

Seller 761

Chapter 761: Earth 1712: 19 years later (Present timeline)

Before the Werewolf Lord came out of his shock, the glowing orb reached Sungjun and entered his forehead.
"Wha..."

Sungjun felt like something sharp struck his head, and he blacked out, losing his consciousness entirely.

"No..." The Werewolf lord roared in panic and rage, transforming into a giant werewolf and charging toward Sungjun in fury. "How dare you..."

Just as he almost reached him, energy surged from Sungjun's body and expanded at an impossible speed. Before the Werewolf Lord even react, he was struck. Sun Xiao and Cyro had disappeared and appeared unconscious right outside the dungeon entrance while the entire dungeon collapsed on its own.

19 years later;

Year 20015, Continent of Siberia, Drakamir Republic;

A private jet was flying above the skies of Siberia with its destination as Krasinostok, the capital city of Drakmir Republic, one of the most prosperous nations in the northern continent, the one with the strongest military force, and a safe haven to mafia gangs.

Inside, Alexander Han leaned back in his leather seat, his eyes closed. He was a tall man with a lean physique, barely looking like his early twenties, although already 29 years old. While his face was charming enough to seduce a lady, the patch on his left eye and the bionic eye beneath it were like craters on the moon.

However, none in his circle cares, or atleast didn't possess the courage to say it aloud, because...

Buzz Buzz

"Sir..." A man tapped his shoulder. "You have a video call from Mr. Prime Minister."

Alexander snapped his eyes open, and a low groan escaped his lips as he rubbed his forehead. "Ugh... I wonder what's wrong with me lately... Not enough rest or caffeine, I wonder..."

"Sir... are you alright?" The man asked.

Alexander gave a calm nod. "Yeah, connect the phone to the screen."

After a while, he was listening to the person on the other side, his fingers tapping against the armrest.

He was in deep conversation with the Prime Minister, and judging by his tone, it looked quite serious.

"Look, Mr. Mikhail, I understand your position on the Wagner Group, but they intruded into our extended territory of influence for the second time during the past three weeks and bombed a civilian's house. If this happens one more time, I'm afraid we will consider it as a hostile force, and Pavel will be forced to act."

On the other side, the Prime Minister of Drakamir was almost sweating bullets with stress, "We don't have any intentions to offend Pavel, but our Supreme Commander-in-Chief was taking anti-Drakamir forces very seriously. We ask your coopera..."

"Hmm?" Alexander's expression changed suddenly, halting the conversation for a moment as his bionic eye flickered, processing data faster than humanly possible.

A red alert flashed on a holographic screen inside his head.

[WARNING: SYSTEM FAILURE]

"Wha..."

Before he reacted, the jet lurched. The cabin lights flickered. The pilot's panicked voice crackled through the intercom.

"Boss! The front wheels aren't opening up— we need..."

Then, silence.

He barely had time to react before the plane crashed onto the runway.

The last thing he saw before the impact was the reflection of his own cold, unblinking gaze on the shattered screen.

Then, everything went blank.

A voice then echoed through the void. Feminine, mechanical. And quite familiar.

His body twitched as countless notifications flooded his mind, lines of data overlaying the imaging in his brain.

[WARNING: IDENTICAL SOUL DETECTED— TRANSMIGRATION IN PROGRESS]

[RESISTANCE: FAILED]

[WARNING: BREACH INTO MINDSCAPE—WILLPOWER OVERRIDEN]

[FIRST CONTACT WITH HOST'S SOUL]

[RESISTANCE TO POSSESSION: SUCCESSFUL]

[WARNING: SOUL FUSION ATTEMPT]

[RESISTANCE: FAILED]

[SOUL FUSION COMPLETE]

[REAWAKENING: FAILED]

[WARNING: FOREIGN SENTIENT PROGRAM DETECTED]

[PROCEEDING WITH THE ELIMINATION]

[WARNING: SYSTEM CONTROLS ARE BEING OVERRIDDEN]

[INITIATING HIBERNATION in 3, 2, 1]

Followed by that, a voice, an unfamiliar masculine voice, spoke in his head. "Transmigration is successful. Welcome, Monarch."

The man clutched his head as he groggily opened his eyes, waking up in pajamas on a familiar yet unfamiliar bed and in familiar yet unfamiliar surroundings, which looked quite modest compared to his usual lifestyle.

He sat up and looked around. "What in the hell is going on?"

He couldn't help but look at his hands and legs, which looked much thicker and fitter than he remembered. There was little to no fat on his arms to the point he could spot veins with his naked eye.

At the same time, there was a holographic screen floating before his eyes, where the words were written.

[Transmigration is successful.]

[Mimic Ability has been upgraded to Overlord's Authority]

[Congratulations. You are now a Registered Codex Overlord.]

[Overlord System—Activated]

"What are you?" He muttered aloud, but there was no reply. No voice. No answer to his question. "Eva?" He called out. But then a moment later, he murmured. "Wait a second. Who is Eva? And what's with my voice..." He clutched his head in confusion, "What's happening?"

As he looked at the screen once again, he found that the only option that was accessible was a simple button: Close.

As soon as he instinctively reached out to it and pressed on that cross mark, it disappeared, and another holographic screen opened, quite identical to the previous one. And that masculine robotic voice returned as the words appeared on the screen.

"Memory integration will begin shortly."

"What's happening?" He furrowed his brows, thinking deeply. "The last thing I remembered is on the plane and Sssss" He hissed, clutching his head. "What the... I remember the Werewolf Lord trapped us and killed us... The plane crashed? What's going on..." Just as he gave another look at his muscles before glancing at the holographic screen, the loading is finished, and his brain is flooded with memories, different sets of memories of two lives at once.

"Am I Han Sungjun, who occupied Alexander Han's body, or am I Alexander Han, who received Han Sungjun's memories?"

The man tensed as images began to flood his senses. A rush of memories that didn't belong to him: flashes of a different life. However, which one was real and which one wasn't his, he had no idea.

As he was struggling with his identity, the system's chime echoed in his head, and a new notification screen materialized before his eyes.

Ding!

[The host is going through an identification crisis]

[Due to soul fusion, the host contains both the memories of Han Sungjun and Alexander Han. Please pick an identity and register it with the system.]

The man's eyes widened, reading the notification. Taking a deep breath, he shut his eyes and concentrated. He revisited both of his lives.

Han Sungjun was born to a divine beast, who left him on his father's doorstep. Not long after, his stepmother was allegedly killed by his stepbrother, Han Seok-jin, who was sent to a juvenile detention center. His father, who couldn't raise him, sent him to his grandparents, who lived in the Zuania Continent's Ospana. Not long after, his grandparents died in a fire accident.

Terming him a curse, his father never came back to collect him and instead left him to his own devices. Sungjun grew up in an orphanage, without the love of any parents or relatives, but still managed to graduate at the top scores from the Hunter Academy at the age of 17. He was then scouted by Black Commando Unit, the most secretive yet prestigious unit of the Alsacian Federation. He worked hard, often nearly died, to earn the codename: White Wolf. And at the age of 19, Sungjun died as a virgin, without an ounce of romance in his life.

On the other hand...

Alexander Han was born with a diamond spoon, as the heir of Pavel. From a young age, he was groomed to become the next Pakhan, but unfortunately, he had a rather mediocre talent of Mimic, which could barely copy one's ability for a while.

However, his musical talent was considered once in a century talent, often compared to the legendary musicians of the medieval era. Unfortunately, his dream wasn't supported by his father, as the latter felt that becoming a musician was below their social status. His mother, a struggling actress, passed away when he was young. The cause of death was noted to be suicide due to sheer mental pressure and a complicated marital life.

At the age of 16, Alexander was selected for the International Tchaikovsky Competition, the youngest ever from Drakamir Republic to attend. At the competition, he fell in love with a fellow competitor.

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However, tragedy struck him on the night after the semifinals, when they went on a drive and had an accident. As a result, Alexander lost his left eye, and went missing for a year.

During this year, he was in the household of the girl's father, who was also in the same field. Not knowing about his true identity, the girl's father, who coincidentally got the assignment of transporting a prototype quantum AI chip, would hide it in a bionic eye before transplanting it into him, for unknown reasons.

In the end, Alexander married the girl and stayed at her place for a year.

However, the tragedy struck him again as they were attacked by Shen Triad, a rival of Pavel, after finding his whereabouts. His in-laws, his pregnant wife, and their entire gang were destroyed in the drone attack, with him ending up the lone survivor.

In pursuit of his revenge against Shen Triad, Alexander returned to his gang and took up the mantle.

With the help of the Quantum AI, Eva, he rose to the position of Pakhan, earned respect from his subordinates, and eventually became the leader of the underworld. And yet to date, his face remained a mystery for the police and the rest of the world. Only a few trusted leaders know how Alexander looks. For the public, he is a lawyer at Royal Gold Group, which he himself founded.

Weighing both of these lives against each other, the man with dual memories took deep breaths to clear his mind and mumbled. "Apart from the fact that he couldn't save his wife in the past, and now he still can't eliminate Shen Triad. Alexander's life is filled with bliss, but Sungjun has regrets. He had a brother who was falsely accused of the crime, all because he had a contract with an evil spirit king. By the time he got in contact with him, his life was already gone..."

