

## **Few Wives 221**

Chapter 221: Restricted zone

Around an hour later...

Muku still hadn't met even a single beast despite walking that long. And he was starting to get scared. Which was rather weird. You'd think that he'd be happy not to meet beasts when he was weak. Yet there he was hoping to get attacked.

Then again, anyone would be spooked out when they don't see any beasts in a literal Beast World...

"Umm, gave you figures out what the problem might be? Why are we alone?" Muku asked the dragon.

{Hhm... I think I know where we are. We might be in a restricted zone... Yeah, that's the only explanation that makes sense here. The Guardian was clear when he said we'd be sent to The Beast World. So, we're definitely there} The dragon replied. However, its tone was uncertain. Probably not sure about what it was saying.

"Okay, so what's a redistricted zone? And why do you sound so unsure of your words?" Muku asked.

(Restricted zones are various places located in random places all over the Beast World. They are surrounded by a white mist no one can pass through. It's said that not even the Monarchs can get through. I've only heard about them. I have never seen one myself. So, I'm unsure. And also because no one has managed to get inside them before from what I know. I can't say if that's where we are right now} The dragon explained.

"Oh, okay. After hearing that. I think that's probably where we are. At the very least, that thought calms me down a little. It's a lot better than wandering around not knowing anything. Now, we just have to find the exit point. Or the edge. Whichever comes first." Muku spoke. His voice sounded a lot calmer than before.

Having a goal was always better than walking around aimlessly. The duo then continued making their way through the suspected secret zone.

It was all fine and good until they realised something. They didn't seem to be making any progress. No matter how far they walked, the sites in the distance didn't seem to be getting closer.

It was something neither had paid attention to before. They were preoccupied with other thoughts. And there was a sizable piece of land they were walking through. So, they subconsciously thought they were making progress and the trees just looked similar.

With such a weird thing occurring. It was only natural that they decided to stop for a moment. It was time to rethink their game plan.

"I say we go toward the higher concentration of mana instead of away from it. It's not like we have any other choices right now. It's either that or we keep on wandering around in the same place. And I'm too hurt to do something so pointless" Muku put forth his suggestion.

{Hhm... Why not try flying first?} The dragon was still unwilling to go toward the denser mana. Having been born in the Beast World. It had become an instinct to avoid doing such a thing.

"Sigh. Fine. However, I'm pretty sure it's going to be the same. And we're doing what I said if this fails" Muku agreed to try it. He had recovered enough mental energy to waste a bit.

Since there didn't seem to be any other living creatures in the place. There was no need to save it either. So, he might as well try it. Though, he didn't have much faith in it working out.

And so, to satisfy the dragon's request. He took off in flight. It looked painfully slow compared to his usual flight speed. He'd probably need to sleep for a while to get back into peak mental state.

However, that didn't stop him. He still flew his hardest in the direction he was walking toward before. And yet, no matter how fast or how long he flew forward. When he looked down, he was still moving through the same stretch of space as before.

He even tried flying up. And like with the group, he couldn't go past a certain point. So, he chose to land. He might as well let himself recover more than waste the little Mental Energy (ME) he had recovered.

The experience had been worse than he expected. He didn't expect even going up to be restricted. He had actually been planning on checking the treetops out of the plan he suggested failed as well.

Now, however, it seemed they were doomed if it failed as well. It was their only option left. Hopefully, it works out.

Maybe such weird spacial laws were the reason even Monarchs were rumoured to be unable to get in. From his perspective, the formation or whatever it was. It was inconceivable. He didn't even feel like he was being restricted in any way. Despite the restriction, everything still seemed to be okay.

He couldn't sense any mysterious power affecting the surroundings or his mind. For some reason, he couldn't help but be reminded of his own ability. The "erasing gaze" He had erased half of a R1 beast's body before. Yet, it didn't die or bleed. Its life was as strong as ever despite missing half of its body.

It was almost as if the laws of the world themselves were forced to accept the beast's new state as its natural form.

He was certain that they were definitely in a restricted zone by that point. At the same time, he was also certain that the laws of the area had been tampered with.

As for how it was done, he wasn't sure. It was definitely not something he could do with his Erasing Gaze. It was nowhere near as almighty as whatever ability was used to create the restricted zones.

Well, whatever, that had nothing to do with him. All he cared about and needed to care about was getting out of the zone. After that, he'll figure out how to spend his days until the time to return home comes.

"Can we try my thing now?" Muku asked as he flew back down.

{Fine... Just don't get us killed} The dragon relented.

"What about Raya?" Muku asked a question out of nowhere.

{What?} The dragon was confused.

"For your name. How does Raya sound?" Muku clarified.

{What?! You're still on that. With our current situation?? You know what? Fine. You can call me Raya from now on. I officially accept it as my name} The dra... Raya was surprised and annoyed by his fixation with giving her a name. So, she just accepted it to get it over with.

"Great! I'll call you Raya from now on!" Muku spoke in a happy mood. Ignoring Raya's grumpy mood. His OCD had been satisfied. So, he was happy even with the poor reception.

With that taken care of. He began walking toward the denser mana. Soon enough he noticed a difference.

He was finally able to make it out of the little stretch of land from before. Tears of joy almost left his eyes.

However, he didn't stop to look back. In fact, he began walking faster. Eventually, he took off. What if the zone changed its mind a chose to restrict him again?!

While that was unlikely, he'd rather not take the chance. So, he flew forward as quickly as he could. In less than an hour, he could almost see the mana in the surroundings. That's how dense it had gotten.

After a little while longer. He could barely see more than a few metres in front of his eyes. The mana had gotten dense to the point that it had turned into a mist-like state. It was a multicoloured mist which slowly swirled in the area. Going in random directions.

He could barely see a silhouette of what seemed to be a building deeper in the mana most. Well, it was either that or a cut-down tree that just happened to look like a building from afar. Either way, he'd find out soon enough.

At that point, his mana had long filled up to maximum capacity. He could even feel it slowly getting refined in his core. Which was odd since he didn't know that it could do that.

Which was understandable since his and his group's mana had always been of a high quality. For that reason, their world's trash mana density couldn't even dream of refining it. The mana density couldn't even refine epic classes.

Hell, it could barely work for the lower classes. And the results would be pretty negligible. Maybe after one more evolution or so, people will start seeing a change...

Interestingly enough, it was actually one of the two major steps that needed to be passed through to reach R4. Which would have been especially hard for Muku to do on the Blue Planet.

Yet there he was, going through it without even knowing what was going on. It was only much later that he'd realise what a great fortune he had encountered. It was something only the highest order of privileged beasts could enjoy in the outside world.

Even Raya was unaware of the fact. She was just as oblivious as Muku.

Fortunately for her, the link she had with Muku provided her with mana when she was in the mindscape. So, she was recovering alongside him.

Both of their bodies were still beaten up. However, with a "full tank" they could augment themselves with their mana. Making it easier for them to move.

In normal cases, such a method would be a waste of mana, which would drain them after a while. However, in their current environment. They'd regain the mana as soon as they lost it. So, it was okay to use it.

Raya soon left the mindscape. She shielded herself from the gravity with her mana. It was all so that she could get the same benefits as Muku.

He had told her about the mana refinement she hadn't been getting in the mindscape. While not sure of the benefits yet. She still chose to partake. It didn't seem to be bad in any way, after all...

Chapter 222: Open door!

A few minutes later...

Muku and the little dragon on his shoulder finally made it in front of the "building"

The dense mana circled around the structure for whatever reason. However, that was to his advantage. It made everything clear...

Both of his guesses about the silhouette turned out to be correct. It was both a tree and a building. As for why it was like that. Well, someone seemed to have cut a huge tree down. Then carved the stump to look somewhat like a building.

It even had a large door which Muku didn't know how to open. He didn't try to blast it open or something like that. He was certain that it wouldn't do anything.

Though the door looked like it was made out of wood. He doubted he could damage it.

It was already agreed upon that the place was definitely created by an almighty being. So, what could his little strength do?

Besides, what if he angers the owner or some cliché hidden guards by attacking? Wouldn't he have to quietly let himself get killed by that point?

Since he couldn't see a huge doorknob anywhere on the door. It was safe to assume that it wasn't opened like that. Maybe it worked like the door he turned into mana...

With that thought, he tried to channel his mana into the door after placing his armour-covered hand on it. And that didn't work.

Speaking up the armour. He thought that he was too spent to remove it when he initially tried. However, he tried again after regaining all his mana. Yet, it wouldn't budge even a little bit.

It was pretty embarrassing actually. A legendary class Divine Metal Warlock being unable to control metal. Not just metal, but metal he had personally manipulated onto his body.

He should probably just give up on the divine part of his class's name. He clearly didn't deserve it if he had such performance issues.

Fortunately for him, no one was around to see his failure. And, the armour wasn't negatively affecting him in any way. The only problem he had with it was how it was subtly attacking his mental state again.

The attacks were easily manageable since they were nowhere near as powerful as before. However, it was still quite annoying.

Not to mention how the strength of the attacks seemed to be directly proportional to how much mana he had. Which was probably why they were a lot stronger before when he had more mana.

It was almost like... The bastard armour was using his energy to attack him! What the hell was that?! No wonder, he felt a weird expenditure that wasn't there before.

