

Seller 771

Chapter 771: Earth1712: Tianzhu meets a beauty

He set his bag down near the treadmill, rolled his shoulders, and began his warm-up.

The woman nearby, mid-set on a lateral raise, found her eyes drifting toward him when he was on the treadmill later. She hadn't noticed him at first, but now... it was impossible to ignore him. The rhythmic pounding of his footsteps, the way his muscles flexed under his fitted workout shirt, and that sharp, almost indifferent expression when the treadmill was going at its highest, at 56kph—it all caught her attention. It was almost like a main character from a drama. "Was he showing off to impress me or something?" She couldn't help but wonder.

Her grip on the dumbbells slackened slightly, and her trainer cleared his throat. "Miss, focus."

She blinked, snapping out of her trance. A hint of irritation crossed her face—whether at the unexpected distraction or the trainer, she wasn't sure.

Meanwhile, Tianzhu remained oblivious. He lost in his workout, focusing on burning as many calories as possible, in order to reach that Daily Mission target. Lee Hye-rin couldn't help but steal another glance and thought. "It was rare to see someone so entirely engrossed in their workout." Was he just showing off to impress her, as she originally thought? Hye-rin wondered.

If the gym had been busy with clients around, she wouldn't have bothered much, but since he was the only other person who was working out, the woman was quite distracted.

But Qin Tianzhu? He didn't remotely pay any attention to her.

After a few more minutes, he finally eased into a jog, gradually reducing the speed until he came to a stop. His breathing slowed as he stepped off the treadmill, rolling his shoulders. After resting for just about a minute, he moved on to his next routine.

Roughly, half an hour later, his attention shifted.

Hye-rin stood near the counter, sipping a shake. From the corner of her eye, she noticed him approaching.

"Here it comes. Finally..."

She had seen this scenario play out more times than she could count. It was inevitable, especially in places like this, where wealthy, young, and good-looking men often show off their physiques in workouts and linger a little too long after they were done, ending up striking up a conversation with a beauty.

It was as if she was looking forward to his approach to flirt around after showing off like that. Of course, she didn't plan on flirting back. If anything, she was preparing herself to reject his advances.

Just as she took another sip of her shake, she heard a voice, calm, even.

"Excuse me."

Hye-rin turned, half-expecting the usual smooth remark or an attempt at conversation. Instead, she was met with Tianzhu's impassive gaze.

"Could you move aside?" he said simply, his tone polite but firm. "I need to use the stair climber."

For a moment, she just stared, caught off guard. "Eh? What?"

"The Stair climber," Qin Tianzhu repeated, pointing at the machine behind her.

Then, realizing she had been standing in front of the machine without thinking, she quickly stepped aside. "Ah... sure," she muttered, her ears reddened in embarrassment.

Without another word, Qin Tianzhu adjusted the settings to max incline and continued his workout.

The woman, now idly stirring her drink, found herself watching again. This time, her gaze lingered on him quite longer.

She wasn't sure why.

Perhaps it was because she might be really impressed by his stamina. Or perhaps it was because of how effortlessly he had dismissed her presence.

Whatever it was, she found herself staring at him until her eyes glanced toward her, meeting her eyes. She immediately lowered her gaze and turned away in a hurry.

She exited the gym, heading toward the spa treatment rooms.

Tianzhu, on the other hand, continued to work out.

An hour later;

He wiped his sweat with a towel before checking the time. "1 hour 54 minutes... just under 2 hours."

Without wasting another moment, he left the gym and made his way to the 16th floor—the infinity pool in order to cool down.

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Meanwhile, somewhere far in the suburbs, in some internet cafe, a middle-aged man with a mask covering the lower half of his face was texting someone on the dark web.

Clown Mask: Target just left her residence in casual attire.

Curator: Who is following her?

Clown Mask: Spark

Curator: Is Spark up to the task? The last few missions given to him ended up as failures.

Clown Mask: Yes, I'm aware of his reputation. That is why I didn't give him the artifact. The artifact lies with me.

Curator: Then, I suppose you will handle this by yourself?

Clown Mask: Yes, you can be assured that the target will die.

Curator: Make sure you don't miss this opportunity. The Japanese delegate is arriving on this evening's flight. If Noa meets him and hands over the physical recording data of our client, our efforts will be in vain.

Clown Mask: No, I don't miss it. Don't worry. All we need is our target reaching an indoor but public location with lots of people. We will lock it down.

Curator: Be careful. Spark shouldn't get caught. Noa had the ability to extract memories.

Clown Mask: Not a problem.

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Meanwhile, 30000ft above the sea of North Sentinel that separates the continents of Siberia and Zhonggou, a private jet was seen traveling through a heavy thunderstorm, surprisingly quite safely without being touched by the raindrops. It looked as if the rain was avoiding it because of the barrier.

In reality, it wasn't because someone was shielding the craft. Inside, Sungjun was seen in a meditative pose, practicing the technique of Mana Condensation, absorbing every bit of vitality of the rain and rogue lightning strikes around.

Meanwhile, as he subsequently refined the natural energy, his Mana reserves increased at a rapid rate. The two guards coming with him and the private stewardess assigned just continued to stare at him in silence as he was enveloped by a layer of scarlet aura.

Soon, as its color slowly turned blue, a system chime rang in Sungjun's head as a holographic screen materialized before him. His lips widened a bit as he slowly opened his eyes.

Ding!

[Congratulations, host. Your Mana particles number reached 100,000. You broke through Tier-6.]

[You unlocked Overlord Authority's ability: Dungeon's Reins.]

"Good..." He nodded to himself but shut his eyes again.

Chapter 772: Earth 1712: A series of misunderstandings

Meanwhile, at Four Seasons Hotel, Hangzhou City;

Hyerin arrived at the infinity pool with a composed posture and peaceful thoughts, having just finished her spa and massage treatment, and was here for a swim at this infinity pool, which seemed like it stretched seamlessly into the skyline.

She adjusted the strap of her one-piece swimsuit and stepped forward to dive into it, only to halt in her tracks.

There, floating lazily in the water on a pool lounger, was the man from the Gym.

The same fellow who troubled her thoughts at the gym.

And here he was once again in the same space as her, lying back on a floater with his eyes closed; his toned chest and abs were visible for everyone to see.

Hye-rin felt a sudden hesitation.

She had come here to enjoy a quiet swim for a cool down, but now... should she even go in?

A small and irrational thought crept into her mind as no other person was in the swimming pool apart from this same fellow once again, and she wasn't the type to think that it was fate or something. "Is he here because of me? The coincidences are too much."

Theories popped up in her head automatically to fulfill the logic.

He hadn't spoken to her at the gym, perhaps because of the staff. Maybe he had been waiting for a more private setting to make his move.

After all, she was a celebrity herself, a known face throughout the country.

Hyerin glanced at him again, observing his relaxed form. But he looked too at ease, too indifferent for someone with ulterior motives. That only irritated her a bit.

Hesitating a few more seconds, Hyerin stepped into the water in the end, letting the cool sensation wash over her.

The two of them remained in their own worlds for a while. Hyerin swam at a leisurely pace, occasionally glancing his way as if to wonder why he wasn't approaching her yet, while Tianzhu remained undisturbed, drifting weightlessly.

The only sound between them was the occasional ripple of water.

Then, a sharp buzz broke the silence. Without checking the caller ID, he answered with a smile. "Hey, my baby."

Hyerin, who had been floating a few meters away, paused. She narrowed her eyes, glancing at him. "Hmm?"

His tone appeared to be quite affectionate and warm, completely different from the stoic aura he had carried so far.

Meanwhile, Tianzhu continued speaking. "Mm. I told you... You shouldn't stay up so late, watching those silly sitcoms. I don't even know why you are obsessed with those things. Anyway, did you eat breakfast yet? You were out of the shower already? When did you wake up?"

"Girlfriend?" Hyerin couldn't help but contemplate. "No wonder he wasn't interested in me. I mean who would ignore..." Then a sudden thought appeared in her head, widening her eyes. "Wait. What if it is just an act?"

She had also seen it before. Some men deliberately make it seem like they were taken. And then they make it seem like they were going through rough patches, giving a hint that they were breaking up.

