

BloodLine 921

Chapter 921: Part 2: Madman Mitch

From MC's Perspective:

Jonathan's expression softened as he realized I was far from troubled by the situation.

"I see.

An enemy, but not a threat," he murmured, more to himself than to me.

He knew me well enough to understand that any issue I smiled about was something I had already begun to turn to my advantage.

Still, Jonathan's eyes flickered with interest, awaiting the details.

Meanwhile, not far from the castle, ""Mitch"" had finally caught up to my trail, just in time to catch sight of the massive, intimidating structure of Lowell Castle.

The blood drained from his face as realization hit him like a punch to the gut.

He knew exactly where he was now.

""Lowell Castle""-a place of legend and power, deeply intertwined with the political web of Delta City.

The Lowell family had influence that extended far beyond their castle walls, and ""Zack Lockwood""?

He was a name whispered with both respect and fear.

Mitch's eyes darted nervously around the perimeter of the castle before he clenched his fists in frustration.

There was no point in lingering here any longer.

Continuing to pursue me near Lowell Castle would be nothing short of suicide.

In the worst-case scenario, Mitch knew he could be captured, or worse, his family's name could be dragged into a dangerous feud with the Lowells-a feud his family wasn't ready to handle.

With a deep growl of frustration, Mitch turned on his heel and began his retreat, flying away from the castle as quickly as he could without looking back.

His rage boiled within him, but it was tempered by the cold reality of his situation.

He had miscalculated, and now, he would need to return home empty-handed, his pride wounded and his plans in shambles.

Back outside the ""barrier"", Catherine and the other warriors stood waiting, uneasily watching for any sign of Mitch.

They had all gathered, but none of them dared to leave without him.

He was, after all, their leader, and abandoning him now would send a message of disloyalty that could have consequences later.

But despite their hesitancy, there was an undeniable tension among them.

They knew the dangers of sticking around.

"Why are we waiting?" one of the warriors muttered under his breath.

“This isn’t the place to be standing around.

If Zack Lockwood decides to retaliate, we’ll be in deep trouble.”

Catherine nodded, her brow furrowed.

“Lowell Castle! Delta City is under Lowell McClain’s control.

Zack has every advantage here.

If he wants to cause trouble, it won’t just be Mitch who suffers.

We need to be careful.”

The others murmured in agreement, their nerves clearly frayed.

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None of them wanted to provoke Zack any further.

The consequences could be disastrous, not only for them but for their families.

To ensure their safety, several of them had already reached out to their respective families, quietly informing them of the situation and seeking guidance.

Still, despite their growing anxiety, they waited.

The tension in the air was thick, and though they were loyal to Mitch, they knew in their hearts that this situation could spiral out of control.

Whether they would remain standing beside Mitch when that happened was a question none of them wanted to answer.

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A few minutes later, ""Mitch"" finally reappeared, his face tight with frustration and worry.

His usual arrogant demeanor was gone, replaced by a strained look that made it clear he had realized the gravity of his situation.

As his eyes swept over the group waiting for him, there was a brief moment of relief on his face.

At least they hadn't abandoned him.

That small comfort softened the tension in his posture.

"Let's go," he muttered, his voice low and devoid of the usual bravado.

He was eager to leave, the weight of his failure hanging over him like a storm cloud.

The group, sensing Mitch's mood, silently nodded in agreement.

No one spoke a word about what had transpired.

It was obvious to everyone that Mitch had failed to get what he came for, and they had no desire to further aggravate him by asking questions.

The tension between them was thick, but it was an unspoken rule not to embarrass or challenge Mitch in moments like this.

His pride was already wounded, and they all knew better than to pour salt in the wound.

As they began their journey back, the group moved with purpose, their eyes scanning the surroundings with quiet vigilance.

Every step away from “Lowell Castle” felt like a small victory.

None of them dared speak of it aloud, but the underlying fear was clear: they wanted to escape the city before anyone from “Lowell Castle” decided to intervene.

The reputation of the Lowell family loomed over them like a shadow, and the longer they stayed, the more they felt the weight of potential danger.

Mitch walked ahead, his pace faster than usual, his body tense as if expecting an attack at any moment.

His mind raced with conflicting emotions-anger, frustration, and a deep-seated fear of what might come next.

He had not only lost face, but he had also stirred the hornet’s nest that was “Zack Lockwood”.

It wasn’t just a failed mission; it was a potential disaster that could ripple far beyond just him.

The others followed silently, exchanging occasional glances but not daring to voice their thoughts.

“Catherine”, usually the one who spoke her mind, remained quiet.

She could sense that now was not the time for questions or advice.

Whatever had transpired between Mitch and Zack, it had shaken him enough that all he wanted to do was leave.

In their minds, they were all playing out worst-case scenarios-Lowell Castle's soldiers appearing on the road to question them, or worse, ""Zack Lockwood""himself deciding to follow them out of the city.

The tension was palpable, like a stretched wire ready to snap at the slightest provocation.

They kept their heads down, moving swiftly through the streets, their destination clear: the borders of ""Delta City"".

Mitch's thoughts, though clouded with frustration, were focused on the same goal.

He knew better than to linger after what had happened.

Lowell Castle's reach was vast, and Zack's influence over Delta City was good.

It wasn't just a matter of personal pride anymore.

The situation had escalated beyond his control.

He could only hope that by leaving now, the wrath of Lowell Castle wouldn't follow them back to their homes.

As they reached the edge of the city, a collective sigh of relief seemed to sweep through the group.

They had managed to leave without incident, but none of them believed they were truly free of the consequences.

Mitch, though outwardly calmer, knew that this wouldn't be the end of it.

He had made an enemy in Zack Lockwood, and that was a mistake that could haunt him long after they had left Delta City.

Chapter 922: Mission report submitted

From MC's Perspective:

Jonathan's voice was low and determined as he said, "I will look into their backgrounds.

Hereafter, they won't be able to do anything."

I gave him a curt nod, acknowledging his resolve.

The tension in the room was palpable, but there was no time to dwell on it.

"Where's the Teacher?" I asked, needing to shift my focus.

When Jonathan informed me that he was in his study room, I turned without another word and made my way there.

As I left, I caught a glimpse of Jonathan's eyes-sharp and flickering with barely contained frustration.

He was thinking, no doubt, that the Federation's forces were making a grave mistake by underestimating Master Lowell.

Jonathan believed that unless they were taught a harsh lesson, these provocations would continue.

I didn't need to hear his thoughts to know that; it was clear in the way his jaw tightened before he stormed out of the Castle.

I arrived at the study room and pushed open the heavy wooden door.

Inside, the room was dimly lit by the soft glow of ancient lamps.

The scent of old books and ink filled the air, adding to the scholarly atmosphere that always surrounded the Teacher.

Master Lowell was seated behind a massive desk, surrounded by scrolls and tomes that likely held more secrets than I could imagine.

"Have you completed your mission?" His voice was steady, though his gaze held a weight of expectation.

I nodded in response.

"Yes, Teacher," I said, but my mind was already on another matter.

"Teacher, is there any news regarding the Top List Competition conducted by Star University?" I asked, my voice betraying a hint of urgency.

Lowell, who had been casually leaning back in his chair, suddenly sat upright.

His eyebrows shot up, clearly surprised by the question.

"Are you talking about the SSS-ELITE Rank competition?" he asked, his tone more serious now.

"Yes," I confirmed, maintaining a solemn expression.

"I've heard rumors that the competition will be held next month."

Lowell's face darkened slightly.

He leaned back again, but his mind was clearly racing.

After a moment of silence, he shook his head.

"You should focus on accumulating experience first," he advised, his voice calm but firm.

"It would be wise for you to reach the SSS-ELITE Rank before concerning yourself with such things."

There was something in his tone, a subtle warning perhaps, that told me he wasn't being entirely forthcoming.

The information about the competition was sensitive, confidential even-details likely reserved for those ranked above the Black Mark Warrior.

As a Silver Mark Warrior, I wasn't privy to the full scope of what was happening in the upper tiers.

I could sense that Lowell was withholding something, perhaps for my own good, or perhaps because even he, in his position, didn't know everything.

The chaos in the higher regions-Tier-4 and beyond-was becoming more opaque with each passing day.

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Even within the Tier-5 Region, the inner post region, information was filtered and controlled.

Lowell's gaze drifted for a moment, as though recalling something troubling.

Perhaps the spatial crack that had allowed those monstrous entities to breach our region still weighed on his mind.

It was a mystery that neither of us fully understood.

What were those monsters?

How had they managed to reach us?

Even now, the answers remained frustratingly out of reach.

On the other hand, I noticed that Teacher was lost in his own thoughts, his eyes distant, as if wrestling with matters far beyond our current conversation.

Seeing this, I sighed inwardly, realizing I had let my impatience get the better of me.

Perhaps I was frustrated too.

The uncertainty, the constant pressure, and the weight of the expectations on my shoulders-it was all beginning to wear me down.

I knew I needed to center myself.

The thoughts swirling in my mind, the anxious speculations, were all distractions.

I closed my eyes briefly, taking a deep breath to push away the unnecessary clutter in my head.

