

Strongest 151

Chapter 151: Planting Seeds

"That exchange taught me a lot of things," Est said as he ate the sandwich that Ian and Isaac had prepared earlier.

"It taught me a lot as well," William commented as he picked up another sandwich from the basket that was in front of him.

After the battle, Est invited William to join them for lunch. The shepherd happily accepted because free food was always a good thing. Est chose to have a picnic at one of the most scenic areas near the Magic Division, and William had to admit that the place Est chose was a good spot to have a picnic.

Isaac and Ian were also eating by the side, but they only listened to the conversation. Surprisingly, Kenneth was there as well because William had dragged his roommate with him. Est didn't mind because the talk that they were going to have was about the dungeon exploration they would undertake tomorrow afternoon.

Since Kenneth was one of the party members, Est thought that having him around would, also, be a good thing.

"Have you decided which dungeon to explore first?" Kenneth asked.

Est didn't reply. Instead, he looked at William as if telling Kenneth that the one calling the shots on the exploration would be him. Kenneth glanced at the red-headed boy who was happily eating the sandwich in his hand.

Feeling his gaze, William decided to tell them where they would go in their first dungeon exploration.

"I want to go to the Goblin Crypt first," William said with a serious expression.

"Goblin Crypt?" Est asked. "Is there any particular reason why you want to go there?"

"No. Just simple curiosity." William lied. "Based on the information that I read yesterday, the Goblin Crypt is a Grade B Dungeon. It has thirty floors and some say that it is one of the hardest dungeons for beginners."

William was surprised when he saw the information on the Goblin Crypt that he found inside the academy's archives.

The Goblin Crypt that he could access from his Ring of Conquest only consisted of twenty floors and was a Grade C Dungeon. Obviously, there was some discrepancy between the two dungeons and William was very curious if the Goblin Crypt that he had been exploring all these years had a relationship with the one inside the academy.

"According to the rumors I gathered, most First Years can't get past the Fourteenth Floor," Est commented. "It is said that many Hobgoblin Shamans, who specialize in Dark Magic, can be found on that floor. It is best that we only go as far as the Thirteenth Floor just to be safe."

William nodded his head in understanding. His first fight against the Hobgoblin Shaman almost wiped out his entire herd. If not for James', and Owen's, timely assistance, William and his herd might have died on that fateful night.

"Good. Our goal for this exploration is to safely reach the Thirteenth Floor," William said with a serious expression. "We will not challenge the Hobgoblin Shaman. Although that monster is in the lower tier of Grade C, it is still a tricky monster to fight. Especially if you don't have any resistance to curses and Dark Magic."

After finalizing their strategy, William and Kenneth returned to the Martial Class Division. The fight against the Magic Division Classes had made the students of the Martial Classes more motivated to train. This was good news for the instructors and they happily opened the training ground to accommodate the feisty students.

William was still a few meters away from the entrance of the training grounds, but he could already hear the clash of weapons against each other.

"It seems that the 'exchange of pointers' woke them up from their daze," Kenneth commented.

"Mmm. This is a good attitude to take," William replied.

When William and Kenneth entered the training grounds, they saw all the students of the First Year Martial Class hard at work with their training.

Grent was in a corner of the training ground, getting attacked by a dozen students. A big smile was plastered on his face as he calmly dodged, and blocked, the attacks that the children were raining down on him.

William watched for a few minutes before nodding his head in appreciation. He then raised his voice to call everyone's attention.

"Rally to me!" William shouted.

The students immediately stopped what they were doing and fell in line in front of William. Priscilla walked behind William before facing the other students, befitting her rank as Vice-Prefect.

"Your performance in the battle against the Magic Division Class was good," William said as he looked at the students in front of him. "How was it? Is the Magic Division Class strong?"

""Yes!""

"Indeed they are strong." William nodded his head. "However, that doesn't mean that they are undefeatable. The reason why the majority of you lost is because you have been lazy in your training. We need to fix this issue. That's why, starting tomorrow, all of you will wake up at five in the morning!"

William paused briefly in order to allow his words to sink in. "I am going to train all of you from the ground up. Everyone is going to train. There will be no exceptions! I'll make sure that during the inter-class-battles, our Martial Division will reign supreme! Anyone who doesn't want to participate will not be given breakfast and lunch! I don't need slackers in the Solaris Dormitory. Do I make myself clear?"

""Yes, Head Prefect!""

"Good. Carry on with your training and I'll see you all tomorrow!"

""Sir, yes, Sir!"

While William was giving out his orders in the Martial Class Division, Carter was inside the training room of the Third Year Magic Class Division.

"As you may already know, the most effective way to not get hit by a magic attack is to dodge it," Carter explained. "Of course, if you have strong magic powers, creating a barrier is also a good option.

"However, not everyone can do this. Each and everyone of you have different Magic Affinities. Those who have Low-Grade Affinities will not be able to block strong magical attacks. That's why you have to train yourself on how to dodge properly."

Carter summoned his silver staff and gave everyone a sweet smile. "Today, we will start your Defensive Combat Training. All of you will face me one by one. I will fire a single magic spell and it will be up to you whether to dodge it or block it. Those who perform well will receive a reward from me."

The girls giggled as they looked at their handsome professor and readied themselves to give him a lasting impression.

Just like Carter expected, not more than thirty people, out of three hundred students, were capable of blocking his magic attack. Some of the fool-hardy ones turned into particles of light after Carter's spell pierced through their defenses.

Those with lower grade magic affinities took his advice to heart and just focused on dodging. Carter praised these students as well, which made them quite happy.

"I'm very impressed." Carter praised the entire class after the last student had returned to her position. "All of you have the makings of great mages."

His flattery was happily accepted by everyone, which made the atmosphere very lively.

Carter was someone who understood human nature and used the students' emotions to his advantage. "Now to give out the rewards I promised. To those that have performed well, I will give you three candies. Please line up and accept your rewards."

The students made two lines. One for the boys and one for the girls. Carter personally handed his "candies" to everyone, which made him look like a fair and kind instructor.

"Those who receive only one candy, don't feel bad about it," Carter announced. "Train harder and, in time, you will also receive more candy from me. However, a part of me wishes that all of you will not suddenly become experts on our next meeting.

"Why? Because these candies are personally hand made by me. It takes time to make them and I will run out of stock if all of you suddenly become amazing mages. Please, have mercy on me."

The students chuckled because Carter acted like he would suffer if all the candies he had on hand disappeared.

After giving his final words of encouragement, Carter left the training grounds with a smile on his face. While it was true that he had worked hard to prepare those candies, he was also looking forward to the fruits that he would harvest in the future.

The more the students ate the candies that he had prepared, the more their consciousness would be open to his suggestions. While it may not be as powerful as a charm spell, being able to manipulate them to do things that seemed "natural" to them was scarier.

For now, Carter was willing to "plant his seeds" and wait until they were ripe for the picking. When that time came, the plan that he had in mind would also become a reality.

Chapter 152: The Carrot And Stick Approach

William opened his eyes and lightly rubbed his Mama Ella's stomach before propping himself up into a sitting position. He raised his arms to do a little bit of stretching, while the goat beside him also raised her head.

"Good morning, Mama."

"Meeeeh."

It was still dark outside, but William had already formed a habit of waking up early in order to do his morning training routine. However, this time, it was different. As the Head Prefect of the Martial Class Division, he would lead the students into a rigorous training exercise that would help them build their foundations.

He planned to use the same training that his Grandpa James, and his mentors back in Lont, had used with him.

William went to his closet and selected the sleeveless black training uniform that he had prepared beforehand. This was the same uniform that he had used during his training in Lont and it was made from the pelt of the Thunder Horned Wolf that he had defeated ages ago.

After putting on his clothes, William walked towards the opposite bed where his delicate roommate was still sleeping. Due to his Half-Elven bloodline, William was able to see in the dark. He could see Kenneth's cute, peaceful, face in the darkness as he continued to sleep.

"Wake up, sleeping beauty," William said as he lightly poked Kenneth's cheek. "Our training is going to start soon."

Seeing that his roommate was not showing any reaction, William continued to poke the delicate face which was as smooth as a girl's. He poked Kenneth's cheeks and nose until the sleeping boy opened his eyes in irritation.

"Rise, my little sunshine," William teased. "Or do you need me to kiss you before you wake up completely?"

"I'm not your sunshine and I don't need your kiss," Kenneth replied as he grabbed William's annoying finger and pushed it away. "Wait for me outside the dormitory. I'll wash my face first."

"Okay." William smiled as he walked toward the door.

Ella followed behind William as they left the room together. The entire dormitory was quiet, and it seemed that most of the students were still in their beds, dreaming of when they would stand at the peak of the Mortal Realm.

William felt mischievous and placed his hand over the emblem pinned on the right side of his training uniform. Immediately, blaring sounds erupted throughout the Solaris Dormitory.

The noise instantly woke most of the sleeping students. Some of them came out of their rooms to see what was happening, with their weapons ready.

"Wake up, sleeping beauties! The time to train has arrived!" William's domineering voice reverberated inside the Solaris Dormitory. "Of course, if you want to stay as beautiful princesses, you can ignore this announcement. Those who want to become strong and increase their ranks, I'll meet you at the gates of the Solaris Dormitory. I'll give all of you ten minutes to prepare. See you outside!"