Even though his mana recovery was a lot better than before. He still felt a slight drag. Like something was holding it back from its maximum capabilities.

It had to be the damned armour! Was he having a "The Mask" moment? Like, the armour had been useful. However, it had drawbacks. Now, it was refusing to come off.

The worst part, daylight didn't do anything to it. At least Jim Carrey was safe during the day!

Muku didn't stop his complaints about the armour stop him from snooping around the door. He tried everything he could think of.

From all the secret door passwords he has heard in movies... "I see dead people" and "open sesame!" coming up at some point. Which got him a weird gaze from Raya.

However, that didn't stop him. He then moved on to secret knocks. Which also did work. At that point, Raya just quietly looked on. Not even reacting. She had already gotten used to his craziness.

"Umm... Why not try saying \*Open door!\*"? Raya spoke in a chibi voice while sitting on his shoulder. Her little dragon form looked rather cute.

All the ferociousness from her true form had been stripped away. Leaving behind a cute little white dragon with black fur running down the middle of her back. Not to forget her cute, big yellow eyes, which shone with innocence. She was about the size of a little kitten. All the above qualities made her pretty much look like the perfect doll any child would want.

"No, why would I try something so simple? This was obviously made by a being beyond the understanding of mere mortals such as ourselves" Muku immediately denied the chibi Raya's suggestion.

It was already hard enough to take her seriously in her current state. Yet she had to go and say such an unreliable thing. Had her little size affected her thinking capabilities or something?

"Try it. It's not like you have anything to lose" Raya stuck to her suggestion just for the sake of it. She also didn't think it would be that easy. However, she refused to be looked down on and ignored.

"Fine, but we're just wasting our time. There's no way the door is opened by saying "Open door!" That's way too sim..." Muku tried the suggestion just to get it over with.

However, before he could finish discrediting it. The huge door began shaking. The next moment it began rising up like a garage door. Which was different from how he thought it would open.

However, that didn't really matter. What mattered was that it was really opening up. And from the looks of things, it was all because of the suggestion he was putting down.

"..." (Muku)

"..." (Raya)

The two stood silently for a moment as the door opened up. Muku suddenly noticed Raya fidgeting on his shoulder when he gave her a side glance.

It was clear to see that she was holding herself back from laughing. His face reddened a little behind the armour. He had lost quite a bit of face in that little time span.

The door just had to open when he was confidently stating that it wouldn't open. It was clearly sabotage!

"Don't you dare la..." Muku was trying to warn Raya against laughing. However, before he could...

"Pfft. Hahahaha" Raya exploded into a feat of laughter. And it wasn't brief either. She laughed as hard as she could for as long as she could.

By the time she was done, Muku felt like there was a whole layer of skin missing from his face. She really showed him no mercy when she laughed.

What made it worse was that he knew it wasn't forced from their soul link. She really saw him as a clown. The disrespectful brat!

"Are you done?" Muku asked neutrally. Doing his best to hide the anger and shame he felt.

Which was pointless since she could peek into his emotions if she wanted to. Maybe she already peeked. That could be why she found the situation so funny.

"Huff, huff... Yeah, I'm done. We can go in now. We shouldn't keep the being beyond our comprehension waiting now" Raya took in a couple of big breaths to calm herself down.

She then expressed her readiness to proceed. She took a little dig at Muku just because she could.

It was amazing how much her personality had changed in just a few hours. The reliable partner Muku thought he had gotten was long gone.

He had gotten another headache instead. Was he doomed to always judge those around him incorrectly until the end?

Anyway, Muku ignored the obvious dig she took at him as he quietly proceeded forward. He'd just note down the grievance and settle it in the future.

It wasn't being petty. No!. It was just being fair. He can't be the only one to lose a layer of skin right?

Bang!

Just as Muku was stuck in his thoughts. Plotting his revenge. A loud bang sound was heard behind him. Then he found himself standing in pitch-black darkness.

That's right. He had been caught up in an old cliché. The door shut behind him soon after he stepped into the room.

The obvious next move would be to panic and hit the door pointlessly, right? Well, yeah. That totally made sense in a panicked situation. Muku was even thinking about it.

However, before he could do that. A blue light appeared in front of him. It was a little distance away from him. It came from the centre of the large empty room.

After taking a closer look. He realised that it looked like a door. Or more precisely, a portal shaped like a door. Even the blue light was a shade lighter than the blue from the portals from his planet.

Which probably signified that it didn't lead to the same place. Though just the shape and aura were enough for him to tell that it was different. Unlike the beast portals, the portal in front of him radiated with an inviting aura instead of a threatening one.

"What do you thi." Muku was about to ask Raya what she thought they should do.

However, before he could finish, she turned into a white like and returned to his body. Which stopped him from continuing.

{Argh Finally! I can breathe. Please tell me. What's your secret? How can you handle such strong gravity so easily?!} Raya spoke in his mindscape before Muku could ask what was going on.

"Hhm? What do you mean?" Muku asked confusedly.

{Wait... Don't tell me you don't feel any gravity here as well?! It's like ten times worse than outside, though?!... You know what, I can sense that you're confused as well. Let's forget it for now. Just go through the door. It's not like we can go back} Raya replied. However, she dismissed the topic since they were both confused.

"Okay...?" Muku replied still confused. He then proceeded to walk toward the portal...

Soon, he was standing in front of it. After some hesitation due to the recent event of being dragged into a crack. He jumped right in.

Like Raya said. It's not like they could go back...

Chapter 223: I'm your mother!

"Woah!"

Bang!

Muku who wasn't used to travelling through portals... Stumbled and fell to the ground when he reached the other side.

He expected to travel through some extended space corridor like before. However, it wasn't like that. The moment he got into the portal was pretty much the same one he got out through the other side.

Which caught him off guard. This, of course, warranted a snicker from Raya. She was probably too tired to laugh anymore.

That didn't faze him, however. He had already lost all his face in front of her after all. His head pretty much only had the skeleton left. All the skin was long gone.

"Fortunately, there's no one worthy of note who witnessed that" Muku spoke while getting up.

{Hey! Are you saying I'm not worth noting?! Besides, look up} Raya complained from the mindscape. She then directed his focus to something she had taken notice of the instant he arrived.

"Hhm? What do you m..." Muku, who hadn't had the chance to look around him, spoke while doing so.

He couldn't finish his statement though. That was because he saw a lady standing a few metres away from him. She just quietly stood there staring at him unblinkingly. While he was certain that he had never seen her. She seemed familiar to him for some reason.

She was a middle-aged lady who seemed to be in her mid-forties. She had long silverish-grey hair, much like his own. However, her eyes were different. They weren't grey, instead they were black. The darkest shade of black he had ever seen. And various colours would flash in them from time to time. It was almost like she had a whole galaxy in her eyes.

Then there was her very presence. He couldn't place it at all. It was almost like he was looking at an otherworldly being. Even though she was an outstandingly beautiful middle-aged lady. Her grace and presence were what stood out the most about her. They would always make her the centre of attention wherever she went even before her beauty was seen.

Even though her body didn't radiate any mana or any kind of oppressive force. It took everything in him not to bow down and pledge his undying loyalty.

"Wow... What amazing mental strength for one so weak" The lady spoke in a pleased tone.

It was clear she wasn't making fun of Muku despite the ambiguous choice of words which could be taken negatively.

The otherworldly aura she gave off went away the moment she opened her mouth.

Muku could finally breathe properly. That's right, just being in her presence made it hard to breathe. And she wasn't even doing anything!

"W... Who are you?" Muku asked while trying to calm himself down. Most of his regained mental energy was depleted by just that little stare-down. It would have taken him at least a few hours of flight to exhaust that much!

"I'm your mother" The lady spoke with a natural expression on her face.

"What?!" Muku exclaimed in shock.

He didn't know what to think. His mind completely shut down on him. He just stood there like an idiot. That was the last thing he was expecting to hear.

"Pfft. Just kidding. I just felt like saying that since our hair looks the same. You're really gullible to believe that so easily, huh? You should see your fave right now. Hahaha," The lady spoke again in an amused tone. Even laughing at the end.

"It must be really funny to make fun of an orphan to you, huh?" Muku spoke grumpily. He was so pissed off that he missed how her words suggested that she could see his face even through the armour.

Though even if he took notice of it. He probably wouldn't care too much. After all, there were too many mystical abilities out there. Plus he was certain that she was some kind of expert. So, anything should be possible for her.

"Yeah, you're right. That was my bad. I know how to make it up to you. Since you don't have a mother and I don't have a son. Why don't we just accept each other as mother and son? That sounds like a great

idea. So, from now on. You'll call me mom and I'll call you son!" The lady apologised then went on and on. Getting more excited the more she spoke.

By the time she finished speaking. All the reverence Muku still had for her from the initial encounter was long gone. The old lady moved way too quickly! They had just met, and they were already related. He couldn't keep up at all!

"Hey! Hey! Slow down a little, lady! I don't even know you! Who said I wanted to be your son?!" Muku spoke while holding his hand in front of his body to show his refusal.

"Too late son. I never go back on my words. Here is a little gift for the happy occasion. This fruit will heal you and your little dragon friend" The lady spoke while casually taking out a glowing green apple from out of nowhere. Like, she just reached out and pulled the fruit out of the empty space in front of her.

