

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 261 - Chapter 259

Chapter 261: Chapter 259

It was all Beru's scheme.

From the moment Suho received Kamish's Wrath as a reward.

From the moment Sung Jinwoo's main weapons, the daggers, were finally held in Suho's hands.

[KIEEEEEEEEEK!] Beru began to pester Yoo Jinho as if he had been waiting for this all along.

[Dagger! Dagger! Dagger! By any means necessary, find runestones related to daggers and bring them to me!] But Yoo Jinho, who was suddenly grabbed by the collar, was no longer the young boy who used to cower before the shadow ant.

– Leave it to me. I'll make it happen somehow. – He met Beru's eyes with a dependable adult's gaze and asked,

– So, what were my brother's skills?

The Ruler's Authority and the shadow power were obviously impossible, but other skills could be learned as long as they had the 'rune stones.' Only Sung Jinwoo and Sung Suho were irregular. It was an everyday routine for all Hunters on Earth to search for rune stones. There was no other way to become stronger... As such, it was only natural that the price of rune stones skyrocketed. Depending on the value and rarity of the skill, the price was literally whatever the seller asked for.

Skill: 'Slaughter'

This was a top-tier skill that only a few assassin-type Hunters in the world possessed, and its value was even higher than that of 'Stealth'. Items like this were never released on the market in the first place. It was much more profitable for the Hunter or guild leader who obtained the rune stone to learn it themselves than sell it. But learning just any skill without careful consideration was an astronomical loss. It was common sense that assassin-type skills were best utilized by assassin-type Hunters. Therefore, it was standard practice to keep rune stones in the guild vault until the right person for the skill was found. And Yoo Jinho managed to rummage through their vaults to find what he wanted. No, let's rephrase that.

He squeezed them until he found it.

— I told you, if you squeeze them enough, it will eventually appear. — Yoo Jinho's dependable and wicked voice was still vivid in his ears.

1

[...He's grown up well.] Beru muttered with a sinister smile, implying various things. And he looked ahead.

1

[Using Skill: 'Slaughter'.]

Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash—!

Suho's two daggers were mercilessly slashing at the enemies. The speed gradually increased until it was impossible to follow them with the naked eye.

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz—!

Black trails filled his vision. Following those, the high elves' bodies were being mercilessly cut down.

[Can you see, my King?] Beru's voice echoed faintly at that sight.

"Kraaa...!"

It was simply beautiful. The screams of the high elves erupting here and there resonated like an opera.

2

Crackle—!

BZZZZZT—!

The thunderbolts striking down from above their heads were like the sound of an angel's trumpet.

Flare! Whoosh! Whoosh—!

Beautiful Elvenwood instantly turned into a sea of fire with the flames of destruction.

[?? has been defeated.]

[?? has been defeated.]

[?? has been defeated.]

[?? has been defeated.]

[...]

[Blessing: 'Blessing of Gluttony' amplifies experience points.]

[Level Up!]

[Level Up!]

...Beru burst into laughter at the sight of the fierce battlefield, where all these elements intertwined, resembling a majestic requiem.

[Can you hear, my King!] He called, Hoping his voice would reach Sung Jinwoo in outer space.

1

[Behold! Your son is following the path you walked!] For Beru, all of this was a prayer and a ritual offered to the king he served. Skill: 'Slaughter' was Beru's offering for Sung Jinwoo, not Sung Suho. Just then...

Twitch.

Beru's antennae twitched, and his eyes stared intently somewhere.

[...Found it.] It was natural for battles to occur during a war. But it wouldn't do to forget the initial objective because of being engrossed in the fight.

[The energy of the Outer Gods!]

Battle was one thing, but Beru hadn't forgotten why Suho set foot in this suspicious city. The fundamental cause that turned this area into a field-type dungeon. As Elvenwood burned, the location of the energy, previously hidden by the forest and trees, was finally found by Beru's senses.

[My liege! I found the Gates! I can sense three Gates underground!] Someone reacted to Beru's shout before Suho.

"How dare you!" Forest grit his teeth while stretching out his arm, half-severed by Suho's dagger, and wrapped it around the neck of another high elf burning and screaming beside him.

Crack—!

'...?!'

Like plucking an apple from a branch. Forest lightly snapped his fellow elf's neck and pulled off his head. And then something amazing happened.

Whoosh—!

The spirits erupted like a fountain from the neck of the headless high elf. Like when you shake a cola bottle and open the cap. Countless spirits gushed out explosively, and began to swirl around Forest's body.

Crackle! Crackle!

Then, the other high elves fighting Suho began to follow suit. They tore apart the bodies of their comrades that were damaged by his attacks and absorbed the spirits inside.

Graaaaaaaaaaaa—!

Then, at an astonishing speed, the high elves' bodies began to grow and swell. They now looked like giant trees only resembling elves.

"Oh-oh my god...!" It might have seemed like a beautiful sight at first glance, but not to Sirka, who was an elf. To her it was horrifying to the point of nausea.

"It's not just one! How many spirits are inside each body?!"

"Huh. Young elf. Why are you so scared? Didn't you know this was the relationship between you elves and us?" Forest's smile as he looked down at the terrified Sirka was grotesquely distorted. It was chilling for a fellow elf.

'That's not an elf.' He, no, 'they' were something imitating elves. Now she understood. They didn't need eyes in the first place. Countless eyeballs were already crammed inside their bodies, peeking at the world outside. So many that they would spill out even with a small hole!

'That's a high elf?' If that horrifying thing was a high elf, she would definitely decline. Sirka shuddered as she recalled her desire to become a high elf, even for a moment.

"Suho! These guys are a collective of spirits! They're much worse than the ice golems we saw in the Echo Forest...!"

"How dare you compare us to mere ice golems!"

Crash—!

"...!"

Was he offended by Sirka's words? Forest's giant hand tore through the wind and fell vertically from the sky.

Bang—!

The hideous palm, filled with the eyes of countless spirits, struck Sirka as if swatting an insect. But fortunately, there were two shadow soldiers who rose before her just in time.

[...Hmm. Is that all you have?]

[Easy.]

Greed and Iron, armed with large shields and full-body armor, stood side by side and blocked Forest's palm. Sirka's eyes widened at their dependable backs. For reference, they were the High Priest and Priest in the Cult of the Outer Gods until recently. The sight of the high elves devoured by spirits felt a little different to them.

[It's quite novel that they thought of embedding Starpieces in their eyes. Does this make them see something different?]

[Maybe they can see the Outer Gods directly in exchange for losing their sight?]

Kraaa!

As Forest's size grew even larger, tremendous pressure bore down on Greed and Iron.

"Sirka! Freeze him!" The ice elf, startled by Suho's sudden shout, activated her 'Blessing of Frost.'

Whoosh— Crack—!

A blizzard raged, freezing Forest's hand and arm solid. And Suho, who flew over the frost-covered limb, struck down with his dagger.

Crack! Shatter—!

As the weapon, blazing with heat, collided with the rapidly frozen wood, Forest's arm broke off.

[It's useless!]

Whoosh—!

At that moment, countless spirits erupted from the broken arm, shouting in unison and attacking Suho's body all at once. Elvenwood forest burned and lightning struck everywhere. But... for some reason they were still smiling.

[We!]

[Do not die!]

Whoosh—!

"Suho!" Cha Hae-In, still fighting the trees, shouted urgently and rushed towards her son being swallowed by the numerous spirits.

[My liege—!] Beru also flew towards Suho in dismay.

And at the center of it all, the spirits whispered in Suho's ear in unison,

[Huh. Did you say they might be able to see the Outer Gods if they embed Outer Gods stones in their eyes?] They were mocking Greed and Iron's words.

[Can't you think of the opposite case?]

'The opposite? Don't tell me?' Suho realized an important fact at those words.

"Don't tell me the Outer Gods are seeing this side through your eyes..."

Whoosh—!

At that moment, the spirits scattered in all directions and attacked Suho.

Flare!

The black-red shadow that was engulfing Suho's body repelled them. And the spirits immediately changed direction and chose an alternative.

Sirka.

The bloodline of Sillad, the King of the Ice Elves.

[Young elf.]

[We'll give you a chance.]

[Become one with us.]

"...?!"

Whoosh—!

Sirka's pupils dilated. Her body froze as all those grotesque things rushed towards her. But then... What came out of Suho's mouth as he desperately reached out to Sirka wasn't her name.

"Sillad!" At that moment...

[Skill: 'Unknown' is activated.]

Flash!

Suho's mind fell as he barely managed to grab Sirka's hand. Distant darkness or somewhere in the light. his mind was trapped in a storm raging within. But even as he was tossed around in that storm, Suho simply closed his eyes peacefully.

[...Long ago, the ice elf warriors who participated in the Monarch Wars were always accompanied by the blessing of the ice spirits.] A voice reached Suho.

[When a bow or any weapon was held in their hands, all their attacks were imbued with the 'Curse of the Frost'.]

'...Sillad?' He finally realized the identity of the voice. Ah, he succeeded. This was the world of the King of the Snowfolk, the Monarch of Frost.

[Those hit by our arrows would have that part frozen, and those cut by our blades wouldn't bleed, but a chilling and cruel coldness would penetrate their blood vessels through the severed part.]

But Suho still had his eyes closed. And Sillad wasn't visible. Only his calm voice was telling him an old tale.

[As those attacks accumulated, the opponent would eventually freeze to death. Everyone feared us. ...But this was only the story of elf warriors who used spirit magic. On the other hand, the fate of the elves devoured by spirits was miserable.]

Suho suddenly recalled. He had already fought elves possessed by spirits in the sanctuary on the Island of Facade. Esil clicked her tongue as soon as she saw them back then. What a sight. Snowfolk devoured by ice spirits? Just how weak were they in life...? Elves, whose specialty was spirit magic, were devoured by spirits instead of controlling them. It was truly an absurd situation. But now the circumstances were quite different from back then. Sillad's voice continued.

[At least the high elves of Elvenwood here weren't devoured by spirits because they were weak. Rather, they must have accepted the spirits by choice, to become even stronger.]

'...' Suho, trapped in the storm, finally opened his eyes. He could see Sillad beyond that.

[Perhaps their original goal was to accept the 'Primordial Darkness' into their bodies, not the spirits. That's the only way to become a Monarch. But to do that, they would have had to find where the Primordial Darkness was first.] Sillad's expression as he looked at the storm engulfing Suho... seemed a bit bitter. No matter how he looked at it, this wasn't normal spirit magic.

[Starpieces...? To embed such suspicious things in their eyes. Even those idiots wouldn't do that. Some guys must have tricked or forced them.]

Whoosh—

As Sillad stretched out his hand, a white wind swirled and seeped into the storm engulfing Suho. And as Sillad clenched his hand again, someone's will, swept away in that storm, bloomed into a small ice flower. Sillad clicked his tongue as he looked at that pathetic ice flower.

[It's been a while, Forest. My tenacious nemesis.]

[...] As no answer came, Sillad's expression gradually filled with anger.

[Speak. Who are the ones who put you in this fishbowl and raised you?]

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Was he unwilling to respond? Or was he not in a state to answer? No reply came from Forest's soul, which had already become an insignificant ice flower.

[You may not answer, but I need to know.] Sillad reached out and grabbed the ice flower with a fearsome expression.

[Even if I have to squeeze it out of your soul.]

Whoosh— A frosty wind blew from Sillad's mouth.

[King of the Snow Folk and the Monarch of Frost, uses Skill: 'Ice Flower Illusion'.]

Ice Flower Illusion.

Sillad's spirit magic that showed Suho the image of Cha Hae-In in the Tomb of Berserk Dragons. That chilling wind now wrapped around Forest's ice flower like a rope. And then, a system message appeared before Suho.

Ding!

[Calling forth the traces left on the spiritual body.]

[Do you accept?]

[Y/N]

'What's this?' Sillad's firm voice reached Suho as he looked at the message.

[Accept it quickly. This insignificant guy, despite his appearance, was quite strong among the high elves who competed with me for the position of Monarch. The fact that he ended up like this is no trivial matter.]

'Traces left on the spiritual body... Are you trying to peek into his memories?'

[Yes. Even though I'm dead, I can still exert this much power against the elves I once ruled.]

Frost.

An aura emanating from Sillad, the dignity of someone who was once a Monarch of a dimension, was overwhelming. Seeing that dignified appearance, Suho's gaze naturally shifted to his side. He and Sillad weren't the only ones in this world. The successor personally chosen by him, Sirka, was also dragged here alongside Suho.

Whoosh—

Sirka was trapped in transparent ice, her eyes closed peacefully in this chaotic storm. It was as if the flow of time for her had frozen along with the ice.

[Don't worry. I temporarily froze her, so she'll be safe for a while.]

The target of this storm of spirits wasn't Suho, but Sirka. It was their alternative after failing to take over his body, but from the spirits' perspective, Sirka would be a much more suitable vessel than Suho. She was an elf, the same race as the high elves who were their original hosts, and her bloodline was even directly descended from the previous Monarch, Sillad.