It's a psychological tactic. Not that common in the east, but it's still there, nevertheless. Men who appeared unavailable were often desirable to women who were successful but lonely. After all, if someone was already claimed, didn't that mean he was worth having?

And some single women, strange as it may appear, are attracted to those traits and would want to snatch such men when those men seem like they are about to become available.

She glanced at him once more, watching as he listened attentively to the voice on the other end of the line.

Was it real? Or was he just playing the game better than most? Or perhaps he was waiting for her to approach him or something? Her thoughts were filled with curiosity.

And the best way to be known is to see to what end he will try acting this way. No matter what, she should never approach him on her own, no matter how much curiosity she has. Or so she decided.

However, contrary to her expectation, after finishing his call, Tianzhu stretched briefly, and then with the same quiet indifference he had maintained all morning, got up from the floater and put on his t-shirt that lay below his head earlier.

Hyerin, who had been subtly observing him, expected at least a glance in her direction, a smirk, a comment, just anything.

But he walked past her without hesitation.

No lingering stare. No playful remark. No acknowledgment that she even existed.

Her grip on the pool's edge tightened slightly. "Seriously? C'mon..." Her ego was hurt quite a bit by the disregard, and she couldn't help but stare at his back sharply. "Is he gay or what... How dare he just ignore me, not even spare a glance at me? Me... Hyerin, the one who won the Nation's Crush Award two years in a row..."

Back in his suite, the room was now filled with the faint scent of perfume. Vera was already dressed, standing in front of the mirror as she carefully adjusted her white turtleneck sweater.

She turned at the sound of the door opening. "Uncle!" she chirped. "I thought you were at Mom's house. Where were you earlier?"

Tianzhu picked up the towel on the floor and tossed it onto a nearby chair. "At the pool. Anyway, don't throw things around. Look at the clothes on your bed. It is so much of a mess."

"I'll do it later." Vera wrinkled her nose. As an afterthought, she added. "It would be nice if Theo had been with us. He would have done everything in a jiffy."

"Veraaa... He is your brother, not a butler." Tianzhu narrowed his eyes, walking to his bed, which was placed a few feet away from hers.

"Well, he always tries to put me down, you know." Vera sighed, dropping her head down, but then making a serious face as she continued in a deep tone as if she was imitating him. "Vera, you are a lady; you should know how to do laundry. Vera, how are you ever going to become an idol if you just focus on the guitar? Vera, your arms are too thin to fight. Vera, don't just eat salads. Eat meat. Vera, don't embarrass me in front of my friends. Act like a lady, you are not 10 anymore. Vera, you are a wolf, so act like one. Don't make those puppy eyes. Vera..."

"I get it..." Tianzhu was forced to interrupt her as she kept on mimicking her brother's words. "But, you know, Theo. He was just being overprotective because he thinks I was a bit too lenient on you, and you might pick up bad habits. That's all."

"Yeah, whatever..." As the adolescent sat down with her shoulders drooping, Tianzhu looked at her. "Anyways, young lady, you have fifteen minutes. I'll go to shower, and by the time I return dressed up, I should see the bed empty and your clothes in your bag or neatly folded in the wardrobe. Or else, you are staying back at the hotel. And I go shopping alone."

She pouted, crossing her arms. "What? That's not fair."

Chapter 773: Earth 1712: To the mall

Tianzhu smirked slightly at her reaction but didn't respond. Instead, he grabbed a fresh set of clothes and disappeared into the bathroom.

By the time he came out dressed in a fitted black coat over a casual white sweater, he saw that Vera had already put on her coat and boots, quite matching his attire. All of her clothes disappeared from the bed. She was sitting there, playing with her smartphone.

She bounced on her feet. "Let's go."

Tianzhu shook his head, chuckling under his breath. "Alright, alright."

Just as they stepped out of their suite, heading towards the elevators, a familiar presence appeared in the hallway.

It's the same beauty he saw in the gym and later at the pool.

This time, she was wrapped in a plush white bathrobe, her wet hair tied loosely behind her. She had just returned from her swim, holding a bottle of water in one hand and her key card in the other.

Her eyes flickered toward them, almost instinctively.

And then she froze as she spotted an excited girl who looked mature yet fresh, looking undeniably foreign, yet there was a hint of typical Han features on her face.

It wasn't just her exotic appearance that surprised her. The girl's youthful energy, the way she clung to Tianzhu's arm while skipping slightly ahead with a bright smile, and both of them wearing matching attire... it all once again brought up misunderstanding.

"His girlfriend?"

The thought came so suddenly that Hye-rin barely registered it at first. But the more she processed the scene, the more her frown deepened.

Everything just fits Hyerin. Perhaps she couldn't think of other possibilities at all due to the embarrassment and guilt she felt earlier for a possible misunderstanding.

"But she looks like she is in high school. Definitely too young to date this guy who seemed to be like he is even older than me..." As another thought crept into her head, a flash of disgust crossed Hye-rin's face immediately. "Don't tell me she is his sugar baby or something?"

While she was busy sorting out her conflicting thoughts on whether to take a chance and report to the police to save her from the trap or confront him for the truth, Tianzhu and Vera had already boarded the elevator.

A while later;

A sleek black sedan glided through the streets of Hangzhou City. Inside, Tianzhu was driving with one of his arms resting against the door, watching the city slip by. Beside him, Vera scrolled through her phone, lost in her own world.

Their destination: the InCity Mall. The shopping center was a natural choice for what they needed: gifts for the family they were about to visit for dinner.

They were halfway to the destination, but Tianzhu's phone buzzed all of a sudden, with the name Storm appearing on the screen.

He picked it up and answered in a neutral tone. "Yes?"

A voice answered from the other end. "Hello, this is Rupert from the External Affairs Ministry, and we would..."

Before those words were finished, Tianzhu interrupted him, "What is it?"

There was a beat of silence before the voice deepened on the other end, "Brother Qin, Theo, and I just got down from a cab. We entered the MIXC."

Tianzhu furrowed his brows while his grip on the steering wheel tightened a bit.

Tianzhu's gaze sharpened slightly, but his voice remained calm. "All right," he said and hung up. He didn't say anything for a moment. After about a kilometer, the car suddenly slowed down and took a U-turn.

Vera looked up, confused. "Wait... Uncle? Why are we going back that way? Isn't Zhejiang in the other direction?"

"There seems to be a problem at InCity Mall," Tianzhu replied casually. "Let's go to the MIXC."

She raised an eyebrow but shrugged and returned to her screen.

Another hour later, they reached the location.

Tianzhu felt the glances as they moved in the mall, people noticing them, some subtly, some not. He ignored them all.

He knew what those busybodies were thinking.

In fact, it was the same situation almost everywhere his counterpart experienced, especially over the past couple of years. Either people think of Vera as his half-sister or take him as a person who was dating a high schooler. Not because they walk beside each other, but Vera has the habit of wearing matching attire with him, and when they go out, she always... well, most of the time, holds his hands.

Meanwhile, a wireless earbud was in his ear, connected to the phone, which was kept in his pocket. Through the earbud, the familiar voice came in. "Brother Qin, I distanced myself but had an eye on him. Theo is heading into boys' wear, second floor, Section B-3," the voice reported quietly in his ear.

Tianzhu didn't reply to that. But instead, he turned toward Vera, who was currently in the middle of admiring a jewelry case. "That won't suit you, Vera. It suits adults."

Vera looked away with a snort. "I'm an adult. And who said I want this? I'm just looking for the Aunt."

Tianzhu chuckled, "Think your aunt would like it?"

Her eyes sparkled as she nodded. "Of course, it's pretty." Then, after a pause, she asked. "By the way, but what about my sisters? Shouldn't we get them something, too?"

Tianzhu blinked. "Sisters? You only have one sister, dear."

"I meant Park Soojin," Vera rolled her eyes as if she were stating the obvious. "She might be my step-sister, but still a sister, nonetheless."

Tianzhu grabbed his chin as his gaze drifted toward the necklace as if weighing his words carefully. But, he kept his thoughts to himself and nodded, going with the flow instead. "Yeah, I guess so. Moreover, Soojin is the same age as you. You can buy something for her to form a quick friendship. But don't buy expensive ones, because it might seem like you are showing off."

