

SPELLCRAFT 961

[SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

Chapter 961: An Interesting Discovery

Sloth drifted in the abyss.

He thought he had died, and so his soul was most likely going to descended to the depths of hell thanks to all the atrocities he had committed in his life.

However...

"[The Hanged Man]"

At the sound of that voice, and with the surge of energy that pulled him from the abyss, he found himself regaining his senses.

He wondered what was going on. Wasn't he meant to be dead? How could he hear, or smell, or finally... see?

That's right! He was no longer dead.

"W-why am I still...?"

"Why else?" The towering figure that stood before Sloth reminded him of the humiliating fight he just had, and the impossibly powerful enemy he had faced.

'E-eeeeek!'

"Don't worry. This won't take long." the blonde spoke with a bright smile, almost bright enough to hide the darkness that Sloth could sense from him.

'Don't touch me! Don't... touch m-mee...'

As soon as the young man placed his hand on his head, he felt himself drained of energy, and his vision instantly gree blurry.

'I... can't do... anything...' Sloth found his consciousness fading away, and in no time he completely passed out on the cold ground.

'I...'

"I knew it." I smiled to myself once I was done taking all of Sloth's memories.

'I was able to learn a couple of new things, but it's mostly in tandem with what I've found out for myself.'

Just as I suspected, the Zenith was the same as the Shadows of Light.

'Where there is light, shadows are bound to appear. To appreciate good, evil must also exist.'

The Shadows of Light was an organization that was created to oppose the Hunters of this world in order to boost the image of the Zenith.

They would cause the problem, and the Zenith would fix them.

'But that's not all they're good for.' I gave a wry smile. 'They're also used for the Zenith's dirty work.'

If anyone opposed the Zenith, or perhaps the Zenith wanted to make a nation desperate or suffer, they would use the Shadows of Light.

All those years ago, South Korea refused the policy of the Zenith, and hadn't joined them yet, so the triple S Class Dungeon Break diaster was initiated in order to make them bend.

'South Korea isn't the only country, though. The water gets murkier the deeper you go...'

In the end, the Zenith had only managed to build their image and prestige on bloodshed.

And that was only the half of it. The second part had to do with their creation of Blood Stones—the item that Sloth seemed to cherish so much.

'The crimson orb was made using the lives of others as a base. It seems they cause disasters to also generate casualties do they can fuel their powers even more.' It was a disgusting venture, but that explained so many things now.

Finally, the Zenith, or Shadows of Light, knew a lot more about the Gated and Dimensional Energy than what the world was currently privy to.

That was why they were able to cause Dungeon Breaks whenever they wanted, or even create a Gate if they wanted to.

'Seems like it requires a good supply of Blood Stones to pull off, especially depending on the Rank they intend to make.'

Still, to think they committed so many atrocities and also claim to be the heroes of this new world—it was a horrid joke.

Still, everything now fell into place accordingly.

"As for you..." I looked at the unconscious Sloth with a cold gaze. '... I know the perfect thing to do.'

I intended to use [The Fool] and manipulate his memories. He was an executive officer, after all.

'I make good uses of my pawns. You'll be useful for my plan, so until then... let's change the narrative a little, shall we?' A grin formed on my face.

"Let's get started."

Once I was done altering Sloth's memories, I allowed him to leave the scene. He was going to return and give his report to his leader.

He was going to tell his leader how he underestimated me, and how he almost won, but I was just a bit stronger, and in the end, he was able to injure me before escaping due to the commotion caused by his explosion.

'Its scripted, but I'm sure he'll tell a convincing tale since that's what he believes happened.'

I also had to return his Blood Stone to make it all convincing, but that didn't concern me too much.

With that matter settled, I turned to face the true victim of tonight's event.

"... Chairman Sung's grandson." Muttering to myself, I drew closer to him.

I could hear his muffled sounds from my position, and while he was bound and gagged, I knew he was trying to say something.

With the flick of a finger, I released his gag, and also untied him from the right position he was strapped in.

"You're free now." I smiled at him.

"T-thank you! Thank you so much." He began to thank me profusely, even breaking down and crying.

The young boy looked just slightly older than me, though from what I gathered, he was in his early twenties.

'He indeed looks very young.' I thought internally.

'Hmmm?' Something about the man in front of me felt similar, no, different.

He felt different from all the other people I had encountered in this worlds thus far, yet he appeared similar to me, and those I had interacted with before arriving here.

'Don't tell me—!' My eyes widened once I enhanced my senses slightly.

This was the first time I was really paying him any mind, so I hadn't noticed until now, but to think I would make such a discovery here!

'He has a Mana Core!'

I instantly walked closer to him, placing one hand on his shoulder while kneeling partly.

"S-sir...?" His face depicted confusion as I stared at him with a warm expression.

"Young man, what do you say to becoming my disciple?"

"E-eh...?"

There was no way I would pass up the chance to have a test subject—no, I meant a disciple—who was an oddity.

"Become my disciple!"

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Chapter 962: Different Paths

The next day, I had a meeting with Chairman Sung, Director Baek, Kuzon, and Aloe.

We had a lot to discuss, but it mostly concerned what I had been up to the previous night.

I briefed them of what happened; how Sung was kidnapped for information about myself and Kuzon, and how I saved him.

I further went on to exposit my fight with Sloth, one of the Stars of the Shadows of Light, and how things ended.

I refrained from mentioning the link between the Zenith and the Shadows of Light.

Telling the Chairman any of that wouldn't solve any problem, and it was possible that the opposite could happen as a result.

I did mention my use of memory manipulation to have a pawn among the ranks of the Shadows of Light, and how Sloth would be useful to us in the long run.

"It will take some time before everything falls into place, but everything is proceeding according to plan."

That meant two things.

One was that none of the things that occurred last night took me by surprise or derailed my plans.

The second, and perhaps, the most pertinent one for now... was that we now had some free time on our hands.

"Tch. So you went out all alone to get the action." Kuzon murmured. "How inconsiderate..."

It sounded as if he was sulking, but his expression didn't show anything of the sort. Well, what did I expect from Kuzon to begin with?

"You can explore one of the S Class Dungeons that have just been discovered by the Hunter Association. I'm sure Chairman Sung wouldn't mind." I returned his words with a smile.

"W-well, I wouldn't really mind, but—"

"What sort of compensation is that? You just want me to do free labor and fight some weak monsters."

"Why don't you trust me on this one? I promise you, something interesting is sure to happen." Kuzon's hard stare was at me for some time, but I maintained my positive glow.

"Haa... fine. I guess I'll settle for that."

In the end, the Chairman agreed to the whole thing. Of course, Kuzon would have to sneakily do his thing, since we were still not affiliated with the Hunter Association.

"What about you, Aloe? What will you be doing?" I asked Vida, who had been silent for some time now.

"I think I'll just continue to do raids in order to lessen the burden of the Hunter Association. There's a lot to be done, after all."

That sounded just like what I would expect someone like her to say.