[Sirka can't handle this quantity of spirits yet. The moment the ice breaks, She will be devoured by them. Accept it quickly.] Sillad urged Suho. The answer was already obvious.

'Accept.' As Suho nodded, a mirage-like illusion bloomed from the ice flower that Sillad was holding.

Whoosh—!

'...Huh?' Suho regained consciousness in a beautiful forest, no longer tormented by the storm. The air was fresh with the scent of grass and flowers, and the Ice Flower Illusion had painted a new scene. Elves frolicked peacefully amongst the trees and beautiful wooden houses, adding to the idyllic illusion. And the last thing that appeared was a giant tree standing tall in the middle of the forest. Suho muttered as he looked at it,

'Elvenwood?'

[Yes, this is the Elvenwood where I used to live.] Sillad's face suddenly appeared in the air, accompanied by a chilling blizzard that swirled around Suho. He looked around the forest with a nostalgic expression and muttered,

[Originally, 'Elvenwood' was the name of that tree you see in the middle. And we elves were nomads who lived around it.] Suho tilted his head. There was a contradiction in those words.

'Lived around the tree? If you're nomads, shouldn't you be moving around?'

[We move around. After the land becomes barren.]

'Becomes barren? What do you mean?'

[Watch. It will begin soon.]

Whoosh—

A chilly wind blew through the forest as Sillad finished speaking. Time seemed to accelerate, and the seasons passed rapidly before his eyes - spring, summer, autumn, winter. The once beautiful forest became desolate; the vibrant leaves withered and fell, leaving bare branches behind. The elves' clothing grew thicker as the temperature dropped, reflecting the harshness of the changing environment.

Whoosh—

What remained was a 'bitter cold.' But even then, there was still something that hadn't changed from the beginning... It was 'Elvenwood.'

[Elvenwood is a spirit tree that provides the optimal environment for elves to live in. Near it, the strength of the spirits increases, and so does the power of elves' spirit magic.]

But nothing in the world was eternal. There was no such thing as an inexhaustible power.

[Elvenwood absorbs all the nutrients around it. And when they are depleted...]

Whoosh—!

[It consumes the elves as nutrients.]

Gasp!

A scream rang out. Elvenwood, which was becoming gaunt due to lack of nutrients, suddenly extended its roots and began to attack the elves. Suho frowned.

'It's a friend to the elves when the land is fertile, but when nutrients are scarce, it consumes the elves as emergency food?'

[Emergency food... That's an appropriate expression.] Sillad muttered bitterly.

2

[Yes, that's right. I don't want to admit it, but we elves might have been raised as nutrients to be consumed by Elvenwood from the beginning.]

The elves were dying tragically before his eyes. With Elvenwood's sharp roots piercing their bodies, they were withering away, having all their nutrients stolen.

[Even the spirits don't help us in these moments. Spirits are friends of the elves? Heh. Those who spout such nonsense are one of two things.] Sillad's eyes flashed with anger.

[Either young elves who have never experienced this, or...]

'The spirits themselves.'

[Yes.]

Rustle. The corpses of the elves who withered and died from having their nutrients stolen were getting up again before Suho's eyes. Like zombies.

[The spirits target the lifeless, nutrient-depleted bodies of the elves that have been consumed by Elvenwood. Due to our close relationship, the corpses have a strong affinity for them.]

To use spirit magic, one needed a high affinity for spirits. Conversely, this meant that a corpse of such an individual was the perfect vessel for spirits. And...

[??]

Suho saw. Just like with Forest, question marks appeared on the name tags above the elf zombies.

'Now I understand.' He finally realized. Perhaps those question marks meant that the system couldn't identify them. They had already become something that was neither elf nor spirit. And even at this moment, others were competing to enter those shells, pushing aside the spirits that had already settled in.

'Since their essence is constantly changing, they can't be named.'

[Name. Come to think of it, you humans seem to call us ice elves 'white ghosts'.] Sillad stroked his chin and muttered at Suho's words,

[In that sense, it would be appropriate to call those guys 'corrupted ghosts'.]

Ding!

[??] → [Corrupted Ghost]

At Sillad's words, the question marks that were their names changed to 'Corrupted Ghost'. But what did it matter what they were called? Names didn't matter. What was more important was the purpose of those 'Corrupted Ghosts.'

Graaaa—!

The zombie elves, taken over by the spirits, moved sluggishly and began to slaughter all living creatures they could see outside the withered forest. And they dragged the corpses back to Elvenwood.

'Are they bringing nutrients for the Elvenwood themselves?'

[Yes. It's the so-called symbiosis. A relationship where they use each other for their own benefit. In fact, we elves are the same. Look at that.]

'...!'

Come to think of it, not all the elves were annihilated and turned into Corrupted Ghosts. Where Sillad pointed, those who survived by avoiding Elvenwood's rampage were desperately escaping. And Suho spotted 'Forest' among those survivors, running away in a panic. Since this illusion itself was a mirage that came from his memories, the scene of Forest escaping among the elves scattering and running away wasn't why Suho was surprised. All the surviving elves running away in a panic, had 'fruits' in their arms.

'Those fruits, don't tell me?'

[...Yes. They're the fruits of Elvenwood. More precisely, they're 'seeds.']

'Are they trying to grow Elvenwood again after all this?'

[That's why I said it's symbiosis.] Sillad was also looking at Forest's back with a bitter expression.

[No matter what, elves need Elvenwood to survive. The same goes for the spirits. At least until all the nutrients in the area are depleted, Elvenwood and the spirits pretend to be 'friends of the elves.']

'...'

Forest, who managed to escape Elvenwood's rampage, arrived at a new land. He found the most fertile ground, dug into it, and planted the fruit. As he performed spirit magic there, a new Elvenwood sprouted. That shoot quickly absorbed the fertile nutrients growing rapidly, and a new elf village was born around it. Suho nodded.

'So that's why they're nomads.'

[Yes. To grow Elvenwood, they have to constantly wander in search of fertile land.]

Meanwhile, time passed quickly in the illusion. The new home they obtained after much hardship quickly withered again. And the same situation repeated. Elvenwood attacked the elves. Corrupted Ghosts were born. And Forest once more escaped with a fruit in his hand, searching for a new land. And once again, he planted Elvenwood in fertile land. While watching this whole series of events, Suho suddenly became curious.

'But Sillad, why can't I see you?'

This whole illusion was Forest's memory. And Forest said he once lived and competed with Sillad. But why couldn't he see Sillad among all these survivors?

[You're asking why you can't see me among the survivors? It's only natural.] Sillad's lips curled up at Suho's question. That expression was clear confidence.

[Because I didn't run away.]

'What?' Sillad answered proudly,

[I am the only high elf who didn't run away from the rampaging Elvenwood. That is why I, Sillad, am called King of the Snow Folk and the Monarch of Frost.]

Whoosh—

A gust of icy wind blew just in time.

[Friends with the spirits?] Sillad scoffed and grinned, revealing his teeth.

[The one who rules the spirits, that is the Monarch.]

1

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Whoosh—

The Ice Flower Illusion erased Forest, and now Sillad began to paint very old memories before Suho's eyes. It was a newborn baby.

[That's me.] It was Sillad in his very young age, sleeping soundly in the arms of an adult elf.

[And that's my mother.] Behind them, the towering Elvenwood was ominously wriggling its branches. Sillad gazed at the hideous monster disguised as a peaceful tree and muttered softly. Since when...?

[...Even before I was born, we elves were already being raised by the Elvenwood.]

This memory was a very painful one that Sillad still carried, even in death. Spring, summer, autumn, winter. The four seasons that the elves experienced weren't a single year. Sometimes they were short, sometimes they lasted for decades. But there was always an end. Even peace that seemed to last forever eventually met winter. One day,

a blizzard raged through the barren forest where the fertile land had dried up and even the leaves had fallen,

[As always, the 'Year of Harvest' came suddenly.]

Kyaaa—!

R-run—!

[Winter is always sudden.]

The Year of Harvest. The day when Elvenwood began to harvest the elves it had raised.

[...I was still young.]

Suho, watching the illusion, saw Sillad's expression. He was facing the memories with pained eyes.

Whoosh—!

He could still see it vividly, even with his eyes closed: the blizzard, his mother desperately running across the frozen snowfield. He was just a baby, held tightly in her arms. Sillad looked at his younger self, staring blankly at his mother's urgent face from the warmth of her embrace. And...

Stab—

Ugh...!

...Even as those hideous thorny roots pierced her back, his mother's trembling hands desperately handed him over to another elf.

"You... at least you..." ...Her last words as she was dragged back to Elvenwood by the Corrupted Ghosts. Her sorrowful eyes, smiling faintly as she looked at her child, who was getting further away in the arms of another elf. Still muttering towards him, her vision fading.

"Live..."

[...At least you, live.] All of that was still vivid in Sillad's memories. Even now, in this moment of eternal rest in death.

[That is the last image I have of my mother.]

Whoosh—

Time passed quickly in the illusion. Sillad. The baby who lost his parents and barely survived, entrusted to the arms of other survivors, was there. The young elf, who witnessed all that tragedy with his own eyes, settled peacefully in a new village with other adults, carrying all that despair in his memories. A new home. Within the fence of a newly sprouted Elvenwood. Sillad gradually grew into a boy. And then a young man. He made friends. Forest among them. Sillad learned spirit magic and hunting with his companions and competed with them for the position of the village guardian.

Looking back, it was peaceful. The bright weather. The fresh scent of grass. Every second was peaceful. But even in all those moments, Sillad's friends never once saw him smile. It was as if he didn't know how to. It was only natural. His mother only told him to live, but she left without telling him how to...

[Did you know?] Sillad muttered beside Suho.

[Sometimes, a bloody battlefield is better than a miserable peace.] Sillad was staring at the illusion he created with fierce eyes.

Kraaa—!

Winter had come. Peace was over and the elves were dying once again. The survivors fled in a hurry.

"Why?!" Forest was crying out among them.

"Why must we suffer like this every time?!"

[Forest was the same as me.] He was also a survivor from the previous village, like Sillad. An elf who experienced the repeating tragedy of winter.

[We were always frustrated. Why did we elves always have to repeat this? Why couldn't we escape this vicious cycle of fate?] Sillad's eyes blazed with quiet anger as he watched Forest crying out in the blizzard.

[So I stayed.]

Sillad made a different choice. In the middle of the village where everyone was scattering and running away, In that cold and freezing blizzard, Only Sillad remained, holding his weapon.

[I was frustrated. So I made up my mind. To not repeat this anymore.] Countless thorny roots attacked Sillad, who was looking up at Elvenwood with a venomous expression.

Piercing through the icy ground.

Piercing through the blizzard.

[If my end is already decided, at least I'll choose where I die.]

Whoosh! Slash!

Corrupted Ghosts also attacked. Demons wearing the faces of those who were once family in the same village. Hungry spirits who hadn't yet found a vessel. Against all those enemies. No... against everything in the world.

[...I did not run away.]

Whoosh—!

Graaaaaaaaaa—!

In that thick blizzard, Sillad fought and fought without rest. In the place where everyone ran away, only Sillad remained and fought alone.

[I fought day and night. I forgot hunger. The flow of time didn't matter in the blizzard. And as I fought like that...]

Suddenly

[No one attacked me anymore.]

All the enemies were gone. The cold and freezing winter. In that blizzard, only Sillad stood alone on the desolate snowfield. And Sillad couldn't help but chuckle as he belatedly discovered something. Suho, watching the illusion beside him, also saw it and opened his mouth.

'...Elvenwood froze to death.'

[Yes. Isn't it absurd?] Sillad chuckled and replied to Suho's words,

[That great Elvenwood froze to death. Much faster than me, who was just struggling to survive. Unable to withstand a mere cold. A mere cold...]

To think it was just that weak. Sillad's face was filled with a mixture of emptiness, mockery, and frustration. It also looked like he was holding back tears.

Sob...

Sillad, who barely survived, dragged his wounded body and approached the frozen Elvenwood. And he began to strike the frozen tree madly. There was no purpose. Just until his anger subsided.

Crash! Bang! Shatter—!

For days and nights. Continuously. He didn't stop until Elvenwood was shattered.

[But my anger still wouldn't subside. So I dug up the frozen ground and pulled out all the roots hidden beneath. And this time, I chewed and swallowed all of its roots.]

Munch Munch

Munch Munch Munch Munch

Sillad's expression as he forcibly chewed and swallowed the remains of Elvenwood was already half-mad. How could he be sane? His entire body, exhausted from the long battle, was battered. The blood that came out of his wounds had frozen from the blizzard, and his skin was cracked. He looked even more miserable than the Corrupted Ghosts, and it wouldn't have been strange if he died soon. But Sillad was still alive. Even this bone-chilling cold was nothing to him anymore. Rather, he couldn't collapse; he had to live to mock Elvenwood, which couldn't even withstand this cold, to mock it for the rest of his life.

[So I decided to stay in that village. There was no reason to leave anymore.] And the thought that he would no longer have the right to mock Elvenwood if he left that land to escape the cold was also significant.

