

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 341 - Chapter 338

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2

He had always wondered.

2

Suho had encountered Nidhogg several times before. The purpose was always to help the successors of other Monarchs inherit the Primordial Darkness. And without exception, those successors could sense, among Nidhogg's heads, the specific one containing the darkness meant for them. It was a sense akin to instinct, a phenomenon possible because it was their ceremony. Perhaps Nidhogg itself deliberately revealed it to devour the successors.

A so-called 'bait.' An action to lure prey into its own mouth. And without exception, all those successors were drawn by that bait, unhesitatingly leaping into Nidhogg's maw themselves. That series of events was the succession ceremony. And two choices opened up before those devoured by Nidhogg. Either be consumed by the darkness as they were. Or, conversely, devour that darkness and emerge outside. If they lacked the qualifications and chose the former, they would become one with the great and vast Primordial Darkness, melting away within Nidhogg's belly. If they chose the latter, they would proudly overcome the trial within, embrace the Primordial Darkness in their vessel, and be reborn as a new Monarch.

3

'So what about me?'

Suho had witnessed all those succession ceremonies until now. And he couldn't help but wonder each time...

'So which one holds the darkness meant for me?'

He simply couldn't tell. What his own darkness was. Which of Nidhogg's heads contained it. No matter how hard he looked, he simply couldn't notice it.

'The others recognized it immediately upon seeing it, so why can't I? Could it be that I still lack the qualifications?'

Impossible. He was a qualified candidate who had overcome the Dragon King's trials three times. In fact, hadn't he even obtained the title 'Qualified for the title of Dragon

King' as a result? Then why? Even though he had met Nidhogg several times already, his eyes still saw nothing. He simply couldn't recognize which darkness was his. He had even asked the Dragon King Antares directly about this...

– Could it be... because I am my father's son?

He was the son of the Shadow Monarch. And the 'Shadow Monarch' was already a being embodying the Primordial Darkness itself. So, having been born his son, it was entirely possible that this body couldn't embrace another darkness. Indeed, wasn't he already using the Shadow Power like his father? So, even if his qualifications as the Dragon King had been thoroughly verified through three trials, could it be that Nidhogg itself refused to choose him...? But Antares, hearing Suho's question, answered with an arrogant laugh.

[Not all Primordial Darkness is the same.]

His expression was utterly haughty.

[I am Antares, King of Dragons, Monarch of Destruction. The strongest Monarch who reigned above all others. Would being chosen by the darkness I harbored be as easy as it was for the other Monarchs?]

Indeed, Antares was the only being capable of confronting the Shadow Monarch single-handedly.

[Though I may have lost the war that required legions to clash against legions, as a Monarch, my rank was equal to that of the Shadow Monarch Ashborn. That was I, Antares.]

This was the pride of the Dragon King Antares, the foundation of his power, unmixed with exaggeration. As proof, the burn mark from the Dragon King's flames remained clearly on Sung Jinwoo's hand. Like a brand. As if to say, though I lost the war, I was never inferior to you in combat. Never forget.

3

[Of course, I do not mean the succession ceremonies of the other successors were easy. But it is true they became decidedly easier thanks to you volunteering as the priest.]

It was clearly easier. The pilgrimage path was skipped entirely thanks to Suho's unknown ability; they went across the Sea of the Afterlife instantly and arrived directly before Nidhogg. What if Suho hadn't been there? If Suho hadn't faithfully fulfilled his role as the priest? Originally, all those successors were fated to wander aimlessly in the Sea of the Afterlife, never even meeting Nidhogg, ultimately failing to find the edge of the World Tree and returning to nothingness. It wasn't just the Dragon King who saw it that

way. Even the other dead Monarchs clicked their tongues at how weak their successors were when they first discovered them. It was only natural, as all those successors were survivors, or perhaps refugees, who had barely survived to the end of the war with the Shadow Monarch. What great power could one expect from such individuals? But ironically, the one who helped those weaklings grow and even aided their succession ceremony was none other than Sung Suho, the son of the Shadow Monarch. Antares chuckled and said.

[Stop the idle thoughts and just get stronger. When the 'time' comes, I myself will drop you into the fire.]

And finally, 'that time' had come.

Right now. Before Suho's eyes. Wearing the same expression as back then, chuckling, Antares readily dropped Suho into the middle of the fiery pit.

[You have accepted the job change Quest.]

[Generating dungeon for the job change Quest.]

Rumble!

A tremor ran through the place. The cave walls crumbled, and the ceiling melted like lava. The intensifying heat began to hotly envelop Suho.

[Kieeeeeeeeeek— Young Master...!]

The moment Suho looked around, Beru, calling out to him in surprise, vanished from his sight. The figures of the fanatics fighting him, too. Even the giant door he had entered through. All completely vanished from his view. Thus, Suho was utterly isolated from reality, left alone with the Apostle of Conquest, reborn as a fire spirit through spiritualization. In this space, which had transformed into a complete inferno due to the flames the creature radiated. Suho instantly grasped the situation.

'A dungeon for the job change quest.'

It was different from the Dragon King's trials so far. This time, it was a full-fledged job change quest created by the system. Antares, the Monarch of Destruction, had completely isolated the space from Earth just for the quest. Now that this place had become a 'quest dungeon' disconnected from reality, he could unleash his power freely without destroying the surroundings. Furthermore, because the Apostle of Conquest had recklessly drawn upon the power of the outer universe, Antares had preemptively isolated the dimension to prevent the resulting shockwaves from tearing and collapsing Earth's dimension. Perhaps that was the Apostle of Conquest's underlying intention. Only if Earth's dimension collapsed could a giant hole be opened for the true forces of the Outer Gods to cross over.

[Ignore everything else, and focus only on the trial before you.]

Antares's voice echoed directly in Suho's mind.

[Only 'you' exist here. As this trial is solely for you, no external help can be received. Shadow Soldiers cannot be summoned. Especially, having someone like Beru interfere would be somewhat problematic.]

3

As soon as his words ended, a system message popped up before Suho's eyes.

Ting.

[Potions and Shop usage are prohibited in the current location. Status will not recover even if level increases.]

Antares had excluded Beru, but the system had blocked even potions and the shop.

[You cannot exit until the job change process is complete.]

Even the escape route...

Suho let out a hollow laugh. "At this rate, it's like being devoured by Nidhogg."

Antares's laughter returned at those words. He hadn't simply isolated the dimension from Earth; he had thrown this entire space, Apostle of Conquest included, into Nidhogg's maw.

[Your intuition is sharp. Indeed, that is so.]

And the Apostle of Conquest, rather than Suho, instinctively realized this fact first and was greatly flustered. To the point of forgetting he was attacking.

[Th-this place is...!]

The Apostle of Conquest was currently receiving an immense shock. An enormous pressure was felt from the surroundings. And, thanks to being composed of a hive mind, he quickly grasped the situation.

[The World Tree! Could this be the energy of the World Tree! Oh God, I have finally found the source that constitutes this universe! Kuhahaha!]

Having been born through Elvenwood, it wasn't difficult for him to recognize the energy of the World Tree, which shared a similar ecology. And instinctively, he quickly realized even the purpose of Nidhogg's existence, within which he now found himself. If Suho

had to overcome the Dragon King's trial here, the Apostle of Conquest, who became his opponent, was in the same position.

Fwoosh!

[I see. If I devour you here, I will become the master of this great darkness. That is the 'Succession Ceremony'.]

The conclusion was reached. His gaze, momentarily bewildered by the dimensional isolation, landed on Suho once more. Eyes tinged with burning heat and desire. This was an opportunity. The Primordial Darkness slumbering here was the power of destruction, harboring immense heat. The moment he devoured Suho, he was certain that great power would merge entirely with his own fire. He didn't know if it was because their attributes were the same, or if the Primordial Darkness had already chosen him. Or perhaps, the dead Monarch had intentionally granted him more power for Sung Suho's trial. But regardless of the reason, the conclusion was what mattered.

[Do you know? The vessel I am using was capable of destroying a nation single-handedly with the power of just one individual.]

'National-Level.'

Even without using such a designation, the apostles of the Outer Gods had been searching for such vessels all along. The larger the vessel, the more energy they could draw from the outer universe. And the life or death of the vessel mattered little. Even if it died and turned to ash, they just needed to absorb it as fertilizer for Elvenwood and recreate it. That was the pupa. The 'true fruit' finally completed through the collaboration of the Apostle of Paradise and the Apostle of Conquest...

Flare!

As he raised one hand, the cave ceiling melted.

[But that was merely the vessel of Christopher Reed in 'life'. This current vessel, completed through the combined power of the Apostle of Paradise and myself, is...]

His fingers elongated, turning into flame. That finger pointed towards Suho.

[A 'passage' whose scale cannot be measured by the standards of this universe.]

Crack.

Instantly, cracks appeared all over his body, which was armed in a fiery armor due to spiritualization.

Crrrack.

Those cracks spread like a spiderweb over his entire form. Then, those cracks truly became 'passages,' and the energy of the outer universe began to overflow.

[And bringing forth a great power into this place, enough to shatter this vessel, that was our goal.]

Grin.

He smiled.

[Even if you isolated the dimension, bringing me before the World Tree was your clear mistake. Now, I shall devour all the power here and...]

He began to unleash his power in earnest.

Fwoosh!

[I shall become the Monarch.]

Swiiiiiiish—

He shot towards Suho. Simultaneously, hundreds, thousands of fiery projectiles rained down from all directions like missiles, targeting Suho. An actual 'rain of fire.' Not a blizzard of harsh cold, but a dazzling typhoon of extreme heat swirled around him.

[Evading is useless.]

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

1

The numerous projectiles exploded everywhere before even reaching Suho's body. But before the heat of the explosions could dissipate, the flames, like living creatures, reformed, transforming into large and small fire butterflies. Those fire butterflies erratically changed direction, targeting Suho's blind spots.

And then, explosion again.

Explosion.

Explosion.

...

Ruuuumble—

Due to the extreme heat, the cave floor began to boil. Rocks melted, turning into lava. From the ceiling, intense heat still shimmered like waves. And all of it lunged towards Suho. If Sirka had faced 'Winter', the entity he was fighting was 'Summer.' A fiery hell, like the heart of an active volcano.

[Ahh... It feels like home. Do you recognize this place?]

Ignoring Suho's trial, Antares asked idly. There was no time to answer, but the reply arose in Suho's mind anyway. This was very similar to the place where Suho had first met the Monarch of Destruction, Antares.

But the Suho of then and the Suho of now were different. Back then, if not for his father's illusion, he would have burned to death right there under Antares's power. But now... it was different.

Flick.

Before he knew it, two daggers: The 'Kamish's Wrath' were held in Suho's hands. Made from the bones of the Red Dragon, they wouldn't melt even when enveloped in the Dragon King's flames; rather, they were special weapons that grew sharper and stronger. Suho gripped the daggers in a reverse hold, his eyes smoldering calmly. That gaze was different from the Apostle of Conquest, who was boiling with madness. Even though he was in the midst of a catastrophe, there was no wavering in his eyes. Rather, they were cold and cool, like a volcano on the verge of eruption, slumbering peacefully at the bottom of a distant abyss...

2

Flash!

Suho leaped into the heart of the natural disaster assailing him from all directions. And he swung the two daggers held in a reverse grip.

[Using Skill: 'Slaughter'.]

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

As the scorching mana flowing from his second heart, the 'Dragon King's Heart', personally handed over by Antares, intertwined with Kamish's Wrath. He began to mercilessly shred all the calamities flying in from all directions. In that appearance, the Dragon King Antares briefly thought he saw 'His' image. The face of a man who dared to stubbornly attack him, the Monarch of Destruction, long ago. 'His' son asked Antares.

"You said I couldn't summon Shadow Soldiers. Then what about my own shadow?"

[...!]

He didn't ask seeking a response. He could just try it himself.

[Shadow Extraction Lv.2 – Shape Transformation]

[Shadow Power.]

[No Mana Required.]

[Arbitrarily changes the form of a Shadow Soldier.]

Suho changed his own shadow, no, his own soul.

"Arise."

2

At that moment, from beneath Suho's feet.

Shwaaaaaak!

Suho's shadow enveloped his entire body.

Like armor.

[You have learned Skill: 'Spiritualization'.]

5

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



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He wouldn't have realized it on his own. But the moment Suho saw it right before his eyes, he instinctively understood. 'Spiritualization', he realized that he could do that too. He understood the method the moment he saw someone else drawing the power of the soul out beyond their vessel. If the vessel was weak, it would break. If it's smaller still, it won't endure and will shatter. But, what about his own vessel...?

It was sufficient. More than enough. After all, he was the one who conquered the Sea of the Afterlife. Who found the World Tree. Who fought Nidhogg time and again. The one who gave birth to several Monarchs. That was Sung Suho himself. Yet, while the others had become Monarchs, it was strange that he alone had still not inherited the Primordial Darkness. But now he knew the reason. As Antares had said, what mattered was the 'time.' Or, more accurately, the right 'catalyst'. To prove one's qualifications, a trial befitting them is necessary. Only by overcoming that trial does the power gain a 'foundation'. Not some illusion like baseless confidence, but proof of well-founded qualification was needed.

To achieve that, the one thing Suho lacked was precisely the 'target'. To inherit the power of destruction. Suho needed a clear target to thoroughly and mercilessly destroy. In the past, for the Dragon King Antares, that target was the army of the Rulers. And the Dragon King, fiercely burning that distinct fuel, had ignited the flames that led the whole world to destruction. But now, right before Suho's eyes...

"You dare aspire to become a Monarch?"

Fwoosh!

An adversary had appeared, coveting what was rightfully his. Spreading a fiery hell, deceptively resembling destruction itself, in all directions.

[Kraaaaaaaah!]

The catastrophe unleashed by the Apostle of Conquest assaulted Suho.

But...

"Pathetic."

2

Suho merely laughed. The Apostle of Conquest, trying to burn him to death with such a 'fake' power, seemed utterly pathetic. How could such embers possibly hurt him?

"Flames of the outer universe lack foundation, they are not even the power of this world."

Shwaaak!

As he clenched his fist, all those flames were swept into his hand. At that sight, the Apostle of Conquest's pupils trembled.

[What is this...!]

His expression was clearly baffled by the unprecedented spectacle. Suho's transformation was different from any spiritualization the Apostle of Conquest had encountered before. That wasn't mere spiritualization. It was something... more fundamental.

[Kraaaaah!]

At that ominous foreboding, the Apostle of Conquest struck Suho with even fiercer flames. But unlike him, Suho possessed a 'foundation'.

Thump! Thump!

His second heart, violently pulsing within his chest. The 'Dragon King's Heart' inherited from Antares. The intense heat, like lava bursting from an active volcano deep inside. The flames of destruction, always threatening to incinerate Suho's body at any moment of carelessness... He decided not to suppress this power he had always kept in check any longer.

'I permit it. Go ahead, run wild as you please.'

Rather, he freely unleashed the power he had restrained until now. Then, as if waiting, the flames devoured Suho. Lava bursts through a dam. Those flames were the power of destruction, incomparable to the embers ignited by a mere apostle of an Outer God. The infernal flames erupted all at once, beginning to run rampant with the force to blast Suho's entire body apart. But...