Muku was stunned a bit by the act. However, he recovered quickly enough. Layla had something like that as well. Just not is mystical-looking. But, the same nonetheless.

{You better accept that fruit. It's exactly what we need and more!} Raya's anxious voice sounded in his head before he could refuse. Any reasonable person wouldn't accept food from strangers after all.

However, Raya didn't care about all that. Her experience gained from living in the beast forest told her that the fruit was definitely something they couldn't pass by. Besides, she was now Muku's mother. So, it was totally okay to accept the gift.

"Listen to your little friend. And are you so doubtful of my character? I'm your mother, though! It really hurts my poor old heart to know that my son doesn't trust me at all!" The lady casually did another mystical thing again.

Which was hearing Raya's speak even though she was in Muku's mindscape. Then she began overreacting again. She even shamelessly sprayed something in her eyes in front of Muku so that tears came out.

"If I take it. Will you shut up and tell me what's going on here?" Muku spoke in a defeated tone.

He was certain that the fruit wasn't anything bad, after all. From the few things he had seen her do. It was safe to assume that she could kill him as easily as it was for her to blink. So, there was no need to go through all the trouble if she was planning on killing him.

"Yes. I was going to tell you anyway. I just want you to be healed up before that" The lady spoke seriously while wiping away the fake tears from her face.

Muku rolled his eyes as he took the fruit from her hand. As for when she had gotten so close to him. He wasn't certain. He also didn't notice how she had managed to get him to drop his guard around her.

Sure, keeping his guard up would be useless against her. However, that still wouldn't have made him drop it in normal cases. The lady was definitely a special case.

Maybe she'd have wormed her way into his heart before he realised what was going on...

Crunch!

Muku bit into the fruit just like he would a normal fruit. However, unlike what would happen next after biting a normal fruit. Which was to chew and swallow. The part he bit melted into his mouth and was instantly absorbed into his body.

As for the taste... He didn't know how to describe it. It tasted so good it was beyond anything he had ever tasted before. Even without getting to chew it and such. He experienced all of the fruit's taste. He completely devoured it within seconds.

He was even considering asking for another one shamelessly. After all, she had been shameless a few times already. He could do it once, right?

However, before he could do that. He felt his whole body start to warm up. The heat kept on increasing until his body turned red from the heat behind the armour.

Interestingly enough, Raya was going through the same thing inside his mindscape.

Neither of them panicked though. They were legit R3s, after all. They could take that little amount of pain from the heat. One normally doesn't get R3 without going through quite a bit of pain. Which they both had gone through.

They even ignored the pain. What they focused on was the healing effect hidden behind the pain. They quickly realised that they weren't just healing. Their bodies were actually being improved at the same time.

It wasn't a small improvement either. Their durability was being made at least two times better.

Which was unthinkable to them. One had to know that Raya was a legit dragon. Her body was basically as strong as a body at her rank could get. Yet it was getting improved even more.

Then there was Muku. His body had long caught up to the durability and strength of Jade and Audrey after his soul link with Raya. Which was amazing enough since those two had outstanding bodies due to their classes.

Yet there he was improving even more. He'll be at least twice as strong as Jade and Audrey by the time he was done.

Jade is definitely going to be pissed off when she finds out...

Chapter 224: Mom! Please save me!

Ten minutes later...

Muku could be seen running all over the room. Doing pushups, backflips and even running on walls.

A look of amusement appeared in the lady's eyes as she looked on.

Anyway, the healing and tempering process had ended just a minute or so before. And Muku, who had to drag his body for quite a few hours, was excited by how light it had gotten. It wasn't just healed, it was better. A lot better. And so, like a kid who had been given a new toy. He had to test it out.

It was a rather comical scene when one looked at his get-up. It just didn't match! It looked wrong in every way!

It was like if Darth Vader suddenly began jumping around, running on walls and screaming loudly all over the place. Who would still respect and fear him after that?!

A while later Muku came back and stood in front of the lady shyly. The adrenaline was gone. All that was left was shame...

"Can we proceed now?" The lady spoke with a slight smile on her face. She didn't make fun of him like he expected.

"Yes. And thank you for the fruit. I'm in your debt. Also, how should I address you?" Muku spoke seriously. He was really grateful. The fruit was definitely a rare treasure. So, for her to be willing to give it to him. How could he not be grateful?

Even if she wanted him to do something slightly dangerous but doable as a way to repay her for it. He was very willing. It was worth at least that much.

"There's no need to repay me for it. Like I said, it was a gift. And you already know how to address me... In fact, that fruit has a causality law. By eating it. You have to call me mom every time I call you son, or your head will explode in the next two minutes..." The lady spoke maturely for a bit before returning to her crazy ways at the end.

"Really?" Muku asked in a neutral tone. Based on her personality from what he has seen so far. He wasn't sure whether she was joking or not. With her, it could be either.

"Pfft. Of course not. I'd never endanger my child like th... Anyway, your head won't explode. You'll only lose all your hair and go bald" The lady replied.

Something seemed fishy about how she didn't finish her statement about endangering her child. However, Muku had other things to worry about.

"Mother!" Muku, being the narcissist he was, immediately called her mother. He could risk an exploding head but never going bald! Without his mane, his pride, his hair. Would he dare show his face to anyone? Of course not! That would be absurd and should never be a possibility!

"Hehe. And I thought I was crazy" The lady gave a little comment. Her overbearing personality flickered for a bit. Was she aware of her own absurd behaviour from the start? Well, only she'd know the answer to that.

It seems she didn't expect Muku to actually call her mother. So, it caught her off guard. However, a big smile appeared on her face soon after. She looked even happier than Muku when he was jumping around the place.

Though unlike him, she didn't lose all her shame. A smile was enough to express her joy.

Muku was dazed by her smile for a second. For some reason, he felt happy to see her smile. He wanted to keep her smiling always.

He had to shake his head to get rid of such thoughts. Since when was he so weak-willed! Was he already having filial thoughts just because she called him son?? What the hell? Did he secretly long for a mother or something??

"Anyway, that was a lie also. It was just a normal fruit which has already done all it can do. However, for being such a good sport. I'll give you ten more before you leave. But before we get to that. I think it's time we get to business" The lady spoke happily before switching the topic to why Muku was there.

Even her unreliable personality seemed to get a little more restrained at the end. Which made Muku listen intently in preparation for what she was about to say.

It was obvious that it was going to be something important. For that reason, he didn't want to miss a single word.

"No need to be so serious. It's not as bad as you might think. In fact, you're quite lucky to have randomly dropped into this place. Maybe it was fate since you meet the requirements to access it directly

anyway" The lady continued speaking. Her eyes got a little shifty when she mentioned how Muku got there randomly. However, he chose to ignore it.

He was certain that if he asked. It would only waste their time and she won't say anything substantial.

"So, firstly. This is what the local residents of this world call a restricted zone. However, it's actually just a trial ground for those who meet a certain standard. Which you fortunately meet. I'm not going to go into detail about that. Just know that you meet the standard, that's all," The lady continued speaking.

Some of the things made her seem more and more suspicious in Muku's eyes. However, he chose to ignore it. Maybe she was setting him up for another trap again. She seemed to like making him seem really gullible, after all.

"With that said. The purpose of this place should be clear from the name, right? It's to test and train various attributes of the qualified individuals. Of course, there's a prize at the end of it. It will be yours as long as you can pass all the floors. This place has ten floors" The lady continued speaking clearly and seriously.

Her current behaviour matched the initial impression Muku had of her a lot more. Unfortunately, she'll probably return to her hyper mode after she's done with the serious stuff. He was pretty certain of that.

"When it comes to the floors. You'll start from floor one, where some of your abilities will be restricted along with your rank. It has already been tried and tested that it's possible to pass the floors with the leftover abilities. So, don't assume that you're being targeted when the time comes. Now, if you look behind me. You'll see a closed door with the number "1" on it. That's where you start. After you clear the floor. Two doors with the numbers "2" and "0" will appear. You can either proceed deeper through "2" or come back here through "0". Are you still with me so far?" The lady stopped explaining for a bit and asked Muku if he understood everything up to that point.

To which he nodded in agreement. Giving her the go-ahead to proceed.

"Good. Now let's move on to the trials themselves. I won't tell you anything about trials 2-10. However, I will tell you something about trial "1". In trial one. You'll face R1 beasts with your strength reduced to the same level and you'll only be able to use your body to fight. Anyway, you'll find out the rest later. Since the creator of this place is magnanimous and beautiful. They have built-in safe words you can say

to pause the trial if it's too much for you. And you have to understand that this has nothing to do with me. I only just found out myself. It seems the safe words are "Mom! Please save me!" And you have to really shout out loud for it to work. What! I'm telling the truth!" The lady continued speaking seriously until Muku's glare stopped her.

His expression had long gotten dark. He already had a bad feeling when she mentioned how she had nothing to do with the creation of the place. And how she casually complimented the creator. Then the safe words were dropped.

If he had been drinking tea or water. He'd have gotten choked instantly as well as spat it out. What kind of safe words were those?!

And how can she shamelessly say she had nothing to do with the safe words when they have her written all over them! Hell, they are literally a cry for help from her!

