

With The Gods 71

Chapter 71

Salamov opened his eyes.

His eyes had turned white, and he was able to see hundreds of meters around him.

Salamov was a well-known recon player in the lower floors.

“He’s gone,” he said.

“What?”

“Gone?”

Salamov nodded his head.

He had his sights on YuWon just a moment ago, and then he suddenly disappeared.

There was only one possibility as to what happened.

“It must be some stealth ability,” Salamov remarked.

There wasn’t a lot of information known about YuWon. The few players that managed to see YuWon fight on his way up to the 11th Floor said that he was a melee swordsman, and that was true.

The players of Team B that came across YuWon said that he used a sword.

But there had been zero information that said that he was capable of [Stealth.]

“Stealth?”

“He has such a skill?”

“Is there any way we can find him?”

Salamov shook his head. His skill, the [Thousand-Mile Eyes,] was a rare skill that, depending on the proficiency, could literally see as far as a thousand miles, and it was even capable of seeing through most [Stealth.] Yet Salamov couldn’t see even a trace of YuWon.

Salamov spoke with a frown, “I can’t say for certain without getting closer, but I don’t think this is an ordinary Stealth.”

“What do you mean?”

“It must be a pretty powerful skill. I can’t even see a shimmer,” Salamov explained.

His explanation left his teammates in shock.

The [Thousand-Mile Eyes] was a pretty famous skill. Its reputation as a detection skill made even Rankers desire it, and this skill was the sole reason why Salamov came to be well-known in the lower floors.

According to the rumors, he’d already made a contract with a major guild, so his skills were not in question.

So for Salamov to say such a thing...

"Kim YuWon was an assassin?" said one of the players.

... That was the natural conclusion one would come to.

However, Salamov shook his head. "I don't think that's the case. Assassins typically don't wield long swords. Not to mention that they intentionally wear dark clothes," he said.

"Then what is it?"

"My guess is..." Salamov trailed off, turning his head quickly. Salamov's eyes were still white, meaning his [Thousand-Mile Eyes] was still active. "When did you get all the way here?" he asked.

Salamov's question shocked his teammates, making them draw their weapons.

There was a faint shimmer in the direction of Salamov's gaze.

"Is that the Thousand-Mile Eyes? You have a pretty good skill," YuWon said, revealing himself.

Salamov's teammates breathed a sigh of relief. If Salamov wasn't present, they would have all been assassinated without knowing what was going on.

'What the—?'

'So he is an assassin!'

Because YuWon didn't socialize with other players, there was little information known about him. So without directly facing him, it was impossible to figure out what his abilities might be.

Salamov was among the confused.

Earlier, if he hadn't seen the faint shimmer, he would have ended up with the same fate as everyone else.

'There's a stealth skill that I couldn't see through with the Thousand-Mile Eyes at this distance?' Salamov couldn't believe it. He wondered if perhaps YuWon really was a player specialized in assassination.

'Let's hope that is the case. Because if he's not an assassin, and he can use Stealth at this distance...' gulped Salamov, '... it'll be close to impossible to defeat him.'

"Maybe it's because you guys don't have a lot of people, but your Heaven's Net is too flawed," said YuWon while looking around.

Team B players that were spread out started gathering closer together, and the wide Heaven's Net started to tighten.

"Even if it's you, now that you've revealed yourself, you can't do a thing," Salamov told YuWon.

Salamov could see the dozens of players surrounding YuWon, their gazes aimed at YuWon's vitals. Dozens of skills and weapons were all ready to fire.

This was a stage prepared for YuWon.

"It was a wise choice to separate yourself from the 'king,' since you can't fight us at full power if you're protecting someone," said Salamov.

Yuwon was looking elsewhere during Salamov's explanation. This made Salamov frown. He took a step towards YuWon.

Salamov shouted, "Hey, are you listening to me...?"

A chill went down Salamov's spine, shutting him up and making him take a step back.

Finally YuWon's gaze looked to Salamov.

"You have good instincts," YuWon complimented.

Slice—

Salamov looked down at the ground in front of him. There was a fresh cut on the ground.

Despite being more than ten steps away, YuWon had managed to cut from that distance.

Salamov gulped, realizing the danger of moving recklessly.

There weren't many players that were capable of fighting head to head against YuWon.

Tmp, tmp—

People started to appear out of the forest.

There were roughly 20 players, most of which YuWon didn't recognize.

The only two faces that YuWon did recognize were Hoon's and Ro'el's. Hoon, the genius of the NamGung Clan who was expected to become a High Ranker one day, and Ro'el, the one nicknamed an angel because people say that she was blessed by god.

Yuwon knew their faces because both would become Rankers in the future.

"You abandoned your 'king'..." Hoon said while raising his greatsword. "So you chose battle over the test."

Being capable of lifting a heavy greatsword with one hand made Hoon look reliable.

On top of Hoon and Ro'el, the other 20 players present were also the cream of the crop on Team B. And in the distance, there were dozens of players waiting and aiming for YuWon.

