were no proper cures or Healers, the only way to heal injuries and recover

health was to eat the fruit. So Hasul must have consumed the fruit to survive. Even if she was an S-rank Awakened, dangerous moments would always happen as long as she lived in a land swarming with villains. But Hasul, and only Hasul, was still fine. Even though she ate so many fruits, Her skin didn't turn into bark or harden like the other villains.

"Don't tell me you're only realizing it now? Well, it's natural not to know. The Doctor's purpose was to extract the power of the fruit as secretly as possible, to the point where even the Apostle of Paradise wouldn't notice." He could feel great pride in the 'Doctor' from the woman's words. In short, it meant this:

The owner of the scythe of harvest won't be contaminated no matter how many fruits of Elvenwood they eat. Because the scythe absorbs the power of the fruit that accumulates in the body instead. But they still experience the temporary regeneration effect, so no one notices.

"So this scythe is like a water purifier filter. Only filtering out the impurities?"

"...The example is a bit strange, but the principle is similar. So could you please let go of my head? It's a bit scary." Beru's large, black hand was gripping the woman's head.

With enough force to crush that small skull if he wanted to. But contrary to her words, the woman didn't seem scared at all. For test subject No. 47, who called herself a toy, her own safety didn't matter. The woman continued calmly,

"Besides, if it weren't for that scythe, that girl would have been turned into the Apostle of Paradise's puppet long ago due to the accumulated contamination."

"The Apostle of Paradise is dead. Then what about now? Is she your puppet instead of his?"

"No way. The function of extracting contamination and the function of contaminating conflict with each other. If those two conditions were applied to one test subject simultaneously, the Apostle of Paradise would have noticed. The Doctor didn't want conflict with the Apostle of Paradise; he just wanted to extract his power for research purposes. Of course..." The woman hesitated and continued,

"Since the human race is very easily influenced... it seems like she was slightly affected, but it doesn't seem to be a big problem."

"Easily influenced race?"

"Yes. A race without a distinct personality... That's what the Doctor said."

"Are there any side effects?"

"If I had to pick one... Perhaps her personality and aura became a bit similar to mine. There are no other side effects since test subject No. 13 doesn't have any other function besides extracting the energy of the fruit."

"Does the extracted energy go to the Doctor?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"That's good." Suho grinned, revealing his teeth.

"Then how about this?" A delicious-looking 'fruit' suddenly appeared in Suho's hand. And he asked the woman again,

"If Hasul eats this fruit now, will that energy also flow to the Doctor?"

"...Yes." A faint anxiety sprouted in the woman's eyes, which had been expressionless, at Suho's meaningful smile.

"Beru."

[Yes, my liege.]

"Eat this."

"...?!"

The woman's eyes widened for the first time at Suho's words. Beru grinned at her blatant reaction. And after receiving the fruit from Suho, he opened his wicked mouth wide.

"W-wait..."

Crunch!

Before the woman could stop him, Beru unhesitatingly chewed and swallowed the fruit. Still holding the scythe of harvest in his other hand.

Munch. Munch.

The situation changed completely the moment Beru ate the fruit instead of Hasul. He couldn't have known before, But for Beru, who had directly heard the principle of the scythe of harvest from the woman, it wasn't difficult to track the otherworldly energy from the fruit he ate flowing into the scythe. And also the direction where that extracted energy was headed after leaving the scythe.

[I found it.]

"...!"

Grin—

"W-wait..." She felt a chill as Suho and Beru exchanged smiles. Before the flustered woman could finish her sentence, Suho and Beru simultaneously turned their heads and asked,

"Is it that way?"

[Judging from your expression, it seems like we're right.]

"We have a lot of fruits, so let's follow it while eating."

[Yes.]

Swish—

"...W-wait!"

It was too late to stop them. Before the woman, who came to her senses a beat late, could stop them, they were already running far away. Tracking the flow of energy towards the Doctor.

"Eek!"

Thud—!

Test subject No. 47, showing a clearer emotion than ever, began to chase after them desperately.

* * *

This was bad. The plan had gone completely awry. Test subject No. 47 chased after Suho and his party and desperately tried to persuade them,

"Please stop now!"

"Hey. He's a kind soul who even gave us a gift, we should at least thank him in person."

"The Doctor hates interacting with others!"

"But it's rude to just ignore him. Who said we're going to fight? Let's just have a conversation." Suho wasn't the type to be persuaded.

"Please, I beg you! You can talk to him through me...!"

"Through you?" Suho's gaze, who was running in a straight line with Beru, finally turned to test subject No. 47.

"Are you saying your master is watching us through you?"

"Th-that's... It's not surveillance, but a natural phenomenon between a creator and a creation!"

"So you were sent to me for surveillance purposes."

[He's a shady bastard. Now we definitely have to find him]

"...!"

Things had gone wrong. From the moment the initial plan went awry, there was nothing No. 47 could do to stop Suho.

– Even if he's the Shadow Monarch's son, he's still just a human.

– A young human male wouldn't refuse a beautiful female.

– 47, I choose you. You will be Sung Suho's from now on.

The Doctor's orders echoed in No. 47's mind as she chased after Suho, who was running at an incredible speed. And eventually, Somewhere in the freezing snowfields of Russia,

Bang—!

One of the walls of the 'Apostle of Evolution's' lab, secretly hidden deep within the snowfield, was shattered, and unexpected intruders barged in.

"Come out, you bastard." And...

Crunch!

Beru, holding the scythe of harvest in one hand and chewing on a delicious fruit with the other, roared like the Grim Reaper himself,

[KIEEEEEEEEEEEK!]

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 307 - Chapter 305

Chapter 307: Chapter 305

The building shook as if it was going to collapse at the thunderous roar of Beru.

Soon answers came from all directions.

[External intrusion detected.]

[Activating defense system.]

BZZZZZT—

Suho's head quickly turned to the side. And then a laser beam that flew from the side narrowly missed him. The failed attack beam pierced the wall behind him.