Was everyone's mother so unscrupulous when they were new? Or was his a special case?! And why was he already thinking of her as his mother?!

"You know what... Fine. I have no problem with the safe words. Is there anything else I need to know before going in?" Muku, who was certain that she would deny any involvement in the safe words until the end, gave in.

So, what if the safe words were embarrassing? Wouldn't he be fine as long as he doesn't say them? And why were they safe words instead of one safe word?! Ah! Whatever!

Muku stopped thinking about it. He'd probably get a headache if he kept on trying to think about it. She had him on check and that's all that mattered.

"Really?! You're okay with it? I was planning to chan... I mean, yeah! Of course, you're okay with it. It's not like we can change it. Anyway, I don't think there's anything else. At least I don't think there is. If something comes up I'll tell you through the speaker" The lady almost exposed herself before changing her statement.

It was almost like she was still new to lying or something...

At that point, Muku didn't even say anything. He just quietly walked toward the door which led to the first floor. If he stayed around her any longer he'd definitely get a headache.

He didn't even mind how she wasn't certain if there was any more stuff she needed to tell him. Even though he was almost certain that something important would definitely pop up eventually. Probably after he suffers a bit.

"Oh wait, this little one can't go in with you. The lady spoke from beside Muku. Again, he didn't know how she suddenly stood there.

Anyway, as she spoke. She reached her hand toward his head. It then disappeared into space just as it touched his armour. Then she pulled it back.

Surprisingly, Raya was now in her hand.

"... Oooof course", Muku commented tiredly after a little silence, then proceeded to walk forward.

Not because she took Raya from him. But because of how she did it. So casually too!

Fortunately, he was already used to her mysterious ways. Otherwise, he might have had a heart attack on the spot.

What kind of broken move was that?!...

Chapter 225: Back to school?!

With complicated thoughts swirling in his head. Muku walked through the door.

It had opened up automatically when he got close to it. This revealed another portal inside. Which he walked through calmly enough. He was decently acquainted with portals by that point, after all.

When he came out the other side he instantly felt it... His new mother wasn't bluffing before. His power was really reduced to R1! Not just R1, but LR1! The much the weakest Evolver there was.

That wasn't all, he couldn't sense any mana in his body at all. And it got worse. Even his bloodline power seemed to have been taken off the table.

He wasn't really too worried about the last one. While it was a powerful trump card. It was rather unreliable anyway. So, he could always depend on it to not be dependable.

It was his mana and reduced physical abilities that worried him. While he had been told about it already. It still made him nervous.

He had gotten used to having his strength after all. Even in his weakest state after the battle with the Monarch. He felt stronger at that time than he did currently.

It was really hard to get used to. The lady had been thorough in her ways. Even his enhanced senses were reduced to match. All the secret advantages he thought he'd have were stripped away.

The worst part was...

"Hey! Can you at least take this armour off me?! It has become really heavy with my current strength. I can't fight properly in this!" Muku complained out loud. The armour got unbearably heavy after the strength reduction.

He didn't even pay attention to the fact that he was standing in a familiar building. That would come later. What mattered first was to get the armour off him.

"Okay. I'll make it disappear while you're in there. However, it will reappear when you come out. Don't ask me to completely take it off. That's your job to do. As your mother, let me tell you this. You really shouldn't wear things you randomly find lying around. Look at the situation you're in now," The lady's voice boomed into the room.

Like always, he didn't know what to feel about what she said. She agreed to help him out of the armour. Which was a good thing. However, it was only a temporary release. Which sucked.

Then there was the parenting advice. He just rolled his eyes at that quietly. Since she was so much into the motherly role. There was no reason to not let her have her fun. Even if she gave painfully obvious advice that gave off sarcastic vibes.

The armour began fading away from his body while he was still stuck in thought. He only noticed when the weight which pressed down on his body got lifted.

He felt like the world around him brightened a bit when it happened. Maybe it was because he wasn't constantly getting mentally stabbed...

"Now this feels better. Thank you" Muku thanked the lady while stretching his body. It felt great to be free again.

That's when he finally started paying attention to the surroundings. He instantly realised where he was. Well, he recognised the place the floor had been copied from.

It was a nostalgic building. A building that can be called the origin of his and the girls' story. That's right, the school he taught at before the apocalypse.

The floor was an exact replica of the school. Yes, school. Not just a room or floor. But, school! Even the outside of it was copied. The school grounds and all that.

It was like he had been sent into a little pocket dimension. Honestly, it probably was. The barrier for the dimension was just outside the school premises. Everything beyond that was just a white wall. The wall also covered the sky.

Anyway, from the location. Muku could pretty much guess what was going to come. He was probably going to have a rematch with the Killer Dogs!

And this time around, he had no backup. Fortunately, he still had his experience from fighting them before. As well as the experience from fighting other beasts. Which were even better than the dogs.

His starting point was the principal's office. Which was different from when his group had to work their way to it.

Like before, when something weird happened. He didn't stress about how she knew his past in such high detail. The lady literally pulled Raya out of his mindscape after all. So, recreating an old memory was nothing worth noting.

"I reckon there won't be any Unranked beasts like the real event, right?" Muku asked.

"You catch on quick. Such a smart boy. You make momma proud. Anyway, your goal is to reach the school gate. You can take as much time as you need. Oh, and... Nah, you'll find out soon enough anyway. You can leave that safe room whenever you're ready to start. Good luck son! I believe in you" The lady's enthusiastic voice sounded in the room.

"Okay, thanks", Muku replied, then immediately walked towards the door after taking a deep breath.

He felt an unknown excitement rising from deep inside him. Maybe he missed simple fights like the ones back then. When it was mostly physical instead of throwing around flashy moves at each other.

Or maybe he had always wondered how things would have gone if he had been alone back then. Would he have been able to make it out?

Well, whatever the reason for his excitement was. He was definitely about to have a good time.

With that unshakable resolve, he opened the door and walked through it. The moment he did, he came face to face with four killer dogs. They seemed to be guarding the stairway to the lower floor.

The moment Muku came through. All their attention focused on him. Four pairs of eyes looked at Muku hungrily while he looked at them calmly.

In the next moment, he calmly opened the door behind him. Then calmly went back inside.

"Rhoof! Rhoof!..."

"Rhoof!..."

"Rhoof!..."

"Rhoof!..."

The killer dogs froze for a moment. Seemingly trying to make sense of what just happened. Then they charged forward while barking angrily.

The bastard dared retreat without even trying to fight! And he did it so calmly too! How dare he walk away from them?!

Bang! Bang!...

The dogs began banging on the door furiously. Unfortunately, their efforts were in vain. The room had been designated as a "safe room" by Muku's new mother. So, there was no way they could break it, no matter how hard they tried.

....

Inside the room...

"What the hell?! How am I supposed to win against that?! It's so obvious! You're plotting to kill me! You want me dead!" Muku shouted loudly while pushing against the door as hard as he could.

Even though he knew the dogs couldn't break through. It was just an instinctual response.

And as for why his confidence evaporated so quickly? Well, the four dogs behind the door weren't just rank ones like him. No, they were slightly different. It wasn't anything major, just that they were all PR1s and looked like the Killer Dog Boss!

The same one he barely defeated with his whole team, magic and more strength than he had currently. No matter how confident he was in his abilities. He wasn't one to willingly seek death.

"Calm down... I guess I should have told you after all. I just thought my son was fearless and would be able to handle anything. Anyway, while there's a little difference in your strength and numbers. Defeating them is probably not as hard as you think. Firstly, they can also only use their physical abilities to fight and you have the environmental advantage. Also, look at the right corner. You missed something." The lady's calm voice sounded again. She clarified things a bit more.

"What do you mean by "probably" not as hard?! You yourself are not sure. Yet you want me to face them. And so what if they can't use magic?! What little difference in strength?? Have you seen their bodies?! They are ripped! They probably work out every day! And what's the use of an environmental advantage when I can't deal proper dama... Oh... I think I might be able to work something out with this" Muku didn't fall for her reassuring words.

He wasn't one to be talked into doing something he knew was bad for him. Especially when the talker was so unreliable and used words like "probably". Why would someone say that to someone they are trying to hype up?!

Anyway, he paused his rambling after he looked at the corner she mentioned. His confidence instantly shot toward the roof again.

"With that in hand. I think it's possible..." Muku spoke to himself as he walked toward the corner.

He has gotten what he was missing. He reached out his hand and grabbed it. Bloody memories appeared in his mind the moment he did.

As everyone might have guessed. He had gotten his hands on one of those trusty emergency axes.

While the dogs definitely had many advantages over him. As long as he had a proper way of dealing damage.

Everything could be discussed...

Chapter 226: Killer dog fight!

"Are you ready to go now?" The lady asked.

"Yes, I'm ready" Muku replied confidently.

"Good, because I'm cancelling that room's protection in ten seconds. Oh, and since you don't want to call me mother. You can call me Mrs C" The lady... Or, Mrs C rather, spoke. She managed to rile Muku up with her words again, like always.

"What?!" Muku exclaimed as he quickly ran to the door.

As a veteran, he instantly came up with a battle plan. Even when Mrs C was clearly making things difficult for him. She must really like seeing him being at ease. She always finds a way to trip him when that happens.

Bang!