Focus.

I needed to focus.

Opening my eyes again, I decided to shift the conversation.

“Teacher,” I began, my voice steadier now, “what about my training?”

Is there anything more I should work on?”

Lowell snapped back from his reverie, regarding me thoughtfully.

His answer, however, was a measured one, providing me with just enough to ponder but not enough to overwhelm me.

The conversation flowed more easily after that, as we discussed various techniques and strategies I needed to hone.

Time passed without either of us noticing, the atmosphere lighter now that the tension had dissipated.

After half an hour, I excused myself and left Lowell Castle, the weight of our conversation still lingering in my mind.

The cool evening breeze brushed against my skin as I made my way back toward the Headquarters, my steps quiet on the cobblestone path.

The journey, though short, gave me time to reflect.

I had much to work on, not just in terms of skill, but also my mindset.

I needed to be sharper, more focused.

Arriving at the Headquarters, I stepped through the large double doors and into the familiar building.

The air inside was a mixture of anticipation and fatigue, the kind of energy that clung to a place filled with warriors who were either preparing for missions or returning from them.

I made my way to the mission counter and handed over my report.

The clerk quickly processed it, handing me the rewards without much fanfare.

I pocketed them, offering a brief nod of thanks before turning to leave.

The lobby buzzed with quiet activity, but I paid it no mind.

I was focused on one thing: getting back to my room.

I walked toward the elevator and pressed the button, feeling a slight twinge of exhaustion beginning to set in.

“Creak!”

The lift doors slid open with a metallic groan, and I stepped inside, pressing the button for my floor.

The soft hum of the elevator rising was oddly soothing, a brief moment of stillness in an otherwise chaotic day.

When the doors opened again, I stepped out onto my floor, the corridor stretching out before me.

My room was just down the hall.

The familiar sight of the door brought a small sense of relief.

I entered my room, the soft click of the door shutting behind me offering a brief respite from the world outside.

Finally alone, I let out a breath I didn't realize I was holding.

Chapter 923: Alpha City

From MC's Perspective:

Days passed like fleeting moments, each one blending into the next as I lost myself in relentless training.

Every day, I pushed my limits, sharpening my skills and honing my instincts.

Whenever the hunger for progress gnawed at me, I ventured into the monster zones.

There, amidst the snarling beasts and treacherous terrain, I fought, learning the brutal language of survival.

Slowly but surely, my strength grew.

My senses became sharper, my reflexes faster, and my mind clearer.

Yet, despite the accumulation of power, there remained an invisible wall-a barrier I couldn't break through.

I knew that to truly grow, it wasn't just about strength; it was about life-and-death experiences.

Only by facing peril head-on could I hope to breach that threshold.

After much contemplation, a plan began to take shape.

I knew what I had to do: I had to leave my comfort zone, abandon the familiar hunting grounds, and venture out into uncharted territory.

My progress had stagnated in Delta City, the place I had called home.

It was time to test myself against the unknown.

The Federation governed five cities, each with its own dangers and challenges, but one stood out among them all: Alpha City.

Alpha City was vast, a sprawling metropolis compared to Delta's modest size.

Its monster zones were notorious for their dangers.

Many warriors had ventured there, only to meet their untimely end.

But I wasn't just after stronger monsters.

Alpha City was also home to powerful warriors, many of them ruthless and ambitious.

Warriors like Simon and his gang-those who would stop at nothing to assert dominance.

I knew that crossing paths with such figures could lead to unnecessary drama or brutal confrontations.

Yet, I also understood that avoiding danger wouldn't help me grow.

If I was serious about gaining the experience I needed, I couldn't afford to be held back by fear or hesitation.

The decision was made.

I would head to Alpha City, where both monsters and men would test me to my very limits.

The road ahead would be perilous, but only through such trials could I hope to break the barriers that held me back.

After a moment of deep reflection, I made a pivotal decision.

It was time to test my limits and seek out a new challenge.

I had decided to accept a mission in Alpha City.

The new experience might be the key I needed to push through and finally break the barrier that had eluded me for so long.

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The following morning, I prepared myself both mentally and physically for what lay ahead.

After gathering my gear and steadying my thoughts, I informed my teacher and Jonathan of my decision.

To my surprise, both of them agreed with my plan without hesitation.

They understood the importance of this step in my journey, offering silent approval through their steady gazes.

With their blessings, I left the room, feeling a surge of determination wash over me.

I quickly made my way to the lobby, where the mission desk awaited.

The familiar atmosphere of the Headquarters hummed around me, but my focus was unshakable.

Reaching the desk, I scanned through the available missions, my eyes skimming over the lists with intent.

Suddenly, one mission caught my attention, standing out like a beacon among the others:

[Mission: Collect Monster Core of Dual-Headed Red Striped Lizard]

[Location: Alpha City]

The mission instantly intrigued me.

I hadn't faced a creature like the Dual-Headed Red Striped Lizard before, and its location in Alpha City made it even more appealing.

Without wasting time, I delved into the mission details.

The time limit was one week-ample time for preparation, yet tight enough to add pressure.

I didn't hesitate.

I selected the mission and registered my details, feeling a surge of excitement course through me.

This was it-the challenge I had been seeking.

After completing the formalities, I left the Headquarters and made my way to the Teleportation Platform.

The anticipation built with every step.

Soon, I arrived at the platform, where the guards stood watch, their eyes scanning the flow of travelers.

When it was my turn, I approached them and calmly stated my request.

“I need transport to Alpha City,” I said, my voice steady.

Their reactions were immediate.

Surprise flickered across their faces.

It wasn't often that someone from Delta City sought to travel to Alpha, especially for the first time.

I could see the unspoken question in their eyes: “Why Alpha City?” But they didn't ask.

Instead, after a brief pause, they nodded in acknowledgment.

I stepped onto the platform, feeling the hum of the teleportation mechanism beneath my feet.

The air around me began to buzz with energy as the platform activated.

A faint light enveloped my body, growing brighter with every passing second.

In the blink of an eye, I vanished from Delta City, the familiar surroundings replaced by the unknown as I was transported to Alpha City.

A new chapter was about to begin.

“Swoosh!”

The familiar rush of teleportation surged around me, and in the next instant, I vanished from the spot.

When I opened my eyes, the world before me had changed entirely.

I was now standing atop a sleek, gleaming teleportation platform, far different from the one back in Delta City.

The energy of Alpha City pulsed in the air, and the unfamiliar surroundings quickly began to take shape around me.

The guards stationed at the platform were clearly taken aback by my sudden appearance.

“Zack Lockwood!” one of the guards exclaimed, his voice a mix of shock and disbelief.

The other guard’s reaction was no less dramatic, his eyes widening in surprise as he looked me up and down, clearly recognizing my name.

Alpha City wasn’t a place where I was expected to appear, not someone from Delta anyway.

I glanced at them and smiled, a casual confidence in my expression.

“Yes, it’s me,” I said, my voice calm and steady.

“I have a mission here.”

Without lingering for further conversation, I turned and made my way off the teleportation platform, leaving the startled guards behind.

As I stepped out into the open, I took a moment to survey the city that lay before me.

My eyes swept across the landscape, and I couldn't help but be impressed.

Alpha City was unlike anything I had seen before.

The skyline was dominated by towering high-rises, sleek and modern, reaching up toward the heavens as if they had no limits.

The streets bustled with activity-warriors, merchants, and all manner of people moved with purpose.

There was an intensity in the air, a stark contrast to the more subdued atmosphere of Delta City.

I raised my eyebrows in genuine surprise.

The sheer scale of this place, its energy, its ambition-it was clear this city operated on a different level entirely.

"Looks like I'll be coming here more often," I murmured to myself, a small smile playing on my lips.

Alpha City was not just a new challenge-it was a place that demanded respect, where both opportunity and danger lurked at every corner.

And I was ready for both.

Chapter 924: News of Gangs

From MC's Perspective:

Alpha City:

After arriving in Alpha City, I decided to indulge in the local cuisine before diving into my mission.

The towering structures and bustling streets were a far cry from the quieter places I've been.

My stomach grumbled as I spotted a restaurant, and I chose to explore what the city's food had to offer.

As soon as I stepped inside, the warm atmosphere enveloped me-sounds of clinking glasses, murmured conversations, and the faint scent of grilled meat filled the air.

I picked a window seat, hoping to take in the city's pulse while I ate.

Outside, warriors in various armors and cloaks moved like shadows, each on their own journey.

The weight of the mission ahead tugged at my mind, but for now, I pushed it aside.

I ordered a steak, something simple yet filling.

When the server brought it, the juicy aroma momentarily distracted me from everything else.

With each bite, I allowed myself to savor the tenderness of the meat, but I couldn't help but remain hyper-aware of my surroundings.

My senses were sharp, and I discreetly listened to the conversations around me.

The restaurant was filled with warriors.

Some were seasoned veterans, bearing the unmistakable marks of battle, while others were younger, their eyes burning with ambition.

This city, Alpha City, was vast, and its resources attracted fighters from all over the Federation.

Many of them came here not just for survival, but for fortune, or even to complete dangerous missions that promised high rewards.