At first, he addressed both of them as if they were someone else, but without knowing, he went on mumbling, filled with thoughts. "When I was going to the Temple of Horus, Hyung was married, and Sis-in-law was pregnant with twins. 19 years have already passed. By now, they would be adults. As Alexander, I have a net worth of over 700 billion credits, which will put me in the top 20, maybe 30, if there are more people like me with secret wealth... Anyway, I'm clearly in a position to help them. And I should first fulfill my duties as Han Sungjun and then continue to live as Alexander..."

Taking a breath again, he spoke in his head. "System, register my name as Han Sungjun."

Ding!

[Your name is registered as Han Sungjun]

Followed by that, a new window opened, showcasing the details.

Name: Han Sungjun

Age: 29

Ethnicity: Goryeo

Arcane Path: Mage

Ability: Overlord's Authority, Mystic Eyes (Locked)

Ability Rank: SSS

Mana reserves: 34,556

Mana Tier: 7 (Max: Tier-1)

Skills:

Mana Condensation: An ancient technique that lets the user absorb natural energy from the surroundings and refine it into mana.

Mana Armor: Use one's mana to form a defensive layer and nullify the attacks.

OVERLORD'S AUTHORITY:

1) Chain of Command: Can recruit underlings (up to 10). For every underling recruited, strength is increased by 5%.

2) Eyes of Dominion: Can copy abilities from anyone the user sees [Need to be within a 20-meter radius. Only 3 extracted abilities can be used per 24 hours. Mana consumption depends on the strength of the ability.]

3) Sovereign's Resistance: The user gains high resistance to the abilities the user stored under the Overlord's Authority. All damages from such skills are reduced by 50%. Elemental resistance also rose by 20%

4) Dungeon's Reins: Can temporarily control monsters in a dungeon (up to 10) [Need Tier-6 Mana to unlock.]

5) Inheritor's right: The user can copy one ability from an underling and permanently add it to Overlord's authority (Only 1 permanent ability can be stored) [Need Tier-5 Mana to unlock]

6) Trophies of the Fallen: The user can extract one ability from a dead monster the user killed and use it without limitations (Only 1 permanent ability can be stored) [Need Tier-4 Mana to unlock]

7) Sigil of the Chosen: Can Brand underlings with a Soul Sigil, giving them a permanent boost of 10% in strength and mana reserves (Limit: The user cannot enjoy any benefits from these special underlings, such as buffs or ability copy. Only underlings with tier-2 or lower can enjoy the boost.) [Need Tier-3 Mana to unlock]

8) Iron Loyalty: Passively enforce loyalty into an underling (Limit: The target has to be an existing underling) [Need Tier-2 Mana to unlock]

9) Throne of Mana: Can use underling's mana as one's own [Need Tier-1 Mana to unlock]

One week later;

Hangzhou City, Southern Wu, Zhonggou continent;

On almost an empty bridge, save for a few vehicles, a luxury sedan was going at a nominal pace, not intending to take advantage of less traffic to go faster.

Inside, a drunken woman was seen slumping against the passenger seat.

"Did you have to drink that much?" her husband asked, glancing sideways at her. His voice contained a slight irritation.

"Success tastes better with champagne, Honey," Jiang Xueli mumbled in a lazy tone. She closed her eyes, leaning her head back against the headrest with a half-smile curling her lips. "Well, I worked very hard for this movie. I deserved a few glasses of champagne."

"Yeah, you surely worked very hard, doing great service to your male and gay fans." Mingze scoffed at her remark, looking straight down the road.

Xueli's muddled eyes glare at her husband, and she shouts in a drunken stupor. "Hey! We have been through this already. The scene demanded a few near-topless acts. And we used a body double. I'm not even the one who is in there. What are you so bitter about?"

"But for the rest of the world, it is Jiang Xueli, not some girl named Lin Suyin. You don't read the articles bashing you left and right?" Mingze calmly responded to her before his gaze retreated to the road. "You aren't just an A-list celebrity Actress. You are also a mother, at that."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever... save those lectures for when I'm sober..." She complained aloud in a drunken voice before lightly dozing off into sleep.

His eyes flicked toward her, hardening a little bit, but before he could continue his conversation, the sharp trill of her phone interrupted them. Her hand fumbled lazily at the side pocket of her coat, taking it out and pushing it to her husband. "Ugh, just... You deal with it."

Mingsu sighed, taking the phone from her with a quiet shake of his head. Glancing at the screen, he furrowed his brows. "Dear, it's your uncle."

She didn't react to it, as if she didn't care much.

He swiped to answer. "Hello?" "Hello, Uncle Li, this is Zhao Mingze."

"Ah, yeah, Xueli is too tired... She is taking a rest."

The voice on the other end was hurried, low. "No, wake her up. It's urgent. Xueli's father is..."

Mingze listened for a second, and then his eyes widened. His hand clenched the phone a little tighter. "What? Hospital?"

"Hospital?"

Xueli blinked, turning her head sluggishly toward her husband. "What happened?"

"Your father seems to have been admitted to the hospital."

"Give it to me," she said in a hoarse voice. As he slightly stretched it to her, she swiftly snatched it from him and spoke. "Uncle, what happened?"

"Xueli, your father's condition looks quite bad." Her uncle's voice was filled with urgency. "It's stage 4 non-small cell lung cancer."

A breath hitched in her throat. "Wha..."

Her father was a highly successful and honest police officer who retired as the Hanzhou City Police Department's Chief Superintendent General, the second-highest ranking in the city's law enforcement. But, as a father, he was a complete failure.

Even when her mother died, her dad was busy with so-called an important mission.

Her dad never cared to ask her when she returned home with injuries from the dungeon.

Even when she was reevaluated as an S-rank Hunter, her dad didn't send any congratulations to her.

Even when she entered the fashion industry and later the entertainment field, he didn't care.

And even when she accepted Mingze's proposal of marriage and they set a date, her father simply agreed and didn't care enough to have a proper talk with her husband either.

And yet the small, wounded part of her stirred in emotion upon hearing that his father was suffering from such a disease.

"What hospital?" she asked in a hushed tone.

"Zheda Shaw hospital," her uncle replied.

She exhaled, pressing her palm to her forehead. The remnants of champagne in her system dissolved into nothing, cleansed by her mana in an instant.

"Take me there," she looked at her husband seriously. The husband inwardly sighed and pressed on the accelerator.

After a while;

Xueli's heels clicked sharply down the hospital corridor, eventually reaching the VIP section: Room 503.

The man waiting outside the hospital room, her distant uncle and yet closer than her own dad, hesitated before shaking his head. "Your brothers... Your step-brothers made it clear they wouldn't come."

A bitter chuckle escaped her lips as she shook her head. "Of course, they wouldn't. They hate him even more."

With a deep breath, she then pushed open the door. Her father lay in a hospital bed, a pale ghost of the formidable police officer he once was.

"Xueli," he rasped in a voice fragile as paper.

She stepped forward and kneeled to the bed's height.

He lifted a trembling hand, and without thinking, she moved closer. His fingers brushed against her cheek. "I wasn't... a good father," he whispered. "I can certainly see that now."

A lump formed in her throat at those words. She still replied. "Appreciating that now is a little late, don't you think?"

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He gave a faint smile and muttered, "I don't want to inform you about it, but I was told that I didn't have much time. I became selfish and couldn't stop myself from calling you all."

He gave a soft, broken laugh, turning his eyes to the ceiling. "At the very least, you have responded to it. Your elder brothers... they didn't even ask for details. One told your uncle that he doesn't care, while the other told him to cremate me when it's time and then call him for the funeral."

She stared at him for a long moment. Then quietly, she said, "You really were a terrible father."

After a beat of silence, he nodded slowly, his eyes looking at the ceiling. "I know. I was the worst father one could ever ask for. I'm sorry to Tianzhu, more than anyone."

Xueli looked up too, as her eyes welled up in tears.

"I was part of your lives at least... but Tianzhu... he was only six when his mother died. And I just..." The father trailed off with a clear evidence of regret in his raw voice. "I wasn't there at all."

Xueli lowered her gaze.

"I wonder," he continued weakly, "how he's doing now. Whether he's okay. Whether he even remembers me. Or if he is even alive."

Xueli slowly opened her mouth but eventually closed.

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****A few days later, Kitez City, Novarusk Republic, Western Siberia;****

Around Noon;

"Ha" "Ha" "Eiiya"

In the front yard of a mansion, an adolescent beauty darted forward with her fists flying at her father, who effortlessly evaded each strike.

Her kicks sliced through the air, but he sidestepped with ease, with a smirk constantly on his lips as if he wanted to agitate her.

And the tactic was quite successful too.

"Argh... c'mon, Uncle. Let me hit you once." Vera huffed, throwing another jab at Tianzhu's face.

Tianzhu leaned back just enough to let her punch slip past his chin. The bionic eye under his left contact lens zoomed a bit as Tianzhu processed Vera's movements with sharp precision.

