

World Mall 246

Chapter 246 Fighting the Two Assassins

The two assassins were just waiting for the beasts to kill Clovis and the others.

"Oh, oh! There is so much ruckus over there," said one of the assassins while relaxingly leaning on the tree.

"It's going to be impossible to escape from that. Thanks to the sudden visit of Skylark's princess, we were unable to do anything to him for a while. However, we have to thank the mayor for chasing them away."

"Well, he's not chasing them away."

"He is simply too ignorant. He doesn't know that if he wants to protect them, he should have kept them close. Now that they are in a different city, they won't have anyone to help them. In addition, the shield bearer that they have recruited..."

"According to the investigation, that guardian is a leech, whose strength is subpar. He might be good enough to protect the people on the back, but he will become a burden in an emergency situation like this."

"Yes. And we've prepared everything we can in order to create a situation where they are completely surrounded. I have seen the video of them fighting the Tier 3 beast during the expedition with that Skylark's princess. While the beasts here are not as strong, it'll be impossible for them to kill the Tier 3 beasts in an instant."

"So one Tier 3 beast stops them and the rest will kill them. There is even a Tier 4 beast in the mix... and a flying beast."

"Yes. No matter how abnormal they are, they won't be able to escape."

"What if they are able to escape?"

"It's impossible, but if they are able to do it..." The assassin fell silent for a moment. "We might have to inform the headquarter about it."

"We are going to retreat?"

"The opponent is that madman's grandson, you know."

"...I see."

There was an awkward agreement between them when they mentioned Clovis's grandfather.

However, that awkward atmosphere suddenly changed when they noticed something. The assassin who had been leaning on the tree suddenly pointed at the back with his thumb while nonchalantly saying, "Why do I feel like I'm hearing the ruckus coming toward us?"

The other assassin couldn't help but furrow his eyebrows and take a peek, only to realize it was too late.

"Watch—!"

"Jay! Kill them!"

What they found was Clovis and the others going down the hill at high speed, coincidentally running toward them.

The assassin straightened his body, pulled his dagger, and turned around, trying to figure out what was happening. At that moment, Jay had already slashed the tree, his blade was about to reach the assassin's body.

"!!!" The assassin tried to block this swing. However, because he didn't expect them to be able to escape the beasts' encirclement, his form was still unstable.

Clink!

When the two blades clashed, the assassin was instantly losing. Jay's blade pushed the dagger back, almost reaching the assassin's body.

'What is this strength? Even though he had all that momentum and initiative, I'm still a Tier 5 human. How can I lose to a mere Tier 1 human?' The assassin gritted his teeth before noticing something important. 'Wait. This strength... Don't tell me...'

Seeing his friend getting pushed back, the other assassin planned to back him up. However, both assassins suddenly tilted their bodies and heads before several gunshots echoed.

Kanaria and Melody were there to provide some cover for Jay. Unfortunately, it seemed that normal guns wouldn't work against Tier 5 humans. Even if they didn't have the Brain Affinity, their bodies had evolved enough to develop the instinct to dodge bullets.

"Don't underestimate me!" The assassin roared and used all the strength he could muster to knock away Jay's sword.

Jay gritted his teeth. It seemed that no matter how much strength he put into his sword, it wasn't going to be enough to overwhelm a Tier 5 human. Still, Jay was glaring at the assassin as if he wasn't scared of him.

'I applaud your courage. While I can't kill Clovis Hacfield directly, it doesn't mean I can't kill you here. To think you would be able to use Muscle Augmentation while being a Tier 1 human... You are not a genius anymore, you're basically a monster for being able to use something that only a Tier 3 or even a Tier 4 human can barely use.'

But if I let you get stronger, you will be a threat to our plan in killing Clovis,' the assassin muttered inwardly.

He tilted his hand, ready to impale Jay's head.

However, that was when Clovis suddenly appeared in front of Jay, sacrificing his own body. It wasn't a foolish move. He perfectly knew that the assassins wouldn't dare kill him. In fact, this might be what he was going to do if the assassins tried to attack them.