"Many thanks, Miss Vida." Both the Chairman and Director expressed their gratitude.

"What about you, Mr. Leonard? What are your plans?"

"Yeah, Jared. I'm curious too."

Well, I suppose I left 'that' part out of the story, so they couldn't have guessed yet.

"I'm going to spend more time with Sung Han Soo. Specifically training and research."

"H-Han Soo?!" Both Aloe and the Chairman spoke at the same time, their tones echoing something akin to shock, but also concern.

"Yes. He is actually really special. None of you could recognize that, since your technology isn't suited to detect it, but I was able to notice."

The boy who was ostracized as the pathetic E Class Hunter just might have enough potential to surpass all the Hunters in this country—perhaps even the world.

'There's only one way to find out.'

"I-I see. Then, I thank you for giving up your time to nurture him."

Once more, the Chairman thanked all of us for what we were to venture on during our break period. Director Baek followed his lead.

The meeting didn't last long after that, and we left his office not long after.

'I can tell he's still concerned about the numerous issues that are surfacing, but he appears more at ease now.' I smiled and nodded.

'Don't worry, Chairman. It'll all be fine.'

[Several Hours Later]

It was night already, and Chairman Sung was still in his office, sorting out the documents that had piled up on his desk.

The Hunter Exams and Special Awakening Ceremony were going to happen in a few months, and there was a lot to do before then.

After the candidates had been screened, and shortlisted, he as the Chairman still had to thoroughly scrutinize them to make the final call.

South Korea needed loyal and trustworthy Hunters. It would be a waste if the ones chosen were the opposite of that.

"Haa... I was so immersed in work that I didn't notice how much time had passed." He lifted his gaze from his desk and looked to his side.

There, he was able to peer through the glass walls of his office and take a look outside. It was night in South Korea, and the neon glow of the city's night hours made it all worth it.

Somehow, Chairman Sung felt like rising from his chair and moving closer to the glass walls so he could be closer to the sparkles of light he witnessed.

'To protect this beautiful country and her people... that is why I work this hard.' That was why he couldn't take a break.

Not yet.

"Heh!" Chairman Sung gave himself a little chuckle. This too was a sacrifice he had to make for his country.

"What's making you smile like this, old man?"

The moment Chairman Sung heard the echoing voice, his body froze and his eyes bulged.

He felt completely paralyzed, and even his open eyes refused to close.

"You seem to be in an awfully good mood despite the mess you're in, old man."

At that moment, someone appeared before Chairman Sung, like a shadow emerging from the ground.

He had a hooded cloak, and it seemed like his whole body was dressed like the night itself.

'Y-you...!!!' The Chairman's thoughts echoed as his brain pounded.

There was no way he wouldn't recognize one of South Korea's former S Class Hunters, now naturalized to become someone else.

"Look at you, still trembling in my presence. Did you miss me so much?"

How could he say that? Chairman Sung felt a lot of emotions swirling within him; rage, pain, betrayal, and so much more.

However, there was one dominant feeling that overshadowed the rest.

It was fear.

'Gyu Pol...' His thoughts echoed grimly as he stared at the young man who had brought his hood down.

This man was no longer a citizen of South Korea. He had now become a Pillar of the strongest organization in the world.

'Fourth Pillar of the Zenith!'

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Chapter 963: The Zenith

Gyu Pol.

He was an exceptional Hunter with so much skill and talent that everyone in South Korea knew him to be one of the strongest S Class Hunters.

After the death of Sung Han Soo's father, the strongest Hunter in Korea, the rise of Gyu Pol brought hope to the people.

He was strong, but also incredibly kind to the people.

Chairman Sung noticed all of these and even thought Gyu Pol would one day succeed him and become the next Chairman of the Hunter Association.

However... the facade was soon dropped when the Zenith offered Gyu Pol an offer he couldn't resist.

Chairman Sung had thought he would reject it, considering all the actions he had depicted as a Hunter of virtue.

His teammates and colleagues all thought he would choose South Korea and fight for their country.

"This was all to climb the ladder. Do you think I'll remain stuck here when a bigger opportunity awaits? What am I, an idiot?"

In the end, Gyu Pol had only been putting up an act to rise to the very top. Once a different, more prospective, path opened up, he chose it without hesitation.

It was all for the power; nothing more, nothing less.

"W-what are you doing here?" Chairman Sung was soon able to move his body, and while he would have glared at his interlocutor for treating him in such a way, he dared not.

"What? I can't visit you anymore, old man?"

Gyu Pol sat on the chair opposite Chairman Sung, an air of disrespect and conceit flowing around him.

"Y-you..."

"Aren't you forgetting something? I'm a member of Zenith's Seven Pillars. As a representative of the world order, am I not allowed to visit your office?"

The Chairman realized there was no way he could wiggle out of the trap he had put himself in.

"I-I apologize. You are right." In the end, he could only bow his head and beg for forgiveness.

"That's much better." The satisfied grin Gyu Pol made brought him so much internal agony, but he endured it

Even this humiliation was for the sake of his country.

"The Grand Symposium is in a few weeks' time. I came to remind you of that."

"Y-yes, we are preparing our best to atte—"

"We hope your Hunter Association would have found our item before then. Inability to do so will lead to some... undesirable consequences."

Once more, Chairman Sung gulped despite gritting his teeth.

'They're already calling it their item. We were only supposed to lend it to them, and yet...'

The investigation concerning the stolen SS Class Core had gotten nowhere.

They had reached a dead end, and while Chairman Sung would have thought of it as officially the ruin of their Hunter Association, Jared told him to have trust in the plan.

That was the only reason he hadn't despaired yet. However, with the situation already reaching this point, the only other alternative presented itself to the Chairman.

"We will return the payment Zenith made for the item." Those were heavy words he uttered, but this was the only compromise he could make at this point.

'Raising the funds won't be easy. No, it will be downright difficult, but it's not impossible.'

"Oh? You do realize that the loss of the item incurs further damages for breaching our contract."

"I understand that." Chairman Sung said, his eyes glowing with resolve. "We will refund the money to y—"

>VWUUUUUUUUUMMMMMM!!!<

Suddenly, a warbling sound echoed across the hall, and an insurmountable pressure causes the Chairman's body to freeze.

It felt like he was being torn apart, yet his body was stationary.

'K-keuk!'

"Look here, old man." Gyu Pol smiled, his eyes glowing bright purple. "We want the Core, as stipulated in the contract."

Chairman Sung's heart trembled, as the young man's voice sounded like grating metal in his ears.

"If you fail to deliver it, there will be consequences."

After a moment of silence, the pressure slowly dissipated.

"Do we have an accord?" With Gyu Pol's voice echoing in the office, Chairman Sung could do nothing but hang his head in powerlessness.

"Y-yes. I understand..."

"Good. Now, then... to our next area of business."

'There's more?!'

"The Busan incident yesterday. Why is the Hunter Association being silent about the two men who appeared there to save the day during the Dungeon Break?"

'Ah... that.' Chairman Sung already knew what the Zenith was really after.