Letting out a smirk, he provoked her. "Sorry, munchkin. True victory cannot be handed on a platter. You have to snatch it with your own hands."

Birthname: Veronika Sokjinovna Qin

Nickname: Vera

Age: 18

Ethnicity: Han/Rus

Arcane Path: Shapeshifter

Ability: Lightning Wolf Transformation

Ability Rank: S

Mana reserve particles: 21,667,408 (Tier-3)

Hunter Rank: Unlicensed

*

Birthname: Qin Tianzhu

Age: 39

Ethnicity: Han

Arcane Path: Mage

Ability: Forest Creation

Ability Rank: SS

Mana Reserves: 766,912,671 (Tier-2)

"Stop calling me that," Vera snapped at her uncle as her cheeks flushed in embarrassment. "I'm not a kid anymore, Uncle." She stepped in fast with her fist charged with mana as she swung, trying to take him by surprise.

But Tianzhu had already shifted, gliding past her strike like he had seen it coming a mile away.

He couldn't help but chuckle, teasing her as he dodged the attack. "But you are a kid."

"I am not," Vera shouted in frustration, turning her embarrassment into mild rage. All of a sudden, black fur sprouted over her flawless skin, and her eyes turned yellow as she dropped low with her hands, pressing into the dirt. Lightning flickered across her form, and within seconds, the girl was gone, replaced by a black wolf.

Tianzhu couldn't help but smirk as he saw the transformation. "Let's see how long you can maintain this form this time."

Vera, now fully transformed into a lightning wolf, crouched low to attack.

Grrr

As she growled at her father, the latter quickly snapped to reality. He raised his hand and motioned, provoking his daughter to attack.

She let out a deep, guttural growl once again before launching forward and lunging at Tianzhu with its mouth widely opened, revealing its sharp fangs.

Tianzhu, however, didn't move from the spot. He calmly stared at the wolf.

But just as her fangs nearly met his shoulder, he mumbled. "Paralysis of the Great Vine."

At once, one third of his entire mana reserves were consumed as vines burst from his body, lashing around Vera in mid-air and pushing her away from his body.

Before Vera could get out of those entanglements, the vines started absorbing her mana. Within moments, her entire mana reserves were sucked away, and Vera transformed back into herself.

Tianzhu dismissed the vines and caught her before she fell to the ground. "Uncle, you cheated. You said you wouldn't use abilities." Vera protested, glaring up at her dad.

He chuckled, brushing a strand of hair from her face. "My dear munchkin, you forgot rule number 1. Don't ever expect your opponent to follow the rules unless it is a formal setting."

Vera puffed out her cheeks and looked away. "Still, cheating is cheating. You tricked me."

Tianzhu couldn't help but smile, finding his niece's actions very cute. As he continued to stare at the daughter in his arms, suddenly, he saw the illusion of a three-year-old little girl in his arms, spinning her around in a park. His facial expression changed for a moment.

"Hmm? Uncle..." Vera's blurred voice became a bit louder now, enough to drag him out of his thoughts. "Uncle... Hellooo? Oi, old man..."

His eyes refocused, snapping back to reality. "Hmm?"

Vera spoke. "Can you put me down now?"

"Oh, right." Tianzhu gently put her down.

"What happened? You were making this strange face earlier."

"Ah, nothing. I just remembered something." Tianzhu shook his head, forcing out a smile.

Vera tilted her head, blinking a few times in silence, wondering what it was about. "Huh."

From the veranda, Theo, who had been recording it since the start, finally stepped down. He walked forward, arms flailing slightly. "Ugh... what a boring fight this was. You clearly don't suit for fighting, Vera."

"Hmm?"

Name: Theodore Sokjinovich Qin

Age: 18

Ethnicity: Han/Rus

Arcane Path: Mage

Ability: Song of the God

Ability Rank: S

Mana Reserves: 156,779

Both Vera and Tianzhu turned their heads.

Approaching them, Theo switched the pc tablet in his hands to their side and showed a frozen moment, "Here, look at this. This is where you lost. You could've used the charged leap to feint. You hesitated too long before the pounce."

Vera snorted, puffing her cheeks. "Oh, come on! I was literally trapped by mana-sucking vines!"

"Doesn't matter," Theo said, raising his voice a little too loud. "You still messed up the timing. What's the use of having an S-rank ability with superior senses to a human if you make up such a rookie mistake? It's seriously a waste of such ability on you. If only I..."

Tianzhu turned, interrupting him in a firm voice. "Theo. That's enough." His eyes turned slightly serious.

Theo, however, didn't just stay quiet.

"She could've won if she had just..."

"I said that's enough," Tianzhu repeated, shutting the argument right away by lecturing him. "Don't be too harsh on your sister. Everyone grows at their own pace."

"Fine... Sorry..." Theo lowered his gaze and apologized to his twin, but a moment later, he looked up with hopeful eyes. "So... can I spar now? I don't know if I can defeat you, but I'm sure I can do better than Vera."

Tianzhu exhaled slowly, letting out a sigh. "Theo, unlike Vera, you're not weak. You were strong enough to protect yourself from danger, or at least run away from it. But you don't have the combat-type prowess required for battles. Your strength lies in music. That's your gift. So, don't try to obsess over the fight. Instead, try to enhance your abilities so that you can make a career out of it."

Theo's eyes narrowed, clearly displeased by his uncle's response. "Uncle, I believe I have told you a thousand times so far. I don't intend to pursue a music career. I want to register with the Hunter Association. But you never let me sign up for it."

Tianzhu's voice deepened slightly in response to his son's statement. "It's because that's not the path for you. Don't waste your time chasing such a foolish dream. If you don't know your strengths, it is perfectly alright to explore them, but you know your talents. You should come to terms with your limitations. If you are not interested in music, then focus on your studies. You slipped more than thirty ranks in the final exam, and as a result, you were dropped to Class-3 this year."

"But I still want to be a Hunter," Theo muttered aloud, not being able to hold his feelings under his breath.

Tianzhu's sternness wavered for a moment. But in the end, he spoke. "You can do what you want when you're an adult. Until then, you listen to me."

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"You just don't listen to me and impose your will on me... All you care about is Vera's dreams. Just admit that you hate me because I resemble my dad. Had we stayed with my mom, I swear my life would have been a lot better..." Theo stomped his foot and shouted at Tianzhu in frustration, then turned, retreating to the house. The front door slammed moments later.

"Theo..." Vera rushed after her brother.

Tianzhu sighed as his gaze lingered on the closed door. "I don't want to act like this," he murmured, almost to himself. "I just... I wish you both could live in peace, surrounded by comfort and safety. That's all I want. I will attain everything I can give you in this world, but I cannot let you push yourselves into danger... Theo and Vera are no longer young. I highly doubt I could stop them from doing what they want. I have to do something..."

****Meanwhile, at Krasinostok in Eastern Siberia;****

Coming out of the shower, Sungjun took the smartphone and opened Pavel Text, a private messaging app not found in any app store, exclusive for members only.

Opening the inbox, Sungjun browsed through the new messages sent by a couple of his trusted subordinates: Tempest and Pyro, the North East guardian and the South guardian of Pavel, respectively. Basically, Sungjun had 8 guardians in Pavel, each responsible for one direction. And each of them, while they don't carry a hunter license to stay out of the system, they are as strong as an S-rank hunter.

He tapped on Tempest's message first.

[Tempest]: Boss, this month's first batch of Mana Ores has reached the refinery. Total shipment: 124.4 tonnes. Grade-2 Mana Ores: 15.6 tonnes. Grade-3 Mana Ores: 108.8 tonnes

[Tempest]: No losses during transit. Surveillance logs and seal-authentication reports are attached.

Sungjun raised an eyebrow. "Hmm... According to the memories of Alex, a Grade-3 Mana Crystal typically sold for 10,000 credits per kg. And a Grade-2 Mana Crystal is sold as high as 200,000 credits per kg. Considering the efficiency is typically around 10-12%, in refining them into mana crystals, the monthly revenue just on these two alone would be around 400-500 million credits. But then again, the costs will be just as high... typically, I would get 100 million, but seeing that this time yield is higher, I guess I might get 150 million credits of profits this time... if I calculate on 1996 year... it would be equivalent to 60-70 million dollars... Man, and I used to earn 7000 credits a month..."

Letting out a sigh, Sungjun shook his head, getting rid of useless thoughts, and focused on the matter.

"Since Eva is no longer there to support me, and neither my ocular powers were working, I have to fully depend on this new power, Overlord's Authority, which basically improves as Mana particles increase. But, what's with this weird quest..."

His eyes slid down to the quest log. There was a quest that appeared in front of him, after one week of his transmigration.

Daily Mission: Burn 5,000 kcal

Progress: 942/5000

Reward: +1 Skill Point

He scoffed. "To burn 5000 calories... that's like five-six hours of non-stop workout."

"Forget it. Skill points only work on active skills, and I have none either way." He minimized the quest log with a flick of his finger and turned back to the message list.

Sungjun put aside Tempest's report with a flick and clicked on Pyro's name.

The message opened instantly.

Pyro: "Lord Pavel, urgent report. The Shen Triad attacked Cargo-77 en route to Vladivostok. The entire vessel submerged. No survivors. Estimated time of incident: 0420 hours."