After making his announcement, William made his way towards the dormitory gates. He didn't know how many people were planning to participate in the morning training, but he hoped that more than half of the First Years would come.

Ten minutes later, a bunch of annoyed, drowsy, and excited students could be seen lining up behind William.

The guards, who were manning the gates, looked at this scene with interest. This was the first time they saw such a scene and they were wondering what was going on.

"Okay, all of you follow my movements," William shouted. "We will be doing basic stretching exercises first. After that, all of us will run towards that golden flag fluttering in the distance!"

Some of the students groaned when they saw what William was pointing at. The huge flag fluttering in the distance was the flag that marked the boundary of the Martial Class Division. According to their estimate, it was at least five to six miles away from the gates of the Solaris Dormitory.

Only those who had been training for a long time didn't make any unnecessary comments and began to follow William as he did his stretching routine.

After five minutes of stretching, William faced all the students and smiled.

"The first one to reach the flag will become a "temporary" officer. If that person continues to follow my training regimen until this month is over, he will become a permanent officer of the Martial Class Division.

"Cheating is not allowed. You are only allowed to use your own physical powers. Using artifacts, weapons, or accessories to boost your body's performance is not allowed. Anyone caught doing this will not be tolerated, and will be forever banned from getting an official post. If you want to become an officer, use your own two hands and feet to seize it!"

William's words broke everyone out of their daze. Those who were still half-asleep suddenly became awake, while those who were grumbling earlier looked at the flag in the distance as if they wanted to eat it whole.

The red-headed boy chuckled internally as he saw their serious expressions. 'The carrot and stick approach is really effective.'

William stood straight in front of everyone and raised his chin. "Are all of you ready?!"

""Yes!""

"Very well. On my mark," William said as he raised his hand. "Ready, get set, Go!"

The First Years started to run earnestly. They didn't hinder each other's path and ran at their own pace.

William ran behind the group to ensure that no one would slack off. Although running five to six miles may seem like a long journey, for Martial Warriors, it could easily be accomplished in less than an hour.

All the First Years that had passed the entrance test of the Royal Academy were all talented individuals. Although they may not be as strong as Priscilla, Spencer, Drake, and Conrad, they were not far behind when it came to Martial Prowess.

Just like William expected, the entire student body reached the border area in less than an hour. While all of them were panting for breath, and their sweat oozed out of their bodies, they looked at him with determined expressions.

Surprisingly, the first one to reach the goal was a chubby boy with dark-brown hair. William had ordered the system to memorize the faces and names of everyone that he had met. After a little bit of digging, William was finally able to recognize the boy who was looking at him with anticipation and excitement.

"Dave Cornwell, step forward," William ordered.

"Sir!" Dave replied as he stood in front of William.

"You did well." William patted the boy's shoulder. "From now on, you will be our Temporary Logistic Officer. You will be in charge of gathering the things that we will need for our daily exercise routines, as well as the supplies needed for the missions that our class will undertake."

William smiled as he personally pinned a silver emblem on Dave's uniform. "I will allow you to pick six people to help you accomplish this important task for our Martial Class Division. Do not let me down."

"Thank you, Head Prefect," Dave replied with a teary expression. "I will do my best."

"I know." William once again patted Dave's shoulder before facing the rest of the students who were looking at Dave with envious faces.

"Our training is not yet over," William said with a smirk. He then pointed at the boxes that were piled up beside the tree where the flag was enshrined. "Open the boxes and pick four metallic bracelets each. Wear them on your wrists and on your ankles. Starting today, you are not allowed to remove them!"

Each bracelet weighed 22 lbs each (10 kilos). The martial students were familiar with this training method, so none of them complained. What they didn't know[,] however, was that these were "enchanted bracelets". The bracelets would automatically increase their weight, depending on the one who wore them.

If they were worn by someone like Drake, instead of 22 lbs, they would weigh 44 lbs. That would mean that the boy would be carrying that much weight on both his wrist and ankles.

William had pestered Grent and Andy to have these bracelets prepared so they could be part of the First Years' training. The two instructors happily accepted William's request and went to the Martial Division's storage to personally handle this undertaking.

Training bracelets were very common in the Royal Academy. Even mages used them in order to build their physical foundations.

William wouldn't wear any of the bracelets that were prepared by the academy. He was already wearing his own that were personally forged by the Blacksmith of Lont, Barbatos, to help with his training.

The blacksmith's best friend, Seraphy, the Jeweler of Lont, helped inscribe the runes on William's bracelet, doubling their effectiveness.

In the four years that William had trained in Lont, the black bracelets on his wrists and ankles had already passed 100 lbs each (40 kilos). As William got stronger, the weight of his bracelets also increased.

When he started, William had a hard time adjusting to the weight, but as time went on, he got used to it and treated the bracelets as accessories instead of shackles that limited his movement.

Of course, William's bracelets were not ordinary bracelets. They had a special enchantment that allowed them to transform into bracers (arm guard) giving added protection to William's body.

William eyed everyone with a serious expression. When all of them had secured the bracelets around their wrists and ankles, the red-headed boy gave the order to jog back to the Solaris Dormitory.

He wanted their training to be a gradual strengthening instead of an intensive one that would leave the students paralyzed, and unable to go to their respective classes.

William wanted to increase their stamina first. Once he deemed that everyone was ready, he would increase the intensity of their training accordingly.

He was confident that the students of the Martial Classes would be able to surprise the other two divisions in the inter-division-class battles in three months' time.

Chapter 153: The Town of Hartlepool

Since William was planning to head to the Goblin Crypt within the Royal Academy, he ordered Priscilla and Dave to take charge of the morning training routine. For now, William wanted everyone to build their stamina, so running in the morning was the most effective way to do it.

As for their physical training, that would be taken care of by Grent and Andy during their Martial Training Lessons.

After relaying his orders, William, along with Kenneth, went to the meeting spot where Est, Ian, and Isaac were waiting.

The Goblin Crypt and the other dungeons were not located inside the academy. They were actually located in different parts of the Hellan Kingdom. In order to get to their destination, they would have to use the academy's exclusive Teleport Gates that were powered by Magic Crystals.

Each trip cost five gold coins per person. Naturally, the farther the place was, the more expensive it would be.

This was why most commoner students preferred to take commissions from the academy instead of going to the dungeons to hunt monsters for their cores and materials. Only the children of nobility or well-off merchants, were able to use these Teleport Gates at their leisure.

"Are both of you ready to depart?" Est asked as soon as William and Kenneth arrived at their meeting place.

"I'm as ready as I'll ever be," William replied.

"Meeehh!"

Kenneth just nodded his head to say that he was ready to go anytime.

"Good," Est smiled. "Let's go. I've already asked around and found the teleport gate that we will be using."

Est led the way and the rest followed behind him. Less than five minutes later, they arrived at a gate where over a dozen students stood in place.

William saw a few familiar faces among the group of people who also wanted to challenge the Goblin Crypt. Spencer, along with his twin sister, Wendy, were there. The two boys whom William and Ella had faced in the battle were there as well.

"Fancy meeting you here," Brutus greeted with a smile.

"This must be Fate at work," Bruno stretched out his hand for a handshake. "Nice to see you again, William."

William happily shook Bruno's hand and returned the greeting. "Senior, are you going to the Goblin Crypt as well?"

Although William defeated the two of them, the twin brothers didn't take it to heart. They were even quite impressed by the "harmless" looking goat that always stayed by William's side. Never in their wildest dreams did they think that they would be defeated by an Angorian Goat that could be seen anywhere in the Hellan Kingdom.

"Yes," Bruno replied. "Little Wendy asked us to accompany her in the dungeon exploration. The siscon decided to tag along because he doesn't trust the two of us to protect his sister."

William gave a side-long glance at the "siscon" who was standing beside Wendy. Spencer snorted at William's inquiring gaze, but didn't say anything.

"Up to what floor are you guys planning to explore?," William inquired. "I heard that the Fourteenth Floor is a dangerous place because it is the floor where the Goblin Shaman spawns."

Bruno grinned and used his thumb to point at Wendy. It seemed that the blonde beauty was the leader of the group, and the decision making lay in her hands.

"We're planning to challenge the Fourteenth Floor," Wendy admitted. "However, we will immediately run away if it gets too dangerous."

William frowned, but he didn't say anything. It was not up to him to tell them what to do because they were not part of his Division. Even so, he still kindly reminded Wendy and her party to be extra careful when dealing with the Hobgoblin Shaman.

'I hope they can handle it,' William thought.

While William was reminiscing about his first battle with the Hobgoblin Shaman, the Teleport Gate glowed and several students appeared in the area around it. They were the students that had finished their dungeon exploration.

Some of them had smiles on their faces, while others had pale expressions. It seemed that not everyone was able to leave unscathed from their dungeon expedition.

After the last student had left the teleport area, the one managing the gates raised his hand.

"Those who are traveling to the town of Hartlepool, please, stand beside the Teleport Gates!" the staff announced. "We will be sending you to your destination in five minutes."

William's and Wendy's group, along with others, stood beside the gate and waited for their turn. Hartlepool was the small town that was built around the Goblin Crypt.Â

In most cases, dungeons were discovered by humans by accident. When a dungeon was found, they would either keep it for themselves, or report their discovery to the kingdom. Both held advantages and disadvantages.