Just like they poached Gyu Pol from South Korea, they wanted to do the same to South Korea's new heroes.

Unfortunately for them, things weren't going to go as they planned this time.

"The Hunter Association has no affiliations with them."

"Hmm. Are you being serious right now?"

"I am. We have no connection to those two men."

"Do you really take our information network for granted? We know the SSSS arrested them, and the Hunter Association took them away from custody."

'So they already went that far in such a short amount of time, huh?' Chairman Sung could feel a bead of sweat fall from his face.

Still, he expected something like this would pop up eventually.

"Yes. We wanted to interrogate them about the Dimensional Spike that occurred which overlapped with their time of arrest. After interrogating them and seeing they were innocent, we let them go."

Chairman Sung could feel the heavy aura increase in his office, but he stuck to his guns.

"We currently have no affiliations with them, and we aren't responsible for their actions."

"Oh? So they just helped out in an S Class Dungeon Break for nothing?"

Chairman Sung gave a wry smile as he heard Gyu Pol's question. It was regrettable that things turned out this way.

"Can we... not have good people who do the right thing just for the sake of justice?"

He knew he was being impudent, but... Chairman Sung stared at Gyu Pol in the eyes while speaking.

"The Hunter Association has no need to hide anything from The Zenith. If we had such capable Hunters, why would we keep them from you?"

"Hmmm..."

"We're all on the same side, aren't we?" Straining the best smile he could as the pressure intensified, Chairman Sung concluded all he had to say on the matter.

"Oh? Is that so? It seems you've gotten better at sophistry since we last spoke, old man."

"Thank you for the compliment, Fourth Pillar."

For yet another moment, an air of tension permeated the office, and the Chairman felt his body ache in apprehension.

What would Gyu Pol's next move be? Was this enough to satisfy him? Or would he keep pressing on the issue?

Chairman Sung knew he wouldn't give up the information no matter what, but he feared the extreme to which his former protege would go to achieve his goals.

"Hmph. Very well, then. If that's what you say, then I'll believe you."

Fortunately, Gyu Pol rose to his feet, refusing to press the issue any further.

'Haa... haaa...'

"I suppose we'll see each other in the Grand Symposium. It should be entertaining..."

And so, like mist that faded in the presence of the wind, Gyu Pol vanished into thin air, leaving the trembling Chairman alone in his office once more.

"Damnit!" Chairman Sung's croaking voice echoed as he fought back the tears of frustration that welled up in his eyes.

Even now, South Korea was being threatened by The Zenith, a body meant to protect them.

The future appeared bleak, and it was inevitable that worry would pervade his heart.

However, amid all of these, Chairman Sung had one thought.

'Jared Leonard... I'm counting on you.'

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Chapter 964: Special Hunter

Aloe, Kuzon, and I spent the whole day catching up and discussing many things. We were supposed to go about our businesses that day, but by the time we realized what was going on, it was already late in the night.

As a result, we decided to postpone our activities to the next day.

The moment that arrived, Kuzon left for his adventures in the S Class Dungeon nearby, while Aloe made her way to see Director Baek for her next assignment.

With only me left, I decided to reach Sung Han Soo through Telepathic Magic. Thanks to the link I already established with him two nights ago, it wasn't very difficult.

... Not that it would have been any harder to do it normally, especially with my current level of proficiency.

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"You came faster than I expected." I smiled at the enthusiastic young man who stood before me.

We were currently occupying one of the training halls within the Hunter Association. However, since I was the one who requested to use a training room, they gave me the largest that was available.

As a result, Han Soo and I were standing in a very magnificent hall that would otherwise contain thousands of people.

'How generous.' I smiled.

"It's because I want to get stronger. You told me you could do that. I was... also curious about what you said back then."

Ah, yes. The night I told Han Soo to be my disciple, he was very puzzled by my request. Considering how he lacked anything really special, he considered himself unworthy for some reason.

However, it all changed when I told him one thing, and also promised him strength.

"You're special, Han Soo." I repeated the words I told him that night.

I didn't mean he was very special beyond what I had seen before, but in this world, he was an anomaly.

And that was something that intrigued me. To pass time, I wanted to see how far I could go with this young man.

"You have something called a Mana Core within you. It's an intangible, incorporeal energy source within you that grants energy for you to perform supernatural feats."

In this world, there was nothing like Magic. Skills and Special Abilities took the cake. There were a couple of people whose abilities resembled Magic, but they didn't refer to them as the actual thing.

'Which is why Han Soo is special. I can actually teach him Magic.'

"Mana Core? I have something like that in me?"

"Yes. Usually Mana Particles in the body gather over a period of time to form a Mana Core. However, in this world, it seems the Mana Particle flow has become stagnated. As such, Hunters merely harness power directly from Mana Particles and not the Mana Core."

Compared to using a Mana Core, the power and efficiency of such a method was greatly inferior.

"The reason you seem weak and talentless, Han Soo, is because you are an exception. Your Mana Core has been pulling in your Mana Particles, leaving very little for you to use directly. And so, it seems you don't have an aptitude due to the smaller amount of Mana Particles outside your Core." As I was speaking, smiling with every word uttered, I noticed Han Soo was already breaking into tears.

He seemed so dazed, like he was dreaming, and the tears flowed down his cheeks.

"I... I really... had something like that...?" His tone contained disbelief, but also something reminiscent of hope.

I could tell he was overjoyed to hear what I was telling him, even though he couldn't completely comprehend it yet.

"That's right, Han Soo. You have the potential to become very strong. If you learn to harness the power in your Core, you'll develop a power that can exceed any Hunter in Korea—no, even the whole world!"

One of the major reasons why absorbing directly from Mana Particles was so crude and inefficient was the limit it placed on the user.

Every person had the rate at which their bodies produced and distributed Mana Particles. As a result, once Awakened in this world, the present amount of Mana Particles and the rate of recovery were seen as affinities, and Ranks were given based on that.

'From F Rank to S Rank. Those in the upper ranks have higher recovery of their Mana Particles, and a greater number. But isn't that simply too arbitrary?'

Rather than relying on something as stagnant as that, someone who had a Mana Core could keep growing as time went on. Eventually, he would be able to manage a higher energy output than an S Class, and that wouldn't even be the limits of his growth.

'In a world where those at the bottom remain powerless, and the strong occupy the top, stagnation is bound to occur.' Hopefully, my actions would shake the status quo for the best.

"Your grandfather told me a bit about you before we met, Han Soo. I know you want to help your Country, especially your grandfather and the Hunter Association. You want to save people, don't you?"

"Y-yes! I want that more than anything!"

I smiled and nodded at him. Chairman Sung was right. He had the makings of a hero. Weakness had simply clipped his wings.

"So, what will you do now that I've told you all this? Make your choice."

"I want to do it!" I had barely finished speaking before Han Soo responded with fervour.

His eyes glowed with extreme determination, and I could see his fists clenched with fierce desperation.

"I will give it my all! Please help me become stronger!"