The assassin snapped back. He gritted his teeth while using the last bit of his strength to slightly change the trajectory of his dagger.

Although barely, the dagger missed Clovis. However, forcefully changing the trajectory required a lot of movement internally, causing some internal injuries to the assassin's body.

The other assassin tried to help his friend, but Kanaria and Melody shot at him again. Now that he knew about them, the assassin skillfully avoided the bullet while making his way to Clovis.

But this time, Ragna appeared in his way.

He couldn't help but remember the result of the investigation into Ragna. Without hesitation, he swung his hand as if trying to push Ragna away.

Bam!

The hit was quite powerful, but the assassin was surprised because Ragna wasn't blown away. He only managed to push Ragna one meter back.

"Wha—!" His eyes were filled with disbelief. However, to reach his friend, he had to blow away Ragna. He didn't have time to think about why Ragna was different from their investigation. He hit Ragna's shield with all his strength this time.

As expected of a Tier 5 human, even Ragna couldn't withstand the second blow and was launched into a tree.

However, he managed to buy Clovis and the others two precious seconds.

After all, in those two seconds, Jay spun his body, looped around Clovis, and struck the assassin's side.

Chapter 247 Secret

'Not good!' The assassin thought. Because he had to avoid hitting Clovis, he directed the dagger to the left. In other words, he had just exposed his rights.

Jay took this chance to loop around and strike him from his right.

The assassin tried his best to retract the dagger, but Clovis struck the dagger, stopping the dagger.

"!!!" The assassin was completely out of options. The only way to escape from this was to use his left hand, but the biggest problem was that Jay's strike was too powerful.

Still, as a Tier 5 human, he was much more experienced in battles.

He extended his left hand, trying to stop the weapon.

Jay had expected this and used all his strength so that he could cut both his hand and body in one go.

But to his surprise, the assassin caught the blade at the last moment.

Jay didn't care. He pushed through and saw the initial success as the blade actually cut the gap between his fingers all the way to the base of his wrist. The side also got hit, but it wasn't deep enough to reach the organ.

With one more push, he should die.

However, he didn't realize that the real intention of the assassin's action was to use the force behind that swing to give the last push to throw his body to the side.

It was effective. His body fell down before Jay inflicted a fatal injury.

Seeing that injury, the other assassin couldn't help but shout, "Retreat!"

"!!!" The injured assassin didn't expect that they would have to run away from a bunch of kids. Then again, the fact that they were able to push them back to this extent was already an undeniable proof of their extraordinary strength.

It seemed that they had no choice but to give this victory to Clovis. If they stayed alive, they could do it again later. In addition, they should inform them about the strength of Clovis's group.

Although it was only clear that Jay had the special power, there might be something else that made the group strong.

That was why they had to report this incident first.

With that thought in mind, the injured assassin rolled on the ground and started escaping at full speed. Jay and Ragna had a hard time following their movements, making them realize that if they didn't take them by surprise, they wouldn't even get this chance.

Kanaria and Melody furrowed their eyebrows as if realizing their responsibility as the group's eyes.

Only Clovis focused on what truly mattered in their current situation. He shouted, "What the hell are you doing? Run!"

Those words were not directed at the assassins. They were for his teammates. For better or worse, the beasts were still chasing them.

Because they stopped for a brief period, the beasts almost reached their position.

"O-oh!" The group panicked for a second and started running again.

Although it was a shame, they really couldn't kill the assassins. Then again, they were probably the only insane people that dared to challenge Tier 5 humans. They were much stronger than even the snake that chased them.

One wrong step would have resulted in them dying.

Still, they managed to escape the impossible encirclement and escaped from the area, returning to their previous camp.

Everyone was completely exhausted, both physically and mentally.

Jay was raring to go again since he hadn't done much other than opening the path, but Kanaria and Melody stopped him.

After all, Kanaria had been the one supporting the entire group, while Melody looked after everyone on the radar. Without both of them, something was bound to go wrong.

The hardest job would be Clovis. He actually risked his life to create an opportunity for the team to escape.