The best way to describe this situation would be to say that he was a cornered rat. In fact, he had walked into this trap himself.

Tmp, tmp—

Hoon walked towards YuWon, getting even closer than where Salamov was. Considering his skills and the length of his sword, Hoon was now more than capable of reaching YuWon with his sword, yet YuWon didn't stop him.

YuWon could tell by the atmosphere. NamGung Hoon. He was essentially the one leading Team B.

“I’m sorry that it’s come to this...” Hoon apologized, bowing his head to YuWon.

“What do you mean?” YuWon asked.

Hoon responded, “Though unintentional, I have a good team, unlike you.”

The teams were picked randomly, yet the differences between the two teams were too great.

Hoon turned his head and looked around. “I’m not ashamed of this situation because this is a test. You are certainly a very skilled player. It’s just that your luck didn’t match your skills,” he said.

“What are you trying to say?” YuWon asked.

“Give up on the test. I don’t want to have a match like this.”

YuWon smirked. Telling him to ‘give up.’ He was wondering what Hoon was on about, but for it to have been this...

“You’re more talkative than I heard,” YuWon said, raising his sword and displaying how he had zero intentions to give up on the test.

* * *

Reaper Scans

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Hoon let out a sigh. He had expected this, but he was still disappointed. It seemed that things had to happen this way.

“I guess it can’t be helped then,” Hoon said while also raising his sword.

As if they had made an agreement ahead of time, the other players did not intervene. It was a 1v1 situation.

“Hmm...” YuWon hummed while letting out a small laugh. Hoon didn’t have a bad personality.

‘Back then and now. His personality is still the same,’ YuWon thought to himself.

Hoon had a cool-headed personality. He was rational and made quick judgements. It was how he was able to climb the Tower quickly and become a Ranker. And on top of that, Hoon was not a coward.

Being rational and uncowardly, even in a situation like this, Hoon wished to have a one-on-one duel with YuWon.

And YuWon liked people like him, so if possible, he didn’t want to kill him. Especially because in the future, Hoon had great things he had to do for the NamGung Clan.

“I don’t really care how many people there are,” YuWon said.

“That makes me feel a bit better,” Hoon said, taking a step towards YuWon.

In that moment...

Whoosh—

Hoon’s sword drew an arc and...

Klang—!

... Their swords clashed.

The heavy greatsword exerted a lot of pressure, making YuWon’s eyes light up.

‘Would you look at that,’ YuWon thought.

He knew very well that the NamGung Clan’s sword was heavy because in his past life he took the 10th Floor’s test with the NamGung Clan.

‘I guess he’s a gem for a reason,’ YuWon thought to himself, impressed by the strength of a player who was currently only at the 11th Floor. It made him genuinely curious what Hoon’s stats were.

“Hmph—!” Hoon let out a deep breath, swinging his sword repeatedly.

There was no reason that a heavy sword had to be slow. As an example of this, Hoon’s sword was quick and moved with the full extent of his strength.

The players watched the fight in a daze, wondering how Hoon could put so much strength into his swings while moving so fast.

Watching Hoon made YuWon think, ‘He’s definitely a martial arts genius.’

YuWon was called a genius plenty as well, but he was not as much of a genius as Hoon when it came to martial arts.

‘Not bad,’ YuWon remarked.

Whoosh—

Whoosh—

Klang—!

Hoon’s sword was deflected, making it swing upwards. His eyes widened from the pain that made him think his hand was about to break.

‘What is this strength...?!’ Hoon wondered.

His hands were numb, making him almost lose his grip on his sword.

The NamGung Clan’s sword was heavy. And the clan’s Imperial Sword Form had a power that could exert pressure on one’s surroundings just by wielding the sword. And this principle was naturally baked into Hoon’s sword techniques.

‘What’s going on?’ Hoon was confused.

Klang—!

Once again, Hoon’s sword was deflected.

When his sword clashed with YuWon’s sword, it felt like both his feet got lifted off the ground.

There was an unbelievable difference in power.

‘I can’t believe I’m being pushed back in terms of strength,’ Hoon thought while gritting his teeth.

A blue shimmer started blooming around Hoon’s sword. And at the same time, an enormous, mountain-like power was imbued into his sword.

“Hmph—!” Hoon grunted.

[Archangel’s Blessing empowers you.]

[Your Strength increases.]

[Your Constitution increases.]

[Your body becomes lighter.]

[Your mana regeneration accelerates.]

An unexpected power strengthened Hoon and his sword.

Crash—!

Yuwon and Hoon’s swords collided with each other.

Despite swinging with his all, YuWon’s sword didn’t budge an inch. But what preoccupied Hoon’s mind the most were the messages that popped up a moment ago.

Hoon turned his head and saw that the tip of Ro’el’s hand was pointing towards him.

Shnnk—

With an exchange of sword swings, Hoon and YuWon ended up some distance away from each other.

Hoon took this chance to glare at Ro’el.