Those who didn't report the dungeons they had discovered would gain a monopoly of monster materials, beast cores, and other items that could be found inside the dungeon like chests and treasures.

When seen from an angle, this was a very lucrative business, at least for the short term. However, once this dungeon was discovered by others, fighting would usually ensue between the different parties.

The worst case scenario was when the noble who had jurisdiction over the territory discovered the location of the dungeon, they would immediately send a message to the ruling family in order to give them the rights to manage the dungeon in their domain.

Of course, once this happened, all the benefits that the "discoverers" had gained for the short term would disappear completely.

If they were the ones who reported the dungeon to the Kingdom, they would be given an honorary title, and the deed of the land surrounding the dungeon. This means that they would become the "rightful owner" of the area and the ruling noble couldn't do anything about it.

This was to ensure that newly discovered dungeons would immediately fall under the kingdom's jurisdiction and be developed accordingly.

"Everyone get ready," The staff announced. "We will be activating the Teleport Gate!"

William felt light-headed as his vision turned completely white. This feeling only lasted for a brief moment before he found himself in an enclosed area surrounded by a tall wall. Several soldiers could be seen on top of the ramparts, and a big steel gate served as the only point of entry and exit towards the Teleport Gate.

As William scanned his surroundings, a tall man wearing armor with the Royal Academy's insignia on it greeted them.

"Welcome to Hartlepool," the Guard Captain, who was guarding the teleport gate, said with a brief nod. "As students of the Royal Academy, I expect that all of you will follow the rules of Hartlepool and not get into fights with the locals. With that said, any crimes that you commit during your stay will be written in the academy records. I wish all of you the best on your dungeon exploration."

After finishing his speech, the Guard Captain made a gesture and the steel gate opened. The students made a beeline towards the exit and a bustling town appeared in their sight.

"Should we reserve a room at an inn or do you want to just jump to exploring the dungeon?" Est asked.

"Let's just go to the dungeon," William replied. "We didn't come here to sightsee, so let's get down to business."

William looked calm on the surface, but he was actually really itching to go to the Goblin Crypt as soon as possible. He wanted to see if it was the same dungeon that he could access with his Ring of Conquest.

Surprisingly, Wendy shared his opinion and proposed that they all go to the dungeon together.

"This is our first time arriving in this town. It will be best if we all stick together." Wendy said with a smile. 'Head Prefect Est and Head Prefect William look so dreamy. If possible, I want to form a closer connection with the two of them.'

Spencer frowned because he could vaguely sense what his sister was thinking. He was the over-protective type. If possible, he didn't want anyone to approach his sister during her stay at the Royal Academy.

"Sounds like a good idea," William answered. "What do you think, Est?"

"I don't mind." Est nodded.

Wendy's smile widened when her two idols gave a positive reply. She even took the initiative to grab hold of William's and Est's hands and slightly pulled them to leave the gate together.

William was amused by Wendy's actions and played along. Est, however, didn't expect this move from Wendy. He wanted to pull away, but decided to just go with the flow for now.

'It wouldn't hurt to get along with Wendy since she's part of the Magic Division,' Est thought as he gave William a side-long glance. The shepherd returned his gaze and even teasingly winked back at him.

Clearly, he enjoyed seeing Spencer's irritated expression as the latter's twin pulled him through the town of Hartlepool.

Ella walked beside William, while Kenneth, Ian, and Isaac followed behind them. Brutus and Bruno shrugged their shoulders as they followed the group, leaving the frowning Spencer behind them.

'Wendy has lived a sheltered life and this is her first time interacting with people outside our Duchy,' Spencer thought. 'Although William seems like a good person, I still don't want him to act chummy with my little sister. I better keep an eye on him to ensure that he won't have any weird thoughts about Wendy.'

The Sison felt that it was only right and proper to protect his little sister from shady characters like William. As for Est, although Spencer didn't know who he was, he had a more favorable opinion to Est compared to the red-headed boy who was shrouded in mystery.

Chapter 154: Goblin Crypt [Part 1]

"So this is the Goblin Crypt...," William muttered as he looked at the entrance of a big cave. He also noticed the sign hanging near the entrance that had the information of the dungeon.

Dungeon Name: Goblin Crypt

Grade Level: B

Number of Floors: 30

Overall Assessment: A dungeon where only Goblin Type Monster Spawns. It is highly recommended to explore it with a party of six starting from the Fourteenth Floor onwards.

"They even highlighted the Fourteenth Floor... how considerate," Est said as he read the information near the entrance of the cave. "Will, are you sure you don't want to challenge the Fourteenth Floor?"

"If possible, I don't want to challenge it," William replied as he gazed at Wendy. "Hobgoblin Shamans shouldn't be underestimated. I hope you reconsider your plan to challenge them."

"I-It's fine," Wendy stuttered. "I have my Big Brother, as well as senior Brutus and senior Bruno with me. I am also strong, so I think we can handle it."

William nodded his head in understanding. Even so, he sighed internally. He was just like her in the past. Naive, and thought that everything would go his way because his Mama Ella was strong.

'System, place a tracker on Spencer and Wendy.'

< Four God Points will be consumed. Are you sure of your decision? >

'Yes. Please.'

< Understood. Trackers had been successfully placed. >

< Spencer Armstrong's and Wendy Armstrong's location and health conditions will be monitored for 48 hours. >

'Thank you.'

The Tracker Tool of the system allowed William to put a special mark on anyone. This allowed him to know their general location as well as their current health condition. The maximum number of trackers that William could deploy at any given time was ten and it consumed two God Points per beast or person.

It was one of the Special Functions of the system that was unlocked when William had acquired the Cavalier Job Class.

It was a function meant to mark "Wild Monsters" that could be hunted down and tamed to become a mount for the Cavalier Class.

Ironically, the system made the mark universal and allowed William to use it on people as well.

"I guess this is where we part ways," Est commented. "Wendy, Brutus, Bruno, take care. Remember, your lives are important. Don't take unnecessary risks."

""Yes, Head Prefect!""

The three replied in unison.

William patted Spencer's shoulder, "Keep your sister safe. If she gets hurt, I will give you a punishment."

"I'll do that even if you don't tell me to, Head Prefect," Spencer replied grumpily. "You should worry about yourself. I've heard that there are certain adventurers who go out of their way to harass new faces that they see in the dungeon."

Spencer glanced at William's slave collar and put on a serious expression. "Everyone should be careful, there are instances where adventurers are captured and sold as slaves. Although the Goblin Crypt is under the jurisdiction of the Hellan Kingdom, there are still scumbags that are always on the lookout for pretty girls and boys that will fetch a high price in the black market."

"That's very good advice," William smiled. "So, make sure to protect your sister as well."

William unconsciously caressed the slave collar on his neck while staring at the entrance of the dungeon. Wendy's, Brutus', and Bruno's expressions changed when they realized that the collar on William's neck was a slave collar.

They initially thought that it was just an accessory, but Spencer's words made them give it a second look.

Feeling their gazes, William smiled wryly. "I can guarantee that being a slave is not a fun experience. That is why, all of you should be more careful, especially you, Wendy. Someone as beautiful as you will definitely be sold for a high price."

"I'd like to see them try," Wendy said in a tone laced with anger. "Head Prefect, if you want, I can buy your freedom for you."

Wendy looked at William with genuine concern, which made William feel warm inside.

"You don't have to worry about me," William replied. He decided to change the topic by pointing at a store that was not far away from the entrance of the cave. "Let's buy some maps first. It will be a good idea to have a general outline of the dungeon that you are going to explore."

William didn't wait for any kind of reply and walked towards the store at a steady pace.

He wanted to tell them that he had already regained his freedom, but decided not to say anything. The reason why William kept the collar on his neck was to remind himself that slavery existed in this world. Also, the collar doubled as a means of protection.

Since he was already wearing a collar, it meant that he had an owner. Human Traffickers would no longer attempt to enslave him because a slave collar could only be removed by their owners. Unless the owner of the slave died, the enslavement spell would remain in effect.

There were powerful Slave Traders that are on par with the experts of Lont. William had no chance of winning against them if he met them on his journey, so having the collar on his neck added a layer of protection.

Aside from Elves, and Beastkin, Half-Elves were always high in demand in the auctions on the Black Market. With William's looks, he would be a very attractive target for the slave traders who were looking for some new goods to sell.

When William arrived at the store, he immediately bought all the Floor Maps that were available. This cost William ten gold coins, but he didn't care. He was more curious about the differences between the maps in his hands and the maps that were recorded in his system.

'System, scan the maps and tell me your initial findings.'

< Understood.>

< Scanning the Floor Maps of the Goblin Crypt. >

< Scanning Successful! >

< Host, the floor map of the Goblin Crypt that can be accessed through the Ring of Conquest is slightly different from the map that we have just recently obtained. >

'Slightly different?'

< Yes. I will show you the difference between the two dungeons. >

Two maps of the first floor appeared inside William's status screen. On the left side was the Goblin Crypt that he could access from the Ring of Conquest. On the right was the map that William had just bought from the store.

'Wait, this is...'