BOOM—!

He chuckled at the obviously fatal attack power. "So the best defense is offense?"

Before Suho could even finish his words, countless laser beams began to fly towards him from all directions.

2

BZZZZZT—

2

BZZZZZT—

BOOM—!

Suho continued forward, dodging all the laser beams that formed a net-like pattern.

[My liege! There are tiny dimensional gaps all over the place!]

As Beru said, beyond the dimension, Those laser beams were being fired through small dimensional cracks, barely big enough for a finger to fit through. In other words, there was no way to block the laser beams at their source. Just then, he heard Test Subject No. 47's urgent voice,

"Mr. Sung Suho... please, I beg you. It's too dangerous to go any further."

"Who's in danger? Me? Or the Doctor?"

"Me." Suho, who was smirking, turned around at those words and couldn't help but burst into laughter.

"...Hmm?"

Unlike Suho, who was dodging each laser beam, No. 47's body was being repeatedly cut and reattached behind him. As if she had no intention of dodging the laser beams, her tattered appearance, with holes all over her, was absurd.

"Your regenerative abilities are amazing. So the guy who created someone like you is hiding here?" Suho wanted to meet the Doctor even more.

But No. 47's warning was sincere. The purpose of these laser beams wasn't to eliminate the intruder in the first place.

Rumble—!

"Hmm?"

The ceiling suddenly began to collapse. It was a natural consequence. The laser beams Suho dodged, pierced and cut through all the walls and pillars supporting the building.

[It seems like he made the entire building collapse if the intruder wasn't stopped.]

"Amazing. Did he prepare for this?"

He was a brutal but smart guy. The idea of burying his entire lab if the enemy's intrusion couldn't be prevented was interesting. But Suho had no intention of backing down. Rather, he calmly observed the surroundings as he deflected the falling debris with his fists.

"Then what did he prepare for next?" From experience, smart guys always prepared for the next thing. So wouldn't he have prepared for what would happen after the lab collapsed?

"Found it." Suho's eyes sparkled. Although the laser beams seemed to be flying at random angles at first glance, there was something unique if you looked closely. The floor.

"What's the reason for cutting through all the walls and pillars, but never touching the floor?" Suho raised his fist towards the floor, which was surprisingly well-preserved unlike the collapsing ceiling and walls.

[Using Skill: 'Iron Body Technique']

BOOM—!

Suho's fist, enveloped in terrific energy, struck down vertically. And with that momentum, it pierced through the lab floor.

Crash—!

[Warning! Intruder alert in the lab!]

[Warning! Intruder alert in the lab!]

An alarm, seemingly more urgent than before, rang out from all directions.

"Earlier, it just said it detected an intrusion, but now it says there's an intruder in the 'lab.' Then, as expected..." Suho, who came down through the floor, looked around and soon found a classy staircase leading underground.

"Just as I expected."

It seemed like the 'real lab' was located deeper underground. Suho, slowly approaching the stairs, suddenly tilted his head. No matter how much he focused, he couldn't see beyond the stairs. It was like the entrance to an abyss.

"A Gate?" Suho grasped the structure at a glance.

"There's a Gate at the bottom of the stairs. Or is it the other way around? Was the Gate there first, and the stairs built on top of it?" He looked at No. 47 for an answer, but she shook her head.

"I don't know because I wasn't born long ago. The lab has always been like this since I can remember."

"That must be one of the reasons why he sent you as a gift." If she didn't know anything, there was no way to extract information from her.

Anyway, what was certain was that the scale of the lab hidden under the snowfield was much larger than expected. If the Apostle of Paradise chose to expand his territory by planting trees that soared into the sky, the Apostle of Evolution was the opposite. To secure his safety and focus on research, it seemed like he built his base deep underground.

Beru asked, [Shall we enter right away? It could be a trap.]

Although they arrived quickly before he could do anything, they didn't know what awaited them when dealing with someone smart. But what could they do?

"Let him do the thinking, and let us keep things simple." In the end, to meet the Doctor, the only option was to enter his territory.

"Like a Hunter." Suho's eyes gleamed meaningfully as he dodged the laser beams still targeting him.

"If there's a Gate, we just raid it."

Whoosh—!

Suho's foot stepped onto the stairs without hesitation. At that moment, the laser beams that were pouring down from all directions stopped as if by magic, And the scenery beyond the Gate unfolded before Suho's eyes.

[Activating Labyrinth System.]

"Seriously, what a pain."

What lay before his eyes was literally a labyrinth. Countless walls and mazes blocking his vision. And numerous traps hidden along the complicated corridors blocked Suho's path.

Whirr—

Starting with automatically moving saw blades,

Iron spikes shooting up from the floor,

Acid rain pouring from the ceiling,

Deadly traps were activated one after another, aiming for Suho's life.

"Oh dear." Suho just sighed.

"This isn't a playhouse, what the hell was he doing, hiding in here?" The laser beams from before were much more threatening.

"Arise."

At Suho's command, his shadow spread along the corridors and walls of the labyrinth. And countless shadow soldiers rose from within, accompanied by black steam.

"Break through."

Whoosh—!

That was all it took. The shadow soldiers destroyed all the traps hidden in the labyrinth and cleared Suho's path.

"W-wait!"

No. 47 hurriedly blocked Suho's path.

"Besides the defense system, there are numerous test subjects in the Doctor's lab! If you do this, the great achievements he created will be damaged..."

Grab—!

[You're in the way.]

Beru's black hand lifted No. 47's head. And he glared at the woman, hanging from his hand, and gritted his teeth.

[Guide us if you don't like this.]

"A-alright..."

[Too late.]

"...?!"

Crash—!

[We already broke through.] As Beru said, Suho's path was already clear.