“What is the meaning of this?” he asked. He had made it clear that he’d first fight YuWon one on one.

“This is all you can do even after receiving my buff. Doesn’t that mean this match is already over?” Ro’el said.

The power that had buffed Hoon a moment ago was Ro’el’s doing, and she was already buffing the other players, having judged YuWon and Hoon’s fight to be over.

Hoon grit his teeth. He was completely uninjured, meaning the fight was only just starting for him.

“It’s far from over yet—” Hoon argued.

“It looks like he thinks it’s over though.”

“What?”

Fwoosh—

Hoon turned his head and felt a wave of heat on his face.

It was an extremely hot fire, but what really caught his attention wasn’t the heat.

‘That fire is...’ Hoon thought to himself.

A purple fire had appeared around YuWon, making Hoon think back to a scene.

‘Agrea’s Dungeon...’ Hoon’s eyes widened. ‘Could it be?’

Chapter 72

Purple flames were not common. At the very least, Hoon had never seen or heard of them before.

‘This can’t be a mere coincidence,’ Hoon thought, recollecting the traces left behind at Agrea’s Dungeon.

He could vividly remember the wounds left on the dungeon’s boss, the Spider Queen Agrea. The sword wound so sharp, precise, and destructive that it made him wonder if it was the doing of a Ranker.

‘So why...?’ he wondered.

The sword that he felt when he traded blows with YuWon was completely different from what had made the cut on Agrea’s body. With YuWon’s power, it should have been impossible to cut the dungeon’s boss with a single strike.

That left only two possibilities.

‘Either I’m mistaken, or... he was going easy against me,’ Hoon concluded.

Judging by how YuWon’s response didn’t change from before or after Ro’el’s buff, he had an idea of what the truth might be.

Hoon gritted his teeth. The duel was basically over, and if YuWon really was the one who conquered Agrea’s Dungeon...

“Let’s retreat,” Hoon spoke to Ro’el using sonic telepathy.*

Ro’el turned her head towards Hoon in shock. She then glared at him in confusion. She couldn’t understand why he wanted them to retreat.

“If YuWon is the same person as the one I’m thinking of, this fight is meaningless,” Hoon continued speaking in secrecy to Ro’el, staring at the purple fire floating around YuWon. **“We will all die.”**

Ro’el was at a crossroads with how certain Hoon sounded.

Hoon normally didn't say anything unless he was certain. Coupled with the fact that he was always confident and had the skills to back it up, Ro'el wondered what could possibly make Hoon suggest that they retreat first.

YuWon looked back and forth between Ro'el and Hoon. After standing still for a moment, his eyes now red, he took a step towards them and asked, "Are you guys done talking?"

Hoon flinched in surprise before nodding his head.

YuWon noticed he was communicating with Ro'el through sonic telepathy, yet he waited for them.

"Can I ask you a question?" said Hoon.

YuWon stopped in his tracks and nodded. "If it's only one question."

"Are you the one that conquered Agrea's Dungeon?"

Agrea's Dungeon. The mention of it made the players around him murmur in shock.

It was a difficult dungeon that hadn't been conquered in a long time. The fact that the dungeon was conquered was shocking, but the players could accept that it had happened, considering it was YuWon.

"What if I tell you that it was?" YuWon answered.

"... So I was right," Hoon responded. In that moment, he was able to, by proxy, get a taste of YuWon's true strength.

"If you guys want to fight him, we're out. Let's go," Hoon commanded his teammates.

"Huh?"

"Hey, Hoon!"

"Are we really leaving?"

Hoon's unexpected actions made his shocked teammates chase after him.

Ro'el bit her lip from the sudden development. "You're a coward, unlike the rumors," she insulted Hoon.

"Feel free to say whatever you want," Hoon said while looking back at YuWon. "I value my teammates' lives more than my pride."

One could always retry a test.

The test fee was pretty expensive, but points weren't a problem for Hoon. Not only did he have quite a lot of points saved up, but if needed, he could always ask his clan as well.

However, there was no re-do for your life.

Even if the entirety of Team B fought YuWon at once and somehow managed to defeat him...

'At least half... no, most of us would die,' Hoon predicted, and he didn't want to pass the test like that.

From the beginning, he didn't like this test, so quitting here was an option in itself.

"Hoon..."

"Sniffle..."

"You're so..."

Hoon's teammates were touched by his statement.

In response, Hoon waved at them to hurry up.

YuWon had no intention to stop them. 'If they'll step out on their own, that's fine by me,' he thought.

It wasn't bad for YuWon for there to be fewer enemies to fight.

Hoon put down his flag on the ground, and his teammates followed suit. It was clear that Hoon's teammates had a great amount of trust in him.

"Damn it..." Ro'el muttered with a frown, watching Hoon and his teammates walk away.

Now there were only 40 members of Team B present. They still outnumbered YuWon greatly, but the absence of Hoon was a huge loss as he was the most skilled player on Team B.

'Still...' Ro'el thought while looking over at YuWon. He was truly delectable-looking prey.