Of course, I was going to that. It was also good that he agreed upfront. This way, I had gotten consent from my test subject.

'Now I can freely use his body for more research.'

We would both get what we wanted, so everyone would end up happy.

It was a win-win for the two of us.

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Chapter 965: Dungeon Mayhem

>BOOOOOOMMMMMMM!!!<

In a very loud explosion, several monsters were sent flying in multiple directions.

Those with close proximity to the blast were all eviscerated by it, while the surrounding creatures were simply blown away by the shockwave.

In the end, none could withstand its power, nor the power of the being who floated in the sky above them.

"I can't even properly train in this place. The monsters are too weak..." He muttered to himself.

~Why didn't you just ask Jared for a spar? He would be a worthy training partner.~

The moment Kuzon heard the voice of his Constellation Familiar, Leo, he sighed even harder.

Clearly, even his Bond Soul was bored out of his mind.

"He's teaching a kid. How could I interrupt him?"

~Can't he... duplicate himself or something? He could just leave a clone to teach the kid and then fight you or something.~

Kuzon knew that was a possibility. However, there was a reason he wasn't involving Jared in his training.

'I don't want him to know just how much I'm capable of yet...'

Besides, there was the possibility of him losing, thus changing the status quo that they had.

~In essence, you aren't seeking his help because of your pride?~

"When you put it that way..."

"ROOOOOOOOOAAAAARRRRRRR!!!"

A massive beast, having four arms, with a ferocious face like a dragon, and bat-like wings, roared and charged for Kuzon.

It was clearly the Boss Monster, and with pretty much almost every single monster vanquished in the Dungeon, it had finally reared its ugly head.

'... You're making it sound like I'm holding myself back.'

Before the horrifying creature even neared Kuzon, several invisible threads wrapped themselves around it, cutting through its black scales and turning it into mincemeat in no time.

>SQUELCH!<

Just like that, the blood and meat of the Dungeon Boss scattered all over the devastated landscape before Kuzon.

"Oh well, the Boss is dead. Time to go."

~The Hunter Association needs the spoils of war gathered from eliminating the monsters, and also the useful materials that can be gotten from this place. Won't you help them retrieve them?~

"Ah, that's true. But it's difficult to find anything I can consider 'not trash' in this place." Kuzon responded, looking around yet failing to see what could be so valuable.

At that moment, it struck him that the world he was delivering these materials to didn't have the standards he possessed.

~Seems you're catching on.~

"I'll just grab whatever. We still have about thirty minutes or so before the Gate closes." He would grab anything that had any value, no matter how little.

If it had vestiges of Mana, or was shiny and dense enough to take a light blow from a low-energy output punch, then it was good.

In the end, Kuzon spent a good deal of time analyzing and ensuring he was thorough in his search.

The items and materials he ended up picking were thrown into a specific room within his Emperor's Domain.

'I should take all the corpses too...' The ones that were left intact, that is.

He used [Marionette] to sew the Boss Monster's body, giving it a whole appearance, and he also did the same for the other monsters that were rendered into mincemeat.

'Can't do anything for those already burned up, though. At least, their Cores will be useful.'

By the time Kuzon was done, it remained ten minutes before the Gate would close. As a result, he knew he had to hurry.

>FWUUUSHHH<

In a single flash, he teleported to the entrance/exit of the dimension he found himself in.

'Welp. Time to go.'

>BZZZZTTTTTTTT!!!<

The moment he attempted to leave, the Gate suddenly glowed red, buzzing with some sort of crimson spark.

It refused to part, and for some reason, the surface tension was too dense for even Kuzon to get through.

"What is this? The spatial passage is locked. Why?"

~Who knows? But I'm guessing you know what this means.~

The implications of this was simple. Kuzon was stuck in the Dungeon.

'I'm not an expert on Space Magic, so I don't have the Magic expertise to bypass the dimensional threshold.' He sighed, looking at the shrinking red Gate.

He would have loved to keep staring at the strange thing to figure it out, but the mere fact that there was a time limit bothered him.

If he wasted too much time, the Gate would completely close, and he would be stuck in this place.

'I can't fully operate the Magic Item Crazy Neron gave me since it has preset coordinates, which means I can't rely on it.'

At this point, there seemed to be only one way out.

"I know you can do something about this, Leo."

~Hm? What are you talking about?~

Kuzon nearly sighed in exasperation, but he decided to continue.

"The fact that you're silent now proves that you want me to ask you about it."

His Familiar was often times an attention whore. And now that it was finally time for the Constellation to show its full power, his dear Leo was playing coy.

"Please help."

~Haaa... fine. Fine, you got me.~

Kuzon instantly sighed in relief.

It was already less than five minutes before the Gate would finally close, and from the looks of it, the dimensional rift was closing much faster with each passing second.

~I'll let you use my [Representation]. I told you before, didn't I? I represent Authority and Sovereign Power.~

"Yes."

~Well, it's time to see it play out right now. Behold my power!~

At that moment, Kuzon felt a surge of power rush through him, and his mind suddenly grasped the Magic of his Constellation Familiar.

"I see." A grin formed on his face. "So that's what it is."

This time, Kuzon did not hesitate in touching the crimson Gate before him. A golden aura shrouded his palm as he did so.

And then, he whispered.

"[Authority Of The Sovereign]."

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Chapter 966: The Star Of Gluttony [Pt 1]

Kuzon had learned a lot in his journey as a living entity. He was also blessed with a lot of power

From his Spells, to his Original Magic, and even down to his transformations.

However, perhaps what stood out the most were his major abilities that stemmed from his absorption of two Arcanas.

[The Emperor], which allowed him to dominate anyone and anything inferior to him.

[The Empress], which allowed no harm or 'negative effect' to befall him.

With these two, along with the Absolute Emperor Transfiguration, he was considered invincible.

However, that only applied where he was facing those without the same sets of Arcanas as him... or beings who were inconceivably superior to him.

In the end, he had yet to achieve absolute invincibility.

That is... until now.

"[Authority Of The Sovereign]"

One could call this power similar to [The Emperor], but infinitely stronger.

However, there was one key difference that separated the power of the Constellation Leo from the Arcanas Kuzon wielded.

While Kuzon was allowed to dominate the inferior with his Arcana, the Authority of the Sovereign qualified him to be superior.

In simple terms, [Authority Of The Sovereign] placed Kuzon at a higher plain of existence, like a god in the clouds, staring at insignificant ants.

In this realm... the power to quash a simple barrier seemed almost inconsequential.

It was as simple as making a thought.

And then...

>VWUUUUUUUUUMMMMMM<

... Kuzon was finally free.

"T-that was... wow!" Kuzon murmured as he stepped out of the Gate, appearing dazed.

He found himself within an apartment uilding, which was evacuated once an S Class Gate was detected there

His eyes barely saw anything around him, and his body felt heavier than usual. It was a strange sensation, something that only came about when he overexerted himself.