I overheard snippets of conversation that piqued my interest.

Casual talks about daily life here, descriptions of missions, and accounts of the dangers lurking in the city's shadows.

At first, it seemed like harmless chatter.

But as I continued to listen, my brows furrowed.

There was something ominous beneath their words-something dark, hidden just under the surface.

I kept eating, my focus split between my meal and their whispered words.

The more I heard, the more my unease grew.

Thirty minutes passed before I finished my meal.

I left the restaurant, my expression grim.

The casual conversations had taken a darker turn, revealing the undercurrents in Alpha City.

What I had learned wasn't positive.

A sharp gleam flashed in my eyes as I walked through the crowded streets.

On the surface, Alpha City appeared peaceful-a thriving metropolis of warriors, merchants, and adventurers.

But beneath that facade, the city was a breeding ground for chaos.

Hunter teams, many of which had banded together for survival, had formed gangs.

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What disturbed me wasn't the existence of these gangs, but their backers.

I had overheard people mention the involvement of core members-elite warriors with ties to powerful families.

It wasn't clear whether these backers were Silver Mark Warriors themselves or their close associates, but either way, it posed a problem.

If I crossed paths with any of these gangs, it could lead to unnecessary trouble.

The last thing I needed was to draw the attention of powerful factions in this city.

My teacher, a core member, had appointed me as his successor.

That alone put me in a precarious position.

The deeper I delved into Alpha City's affairs, the more I realized that this place was a quagmire, and navigating it without stirring up unwanted attention would be difficult.

I sighed, shaking off the weight of those thoughts.

I had come to this city for a reason-to complete a special mission.

That was my priority.

I couldn't afford distractions.

With my focus renewed, I pulled out the map from my storage ring.

The boundary I needed to reach was about two miles away.

Alpha City had consumed much of the surrounding land, but there were still vast stretches of empty terrain beyond its borders.

After studying the route, I left the area, moving swiftly through the streets.

For safety reasons, I retrieved a mask from my storage ring and slipped it on, concealing my identity.

As I made my way toward the boundary, I noticed more hunter teams patrolling the area.

Their movements were organized, their eyes sharp as they scanned the surroundings.

Each team moved with precision, a testament to their experience in this perilous city.

Just as I passed a group of warriors, I overheard their conversation.

There was some kind of competition brewing between different hunter teams-a rivalry that could turn volatile at any moment.

Tensions were high, and I hoped they would keep their business to themselves.

The last thing I needed was to get caught up in their disputes.

With a steady pace and my eyes forward, I continued toward my destination, hoping that whatever conflict lay ahead wouldn't interfere with my mission.

"Dual-Headed Red Striped Lizard," I muttered under my breath, the name lingering in my mind.

A creature I hadn't encountered before-its strength unknown.

But the uncertainty didn't bother me; in fact, it excited me.

My lips curved into a faint smirk.

Challenge accepted.

With a sudden burst of energy, I launched myself forward, dashing towards the boundary of Alpha City.

The hunter teams behind me barely took notice of the lone figure sprinting past.

They gave me a glance, perhaps curious for a moment, but their attention quickly returned to their own affairs.

I was just another warrior to them, another wanderer amidst the chaos of this city.

Within an hour, I arrived at the boundary-a towering, foreboding gate that separated the relative safety of the city from the dangers beyond.

The guards at the gate eyed me warily, but I pulled out the black token, and with a simple nod, they allowed me through.

As soon as I stepped past the boundary, the air changed.

The city's noise faded behind me, replaced by the oppressive silence of the wilderness.

I was now standing at the edge of the forest, my feet sinking into the soft, uneven ground.

For a moment, I was struck by the sight before me-the dense greenery stretched as far as the eye could see, a chaotic blend of nature's beauty and danger.

The forest was alive, but it wasn't the vibrant, welcoming kind of life you'd find in peaceful woods.

No, this place was different.

Poisonous weeds dotted the landscape, their sickly colors warning any creature of their deadly nature.

Thick vines and dense vegetation twisted around the forest floor, making it hard to discern the safe paths from the perilous ones.

Above, enormous shade trees loomed, their canopies casting deep, dark shadows over the ground, where who knew what kind of predators might lurk.

I stood there for a moment, taking it all in.

The atmosphere was stifling, thick with the scent of wet earth and something far more ominous.

Despite being on the outskirts, the forest felt as dangerous as the core of the monster zone.

The usual rules didn't seem to apply here.

Normally, plant and tree monsters would be deep within the core area, far from the edges of the zone.

But the environment here felt! wrong.

It was like the forest itself was waiting, watching.

A chill crept up my spine.

The sense of danger was palpable, and I knew that I couldn't afford to lower my guard for a second.

I had been in dangerous places before, but this time, the threat felt closer-more immediate.

My instincts told me that the outskirts were just as treacherous as the heart of the monster zone, if not more so.

Something about this forest was off, and I could feel it in my bones.

Whatever lay ahead wasn't going to be a simple hunt.

I took a deep breath, clearing my mind, and steeled myself for what was to come.

The trees rustled with a breeze, but it felt more like a whisper, a warning from the forest itself.

I knew I had to move forward.

Standing still would only make me more vulnerable.

With a cautious step, I ventured deeper into the forest, every sense heightened as I prepared for the unknown.

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On the other hand, several hunting teams had also crossed the boundary into the monster zone, each moving with purpose and intensity.

The atmosphere was thick with tension could be sensed and the competitive spirit radiating from them.

These weren't just random groups of warriors-they were members of different hunting teams, each aligned with rival gangs.

The rivalry between these gangs wasn't just professional; it was personal, deeply rooted in blood and grudges.

These gangs were notorious for their deadly feuds, and it was a common occurrence for their conflicts to escalate into violent clashes.

Normally, such rivalries would erupt into full-blown battles at the slightest provocation.

Yet here, at the edge of the monster zone, there was an uneasy truce.

It was a miracle they hadn't attacked each other yet.

Each team kept a wary eye on the others, their hands never far from their weapons.

Their eyes darted between one another, each group silently assessing the others, gauging their strength, their weaknesses.

Despite their outward focus on hunting monsters, it was clear that their real enemies weren't just the creatures lurking in the zone-they were standing right next to them.

The only thing keeping them in check was the danger of the zone itself.

They knew that an all-out brawl in the monster zone could attract attention from predators far worse than each other.

For now, survival came first.

But the moment they felt safe-or confident enough-that fragile peace would shatter.

Chapter 925: Part 1: Dual Headed Lizard Monster

From MC's Perspective:

I swept my gaze across the forest, the towering trees casting long shadows over the dense undergrowth.

The air was thick with the scent of earth and damp leaves, and the occasional rustle hinted at the presence of creatures hidden just beyond my sight.

I recalled the map in my mind, its intricate details etched into my memory, and adjusted my course.

The route ahead was uncertain, and in this monster zone, there were no clear distinctions between outer and inner territories.

Powerful monsters could appear anywhere.

After several minutes of cautious travel, I found myself on a narrow, winding path flanked by gnarled trees.

The tension in the air was palpable.

Suddenly, a sharp sensation prickled at the back of my neck-something was coming.

My instincts kicked in, and with practiced ease, I retrieved my black sword from the storage ring.

Its weight felt familiar in my hand, a cold, reassuring presence.

SWOOSH!

Without warning, thick, gnarled roots burst from the ground, surging toward me with alarming speed.

Their brown, bark-like surface told me everything I needed to know-this was no ordinary tree.

A high-level tree monster was nearby, lurking in the shadows.

A direct confrontation would drain my energy, something I couldn't afford so early in this journey.

I quickly coated my blade with a crackling layer of purple lightning.

The energy hummed around the sword as I readied myself.

As the roots drew closer, their momentum building, I slashed downward in a swift arc.

SLASH!

The blade cut through the thick roots as if they were paper.

A large segment of the root fell to the ground with a dull thud, the severed end smoldering from the lightning's touch.

CRY!

A terrible, guttural cry echoed through the forest, sending a chill down my spine.

My heart raced.

Whatever monster had sent those roots after me wasn't just nearby-it was much deeper in the forest.

And if that cry was any indication, it was far more dangerous than I had anticipated.

Without hesitation, I vanished from the spot, moving swiftly toward my destination.

I couldn't afford to linger any longer.

As I continued through the forest, smaller, more manageable monsters crossed my path-none of them strong enough to pose a threat.

I dispatched them quickly, their low classes making them no more than fleeting obstacles.

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But I remained vigilant.

Class-8 and higher monsters were a different matter altogether.

They rarely left their territories, but when they did, it was a harbinger of chaos.

I hoped my journey would continue uninterrupted.

Two hours later, I finally arrived at the designated location.

It had taken longer than expected, considering I had only ventured a few miles into the monster zone.

But the sheer density of the forest and the lurking dangers had made every step fraught with caution.

Before me lay a small, barren clearing.

The ground was uneven, patches of rough soil exposed between tufts of stubborn weeds.

Not a single tree grew within this circle, and the absence of life made the space feel unnatural.

Something wasn't right.

My eyes narrowed as I activated my perception, extending my awareness beyond the visible.

