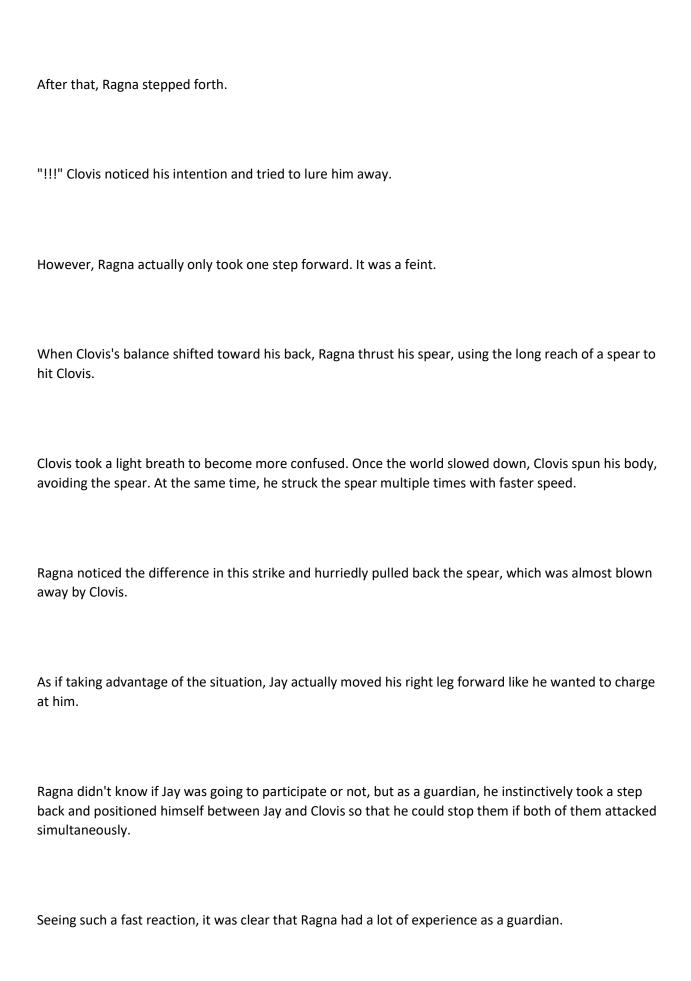
## World Mall 221

Chapter 221 Test
Clovis nodded. "Alright. I will be your opponent. You are Tier 2, right? I am only a Tier 1 human. I believe that my evolution progress is also the lowest in the group."
"I understand." Ragna nodded with a serious expression. He grabbed the wooden shield and spear again.
Clovis's aim in saying those words was to make Ragna lower his guard. If he actually underestimated him, especially his future boss, there was no need to get him into the group.
And Clovis turned around and whispered something to Jay and Melody before asking Kanaria to fully observe the battle from the side.
After arranging the situation, Clovis grabbed a long sword and a short sword from the shelves.
"Alright. Since you're a guardian, pretend that behind you is the target you have to protect, while I'm trying to get past you and kill that target. Are you ready?" Clovis asked.

Clovis leaped forth, making the same movement as Jay.

"Please." Ragna nodded while putting the shield in front of him.

Knowing how powerful Jay was despite being Tier 1, Ragna thought he should be cautious against Clovis.
Clovis didn't know that Jay had told Ragna that his captain was much stronger than him, so the trick he prepared wouldn't work.
Clovis began with a low speed, striking Ragna like a normal beast. However, he still used all his strength in each swing. Even though it was unable to produce a swing similar to Jay's, it still packed a punch.
*Bang!*
*Bang!*
Ragna shifted his shield skillfully and matched Clovis's strikes, completely blocking the swings.
"!!!" Ragna noticed something. The speed and strength Clovis used actually couldn't be compared to Jay, causing him to think, 'Is he not using all his strength?'
Clovis took a step to the left and struck him again, but this time Ragna became faster to block these attacks. He even used all his strength to actually push Clovis back.