In that situation, the only way to survive was to stop the snake. The dragonfly and the bear wouldn't make such a simple mistake. Hence, he used the colossal beast to sow discord among them. It also sealed up the beasts that came with the snake.

There was an unexpected situation, and Clovis had no choice but to give the items to Ragna ahead of time. Now that Ragna knew about this, Clovis only had two options: trust him or kill him.

He still hadn't fully trusted Ragna, considering this was their first trip.

On the contrary, Ragna was completely astounded. He dropped his spear because he had to catch the items and end up abandoning them due to the others rushing forward, but his mind was still occupied with the items.

Once they set up the tents for raising, the rest just wanted to relax. Ragna was sitting near them as if he were trying to tell them that he wouldn't leave the group all of a sudden because of these items. In fact, he had given back the items to Clovis without saying anything, fully aware that no excuses would make Clovis trust him.

Still, his head hung low.

Ragna couldn't help but think, 'Those items... I have never heard anything about an item that can boost someone. If it's something that can be injected into one's body, then I can understand. But I just hold it, not even wearing it.'

'What kind of item is that? How can they have such a magical power? Now that I think about it, I notice that they are wearing some accessories. While I understand if the girls are using it, what about the men? Well, it's not my place to say anything about their preference, but I'm afraid that those accessories also have that kind of effect.'

'Is this the secret why this group is so strong? In that case, the one who provides all these accessories... must be the captain, Clovis. How could he even have so many magical things? I can't understand.'

While Ragna was in deep thought, Clovis's voice echoed right next to his ears.

"The answer lies in my name."

"!!!" Ragna was taken aback and saw Clovis sneaking up from the back. "C-captain?! Your name?"

"I am Clovis, Clovis Hacfield."

Thud!

Chapter 248 Choices

Thud!

Ragna's heart sank the moment he heard that name. "Hacfield? Which Hacfield are you talking about? Are you talking about THE HACFIELD?"

Ragna suddenly fell silent, noticing that it was a foolish question. It was pretty much clear from Clovis's strength and talent that he was not ordinary. In addition, he was accompanied by great people like this and had such a mysterious thing.

It should be pretty obvious that Clovis was telling the truth about his name.

Ragna was blown away. He had never thought that the heir of one of the Tier 9 humans was actually standing next to him this whole time.

"You can consider this a threat, so I won't bear around the bushes. You have two options." Clovis raised two fingers. "You either join our group or promise not to tell anyone about my identity."

Ragna was surprised for the second time. A threat? What kind of threat was this? Being able to join the group of someone related to a Tier 9 human was a very rare opportunity that most people could only dream of.

In addition, it was clear that joining his group would also mean he could get those items. He could solve his problems and become a great guardian.

Ragna had been doing anything he could think of to solve his weakness, but none of it was effective. The ability he got after reaching Tier 3 or Tier 4 might be able to solve that problem, but there was no guarantee since he only heard about the rumor.

Compared to the items that had been proven to be effective, it was simply an offer instead of a threat.

On the other hand, what about the second option? He seemed to be able to walk away as long as he promised not to say anything about it.

Why would Clovis even allow such a thing? There was a high chance that this was just a trap. If he chose the second option, he might have to eliminate him. An item that could boost one's strength was basically unheard of in this world. Once it was revealed, it would definitely shock the whole world.

However, some people might choose this option, especially after seeing the strength of those two assassins. They fought them briefly, but it could be said that they were too weak against them. If not for them launching a surprise attack, the two assassins could easily kill them all.

Still, as a guardian, he was quite perceptive. He noticed that the assassins seemed to be able to kill them except for Clovis.

He didn't understand the reason behind it, but some people would be afraid of them... except for insane people or those who had nothing to lose... Yes, just like him.

Ragna only took a moment to consider that option. He actually turned around and fell on one knee, causing a small bumping sound on the ground.

"!!!" The others looked surprised.

'Kneeling?' Melody blinked her eyes a few times, not expecting to see it like this.