[Using Skill: 'Art of the Iron Body']

He endured. Suho's vessel did not break. To shatter from just this would render all the hardships he had endured meaningless. Training. No... Forging he did to his spirit. The process of tempering, struck and crushed countless times. Through that repeated agony, becoming redder, hotter, yet ever harder, like the essence of metal. The daily training with Ammut had strengthened Suho's vessel to the extreme. To a point where even the power of destruction could not break it.

Ruuuumble!

Then, the power of destruction lost its way and faltered. It wanted to run wild, but Suho's vessel was too sturdy. The aftermath shook his insides. Then, Suho's soul became a shadow and enveloped the flames. That was Spiritualization. Imitating the technique performed by the Apostle of Conquest right before his eyes. Thus, armor made of shadow covered his entire body. And from the crevices of the black shadow armor, scorching white steam leaked out. The pure white energy emitted by the intensely condensed flames of destruction enveloped Suho's entire being, radiating outwards. Like an active volcano on the verge of eruption. Seeing that, Antares murmured.

[Not Black Flame, but 'White Flame'...]

2

A certain fondness was woven into his voice.

[So that is the fire you have kindled.]

Suddenly, a memory from long ago surfaced.

– Isn't it amusing?

Long ago. The Dragon King, not doubting his victory in the slightest, had looked down at the face of the defeated enemy and sneered.

– A battle between flames born from darkness, and darkness born from light.

Yes. Back then, at that moment. The flames born from darkness were Antares. The darkness born from light was the Shadow, created as a fragment of brilliance but reborn as a Monarch after death. And the one who inherited all that power was merely a human.

'Sung Jinwoo.'

But this time, the situation was different...

[This time, the flames were born from all the darkness and light embodied in one body. Truly, he is his father's son.]

An irregular personifying all irony. That was Sung Jinwoo's son, Sung Suho. And after much time had passed, the Dragon King Antares was now watching the son of Sung Jinwoo inherit his power and grow in real-time. And recalling that day's conversation, he murmured.

[Now, the end is in sight.]

Shwaaak—

Even at this moment, Suho's form was transforming ever more fiercely. The Kamish's Wrath swirling in his hands gained an even sharper edge. Over the two blades, a white shadow blazed, 'burning' as if they had become two longswords.

[Using Skill: 'Slaughter'.]

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish...

Countless attacks struck the Apostle of Conquest's body.

'One more time!'

Swish! Swish! Swish!

[Ughh! You bastard...!]

Even amidst the barrage of countless attacks, the Apostle of Conquest persistently absorbed Suho's flames. And receiving that power entirely, he struck back. Suho, too, chose attack over defense. Both neglected defending entirely, unleashing only attacks upon each other. But there was a difference between the two...

"..."

[Uaaaagh!]

Unlike the Apostle of Conquest, screaming in agony, Suho's mouth remained firmly shut. The pain must surely be similar, yet not even a small groan escaped. Wasn't he in pain? Impossible. Even the Tenacity skill that usually protected Suho only reacted to physical damage. Right now, he was simply enduring it. So what if it hurt...?

Swish! Swish! Swish!!

He just had to hit back that much harder!

Slaaash—!

Eventually, the Apostle of Conquest's wings were severed.

[Uaaaagh!]

The Apostle of Conquest agonized over the loss of his wings. Golden energy poured like blood from the places where they were cut off. But his body quickly began to regenerate, blazing with flames again. And the scattered droplets transformed into small, numerous fire elementals, scattering in all directions. Voices of anger erupted from them simultaneously.

[With just this!]

[You think you can defeat me!]

[Think again!]

The Apostle of Conquest roared furiously, raising both hands. The cave ceiling, completely melted, sent viscous lava masses raining down on Suho's head. It felt like facing a waterfall of immense heat.

[I shall show you!]

[My power!]

[I shall prove my qualification!]

[The Primordial Darkness is mine!]

The image of Christopher Reed had completely vanished from the Apostle of Conquest. In its place remained only a pure fire elemental, blazing golden. Two pairs of wings, immense in size, regenerated. And within those flames, countless faces writhed with distorted expressions.

1

"Even with a hive mind..."

Suho merely laughed. In times like these, a hunter simply needed to choose one of two options. Take down the strong one first. Or start with the weaker ones. Suho chose the first method.

Stab!

Instantly, his extended sword pierced the abdomen of the largest entity. It plunged so deep that only the hilt remained visible.

[Kyaak—!]

The Apostle of Conquest vomited golden blood. But even that scattered immediately, attacking Suho with potent divine energy. Then he released the sword hilt, leaped upwards, spread his empty hand wide, and struck the air downwards.

'Ruler's Authority!'

Kwaaaaaang—!

Then, a giant transparent palm appeared in the air, striking down the Apostle of Conquest.

Boom!

[Keoheok...?!]

Crushing him flat. Repeatedly.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

[Kuk! Th-this power...?!]

Under the successive attacks, the Apostle of Conquest simply couldn't regain his senses. He couldn't understand. Why the power of the Rulers, encountered in the outer universe...? Beings different from the Shadow Monarch, rooted in darkness. How could this human possibly wield the power of the Rulers! The Ruler's Authority wasn't mere telekinesis. It was literally an authority. In other words, a divine power born not from the outer universe, but from this universe. Moreover, it was a divine power that enabled the creations to kill the one who created them, by their own will! The god killing power!

Swiiiiish—

In the meantime, Suho had already closed the distance right before his nose. And raising the remaining Kamish's Wrath high, he forcefully stabbed it into the Apostle of Conquest's eye. Deep enough to pierce the eyeball and penetrate the brain beyond.

Boom!

And finally, the Apostle of Conquest's spiritualization cracked.

Crack!

Starting with that crack.

Crrraaaaaack...!

His body shattered like broken pottery.

At that moment, all the heat contained within, burst out towards Suho at once, like fireworks. But he did not avoid any of that power, he accepted it all.

Whoooooosh—

He sucked it all in.

[W-wait!]

[No!]

[Stop!]

Then, the small elementals scattered around urgently raised their voices towards Suho.

[The vessel we painstakingly created...!]

[How hard we worked to make that...!]

[It was the most optimal vessel to become our main body!]

Voices filled with palpable regret. Not begging for life, but loaded with pure frustration, disappointment as well as anger and thirst for vengeance were heard. But what could they do? All the power they had gathered until now flowed entirely to Suho. Devoured completely by the Dragon King's Heart nestled within him. And then...

Ting! Ting! Ting!

[Conditions met for Class Change Quest: 'Trial of the Dragon King - 4'.]

[Concluding Class Change Quest.]

Simultaneously, the Dragon King Antares, appearing in Ragnar's form, burst into laughter.

[Uwahahahaha!]

His immense satisfaction with Suho's performance was clearly felt. But Suho focused more on the system message appearing before his eyes than on Antares.

[Your class will be determined shortly.]

[Advancement to a higher class is possible based on the acquired advancement points.]

"Acquired advancement points?"

At the game-like expression, he recalled something Beru had told him once. The Great Sorcerer of the Demonic Realm, Kandiaru created this level-up system he inherited from his father, to grow a human vessel capable of containing the power of a Monarch. And that method borrowed the rules of games familiar to humans.

Ting.

[Analyzing player's actions to assign a suitable class.]

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

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"My Actions... Acquired points... Higher class...?"

Suho, staring at the continuing system messages, suddenly turned his head sideways. There, the remaining small fire elementals were trembling with rage as they looked at him.

[Uwaah! No!]

[Just you wait!]

[How dare you...!]

But what could they do? The battle was already decided. However... it still wasn't enough.

[Hmm... What's with that dissatisfied expression?]

As Suho suddenly licked his lips looking at them, the Dragon King Antares regarded him with a curious look. But contrary to his words, a strange sense of anticipation flickered in Antares's eyes. Suho spoke resolutely.

"System. Wait. Stop the tally."

'...?'

He didn't know if communication with the system was possible, but he wanted to stop it for now. Suho maintained his Spiritualization state.

"There are still advancement points left to acquire."

[Hooh?]

At those words, Antares's lips curled into a wide grin. Even though the Dragon King himself had declared the trial over, Suho was still brimming with ambition.

Through various mouths, Suho already knew the entire process of his father's class change. Sung Jinwoo had skipped the initial class during his quest, ascending directly to the final one in one go. If he had followed the path originally set by the system, after becoming a 'Necromancer' in the first quest, he would have steadily accumulated more experience points and become the Shadow Monarch in the next class change quest. But Sung Jinwoo hadn't done that. With grit and tenacity, he had accumulated more and

more advancement points all at once, clearing both the 1st and 2nd class changes instantly. And Suho, too, had endured the grueling trials of the Dragon King four times to reach this point. But...

'Accomplishments... Every path I've walked so far. If all those experiences combined are what allows for advancement to a higher class...'

'I can still do more.' Having reached a conclusion, resolute determination appeared in Suho's eyes.

Did that determination reach the system?

Ting, Ting.

The continuous system message suddenly stopped. And then, silence. Suho grinned towards the remaining fire elementals with a satisfied expression.

"Indeed, this isn't enough. I won't be satisfied until I eradicate all of them."

At those words, the creatures unleashed their killing intent.

[Eradicate? You dare speak of us?]

[Do you think the vessels our main body prepared, exist only here!]

[Killing us is useless!]

[We are one whole! Eternal and immortal!]

[We can change our main body anytime!]

[That is why we always consider numerous variables and have prepared various and many vessels!]

"How kind. But aren't you revealing such important secrets too easily?"

[Secrets? Hehe.]

[The time of secrets is now over.]

[Since you thieves stole our memories anyway, there's no need to hide.]

[And it has already begun.]

"What has...?"

At Suho's question, the fire elementals sneered at him in unison.

[While you were trapped here.]

[What do you think is happening on the other side of Earth?]

"The other side of Earth?"

At Suho's reaction, they smiled meaningfully.

[Quantity over quality.]

[If the vessel here was quality, quantity resides there.]

"Perfect timing."

Hearing the fire elementals' words, Suho spoke with a meaningful expression.

"System. You said you'd analyze my deeds to grant a suitable class? If you're going to evaluate them, do it thoroughly."

Towards the system that was tallying his acquired advancement points. Suho raised the corners of his mouth and said.

"Though I am doing this to inherit the Primordial Darkness, know that if I wished, I could have severed Nidhogg's head at any time."

Conquering the World Tree meant exactly that. Having made his main base right beneath Nidhogg, meant he could forcibly hunt it if he so chose. Of course, even if he cut off its head and took the Primordial Darkness by force, it would be useless if there was no one to properly inherit it. But conversely, it meant he could just hand it over if he found a vessel capable of handling that darkness...

What if the vessel wasn't sufficient? Well he could just keep breaking it until it was, tempering it to enlarge the vessel. Wasn't that the very purpose for which Kandiaru designed the level-up system...? To grow humans, making them vessels capable of containing a Monarch. And just in time...

Ting.

[...is born.]

Suho, confirming a system message, grinned and spoke.

"System. Record this as my deed as well. It seems I've just completed another vessel."

* * *

Bubble Bubble.

USA.

Below the calm surface of New York Harbor. Something unnoticed for a long time stirred. Breaking the peaceful moment, when the Statue of Liberty quietly watched over the city.

Thump—

A great vibration began deep underwater. At first, it was a small ripple. Tourists thought it was merely the wake of a passing boat. But the ripple soon became a wave, and then the water began to churn as if boiling...

Kwaaaaaang—!

"...!"

Suddenly, the waters of New York Harbor split apart as if from an explosion. And from within, a colossal figure of unimaginable scale soared upwards. First, two giant antennae emerged from the water. Followed by the unfurling of two pairs of enormous wings. It was a butterfly so massive that even the Statue of Liberty seemed small beside it. Its wings, shimmering with intersecting gold and black, were dazzling, as if reflecting a thousand suns. Each flap sent fierce winds crashing into the city.

1

Kwaaaaaang—

"What is that...?"

"God, have mercy..."

Citizens on the streets looked up at the sky, paralyzed with fear. Thousands of small lights glittered on the giant butterfly's abdomen. Each light, like a living eye, watched every corner of the city. This was no mere monster. Its very existence was a declaration. The beginning of the conquest. Deep in the undiscoverable ocean depths. The massive vessel the Apostle of Conquest had prepared over a long time.

Fwaaaaaaah!

As the overwhelmingly massive butterfly fully spread its wings, its presence filled the New York sky, radiating an oppressive aura like a divine being from another dimension. Intricate patterns seemed to live and move upon its dazzling wings. And from each

pattern, golden dust scattered, settling down upon the city. New York was quickly being eroded by the brilliant golden light. And from the sky above, a majestic voice, imbued with divine power, thundered across the entire city.

[I declare!]

[I offer this land to my great god!]

[Bless me, I pray!]

"Evacuate! Everyone get indoors!"

The Hunter Association's emergency alert blared throughout the city. But the citizens, overwhelmed by the sheer spectacle, seemed rooted to the spot, unable to move. The giant butterfly slowly circled above the buildings, as if calmly observing the world. Then, its antennae moved, vibrating as if sending a signal. At that moment, wherever the golden dust had settled, small flames began to bloom like embers. And soon, another change occurred in the New York sky. The heavens distorted, and space ripped like tearing fabric, creating cracks. From those fissures, thousands, tens of thousands of smaller butterflies poured out. The children, or perhaps clones, of the giant butterfly. Hunters, having been summoned, began to arrive on the scene, but their expressions turned grim as they looked up. As they had intuited, this was an 'invasion,' a declaration, on a completely different scale from any ordinary dungeon break they had encountered before.

[My name is the Apostle of Conquest!]

4

[For the great Itarim!]

[I shall conquer this land!]

1

The Apostle of Conquest, no longer hiding, finally revealed his existence publicly to the entire world. As the golden dust settled upon the city, everything it touched began to slowly corrode. The metal surfaces of cars rusted, asphalt softened, and building windows fogged over. It was as if the materials of this world were kneeling before the alien energy.

"Please... save me..."

A woman on the street knelt and cried out to the sky. There was nowhere left to run, nowhere to hide. Hunters had deployed, but the enemy numbers were overwhelmingly vast. However the real problem wasn't the numbers. It was that giant beast! The

colossal butterfly monster, too large to take in at a single glance. The appearance of a being that shattered the Hunters' common sense, leaving them clueless as to how to even confront such an absurdly massive monster. Before it, some despaired, crouching beneath cars. Some picked up their phones to deliver final words to loved ones. Some were even seen turning on their phone cameras with trembling hands, trying to record this final moment. The butterfly's antennae, high above, moved this way and that, looking down upon all these despairing figures. The thousands of eyes glittering on its abdomen blinked in unidentifiable patterns, sending signals as if communicating amongst themselves. It seemed to be scanning the territory it would conquer. And then...

[Conquest, begin.]

Kyaaaaaaaaa—

Finally, the great chaos began. And the day of despair, later to be called the Second Cataclysm, dawned.

Uwaaak!

Kyaaaaaak—!

Screams stained with despair and fear echoed through downtown New York.

But then...

Screeech—

At the center of all this chaos and fear. On the upper floor of a tall building, a man quietly opened his eyes. Soon, the lid of the game capsule opened, and 'Thomas Andre' sat up.

1

"..."

He listened to the screams and explosions coming from outside. Then turning his gaze to the window, his eyes took in the sight of the giant butterfly monster crushing the city. An absurd scene, like something out of a Hollywood movie, had become reality.

2

"Heh. Inside the game or in the real world..."