With Hoon gone, if they could defeat YuWon, the glory would be all hers.

"What should we do?"

"We still outnumber him..."

"The numbers aren't the issue here!"

"Dammit. Maybe I should have left with Hoon."

There were many hesitating, but no one was actually giving up. This was thanks to the power rising within them that filled them with courage.

"So no one else wants to give up. Tch," YuWon said in disappointment. He had hoped that more would change their minds with Hoon leaving.

"I'm saying this just in case, but don't kill too many kids. It's unsightly for an adult to run amok in the middle of children fighting," said the hero Hercules. Even in the middle of the meeting to pick who would go back in time, Hercules was worried about the players' lives.

"That's true."

"They are the guys that we need to fight the Outers together later..."

“I don’t know who we’re sending, but whoever it may be, they’re bound to run into some future Rankers.”

“And that will be a loss for our side.”

It was a promise made in the middle of the meeting. As long as it was within their abilities, they would climb the Tower in a way that saved players rather than killed them. Because at the end of the day, it was the Inners, the beings inside the Tower, that had to fight against the Outers. So if possible, they had to avoid killing players and Rankers.

Not only that, but they had to prevent events that could result in a big casualty for the Inners. That was the task at hand for YuWon.

‘That is what I’m supposed to do...’ YuWon thought.

So far he had kept that promise the best he could. As long as they weren’t scum like Kim MyungHoon or actual villains, he took the test in a way that saved people.

‘But what can I do when they’re baring their fangs so much...’ YuWon thought.

Hercules insisted that they should save people rather than kill them, and Hercules would have indeed figured out a way. He had the ability to make such things happen because, as a hero, that was what he lived for.

However, YuWon was different.

‘I can’t guarantee anything.’

Yuwon liked Hercules for being a hero, but he himself could not be one.

Fwoosh—

[Holy Fire]

The fire around YuWon started to grow more intense.

In response, the players on Team B started to prepare their skills one by one.

‘I’ll give it my best shot...’ YuWon thought.

His will made the fire roar bigger.

‘... But if it can’t be helped, it can’t be helped.’

The fire enveloping YuWon’s body opened its mouth.

It was now time for him to butt into a children’s fight.

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Reaper Scans

Translator – NumbaWon

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Tmp, tmp—

Hoon headed to Team B's original starting point.

His teammates were busy trying to gauge the situation. They initially left according to Hoon's will, but they wondered if this was really okay.

"Are you really going to give up?" one of Hoon's teammates asked.

The question prompted Hoon to stop in his tracks and turn around.

"What do you mean?" Hoon asked.

The teammate that asked the question was surprised. He didn't think Hoon would go as far as to stop and turn around.

"I-It's just it's not like you."

"Not like me?" Hoon wondered.

"I get that the opponent is really strong, but it's not like you to give up without even properly fighting..."

Hoon let out a sigh. His teammate wasn't wrong.

He hadn't lived that long of a life, but this was the first time this had happened as well.

"I didn't like it," Hoon said.

"Don't like what?"

Hoon continued, "Passing the test like this and making YuWon fail like this."

Hoon looked back in the direction he came from.

He had traveled quite a long distance, but he could feel that the fight had started by the intense flow of mana.

"Even if we did fight, we can't win... But if that was the only factor, I might have fought. Because if all of us fought together, we might have had even the slightest chance. However..."

Hoon took a momentary pause before continuing.

"... The one that deserves to pass this test isn't me."

"Ah..."

"That's right..."

Hoon's explanation made his teammates nod in agreement.

To begin with, this test's roster made no sense. The difference between Team A and Team B was ridiculously unbalanced.

Despite that, YuWon was making up for that gap by himself.

So based purely on skills, YuWon was more than qualified to be one to move onto the next floor.

“You’re too uptight.”

“But he’s got a point.”

“I guess there’s always the next test.”

“It seems like a waste to let our team luck go like this, but this is why I like you.”

Hoon’s teammates weren’t all that disappointed because as long as they had the skills, they could always move onto the next floor with the next test.

A smile of satisfaction bloomed on Hoon’s face.

He was relieved because he had been worried on the off chance that his teammates might have been dissatisfied with his decision.

‘They really are a good team,’ he thought, thinking back to what his father, NamGung JinWoon told him.

His father insisted that the things required to climb the Tower weren’t only excellent skills and power. What was equally as important were amazing teammates to climb the Tower together with.

Starting from the Tutorial, Hoon searched for teammates to climb the Tower with him. And because he took the task of climbing the Tower seriously, he spent a long time selecting his teammates.

That was how he ended up with his current team. A team that was not only skilled but had the same moral code as him. And Hoon greatly liked his current team.

“Now then, let’s go back...” Hoon trailed off while turning around to continue back to the starting point.

He spotted a player shining gold walking towards him in the distance.

‘The ‘king’?’ Hoon wondered.

It was Team B’s ‘king.’ The player he didn’t know the name or face of. The player he couldn’t remember a single thing about had appeared.