The door was broken through exactly ten seconds later after it was mentioned. Muku was already in position. He stood beside the door.

The killer dogs instantly ran into the room the moment the door broke. Due to their large sizes, they could only go in one at a time.

Muku patiently waited for the first three to rush through. When the fourth and final one's head came through. He swung down the axe he had been holding above his head viciously.

"Howl!" The axe hit the dog directly on top of its head. This prompted the dog to let out a cry of pain. It then slumped down to the ground. Its eyes shut, with an axe half buried into its skull.

Muku quickly pulled out the axe and bolted out of the room. Everything happened so quickly that it took the remaining three dogs a moment to catch up and then react.

They angrily ran after Muku who had gone out. The first one to go out managed to catch a glimpse of him as he entered another room and closed the door again.

He had the opportunity to run to the lower floors. However, that would have sealed his fate. From Mrs C's words, there'd be more dogs waiting for him down there. And he was pretty certain that the following floor would have more dogs than the last one.

So, it was better to first deal with the three dogs before finding trouble with any more of them.

The dog, which saw him, quickly led the other two to the door he went through. However, unlike before, they didn't rashly break down the door and go in. They weren't that dumb. Hell, even normal dogs wouldn't do such a thing.

The three dogs just looked at each other while moving about on the passageway. They didn't stray too far from the door though. They'd let out low growls at each other from time to time.

It was almost like they were saying to each other...

"You go first!"

"No, you!"

"What about you?"

"What did I do? I'm just quietly standing here?!"

"Well, since you've got nothing to do. I guess you can go"

"Sure... After you"

"I always knew you two weren't trustworthy!"

"Oh, shut up! Who cares about your trust? You scaredy-cat"

"You dare call me a cat?! Do you want to die!!?"

Just like that the dogs kept on growling at each other. They'd give each other angry looks from time to time. So, their conversation probably went something like that.

"Rhoof!"

Bang!

One dog bucked loudly. Then banged its body against the door. Which broke the door down. It had probably had enough of waiting around doing nothing.

Besides, it was the last one to go in who would get attacked... Right?

It went into the room immediately after breaking the door down. And the old scene, with a twist, repeated itself. Muku who had been standing in wait, swung down his axe.

Unfortunately for him, the dog was a lot more cautious than the one before it. Its superior strength and cautiousness allowed it to avoid his attack. It jumped back before his axe reached its head.

Muku wasn't disheartened by it though. He was just trying his luck. He knew that such a trick would never work a second time. Even if he switched it up a little bit.

Which was why he didn't waste a single breath in his transition to the next move. The move was taking out a wooden stake from his back and stabbing it forward.

He knew that the dog's skull would be too tough for him to break through so easily. So, he viciously stabbed at the dog's eye instead.

The dog hadn't expected such a move from him. It hadn't even stabilised its standing position after jumping back when Muku attacked. So, there was little it could do in its defence.

The worst part was, due to its surprise. It actually opened its eyes wider as the stake approached. Which just made it easier for Muku to stab it right in the eye.

"Howl!" Another cry of pain. One even louder than the last one sounded.

Muku had succeeded in stabbing the killer dog's eye. It instantly fell to the ground as it continued crying in pain while rolling on the floor. Unlike the one from before, it wasn't taken out by the attack. Which left it to suffer imaginable pain as blood gushed out of its eye.

The other two dogs were surprised again. They hadn't expected their friend to break down the door in the first place. Yet a few seconds later, the door was broken down and their friend was on the ground crying in pain.

However, they didn't get too much time to think as Muku ran out of the room. He was done with running around. If it was just two dogs. He could take them out with little difficulty.

Even if they were physically stronger. He was smarter and had experience on his side. The physical capabilities of those below Pseudo-R2 weren't absolute after all. Those of lower strength could still use skill to fight. Unlike those beyond that.

So, as long as Muku was mindful of his actions. He really could dispatch the two dogs without losing a leg or hand.

"Rhoof!"

"Rhoof!"

Seeing Muku approaching them. The two dogs were overwhelmed by anger. How dare the sneaky human show himself after all his dirty acts?! And he seemed to want to attack them as well! He was seeking death!

With that, the two dogs lunged forward. Their maws opened wide, ready to bite. They were ready to bite either Muku or that axe of his. One thing was certain. He wasn't going to catch them off guard again!

And yet, he did. The dogs jumped up in their lunge like any animal would do when lunging toward a tall enough target. However, Muku slid down instead. Which was easy enough to do on the polished floor.

So, while the dogs were in the air, he was on the ground. They were moving in opposite directions. Which Muku took advantage of. He raised his axe under the unlucky dog he was sliding under.

If it was a movie. The scene would be shown in slow motion. His axe's sharp blade was pushed onto the dog's soft underbelly. It easily cut through the skin. Then it got buried into the flesh ever so slightly.

With the dog's movement, which went against Muku's own. It was obvious what was going to happen. The dog's underbelly was sliced open by the axe.

By the time both sides came to a halt. The dog's fate was set. The moment its feet touched the ground. Its insides fell out from the large gush Muku had made.

Unfortunately for the dog. It didn't die immediately. However, the pain it felt did make it wish it were dead.

It weakly slumped onto the ground, making a low, whimpering sound. Its eyes looked into empty space as it wished for death's quick embrace.

After all, it wasn't a matter of whether it was going to die. But, a matter of how long it would take before it would die. Which it hoped was sooner rather than later.

Muku wished the same. However, he didn't have the time to put it out of its misery immediately. He still had one last dog to deal with. And that dog was more ravenous than ever.

It wasn't shocked or surprised by its friend's sudden and brutal downfall. It was long past the time for such things. It had already made that mistake twice. It wasn't going to make it again. After all, it was its life that was at stake at that point. Without question since the others had been defeated already.

"Rhoof!"

Bang!

The killer dog swiped at Muku instead of lunging forward for a bite like usual. Which was understandable considering what had just happened.

Its large paw came into contact with Muku's axe which he used for defence. To its luck and Muku's misfortune. The contact knocked the axe away from Muku's hands. Which flung it away into the distance.

It was clearly a situation brought about by the dog's superior strength. So, while luck played a part. The dog's very own skills were just as crucial.

The axe which was knocked away from Muku's hands, fell to the dog's side. This made him retreated immediately.

The dog didn't immediately pursue. It waited for Muku to retreat some distance away. All the doors were on its side. Muku only had the stairway, which he was definitely not going to take yet.

He needed to rest and come up with a game plan before doing such a thing.

While the dog didn't know that, it didn't really need to. Whether he went down or not. He was going to die. It knew what awaited him below. And, it was certain that without the axe, it could take care of him easily.

So, there was no need to rush to attack. The ball was in its court. It locked eyes with Muku, quietly daring him to go down the stairs.

Seeing how he remained standing in a defensive position. It made the decision for him. It began walking toward him slowly. It was going to take care of him personally.

It flexed the spikes on its back as it moved closer and closer. The damn thing was feeling itself!

Which Muku noticed and rolled his eyes. What kind of messed up world was he living in? Even dogs narcissistically flexed now!

Well, whatever, that didn't matter. It was time to settle things. That's all that mattered...

Chapter 227: Physical improvement!

"Grrrrr... Rhoof!" The killer dog growled menacingly as it got closer to Muku. With one final bark when it was close enough, it sprinted forward.

Muku was ready to receive it. So, he prepared to jump to the side. However, the dog noticed. It changed the direction of its charge to match where he was about to jump to.

Unfortunately for it. It turned out that it was a feint. Muku stopped himself at the last moment. This made the dog miss him and pass by.

It seemed to have all been part of Muku's plan as he immediately got into position and threw a powerful kick. The kick wasn't aimed at the dog's meaty body. That probably wouldn't do much damage.

He aimed it at its leg instead. The side of the leg joint, to be exact. So what if his kicks weren't strong enough to kill it. They were at least strong enough to break its legs right?

Bang!

Crack!

"Howl!"

The dog howled in pain after Muku's kick landed and did what he intended. While he didn't manage to break it all the way like he had hoped, it was enough to disrupt the dog's tempo. As well as reduce its deadliness, so, he was okay with it.

Bang!

"Argh!"

Due to the not-so-serious injury. The dog wasn't instantly incapacitated like the others. In fact, the injury angered it even more. It made a move Muku wasn't expecting. It gave him a heavy kick in the gut with its good leg. Which threw him a distance away.

The kick was so unexpected that it knocked the air out of him. He even vomited some blood as he flew across the sky.

If he was a normal person. It would have definitely killed him. Hell, for a second there, he felt like he was going to die as well.

He grabbed his stomach as he lay on the ground. It hurt so much he could barely keep his eyes open. Which he forced himself to do since he had to keep an eye on the dog.

Fortunately for him, it didn't immediately act. It was also dealing with its own pain at the moment.

However, he didn't get to relax for too long. The dog soon turned his way. Pain would still flash in its eyes from time to time. However, anger was still the dominant force in them.

It slowly limped toward him. Doing its best to ignore the pain. Its hate for him drove it forward. He had taken way too much from it! From its friends to its leg. He had to die!

Muku lay limply on the ground as the dog approached. Both his hands clutched his stomach as he looked on as it approached. A look of helplessness and fear appeared in his eyes. Which the dog noticed and revelled in.