[So I just settled down. It was cold, but there were many advantages to living here.]

Advantages...? It was terribly cold. But elves were a race that adapted to their environment...

[That's how I became the first ice elf.]

The first ice elf.

The story of how Sillad, who survived the bitter cold, became the next Monarch happened a long time after that. Only after the Monarch of the elves at that time died in the war against the Rulers could Sillad finally become the next Monarch. But he was still young at that time. And... he hadn't properly taken revenge on Elvenwood. The only thing he accomplished was enduring until it froze to death. He made up his mind.

[One day, I will become the Monarch of the elves, find all the Elvenwoods, and uproot them. And I finally did it. As soon as I became the Monarch, I uprooted all the Elvenwoods I could find.]

Of course, there were elves who opposed him. But Sillad's decision, having already become the Monarch, was absolute, so all the elves gradually adapted to the land of bitter cold where Elvenwoods had disappeared and became ice elves. And the starting point was the first snowfield where Sillad survived. The first village was rebuilt on the land of bitter cold where Elvenwood died. But ironically, the elves who lost their tree

were too weak. The spirits, having lost their center, no longer listened to their requests. But it didn't matter. They were no longer friends, so a hierarchy needed to be established.

– Submit to me, you lowly and cowardly spirits. – Sillad, who became the Monarch of Frost, began to hunt the spirits that scattered to avoid him after uprooting all the Elvenwoods.

[Spirits don't die. But it's enough to catch and freeze them.] Sillad poured all his resentment into a curse towards the spirits he captured one by one.

– Spirits. Freeze, be trapped in the bitter cold and suffer forever. – That curse was spirit magic containing all the resentment of Sillad, the first ice elf who survived the bitter cold.

– Just as you made my people, you too will live for eternity, neither alive nor dead. – And just as they had toyed with the corpses of dead elves turning them into Corrupted Ghosts, They too would be trapped in a frozen prison forever, becoming Sillad's slaves, neither alive nor dead.

Graaaaaaaaaa—!

The ice giants born that way trembled before Sillad and pledged their allegiance. Their roars were the pathetic screams of the spirits trapped inside.

[Ice Golem]

Suho was looking at the name of that prison. And he remembered. A philosopher's quote he had seen somewhere.

'We are all fighting our own battles.'

When he first met the dead Sillad in this world of pure white... He recalled the illusion of the forgotten time shown to him. In that illusion, he... Was whispering in a cruel voice with a frozen blade piercing Sung Jinwoo's heart,

– Is this the end, human? Then you won't be able to see it. The moment our army arrives on this land. Then the corpses of you humans will form mountains, and your blood will form rivers. – That was the worst curse that Sillad, the King of the Snow Folk and the Monarch of Frost, could utter.

– But this land where you were born and raised will be different. I will personally freeze all the humans on this land and make them suffer eternally. – And at the same time, it was the 'real' hell that Sillad himself knew best, the hell he understood most deeply.

– They will live for eternity, neither alive nor dead.

The Corrupted Ghosts who lived for eternity, neither alive nor dead. The very lives of the elves, who had everything taken away after being raised by Elvenwood and the spirits.

– Hate me endlessly in death. – Recalling the hell they had experienced themselves, Sillad poured out the greatest curse he could muster towards the dying Shadow Monarch.

– That will also be my pleasure. – That was the only ritual that could console the smile of his mother, who died saving him, and the deaths of his fellow elves who perished unjustly by his side.

– Why?! Why must we suffer like this every time?! – The illusion had returned to the image of Forest desperately crying and running away. Sillad muttered with sad eyes as he watched that,

[Yes. I was also that frustrated. I wanted to make others experience the hell that we elves live in. That was all I could do for my friends who had already died. But now that I see it...] Sillad's eyes flashed as he saw Forest's next memory.

[...Forest, this guy seems to have found a different way.]

Sillad endured winter with his own strength. Forest, despite being a high elf, repeatedly fled from the endless winters. The fate of these two led to completely different endings. Sillad eventually became a Monarch, fought against the enemies, and died fighting on the battlefield. Even though that ending was a defeat, he was a warrior who achieved the feat of personally piercing the heart of the great Shadow Monarch with his own hands. But Forest was different...

– You creature born with a pitiful fate.

'...!'

Suddenly, someone appeared before Forest, crying out in the Ice Flower Illusion.

'...!' Sillad and Suho's eyes flashed simultaneously.

Unknown beings with golden halos floating above their heads appeared before Forest. But unfortunately, their faces couldn't be seen clearly because of the dazzling light emitted by the aureole. This was Forest's memory. And he didn't even dare to raise his head, overwhelmed by the sacred light they emitted. But even then, he saw something.

– Shall we help you a little?

It was the cruel yet beautiful smile on their lips. And their hands, reaching out to him who was in despair. Those hands, without even waiting for an answer, mercilessly plucked out Forest's eyes.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 264 - Chapter 262

Chapter 264: Chapter 262

The moment Forest's eyes were gouged out.

Whoosh—!

Golden light burrowed deep into Forest's vision, dyed in pitch-black darkness. Both Suho and Sillad already knew that it was from the Starpieces. The problem was his soul.

Crack! Crack Crack!

As the Starpieces burrowed in, cracks began to appear in his darkened vision from the shock. And...

Snap!

Finally, Forest's soul shattered and fell apart like a broken window.

[The soul is broken.] Sillad gritted his teeth with a fearsome expression.

Forest's soul began to shatter and his memories flickered incessantly. The illusion of the ice flower itself was crumbling like snowflakes. Sillad clicked his tongue as he watched the figures who handed over the Starpieces melt away like a mirage.

[No wonder his soul was so small for a high elf. It seems like Forest's vessel was insufficient to accept the power they handed over.]

'No, maybe they did it with that intention from the beginning. Look...' As soon as Suho finished speaking,

Whoosh—!

Hungry spirits were pouring in like a flood through the cracks in the shattered soul. Perhaps the usual Forest would have struggled to escape this fate But now it was different.

– Aaaaa...! This power...! – He was already blind, and he found new light in the darkness.

– Aaa! Thank you! Thank you! God of the Elves! With this power, I can finally become a Monarch...! – He embraced all those spirits with a joyful expression. He chose to become a Corrupted Ghost of his own free will.

[Tsk. He's completely lost his mind and is bewitched.] Sillad clicked his tongue in regret. Forest didn't realize what they were, even as he heard their giggling laughter, trembling with joy. And when those numerous spirits mixed to the point where Forest's soul couldn't distinguish them,

– You're a good child. Quite an interesting creature. – A voice like a ray of light whispered to him.

– Are there any other children like you?

– Yes! There are! – Forest's joyful voice, worshiping that solemn command, echoed like a hymn.

– Even if they aren't there, I will somehow find and bring them... – Then he stopped abruptly. Forest, who seemed like he would keep talking forever, suddenly stopped. Then his head creaked and turned to the side like that of a soulless doll.

[W-wait.] Sillad's expression hardened.

[Don't tell me?]

His lifeless gaze slowly moved past Suho and Sillad, who were watching him, and found... Sirka.

– Found you. – A bright smile suddenly appeared on the face of the eyeless Forest.

'...?!'

Surprisingly, the illusion was clearly looking at Sirka, who was trapped in ice, and shouted as if screaming,

– I found you!

Flash!

The golden light that suddenly erupted from Forest's illusion rapidly grew and stretched towards her.

[This is crazy! This can't be happening...!] Sillad, horrified, hurriedly tried to dispel the illusion of the ice flower. And a strong resistance came back. His spirit magic was out of control!

[S-stop it...!] Sillad shouted desperately, clenching both hands and pulling the illusion of the ice flower towards him.

Grab!

But before he could even finish speaking, Suho was already springing forward. With Kamish's Wrath in both hands. And at that moment.

Crack—!

The golden light that Forest unleashed broke through the ice protecting Sirka. And it pierced Sirka's chest.

'Where do you think you're going!'

Flash!

Suho's sword barely managed to cut off the golden light.

Flare!

It burned in the black-red flames.

'That was close.' Fortunately, Sirka was safe. But this was only the beginning.

Sillad erupted in anger. [Stop hiding and come out! Who dares covet my successor!]

Whoosh—!

A blizzard raged over the out-of-control illusion of the ice flower. And the figures of the beings hidden beyond the dark abyss were revealed. Countless gazes. The grotesque eyeballs hidden in the abyss spun playfully. Suho realized their identity.

'Spirits.'

[Yes, it was my mistake.] Sillad gritted his teeth.

He was careless. Even though this was the world of a dead Monarch, and even the time was stopped, This place was still an unknown territory to Sillad himself. He was only

temporarily summoned here by Suho's 'unknown' ability. But he realized one thing for sure. The fact that he could use spirit magic here meant that at least for this moment, the spirits were also free from the flow of time.

[While we were peeking into Forest's memories, they were also peeking at us.]

Hehehehe!

Kihihihhi—!

The spirits' eyes were spinning around Sirka, growing and shrinking repeatedly. The entire world was covered in grotesque eyeballs, as many as the number of spirits Forest possessed. Their intentions were obvious. Sillad blocked Sirka with a determined expression and said to Suho,

1

[Sirka's vessel isn't complete yet. If we give her up, her soul will break just like Forest's.] Even though Sillad chose Sirka as his successor, she was still young and weak. Her vessel was far inferior even compared to the high elf Forest.

Crack—!

As Sillad clenched both hands around the blizzard, a long, frost-covered trident was created.

[Suho. You protect Sirka here. I'm much more familiar with dealing with spirits.] And without waiting for an answer, he sprang forward and swung his spear.

[I'll teach you how to hunt spirits.]

Whoosh—!

The spear swirled and struck without hesitation. The spirits froze and shattered from those attacks. But Suho wasn't going to just stand there and watch.

'Rulers Authority'

Whoosh—

Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash—!

Suho protected Sirka and attacked the approaching spirits with Kamish's Wrath. But there were too many of them. He wanted to use the Breath of Destruction, but it was inefficient against these chaotic guys because it was a straight-line attack. He had never felt as frustrated as now that he couldn't summon shadow soldiers in this space. But he

was able to summon more than just shadow soldiers. He had summoned Gray even in the world of the dead Querehsha, because he was bound by the pet system.

'Gray! Come to me!'

[Grrrr!]

Gray, the fang wolf, enveloped in sacred light, appeared before Suho. There was no need to waste mana on possession. The more hands, the better.

'Gray.' Gray's eyes as he turned his head and met Suho's gaze were intense. Seeing that, he felt a bit emotional. It seemed like just yesterday when he was a weak puppy caught by the Hyena Guild, yet he had grown so much. Suho nodded towards him waiting for his orders, and commanded,

'Eat.' Gray's lips curled up, revealing his fangs. And...

[Grrrr!]

Flash—

The moment Gray kicked off the ground with his four paws, He literally became a gust of wind.

Crack!

Crunch! Crack—!

Kiiiiik—!

Hiiiiik—!

He began to chew and swallow the spirits indiscriminately like a beast unleashed in a sheep pen. Of course, the spirits fought back with ferocious momentum, but Gray had the dentures that Suho specially gave him.

[Grrrr!] His roar echoed, and a tremendous killing intent shook the spirits.

[Gray uses Skill: 'Contempt for the Weak'.]

[Effect: 'Fear' is activated.]

[All stats of targets are reduced by 50% for 1 minute.]

Not all spirits would be weaker than him. But for those below his level, Gray was a true predator.

[Krack!]

Crunch! Crack—!

[Gray uses Skill: 'Fatal Strike'.]

[Gray uses Skill: 'Paralysis'.]

Gray, who was getting stronger as he skillfully found and killed the spirits weaker than him, was a true hunter.

[Spirit has been defeated.]

[Spirit has been defeated.]

[Spirit has been defeated.]

[Spirit has been defeated.]

[...]

[Pet: 'Gray' offers 50% of the experience points to the owner as a sacrifice.]

'They said spirits don't die, but it seems like they can be eaten.'

[The King of Beasts, the Fang Monarch, says the world is a jungle where the strong prey on the weak, and there's nothing you can't eat if you have teeth.]

[The King of Beasts, the Fang Monarch, says that only elves with high affinity for spirits are eaten by them.] Rakan's pride in the grown-up Gray was conveyed even here.

'Good. Then shall we take care of this side as well?' Suho turned his head and looked at Sirka. Still sleeping peacefully in the broken ice.

Crack!

Suho reached into it without hesitation and pulled Sirka out.

[Wh-what are you doing! I told you to guard her well!] Sillad, who was fighting the spirits, was horrified.

But Suho replied calmly, 'What am I doing? I'm not lazy enough to wait for her to grow up.'

Thud!

'Sirka.' Suho lifted Sirka, who was forcibly asleep.

'How long are you planning to sleep?' He shook her awake and said,

'I've been thinking, and now I understand why Sillad chose you as his successor out of all the high elves.' Suho had watched Sillad's entire life from beginning to end. So he could be sure.