However, Clovis didn't plan to stop him. He jumped to the other side, aligning himself with Jay.
"!!!" Ragna noticed that Jay's entire body was covered by Clovis for a split second, which caused him to lift up his shield.
Clovis instantly moved at his fastest speed and delivered seven swings within a second, startling Ragna.
He held the shield as hard as possible, trying not to get overwhelmed.
Melody then moved her hand to her pocket as if trying to get a gun.
Ragna stomped the ground and thrust his spear at Clovis while tilting his shield so that it could block Jay and Melody's attacks. Unfortunately for him, Clovis at his full speed delivered swift and deadly blows.
He lost his grip on the spear and saw Clovis's blade coming from above.
Before he hit Ragna, Clovis stopped his swing, looking very amused. After all, Ragna's hand immediately tried to catch his sword after losing that spear. Even at the last moment, Ragna would do everything just to protect the person behind him instead of dodging the swing and endangering the target.

"Incredible." Clovis smiled, marking the end of the test.
He was indeed a guardian. At the same time, he understood why Jay said his weakness was troublesome. Yet once he fixed that weakness, he might become impenetrable.
In addition, Jay claimed that this guy had insane regenerative ability. When that happened, he would really become a moving fortress.
"Thank you. I'm sorry that I end up losing my spear." Ragna gave a wry smile, understanding his weakness too well. He was still surprised that Clovis was this strong when he was only a Tier 1.
In fact, he might be able to go toe-to-toe against his previous captain who was already a Tier 3.
"Ah! You're that person!" Suddenly, Kanaria screamed while pointing at Ragna.
All of them, including Clovis, were bewildered.
"Clovis. It's him! The one we saw this afternoon! But his face looks feminine are you a guy or a girl by the way?"
"Ah. You are talking about that? Because I can't develop my muscles, people often underestimate me and even mistake me for a girl. But I'm a boy. The beard and mustache are fake because they make me

more manly. Well, I'm a little cringe since, without it, people often say, 'When there's a hole, there's a way,' which is pretty disgusting for me." Ragna scratched the back of his head.
Clovis pondered for a few seconds. "In that case, are you planning to take your revenge against your previous group? Or are you just planning to get stronger without any aim whatsoever?"
"I can understand why expel me, but I will be lying if I say I'm not disappointed. But I'm not planning to get my revenge against them, I will just keep getting stronger and show them that I can do much more. Well, I'm an orphan, but according to the orphanage's manager, my parents are still alive. I just want to get stronger and see the world, trying to find my parents."
Clovis remained silent for a while, considering his words carefully.
Ragna lowered his head. "I know that I'm unworthy, but I'll definitely work hard. I will act as the guardian and I can also do daily chores as well as basic maintenance."
After several minutes, Clovis opened his mouth. "I"  Chapter 222 A Condition
"I have a condition." Clovis raised one finger.
The others were quite surprised by this decision. The entire atmosphere felt like Clovis was about to accept him, but surprisingly, Clovis wanted to add something first.

"What is that?" Ragna gulped down, feeling the pressure.
"First of all, we are not from this city, so we don't know anything about you, especially your reputation. What we know comes from what you've claimed. I'm not saying if you're lying or something, but there's still a need to prove yourself first, don't you think?"
"That's" Ragna thought for a moment. "understandable."
"And the reason why we're here is to prepare ourselves for the Shining Star Competition."
"Shining Star? The competition for under 25 years old? If I'm not wrong, you guys are"
"Our age is more suitable for the lower one, but Melody can't participate if that's the case. There is a chance that we will register your name as well. And after that, we're planning to return to our own city. So I want you to make a decision with that thought in mind."
Ragna nodded in understanding. "I personally don't care much about this city. While I was raised in the orphanage, it wasn't in this city and that orphanage was destroyed along with the city a few years ago. That's why are you planning to visit other cities as well?"
Considering Ragna's aim was to find his parents while exploring the world, Clovis said, "Of course. That's our original intention. I can't say the details, but I can say for sure it will happen within a year. And I'm sure you understand what this means, right?"