However, it didn't get cocky by slowing down its pace. It had long realised that he wasn't someone it should look down on, no matter the situation. It could only relax after biting off his head...

With that thought, the dog reached Muku's side. It immediately attacked. It opened its large mouth and bit toward his head. It wanted to end it with one attack. Who knew if he had other tricks he could use if it delayed?

Soon, Muku's head was almost in its mouth. Everything was about to end. Muku seemed to have given in to his fate as his eyes were shut.

That's when...

Whoosh!

"Howl! Gurgle gurgle" The dog howled in pain one more time then fell back. It then began choking on its blood as it lay on the floor...

.....

A few moments before...

Muku was hit in the gut by the dog and found it hard to even move. He instantly ran out of ideas of what to do in his incapacitated state. He was even thinking of dragging himself away while the dog was still trying to get used to the pain.

Something happened just as he was about to do so...

[You've successfully killed two peak rank one beasts. Gained reward! Slight improvement to physical capabilities×2]

Muku heard an unfamiliar and odd prompt in his head. Unfamiliar in the fact that he had never heard of such a reward for killing beasts. It has always been KP from day one.

And weird in the fact that the voice was different. It wasn't the usual cold female voice he was used to. It was a male voice this time... Though still cold.

Well, whatever, the event couldn't have occurred at a better time. The reward didn't just improve his physical strength like the prompt said. It also healed his condition to some extent.

While he wasn't returned to his tip-top state. The pain he felt was reduced by half. Which was enough for him to move again, though painfully.

It was all he needed. Now he had a fighting chance. Especially with his slightly improved strength. He should be able to catch the dog off guard if he played his cards right...

Anyway, he sneakily took the remaining stake he had tucked into his trousers. At the back.

It was one of two stakes he had made in the lounge. It was during the time the beasts were hesitating to go on. He broke apart a couch to get the wood. Which he then shaped with his axe.

They were definitely roughly made. However, they were still very effective. Which the killer dog he stabbed in the eye could attest to.

Anyway, when the killer dog finally started paying attention to him. Everything was already in order. He carefully hid the stake. He put on his best act for the dog. He felt that his acting was so good that it could trick a human, let alone a R1 beast.

While he had a plan which he was committed to. He still felt nervous. After all, things could always go wrong. Like how he was unexpectedly kicked in the gut.

That nervousness probably made his act more believable. So, while the dog thought it had taken proper precautions. It probably wasn't as cautious as it should have been. Which contributed to the success of Muku's plan.

Just when the dog was about to bite Muku's head off. Muku made his move. With his current fastest speed, ignoring his pain. He stabbed right into the killer dog's fully opened mouth.

The stake easily pierced through the killer dog's weak inner mouth flesh. It then got lodged at the back of the dog's throat. It blocked the killer dog's throat. Which prevented it from breathing properly. It soon fell to the ground in its struggle to breathe.

.....

Back to the present...

The dog's mouth bled extensively. Which, of course, led to it choking on its blood. In less than two minutes, the dog which couldn't remove the stake was dead...

Unfortunately for it, it didn't have humanoid hands. So, there was no way it could reach into its mouth and take the stake out.

It died with its mouth open, while looking into empty air. Instead of pain, there was a look of disbelief frozen in its eyes. It was greatly surprised by how it died.

It had taken so many precautions. It didn't take Muku lightly. It acted at its fastest speed. Yet it still lost. How could it not be in disbelief??

Its death was definitely unfair! It had lost to the plot armour, not Muku. A normal person would have definitely been killed by it.

"Argh! Finally, it's over..." Muku spoke to himself as he lay back down. He had gotten another prompt after the dog's death. This improved his condition some more. It pretty much returned him to peak condition.

However, he was still spent. The adrenaline rush ended the moment he got the prompt. All the tiredness his adrenaline had been holding back, flooded in all at once.

It had been a long time since the last time he felt physically tired after a battle. In his recent battles, he'd either be completely fine or be completely beaten up to a pulp. Neither was actually physical exhaustion. So, the feeling felt slightly alien. However, he didn't dislike it. It was a sign of his hard work!

"Wait... Weren't there four killer dogs? Why did I get prompts for only three of them?" Muku, who was enjoying his tiredness, suddenly thought out loud after calming down a bit.

He immediately felt a cold chill go down his spine. Since when did he make such newbie mistakes?! Even when he was a newbie, he never did such a thing. Had his usual strength got to his head?!

He didn't stay down as he thought such things. He quickly got up and made his way to his axe while cautiously looking around.

By the time he grabbed his axe. He had noticed that three of the dogs were definitely dead. The one he stabbed in the eye bled to death. The one he sliced open also died and the last one he stabbed in the mouth was also dead.

Which only meant one thing. It was the dog he axed on the head that wasn't counted for.

So, he cautiously made his way to the principal's office again. His axe was tightly held in hand. He couldn't help but feel nervous.

He and the dog had pretty much switched roles after all. Unlike before, he was the one who had to go through the door uncertainly.

However, it had to be done. The dog seemed to be waiting for him to come since it hadn't appeared despite being alive.

It was going against the script though. In such situations, it should have appeared and attacked him when he mentioned it. Such a dumb dog. It definitely deserved death!

Soon, Muku stood by the door. He looked in from a little distance away. There was no way he was going to rush in after all.

"Okay. That's just anticlimactic" Muku spoke to himself while looking into the room...

Chapter 228: Acting...

A few days later. Back on the Blue Planet...

"Has anyone come across her yet?" Audrey suddenly spoke at the silent breakfast table.

Everyone had been mostly keeping to themselves in the last few days. Going out and doing their own things. Then returning in the evening to rest. The mansion was still as gloomy as ever.

It hadn't been moved from its place. Which was obvious since only Muku had the ability to do that. Those like Audrey and Jade could probably lift it.

However, that would obviously be inefficient. And who knows for how long they could keep it up?

Anyway, Audrey had ordered everyone to gather together for breakfast before leaving. That's right, she ordered them. If she had requested like she usually would have done. That might not have been very effective.

So, she took the hard stance. Muku's departure was still fresh in everyone's mind. Which meant that a soft approach would be met with resistance. So, slight force was the way to go.

While it was okay to want to take some time to themselves after what happened. Audrey refused to let them drift too far apart due to it. And since everyone respected her. They could only agree. It wasn't like they were too against it, after all...

Well.. all but one agreed. Three people were missing from the breakfast table. One was Muku, obviously. The other was Jade. She hadn't come back since the day she left.

The others had been trying to get into contact with her ever since. However, they were unsuccessful. She had better senses than all of them. Even better than Audrey when she used her special skills. So, she could easily avoid them.

All they were able to find were traces of her. Even when they sensed her fighting a beast. She'd be gone by the time they arrived. Even if it meant abandoning her prey.

It was obvious that she didn't want to talk. However, Audrey refused to give up on her. She'd continue hunting her down until she catches her.

"No" Surprisingly it was Hope who replied first. The others just shook their heads.

What was most surprising about Hope was how she was taking it so well. She had woken up a day after Muku was dragged away. But instead of the breakdown they expected.

She acted normally enough. She didn't withdraw herself or run away like Jade. She still engaged with anyone who wanted to engage in conversation with her.

The only thing that changed was that she was a lot more hardworking than before, just like the others. She'd leave the mansion in the morning and return in the evening.

With the recent WE, there were a lot more beasts roaming around. Rank threes were everywhere now. So, the girls didn't have to go far to find them. They also didn't need to give each other opportunities to kill them like before.

Audrey had encountered a Rank Four once. Which she warned the others about. So, for that reason. They didn't stray too far lest they put themselves in danger.

Anyway, the thing about Hope's situation was simple. There was a keyword in how she acted. Which was the word "acted" itself. Despite the act, the others could see the pain she tried to hide behind her forced smiles and expressions.

No one talked to her about it though. They were also dealing with the same thing. They were also acting like they were better than they actually were.

So, how could they talk to someone else about it? Although it was not a healthy thing to do. It was better than shutting yourself off from the world. At least there is some form of venting going on in the method they chose. They had things to do to keep their minds off the depressing matter.

Maybe they will get better through the method. Then they can stop acting and be genuine instead.

After all, it wasn't like Muku was dead or anything. They still had hope of seeing him one day. As long as they had their necklaces. They could confidently keep living on.

As for the last person missing from the table... It was the most unfortunate person in the whole ordeal. That's right, Chloe.

I like the others. She had taken too heavy a hit. She didn't just take a hit from Muku's sudden departure, but her father also died right in front of her.

She was so broken she couldn't even act like she was okay. Even her strong personality couldn't brave through such a situation. So, unsurprisingly, she shut herself off from the world.

She hadn't left her room since the day she woke up. Which was the same day Hope did. She hasn't spoken a word either. Nor has she eaten anything.

Being a Rank Three she could go a whole month without eating as long as she doesn't get into fights.

However, she had gotten into a fight already. A big one at that. So, that time was halved. She could probably go for a little over a week without eating in her current state. Of which, a few days had already been removed.

Unfortunately, there wasn't anything the others could do. They tried to talk to her but she didn't respond at all. Her eyes looked dead as she stared at the wall in front of her.