< Yes. The floor layout of the First Floor of this dungeon is bigger than the one that we can access from the Ring of Conquest. To put it simply, it's like an expansion. Although there are similarities between the

two maps, some changes were made and the Goblin Crypt in this area is two times bigger. Than the one we can access with the ring. >

'Tell me your thoughts about the matter.'

< Host. Perhaps our version of the Goblin Crypt is the version of the dungeon when it was still young. According to the data that I have gathered from this world, all dungeons can grow and expand. It is very possible that the Goblin Crypt that we have is a recorded copy when it was newly discovered. >

William stood in a daze as he looked at the map inside his status screen. His group had already arrived by his side and taken a peek at the maps that were in his hands. They thought that the red-headed-boy was just taking a close inspection of the map before they entered the dungeon.

"William, is there a problem with the maps?" Est inquired. William had been staring at the map for too long that he thought it was strange.

"No. There is no problem," William answered as he gave the maps to Est. "Carry it with you. I have already memorized it so I don't need it anymore."

"Then I will gladly accept your generosity." Est inspected the maps one by one and tried to memorize them.

Spencer didn't want to waste anymore time and decided to buy maps for their own party as well. Wendy could see the impatience on her Big Brother's face, so she decided to reluctantly bid her goodbyes to her two idols.

William watched Wendy's retreating back as she entered the cave along with her party.

"She is a good girl," William said as he crossed his arms over his chest.

"Yes. She is a good girl, so stay away from her." Ian scoffed.

"What's wrong? Are you jealous?" William gave Ian a teasing glance. "I'm just worried that Wendy will bite off more than she can chew."

"You don't need to worry about her," Kenneth commented from the side. "Spencer, Brutus, and Bruno are strong. She'll be safe as long as she doesn't go to the lower floors or meet some strong adventurers along the way. Besides, she's wearing the uniform of the Hellan Royal Academy. Even if the bad guys had guts, they would still need to think twice before making a move on her."

After Kenneth finished his explanation, Est looked up and cleared his throat. "I've memorized the maps from Floor One up to Floor Fourteen. Since we are only planning to go as far as Floor Thirteen, I think this is enough for the time being."

William nodded his head in agreement. "Lead the way, Party Leader."

"Okay." Est smiled as he walked towards the entrance of the cave.

William had passed the leadership role to Est because his only intention was to see the differences between his version of the Goblin Crypt and the dungeon in front of him.

After walking deeper into the cave, William and his party met many parties who were busy killing Goblins on the First Floor.Â

'The goblins here are more numerous compared to my version of this dungeon,' William thought as he scanned his surroundings. 'The system is right, this place is indeed bigger.'

As they walked towards the Second Floor, William noticed a single goblin standing in the distance. He immediately summoned his bow and quiver before pulling an arrow out from behind his back and taking aim.

The goblin wasn't even able to cry out in pain as its body fell to the ground. A few seconds later, it turned into particles of light leaving a single ear on the place where it died.

William's eyes widened when he saw the notification that appeared on his status screen after killing the goblin.

< Exp Gained: 12 >

Chapter 155: Goblin Crypt [Part 2]

"That was a good shot," Est praised. "Eh? Why do you look so happy?"

"Because it is more than ten" William as the smile on his face widened.

"More than ten? What do you mean?"

"You won't understand."

How could he possibly tell his friends that over the past four years the highest experience points he gained from killing a monster was ten. Those ten points could only be achieved by killing a Goblin Shaman, which was ranked between D and C.

Depending on the skills it had learned, a Goblin Shaman could be at the peak of the D Tier, or in the initial stages of Rank C.

Ella in her War Ibex Form could be classified as a Level C (Low) threat. The Goblin Shaman's threat level started at Level D (High) and ended at Level C (Mid). Meaning, it was a threat that could potentially kill people who are unaware of its true strength.

Since William, Ella, and the goats had trained to resist curses and Dark Magic, a Goblin Shaman was something that they could handle.Â

Even so, after killing this dangerous creature, the amount of experience points that William gained would not surpass the number ten.

That's why he became very emotional when an ordinary goblin gave him twelve experience points.

'System did you notice?'

< Yes. The experience points gained inside this dungeon and the one we can access through the Ring of Conquest have almost the same value. Although the experience here is a little lower, the difference is not that far apart. >

William agreed with the system's observation. Right now, there were six members in their party. William, Ella, Est, Kenneth, Ian, and Isaac. The Experience points were split among the group so the red-headed-boy only received 12 Experience points after killing one goblin.

'System, set the exp allocation to the Shepherd Job Class,' William ordered. 'It would be best if we max it out as soon as possible.'

< Understood.>

< Experience points allocation is successfully transferred to the Shepherd Job Class. >

'Thank you.'

William sighed. He had long wanted to max out his main job class, but circumstances had prevented him from doing so.

< Shepherd Lvl 28 >

Current Job Exp: 42,400 / 91,207

"Are you really okay?" Kenneth inquired. "Should we return when you're feeling better?"

"I'm fine," William said as he wiped away the last tear stain on his face. "Sorry, you saw a weird side of me just now. Let's continue our exploration."

Est was still worried about William, but since the latter had said that he was fine then he decided to continue their dungeon expedition.

"Our goal is to get to the tenth floor as soon as possible," Est explained. "We will only kill the goblins along the way. Be wary of human parties that look suspicious. If any of you feel that something is wrong, feel free to give a warning."

Everyone nodded their heads in agreement. Just like Spencer said, inside dungeons, it was not only the monsters that you needed to worry about. You also needed to protect your backs against humans.

The progress of their group was quite smooth. They didn't meet that many goblins and the parties they met along the way steered clear of them. After three hours inside the dungeon, they finally arrived at a Bronze Gate that marked the end of the Tenth Floor.

"According to the map, the first boss of this dungeon is the Hobgoblin Leader," Est said with a serious expression. "Its Threat Level is D (Mid). It also summons two Hobgoblin Warriors, and two Hobgoblin Archers. Their Threat Level is D (Low). William, Kenneth, I will let you deal with the archers. Ian, Isaac, you will deal with the Hobgoblin Warriors. I will handle the leader."

""Understood.""

"Meeeeeeh."

The moment William's entire party entered the door, the bronze gate closed behind them. William had experienced this many times before, so he wasn't worried. Est, Ian, and Isaac, on the other hand, were looking around anxiously.

Just like in William's memories, the boss room was similar to a coliseum. Torches lit up the sides, casting their eerie glow on the challengers.

Suddenly, a mighty shout sounded at the far end of the Coliseum and a Hobgoblin jumped down from who knows where and landed in the middle of the battleground.

William raised an eyebrow, because the Hobgoblin Leader that appeared was very different from the one he had battled inside his version of the Goblin Crypt.

The Hobgoblin Leader that was standing in front of them was two meters tall. It held a sword in each hand. It was also wearing light-weight metal armor on its body and the presence it revealed was that of a veteran fighter.

Four Hobgoblins appeared beside it. Two archers, and two warriors. Their threat level was leagues apart when compared to the Boss Fight that William had fought inside his version of the Goblin Crypt, many years ago.

'System, it seems that your guess was right.'

< Yes. The monsters inside this dungeon are stronger compared to the ones that are available in our version of the Goblin Crypt. >

'Dungeon growth,' William mused before using his appraisal skill.

Hobgoblin Leader

-- Goblin Race

-- Threat Level: D (High)

-- Cannot be added to the herd

-- After countless evolutions, the goblin race has finally given birth to a leader. The Hobgoblin is born from the goblin race's desire to grow stronger. A Hobgoblin Leader is born to lead the Hobgoblins to battle.

'If the Hobgoblin Leader is already this strong then it is safe to assume that the Goblin Shaman is already at Rank C,' William frowned.

The system had kindly reminded William that the threat level of the Hobgoblin Shaman would always be a level higher than the Hobgoblin Leader. Not only that, since the dungeon's monster composition had changed, it was very possible that on the Fourteenth Floor, the Hobgoblin Leader and Hobgoblin Shaman might be in the same group.

If this was true then they would really be fighting a strong team of monsters once they stepped onto the Fourteenth Floor.

'I'm worried about Wendy.'

< How about Spencer, Brutus and Bruno? Are you not worried about them? >

'They're boys, why should I worry about them?'

< ... >

William stood in place holding his bow and arrow. Est, Ian, Isaac, Kenneth, and Ella had charged towards their respective foes and engaged them in combat.

William didn't intend to participate in this battle. His Mama Ella was more than enough to dispatch the Hobgoblin Archer with ease.

He was paying close attention to his friends' battles and would help them if needed.

Kenneth's quick movements allowed him to close the gap between himself and the Hobgoblin Archer in order to engage it in close combat.

Surprisingly, the Hobgoblin Archer used a short sword to parry Kenneth's attack. Ian and Isaac were battling hard against the two Hobgoblin Warriors who were equipped with both swords and round shields.

The Hobgoblins Threat Level was D (Mid), just a level lower than the Hobgoblin Leader, and they were fighting against Ian and Isaac evenly.

It seems that the twins weren't being serious in the battle because they didn't use their magic powers. They were only using their sword techniques as if they were using the Hobgoblins as training partners.

Est was fighting a "dual wield" battle with the Hobgoblin Leader and, just like his retainers, he wasn't using his magic powers either.