"Yeah, yeah, I know that, Uncle." Vera snorted, looking away. "You don't have to treat me like a kid, even here, too."

As Vera skipped off to explore, Tianzhu sighed, shaking his head. "Adolescent daughters are really troublesome. One moment, they look adorable, and another moment, they become too snobbish. Moreover, there is always a fear of boys who hit on her. With Theo at her side, he will throw away those flies. Speaking of Theo..."

Shaking his head of the thoughts of Vera, he then reached out to the earbud and finally spoke. "R, where is that brat now?"

An immediate reply came from the guard that has been on his nephew's tail. "Target is now at the meat section. Aisle 7." After a pause, the voice sounded rather serious, "K, I believe you are the one who decided not to call by our former codenames, especially on the phone."

Tianzhu: "..."

Ten minutes later, Tianzhu walked calmly into the refrigerated meat section, inspecting cuts of A-7 beef until his gaze settled on a familiar figure near the end of the aisle.

Theo was spotted standing with his back turned, intently comparing packages of steak. Tianzhu's footsteps made almost no sound until he was directly behind him.

"Theo," he said in a low voice.

The 18-year-old startled all of a sudden, jumping like a cat that's been poked in its sleep. Then, as he slowly turned around, he spotted Tianzhu, and his eyes widened in shock. "U... Uncle? How... How did you know I was here?"

Chapter 774: Earth 1712: The Instant dungeon (Part-1)

"Forget about me, Mister," Tianzhu said firmly with his eyes turning serious. "What the hell are you doing here, in Hangzhou, 7000 kilometers away from home? Didn't you refuse to come with us?"

Of course, Tianzhu didn't need to question. He was just doing it for the sake of formality. He already knew how Theo was here, who brought him here, everything.

However, his nephew doesn't know that fact. So, Tianzhu had to act as a part of the norm, and of course, to see whether this 18-year-old would be honest with him or not.

Theo fidgeted at the enquiry at first. "I... I... changed my mind yesterday. I wanted to come here after all and surprise you. But then Uncle Ray volunteered to bring me here. I asked him not to tell you. So, don't blame him, please..." He hung his head down to look at his feet in the end and apologized. "And also, I'm sorry. I wasted the flight ticket money."

"It's not about the money, Theo..." Tianzhu sighed before his voice rose slightly, "It's about trust. If you do these things behind my back and keep things from your parent... how am I supposed to trust you in the future?" After a pause, acting as if he was angry, Tianzhu clenched his fists while looking around, "And where's your Uncle Ray."

Theo lowered his head and apologized again without exactly answering the question. "I'm sorry."

Before Tianzhu could scold more, a familiar voice then called out from behind. "Uncle, I'm back... look what I fou..." Vera came around the corner with her cart overflowing with a bundle of items.

She froze on the spot, spotting Theo standing right in front of Tianzhu all of a sudden. "Wait... Theo?" Her eyes widened in shock, but then lit up in joy. "What the heck! What are you doing here?"

Theo smiled sheepishly and waved his hand. "Hey, Vera..."

Tianzhu then had his gaze shift to Vera, followed by an employee pushing an increasingly full cart. It had only been 20 minutes since they parted ways, and she came back with a mountain load of things.

He sighed, almost feeling like slapping his forehead. "Seriously, Munchkin. You want to gift all of those?"

The nickname made Vera groan. "Uncle, stop calling me that in public! It's so embarrassing. I'm not a kid anymore."

Tianzhu shook his head with a chuckle. He leaned forward and playfully pinched her nose. "Even if you turn fifty, you'll still be my munchkin."

Theo watched both of them and made a disgusting expression. "Ugh... sometimes, I get cringed so hard, looking at you two. And matching attire, seriously?"

At that, Tianzhu snapped at the boy, his expression turning serious once again. "Do you think you were in a situation where you could make comments, Theo? We aren't still done yet."

As Theo looked down at his shoes again, Vera asked. "Why are you here anyway? I thought you didn't want to come with us."

Theo was about to answer, but Tianzhu sighed again, interrupting him. "Forget it. Since you are already here, go and buy gifts for your mom's family. We are going there for dinner."

After a brief pause, he added. "By the way, the budget's still 10000 credits. Anything over that comes straight out of your allowance. I have to remind you both that today is the 21st. That means your next pocket money won't arrive for at least 14 days."

Vera's face twisted in horror at once. She whipped out her phone. "I know. I'm calculating it now..."

Meanwhile, Theo took a deep breath and asked. "Uncle, how many gifts are we supposed to buy? Are we buying for everyone? Or are we splitting the responsibilities?"

Tianzhu answered. "It is not mandatory for you two to buy them anything, but since Vera is already buying and you caused trouble behind my back, here's how it goes. Vera will buy a gift for Park Soojin, and you will buy one for Little Alice."

Theo nodded in understanding.

After a while;

"Uncle, I bought this for Alice..." Theo brought a plush toy with him. Vera couldn't help but take it into her hands to check its price. Her eyes widened instantly. "9,990 credits? Theo... seriously?" She looked at him in almost horror. "Alice is a 3-year-old. Why would she need such an expensive toy?"

"Why not? I bought within the budget limit set by Uncle." Theo calmly shrugged his shoulders and placed it in her cart.

Tianzhu, standing beside, cleared his throat. "That's alright. Let's go."

As the shopping was done, the three of them were standing at the reception desk, in a long line, to pay the bill.

Everything seemed sorted out. With both of his children together, he can have a hearty dinner with his sister's family, too.

But, just three minutes later, a sharp, sudden noise erupted, followed by a loud alarm. Hundreds of shoppers also received government-issued alerts on their smartphones at the same time.

The lights flickered as the PA system crackled with an urgent, robotic voice all over the mall:

"ALERT. This shopping center has been designated as an Instant Dungeon. Grade 3 detected. Please follow safety protocols immediately."

People froze. The buzz of excitement that had filled the mall evaporated in an instant, replaced by panic.

Vera clutched the cart. "Uncle... what's going on?"

Theo, on the other hand, clenched his fists. A smile could be seen on his face as he muttered under his breath. "An instant dungeon. Just one day after I came to Hangzhou, the opportunity fell right into my lap."

At once, the people started rushing as the standard 90-second timer started on their smartphones. Once it is over, the barrier will be materialized and everyone will be stuck inside. From then on, only the entrance will be possible until the dungeon boss is defeated.

Pushing the carts away, Tianzhu also acted in instinct. "Let's go now..."

He instinctively grabbed Vera's and Theo's hands and made a run for it. "Please stay calm! Hunters are en route. Please move orderly!" A young employee nearby directed the traffic and tried to manage the rushing crowds, although his own voice was shaking in panic.

Around him, shoppers ran frantically, not heeding his calls at all. He got pushed by many, but he tried to manage, using his voice as loudly as possible.

Uwaaa

A child started crying as she was abandoned in the middle of a rushing crowd. The employee saw it, and his facial expression changed, his body turning into a blur of lightning sparks by the surge of mana. He then rushed forward, passing through the people, and picked up the little child in almost an instant, dragging the boy to the side. "Damn it. This is getting worse."

Meanwhile, reaching the balcony of the second floor, Tianzhu spoke aloud. "Use mana to protect your bodies." They followed his instructions, enveloping their bodies with a layer of mana to prevent any damage from the fall. However, Tianzhu didn't move. He stood there, watching down.

"Uncle?" Vera asked. "What happened?"

Theo followed it up with, "Why was no one leaving?"

Tianzhu's face hardened instantly as his gaze fell outside through the glass, where a translucent barrier had already materialized. "It's only been 30 seconds. Why..."

Across the mall, countdown timers lit up.

114:58

114:57

114:56

Tianzhu's brows furrowed in irritation. "Tch. We had to be stuck in a dungeon, at times. And that too, a Grade 3."

Chapter 775 775: Earth 1712: The Instant Dungeon (Part-2)

Basically, dungeons are of three types on this earth.

1) Open dungeon, which generally encompasses a certain region like a forest, an island, mountains, etc.

2) A dimensional dungeon, which exists in a different dimension with its own space-time laws, but its entrance appears periodically at certain historical sites. They are mostly harmless, as no monster escapes from the portals.