'You're already qualified.' Sirka was an ice elf who was born and raised in a land of bitter cold without any adults. And she was a guardian who fought against spirits to protect her friends despite being a child herself.

'Wake up. Wake up and rule those spirits yourself.'

...Flash!

Sirka's eyes opened and the stopped time began to move again.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 265 - Chapter 263

Chapter 265: Chapter 263

Sirka was dreaming. It was a memory from a few years ago. The day she first met 'Cha Hae-In.' But as always, her dreams, regardless of their content, had one thing in common that never changed. It was 'color.' Sirka's dreams were always white. Because from the moment she was born until now, the world around her had always been white, and that was the only thing she knew.

Whoosh—!

A blizzard. A pure white snowfield. A life of struggle, running barefoot on the icy snow and fighting countless spirits. That was all Sirka knew of the world. But... It was from 'that day' that things began to change.

— Sirka! It's terrible!

— Spirits are attacking the village!

Sirka's nightmare, which seemed like it would last forever, began to change.

- The spirits have gone berserk!
- Everyone, grab your weapons!

One day, the spirits of the Echo Forest went on a rampage and attacked the village. While fiercely fighting their endless waves for days and nights. Seeing the old elves dying one by one by her side, Sirka also accepted her death.

Whoosh—!

- Look at the sky!
- A monster is descending from the sky!
- It's a dragon!
- Ah, why...

Why did misfortune always come all at once? The moment she saw the giant wyvern plunging through the blizzard, Sirka should have felt that immense despair. But surprisingly, it turned into brilliant hope in an instant. From the moment a human, riding on the giant wyvern that suddenly appeared, stepped onto the ground.

- Where is this place?

From the moment she saw the tremendous magic power emanating from the human who immediately grasped the situation with sharp eyes even in the blizzard. And...

– Hey, I don't have any weapons, can you lend me something, anything? – Sirka inadvertently handed over her daggers to the woman who suddenly approached her and held out her hand. Two spare blades from her waist.

– Daggers... I miss those. – The human, as if suddenly remembering something, held the two daggers in a reverse grip and smiled faintly. And it was from then...

Whoosh—!

The human began to perform the 'sword dance' with her hair fluttering.

Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

And right behind her, the giant wyvern roared fiercely and began to hunt the spirits too. That day, The village barely regained peace. Thanks to a stranger who appeared out of nowhere. But even though the battle was over, that mysterious person didn't leave the village and continued to meddle in their affairs.

– This won't do. I don't know where this is, but I need to take care of you guys first.

'Really...' Thinking back, she saw that this was a really strange person.

– Is everyone alright? All those who are injured, gather here! And you there!

– M-me?

– Yes, you. Can you bring me some bandages or medicine if there are any in the village? And has everyone eaten? Why are you all dressed so lightly? Aren't you cold?

'...Seriously.' The human was the one wearing the thinnest clothes.

The sudden appearance, saving them, and then carefully tucking in their collars to keep out the cold wind. It wasn't funny at all. ...Rather, she cried. Tears of relief, realizing that she had survived once again. And it was from that day. That the nosy stranger earned the nickname 'Cha Cha' and settled in the village.

'Cha Cha...' Stayed with the young elves who barely survived and became their family. Sometimes as a swordsmanship teacher.

– Sirka! Your waist! Lower your stance! You need a lower center of gravity to not fall over!

– What's a center of gravity?

– Ah, do I have to explain that...

She taught them tactics, strategy, and how to protect themselves. And sometimes like a mother.

– Kids, let's eat!

– Whoaaaaa—!

– Sirka! You'll be in trouble if you eat first again! Eat with your friends!

– No! I already ate.

1

She made warm food and cozy clothes for them in the cold and freezing blizzard. And...

– Wow, Sirka! You look so cool with your hair braided! This will be good for your vision during battle, right?

– Hehe. Yes!

– The hair of elves is amazing. How can it be so beautiful and flowing, yet strong and durable enough to be used as a bowstring?

– Ahem. Jealous? Wait a little bit. When my hair grows longer, I'll make a bow for Cha Cha myself.

– Oh my, thank you. Then I'll have to make you a bracelet with my hair as a reward.

– Why a bracelet? That's useless in battle.

– You're so mean.

– Hehe. Just kidding.

...She taught them how to smile brightly even in the harsh cold. Thanks to Cha Cha, Sirka was able to learn a new color for the first time in her cold and harsh winter world where she had been trapped all her life. That color was warmth. If spring existed, she had no doubt that it would be this color.

"Sirka." A voice, strangely similar to that of Cha Cha, was calling from afar.

"You're already qualified." A voice similar, yet with an unusually low resonance, was calling her.

"So wake up."

'Wake up? What did that mean?' That voice reached Sirka, who was having a happy dream. And she instinctively realized...

Whoosh—!

'...!' That she was once again surrounded and targeted by hungry spirits, just like that day.

Whoosh—!

That she was on the verge of being devoured by the countless spirits that invaded the village, just like before Cha Cha appeared. The first thing that surged was the instinctive fear she felt that day. And the next thing that came to mind was Cha Cha's smile, always looking at her with warmth.

"Wake up and rule those spirits yourself." Someone's voice, calling out again, awakened Sirka's courage.

'...!'

Just like that day.

"Become a Monarch."

...Flash!

Sirka instinctively opened her eyes and saw Suho's face, which resembled Cha Hae-In. She asked with a dazed expression,

[...Where is this place?]

'If you're awake, take out your weapon.'

There was no answer. Instead, Suho's broad back turned to face forward, and a black shadow stretched long behind him.

Whoosh—!

[Using Skill: 'Monarch's Domain'.]

And he shouted towards Sirka, watching Sillad hunting the spirits beyond that,

'Focus and look ahead! The former Monarch of Frost is showing you how to fight spirits! You should watch and learn directly instead of me!'

[...?!] Sirka was startled. He was right.

Whoosh—!

The dead Monarch was overwhelming the spirits with a tremendous aura. But at the same time, she realized,

[No. It's impossible. I'm still...] That her abilities were far too lacking to imitate that tremendous presence.

'Impossible, my foot!'

Slap!

'Ouch?!' Sirka's mind suddenly cleared as Suho's palm flew and struck her back without mercy.

A familiar sting. This pain was the sting of Cha Cha's hand, which she had been hit with countless times while learning swordsmanship. And it was also the sting of her mother's hand, which Suho had been hit with even more times. He said,

'Don't worry and just follow me. I've already learned the trick.'

[What? That power is completely different from what you wield, how can you?]

'That's why I said it's a trick. Use it as it is, even if it's lacking. Now, let's go!'

[W-wait...!]

Whoosh—!

He suddenly jumped forward, dragging Sirka with him. She was inadvertently thrown into the vortex of hungry spirits. Suho chuckled and said,

'Now, take out your weapon.'

[...Ice Tree Spear.]

Crackle—!

Sirka obediently followed the instruction, and frost formed in her hand, extending into the Ice Tree Spear. With a weapon in her hand, Sirka's body instinctively began to attack the spirits, following the movements she learned from Cha Hae-In.

'Good. You're fighting well.'

[This won't work...!]

'Then it's time. To learn the trick.' Suho's eyes flashed.

[Using Skill: 'Iron Body technique'.]

1

Whoosh—!

In an instant, black energy enveloped Suho's fists and arms. Sirka's eyes widened. She instinctively realized. This power wasn't an ordinary skill. That hard and strong black energy climbed up to Suho's shoulders and formed a giant armor. He reached out his enormous hand, grabbed a spirit, and crushed it.

Bang!

Suho, who crushed a spirit and made it explode, looked back at Sirka and grinned, revealing his teeth.

1

'This is power. The power that the Iron Body Monarch used.'

[H-how can you...?!]

'I learned it. It's your turn now.'

Crack!

Bang!

Suho grabbed and crushed another spirit.

'One more thing.'

[Using Skill: 'Giant's Armor'.]

Whoosh—!

Suho's entire body was covered in armor. This was an ordinary skill, but Sirka already had a look of realization.

'Sirka.' Suho asked,

'If Sillad became a Monarch by fighting against the sudden bitter cold. Then what is the bitter cold to you?'

There was no need to answer that question. The cold winter was nothing to Sirka in the first place. If Sillad fought against the bitter cold, the same to Sirka was everything she saw from the moment she was born. Day and night, nothing but white...

Crack—!

Sirka's Ice Tree Spear pierced a spirit that was aiming for her. Yes, she knew...

She was still young and weak.

She wouldn't be able to rule all the spirits like the great former Monarch Sillad. But, She declared here,

[At least the spirits within my reach...]

Crack—!

The spirit pierced by the Ice Tree Spear froze.

[I rule.]

Crack—!

One by one. Sirka began to pierce and freeze the hungry spirits swirling around her.

Keeeeeeeeeeeeaaaaa—!

Amidst their screams and cries. Following Sirka's spear, all the spirits she pierced began to freeze. And that form was the giant armor that Suho personally showed her...

Crack—!

A cold and harsh dignity settled in Sirka's eyes.

[Spirit Armor]

Crack—!

And that armor gradually expanded its range, engulfing Sirka's entire body, as the number of spirits she killed increased. Just like the Iron Body technique and Giant's Armor that Suho showed her. As a result, her body was covered with a giant armor two to three times larger than herself. And...

Crack—!

She reached out a giant fist made of ice spirits, grabbed another one, and crushed it. Just like Suho showed her.

'Yes, well done. If you learned from my mother, you should be able to do at least that.' Suho chuckled.

[...Oh my god.] On the other hand, the former Monarch Sillad's eyes widened in shock. But it was only for a moment. He was filled with pride.

[Well, not a bad start.] Not spirit magic, but spirit domination. To succeed in her first step by imitating the skill used by the Iron Body Monarch, no less.

[No, it's more than excellent.] Yes. His choice was right after all.

'See, Forest?' Look at that dignified appearance, not just using spirits for spirit magic, but dominating them, using them as mere materials to create weapons and armor.

Wasn't that young elf much more like a Monarch than the high elf who just ran away from the cold winter?!

[Uhahahaha!] Sillad burst into laughter with genuine joy.

Ding!

[King of the Snow Folk and the Monarch of Frost, expresses his deep gratitude to his priest.]

[King of the Snow Folk and the Monarch of Frost, expresses his respect for his priest's performance.]

'Hmm?' Suho looked at Sillad, seeing the system messages that suddenly appeared.

Sillad was smiling with deep satisfaction. [Son of the Shadow Monarch. Do you remember what I said when I first met you? I originally intended to kill you instantly. But then I saw her. The Shadow Monarch's companion who became a mother to my young and weak tribe.]

The misery Sillad felt at that moment was indescribable. It was even more so because the moment he saw that, he recalled the face of his own mother, who died protecting him when he was a baby.

[I was grateful to your mother, so I decided not to kill you. But it's not just her anymore.] Sillad was still looking at Suho's face as he tore apart and killed another spirit.

Crack—!

[Thank you. For proving that my choice was right.]

Ding!

[Would you like to recruit 'Descendant of Frost' as a companion?]

[Y/N]

At that moment, another message appeared before Suho's eyes. And a new quest too.

[A quest has arrived.]

But Suho already knew what Sillad's request was.

[Please take good care of my descendant.]

Grin. With those words, Suho and Sirka, clad in black armor and spirit armor, simultaneously glared and crushed a spirit.

Bang—!

'Then step back. From now on, we're eating all the spirits.'

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 266 - Chapter 264

Chapter 266: Chapter 264

Sillad had already acknowledged Suho as the priest. He even bestowed his blessing, allowing him to use the skill 'Blizzard of Frost.' But as Sillad said, he accepted Suho because of his mother, Cha Hae-In, not Suho himself. However, it was different now.

Ding!

[Recruited 'Descendant of Frost' as a companion.]

Sillad finally acknowledged him as the 'Priest of the Dead Monarchs.' He felt that he could truly entrust his descendant to Suho. Moreover, it wasn't just the Monarch of Frost who acknowledged him.

[Suho! Did you see? I did it!] It was Sirka. The next Monarch candidate, armed with Spirit Armor, looking back at him with a triumphant smile.

Crash! Bang! Bang! Bang—!

[Spirit has been defeated.]

[Spirit has been defeated.]

[Spirit has been defeated.]

[...]

Sirka was no longer a victim of the spirits that had haunted Elvenwood and raised elves for centuries. Thanks to Suho's teachings, she had become a powerful ruler who

dominated them with her newfound strength. The roles were completely reversed, and the outcome was remarkable.

2

Ding!

[50% of the experience points gained by Companion: 'Sirka' are transferred to the player.]

Was this the true meaning of a 'companion'?