Seeing the walls and traps turned into a desolate wasteland, No. 47 let out a small sigh. And at the end of that path, there was someone waiting for Suho with a troubled expression. A boy. A young child who looked to be less than ten years old sat on a chair, sighed at the sight of Suho, and spoke,

2

"...I was planning to meet you someday, but you're much earlier than I expected, so I'm a bit flustered."

"Are you the Doctor?"

"Yes. For now, I'm using that title. You can also call me the Apostle of Evolution." Surprisingly, the Apostle of Evolution didn't seem disappointed at all that his hideout was destroyed.

Creak.

As the doctor got off the chair, his small figure became even more noticeable.

"It wasn't planned, but since you're here, would you like to see my lab?" He moved his short legs and walked towards his lab, which Suho hadn't destroyed yet.

[Master, shall we kill him?]

[First, I'll use my poison...]

The shadow soldiers by Suho's side glared at the Apostle of Evolution's back, waiting for the order to fall. But Suho stopped them for a moment. Besides, the doctor didn't seem to care whether they attacked him or not.

"I'm a bit embarrassed to show you this so suddenly. These are all my failed creations."

If the path Suho passed through was a labyrinth full of traps, the place he was shown now was a space with the atmosphere of a scientist's lab. Countless glass tubes and fish tanks. Pink cells wriggling inside them. And...

"Weapons?"

There were even various types of weapons floating, half-finished, emitting the same energy as Hasul's scythe of harvest.

"Ah, yes. Those are all unfinished. I started making humanoid weapons from No. 41. And No. 47 I gave you is among them..."

"Wait." Suho interrupted him and cut to the chase.

"Are you saying there are 39 more weapons like the scythe of harvest? Where are they?"

Suho's gaze quickly scanned the surroundings. He couldn't see any properly completed weapons here. The Apostle of Evolution replied awkwardly to Suho's question,

"Strictly speaking, they're all failed products, so it's embarrassing to even call them weapons. But it was a shame to just dispose of them, so I gave them as gifts to those I met along the way."

"Gifts?"

"Yes. It hurts my pride to trade with failed products, so I just gave them away."

Gave them away. Suho recalled what Woo Jinchul told him. He also said that he received the scythe of harvest from the 'Doctor' he met by chance. Just like that, without expecting anything in return.

'...But there's no way there was no real purpose.' To gauge his intentions, Suho pointed at No. 47 and asked,

"Then is this woman also a failed product?"

"Unfortunately, yes, she is. But she's a useful result, so it's a bit much to give her to just anyone."

"So you sent her to me?"

"Yes. It's literally a gift with pure intentions. Just so you know that I have no intention of being hostile towards the Shadow Monarch's son..."

"Then I'll ask one more thing." Suho ignored his useless words and got to the point.

"Then who did you give the rest of the weapons besides the scythe of harvest to?"

"..."

* * *

Meanwhile...

Woo Jinchul and his party, who parted with Suho, split into two groups.

Choi Jong-In and Woo Jinchul.

"You must not burn the tree trunks."

"I'll keep that in mind." With that answer, Choi Jong-In went around North Korea to deal with the remaining Elvenwood.

FWOOSH—!

His fire skill was perfect against tree-type magical beasts. Of course, it couldn't compare to Sung Suho's flames of destruction, but it was enough against Elvenwood, which was already in chaos due to the Apostle of Paradise's death.

"Then I should also... do what I can."

The place Woo Jinchul visited was the city of villains.

'Alfheim'

The Apostle of Paradise's favorite Elvenwood. And at the same time, the last hideout of the villains who ran away from Woo Jinchul. Arriving there...

"This is hell itself." Woo Jinchul muttered with a hollow laugh.

He was told that winter had come to this land, but this was too much. As in all the places Sung Suho passed through, this land was also a mixture of hellish heat and

harsh winter. In short, it was a complete mess. And in the middle of that, Where Alfheim should have been at the center of the city, a giant ice pillar soared high, boasting its presence.

"We'll guard this place from now on."

"Yes. I'll set up camp nearby."

Woo Jinchul left other miscellaneous tasks to Choi Jong-In, and he decided to protect what Sung Suho considered most important. But he wasn't planning to just stand here and do nothing. Although the Apostle of Paradise was dead, his traces would still be buried under this snow-covered field.

"Let's search everywhere. For traces of the 'bank'."

Woo Jinchul took off his black sunglasses, and his eyes gleamed like a hawk's.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 308 - Chapter 306

Chapter 308: Chapter 306

4

The area was blanketed in snow. stretching far beyond the horizon, but with so many Hunters gathered here, it wasn't a problem. They could just melt it. Even the Hunters following them, let alone Choi Jong-In, had fire skills. Rather, it was better if Choi Jong-In didn't step forward. If he used his firepower, he might not only melt the snow but also burn away any meaningful traces buried beneath.

Flare—! Flare Flare—!

The Association Hunters began to melt the snow and meticulously investigate the ground, centered around Woo Jinchul. And the rest of them without fire skills started to build a base camp in a suitable location. Since they didn't know how long they would have to stay here, they decided to build a proper base instead of just setting up simple tents. Among that, they put the most effort into building a defensive formation around the ice pillar standing tall in the center.

"...This is a sight I never thought I'd see." Woo Jinchul muttered with a strange expression as he looked at the thoroughly protected ice pillar.

Sirka.

That ice pillar, where the ice elf who was Sung Suho's companion was trapped, was in an egg-like state, and they didn't know when it would hatch. And he also said that when that egg hatched, it would be the moment when Sirka inherited the power of the Monarch of Frost and was reborn.

"...To think that I would protect the descendant of the Monarch of Frost."

The Monarch of Frost. To personally protect the descendant of the one who killed Chairman Go Gunhee. Even if the enemy of an enemy was a friend, he couldn't help but feel mixed emotions when faced with this situation.

"Did I live too long..." Woo Jinchul calmed his mind with a bewildered expression.

1

'No, Time went backwards without me.' First of all, after the world was completely reset, Chairman Go Gunhee passed away after enjoying a long and healthy life. With the respect and condolences of countless people. He wondered if it was even meaningful to be angry at a young descendant over something that had become a non-existent event in this world.

