

World Mall 366

Chapter 366 Invitation

"!!!" Clovis widened his eyes. "A spider?"

"Yes." Erwin nodded. "While it's true that the beasts that manage to survive this whole time look random, it's clear that when they're the apex predators or have distinctive features, they will most likely survive and become a beast that inhabits the underworld. And according to the remnant of the web we've found among those rubbles..."

Professor Genzert added, "The data is matched with the data that Sdein Country had 10 years ago. The web matches toxicity and all other characteristics, except for the fact that the one we record is stronger than the existing data. In other words, the spider itself is actually stronger than what Sdein Country has."

"The spider recorded in the Sdein Country is a Tier 5 beast, close to Tier 6. However, the data we have is actually ten times that amount," Erwin continued.

"Ten times? Are you saying that the spider that causes all this is Tier 6 if not Tier 7?" Clovis widened his eyes in shock.

Erwin confirmed it with a nod.

"So is there already a plan?" Ragna asked.

"We are still discussing the plan, but more importantly, we've been trying to locate the spider first so that we can see whether it's good to use explosives or not."

"Why is that?" Jay frowned. "Are you afraid that the spiders have created a few layers of webs and you'll run out of explosives before you can bring down all the rubble?"

"Indeed." Erwin raised his index finger. "I told you earlier that a beast needed to have a certain distinct feature, right? This time, the spider we're talking about is from the Carboniferous period, where giant insects lived. And the spider identity is the biggest spider that is recorded in history, *Megarachne servinei*. And it's possible that this is the culprit."

Kanaria sucked a cold breath before crossing her arms. "So we can't do anything before we locate the spider?"

"Can't we check the condition of the underground city through a different city? I mean, we can send reinforcement using another tunnel to at least improve the situation in the underground city. I mean, if the city on the surface is already in such a condition, I can't imagine the underground city's location."

"Mhmm?" Erwin and Professor Genzert raised their eyebrows, not expecting that solution.

"Let me call the commander first." Professor Genzert walked away and informed him about this idea.

From his voice, the commander seemed to be impressed. Fortunately, his reply came as expected.
"Thank you for the suggestion, Professor Genzert. However, please focus on the tunnel. We'll handle the rest of the problems here."

"But..." Professor Genzert sounded worried.

The commander had no choice but to say, "We thought about this idea two days ago. In fact, we have dispatched two teams with Tier 6 explorers as the leaders. However, we haven't received any information from them yet.

"Although we have several Tier 7 explorers, we can't move them easily, especially when the enemies are still unknown. For example, even if they manage to reach the city, what if a Tier 7 ambushes them? Or what if this is a trap from the spider? If they come and investigate the tunnel from below, what will happen if the spider crushes them with those rubbles while they're inside?

None of them can survive."

When Professor Genzert heard all those possibilities and the actions they had taken, he ended up apologizing.

"Still, why are you thinking about this right now?"

"It's..." Professor Genzert hesitated for a moment. "My son invited several friends. One of them suggested the idea when I explained the situation in the city."

"Your son?" The commander contemplated. "How long did that person come up with that idea?"

"Right away? I explained, they asked."

"I'm interested in meeting your son's friend. If I'm not mistaken, your son has made a group of friends during the competition. May I ask if they are from the Libation Fiesta?"

"I don't know who they are. But they are coming in a group of five."

"In that case, that's definitely them. Do you mind if you bring them to us?"

"This..." Professor Genzert hesitated. He didn't want Clovis and the others to be detained or questioned by the commander.

"Please don't worry about it. I just want to have some words with them. How about bringing Erwin there as a guarantee? Besides, there are also a few high-ranking people here, so I can't really bully them... not that I plan to."

"I understand. In that case, should I just send them to your location? Do I need to explain a bit more about the city's situation?"

"No. I'll take care of the details."

"Alright then." Professor Genzert hung up the call before letting out a sigh. He went back to Clovis, saying, "It appears that the commander would like to see you guys."

"The commander?" Clovis looked surprised. "Why?"

Professor Genzert shook his head. "It seems that he is interested in the person who suggests the idea."