'It's similar to Gray.' Although Gray was a 'pet', not a companion, only the name was different, the principle was the same. The level-up system used the same approach with Sirka. Suho, who had seen and experienced many things, now fully understood the concept. Although the expression 'experience points' was used for convenience, it would be more accurate to call it 'nutrients' that should go to the World Tree. The nutrients that leaked out when magical beasts or spirits died. The level-up system intercepted those and had Suho absorb them. And that method was very similar to how the 'weeds' grew by stealing the nutrients of the World Tree in the Sea of The Afterlife. As a result, Gray and Sirka became transmitters who handed over a portion of the 'nutrients' that burst out from the creatures they killed to Suho. This was the concept of a 'companion' in the system. To borrow an expression familiar to humans, it was party play where they shared experience points. But there was one exception: Esil. Even though she volunteered to become Suho's subordinate, she didn't share experience points. Instead, she offered a greater offering.

[Spirit has been defeated.]

[Spirit has been defeated.]

[Spirit has been defeated.]

[...]

['Blessing of Gluttony' amplifies experience points.]

[Level Up!]

'Blessing of Gluttony'

Esil's blessing, which tripled the experience efficiency, was still in effect even though she wasn't here. This was due to the unique characteristic of the demon race. They began as the weeds that grew by stealing the nutrients of the World Tree in the Sea of The Afterlife. Those insignificant weeds evolved repeatedly, becoming residents of the

gap and then the demon race. So Esil, their Monarch, didn't simply offer nutrients, but amplified the absorption rate itself, which was how the nutrients were digested.

'Even if they're in the same companion relationship, each race has different characteristics. Gray could grant possession...'

Growl—!

Crack! Bang—!

Seeing Gray bravely hunting spirits even now, 'possession' must have had a positive impact on his growth as well. A win-win situation. Wasn't this a true companion relationship? So Suho had a question. If the 'Blizzard of Frost' he received earlier was a gift for his mother, not him, then what about now? What about Sirka, who just became his companion?

Crack—! Bang—!

The once noisy surroundings fell silent as the spirits surrounding Sirka froze mid-escape. Looking pathetic frozen in their sharp, icy prison, Sirka thrust her spear into the center, as if to finish them off.

Crack Crack Crack—!

Strangely, the ice began to clump around Sirka's spear, becoming thicker. It resembled a giant hammer. It had turned into a brutal blunt weapon, no longer the 'Ice Tree Spear' but the 'Ice Tree Hammer.'

[Ugh] Sirka lifted the giant ice hammer and placed it on her shoulder.

Suho chuckled at the sight. Rather than wearing the giant armor, it was more like she was riding it. Sirka's expression as she raised her head and struck a pose inside, as if waiting for praise, made it difficult to ignore her.

'She learned better than I thought. Is this because she's the descendant of a Monarch?'

[Ahem!] Sirka's shoulders puffed up.

Sillad, holding back his twitching lips, gave a stern warning, [...You still have a long way to go. You're only at the level where you can control the spirits that directly touch your hand...]

[Grandpa.]

[Wh-what?!] Sillad was startled.

Sirka suddenly looked him straight in the face and spoke. Until now, they had only communicated through 'prayer,' so this was practically the first time they faced each other. She asked confidently,

[What..? Isn't it true? You're my grandfather, right?]

[...] Sillad couldn't answer that bold gaze.

[I saw my dad once, when I was a baby. When leaving for the battlefield, he clearly told me that I was the granddaughter who inherited the blood of the Monarch of Frost.]

[...] Still no answer. Sirka continued to speak, staring intently at Sillad's face, who was avoiding her gaze.

[So I have to grow up quickly and protect this village.]

[...]

[To become a guardian.] Even though she was very young, Sirka remembered it clearly.

[Those were the first and last words my dad ever said to me.]

Her father's firm gaze as he said those words to her. There wasn't a shred of warmth in that cold voice. She didn't know it then, but Sirka had grown enough to recognize that coldness now.

[...Don't resent your father. He was just a pawn to be used in the war for me. And that's how I brought him up too.] Sillad finally opened his mouth with a heavy groan. White frost flowed out with his sigh.

[No... All of us were born with the fate of fighting on the battlefield from the instant we come into the world until the moment we die. That is the only mission of us elves...]

[You're wrong.]

[...What?]

[You're wrong.] At Sirka's bold reply, Sillad finally turned his head and looked at her face. And his eyes widened.

[Cha Cha didn't say that to us.] Sirka... had an expression that wasn't like that of an ice elf at all.

[She told us not to run around like that. Because it's dangerous to fall. She told us to cover ourselves with blankets and sleep. She told us to dress warmly because it's cold.] Cha Cha's continuous nagging. Recalling that kind voice, Sirka...

[She told us to live happily, even when we're fighting.]

...Was smiling brightly.

[She said my smile is pretty.]

[...]

[What about you, Grandpa?]

[...It's nice to see.]

[Does that mean it's pretty?] Sirka giggled as she finally got an answer.

2

At the same time, Sillad had a strange expression. Words he had never uttered before. Words he had never even imagined. But seeing his granddaughter smiling confidently before him, Sillad finally crumbled.

1

Whoosh—

Couldn't he hold it in anymore? Or was Sillad's time up? With a flurry of snow, Sillad turned his back and hid in the blizzard. A very small voice flowed from that cold and harsh snowstorm.

[...Thank you for growing up well.]

1

Whoosh—!

With those words, Sillad's world ejected Suho's and Sirka's minds back to reality. And at that moment, his voice pierced Suho's ears.

[Prepare for battle. The moment you leave here, Elvenwood, everything in the forest, will attack you.]

'I know. In that sense, can you give me a useful blessing or skill?' Sillad scoffed at Suho's words, who was still trying to negotiate at a time like this.

[You cheeky thing. You haven't answered my question yet.]

'You mean the quest? Okay. Accept!'

[...The contract is established. Please take good care of my granddaughter.]

6

Whoosh—!

Sirka waved with a bright smile towards Sillad, whose presence was fading away.

[Grandpa! I'll pray later...!]

[...Well, do whatever you want.]

Whoosh—!

The stopped time began to flow again.

[Young elf.]

[We'll give you a chance.]

[Become one with us.]

Whoosh—!

Suho and Sirka's vision changed in an instant. They saw Cha Hae-In's determined expression. Countless high elves, tree branches, and spirits were attacking them from all directions. But the situation no longer called for panic. Without prompting, They counterattacked the entire forest.

"Spirit Armor!"

Crack—!

Sirka slammed her spear into the ground. And an ice armor, sprouting like frost from the spearhead, covered Sirka's entire body. Suho took a step forward too,

[Using skill: 'Blizzard of Frost'.]

Whoosh—!

Winter came to Elvenwood.

"Th-this is...!"

"How can the power of a dead Monarch be in this land...!"

The horrified expressions of the high elves were a sight to behold. They probably wouldn't even dream that the Monarch of Frost, who had already been defeated and died in the war, could still intervene in this world. And the moment Suho accepted his quest, just as he taught Sirka how to use his power, the Monarch of Frost also gave Suho the trick to utilizing his blessing.

['Bonding Skill' is formed due to the bond with the 'Descendant of Frost'.]

Grin. Suho grinned meaningfully as he saw the newly created skill.

"Those without wings. Arise, all of you!"

Rumble—!

Shadow soldiers rose from Suho's shadow and he used the new skill towards them.

"Spirit Armament!"

[Skill: Spirit Armament Lv.1]

[Required Mana: 1 per second]

[Temporarily strengthens shadow soldiers by sacrificing spirits.]

[The attribute and degree of strengthening vary depending on the type and amount of spirits.]

[Kraaaaaaaaaaaa!]

The shadow soldiers' bodies swelled up without prompting. The spirits that Sirka killed dwelled in their bodies.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 267 - Chapter 265

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[Kieek?!] Beru was startled by the sudden change in the tide of battle.

SWOOSH—

The shadow soldiers' attacks were enveloped in sharp winds.

1

BOOM! CRASH!

Whirlwinds raged with every step they took. It was a similar effect to the attacks of the 'Wind Blade Crows' that flocked outside Elvenwood.

Kaboom—!

The spirits tried to scatter to avoid their attacks, but they couldn't escape being swept away by the giant ice hammer that Sirka wielded.

Hiiiiik—!

Crack—!

The startled spirits screamed in surprise and froze on the spot, like sharp icicles, with shocked expressions. It was a spectacular sight.

[My liege!] Beru looked at Suho and exclaimed in admiration,

[How did you learn such a wonderful skill?!] Beru recognized the structure of the new skill Suho acquired at a glance. The ability to temporarily strengthen the attack power and defense of shadow soldiers!

"A buff skill?!" Cha Hae-In, who was striking lightning in all directions with the Demon King's Longsword, also widened her eyes at the sight of the shadow soldiers imbued with elemental power. Like Beru, she also recognized how valuable the buff skill Suho used was.

Buff.

It was an ability mainly used by support-type Hunters like Healers to assist their party members in battle from behind, and there were countless types of them. And the larger the raid party, The higher the difficulty of the dungeon, The more diverse buff skills needed to be utilized appropriately for a safer and more efficient raid. But among them, if one had to choose the most versatile and useful skill, all Hunters would agree on 'elemental buff.'

'A buff that adds elemental damage to allies! It's the most efficient buff in a situation like this!' A chaotic battle. Especially when facing various types of magical beasts like now,

Elemental attacks, if used properly according to the attributes of the magical beasts they were facing, could inflict much greater damage with the same strike.

But Beru had a different perspective from Cha Hae-In. He saw the advantages and disadvantages of the 'Spirit Armament' that Suho used more clearly and specifically. [Kieeeeeek! This is truly amazing! To strengthen the soldiers by consuming spirits instead of mana!]

Advantage one.

It didn't consume mana. This was the most important because it meant that Suho could save mana, the core material for maintaining the Shadow Army.

Advantage two.

It was fundamentally different from Skill: 'Monarch's Domain,' so the effects stacked.

Advantage three.

The buff effect became stronger as more spirits were used as materials.

But there was a problem. The third advantage was also a drawback. A skill that required spirits as materials instead of mana. It meant there was a clear limit.

[It's a shame. It's quite a useful skill, but it can only use the spirits that the young elf personally caught as materials. And even that is a consumable that ends the moment the spirits disappear. In short, it's a much lower version compared to 'Monarch's Domain'.] In that sense, Beru could also quickly figure out who Suho received this skill from. He glared at Sirka, the Descendant of Frost, with burning eyes.

[Kieek! How outrageous! It's obvious that he will want the young elf to grow up quickly so he can use more spirits as materials!] This was why all the dead Monarchs were so cunning. They pretended to help Suho, but in the end, they wanted to take care of their descendants. Didn't the Fang Monarch also present Gray for the same purpose? Of course, Suho wasn't unaware of that fact.

"But it's a deal where no one loses. Let's think positively."

[In any case, you're too naive... Kieek?] Beru, who was grumbling, suddenly looked at Suho's eyes and realized something.

[...My liege, don't tell me?]

Suho's smiling face as he looked straight at Beru was very similar to Sirka's triumphant expression when she succeeded in imitating Sillad's power, albeit insufficiently.

"Yes. This will definitely help my father."

[...What a devoted son! Sob. Sob.] Beru burst into tears at that noble filial piety. Regardless, Suho sprang forward with his weapon.

Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash—!

Beru quickly followed Suho, who was slaughtering the enemies in Elvenwood alongside the soldiers, and continued to wail.

"Beru, you said it before, didn't you? That no matter how strong I become, I can never be as strong as my father. The same goes for my soldiers."

4

[Sob! Unfortunately, that's true! The shadow power you inherited, my liege, is just a 'skill' that can't even compare to the King's power!]

"It's not comforting at all when you cry with an expression that's not sad at all."

[But what can you do? It's an obvious fact.]

"Seriously." Suho chuckled and cut down the roots of Elvenwood that sprouted from the ground.

It was just a fact, devoid of any human touch or empathy. But even though he looked like that, Beru was always right. And it was something Suho often worried about. If he continued to grow stronger like this and finally met his father,

'How much help will I be to my father?'

'Will my shadow soldiers be of any use?' He was only at this level even on Earth, so how effective would his power be against the real outer gods that his father was facing?

"In that sense..." That was why Suho was only able to find the answer after recently receiving the power of destruction from the Dragon King and seeing Sirka's ability today.

"This is the only way. The most efficient way I can actually help my father."

Buff.

Suho chuckled and said,

"It's a war, right? War is a confrontation of power and power, but I also learned that you need to be able to create variables with various strategies and tactics. From my father."

Of course, it was something his father said while playing games together. But Suho had a truly refreshed expression as he said those words. Thinking back, to protect just one Earth, where not even Itarim themselves but only their apostles were active, was a problem that could be solved by diligently accumulating experience points and becoming stronger like now. But Suho's ultimate goal wasn't limited to just that. After completely resolving Earth's problems, going to space to meet his father who was at war with the outer gods. Fighting alongside him. Wasn't that the meaning of the name 'Woojin' Guild that Suho created? But the problem was, what if he went all the way there and wasn't of any help? Then Suho himself would only become a burden to his father.

'...Because I'm my father's only weakness.' But until when? How long did he have to live as a child who needed protection?

"My father already saved the world by himself at my age."