"The Shen Triad?" Qin Tianzhu's expression hardened. His fingers curled slowly around the edge of the armrest, the fake leather creaking beneath the pressure. "Those damn basards..."

Even hearing the name again sent a spike of cold rage through his veins. He couldn't help but remember Alex's memory of his wife and unborn baby's death.

The screen dimmed slightly as his mind drifted, accessing his memories of Shen Triad's information.

The only reason why he had yet to exterminate this rival group, even with so much power and authority, is mainly because the Shen Triad is a part of a broader power bloc called the God Axis, a hellish alliance between the Shen Triad and the Okoro Brotherhood from Novus Mundus, forming the Shen-Okoro Nexus.

With full control over the largest desert in the world, they had an abundant amount of mana veins and dungeons under their control with little opposition.

Back when Eva was still functional, Alexander had made their financial lives a nightmare. He had siphoned billions of credits from their hidden vaults, broken through their offshore ledgers, and constantly exposed their false fronts to the Interpol.

But now...

Eva was gone.

So were the satellite surveillance hacks that used to monitor Siberia's unguarded stretches for activity. As a result, he could now barely focus on his own territory and did not have enough time to focus on theirs. As a result, Pavel couldn't anticipate an attack on their shipment from their rivals and lost in the end.

His jaw clenched as he re-read the message. After all, this wasn't just an attack on Pavel's supply line. Because the cargo they destroyed wasn't filled with gold, minerals, weapons, or ores.

It was actually filled with medicines. Shipments Alexander himself had arranged months ago, imported quietly from the Zuania's Vedraya, the mystical country of Hindus, and also the pharma hub of the world.

While Alexander didn't do it for charity or have this special care for the unfortunate or anything, and those medicines were nothing but a medium for Pavel to find footing in the northern region of Novus Mundus continent, which is frequently destabilized by dungeon breaks, Sungjun himself decided at the last minute of not making money out of it but instead, he planned to donate through his charity group and gain good faith over there.

And when such a noble deed was destroyed by the rival group, Sungjun's eyes glinted coldly. His mind raced with thoughts on how to get back at this rivaling group.

Then, with a sharp exhale, he started typing a command to Pyro.

Commander: [Prepare a decoy cargo ship. Fill it with wooden crates—each box must be sealed and packed with nothing but cotton. Nothing that scanners can pick up. Layer the entire cargo bay with anti-sensor barrier fields. I want no human crew. Let the ship be manned by the combat bots. Load them with mana cannons.]

His fingers paused for a second, then he added the final detail.

Commander: [Each box will also carry one of our new special devices, you know which ones. The Ship's destination this time will be Kalaallit Nunaat, that icy island near the southern pole where fewer than 10,000 live and are basically cut off from the rest of the world. I'm sure with such a destination and such defense on the ship, they will indeed take action this time with even a bigger fanfare. Also, I will need you to lead this alone, but I don't want you to engage the enemies. Instead, I need you to...]

A thin, wicked smile curled across his lips as he hit send.

Message Delivered.

He tossed the phone onto the table and muttered, "Ren Tianyu... this is just a sample gift for your Christmas." Sungjun chuckled under his breath, voice sharp with venom. "This is going to be my new year for you. Let's see how you will respond."

He then rose from the couch, walked silently toward the window, and looked out into the endless Siberian night. The wind blew strongly, but his heart was heavier.

"Hyung," he murmured, barely audible, "What kind of mess did you leave behind? You went missing. Your wife ended up marrying someone else. Your kids were being raised by their uncle. I don't even know whether I should intervene in their lives, and even if I want to, how should I do it... The reality you left behind is quite different from my expectations... Sigh..." he shook his head as he watched the moon.

Later that night;

The time was around 23:55 in Krasinostok.

Sungjun was in a deep sleep on his bed, unaware of the translucent holographic screen floating above him, blinking as a five-minute timer started in scarlet color.

Down below the timer, a notification popped up on its own.

[System Notification]

Daily Mission: Burn 5000 kcal

Progress: 1267 / 5000 kcal

Reward: +1 Skill Point

Punishment (if failed): Activation of Compulsory Physical Trial

Time Remaining: 00:05:00

The message blinked silently in the air as the remaining time reduced, unseen and unread by Sungjun.

And then, the clock hit 00:00.

The screen vanished in a sharp flash of light, and the world around him changed instantly.

THUD

Sungjun's body suddenly slammed onto dry, cracked earth.

He groaned, wincing at the sting along his shoulder, then blinked rapidly to adjust to the sharp sun beating down on him.

"What the..."

Chapter 765: Earth 1712: Compulsory Physical Trial (Part-1)

He sat up.

The world around him was no longer his bedroom but instead a barren wasteland, stretching endlessly into the distance. No trees, no buildings—just a broken horizon under a rust-colored sky.

His gaze dropped to his body; he was still in his pajamas that he wore in his bed, too.

"Where the hell is this? What's happening?"

And the answer came with a shadow falling over him.

As a confused Sungjun stiffly raised his head, he saw a giant humanoid creature, towering over 5 meters tall, standing just a couple of meters away. Its skin was stone-like, veined with glowing red cracks. In its hands, there was a massive club.

"The Hell..."

Ding!

Ding!

[Daily Mission: Failed]

Punishment: Compulsory Physical Trial: Active

Status: Time-Suspended Instance Realm

Objective: Defeat the Designated Guardian Beast to Return

Remaining Lives: 9

Optional Reward Upon Completion: +1 Skill Point

Sungjun couldn't help but stare as the screen floated before him with a frozen face. "This... this is the punishment?" he muttered, slapping his cheeks to snap out of his daze.

A thunderous step echoed, all of a sudden, as the towering giant moved.

In no time, the towering giant started charging at him with its spiky club raised high. It moved with surprising speed, despite its hulking size.

As the club swung down at him, Sungjun dove to the right in reflex, almost dodging it completely.

Almost...

The edge of the club grazed his ribs, just a graze... and yet...

CRACK!

He was sent flying like a rag doll. He tumbled across the earth, rolling, before skidding to a halt a dozen meters away. His entire ribcage was shattered like glass.

"Fk," He gasped, struggling even to lift an arm.

But the shadow loomed again, closer this time.

The giant was in mid-air, its club already coming down at him.

This time, Sungjun didn't have enough time to move. He could only look up with pain-glazed eyes as he tried to raise a hand, to dodge, to do anything...

But...

CRACK

His world went dark almost instantly. The last thing he saw was a massive foot.

And then, just like that, he turned into a bloody pulp.

Ding!

[You died]

However, a moment later, with a gasp, he came back to life.

Sungjun's body reassembled itself to its normal state without any wounds or injuries, on the cracked earth where he had first stood.

A new notification hovered above him.

Ding!

[1 Life Consumed – Resurrection Complete]

[Time Suspension: 00:10 Seconds Remaining]

[Lives Remaining: 8/9]

The stone giant froze mid-motion, just like how it was in the state for the first time Sungjun saw it. It was paused like a scene in a VR simulator.

Sungjun's eyes darkened, and almost a growl escaped his mouth. "Such grave punishment for not doing a workout... this fucing system..."

As the ten-second timer ticked toward zero, Sungjun shoved away all kinds of thoughts and sprinted away in the opposite direction, increasing the distance between him and the frozen giant.

"Show Character interface."

With a swift scroll down, he clicked on Ability.

[OVERLORD's AUTHORITY]

Unlocked abilities:

Chain of Command: Current status: 20% strength increase.

Eyes of Dominion: Stored skills: Lightning God Armor.

Sovereign's Resistance: All damages from Lightning God Armor are reduced by 50%. Elemental resistance increased by 20%

Without much thinking, he clicked on Lightning God Armor. A new holographic window materialized, displaying its details.

Lightning God Armor (Original user: Tempest)

Usage Remaining: 3

Duration: 60 seconds per activation

Sungjun's fingers hovered for a breath. "1 minute per usage. That means I have roughly 3 minutes to defeat this monster?"

As he was wondering the strategy, the timer hit zero.

The screen vanished, and the stone giant's body twitched. It resumed moving.

And then, Sungjun spun on his heel and ran toward it.

At ten meters away, his feet slammed into the earth, and he growled out the trigger.

"Lightning God Armor, Activate."

CRACKK-KOOM!!

In an instant, his entire being erupted with a blinding flash of light.

When it disappeared a moment later, lightning enveloped his body in sharp plates, and sparks of electricity danced all over his body.

His hair shot upward wildly. Even the air around him began to hum, vibrating with unstable sparks of electricity.

"Let's see how you like this," he muttered with his eyes fixated on the opponent.

As the giant continued to move, Sungjun shot off the ground like a thunderbolt.

BOOOM!

He shot straight at the beast's head with his armored fist pulled back, lightning spiraling into his knuckles. And then, he struck with every bit of strength he had.

His punch crashed against the giant's face with the speed of sound, releasing a shockwave.

CRACK!

But when the light cleared...

A faint white scratch, a hairline fracture across the creature's right cheek, was seen.

But that's it.