Ragna's expression turned grim. With such talented people, it wouldn't be weird if these people could actually get to Tier 2 or even Tier 3 before twenty years old. If Ragna couldn't keep up with them, he might be left behind.
Hence, Ragna said, "Please state your condition. I will definitely do my best."
Clovis nodded. "In that case, my only condition is that we'll get to know you first. You can say that we'll hire you through the usual hiring method like a mercenary. What's the rate of Tier 2 guardian again?"
Melody checked the association and said, "It's 25,000 union dollars per day."
"In that case, we'll pay you 25,000 per day as well as 20% of the Tier 2 essence we've got during the expedition," Clovis explained his plan.
Ragna didn't feel offended by this offer even though Jay had asked them to come so that Ragna could join their group. He might have been praised, but it didn't change the fact that he had a glaring weakness.
Clovis wanted to use this process to learn more about him while leaving the option to reject him if he wasn't suited to the group.
Ragna gave a gentle smile. "I'll agree to that condition. Since I'm just a free explorer, it's not that bad to accompany a promising group for a while. If you think I'm trustworthy, I don't mind participating in the competition as well. I'll do my best not to shame you."

"Clovis, sorry." Jay had a wry smile on his face, feeling bad that he ended up involving Clovis in this matter.
"It's fine." Clovis patted Jay's shoulder. "In the end, I'll be the one making a decision. So it's not your fault. No, I think I'm supposed to say 'good job' here. He is indeed a good guardian."
Jay asked, "So for the next few weeks"
"Yeah. We'll just have to see whether he is trustworthy or not." Clovis nodded.
"Don't worry. I'll be observing him as well. Your identity is special, so there's also a chance that he is a spy who wants to enter the group through me. If that's the case, I will be the one to cut him down." Jay's expression turned grim.
Jay might have lost to Clovis that day and failed to become the captain of the group. While he might not have put much effort into the group, his desire to make the group successful was the same as Clovis.
Clovis smiled. "I'm lucky to have you."
Jay smiled, gratified. Both of them soon noticed Kanaria watching them closely.
"What?" Clovis turned his head around.



"Hahahaha. Imagine losing to a man, Kanaria," said Jay with a sly grin.
"" Kanaria tried to elbow him, but Jay skillfully avoided it. Both of them stared at each other before Jay ran away while Kanaria chased after him.
Clovis only chuckled, thinking that these two were indeed childhood friends.  Chapter 223 Plans
"No! Don't go to this place." Ragna shouted while looking at Clovis with a face full of concern.
Clovis was surprised by such a reaction. He never thought that the peaceful meeting would be disturbed.
A few minutes ago.
"So we'll be visiting these three places during the next expedition. It will be a long seven-day trip." Melody opened the map. "We've gotten several missions, but I guess there are a total of five targets that we have to kill no matter what.
"The first two are located in this forest. This forest is located not far from the city, and it's one of the most famous hunting zones for explorers. The targets are Tier 3 Gastornia and Tier 3 Megaloceros.

"Clovis and Jay will be killing one each without any help. Gastornia is known to be a 'terror bird.' A kind of flightless bird with a robust build, long legs, and a powerful beak. The Megaloceros is known to be a Giant Deer. It has long, branching antlers that can span up to 5 meters in width."
Ragna noticed something and couldn't help but ask, "They are going to kill Tier 3 beasts without help?"
"Yes." Melody nodded without hesitation as if it were the normal thing to do.
"Ah, if you're not aware of it, they're more than capable of defeating a Tier 3 beast by themselves. As we said previously, we're preparing ourselves for the competition. Hence, this will give them good training."
"That's true." Ragna looked worried, but when he recalled their strength, they might indeed have the prowess of a Tier 3 human despite being a Tier 1 human.
Melody continued, "The second place will be this freshwater lake. If I'm not wrong, there is a Tier 4 Madtsoiidae in this place."
"What?!" Ragna dropped his jaw to the ground. "Are you serious?"
"Yes. This will be our group's main target on this expedition. Well, we don't expect to kill this Tier 4. We just want to fight it and survive. Since it doesn't have any toxins, it'll rely on physical attacks. Hence, it's easier to escape if needed."

"That's" Ragna fell silent for a moment. "But isn't it too reckless? Challenging a Tier 4 snake when you're only a Tier 1 human"
"I guess it's still too much." Clovis glanced at Melody. "We can't be too reckless."
"Alright. The reward is quite amazing, so I think that we can give it a shot. In that case, the target will be this Tier 3 Paraceratherium. It's known to be one of the largest land mammals to have ever existed. It has thick skin and a long neck. Because of the size, we have to avoid its stomp." Melody looked at Ragna.
This was a kind of test for him. With such a beast, even Ragna wouldn't survive if he got stomped. But he was the guardian, so he needed to have the ability to 'guard' them without blocking the attack.
Surprisingly, Ragna nodded his head, not making another remark.
"In that case, we'll move to the next destination, which is this grassland."
"No! Don't go to this place." Ragna shouted while looking at Clovis with a face full of concern.
Clovis was surprised by such a reaction. He never thought that the peaceful meeting would be disturbed.