Suho, gritting his teeth, pulled out the roots of Elvenwood with his rough hand. Following those, the flames of destruction flowed towards the trunk of Elvenwood. He extended his other hand towards it and unleashed his power.

[Using Skill: 'Breath of Destruction'.]

KRAAAAA—!

Elvenwood was pierced by that powerful inferno. Seeing that, Suho recalled what he saw today. The lives of the elves who were raised by that Elvenwood. The history of struggle that Sillad, the Monarch who died after being defeated by his father, lived through. The noble Monarch of the elves who remained alone in the blizzard where everyone else fled and fought against the whole world with gritted teeth and won.

"Not only my father, but Sillad also fought and won against the bitter cold alone. And even Sirka..." Yes. Even that little Sirka was a child of frost who learned to walk in a blizzard from the moment she was born. Because all those conditions were met, Sillad chose Sirka as his successor as soon as he saw her.

'But what about me?' Suho never overestimated himself. He wasn't foolish enough to be intoxicated by the feeling of becoming stronger, no matter how much he leveled up.

— I briefly fought him, and your son was pathetic. Did the peaceful comfort dull the Shadow Monarch's blood?

The words of the Dragon King, the Monarch of Destruction, who was his father's rival. Those words were still etched in Suho's mind, deeply embedded in the Dragon King's heart that was beating in Suho's chest.

Thump! Thump!

As long as this hellfire he received from the Dragon King boiled in his blood, Suho would never be mistaken.

'An extremely ordinary human who grew up in peaceful comfort. That is me.'

The only difference from others was that he was born to good parents. That he inherited special blood. But to be arrogant about that, Suho already knew too much. Look at Sirka right there. The reason She was chosen as the Monarch's successor wasn't because of Sillad's bloodline. It was because she proved her qualifications with her own life. In that sense, Suho squeezed this buff skill out of the Monarch of Frost.

"This ability not only strengthens my soldiers, but it can also buff my father's Shadow Army."

Beru's eyes curved into crescents. [That's right. Although it's limited, this skill is definitely applied separately from the shadow power. Ah, for your information, the King already buffs the soldiers with the energy of the dead Rulers' soldiers, even though they're not spirits.]

"...!" Suho's triumphant expression faltered.

"What? My father doesn't have spirits so he's using angels? You're saying he uses angels as sacrifices for buffs?"

[It's recycling. New angels aren't born from the World Tree anymore. But...] Beru just smiled at Suho, proud of him.

[It seems like the angel and spirit buffs will stack. In other words, it will be helpful.]

Suho smiled as he finally received Beru's approval. Yes he still had a long way to go. He was still his father's only weakness. But at the same time,

"I am a variable. The only variable in this war. I will definitely become that."

[...] Beru's eyes widened at Suho's confident declaration. He grinned, revealing his teeth.

"So just watch. I'll be helpful to my father by any means necessary."

Crackle—!

With those words, the giant tree Elvenwood finally collapsed under Suho's power. Engulfed in the flames of destruction.

Whoosh—! Flare—!

Tremendous heat. The green city turned into a sea of fire.

Rumble! Crash!

The White Flame lightning striking down from the sky.

Crack—!

And the high elves turned into ice sculptures below. It was truly a natural disaster. The city which maintained its beauty by using humans as fertilizer, perished overnight.

"Rescue the people."

[Yes!] At Suho's command, the shadow soldiers moved in unison and began to rescue the survivors trapped underground in the city.

[...] Beru silently watched them. And he was recalling a memory from some time ago.

– Master, wouldn't it be alright to return the power to the Young Master now? – It was a conversation between Sung Jinwoo and Igris about Suho's sealed power.

– We've done tests before, but this is the first time the Young Master has reached the level of the Monarch. I think it's a passing grade. – Sung Jinwoo firmly shook his head at Igris's words and said,

– If I had relied only on my power and fought the Dragon King, would we have won?

There was something Sung Jinwoo was most worried about as he tested Suho in his dreams over and over again. His recklessness. It could be disguised as bravery, but it was different from the perspective of a father worried about his son. Even if you have a lot of power, you need to be able to run away in situations where victory isn't guaranteed.

– And Recklessly rushing at a strong enemy without any calculations is foolish.

"Recklessly rushing at a strong enemy without any calculations is foolish. We need a plan."

[...] Beru's eyes widened.

The words that Sung Jinwoo so desperately wanted suddenly came out of Suho's mouth as he was rescuing people. Of his own accord! But it wasn't because Suho was afraid of death. For him, who had lived with shadow soldiers since birth, death wasn't the end. Perhaps Suho's recklessness stemmed from that. Knowing that death wasn't the end, he wasn't afraid of it. But ironically, after seeing the life of struggle that Sillad lived, fiercely enduring to avoid death, Suho realized an important fact.

"It's okay to die. But I refuse a foolish death where I have regrets even after dying. We need a solid plan." With those words, Suho opened his inventory. And what he took out was the item he found after defeating the 'Mad Blooded Tyrant' Itarim's apostle, in the demon world.

[Item: Itarim's Stone Tablet]

[Acquisition Difficulty: ??]

[Type: Stone Tablet]

[A stone tablet engraved with Itarim's language.]

[A special spell is cast on it.]

Beru recognized what it was at a glance. [I know what this spell is. I clearly saw Itarim's army using this to communicate with each other during the war.]

"Communicating with a stone tablet?"

[Yes. The problem is that they come in pairs, and there's only one here...]

"The other one must be with someone else. The one who sent the Mad Blooded Tyrant here."

"Harmakan, thoroughly analyze this stone tablet." Suho's order fell.

"By any means necessary, we will track down the apostle from now on."

The true hunt had begun.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 268 - Chapter 266

Chapter 268: Chapter 266

Darkness melting away. An endless expanse of the open sea. Numerous rafts carrying demons drifted across the gently swaying surface of the water.

Splash—

The only sound that could be heard was the faint noise of the oars pushing against the viscous seawater and the flow of the polluted air due to the resulting headwind.

'The Sea of The Afterlife'

The demons rowing the oars had serious expressions as they tracked the scent of the World Tree that was somewhere in this place. It looked like a peaceful and comfortable journey on the surface, but in reality, the demons were exploring a 'hell' in the truest sense of the word. Beneath the rafts was a bottomless abyss. Countless weeds lurking below were waiting for an opportunity to devour them.

Wave—!

[Again!]

The moment the raft was violently rocked by a sudden wave, The ravenous weeds, unable to bear their hunger, sprang up from the black seawater. But even in this moment, the demons rowed without wavering.

[Catch them!] It wasn't the demons who shouted, but the bearded dwarves.

Whoosh—!

At that command, shadow spiders on the raft spread their webs. The black net caught the weeds that popped out from the sea.

[A big catch!] The shadow dwarves chuckled and raised their sharp axes and saw blades.

Crack! Crack!

Slash! Slash!

The sounds of tools being used echoed from the previously silent rafts.

[Good. With this much, we can double the size of the vessel.]

[We can't lose! Demons! If you still can't find the direction, why don't you go where there are more weeds!]

"..."

[Tsk tsk. You silent bunch. You look scary, but you're all cowards.]

"We're not scared." The demons couldn't help but be cautious, despite the urging of the shadow dwarves.

"You seem to keep forgetting, but we're not immortal like you."

[Heh. That's unfortunate.]

"Tsk." The demons decided to just keep their mouths shut.

They knew that the shadow dwarves didn't mean to mock them with those words, so it was awkward to be angry. The dwarves truly felt sorry for the demons. Because their souls were contaminated, they couldn't become shadow soldiers. Perhaps there was a way. Suho's flames of destruction had the power to purify contaminated souls, and if they used that power, maybe even the demon race could become shadow soldiers. But from the perspective of the demons who were still alive, it didn't make sense to ask Suho to burn them to death.

'Burn them with the power of destruction?'

If he failed to control the firepower, their souls would be annihilated instead of purified, and who would take responsibility for that? It was better to perish while fighting; that wasn't just a meaningless death. Similarly, being devoured by the weeds lurking in this sea was also a meaningless death. It wasn't just demise; their existence itself would be taken away by them, so the demons' cautiousness was only natural. Of course, the dwarves had a point. It was only natural that expanding the size of the raft from the beginning was advantageous for exploration in the long run, even if it meant taking risks. But they had to calculate that risk.

"If we go to a place with many enemies with this small raft, we'll be isolated."

The moment the number of weeds attacking them became overwhelmingly greater than the shadow spiders' webs, this crude raft would be helplessly destroyed. There were already dozens of rafts that were stranded like that. Fortunately, no demons had lost their lives yet. The moment the raft was stuck, Suho's shadow spiders would quickly carry the shadow dwarves and demons on their backs and move them to another safe raft. And they would stay there for a while, build a new raft, and become independent. The problem was that if this happened repeatedly, the expansion of the raft would slow down. Because they had to share resources.

[Tsk tsk. It's harder to find the World Tree than we thought.]

[Yeah. I thought the demons would find it as soon as they smelled it.]

"...The sea is too vast." Of course, the demons had an excuse.

"Besides, our senses are dulled in here."

This wasn't called the Sea of The Afterlife for nothing. Not only was it dark, but this Sea of The Afterlife was also dulling the demons' senses. It was as if a perception-impairing barrier was in place. In this situation, the only option was to use overwhelming numbers to detect the scent of the World Tree. They literally had to search every nook and cranny.

"...But we will definitely find it." Esil, receiving updates on the situation from her subordinate demons, gleamed with determination as if she could see through the dark sea.

The reason why she could know the situation of her subordinates scattered across this vast sea was thanks to the abilities she awakened upon becoming the King of Demons. No matter where or who found the World Tree, Esil would know immediately.

Lick. Esil suddenly smacked her lips as she recalled the leaf of the World Tree. Having tasted it once, Esil could understand why Vulcan was called the Demon of Greed. And why she herself became the 'Monarch of Gluttony.' For the demon race, the taste of the World Tree was truly the best.

'A way to increase the size of the raft continuously from the beginning...'

That's why Esil agreed with the shadow dwarves' suggestion. To gather a lot of materials to expand the raft, even if it meant taking some risks. And it was more efficient for the Monarch herself to take on such dangerous tasks rather than her weak subordinate demons. Esil had been leading the way since the beginning, searching for places with many weeds and hunting them. Now, the weeds had become cunning and were avoiding Esil's raft whenever they saw it.

[Hmm. The weeds aren't appearing at all.]

Esil nodded at the dwarf's words and focused all her senses to find traces of the weeds. But all that came back was a quiet silence. She clicked her tongue.

"Cunning bastards."

[At this rate, our ship will never be able to evolve beyond a raft, let alone a warship. I wish a big one would appear... Keuk?!]

"...?!" At that moment.

Stab—!

Suddenly, there was a sharp object protruding from the chest of the shadow dwarf who was grumbling next to her. Esil, startled, soon recognized what it was, and her expression brightened.

[Using Item: 'Shadow Key'.]

Whoosh—!

A hole spread in the shadow dwarf's body around the key, and a Shadow Gate opened.

[Demons of hell! Are you doing well?!] Beru's stern gaze, peeking from the Gate opened in the shadow dwarf, scanned Esil's surroundings sharply. And after seeing the size of the demons' raft, he roared,

[Kieek! You lazy bums! Why is the ship still so small?!]

"What can we do? The materials are all hiding because they're scared of us." Esil grumbled in response.

"I can dive and catch them myself, but it's too dangerous for my subordinates. In the first place, the weeds are also just waiting for us to do that and are only engaging in a battle of nerves. There's a limit to how much I can catch and distribute individually."

[Tsk. Knowing you would be like this, our liege has personally come to solve your problem.]

"What?"

[So be grateful and worship.]

Before the bewildered Esil, Suho appeared through the Shadow Gate. But he didn't come empty-handed.

Whoosh—

"Wh-what! What's this tree?!" Esil was shocked. Suho dragged a large, thick tree trunk through the Gate with tremendous strength.

"It's Elvenwood."

[...?!] All the shadow dwarves' faces were filled with shock at that answer.

[E-Elvenwood?!]

[The divine tree of the elves...!]

Splash—!

As Suho threw the charred 'Fragment of Elvenwood' onto the Sea of The Afterlife, it floated on the black surface. Although it was called a fragment for convenience, it was

still incredibly large because he personally cut off all the roots and pulled out only the trunk. Its scale alone made the rafts the demons were riding on look insignificant. The demons and dwarves looked at Suho in shock.

[Kraa! As expected of our Master!]

[How did you obtain this precious wood?!]

"How is it? I thought it would be a shame to just burn it, so I brought it whole. Can we use it as material for the raft?"

[It couldn't be better!]

Ooooooh—!

The shadow dwarves responded to Suho's words with cheers. And they looked at the Fragment of Elvenwood with eyes blazing with greed. And without prompting, they all jumped on it with saws and hammers. No matter how big it was, it was still just one tree. If they didn't hurry, other rafts would take this precious material away from them.

"Ah, be careful. That tree is still alive."

Whoosh—!