The air was too still, too quiet.

I scanned the surroundings with heightened focus, searching for the hidden danger I knew was there.

Something was waiting, watching from the shadows.

One hour later,

I stood perfectly still, my body blending into the landscape as if I had become one with the forest itself.

My senses were finely tuned, heightened to a state where I could detect even the slightest movement or shift in the environment.

Every rustle, every whisper of wind through the leaves, was caught in my perception like a ripple in a pond.

Rustle!

A boar monster emerged from the dense underbrush at the edge of the clearing, its thick hide glistening in the dim light.

It sniffed the air cautiously, its tusks gleaming as it wandered to the boundary of the empty plot.

I expected it to cross the clearing, but instead, the creature froze for a moment, its body tense, and then it turned abruptly, bolting back into the forest.

For a brief moment, confusion flickered in my mind.

Why had the boar monster fled?

I hadn't made a move, and nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

That's when I felt it.

Rumble!

The ground beneath me trembled, a low, ominous vibration that grew in intensity with every passing second.

My eyes snapped back to the empty plot.

The soil rippled and heaved as though something enormous was stirring beneath it, something that had been in a deep slumber and was now awakening.

The air grew thick with tension.

My pulse quickened as I realized that whatever was under there had sensed prey-me.

I had my suspicions, but I wasn't certain.

Could it be the creature I had been hunting all this time?

The elusive Dual-Headed Lizard Monster?

BOOM!

The earth exploded outward, dirt and debris raining down around me as a massive creature burst from the ground.

It towered over the clearing, its body a monstrous, writhing mass of muscle and scales.

My eyes immediately locked onto its defining features-two enormous, reptilian heads, each with glowing, predatory eyes and a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth.

Its long tail, adorned with red stripes, lashed menacingly behind it.

A grin spread across my face, a mixture of excitement and satisfaction.

At last, the beast had shown itself.

This was the creature I had been searching for-the Dual-Headed Red-Striped Monster.

Its immense form, over 20 feet in length, was every bit as fearsome as the legends had described.

Each of its heads was a nightmare of fangs and ferocity, its jaws capable of tearing through even the toughest of monsters.

Without warning, the monster swung its tail with incredible force, striking the ground where the boar had fled moments earlier.

The impact was devastating, sending shockwaves through the earth that shook the surrounding trees.

The tremors spread outward, a violent reminder of the monster's raw power.

But I was ready.

My grip tightened around my black sword, its surface humming with barely contained energy.

This was the battle I had prepared for-the one I had come to this deadly place to find.

And now, it was time to face the beast.

The Dual-Headed Red Striped Lizard, now fully above ground, scanned the clearing for the prey it had hoped to devour.

The boar monster had escaped, and though it wasn't the most substantial meal, its meat would have sustained the lizard for a few hours at least.

Angered by the missed opportunity, the monster let out a guttural, inhuman growl, its two heads moving in unison as it sought another target.

On the other hand, I stood ready, my eyes locked onto the beast.

This was no ordinary creature.

The Dual-Headed Lizard was a Class-7 monster, dangerously close to ascending to Class-8.

It was a perfect opportunity for me to test my strength and finish the job I had set out to do.

With a calm breath, I whispered the incantation, "Sword Divide."

In a flash, I channeled the purple essence into my black sword, the blade humming as it became enveloped in crackling purple lightning.

The energy surged through the metal, making the weapon feel almost alive in my hand.

Without wasting a second, I aimed at one of the monster's heads, focusing all my power on the strike, and released it in a single, decisive attack.

BOOM!

A brilliant purple beam shot from the sword, cutting through the air in a straight line before colliding with one of the lizard's massive heads.

The moment the lightning-infused beam made contact, the head exploded in a burst of electrical energy.

The raw power of the attack sent violent arcs of lightning surging through the monster's skull, frying nerves and tissue alike.

The creature's high-pitched scream of pain echoed through the forest, a horrific sound that resonated deep in my bones.

The remaining head twisted toward me, its bloodshot eyes locking onto my position.

I could feel the weight of its fury, the intelligence behind its gaze.

This wasn't just a mindless beast-it was a predator, and I was now its target.

As the lizard's jaws opened wide, I noticed the air around it beginning to shift.

The monster was summoning something, pulling the wind itself toward its gaping maw.

A swirling vortex of air began to form inside, growing in intensity with each passing second.

My instincts screamed at me to prepare, but I couldn't help the sinking feeling in my gut.

Boom!

With a deafening roar, the monster unleashed its attack.

A massive vortex of wind, swirling with raw elemental power, shot toward me like a hurricane compressed into a single blast.

The force of it was overwhelming, a spinning torrent of destruction headed straight for me.

As I watched the attack hurtle toward me, realization dawned.

This was no ordinary monster.

This lizard was a "Special" class monster, capable of harnessing elemental abilities-a rare and deadly trait.

Few monsters had such power, and even fewer could wield it with such devastating effect.

But I wasn't about to be outdone.

My grip tightened on the hilt of my sword, and with a burst of speed, I prepared to meet the monster's elemental strike head-on.

The wind roared in my ears as the vortex closed in, but my mind was sharp and focused.

This was no longer just a hunt-it was a battle of wills, of strength against strength.

And I was determined to come out on top.

Chapter 926: Part 2: Dual Headed Lizard Monster

From MC's Perspective:

The Dual Headed Lizard Monster roared in fury, its massive jaws parting as it unleashed a wind vortex toward the empty ground where I had been standing moments before.

Boom!

The ground trembled from the impact, sending debris flying in all directions.

I quickly sidestepped, narrowly avoiding the direct hit, but the sheer force of the blast still sent me stumbling sideways.

The wind howled as the vortex tore through the landscape, uprooting everything in its path-bushes, trees, even the earth itself.

The once lush vegetation was reduced to scattered remnants, swirling in the aftermath of the monster's attack.

The monster was relentless.

As the Dual Headed Lizard Monster turned its gargantuan body to unleash yet another vortex, I knew I couldn't afford to waste time.

My muscles tensed, and with a sharp exhale, I raised my sword, feeling the crackling energy of lightning surging through my veins.

"Sword Divide!"

I channeled the lightning essence into the black blade, and within an instant, the sword blazed with an intense purple light.

Sparks crackled along the edges, the energy humming through the air.

With deadly precision, I aimed at the creature's second head-the one still capable of launching attacks-and released the charged lightning beam.

Boom!

The beam shot forward in a straight, blinding line, cutting through the air with a crackling hiss.

The purple light illuminated the battlefield for a brief moment before it found its mark, striking the second head of the lizard monster just as it prepared to release another wind vortex.

The beam pierced the creature's mouth, and for a split second, the two opposing forces-lightning and wind-collided in a spectacular clash.

Boom!

The resulting explosion was deafening.

A violent surge of energy erupted from within the monster's second head, the shockwave rippling through the air.

Sparks of lightning intertwined with gusts of wind, creating a storm of destructive power.

I watched as the energy burst inside the monster's mouth, shredding it from within.

The wind vortex it had been preparing was obliterated in the blast, along with the second head itself.

A tortured cry echoed across the battlefield, reverberating from the monster's remaining head.

The once fearsome creature was now crippled-its second head hung lifeless, slumped to the ground in a twisted heap.

The monster had lost half of its life force, and I could see the pain etched in its remaining head, its movements growing sluggish, weakened by the death of its counterpart.

With the second head destroyed, the fight was half won.

I knew that if I could take out the first head, the monster would be finished.

And I wasn't planning on giving it any chance to recover.

...

The Lizard Monster, sensing its impending doom, finally realized the severity of the situation.

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A primal instinct for survival surged through its massive frame.

Without hesitation, it tried to escape by burrowing underground, its thick claws digging furiously into the earth.

The creature knew that if it stayed above ground any longer, its life would be forfeit.

I watched in surprise as the beast made its move.

For something so large, its speed was impressive.

The ground beneath it began to tremble as its enormous body started sinking into the soil.

But I wasn't about to let it slip away so easily.

Calling upon my lightning phantom technique, I moved in a blur, dashing toward the monster at lightning speed.

Despite my rapid approach, the creature had already managed to bury half of its body beneath the earth by the time I reached it.

Its survival instinct was strong, but so was my resolve.

I couldn't allow it to escape and recover.

Halting suddenly, I switched tactics.

If I couldn't stop it physically, I'd strike it down with raw power.

I gathered the crackling energy in my hand, feeling the surge of electricity coursing through my veins.

“Lightning Drop!”

A dense, glowing ball of lightning formed in my palm, humming with barely contained energy.

Without wasting a second, I hurled the lightning ball toward the retreating monster.

Boom!

The ball made contact with the monster’s exposed back, and in an instant, it exploded into countless bolts of lightning.

The energy surged through the creature’s body, striking every inch of its massive frame, sending violent arcs of electricity across its thick, scaly hide.

Cry!

A thunderous roar of pain and anger erupted from the Lizard Monster as it thrashed wildly.

Its once-impenetrable skin began to crack and break under the relentless assault of the lightning bolts.