"Eh?" Sungjun's eyes widened, and his face went pale in horror. "That was everything?"

He didn't even get the opportunity to land on the ground to attack again as the giant's hand closed around him like a cage.

CLASP

The Lightning Armor sparked violently, trying to resist the force. But it was no use against the mighty grip of the giant.

Grrrr

The giant growled, tightening its grip again as Sungjun's ribs cracked under its sheer power.

"Arghh! Gahhhh!! Leave me, you fucer!"

With a sickening crunch, Sungjun's bones gave way. His eyes rolled back as the armor shattered into shards of lightning. Sungjun was helpless to fight against it. He couldn't get free from its grip, and eventually, his body ruptured inside the giant's hand like a popped fruit.

The blackout is here again.

[1 Life Consumed – Resurrection Complete]

[Time Suspension: 00:10 Seconds Remaining]

[Lives Remaining: 7/9]

Sungjun reappeared in the same location as he had resurrected earlier, lying on his back, letting out a loud gasp as he sat up. His body healed instantly as if he hadn't died and resurrected, but had gone back in time.

"Damn it... even with that power, I could only scratch him..." Sungjun gritted his teeth and squeezed his fists. He stared at the giant, which had frozen again after the resurrection, just like last time.

The countdown began anew above its head.

[Resume in: 00:06]

"Six seconds," he murmured, eyes narrowing. "Only six seconds left..."

He shut his eyes and breathed in slowly. Then, focusing his will, he reached into his body and pulled forth mana reserves he had in his body and shaped them.

HSSSSH HHK

A saber of translucent golden-blue energy ignited in his palm, humming with unstable mana. "What I need isn't a fist but a saber..."

A simple conjured blade, rudimentary, yet sharp enough to cut most monsters. Or at least that's what he believed at the moment. "If it can't be destroyed with brute force, then I must cut it down."

Taking advantage of its stillness, Sungjun launched himself forward.

The saber glinted as he raised it overhead and brought it crashing down on the beast's left leg, hoping to restrict its movements.

But... the moment his mana saber struck the giant's leg...

BOOM!

A ripple of force exploded outward instead of hurting the monster.

Sungjun's body was flung backward like a rag doll. He struck the ground with a thud, and a massive pain jolted up his spine. "SHT!"

He hit hard and coughed violently; before he could move further, the countdown vanished.

[00:00]

The giant roared back to life and took a giant leap forward once again, as usual.

CRACK—BOOM!

Sungjun barely got his arms up before the titan's foot came down on his body.

The world went black for the third time. And a familiar notification appeared.

[Resurrection Complete]

[Time Suspension: 00:10 Seconds Remaining]

[Lives Remaining: 7/9]

Sungjun's body reformed again in the dust with his eyes fluttering open in confusion.

"Ugh..." He sat up slowly. But then, as his eyes fell on the holographic screen, he felt something wrong.
"Hmmm?"

He had died three times so far, so the notification should read: [Lives Remaining: 6/9]

But instead, it still read: [Lives Remaining: 7/9]

He blinked. "Okay, what's going on?"

Then came the second shock. His mana core pulsed inside his chest.

His reserves were completely full.

Sungjun rose to his feet, blinking rapidly. "Wait... not only does this death number not go up, but my mana was restored?"

He looked down at his hands, flexing his fingers. "Why?"

After a while, Sungjun tightened his grip around the energy saber. He had no idea why his lives weren't decreasing the last few times. Was it a glitch? A feature? Or some kind of hidden rule.

Chapter 766: Earth 1712: Compulsory Physical Trial (Part-2)

Unfortunately, he didn't have the luxury to care as the giant stirred again.

The giant moved with blurring speed as usual, with its club raised high. This time, Sungjun tried to dodge early, to predict the swing, but the beast adjusted.

BOOOOM—

The club swung low in an arc, and the very tip clipped his left side.

CRACK!

Ribs shattered instantly.

"Argh..."

Sungjun's body hurled through the air, bouncing off cracked stone and sand, coughing blood violently as his vision spun. He could feel the skin along his chest split open. The pain was quite unbearable.

His eyes flicked up just in time to see the shadow fall.

The titan landed its foot on him.

CRUNCH.

[Resurrection Complete]

[Time Suspension: 00:10 Seconds Remaining]

[Lives Remaining: 7/9]

Gaaah

He gasped awake with a scream, gripping at his sides before realizing his body was whole again.

Still, seven lives.

"What the fck is just going on?" he growled again, staggering to his feet.

No time to think.

Only time to try.

Again.

This time, Sungjun didn't rush in head-on. As the countdown began above the frozen giant, he moved behind the monster. "Achilles Tendon... it doesn't have tendons but..."

He conjured the saber again, letting out a sharp breath. "Let's see if this works

[00:00]

The monster moved again.

And Sungjun struck first with a clean slash, right into the back of the heel. The blade dug quite deep.

SLIIICE—

And for the first time, the giant let out a horrifying ROAR, almost deafening Sungjun, who winced at the sudden roar.

However, the roar was the least of his problems. It's blood, thick, black, slimy, and foul-smelling, gushed out of its legs, sprayed like a geyser straight from the wound, arcing back onto him.

HISSSSSSS

The effect was quite immediate. As soon as his face was splashed by its blood, his skin started sizzling.

"Arghhaaaaa"

Sungjun screamed as agony seared through him, the liquid burning through his flesh like acid. Steam rose from his facial skin as he dropped to the ground. His saber vanished from his hand. His eyes bulged, his mouth agape, and in no time, his entire face was melted into nothing.

Then, Blackout again.

[1 Life Consumed — Resurrection Complete]

[Time Suspension: 00:10 Seconds Remaining]

[Lives Remaining: 6/9]

He sat up again, coughing reflexively even though his lungs were intact. But his eyes were sharp now.

Because this time, something clicked in his head.

[Lives Remaining: 6/9]

He blinked hard in realization. "Three deaths by stomp. Two by crushing hands. One by that blood, the acid bath. That's six in total. And yet..."

"Only three types are being counted?" he muttered, his voice hoarse, but steady.

His eyes widened as a whisper escaped him, "It's the number of distinct ways I've died."

The system wasn't deducting lives for repetition. It was cataloguing deaths by method.

Three kinds had been 'registered' so far. And with every death... his mana returned full.

Sungjun chuckled bitterly, brushing dust from his shoulder as he stood again. "So that's how you want to play it."

The pain from the melting blood still haunted his skin, but the determination in his eyes became clearer than ever now that he understood it.

While his mind started calculating how to maximize his chances to check its weak points while keeping his remaining lives as high as possible, the ten-second grace period reached the fifth second.

Sungjun tightened the grip around his energy saber. He didn't hesitate to charge forward again. He circled it once again, closing in before taking his stance.

[00:02... 00:01...]

SLASH!

The blade bit into the tendon again, same as before. A geyser of black blood erupted into the air.

But Sungjun was already gone, his movement perfectly timed with a body twist and escape from the death-spray zone. A few droplets grazed his sleeve, but the main torrent missed him.

And then, the giant fell.

A satisfying CRASH thundered through the wasteland as the massive form collapsed forward.

Thud

Sungjun didn't waste time celebrating and sprinted forward. He then leaped onto the back of the giant and reached its back.

Then, a wild swing of its club came at him. He ducked and charged forward.

He held steady, sliding forward, boots scraping stone flesh. The nape of its neck came into view, at last. "I didn't expect to reach this so fast..."

"Let's end it," Sungjun growled, the saber in his hands gleaming as he raised it.

However, the monster wasn't done.

Its left hand, still functional and terrifyingly fast, snapped back and grabbed him mid-lunge.

"No!"

A moment later, pain crushed his every nerve. His bones were crushed like a walnut crushed by a hammer.

And then...

[Resurrection Complete]

[Time Suspension: 00:10 Seconds Remaining]

[Lives Remaining: 6/9]

He coughed, groaning as he sat up.

But this time, there was no panic in his eyes. The lives remaining were kept intact.

"Foot stomp. Hand crush. Acid blood..." he whispered, recounting calmly. "I've only been truly punished for new mistakes. Yup, my theory is true. And now..."

"Your bad time has come," he murmured with his eyes narrowing. "You giant..."

After a while;

Snap

Blackout

[Resurrection Complete]

[Time Suspension: 00:10 Seconds Remaining]

[Lives Remaining: 5/9]

Sungjun sat cross-legged, once more resurrected. The dry wind blew past, unbothered by his death or resurrection.

His bones no longer hurt as much as his pride... But he had no panic or worry on his face. It was completely calm. He opened his eyes slowly, letting out a deep breath. "Five lives," he muttered. "Still five left."

He closed his eyes again, thinking fast. "First, the mana saber is sharp enough to cut through its defenses. Secondly, its Achilles tendon strike is effective enough to bring it down. Thirdly, the giant's reflex range is insane. The left hand doesn't seem to let go of the club, whether it stands or falls. But the right hand, it's got way too much damn flexibility. It can be bent almost like 150 degrees and reach all the way to its lower back."

He took another breath.

A distant part of him wanted to curse the system. But he kept his calmness and let out another deep breath.