The only problem was, Est was getting pushed back by his enemy. Even so, Est didn't back down and continued to engage the Hobgoblin Leader in close combat.

The sound of weapons clashing reverberated inside the boss room as both parties fought for supremacy.

Five minutes later, the twins felt that they had endured enough and used their magic powers to make a comeback.

Ian's sword extended and lashed out at his opponent like a whip. The blade turned into a whip made up of water and sent the Hobgoblin skidding away a few meters.

'Whip sword? Wow!' William praised the snot-nosed pansy behind his back. 'That looked so cool.'

Isaac on the other hand summoned a round shield made up of Hard Rock that was a meter and a half tall. He then charged against his foe using the shield to ram the Hobgoblin's body. A miserable shriek escaped the Hobgoblin Warrior's lips as it was sent flying.

William winced upon seeing this scene and wondered how he would fare if he got hit in the face by Isaac's shield. The thought of it made him shiver, so he immediately looked in another direction.

Est gritted his teeth and Rhapsody glowed brighter.

"Divine Burst!" Est unleashed a special move at point blank shot which caught the Hobgoblin Leader by surprise.

With a shout of unwillingness, the Hobgoblin Leader tried to use its swords to block Est's attack, but it was futile. The power of the Divine Burst overwhelmed the defenses of the Hobgoblin Leader and tore through its body.

Est looked at the gaping hole that appeared in his opponent's chest before it lifelessly fell to the ground. Soon, its subordinates followed its demise as they were finished off by William's party.

Ella had long defeated her opponent, and simply watched the children as they fought against their respective opponents. She understood that they were training themselves with real combat, so she didn't help them after her fight had ended.

The Hobgoblin Leader and his lackeys disappeared into particles of light, marking the end of the boss fight.

< Exp Gained: 5,000 >

< Shepherd Lvl 28 >

Current Job Exp: 47,400 / 91,207

William grinned when he saw the influx of experience points that he had received. It had been a while since he saw over a thousand experience points and it made him giddy with happiness.

"Good job everyone." William clapped his hands in approval. "That was an impressive battle."

Est smiled and nodded his head. For some reason, he liked getting praised by William. It was at that moment when a treasure chest appeared in the center of the room.

William crossed his hands over his chest. He had no intention of taking the spoils of this battle. Est and the rest understood his stance as they crowded in front of the treasure chest with curiosity.

"Open it, Young Master," Ian urged. "I want to see what is inside."

"Okay." Est nodded. He, too, was quite curious about what he was going to see inside the chest.

The handsome boy lifted the lid of the chest and saw a pair of boots.

William's smile stiffened as Est took out the pair of boots from the chest. He didn't need to use his appraisal skill to identify them, for they were the same boots he received when he won against the Hobgoblin Leader in the past.

Windborne Boots

-- Wear light on your feet, go strong in your life.

-- Agility +3

Perhaps it was by coincidence, but Est's gaze landed on William's boots. He then looked at the boots in his hand and saw that the two pairs of boots were identical.

William whistled and looked at the ceiling of the Coliseum. For some reason, the stalactites that were hanging on the ceiling looked very interesting to him right now.

Est cleared his throat as he showed the pair of boots to the rest. "Who wants these boots?"

"I don't need them," Kenneth politely declined Est's offer.

"I don't need them as well, Young Master," Isaac replied.

"Wait, these boots look oddly familiar," Ian frowned as he inspected the boots in Est's hand. He then looked at the boots of the annoying boy that was looking up at the ceiling and realized something.

For a brief moment, Ian wanted to ask Est if he could have the boots for himself. However, when he saw Est's expression, he realized that his Young Master was giving him the "I dare you to ask for these boots" smiling face.

Ian gave an awkward cough as he reluctantly took a step back to compromise.

"My boots are already good, Young Master," Ian said with a smile that didn't reach his eyes. "Please, take the boots and use them well."

Est's expression softened as he nodded his head in approval. "Since none of you want them then I'll gladly use them as a memento of our first Boss Fight."

Est stored the Windborne Boots inside his storage ring for the time being. As much as he wanted to wear the Windborne Boots, now was not the time to do so. He then made a gesture for everyone to follow him, as he stepped into the glowing portal that would take them to the Eleventh Floor of the dungeon.

Chapter 156: Goblin Crypt [Part 3]

Meanwhile on the Eleventh Floor of the Goblin Crypt...

Wendy's team was fighting against three Hobgoblin Warriors. They had cleared the Boss room half an hour earlier than William's party. Compared to the boss fight, the three Hobgoblin Warriors didn't stand a chance against the four powerful students of the Hellan Royal Academy.

After cutting down the last Hobgoblin, Spencer looked at his sister--who was panting for breath. This was the first time she had gone inside a dungeon and she was not as experienced as him in conserving her strength.

Brutus and Bruno, on the other hand, were in the same boat as Spencer. Aside from being older than the twins by three years, they had plenty of experience when it came to raiding dungeons.

Although this was their first time visiting the Goblin Crypt, they were more proficient in conserving their physical and magical strength. The three boys silently agreed that they wouldn't interfere with Wendy's battle style.

They were doing this in order to help her to understand that even if you were strong, you should know how to maximize your abilities by only using sufficient strength to end the battle. Going all out in each encounter would only exhaust you, and this was a fatal mistake when it came to any kind of dungeon exploration.

As they waited for their leader to catch her breath, a party of adventurers also appeared at their location.

The leader of the six-man-party was a brown-haired man who seemed to be in his mid-twenties. He had average and sharp features that were quite common among mercenaries.

"Is this your group's first time coming here to the Goblin Crypt?" the brown-haired man inquired. "I've been here for a few years and this is the first time I've seen you guys. Are you perhaps students from the Royal Academy?"

"Yes," Wendy replied before Spencer could stop her. "We are from the Royal Academy."

The brown-haired man smiled at the little beauty in front of him. "We are planning to head to the Fourteenth Floor, do you guys want to come along?"

"No." Spencer walked between the brown-haired man and his sister. "We plan to explore the dungeon at our own pace. Thank you for your offer."

The brown-haired man gave a nod of understanding. "My name is Kent. If you run into trouble on the Fourteenth Floor, come and find us in the Eastern Part of the dungeon. That is where we usually hunt during our stay here in the Goblin Crypt."

"Understood," Spencer replied before taking his sister's hand and pulling her in the opposite direction.

Brutus and Bruno gave Kent a side-long glance before following the brother and sister pair. They could tell that the brown-haired guy was trouble and didn't want to form any connection with him.

Kent watched them go with a smile on his face. He then made a gesture to his men to continue their journey towards the lower floors. Whether Wendy's team went to the Fourteenth Floor or not, they didn't really care.

The Fourteenth Floor where the Goblin Shaman spawned was their old haunt. They knew the floor like the back of their hands and they specialized in making traps to catch suitable prey that would reap them great rewards during their dungeon expedition.

"Wendy, next time, don't casually give information to people you've just met," Spencer advised. "There are a lot of bad people in the world who will ask you for a mile if you give them an inch. It is best not to associate ourselves with people like Kent."

"He's right, you know," Bruno backed Spencer. Wendy was a good child and they didn't want her to experience something terrible while they were together. "Some people look harmless, but when you turn your back to them, they are scheming things behind your back. Just a glance and I can already tell that the brown-haired guy is bad news."

Brutus nodded. "If we meet them again, it will be best if you leave the talking to us."

"U-Understood," Wendy stuttered. Although she was inexperienced and naive, she could tell that her Big Brother and her seniors meant well. If they said that Kent was not a good person then they must have a reason for their stance.

"One more thing." Spencer looked at his little sister with a serious expression. "Conserve your strength and don't use any fancy moves when you battle. You will only exhaust yourself if you continue your pace. It's possible that we might get into a fight with something other than monsters."

Wendy could feel the tension in her brother's voice, so she nodded her head in acknowledgement.

"I understand," Wendy said after careful consideration. "But, if possible, I want to go to the Fourteenth Floor. I want to see if the Hobgoblin Shaman is as powerful as the rumors."

Spencer looked at the two brothers in askance. He wanted to know if they had any encounters with the Hobgoblin Shaman in the past.

Both brothers shook their heads in unison. After that Brutus scratched his hair and voiced his opinion.

"We can take a look first," Brutus said. "It will not be too late to retreat if the situation gets dangerous."

"To be honest, I also want to see how powerful that Hobgoblin Shaman is," Bruno commented. "I've never faced a Dark Mage before. This might be a good opportunity to learn from experience."

Spencer also agreed that this was indeed a good chance to understand how strong Dark Mages were. The Hellan Kingdom had banned the use of Dark Magic and anyone caught using the art would either be imprisoned or sentenced to exile. If they had committed atrocious acts then they would be sent to the gallows to be executed.

"Okay, we will speed up and head towards the Fourteenth Floor," Spencer stated. "We will conserve our strength and only fight when necessary until we reach our destination."

Everyone nodded their heads and proceeded to follow Spencer's suggestion.

< Exp Gained: 30 >

< Exp Gained: 30 >

< Exp Gained: 30 >

"I never expected Hobgoblins to be this strong," Est muttered after Kenneth, Ian, and Isaac disposed of the three Hobgoblin fighters who blocked their path.