While Clovis and the others were confused by the sudden invitation, Erwin received a call from Aileen. It was just a brief call, but enough to cause him to smile apologetically. He turned to Clovis and the others. "It's true. Aileen seems to be there as well."

Clovis could only accept the invitation.

Erwin drove them to the military base. It was a short trip since the military base was never located too far from the underground tunnel.

They were guided into a meeting room with six people in it. The first one was none other than the commander of the base, a Tier 7 human.

The second person shared a similar feature, which seemed to be Erwin's relative. The third and fourth people were also Tier 7 humans, who controlled the city. The last two people were Aileen and an elderly man.

Considering Aileen was standing behind the elderly man, it seemed that he came from the same family but had a very high rank within the family.

"So you have come." The commander's expression turned grim.

Chapter 367 A Mission

"So you have come." The commander's expression turned solemn. "I apologize for suddenly inviting you here after knowing about your arrival."

The others were staring at the Tier 7 explorers in this room. Meanwhile, Clovis stepped forth. "I am aware of the emergency situation in this city. However, may I know the reason why a commander would invite us, who might be slightly famous but not qualified enough, here?"

The people in the room looked quite amused by his reply.

'So, this is Clovis. He is spitting some facts but not exaggerating them.' One of them squinted his eyes.

'To think that such a young guy can beat Aileen...' The elder next to Aileen couldn't help but sigh inwardly.

The commander opened his mouth to explain, but he suddenly got interrupted by one of the Tier 7 explorers in the room. "Why don't you take a guest? You can suggest the idea of sending reinforcement from other cities, right? You should be able to figure it out."

'As if!' The other two Tier 7 explorers and even the commander reacted at the same time, but they didn't show it in their faces.

In fact, the commander wanted to stop him so that they didn't embarrass the little guy, considering they were about to ask him for a favor.

But once again, the commander was one step too late. Clovis replied as if he had gotten the answer right after entering the room. "A mission... maybe related to Aileen. That's just my guess. I apologize if I'm wrong."

"!!!" All of them were startled. There were a lot of possibilities, but Clovis managed to actually figure out their plan so quickly. Even the one who asked him to guess opened his mouth in amazement.

"How did you figure it out?" The elder next to Aileen asked.

"I'm just thinking that all the people here are all high-level, but there is one person who is not. It's impossible for Aileen to join a meeting with only the strongest people in this city. While I don't know much about all of you, I know that you have a successor or at least a good seedling that can experience the tension of a secret meeting."

"So you judge that my grandniece is here not because of the connection but because she is taking part in the mission."

"Yes." Noel nodded with a serious expression.

"Impressive." The commander muttered in a low voice. "If that's the case, let's cut to the chase. We would like to commission your group to complete a mission for us."

"That's..." Clovis frowned. Considering the situation involved a Tier 7 beast, Clovis hesitated because the monster was beyond their level.

"You can listen to what I have to say first before deciding." The commander opened the map of the underground world. There were two cities in those maps and multiple territories, including unknown territories between the two cities.

"I originally entrusted the mission to Mr. Albert and Miss Aileen. However, once I learned about your existence, I thought that I could also include you to increase the success of the mission.

"First of all, I'd like Mr. Albert, Miss Aileen, and your team to infiltrate Serrest City. We have sent two teams to Serrest City, which causes them to be alarmed about our intentions.

"On the one hand, explaining our situation can cause the situation to go viral. I'm sure you have seen the atmosphere inside the city. It will simply become much worse when the real situation goes viral. We're talking about thousands of deaths and numerous people suffering.

"On the other hand, we're fighting against time. We have one objective. It's to locate the Tier 7 beast's existence and its location. Once we're able to confirm their location, we can finally ask for reinforcement from the capital city.

"During that time, we can only hide the situation from the citizens as much as possible."

Clovis contemplated for a moment. "So you want us to go to Serrest City because we're not related to your city, so they won't really question us if we go there."

"Yes. The same applies to Miss Aileen and Mr. Albert. They have their own concealment technique, which allows them to infiltrate the city at their own discretion."

"Why don't you explain the situation to the capital city? I mean, it won't be a big reinforcement, but with enough connection, you can probably get one Tier 8 explorer to help you," Clovis asked while crossing his arm. "Or you can ask them for money."