Instead, his fingers moved. He swiped his hand through the air and pulled open the Ability list.

Lightning God Armor

Uses Remaining: 2 / 3

Taking a deep breath, he murmured. "20 minutes have passed so far. I have gathered some information. Now, it's time to use the second one."

Unlike the mana, the Lightning God Armor didn't reset. He used it once, and that's it. He was only left with twice per day.

As the timer struck zero and the giant stirred, Sungjun opened his eyes and stood. "Let's do this."

He activated the skill.

Lightning God Armor: ENGAGED

After activating the Lightning God Armor, he conjured a blade of focused mana saber in one hand and a mana spear in the other. The double summon consumed nearly half his reserves instantly.

"Alright, let's go this..." He shot forward like a missile.

The giant swung as he approached it.

Sungjun blurred low and slid through its legs, motioning the saber.

SLASH!

He struck its right Achilles tendon clean. Blood gushed, but he vaulted high before it sprayed over him.

The beast wailed, dropping forward with an earth-rattling quake. Sungjun landed on the back of its thighs and ran.

The club thrashed wildly again. He ducked, dashed, and sprinted across its spine.

The neck came into view, along with its right hand, curling up in the air to capture him.

"Hmpf, predictable..."

Just as the hand lunged, he hurled the energy spear upward, not at the palm, but straight into the wrist.

THUNK!

A jet of steaming blood erupted as the mana spear stabbed deeply into its wrist, but he was already sliding backward to evade that acidic blood.

As it screamed, Sungjun couldn't help but grin. "That's right, scream, you bastard."

Then...

He sensed something, all of a sudden, and a shadow appeared all over him.

He looked up.

His eyes only captured the tip of its club at the last fraction of a second. "Come on," he whispered with blank eyes.

CRACK.

It landed squarely on his head from above like a hammer.

Blackout

He gasped as breath returned like a punch to the chest.

[Resurrection Complete]

[Time Suspension: 00:10 Seconds Remaining]

[Lives Remaining: 4/9]

He lay there for a moment, blinking at the sky.

"Dammit. I thought it was only its right hand that had incredible flexibility. How can its left hand with a club just twist entirely to hit me? Isn't this too much?"

Chapter 767 767: Earth 1712: Compulsory Physical Trial (Part-3)

He looked up again as if staring at the System interface in the sky.

"Seriously?" he snapped at the system, finally. "You're just going to bend physics now without following any logic? Are you hell bent on finding new ways to beat me to death or something? Just unlock my ocular powers. I'll show this monster who is the boss..." He roared in frustration.

A groan followed, and self-criticism poured out of his mouth. "If I had known this would happen, I would have done workouts for hours to burn 5000 calories."

There was no response from the system, of course. Just that same damn blinking counter in the corner.

He stood up slowly, brushing dirt from his shoulder and letting out a deep sigh. "So," he said aloud, narrowing his eyes at the monster in the distance, now stomping around again. "Alright then. I see that the information gathered isn't enough. From this point on, I will find ways to break you down. Everything for that last attempt."

Time was no longer a number on a clock for Sungjun. It was counted in deaths instead.

And in lives remaining: 4 / 9.

He had one last remaining attempt to use Lightning God Armor.

Sungjun had managed to race up the giant's club arm, timing his movement with the beast's rhythm, bouncing between thick, boulder-like fingers.

He stabbed it once at the base of the nape. Evading the gush of its blood, he ran across the shoulders, leapt... And went for the eyes.

But the creature shook its head violently, like a bull swatting flies.

WHAM.

In mid-air, the club came up.

[Lives remaining: 4]

"Again..."

Same strategy.

Up the shoulder, try again. This time, he stabbed the side of its eye. It roared, eye leaking toxic blood.

There was some progress, but certainly not enough.

It's because the left hand grabbed him like a fly on its cheek.

Crunch.

[Still: 4 lives]

Another redundant death.

"Again"

He took to the skies, using a giant extra leap, powering up his legs with the mana that cost a third of his reserves, and hurled the mana spear at the hand holding the club.

The spear landed at its target. The wrist tore successfully as a scream escaped the giant.

The club dropped for the first time from its grip.

Victory?

Nope.

He landed badly and was slammed into the dirt by the same injured arm before he could dodge.

[3 lives left]

He groaned as he respawned, blinking against the sun, and muttered:

"Again..."

From above, conjuring a spear mid-jump, he aimed for the crotch this time, ignoring moral ethics, or whatever. The impact is connected successfully, too. The black toxic blood gushed out, too.

But then... a clean, casual swat struck his body.

Gaah

As he crashed to the ground with his ribs shattered, a foot stomp landed on his body.

[Remaining: 3 lives]

Sungjun lay on the ground after resurrection for a moment, "Okay... It's not a good spot cause there are no landing spots after striking the location. Got it."

He was on the shoulder again.

If he crouched lower, maybe the arm couldn't reach him. If he stood closer to the neck...

Nope.

The left arm still found him and crushed him like a bug.

[Remaining: 3 lives]

Another repeat kill.

Another red X in the invisible mental diagram he was drawing of this thing's body. "Again..." Sungjun only got more determined to find its weaknesses.

This time, with a series of combo attacks, one after another, he managed to inflict wounds on the giant. Its right wrist was bruised. Its left eye is damaged. Its tendons were slashed more than once. Even the crotch bore a tear in its armor-like skin.

But it still moved and killed him, fortunately with a footstomp, a redundant kill.

[Remaining: 3 lives]

[Remaining: 2 lives]

[Remaining: 2 lives]

After several failed frontal assaults, Sungjun tried something different.

He once again waited behind the giant during its club swing as he did during the earlier attempts. The only thing he had forgotten was to slash its Achilles Tendons. As the club smashed into the ground ahead, Sungjun sprinted up its back instead, timing his run perfectly with the recoil motion.

Just as the giant lifted the club to swing again, Sungjun jumped, aiming to land on the handle of the weapon itself, hoping to use its own swing as a slingshot toward its exposed ear or jawline.

For a split second, it worked.

He rode the rising arc of the club like a surfer.

Then...

Snap.

The giant jerked its arm backward with unnatural speed, yanking the club into a sudden reverse swing.

Sungjun didn't anticipate the torque. His body flung like a ragdoll across the air as a result, and smashed his spine into a nearby rock with a sickening crack.

It was an instant death.

Lives remaining: 1

"Okay, this is the last one," Sungjun muttered with his gaze as cold and hard as an ice berg. He clenched his fists as the countdown timer above ticked down.

Ten... nine... eight...

With a mana saber in his right hand and a mana spear in his left, the instant the timer hit zero, Sungjun darted forward with full speed, his movements honed by failure, pain, and vast experience he had accumulated over like twenty consecutive deaths or more. He made his way to the giant's backside, just as he had done several times before.

Without hesitation, he sliced through its right Achilles tendon.

GRAAAHHHHHH—!

The beast collapsed, roaring in agony as it hit the ground. Sungjun didn't stop. He circled around and cleanly severed its left Achilles tendon as well, ensuring it had no chance of standing again.

As its toxic blood gushed from the massive wounds like a jet spray, Sungjun jumped onto the monster's back, sprinting along its spine while the massive club came swinging toward him.

He ducked under it and slid forward.

At just the right moment, he plunged the energy spear into the beast's club-holding wrist.

SHRIIEEK!

A flood of burning blood shot out.

Just as its right hand bent backwards to catch him, Sungjun murmured. "Activate, Lightning God Armor."

The electrical sparks erupted from his body, and he instantly vanished from the blood's path in a streak of blur, zigzagging away as the right hand just missed him.

While charging ahead, he conjured another spear in mid-motion.

"Die, you bastard."

Without hesitation, he drove the spear deep into the base of the spine, right where the nape connected to the skull, and jumped back as another wave of acidic blood sprayed outward.

Still in mid-air, he saw the giant's eye twitch toward him.

Graaa gra graaaa

The beast could no longer move its limbs. Its head shook faintly, roaring in pain and struggle. With every bit of strength left, the creature slightly turned its neck and opened its jagged, grotesque mouth to swallow him whole.

But Sungjun landed perfectly, right on one of its front teeth.

Using it as a launch pad, he kicked off again with full force, rising high above its face.

In that instant, two sharp spears, smaller and hastily forged, appeared in his hands, created from the last stretch of his mana.

"Oraaaa. Die..."

With a roar, he hurled one down.

PFFFT!

The spear pierced the giant's eye. It howled in pain.

Sungjun landed safely below, panting heavily, but he wasn't finished yet. "C'mon..."

Amidst its agonizing screech, he rushed forward one final time, leapt onto its chest, and climbed up to its face again.

He stabbed the last spear straight into the other eye, burying it deep until only the hilt remained. Then he jumped away and landed on the cracked, dusty ground with his mana completely spent.

Graaaaaaaaa!

Behind him, the colossus let out one last broken scream before going utterly still. Its body began to twitch, then collapse.

At once, its entire body slammed to the earth.

Sungjun didn't move. He simply stood there, staring at the monster's corpse, waiting to see if it would rise again. There's still half a minute left before the final Lightning God Armor dissipates.