"It seems that the groupings on this floor are three Hobgoblins per party," Kenneth said while picking up the Hobgoblin Ears that dropped on the ground. They were the monster drops from the Hobgoblins and could be exchanged at the Adventurer's guild or the Alchemist Guild for a few coins.

'Mmm, this is interesting,' William thought. 'The Hobgoblins don't drop anything inside my version of the Goblin Crypt. They are there purely for experience points.'

William had long thought that the purpose of the Ring of Conquest was for training purposes. Perhaps, it was even meant for leveling purposes. This realization brought a couple of questions in his mind.

Just who was the one who made the Ring of Conquest and for what purpose? William had a hunch, but this hunch only brought more questions that he couldn't answer at the moment.

'Perhaps, I'll only know the answer once I have a proper talk with Gramps.' William sighed internally.

Now that it had come to this, he wanted to know how his father, Maxwell, got his hands on the ring. William was also curious to know how his father used the ring to his advantage.

He had only heard that his father had single-handedly prevented the Demon Race from invading the Silvermoon Continent. As to how he did it, perhaps only his Grandpa James, and his mother, Arwen, could answer the mystery that had plagued him since childhood.

The group continued to head deeper inside the Goblin Crypt. Just like Wendy's party, he wanted to know just how strong the Hobgoblin Shaman of this dungeon was. Little did he know that the monster who almost ended his life four years ago, was far scarier than he could ever imagine.

Chapter 157: Goblin Crypt [Part 4]

'Why? Why did it come to this?...'

Spencer gazed at his twin sister who was being stripped of her clothing by one of the Hobgoblin Warriors. Wendy was unconscious and was not aware of the Fate that was about to befall her.

'Wendy...'

Spencer tried to move his body to save his little sister. However, a foot pushed him back down. The young boy raised his head, only to find a gnarled staff pointed at his forehead.

The Hobgoblin Shaman said a word, and Spencer instantly felt drowsy. The strong urge to sleep corroded his willpower, and before long, his body gave way as his consciousness sank into darkness.

However, before he lost his consciousness entirely, he managed to activate the emblem on his uniform, and prayed that someone would be able to come and save his little sister from harm.

As Spencer laid on the ground, unmoving, the other Hobgoblin Warriors had gathered around the unconscious girl. Lust could be seen in their eyes as they looked at the young and slender lady who would soon become their new Broodmare.

When the Hobgoblins were about to do the deed, two whips of Dark Magic lashed out at them from the shadows. The Hobgoblin Warriors cried out in pain as they were all sent flying into the wall of the dungeon.

A Hobgoblin Shaman who was a meter taller than the other Hobgoblins appeared in the passageway. It carried a jeweled bronze staff in its hand, and its light-green eyes glowed with power.

This Hobgoblin Shaman was vastly different from the other Shaman's that could be found on the Fourteenth Floor. If William was here, he would definitely tell his party to run away and not engage it.

For it was a creature that was just as strong as the Guardian Deer, Spire, that lived inside the Enchanted Forest.

The tall Hobgoblin Shaman spoke a few words to the Hobgoblin Shaman who had already knelt on the floor. The vast difference in power made it submit itself willingly without resistance.

The tall Hobgoblin Shaman ordered the other Hobgoblins to carry the children and send them to where the other captives were being held. It also explicitly ordered the Hobgoblins not to touch Wendy, for its Master had already set his eyes on her.

Although the Hobgoblin Warriors were reluctant, they didn't dare defy the Shaman's orders. Spencer, Brutus, and Bruno, were carried like a sack of goods on the Hobgoblin Warriors' shoulders.

The tall Hobgoblin Shaman personally picked up Wendy in a princess carry as it took her to the place where its Master had gathered the other captives.

When they arrived at the location, the shaman covered Wendy's body with a robe, before placing her inside a cage. Spencer and the rest were also locked up in different cages.

After seeing that everything was in order, the Hobgoblin Shaman cast a "Deep Slumber" spell on all the captives, so that they would continue to sleep. Its Master had already made his own arrangements and it only needed to play its role for its Master's sake.

Suddenly, it received a new order from its Master to leave the Fourteenth Floor and head towards the Fifteenth Floor as soon as possible. Its Master added that it should continue to travel to the Nineteenth Floor and stay there until further notice.

Although the Hobgoblin Shaman was confused by this new order, it still followed it without fail.

Clearly, its Master didn't want anyone to know of its existence. It was a creature that roamed between the Fourteenth and Nineteenth Floors of the dungeon to do its Master's bidding.

The reason for its existence was to provide its Master with new slaves that its subordinates had captured inside the dungeon. That was the role it played, and it was more than happy to do its Master's bidding.

"Let's hurry!" William urged his party as they ran across the Fourteenth Floor of the Dungeon.

Along the way, students of the academy--that were also on the same floor--followed behind them. They had received a distress call coming from a student, and it was standard procedure to come to their aid.

This was a strict rule that was implemented in the Hellan Royal Academy when a batch of students were exploring a dungeon. They were duty bound to rescue their schoolmates once the distress signal had been activated.

Right now, more than twenty students of the Royal Academy, ranging from First Years up to Third Years, were heading to the spot where the signal had been sent.

Kent had noticed their movements and a slight frown appeared on his face. He, and his group, followed behind the students and asked them what was happening.

The student he asked briefly mentioned the situation. Kent listened patiently and nodded his head in understanding.

His group's expressions suddenly became serious, but Kent gave them all a stare that shut them up. Kent placed his hand inside his pocket and touched a red jewel the size of a quail's egg. A minute later, he removed his hand from the pocket and continued to follow the students who were making their way to the Western Part of the dungeon.

A Third-Year Martial student was in the lead as he held his sword in his hand. He spotted two Hobgoblin Shamans ahead as well as six Hobgoblin Warriors. He immediately gave his party the order to attack and ensure that they would be finished off as quickly as possible.

These Third-Years were a regular party that explored the Goblin Crypt. They could be called veterans when fighting against Hobgoblin Shamans and they took the lead in rescuing their fellow students.

The Hobgoblin Shamans fired their curses, but they were easily intercepted by the magic of the Clerics who were among the group of students. The numerical advantage played in their favor as they disposed of all the monsters that blocked their way.

The group stopped at an intersection where the path was divided into three. They didn't randomly choose a direction. Instead, they asked the red-headed boy where they needed to go.

"Where should we go next?" the Third-Year-Martial Student, Harrison, asked William--who seemed to be aware of the missing student's location.

"The left one," William replied. "My friends are only two hundred meters away from our location. We're almost there."

Harrison nodded and led the way. Five minutes later, they found several Hobgoblin Warriors who seemed to be guarding a man-made enclosure.

There was no need to say anything and a fight broke out immediately. William and his party joined the clash. All of them were feeling anxious because they knew the identities of the missing students.

Surprisingly, there were no Hobgoblin Shamans present in the enclosure. The dozen Hobgoblin Warriors were easily dealt with and Harrison, and the other students, destroyed the "cages" where several people lay unconscious.

"Wendy!" Wake up!" Est held the unconscious girl's shoulder as he shook her awake. "Wake up!"

He was very careful in shaking her, for the girl had only a robe draped over her body. Est's senses had told him that aside from being completely naked, Wendy was still a pure maiden. The Hobgoblins weren't able to taint her, which made William and the others sigh in relief.

Chapter 158: Goblin Crypt [End]

"Please stand aside." A Third Year Student, who seemed to be a Cleric, tapped Est's shoulder. "She's under a powerful sleep spell. Normal means won't wake her up."

The Holy Magic of Clerics were powerful counters for Dark Magic and curses. Usually, when a group tried to fight against creatures who wielded Dark Magic, bringing a cleric would increase their chances of not getting wiped out in a battle.

Est nodded his head in understanding and stepped away. The lady student pressed her hand over Wendy's forehead and chanted.

"Dispel!" the lady said as her hand glowed with magical power.

When the glow receded, Wendy's eyelids fluttered. She then opened her eyes and looked around in a daze.

"Wendy, can you remember what happened?" Est asked immediately after Wendy opened her eyes.

"Head... Prefect?" Wendy was still half awake and couldn't process the current situation.

The Lady Cleric sighed and gave Est the "I'll leave this to you" look. She then stood up and went to check the other captives for injuries.

Est took out a blanket from his storage ring and wrapped it firmly around the young lady who was still in a daze. Kenneth, Ian, and Isaac made a protective perimeter around them to prevent anyone from sneaking glances at Wendy.

While Est was trying to get answers from Wendy, William was interrogating Spencer who had woken up a minute earlier than his twin sister. He had seen Wendy's state and almost made a commotion.

Fortunately, William was there. The shepherd immediately delivered a punch to Spencer's stomach which rendered him unable to move due to pain. While the boy was curled up like a shrimp, William told him that his sister was unharmed.

Ater hearing William's explanation, Spencer finally calmed down and cooperated with William's interrogation.

"Two whips that seemed to be made from dark energy attacked you from your blindspots and allowed the Goblin Shaman to fire its curses at all of you?" William frowned. "Also, you saw hands materialized out of thin air that helped the Goblin Shaman rain down curses on your group? Are you sure this is what you saw?"

"I'm sure of it, Head Prefect," Spencer answered firmly. "I swear it to the Gods."