I could see the flickers of energy searing through its flesh, the smell of charred scales filling the air.

The monster’s escape attempt faltered as the pain overwhelmed it.

Its burrowing slowed, its body twitching as the electricity coursed through its muscles, locking it in place.

I saw the effectiveness of my attack immediately.

The creature was vulnerable, and now was the time to press my advantage.

I wasn't going to give it a chance to recover.

Channeling more energy, I summoned another lightning ball into my palm.

"Lightning Drop!"

Another dense sphere of energy formed, crackling with intensity.

I hurled it toward the monster again.

Boom!

The second lightning ball struck with devastating force, followed by a third and a fourth, each one exploding into an electrifying storm of lightning bolts.

The Lizard Monster roared in agony as each strike tore deeper into its body, its thick hide now shattered, its movements sluggish and desperate.

The ground trembled beneath the weight of its collapse as it struggled to stay upright, but the relentless barrage of lightning attacks was too much.

The once-mighty beast was now battered and broken, its life force draining away with every passing second.

The Lizard Monster, unable to withstand the relentless barrage of lightning attacks, was caught in an endless cycle of pain and desperation.

The continuous strikes of crackling energy had stopped it from retreating fully into the ground, leaving it vulnerable and exposed.

Its massive body rolled over the dirt in a futile attempt to alleviate the agony, but there was no escape from the unrelenting assault.

The once-impenetrable scales that covered its body had been shattered, revealing raw, bleeding flesh beneath.

Blood flowed freely from its many wounds, pooling beneath the monster as its life force steadily ebbed away.

Each roll, each movement, sent more of its crimson lifeblood spilling into the ground.

The monster, once a towering and fearsome creature, now lay broken and battered.

It was clear-the beast was teetering on the very edge of death.

I observed the scene, assessing the creature's condition.

It was a pitiful sight now, its strength and ferocity reduced to nothing but a fading memory.

With its body ravaged and its defenses shattered, it was time to end this.

My hand tightened around the hilt of my sword.

"Sword Divide!"

I called upon the lightning once more, channeling its raw power into my blade.

The black sword in my hand came to life, glowing with an intense purple hue as lightning crackled and surged along its edge.

In the blink of an eye, the sword shimmered with energy, ready to deliver the final blow.

This time, the monster didn't move.

There was no desperate lunge, no attempt to escape.

Its massive body lay still, defeated and drained, its will to fight utterly shattered.

I advanced toward the fallen creature, my eyes locked on the trembling form of the first head, the last remnant of its once-dominant presence.

With precision and cold determination, I swung my blade downward, the lightning-charged sword cutting through the air in a flash.

Shhhhhkkk!

The blade met no resistance as it sliced cleanly through the monster's thick neck, effortlessly decapitating the first head.

A torrent of blood gushed from the severed stump, spilling out in a gruesome cascade, drenching the ground in dark crimson.

The headless body convulsed violently for a brief moment, its final act of defiance before it collapsed entirely.

With the second head already destroyed from my earlier attack, there was nothing left to sustain the creature's life force.

The remaining essence of the monster drained from its massive body, leaving it still, lifeless.

It was over.

..

With the Lizard Monster lying lifeless before me, I wasted no time.

The battle may have ended, but the task was far from over.

I approached the massive carcass, blood still seeping from its numerous wounds.

The stench of charred flesh and iron filled the air, but I ignored it, focused solely on what needed to be done.

I knelt beside the creature, pulling out a small but sharp blade from my side.

The scales were tough, even in their damaged state, but with careful precision, I began to dissect the monster's body.

The sheer size of the beast made the process grueling.

Its muscular frame and thick, armored skin were difficult to cut through, even with my enhanced strength.

I worked methodically, my hands steady as I cut away layers of flesh and muscle, searching for what I had come for-the monster core.

This core, a crystallized mass of energy, was the true prize.

It pulsed with raw power, the lifeblood of the beast's strength and abilities.

Extracting it required care.

One wrong move could damage the core, rendering it useless.

Time passed as I carefully carved through the dense flesh and sinew, my blade slicing through layers of tissue.

The monster's internal structure was intricate, but I had done this enough times to know where to look.

Finally, after nearly half an hour of careful work, my blade struck something solid-there it was, nestled deep within the creature's massive chest.

The core gleamed faintly, a dull glow emanating from its surface.

It was large, much larger than most I had harvested, a testament to the Lizard Monster's strength.

With a firm pull, I freed it from the surrounding tissue, holding it up to inspect it more closely.

The core throbbed with latent power, shimmering faintly in the fading light.

Satisfied, I reached into my pocket and retrieved my storage ring.

With a simple thought, I opened its hidden space and gently placed the core inside.

The ring, imbued with dimensional magic, safely stored the core away for later use.

The task was done.

The field was silent, save for the faint rustling of the wind.

Chapter 927: A Black Armadillo Monster

From the MC's Perspective:

After erasing any traces of the battle, I stood still for a moment, taking a final glance around.

Satisfied that no evidence remained, I turned and began my journey back to Alpha City.

The path ahead was long, but I preferred solitude-especially after such a confrontation.

A few minutes passed when I felt the faint tremor beneath my feet.

My instincts flared.

As I slowed my pace, I spotted something small emerging from the shadows.

At first glance, it appeared to be a Class-6 monster, but as I focused on its aura and the energy radiating from it, I realized this monster was more formidable-a Class-7 monster, one that lives underground.

I activated my perceptual ability, sharpening my senses as I took in every detail of the monster.

Its pointed nose gleamed in the dim light, and its hairless back reflected a dull sheen.

It moved on four short, clawed legs, its body covered in thick, dark armor-like scales.

A sharp, whip-like tail trailed behind it, twitching as it moved.

I studied it carefully until its identity clicked into place.

"A Black Armadillo," I muttered inwardly, recognizing the creature.

Class-7 monsters were rare, and despite their relatively small size, they were known for their burrowing abilities and dangerous encounters underground.

I wasn't interested in provoking a fight, especially after the battle I had just fought.

Deciding it was best to avoid unnecessary conflict, I turned to take a different route, hoping the Armadillo would lose interest in me.

But the moment I changed direction, the monster moved.

With a surprising burst of speed, it circled around and blocked my path.

I frowned, raising an eyebrow at its unexpected behavior.

The Black Armadillo stood in front of me, its eyes locked onto mine.

There was no aggression in its stance, no signs of hostility.

Instead, its dark, beady eyes seemed almost...

pleading.

What is this?

I thought, studying the creature more closely.

It wagged its tail slightly and began walking in a different direction, glancing back to make sure I was watching.

"This...?" I muttered, feeling a mix of surprise and curiosity.

Was it trying to lead me somewhere?

Monsters typically didn't act this way unless they were being territorial, but there was no aggression here.

Should I follow it?

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Logic told me to leave; after all, I had completed my mission and had no time for distractions.

Delaying could risk an encounter with one of the local hunting teams, and that wasn't a risk I was willing to take.

Not when I didn't know if they'd be friend or foe.

Suddenly, the Black Armadillo let out a small, pitiful cry, drawing my attention once more.

Its sound was soft, almost imploring.

I sighed, shaking off the hesitation.

The monster was clearly trying to communicate something.

"Alright, I'm coming," I said aloud, whether the monster could understand or not.

Whatever this was, I would follow.

At the very least, it would lead me away from any unwanted encounters.

...

The Black Armadillo noticed the human warrior was following closely, and with a determined gait, it led the way along a narrow, overgrown path, weaving through dense green weeds and thick bushes.

The terrain was far from easy.

I glanced at the tangled mess of plants and raised an eyebrow in mild annoyance.

This was going to slow us down.

With a resigned sigh, I reached into my storage ring and pulled out my black sword.

Its blade gleamed sharply in the faint light filtering through the trees.

I began hacking through the dense foliage, cutting a clear path as we moved deeper into the forest.

The monster would turn back every so often, its dark eyes checking to make sure I was still behind it.

After confirming I hadn't fallen behind, it pressed onward.

Time passed, and we traversed a few hundred meters, though it felt like much more.

The thick vegetation, combined with the narrow, winding route, made the journey tedious.

Sweat trickled down my brow as I continued clearing the path.

My eyes flicked toward the Black Armadillo again.

It had taken me deep into the forest, far off the main trails, along an unusual and seemingly hidden route.

My steps slowed, hesitation creeping into my mind.

What is this monster's purpose?

I wondered.

This wasn't random.

It was leading me somewhere deliberately.

Minutes later, the monster came to a halt.

I immediately sensed something was different.

My curiosity piqued, I quickened my pace and approached the spot where it had stopped.

But just as I caught up, the Black Armadillo resumed moving, heading toward a large, moss-covered rock.

The rock was massive, nearly obscured by the layers of weeds and vines that had grown over it.

As I neared the boulder, my enhanced hearing picked up faint sounds-footsteps, accompanied by low murmurs of conversation.

My heart skipped a beat.

“There are warriors nearby,” I muttered under my breath, quickly scanning the area.

The presence of others here, so deep in the forest, was unexpected.

I turned my gaze to the Black Armadillo, suddenly aware that it had stopped once again, just ahead of me.