"We have done that. The closest one is probably Tier 8 Explorer Liam, who happens to be Aileen's teacher. However..."

"She is delaying her study, which causes him to not trust her easily?" Clovis squinted his eyes.

Aileen could only lower her head, feeling embarrassed.

As for the second reason, it didn't seem the commander needed to explain. In fact, this was also the reason why only Aileen and her granduncle were included in this mission. The rest still needed to protect the family.

They still had to maintain the politics, even in this situation. And they seemed to have used a lot of money to stay afloat during this situation as well.

"I understand the gist of the situation and the reason you chose us." Clovis nodded in understanding. "What's about the mission itself? You haven't talked about the 'danger' of this mission."

"Of course." The commander pointed at the map. "We want you to head to our underground city, Svilshare, through this unknown area. The areas surrounding this unknown place are classified as Tier 4 to Tier 5 areas. So there's a chance that this unknown area is Tier 4 to Tier 6.

"And among the three unknown areas, we suggest going through this rocky mountain. Since the spider is the cause of all this, there should be no high-tier spiders in this place anymore. In addition, you can get the sample and send it to us so that we can examine it and create a better countermeasure."

Clovis frowned as if he saw the glaring problem.

Chapter 368 Officially Joining Libation Fiesta

Clovis said, "Still, if it's truly the spider's nest, then it's considered to be a Tier 7 area, no?"

"We are aware of that. Hence, we send you together with Mr. Albert." The commander nodded. "He will take care of the high-ranking spiders, but we believe that all the powerful spiders are already gone. The remaining spiders will most likely be Tier 4 or below.

"And we have confirmed it through the original two groups." The commander raised his index finger.

"So they're not mere scouting groups..."

"Yes. They scout the area, create an escape path, establish a connection, and investigate the city. Your group's role is to be their supervisor and ensure that the path is secured. Once that's done, Mr. Albert will find the Tier 7 spider, and the mission will be considered a success after all of you evacuate."

"I see. Once we've located them, there's no need to maintain secrecy anymore. Even if it goes viral, you have identified the enemy, and reinforcements will come. Besides, the rescued people will also meet their loved ones, which will bolster their morale and mood. All you need to do is recover economically." Clovis nodded in understanding.

The commander sucked a cold breath, impressed that he had a clear grasp of the big picture. "Yes."

Clovis looked down, contemplating. The risk was extremely high, but their group should be capable of dealing with one or two Tier 4 beasts even if they were not suppressed by the stone pillar.

"To be honest, there's no need for us to help this city. Even if we don't do anything, I'm sure that the city will be able to resolve this sooner or later. But I wonder how much the commander is willing to let go to increase the success of this operation."

"There is no need to beat around the bush. State your requests." The commander was decisive enough to cut it short. He knew Clovis wanted something.

"I have three conditions, which shouldn't be that hard for the commander to accept, but the first condition might need to be asked of the person himself." Clovis took a step back and turned his head toward Erwin.

"Ah!" Erwin realized his intention. This time, he wanted Erwin to join them on this mission as a part of the team. Without hesitation, Erwin replied, "My first mission with Libation Fiesta is to help my city. This is probably the best mission I could ever ask for. Besides, I'm not really helpful to my father's research."

"I see." The commander nodded. "I understand. If the person in question doesn't reject it, I don't have any problem with you bringing him on this mission."

"Then, my second condition is..." Clovis pointed at Kanaria. "Please provide her bullets for high-level beasts. Tier 3 or Tier 4 bullets. Of course, it also includes the explosives our team needs. I don't want to boast, but our team is very aggressive, which causes us to require a lot of resources."

The commander frowned for a bit. However, it didn't take long for him to agree. "Alright. I can provide you with that. However, please use it sparingly because there's no way to resupply once you're there."

"Understood." Clovis paused for a moment. "In that case, my last condition is to have full control of my party. I'm not planning to follow orders that will only lead my people to their deaths. However, I'm not unreasonable enough to ignore orders if they're not too much. While we don't mind danger, we're not foolish enough to fight in a battle we can't win."

If the order is reasonable, we don't mind executing it."