However, the giant didn't wake up. It slowly disappeared.

He let out a long and quiet breath as the floating screen finally returned, shimmering above him.

Ding!

[System Notification]

[Compulsory Physical Trial has been completed]

[Reward: +1 Skill Point Acquired]

Returning to Origin World in: 10... 9... 8...

Sungjun exhaled as he muttered under his breath, clenching his fists as a breathless smile curled on his lips. "Finally... I actually pulled it off..."

Chapter 768 768: Earth 1712: Tianzhu's memory

His eyes fluttered shut. The moment of peace felt almost surreal after 20-odd deaths and continuous repeated battles.

3... 2... 1...

Soon, the timer hit zero, and a soft pulse of white light engulfed him. Sungjun landed softly on the bed, returning to his room.

Sungjun blinked rapidly, looking around to confirm that it was indeed his place. However, when he snapped his eyes to the smartphone on the bedside table, he saw that the time was stated: 00:43.

That's exactly the same number of minutes he spent fighting the monster.

"So, the time flows normally in the real world, after all. But that's fine. After all, I..."

Ding!

"Eh?" Sungjun was forced to stop mumbling as the same floating screen gently blinked above him again.

[Daily Mission has been refreshed]

Daily Mission: Burn 5000 kcal

Progress: 0 / 5000 kcal

Reward: +1 Skill Point

Deadline: 23:59 Today

"Ugh," Sungjun couldn't help but groan, seeing that...

He sat up slowly with a serious expression on his face, "... I don't think I can do that again," he murmured in a shaky voice. "Just because I managed to defeat it doesn't mean I would want to face that thing every single day. And who knows what kind of monster the system will generate in order to kill me differently? And who knows if the rules remain the same, too."

He shuddered for a moment as the vivid memories of every brutal death flashed across his mind: being crushed, burned, melted, splattered, and skewered. Back then, he didn't think too much about it as he had only 10 seconds to even think, and his focus was entirely on defeating the giant, but now that there was peace around, the memories of deaths came to him all at once.

Sungjun fell back on his bed and lay there. "Burning 5000 calories will be my first priority from now on."

Several hours later;

The sun had almost reached its peak when Sungjun was in the workout.

His breath steamed in the air as he pushed his body through a grueling session—burpees, sprint drills, weighted squats, resistance core sets. Sweat poured off his back and arms like rain.

The holographic screen hovered nearby, displaying his progress in bright orange text.

Calories Burned: 4918 / 5000 kcal

"Just 72 to go..."

Six hours of nonstop workout...

Today, he didn't go out to open the store. He didn't offer to drop his kids off at school either. Since dawn, Sungjun has only focused on the workout.

Another ten minutes later, the smartwatch around his wrist beeped and beeped before he put the brakes on his legs and slowed down on the treadmill.

Ding!

[You completed the Daily Mission. +1 Skill Point is added.]

After a while, coming out of the warm shower, Sungjun sat down on the couch and relaxed a bit, letting out a long groan. The mansion steward walked to him and bowed. "Master, the lunch is prepared."

Sungjun sighed. "Alright." After a brief pause, he added. "Robert, I'm leaving for Southern Wu this evening and won't return for a few days. Look after the house."

"Eh?" The steward looked a bit surprised as Southern Wu is located in Zhonggou, where Pavel has no business at all. But, in the end, he didn't question and gave a bow. "Understood, Master Han."

****The next day;****

****Tianzhu's residence, Kitez City, Novarusk Republic;****

At dawn, Tianzhu was in the shower, letting the hot stream cascade over his skin. He didn't seem to be moving. Just stood still with his head bowed and eyes closed.

The memory of his Mother's death played in his head. On the eve of the New Year, she was lying there in the bathtub with a cut on her wrist. A five-year-old Tianzhu was staring at her blankly as the water-filled tub changed red.

Then the scene shifted. Tianzhu sat stiffly in the arms of his older sister as mourners offered their condolences. His father, dressed in a black suit, smiled and bowed, and shook hands with them.

But he never came to Tianzhu. Not once did he ask him how he was holding up. To hug him and say, I'm here. To tell him that it is okay to cry.

Even at the funeral, Tianzhu wasn't allowed to cry. Instead, his father had sternly said, "You're the man now. Stand tall."

The memory flashed to middle school...

"Tianzhu, drop the sword. I said Drop it."

"Dad, I was just."

"I said DROP IT!"

Cling

The sword was dropped onto the polished wooden floor.

"If you dare to pick up swordsmanship again, I will break your legs. Go and study." His father warned him with an intense glare to the point that a 14-year-old Tianzhu trembled.

In the present, Tianzhu opened his eyes slowly, as another memory returned. A 17-year-old Tianzhu was at the airport. His flight is just an hour away. He was scouted by a top guild.

But his father never showed up. Only Xueli had come. Just his sister was there for him.

The scene shifted again to when Sister gave birth. His brother-in-law ran away just before she went into labor. She was all alone in the hospital. A 22-year-old Tianzhu, who was on an important mission assigned in Shen Triad, left in the middle of his mission and came to her side. During the next 10 days, he saw her friends and acquaintances, their relatives, and even their hateful step-siblings come to see her.

Yet, their father, who was living in the same neighborhood, came to visit her.

Back to the present, with such disappointing memories he had of his father, who recently passed away, Tianzhu's hand reached out to press the shower button. The water stopped instantly.

He stood there for a moment as he murmured aloud. "Jiejie knows that I'm not interested in meeting him even if he were on his deathbed. Why does she have to do this..."

A few hours ago;

Tianzhu, Theo, and Vera sat at the dining table, having dinner. The atmosphere looked quite tense, with no one speaking because of Theo's outburst a while ago. Vera was forced to meddle in, talking about everything that came to his mind to change the mood.

Beside them, a humanoid assistant stood silently, the sole servant of their 12-room mansion. Amy is a butler robot that does everything, from cooking to helping the kids with their studies. The only function it doesn't have is fighting.

As Theo silently ate his meal while Vera chattered about her upcoming December excursions, an outdoor trip to Yelagin Island, ice skating on the weekend, but most importantly, a four-day Trip, which required parental supervision, Tianzhu's phone buzzed.

As he took a look at the screen, his brows furrowed as it was an unknown number.

He picked it up. "Hello?"

On the other end, a professional yet polite voice greeted him. "Hello, Mr. Qin, this is Sasha from the Reception Desk at Egmor HQ, Moscow. I was informed that you are currently on leave. I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"No, it's fine. What is it? Something urgent at the company?" Tianzhu asked. He didn't particularly care for the answer. He no longer worked at Egmor Group as a security chief. He left it a few years ago and is now only a store owner.

Chapter 769: Earth 1712: Tianzhu meets family

"I received a message from someone trying to reach you," Sasha continued. "A woman named Jiang Xueli. She claims to be your elder sibling. She mentioned that your number had changed and that you weren't responding to her emails. She left a message. Would you like me to forward it to your email?"

Qin Tianzhu blinked. "Jiejie? Ah, yes, she is indeed my sister." His grip on the phone tightened as he said. "Alright."

Opening the mail app, he then tapped the message.

Xueli's voice played a second later, soft but clear. "Hey... It's me," she began. "I hope you're doing well. I... I promised that I won't contact you again through public channels like this. I'm sorry. But the situation is urgent."

There was a pause.

"Sigh... Dad passed away, Xiao Zhu. I know your thoughts will not change. But before his death, he regretted a lot of things. Since he is no more, I thought it was time to put away that resentment. If it is not too much trouble, can you come back home with Veronika and Theodore to attend the funeral?"

The message ended.

Tianzhu stood in silence for a long moment. No anger. Just a numb silence. However, his grip on the phone tightened on the sides.

As Tianzhu disconnected the call, Vera eyed him curiously. "Uncle, what is it?" She couldn't help but turn curious, seeing a change of expression on Tianzhu's face. He seldom loses his calmness when it doesn't concern her or Theo.

Tianzhu sighed, shaking his head. "Your grandfather passed away, dear."

"Oh, are we going then?" As Vera asked expectantly, Tianzhu shook his head. "No. We will go after the funeral."

****A few days later,****

At a columbarium in Hangzhou City, Southern Wu,

Tianzhu stood in front of the compartment where his mother's portrait and ashes were stored. He stood there in silence.

Xueli approached, carrying a bouquet. "Xiao Zhu..." As she called out with an emotion thickened in her voice, Tianzhu slowly turned around and smiled faintly. "It's been a while, Jiejie."

Tears welled in Xueli's eyes as she nodded. Her voice broke a bit, "Yeah... it has been." After a brief pause, she asked with her eyes wandering around. "Where's Theo and Vera..."

At that, Tianzhu's eyes darkened. He let out a sigh, shaking his head.

Xihu District, Hangzhou City, Southern Wu;

The doorbell's tune echoed through the quiet morning.

Jiang Xueli, still wrapped in a thick robe, shuffled toward the entrance, rubbing sleep from her eyes. When she pulled open the door, she blinked in surprise. "Xiao Zhu?"