"Calm down," William patted his shoulder. "I'm not saying that I don't believe you. I'm just trying to understand how your party ended up in this manner."

William didn't doubt Spencer's words, because he was very familiar with the sneak attack that rendered them unable to battle. The two skills Spencer mentioned were two of the high-end skills that belonged to the Dark Mage Job Class.

< Spectral Hand >

(10 Mana Points)

-- Summons a ghostly hand that moves as you desire, allowing you to deliver low-level, touch range spells at a distance.

-- The spectral hand is also able to use Dark Whip

< Dark Whip >

(10 Mana Points)

-- Conjures a whip of Dark Energy.

-- Can be used to attack, defend, or let the user maneuver over the terrain.

-- No more than two Dark Whips can be created at a time

-- Damage dealt is equivalent to Intelligence x 2

William had used these two skills when he fought against the Cyclops inside the Trial of Courage. He was well aware of how flexible these two attacks were. However, based on Spencer's story, the Hobgoblin Shaman they fought were not able to use these two abilities.

That only meant one thing...

There was a High-Tier Hobgoblin Shaman that attacked them from the shadows. As William continued his interrogation, the Clerics among the students had woken everyone from their slumber.

Aside from Spencer, Wendy, Brutus, and Bruno, there were twelve other people who had become captives of the Hobgoblin Warriors.

These people were locals of Hartlepool and had only come to the Fourteenth Floor to try their luck in getting better monster drops.

Harrison scanned the surroundings with a grim expression. As someone who was familiar with the Hobgoblins of the Goblin Crypt, he found the Hobgoblin's actions very unnatural.

Goblins were well-known to only capture female adventurers, and dispose of the men. They used these women in order to breed and increase their numbers, so capturing the girls was understandable.

What he didn't understand was why the goblins spared the men? Aside from superficial injuries, most of them were unscathed. Also, the cages where the captives were locked up were well made.

It was impossible for Hobgoblins to create such cages, which only led to one thing.

They were created by humans.

"Both of you are Head Prefects, correct?" Harrison asked Est and William who were tending to their friends.

"Yes," Est answered.

William nodded his head.

"Immediately notify the school and ask them to send a team to investigate," Harrison. "Tell them that there's a possibility of 'Foul Play' inside the dungeon."

Foul Play was the code-word that someone was capturing adventurers to be sold as slaves. This was a common thing in most dungeon towns and cities, and that meant that the officials managing the dungeon were in cahoots with the slave traders.

When this violation was proven true by the officers of the King, all violators would be sent to the kingdom's mining areas where they would spend the rest of their lives mining for ores.

A brief flash of killing intent flashed across Kent's eyes, but disappeared the next moment. He was regretting the fact that he had targeted the students of the Royal Academy.

'I need to ensure that I leave no traces behind,' Kent thought as he gestured for his men to leave the area. 'I have to keep a low profile for the time being.'

Kent activated the teleport crystal in his hand which would send him back to the entrance of the dungeon. He needed to leave the town as soon as possible and tell his accomplices to cease all operations until things cooled down.

'This will make it hard for me to reach the quota for the next few months.' Kent sighed as he calculated his losses. 'I got too greedy.'

Kent knew that the students in the Royal Academy were considered to be very talented individuals. When he saw Wendy, he knew that the pretty young lady would fetch a very high price in the black market.

Frankly, Kent had no thoughts of selling her. He was more interested in turning her into his personal slave.

Kent had seen a glimpse of Wendy's fighting ability through the eyes of his slave. He could tell that she was a rough gem waiting to be polished.

If he could make Wendy his slave, he was confident that after a week or two, he would be able to train her into a loyal servant who would happily open her legs and allow him to ravage her as he wished.

Sadly, the opportunity had been lost and it also brought a lot of problems in its wake. Kent knew that an investigation would be held and the guards manning the dungeon would be replaced. The town mayor might also lose his position if he couldn't convince the officers of the King that he had no part in the slave trading that was being done inside his own town.

Kent was not optimistic that his old pal would be able to lie his way through this event. Half of the payment for the slaves went to Kent, while the other half went to the town mayor. Both of them had worked together for many years, and the latter would definitely be proven guilty by the officers of the Kingdom.

'I really regret it,' Kent sighed again as he rode in a carriage that was headed towards the town's gate. 'I have no choice but to return using a new identity and start from scratch again.'

While Kent was making his escape, William and his party escorted Spencer, Wendy, Brutus, and Bruno towards the Guard Captain of the Academy who was stationed at the Teleport Gates.

They needed to file a report so that the staff of the academy in Hartlepool could be made aware of the suspected "Foul Play" that had targeted the students of the Hellan Royal Academy.

Chapter 159: You Can Repay Me With Your Body

"Thank you for saving me," Wendy said as she enclosed William's hand with her two hands. "If not for Head Prefect William, I might have already been..."

William looked at her with a gentle gaze as he patted her shoulder. "I'm not the only one who came to rescue you, Est and the other students of the academy were there to lend their help. Also, it was your

Big Brother, Spencer, who activated the School's emblem to call for help. If you have to thank someone, you should thank him first."

Wendy nodded her head. "I will thank Big Brother later, but it was the Head Prefect who found our location. If there is anything I can do to repay you, please, tell me and I will do my best to meet your expectations.

William wanted to tease the little girl and say "You can repay me with your body", but he immediately changed his mind when he felt four killing intents lock onto his back.

William was sure that if he decided to go ahead with his plan to tease Wendy, Spencer's spear and a few other sharp weapons would pierce his back.

The red-headed boy lightly coughed and put on a righteous expression. "Wendy, you are a student of the Hellan Royal Academy. As fellow students, it is only right and proper that I extend my help. There is no need for a reward.

"However, if you really insist on giving me a reward, the one thing you can do for me is to keep yourself safe. It pains my heart to see someone as beautiful as you suffer. Please, take care of yourself for me, won't you?"

William thought that his award winning performance was enough to pacify the people who had the intention of turning him into a human barbecue. What he didn't expect was that their killing intent only grew stronger as Wendy looked up at him with an infatuated gaze.

"I-I will keep myself safe and pure for Head Prefect," Wendy stuttered as her face turned beet red. "Wendy is willing to wait until the Head Prefect comes of age. When that time comes... I will..."

Wendy said something, but it was too soft and low for William to hear and understand. Even so, William thought that the young lady was only saying her gratitude to him.

"Yes, please keep yourself safe and pure for me." William smiled. "I like Wendy, so I hope that you will grow up to be a strong and beautiful lady that will protect the weak from those who try to oppress them."

"L-Like? Head Prefect likes me?"

"You bet! I really like Wendy a lot."

"I-I like you, too, Head prefect!"

"The feeling is mutual then." William chuckled.

Suddenly, William's sixth sense screamed of danger as all the hairs at the back of his neck stood on end. The shepherd immediately jumped to the side as he evaded the spear, that was thrust at his back, by mere centimeters.

"Big Brother! What are you doing?!" Wendy raised her voice in anger. 'How dare you get in the way of my intimate moment with Head Prefect William!'

"Tsk!" Spencer clicked his tongue because he missed his target. "I'm sorry, Head Prefect. My Spear suddenly moved on its own. I apologize if I scared you."

"Hahaha! Don't worry, I'm not hurt. Just be careful next time." William nodded his head in understanding. 'Fool! What do you mean your spear suddenly moved on its own? Do you think I'm stupid? Hmp! Wait till we return to the academy, I'll make sure to straighten you up!'

William was about to say something else when he felt someone pinch the side of his waist. He almost screamed like a little girl due to the pain. Fortunately, he was able to close his lips in time as he endured the sudden pain that came out of nowhere.

When the pain subsided, the red-headed boy glared at Ian who was standing right next to him.

"What's your problem?!" William asked with a hateful glare.

"Sorry, my hand moved on its own," Ian said with a smile. "Are you hurt, Head Prefect?"

William's lips twitched in anger when he heard the snot-nosed pansy's reply. "Why are you acting like a jealous girlfriend? Are you jealous because I'm more handsome than you? Do you want me to give you some beauty tips?"

The two bickering buddies were about to have a go at each other, like usual, so Est immediately separated the two of them and stood in the middle.

"Alright, settle down," Est said as he pushed both boys away from each other. "The Teleport Gate will activate in ten minutes. Don't make a scene or we might get punished when we return to the academy."

"Hmp!"

"Hmp!"

William and Ian snorted at the same time. Est looked at the two of them with a fed-up expression as if he had already given up trying to convince the two boys to get along with each other.

Everyone thought that the situation had finally calmed down, but that thought instantly vanished when the infatuated girl, Wendy, appeared beside William and held his hand like it was a very normal thing for her to do.

"Head Prefect, I forgot to ask. How were you able to find us?" Wendy asked with upturned eyes.

Her eyes were so clear and bright, that William could see his face reflected in them.

'It's good that nothing really happened to you,' William thought.

That was his genuine feelings in regards to Wendy. William felt that it would really be tragic if someone as kind and caring as Wendy were to lose the brilliance in her eyes because of this incident.

"I'm glad we made it in time," William muttered his thoughts out loud.

"Um? Head Prefect?" Wendy tilted her head in a cute manner which gave William a strong urge to pinch her cheeks.

Remembering the girl's question, William cleared his throat to give the excuse he had prepared beforehand.