She didn't even attend to her own father's burial. At least not physically. The others had made sure to bury him close to the mansion. At an area, she could "see" with her mana sense.

And they felt her presence when they did it. Which gave them hope. At the very least, she didn't seem to be completely dead inside. There was still hope for recovery...

"Sigh, I never expected such a thing from that girl" Audrey commented.

"I think we should just let her be. Iris said that she isn't in complete control of herself right now, right?. Maybe she'll get better and come to us herself" Emily responded.

Though what she said made sense. The others could see that she was the most unwilling to accept it. She was just forcing herself to be strong out of helplessness. Jade really was too good at avoiding them, after all.

"Yeah. You're right. We should focus on keeping up for now. I'm certain she is killing beasts like crazy out there" Audrey replied, shifting the focus of the topic a little bit.

If they focus on keeping up with her. The situation wouldn't seem as bleak as it did at that moment.

"Yeah," Emily and the others agreed.

The room returned to silence again. However, they could all tell that it was a little brighter than before.

Audrey smiled a little bit. If the situation keeps on improving like that. She'll definitely be able to get the team out of the gutters and make Muku proud when he returns.

The group soon finished their meal. The one in charge of the dishes for that day took them for a wash. The others rested for a bit then left the mansion. Going their different ways to hunt once more.

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A little while later. Somewhere in the forest...

Hope could be seen sitting on top of a dead bull-like LR3 beast. All of its body had turned purple. It was obviously poisoned to death.

"Until when are you going to hide from everyone?" Hope suddenly asked a question. Seemingly to no one in particular since she was alone.

"Until he gets back..." A voice responded from a tree top behind Hope.

"Why?" Hope asked without looking back. She was familiar with the scene after all.

Jade would trail her whenever she was out hunting. Whenever she tries to interact with her face-to-face, Jade avoids her. Always maintaining a position behind Hope.

"I need to stay sharp to get as strong as I can before he returns. If I rejoin the others. Eventually, I will soften again. Then I won't be able to get as strong as I would have gotten if I stayed away" Jade replied calmly.

"Why? Isn't that unfair to the others? Especially Emily? You are aware that your avoidance of her hurts her feelings a lot, right? Why are you so obsessed with strength when it hurts the ones closest to you?" Hope continued speaking.

"I know it hurts her. However, it's temporary pain. And I'm not obsessed with strength. I'm obsessed with preventing what happened before from happening again. I refuse to let it happen again. For that I need strength. I need to stay sharp. No matter what!" Jade replied. Her voice exposed a lot more emotion than before.

"Oh, so that's how you see it. At least you don't seem to be affected by your forced awakening as much as Iris said you were. However, I don't get it. Why do you constantly appear in front of me though... Well, I guess I should say behind me" Hope spoke. Her tone was unchanged. The way she spoke made it seem like Muku's absence had made her mature a lot in just a few days.

"Because you and I saw everything. I know that you're a lot closer to breaking than they think you are. You're barely holding on. They can stop you from doing something crazy in there. I can stop you from doing something crazy out here. That is, if you ever shall break" Jade replied. Her voice had returned to its previous calm state.

"Oh? Is that so? I guess I should thank you then. It's always good to have someone who worries. However, there's no need. I won't break. I won't do anything stupid. I will see my big brother again" Hope replied. Seemingly moved by Jade's words. She then expressed her conviction in staying strong. Which was raw and true. Jade could feel it.

"If you say so. I'll leave you to it then. See you again soon..." Jade spoke a few words and disappeared before Hope could say anything.

"Tsk, I'm more worried about you breaking. Not me" Hope spoke to herself in a low voice as she got up from the beast's body.

She then continued her hunting. If there was a core in the beast. Jade would have mentioned it...

Chapter 229: Special way of showing love

Back on Muku's side. A few days earlier...

"Okay. That's just anticlimactic."

The statement reverberated in the room after Muku spoke. His eyes were focused on the last remaining dog.

Instead of the angry beast waiting for its revenge he was expecting. He was met by a beast close to death's door. The dog had moved further into the room as it tried to get up.

However, it was failing miserably. It seemed that while the axe didn't manage to kill it. It still managed to do significant damage to the killer dog's brain. Which messed with its motor skills among other things.

The killer dog's eyes were out of focus. It tried to get up, but its back legs seemed to be unresponsive. The front legs also seemed to buckle from time to time. The killer dog was pretty much rendered useless by one axe to the head.

There was no recovery from that. Even if Muku left it like that. It would die on its own. However, he wasn't so heartless. Not to mention that he needed the physical improvement it provided for his coming battles.

With that thought in mind, Muku readied his axe and slowly made his way towards the dog. He was being cautious since he had just faked a serious injury to gain an advantage a while back. So, who knows if the killer dog noticed him and copied him?

It was highly unlikely, but not impossible. It's not like he'd lose anything from being cautious anyway.

Fortunately for him, the dog wasn't faking an injury. He soon got in place and swiftly put it out of its misery.

His physical capabilities were improved again. He was getting closer and closer to the strength of the dogs. He felt a little proud of his accomplishments so far. Especially the fact that he did it all without mana.

"Good job son! I knew you could do it! Now you only have seven more rooms and the surrounding area to go!" Mrs C's happy voice sounded.

Muku smiled at her praise. However, his expression soon turned dark when she reminded him of all the work that still had to be done. It had taken pretty much everything in him to deal with four beasts. So

what if there was a physical enhancement after every kill. The damn dogs wouldn't just lay down and die after all!

"You know mother... You have a special way of showing your love. You always go out of your way to crush my happiness" Muku replied while sarcastically calling her mother.

"Hehe, I don't know what you mean. In fact, I'm such a good mother I was going to tell you how many beasts are on the next floor. However, you don't seem to want me to say anything. So, I'll keep my words to myself. Good luck, son!" Mrs C replied in a jovial mood, as always.

She seemed even more happy than before actually. Which was probably because Muku called her mother. Of course, she conveniently ignored the obvious sarcasm. A win is a win, after all.

"Sigh... Please, Mother, can you spare a little bit of your vast knowledge for this prodigal son of yours" Muku, who knew the importance of such information, didn't mind sucking up to her.

It would help him come up with a game plan. Unlike when he pretty much had to wing it with the first four killer dogs. Though it was their strength which caught him off guard.

"Well, if you put it that way. I guess I can spare you a little bit of my information. And you better use that glib tongue of yours for a good cause. I want many daughters-in-law and even more grandkids okay? Anyway, the next floor has a few more beasts than the current one. Which I'm sure you've already guessed. The increase isn't by that much though. It's just eleven more," Mrs C, who didn't mind some brown nosing from her son, told him what he wanted to know.

Of course, she wouldn't be herself if she didn't add some unwanted comments in there. Which Muku tried to ignore. However, he couldn't help but wonder if she already knew about his situation back home with the girls... Who was he kidding, she probably did.

Well, fortunately, she wasn't against him having many wives, right? Wait! What does her opinion have to do with anything?!

Anyway, he didn't linger on that subject for too long as her next words struck him like thunder...

"Is my math wrong or is four plus eleven more equal to fifteen?" Muku rhetorically asked whilst stuck in disbelief.

"Your math is definitely correct. There's going to be fifteen on the next floor. Don't worry too much. They all have the same strength as the ones you dealt with. I'm sure you can do it!" Mrs C replied.

Though she knew the question was rhetorical, she still replied to it. She just couldn't stop herself. Muku's expression looked away too comical. She just had to add a little salt to the wound.

Hearing her confrontation. Muku slumped down to the floor. All his strength left his body.

He was expecting eight beasts at most! Even that would have been a hard fight. But fifteen!? That's almost twice as much as his expectations!

Can't she ever play by the book?! Well, whatever, he was certain of one thing now. His new mother definitely had some sadistic tendencies. She enjoyed seeing him suffer!

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In room zero...

Mrs C could be seen sitting on a luxurious chair with little Raya in her arms.

In front of her was a huge holographic screen. Muku's distraught expression was shown on the screen in 8K Ultra HD! The lady was clearly up-to-date with technological advancements!

A smile was plastered on her face as she looked on. Little Raya's uncontrollable laughter reverbed throughout the room. She was clearly enjoying Muku's misery. She laughed so hard tears were coming out of her eyes.

"Aren't you a little too happy little one? Especially for someone who's about to face your own trials?" Mrs C's voice suddenly rang in Raya's ears.

The moment Raya heard her words. Her laughter instantly seized. She felt a cold chill go down her spine as she hesitantly looked back at Mrs C. She hoped that she heard wrong.

"I'm sorry, I think I heard you incorrectly... Or not, b...but my physical capabilities are already at their limits, especially after that magical fruit's effects" Raya hopes to play it off by saying that she heard wrong.

Then she would casually say she had something to take care of and escape. She wanted no part in Muku's suffering at all!

However, a slight smile with narrowed eyes from Mrs C made her instantly give up on that idea. She chose to use reason instead.

"Oh, Honey, there is no such thing as limits. That's just something people use as an excuse to give up" Mrs C replied with a slight smile on her face.

Before Raya could say anything she had long disappeared from Mrs C's hands. She found herself in her old form. A horned serpent in a familiar forest.

While she was certain that it was just a replica. She couldn't help but shrink back a little. She didn't have any fond memories of the forest.