3) Instant dungeon, which can randomly open up anywhere in the world, taking over a certain amount of space based on its grade. When it appears, the entire region it encompasses will be locked down, and everyone inside. No one can escape the exit. People can only enter this type of dungeon. Based on its grade, there will be a time limit for the preparation. The Higher its grade, the greater the time limit. And when the time limit is over, the monsters will flood the dungeon and massacre everyone inside. Until the boss monster of that dungeon is killed, the dungeon won't disappear, and over time, the dungeon will break completely, releasing monsters into the world, or the monsters inside the dungeon evolve, just like the Temple of Horus that Sungjun has gone. It was often the worst type of dungeon.

As for a Grade-3 dungeon like the one Tianzhu was trapped in, it has over 25-100 meters in radius, with over 120 minutes of preparation time, and will release from 50-200 monsters.

Typically, as if the gods want to give the innocents a chance to escape, every time a dungeon appears, based on the grade, people can still escape if they act within the first few minutes.

And right now, Tianzhu and his two adolescent children, alongside more than a thousand people from various floors who were currently shopping in the mall, were stuck in this instant dungeon.

However, strangely, the barrier materialized so quickly that barely more than ten were able to escape.

And now, with no choice left, some began quickly, hurrying toward the safe zone in panic, pushing others away in the process. Meanwhile, some still calmly put away their carts and followed the staff in a careful manner.

And there are some who seemed unhurried and continued their shopping as if this were a daily occurrence to them, or it might be because there were still two hours left.

Tianzhu tightly held Theo and Vera's hands instinctively, following the employee nearby who guided them. Together, they made their way to the nearest escalator marked SAFE ZONE -> CENTRAL ATRIUM.

"Please stay calm! Hunters are en route. Please move orderly!" A young employee nearby directed the traffic and tried to manage the rushing crowds, although his own voice was shaking in panic.

Around him, shoppers ran frantically, not heeding his calls at all. He got pushed by many, but he tried to manage, using his voice as loudly as possible.

Uwaaa

A child started crying as she was abandoned in the middle of a rushing crowd. The employee saw it, and his facial expression changed, "Damn it..." He tried to move, but right then, a blur of lightning filled his vision, which passed through the people like a ghost, and picked up the little child in almost an instant, dragging the boy to the side.

His eyes fell on a young man before two men in suits appeared behind him. One of them, someone looking in his 30s, has a scar behind his wrist. He spoke. "Sir, you don't have to..."

Sungjun ignored him and kneeled to the boy's height. Wiping his tears with a smile, he spoke. "Now, now... this uncle here will take you to your parents, alright?" As the boy nodded, Sungjun finally glanced at the one who had earlier attempted to speak. "Tempest, bring him to his parents. They should be on the same floor, looking for him. Until you find them, he will be your responsibility."

"But, Sir..."

"Do it..." As his eyes turned sharp, Tempest nodded and took the boy, wrapping both of them in similar lightning sparks and disappearing.

Sungjun then turned to the other one, "Umbra, I want you to go incognito and search for those kids. Just stay hidden and observe them from the shadows, from far away. Only act when they face a life threat."

The other man in shades nodded, but after a pause, he hesitatingly asked, "Sir, may I ask something if you don't mind..."

Sungjun replied, "You want to ask why I was going through so much effort for those kids? And you wonder what connection I had with them?"

As Umbra stayed quiet, Sungjun said, "Speak your mind."

Umbra nodded firmly and opened his mouth. "We have been with you since you were a teenager. We never saw or heard either you or our late boss (Sungjun's father) mention the name of Han Seokjin at all. But you share the same surname. Ever since the accident a week ago, you have made enquiries about him, using all our resources in every continent, and now, you have even made a trip all the way to Hangzhou City... I wonder whether they are..." He hesitated a bit but slowly finished, "related..."

To that, Sungjun shook his head, replying with a prepared lie. "He is not related to Pavel or your late boss. But there was indeed a connection. You will know it when we find him. For now, we will do everything to keep his family safe. Now, go and do your job."

Umbra nodded and then, in the next standing, dark energy erupted from his body and swallowed him. He disappeared without a trace.

"Who... the hell are these people..." The employee mumbled in wonder.

95 minutes left till the Rift activation.

Meanwhile, Tianzhu, Vera, and Theo finally arrived at the atrium, packed with thousands of people. There was panic; screams were coming from everywhere. Some mothers lost their children, some were even injured, and many were, of course, scared as hell.

"Uncle!" Vera clung closer to him, her voice barely audible in this chaos. "They say it is Grade 3. That means the boss monster will be a Class-2, right?"

Tianzhu held her tightly and put up a smile. "Everything will be alright. No need for panic." After a brief pause, he looked to the side at his nephew. His face turned a bit serious. "Theo, I know what's going on in your mind, but you must not fight, understood?"

"Eh?" Theo was mildly surprised. "But this is an emergency. If we don't fight, who will save these people?"

To that, Tianzhu sternly replied. "The hunters will come soon enough and take care of the monsters. You don't need to try to play the hero. Just sit and wait like everyone else."

72 minutes left till the Rift Activation

Chapter 776 776: Earth 1712: The Instant Dungeon (Part-3)

By this time, more than thirty hunters from Starlight Guild and another ten hunters from Haze Guild had already arrived at the mall, entering the dungeon.

The Haze Guild Hunters came down to the atrium to protect them while the Starlight Guild Hunters went to the fourth floor, where the spatial distortion was happening—meaning, it is where the rift will be activated and the monsters rush out.

18 minutes left till the Rift Activation

Tianzhu sat there in a corner; Vera and Theo sat beside him against the wall, Vera sitting in the middle. The former had her eyes closed and was listening to music to calm her nerves, while the latter was constantly observing his father and the surroundings.

The atmosphere was calmer now, compared to an hour ago. It is not that everyone has become calmer.

If anything, more and more people began to worry as the time was ticking down to the last twenty minutes. However, at the very least, there was less noise and crying in the atrium. Whoever had separated earlier was reunited with their companions, with the support of the staff members of the mall.

Meanwhile, Umbra reached nearby and spotted them. As ordered, he kept his presence hidden in the shadows and quietly observed his targets.

Tianzhu, on the other hand, is also busy on his phone, playing an offline chess game against the Bot without a worry on his face. The probability factor was displayed on the side, the engine analyzing the bot's moves and Tianzhu's, giving a live score of 46.4: 53.6, i.e., Tianzhu was slightly losing.

He seemed so engrossed in the game that he didn't notice someone sitting beside him and observing his game for a while, too. As his eyes were darting left and right, all over the board on the screen to find the move, a voice obstructed his concentration. "Knight to F7."

"Eh?" Tianzhu cast a sidelong glance to the right and saw a woman looking at his phone and then at him. "Hi."
She smiled.

She seemed Korean, and yet at the same time, she didn't seem like one. "Who..."

Name: Shimizu Noa

Age: 27

Ethnicity: Yamato/Goryeo

Arcane Path: Mage

Ability: Memory Extraction.

Ability Rank: S

Mana Reserves: 9,609,238

"Who are you?" Tianzhu couldn't help but ask her, who looked at him like she knew him. The fact that she knows him is a grave matter. Tianzhu's heart did spike a bit, but he kept his composure on the outside.

"Don't mind me. Your time is ticking." The woman replied, pointing at the timer on the screen. Tianzhu nodded, going back to the phone. He made the same move as she suggested earlier.

As the Bot responded with a check, forking both the King and the knight, the woman instantly spoke to him again. "Now, don't move Bishop, and instead move away the King and sacrifice the Knight."

Tianzhu glanced at her again, feeling slightly annoyed by her interruption, but then again, he already thought of that move anyway. He followed the move and sacrificed the knight.

Once the Queen of that D-column, Tianzhu took over the control in a few more moves, and the Bot resigned the game when the probability of its winning chances dipped below 5%.

Once the game was over, Tianzhu finally turned to face her. She smiled, tilting her head slightly. "You are welcome."

Tianzhu glanced at the digital board overhead. There are still more than ten minutes left. He looked back at her, offering a handshake. "Qin Tianzhu."