Melody frowned. "Is there a problem?"
"That's" Ragna bit his lips. "This place is extremely dangerous. They are much stronger than anything you can imagine. Even I have a hard time blocking a single Tier 2 beast. This place"
Ragna's breathing became rough. Because of Clovis's curious gaze, Ragna had no choice but to blurt out the real reason. "This was the place where I messed up and got expelled by my previous group."
He was afraid that he would mess up once again.
However, Clovis stated, "That's the reason why we want to visit this place. It's because they're strong that it's going to be a challenge."
"But those beasts are" Ragna bit his lips.
"Stronger than normal beasts? Maybe twice as strong as the ones you can find near this city?"
"!!!" Ragna raised his eyebrows, stunned. "How do you know"
"We have gone to a similar place. Well, there are some explanations about that kind of place, but that's not really important." Clovis glanced at Melody to continue.

"We have picked another two Tier 3 beasts as the target. If the first destination is to give Clovis and Jay's
good experiences and the second destination is to test the harmony of the team, this third place is to
test our abilities. We're aiming to kill these two Tier 3 beasts as quickly as possible without sustaining
any injuries. If someone gets an injury, they will be punished."

Ragna was dumbfounded. He never thought that these people would be so confident. Even his previous captain, a Tier 3 human, had a hard time. So, it was quite surprising that a bunch of Tier 1 explorers would dare to take up the challenge.

"Don't worry. If you mess up here, we won't terminate the agreement right away. This is just a challenge, and we'll retreat if it starts becoming dangerous," Clovis added, assuring Ragna.

Ragna still looked concerned, not knowing that this third destination was actually a challenge for Ragna, not for the team. If he was indeed capable, the only thing they had to check was his loyalty to the group.

Only after that would Clovis give him the items. In fact, Clovis had thought of several items that Ragna could use, like items that boost his 'Strength' or 'Muscle.'

And that wasn't everything. Clovis also planned to give a copy of the Star Method that his father devised for Bones Affinity.

If the group managed to overcome all the challenges for the next month, they believed they could take on the Rising Star Competition.

Ragna contemplated for a few minutes before saying with a serious expression, "I understand. I shall prepare for the expedition."
"Mhmm. We will give you the details through Skychat." Clovis nodded and extended his hand. "I look forward to seeing your performance."
Ragna shook his head, feeling the pressure from this group. He wanted to see whether their confidence was fake or not.  Chapter 224 Starting
The next day, they met up in front of the gate, ready to take on the new challenge. For this journey, Clovis brought a vehicle.
It was just a cheap car they could easily abandon. Because their destinations were far from any cities, Clovis planned to hide this car on the road. If it was stolen, he didn't care much. If it wasn't, they would bring it back to the city. They had some spare money, especially when the mayor gave them two hundred thousand union dollars in the first part.
As usual, Jay was the one driving it. Clovis had taken some driving classes during his free time, but he wasn't reliable yet.
Once they were near their destination, Jay went off the road and hid the car behind an abandoned gas station. It was a building made before the 'simulation' after all.
Once they were done hiding it, Clovis brought all their equipment with them and abandoned the car.

The first destination was a forest where Tier 3 Gastornia and Megaloceros resided.
According to Ragna, there were several Tier 3 beasts in this forest. However, Clovis only wanted to take down the beasts that lived in the southern part and leave. This place wasn't their main destination after all.
The forest was located 10 kilometers from the city.
As the group reached the entrance of the forest, they gazed out at the towering trees that stretched as far as their eyes could see. The humidity was quite high as Clovis and the others could smell the rich earthy scent.
"So we will be hunting in this place?" Jay smirked, feeling a bit excited. He could hear several roars echoing inside the forest.
"Yes. We'll take it easy on the first day to get used to this new party. The next day, we'll kill as many beasts as possible as per usual and head to the next destination before dark." Kanaria nodded with a serious expression.
"What if we meet the Tier 3 beasts?" Jay asked.
"We'll take them down. You choose your opponent's Jay." Clovis glanced at him. Since each of them would be challenging a Tier 3 beast here, it was best to know which one would become their target.