~This is why I was skeptical of you utilizing my power. It's too much for you to handle, at least not without preparing your body with your other transformations first.~

'So why didn't you say anything?!' Kuzon's thoughts screamed in exasperation.

His body felt really worn out.

~Is that your way of saying thanks? What an ungrateful brat.~

"W-well..."

Kuzon was indeed grateful that his Constellation had come to his rescue, but something within him told him something wasn't right.

Especially now that his head was much clearer from the panicky state that he temporarily assumed in the Dungeon.

And then, it struck him!

"Now that... I think about it... haaa... I could have used [The Emperor]."

The Gate was being blocked by someone sort of ability, now that he thought well about it. If he used [The Emperor] to hijack control, it would have worked out.

Perhaps even using powerful Magic to break down the surface tension.

There seemed to be so many other options than his Constellation's ability. So why...?

"You wanted me to use your power, didn't you? Yet you claim it's the opposite of what you wanted."

~W-what? I have no idea what you're talking about? I didn't even want you to use it.~

"Sure, you didn't." Kuzon smiled, feeling a little better as the aftereffects of receiving so much power began to leave him.

~Well, whatever. We've gone past the point of any return. Your body will slowly acclimate to my power. When you use my power next time, it won't hurt... too much.~

"Well, that makes me feel so much better." Kuzon chuckled.

There still seemed to be a lot of questions on his mind. For example, why did the Gate turn red and trap him within the Dungeon.

However, at this point, Kuzon didn't really need to ask that question.

He already knew the answer.

"Are you seriously going to keep watching me?"

His voice echoed in the vast complex, and finally, after some time, a certain figure appeared, fading into visibility.

"So you could sense me, huh? That's amazing. You're really amazing..."

Kuzon strained his gaze to see the person before him, and he found him to be a complete stranger.

It was a young lady, and she had a black cloak, with red hair and eyes. She also had a pale complexion, and her facial features didn't seem like a South Korean.

'She's speaking the language fluently, though.' Kuzon thought to himself.

"Not only did you manage to escape the Gate I clogged with my S Class [Spatial Lock] Skill, but you even managed to see through my A Rank [Blank Form]. Interesting..." The pale-faced woman spoke.

Kuzon simply watched and listened in silence.

"You seem exhausted already, though. It seems breaking out took up most of your energy..."

'Um, no. It was Leo's overwhelming power that made me like this...' Kuzon thought to himself, but he couldn't exactly tell her that.

"And you also talk to yourself a lot, don't you? I used my A Rank Scouting Skill on you, and it doesn't seem like you're communicating with anyone."

'I'm conversing with my Familiar who is within me...' Still, Kuzon couldn't tell all of this to his enemy, so he decided to keep quiet instead.

"In any case, I suppose it's time for introductions. You must be wondering why I trapped you in that Dungeon, and why I have appeared before you now." The woman smiled, her eyes glowing red.

She slowly began walking toward Kuzon, every step ringing of confidence.

'Not really. Isn't she one of those Shadows of Light people that were spying on what Jared and I did in Busan? She's probably here to eliminate me.' Kuzon's thoughts trailed.

"I am a Star of the Shadows of Light." Exuding confidence, the woman licked her lips as she stared at Kuzon with a murderous gaze.

"You may call me Gluttony."

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Chapter 967: The Star Of Gluttony [Pt 2]

Tense silence enveloped the deserted area as both enemies stared at each other—the woman with a bright, confident smile, and the young man with slight indifference and caution.

Any moment, and it seemed like the entire area would collapse as a result of the heavy tension.

'As expected. A Shadows Of Light Star, huh? Just like the one Jared faced...'

It all slowly began to make sense to Kuzon, especially considering what Jared told him.

'So this is what he meant by something interesting. Not bad.' Kuzon nearly leaked out a smirk, but he maintained his serious demeanor before the woman in front of him.

'At the very least, my journey here wasn't completely in vain. I should be able to practice something if she's the target.'

As Kuzon was engaging in his thoughts, Gluttony vanished from her location, becoming a blur that could hardly be perceived by anyone.

>WHOOOOOOOOOSSSHHHH<

Closing the distance between them in a single moment, she launched her hand towards Kuzon, the whole thing being coated by a dark red aura.

'What's this...?' Kuzon swiftly dodged the attack at the last minute, sensing something off about his interaction with the lady.

>WHOOOOOOOOOSSSHHHH<

Not giving him room to breathe, she vanished again, this time appearing behind him. Just as before, he dodged, and then she kept switching positions and attacking with such speed and veracity that the entire room vibrated.

'Her speed isn't bad. It's just not enough.' However, despite that, his focus wasn't on the woman's speed.

It was on something she wielded that kept drawing Kuzon's senses toward it.

"Hey, what's that you have in your pocket?" Kuzon asked her, an eyebrow raised in suspicion.

Unfortunately, her blow was already fast approaching him when he began his inquisition, and it seemed inevitable that she would hit him.

But...

"H-huh??"

She suddenly froze on the spot, her fist a mere inch from Kuzon's face.

No, it wasn't like she froze. It seemed more like something restrained her, holding her still despite her best efforts to move.

"Looks like [Marionette] works just well. In any case, what's the stuff you have in your pocket? It's the first time I'm sending something like that in this reality."

"Y-you bastard! Let me go!" The Star called Gluttony yelled.

Of course, Kuzon ignored her and went straight for the item she had in her breast pocket.

"Argh! W-what are you doing, you—"

"You're too loud. Jeez..." Finally feeling something warm in the pocket, Kuzon grabbed it and brought his hand outside. "Here we go."

Locked in his grasp was a brimming crimson stone. It had a malevolent aura emanated from it, and it contained a considerably large chunk of Mana.

"So this is the Blood Stone Jared talked about. A bit underwhelming, but—"

"Kuku... kuukukuku..." As Kuzon began appraising the stone, Gluttony began to laugh, her eyes narrowing as her lips widened in delight.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Hahahahaha! You fool! You've made your worst mistake! Now that you've touched the Blood Stone, there's no going back!"

'What the hell is she talking about?' Kuzon thought to himself.

"Looks like I can't go easy on you any longer. I'll use my Trump Card!"

Kuzon's eyes widened as the stone in his palm suddenly began to grow incredibly hot. Of course, no harm came to him, but the sensation made him wonder.

>VWUUUUUUUUUMMMMMM!!!<

Suddenly, something akin to a veil enveloped the surroundings.

It took over everything, coursing through the ceilings and floors as well, transforming everything into a world of crimson hue.

The woman, who had been still before, was suddenly freed by teleporting away from her previous position.

The stone in his grasp also vanished, returning to her possession.

The world became fully formed, and it seemed like a desolate reality drenched in blood, cut off from the rest of the world.

'Is this... an alternate dimension?' Kuzon thought as he observed the newly changed world.

He felt completely disconnected from the reality he was in just moments ago. The sensation was similar what he felt in a Dungeon.

'So, I'm trapped once again, huh?'

"Welcome to my [Blood Dimension]!" Gluttony roared in both amusement and pride. "It's my Ultimate Skill, an S Ranked Skill!"