* * *

[You obtained a flag.]

[You obtained 10cp.]

[You obtained 2 flags.]

[You obtained...]

Multiple messages rang in quick succession.

YuWon picked up the flags that had dropped and rummaged through the players that were lying on the ground.

It was a message that felt good to see because the more flags he had, the higher his chance of passing this test went up, and the more CP he obtained, the bigger his reward would become.

“Ahhhh!”

“H-Hot!”

“Someone, save me...”

“I-It’s a demon! Ahhhhh!”

“Go away!”

The entire place had erupted into chaos.

Despite the name ‘Holy Fire,’ YuWon looked like a demon to the players. But that was inevitable.

‘That’s just how the power of an Outer is,’ YuWon thought to himself.

The power of an Outer was a power from outside the Tower.

People had an instinctive fear of the unknown. The [Holy Fire] was a foreign power to them, so it evolved into what they feared the most.

And so the [Holy Fire] grew by consuming their fear to grow larger. This made YuWon’s job not to make the flame bigger but to control it and reign it in.

‘If the fire grows too big, it’ll become hard even for me to control.’

YuWon put out some of the fire and looked around.

The test site had descended into utter chaos. Dozens of players were already unable to fight anymore.

There were a few players that were putting up a good fight against the [Holy Fire,] but they wouldn’t last long.

‘There’s no way this is going to end here...’

This test was a stage set up by Olympus to get YuWon. There was no way the only trap they had set up for him was inconveniencing him by ruining the balance of the teams. There was bound to be a more surefire, secure trap set up for him.

After the Heaven’s Net was enacted, YuWon had been searching for a single player with his [Cinder Eyes,] and finally...

‘You’re here...’ YuWon thought, seeing the player in the distance that he had been searching for. ‘The ‘king.’”

Chapter 73

[Holy Blessing]

[Angel’s Wings]

[Strength of a Giant]

In a hurry, Ro'el directed her skills at the players spread around her.

She made their bodies lighter, protected their bodies from the fire, buffed their strength, and more. She had used over ten types of buffs on her team.

Her abilities were so versatile that any team with her on board could double their power.

But then why...?

'What's up with this?' Ro'el wondered. She started sweating seeing YuWon just standing still.

She was unable to stop the fire YuWon controlled with her skills.

On top of that, the dozens of players were busy running from the fire as if they were put under some illusion.

No matter how powerful a buff she casted, nothing would change. She couldn't stop the fire, nor could they injure YuWon, let alone approach him.

Ro'el grit her teeth, focused her sights, and aimed her hands at YuWon.

She specialized in healing and buffing, but those weren't the only abilities she had. If that were the case, she wouldn't have managed to become nearly as famous as she was.

Whirrrr—

Above YuWon's head, a giant, yellow, glowing sword appeared.

[Sword of Execution]

It was the only attack skill that the Angel Ro'el possessed, but that was good enough because this skill was said to be one of the most lethal man-to-man attack skills.

"Die!" Ro'el shouted as she swung her hands down.

The sword made of light above YuWon's head fell toward him.

In response...

Shnk—

... YuWon, who had been standing still all this time, drew his sword.

Thwack—!

Whirrrrr—

The [Sword of Execution] released a powerful light, enough to light up the whole forest.

Ro'el and the other players heard the loud ringing caused by the collision.

Riiiiing—

It echoed in their ears.

Through the blinding light, Ro'el could see her sword getting shattered.

'The Sword of Execution...'

Ro'el's eyes widened.

The shock from what she witnessed made her numb to the blinding light.

Her [Sword of Execution] was destroyed, not even by some special skill, but from a normal swing of a sword.

Ro'el had a flashback of what Hoon told her.

"We will all die."

Ro'el's eyes locked with YuWon.

She felt a shiver down her spine and even took a step back subconsciously.

There didn't seem to be anything she could do against him.

"This is cheating..." she muttered.

After looking around, Ro'el noticed that most of the players had already run away.

She changed her mind. 'There's no point in fighting anymore.'

Hoon was right. Ro'el didn't know what made him come to that conclusion, but YuWon was not an opponent they could face.

Even though he was still only a player, his strength was beyond their measure.

Ro'el bit her lip.

"Everyone, let's retreat," Ro'el telepathically communicated to all the players of Team B that had received a buff from her. **"We don't stand a chance. If all of us die here, even if we get his 'king,' we will still lose this test."**

After hearing Ro'el's words, the players of Team B looked at one another and nodded their heads.

She was right.

Their original plan was to get YuWon and the 'king,' but currently both seemed impossible.

"Make sure you leave your flags behind," YuWon said out loud.

This caught Ro'el off guard.

"Did you hear all that?" she asked.

YuWon responded, "I don't need to hear anything to know what's going on in your head."

"... And if I say we're just going to leave?"

"I won't let you guys go," YuWon said while signaling with his fingers to hand the flags over.

He did feel like he was taking a kid's lunch money, but that was kind of what was happening.