'A temporary alliance to face a greater enemy. That's all it is for now.' That was Woo Jinchul's stance towards Sirka. And there was also the matter of power. Although he didn't fully understand how powerful the Monarchs were, he knew that they were at least beyond human level. When Sirka successfully became a Monarch, she would be the one who could help Sung Jinwoo and Sung Suho the most. And at the same time, he knew all too well how powerless humans were in this war. A bitter expression briefly crossed Woo Jinchul's face as he thought that.

'Humans have no role in this war anyway. We're just hostages holding back Hunter Sung Suho.' It was an extremely cold-hearted assessment. But what could he do? It was an obvious fact, and he had already experienced it once. Woo Jinchul was deeply aware of how powerless the human race was at the time of the apocalypse.

'So even if we just don't cause unnecessary trouble and panic among ourselves, that's good enough.' Well, in war terms, it would be like civil defense. Woo Jinchul chuckled as he thought that.

'But it's still fortunate. It seems like his son took on the role of supporting him from behind.' Sung Suho. Sung Jinwoo's only son. After seeing his power with his own eyes, Woo Jinchul felt truly relieved for the first time in ages. The heavy burden that had been

weighing on his shoulders disappeared like melting snow. Especially that night, when he passed through the Gate Suho opened and fell asleep on the soft bed in Ahjin Hospital with an IV drip... He was finally able to have a good night's sleep. The insomnia that had been plaguing him, The dark circles under his eyes hidden by sunglasses, all disappeared overnight.

That was why he couldn't help but let out a silly laugh. And he suddenly muttered in a casual tone,

"Now that the real war has begun, I can withdraw from this Association President post that doesn't suit me."

"...?!"

"...What?!"

"Wh-what do you mean?!"

All the Hunters nearby, who were clearing snow, were shocked and doubted their ears. What did they just hear? Woo Jinchul was quitting as Association President? Why all of a sudden? Considering the tremendous presence and influence of Association President Woo Jinchul in Korea, they couldn't think of anyone who could replace him. But Woo Jinchul was serious.

"Preparing for war. That was always my role and goal."

He smiled at the bewildered Hunters with a truly relieved expression. His black sunglasses reflected the dazzling snowfield.

"And no matter how much I think about it, being the section chief of the Surveillance Department suits me best."

"...?"

The Hunters couldn't hide their confusion.

'The Surveillance Department all of a sudden?'

'What is the Association President talking about?'

'The Surveillance Department...'

It was the section that suppressed crimes committed by Hunters and subdued criminals. In other words, it was optimized for battles against humans rather than dungeon raids. Armed with skills specialized for dealing with fellow people rather than magical beasts,

that was the Surveillance Department. And once, In the vanished history that no one remembered now,

'Section Chief Woo Jinchul' was the elite agent with the highest combat power against humans in that Surveillance Department...

"In short, this is what it means."

Crack. Crack.

Woo Jinchul relaxed his shoulders, which felt much lighter, and subtly held his weapon.

"I want to take off this cumbersome hat and return as a pure Hunter."

"...!"

It was at that moment. The voices of hunters who were excavating traces of the 'bank' buried in the snow could be heard simultaneously.

"Found it!"

"We found a suspicious stone tablet!"

"I can feel the magic power... No, it's getting stronger!"

Whoosh—

Even before they could finish their words, the wave of that magic power reached all the Hunters in the area. And Woo Jinchul, who was the first to detect that dangerous sensation, glared at that spot and took his stance.

"They're coming. Everyone, prepare for battle."

Flash—!

The suspicious stone tablet. As the snow melted, the stone tablet that was frozen underneath emitted light. And then, 'humans' poured out from the unknown Gate created above it.

"What the, why is this place like this?"

"We barely escaped from Liu Zhigang..."

Chinese.

The Chinese, emitting an obviously extraordinary aura, grumbled as they looked around the snow-covered field. Covered in blood from head to toe, they were clearly villains. They spotted the Korean Association Hunters surrounding them and grinned, revealing their teeth.

"Huh? Who are these guys?"

"Do they want to fight us?"

This situation was definitely unexpected even for the Chinese villains. But, they didn't flinch and just smirked. Even now, they, still coming out of the Gate easily numbered in the hundreds. On the other hand, there were only a few dozen Koreans. A clear numerical superiority. And the Korean side was currently without S-rank Choi Jong-In. To make matters worse, there were even a few A-ranks mixed among the Chinese villains. In that tense situation, Woo Jinchul spoke to them in fluent Mandarin,

"You've crossed the border."

"What, you little...!"

"So what?"

There was no point in responding to their glares. Woo Jinchul had already confirmed it. The strange weapons in their hands. Their design resembled the scythe of harvest...

"Otherworldly weapons. That's what I'm calling them for now."

"...What?"

Woo Jinchul decided to call the weapons made by the 'Doctor' otherworldly weapons. And based on Hasul's experience using it, he knew how powerful those creations were. But so what...?

"Since villains from another country carrying otherworldly weapons have crossed the border, I'll have to take action."

Whoosh—!

Despite the overwhelming disadvantage, Woo Jinchul took the lead and attacked them.

"A-Association President!"

His agility surprised even the Association Hunters who were on standby. At the same time, the Chinese villains laughed at him and unleashed a thick killing intent.

"You idiot!"

"You're walking into your own grave!"

Yes.

At least it must have seemed that way. To their eyes. But again, Woo Jinchul was a former section chief of the Surveillance Department. As an elite agent specializing in battles against humans, his main skills were also focused on that. Especially in this era where he vowed to solve matters between humans with humans.

"Wide-range debuff."

"...!"

A silent wave spread from Woo Jinchul. That was the beginning... It was the beginning of all sorts of skills he unleashed, engulfing the entire area one after another.

"Attack power reduction."

"Speed reduction."