Yet a faint smile touched his lips as he witnessed the scene. The golden divine energy of the Outer God poured through the window. As if dazzled by it, Thomas Andre narrowed his eyes slightly and extended his hand to the side.

"Laura, sunglasses."

At his voice, his waiting secretary approached and handed him sunglasses. Thomas Andre casually accepted and put them on, even as the world seemed to crumble around him.

"Shall I prepare the helicopter?"

"Ah, no need."

Dismissing Laura's words, Thomas Andre leisurely walked. Not towards the elevator, but towards the window overlooking the giant beast. The closer he got, the more details of the situation in New York became visible.

Streets dominated by chaos.

People running frantically in all directions.

Cars colliding.

Streetlights, knocked down by the giant butterfly's wingbeats, lay scattered everywhere.

Crash!

Thomas Andre leaped through the window, towards that catastrophic scene

Swiiiiiiish—

His massive body cut through the wind, plummeting towards the ground at high speed accelerated by gravity's pull. His white hair, like a lion's mane, fluttered behind him.

Boom—

As his sandaled feet landed on the ground, the road beneath him cracked and sank inwards.

At that moment...

Flinch.

His presence was instantly detected by the giant butterfly's senses. A large old man in a Hawaiian shirt was trudging towards it. But contrary to his leisurely gait, an ominous

threat, completely different from other humans, was detected from him. Instantly, the butterfly moved, following its instinct.

Boom—!

From the sky above, the butterfly's massive leg slammed down. An overwhelming attack, as if intending to crush an ant. Before it, Thomas Andre grinned and thrust out his own fist. Muttering a single word.

"Giantification."

4

[...!]

At that moment. With that single word, an immense force exploded from Thomas Andre. His body began to rapidly expand with a roar like space-time itself was tearing apart.

'Goliath.'

Befitting the nickname that had always preceded his name.

Kwaaaaaang—!

Thomas Andre's fist, transformed into a giant's, collided head-on with the giant butterfly's attack. The shockwave generated from the collision spread out in all directions like the blast of a nuclear explosion. The windows of nearby buildings shattered instantly. Cars flipped over like toys. People were swept away by the fierce wind. At the spot of that tremendous collision, Thomas Andre grinned like a mischievous boy and spread his other hand wide.

"Not so fast. That's dangerous."

He clenched his hand, grabbing the exploding shockwave as if protecting a treasure, simultaneously the mana that was about to spread in all directions was sucked into his palm.

Fwoooooosh—

Then, drawn by that immense gravitational pull, the people who had been swept away by the fierce wind surprisingly descended back to the ground. Gently and safely. An incredible ability, as if controlling gravity itself! Thomas Andre gathered that immense energy into one hand, and with that empowered fist, struck the giant butterfly once more.

Kwaaaaaang—!

This impact was even stronger. The Apostle of Conquest's massive body was pushed back, creating a giant waterspout in the Hudson River.

[Kraaaaaaaak!]

Then, a scream erupted from its mouth, like a human's scream, yet simultaneously like the overlapping voices of thousands. From the Apostle of Conquest. Or rather, their collective entity. Before long, Thomas Andre had grown large enough to look down upon the giant beast.

"Apostle of Conquest... I like it."

His eyes were no longer those of a human. It was as if they were—

"I'll be using that name from now on."

The giant Thomas Andre's voice shook the entirety of New York like thunder.

[King of Giants, Monarch of Conquest]

23

—those of a Monarch.

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 344 - Chapter 341

Chapter 344: Chapter 341

'Devil in the Ring.'

2

Former UFC Undisputed Heavyweight Champion. Thomas Andre was a man who had claimed the title of 'Humanity's Strongest' through pure physical might even in an era before mana or magical beasts existed on Earth. And at this moment, the entire history of violence he had walked throughout his life was being unleashed madly upon the giant beast. A truly overwhelming violence!

1

[Kaaaaaugh!]

Struck by his fist, the giant butterfly's body crashed in front of the Statue of Liberty. A tremendous shockwave spread throughout downtown New York. The windows of

nearby buildings completely shattered. An enormous spray of water scattered like a tsunami, centered around the two giants battling on the water. Amidst it all, Thomas Andre didn't stop punching for a single moment. Instead, he grabbed the head of the creature that tried hiding beneath the surface, forcibly lifted it, and continued to unleash overwhelming violence.

5

[H-how can this be...!]

1

The Apostle of Conquest couldn't hide its confusion.

[This power, don't tell me...!]

Separated from the pouring violence and the accompanying pain, their collective intelligence desperately tried to comprehend the current situation. But they simply couldn't understand. Simultaneously, their massive body struggled desperately to counterattack. But it was insufficient.

Kwaaang!

Thomas Andre's kick bent the giant butterfly's back at a 90-degree angle, and launched it upwards.

1

"Capture!"

He stretched out his hand, generating an immense gravitational pull.

1

Fwooooosh—

Desperately resisting, the butterfly flapped its wings, attempting to flee skyward as if seeing an opportunity. But its effort was futile. Suddenly, the Apostle of Conquest's body was forcibly dragged towards Thomas.

Splash—

Once again, there was a cold gaze looking down from a great height, at the beast that had fallen into the water.

"Where do you think you're running? This body once dragged down even the great Kamish from the sky."

6

Thomas laughed savagely, clasped his giant hands together, and slammed them down hard on the head of the Apostle of Conquest as it tried to rise again.

Boom!

[How can such power... Why....]

The giant butterfly uttered a lament rather than a scream.

"Why? What's so surprising?"

[How dare the likes of you harbor the Primordial Darkness—!]

"Ah, so that's what you were curious about."

1

Thomas grinned wickedly, concentrating immense mana into his fist.

'Skill: Smash.'

2

That fist accurately pierced the Apostle of Conquest's torso.

3

Craack—!

[Kuaak...!]

Finally, cracks began to form on the creature's massive body. Although its appearance resembled a butterfly, when an insect grows this large, its surface looks less squishy and more like that of a crustacean. This was because its entire joints and surface were covered in armor resembling hard, gleaming metal. Yet, a hole was punched through that hard armor. By an overwhelming force.

Fushaaaa—

And as the giant's fist was withdrawn from the hole, golden divine energy burst out like a fountain. Spreading in all directions. It rained down upon the streets of Manhattan. At the sight, people shrieked and fled to avoid contact with the light.

[Krrrk... You... How....]

Writhing in agony, the Apostle of Conquest still couldn't hide its confusion. How could a mere human, of all things... Why could the 'Primordial Darkness' be felt from such a being!

To that, Thomas replied with a leisurely smile.

"The Tower of Trials."

[...What?]

"I logged in the fastest. Fastest in the whole world."

2

[...?]

Words that made no sense. But did it matter if the creature understood or not? Thomas Andre felt pride in being the first user.

"Since I started the fastest, I leveled up ahead of anyone else. I followed the game's story ahead of anyone else. And at the end of it... I met the 'King of Giants'."

2

[...!]

Even if it was... an illusion within a game created by the Monarch of Trials and Harmakan. It was sufficient as a trial to prove his qualifications.

* * *

Just a few minutes ago, Thomas Andre had been inside a game capsule. And his soul, possessing an avatar in the Tower of Trials, was experiencing the life Sung Jinwoo had lived. Countless level-ups. Dungeons. And...

'First Class Change.'

Based on the deeds and experiences engraved upon their souls, the Tower of Trials bestowed various classes upon the players worldwide. Along with skills appropriate for those classes. And Thomas Andre, too, underwent his first class change.

1

'Titan.'

1

Perhaps thanks to his experiences in the previous world, the class Thomas Andre obtained was a tanker, cladding himself in armor and fighting magical beasts head-on. His main skill was 'Giant's Armor.' But Thomas Andre wasn't satisfied with just that. To become as strong as before, no, even stronger than before. He gathered more money, bought runestones. And he lived Sung Jinwoo's life as guided by the Tower of Trials. And at the end of it... He finally encountered him. The King of Giants.

[King of Giants, Monarch of the Beginning Legia]

Deep within the dungeon. The King of Giants, bound in chains. The moment he first saw Legia, Thomas Andre opened his mouth in surprise and excitement.

– Beautiful...

1

Looking at Legia he was genuinely impressed. Forcibly sealed here, black chains connected to the dungeon walls not only wrapping around him layers deep but also piercing his body. It was such a horrific sight that one wondered what great sins must have been committed to warrant such punishment. But despite that, a massive and oppressive power stirred within him.

3

[Hahahaha!]

Legia, whose entire body except for his face was bound, burst into hearty laughter. Looking down at the small human who had found him.

[Amusing, truly amusing! You despicable Rulers, behold who has found me first!]

Listening to Legia's laughter, Thomas stopped at a moderate distance, neither too far nor too close. And looked up at him.

[Release me... undo the chains.]

Legia said.

[I know the Rulers' plans. Quickly, I must inform the other Monarchs...]

Legia's words cut off abruptly. His eyes, filled with joy just moments ago, became unnervingly calm.

[You... are not the one I know.]

Thomas Andre's and Legia's gazes locked. Thomas's heart pounded violently. This was exactly what he wanted. A large, powerful being, an opponent that made his heart race.

[Perhaps the Monarchs and Rulers alike will target you. You currently lack the strength to face them all. To stand against them, you too will need forces.]

Legia didn't know the emotion contained in Thomas Andre's flashing eyes. He simply stated his desires. Merely attempting to use the 'Sung Jinwoo' before him to achieve his own goals.

[Release my bindings. I shall aid you.]

– And you expect me to believe that now?

[I shall make you believe.]

Legia chanted an incantation.

[The King of Giants casts Skill 'Pledge of Sincerity (Deal)'.]

[Accepting 'Pledge of Sincerity (Deal)' prevents both caster and acceptor from speaking falsehoods to each other.]

[Will you accept 'Pledge of Sincerity (Deal)'?]

(Y/N)

'King of Giants...'

Through the system, Thomas confirmed that Legia was indeed a true Monarch. At that moment, he made his decision without hesitation.

– Yes, I will make a deal with you.

[Pledge of Sincerity (Deal) has been established.]

[Until the contract is mutually terminated, caster and acceptor cannot speak falsehoods to each other.]

At that moment, Legia spoke as if he had been waiting.

[Release my bindings. I shall aid you.]

Thomas looked at the chained Legia and smiled. And following the Pledge of Sincerity, he stated his own objective. With all his heart.

– I will release the chains right now. So fight me.

3

[...What did you say?]

Legia's eyes held a tinge of confusion. In contrast, Thomas looked up at the King of Giants, dozens of times larger than himself, brimming with more intense fighting spirit than ever before.

– I wanted to try fighting a Monarch one-on-one again someday. I was miserably defeated back then.

Thomas Andre recalled his fight against the Fang Monarch in the previous world. The pressure he felt that day. In that dizzying moment when the overwhelmingly powerful being tore into him, there was nothing he could do. He was weak. And he realized. He had almost no experience fighting overwhelmingly strong opponents. He was accustomed to fighting the weak, but he'd had no opportunity to fight someone stronger than himself. That's why Sung Jinwoo had been such a special existence to him.

– I'll release the chains immediately. That way it will be an even fight.

At the word 'even', Legia's eyes widened. What nonsense was this lowly human spouting? He couldn't fathom his intentions at all. But there was not a shred of falsehood in Thomas Andre's voice. Instead, an arrogant smile formed on his lips.

1

– But swear this. Fight with all your might. With the intent to kill me. That is my condition.

[...?!]

At those words, Legia's expression twisted in astonishment. Then, it contorted with fury. Fight with all his might? How disrespectful! For a mere human to propose such conditions to him! Even if he was bound like this, to be subjected to such mockery by a human!

[Can you handle the consequences of those words?]

Fwooooosh—!

An immense killing intent erupted from Legia. A chilling sensation that stimulated survival instincts. But...

Slice.

'Fearlessly', Thomas strode towards Legia and began cutting the chains one by one. Each time a chain snapped, the space vibrated.

Snap!

The moment the last chain broke.

Fwooooosh—!

Thomas saw the giant's fist, filled with fury. A blow delivered with full force.

3

Boom!

Immediately after, Thomas's vision went dark.

[You have died.]

7

[Would you like to restart?]

His vision turned black. Instant death, without a doubt. At that moment, Thomas's soul, bound by the Tower of Trials' magic, briefly visited the Sea of the Afterlife. But the Tower of Trials instantly returned it back to his avatar. The experience lasted only a fleeting moment, but it was definitely the sensation of 'touching death.' And such an experience caused Thomas Andre's soul to grow, just a little. This was a system applied equally to all players. The moment of death was fleeting, but through that process, the players' souls absorb a small amount of 'nutrients' from the Sea of the Afterlife before returning. And because the place they happen to visit was near the World Tree conquered by Suho and his companions. The phenomenon called 'Re-Awakening' occurred, where a soul wandering the Sea of the Afterlife 'very coincidentally' encounters the World Tree and becomes stronger.

2

Phew—

Thus resurrected from death, Thomas Andre's avatar opened his eyes again. It felt like he had merely blinked once. He stood before Legia again, perfectly fine. Death within a

game. Normally, in such cases, other NPCs wouldn't remember the event. The story would continue as if it never happened, as if the player hadn't died. But an NPC who was a 'Monarch' was indeed different.

1

[What is this? I clearly killed him...]

Deep within the dungeon. Legia, the King of Giants imprisoned here, looked puzzled as the human he had just killed reappeared unharmed. Regardless, Thomas clenched both fists and spoke.

– That was too quick. Now, let's try again. You promised, right? I will fight until I die.

And this time, he charged at the creature first.

Boom!

[You have died.]

And he met death again. Several times. Continuously.

[You have died.]

[You have died.]

[You have died.]

[...]

1

Thus, he repeated death and resurrection countless times.

And then.

– Good. Let's fight again, Legia.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 345 - Chapter 342

Chapter 345: Chapter 342

The more Thomas Andre repeated death, the stronger he became, little by little. Even without leveling up conventionally, all his combat experience accumulated. All of Legia's attack patterns and weaknesses were etched into Thomas Andre's muscles and brain. The same applied to his soul. As his experiences visiting the Sea of the Afterlife continued to accumulate, his vessel grew increasingly stronger and more resilient. It was a never ending cycle...

– Let's fight again, Legia.

[...]

It repeated again.

– Again.

Again and again.

3

– Legia.

Continuously...

[You have died.]

[You have died.]

[...]

[Would you like to restart?]

– Again.

– Again.

Eventually, Legia's patience ran out, he snapped.

[Kraaak! Do you still not understand! No matter how many times you repeat this! There is no chance for you to win!]

– So? You won't fight?

[What kind of creature is this...!]

The King of Giants was furious. Indomitable fighting spirit. He simply couldn't comprehend Thomas Andre's appearance, returning shamelessly as if nothing had happened after dying countless times, burning with fighting spirit. And at the subsequent, blatant provocation, sparks flew from Legia's eyes.

– Ah, perhaps your giant race can only flee and avoid fights when there's no chance of winning?

3

[...!]

This provocation was destined to land. Because there was absolutely no trace of bluff in Thomas Andre's appearance as he casually adjusted his sunglasses, lips curled upwards. Under the Pledge of Sincerity. Every word coming from this insignificant little human's mouth was entirely genuine. And he had declared his intentions towards him, filled with sincerity, time and time again.

– King of Giants, Legia.