The commander shook his head. If Clovis hadn't proved himself to be a capable leader, he would have rejected the third condition. But Clovis had shown his insight in this meeting. "Mr. Albert is the only one who will have the authority to command your group there. You can ignore the others, including the two Tier 6 explorers."

"In that case, I'll accept the mission." Clovis nodded.

"As for the reward... What do you want?"

Clovis thought for a moment. "I know the city needs a lot of money to recover from this incident. I'm not devilish enough to demand a lot of money. That's why you can pay us after we finish the mission. If we don't do much, you don't need to pay us anything. But if we contribute a lot, hehe..."

Clovis didn't continue, but the meaning was clear. He was planning to suck them dry.

"Please go easy on us." The corner of the commander's lips curved a little bit. "In that case, you may prepare first. You will depart two hours later. Aileen will be your guide for now. Ask her anything about the city's condition or the mission."

"Yes, sir." Clovis smiled, satisfied with the condition. It was a bit risky, but he believed that the situation was still under control.

Fortunately, Aileen's granduncle would be there to support them. This way, the assassins that wanted to kill Clovis would definitely not try anything funny, or Albert, who was two tiers above them, would notice and eliminate them.

This was the biggest reason why Clovis accepted the mission.

Now that they had reached an agreement, Clovis led his team outside. Of course, Aileen followed them.

"Sorry. It seems that I end up accepting a mission far more dangerous than we originally expected." Clovis scratched the back of his head, apologizing to his team.

"This is nothing new. Besides, having more information, provided by the commander himself, makes it much safer than missions with unknown danger." Kanaria shrugged.

"I can fight strong beasts." Jay didn't seem to care as long as he could become stronger.

"It's nothing new. Just don't be too reckless, or you will end up becoming Ivan, whom you hate so much." Melody harrumphed.

Ragna only nodded, planning to follow him anywhere.

"Hehe. Nice to meet you guys, a new member here, Erwin!" Erwin playfully waved his hand.

"Mhmm. I guess we can split up for an hour to do our thing and regroup again to discuss the plan. How's that?" Clovis asked.

"Sure. I need to check the bullets." Kanaria was the first to agree. The rest also nodded their heads.

"In that case, I'll go with you this time. We have a lot of things to talk about." Erwin patted Clovis' shoulder with a smug smile on his face. "Let's go!"

Clovis smiled wryly. Little did Erwin know, this stroll would end up terrorizing him.

Chapter 369 Mysterious Woman

"Hehe. I guess I have officially become a part of Libation Fiesta now." Erwin smirked while patting Clovis' shoulder.

"Indeed. I'm going to work you to the bone after this." Clovis nodded.

"Oh? Do you think I haven't worked hard this whole time? And do you think that I'm not smart enough to finish my job faster than the expected time? However, I'll complain if you just assign me another task once I finish mine faster." Erwin harrumphed.

"Yeah, yeah." Clovis paused for a moment. "So, I'm wondering if you want to have strength on par with a Tier 4?"

"Huh? What are you talking about?" Erwin tilted his head in confusion.

"Aren't you curious about the reason for our abnormal strength?" Clovis smirked.

Erwin fell silent. Of course, even if the others didn't notice it, Erwin would definitely think their power was weird. Talents alone weren't enough to justify that power. In addition, Clovis only had a 15% evolution rate.

There might be something that no one can figure out. And the only thing that could match the description was the strength of the Hacfield family.

"External power, huh?" Erwin looked down, his hand brushing his chin. "I don't really like getting stronger from external help."

"Is that so? I'm not going to force you, but what's the difference between external power and good weapons and armor?"

Erwin raised his eyebrows. "So you're saying it's something like that?"

On the one hand, external power felt like it was never his to begin with. On the other hand, good weapons and armor were essential. At the end, even the power of his family or connection would play a part in defining him.

"I thought the external power was like a drug or something."

"Idiot. Do you think I'm going to destroy my future with drugs?" Clovis shook his head helplessly.

"Fair enough." Erwin crossed his hands, contemplating. "If it's something like a weapon and armor, I don't think I'll mind. Then again, is there an item like that?"

Clovis took out a ring. "Wear this."

