

Last System 267

Chapter 267 Oppressive Feeling

"Okay..." I muttered while midair.

And then I landed.

The momentum of my lunge that carried me upwards like that turned my landing into a crash site.

Instead of just landing on my own two feet, I hit the ground with my very ass, only for it to drag itself through the dirt and mud, leaving a long, thin trail in its wake.

"My ass!" I whined silently.

As much as I wanted to scream my pain out, I knew better than uttering any loud noises in the forest.

Sure, at my current level, hardly any monster could even be considered a threat.

The animals that I used to hunt in the past were now nothing more but cannon fodder for me. The second any of them would dare to retaliate, I would just smash several bolts into them before grabbing the loot and moving on.

But in the forest, no one ever knew when they would encounter a monster strong enough to give them the run on their money. And since this is not a game and I don't have any respawn button, I dared not to take excessive risks.

'Still,' I thought, gathering myself up from the ground and taking a quick glance to the back at the devastation my landing brought upon the forest.

The trees were burnt and broken, the leftover from a ranged battle I engaged with a random, feather-throwing monster.

There was a burning trail cutting right across the forest. It was a remnant of where I unleashed my elemental power for the first time, only to realize how basically useless it was.

Back at the auction hall, I learned what made the energy behind the fire act the way it did. Yet, while it was possible to infuse fires with my own energy to smoothen it out and make its energy possible for me to use...

Doing the same but in reverse turned out to be pretty possible, but not only extremely hard to do, but also extremely cost-ineffective.

That's the very reason why there was only one trail of burned-out vegetation in the forest. If using elements turned out to be any easier, I would likely burn the whole place down just for the quirk of doing so!

'I'm running out of time,' I thought, raising my head to the skies, only to realize that they were covered by the treetops of the surrounding trees.

But even without judging the location of the sun, I could tell more or less how much time had passed.

It's been already a day since I left the outpost in my quest to take care of my inner problems. And the last day was quite busy for me too, because I managed to take general stock of every change that happened to me since I advanced.

First off, new ranks and statistics.

Just like before, the amount of mana necessary to advance was so stupidly high that even the system gave up on using numbers alone, adding a letter M to emphasize millions in its very description.

Yet, as annoying as it was to find myself standing before this massive gap, there was no denying that I was already a lot stronger than I used to.

With my current stock of mana, I could easily treat mage's tower as just another spell, keeping it raised for extended periods of time.

But that was only the basic improvement to what I already had, not something that appeared out of nowhere and only because I managed to rank up.

But that didn't mean I didn't receive skills like that either.

Yesterday, when I finally managed to calm myself down, I took a moment to inspect my system. And the second I did so, several selection screens appeared, forcing me to make a choice.

[Shatter Stone +/Slinging Stone/Exploding Stone]

It was a short selection window that refused to leave my vision no matter how much I tried to fiddle around with it.

Pushing it away didn't work, and I was too scared to wave it away, wary of accidentally making a selection.

After learning that I couldn't do anything to make this window disappear, nor were there any explanations provided about the meaning of those words, I ended up selecting the shatter stone.

It wasn't a result of a well-thought analysis. I saw the plus by the name of the spell, so I clicked on it, hoping it would be better than its counterparts.

The selection window disappeared... Only for another to pop out right away.

In the end, I had to make my selection three times, ending with shatter stone, aura wielder, and repel skills. What's more, the second I picked the three skills out of the total pool of nine, the numbers in my status suddenly quivered, only for all my skills to raise a level!

I ended up with just a single thing left that I couldn't really crack. An empty slot in a new status window appeared after the recent change to my system.

Enlightenment: NULL

Ascendance: NULL

What those two things were? Was I supposed to do something else before advancing? Or did I miss a vital step that kept me locked and even unaware of that very fact?

All in all, my advancement increased my power by leaps and bounds. Even the sheer fact that I could keep my mage's tower almost indefinitely made the entire growth worth it as it allowed me to turn my already powerful skills into tools of mayhem.

Yet, no matter how hard I tried, no matter how great my three new skills were...

It all felt empty.

For the first time since I appeared in this world, growing to the next stage lacked this feeling of umph, of a qualitative change happening to me.

Sure, I was more powerful than I was before. Due to the greater mana in my pool, I now also obtained a lot of freedom in how I was using my skills instead of being forced to strive for perfect optimization of every spell.

But all in all, my growth turned out way smaller than I hoped it would be. Especially given how Ascendancy was the last rank that anyone could reach with just enough effort and luck.

'Well then, I wonder what I'm supposed to do for the rest of the day,' I thought, once again raising my eyes to the sky only for my view to be blocked by the green treetops of the forest all around.

Yet, just as I raised my head, I noticed that there was something wrong.

I could feel a strangely oppressive aura looming over my head.

It was a feeling similar to how I felt when I first encountered a monster way above my paygrade. Yet, as seconds turned into minutes and the aura grew more and more powerful, I realized that it wasn't the case.

There was something different about this aura than just the oppression created by an overwhelming amount of energy. It was different... But at the same time, somehow slightly familiar.

'What the hell is this?' I thought, looking around in hopes of finding the monster powerful enough to ooze such a domineering aura. Yet, even when I rushed into my search, I couldn't find a single viable candidate.

'Now that I think about it, there shouldn't be any problem if I just go and watch her participate in the tournament, right?' I thought to myself, trying to turn my thoughts away from the oppressive feeling that only continued to grow in intensity.

I still had yet to deal with my emotional trauma. Initially, I planned to do it right after discovering my new limits and finding a safe spot... But as things were right now, I still had to deal with the source of that oppressive aura first.

'If I recall correctly, we should be entering the night soon,' I thought, rushing around the forest with the techniques I learned from Lucius. Even though I was no longer a contractor, the ability to rapidly move through the forest proved at all times useful now.

Finally, after several minutes spent rushing through the forest, I found it.

I found the monster powerful enough to be the source of this strange oppression. And so, I didn't wait even for a second.

With my Mage's Tower raised, I sent a barrage of my improved bolts at the monster, showering it with an endless stream of offensive magic.

Yet, it wasn't enough. Even though my barrage was constantly chipping away at the monster's health, it would take a long time before I could get actually down it like that.

It wasn't that my magic somehow turned weaker, from something capable of shattering the reality into just as a pebble of magic.

It was the defenses of this monster that allowed it to withstand the barrage by simply guarding against it.

But there was one more trick up my sleeve that didn't involve testing my new abilities out.

Keeping up the barrage and having my wardens set up around the place, I started to close the distance to the crab-like monster.

For every bolt that the monster would cut with its scissor-like arms, I would take a step closer. And once I was close enough...

I unleashed my disturb ability.

In order to use an unenhanced version of it, I had no other choice but to drop my mage's tower. For a short window, only the shots that I had already fired remained in the air, putting me on a tight schedule before the monster would recover and have a window to attack.

But when my ability kicked in, the crab could no longer guard itself against my attacks. And the second a single bolt of mine reached its delicate parts, the fight was over.

"That wasn't even that hard," I thought, looking down at the steaming corpse of a monster, not even sure if I should bother extracting the stone from this stinky mess.

And then, I couldn't help but shrug.

The monster was dead; there was no denying it. And if that was the case, then why didn't this oppressive aura disappear?

As this oppression only continued to grow, one would expect to be able to pinpoint its source... but that didn't happen.

For god-knows why the source of this strange aura remained as elusive as it was before.

'I wonder if I will make it before tomorrow,' I thought, raising my head once again.

And once again, the treetops shielded the sky from my prying eyes. But this time, they couldn't shield everything.

Noticing a strange, violet light, I quickly jumped up and headed for the treetops myself, puzzled by spotting something like that.

But the second I climbed to the layer high enough to have a look at the stuff above...

I froze.

Because a massive, violet meteor was hurling its fat self right at me!

'There is no denying it,' I thought, swallowing down a gulp of my saliva. 'This is the source of this oppressive feeling!' I thought, tightening my hands into fists as I prepared my mental self for the fight.

Then, my lips twisted in an ugly grimace

'Why does it feel so familiar, though?'