That blatant gaze...

– You will surely die here by my hand.

It was utterly absurd. The look in that man's eyes held the genuine intent to kill him. He regarded him, the great King of Giants, as mere prey.

– I am Humanity's Strongest Hunter, and you are the largest and strongest prey I have ever seen.

[...How dare you!]

Oblivious to how reckless and impossible it was. As the attempts repeated, that 'sincerity' was clearly and firmly being imprinted upon Legia. By the Pledge of Sincerity binding them. All those words were filled to the brim with sincere 'killing intent'.

– So remember it clearly even in death. My name is Thomas Andre. Not 'Sung Jinwoo 2'. I am Humanity's Strongest Hunter, who will kill you.

2

Perhaps killing this man without releasing the chains that bound him would be an easier path to take. If he himself had only one life, he certainly would have done so. No, perhaps that was the original storyline. A special event where this enormous chunk of experience points was served up before him, hands and feet bound tightly, to allow the player easy and rapid growth. If not for that, there would be no reason to present such a

strong boss monster, impossible to face at the current level, bound hand and foot right before his eyes. But...

What fun would it be to just follow the predetermined story? Especially when he had spare lives. Facing a difficult game, what was the problem with repeating the events until success was achieved? As long as the goal was worth reaching. Wasn't repeating it hundreds, thousands of times possible precisely because it was a game? Thomas Andre charged at the King of Giants once more. Legia roared.

[Why go to such lengths! Do you not fear death! Do you not tire of repeating the agony!]

2

– Tire? How could I possibly abandon this place, leaving behind something as large and beautiful as you?

4

[...What?]

– Anything that makes my heart race is beautiful. You are no exception.

'I'm trapped with a complete madman.' Legia thus defined the human named Thomas Andre. And truly, ironically. Quite cruelly... The horrific nightmares Thomas had repeatedly dreamt every night for years past. The excruciating nightmares of being thoroughly and mercilessly defeated by the violence of 'Sung Jinwoo', a being far more overwhelmingly powerful than the likes of Legia before him. At this moment, facing the formidable enemy, they were serving as his unshakable encouragement. Repeating a battle destined for defeat. Yet never stopping. Repeating the quests in front of him each day. Was that a game? No, to Thomas, that was life itself.

1

– I learned something new thanks to this game. Fighting the weak is mere violence, but fighting the strong is courage.

3

And Sung Jinwoo's life, experienced within this game...

– It's not because I'm a special human. He too, Sung Jinwoo, always lived like this. Born infinitely weak... yet always preparing for death, charging at the strong, an underdog.

1

Looking back, his own childhood was similarly difficult. White Trash. Growing up in a poor white immigrant family in America, bullied in a school full of black children. To survive in those lawless slums, he had to become strong himself. The weak lose everything. The strong take it all. In that respect, Thomas Andre was quite lucky. He was born with a stronger body than others. If someone hit him, he was the type of innate tough guy who would immediately charge back and bite off an ear. But 'Sung Jinwoo's' life was different from the start. Humanity's Weakest Weapon? An E-rank Hunter? Born into all that inferiority, a life lived as a social underdog. To fight, risking one's life to protect family within that context, truly required 'courage.' And...

5

– ...Now his son is doing the same. Saying he'll help his father who went off on a business trip far away.

Sung Suho. The son of the Shadow Monarch, Sung Jinwoo. Thinking of the kid's face, who must be somewhere, striving to improve even at this moment, Thomas Andre gritted his teeth.

– That's why I absolutely cannot give up. Even that snot-nosed kid is running around trying to save the world alone like his father, so being an adult and just watching is frankly embarrassing. Relying on just one person for the entire future and just watching is a foolish act I refuse to repeat.

4

Because Thomas Andre had already experienced that desperate future once. Because he knew the overwhelming fear felt before the numerous Monarchs. He absolutely could not give up this time. He refused to give up. And the result...

– Sung Jinwoo, now I finally understand why you were so strong.

Thomas suddenly murmured.

– You were always fighting enemies like this. Only now have I finally approached your level.

7

[...!]

Before he knew it. The King of Giants lay before him, gasping for breath. Now it was time for the finish. Thomas Andre drew his serrated sword to slice through the creature's tough hide and sever its neck. He had finally won.

– You worked hard. Now die.

[...Hahahaha!]

– Hm?

But then. Legia, lying exhausted, suddenly burst into hearty laughter, his back shaking. However the feeling was completely different from before. As if he had become someone else entirely.

Flash!

Suddenly, a light flashed, enveloping the entire dungeon. And from Legia's collapsed body, a magical beast resembling a crocodile emerged.

[Magnificent. A worthy vessel has finally appeared.]

– You are?

A strange light appeared in Thomas Andre's eyes. Kindly, this game displayed names above enemies' heads.

[King of Monstrous Humanoids, Monarch of Trials Ammut]

1

Confirming it, Thomas adopted a guarded stance.

– Ammut? A new Monarch?

[Krrk. Do not be alarmed. I am something like an administrator of this game.]

– Administrator? I don't know what business an administrator has, but this is an important moment, so don't interfere. It's finally time for me to kill this guy and level up.

[Ah, that's why I came personally. This is actually something like a hidden quest, so I have to hand over the reward myself.]

– This was a hidden quest?

2

[So to speak. You were the first and will likely be the last, no one else will attempt such a mad act as you did.]

1

– Hooh?

At the words 'first and last,' a strange light flickered in Thomas Andre's eyes. He didn't know the reason, but wasn't it quite a rewarding statement for the first player of this game?

[Anyway, take your reward.]

Ammut grinned wickedly and opened his palm.

Fwoooooosh—!

Then, a sphere of swirling darkness appeared above his palm.

— Is that the reward?

[Yes. It is called the 'Primordial Darkness.' A fresh one I recently acquired. But the race that originally inherited this power became extinct long ago, and there was no one else qualified, making it difficult to make use of it. But to think a vessel capable of proving their qualification for this power would appear among humans.]

4

Smiling contentedly, the sphere of darkness from Ammut's hand slowly flew towards Thomas Andre. He instinctively accepted it.

[That darkness is now yours. You are sufficiently qualified.]

1

At that moment, the 'Primordial Darkness' permeated Thomas Andre. The qualification was sufficient. And the vessel was not lacking. It was the moment a new King of Giants was born. From the start, this Tower of Trials, this level-up system incorporated into the tower, was a place designed to give trials until a human vessel could contain the power of a Monarch.

* * *

Back to the present.

Thomas Andre, who had succeeded in becoming the King of Giants after much hardship, was playing the game when he sensed the anomaly and emerged from the capsule.

Boom! Crack!

Kyaaak—!

Thomas Andre was tearing off and breaking the giant butterfly's wings and legs one by one with overwhelming physical force. With each shattered joint, each torn wing, golden blood scattered into the sky from the wounds.

[How can a human harbor the Primordial Darkness!]

1

[Our plan was perfect!]

[For a mere human to become the King of Giants!]

[Kraaaaaak!]

"Never done weightlifting? If you keep tearing and recovering, you get bigger. Seems the soul's vessel is similar."

1

Thomas's giant palm covered the sky, blocking the view. Before it, the Apostle of Conquest trembled in fear.

[Khahaha! The first hunt of a new Monarch. Quite a spectacle.]

3

Ammut's laughter was heard from somewhere.

[This will be your first step towards conquest. Continue, King of Giants.]

At that voice, Thomas Andre grinned faintly and delivered the finishing blow.

Crack!

At that moment, gold and black light explosively collided. The creature's body released tremendous energy. And as the largest one died, the smaller Apostles of Conquest scattered throughout New York City instantly turned to dust and dispersed.

[King of Giants, Monarch of Conquest]

1

His new title was confirmed at that moment.

* * *

And at that time. In the White House, the President and his advisors were watching the entire scene unfold.

"Thomas Andre has defeated the monster."

An advisor said with a trembling voice.

"No, he has become a new monster."

Silence fell in the White House meeting room. And a phrase simultaneously surfaced in all their minds.

'National-Level Hunter.'

That title, which until recently existed only within the game released by Ajin Soft, was officially formalized by unanimous consent at that moment. Because a monster like that, capable of overthrowing a nation if he wished, could hardly be classified merely as 'S-rank'.

3

* * *

"So, Ammut."

Thomas Andre asked in the direction where he felt Ammut's presence.

"What is Suho doing now? Has he become a Monarch like me?"

[Not yet. The issue of the vessel hasn't been resolved yet.]

"Vessel? If he's 'His' son, it shouldn't be lacking?"

[Quite the opposite. The vessel was sufficient from the start. More than sufficient, even overflowing. But sometimes, what you put inside the vessel is more important than its size.]

4

With those words, Ammut chuckled and disappeared. Thomas Andre, looking at the empty space, smiled in a similar manner.

"What you put inside... Indeed, that must be it."

It was a smile that only those who had inherited the Primordial Darkness could comprehend.



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 346 - Chapter 343

Chapter 346: Chapter 343

2

Ting!

[The King of Giants, Monarch of Conquest is born.]

"System. Record this as my deed as well. It seems I've just completed another vessel."

Suho grinned, speaking to the system that was calculating his class change. Then, as if in response to his words, numerous level-up notifications appeared one after another.

Ting, Ting, Ting!

[Level Up!]

[Level Up!]

[Level Up!]

[...]

A feast of immense experience points flooded in as if waiting. Suho's level soared sky-high. There wasn't any particular quest, nor had Suho directly defeated a magical beast. Yet, as if he had extorted them by threatening the system, the experience points came in response to Suho's words. But this was neither a threat nor conversation. As Suho had stated, he was simply being rewarded with the correct amount of 'advancement points' corresponding to his achievements.

Furthermore Suho no longer considered these levels or experience figures important. From the start, these numbers were merely indicators of how the 'system' defined his existence. But, to be more precise, the system wasn't the judge of that either. It was literally an auxiliary device. A convenient calculator that easily deciphered how much Suho's rank had risen. Then, what was the true entity that actually judged Suho's rank? Suho had been gradually realizing the answer for a long time. It started as a vague guess, but only after becoming strong enough to clear even the class change quest did

he finally become certain. At this very moment. A 'gaze' was reaching him, meticulously examining the path Suho had walked, not through numerical calculations, but far more directly and fundamentally, seeking to define his 'name'. Suho met that appraising gaze squarely and grinned.

2

"...I always wondered. What exactly is that '(Unknown)' skill."

Skill: 'Unknown'.

The unidentified skill that had always forcibly stopped time in various situations and dragged his soul somewhere. Thanks to that skill, Suho had experienced truly diverse events. He had inadvertently become a priest for dead Monarchs. He had also helped with the succession ceremonies for new Monarchs. There was one common thread in all those events...

'Nothingness'

The pure white world that always existed at the final destination Suho reached through that skill. An endlessly unfolding white horizon. Where nothing existed except him... The boundary of nothingness. An unknown space where even the dead Monarchs, who had thoroughly returned to nothingness without leaving even a soul, could briefly open their eyes... Suho could now properly ascertain the identity of that place. Because at this very moment, as that blatant 'gaze' from beyond assessed Suho's rank, he could simultaneously look properly beyond that gaze. So he looked up at the incredibly vast existence beyond and curled his lips.

1

"I see now... the World Tree has a shadow too."

Fwooooosh!

As soon as those words ended, a pure white shadow enveloped Suho.

1

Ting!

[Passive Skill '(Unknown)' activated.]

Fwooooosh!

As always. The area of the class change quest surrounding Suho melted away, and a 'pure white darkness' completely covered it. And, as always, an endless horizon

stretched out before him. But whereas until now, dead Monarchs had always awaited Suho beyond that horizon, today was different. The existence waiting for Suho beyond was not some Monarch, but something he had anticipated.

[World Tree]

The World Tree stood tall. Looking down at Suho from an incredible height.

"Now it's certain."

Though he had encountered the World Tree several times already, this time it looked different. This place, now, was the opposite side. This 'white shadow' filling his entire vision was the vast shadow cast behind the World Tree. The shade of the World Tree.

[Hello.]

And beyond the pure white horizon someone offered a simple greeting. Simultaneously, the white shadow shimmered, and an existence mimicking Suho's form approached. Meeting its gaze, he also greeted it.

3

"Yes, hello to you too. Should I say we've met before?"

[We have. I was always by your side.]

"What should I call you? World Tree?"

At Suho's question, 'He' calmly shook his head.

[No, the World Tree is dead. It slowly withered and died after the Creator perished.]

1

"Then what are you?"

[I am the 'Shadow of the World Tree'. The great flow of souls left behind when the World Tree died.]

5

Simultaneously with that answer, a change occurred in the passive skill section of the skill information window that automatically opened.

Ting.

[Skills]

[Passive Skill: (Unknown) Lv.Max]

Ting.

[Skills]

[Passive Skill: Shadow of the World Tree Lv.Max]

3

Finally, the name of the previously unidentified skill was revealed. Checking the status window, Suho asked.

"Shadow of the World Tree... Do plants have souls?"

[Usually not. But the World Tree is no ordinary plant.]

The Shadow of the World Tree, with the same face as Suho, answered while looking back at him.

[The World Tree is the origin of this universe, a cyclical device that returns dead souls to living beings. If forced to categorize, it is a tool of the Creator, like the 'Cup of Reincarnation'. And I, now... am the shadow cast beneath the death of that tool, and its soul.]

1

'World Tree.'

Recently, even the Apostle of Conquest fighting Suho had been overjoyed upon sensing the World Tree's energy nearby. That's how essential and inevitable the World Tree's existence was, exerting immense influence on the universe just by being there. It was a massive lump of nutrients, harboring tremendous energy in itself. Even with the World Tree now dead, that fact remained unchanged.

[There was a time when the soldiers of the Rulers were born from the fruits of the World Tree. But it has long since lost that function. And as time goes on, the World Tree will wither even more than now and lose more functions. When that happens, what do you think will occur in this universe?]

The Shadow of the World Tree asked calmly. But it wasn't a question seeking an answer.

[Not just the soldiers of the Rulers, but no other life forms will be born either. Including humans, it will become a world where no new children are born, and existing life forms only gradually age and die.]

4

At that definitive statement, Suho's eyes widened.

"No one will be born anymore?"

1

[Correct. And the signs have already begun. The universe is increasingly transforming into one where deaths overwhelmingly outnumber births. Truly, the end of the universe. A universe without a god ultimately ends this way. But it's alright. You have a choice.]

"A choice?"

[Yes, your father...]

The Shadow of the World Tree gestured towards Suho and said.

[Your father, the Shadow Monarch, can raise all the souls of this universe into the legion of death. Then this will truly become a dimension of death. No new births, but... death is eternal. That too is a new beginning and an end. Objectively speaking, it's not a bad outcome. Much better than being devoured by the gods of the outer universe.]

"...I don't think my father would want that."

As Suho's expression hardened, the Shadow of the World Tree readily nodded.

[True. He likely wouldn't. I know your father's disposition well. While being the king who rules death, he simultaneously loves life more than anyone. Such irony is also a characteristic of the human race. Therefore, the World Tree concluded that, in the end, there is only one remaining method.]

The Shadow of the World Tree smiled palely, pointing at itself.

[Specifically, using me. Using the Shadow of the World Tree to somehow revive the World Tree itself.]

"Using the shadow to revive it, does that mean using the Shadow Power on you?"