Unlike the Sin of Sloth who focused on obtaining three S Class Skills, Gluttony spread her Skill sets more broadly. She had only two S Class Skills, and a couple of other inferior ones.

Out of all of them, though, her most powerful Skill was the [Blood Dimension], which created a realm that she had absolute control over.

Coupled with her Special Ability of teleportation, she was invincible.

"It seems I've wasted too much time messing around. It's time to show you my full power and destroy you!"

There were so many ways she could go about her enemy's elimination. Just thinking about how to pay him back for humiliating her, and also due to the orders of their leader, made her lick her lips in delight.

"I agree. It also seems like I've wasted my time." The golden haired opponent suddenly said, his tone depicting nothing short of boredom

Perhaps even disinterest.

"Since I've seen your Trump Card, I've deemed this battle to be a waste of time."

"What?!"

"You're pretty proud of this stifling room you call a dimension. It's disheartening."

"You..." Veins began appearing on Gluttony's head as she glared at the ignorant fool who spoke.

Her special dimension was as large as a house. She could manipulate anything within it, and she could easily kill him now if she wanted.

How dare he degrade her power to such an extent?

"You deserve to be punished!" As soon as she said this, with a widened, murderous gaze, several spikes emanated from all over—the floor, ceilings, sides, etc., and sharply launched themselves at the young man.

Gluttony expected to see blood strewn on the floor, or the boy turning into mincemeat. Ah, even seeing his guts spilled all over her dimension wouldn't be bad.

Using Skills below S Rank didn't work in this world, and even the S Rank Skills used would instantly be detected by her at the moment of activation.

She was quite literally invincible!

"Disappointing..." With a single mutter, the crimson spikes that closed in on the young man began to change color.

All of them turned golden.

"W-what?!"

"Perhaps I should show you what a true domain ought to look like."

The floors, the ceilings, and everything around began to take on a golden form.

"W-what are you doing?!"

"Taking over your special dimension. But even this isn't enough." A wide smile formed on his face, causing Gluttony to break into an anxious sweat

Gold covered everywhere, and a bright light took over her senses.

It felt like she was being transported to get another new reality.

"You need to see for yourself. What a superior domain is."

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Chapter 968: Superior Domain

The Emperor's Domain materialized before their eyes, a breathtaking palace that seemed to stretch on for an eternity.

Every inch of the palace was adorned with an ethereal beauty, bathed in a golden glow. The walls, intricately carved and adorned with delicate patterns, shimmered like liquid gold. Sunlight cascaded through ornate windows, casting a warm, enchanting light that danced upon the gilded surfaces.

"Haaa... w-what is... this...?"

As Gluttony stepped forward, she found herself standing on a floor made of polished gold, reflecting her every movement like a mirror. The air carried a sweet fragrance, as if the very essence of blooming flowers had been captured and infused within. Soft, melodious music resonated from unseen corners, serenading their arrival and stirring their souls.

The ceilings soared to great heights, seemingly impossibly distant. They were adorned with grand chandeliers, sparkling with crystal and gold filigree. The light from the chandeliers refracted through prisms, creating a mesmerizing display of colors that painted the entire palace in a celestial symphony.

In the distance, Gluttony could see a network of grand corridors and archways, leading to unexplored realms within The Emperor's Domain. Every doorway held the promise of a new marvel, inviting her to venture deeper into this captivating sanctuary.

"I-impossible..."

As soon as she realized the magnificence of the scene unfolding before her eyes, the location changed.

This time, Gluttony found herself in a massive hall.

Statues sculpted from pure gold lined the hall, their intricate details frozen in time. Elaborate tapestries, woven with threads of precious metals, depicted scenes of mythical creatures and heroes from ages past.

Once again, the scenery changed. This time, they were outside the Golden Palace, surrounded by a surreal golden sky that reflected the evening sun.

The gardens of The Emperor's Domain were a verdant oasis, a testament to nature's mastery. Exotic flora bloomed in vibrant hues, their petals seemingly kissed by the sun. Majestic fountains, crafted entirely of shimmering gold, formed the centerpiece of each garden, their waters sparkling with a timeless allure.

Amid all this beauty and wonder, time seemed to stand still.

Gluttony lost herself in the enchanting whispers of the wind and the soothing echoes of footsteps.

The Emperor's Domain, with its ethereal beauty and surreal grandeur, was a haven unlike any other, a place where dreams merged with reality.

In this realm, Gluttony experienced a world beyond her wildest dreams, where everything shimmered with the luster of pure gold. It was a palace of wonder and enchantment, a testament to Kuzon's extraordinary power and his ability to command a realm that transcended the limits of imagination.

"You understand now, don't you? How pathetic your realm is."

"A-ah... ahh..."

Kuzon watched Gluttony shudder as he stood behind her. He could see tears fall from her eyes, but he ignored them and casually placed his hand atop her head.

"Heuk!" Twitching as Kuzon absorbed her memories, her mind-broken face shone with the same golden wonder as the sanctuary she beheld.

"I'm not as soft as Jared. The obvious end to our encounter is death... especially since I'm not the one making the plans."

The body of Gluttony had now become a golden statue, brimming with beauty but devoid of life.

"He probably knew this would happen. In any case, it seems I'm done here." With a smile, Kuzon snapped his fingers, causing everything around him to dissolve like Magic Particles.

In moments, he returned himself to the reality he left—Seoul, South Korea.

Looking around him, there was no evidence that there was ever a serious battle here. He couldn't also sense anyone observing him, so it was more likely that Gluttony came alone.

With nothing left to do, Kuzon decided to return to the Hunter Association HQ.

'At least I got a souvenir.' His smile widened.

A glimmering stone shone in his pocket as he walked out of the abandoned building.

Seated in a sumptuous, high-backed leather chair was a man of commanding presence.

He had long white hair, and his blue eyes gazed at the large video conferencing screen before him.

The luxurious office, adorned with mahogany paneling and exquisite artwork, exuded an air of opulence. Behind the man, a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows offered a breathtaking view of the bustling city below.

This level of luxury was certainly something befitting the most powerful man in the world.

The Strongest Hunter and leader of The Zenith—Chad.

On the screen, six faces materialized, each belonging to an individual who held a prominent position in his organization, all experts their respective fields.

The virtual meeting had commenced, and Chad's expression was a mask of composed authority.

"Good evening, my Stars... or should I say Pillars?," he began, his voice resonating with an air of gravitas. "I have gathered you all here today for an important announcement."

His tone held a hint of intrigue, a calculated mystery that left the others on the edge of their virtual seats.

"One of you is no longer among the living. While Gluttony was a wild one, she was still one of the most powerful among you. It's a shame she is dead." Chad continued, his gaze sweeping across the faces displayed on the screen.

The room fell into a silence that hung heavy with curiosity and a touch of unease. The participants exchanged puzzled glances, their expressions reflecting a mix of apprehension and curiosity.