"The one who found your location was Mama Ella," William answered.

"Meeeeeh?" The Angorian goat tilted her head in confusion.

"You see, Mama Ella has a very sensitive nose. She can easily find me, even if we are miles apart."

"Meeeeeeeh." Ella nodded her head in acknowledgement. Although William was spouting nonsense about the sensitivity of her nose, it was true that she could find William even if they were miles apart.

"I see, thank you Mama Ella." Wendy bowed her head towards William's mother. "From now on, Can I also call you Mama."

"Meeeeeeeh?"

"I was just joking!"

"... Meeeeeeeh."

Wendy hugged Ella with a big smile on her face as she thanked the goat for helping to save her. 'I guess I need to take things slowly. Ella is much smarter than I thought.'

William looked at this touching scene while scratching his cheeks. He felt bad about lying to Wendy, but he couldn't possibly tell her that he had placed a tracker on her and Spencer. He didn't want others to think that he was a stalker!

While the shepherd was thinking of these mundane thoughts, Est, Ian, and Spencer looked at him as if they were looking at a dead person. Inside their minds, they had already butchered him countless times already.

Only the delicate looking Kenneth looked at this scene with a smile on his face.

Chapter 160: A Tale Of Tears, Blood, And Suffering

When William and the rest returned to the academy, they were immediately summoned by the Dean and hurriedly brought to his office.

This was the first time that William had entered the Dean's Office since he enrolled at the Royal Academy. The room was less extravagant than he initially thought it would be. He could even say that it is quite plain. Nothing stood out enough to make it look like the room of the most powerful person inside the academy.

However, although the room had nothing to offer, the person sitting in the chair facing William and the others was a different matter.

'Such a strong presence,' William thought.

Although the Dean was only sitting on his chair, William felt as if a mountain was pressing down on his shoulders. He knew that the Dean wasn't doing this on purpose, but it was similar to the presence held by his Master, Celine, and his Grandpa, James, when they were planning to do something serious.

"Thank you for coming," the Dean of the Academy, Simon Otis Beasley, said with a smile. "Please, sit down and tell me everything that happened from start to finish."

Everyone sat down, and Spencer started to narrate their tale. While Wendy's twin brother was telling his version of the story, William observed the Dean of the academy.

Simon had long blonde hair tied in a ponytail behind his back. His light-green eyes were clear and bright. His pointy ears, that revealed his identity as an elf, listened seriously to Spencer's accounts of what happened.

From all looks and angles, he looked like a man in his late twenties. However, since he was an elf, it made his age very hard to determine.

William's Master, Celine, was twenty-eight years old, however, she looked like a young lady who had just turned twenty. The red-headed-boy had a feeling that even if a hundred years were to pass, Celine would still look as she did now.

"Thank you for sharing your story," Simon commented. "We will investigate this matter."

Simon then scanned the students inside his office and gave another announcement.

"Starting today, the Goblin Crypt will be inaccessible to the academy for the duration of the investigation. I know that this incident has caused everyone some inconveniences, so I've decided to award each and everyone of you 5,000 academy points."

Simon waved his hand and five white coins hovered in front of each student. "The academy will not turn a blind eye on everyone's heroic efforts. I pray that in the future, you will continue to protect the safety of the students of the Royal Academy and uphold our dignity."

The eyes of the Third-Years widened when they saw the 5 white coins floating in front of them. Each white coin was equivalent to a thousand academy points. Usually, you could only earn a thousand points once you finished four to five missions on the academy's bulletin board.

Aside from the First-Years, who didn't know how lucky they were, the rest of the students were feeling giddy because a meat-pie had fallen from the sky. With this, they would be able to exchange for rare skills, weapons, armors, accessories, and many more items that were only exclusive in the Exchange Office of the Royal Academy.

"Ah, before I forget." Simon cleared his throat. "This matter will be confidential. Don't tell anyone what happened inside the dungeon. We don't want the perpetrators to get wind of our investigation, so all of you must act accordingly. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Sir!"

"Good." Simon nodded his head. "All of you may leave, except for Mr. Ainsworth. I still have a few questions to ask you."

Est and the others gave William a glance before leaving the room. When the door of the office closed, only two people and one goat remained inside Simon's office.

William didn't know why the Dean asked him to stay. The latter busied himself in preparing tea, leaving William to ponder Simon's intention.

Ten minutes later, Simon poured two cups of tea and placed one of them in front of William. The red-headed boy said his thanks before drinking the cup that was specially prepared just for him.

The moment the tea entered William's mouth, he felt a refreshing taste that he had never felt before. It washed away the exhaustion and anxiety that he was currently feeling from the events that had happened inside the Goblin Crypt.

Simon smiled as he observed William. He picked up his own cup of tea and drank it. A few minutes of peace passed before Simon finally decided to break the ice.

"How is Celine?" Simon asked. "Is she doing well in Lont?"

William returned the teacup on top of the table and looked at Simon with caution.

Seeing the young boy's guarded expression, Simon chuckled and raised both of his hands in surrender.Â

"I meant no harm to you or your Master," Simon said.

"Master? I don't have any Master," William commented. "What are you talking about, Sir?"

William knew that the Hellan Kingdom had banned the use of Dark Magic. He was not gullible enough to expose his Master's condition nor whereabouts to a stranger. Even if that person was the Dean of the Royal Academy.

Simon had an amused expression as he eyed the handsome Half-Elf in front of him. He was quite satisfied with William's reply because he didn't acknowledge anything that might compromise his Master.

'She found a good disciple,' Simon thought as his eyes landed on the mithril collar on William's neck. 'So, this is the child of Arwen and Maxwell. Lady Fate is truly a fickle lady.'

William noticed that the Academy Dean was looking at his collar with a gentle gaze. Even so, he was firm in his decision to protect his Master's whereabouts and identity.

"Did you know? I was one of the makers of that collar hanging on your neck," Simon stated. "The Collar of Wisteria, a special collar that was crafted to enslave a young elf named Celine because of the power of darkness that ran through her veins."

William's eyes narrowed as he unconsciously clenched his fists that were lying on top of his lap.

'This collar was used to enslave Master?' William felt his heart shudder. 'These bastards!'

William wanted to ask questions, but he resisted the urge and pressed his lips firmly together. He was afraid that he would start to hurl curses at the Academy's Dean due to the anger that was rising inside his chest.

Simon noticed the change in William's expression, but he didn't say anything about it. Instead, he continued his tale as if he was reminiscing out loud.

"I can still remember her lifeless expression when she wore that same collar on her neck. Back then, everyone in the elf village disdained and scorned her for being impure. She was also subjected to very harsh training... Yes, she was subjected to torture using Dark Magic."

Simon drank the remaining tea in his cup to wet his throat. When he was done, he returned it to the table and spoke once more.

"I don't know how an eight-year-old was able to take that kind of training," Simon continued. "There were times when she would return home and her dress would be dyed with her own blood. That is not something that any eight-year-old should experience. It was inhumane..."

William's fist was starting to shake for he knew just how terrible and painful it was to be subjected to such torture using Black Magic.

Simon sighed before looking up at the ceiling. "When her training ended, she thought that everyone in the village would be able to accept her, but she was wrong. The elves are a proud race. They disdain anything that isn't pure. Although they tolerate Half-Elves in their territories, they also make them feel that they weren't welcome. Hah~ such narrow minded fools.

"On Celine's twelfth birthday, she was exiled from the village and sent to the Dark Elves to continue her training. There, she suffered untold horrors. Horrors that any teenage girl would never dream to experience. This lasted until she turned twenty years old. Her Grandfather, Darwin, personally went to bring her back from the Northern Continent.

"The Celine that came back with him was no longer the child that hoped for acceptance and love. Since the Silvermoon continent wouldn't accept her existence, Darwin decided to take her to the Southern Continent--where his old friend lived.

"There, he hoped that Celine would regain the things that she had lost during her childhood. When she arrived at Lont, that was also the day when the collar on her neck was finally removed."

Simon's gaze shifted and locked onto the collar on William's neck. "The collar you wear on your neck right now was dyed with her own tears, blood, and suffering. Do you know? That collar is the most precious and hateful thing in her possession. A collar she had to wear in order to tell others that she had

no intention of hurting them or anyone else. A collar that she was forced to wear so that others will feel safe in her presence... that is the history of the Collar of Wisteria.

"A legacy of how the Proud Elven Race chained up a young girl because they were afraid of some stupid prophecy. A prophecy that would bring them to their knees." Simon sneered. "Didn't it even occur to them that if they showed her love and compassion, she would repay them in full? Perhaps they did, but they are a proud race. Elves are such a stupid race. A very stupid race..."

Simon ridiculed and mocked the Elves as if he didn't belong to their race. The Dean of the Academy sighed one more time, before waving his hand.

"You may go," Simon ordered. "The next time you see your Master, know that your own suffering wasn't even a tenth of what she experienced in her lifetime. Make sure to treasure her well."

William walked out of the Dean's Office in a daze, followed by his Mama Ella. He didn't even know how he managed to return to his own room. Simon's tale was still circulating inside his head and it made him feel angry and ashamed at the same time.

Angry because of how much suffering his Master had gone through and shame for cursing his Master, Celine, in his heart during the first few weeks of his own suffering.