'What is this? A knight ceremony or something? We have stopped doing that for centuries, you know.' Kanaria furrowed her eyebrows.

Ragna ignored people's gazes. He simply declared his answer out loud, "If it means I can solve my weakness, I wish to serve you for the rest of my life. As long as you don't think I'm too useless, I will become your shield. I will protect you or your family with my life."

Clovis looked at Ragna, who lowered his head after his declaration. Even he didn't expect this much reaction from Ragna.

He thought that Ragna would accept the offer normally and gradually become their 'true' companion.

However, he didn't feel any trace of hesitation in Ragna's words as though he was indeed prepared to do it for the rest of his life. It was a heavy commitment over some items.

Ragna didn't even know whether it would be effective in the future.

Clovis fell silent for a moment and sat on Ragna's seat earlier.

"I can't understand." Clovis's voice was deep and filled with confusion. "Trying to search for your parents, was it? By serving me, you won't be able to do it, you know? Is your dream so easy to give up?"

Ragna shook his head. "From my perspective, my choice will lead to a higher possibility of me being able to find my parents."

"You can do it in another way instead of selling yourself to servitude." Clovis's expression turned grim.

Ragna gulped down. "Servitude, huh? I have two simple stories that I'd like you to listen to. In the first story, an honest man works hard his entire life but is unable to overcome his limit and eventually becomes an embarrassment. In the second story, the man sells his soul to the devil.

He can only live for a few years, but he is able to achieve much more than the honest man in his entire life and even give back to the people. I believe that the second man is wiser."

Clovis fell silent for a moment.

Ragna closed his eyes before saying helplessly, "Besides, this weakness has been plaguing me for a long time. I don't know what kind of things can solve my weakness. If I can solve it as quickly as possible, I will gladly do anything."

"You're acting as if you're able to kill me as long as you can get that solution," said Clovis with a cold tone.

"I am nothing but a Guardian. My power is to protect, not to kill."

"You're merely making an excuse. Didn't you say that you were thinking that becoming a Tier 3 would solve that problem? Why don't you just wait? You might not need my help in the end."

"YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!" Ragna shouted, his hands clenching his chest and his face distorted.

Clovis didn't expect Ragna to show such a reaction. But it seemed that there was something more than what he originally knew. It must also be the reason why Ragna chose this option.

Chapter 249 Ragna's Past

10 years ago.

Ragna was nine years old. He was still under the care of an orphanage.

However, unlike other children, where they could have some fun, Ragna was actually being beaten up by a few kids in a small alley.

"Gah!" Ragna coughed up blood. His body was full of bruises, and his consciousness had become fuzzy.

"Hahaha. This is interesting. Look at this..." one of the guys grabbed Ragna's arm. "I hit this spot earlier and it was supposed to turn blue. But it's already gone!"

"It's true. Then we don't have to worry!"

"He is such a good dummy for practice."

"A living dummy!"

They just laughed and kept beating him. They hit him with a wooden sword, stabbed him with a wooden spear, or even slammed him with a wooden shield.

Ragna didn't say anything to them.

It was only after two hours that these guys started getting exhausted. With one of his eyes closed due to injury, Ragna weakly extended his hand and said, "Pay..."

"Huh?! You bastard! We're not done yet!" The guy roared while stomping his body.

"Pay..." Ragna kept saying the same thing.

They looked pretty disturbed and disgusted.

"Pay right? Take it! Ruining our mood!" The guy tossed some money and walked away with an annoyed face.

The others could only follow him.

Ragna glanced at the money and said, "This is not the amount we agreed..."

Ragna's voice didn't reach them as those people had walked away. It wasn't like he could catch up to them. Even if he managed to do it, he didn't have the ability to fight back.

These people might get their money back out of pettiness.

Ragna could only grit his teeth and grab the money on the ground.

He laid down on the ground for one or two hours, recovering a little bit with the help of his constitution.

After he recovered enough to walk, Ragna returned to his orphanage tattered. Fortunately, he walked quite far away, so by the time he reached the orphanage, a lot of his injuries had been healed.