"It seems the two Busan Heroes were more powerful than I gave them credit for. Sloth suffered defeat and retreated, while Gluttony was killed.

What Sloth reported was that the match ended in a stalemate, and he managed to escape, but Chad wasn't foolish enough to believe that story.

It was more believable that Sloth realized he couldn't win, and thus decided to escape.

The air was heavy in his office, a testament of the severity of the topic at hand. It was at times like this that Chad had to raise the mood.

"Fear not, my subordinates," Chad reassured, a sly smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "For the Grand symposium that awaits us shall shed light upon all the secrets that lie in the shadows." His words carried an enigmatic weight, hinting at a hidden purpose, and the participants leaned closer, their interest piqued.

What secrets? What shadows? The answer was whatever Chad purposed in his heart.

"As we prepare for this gathering of exceptional minds," He continued, his voice steady and deliberate, "I encourage you all to ready yourselves for what is to come. You all have your parts to play."

The screen flickered, and Chad's image expanded, filling the room with his commanding presence. The participants were captivated, their attention held by the man who spoke of mysteries and imminent revelations.

He was more than worthy of his title.

"Till then... let us remain what we always are; the light that shines upon the world, and the darkness that lurks in the shadows."

This duality was essential in the world that he wanted to create.

Playing the hero and the villain at the same time certainly had its thrills, but more importantly was the power to be amassed as a result of the balance he achieved.

"Both fear and respect. Hope and despair. Law and Chaos. I hold all of them in the palm of my hands."

As his words hung in the air, a lingering tension wrapped around the virtual conference room. The participants exchanged glances, their minds buzzing with anticipation and a hint of trepidation.

Chad's final smile, enigmatic and alluring, conveyed a subtle promise of an extraordinary climax.

"It should be fun."

From behind the screens, the six other participants of the virtual meeting made a graceful nod, allowing him to conclude the meeting.

As the virtual screen faded to black, and the participants left with an indelible impression of Chad's profound might, the mastermind grinned in delight.

In the luxurious office, Chad reclined in his chair, his eyes glinting with a mix of mischief and ambition.

He had set the stage, planting all the necessary seeds, and now he eagerly awaited the day of harvest.

"The Grand Symposium. I guess I'll see you there..."

With that final thought, he closed his eyes.

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Chapter 969: A Serious Conversation

"I wonder if Han Soo is still with Jared." Aloe Vida's thoughts leaked out of her lips as she walked in the hallway, navigating her way to the suite assigned to the latter.

She had just concluded a mission, and since she had some free time, she thought she'd check in on the group.

'Should I first check the training room? Well, it's on my way there, so I'll just check in.'

With this rationale, Aloe made her way to the suite. She didn't even need to knock before hearing a voice telling her to come in.

Opening the door and walking in, Vida found Kuzon floating in the air as his body lay down flat.

"Sup. How'd it go with the mission, Aloe?" He casually said, his gaze trailing to her for a moment before returning to the ceiling.

'It's just Kuzon, huh?' Aloe didn't have a particular problem with the young Midas, though it would have been nice if she met Jared too.

'I could have just sensed their presence, yet...' She fought back a sigh and moved closer.

"It was fine. After this break, Chairman Sung and I are going to attack the other S Class Gate that formed recently. That should get rid of all the major Dungeon threats." She smiled as she sat on the sofa in the room.

Kuzon, upon seeing that, sat upright, though he still remained in midair.

"What about you, Kuzon? How did it go with you?" She asked with genuinely curious expression.

"I encountered a Star of the Shadows of Light." He shrugged nonchalantly.

"Really? How did it go?"

"Meh. It was pretty easy. Even the S Rank Dungeon was too easy."

Aloe Vida understood how he felt. She felt the same anytime she was in a Dungeon. It was just unfortunate that she had to follow protocol in order to avoid the worst scenario occurring.

"I should even submit the loot I collected. Maybe I'll just use Magic to transport them..."

"Haha. You've really gotten lazy, huh?"

"More like bored. I just want to return home, yet Jared keeps making me wait with these elaborate plans of his." Kuzon sounded like a whiny child, but even this was understandable.

Even though the boy was usually playful and carefree, it was easy to tell that he was worried as well.

"You miss Ana, don't you?" As Aloe said this, Kuzon glanced at her, and she returned his gaze with a smile.

After a moment of silence, he finally responded.

"I do." A smile formed on his face "I really do."

"Are you worried about her? Maybe her safety, or—"

"Not really. As you already know, my Familiar is connected to our original world, so I already asked him to check how things are. He won't tell me the details, but he assured me that she's safe. Everyone is safe."

"But that doesn't completely eliminate your concerns, does it?"

A wry smile formed on Kuzon's face and he nodded.

"No. It doesn't." Once again, he stared at Aloe. "How about you? Got anyone you're concerned about?"

A fuzzy feeling coursed through her heart as her thoughts went to many people she cared for.

They were too many to count.

Her family. Her students. Her colleagues. Her friends. Maro Smith...

"Yeah. I've got lots." She finally settled for those choice of words.

"I see..."

For yet another awkward moment, no one said a thing.

They remained still in the room, either looking at the furniture or ceiling. Perhaps it was because neither of them had really talked to the other much—or even at all—when they were still in their original world.

Now that they were stuck in the same situation, it was a bit... weird.

"Can I ask you something?" Kuzon finally broke the silence with a rather serious tone.

It made Aloe nearly tighten her hand on her chest as she heard it. His voice sounded like a mix of caution and silent rage.

"What do you think about 'our' Neron?"

Once Aloe heard the question, her thoughts became plunged into a sea of rather confusing, conflicting, and contrasting ideas.

Kuzon and Jared had briefed her on their tour of the world, and they also revealed how suspicious Neron's actions—or rather, inactions—were

The main question raised by all the discussions they had was;

"What is Neron up to?"

Aloe was yet to give her own opinion or thoughts on the matter since, at the time she was told, she still had to gather her thoughts.

She thought she would be able to reach a definite conclusion if given some time, however, even now that Kuzon was raising the question before her, Aloe still found herself unable to answer properly.

"I... am still unsure." The image of Neron appeared in her mind, and for a second, her heart leaped.

Neron's jet black hair and crystal blue eyes reflected in her thoughts. His handsome face occupied her mind, and his gentle tone echoes on and on within her.

Even letting go of all the biases, she couldn't reach a clear answer.

If Aloe was to give any, then it would be;

"Maybe he has his reasons for doing what he did. We can't be completely sure until we ask him."

"What?" Kuzon raised his brow slightly, and a hint of annoyance slithered in his tone.

"I mean... we can't jump to conclusions, right? He must have had a really good reason for what he did."

"You mean manipulating us, lying to us, and allowing something disastrous of this scale to occur?"

"Yes."

"He's literally playing us like puppets. We don't know what he's thinking, but we're moving according to his bidding, and all for a goal we have no idea about."

"I'm sure it's something that'll benefit all of us, and—"

"How can you be so sure?"

"H-huh?"