After contemplating, Ro'el ended up handing her flags over.

[You obtained 8 flags.]

[You obtained 80cp.]

As expected, she had quite a few flags on her.

This was one more than the seven flags that Hoon had on him.

‘A support plays a bigger role in the team than a lone swordsman, so that makes sense,’ YuWon thought.

It was a natural way for a team to distribute the gains.

The other players followed Ro’el and handed YuWon their flags.

There were no casualties yet.

“Will you really not kill anyone?” Ro’el asked, as YuWon was finishing up collecting the flags.

YuWon nodded. Since he got all their flags, there was no need to kill anyone.

“How come? You don’t seem like someone who’d hesitate to kill people.”

“That’s true, but I don’t particularly like killing either.”

“Will you really be okay? You might be taking all our flags, but we’ll just go collect more. You’re by yourself. You might lose your ‘king,’ and with the remaining time...”

“Are you asking me to kill you?” YuWon asked.

After getting goosebumps from locking eyes with YuWon, Ro’el took a few steps back.

“What is it that you want?” YuWon followed up with another question.

“A talk with you,” she responded.

“A talk?”

“I heard that you rejected all the sponsorship offers from major guilds.”

YuWon nodded his head.

Many players from major guilds had met up with him. He was even personally visited by a few Rankers.

But every time, he said no.

Ro’el knew this, and that was why she had approached YuWon.

“Why did you do that?” she asked.

“What is this? Is this a recruitment offer?”

“Zion* can offer you the best treatment possible. I’m certain they’ll treat you even better than me,” Ro’el spoke with a spark in her eyes.

YuWon couldn't believe she was making such an offer when just a moment ago they were fighting over the flags.

'So she's sponsored by Zion,' YuWon thought to himself. He was amazed that a player on the lower floors was already sponsored by such a major faction, but it made sense as Ro'el's ability fit them.

"No thanks," YuWon rejected her offer.

"Why?"

"It's annoying, having to repeat myself. Just leave."

"Then at least give me your kit number..."

"I'm always happy to get a number from a beauty. That is, unless they have an ulterior motive," YuWon said while shooing her away, "So just go. Whether it's Zion or Asgard, I have no intention of joining anywhere."

"Why?"

Ro'el refused to give up.

Without her persistent personality, she probably wouldn't have managed to make it this far so quickly.

She continued, "Why are you rejecting all the offers from these major guilds? I'm sure you're aware, but the Tower isn't a place you can conquer by yourself. If you have something you desire..."

"It is possible," YuWon cut Ro'el off with an annoyed tone, "even without a major guild. No, I have to solo it."

That was the biggest thing the returner of the 「Clock Movement」 had to keep in mind.

"You can't join or get sponsored by some guild for just a little convenience."

"You're right, or they might find you suspicious."

"And to be the center that brings the Tower together, there can't be a guild backing them."

"The center..."

"That won't be easy."

"But that's what needs to happen, especially when the major guilds are out to get each other."

"Damn bastards."

“We are those bastards.”

The guilds were naturally against one another, but it was the worst among the major guilds that were trying to gain the rights to the Tower.

And the major guilds had been at this for too long. For far too long there had been rivalries, suspicion, and pride.

So in order to bring them together as one, there needed to be a new ‘center.’

“Now stop being so noisy and go away. If you stay any longer, you might actually die.”

“What?” Ro’el asked in shock, staring at YuWon.

The other players had already dispersed, and Ro’el realized she was the last one there.

She nodded her head and answered, “... I understand. Well, I hope I’ll get to see you again. And hopefully we’ll be on the same team next time.”

“Whatever suits you.”

Ro’el turned around.

YuWon watched her back for a second before adding, “Sorry, but the ‘king’ won’t die.”

Ro’el turned her head back towards him.

YuWon continued while playfully waving his hand, “So you should just root for me losing.”

“What do you mean...?” Ro’el asked in confusion.

“Now carry on,” YuWon told her to go.

Despite her confusion, she decided to keep moving.

YuWon stood in place and waited for everyone to disappear.

After a few minutes had passed...

“Everyone’s gone,” YuWon stated.

Rustle—

A sound came from behind YuWon in a direction where no one was visible.

Then out of nowhere, a gold light appeared.

“How long were you aware?”

“For a while now,” YuWon said while turning around, meeting face-to-face with Team B’s ‘king.’

A man without a face, glowing gold, the light that symbolized the ‘king.’

* * *

Reaper Scans

Translator – NumbaWon

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* * *

This man had moved alone to get YuWon.

“You’re as smart as the rumors say you are, not to mention you’re also skilled,” the ‘king’ said.

He looked around the surrounding area and was pretty impressed. After such a fight, it wouldn’t have been strange if a big fire had engulfed the forest. But instead of a fire, there weren’t even any traces of scorch marks.

There were plenty of skills with great firepower, but the ‘king’ had never heard of a skill that could burn selective targets like this.

“A fire with a will... If he saw it, he’d want it,” the ‘king’ mumbled while nodding his head.