She didn't take his hand. Instead, she smiled again, introducing herself. "Noa."

Tianzhu pulled his hand back and asked. "Do you know me?"

Noa blinked in surprise. "Of course, not. I just felt like we met before."

Tianzhu shrugged indifferently, "I wasn't from even Zhonggou, Ms. Noa. I highly doubt that we met before."

Noa blinked, but then nodded. "Yeah, I can guess that you aren't a citizen of this country and definitely a tourist."

Tianzhu blinked in genuine surprise this time. "How do you know that?"

Noa chuckled, shaking her head. "I just have good observation skills." She pointed at his smartphone. "That's the Aota brand, which you cannot see sold anywhere outside Siberian countries. That gave it away."

"Hmm... I'm intrigued." Tianzhu said, facing her. Intending to pass the remaining ten minutes in a piece of conversation with this beautiful young lady, he continued. "Ok, let's put your observation skills to the test, then. What else can you tell about me?"

Noa hesitated, but then her gaze sharpened as she observed him again. "The girl beside you has the same almond-shaped eyes as you; both of you had matching attire, and even the phone straps. But she looks like an adolescent, perhaps 18 or 19. It is unlikely you are a couple. And you look too young to be her father. Hmm, perhaps, brother?" She paused, her eyes flicking to his exposed wrist due to the fact that he had rolled his sleeves earlier. "You are wearing expensive brands from top to bottom, but the watch was an analog watch with an almost worn-out strap. Therefore, it has a high sentimental value to you. Someone very important must have given you that watch, and judging by how you still treasure it, you were missing that person, and that means it's been years since you last met that person, or the person might have passed away. I apologize for that remark."

Tianzhu raised an eyebrow, impressed by her analysis. "Go on."

Noa continued by pointing at his left hand. "The difference in color on your ring finger clearly showed that you were married for a while and recently removed it. The absence of a ring either states that you don't like to wear it often or that you were divorced."

Tianzhu regarded her for a moment and then nodded in approval. "You are good."

"So, how many things have I got right?" Noa asked curiously with a smug expression on her face.

Tianzhu replied with a shrug. "Except for two."

"And where did I go wrong?" Noa enquired, raising her eyebrow.

Tianzhu replied, pointing his finger to the side. "First of all, she's not my sister. She's my niece."

"Oh?"

"And secondly, I'm not as young as you think. I'm at least 15 years older than you."

"Wait. What?" Noa's voice was louder than she intended, catching the attention of a few nearby people for a moment. "Sorry," She awkwardly smiled and bowed to them in apology before shifting her attention back to Tianzhu. She couldn't help but point at herself. "How old do you think I am?"

"24," replied Tianzhu right away.

Noa blinked. "Really?" She crossed her arms with a smirk. "You said that too quickly. Aren't you worried that you might offend me by giving me a higher age number?"

"Nope." He leaned back slightly, staring at her. "That's because I'm confident about my guesses."

"Oh?" She raised an eyebrow. "But you are off by 3 years then."

Tianzhu faked a surprise, "21? Seriously?"

To that, Noa chuckled and shook her head, "Please, stop it. It's too cliché... I'm 27."

"Really?" Tianzhu tilted his head, widening his smile. "Then I guess we are born in the same year of the tiger?"

"I guess..." Noa replied slowly and looked away, pretending to brush imaginary dust off her sleeve.

Chapter 777 777: Earth 1712: The Instant Dungeon (Part-4)

Intending to talk further, he said. "By the way, there's something else I forgot to mention, the thing you missed."

"Hmm?"

"The boy sitting beside my niece is my nephew. They are twins. It was quite easy to see the resemblance. You missed it. That makes it 3, I guess." Tianzhu gave off a chuckle. To which, Noa seemed taken aback. "Eh? What boy?"

"What do you mean, what boy? The boy who was sitting..." Tianzhu suddenly snapped his head to look at Theo, only to see him missing. "This damn brat..." Tianzhu's expression changed instantly. He swiftly stood up and looked around. Fortunately, he spotted him right away. He saw that Theo was talking to some hunter nearby, belonging to the Haze Guild.

Tianzhu collapsed to the floor again, letting out a deep breath,

"What happened?" Noa asked. Tianzhu sighed, shaking his head. "Nothing. My nephew was talking to someone. I thought he ran off to fight those monsters or something."

Right then, another alarm rang all over the mall, and both of them turned their heads to look at the timer on the screens at the same time.

01:56

01:55

01:54

Meanwhile, in another corner of the Atrium;

Sungjun simply sat there in a relaxed pose against the wall while scanning the people around to see if there were any potential abilities to extract. Looking around, his eyes fell on a young man, covering his face with a mask and his head with a hoodie.

[A-rank ability: Invincibility has been detected. Proceed to Extract?]

"Invincibility?" Sungjun couldn't help but sit right up in surprise. He instantly clicked on Yes.

Ding!

[Distance Check: 18.7 meters. Within operational range. Extraction could be done.]

[Abilities under Eyes of Dominion are filled to max. Please remove one to replace.]

[Lightning Armor (in cooldown)] [One with the Void] [Gravity Suppression] [Flaming Sword]

Ding!

[Note: Replacing the skill in cooldown will result in the new skill remain in the cooldown timer]

"There's nothing to think about. I already have one in my head."

"Replace One with the Void." He made the decision to swap out the S-rank ability with a new one.

Ding!

[Invincibility is an A-rank ability, lower than the existing one. Proceed?]

"Yes. With Umbra on my side, I can extract that ability whenever I want. Why would I bother missing it out? Replace."

Ding!

[Invincibility has replaced One with the Void under Overlord's Authority: Eyes of Dominion.]

Meanwhile, on the fourth floor of the mall;

The vibrations of the Rift grew more erratic as the countdown ticked closer to zero.

The lights above flickered, casting strange shadows as the digital board displayed the remaining time.

01:16

01:15

01:14

The Starlight Guild hunters stood ready with a group of thirty, their armor gleaming under the overhead lights. In the back, freelance hunters, who volunteered to help, stood in support.

At the front, the Vice Leader, the A-rank hunter Mo Xingchen, checked his equipment one last time. His eyes were narrowed, scanning the growing tension in the room.

"Get ready to attack, all of you," he said, voice steady but sharp. He looked at the group—his elite squad, 6 B-ranked hunters, who stood by him. The rest of the team were C-ranked hunters, not much worth talking about. They were basically the support here and made up the numbers.

"Should we expect a large batch?" asked Rachel, a newly promoted A-ranked hunter of the guild, her hand tightening around the hilt of her sword.

She glanced toward the monitor that had been set up to observe the Rift.

Meanwhile, a few media personnel were clustered around the rift while their cameras focused on the growing portal.

"Quite possible," Mo Xingchen replied to her, nodding toward the rift. "This one looks like a large batch is going to come out. Expect at least a hundred. Better brace yourselves."

Rachel raised an eyebrow. "A hundred? The numbers are manageable if all of them were Class-3, but I'm just worried about Class-2 monsters."

Mo Xingchen didn't respond immediately. Instead, he glanced at the other hunters, noting their readiness. The tension in the air was obvious to notice. The Rift was about to open. Any moment now.

1:05...

As the countdown continued, whispers spread among the A-ranked hunters. They had all seen a dungeon open before, but this felt different from a typical Grade-3 dungeon. The air felt a lot thicker in the surroundings.

"How much did you guys get from this dungeon?" asked Zhao Wuhen, a freelance B-rank hunter who had joined the fight to help out. He was originally a shopper who got stuck inside the dungeon but volunteered to help, like others.

"On an average Grade-3 dungeon..." replied Jing Ruyin, a B-class hunter belonging to the guild. "5 million credits."

"And the media?" Zhao Wenhua glanced at the media personnel belonging to K-TV.

Ruyin shrugged. "Usually, it is around 250k-500k. But this one, KTV got the rights for 900k. The association takes a 30% cut as taxes."

"More than 2 million from a grade-3 dungeon, huh? No wonder the association is quite rich." Zhao Wuhen mumbled, almost impressed. "Sounds like a racket."