[...Keuk?!]

"Ah, too late." Before Suho could even finish his words, the branches attached to the Fragment of Elvenwood pierced the shadow dwarves' bodies.

But they were immortal soldiers in the first place. Even with their bodies skewered by the vicious branches, the shadow dwarves diligently sawed away. And they triumphantly raised the branches of Elvenwood stuck in their bodies like trophies and burst into laughter.

2

[Khahaha! What an honor!]

[To think I would touch the divine tree of the elves with my own hands! Of course, it's already dead, but still!]

[If I had done this while I was alive, that day would have been my death! Khahahaha!]
The shadow dwarves couldn't help but be excited. It was only natural...

Elvenwood!

How many dwarves would have ever touched this precious divine tree of the elves? Probably almost none throughout history! Even those who did, probably just gently stroked the bark. Doing something as blasphemous as sawing it like this was unimaginable. How vicious and tenacious those pointy-eared elves were! Not to mention the spirits. But now they were personally sawing that precious tree! It was such an overwhelming honor that they wondered if it was even okay.

[My saw is having a feast today!]

[Building a ship with the divine tree of the elves?]

[And a ship to explore the Sea of The Afterlife?!]

2

[Kyaa! This is romance!]

7

[I would have no regrets even if I were to die today! Of course, I'm already dead...! Hahaha!]

4

Ordinary materials would quickly rot when they came into contact with the death air and water of the Sea of The Afterlife. But lumber like Elvenwood... It was disrespectful to call it ordinary. But something was strange.

[Hmm. But was Elvenwood originally this kind of tree?]

Even though they had only heard of Elvenwood and never actually seen it, The lumber that Suho brought was quite strange. The energy it emitted was strange. The way the branches wriggled incessantly, trying to attack them, was also very ominous.

1

[I heard it was very sacred.]

[This is no different from... a tree-type magical beast.]

"No." Refuting the dwarves' words, Esil was staring at Elvenwood with a stiff expression. The other demons had the same look.

"This tree... The divine tree of the elves? It feels very similar to the weeds here."

"You think so too?" Esil nodded in agreement with Suho's words.

"I felt it while fighting, but this Elvenwood somehow feels like something between the weeds of the afterlife and the World Tree." That was the nature of Elvenwood that Suho personally experienced. When he told Esil about what happened, she muttered with a serious expression,

"Don't tell me... you're saying that the weeds were preying on not only us demons but also the elves?"

"No one knows the exact details. The method is different, but they're quite similar, aren't they?"

The difference in method. Directly hunting versus raising to devour them. If the weeds of the afterlife became residents of the gap and hunted and devoured demons, It seemed plausible that Elvenwood, which slowly raised elves to devour them, was originally a weed too. Even the process was similar. If the weeds evolved by devouring 'dead souls,' Elvenwood grew by coexisting with 'spirits.'

"...They're certainly similar. Especially in that they have to struggle forever to survive. Even more so if that was the fate of the creatures that the 'Absolute Being' wanted, for the warriors who gradually grew stronger to be thrown into the war against the Rulers."

Esil felt a chill as if she had learned a truth about the world she didn't know. And it didn't matter whether Elvenwood was originally a weed or not. In the end, what the now-deceased Absolute Being wanted was to watch the never-ending war of his creations, so Elvenwood was an accessory that perfectly suited that purpose.

[But now it has become our excellent lumber.] Beru chuckled, unconcerned. And the shadow dwarves, who were excitedly sawing Elvenwood, looked at Suho and asked,

[Master, where did you get this Elvenwood?]

"Why?" Suho, sensing their greedy eyes, chuckled and replied,

"You want more?"

[Don't tell me it's possible?!] The dwarves were surprised and shouted in excitement.

[Look at the vitality of this Elvenwood!]

[It's so tenacious that even at this moment, it's extending its branches and catching the weeds hiding in the sea!]

[If we actively utilize this principle, creating a self-repairing warship of the afterlife isn't a dream!]

"Indeed." Suho was also watching Elvenwood wriggling its branches. And he nodded at the dwarves' sparkling eyes.

"I can get you as much as you want. Enough to build all your rafts with Elvenwood."

3

[Gasp?!]

Yes... The problem was that there was too much.

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 269 - Chapter 267

Chapter 269: Chapter 267

Keel. – This term refers to the central axis of a ship that runs along the bottom center from front to back. The keel acts as the backbone and main beam of a ship, and its length determines the size of the ship... When the vessel is damaged other parts can usually be repaired and reused, but if the keel is damaged, the ship's lifespan is essentially over. Replacing or repairing the keel means completely dismantling the vessel. It's practically the same as building the ship from scratch.

3

[...In that sense, the material used for the keel directly affects the ship's durability.] The gist of the shadow dwarves' rambling about the importance of the keel was simple.

"So you're saying you want to use this Elvenwood as a keel?"

[Yes!] The shadow dwarves answered in unison, their eyes already filled with madness. If there was only one Elvenwood, they would share it, but now that Suho could get more, the situation was completely different.

[There's no reason to cut up this precious wood!]

[As we said before, the size of the keel determines the size of the ship!]

[The sturdiness of the keel is the sturdiness of the ship!]

[If we use this precious material as a whole for the keel instead of dividing it, we can create a truly enormous vessel!]

Kyaa!

Wasn't it thrilling just to imagine?! A ship with the elves' divine tree as its keel! And one that even had the special ability to extend its branches, devour the surrounding weeds, and grow on its own? If they recklessly cut it to pieces, that function could disappear. Suho, after hearing their earnest request, accepted without hesitation.

"Alright. Then use this one as the keel for Esil's ship for now."

[Kyahaha!]

[Ugh...!]

The dwarves were divided into joy and sorrow at Suho's decision. Of course, they knew that the ship of the Demon King should be the priority, but it was still painful to have this delicious material taken away from them right before their eyes.

[Then can you give us the next one for our raft?!]

[Nonsense! Our raft is the biggest among them! To handle a keel of this size, the more materials we have, the faster the crafting will be!]

"That's true. Then let's go in order of the largest raft."

[...!] The shadow dwarves became restless at Suho's decision.

[Th-there's no time to waste!]

[You lazy demons! Hurry up! We need to gather the most materials before the next Elvenwood arrives!] As Suho set the standard, competition suddenly arose between the rafts.

[The movement speed also varies greatly depending on the completeness of the ship!]

Finding the World Tree in this vast, dark sea was as difficult as finding a needle in a desert. Even if that 'needle' was the enormous World Tree, the Sea of The Afterlife was a world far vaster and more daunting than a mere desert. In the end, if they wanted to find the World Tree quickly, they had to risk their lives and gather more weeds than anyone else.

[Demons! Risk your lives! If our ship finds the World Tree first, wouldn't it be better for you?!]

[You'll be able to eat the leaves first and become stronger before other demons arrive!]

"...!" The dwarves' persuasive provocation ignited the competitive spirit in the demons who had been passively rowing until now. It was only natural that the more leaves of the World Tree they ate, the stronger they could become as demons. Until now, they had been gathering weeds floating on the sea and wandering aimlessly, but. If they started with a powerful keel, they could become stronger than other demons with ease.

"L-let's go!"

[Yes! That's it!]

[Hurry up! Demons!]

SWOOSH—!

...Well, in any case, it was a very positive motivation for Suho and Esil.

"But Esil. Can you take a look at this?"

"...?" Suho, watching the rafts scatter according to their desires, approached Esil and handed her something. The reason he personally visited the Sea of The Afterlife like this wasn't just because of the Elvenwood.

"Master, this is..." Esil's eyes became serious.

The item Suho handed her was none other than the 'Starpiece' once embedded in Forest's eye. After defeating the high elves and spirits, Suho felt a strange sense of incongruity the moment he touched this one.

"Somehow, the energy felt strangely different from the stardust and star fragments I found before."

Stardust, a magic power amplifier developed in the demon factory using the demons' Mad Blooded Poison. And the gem, the star fragment, which was a highly refined version of stardust. They were called Starpieces now, but there was a time when he thought of them simply as magic power amplifiers.

But now he knew. Magic power amplification was just a result visible on the surface. The principle behind it was completely different.

[It's not amplification, but 'reception'.]

[And furthermore, enabling 'communication.' That is the true purpose of the Starpieces.]

Greed, who was once the High Priest of the Outer Gods Cult, And Iron, who was a priest, They were now shadow soldiers, on Suho's side. Thanks to them, he had gained all the information they knew about the Outer Gods Cult.

[The Starpieces are a kind of medium.]

[A medium to inject the magic power of the outer universe into a human body. It's not amplifying magic power, but simply receiving it from an external source.]

[If the vessel can't handle that immense energy and breaks, they die.]

[That's why the humans who overdosed on stardust in the early days perished.]

Of course, even Greed and Iron didn't know everything about the Outer Gods Cult. That was because it was a thoroughly cellular organization. And strangely, they sprang up individually in various parts of the world as if occurring naturally, without anyone leading the way. There was no concept of preaching or proselytizing, so they didn't contact or cooperate with each other. There was no need for that in the first place. Thanks to the 'Starpieces.'

[The Outer Gods Cult 'communicates' with the outer universe through the Starpieces.]

[So there's no need for humans to exchange information with each other. Except for very special cases.]

"What are the special cases?"

Greed answered Suho's question, [Sharing research data on Starpieces. Only then.]

The existence of Starpieces was the most important goal and means for the Outer Gods Cult. From stardust to star fragments and now Starpieces, how many sacrifices and research had there been done? As a result of that endless pursuit, the efficiency and purity of the Starpieces they created increased day by day. As a magic power amplifier, this meant that the amplification rate increased. And the race that first led this research was the demons. It was the beginning of the 'demon factory.' They diligently exchanged research and development data with other regional cultists, finally creating Starpieces capable of not only 'reception' but also 'communication.'

[The research on Starpieces finally reached its peak, to the point where two-way communication became possible] From one-way to two-way. It was a revolution.

[If the cultists until then could only passively receive orders from the outer gods who descended through the dimensional gaps, they could now send information to the outer universe from Earth.]

[The Outer Gods Cult calls that 'prayer' or 'ritual.']

Communicating with the outer gods. It was the moment when the Outer Gods Cult truly became a religion. The problem was that the deities they served happened to be invaders who came to destroy this world. And since Suho already knew this information through Greed and Iron, he noticed that the Starpieces embedded in the high elves' eyes were different from before.

"This Starpiece... wasn't made with our demon blood." Esil's answer was decisive.

"Indeed." At that moment Suho's suspicion turned into certainty.

"I thought it was strange. While rescuing the survivors and searching the high elf village, I couldn't find any traces of demons." He even found three hidden Gates and searched inside them, but there were none. He searched the entire area, but he couldn't find a demon factory.

"There were Starpieces, but no demons..." Esil held the gem and pondered Suho's words. The meaning was clear.

"It seems they can now create Starpieces without our demon blood." The research that began with Mad Blooded Poison seemed to have finally borne fruit. And even one with much higher purity than before.

"It seems they found a material to replace demon blood. And that must be..."

"Another sacrifice." Suho nodded with a grim expression, finishing Esil's sentence.

"Esil. You need to find the World Tree quickly. And become stronger as soon as possible."

"Yes."

Esil succeeded in becoming the next Monarch, but it was possible thanks to Suho's help. This didn't mean that she was still unqualified as a Monarch; rather, it was a positive thing. Esil was the Monarch of Gluttony. If she became that way by eating the leaves of the World Tree, what would happen if she ate more leaves here? Wouldn't she become much stronger than now? Then, Esil would be able to use 'Hell's Army' and gather all the demons scattered across the dimensions. With that one power, she could find all the demon factories hidden by the Outer Gods Cult in an instant. That meant she could uncover the locations and information of all the Cults of the Outer Gods connected to those demons at once.

"Let's both do our best. You find the World Tree here, and I'll take care of Nidhögg attached to the World Tree." With those words, Suho left the Sea of The Afterlife.

* * *

To deal with Nidhögg... The first step to weakening that giant serpent with six heads was the request Sillad gave Suho.

[Quest: Request of the Monarch of Frost]

[Make Sirka, the descendant of Sillad, the next Monarch.]

[However, Sirka is still young and weak, and her vessel is lacking to contain the Primordial Darkness.]

[Until Sirka can inherit the Primordial Darkness, take responsibility for her safety and help her grow.]

Sillad's quest. It was an earnest request to be responsible for Sirka's safety from the threats of numerous spirits and Elvenwoods. But there was one thing Sillad didn't consider...

[...Kieek? Why are you looking at me like that?] Beru tilted his head.

Seeing that innocent, no, naive expression of Beru, Suho just smiled back. Very brightly.

[King of the Snow Folk and the Monarch of Frost, realizes that something is wrong.]

But it was too late to realize. Unfortunately, Suho had only learned one way to raise a young and weak descendant of a Monarch.

"No pain no gain"

2

[Kieek?]

"She's the descendant of frost, she needs to be at least stronger than an ant larva, right?"