"What's this?" Erwin grabbed the ring while furrowing his eyebrows. He didn't know why he would take out this ordinary ring, but his opinion drastically changed the moment he put it on his middle finger.

"!!!" Erwin's body convulsed for a second. "Kh? This is..."

Erwin looked shocked, his eyes staring at the ring. "What is going on? Why do I feel like my muscle is being torn for no reason?"

He tried clenching his fists a few times, noticing something different. "Mhmmm? My grip feels a bit stronger?" Erwin shuddered after experiencing this weird power. He raised his head and asked, "Clovis... What is this? I have never found something like this."

"It's a bit hard to explain it, but you can treat it as the power of the Hacfield family." Clovis ended up shifting all the blame to his family like always. He was fortunate enough to have a big family that no one understood.

"This... I have never known that an ordinary ring like this can increase my strength. From the looks of it, there is no injection or physical modification that takes place." Erwin took it off and put it on several times to feel the change. "This is not a normal item anymore."

Erwin's face became solemn as he halted his steps. There were only ten Tier 9 explorers in the world, each with their own mysterious abilities. Currently, the only thing that described this ring was the 'mysterious' part of the Hacfield family.

Still, he heard that the Hacfield family had been destroyed. It was impossible if they had something like this.

With just this item alone, he realized the Hacfield family wasn't destroyed. It was just a part of the scheme. And the reason why their enemies destroyed them might probably be related to this secret.

"Are you sure about giving this ring to me? What if I just sell this ring or information? I can probably get things beyond my imagination." Erwin frowned.

"If you are a person who can easily betray your friends, I won't bother recruiting you, let alone showing this secret." Clovis shook his head.

Erwin smiled wryly. He couldn't deny it since he didn't intend to leave easily either. "If I may ask, how far are you planning to go, Clovis? Are you planning to become a Tier 9 like your grandfather and control

the fate of countries? No, if you work together with your grandfather, you might be able to take over the world."

"No. Who cares about the world? My only goal remains the same. I want to become the greatest explorer by discovering the truth about this world being a mere simulation. Becoming a Tier 9 is just a part of the process." Clovis' resolve became firm when he saw the glitch in the matrix that showed 'Mission Completed' to him.

He couldn't explain it yet, but as he continued onward, he might be able to discover more about it.

"I see." Erwin closed his eyes. "It's going to be an interesting journey. I want to observe all kinds of people, but you are going to be my primary subject of observation. I want to see what you will become in the future."

Clovis smiled. "Sure. This is going to be a long journey, Erwin."

"Sure it is." Erwin nodded.

"In that case, let's go to the minibus first. I'll show you the rest of your equipment. With this, let's kill a lot of beasts and shock everyone, shall we?" Clovis winked playfully.

"Hehe. It's going to be amusing to have Aileen's cold face changed." Erwin smirked. "This way then."

When they were about to go to the minibus, they suddenly came to a halt as a woman was standing five meters before them. Both of them didn't feel her presence, as if she were just a ghost.

They could only see her right eye as the other one was covered with her bang. Her black hair just created a contrast with her crimson pupil as though her eye had been dyed in blood.

But the most important thing was that when Erwin's eyes met hers, he suddenly dropped to his knees while screaming in pain.

"Aaaaggghhhh!"

Chapter 370 Reason

Erwin always felt that his eyes were a bit unique compared to those of other humans. He didn't know whether he was born with them or trained them subconsciously.

However, his eyes certainly could pick up more details from everything. Even for a human, he could see not only their appearances but also the way they behaved. He studied psychology so that he could fully utilize his eyes.

But never in his wildest dream would a certain quote appear in his mind.

'If you stare into the Abyss long enough, the Abyss stares back at you.'

For a person who stripped people's bare with his eyes to learn more about them, the opposite party would also stare at him. But this time, the one who was stripped naked was him.

No, it didn't stop there. Erwin could feel that his world had changed into a black room where he could see nothing. Suddenly, a dim red light brightened the room, allowing him to see a dark figure standing before him. Its figure was deformed, but it still looked similar to that of a human.

Yet the moment that figure cast its gaze upon him, the crimson eyes that were filled with bloodlust pierced through him. Erwin wanted to scream and run, but his body refused to move.