3

[No. If it could be resolved that easily, I would have asked your father long ago.]

The Shadow of the World Tree wore a bitter expression.

[First, let me explain properly about the World Tree.]

Fwooooosh—

[This will be easier than listening.]

"...!"

With those words, new knowledge flowed into Suho's mind. That knowledge concerned the flow of all souls circulating around the World Tree. Since it was a passage through which all souls moved, the massive tree itself was akin to a vast spiritual universe. Because of that, its fundamental nature was the exact opposite of the Sea of the Afterlife.

If the Sea of the Afterlife was a spiritual universe existing as a deep abyss of darkness, the bottom of the abyss, the 'Shadow of the World Tree' towering above it was the opposite. It was a spiritual universe composed not of the legion of death raised by the Shadow Power, but of the vast souls seeking to be reborn as new life forms.

[In short, the Shadow of the World Tree is a natural spiritual universe that does not defy death. Not a single soul, but a great flow and passage for souls.]

Because of that, the 'white shadow' of the World Tree, extending beyond the deep shade of darkness, reached out towards the entire universe. However, that shadow was simply too vast to be contained within one's sight.

[But precisely because of that characteristic, the Shadow of the World Tree possesses a nature utterly unreachable by the Shadow Monarch who exists as the king who rules death; the passage for souls seeking not to defy death is like oil and water, a relationship where they cannot mix.]

Ultimately, it meant that even the Shadow Monarch could not raise the Shadow of the World Tree. But the instinct of the World Tree, originally created to sustain the universe, desperately extended its shadow for the sake of this universe even as it withered and died. Hoping its edge would somehow reach someone qualified. And that hope finally, barely succeeded in reaching somewhere.

[That was you. Sung Suho.]

The Shadow of the World Tree pointed at Suho again and spoke.

[The son of the Shadow Monarch. A new life born from the King of Death. You, born bearing both life and death, those exact opposite attributes, perhaps you could create a special variable. That was the best the World Tree could conceive at the final moment.]

But that was merely creating a variable, not a perfect solution. Even the World Tree could not dare judge what kind of variable the existence known as Sung Suho would create. So, for the time being, like watering and nurturing a sprout...

[The decision was made to first foster your growth. Though no one could guarantee what fruit would bear at the end of that growth, it was the best option at the time. Even actively utilizing the system applied to you, if necessary.]

1

"...Hooo."

Finally, Suho, having absorbed all the knowledge conveyed by the Shadow of the World Tree as his own, calmly opened his eyes. Deep within those pupils, tranquil darkness and light intermingled. In that calmness, Suho looked back on his past days. A young age that could never be called a long life. But so many things had happened in between. A life that had passed through many experiences and trials. Using all those as nourishment, he had become who he was now. And exactly reflecting this current self like a mirror, he looked at the 'White Shadow' standing before him with a calm gaze and asked.

"So, what's the result? Are you satisfied with me now?"

[Perhaps. That is rather the question I wish to ask you. I have merely watched over your growth. From now on, the choice rests solely with you. So I ask. What fruit do you wish to bear now? Setting aside the continuation of the universe and the revival of the World Tree, what kind of existence do you yourself wish to become.]

"You say not to worry about the continuation of the universe and the revival of the World Tree? Is that alright?"

[Yes. As I first said, I am merely the Shadow of the World Tree. The continuation and circulation of the universe is the duty of the World Tree, it has nothing to do with me, the shadow. Therefore, as I first stated, I see the ending where everyone becomes soldiers of death and lives eternally as not bad either. Wouldn't it be fine for at least one such dimension to exist among the many universes?]

The Shadow of the World Tree faced Suho with a somewhat mischievous smile. That expression was exactly like the one Suho made when he was being playful.

1

[Therefore, I am simply curious about your intentions.]

But though his mouth was smiling, his eyes had been staring intently into Suho's soul from the very beginning. With an unwavering, straightforward gaze.

[Because you are everything to me.]

"...I am everything?"

Suho asked again at the words that held a strange resonance. Then, the Shadow of the World Tree nodded and introduced itself in a way different from before.

[I am the Shadow of the World Tree, and an existence born solely to reach you.]

Smiling...

[In other words, I am the Irregular: 'White Shadow,' born only for you.]

5

[...]

[Therefore, I have long awaited the moment when I would finally meet you.]

7

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 347 - Chapter 344 Chapter 347: Chapter 344

2

[Irregular: White Shadow]

Although the Shadow of the World Tree defined itself as such, that name was simultaneously the most fitting expression to symbolize Sung Suho, standing face-to-face with it here.

[You are the son of the Shadow Monarch, and at the same time, an existence with the Ruler's Authority dwelling within your soul from the moment of birth. You probably cannot fathom how significant that is, because you have been such an existence since the moment you were born. That is why I intend to tell you.]

Fwaaaah—

With those words, new knowledge flowed into Suho.

[Before that, let me ask just one thing. How much do you truly know about your father?]

'Shadow Monarch.'

...That knowledge was none other than the story of his own father, Sung Jinwoo.

[Most children, transcending race and dimension, do not know in detail what kind of life the parents who gave birth to them have lived. They don't even wonder in the first place, nor do they ask. Because parents existed from the moment they were born, it's as natural as breathing, so they are not even aware of what they don't know. But you, at least, must know. About your father.]

The Shadow of the World Tree spoke with a faint smile.

[Sung Jinwoo. Though your father is now called by the name Shadow Monarch, his origins lie in a completely different place. Precisely, the 'Primordial Light'.]

Faaaaaah—

The memory of creation unfolded before Suho's eyes.

[This is a story you already know. The Creator of this universe, now deceased, split the Primordial Light to create the Fragments of Brilliant Light, namely the Rulers. Likewise, he split the Primordial Darkness to create the eight Monarchs.]

And to the Fragments of Brilliant Light, he gave the mission to protect this world. Simultaneously, to the Monarchs, he gave the mission to destroy this world.

[And he made the two forces fight endlessly.]

As he said, this was a story Suho knew well, and he also knew the outcome. Catastrophe. The Fragments of Brilliant Light, enraged upon learning that all the war was solely for the Absolute Being's amusement, staged a rebellion and murdered their god.

But the story the Shadow of the World Tree intended to tell began after that.

[However, there was one being who did not join that rebellion..., the 'Greatest Fragment of Brilliant Light'. The Primordial Light that served the Absolute Being more faithfully than anyone else. That was 'Ashborn,' the first Shadow Monarch.]

The Absolute Being, wary of the Fragments of Brilliant Light and Monarchs who had 'grown' enough to potentially threaten him through the eons-long war, had made one provision. He had implanted within Ashborn, his most loyal servant, the power to return

everything to nothingness. It was a power that should never have awakened, should never have existed.

[The moment the Absolute Being met his death at the hands of his creations' rebellion... the 'Ninth Monarch,' who should not exist, embodying both the Primordial Light and the Primordial Darkness simultaneously, was born.]

Tracing back, the first Irregular wasn't Sung Suho, but the Shadow Monarch himself. Because he was an existence embodying the powers of polar opposites, which could not and should not exist together, within one body.

[Though each was merely a fragment, the fact that those fragments possessing opposing powers merged into one was by no means an ordinary event.]

The Primordial Light, split into eight pieces. The Primordial Darkness, split into eight pieces.

[...Two attributes that could never become one, have merged.]

The shadow of the World Tree 'dared' to say something that no one else could think of.

[That meant the being itself became a 'Fragment of Itarim'.]

2

"A Fragment of Itarim?"

At the unexpected words, Suho's eyes widened significantly. In contrast, the Shadow of the World Tree maintained a consistently calm tone, despite the shocking content. It was merely relaying a story everyone knew, but delving a little deeper.

[Yes. Embodying both the Primordial Light and Darkness simultaneously means just that. The powerful foundation of force, which the Creator had deliberately split in half, merged again. Of course, even so, it was merely a fragment, but at the moment the true god died, it became the one and only existence qualified to replace him in that position. And that was precisely the reason why all Monarchs and Rulers revered Ashborn.]

1

In short, the moment the Fragment of Light and the Fragment of Darkness merged, Ashborn became an 'absolute' existence that could overwhelm everyone else by his presence alone.

[However, this was by no means the outcome the Absolute Being desired. It was merely a preparation for a 'what if' that should never have happened.]

1

From the Absolute Being's perspective, it was a provision made while sincerely believing such an unimaginable thing as rebellion would never happen.

[In the case where his creations simultaneously turned against him. He prepared a weapon capable of crushing them all. Though that weapon did not contain all the powers of a god, in terms of simple combat ability, it was truly the 'strongest'. A weapon powerful enough to fend off all his created beings even if they attacked simultaneously.]

1

The proof was right before them. Even though numerous Itarim from beyond the outer universe were invading, aiming for this realm, the Shadow Monarch was effortlessly holding them back.

1

[In the first place, such a feat is absolutely impossible with the power of a mere 'Monarch'.]

"Are you saying... that's only possible because my father is a Fragment of Itarim?"

[Correct. To be precise, it's because he inherited the Fragment of Itarim. Let me reiterate, the one who became the Fragment of Itarim was 'Ashborn,' not 'Sung Jinwoo'. In fact, that part is the most miraculous and surprising aspect. That a human's vessel could be vast enough to contain a Fragment of Itarim...]

The Shadow of the World Tree stroked its chin with an expression of genuine curiosity. But from its perspective, there was no way to satisfy this curiosity. As mentioned before, the World Tree and the Shadow Monarch were like oil and water. The king who defied death and the World Tree which did not were existences that could never meet. Hence, the conclusion it arrived at was 'Sung Suho.'

[I could reach you, born as Sung Jinwoo's son. It was truly fortunate.]

Sung Suho was a different breed altogether from Sung Jinwoo. Not a Fragment of Itarim, but a new life form born from a Fragment of Itarim. If Sung Jinwoo was an existence where the Primordial Light and Darkness merged into one, Sung Suho was born with Primordial Darkness and Light already combined. Thanks to that, Suho could instinctively use the Ruler's Authority, the power of light, from a young age. And simultaneously, he could freely traverse between the world of life and the world of death. The results were similar, but the principle of their birth was fundamentally different.

[Do you know? While giving birth to you, how much Holy Water of Life potions do you think Cha Hae-In consumed?]

3

"...What?"

At those words, Suho's expression instantly hardened. Simultaneously, the image of his mother, Cha Hae-In, appeared before him as an illusion created by the Shadow of the World Tree. It was a scene it remembered well.

- Aaaak...!

Cha Hae-In. Her belly was swollen like a large mountain, indicating it was before Suho's birth, like all expectant mothers, she was feeling labor pains while carrying her son in her womb. But just as her son was a special existence, those labor pains were also extraordinary.

2

[Cha Hae-In faced death several times before giving birth to you. And each time, Sung Jinwoo fed her the 'The Holy Water of Life'.]

2

Thanks to that, Cha Hae-In barely survived the brink of death and safely gave birth to her baby. ...Thus, Suho was born.

[Looking back, it was a truly critical moment. Think about it. From the perspective of the Shadow Monarch, harboring a Fragment of Itarim. If you hadn't been born safely, or if his beloved partner had died in the process, what would he have felt? What decision might he have made?]

4

The Shadow of the World Tree asked in a light tone, but the weight of the question was by no means light. And the answer to that... somehow, Suho felt like he had already heard it earlier.

'If Mother died...'

In fact, from Suho's perspective, it was a hypothesis he had imagined several times long ago, considering the worst-case scenario. The past few years. The overwhelming fear of both his parents suddenly going missing. There were years lived amidst the worry and sorrow that perhaps it wasn't a disappearance. And now. At this point where he had

learned and was using the Shadow Power, the moment Suho thought of his mother's death, only one alternative came to mind.

"If that had happened... would he have revived Mother as a Shadow Soldier?"

1

Suho's choked voice quietly escaped his lips. The Shadow of the World Tree nodded.

[That's right, with a very high probability, wouldn't such an option definitely exist? Of course, knowing your father's personality, he would have respected Cha Hae-In's wishes. But even then, you must first summon the dead soul to ask for its wishes, right? Then, since he summoned her anyway, wouldn't it be okay to live together for just a few decades before returning her to nothingness? A few centuries would be even better.]

"..."

Suho fell silent. At his reaction, the Shadow of the World Tree shrugged and continued speaking.

[But would it only be Cha Hae-In? What about your grandfather and grandmother? They are old, won't they die of old age soon? In the end... all humans eventually die. Whether by illness, old age, or being torn apart by a magical beast. But isn't it a bit unfair?]

And the words that followed were somewhat realistic. Chillingly so.

[The truth is, other people also have families they love. But when the families of others die, they are just left to grieve, while the Shadow Monarch alone lives happily ever after with his entire family, eternally immortal; isn't that a bit unfair? Even though he has the ability to revive all those people, deliberately letting them die seems quite cruel, doesn't it?]

It was a considerably difficult problem. Even Suho himself felt complex emotions, unsure what choice he would make if placed in such a position. And simultaneously, he wondered.

'What would Father have done?'

His father must have experienced such situations several times already. If so, how many times had he watched acquaintances die before his eyes? Imagining his father raising all of them as Shadow Soldiers somehow didn't seem fitting.

"...No wonder Father didn't seem to have many friends."

The conclusion was a bit anticlimactic, but it was true. Recalling his father's appearance as he had observed him throughout his life, he seemed outgoing, yet surprisingly, he

rarely formed close bonds with others. A very small number of friends besides family. He recalled images of him thoroughly drawing lines with everyone else. Perhaps that was his own mindset, a determination not to get deeply involved in the deaths of acquaintances. And recalling that image of his father, Suho felt a little bitter. But the Shadow of the World Tree, having witnessed the moment Suho was born, understood the practical worries and decisions the Shadow Monarch faced at that moment better than Suho did.

[If your father were to raise all beings in this world as Shadow Soldiers so they could be together forever... what kind of universe would that truly be?]

Suho felt like he had already heard the answer to that earlier.

"...So that's what you meant before. The dimension of death. A future where everyone lives on as Shadow Soldiers."

[Correct. When you were born, your mother was fortunately safe, but being human, she will eventually face death someday. What choice will your father make then? And once he has revived someone close to him, wouldn't it become easier to revive others?]

Listening to the story of the Shadow of the World Tree, which presented a plausible future, Suho was lost in thought. Then he raised his head and asked.

"So what are you trying to say? Why are you telling me this story?"

[... I asked first. What do you want to do? Your intention. You seem to have forgotten, but we were discussing your class change quest, weren't we?]

Ting.

As if waiting, the system message returned before Suho's eyes.

[An opportunity to advance to a higher class based on acquired advancement points is given.]

[Beginning calculation.]

[Calculating advancement points...]

'Advancement Points.'

No longer did Suho see these as mere 'numbers.' It was the future ahead, the path he would walk.

[Will you become the Monarch of Destruction as planned? That's not a bad choice either. You would acquire a great power to help your father.]

The Shadow of the World Tree urged for an answer. Suho looked directly at it and opened his mouth.

1

"I..."

2

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 348 - Chapter 345

Chapter 348: Chapter 345

Sirka and Ammut conversed while watching Nidhögg.

[...It's taking longer than expected.]

[Have patience. You took much longer than this.]

Hwooooo—

This was the Sea of the Afterlife, where a harsh winter had arrived. Due to the blizzard, pure white snow now covered the top of the World Tree. Truly, the World Tree's nightmare. Even Nidhögg, who had fled to the higher branches, could not remain unharmed in this cold.