"Big brother Ragna!" A few kids noticed him and immediately rushed to him.

"Oh? I bought some candies. Why don't you share it with others?" Ragna smiled, handing them a small pouch filled with candies.

"Really? Yey!" The kids hurriedly ran to the other kids.

Ragna just enjoyed the view of their smile and happiness before walking to the inside, only to find an old woman standing in the entrance with her arms crossed.

"Nana." Ragna greeted her with the best smile he could muster, despite his injuries.

"Are you doing it again?" She looked concerned, her voice filled with worries.

"I heard that the orphanage is about to be closed. I don't really want that." Ragna shook his head.

"But, look at you! You are being beaten like this. Do you think I will be happy if we manage to stay open?"

"I'm grateful for you... for taking in a child that is left alone in the winter. Without you, I might not be in this world anymore. You gave me love, you cared for me as if I were your own child... I just wanted to repay you."

She bit her lips as tears started forming on the corners of her eyes. On one hand, she couldn't bear to see Ragna sacrifice himself like this. On the other hand, she couldn't deny the fact that the orphanage was about to close because they had no money left.

She had done a lot of things, but it was futile. She couldn't get the money to do it.

"Please accept this." Ragna smiled while shoving the money into her hand before walking away. "I'm going to get some rest."

When he was about to reach his room, Ragna noticed a little girl standing in the hallway as though she were waiting for him.

"Big Brother!"

"Lilia?" Ragna looked surprised as the little girl just hugged him. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Lilia can't do anything to help. She wants to grow up much faster so that she can help Big Brother and Nana."

"Is that so? I'm happy as Lilia's big brother."

However, that never happened. The orphanage didn't need money anymore, not because they had secured a huge fund but because it was destroyed.

There was a monster wave that struck their cities. The people were running around the street, trying to go to the gate, where they opened up the path for evacuation.

"Run! Run!" Ragna shouted, leading the people from the orphanage.

Buildings began to collapse because of the destruction the beasts brought. People were eaten left and right.

Bam!

All of a sudden, a beast emerged from a wall.

"Watch out!" Ragna hurriedly jumped toward the beast, trying to use himself as bait.

The beast simply knocked him away with a single wave of its tail.

"Gah!" Ragna crashed onto a pillar with a force that knocked him out for a few seconds.

When he regained his consciousness, Ragna had to witness something he never expected in his life.

The children were completely gone. He wanted to believe that they just used the chance he provided, but no, he could see severed limbs that weren't eaten away.

He recognized all of them.

"Big Brother... I'm glad... you're alright..." Lilia's voice echoed weakly from the side.

"!!!" Ragna widened his eyes and hurriedly checked on Lilia. Her ribs must be broken and there were some superficial wounds.

"Don't talk. I will help you. We will—" Ragna abruptly stopped because Lilia said, "Don't... Big Brother... You should... escape..."

"Don't say anything. You're going to be fine." Ragna bit his lips. He believed it was going to be alright because he had suffered a much worse injury compared to this.

However, his thoughts had been distorted because of his special constitution.

"Ah. If only... I am... like big brother... I won't... make you... cry..." Lilia looked unwilling but those were the last words she uttered before succumbing to her wound.

"Lilia... Lilia!" Ragna turned pale. If Lilia had this body instead of him, she would have survived. People might think this body was a blessing, but Ragna thought it was a curse. He was just a person who could only witness people's deaths but was unable to follow them.

What he didn't know at that time was that this was not the end of the misfortune that his special constitution brought.

Chapter 250 Clovis's Answer

Bam!

A guy slammed the table hard while glaring at Ragna.

"What the heck did you do earlier? How could a guardian be so weak?"

"I'm sorry, I will do better next time." Ragna lowered his head, his face was already pale.

"There's no next time. Go away!" The guy kicked Ragna. "Hmph. You almost killed one of our members! You freaking sissy."

Ragna didn't say anything. He didn't have the experience to become a guardian. However, the only thing he knew was that his constitution allowed him to take a beating, so he chose to become one.