"Pretty much," Ruyin said with a grin, but her eyes never left the Rift. "But hey, it's a hell of a lot better than freelancing. Just like other guilds, we have the same system. In the participating raid, the normal members of the guild will receive a fixed 20k credits, elites will receive 150k per raid, and on top of that, the one who kills the monster will receive a 20% share of the gains from that particular monster, whether it is spirit core, bones, organs, meat, etc. If you are an elite, your share will be increased too."

As Zhao Wuhen went into a daze, his mind reeling in calculations, Ruyin further added, "Moreover, in our guild, there is insurance coverage for each hunter who dies in the dungeon, basically thrice the amount of money they have made during the last financial year. Of course, this insurance coverage only works when one is in the guild for atleast a year."

Before Zhao Wuhen was about to react to that, Mo Xingchen warned, turning to face everyone with a sharp gaze. "Down to the last 30 seconds. Focus. We need to make sure everything is under control. No mistakes today."

As if on cue, the Rift's core began to pulse, and the floor trembled violently beneath their feet. A wave of heat rushed through the air as the swirling portal began to rip open in front of them.

0:29...

0:28

.

.

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0:10

0:09

0:08

.

.

.

0:03

0:02

The room fell silent.

0:01...

Then, with a loud roar, the Rift tore open.

A blast of dark energy erupted from the Rift as the first wave of monsters began to pour out.

A group of Green Orcs, broad-shouldered and muscular, charged forward.

Graaaa Graaa

Their skin was a sickly green, and their battle cries reverberated through the floor.

They were Class-3 monsters, big and brutish with each atleast 8-9ft tall, with no magic to speak of but plenty of raw strength, and nearly a hundred of them.

One after another, they surged into the room, their massive feet pounding the ground as they rushed toward the hunters, destroying rows of toys that were in their way.

"Get ready!" Xingchen barked, drawing his sword with a swift motion.

Chapter 778: Earth 1712: The Instant Dungeon (Part-5)

"Get ready!" Xingchen barked, drawing his sword with a swift motion.

But that was only the first wave.

As the Orcs piled in, the ground shook again. This time, it was bigger.

Purple Ogres followed, stepping through the Rift with thundering footsteps.

Larger than the Orcs, around 11-12 feet tall, these monsters had an eerie glow in their eyes. Their skin was a deep purple, and their thick arms carried large clubs and axes.

Some even shot fireballs from their hands randomly.

Unlike Orcs, these Class-2 monsters were only eleven in number.

Graaaa

One of the Ogres let out a roar, lifting its enormous club high before slamming it onto the ground, sending a shockwave across the floor.

A teenage-looking boy in the front had his ability pushed out, reinforcing the floor, the walls, and the ceiling in order to contain the monsters in this space. His translucent barrier ability made sure everyone stayed unaffected by the shockwave.

"Ogres. Everyone, spread out!" Xingchen ordered in a commanding tone. "Form up around the perimeter. Don't let them surround us. Ogres can shoot fireballs from both their hands. Be careful."

But the real threat was still to come.

From the Rift's heart, a towering figure emerged, more massive than anything they had seen so far.

"A mutated Red Ogre King." Zhao Wuhen whispered under his breath.

The Red Ogre stood 15 meters tall, its two heads moving independently, scanning the entire place.

Four massive arms swung around; two of the front limbs were holding a weapon, an enormous spiked club in one hand, a jagged axe in the other.

Its eyes glowed with malice as it roared, shaking the floor beneath them.

Graaaa

"Oh, crap," Ruyin muttered under his breath. "That thing's huge."

"I've never seen one that big," Rachel said, wide-eyed. "Even among Class-2 Ogres, I have never seen a multi-armed red ogre."

The media personnel, who had been filming from the sidelines, quickly adjusted their cameras to catch the scene.

The company had already hired two mercenaries/freelance hunters to protect their two cameramen, but they still couldn't help but shiver at the sight of the Red Ogre emerging.

Xingchen signaled to his team. "Team A, Team B, and Team C, get the Orcs away from here and focus on parrying! The rest of you, focus on the Ogres! I'll take the boss. Make sure to separate the Ogres at all costs. Freelancers, I want you all to help out teams to take out the Orcs."

The thirty guild members were divided into six teams, with 5 each, comprising an elite and four normal hunters.

Three teams worked together with eight freelance hunters to lead the Orcs to one section of the floor while the other three teams tried to separate the Ogres from this large bunch.

The teams sprang into action.

Rachel, head of Team A, dashed forward, cutting down two Orcs with a swift, clean strike with her broad sword.

Zhao Wuhen, the freelancer, conjured an arrow through his bow. As he released the arrow, it split into six arrows, taking out half a dozen Green Orcs at once.

"Wow... that's cool," Ruyin said, shooting down the Green Orc with a Mana Shotgun. Its head was blown up into bits by the mana sphere bullet shot by her gun. "How come you are a B-rank?" She asked.

Zhao Wuhen, in the meantime, conjured another arrow. He glanced at her and murmured under her breath, "This woman is quite perceptive."

"Eh?"

Not far away, one of the purple-skinned monsters fired a massive fireball toward Fang Tianlei, a volunteer working with their Team A.

As the fireball was timely blocked by Rachel, Zhao Wuhen took the shot. This time, the arrow didn't split and just flew past like lightning, piercing the Purple Ogre's chest. When it did, the arrow released a torrent of electric current, electrocuting it into death.

"The hell... You killed a Class-2 monster with one shot?" Ruyin couldn't help but almost squeal in amazement. "Tell me, you are not a B rank, right?"

Zhao Wuhen replied; this time, his face looked almost pale. "No, I'm a B-rank. My ability is just unique. I convert my blood into mana. If I use those arrows a few more times, I die."

Ruyin's facial expression changed at that reply.

Elsewhere, on the other side of the floor;

"Keep your guard up!" Xingchen, the leader of the party, shouted as he charged toward the Red Ogre, the boss of the dungeon. His sword was already crackling with terrifying amounts of energy. "I'll take its attention. Focus on the smaller ones."

The others around him nodded, attacking the Orcs and separating them from the boss so that Xingchen could have a one-on-one battle with the boss monster. Then, once they finish those, they will rejoin him and finish off the boss.

That was the plan, but...

Just as Xingchen closed the distance to the Red Ogre, it swung one of its massive arms, knocking a group of hunters back.

Graaaaaa Graaaaaa

Its twin heads had the loudest roar, releasing sound waves and pushing the remaining hunters away.

Only Xingchen resisted its effect and managed to push forward. "Keep pushing!" He shouted, planting his feet and lunging forward with all his strength.

His sword met the Red Ogre's massive arm with a crash, the force of the blow making him stagger, but he quickly regained his balance and went in for another strike.

"Die, you fucing beast..."

Oraa

The Red Ogre howled in pain as Xingchen's sword slashed through its thick skin. "Kraaaa!"

But it didn't counterattack this time. Instead, its expression suddenly changed along with its attention. The two heads had their gaze locked onto the reinforced floor beneath them, their eyes burning with fury.

"Cap, something is wrong with it!" Team E's leader, Lian Yuxui, who was nearby, shouted, but Xingchen was already aware.

The Red Ogre swung its club and Ax down onto the floor, its massive weapons tearing through the concrete like it was paper.

The reinforced floor beneath them cracked and splintered with every blow, each strike sending shockwaves through the room.

Xingchen's eyes widened as the cracks spread. "It's trying to destroy the floor!"

It didn't seem like the Red Ogre cared about the hunters. It continued to pound the reinforced floor with its brutal strength, each strike causing more damage. The sound of a cracking stone echoed throughout the floor.

"Xiao Wei," Xingchen shouted, his voice urgent. "Reinforce the barrier, now!"

Wei Huanxing, the young 16-year-old barrier specialist, rushed to the side. His mana was running low, but he quickly drank a mana potion, trying to recover as quickly as possible.

His hands began to glow as he focused on his ability, trying to reinforce the floor and walls to contain the damage.

But just as he was about to complete the barrier, a fireball from a nearby Purple Ogre landed directly on his back.

BOOM!

The explosion knocked Huanxing to the ground. "Argh..." He gasped in pain, his back charred from the blast.

"Huanxing," Rachel cried out, rushing to her boyfriend's younger brother's side, but the Red Ogre didn't care. It kept attacking the floor, hitting it with more force than ever before.