The ‘king’ was acting quite laid back, even though he spoke like he knew what had happened between YuWon and the others from Team B.

“What’s the test examiner doing here, wearing that weird mask?”

YuWon’s question shocked the ‘king.’ Even though his eyes, nose, and mouth were obscured to the point that no one could recall them, YuWon could see him as clear as day.

The ‘king’ was no ordinary player. It was the test examiner Hypnos, a Ranker.

“You can see me?” Hypnos asked.

“Crystal clear.”

Earlier, YuWon’s eyes had changed into [Cinder Eyes.] They were eyes that could see through everything as well as discern lies and truth.

Even if the player in front of him was a Ranker, with just a simple illusion disguise, he couldn’t beat the discernment of [Cinder Eyes.]

“... That’s not possible,” Hypnos said.

“Sometimes the impossible happens.”

“Ha. You really are something.”

It was a short conversation, but Hypnos was truly amazed.

Even though he was found out, he didn’t take off his disguise. It would be terrible if people found out that Olympus’s test examiner had intervened in a test.

“I was honestly surprised. I didn’t think that you’d choose going after all the players rather than aim for the ‘king.’”

Hypnos took on the role of the 'king' for one reason. He had assumed YuWon would immediately go after the 'king' as soon as the test started because he wanted a situation like this. The opportunity to face him one-on-one.

But rather than searching for the enemy 'king,' YuWon moved at a leisurely pace and then picked a fight with the elites of Team B.

"I finally understand why the higher ups are so up in arms about you."

A faint shimmer spread out from Hypnos.

The faint flow of mana slowly diffused.

As his vision and mind became hazy, YuWon tried his best to keep it together.

Hypnos was a Ranker famous for his illusion skills.

'So, they even mobilized a test examiner,' YuWon thought.

Fwoosh—!

Yuwon drew out his mana and lit the 「Holy Fire」 ablaze.

In contrast to the fight against the players, the [Holy Fire] burned big and loud.

This was a fight he couldn't win just by taking it easy like earlier.

'What a mess,' YuWon thought.

An officially registered Ranker had intervened in a test.

Olympus had taken a huge risk considering the trouble they would be in if the Administrator found out.

Yuwon couldn't help but smirk.

An Olympian Ranker had intervened despite being the test examiner. YuWon knew that they had laid out a trap for him...

'How nice,' he thought.

... But he was getting a much bigger catch than he had originally anticipated.

Chapter 74

Halimun felt like he was going through a horror experience. He was in a situation where he didn't know when or where players from Team B would come after him.

At least currently things were quiet thanks to YuWon drawing their focus.

'It's okay. It's okay. It's okay...' he repeated to himself.

Halimun forgot to even blink.

A spear or an arrow might come flying at him at any moment, like earlier, so in order to dodge, he couldn't afford to even blink for a second.

Gulp—

His leg slid a little.

Halimun desperately wanted to run away that very moment, but...

“Circle.”

Every time he even thought about it, YuWon’s voice echoed in his head.

“Don’t leave the circle.”

He looked down, seeing the line of the circle drawn around him. His foot was right on the line.

Halimun wondered if he should run away or if he should stay there and wait like YuWon ordered him to.

“Please come back sooner...”

Halimun decided that he had no choice but to accept his fate and wait for YuWon.

After some time passed...

Whoosh—!

Finally a skill came flying towards Halimun.

Boom—!

“Ack!”

Fire exploded above his head.

He managed to dodge it by ducking quickly, but the embers from the explosion still scattered on top of him.

Tss, tsss—

Embers fell on Halimun’s back. He wanted to let out a scream, but he didn’t have a chance to do that.

“He dodged it?”

“So he at least has some reflexes.”

“But why is this guy just standing here?”

“I don’t know. Maybe he’s asking to be killed.”

Rustle—

Five players revealed themselves from the shrubbery.

They were players of Team B.

In an instant, they surrounded Halimun so he couldn’t get away.

“Let’s finish this quickly. Things seemed to be going pretty rough over there.”

“Are they really struggling to get one guy?”

“Kim YuWon really must be as amazing as they say.”

Halimun managed to get a grasp of how things were going from the five players’ conversation.

‘Really? By himself?’ Halimun thought in amazement.

He wasn’t sure when he saw YuWon leave confidently by himself, but it seemed that YuWon was really fighting against them on his own. And somehow YuWon was the one who was winning.

‘That is amazing...’ Halimun thought, ready to burst into tears, ‘but what about me?!’

It didn’t matter how much he cried internally. He didn’t have time to contact YuWon with the player kit, and even if he could, YuWon wouldn’t be able to pick up in the middle of fighting.

Besides, it was impossible for YuWon to get here in time from so far away.

‘I need to run away...’

Tmp—

Halimun took a few steps back, his foot landing on the line.

It was the line that YuWon had drawn, and unfortunately what YuWon said rang in his head.

“Damn it...” Halimun muttered, remembering YuWon’s order to stay within the line at all cost.