It let out a soft sound, almost a low growl, before turning to face me with its eyes glowing in the dim light.

The monster seemed intent, its gaze focused and purposeful.

It was then I understood-this monster had led me here for a reason.

The noise I had just heard, the voices-they were tied to the reason this creature had sought me out.

The Black Armadillo shifted its gaze toward the rock, and I realized what it was doing.

It wasn't fleeing; it was leading me toward the enemies.

These intruders were likely ruining its home, disrupting the underground domain where it lived.

With a final glance in my direction, the Black Armadillo made its decision.

It headed for the other side of the rock, where the voices grew louder, and the intruders awaited.

....

Through my perceptual ability, I detected the presence of three warriors on the other side of the rock.

They were busy with something, but I couldn't make out the details from my vantage point.

Curious, I followed the Black Armadillo, gripping my black sword tightly in case things took a turn.

When I rounded the rock and reached the other side, I saw what they were up to.

At the base of the rock, there was a narrow crevice, barely wide enough for a small monster to fit through.

The Black Armadillo was frantically trying to squeeze into it, but the three warriors were working to widen the crevice, using tools to dig it out.

Their movements were precise and deliberate-they weren't just digging randomly.

They had a clear goal in mind.

For a moment, I didn't fully grasp what was happening, but then the Black Armadillo made a plaintive sound.

Instantly, several similar noises echoed from deep within the crevice.

A chorus of soft cries, unmistakably coming from more of its kind.

Realization struck me like a bolt of lightning.

These warriors were after the Black Armadillo monsters.

They weren't here by chance-they were trying to capture the creatures, likely for profit or some underground trafficking ring.

The small sounds from the crevice were its family, trapped inside, while this one had escaped to seek help.

The warriors were so engrossed in their task that they hadn't even noticed my arrival.

I remained silent, observing their movements, my mind racing through possible scenarios.

This wasn't a simple matter anymore.

The Black Armadillo turned to look at me, its eyes filled with desperation as it let out another sound-a plea for help.

My grip tightened around the hilt of my sword.

I could feel the weight of the moment settling over me.

The monster had led me here for a reason, and I couldn't ignore its call for help.

Just as I was about to make a decision, the warriors finally sensed my presence.

They paused, straightening up, eyes narrowing as they turned toward me, their expressions shifting from surprise to wary caution.

The tension in the air thickened.

They knew they had been discovered.

“Who are you?” one of the black-clothed warriors demanded, his voice cold and filled with suspicion.

His eyes narrowed as he tried to assess whether I was friend or foe.

I didn’t bother answering.

Instead, my grip tightened on the hilt of my black sword, and in one fluid motion, I raised it, pointing the blade directly at him.

My silence was answer enough.

“Sword Divide,” I muttered under my breath, the words barely audible as I infused the blade with lightning energy.

In an instant, the black sword crackled to life, the dark steel gleaming as purple lightning coiled around it, illuminating the air with an ominous glow.

Before the warrior could react, I discharged the built-up power, unleashing a purple beam of lightning that shot forth in a straight, deadly line.

The beam crackled as it split the air, moving with impossible speed toward its target.

The warrior’s eyes widened in shock, but it was too late.

He had no time to raise a defense.

The purple beam struck him square in the chest, and the sheer force of the attack sent him flying backward.

His body twisted in midair before crashing to the ground with a sickening thud.

He lay there, motionless, the smoke rising from his armor a clear sign of the damage the lightning had done.

The other two warriors froze, their faces drained of color as they stared in disbelief at their fallen comrade.

They had not expected such a swift and brutal attack, and now, the reality of the situation hit them with full force.

Shock rippled through the air as they exchanged frantic glances.

They had been prepared for a simple capture mission, but now they found themselves facing a much deadlier adversary.

Chapter 928: Vulture Gang

From the MC's Perspective:

As soon as I saw my teammate fall, a surge of urgency coursed through me.

The other warriors, realizing the same, immediately abandoned their chase of the Black Armadillos.

Their eyes shifted from their quarry to me, their movements sharp and decisive as they spun to engage.

Meanwhile, the Black Armadillo that had brought me here skittered into the safety of a narrow crevice.

With it safe, my focus snapped back to the warriors.

Swoosh!

In the blink of an eye, I vanished from my spot and reappeared right in front of the first warrior's sword.

My movements were swift, instinctive.

I swung my sword with precision, and in a matter of seconds, everything had changed.

The first warrior's eyes widened in shock, his momentary lapse leaving him defenseless.

The second warrior, realizing what had happened, yanked his weapon out, desperate to counter.

But he was far too late.

My sword was already mid-strike.

Slash!

My blade cleaved through the first warrior's arm, flesh parting effortlessly to reveal the stark white of his bones.

A simple, clean strike – no need for lightning energy, just pure technique.

"Argh!"

A pained grunt escaped his lips as he clutched his wounded arm with the other, stumbling back in retreat, his face a mask of disbelief.

He hadn't anticipated an attack this swift, this precise.

He staggered, trying to recover, but the damage was done.

His retreat was clumsy, his focus split between the pain and the threat of a follow-up attack.

“Flame Cut!”

The second warrior roared, his sword now engulfed in roaring flames.

He surged forward, slashing toward me, the heat of his blade threatening to consume everything in its path.

A sense of danger prickled my senses.

“Lightning Wheel!”

I responded instantly, channeling my lightning energy.

In a flash, a radiant purple lightning wheel formed around me, crackling with energy.

The flames met the lightning head-on, their collision inevitable.

Boom!

The impact was explosive, sending shockwaves through the forest.

The second warrior was flung backward by the sheer force of the explosion, his body hurled into the air like a ragdoll before slamming into a massive tree.

His sword fell from his hand as he crumpled to the ground, stunned.

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...

At that moment, I turned my attention to the third warrior.

He had managed to pull himself up from the ground, eyes burning with determination, weapon raised and ready for a counterattack.

Without hesitation, I surged toward him, my every muscle coiled like a spring ready to release.

As I charged, I noticed his hands glowing with a dull, earthen light.

The ground trembled beneath his feet as he called upon his elemental power, summoning large boulders from the earth.

With a swift motion, he hurled them toward me, each one whistling through the air with alarming speed.

Swoosh!

The boulders hurtled toward me with incredible force, intent on crushing me.

I felt the air tremble with their momentum.

Reacting in a split second, I channeled lightning energy into my sword.

The blade hummed with electric intensity, purple sparks dancing across its length.

Boom!

The first boulder reached me, and with a swift, calculated strike, I shattered it into dust.

Then the next came.

I swung again.

And again.

Each boulder crumbled under the force of my lightning-infused sword, breaking apart like fragile clay.

Dust and debris flew in all directions, clouding the battlefield.

The third warrior's eyes widened in panic as his attack failed to stop me.

His confidence wavered, and I could see the cracks of doubt forming.

I pressed the advantage, darting forward through the cloud of dust before he could recover, my sword poised for the strike.

Slash!

I swung my blade with precision, aiming for a decisive blow.

But he wasn't done yet.

In a desperate move, he raised his sword to block.

Our blades collided with a resounding clang, the metallic screech filling the air as sparks flew from the impact.

His block held, but I could feel the force of my strike pushing him back, his feet skidding across the dirt.

I was about to press the attack further when a sudden, sharp sensation tingled across my back.

My instincts flared-danger.

In the corner of my vision, I saw a glint of steel approaching fast.

The first warrior, injured but relentless, had crept up behind me, dagger in hand, aiming for my exposed back.

Without a second thought, I summoned my lightning energy once more.

“Lightning Wheel!”

The protective barrier of crackling purple energy erupted around me in an instant, just as the first warrior’s dagger made contact.

The moment the blade touched the wheel, a violent explosion of lightning occurred.

Boom!

The first warrior was blasted backward, his body sent flying through the air.

Lightning bolts crackled and danced across his form as the energy ravaged him.

His already-injured arm twitched uncontrollably as the lightning wreaked havoc, sending painful tremors through his entire body.

He hit the ground hard, writhing in agony, his dagger clattering away uselessly.

...

Seeing the first warrior staggering, struggling to remain on his feet, I knew this was my chance to end it.

With a swift motion, I raised my sword, aiming for his neck.

Swoosh!

The blade sliced through the air with deadly speed.

It was over before the warrior even realized what had happened.

My sword passed cleanly through, leaving nothing but a thin red line across his throat.

His eyes widened in shock, his hand instinctively rising to touch his neck.

The realization dawned on him-his time was up.

Blood seeped through his fingers as the strength drained from his body.

His knees buckled, and with one final, defeated look, the light in his eyes dimmed.

A sense of unwillingness, of unfinished business, lingered in his expression as he crumpled to the ground, lifeless.

I barely spared him a second glance.

One down.

“What have you done to Tony?!” The second warrior, who had been thrown aside by the lightning wheel earlier, struggled to his feet, his face twisted in anger.

His voice was hoarse, filled with rage as he glared at me.

He hadn’t fully recovered, but his fury pushed him forward.

I ignored the dead body at my feet and slowly turned my gaze to him.