"...Huh?" Sirka didn't understand what that meant, but she had a very ominous feeling.

She saw Cha Hae-In's expression on Suho's pleasant face. Sirka adored Cha Cha like a mother, but not 'that expression.' That expression of Suho... was very similar to the expression she had when she trained them.

"Let's go."

"Wh-where?"

"To find all the Elvenwoods in this land."

Suho immediately headed to the nearest elf village.

[Using Skill: 'Breath of Destruction'.]

With a destructive greeting.

* * *

Russia.

An uninvited guest appeared before Yuri Orlov, who was drinking wine while overlooking the city from atop a skyscraper.

[Someone broke my flowerpot.]

Orlov didn't seem surprised by the sudden appearance of the uninvited guest. Rather, he focused on the content of those words and widened his eyes.

"...What? What happened to the terrarium?"

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



Craftyprogamer

Solo Leveling: Ragnarok [FAN TL] Chapter 270 - Chapter 268

Chapter 270: Chapter 268

'Yuri Orlov'

The Prime Minister of Russia, and at the same time, the S-rank Hunter who stood at the pinnacle of the country's power. Currently, there was no one daring enough to intrude on his room. Even disregarding power, the tight security detail, composed of bodyguards, armed soldiers, and Hunters was superior even to that of the president. But surprisingly, the uninvited guest standing before him had entered his room without the bodyguards noticing. Moreover, he was 'daringly' sneering at Yuri Orlov without a hint of fear.

[Are you deaf? Your damn barrier has been breached.]

"What?"

Shatter!

Yuri Orlov's brow furrowed, and the wine glass in his hand shattered. Sharp shards of glass scattered, and the red liquid within floated in the air, forming a sphere before Orlov's eyes. It looked like blood trapped in an invisible fishbowl.

'Barrier'

Yuri Orlov's main skill, the ability that raised him from the bottom to this position. The news that it had been breached was a direct blow to his pride.

"Impossible. The barrier of the terrarium is perfect. No one can penetrate it."

[Your confidence is excessive. It has been breached. Some scoundrels broke through your barrier and trampled and burned one of my precious flowerpots. You were so full of yourself, just how poorly did you make the barrier?] Yuri Orlov gritted his teeth with a fearsome expression and glared at the uninvited guest.

Rumble!

At the same time, an immense killing intent poured out from him towards the uninvited guest. No ordinary citizen in Russia would be able to withstand this rage in their right mind. Yuri Orlov was at the pinnacle of absolute power, even the president was beneath him. With a single word, even those who lived a blameless life could be sentenced to death. But the uninvited guest before him didn't seem to care about Orlov's killing intent; instead, he glared back and gritted his teeth.

[Take the fight out of your eyes right now. I feel like gouging them out. I don't care about your petty pride. What's important is my flowerpot.] He leaned against the window that Orlov was looking out of with his arms crossed in a defiant posture.

[So tell me. Are you sure there are no flaws in your barrier?]

"There are none." Yuri Orlov answered firmly. At the same time, his large hand grasped the red wine that had gathered in a spherical shape before his eyes.

Crush—!

The tremendous grip strength of an S-rank Hunter pressed down on the red sphere. But unlike the wine glass that shattered earlier, his transparent barrier easily withstood his grip.

"Look. This is the barrier I placed on the terrarium. I poured a massive amount of magic stones into it and made it so strong that even an S-rank Hunter couldn't break it with all their might."

[Don't be overconfident. I never expected the power of a mere human to be perfect. I'm just asking for a solution since there's a problem with your barrier.]

"...Hmm." Orlov's blazing momentum gradually subsided at the uninvited guest's calm response, who ignored his killing intent and spoke with an unwavering attitude. Composed, he crossed his arms, leaned back on the sofa, and asked the uninvited guest again,

"Which flowerpot was damaged?"

[North Korea.]

"Hmm. North Korea... I put a lot of effort into that place because of that picky Korean Association President."

[I know. So think about what the problem is. It's not like I only have one or two flowerpots in paradise. If one is breached, the same could happen to others. That wouldn't be good for you either, would it?]

"I've told you countless times, no one can break through my barrier. Especially North Korea, where not only Woo Jinchul but also Choi Jong-in is..." Yuri Orlov, who was organizing his thoughts while stroking his chin, suddenly closed his mouth. Come to think of it, his perfect barrier wasn't completely without flaws. He realized a possibility.

"...What if it wasn't broken through by force?"

[You still overestimate yourself. Are you saying that Elvenwood opened the door to the invaders from the inside?]

"Yes. Wouldn't that make more sense?"

[Elvenwood has no reason to do that.] Orlov scoffed at his firm tone and sneered,

"I'll return those words to you. Don't be overconfident. If you don't know the reason, isn't it something you should find out yourself? There's a problem in the paradise you cherish, and you're just going to whine about it? For someone called the 'Apostle of Paradise'?"

'Apostle of Paradise'

Yuri Orlov glared at the uninvited guest called by that name, his eyes cold as a snake, and bared his teeth.

"Besides, didn't you personally cast a perception-impairing spell near the terrarium? And even distorted space so that no one could find the terrarium even if they were right in front of it? Who was so confident about that? It was you, wasn't it?"

[...] The Apostle of Paradise couldn't help but be silent at Yuri Orlov's words. He wasn't wrong.

'Terrarium'

The area around the flowerpot where Elvenwood was growing was thick with blue mist, making it impossible to identify even with satellite cameras. Moreover, even if you approached it, you wouldn't be able to recognize the giant Elvenwood even if it was right before your eyes due to the perception-impairing magic mixed with the blue mist. On top of that, he even distorted space so that even if you were walking straight towards the terrarium, you would naturally pass by it. But even that wasn't perfect. The Apostle of Paradise nodded and muttered quietly,

"...Indeed. The perception-impairing magic and space distortion only apply to the ground. If you can fly on an airplane or something and reach right in front of the terrarium, it's not entirely impossible."

But... That couldn't happen. The surroundings of the terrarium were always swarming with rampaging spirits. Flying in the sky with an airplane or helicopter was suicidal. No matter how strong a Hunter was, unless they had wings, it was much safer to fight on the ground. Therefore, to pass by the terrarium, one could only move on the ground.

"Which flowerpot that was damaged?"

[North Korea.] At the apostle's answer, Yuri Orlov picked up the tablet on the corner of the table and leisurely scrolled through it.

"Let's see. North Korea, North Korea..." His finger, scrolling down the screen, suddenly stopped at the recent news from Korea.

– (Breaking News) Hunter Sung Suho decides to enter North Korea!

– (Hot Pick) Cha Hae-in appears riding a black dragon!

"...Black dragon?"

He clicked on the article, and a picture popped up on the screen. A black dragon flying towards North Korea with its giant wings spread. And the image of Sung Suho, riding on it and leaving for North Korea. Yuri Orlov's expression hardened.

– The Hero of India, Sung Suho

His abilities weren't accurately known to the public yet. For some reason, the Korean Association had tightly blocked information about him. But seeing him riding that black dragon himself, he became certain.

"...He was a summoner after all. Then don't tell me all those black magical beasts weren't a dungeon break, but his summons?"

It was an absurd ability. Yuri Orlov's expression turned serious at the image of Sung Suho captured in India. Was the overwhelming number of black summons standing beside him all his own power? That meant the eerie feeling he had when he first saw the article about Sung Suho was right. But now he could even summon a dragon?

"Even for an S-rank Hunter, to show that level of performance, it must be a method like mine, drawing magic power from an external source. He couldn't possibly obtain that much quantity of magic stones himself, could he? Is he a Hunter secretly trained by the Korean Association?"

He knew because he used magic stones himself. Considering the number of summons he used in India, Yuri Orlov could roughly estimate how many magic stones Sung Suho would have consumed.

"Korea is a democratic country. It's legally impossible to pour that much resources into an individual. Even Woo Jinchul can't do something that radical. Or could it be that... this Sung Suho is also like me?" The more you know, the more you see. Yuri Orlov's eyes flashed as he stared at Sung Suho's face in the picture. As if he had realized the truth hidden behind the scenes in Korea.

"This Sung Suho. Perhaps he's a Hunter who controls the country's power from behind the scenes, just like me." Suspicion turned into conviction. If someone with power had that kind of ability, they could easily rule a country, as Yuri Orlov himself had proven.

"Or maybe Woo Jinchul was the one who ruled Korea from the beginning. Sung Suho could be a secret weapon that the association president hid, or he could be holding his weakness..."

Various hypotheses came to mind, but the most important thing at this point was that Sung Suho left for North Korea on a giant dragon. And that the terrariums he personally concealed with barriers were located along that route. Having grasped the situation, a cruel smile appeared on Yuri Orlov's lips.

"Heh. As expected, he was fishy from the first time I saw him." As always, ominous premonitions were never wrong. Yuri Orlov handed the tablet screen to the Apostle of Paradise and smirked,

"See? Now it seems like the problem wasn't with me, but with you." And after gulping down the entire bottle of wine on the table, he openly mocked him with a triumphant expression.

"Apostles are always like this. They act all high and mighty, but when a problem occurs, they come crying."

[...]

Yuri Orlov chuckled, having landed a blow on the obnoxious apostle of the Outer Gods. But despite his blatant mockery, the Apostle of Paradise didn't react and just stared intently at the picture of Sung Suho he handed him. Especially at the image of the shadow wyvern Kiesel that Sung Suho was riding.

[...This is truly absurd.] The Apostle of Paradise's eyes shook violently as he saw Suho's numerous soldiers lined up below.

[How can the Shadow Army exist on Earth?]

"Shadow Army?" Yuri Orlov tilted his head at the unfamiliar term. But the Apostle of Paradise, with a serious expression, was thinking about the worst-case scenario, ignoring his reaction.

[...Don't tell me? No, that can't be.] The worst-case scenario. The possibility that the Shadow Monarch, who should be in outer space, had come to Earth.

[Absolutely impossible.] Yes. No matter how much he thought about it, it didn't make sense. Then was there a chance that only the Shadow Army was sent to Earth without him? That didn't make sense either.

[It's too far. His magic power wouldn't reach. If that were possible, we apostles wouldn't have to do such troublesome things.]

Just as the Outer Gods' power didn't reach Earth, the Shadow Monarch's power wouldn't reach here either. The distance between that place and Earth was too far.

[...Then who is this human?]

"Who else? He's the hottest Hunter in Korea, Sung Suho. Ah, that's right. You aloof apostles aren't interested in the names of mere humans, are you?"

[No, now I am. Anything is fine. I need information about this human.]

"Huh, that's a very troublesome and difficult request. Information about Sung Suho is top secret even in Korea. If I fulfill that difficult request, what can you do for me?"

[What do you need?] Yuri Orlov's lips curled up into a meaningful smile as he looked at the Apostle of Paradise.

"I like your straightforward answer. This is why I can't hate you guys."

[Wait.]

Flinch. In the middle of the conversation, the Apostle of Paradise's expression suddenly distorted.

[Just now, another flowerpot was broken.]

"What?" Yuri Orlov's expression also distorted.

"Where is it?"

[The closest place to the previously broken flowerpot.]

"That damned bastard." It seemed certain that the culprit was Sung Suho. This was too much. To damage two of the terrariums he worked so hard to create in one day! Considering the value of the 'fruits' produced in the terrarium, this was an astronomical loss for Yuri Orlov.

"This is a big problem. If we stay put, other flowerpots will be in danger too."

But it was risky to send troops there because the opponent was an S-rank Hunter. Moreover, the location was North Korea, so it could turn into a political issue. That was the reason why he used perception-impairing magic to hide the terrarium in the first place. He didn't need that magic for the terrarium in Russia, which he ruled.

[I'll go check it out. In the meantime, you find out everything about that human named Sung Suho.]

Whoosh!

The Apostle of Paradise left those words and disappeared from the spot. Like a doodle erased with an eraser.

"Ghostly bastard." Yuri Orlov threw the wine bottle at the spot where he disappeared.

"How dare you order me around?"

He immediately summoned his assistants and began investigating Sung Suho. But there was one thing... Something he couldn't understand.

"...How did he really break through my barrier?" Even if Sung Suho had a summoner army, Even if he could fly around on a dragon, The barrier he painstakingly created wasn't something that could be breached with just a brute force attack.

"I said it myself, but there's no way Elvenwood really opened the door itself..." Yuri Orlov muttered with a suspicious expression. But as always, ominous premonitions were never wrong...

* * *

"You're a lost little elf."

"Let us show you our beautiful city, Elvenwood."

The door opened.

With the small and young ice elf Sirka at the forefront, Elvenwood opened its tightly closed barrier and welcomed Suho and his party. And towards the hypocritical smiles of the high elves who came to greet them, Suho simply said one word,

"Three."

"...What?"

"This is the third one..."

[Using Skill: 'Breath of Destruction'.]

KRAAAAAAAAAA—!

"Wh-what?!" There was no mercy in Suho's flames that erupted towards the horrified high elves.

"There is no need for conversation between us."

CREATORS' THOUGHTS



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