"In that case, I will take on the deer," Jay answered without hesitation.
"Are you perhaps thinking about me? Something like I'm not good with the hard antlers and should go for the bird?" Clovis asked nonchalantly.
"No way. I just want to challenge that deer and see if I can crush the antlers when fighting the deer." Jay shrugged.
Jay wasn't the type of person who would lie in this situation, so Clovis agreed with him and said, "Alright. If we meet the deer first, I will open the path for you."
"If we meet the bird, you can rest easy and get carried by me." Jay smirked.
Despite their words, everyone could feel their competitiveness and trust in each other. Melody shrugged before asking, "By the way, what's the content of the competition anyway? We can probably shift our plan to match the content of the competition, right?"
"We don't know the details yet. All we know is that there are individual and group competitions." Kanaria shook her head. "Or do you know anything, Ragna?"
Ragna said, "I'm not sure. In the competition that was held seven years ago, the group competition would be fighting the beasts or even a mock battle. In the individual matches, there would be five duels."

"I see. Then there's no change in our plan. Teamwork is good, but if we can increase our individual performance, it will create better teamwork." Clovis nodded with a serious expression. "In that case, let's enter this forest. Jay and I will open up the path for you. Ragna will protect Kanaria and Melody."
"If you don't mind, I will be using this today." Kanaria took out her new weapon.
"Not your usual sniper rifle?" Clovis furrowed his eyebrows.
"SCAR. To put it simply, I'm going to use it as both. I have some parts ready, so I should be fine helping you from two hundred meters away if necessary. It has been modified to suit my needs as well." Kanaria tried to explain it as simply as possible. After all, Clovis might be using a gun, but when she asked about guns, Clovis was pretty much clueless.
"Is that so?" Clovis nodded. "Alright. Let's head out."
The group agreed and immediately entered the forest. It didn't take too long for them to find a few beasts.
"Let's go with the usual," said Clovis while taking off. Jay nodded and ran a bit slowly.
"Huh?" Ragna noticed their speed and couldn't help but squint his eyes. "Aren't they—"

Before he finished his words, the beasts noticed Clovis and Jay first and let out a roar, alerting the beasts nearby.
The beasts responded to the roar with another and started heading toward them.
"There are a lot of beasts Are they perhaps" Ragna frowned. Normally, they should take down their opponents as swiftly as possible so that they can't bring out reinforcements. However, Clovis and Jay actually did the opposite.
Faced with a lot of incoming beasts, Clovis and Jay smiled and finally sped up.
The six beasts in front of them were mostly Tier 0.
The moment they clashed, Clovis waved both swords swiftly, cutting down one beast after another. On the other hand, Jay swung his saber and cut the beasts into half cleanly.
"!!!" Ragna dropped his jaws to the ground. Even though the beasts were only Tier 0, Tier 1 humans still needed a few slashes to take them down. Clovis indeed hit each beast multiple times, but the execution time was so fast that it felt like he just swung once.
After killing the six beasts, Clovis and Jay looked around. Both of them headed in the opposite direction.

right. "This is how we usually operate. Get ready, they're coming!"
Chapter 225 Shocked
*Bang!*
*Bang!*
*Bang!*
Kanaria released multiple shots, taking down a beast.
One beast seemed to manage to get close to them. When the beast was about to pounce on the girls, Ragna stepped forwardto and put his shield in front.
The beast's entire body pushed him back, but he had calculated the power, allowing him to stop one meter in front of Kanaria.
Kanaria could use this gap to comfortably loop around him and shoot this falling beast. He even stabbed the beast to stop its movement.
*Bang!*

There were 12 beasts on the left and 23 beasts on the right. Considering their number, Melody created a path for Clovis to take down all those twelve beasts while Kanaria started aiming at the beasts on the

Kanaria killed it with a shot on the head. However, both of them noticed a howl coming from behin	nd
Kanaria.	

Ragna swiftly spun his body and positioned his shield, but before the beast could even reach him, Melody shot the beast's body multiple times, causing it to fall down. After that, she finished it off with two shots.