Now that I had taken one of them out, there was no reason to let the other two walk away.

Leaving loose ends wasn’t an option.

The second warrior’s face darkened as he realized what I was about to do.

His anger boiled over, his voice shaking with a mixture of fear and fury.

“You...

stop right there!”

He took a step forward, desperation creeping into his voice.

“We belong to the Vulture Gang.

If they find out you killed one of their hunting teams, your ending will be miserable!”

“Vulture Gang.” The name sent a flicker of recognition through me.

My eyes gleamed, my grip on the sword tightening ever so slightly.

So, I had crossed paths with one of the most notorious gangs in the region.

A group I had wanted to avoid.

Their reputation for cruelty and power was well-known.

For a brief moment, regret flickered in my mind.

This was not a confrontation I had planned.

But now, with one of their men dead at my feet, there was no turning back.

There was no point in regret.

I had chosen my path.

“Vulture Gang,” I repeated, my voice cold.

“It doesn’t matter now.

I’ve already made my move.”

The second warrior's bravado faltered slightly, but he wasn't backing down.

He raised his sword, his eyes filled with fury.

It was clear he wasn't going to let this go without a fight.

.....

"Sword Divide!"

With a sharp command, I channeled the purple lightning essence into my black sword.

The blade responded immediately, humming with power as vibrant purple energy crackled and coiled around it.

The air around me buzzed with electricity, a tangible tension building as the sword radiated with blinding intensity.

In a fraction of a second, the sword was fully charged, glowing with an ominous purple light.

The second warrior's eyes widened, but before he could react-before he even had a chance to raise his weapon-I unleashed the energy in a devastating beam of lightning.

Boom!

The purple beam shot forward in a straight, unyielding line, cutting through the air like a bolt from the heavens.

It crashed into the warrior with brutal force, the impact shaking the ground beneath our feet.

The warrior had no time to defend himself.

The moment the lightning struck him, his entire body convulsed violently.

Lightning bolts danced across his armor, sinking deep into his skin, sending waves of destructive energy coursing through his veins.

His muscles seized up, locking him in place as the purple lightning ravaged him from the inside out.

The destructive force was relentless.

I could see the agony etched across his face as his body betrayed him, paralyzed by the sheer intensity of the lightning.

His previous injuries-already severe-were now compounded as the crackling energy ripped through his nerves, shredding them.

His limbs twitched uncontrollably, his body a prisoner to the violent storm of power within him.

His breathing grew ragged, the lightning tearing apart his defenses as easily as it had pierced his flesh.

His previous injuries, inflicted by my earlier blows, now seemed trivial compared to the devastation that wracked him.

Chapter 929: Trouble comes again

From MC's Perspective:

The body of the second warrior lay lifeless at my feet.

His blood seeped into the dirt, a grim testament to the battle that had just unfolded.

His eyes, once full of life and determination, were now dull and empty.

Without hesitation, I turned my attention to the third warrior.

His movements were sluggish, perhaps from fear or fatigue.

It didn't matter.

In a swift, fluid motion, I ended him too.

His body crumpled to the ground, joining his fallen comrades.

With the fight over, I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, the weight of what I had done settling in.

The adrenaline that had coursed through my veins moments ago began to ebb, leaving only the cold clarity of survival.

These warriors had been skilled, but not skilled enough.

I couldn't afford to leave any trace of this skirmish behind.

Carefully, methodically, I erased all signs of the struggle.

The earth, the trees, everything around me had to remain untouched by what had just occurred.

Only after ensuring the scene was clean did I turn my attention to the Black Armadillos.

I had been too distracted by the fight to check on them earlier, but now I had the time.

As I approached the crevices, I could see them – dozens of them, varying in size from small, nimble creatures to the larger, more imposing ones.

Among them was the very Armadillo that had led me here, its eyes blinking at me with what seemed like curiosity, or perhaps recognition.

But something was off.

This place, I realized, wasn't safe for them.

It might have been their home once, but that time had passed.

The Vulture Gang's hunting team had found their way here, and though I had taken care of them for now, it wouldn't be long before others came searching.

The Vulture Gang was relentless.

They would notice their missing comrades soon enough, and when they did, they would descend upon this area with fury and vengeance.

The Armadillos would be caught in the crossfire.

I observed the Black Armadillos for a moment longer, and it became clear: they were already planning their exodus.

The larger ones were restless, the smaller ones clung close to their elders, and there was a collective tension in the air.

They knew it too.

They had to leave.

My mind was made up.

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I couldn't risk the Vulture Gang discovering this place because of the bodies I had left behind.

If these Armadillos were going to have any chance of survival, I needed to dispose of the evidence far from here.

With renewed purpose, I gathered the corpses of the three fallen warriors.

Their weight didn't slow me down, though the burden of what I had done was starting to sink in.

After walking for half a mile through the dense forest, I found a spot that seemed fitting.

The ground here was littered with monstrous footprints-monsters of the wild that would likely find the corpses soon enough and devour them.

It was brutal, but necessary.

Once I had dropped the bodies, I wiped my hands on my cloak and turned away without looking back.

The forest would take care of the rest.

Time slipped by as I made my way back.

An hour later, I returned to the boundary, my senses on high alert for any sign of other hunting teams.

The token I carried allowed me to pass through the barrier effortlessly, but the tension in my shoulders remained.

I couldn't afford to get complacent, not here.

As I moved toward Alpha City, the familiar sight of returning hunting teams came into view.

They were a motley assortment, each wearing insignias that marked their allegiance to one gang or another.

Though all of them were technically members of the Federation, their gang affiliations were clear from the badges they proudly displayed.

It was a reminder of the fractured alliances that defined this place.

I kept my gaze steady, but I couldn't help but notice something interesting.

Not a single warrior was flying solo.

Every one of them moved in groups, their eyes scanning the horizon for threats.

The fact that I was alone didn't just catch my attention-it caught theirs too.

I raised an eyebrow at their reactions.

It wasn't impossible for someone to travel solo to the boundary, but it was rare.

The gangs had a stranglehold on this territory, and most warriors relied on the strength of numbers to survive.

The murmurs began as the hunting teams noticed me.

Some looked confused, others intrigued.

A lone warrior, moving without a team, was a strange sight indeed.

Their eyes followed me, curious, wary.

But the surprise didn't last long.

As I continued my steady pace, one of them finally recognized my face.

Their expression shifted from curiosity to shock.

They knew who I was.

...

"Hey, isn't that Zack Lockwood?" a warrior from one of the hunting teams muttered, his eyes narrowing as he recognized my face.

His voice carried just loud enough for his nearby teammates to hear.

"The one who's been making waves recently?"

He's the core member's student, right?" another warrior chimed in, sounding both impressed and curious.

At the mention of core member their entire group stiffened.

Some of the warriors who hadn't been paying attention now squinted in my direction, their expressions shifting from indifference to shock.

They took a few moments to scrutinize his face, and soon enough, recognition spread across their features.

"What the hell is he doing here?" one of them asked, his voice laced with suspicion.

"I heard he usually sticks to Delta City.

This isn't the territory of Lowell McClain," another warrior added, his tone carrying a sharp edge.

This one clearly came from a faction hostile to core member Lowell McClain, and the sight of Zack Lockwood here, deep in unfamiliar territory, had caught him off guard.

He exchanged uneasy glances with his teammates, his gaze flickering between them and me.

The tension was palpable; his faction had no love for mine, and my presence here only stirred the pot.

They were already on edge, and now they were trying to figure out my angle.

Meanwhile, warriors from more neutral factions, who had no immediate stake in the ongoing feud, seemed more curious than confrontational.

"He's probably here because of a mission," a warrior from a neutral group speculated, shrugging as if my presence was of no real consequence to him.

"The Delta City monster region is small, after all.

You can only get low-level missions there.”

At this, several others nodded in agreement.

The logic made sense to them.

Delta City didn’t offer the high-stakes opportunities that Alpha City’s boundary region did.

As long as they were all part of the Federation, crossing into other cities for missions wasn’t unheard of.

In their eyes, he was just another warrior expanding his horizons.

But not everyone was convinced.

A few of the more hostile warriors exchanged glances, their eyes darkening with malice.

They weren’t buying the innocent mission excuse.

I could see it in the way they whispered to one another, huddled close like conspirators.

One of the warriors, his jaw clenched, spoke up with a dangerous glint in his eye.

“Go and block him,” he said, his voice low but commanding.

“He’s on our turf.

It’d be rude not to say hello, wouldn’t it?”

His teammates immediately stiffened, their eyes widening in shock.

They weren't naive-they knew what this warrior was suggesting, and they knew trouble was brewing.

A few of them shifted uncomfortably, clearly torn between following orders and avoiding an unnecessary confrontation with someone like me.

They had heard the rumors, they knew my reputation, and picking a fight with a student of a core member was a dangerous gamble.

Still, the one who had spoken was persistent, his eyes narrowing as he glared in my direction.

He was clearly spoiling for a fight, eager to test me or maybe make a name for himself.

His teammates hesitated, exchanging nervous glances, but the idea of backing down didn't sit well with them either.

After all, they were part of a gang, and showing weakness wasn't an option.