Tianzhu stood there in a sweatshirt and joggers. His hands were in his pockets, shoulders relaxed like he had been at her house multiple times. He gave a small, pleasant smile. "Morning, Jiejie. Sorry for not calling ahead. I was out to jog around the Park, but stopped by, realizing your house is nearby."

A beat passed before she stepped aside, letting him in with a smile. "Not a problem. It's your house. You can come at any time. Come in."

The living room was warm, and the scent of freshly brewed coffee lingered in the air. Xueli sat across from him; her husband, Zhao Mingze, also slouched beside her, still groggy from being woken up.

Birth name: Qin Li

Legal Name: Jiang Xueli

Age: 48

Ethnicity: Han

Arcane Path: Fighter

Ability: One Punch

Ability Rank: S

Mana Reserves: Tier-3

*

Name: Zhao Mingze

Age: 45.

Arcane Path: Mage

Ability: Sharing is Caring

Ability Rank: A

Mana Reserves: Tier-5

*

"Proceed with both of them." He quietly muttered under his breath while appearing as if he was taking a sip of coffee.

As Tianzhu shifted awkwardly on the couch, Mingze spoke. "So, I, uhh... heard that you stayed 15 years in Kitez City, is it? How was your life there?"

Tianzhu exhaled and explained, altering the events slightly to suit his fake identity. "Life is good there. My sister might have already mentioned it. I used to work at Egmor, but later, because of too much work and my kids, I resigned and now run a convenience store." He glanced at his sister and added. "That's why you couldn't reach me at the company, Jiejie."

As Xueli's eyes widened in surprise, Tianzhu further pulled out his smartphone and showed them a picture, a teenage girl with striking green eyes, and a teenage boy as tall as him, looking almost identical to him. "This is my daughter, Veronika. And this is my son, Theodore."

Mingze blinked at him, "Your son and daughter?"

As he glanced at his wife, Tianzhu shrugged. "Well, Jiejie might have given birth to them, but I raised them. Additionally, I legally adopted them. So..."

At that, Xueli's face slightly darkened, but Tianzhu continued, "Anyway, originally, I had no intentions to return, but since our father is no more, and the kids also became big enough, I thought there is no need for Jiejie to visit all the way to Kitez every quarter. I also had no reason to stay back there.

Mingze leaned back on the couch with arms crossed, still processing Tianzhu's words. "So, you're planning to stay here permanently," he pondered. "That wouldn't have been an easy decision."

Tianzhu nodded with a smile, swirling the remnants of his coffee in his cup. "Yeah. But as I said earlier, my children are now big enough. They reached a stage where they will start seeking independence and rebel if I try to control them for their own good. I feel like I should let them grow in their homeland, where they could think of the possibility of having a future."

Xueli observed her younger brother carefully. Tianzhu looked like someone more composed, like a proper parent who had gone through much. She couldn't help but miss the carefree brat who does things on a whim and lets things fall into place.

"I still think adjusting to this place isn't going to be that easy for your children and you as well," she said, setting her cup down. "Considering the fact that Vera wants to pursue an idol career..."

"Well, being an idol is so much better than becoming a hunter." Sungjun shrugged, placing the phone away. After a brief pause, he further added. "Unlike Theo, who has inherited your musical genes but wants to become a hunter."

Chapter 770: Earth 1712: Tianzhu meets family (Part-2)

"That's not surprising." Xueli nodded plainly, "I was also a hunter once, despite being in the acting field."

"But, Jiejie... you were talented... Theo doesn't have the potential to become a hunter. His ability lies in..."

Just then, the sound of hurried footsteps came from down the hallway. A moment later, a girl's voice rang out. "Auntie! Where's my hairbrush? I can't find it."

"Excuse me..." Xueli sighed, already pushing herself off the couch. Then she raised her pitch in the same intensity. "It's in the bathroom drawer, second row."

"It's not there... Fetch it for me!"

A few seconds later, a girl appeared in the doorway with her hair half-brushed, her pajamas wrinkled. Her eyes darted to Sungjun, and she froze. "Who...?"

Tianzhu smiled gently. "Hello. You must be Park Soojin."

Park Soojin

Age: 18

Ethnicity: Han/Goryeo

Awakening Status: Unawakened

*

Park Soojin was Zhao Mingze's first wife's daughter, who had been living with him and Xueli for the past few years. Because Mingze had not officially obtained her custody yet, she retained her mother's surname, who was from the Goryeo Islands.

Soojin subtly narrowed her eyes, then turned to her father. "Dad, who is he?"

Mingze chuckled. "That, sweetie, is your uncle, your mother's younger brother. Sungjun."

Soojin blinked, her lips parting in surprise. "The one who disappeared 22 years ago?"

As Tianzhu smiled and gave a slight nod, Soojin glanced at her own clothes and hurriedly hid behind Xueli, peeking out shyly. "Uhh... I'm sorry. I'll just be in a minute. Be right back."

Soojin awkwardly bowed before dashing back to her room and shutting the door.

Xueli and Mingze exchanged glances; the latter looked at Sungjun. "Don't mind her. She is just not good with first meetings."

A few minutes later, she returned, now dressed in proper clothes with a composed expression. Taking a graceful bow, she greeted Sungjun once again, "Hello, uncle. I'm Park Soojin."

Mingze scoffed at her behavior. "And now you're acting like some graceful lady?"

Soojin shot him a glare before turning to Sungjun with a polite smile and taking her seat.

"Uncle, I didn't know you were coming. I never expected to meet you in person."

"Oh?" Tianzhu raised a brow.

Soojin nodded eagerly. "You're famous at my school, at least in our club, you know."

Mingze blinked. "What club?"

Xueli smiled. "Oh, I forgot to mention. Xiao Zhu, Soojin is attending your alma mater. She is also the same as Veronika and Theodore."

Qin Tianzhu was visibly surprised. "Oh"

Soojin leaned forward excitedly. "You're really well-known in our Archery club. Our instructor always talks about his favorite student. He either uses your name to motivate us or to scold us. You're like a legend in the club—the prodigy who defeated the legendary archer, Lin Shu never took a break and dominated every competition."

"Is Teacher Han still there?" Tianzhu asked, curiosity evident in his eyes. In both of his lives, he respected this archery instructor who even took private time to look after his practice. However, unfortunately, after awakening

Xueli and Mingze then exchanged surprised glances. "Wait... since when are you in the Archery club? Aren't you in the Orchestra Club?" Xueli asked, interrupting them.

Soojin shrugged. "A couple of years now, Auntie. And our school allows us to sign up for multiple clubs anyway."

"Is that why you were being late? I thought you were having fun with your friends, not practicing archery..." Xueli's eyes narrowed.

"A couple of years..." Zhao Mingze looked betrayed but held his tongue, stealing a glance at Tianzhu.

Noticing the slight tension, Tianzhu took his phone into his hands again. "Ah, Vera seems to have woken up. I need to go."

"Eh? So urgently?" Xueli was taken aback.

Tianzhu smiled. "We have a few things to do at the immigration office today, Jiejie." He then got up. "I'll be back later with Vera."

Mingze nodded. "Come back for lunch or maybe dinner?"

Tianzhu tilted his head. "Don't you both have work? We can visit on the weekend. No rush."

Xueli waved him off. "It's fine. Consider it a welcome home meal." Mingze added. "And who knows whether one of us will suddenly become busy on the weekend?"

Tianzhu thought for a bit and nodded. "Alright. Let's have dinner."

After a while, he returned to the hotel where he was staying.

The room was still dim, the curtains drawn shut against the morning sun.

Qin Tianzhu stepped inside quietly, careful not to make a sound.

His gaze landed on the bed where his niece was still curled up, her dark hair sprawled over the pillow. Her slow, steady breaths indicated she was deep in sleep. He sighed, a faint smile tugging at his lips. "Still not awake, huh?" he murmured.

After adjusting the room temperature slightly, he pulled the covers up to her shoulders before quietly stepping out, heading towards the fitness center.

Downstairs, the receptionist greeted him with a professional smile. "Good morning, sir. May I have your room number for confirmation?"

"Room 1207," Qin Tianzhu responded smoothly.

After a quick check, she nodded, motioning toward the entrance. "You're all set. Enjoy your workout, Mr. Alexander Qin."

With a slight nod, he pushed the glass door open and entered the gym.

The space was relatively empty, save for one other occupant. A woman was already working out with the assistance of a personal trainer.

Even without makeup, she was stunning, with sharp yet delicate features, a well-toned physique, and a presence that demanded attention. However, Tianzhu barely spared her a glance upon realizing that she is a plain folk, someone without any mana.

Generally, almost 90% of awakenings happen before one reaches an adult stage, when they stop growing. 9% of awakenings happen from 18-21. And 0.99% of awakenings happen before the age of 30.

Those who crossed 30 should more or less give up on awakening their abilities. While beautiful she was, she had almost no prospect of awakening at all. But then again, not everyone goes out there and fights the monsters.

Only a fraction of awakened people become hunters. Many of them choose normal jobs and live a peaceful life. So, it doesn't matter for many, but for Tianzhu, if one doesn't have abilities, they are of no use. As for the beauty, he slept with many such beauties in his former life.

Hence, he made his way to the stretching area, not paying her any attention.