[Nidhögg, the Serpent that Gnaws at the Roots of the World Tree]

Currently, Nidhögg was completely sealed by Sirka's power. Frozen solid by the harsh blizzard she unleashed. Just like Sirka herself had been trapped within a massive ice wall during her succession ceremony.

Grrr...

'What's with that glare? What can you possibly do?'

Sirka felt a strange sensation anew. Nidhögg, stiffly frozen on the snow-covered branches of the World Tree, didn't exude the same pressure as when she first saw it. Well... It was only natural. When she first saw Nidhögg, the creature harbored an energy so immense it made her mind go blank. It wasn't just a matter of size; due to the Primordial Darknnesses it contained, it radiated a pressure comparable to a cosmic catastrophe. Against such a being, the will or courage to fight directly was meaningless. One could only undergo the trial it presented and be judged for qualification. Failing meant becoming mere prey, waiting for inevitable execution. But not anymore. Nidhögg

was no longer the same entity as back then. Now it only had three heads remaining. The other four had already been absorbed by their side.

[Counting purely by numbers, we have more.]

King of Demons, Monarch of Gluttony, Esil.

King of Snow Folk, Monarch of Nightmares, Sirka.

King of Monstrous Humanoids, Monarch of Trials, Ammut.

And... King of Giants, Monarch of Conquest, Thomas Andre.

2

Of course, since each Primordial Darkness possessed different properties and strengths, it couldn't be simply measured by numbers alone. The capabilities and specific authorities of the Monarchs also varied greatly. However, regardless of how many remained, to the Monarchs who had proudly inherited the Primordial Darkness, Nidhögg was no longer the object of vague fear it once was. They had already proven their qualifications. Nidhögg was no longer the judge evaluating their vessels. Surprisingly, to them now, the entity known as Nidhögg was merely a warehouse still storing three Primordial Darknesses.

Immediately after Ammut became the Monarch of Trials and used his authority to spread the Tower of Trials across the world, Suho led all his allies in pursuit of the fleeing Nidhögg. The purpose was none other than his own succession. Despite having undergone the Dragon King's trials several times, Suho had still not become the Monarch of Destruction. Setting aside the reason for that, the immediate goal was to hunt Nidhögg and secure the Primordial Darkness first. He was a Hunter, after all. A hunter. Nidhögg hid amongst the vast World Tree, whose end could not be fathomed, but finding it wasn't much of a problem. As immense as the World Tree was, Nidhögg's size was also considerable. Furthermore, Arsha deployed her Void Insects throughout the World Tree area, thoroughly searching potential hiding spots. The result...

– Found it.

– Grooooooooooar!

Nidhögg, curled up between the branches to escape the harsh cold, immediately charged fiercely upon encountering Suho. But there was no fear.

– Ammut is on our side.

1

Boom—!

– ...!

Ammut's fist, immediately lunging forward, struck Nidhögg squarely. Ammut already had a record of grabbing Nidhögg's maw with his bare hands and tearing it apart. Of course, the wound from that time had long since vanished without even a scar. Nidhögg, living by consuming the abundant leaves of the World Tree nearby, recovered quickly from any injury. But so what?

– We just need to catch it and tear it apart again!

– Grwooooooooooar!

Ammut's overwhelming violence and Nidhögg's furious struggles clashed at the heart of the World Tree. The aftermath was tremendous, but the outcome of the fight was decided from the start. Ammut, already strong, had become even more powerful after inheriting the Primordial Darkness. If Nidhögg hadn't been a being capable of continuous regeneration and recovery, Ammut alone might have been able to hunt it.

Of course, even among Monarch-level beings, not everyone was as strong as Ammut. While there were others that focused on combat like him, there were also those like Sirka, whose strength lay in nightmare-like debuffs. And Suho utilized their talents appropriately to hunt Nidhögg.

– Sirka! Now! Freeze it!

Fwaaaaaaah—

At Suho's command, an intense cold engulfed Nidhögg.

Crrackle—

Then, the massive head, battling Ammut, momentarily froze solid. And the twin daggers held in Suho's hands emitted intense light towards the neck of the creature covered in white frost.

[Item: Kamish's Wrath]

[Acquisition Difficulty: ??]

[Type: Dagger]

[Attack Power +1,500]

[The finest dagger crafted by a master artisan from the sharpest fang among dragon teeth.]

[Its sharpness is unparalleled, and its sensitivity to mana is exceptional.]

[This allows it to become an even more powerful weapon depending on the user's capability.]

Though the blades were significantly dulled from countless battles, they have been perfectly restored thanks to the efforts of outstanding master craftsmen. Until now, the Shadow Dwarves had worked tirelessly day and night to repair the damaged Kamish's Wrath. This was possible because Cha Hae-In had procured the necessary materials from the tomb of the berserk dragons. The result: Kamish's Wrath, having perfectly regained its former sharpness, surged forward, saturated with the Breath of Destruction unleashed by Suho.

Slice—

The scorching energy of destruction severed Nidhögg's frozen neck.

1

Kwa-boom—

The severed head of Nidhögg exploded, scattering pitch-black darkness in all directions. But the Primordial Darkness that emerged had no master.

1

Fwaaaaaaah—

— Krk?

Instantly, the eyes of Ammut, closest to the darkness, twitched.

— The darkness returns.

Just when they had succeeded in cutting off one head, surprisingly, the 'masterless Primordial Darkness' began to return to it. Nidhögg hadn't done anything specific. As though by instinct, the darkness was absorbed, as if sucked into it. Then, astonishingly, a new serpent head began to sprout from that spot.

— Groooooooooar!

Witnessing that scene, Suho made an instantaneous judgment. In such cases, it was one of two things.

– Either that darkness wasn't Antares's darkness, or...

He still lacked the qualification. For now, he decided not to dwell on the latter. Focusing on the former possibility, he cut off another of Nidhögg's heads using the same method. The first time was difficult; the next was easy. Freeze and cut. That was all. If other heads interfered in the process, Ammut and the other Monarchs would each block them. The numbers were equal anyway.

Fwaaaaaah—

Thus, new darkness burst forth again. And futilely, it returned not to Suho, but back to Nidhögg. No matter how many times he cut, the result was the same. Suho tasted bitterness in his mouth. It came to this, he finally had to admit it. The fact that he still lacked the qualification. Even if he now possessed the strength to hunt Nidhögg anytime, absorbing the Primordial Darkness was an entirely different matter. Ammut approached Suho and asked.

– What will you do now? There are no more heads left to try. Only that one remains, and Gray is already inside undergoing the succession.

Even while the war raged outside, Gray still showed no sign of emerging from within. It seemed the succession ceremony was proceeding in a lengthy manner, much like Sirka's had. At Ammut's words, Suho's gaze lingered for a moment on the Nidhögg's head Gray had entered. Within that head, which had remained tightly shut throughout the battle, lay the darkness of the King of Beasts, the Fang Monarch. There was no need to force it open. What he desired was Antares's power.

Ultimately, it was a failure. The strategy to ignore the succession ceremony and directly hunt Nidhögg to obtain the Primordial Darkness. However, it wasn't entirely without gain. Thanks to repeatedly encountering the Primordial Darkness like this, he had learned how to handle masterless Primordial Darkness.

– Sirka.

Suho called Sirka and gave an order. Pointing at the scene where the Primordial Darkness that had just burst out was returning to Nidhögg again.

– Can you perhaps freeze that darkness?

– ...!

At those words, Sirka was greatly startled. Even Esil was taken aback. Esil, the Monarch of Gluttony who desired to eat almost anything, instinctively realized the moment she encountered Primordial Darkness that wasn't hers.

'Eating it means death.'

Survival instinct. This was an instinct only Monarchs who had inherited darkness could understand.

'Harboring two or more Primordial Darknesses is impossible.'

2

'One without qualification eating it is also impossible.'

Even if forcibly frozen and swallowed, the Primordial Darkness would shatter the vessel and return to Nidhögg if it wasn't the vessel it acknowledged. Forcibly holding onto it would only result in the vessel bursting.

– It seems possible...

The power of the King of Snowfolk, Monarch of Nightmares, was not mere cold. As Sirka, reborn as the World Tree's nightmare, wielded the great power of winter capable of freezing even the Sea of the Afterlife, she could certainly freeze even the Primordial Darkness. But doing so wouldn't change anything.

– Eating it frozen is a bit risky...

– Me, eating? No, I've given up.

Suho dismissed Sirka's concern. He had thought of another idea. Looking back and forth between Nidhögg and the Monarch of Trials, Ammut.

– Ammut, what do you think? Nidhögg and the Tower of Trials. Aren't they somewhat similar?

– Hmm?

Ammut paused at those words, then nodded, his eyes gleaming.

– Indeed, that makes sense.

And he spoke to Sirka, who wore a bewildered expression.

– Sirka, first, freeze that Primordial Darkness. Prevent it from returning to Nidhögg.

– ...?

As Suho's and Ammut's gazes focused on her, Sirka quickly gathered her power. If that darkness was reabsorbed by Nidhögg, they would have to repeat the intense battle all over again.

Crrrraaaack!—

Thus, all the cold focused on the masterless Primordial Darkness. Ammut seeing it frozen, grinned widely.

— Now it's my turn.

— Yes, we'll need a freezer.

Fwaaaaaah—

Nodding at Suho's words, Ammut stretched out his hand, and immense pressure forcibly compressed and condensed the frozen darkness. To the point where it could fit in one hand. Its state was extremely precarious. The Primordial Darkness writhed, trying to break the ice and return to Nidhög as soon as possible. But Ammut guided it with his authority, sealing it within the Tower of Trials.

Fwaaaaaah—

Then, a surprising thing happened. As Suho had said, Nidhög and the Tower of Trials, both of which tested individuals to select the qualified, shared the same fundamental purpose. The frozen solid Primordial Darkness no longer resisted and obediently settled within the Tower of Trials. Patiently waiting for a qualified individual, just as it had within Nidhög.

And eventually, that darkness found a qualified individual inside. None other than Thomas Andre. A human who overcame the trial he set for himself and finally seized the power of the King of Giants. However, that process was by no means easy. It would have been absolutely impossible for Thomas Andre alone. The Tower of Trials, and the Monarch of Trials, Ammut, had guided him onto the path of succession to inherit the Primordial Darkness. Just like the priest Sung Suho had helped the others. Additionally it wasn't Ammut's work alone either. Slaying Nidhög together, freezing the darkness, imprisoning it in the Tower of Trials... The role of the priest, previously carried out solely by Suho, was this time accomplished through the combined efforts of everyone else – the result being Thomas Andre. As for other monarchs having performed the role of the priest, well...

[...If it weren't for Suho, we would never have inherited the power.]

They knew now. Back then they knew nothing. They remembered their former selves.

[Back then, I didn't know how weak I was.]

That's why they could 'dare' say such things...

That they would be the next Monarch.

That they were the Monarch's successor.

But to argue about such qualifications, how weak and insignificant they were back then. How insufficient and pathetic their vessels were from Nidhögg's perspective. That must be why Nidhögg had tried to devour and kill them at first sight.

[...But now I know.]

What true strength is.

[Becoming stronger is akin to realizing how weak one truly is.]

Now, having received 'power' thanks to Suho and truly becoming strong, Sirka couldn't kill Nidhögg, but she could hold it captive like this, confidently, with her own strength. Upon the frozen Sea of the Afterlife. Nidhögg was trapped in the ice, unable to move. Just like Sirka herself had been during her succession ceremony.

[...Hm?]

But then. Sirka's gaze, concentrated on Nidhögg, trembled. And she urgently called out to Ammut.

[Lord Ammut! Something is strange!]

[What is it?]

[Inside Nidhögg...! Something is moving!]

[What? The Primordial Darkness? No, that's not it.]

A strange light appeared in Ammut's eyes as he watched Nidhögg trapped in the ice.

[It's not the darkness. It's the one receiving it]

[Yes? But the one inside is...]

[It's one of the two.]

Ammut continued to watch the changes occurring inside Nidhögg with interest. At this very moment, only two beings were undergoing the succession ceremony inside Nidhögg. Gray. And Sung Suho. And usually, when such strange things happened...

[Generally, the cause is always one person...]

A smile touched Ammut's lips as he muttered.

[A curious event. Has the succession ceremony already ended? Then he should just come out.]

[Why... would he move towards where another darkness is located?]

Only three heads remained on Nidhögg. But those three were ultimately connected to Nidhögg's single body. Yet Sung Suho, who had been forced inside due to the class change quest... was, for some reason, moving within it. Towards another head where a different darkness resided.

6

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 349 - Chapter 346

Chapter 349: Chapter 346

1

The scent of blood.

1

Gray's nostrils filled with the metallic tang of blood and flesh from various beasts mingled together. Amidst the Primordial Forest, Gray panted for breath.

'Primordial Forest.'

A paradise and hell for beasts. This forest Gray currently wandered was a space created by the Primordial Darkness. A place to test the qualifications for becoming the King of Beasts. A primordial world where all manner of creatures that have existed since ancient times coexisted. Here, in this vast land extinct giant mammoths, red-maned lions ruling the savannahs, and countless predators from different eras and locations existed together. Only a being capable of dominating this primordial world with overwhelming power was qualified to inherit the Primordial Darkness.

Growl...

Just then, from the shadows of the dense forest, another group of predators revealed themselves. A giant rhinoceros with skin like steel armor, a black-maned lion, and a red-eyed bear. Each beast emanated a potent scent.

Grrr.

Seeing them, Gray also bared his teeth. He lowered his body slightly. The moment he gripped the ground firmly with his front paws, sharp claws emerged, scratching the earth. The giant rhinoceros eyed Gray's posture, growling arrogantly. A thick smell of blood clung to its body as well. It must have just finished hunting other beasts.

Like himself...

Indeed, countless carcasses lay scattered along Gray's path. Some half-eaten, others simply left dead. Seeing the defeated, easily numbering over several hundred, the rhinoceros let out a low growl, almost like a scoff. And immediately after pawing the ground...

RUMBLE!

Its massive body charged fiercely towards Gray. Displaying overwhelming power and speed that shook the forest with the force of the charge alone. But, just as its hard horn aimed to pierce Gray's torso with that momentum...

Whoosh—

Gray leaped upwards like the wind, the rhinoceros's horn futilely cut through the air.

Crunch!

Immediately after, Gray's fangs sank deep into its neck.

Kuaaargh!

The rhinoceros roared, shaking its body violently. But the more it struggled, the stronger and deeper Gray's claws and fangs pierced through its thick hide, digging into the delicate flesh beneath. He bit and clawed, tearing out chunks of meat.

Kwaaaduk!

Fushaaa—

Finally, blood erupted. A thick artery burst beneath Gray's teeth, and crimson liquid spurted like a fountain. The beast bellowed.

[Perfect.]

Watching the entire scene from behind, the Fang Monarch Rakan's lips curled upwards.

[You've become quite the hunter.]

He was deeply moved. Rakan suddenly recalled the first time he saw Gray. A weak pup, listless and near death. A mere whelp dying, having its blood sucked by Brockie of the Hyena clan. Fortunately saved by Suho, but having spent his life within the sanctuary since birth, he was a novice who had never properly learned how to hunt. That was Gray, the last descendant of his Clan. Thankfully, he had gained a lot of hunting experience alongside Suho since then, but those were the combat methods of a 'hunting dog.' However...