In the meantime, Xingchen's sword strikes became more intense, taking away one of the Red Ogre's arms and leaving behind several wounds on its body.

However, the Red Ogre just ignored him completely and attacked the vulnerable concrete floor over and over again.

The cracks deepened, and with one final, powerful blow, the Red Ogre's club shattered the floor beneath it.

Graaaa The massive creature's roar echoed through the space as it dropped down, crashing through the cracks and descending to the floor below. Xingchen's eyes widened in realization.

"No..."

The Red Ogre's massive form fell through the hole it had made, disappearing from their sight. The vibrations shook the building, and a distant, horrifying rumble could be heard from the third floor.

The other Ogres didn't seem to notice, too caught up in the battle with the hunters.

Meanwhile, in the Atrium;

The people were filled with panic and fear, many holding their companions and loved ones who were with them tightly as vibrations shook the walls around. The roars were particularly deafening.

Tianzhu was also hugging Vera, who seemed afraid, but his eyes were fixated in a particular direction; his gaze was on Theo, who somehow managed to get a Violin from someone.

Chapter 779: Earth 1712: The Instant Dungeon (Part-6)

At the same time, in his line of sight, with his heightened vision through the bionic eye lens, Tianzhu spotted a thick purple smoke slowly swirling in the air, rising from a censer near the center of the floor.

It was then...

"Spiralwood Essence?" Noa blurted aloud, her eyes quivering at the sight of the purple smoke.

And then, in a couple of seconds, in realization, she spoke in seriousness. "This is not a natural occurrence, Mr. Alex. The Twilight is behind this."

Elsewhere in the Atrium, Sungjun murmured as he stared at the purple smoke with a deep frown. "That is Darkwood Essence. Isn't that the weapon of Heaven's Gate? According to Alexander's memories, it was already destroyed, though. Did they leave behind the recipe to someone else or..." His eyes widened at a thought in his head, "Don't tell me they still exist?"

Tianzhu turned his head to look at Noa. He didn't have any knowledge of this Twilight Group, making him wonder whether this was some local dark guild. But he still asked her, "What is it?"

Noa let out a breath, her eyes scanning the surroundings in response. For a few seconds, she stayed silent.

"Until a decade ago, Twilight used to be one of the top guilds in the City of Edo," she explained in the end, seriousness creeping into her tone. "They had not one but three S-rank Hunters. Even the Conqueror guild, currently known as the undisputed number one guild in this continent, had five S-rank Hunters. You can imagine how strong Twilight would have been, in its prime."

As Tianzhu gave a faint nod, she continued, lowering her voice. "Back in the earlier 00s, Twilight created and used to monopolize the dungeons using Spiralwood Essence. Originally, it was used to gather monsters at one spot using this incense and take them out with an AOE-type skill. But in one of the grade-3 dungeons they used, it gathered too many monsters, and it went out of control. Over three hundred people died, and nearly two thousand were severely injured in that incident."

She rubbed the back of her neck, clearly uncomfortable as she further went into the topic. "Eventually, the authorities stepped in. Set up a commission and did a full investigation. Turned out that Twilight wasn't just doing dungeon runs. They were taking assassination jobs, too."

She looked down, voice dropping a bit. "To kill one target, they would use the Essence... wipe out entire groups of people in the process, you know, hiding their real motive. They were practically committing genocide."

Tianzhu's facial expression hardened at that. It is not like he had some righteous past. He was in a syndicate and committed numerous assassinations, but the act of mass killing disgusted him to the core. Without knowing, he clenched his fist tightly.

Meanwhile, Noa continued. "After that, they issued warrants. Some of the members got arrested. Some disappeared. Others just went underground."

Her eyes then flicked up toward the skyline. "And now? We've found out they're still active, hiding as merc groups. We recently received news that a big shipment of Spiralwood had just been smuggled into Hangzhou, and one of my colleagues was suspected of being involved in this matter. They sent me to investigate the matter." She took a brief pause and looked at him. "I'm not a fighter, but I have powers, you know. I can read the last memories of the dead. In the investigation, we found a strong lead to apprehend the suspect, but it looked like I was exposed. And now, everyone is paying for it." Sigh

"So, you're saying..." Tianzhu's brow furrowed as he stared at her. "You were the target?"

Noa shrugged nonchalantly; through her eyes held a flicker of doubt. "Can't say for sure. There could be another important VIP hiding here somewhere."

Tianzhun's eyes darted to the side, left and right. He wondered whether he should be involved or not.

While he was still in thought, suddenly, the vibrations grew stronger and louder, like the building itself was about to snap as it does in an earthquake. His gaze snapped upward instinctively.

Then, in the next moment, a deafening sound erupted from above, followed by the sharp, echoing crash of stone as chunks fell from the third floor.

"Ka—!" The scream from the crowd cut through the noise, and chaos instantly spread in all directions. People scattered, and a wave of panic surged through the building like wildfire.

"No... Theo..." Tianzhu's heart skipped a beat, and his eyes wandered over once again.

But the situation went out of control as the Red Ogre appeared on the balcony of the third floor, looming over the atrium.

"Everyone, move away..." The leader of Haze Guild, an A-rank Hunter, bellowed using a large horn loudspeaker. "Gather at one spot and give us the space."

Panic exploded.

People shoved and trampled over each other, running for the exits without caring about anything else.

"Kyaaa..."

Tianzhu's grip tightened around Vera as the incoming crowd pushed them around.

Faces pressed against theirs, bodies squeezed them from all sides. His jaw clenched, his eyes wandered, but Theo couldn't be seen. And neither was his friend, who was supposed to protect him. "Theo..." he shouted, but it was swallowed up in the screams of the crowd.

Graaaa

The massive Ogre let out another ear-splitting roar, shaking the walls as it stood tall on the balcony, its eyes locking onto the crowds below. With a mighty leap, it descended from the third floor, landing in the atrium with a deafening crash.

"Raaahhh!" The Red Ogre roared as it hit the ground.

The beast landed right in the middle of the atrium, where purple smoke was being emitted. Haze guild hunters quickly surrounded the monster. The area is being cleared up.

And behind them, among some of the volunteers, Theo was seen with the violin.

Graaaa Graaa

It let out another deafening roar, shaking loose bits of ceiling and stone from the upper floors.

"Stay focused! Show no fear. Charge!" Bai Xuanming, the leader of the Haze guild, shouted, led the assault, and charged at the Ogre. His body was enveloped by a golden aura, and his gaze carried no fear.

Motivated by their leader's actions, the hunters of the Haze Guild gritted their teeth and charged.

Xuangming moved at blurring speeds as his fists glowed with concentrated energy. He landed a powerful punch across the Ogre's wounded thigh; the monster staggered slightly but didn't receive much damage.

Then came the counterstrike.

With one brutal swing of its third massive arm, faster than one naked eye can capture, the Red Ogre sent him flying across the hall. He hit a pillar and crumpled to the ground, lying unconscious.

The Haze guild hunters couldn't help but momentarily halt in their movements when they saw their leader blasted away, just like that.

Nevertheless, they knew they couldn't stop now and continued their assault.

Theo, in the meantime, calming down his heart, took the violin, placing it on his shoulders, and he was about to play something, but a hunter nearby grabbed him and pushed him away, shouting. "Don't cause trouble here, brat. Join the others. Leave."

Theo pushed away to the back, his eyes widened in surprise.

Meanwhile, the monster swung its enormous fists, knocking several hunters off their feet.

One of them was crushed by the brute force, blood spraying across the floor as he screamed in pain.

A second hunter tried to retaliate, his sword flashing, but the Ogre grabbed him mid-strike, tossing him like a rag doll.

Another hunter screamed as he was caught mid-spell, crushed under the creature's foot.

The fifth tried to run in and distract it from behind, but the Ogre's backhand sent her spinning through the air like a doll.

Some hunters fired poisonous arrows, magic spells, and Spears, and hurled whatever they could at the creature, but it barely flinched.

Its entire body oozed streams of blood, but as if it didn't feel any pain or whatever, the Red Ogre continued its assault again, intending to wipe out everything in its sight.