He had lost everything in his former city. When he wanted to take his own life out of misery, he remembered the kindness he had experienced in that orphanage.

There was no way he could choose the easiest path of all.

Hence, Ragna did all kinds of jobs in order to survive. He let people beat him and once he was old enough, he became an explorer.

Obviously, his evolution rate shocked a lot of people. However, his condition remained the same.

Even he had a high evolution rate, he was bound to be weaker than even someone a Tier below him. So why would they bother to invest so much in him?

Ragna couldn't deny what was happening in his body and decided to distance himself from the group. Eventually, he resigned from the group.

In the past two years, he has been joining all sorts of random parties. Some recognized him and expected a lot, only to feel disappointed after a single expedition. Some didn't recognize him and also got disappointed.

Sissy, weakling, failed guardian or even teammate's killer... he had heard all sorts of nicknames.

Ragna gritted his teeth and said to Clovis, "That's why... It's not something small. I don't have anything to repay you other than myself. As long as I can attain the power that solves my weakness, I'm willing to do anything.

"I'm sick of being weak... I'm sick of being unable to protect myself and others. I want to protect the people around me, so please grant me the strength." Ragna looked at Clovis with a desperate face.

He was aware that nothing in this world was free. He had learned it since he was young. It was also the reason why he chose to become a 'training dummy' for people.

For Clovis to invest more in him, he offered everything. He believed that he was talented enough as long as he could solve this weakness.

Kanaria had been listening to the entire story and couldn't help but think, 'So that's why he put on makeup and acted like an older man. People looked down on his small and feminine appearance.'

Melody fell silent. 'I guess the orphanage is the biggest thing in his heart, considering he doesn't talk much about his life after that. Then again, the orphanage can be considered his home, so I can understand. From what I have seen and heard, I don't think he is someone who would take back his own promise.'

'The problem is whether Clovis wants to take him in or not.' Jay frowned. 'There are a few problems. First of all, we still don't know much about him. This past story can also be made up. But if he doesn't bind Ragna right away, there's a chance that the information will be leaked.'

These three contemplated, wondering if Clovis was going to accept him or not. In the end, the final decision would be in his hands.

Clovis closed his eyes for a moment before asking, "I have one question. You said you were going to offer everything to me as long as you could solve that weakness of yours. Does that mean you're ready to become a robot whose actions are fully controlled by me?"

Ragna didn't answer immediately. The obvious answer would be yes, but he noticed that Clovis was a bit different when leading his group.

Even though he was giving tasks to the others, he let them improvise if necessary. The proof was the fact that he wasn't angry when Melody chose to go against his order and stop for a moment so that she could help him.

Hence, Ragna had gotten his answer. "No. I won't be a robot. I am a guardian. If there is a better plan to protect everything, I won't hesitate to do it. You can punish me after that."

Clovis saw that resolute face on Ragna before saying, "In that case, you are going to have hard objectives from now on.

"Firstly, you have to reach Tier 3 before the Rising Star Competition. Secondly, your role will become much more aggressive from now on. I'll be testing your performance... For example, a single injury to this girl means you've failed.

Thirdly, your condition shall remain the same until you join the group, meaning that you won't get anything other than the fixed amount we've agreed upon until you officially join this group."

Ragna gulped down before saying, "I understand. I'll definitely do my best."

He knew it would be hard to accomplish all these, but he knew how powerful this group was compared to other groups. If he let this chance go, he might not get a second chance.

"Take these." Clovis tossed the ring and the necklace back to him.

"!!!" Ragna looked surprised. He expected Clovis would give him these items later. "Are you sure about this?"

"What? Are you going to run away with those two items? Well, it's not like those items can get you so far. Besides, if you do that, the one hunting you down won't be me, it will be my parents or grandfather." Clovis shrugged.

He acted as if it were not a big deal, but Ragna felt all the pressure on him. He knew the reputation of the Hacfield family after all.

"I don't think I have to tell you this, but make sure you don't say anything about those items to others even if they're your best friend or trusted relative. If you manage to do all that and join the group, I will give you something else."

"Yes!"