"You seem to have so much faith in Neron. How can you be so sure?" Kuzon's golden gaze felt piercing, enough to make Aloe stop dead in her tracks.

She found herself unable to formulate a speech that would properly address his Inquisition.

"It's not strange for allies to turn to foe. It's not unheard of for friends to have secret motives and intentions that cause harm to others. How are you so certain that Neron's actions are geared towards a greater good."

"S-so far, he hasn't failed us yet, so—"

"BULLSHIT!" Kuzon stopped floating in midair, his feet touching the rug.

His eyes were wide with rage and frustration.

"He's using us! Yet we're expected to trust him when he doesn't even trust us?"

"Kuzon, calm yourself and—"

"I'm absolutely calm! Right now it feels like I'm the only one that's calm. Jared is so busy playing his games that he doesn't realize how much he's beginning to resemble Neron. And you... you're actually making excuses for him?"

"I'm not making excuses. I'm just—"

"You're blinded by sentiment. I can see it clearly. Your view is biased."

Aloe felt her chest tighten. She wanted to speak against Kuzon for what he said, but found herself unable to.

Perhaps it was because he was right.

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Chapter 970: The Lesson To Be Learned [Pt 1]

"Emotions blind us more than we can imagine."

As Kuzon said these words, his gaze grew softer and his tone much lighter. It seemed like he regretted raising his voice, but couldn't mouth an apology.

He was just... so upset.

The result of this was a stalemate of silence. Neither Kuzon nor Aloe knew what next to say. As a result, the room became dead with decorum.

"Why are you considering the worst?" Aloe's voice finally rescued the two from the abyss of silent awkwardness.

"I will admit that it's possible that Neron can't be trusted, but it's just... it's hard to believe that. How are you so comfortable imagining the worst about him?"

"Because it's never the best to see the best in people." Kuzon responded, his tone firm and his gaze stern.

"Not everyone has a justifiable reason for their actions. Not everyone needs a noble cause to do bad things. Some people are just fucked up."

Memories of his biological father coursed through his head, but more importantly, the destruction of his people.

"The only thing that blind trust breeds... is ultimate destruction." Clenching his fist and gritting his teeth, his heart heavy from the frustration that Aloe's disposition gave him, he turned towards the suite's exit.

"Crazy Neron told me it was a foolish thing to trust a Neron. So far, that statement rings true." He opened the door, stealing one final glance at Aloe's saddened face.

"And one day, Aloe, you'll see it too..."

Kuzon left the suite, most likely to submit the spoils he obtained from the S.Rank Dungeon. He would also need to have a meeting with the Chairman, along with Jared and Aloe later on due to encounter he had with a Star of the Shadows of Light, as well as the Blood Stone he obtained in the process.

As he walked down the hallway, leaving Aloe alone in the room, his emotions were a mess.

'I'm sorry, Aloe. But it seems I can't trust you as well.'

In the end, even though he was surrounded by two of his comrades, he was all alone.

'I miss you already, Maya...!' With a sad chuckle, he recollected his adventures and walked toward his destination.

"I... I did it! Hyung, I did it!"

Sung Han Soo's eyes were wide with a mix of excitement, relief, and extreme satisfaction.

Why?

"I finally connected to it! My Mana Core!" His loud voice echoed within the large training hall, and while he was seated in a meditative position, his bright smile and widened eyes rang of child-like passion.

Currently, his body was emitting a nearly transparent mist, and something white-like glowed in his stomach region.

It was his Mana Core—pure and white.

"Good work, Han Soo." I smiled, watching everything with a nod.

'By rearranging and strengthening his nerves and synapses, I finally achieved the synchronization effect.'

It was a delicate process, but since Han Soo had never been in contact with his Mana Core before, I had to handle the creation and development of most of the pathways.

'Still, he did a good job enduring and concentrating until now.'

Now that he had seen the fruit of his labor, I was certain he would be even more excited to do more for me.

The fact that he now called me Hyung, despite my body technically being younger than he was, was proof of the respect I had gained.

'That's the spirit.' My wide grin didn't cease.

"Now that you have connected to your Mana Core, the next thing you need to do is learn how to properly harness the power you have." I already told him this, but since he was the only one in this world that I knew of who had a Man Core, his capabilities—Mana Output and Mana Pool—would exceed most Hunters.

Plus, he would be able to grow as time went on. A Hunter that could grow indefinitely... that would be phenomenal in this world.

'Now, what would be the best method for growth? Learning Skills is one way to go about it, but...' Since he was now my disciple, I was going to do away with those stiff concepts and allow him to taste the wonders of true freedom.

Real power!

"Han Soo... I'm going to teach you Magic!" Beaming with delight, I focused my attention on the young man who, to my surprise, was now breaking into tears.

"Y-you..." He sniffed, the tears flowing heavily from his eyes. "Y-you're helping me so much..."

'A-ah...' My thoughts echoed awkwardly.

It's true that I was assisting him, but I was also doing this because I was interested in certain experiments and results. So far, I had achieved some of my goals.

However, if he learned Magic, I would be able to learn more.

"M-miss Vida too... she saved me so easily, and she also helps me all the time. Y-you both... you're so kind."

What a kid. Just how did he grow up for him to think that strangers bring nice to him was suddenly an extraordinary thing?

"B-both of you..." Suddenly, Sung bowed to me, his head flat on the tiled ground. "... You're both gods to me!"

As Han Soo's voice pierced the air, and I felt the sincerity of his gratitude, something about what he said just didn't resonate well with me.

'I'll have to correct it.'

"Han Soo, I'm only doing what is natural. Don't think more of it." With U gentle smile, I knelt and lifted him from his pathetic state.

"If you have the power to do something, and it aligns with your principles, it's only natural for you to do it."

I could see his innocent gleaming eyes reflect my face. It was the perfect blank canvas to paint, but I couldn't do that.

Sung Han Soo had to walk his own path, and that meant his freedom.

"Vida and I aren't gods. We're just people who are more powerful than you are. And while that makes us special, it doesn't make us perfect or infallible."

Han Soo was silent, holding his breath as he watched me.

"Listen to me. Unless there is a higher stake, so long as it doesn't cost me anything or cause bad effects, it's only natural for me to help others. Aloe has her own standards, and you should have yours too."

I placed both of my hands on the young man's shoulders and gave him a warm smile.

"Be a hero in your own way."

'A-ahhh...' Sing Han Soo watched Jared with sparkling eyes.

Inspired by the young boy's words, he couldn't help his fast besting heart and completely immobilized body.

'He's right...' Han Soo's thoughts echoed within himself.

"Can I ask you something?" He managed to croak out.

"What's it?"

"Can you tell me about your connection with Miss Vida?"

For a moment, no one said anything.

'D-did I ask for too much?' Han Soo thought in a panic, sweat enveloping his skin.

"My first encounter with Aloe wasn't a pretty one." Jared's smile didn't waver, even as he spoke, making Han Soo lost for words.

"She was a corpse drowned in her own blood... and I saved her from death."