The dark figure suddenly appeared before him and grabbed his arms before ripping them apart.

Aaagggghhh! Erwin wanted to scream. This indescribable pain was making him crazy, but he couldn't wake up from this dream-like world.

The dark figure simply ripped all his limbs apart before slicing his body into pieces with its long and sharp claws.

In this world, he was like a mere prey that could only wait for his death.

"Aaagggghhh!" In a blink of an eye, Erwin noticed that the world had turned back as if everything he saw earlier was nothing but an illusion that appeared due to the intense bloodlust the eyes were exuding.

He dropped to his knees while covering his eyes. His body was convulsing uncontrollably, but the only thing he could do was scream. "Aaaggghhh!"

"Erwin?" Clovis panicked, not realizing what had happened. He noticed her bloodlust, but there was no killing intent, as if she never had any intention to harm them.

But looking at Erwin's condition, the rage gradually took shape in his heart. Clovis could also feel a surging strength in his body, which was the signal of his entering the perfect state.

"Stop it!" Clovis rushed toward this mysterious woman, drawing his blades. He realized that the fact that she could harm Erwin that much just by staring at him meant Clovis wouldn't be his opponent. However, if he could just last long enough, the Tier 7 people in this city would notice the battle and come.

The mysterious woman looked at him with a face devoid of emotion. She simply said, "I never intended to harm him. That boy had a rather unique perception..."

"Who are you?!" Clovis shouted while swinging his blade.

However, when the blades were about to reach her, she remained motionless, as if she didn't mind if Clovis killed her.

Without hesitation, Clovis continued his swing. If killing her could protect Erwin, he would do it.

But even when Clovis completed his swing, the woman's neck was still intact.

In fact, as soon as he lowered his head, he saw his blades disappear from his hands. It was then that he noticed his arms had gone numb.

"Khhh?!"

It turned out that the woman somehow knocked on his swords without him realizing it.

No, if Clovis took another look at the glaive on her back, its position had already changed because she was currently holding it.

'What? Even with the perfect state, I couldn't even follow her movement?' Clovis' face turned pale. This opponent might even be stronger than his imagination.

At the same time, Clovis could see a red spark in her right eye. Clovis didn't notice it, but the same thing occurred to his eyes.

After that, a screen appeared in front of them. Its color was red, matching the atmosphere of the only word written on it.

[Error]

"What?" Clovis looked shocked.

"Your blades are fine after getting hit by my weapon? That color... is it made of Tier 9 Dunkleosteus, which is known to be one of the toughest scales?" The mysterious woman's expression remained unchanged as she discovered Clovis' identity. "You should stop. You won't be able to do anything against me. As I said earlier, I have no intention of harming both of you..."

"Then why do you attack him?" Clovis gritted his teeth while jumping back, standing in front of Erwin, who seemed to have passed out.

"He just saw something his heart had yet to be prepared for." She shook her head.

"Who are you?" Clovis bit his lips, changing the question. Although he didn't want to admit it, he didn't feel any killing intent. In addition, if he wanted to harm them, both of them would have died before realizing it. At the same time, he couldn't drop his guard down and accept his end without any fight.

"My name? I have forgotten my birth name, but well, people call me Mara."

"Mara?" Clovis furrowed his eyebrows. There were a lot of questions in his mind, but after asking several questions, he calmed down a little bit.

He almost forgot about one thing. When both of them clashed, the world once again glitched as if there was an error in its calculation. The screen only appeared for less than half a second, but it was much clearer than the first glitch.

At the same time, there was a chance that he was the only one who could see it. So he couldn't reveal that information.

To his surprise, she was the one who took the initiative this time. "It seems that you are similar to me."

"Similar? What do you mean?"

"I'm sure you have seen it as well." She pointed in the direction where the screen appeared earlier. "Error."

"!!!" Clovis widened his eyes in shock. Even though he thought this might be the reason she came here, it was still shocking to hear it directly from someone else. "Do you know something about it?"

All of a sudden, she disappeared for a split second and reappeared right before him. She grabbed his collar and pulled him closer so that their faces became extremely close, their eyes only an inch away from each other.

"That's what I want to know as well."