"No!" Many in the crowd screamed. Shouts of terror filled the air, people scrambling for exits once again, pushing and shoving to get away from the rampaging monster.

"They're losing..."

"They can't beat it..."

"Where are the other guilds?!"

"Why do I have to come to this god-forsaken land, of all times?"

"What about the Starlight Guild? Were they done in?"

"Will we die here?"

Chapter 780: Earth 1712: The Instant Dungeon (Final)

With about a couple of dozen injured in the stampede and fortunately no dead, many of those left the atrium and went to hide, hoping that they would stay safe for a bit longer.

Meanwhile, some 'awakeners' stepped forward to help out the Haze guild, including a couple of staff members.

Theo also picked up the violin and started playing.

Mana surged out of his body, the energy turned into visible musical notes as a melodic music filled the entire atrium.

Just a few notes, and the intense battle almost paused.

"Hmm?" Sungjun, who swiftly dodged again and again, making way to a safe corner from the panicked public, felt something strike him.

Ding!

Inside the atrium, as the music released from the violin, the plainfolk almost fell dizzy, collapsing to the ground in sleepiness. The ones with low mana reserves began to feel drowsy.

Meanwhile, Vera blinked her eyes rapidly... "Umm... Uncle, I'm kinda feeling... sleepy..." She followed it up with a yawn.

Tianzhu stood straight, fighting off the resistance. Clenching his fists, he poured mana to his brain, shielding it from the incoming energy.

The drowsiness instantly vanished from Tianzhu. Meanwhile, Noa also seemed like she was unaffected.

"Is that your nephew?" She asked. "I can see the resemblance now."

With a steady breath, Tianzhu muttered in response. "Noa," he said quietly, "Can you hold her?"

Noa looked at him sharply, sensing the shift in his tone. She gave a small nod and gently pulled an unconscious Vera closer.

He then shifted his gaze to the monster, which looked like it was in a daze. He looked at the other hunters.

They all seemed to have fallen unconscious.

Of more than two thousand people who scrambled in the Atrium, there are fewer than 20 who have resistance to the melodic music of sleep apart from Theo himself, and only 9 were completely fine.

Of the seven, three seemed injured. Tianzhu and Noa were not fighting. The muscled hunter from Haze Guild charged forward nevertheless, taking advantage of its state and attacking it with his fists.

Tianzhu's eyes captured the remaining three. A man in a suit was seen tightly grabbing a boy, not paying much attention to the surroundings. The second one was a young man who had a deep frown on his face, but he was simply watching the scene and not doing anything else.

It was then the last remaining conscious nephew seen, checking in on his colleagues. As for his friend, he was still nowhere to be seen.

Tianzhu closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "It seems like there is only one choice left."

Tianzhu then charged forward. He didn't charge at the monster, which was in a disoriented state.

Instead, he approached his nephew.

Theo gave a proud smile to his Uncle, as if he was stating, Look, Uncle. I'm strong. He continued to play the violin.

Tianzhu didn't say anything to him and instead shifted his gaze toward the guy who was attacking the Red Ogre with his fists. He said. "Hello, mister, over here."

"Hmm?" As the guy halted and turned his head to look at Tianzhu. The latter then pointed at the giant axe on the floor. "You looked quite strong based on your physique. Can you pick up that weapon? It could inflict more damage on the Ogre." He said.

"Hmm?"

As the hunter tried to pick up the Ax belonging to the Red Ogre, his mana surged out. However, he couldn't pick it up.

Tianzhu couldn't help but click his tongue. "Tch, I guess this won't do it." He raised his hand and made a swift movement toward his nephew, grabbing the bow from him and snatching it away.

The music instantly stopped. Theo's face froze at once. "Uncle?"

Tianzhu looked colder. "You are not exactly helping, Theo. Look around you."

"Wh... what?" Theo's eyes wandered, looking at the unconscious people around. Then, his gaze fell on the Red Ogre. "But Uncle, I stopped the beast. You just need people to cover their ears with earbuds and attack it. It's going to wake up soon. Hurry. Give it back..."

"Theo, stop it." Tianzhu interrupted him and grabbed his hand, dragging him back.

"Uncle... Uncle..." Theo tried to struggle, but Tianzhu continued to drag him with him.

Meanwhile, others slowly got up. Those who were unconscious continued to sleep. Only those who were slightly too dizzy dozed off.

But before them, the Red Ogre managed to get out of the sleeping spell.

Graaaa

It roared and charged at Tianzhu and Theo.

"Careful..." Noa shouted.

Tianzhu raised his hand, pointing at the incoming monster. Vines grew up from the floor. They were about to capture him, but right then, a translucent beam of energy suddenly struck the monster, and the Red Ogre instantly experienced its effects: 4 times the gravitational force; its bones, muscles, and joints buckled under the pressure. Because of its insane skeletal density, the Red Ogre instantly dropped to the ground.

Tianzhu's eyes shifted to the source. It was the same young man who was simply standing around.

Sungjun was seen with his arm pushed out, his palm pointing at the monster.

Ding!

[40,000 mana particles have been consumed. Adjusting Gravity Suppression Strength. The 30-second time limit has started.]

Sungjun then murmured. "Flaming Sword."

While mana flowed out of his body and simply covered his legs, a sword made of pure orange flames materialized in his hand.

Ding!

[Flaming Sword has been unleashed. 1% mana reserves consumption started.]

Sungjun moved forward, and in the next second, he crossed tens of meters and reached the monster.

Tianzhu frowned, his expression turning ugly, watching the man reach the Red Ogre and raise the sword.

"How dare you try to attack my nephew..." Sungjun murmured under his breath, gazing at it coldly as he swung it down at the kneeling monster.

With a slash, the monster's head was decapitated from its body, and Sungjun followed it up by stabbing the flaming sword into its chest. As he freed his hand, the Red Ogre fell to the ground with a thud before the flames from the sword burned it to cinders.

"Who... Who is this guy?" Noa mumbled, staring at him in a daze as she stepped forward in awe.

Vera, who barely stood on her feet, looked at Sungjun's face. She seemed to be awed, too. "So powerful..."

Theo, who was behind Tianzhu, also stared at him. "His overall mana reserve capacity seemed to be more or less the same as mine. Yet, could he kill it with one blow?" He wondered in his head.

Meanwhile, Tianzhu's face turned slightly ugly. "The Power of Gravity and the Fire? Neither element is compatible with the other. Only those freaks from the Shen Triad's Secret Research Facility have such powers. He is not here for me, right?" His heart raced, not in fear or panic but in fury, as it had already been 18 years since he left the organization.

Meanwhile, on the fourth floor, a pulse of light burst out, and a swirling vortex opened where the monsters had first come through. A powerful suction followed. The remaining orcs and lesser ogres, wounded or still hiding, were dragged toward it, screeching, panicking.

Within seconds, they were gone.

The portal pulsed once more and then vanished completely. Cheers followed it, and the Starlight guild hunters and freelancers high-fived in success.

Watching everyone cheering around, in the quiet corner of the atrium, the hooded man, who released the purple smoke and escaped to a corner, was irritated. "Tch... So much planning and still failed. If I can't

assassinate her today, I will have no choice but to go into hiding. The High Council will punish me this time if I return with another failure."

RESULTS: 4 civilian casualties, 9 Hunter casualties. Survival Rate: 98.64%.

Monsters Killed: 78 Class-3 Orcs, 5 Class-2 Ogres, and 1 Class-2 Red Ogre.

As the battle was over, the staff from the Hunter Association were already inside, guiding the civilians out in an orderly manner.

Medics ran back and forth, tending to wounds, checking pulses, and offering water to the victims.

Tianzhu stood still, leaning slightly against a broken pillar. Since he and his niblings (niece, nephew) were completely uninjured, he intended to wait for a while instead of rushing outside.

Theo seemed to be standing next to him, his head hanging down in disappointment.

Vera's eyes darted toward Theo and their uncle for a while, but she maintained silence.

Meanwhile, Noa was seen walking toward Sungjun, brushing some dust from her coat as she returned after having a brief talk with an official. Sungjun was seen helping the injured people to place them on stretchers.

"Hi..." She said from beside, upon reaching him.

"Hmm?" Sungjun turned to the side, looking at her. "Yes?"