Ragna widened his eyes in surprise. When he glanced at Melody, her eyes actually remained on the screen. He thought Melody was a normal operator, so the fact that she could aim so accurately despite being focused on the screen blew his mind.

When he turned back to assist Kanaria, she had actually suppressed the incoming beasts. There was one more beast that approached her, but Kanaria didn't even flinch. She kicked the beast lightly, deflecting the beast's trajectory, which caused the beast to actually hit Ragna's shield. After that, she ended it with a bullet in the head.

Ragna couldn't understand how Kanaria could actually react as though she knew Ragna was on her left. Despite being so focused on the scope, she actually retained a huge field of vision.

What he didn't know was that their affinity had improved tremendously, so it was normal for her to see it. In fact, her senses were so good that she could actually spot the beasts within five meters with the noises they produced alone.

If she reached Tier 2, it wouldn't be weird to actually create a field of vision and understand things from a third point of view.

Ragna's shock didn't stop there. He was so shocked by Kanaria and Melody that he didn't realize that both Clovis and Jay had actually taken down all the beasts in the area.
In total, Clovis killed ten beasts, while Jay eliminated twelve.
Ragna finally understood why Clovis was so confident. He sucked a cold breath, thinking, 'Is this really a Tier 1 group? Each of them possesses strength beyond their tier. In addition, their hunting speed is something I have never seen before, even among Tier 2 groups. The only one that can be compared to them will be the Tier 3 group with at least two or three Tier 3 humans in the group.
'Kanaria and Melody are also able to fight in close combat. None of them are ordinary.' Ragna felt that his existence here wasn't necessary.
However, when Clovis returned, he said, "Nice work, Ragna."
"Huh?" Ragna blinked a few times in disbelief. He didn't do anything.
"You are letting yourself a bit carried away, Clovis. Jay too." Kanaria shook her head helplessly.
"Well, Ragna is protecting you guys, so I don't have to worry anymore." Clovis waved his hand. "Normally, I have to look out for your safety, so I can't go too far. But with Ragna, even if the situation gets dangerous, he can still buy some time. That's why I and Jay can fight without worries."

Ragna was stunned. Even though Clovis praised it that way, he couldn't really accept it. He said, "Please don't praise me. I didn't do anything."
"Not at all. Don't you see that Kanaria becomes more relaxed? Instead of engaging in close combat, she can rely on your shield and use that slight gap to kill the beast. Hence, Melody can be more focused on guiding us." Clovis shook his head as if Ragna had played an important role.
"No, I haven't done anything. Please get some rest right now. I'll be the one collecting their essence."
"Are you sure?" Clovis looked surprised.
"Yes. Please conserve your energy. I'm used to this kind of work as well." Ragna considered their overall condition, so it was only right for him to collect the essence. Kanaria would be on the lookout while Melody monitored the radar.
When Ragna was gone, Clovis glanced at Kanaria and asked, "So what do you think?"
"He is good. He understands his weakness well and adjusts his fighting style. And his awareness of the overall condition is high." Kanaria nodded. "I think we can stop the test and focus on our mission this time?"
"In that case, let's go in that direction. There are more than fifty beasts in that direction." Melody pointed to the northeast.

"Alright. We can give him more tasks then and check his limit next." Clovis agreed.
Once Ragna finished collecting the essence, the group continued. Clovis and Jay could finally unleash their full strength and become a bit more selfish, increasing their hunting speed tremendously.
Meanwhile, Ragna showed his prowess as a guardian. He kept standing in the beasts' ways, blocking them and creating an opportunity for Melody and Kanaria to kill the beasts.
The more he got used to the group's fighting style, the higher his efficiency. Even Clovis had no qualms about his ability as a guardian, despite his glaring weakness.
The group hunted the beasts for another three hours. Ragna was shocked by the number of beasts they hunted in just a few hours. It would take a whole day for a normal Tier 1 party to kill all these beasts, yet they managed to do it before lunch.
When they were about to stop for lunch, Kanaria couldn't help but notice a 3 meter tall deer standing between the trees.
"Clovis, Jay! The deer!" Kanaria shouted while pointing at the deer.
"!!!" Both of them hurriedly stepped forward, seeing about thirty beasts in their way. There were even more beasts on the radar.

A smile appeared on their faces.
"I will take the front. Don't worry about anything else, just take on the deer!" Clovis smiled before charging forward.