"Dulled Senses."

"Defense negation."

"Blind."

"...?!"

The Chinese villains' expressions hardened. Suddenly, their bodies became heavy, their strength drained, and their vision darkened.

"Cr-crazy!"

"Such petty skills!"

Even while panicking, they instinctively tried to resist the debuff skills he cast, showing how desperately they wanted to survive the chaos. But it was useless. Only two years have passed since the Cataclysm began. The pandemonium they lived through was only two years.

Swing—!

"...?!"

A head flew off from Woo Jinchul's sword strike. Without even a scream.

Swing—! Flash—! Slash—!

Just like that, in the blink of an eye, the next head, and the next, flew off.

"...S-stop him!"

"Ugh?!"

Yes. Not magical beasts, but humans. Against fellow humans, Woo Jinchul was invincible. Association President, wiping the blood splattered on his face, looked back at his subordinates and ordered,

"What are you doing? Kill them all and retrieve the otherworldly weapons."

"...Y-yes!" A beat later, a resounding answer erupted from their mouths.

At the same time, they realized... The meaning of Woo Jinchul's words just now... about returning as a Hunter, not the Association President. The tremendous achievements that Association President Woo Jinchul had accumulated over the past two years, His outstanding political and administrative skills, All the paths he walked were the history of the Korean Hunter world. He was the one who suited the position of Association President the most. But that wasn't all.

He... was a Hunter.

A skilled warrior who suited the name Hunter more than anyone. A true warrior who didn't hesitate to risk his life before the enemy. Woo Jinchul, who had just cut off dozens of heads, was smiling. With a truly carefree expression.

"'Now I can die' is what you say at a time like this." He was sick of playing it safe.

Flash—!

Woo Jinchul narrowed his eyes at the sight of the countless villains still pouring out of the Gate. And he quickly realized the reason why so many of them were flocking to this ruined wasteland at this moment.

Sirka.

There was nothing for them to gain here except for the elf princess trapped in that ice. Although it was a shame that Choi Jong-In was away on business at a time like this, he already had an alternative.

"Come out, Mr. Hwang Dongsoo."

[Call me Greed. It's the name the Master bestowed upon me.]

Rumble—

Woo Jinchul's shadow lengthened, and the shadow soldier Greed rose with his massive body. And he raised his fist towards the invaders from China. With an extremely sinister, villainous smile.

[Welcome. Criminals contaminated by a cult.]

Crash—!

Greed, the former High Priest of the Cult of the Outer Gods, unleashed his full power and struck them.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 309 - Chapter 307

Chapter 309: Chapter 307

At this point, it was necessary to briefly look back on Greed's, no, Hwang Dongsoo's past.

Before the Cataclysm, Hwang Dongsoo was a third-rate criminal, living a life at the bottom of society with his older brother, Hwang Dongsuk, they were called 'The Scammer Brothers' For over twenty years, It was a life of going in and out of police stations and prisons, but he thought it was fun...

Until his brother abandoned him.

– Get lost. – Until Hwang Dongsuk suddenly awakened and kicked him out for being powerless.

– You useless bastard.

...Hwang Dongsoo, dumped by his only family, was devastated. He was lost. What should he do now, how should he live? Until then, all he had to do was follow his brother's lead. He drowned his sorrows in alcohol for a while. But that didn't last long. As Hwang Dongsuk gained notoriety as a villain, Hwang Dongsoo, who was tied to him as part of 'The Scammer Brothers', also became a target of the police. But there's always a way to survive, even if the sky falls, isn't there? Hwang Dongsoo miraculously

awakened while surrounded by the police. A true revival. But what happened...? He awakened, but the police chasing him weren't ordinary guys.

– What the hell. Why is Choi Jong-In here?!

It was absurd. As if he knew that he would awaken, Choi Jong-In suddenly blocked Hwang Dongsoo's path. He was the strongest Hunter of the newly formed Hunter Association. His nickname was the Ultimate Weapon, a terrifying S-rank Hunter. Since it was impossible to run away from someone like that, he fought. Because there was no other choice. But surprisingly,

– ...This might be doable?

The battle between Hwang Dongsoo and Choi Jong-In was a close one. Thanks to that, Hwang Dongsoo realized that the power he awakened to was S-rank. A power incomparably stronger than Hwang Dongsuk, who abandoned him. Courage surged within him. If they fought one-on-one, he might not only be able to escape, but even win? Of course, Choi Jong-In wasn't alone. As if he came fully prepared, he had A-rank and B-rank Hunters with him. But they were useless.

– Kyahaha! Get lost before you get caught in the crossfire!

Hwang Dongsoo laughed loudly and showed off his power to the Association Hunters. Two S-ranks were fighting, how dare the underlings intervene? They would only be captured as hostages and hold him back! In fact, that was why Hwang Dongsoo himself was dumped by Hwang Dongsuk.

Crash! Bang! Bang—!

It was truly earth-shattering. Even in the midst of his breathless battle with Choi Jong-In, Hwang Dongsoo looked for an opportunity to take the other small fry as hostages. But then, he realized that there was someone extraordinary among those small fry.

– Haha! This is an honor! Did even the famous Woo Jinchul come to catch me?

– Mr. Hwang Dongsoo, please surrender obediently. You are still a petty criminal...

– Petty criminal! A damned petty criminal?

Hwang Dongsoo charged towards Woo Jinchul, who appeared in a suit. And when he reached out to grab him by the collar,

Whoosh—

Even in the face of that sharp attack which tore through the air at terrifying speed, Woo Jinchul calmly loosened his tie with one hand and reached out the other towards Hwang Dongsoo.

- Speed reduction.
- Sense reduction.
- Vision disruption.
- Attack power reduction.
- ...?!

At that moment, Hwang Dongsoo realized. That something was wrong. Why the A-rank Woo Jinchul could order around the S-rank Choi Jong-In.

Grab

Woo Jinchul's hand finally grabbed Hwang Dongsoo's noticeably slower fist.

- Chains of Suppression.

Whoosh—

- Wh-what! – Hwang Dongsoo was shocked.

Chains of magic power suddenly flew from all directions and bound his limbs. Of course, they were only A-rank. He unleashed his magic power and tore off the Chains of Suppression. He began to dispel the debuff skills that were binding him one by one. But the problem was that there were too many. And on top of that, Choi Jong-In was still attacking him.

- Hmm, is that all?
- ...Y-you coward!

He was furious. Woo Jinchul's appearance, calmly casting petty skills one by one with an S-rank villain right in front of him, was truly annoying. Perhaps that was why. Even with Choi Jong-In's terrifying flames flying towards him from behind, Hwang Dongsoo tried to attack Woo Jinchul first. But...

- Defense negation.
- ...?!

BOOM!

Woo Jinchul's debuff, cast at the perfect timing. And Choi Jong-In's fire skill that exploded from behind him the moment his defense weakened.

– Kuhk...! – Hwang Dongsoo, hit by the truly perfect joint attack, desperately fled.

Fortunately, Since Choi Jong-In, who was also S-rank, was a magic-type Hunter, there was no one who could catch up to Hwang Dongsoo's speed once he decided to run. Ah, except for one...

– Speed reduction. Chains of Suppression.

– Ah, please stop...!

In the end, because of Woo Jinchul's tenacious debuffs, Hwang Dongsoo barely managed to escape while being helplessly hit by all of Choi Jong-In's attacks. He was completely battered. And to heal from that day's injuries, he had to hide for a long time. Completely concealing his identity, he focused on healing his wounds by searching for freelance Healers in the shadows, out of the Association's sight. Although he wanted to leave Korea right away, it was impossible until his body fully recovered.

Then he encountered the 'Outer Gods Cult'. At first, Hwang Dongsoo didn't even know their name, let alone what kind of group they were. He wasn't interested in the first place. But he couldn't help but keep running into them. Because the Outer Gods Cult was also hiding in the shadows, avoiding the Association's eyes, just like him. And that was how Hwang Dongsoo's connection with them began.

– ...You're saying you'll send a Healer to treat my wounds?

– Yes. A B-rank Healer, no less. In return, could we ask you for a small favor? Ah, of course, we're not forcing you.

The Outer Gods Cult approached Hwang Dongsoo very carefully and cautiously. Since they were still small at that time, the power of the S-rank villain was very useful. But Hwang Dongsoo was also cautious.

– No crimes. If I get caught by the Association in this state...

– Don't worry about that. We won't ask you to do anything that noticeable. Just raid a Gate that hasn't been discovered by the Association yet.

– That much is fine.

Just like that, Hwang Dongsoo began to fulfill the Outer Gods Cult's 'small' requests. Even if he was injured, his S-rank power didn't disappear. And whenever he raided the

Gates they requested without the Association's knowledge, the Healer they sent would come, treat his wounds until his magic power was completely drained, and then leave.

But that was only a temporary measure. It would take too long for his body to fully recover this way. Instead of providing a decent Healer, the Outer Gods Cult rewarded Hwang Dongsoo in a different way. A hideout. They prepared suitable hideouts for him to avoid the Association's eyes. Those hideouts were like rain in a drought for Hwang Dongsoo, who couldn't stay in one place for long because of that damn Woo Jinchul's nationwide manhunt. And then one day...

– Go to Yangpyeong.

The Outer Gods Cult requested a new deal with Hwang Dongsoo, who was almost fully recovered and about to leave this damn South Korea. They whispered to him, who no longer needed a Healer, that they knew who killed his brother, Hwang Dongsuk, and Hwang Dongsoo eventually accepted their offer. It wasn't a difficult request anyway. It was just to take care of a certain Gate in Yangpyeong, as usual. Since he was about to leave Korea anyway, Hwang Dongsoo went to Yangpyeong without a word, saying this was the last time. And there, a human who was a priest of the Outer Gods Cult greeted him with a bright smile.

– I've heard a lot about you. My name is Kim Chul.

– Hmm.

– Why are you looking at me like that?

– ...Have we met somewhere before? You look familiar.

2

– Oh! I was just thinking the same thing, I guess we have a connection. Haha.

– I don't think we're childhood friends, did we meet in prison?

– Oh my, prison? I've always lived a good life, so I've never been near such a scary place. We must have had some connection in a past life. Hahaha.

1

– Past life, my foot. You're not from the Association, are you?

– Oh, how did you know? I recently quit. It wasn't rewarding or fun.

– ...?

Kim Chul's attitude, joking in front of Hwang Dongsoo, who hated the Association, was quite strange. Kim Chul himself also felt strangely familiar with the infamous S-rank villain Hwang Dongsoo.

– Anyway, I'll be counting on you for this Gate. And here's a little something for you.

– A necklace? What's this?

– It's a sacred object sent from our headquarters. I heard you're planning to leave Korea soon? Since we have a connection, it's only right to give you a proper item.

– Item? What's its function?

– It's a top-grade Stardust necklace that increases recovery speed and amplifies magic power. It will be of great help when you're wandering through other countries alone.

– Hmm. Not bad.

Was it because of the strange sense of familiarity he felt from Kim Chul? Hwang Dongsoo accepted the necklace handed to him without any suspicion and put it on. Kim Chul himself was also wearing the same one. Just like that, Hwang Dongsoo entered the Gate under his guidance. And the moment he stepped into the temple of the Outer Gods Cult...

His memory ended there.

And a long time later,

– ...Itarim.

When he opened his eyes again, A blue light flickered in Hwang Dongsoo's gaze. And he instinctively realized who he was.

– I am... the High Priest who serves the great gods, Itarim... Ugh.

At that moment, He felt a strange incongruity deep within his soul, almost making him nauseous. But that feeling soon disappeared with a throbbing headache.

– Have you awakened, High Priest?

Priest Kim Chul stood before him with an extremely respectful attitude. Hwang Dongsoo looked at him and asked,

– ...I feel a strange incongruity in my body. What is this?

– I only received some information from headquarters, so I don't know much. Just that it's a process of a great and noble experiment.

– Experiment? For what?

– Evolution and creation.

– Evolution and creation...?

Kim Chul, who became a priest a long time ago, answered with mad eyes at Hwang Dongsoo's question,

– Yes. Headquarters said that evolution at its peak is not much different from creation. I heard it's a great experiment for that.

– ...Evolution at its peak. Truly great.

* * *

[Fucking Great!]

Greed shuddered and gritted his teeth viciously as he recalled that moment of dark history.

[How dare they turn me into a damn minion of Outer Gods!]

"Wh-who...!"

"Not us...!"

BOOM—!

A tremendous force swept over them like a tsunami. An overwhelming power that overturned the earth and seemed to fold the sky in half. There was no point in listening to their answers. Greed just wanted to get rid of these guys who reminded him of his past self. And there was another shadow that subtly rose beside him.

[I'll join as well! How dare they... to the glorious soldiers of the Master!]

That was none other than Priest Kim Chul, no, 'Iron', who returned as a shadow soldier...

Grab—!

[...Huh?] Iron's vision suddenly flipped upside down,

Greed, grabbing his ankle, swung him like a club and struck the villains.

1

Come to think of it, it was all Iron's fault.

8

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 310 - Chapter 308

Chapter 310: Chapter 308

The general evaluation of Hunter ranks was roughly as follows:

1 C-rank = 10 D-ranks

1 B-rank = 10 C-ranks

1 A-rank = 10 B-ranks

4

In short, it meant that to face a Hunter one rank higher, you needed at least ten Hunters of the lower rank. But this was just a rough estimate. Anyone working in the Hunter industry knew that numbers were just that, numbers. First of all, even within the same rank, the amount of magic power varied, the types of skills were diverse, and with roles like tanker, dealer, and healer, it was impossible to compare them one-on-one. There were too many variables and errors to fairly weigh the gap between Hunters. Therefore, the most objective measure was to determine a Hunter's rank solely based on their magic power. But even those who didn't work in the industry knew that 'S-rank' was completely exempt from this calculation. Because S-rank wasn't a rank in the first place.

'Beyond rank'

'Immeasurable'

The magic power measuring device developed by mankind couldn't evaluate their vast power. Since those who couldn't be measured were called 'S-rank,' the statement that it took ten A-ranks to face one S-rank was completely wrong from the outset. To face one

of them, you needed at least twenty A-ranks, maybe even more. And depending on the situation, the opponent, or even the S-rank Hunter's condition that day, it was completely impossible to estimate how many were needed to win. It wasn't for nothing that this era was called the era where the number of S-rank Hunters a country had was its national power. It was similar to the principle of nuclear weapon states in the past, but in fact, it was a much more practical and intuitive measure than nuclear weapons.

At least nuclear weapons didn't have human rights. Until the launch button was pressed, a nuclear weapon was just a political tool. But S-rank Hunters were different. They were literally walking nuclear weapons. Living nukes whose buttons could be pressed at any moment. There was no way to restrain them. Whether an S-rank Awakened turned into a villain overnight depended entirely on their morality. And that was why Woo Jinchul had been keeping a close eye on the S-rank villain Hwang Dongsoo...

Rumble—!

'This is fortunate.' Woo Jinchul couldn't hide his satisfaction that the S-rank variable Hwang Dongsoo was now fighting on their side as Greed. Especially since his debuff skills synergized even better with someone of that level.

[Don't run away! Gather around, you bastards!]

Bang—!

'Skill, Tremor of the Earth'

6

As Greed stomped his foot on the ground, a tremendous earthquake spread from that spot. Swept away by that shockwave, the scattered Chinese villains were pulled towards him. And Woo Jinchul added a touch.

"Chains of Suppression."

Whoosh—!

Woo Jinchul's magic chains entangled the villains pulled towards Greed like a net. What followed was truly a massacre.

Crash—!

Greed swung Iron like a baseball bat, and some villains even died instantly from the impact. Since Iron was originally an A-rank tanker, his sturdy body was a very effective 'blunt weapon', and his attack power was beyond words. Although it happened against his will, the effect was excellent. Woo Jinchul took advantage of the chaos and ordered the Association Hunters,

"Retrieve the 'otherworldly weapons' from their hands while we have the chance!"

"Yes!"

Otherworldly weapons were dangerous. They were suspicious armaments that granted unknown power to the user. The fact that the villains from China could put up this much of a fight against even S-rank Greed was proof. So Woo Jinchul left the battle to Greed and focused on retrieving the otherworldly weapons from the corpses as quickly as possible. While mixing in debuffs from time to time. Although they had never fought together before, they cooperated seamlessly.

[...Hmm.]

Greed felt a strange sense of emotion. Although he regained all his old memories after becoming a shadow soldier, it didn't erase the bad blood he had with Woo Jinchul in this life. How much he suffered because of those damn annoying debuff skills. He had to hide for two years, covered in wounds, even though he awakened as an S-rank. It was all because of him. If it was just Choi Jong-In, he could have just lied low, but Woo Jinchul used the Association's wanted list and relentlessly chased him. It was truly a sight he never thought he'd see. To think that Woo Jinchul would be on the same side, making his battles much easier with various debuffs.

Grin— Greed smiled.

[...Well, things like this happen.]

It was so convenient to have him on the same side. He didn't feel bad at all. Rather...

[Hmm. Otherworldly weapons...]

Greed picked up one of the otherworldly weapons from the villain he just killed. The forms of the Chinese otherworldly weapons were all different. If they had this kind of buffing function, they could have mass-produced them, but this variety gave the impression that they were experimentally creating various things.

Hum—!

[Huh?]