[First and foremost, the King of Beasts is not someone's hunting dog, but a hunter. One must seize the qualification as the apex predator through one's own strength.]

Thud—

Finally, the rhinoceros, after struggling for some time, breathed its last, the massive body collapsing. Before it, the remaining predators pawed the ground, growling. They couldn't hide their bewilderment at the giant dying so easily.

Grrr.

Gray stood proudly, placing a front paw on the rhinoceros's carcass, glaring at the remaining beasts. Fierce eyes. Yet, an unhurried calmness was felt in Gray's chilling gaze. Grasping his presence, the predators flinched, lowering their stances.

[Good...]

Rakan nodded. Looking back, Gray had never once held back or shrunk before enemies since the succession ceremony began. He may have never properly learned hunting methods, but neither had he learned retreat. That itself was the history of struggle Gray had learned from Suho.

1

Wooooo—!

Finally unable to bear it, the red-eyed bear charged first. Gray turned his body to meet it, but aiming for that moment, the black-maned lion simultaneously lunged at Gray's flank. An unexpected pincer attack.

[Sometimes, predators coordinate attacks against a single enemy. It is instinct, requiring no conversation.]

Before Rakan's explanation could even finish, the situation unfolded and concluded in an instant.

Thwack!

The lion's paw struck Gray. Perhaps in a normal situation, this single blow would have inflicted a fatal wound, tearing the opponent's internal organs. But Gray endured. The lion's fierce attack couldn't penetrate his thick fur. And Gray, simply taking the blow, twisted his body almost simultaneously and caught the lion's neck in a single bite.

Crunch!

The sound of the spinal bones being instantly crushed was heard.

Kwaaang!

Discarding the lion, Gray instantly turned and fiercely extended his front paw towards the chest of the charging red-eyed bear, in exactly the same attack as the lion tried on him.

Thwack—!

With that one blow, the bear's heart was destroyed. Instant death. The bear lost the light in its eyes without even uttering a scream. Witnessing that scene, the remaining predators turned tail and began to flee in panic.

Grrrrrrrk!

Gray didn't stand still. He targeted the fastest among them and gave chase. When running, Gray was like the living lightning. He tripped the fleeing puma by hooking its hind leg with his front paw, then tore into its neck. Meanwhile, the other predators vanished into the jungle.

[Will you pursue?]

Rakan asked. Gray shook his head without hesitation. Then, he turned back, approached the rhinoceros carcass, and devoured its heart. Thus, he consumed the flesh of the creatures he had hunted, one by one.

[A wise decision. If you left such tempting prey behind, only hyena-like creatures would feast.]

In the Primordial Forest, one had to eat when possible. If prey hid away, even the strongest predator could starve. And hyenas, lurking in the darkness, lay in wait, anticipating the moment a starved predator weakened.

[If you have stored up enough strength, move on.]

At that suggestion, Gray lifted his head. Rakan frowned, perhaps finding the expression displeasing.

[Where to go, you ask? Why question me about that? This world is a trial made for you; wherever your paws touch is the path.]

Everything else was already sufficient, but this was Gray's biggest problem. Having always trotted behind Suho, he didn't know how to choose his own prey by his own will – a 'hunting dog.' That was Gray's limitation. Rakan clicked his tongue and spoke.

[If you desire a stronger foe, seek the darker places. In this Primordial Forest, there are still plenty of creatures left for you to hunt.]

In the trial to become the King of Beasts. The Primordial Darkness required Gray to hunt every type of beast existing in the Primordial Forest. Only by finding, hunting, and devouring all of them could he prove himself the true King of Beasts. But the problem was that they didn't attack all at once. Beasts acted according to their own characteristics. Some, thankfully, formed packs and attacked. However, others lay in wait, seeking only opportunity, remaining hidden until the end. Far more beasts waited patiently for him to tire and weaken first. Tracking them down and hunting every single one was the task given to Gray.

[Still, you are doing better than expected. Regardless, since you were confined to the sanctuary from birth, if you cannot master these wild hunting methods, you are not qualified to be king.]

As Rakan said, everything Gray needed was gathered in this forest. Thanks to that, Gray was growing steadily over time. But the problem was that as he grew stronger, the other predators increasingly hid deeper in the darkness. What could be done? Even the strongest possessed no instinct to attack a beast stronger than themselves without provocation.

Grrr.

Thus, Gray had to blindly roam the dark forest, searching for his next prey. Seeking deeper, darker places.

And eventually...

He encountered the being lurking deep within the darkness beyond. Giant horns. Eyes overflowing with a terrifyingly immense aura.

[Behemoth. One of the races that met extinction at my hands.]

Kwaaang—

Combat was immediate. Behemoth. A monster three or four times Gray's size charged, breaking through all the trees in its path.

Rakan advised.

[You've gone too deep. At your current level, this is clearly a strong enemy. Retreat and build up your strength.]

Growl!

[...You do not listen.]

Let's reiterate, Gray had never learned retreat. A thorough hunting dog. He wouldn't seek prey himself, but once prey appeared before him, how strong the opponent was mattered little. He simply fought back.

1

Grrrrrrr!

Attack, then attack again. Even against the Behemoth, possessing overwhelmingly superior strength, Gray sought openings and fiercely bit and tore. The exact opposite situation from before. Gray's teeth couldn't penetrate the Behemoth's thick hide. But after several attempts, his fangs barely reached the creature's weakest point, the Achilles tendon. At that moment...

[Gray uses Skill: 'Paralysis'.]

[Gray uses Skill: 'Bleed'.]

Perhaps if Suho had been present, he would have seen these system messages. 'Rakan's Fang' and 'Kasaka's Venom Fang,' which he had given Gray. These two possessed opposite characteristics. The effects attached to Rakan's Fang were Critical Wound and Contempt for the Weak – powers for when the strong dominated the weak. Conversely, Kasaka's Venom Fang was a power more effective when the weak fought the strong...

[Effect 'Paralysis': Target cannot move.]

[Effect 'Bleed': Target loses 1% HP per second.]

The wound was clearly shallow, and the effects were faint. But it definitely worked! The Behemoth's massive body momentarily stumbled, limping.

[Now! Retreat and wait for an opportunity!]

Growl!

[Such a fearless creature!]

Gray moved contrary to Rakan's advice. Seeing the Behemoth show an opening, however brief, he seized the moment, climbing onto the Behemoth's back, aiming for its neck.

...Thwack!

But he was wrong... Only one leg was paralyzed. Struck by the Behemoth's massive arm, Gray was flung away, tumbling wretchedly on the ground. And immediately, towards his location a tree trunk, ripped out roots and all was swung like a whip.

Kwaaang—

Gray, without blinking an eye, faced the attack filling his entire field of vision, and bared his teeth ferociously.

Krwaaaaar!

With the intent to bite and destroy the entire log descending with immense destructive force.

[Th-this...!]

At that moment, when even Rakan, who had remained calm throughout, let out an urgent cry.

Woof?

Gray's eyes, which had been those of a ferocious predator, suddenly sparkled brightly. Because right in front of him... 'Suho' stood. Blocking the log with one hand.

"Uh, sorry. Am I a bit late?"

Suho spoke. Smiling broadly, looking not at the mighty beast Behemoth, but at Gray. Seeing his smile, Gray finally grinned too, his mouth splitting wide. Tongue lolling out, tail wagging.

[This is undoubtedly a dog...]

Rakan lamented at the pathetic sight. But on the other hand, it was fortunate. As had been the case with all previous successor candidates, having a priest present makes the succession smoother. Hadn't even those lacking qualification received the Primordial Darkness thanks to Suho? But...

Shiver.

The moment Rakan actually looked at Suho's form, his expression stiffened rigidly.

[W-wait. Who are you?]

Accompanying that was a look of utter astonishment. The 'Suho' who appeared before him was not the Suho Rakan had known until now.

[Have you inherited the Dragon King's darkness? No, even so, this aura...]

Rakan couldn't help but trail off. The presence Suho currently exuded overwhelmed the entire Primordial Forest. The aura emanating from the current Suho was so profound that even Rakan, the former Monarch, couldn't possibly fathom it. A bottomless pit that felt like it would suck him in just by looking. A distant abyss was felt.

[...What in the world have you become?]

Rakan asked, wary of him. Beneath Suho's feet, his elongated shadow harbored a pure white darkness.

Grooooooooooar—!

It wasn't just Rakan who felt wary. The hegemon of this region, Behemoth, roared, putting strength into the log it swung, which was being blocked effortlessly, with one hand. Suho, before answering Rakan's question, glanced up at the Behemoth. But the creature was too tall.

"My neck hurts from looking up."

1

[...!]

"Kneel."

3

With that single word, immense pressure crushed the Behemoth.

Kuuuung—!

Chapter 350: Chapter 347

The Behemoth, forcibly pressed to the ground, thrashed its enormous body. A most humiliating posture for the King of the Primordial Forest. But no matter how much it struggled, getting up was impossible. It felt as if an invisible giant hand was pressing down on its body. Truly an immense pressure.

'Ruler's Authority' Rakan recognized the nature of the power Suho was using. But it was on a different level from what he knew. Until now, Suho had used the 'Ruler's Authority' in the form of a skill. But now, it was different.

[...This is not a skill.]

It was as if... Suho himself had become a true Ruler. As if he were using the 'true' authority he had possessed since birth. Rakan swallowed dryly and asked Suho again.

[Who... are you.]

He had to be extremely cautious. What if Suho's vessel was so vast that it couldn't be fathomed, if such a profound aura was felt even after receiving the Dragon King's Primordial darkness, could he truly be satisfied with just one?

'A Monarch cannot harbor more than one Primordial Darkness.'

That was an impossibility. But... upon actually facing Suho, Rakan thought that perhaps it could be possible. If so, Suho... no, the entity that appeared in Suho's form, could it be aiming for the Primordial Darkness Gray was trying to inherit? Rakan was so bewildered by his aura that such a suspicion arose. But when Suho finally spoke, the tension that made the air feel as thick as water dissipated in an instant.

"Gray, you've worked hard. You're quite impressive as you are now, however..."

"Grrrrrr!"

Suho's hand stroked him. Gray, in turn wagged his tail, rubbing his head against Suho's hand with a friendly expression. But then...

Faaaaaah—

Riding Suho's hand, an unidentified 'blessing' descended upon Gray's head. A white light. No... a white shadow.

"Krrrrr?"

Instantly, Gray's eyes trembled. All of his fatigue and accumulated wounds, from pushing himself beyond his limits until now vanished, melting away as if they were snow.

Flash!

All his energy was restored. Moreover a new energy welled up from Gray's body. As if he had 'leveled up.' Seeing Gray's transformation, Rakan was greatly astonished.

[He... surpassed the wall!]

Rakan's eyes could see it too. The fact that a tremendous change had occurred within Gray! It was unbelievable.

[To grow like this even without yet obtaining the Primordial Darkness...!]

"It's a level-up."

Suho answered his unspoken question. In a tone as if it were perfectly natural.

"Until now, Gray has consistently offered half of his experience points to me as a tribute. The system bound Gray to me that way. To assist my rapid growth."

[Pet: 'Gray']

That was Gray's role as defined by the system. To offer half the sustenance obtained from hunting to Suho. A full half. But Suho had never once thought of him as a 'pet.'

'Comrade-in-arms.'

Suho recalled the past events. Looking back, Gray was the very first companion who had fought alongside him. Now he had many allies, but Gray was the comrade-in-arms who had first lent him strength. Of course, Beru was there before him, but Beru only offered encouragement and advice, never fighting alongside him. Suho gently stroked Gray, who was enveloped in the white shadow, and spoke.

"Thank you for everything until now. So, I'll return what should have originally been yours."

Fwooosh—

Through the white shadow, half the experience points he ever earned and gave to Suho returned to Gray. Which meant... Gray would become twice as strong.

"Take it. I've added hefty interest."

No... even more than that.

Grrrrrrr!

[Good heavens...]

An exclamation mixed with a sigh escaped Rakan's lips. Gray's aura had changed. With Gray's roar, a truly immense energy erupted as if exploding. Seeing that, Suho smiled contentedly and said.

"Until now, you've lent me your strength, so this time, let's do it the other way around."

'Possession'

Through the numerous battles Gray's spirit had possessed Suho's body, lending him strength. That was possible because Suho was the priest for the dead Monarch. But now, there was no need for that. The dead Monarch. The one aspiring to be the next Monarch. And, the Primordial Darkness. All were gathered in one place at the same time. Suho, no longer as a priest, but as a comrade-in-arms, cheered Gray on.

"Go, Gray. Hunt that Behemoth and prove your worth."

At Suho's words, Gray's lips curled into a wide smile. And as he turned his head again, looking at the Behemoth lying flat on its stomach, Gray's eyes turned fierce.

Grrrrrrr!

The hunt began.

Boom!

The moment Gray leaped towards the Behemoth, the pressure pinning it also vanished. At that instant, the creature also sprang towards Gray, fearlessly charging at it.

Kraaaaaaaah!

Like a compressed spring suddenly released.

Kukwakwang!

A great collision occurred. But the Behemoth seemed sluggish, the attacks that had felt fast before now looked slow in Gray's eyes. He lightly swatted away the massive arm with his front paw and lunged towards the monster's neck. But the Behemoth too was a predator. Instead of twisting its body to avoid the teeth, it raised its other arm and mercilessly struck Gray down.

Thwack!

The situation was similar to before, but the result was different. Its massive limb didn't fling Gray away; instead, he twisted his head sideways and bit squarely into that arm. Tendon. Artery. The correct hunting method taught to him by the former Monarch, Rakan. Not just biting wherever the mouth reached, but using the eyes and senses to spot the weak points that inflict fatal wounds on the prey. Then using the powerful fangs that pierce hide and flesh, puncturing its blood vessels!

Crunch!

[Skill 'Fatal Wound' is activated.]

Gray's fangs mercilessly tore into the Behemoth's tendon. Then, the wound gaped open, and blood gushed out.

Grwooooooooooar!

The Behemoth's scream echoed. Just moments ago, Gray had been fighting like the weak against the strong. But now, with Suho, it was the exact opposite. He was employing the method of the strong hunting the weak.

Grrrrrrr!

At that roar, the Behemoth's complexion changed drastically.

[Gray uses Skill: 'Contempt for the Weak'.]

[Effect 'Fear' is activated.]

[Target's all stats are reduced by 50% for 1 minute.]

Gray leaped and spun, thrusting his sharp fangs towards its eye.

Stab!

The Behemoth's eye burst. In immense pain, the creature shook its body.

Krrrrraak!

Before Gray's one-sided assault, the Behemoth realized how powerless it was. Under Suho's blessing, Gray thus became the true King of Beasts.

Kuuuuuuung—

The fight was over. But it was merely the beginning. Starting with the Behemoth, all the predators of the Primordial Forest fell helplessly before Gray's fangs. Hiding in the darkness was useless now. Suho's pure white shadow illuminated all the shades that had concealed them.

Awooooooooooooo—!

Gray trampled them and howled towards the sky. Like a wolf. It was the moment the true ruler of the Primordial Forest was born.

"This should be qualification enough, Nidhogg?"

Suho looked up at the clear sky of the Primordial Forest and grinned. Then, Nidhogg's answer came from the unseen distance. Not with a voice, but with action.