Her path had been a tough one since birth. Being the only one with a Monarch's bloodline among her many siblings. Which, of course, got her ostracised soon after breaking out of her eggshell.

While their kind don't stick together like humans or high-level beasts do. They would co-operate in hunts earlier on until they grew up a bit. However, she didn't get that chance just because she had little horns the others didn't have.

It was a rather tough life she had back then. Fortunately, it was at the furthest outskirts of the beast forest. So, she was able to survive on her own.

However, she didn't want to experience that again. It had traumatized her a bit. She was extremely happy when she managed to slip into the human world back then...

Yet, there she was, being forced to experience the situation again.

"Don't overthink it little one. Your situation is the same as Muku. There's only you and beasts you can face in that forest. So, unlike before, you don't have to be too cautious. Take this chance to face your fears and overcome your trauma. Don't you think it's absurd for a dragon to have a fear of deep forests? Especially when your "new home" is also turning into a forest?" Just when Raya was about to drown in her fears. Mrs C's calming voice sounded.

Raya instantly collected herself. Mrs C's words seemed to have lit a fire in her. She was ready to fight. Ready to hunt.

Unlike before when she lived in the beast forest. She wouldn't avoid the deeper parts anymore! It was time to face her fears! She made her way into the deep forest.

The monster which ruled Muku's city in the first part of the apocalypse was awakened...

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Back in room zero...

"That's right little one. Face your fears. You have a great destiny ahead of you after all... To think you managed to figure out the reason for the trials so quickly. You truly deserve your destiny," Mrs C spoke to herself.

The screen in front of her had been split in two. Half showed Raya who was making her way into the forest.

The other half showed Muku who had recovered from the bleak news. He was already making his way down the stairs.

Mrs C smiled happily as looked on. A mother's joy was evident on her face. As for why she was so invested in her casually acquired son, only she knew...

Chapter 230: Cynocephali...

A few days later...

So, clearing the first trial took Muku a lot more time than he thought. The floors kept on getting more and more absurd, the more he cleared.

The sixth floor had fifty killer dogs. The fifth had a hundred. Both floors required him to run all over the place before he managed to clear them. If he didn't have access to the floors he had already cleared. He would have been screwed for real.

Fortunately, the physical improvements from all the killer dogs he killed were worth it. He was on par with them in strength by the time he was half done with the fifth floor.

Then came the fourth floor. Things got switched up again. Mrs C really knew how to keep him on his toes.

Just when he starts to get comfortable with the system. She changed it every time. And that was the case with the fourth floor. Instead of adding more killer dogs. Which would have made it rather hard for them to even properly fight.

She placed five killer dogs on the floor. Of course, they weren't the same old killer dogs he had gotten used to. They were a new breed. They were five Psuedo-R2 killer dogs.

Though calling them that didn't seem very accurate. It would be more appropriate to call them cynocephali.

Their bodies didn't just look like monstrous dogs. They now looked a lot more terrifying than that. They stood on two legs and had five fingers like humans with beastly claws, of course.

They stood around two metres tall. With large dog heads on their shoulders. The intelligence that radiated from their eyes also improved a lot for their predecessors.

The moment he saw them. Muku knew he was screwed. Even if his strength was also in the Psuedo-R2 range by that point.

His strength was around 10% Psuedo-R2 at most. Theirs, from their aura, was at least 30%. And again, there were five of them. So yeah, he was definitely screwed.

Especially when Mrs C mentioned something which almost made him choke on his saliva. The forms he was seeing were actually R5 forms the species will only gain access to at, well, rank five.

Which meant that she had personally tweaked them to make life harder for Muku. Of course, she denied such claims by saying that she was just a host.

However, who would believe such a thing? Before he could complain about it, she enticed him with her words. She told him how fighting them was to his benefit. This was because it would give him insight into how R5s fight. Which would definitely be useful in the future.

Muku wanted to disagree. However, he couldn't. What she said made sense, after all. So, he could only begrudgingly agree.

In normal cases, he would make himself feel better by plotting his revenge. However, something told him that such ideas would be pointless. So, he just sucked it up and continued pushing forward.

And so, with axe in hand. The young man charged forth! The time for tricks was gone. Some battles could only be handled directly!

Speaking of the axe. It definitely wasn't the same as the ones at the school. It just looked like them. It was way too strong to be made from the same materials as the ones from before.

Which he was thankful for. At least Mrs C wasn't completely unreasonable. If she was, the axe would have been broken a long time ago. Yet there it was, still as strong as ever. Bloody but strong.

Anyway, the adrenaline-driven Muku made his way toward the five cynocephali. They did the same.

Soon, their dance of death began. Muku swung, kicked and punched. The cynocephali snapped and clawed.

With his experience and martial arts background. Muku managed to effectively deal with the humanoid creatures.

He didn't manage to grasp the advantage or anything like that. However, he did manage to stop the other side from grasping it as well. He would weave in between them and use their numbers against them.

Both parties suffered losses and procured gains. Within the first few minutes. Everyone involved was pretty much a bloody mess. Muku was the most bloody one for obvious reasons. He had been fighting for a long time, after all. His whole body was covered with claw marks of varying severity.

However, all that was ignored by him. All he cared about was enjoying the battle. That's right, he was enjoying the battle. He was finally starting to understand why Jade sometimes goes crazy when fighting.

If she saw him now. She would probably have a smug expression on her face while saying "I told you so". After that, she'd probably start feeling jealous and end up jumping into the battle. Which would, of course,, lead to an argument with Muku.

Bang!

"Argh!" Muku screamed in pain as he was kicked away.

He seemed to have lost focus for a second while thinking about Jade. Which obviously cost him. He wasn't in a battle in which he could afford to get distracted after all.

Fortunately, he managed to collect himself just in time. He spun midair and landed on his feet. He didn't lose his axe like before. Like they say, "Once bitten, twice shy"...

"Cough! Cough! I totally deserved that. I shouldn't have disrespected you all by getting distracted. Don't worry, it won't happen again" Muku spoke.

His words were directed at the cynocephali. The five beasts looked at him confusedly for a moment. They couldn't understand what the hell he was saying.

While they looked like R5s, they weren't legit R5s after all. They also weren't special cases like Raya, who was intelligent from Rank One.

Well, it's not like they had to know what he said. All they needed to do was kill him and eat his flesh. Which was taking a lot more time and effort than they thought it would.

This confused them a lot. He was clearly weaker than them. Yet he still managed to injure them just as much as they were injuring him. The worst part was how he seemed to have already been injured when they first began fighting.

It was all because of the weird movements he did. The way he managed to skip in between them almost made it seem like he was a slippery snake.

With frustration from being unable to kill Muku even after such a long battle. The cynocephali charged at him again. Their anger was evident in their barks as they approached.

Another round of slashing and scratching began. However, the beasts noticed that Muku was getting less and less injured by them. Which confused them.

They didn't know that he was getting more and more familiar with how they attacked. Unlike humans with all their techniques and whatnot. Beasts had simple straightforward attack patterns.

Although the attack patterns were simple and straightforward. They were still very effective and dangerous. Which Muku's bloody body could attest to.

However, the greatest talent humans have has always been adapting. Humans can pretty much adapt to anything after a while. As long as it was something reasonable.

And the attack patterns of the cynocephali happen to fall into the adaptable category. So, Muku, an outstanding member of the human race managed to adapt after a while...

Soon enough, he had pretty much gone into ultra-instinct mode. He would dodge every move made by the beasts without even looking.

A while later, the first cynocephalus fell to his axe. Its fall not only weakened the other cynocephali's resolve, but it also improved Muku's strength by a bit.

While it wasn't a lot. It was significant enough to lead to the quick fall of two more cynocephali. Like the first one. They had their throats cut open by Muku's axe.

The remaining two immediately went into a panic. They were heavily wounded and their teammates had been killed. So, the obvious thing was to make a break for it, right?

However, there was a slight pause before the decision to run was made in their heads. That was enough for Muku to kill one of them. The other one instantly made a break for it. It was so scared it ran on all fours with its tail tucked between its legs.

It seemed that it never heard of the golden rule of battle... Never turn your back on an enemy.

"Howl!"

Bang!

The cynocephalus howled in pain and lost its balance. It then slammed hard into the wall in front of it.

Muku had made it okay for its blunder. He threw his axe at it. Which, by the combined force of luck and experience, hit the beast right on the back of the leg.

Which was a devastating attack that immediately took it off its feet due to its fast speed.

Muku didn't waste time coming after it. He was already holding two stakes in hand as he ran forth.

Before the beast could get up. He was already in the air above it. It raised its head as it tried to get up. Which pretty much set it up for some pain.

Muku stabbed the two stakes which had been fixed directly into the beast's eyes. Stabbing the eyes was always a sure-kill move as long as you got it right.

Even if you don't manage to directly kill your target. You'll at least take out their vision. So, it was a guaranteed success no matter which of the two it was.

Fortunately for Muku. He managed to stab deep and hard enough that he killed the beast on the spot.

He immediately got the feedback from its death. Which led him to directly slump down on the beast's back. Which didn't have spikes like its predecessor.

"Another floor conquered..." Muku spoke in a tired voice before falling asleep on the spot.

He was drained both physically and mentally...