Was it because he was a former High Priest? Or was it because he was a shadow soldier? The moment Greed held the otherworldly weapon in his hand, He realized that it was sucking out his magic power. There were plenty of armaments that absorbed magic power, but this felt different.

[It's not absorbing my magic power for itself.]

[It seems like it's sending it somewhere.] Iron, released from Greed, also touched one of the otherworldly weapons and examined the feeling. He too immediately came to a conclusion.

[...I don't think we should touch these things.] Greed agreed and nodded.

[I see. Information about us would leak to someone.]

Crack—!

They destroyed the otherworldly weapons in their hands without hesitation. And they retrieved their black mana that was trying to fly away somewhere. After that, Greed approached Woo Jinchul and said,

[I think I know why that 'Doctor' bastard gave these to humans.]

"Yes. It was something I only guessed before I knew the truth about the Outer Gods Cult, but it seems like those bastards want to gather information about us from everywhere, don't you think?"

[You already guessed it?]

"Yes. The Doctor I met seemed to have a great interest in Awakened, no, humans."

[You met him directly? What did he look like?] Greed was truly curious. How dare he brainwash him, a soldier of the great Shadow Monarch, into a cult? He needed to know the face of that outrageous bastard to get back at him later.

"Hmm. If you're curious about his appearance, he was just an ordinary old man."

[Ordinary old man?]

"Yes. An old man, old enough to suit the title 'Doctor'... He was in a wheelchair."

* * *

At the same time. Suho was staring at the 'Doctor,' the Apostle of Evolution, and asking,

"I asked who you gave the rest of the weapons to."

"...Hmm. Well." The young boy, barely ten years old, still had a relaxed expression despite Suho's pressure. The Apostle of Evolution shrugged and replied,

"I don't remember exactly because I handed them out impromptu. Besides, they were all failed products to me, nevertheless it seems like they were quite effective weapons for humans, so some even fought and stole them from each other."

"And that wasn't intentional?"

"Why would I do that? It doesn't matter who's holding them, as long as I extract the information I need."

"So did you get the information you needed?"

"Yes, quite a bit. Especially the S-rank villain from Korea, Hwang Dongsoo, was a useful test subject."

"...Hwang Dongsoo?" Suho and Beru exchanged subtle expressions at the unexpected name. But the Apostle of Evolution continued without concern,

"As expected, S-ranks are different. Thanks to luckily recruiting Hwang Dongsoo into the Outer Gods Cult, I was able to create humanoid weapons from then on."

[Greed... Just you wait.] Beru softly gritted his teeth.

At that moment, Greed, who was far away, felt an inexplicable chill run through his spine and had a puzzled expression. Suho also decided to ignore that for now and asked what he was curious about first,

1

"So what are humanoid weapons? Did you create humans?"

"Creation... That's God's domain. An area that a mere creation cannot touch. But I've certainly been able to imitate it to some extent."

"Imitate?"

"Yes. Evolution at its peak is not much different from creation. Look at No. 47, whom I gave you." The Apostle of Evolution stretched out his hand and proudly pointed at the woman standing next to Suho.

"As you can see, No. 47 is a human who thinks and speaks on her own, but she doesn't have a soul. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't create a soul." At those words, Suho realized the identity of the bizarre feeling he felt when he first met No. 47.

"So to speak, an AI wearing flesh and blood."

"The concept is similar, but isn't this much more human? And a much more evolved version. Even if she's injured, she recovers quickly. Like..."

"The Shadow Army?"

"...Heh." The Apostle of Evolution's lips stretched into a wide grin at Suho's words that hit the nail on the head.

"Correct." The Apostle of Evolution, with a deeply satisfied smile, nodded and spread his hands wide.

"Look! How much effort I've put in! All these failed creations were research that started from the moment I saw the immortal army led by the great Shadow Monarch from afar in the universe." He recalled the shock he felt the moment he witnessed the Shadow Army with an ecstatic expression.

The immortal army that kept reviving no matter how many times they were killed. The sight of God's soldiers helplessly dying before that sticky power of darkness. Honestly, it was a shock. Especially for the Apostle of Evolution, who had been serving his 'god' who created him with loyalty, believing him to be an absolute being. And this question arose. Was the creator he served truly an absolute being? Even before that great, absolute death?

"Did you know? Creation and immortality! They're completely opposite concepts. I'm not a god, so creation is absolutely impossible for me, but what about immortality? If I evolve, if I experiment repeatedly, wouldn't it be possible someday? That was the beginning of my research, the reason why I volunteered to come to this Earth. I don't know about the others, but at least that was my purpose from the beginning."

"So? Did you succeed?"

"I've achieved half of my goal."

Half success. Suho immediately understood what that meant. If the shadow soldiers were an immortal army made of souls, No. 47 was a test subject made into a similar state with only a body, without a soul. An immortal soldier who could recover quickly from any injury. Except for the difference in materials, he had succeeded in creating a result that was almost identical in appearance.

"But there was nothing I could do about the other half of the failure. Perhaps because I'm a mere creation, creating a soul was absolutely impossible."

An empty vessel without a soul. The Apostle of Evolution, who created immortal soldiers whose bodies could be eternally reused, smacked his lips in regret. But Suho wasn't fooled. His experiment was definitely amazing. And as long as he was alive, his research would continue. And someday, when his research bore new fruit,

'He'll become my father's enemy.' Suho immediately condensed magic power in his fist. The Apostle of Evolution, sensing that, asked,

"Why are you suddenly doing that?"

"I'll ask one more thing."

Step. Step. Suho walked towards the Apostle of Evolution, his fist raised.

"You created immortal soldiers with an empty vessel without a soul... Then what number test subject are you?"

"Ah."

The Apostle of Evolution's expression, which had been relaxed from the beginning, finally faltered.

Crash—!

"...!"

Suho threw his fist. At that moment, everything shattered. All the illusions surrounding the Apostle of Evolution. And beyond that...

2

There was a 'brain'. A pink brain submerged in a small fish tank.

2

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



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