Fhwiaaaaaak—

Then, the Primordial Forest itself, surrounding Gray, melted away, becoming Primordial Darkness and beginning to be absorbed into Him. Gray, without the slightest panic, devoured that immense energy. As if it were only natural. Proudly.

[Finally, the time has come to relinquish my seat.]

Rakan nodded, relieved. He had been wary at first, but fortunately, Suho did not covet the Primordial Darkness meant for Gray. Thankfully, as always, he had actively helped Gray's succession ceremony as a priest. At that, Rakan bared his teeth, smiling with utmost satisfaction as he looked at Gray.

[But the lineage of the Fang Clan ends with this. Gray, I shall leave you a new name.]

Ting.

[The King of Beasts, Monarch of the Hunt is born.]

'Monarch of the Hunt.'

A predator that always gives its all in the hunt, whether the prey is strong or weak. To think the pup, once caught and exploited by hyenas, would grow up to stand at the apex of the Primordial Forest like this. Rakan had watched over that entire growth process.

[This is all thanks to you, Priest... Sung Suho.]

The form of Rakan, the former Monarch, grew increasingly transparent as he turned to look at Suho. Amidst the Primordial Darkness swirling around Gray, as the Primordial Forest was sucked into Gray, Suho stood tall, unwavering, directly meeting his gaze. He spoke, smiling with utmost sincerity in his eyes.

[Thank you for everything, child of the shadow.]

"Thank you for everything too, Rakan. What happens to you now?"

[I return to nothingness.]

"Will I not see you again?"

Suho asked what he had always wondered. In the process of helping several Monarchs with their succession until now, the dead Monarchs never showed themselves again. He knew they returned to nothingness once the next Monarch was born. But he was curious about the process or principle. Until now, there was no way to know, but today, Suho had a brief moment of leeway to converse with Rakan, who was disappearing in the process of succession. At Suho's question, Rakan murmured with a surprised expression.

[See me again... Could it be that you've grown fond of me? Of me, who bared my fangs at your father?]

"Well, the more usable pieces one has, the better."

Rakan, growing even more transparent, let out a hollow laugh. And he spoke in a serious tone.

[A dead Monarch returns to nothingness. That is the established principle. Nothing changes.]

But as for the process or principle, only a Monarch who had personally experienced death could answer. What comes after death, one cannot know until one dies. Therefore, Rakan could answer a little more concretely.

[To be more precise, when a Monarch dies, he is swallowed by the Primordial Darkness he harbored. That is what it means to return to nothingness.]

Thump.

His transparent hand casually patted the head of Gray, who was engrossed in absorbing the Primordial Darkness.

[But when the next Monarch is born like this, the situation changes slightly. Much like when the former Shadow Monarch Ashborn passed all his power to your father. Just as Ashborn and Sung Jinwoo became one, I too will melt into the Primordial Darkness and become one with Gray.]

"Become one?"

[Yes. It's just a matter of who becomes the dominant entity, but it's 'assimilation'. Just as Ashborn disappeared, and your father came to exist as the Shadow Monarch. But Ashborn is likely still within your father, cheering on his endeavors. Is that answer somewhat satisfactory?]

As Suho nodded, Rakan chuckled and vanished from the spot. He had been absorbed into Gray along with the Primordial Darkness. Thus, Gray, having become the Monarch of the Hunt, had eyes that were different from before, mature and deep. Like Rakan's. The dignity of a great Monarch that Suho had felt when he first met Rakan was now emanating from Gray.

Flash—

Thus, Suho and Gray exited Nidhogg. They reunited with Sirka, Beru, and Ammut, who were waiting outside.

[Kieeeeeeeeeeeek! Young Master—!]

Beru flew over, whimpering, and clung tightly to Suho. Behind him, Ammut crossed his arms and nodded.

[A new Monarch has been born. But, still not yet?]

Ammut looked at Suho and tilted his head. Like Gray, Primordial Darkness was felt from Suho. But if asked whether he had become a Monarch, not yet.

"Ah, I postponed the answer a bit."

Suho was still not a Monarch.

[Calculating advancement points...]

"I decided to answer after earning more advancement points."

At Suho's words, the white shadow beneath Suho's feet flickered. As if urging for an answer.

"Well then, shall we take care of the overdue tasks one by one?"

Suho immediately announced the next course of action.

"First, the Apostle of Conquest."

Without hesitation he moved towards where Arsha was holding the Apostle of Conquest captive.



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 350 - Chapter 347

Chapter 350: Chapter 347

The Behemoth, forcibly pressed to the ground, thrashed its enormous body. A most humiliating posture for the King of the Primordial Forest. But no matter how much it struggled, getting up was impossible. It felt as if an invisible giant hand was pressing down on its body. Truly an immense pressure.

'Ruler's Authority' Rakan recognized the nature of the power Suho was using. But it was on a different level from what he knew. Until now, Suho had used the 'Ruler's Authority' in the form of a skill. But now, it was different.

[...This is not a skill.]

It was as if... Suho himself had become a true Ruler. As if he were using the 'true' authority he had possessed since birth. Rakan swallowed dryly and asked Suho again.

[Who... are you.]

He had to be extremely cautious. What if Suho's vessel was so vast that it couldn't be fathomed, if such a profound aura was felt even after receiving the Dragon King's Primordial darkness, could he truly be satisfied with just one?

'A Monarch cannot harbor more than one Primordial Darkness.'

That was an impossibility. But... upon actually facing Suho, Rakan thought that perhaps it could be possible. If so, Suho... no, the entity that appeared in Suho's form, could it be aiming for the Primordial Darkness Gray was trying to inherit? Rakan was so bewildered by his aura that such a suspicion arose. But when Suho finally spoke, the tension that made the air feel as thick as water dissipated in an instant.

"Gray, you've worked hard. You're quite impressive as you are now, however..."

"Grrrrrr!"

Suho's hand stroked him. Gray, in turn wagged his tail, rubbing his head against Suho's hand with a friendly expression. But then...

Faaaaaah—

Riding Suho's hand, an unidentified 'blessing' descended upon Gray's head. A white light. No... a white shadow.

"Krrrrr?"

Instantly, Gray's eyes trembled. All of his fatigue and accumulated wounds, from pushing himself beyond his limits until now vanished, melting away as if they were snow.

Flash!

All his energy was restored. Moreover a new energy welled up from Gray's body. As if he had 'leveled up.' Seeing Gray's transformation, Rakan was greatly astonished.

[He... surpassed the wall!]

Rakan's eyes could see it too. The fact that a tremendous change had occurred within Gray! It was unbelievable.

[To grow like this even without yet obtaining the Primordial Darkness...!]

"It's a level-up."

Suho answered his unspoken question. In a tone as if it were perfectly natural.

"Until now, Gray has consistently offered half of his experience points to me as a tribute. The system bound Gray to me that way. To assist my rapid growth."

[Pet: 'Gray']

That was Gray's role as defined by the system. To offer half the sustenance obtained from hunting to Suho. A full half. But Suho had never once thought of him as a 'pet.'

'Comrade-in-arms.'

Suho recalled the past events. Looking back, Gray was the very first companion who had fought alongside him. Now he had many allies, but Gray was the comrade-in-arms who had first lent him strength. Of course, Beru was there before him, but Beru only offered encouragement and advice, never fighting alongside him. Suho gently stroked Gray, who was enveloped in the white shadow, and spoke.

"Thank you for everything until now. So, I'll return what should have originally been yours."

Fwooosh—

Through the white shadow, half the experience points he ever earned and gave to Suho returned to Gray. Which meant... Gray would become twice as strong.

1

"Take it. I've added hefty interest."

No... even more than that.

Grrrrrrr!

[Good heavens...]

An exclamation mixed with a sigh escaped Rakan's lips. Gray's aura had changed. With Gray's roar, a truly immense energy erupted as if exploding. Seeing that, Suho smiled contentedly and said.

"Until now, you've lent me your strength, so this time, let's do it the other way around."

'Possession'

Through the numerous battles Gray's spirit had possessed Suho's body, lending him strength. That was possible because Suho was the priest for the dead Monarch. But now, there was no need for that. The dead Monarch. The one aspiring to be the next Monarch. And, the Primordial Darkness. All were gathered in one place at the same time. Suho, no longer as a priest, but as a comrade-in-arms, cheered Gray on.

"Go, Gray. Hunt that Behemoth and prove your worth."

At Suho's words, Gray's lips curled into a wide smile. And as he turned his head again, looking at the Behemoth lying flat on its stomach, Gray's eyes turned fierce.

Grrrrrrr!

The hunt began.

Boom!

The moment Gray leaped towards the Behemoth, the pressure pinning it also vanished. At that instant, the creature also sprang towards Gray, fearlessly charging at it.

Kraaaaaaaah!

Like a compressed spring suddenly released.

Kukwakwang!

A great collision occurred. But the Behemoth seemed sluggish, the attacks that had felt fast before now looked slow in Gray's eyes. He lightly swatted away the massive arm with his front paw and lunged towards the monster's neck. But the Behemoth too was a predator. Instead of twisting its body to avoid the teeth, it raised its other arm and mercilessly struck Gray down.

Thwack!

The situation was similar to before, but the result was different. Its massive limb didn't fling Gray away; instead, he twisted his head sideways and bit squarely into that arm. Tendon. Artery. The correct hunting method taught to him by the former Monarch, Rakan. Not just biting wherever the mouth reached, but using the eyes and senses to spot the weak points that inflict fatal wounds on the prey. Then using the powerful fangs that pierce hide and flesh, puncturing its blood vessels!

Crunch!

[Skill 'Fatal Wound' is activated.]

Gray's fangs mercilessly tore into the Behemoth's tendon. Then, the wound gaped open, and blood gushed out.

Grwooooooooooar!

The Behemoth's scream echoed. Just moments ago, Gray had been fighting like the weak against the strong. But now, with Suho, it was the exact opposite. He was employing the method of the strong hunting the weak.

Grrrrrrr!

At that roar, the Behemoth's complexion changed drastically.

[Gray uses Skill: 'Contempt for the Weak'.]

[Effect 'Fear' is activated.]

[Target's all stats are reduced by 50% for 1 minute.]

Gray leaped and spun, thrusting his sharp fangs towards its eye.

Stab!

The Behemoth's eye burst. In immense pain, the creature shook its body.

Krrrrraak!

Before Gray's one-sided assault, the Behemoth realized how powerless it was. Under Suho's blessing, Gray thus became the true King of Beasts.

Kuuuuuuung—

The fight was over. But it was merely the beginning. Starting with the Behemoth, all the predators of the Primordial Forest fell helplessly before Gray's fangs. Hiding in the darkness was useless now. Suho's pure white shadow illuminated all the shades that had concealed them.

Awoooooooooo—!

Gray trampled them and howled towards the sky. Like a wolf. It was the moment the true ruler of the Primordial Forest was born.

"This should be qualification enough, Nidhogg?"

Suho looked up at the clear sky of the Primordial Forest and grinned. Then, Nidhogg's answer came from the unseen distance. Not with a voice, but with action.

Fhwiaaaaaak—

Then, the Primordial Forest itself, surrounding Gray, melted away, becoming Primordial Darkness and beginning to be absorbed into Him. Gray, without the slightest panic, devoured that immense energy. As if it were only natural. Proudly.

[Finally, the time has come to relinquish my seat.]

Rakan nodded, relieved. He had been wary at first, but fortunately, Suho did not covet the Primordial Darkness meant for Gray. Thankfully, as always, he had actively helped Gray's succession ceremony as a priest. At that, Rakan bared his teeth, smiling with utmost satisfaction as he looked at Gray.

[But the lineage of the Fang Clan ends with this. Gray, I shall leave you a new name.]

Ting.

[The King of Beasts, Monarch of the Hunt is born.]

1

'Monarch of the Hunt.'

1

A predator that always gives its all in the hunt, whether the prey is strong or weak. To think the pup, once caught and exploited by hyenas, would grow up to stand at the apex of the Primordial Forest like this. Rakan had watched over that entire growth process.

[This is all thanks to you, Priest... Sung Suho.]

The form of Rakan, the former Monarch, grew increasingly transparent as he turned to look at Suho. Amidst the Primordial Darkness swirling around Gray, as the Primordial Forest was sucked into Gray, Suho stood tall, unwavering, directly meeting his gaze. He spoke, smiling with utmost sincerity in his eyes.

[Thank you for everything, child of the shadow.]

"Thank you for everything too, Rakan. What happens to you now?"

[I return to nothingness.]

"Will I not see you again?"

Suho asked what he had always wondered. In the process of helping several Monarchs with their succession until now, the dead Monarchs never showed themselves again. He knew they returned to nothingness once the next Monarch was born. But he was curious about the process or principle. Until now, there was no way to know, but today, Suho had a brief moment of leeway to converse with Rakan, who was disappearing in the process of succession. At Suho's question, Rakan murmured with a surprised expression.

[See me again... Could it be that you've grown fond of me? Of me, who bared my fangs at your father?]

"Well, the more usable pieces one has, the better."

Rakan, growing even more transparent, let out a hollow laugh. And he spoke in a serious tone.

[A dead Monarch returns to nothingness. That is the established principle. Nothing changes.]

But as for the process or principle, only a Monarch who had personally experienced death could answer. What comes after death, one cannot know until one dies. Therefore, Rakan could answer a little more concretely.

[To be more precise, when a Monarch dies, he is swallowed by the Primordial Darkness he harbored. That is what it means to return to nothingness.]

Thump.

His transparent hand casually patted the head of Gray, who was engrossed in absorbing the Primordial Darkness.

[But when the next Monarch is born like this, the situation changes slightly. Much like when the former Shadow Monarch Ashborn passed all his power to your father. Just as Ashborn and Sung Jinwoo became one, I too will melt into the Primordial Darkness and become one with Gray.]

"Become one?"

[Yes. It's just a matter of who becomes the dominant entity, but it's 'assimilation'. Just as Ashborn disappeared, and your father came to exist as the Shadow Monarch. But Ashborn is likely still within your father, cheering on his endeavors. Is that answer somewhat satisfactory?]

4

As Suho nodded, Rakan chuckled and vanished from the spot. He had been absorbed into Gray along with the Primordial Darkness. Thus, Gray, having become the Monarch of the Hunt, had eyes that were different from before, mature and deep. Like Rakan's. The dignity of a great Monarch that Suho had felt when he first met Rakan was now emanating from Gray.

3

Flash—

Thus, Suho and Gray exited Nidhogg. They reunited with Sirka, Beru, and Ammut, who were waiting outside.

[Kieeeeeeeeeeeek! Young Master—!]

Beru flew over, whimpering, and clung tightly to Suho. Behind him, Ammut crossed his arms and nodded.

[A new Monarch has been born. But, still not yet?]

Ammut looked at Suho and tilted his head. Like Gray, Primordial Darkness was felt from Suho. But if asked whether he had become a Monarch, not yet.

"Ah, I postponed the answer a bit."

Suho was still not a Monarch.

[Calculating advancement points...]

"I decided to answer after earning more advancement points."

At Suho's words, the white shadow beneath Suho's feet flickered. As if urging for an answer.

"Well then, shall we take care of the overdue tasks one by one?"

Suho immediately announced the next course of action.

"First, the Apostle of Conquest."

Without hesitation he moved towards where Arsha was holding the Apostle of Conquest captive.

4

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer