

Mana 25

Chapter 25 - Star City

Morning of the next day, I was in the back of a black sedan watching cars rush by as we went down a long road. When we left the roads of Outer Bank X city, we had to pass the only checkpoint for those leaving the city. The checkpoint was near the entrance to an old bridge that was the only road leading towards inner cities. To the left and right of the checkpoint was an expanding wall that circled around the entire city

It was mostly hunters or highly influential people that were able to move around in the empire. The two titles were actually interchangeable as no influential person chose to not awaken

The driver pulled out sparkling military credentials to the Hunter Guards standing by and we were soon driving away from the city. We went across the bridge when I looked back for the last time to see the city surrounded by a wall, not knowing if I would ever return

The scenery around us quickly changed to destroyed buildings and architectures as we saw guard posts every 10s of miles down the road. I couldn't imagine the job of these people that stood in The Barrens for days, only switching their shifts when someone else came to relieve them

The Barrens were the empty and destroyed lands that nobody was living in. You would only find roaches or rats, or mutated animals that were hungry enough to attack anything there. The only people who took the post as guards along these long roads leading from cities were people that had nothing in life and were offered an olive branch from the government

They were contracted to work for them after they were given the resources to awaken and had to follow the contract for a specified time. I felt sad thinking of the people that had no option but to resort to these kinds of work

We drove through The Barrens with no complication, passing other cities surrounded by walls throughout the day. The road got cleaner and cleaner as we went further inland and we saw guard posts more frequently, eventually leaving behind the dystopian Barrens and becoming exposed to a few green trees

The greenery kept on increasing as the hours passed and we were soon nearing a huge walled-off city in the distance. This city had a slightly taller wall surrounding it with huge convoys of military trucks moving in and out

It was definitely much more bustling than the cities I've seen on the way here. We were able to get inside after the driver flashed his papers on the guard's face in an annoyed tone as the process was much more thorough this time around

The inside of the city...was filled with lights. It had taken the entire day to get here, and after the time it took for us to bypass the gates night had already arrived. I was able to see the city come to life with countless lights shining into the night.

We had arrived at Star City.

The streets were so clean with huge buildings pointing to the sky all around us. It was a stark contrast to the destroyed lands we had passed by this morning as if we were in a completely different world.

Masses of people that definitely had happier faces than those I have been used to move around busily

I watched the beauty of the city as if I was back to a time when no dungeons had appeared as if I had traveled in time to the bustling metropolis I used to know.

The scenery constantly changed as we moved further in. I had counted multiple blue monoliths so far, seeing a few rank F, E, and D dungeons based on their size. I was able to see blue monoliths similar in size to [Solael's Castle] after we passed another checkpoint to go further into the city, counting more than 5 as time passed

The large city continued on as we passed through roads with hunters dressed in military outfits patrolling, arriving at a huge compound that had a sizable monolith with a light orange hue shimmering around it

This monolith was almost twice as big as a rank C monolith, its pressure coming down on me and taking my breath away. I got out of the car and breathed in the air of the city, feeling it to be much fresher than what I've been used to

The driver led the way as we entered the huge compound that was teeming with movement with a scan of his ID. The military compound had a variety of eye-catching buildings all around, with a ton of armored vehicles going in or out. We arrived at the tallest building and went inside

I found myself waiting for a few minutes while seated onto a very comfortable sofa before an imposing man came out. He had a long scar on his jawline with his tanned face glistening in the bright room. A powerful voice broke out from his smiling face

"Mr. Osmont, I was very glad you could make it." The rough voice rang out clearly as I observed the man in front of me, noticing him to be very different from the people I've come in contact with.

I smiled back and said "It's only right I come for something as important as this"

The discussion went well after this as the man introduced himself. He was Vice Admiral Magnar, earning my goodwill as the first thing he mentioned after his name was how he wanted to personally come to meet me as soon as I arrived

"Now, I know you must be tired from the trip, so formalities can wait until tomorrow. Commander Kyle will lead you to your resting area, where food and...entertainment will be provided"

The Vice Admiral finished his introduction and left as I began thinking about the words he had said. Entertainment?

Commander Kyle led me away and we walked to the living quarters while I thought about how I planned to live in this city. The first thing on my mind was finding out exactly what major threat was quickly approaching, and the second was my capabilities to solo that huge dungeon monolith near this compound

I'm already assuming that the first time I'll dive in it I'll be accompanied by a team, which is a safe way to play it as I currently have no idea about the increase in difficulty from rank C to B. After we finish the first dive, I'll make my decision then

We passed a few serious faces and I was given a smooth blue ID card that only had a golden letter B on it. Kyle mentioned that this card allowed access for a majority of the facilities in here, and also had access to the room in front of us. I thanked him for taking me around and he saluted and left

I scanned the key card and opened the door, expectant to see the living quarters of rank B hunters that the government provided. The room was slightly bigger than the large rooms in the Pristine Residency, boasting even more luxurious looks all around it. On the table were a wide array of foods and next to it was a huge bed...where a woman with a statuesque figure was flashing the brightest smile. Oh?

Chapter 26 The looming threat

So, last night was different to say the least, as I found myself getting some sleep later than usual. The food and...everything else hit the spot, taking my mind off the many thoughts constantly clashing in my head. A hunter's stamina was nothing to laugh at

I went out of the room early in the morning to walk around the living quarters and observe the compound a bit more. Even though it was this early, there was already bustling activities with people and trucks moving about

I enjoyed the cool morning air and looked towards the huge monolith a distance away, itching to go towards it and give it a go, but I calmed myself down and walked back to the living quarters. Someone quickly called out my name, it was Commander Kyle saying that the Vice Admiral was looking for me. I nodded at him to lead the way and found myself led into an office room that had an abundant amount of folders and papers lying around

"I apologize for the mess, please have a seat" The imposing Vice Admiral has his usual air of confidence as I sat down opposite him

I didn't waste any time as I asked the thing that was heavily weighing on my mind. Magnar paused for a second before pulling out a red folder and laying out multiple photos across the table

"These are aerial pictures of The Barrens quite a distance away from the Empire. They were taken over a span of a few weeks"

The pictures showed a terrifying sight of small dark dots that were uncountable, and large mass that could clearly be seen in the middle of it all. The large mass had a patterned obsidian shell that covered its entirety, only having a large head with pointed horns come out in the front

The pictures gave me a shock because these things were probably even bigger than they appeared on there. The rest of the pictures showed a similar scene, making me prompt the general to continue as I didn't grasp everything yet

"These pictures were taken at a different location each time. They are moving"

The Vice Admiral had a cold expression as he looked at the pictures and said this. My mind was moving to keep up as I took all of this in and asked him "How long do we have?"

Magnar looked at me with a difficult expression before sighing "That's the problem, we don't know. It could be in a few weeks or a month, but we cannot correctly track them because of their unpredictability."

A few weeks? Possibly a month? Phew, I let out a relieved sigh as I heard and laughed out loud, startling the man before me. I looked towards him and said "If it is a few weeks, then we have more than enough time to prepare"

I knew myself, and it was why I said this. Barely a week after I awakened and I was already standing in a position to hear information that many people had no idea about. If I was given another week or two? I was confident in getting much stronger than where I am right now. The question is, what strength will be enough to contend with the huge beast and the things it was bringing this way?

I asked the Vice Admiral whether they were confident in pushing these monsters back and his reply was less than favorable, adopting a dark expression that contained a trace of anger. He spent the next two minutes ranting about how they were not fully prepared, but the people at the top were still hesitant to institute measures to prepare for what was coming

The cities in the outer periphery of the Empire had to start the process of migrating soon, or the military needed to increase and institute its main defenses past those cities and prepare for the fight that was coming. Otherwise, a tremendous amount of people would be sacrificed for nothing

I listen to this as my mind went back to all the cities I passed when coming here, and one of the cities at the outermost of the Empire, Outer Bank X.

My gaze turned cold when I looked back at the Vice Admiral. He saw my eyes and then said "I've already rallied the relevant people though. Even though there is still some push back, we have already begun the process of moving supplies and equipment to the front lines of defense in the outer perimeters"

He continued when he saw my gaze calming down "While this will be an ongoing process to fortify our defenses on the border, we also need Hunters to lend their help in diving into dungeons and bringing out as many resources as possible. [Core]s, [Item]s, [Skill Book]s, they will all go towards the awakened soldiers that will be giving up their lives to fight on the front line"

He finished with a sad expression as he mentioned the people that would be the first line of contact between us and monsters. I thought about all this and asked how they were doing things currently

"We have 3 teams of 6 rank B Hunters alternating like clockwork to clear the rank B dungeon, [Mangrove Swamp]. The three teams are able to clear the dungeon 3 times a day and have a rest period in between, with other similar teams acting the same manner in nearby cities, but we don't know if it'll be enough." He looked at me as he said the next words

"That's where people like you come in. I haven't met any rank B hunters that have been able to dive alone into a rank C dungeon repeatedly, so your power should be among the highest. I would love your cooperation to hasten this process with one of the teams we have clearing [Mangrove Swamp]" He said these words carefully while watching my face

I thought over everything and the amount of time we possibly had before nodding my head. "When is the next team diving?"

A relieved expression appeared on his face as he told me the next team was going in within an hour.

We then discussed how the resources were split up between the hunter teams diving in [Mangrove Swamp]. The military would pay handsomely for all the [Core]s, [Item]s, and [Skill]s they received while providing for all their needs. If you became a hunter enlisted in the military, you would be given a rank with even more benefits

I thought about everything and decided to go with the plan of seeing the [Mangrove Swamp] while diving with a team. I would decide how to move forward from there. The talk with the Vice Admiral finished on a happy note, with him leading me to personally meet the rank B hunting squad I would be joining today

Half the group had already gotten together and I got the chance to meet the first genuine rank B hunters. Their mannerisms were a notch above other hunters and their bodies seemed packed with power that could explode at any moment. These were rank B Hunters that could bring their attributes all the way to 250. When paired up with corresponding skills, it was a deadly force to behold

The first 3 that I met were 2 Berserkers, one holding a broad sword that was just as tall as him and the other holding long blades on either side of him. The third one was a short woman that was about 4'1 in height, and she was surprisingly the Knight of the team. The power emanating from her in no way matched her stature as a huge tower shield larger than her was strapped to her back

I got acquainted with the three while the rest of the team came in. They were all relatively polite with a mild interest in their eyes when we were talking, with the only one different being the short woman who went by the name Lana Stone. She was staring at me with eyes that blazed with fire as she showed much more interest than the others

The remaining team members were 2 mages, a man and a woman dressed in long purple robes with long staffs sparkling with ice elements. The last one was another Knight, this one with a round golden shield covering half of his body and a flail on his other hand

More introductions followed and the 6 usual rank B hunters that were about to dive into the [Mangrove Swamp] were joined by me.

Chapter 27 [Mangrove Swamp]

I didn't like the [Mangrove Swamp] the instant we were transferred in. We appeared in the middle of muddy ground where I could feel my feet sink in a couple of inches. All around us were huge mangrove trees that shot to the sky. The smell was horrendous

From the information the hunters gave me before we came, this land where we were transferred to was the innermost small patch of land surrounded by a muddy swamp. Our enemies would be coming all around us from the innermost ring of the swamp

The swamp was special as it had multiple rings. The first wave of enemies we would be facing would all be from the first ring, and the moment all those enemies were killed, a barrier between the innermost ring and the second wider ring would dissipate.

The moment that barrier dissipated, all the monsters from the second ring would rush towards you. There were 5 rings in the entire swamp, with the fifth ring releasing the BOSS. This really was a killer

dungeon. I didn't like the sticky and hard to move in environment, but my mind couldn't help but think of the possibilities of this dungeon with my abilities

To prevent the complete wipeout of the hunting squads, the hunters designated one of the monsters they faced with the title of [Princess]. They could kill all other monsters besides this [Princess], she had to be protected at all cost. Otherwise, the moment she dies, the 2nd barrier will break and more enemies will rush in before they could catch their breath

I understood their entire system and soon began to feel the earth trembling beneath my feet. Humongous monsters were coming.

The first one entering my eyes was a 4-meter large alligator, its huge jaws wide open as it lunged at our group. I instantly cast [Flames of Torment] and flung the thick pillar of flames forward as if it were a spearheading directly into the open jaws

SSSS!

Sounds of meat being burnt rang out, with a burnt smell right after as the inside of the alligator was destroyed by the rotating pillar of flames. I was thankful that this rank D skill had reached 100 proficiency and continued to be enhanced by support skills that allowed it to take down rank B monsters

"Haha, good work newbie!" The short tank, Lana Stone, was holding the tower shield twice her size shouted as she and the rest of the group members moved to block and attack the other incoming alligators

"I'll hold on to the [Princess]!" The other tank with a flail and golden shield said as his body glowed blue and withstood the charges of other alligators. The berserker with the broadsword held his sword now enveloped with flames and swiped at the neck of another one, making a clear clean-cut as if there was no resistance from their scaly armor

The other berserker with two swords struck out and unleashed a huge cross-shaped sword light that went forward to butcher another set of alligators. The two mages weren't lagging behind as they had already cast their spells. The area in front of them quickly became icy and froze all the incoming alligators, which is when the berserkers came in and shattered them with a swing of their swords. The mages then pulled back behind Lana before continuing to cast other spells

I liked their teamwork and began moving seriously myself. 10 golden swords appeared in the air and rushed down to each of the remaining alligators besides the [Princess], piercing their hard dry scales and nailing them to the ground

I did this repeatedly a few times, taking down tens of alligators before the hunting squad looked at me in surprise after witnessing the enhanced power of [Smite] and shouted words of encouragement soon after as they went to reinforce the Knight with the golden shield on holding off the [Princess].

"Newbie, I knew I felt something special from you. Don't hold back!" Lana said as she went to help hold off the one remaining alligator, her small body powerfully moving the large tower shield as if it was weightless

The two Knights rotated on holding off the [Princess] until 10 minutes passed when everybody had regained most of their energy, a sword bathed in flames ended its life. A sound was heard as if a bubble had popped, before even more tremors could be heard as more alligators rushed in

The squad members always stayed in a tight-knit formation throughout, with the mages and I in the middle, the Knights and Berserkers on the outside. Even while being swarmed by tens of alligators, they held them off successfully

I was casting [Smite] after about every minute thereafter, cleaning off a majority of the alligators without completely overpowering everything and making the short tank throw me even more fiery gazes

The chosen [Princess] of this round was kept alive for 20 minutes before everyone was good to go once more. We repeated this process until the third and fourth barrier was released, the thrill getting to me as I watched these powerful rank B hunters throw out skills in similar power to mine

The release of the fourth barrier was only done after a [Princess] had been held down for half an hour, the hunter squad regaining their strength at their peak before all of their gazes focused on the male mage. They seemed to come to an understanding as they nodded their heads and told me to not go away from them under any circumstances while we began clearing this next wave

I nodded curiously as I waited to see what surprise they were going to pull off as I watched more than a hundred huge alligators desperately clawing their way towards us. The mage held his staff forward as he was protected in a circle and aimed it toward the incoming monsters. Thirty seconds passed with nothing happening, and then the heat began to rapidly rise all around us

I was shocked as I looked up and saw balls of thick magma raining from the sky and barreling down to the large groups of alligators making their way here.

BOOOM!!!

Sounds like bombs were constantly going off could be heard whenever the large balls of magma fell down and burned everything around it, turning any that were near into mincemeat. More than half of the alligators were wiped out with this one attack

My eyes shined as I looked at the heavily panting mage that had fallen to the ground. That type of skill...I wanted one!

My heart was pounding as I replayed the scene of the raining magma balls from before. This skill, I really did want one badly. If I could grab a skill like this, with my abilities...I was imagining how I could easily clear out large groups of monsters in seconds

I was daydreaming too much as someone had to scream to get my attention back to the monsters. "Come on newbie, don't lay there gaping and let's take care of the remaining beasts!"

The miniature tank was laughing crazily as she went forward to block the remaining wave that had reached us. I clicked my tongue while bringing back my focus and cast [Smite] once more. I shaved off a majority of the remaining crocodiles by casting the 10 golden blades every 30 seconds. With the 2 berserkers butchering with their swords, only a [Princess] soon remained. The moment this remaining alligator was killed, An unimaginably large TITAN would be coming for us

I was curious to see how they usually handled this BOSS if their mage chose to cast such a powerful skill just before to avoid being surrounded by hundreds of alligators. Which hunter would come out with another surprise now?

Hi everyone, extra chap surprise after this one because I was able to put in more time yesterday!

Chapter 28 [Mangrove Swamp II]

I was expectantly waiting for another surprise from these genuine rank B hunters. One showed an extremely powerful skill that took out tens of rank B monsters in a blink, although it seemed to be at the cost of her entire mana reserves

The Knights continued to solidly defend even when they had tens of monsters surrounding them, never letting a single one pass through to their squad members.

I wouldn't be waiting long to see the BOSS as half an hour quickly passed and the last [Princess] was killed. I waited to hear the furious tremors of a huge TITAN rushing through the swamp but instead just felt the entire swamp shake once with everything going silent after. It then shook once more a few seconds after

These were...just its steps? I was shocked while feeling the tremors that traveled through the murky waters. The TITAN was slowly making its way towards us in unhurried steps. This was something that would instill fear into the hearts of hunters, but looking at these veterans that had dived into this dungeon multiple times before, they had determined expressions while waiting for the boss

The berserker holding the huge broadsword spoke to me. "Continue casting your golden blades to disrupt it's attention when the fight starts. If you can aim them at its eyes, it'll reduce its combat power even if it can still sense us"

I nodded and prepared to face off against the huge beast on the horizon. It felt like a big mountain was gradually coming closer as the beast neared, its scales shining a dark green color, with its eyes shining a terrifying light. It looked at us a distance away as it's humongous jaws opened and an unnatural sound came out

OOOOOO!!!

The sound was grating to the ears as the huge alligator's mouth now showed rows and rows of glistening sharp teeth. Its upper jaw was much wider than the lower one, causing its teeth to be completely hidden when its jaws were snapped shut. But now that it was open...the sight was horrible to behold.

The man with the flaming sword continued with his directions "Spread out! Knights, keep it busy, and don't get eaten!"

The two Knights nodded as this wasn't the first time, and they took their positions to the left and right of the alligator. The flames on the sword the berserker was holding began to dance wildly before they exploded and went to...cover the entire body of the hunter

I was startled at this type of skill as the man in front of me had his body wreathed in flames. A howl escaped from him as he rushed forward to meet the TITAN head-on. There was a blinding expanse of light as the berserker was flung back right away, looking like a huge fireball.

10 golden blades had quickly appeared and half of them went towards each eye in a straight line. A pained sound rang out as the eyes of the humongous alligator were ruptured with puss leaking out

The berserker with dual blades took this chance to release two large sword lights that smacked onto the right side of the alligator, heavily injuring it. It didn't sit still as it turned to the side and the next thing we knew, a scaly tail twice our size was shining in green light as it whizzed its way towards us

The two Knights shouted as their bodies glowed and transparent shields of light appeared in front both of them when the tail struck

BOOM!

The land shook from the impact, but Knights stood their ground and the strike was stopped. Continuing with the momentum, a flaming berserker rushed in once more, spinning in the air as he constantly released fire blades that struck down on the head of the alligator

I cast [Smite] once again and had the 10 blades aim towards its open jaws when it was howling in pain, rupturing the softer skin inside. The remaining mage that was silent all this time finally acted, her glimmering staff pointed forward as an icicle the size of a car came down and pierced the already mangled head of the TITAN, cutting short its screams as blood and brain matter splattered all around

My blood was boiling as I watched all of these fantastical skills and couldn't wait to start amassing higher ranked skills of my own. I looked at the corpse of the disfigured TITAN and promised myself to run this dungeon at least tens of times in the coming days to see what rank B skills would pop out, and of course, the rare chance of a rank A skill dropping

The hunting squad members were cheering at the finished raid as a green crystal appeared. Lana came towards me and said "Not bad newbie! Those blades of yours allowed us to finish our raid in record time, our profits are about to increase!"

The rest of the members laughed as they gathered together and checked to see if anybody was injured. The mage that had cast the amazing looking skill where magma balls fell from the sky was up on his feet again as they collected the loot and prepared to leave the dungeon

I looked around me at the multitude of alligator corpses, and the even larger one by the side. I knew I could clear this dungeon if I came in alone, but it would take me a lot of time to take down hundreds of alligators and this huge beast, and I loved clearing dungeons as quickly as possible

My highest ranking offensive skill was C, and I felt like I needed a high damage rank B skill similar to these hunters for an even smoother BOSS run. The face of a chiseled man popped in my head as I thought about what to do next

After the [Core]s and an [Item] that dropped were collected, we placed our hands on the green crystal and were transferred to the outside world once more. Officers that were standing guard near the monolith were surprised and checked their watches when we came out. The dungeon was completed in under 3 hours this time around because of my addition

I took down the contact information of the rank B hunters as they invited me to go with them to celebrate. I thought about it as I recalled I hadn't really associated myself in any social settings for a quite a while, maybe this would be something good to do. The dungeon wasn't going anywhere, and a

few hours of new places wouldn't hurt. I told them I'd catch up with them as I already planned to do something else at the moment and went towards the office of the Vice Admiral

Bypassing the many security points, I came back to the office filled with stacks of paper once again. Magnar looked at an antique clock on the wall before smiling at me and saying "Everything went well I presume?"

"Very, and I would love to continue to help, but I'm going to need a favor from you first"

The man's eyes perked up as he listened to my words. This time around, I wanted to look through the offensive rank B skills in the hands of the military that I could learn to make my run of the dungeon even smoother. Even if I was good enough to beat it now, being even more prepared was not an issue

I could've jumped into the dungeon and spent some time clearing it for rank B skills, but the drops were random so I would never know how long I'd be diving before a skill that I actually wanted to use drops

The lower-ranking skills were also quickly losing their effectiveness, as the rank F [Fireball] would not dent the scales of rank B monsters and wasn't used even once the entire dungeon dive.

"Just a single rank B skill? I can make something like that happen, let me call someone in"

I nodded at him and waited by the side. A minute later, a woman dressed in business wear came into the room and greeted the Vice Admiral

"Boss, here's the document you wanted."

Magnar nodded at her as he grabbed the thick book and handed it to me.

"This is the inventory of all rank B skills that haven't been distributed yet. Let us know which one fits your taste and we'll take it out of storage for you"

Magnar looked at the hunter in front of him that was intently looking through the inventory of skill books and smiled at the achievement of recruiting another excellent hunter.

Seeing how he almost halved the dungeon run, his help would continue to bring in even more resources in the weeks to come. He just hoped this hunter's addition along with everything else they were trying to do would bolster their strength enough to stand against what was coming. What they really needed were more of the peak rank A hunters, but they couldn't be cultivated as quickly

He was also looking favorably at the hunter in front of him as another candidate, as his power had skyrocketed just in the past week, maybe there were still more surprises from him

Chapter 29 The Coliseum

The book held a list of many more skills than I expected, making me spend some time deciding my first rank B offensive skill. A disastrous skill caught my eye with its high damage potential and the fact that it would match extremely well with the [Mangrove Swamp]'s huge clusters of alligators that would swarm towards me once I went in alone

I let the Vice Admiral know of my selection and spent a few minutes talking while the assistant went out, coming back ten minutes later with a suitcase that held a thick book

I received the suitcase and absorbed the skill [Miniature Tornado: For 10 seconds, unleash a rotating column of sharp winds that follow your commands]

The skill appeared in my panel without an issue, and I was looking forward to spamming as much of it as I could when hundreds of alligators swarmed me from all sides

I gave my thanks to the Vice Admiral and stepped out of the office. The short tank, Lana Stone, had already sent an address on my phone of where I should be joining them. I'll indulge myself in this bit of socializing before going back to my lone ways of decimating dungeons

I got out of the military sector and got a ride towards the location. The streets of Star City were packed with energy and people, making you rethink whether half the land had really been turned into a desolate wasteland and people were still fighting for their lives

This being one of the core defense cities of the Empire, there were very few incidents of monsters causing deaths and destruction once things stabilized. The unawakened people thus looked up to the hunters that were diving into dungeons to protect them every day and aspired to be like them

The car neared a grand structure that could be seen from anywhere in the city. It took my breath away as I remembered seeing videos of structures like these that were in multiple inner cities across the Empire. The excited faces of people rushing in through the huge double doors and the shouts and screams could already be heard from here. This was the place where hunters fought and competed for fun. This, was The Coliseum.

I shot a text to Lana that I was here, and someone approached me a few minutes after to lead me past the lines of people. Booming sounds of boos and cheers were already resounding throughout the huge building as we went in and neared spaces with fewer people. The Coliseum was built similar to those in ancient cultures, a huge oval amphitheater with thousands of seats

The Hunting Squad had a huge space all to themselves close to the arena floor in the middle where there were already hunters fighting. I joined them and watched the ongoing match which seemed to be between two rank C hunters

The fights were brutal, as the bloodier they were the more cheers the crowd gave. Drinks and food were already brought in and we began talking when the short tank turned to me and screamed in my ears over the loud cheering

"We might be lucky enough to see an amazing show in a few minutes, apparently Lightning Hand is bored enough once again and is announcing a competition soon!"

I listened to her words as I recalled who Lightning Hand was. This was one of the few known rank A hunters of the Empire, I didn't realize he was in Star City. What was someone strong like him about to do?

The fight between the two rank C hunters was gradually coming to a close as the mage ran out of mana and was now being beaten to a pulp by the berserker. The crowd was screaming like they were possessed as a ringing sound was heard and the fight was finished

The cheers reached an even higher pitch when the match was done and a burly man with his body crackling with lightning appeared on the four huge screens in the middle of the coliseum

He was standing in a section close to us surrounded by pretty women when he grabbed a mic and his booming voice could be heard throughout

"HELLO CITIZENS OF STAR CITY!"

The strong voice rang out like a clap of lightning and the cheers from the spectators reached a fevered pitch

"We're in for a great show today, as I will be putting forth a prize that no hunter can say no to..."

Lightning Hand rose his hand in the air as a thick book appeared between his fingers. "This, my dear citizens, is the rank A skill book, [Flight]!"

The crowd went silent for a second before even louder cheers resounded. My mind received a shock as I looked up at the man on the screen and the glistening skill book he was holding

The hunting squad members got up from their seats as serious expressions rose on their faces

The man whose body had tendrils of lightning dancing on it continued "For today only, in the next 30 minutes, the winner of a Free for All fight will get to take this bad boy home!!!"

The loud screams continued to increase as hunters from all over the stadiums rose up with greedy faces. This was a rank A skill, something that rarely dropped in rank B dungeons, and only ever came out from the dungeons that very few hunters could delve in. This was the dream of many hunters

Even I was expectant to get my hands on something like this. [Flight], something that literally allowed you to...well, fly

"Now, for all the hunters that want to participate, jump into the ring!"

The moment his words finished, multiple hunters began jumping from their seats onto the huge circular arena at the center of the coliseum. Hunters were greedy for skills but were smart enough not to lose their lives. Most of the ones that jumped in were rank C hunters and a few rank Bs

The members of the hunting squad look at each other before the short tank said "Haha, lets put our restrictions aside and see which person is lucky enough to get this pie falling from the sky"

The rest of them nodded at this and also jumped down to join the hunters on the ground. I looked at the outpouring of hunters that were filling the arena and rose up myself

It was already half-filled with dense numbers of hunters that were putting their lives on the line. I looked at this and jumped down myself with a sigh. I really couldn't sit out on something like this

Rank A skills were so rare that getting another skill like this would be near impossible unless you farmed the high ranking dungeon tens or hundreds of times. Even now I was questioning why this Rank A hunter was giving it away on a whim

He continued talking as the hunters continued to fill into the arena "The rules for the Free for All are simple, the last man standing...WINS"

The crowd had gone crazy as the build-up to the fight continued, with people standing up hysterically shouting as if they were the ones getting the prize

A few minutes passed by with no other hunters jumping into the ring. Lightning Hand looked around the densely packed arena and raised his arm. Quietness ensued in the huge coliseum before he brought it down and shouted "START!"

Chapter 30 - Free for All

The arena was filled with screams as soon as the fight started, with explosions of skills bouncing from all around. The rank C hunters were taking each other out without a question, their eyes filled with greed.

The lower-ranked hunters here were those whose greed had surpassed their common sense, as the sane ones stayed on their seats to keep on watching the moment they realized the people competing for this would mostly be rank B

I watched the scene of chaos unfolding in front of me as I smiled and activated both [Stealth] and [Camouflage]. I disappeared from the sights of all the hunters and watched the scene while fully protected with multiple defensive skills that brushed off any spell that accidentally came my way

The audience was screaming in a frenzy as they watched the bloody fight below, calling for more blood anytime someone fell. Rank B hunters gradually began to move in full force, devastating skills beginning to fly out

The squad I had dived into [Mangrove Swamp] with were all far apart fighting their own battles, but one of the mages was already knocked out cold. At the center of attention was a hunter holding two round shields with his body bathed in golden light. This Knight pushed back all attacks and hunters that neared him with explosive blasts of white light the moment they neared

Multiple hunters were falling just from him alone. Opposite on the other side was a woman holding a bow that was shooting flaming arrows and heavily wounding the hunters that were struck

I watched all of this while evading any hunters rushing about and absorbing the stray attacks without the notice from any hunters. The bloody fight continued until most of the rank C hunters were knocked out, leaving 9 rank B hunters on the floor of the arena intently staring at each other

AAAHH!!!

One of them couldn't hold on any longer and let out a battle cry while rushing to another hunter nearest to him. Another brawl ensued, with the hunter holding the two round shields continuing to push away any skills and attack with explosive blasts of white light

From the hunting squad I knew, only the berserker with the flaming sword continued, his entire body wreathed in flames once more as he took on two other hunters by himself. The rest of the team members were knocked out cold or sitting out injured

I found a relatively far place in the arena away from the fight that had a ton of rank C hunters either knocked out or struggling painfully and sat down while continuing to observe the fight. My aim was to do very little work and defeat the last hunter standing that should be exhausted to obtain this rank A skill easily

The hard fight continued as it came down to two hunters facing off in the Arena, the hunter bathed in a golden light that was holding two shields and the hunter with a bow that shot scalding hot flames. Their standoff was building up the anticipation among the audience as the cheers continued

I was looking forward to doing very little work and win when I felt the air change. Instead of heading towards each other, two hunters turned towards my location at the same time.

Well shit

I stood up and got ready for the fight early as it seemed the hunters saw through my [Stealth] and [Camouflage]. Did they have a skill that helped in detection or something else?

Oh well, it doesn't matter anyway. A bright smile bloomed on my face as I watched the woman draw her bow and shoot multiple flaming arrows towards me and the shining Knight rushed forward

I would at least get a chance to test the destructive force of the newly gained skill against two rank B hunters that seem to be standing at the peak of this rank. [Miniature Tornado] was cast for the first time

A swirling mass of sharp winds appeared in front of me that dispersed the flame arrows that were rushing towards me and pushed back the glowing Knight. I felt the winds move my dark hair around as I commanded the skill to go towards the nearest hunter

The body of the glowing Knight...expanded? Wow, his body actually expanded as the blinding light shooting out of him increased, withstanding the heavy and sharp winds until the skill faded a few seconds after as it had a 10-second duration

His body came back to normal size while he was roughly breathing, seeming proud of being able to withstand the attack. I gave a light laugh as I shook my head and cast another [Miniature Tornado]

The Knight's face turned ashen as he saw another coming right at him and used the two shields to try and withstand the rotating winds to no avail, being blown away with cuts all over his body a second after

The remaining hunter on the field that was shooting arrows had moved a further distance away from me while continuing to shoot. I wouldn't let her have her way as I used [Whirlwind] to close the distance and cast another [Miniature Tornado] at her position. The rapidly rotating winds swiped the hunter off her feet, inflicting heavy damage on the armor and skin beneath it, the force ultimately blasting her onto the walls of the arena

Silence followed after as I stood in a field of hunters that were either knocked out or crying painfully, with a few missing some limbs

"WAAAA!!!"

The crowd's cries reached another decibel higher as they saw the end of the fight, and the booming voice of the rank A Hunter could be heard

"Haha, good, good, good!"

The man repeated the same words three times before he leaped up from the area he was in and fell down towards the arena like a strike of lightning. He looked me up and down and laughed once more before pulling out a glistening book from his storage ring

"Calm yet careful, smart, and also powerful. Haha, this skill book isn't wasted on you. It was supposed to go to the rank B hunter with the highest achievements in the city, but I'm impulsive and I believe in opportunity and luck. This, is your fortune!"

The skill book was carried by a thin layer of sparkling electricity and drifted towards me. I was marveling at the skills of a rank A hunter while looking at this monster of a man in front of me. His body seemed like a volcano ready to erupt and smash anything standing on its way

I knew I wasn't ready to face someone like this yet. My attributes had only just broke through to rank B because of some support skills, and I needed to put in a lot more work if I wanted to catch up to people at this stage before everything crumbled

"Thank you for the opportunity" I grabbed the skill book, absorbing it right then and there without wasting a single second as I thanked the man surrounded by lightning.

"Use it wisely and try to reach for higher places" He nodded as his body lifted off the ground effortlessly, leaving behind a few words before shooting up to skies and being gone in a flash of light

I could barely follow the speed of that lightning as it went away, making me even more excited to go back to my lone ways of dungeon diving and quickly gain that level of strength.