..

As I continued my steady pace toward Alpha City, my senses suddenly sharpened.

A familiar tingling sensation crept down my spine-someone was following me.

It was subtle at first, the sound of footsteps just a little too close for comfort, but soon it became undeniable.

I turned my head slightly, just enough to take a glance over my shoulder.

Sure enough, two warriors were heading in my direction.

They weren't trying to mask their approach, and they weren't exactly in a rush either.

Their faces held expressions of smug amusement, and as they waved their hands at me, gesturing for me to stop, I caught the glimmer in their eyes-mocking, playful, but with an underlying sense of malice.

Trouble.

The realization hit me instantly.

My eyes narrowed, a cold glint flashing as I processed the situation.

These weren't just any warriors looking to exchange pleasantries.

Their postures, their demeanor-it was clear they were looking for something else.

Something I wasn't in the mood to give them.

When you're out here, minding your own business, there's always someone eager to stir the pot.

I didn't want any trouble, not today, but it seemed that trouble had decided to find me.

I exhaled quietly, calming the irritation bubbling up inside me.

Picking a fight here, in the open, wasn't in their best interest, and they knew it.

The Federation didn't take kindly to public brawls between warriors, especially in areas so close to the city.

They wouldn't dare attack me-not openly, not here.

Still, they wanted to test me, to provoke a reaction.

I wasn't going to give them the satisfaction.

Chapter 930: Entering the City Safely

From MC's Perspective:

As I hovered mid-air, the two warriors approached with deliberate steps, their presence demanding attention.

I glanced down at them, my body still suspended above the ground as the wind gently tugged at my cloak.

The first warrior, sharp-featured with a nose that could probably cut glass, fixed me with a piercing gaze.

"Are you Zack Lockwood?" His voice was clipped, every syllable sharp, as if it could slice through the tension in the air.

I remained unfazed, meeting his gaze with an unblinking calm.

"Yes," I responded, my voice steady, betraying nothing.

"What do you want?" My tone was solemn, but my eyes never left theirs, scanning for any hidden intention beneath their postures.

The second warrior, a hulking figure with arms like tree trunks and a barrel chest, let out a deep, booming laugh.

The sound echoed through the clearing, though it didn't faze me.

"Ha...

Ha...

Ha..." he chuckled, the sound dripping with arrogance.

"That's good to hear," he rumbled, his grin widening as if they had won some unspoken victory.

"Now, you can come with us."

I stood there, motionless.

My expression remained blank, unimpressed by their feigned confidence.

The way they spoke, the sheer arrogance, was laughable in itself.

Did they really think I would just comply?

These fools clearly had no idea who they were dealing with.

Without a word, I turned my back on them and started to fly past, my body gliding effortlessly through the air as if they were no more than obstacles in my path.

The shock on their faces was almost palpable, their eyes wide with disbelief.

They hadn't expected that.

No one had ever dared to ignore them before.

The audacity was enough to momentarily silence even the loudest thoughts in their heads.

As my figure began to grow smaller in the distance, their stunned expressions melted into fury.

“Who does he think he is?” the sharp-nosed warrior spat, his voice cold with hostility.

His hands clenched into fists, the veins bulging from his arms in a futile show of strength.

“Arrogant brat!” the bulky warrior snarled, his once mocking demeanor now twisted into rage.

His heavy frame shifted as if ready to charge after me.

But I didn’t look back.

Their anger was insignificant, like the wind rustling leaves beneath me.

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“Follow him!” the sharp-nosed one barked at their comrades, his voice strained with fury.

“Don’t let him out of your sight!”

Their entire hunting team, scattered around the area, seemed just as shocked by my indifference.

A murmur spread through the group, their eyes tracking my every movement.

Their pride had been bruised, and in their world, that demanded retribution.

But I kept flying, unconcerned, knowing that if they truly tried to stop me, they would regret ever crossing my path.

...

As I soared through the sky, the rush of wind against my face sharpened my focus.

Glancing over my shoulder, I caught sight of the hunting team still trailing behind me, their persistence relentless.

My eyes narrowed, a cold glint flashing as a surge of irritation flickered through me.

They were too slow, too predictable.

Without hesitation, I pushed myself faster, my body cutting through the air like an arrow released from a bow.

The landscape beneath me blurred, but I could hear the faint stir of commotion behind as the hunting team scrambled to keep up.

Their sudden acceleration didn't go unnoticed.

Other nearby hunting teams, sensing the unusual chase, turned their heads.

Their curious gazes tracked the movement, anticipating some sort of conflict.

Was there a skirmish breaking out between factions?

But soon, their confusion gave way to understanding as they saw the hunters were all focused on a lone figure – me.

The same figure who had passed by them earlier without a second glance.

A ripple of interest spread through the bystanders, like a wave across the open skies.

What could cause this pursuit?

Who was bold enough, or foolish enough, to have provoked a hunting team?

Minutes passed like fleeting shadows as I pushed on, my speed unmatched by the warriors behind me.

Finally, the looming walls of Alpha City appeared on the horizon, their familiar silhouette offering a sense of relief.

The city's protective rules were absolute.

No one dared to commit violence within its borders.

Here, I was untouchable.

The towering gates of the city drew closer, and I allowed a small breath to escape.

I was safe for now, but I had no plans to linger.

I wasn't simply fleeing the hunters behind me; there were larger forces at play.

The Vulture Gang was a looming threat, one whose attention I could ill afford.

It wouldn't be long before they caught wind of what had happened.

Before they could make a move, I needed to reach the headquarters.

It was the only place where I could regroup, plan, and assess my next steps.

Behind me, I could feel the hunters slowing.

The sight of Alpha City, with its strict regulations, drained the fight from their efforts.

Their lead warrior, the one with cold hostility etched across his face, looked particularly frustrated.

I could sense the waves of disappointment rolling off him even from this distance.

He had wanted more than a chase.

He craved conflict, a chance to stir trouble, likely hoping to curry favor with the gang backing him.

A gang tied to the Federation's core members.

He was nothing more than a puppet, a pawn in their larger games.

And now, he had nothing to show for his efforts.

His shoulders slumped as he gestured for the others to stop.

There was no point in continuing.

I had reached Alpha City, and any further action on their part would break the city's rules – an offense that carried harsh consequences.

The hostile warrior shook his head in frustration.

His plan had crumbled before his eyes, and there was only one option left for him now.

He would inform his masters, the gang who had sent him, and await further orders.

For now, all he could do was watch as I disappeared into the distance, beyond his reach.

...

"Hmm, what happened?" I muttered under my breath, my voice barely audible above the rush of wind as I glanced back.

The hunting team had stopped following me, their pursuit ending just before reaching the city gates.

A flicker of confusion crossed my mind, but it didn't linger.

They knew better than to cause trouble this close to Alpha City's borders.

Before entering the city, I landed gracefully just in front of the towering gate, the heavy stone arch casting a long shadow over the bustling streets beyond.

With a subtle adjustment to my cloak, I walked forward, blending seamlessly into the throngs of people.

The streets were alive with movement.

Groups of warriors, their armor clinking faintly with each step, moved in tight formations.

Hunting teams filled every corner of the marketplace, their banners fluttering as they weaved through the crowd.

The sharp glances exchanged between rival teams were barely concealed beneath their surface-level civility.

As I walked, I couldn't help but think of the powerful gangs that operated behind the scenes, the real forces controlling these teams.

Each faction had its influence, each gang its own set of warriors ready to do their bidding.

My thoughts wandered to Teacher Lowell.

He had once commanded his own hunting team, a formidable force that had carved out a reputation across the region.

But that was before it all crumbled.

His team had been abandoned, left in the dust because of the members' failures.

It was a reminder that strength alone wasn't enough – loyalty and trust played an equally crucial role.

I sighed internally.

"Teacher Lowell deserved better," I thought, the memories of his stories echoing in my mind.

As I moved through the busy streets, the idea of forming my own team tugged at me.

It was tempting – to have a unit loyal to me, with whom I could share victory and power.

But I knew better.

My strength was nowhere near enough.

In a world ruled by rank, I was still at the bottom, barely scraping by.

The notion of leading a team was nothing more than a distant dream for now.

I would need to ascend to SSS-ELITE Rank before I could even entertain such thoughts.

At my current level, it was laughable to imagine commanding anyone.

The air hummed with activity as I passed rows of vendors shouting about their wares, while warriors haggled over equipment upgrades.

Despite the vibrant energy, I remained focused.

I had to keep my head low.

The last thing I needed was to draw attention to myself, especially with the Vulture Gang possibly sniffing around.

Behind me, the hunting team finally entered the city, their heavy footsteps echoing faintly as they passed through the gates.

Though they had halted their chase, they couldn't resist glancing in my direction, their eyes cold with frustration.

But their leader, the hostile warrior, seemed resigned now.

His earlier ambitions of causing trouble had been thwarted by the city's strict rules.

Without a word, they turned on their heels and made their way back to their hideout, their plan having collapsed the moment I crossed the boundary of Alpha City.

For now, I was safe.

But this wouldn't be the last time we crossed paths.

I was certain of that.