He brooded over YuWon’s warning.

It wasn’t like he had a chance of running away from the five players in front of him anyway.

“Okay. Fine. Let’s go, you motherfuckers!” Halimun shouted, drawing his sword.

Shing—!

It was a rash decision.

The players in front of him might not have been on the level of Hoon or Ro’el, but they were still among the top players on the 11th Floor.

In contrast, Halimun had failed to pass the 11th Floor test multiple times now.

Even if this was a 1V1 rather than a 5V1, it was unlikely that he’d win.

‘I can do it,’ Halimun thought to himself while gritting his teeth. ‘I can do it!’

He believed that he just had to buy time and that if he stalled enough, YuWon would come to save him.

“You’re so pathetic.”

“Hey, let’s finish this already.”

“Let’s divvy up the CP equally. Okay?”

“Got it. Just divide up the flags properly later.”

The players blinded by CP approached Halimun, now within a few steps of him.

Without leaving the circle, Halimun swung his sword with everything he had.

Whoosh—

The sword hit nothing but dead air.

The closest player started mocking him, “You’re flailing too much.”

The other players didn’t hold back just because there was a difference in strength. From the get-go, they hadn’t viewed this as a fair fight.

“So long. Just consider yourself unlucky.”

Vwoom—

The same fire orb from earlier flew towards him again, but this time, it launched so close that it was unavoidable, heading right for his face.

‘I-I’m dead...!’

As Halimun braced himself...

Boom—!

... Embers scattered right in front of his eyes.

Fsss—

A big hand blocked the path between him and the players from Team B.

Halimun turned his head, looking behind him.

It was shrouded by the smoke, but there was something there that resembled a person. And that something had protected Halimun.

“W-What is that?”

“A ghost?”

“Is this his skill?”

The players were taken aback by the domineering mana.

They had expected this to be an easy hunt, but here an unexpected obstacle had popped up.

Fsss—

Halimun looked at the circle that YuWon had drawn on the ground. Then his gaze moved to the thing standing at his back, as if protecting him.

“Ha... Haha...” Halimun laughed nervously.

His legs shook, feeling weak.

[Heavenly Demon’s Spirit]

There was only a single thought that filled his mind: he was going to live.

* * *

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* * *

About ten days before the test, Hypnos received a message from Olympus.

[Fail Kim YuWon.]

The message was short but shocking.

Knowing the possible major ramifications, Hypnos was deeply worried.

A test examiner's role was to oversee possible accidents during a test or remove unfair elements in addition to managing and setting up the tests.

Olympus's order was essentially asking him to rig the test.

'I did think it was a crazy order,' Hypnos thought.

Fortunately for Hypnos, it wasn't that difficult of an order.

Due to the nature of the 11th Floor's test, all he had to do was manipulate the teams' seeding a bit. It might earn him a bit of suspicion, but that in itself wouldn't cause that much of a problem. Especially since Hypnos had Olympus backing him.

However...

'To think that Lady Hera would show interest as well.'

Right before the test began, Hypnos got a message from Hera, a High Ranker of Olympus.

[Kill Kim YuWon at any cost. The method doesn't matter.]

The content of the message wasn't all that different from the original request, but the weight of it was dramatically different.

There was a difference between a message from just the higher ups and a personal message from Hera.

Hypnos had to execute this order, and he could not afford to fail. So he decided that he'd personally make a move.

At first Hypnos thought that maybe he was going a bit overboard, but...

'It wasn't unwarranted,' he thought to himself.

Within the dark, changed landscape, Hypnos watched YuWon endure his mana.

Most players would have long fallen asleep already. Even fairly skilled players should have been affected by the mana and felt drowsy.

But YuWon was perfectly fine, which meant it was one of two scenarios. Either YuWon's Arcane Power stat was high enough to resist his mana, or his willpower was just that amazing.

Hypnos thought that the former was unlikely.

‘His willpower is probably great,’ Hypnos concluded.

It was fine though. YuWon was still just a player of the lower floors. Hypnos thought that even with the penalty, there was no way YuWon would be a match for him.

Fsss—

The mana that was dispersed into the air started to become darker in color.

And finally, Hypnos’s skill activated.

[Dark Night]

Instantly, YuWon started wobbling.

Hypnos smiled. ‘I got him,’ he thought.

[Dark Night] was the skill he had used the longest and the skill that got him to where he was. As a hallucination-type skill, it forced any living beings inside its reach to fall into sleep.

Hypnos thought that YuWon was probably using everything he had to not fall asleep right now.

“It’s hard, isn’t it?” Hypnos said, walking towards YuWon. “Just give in. You can have a sweet dream if you just close your eyes.”

His words were sweet. Most people gave into these words, and YuWon was no different.

Ssshk—

YuWon’s eyes slowly started to close, and he stopped wobbling.

Hypnos let out a smile.

YuWon fell asleep while standing.

‘It’s over,’ Hypnos presumed.

Everyone had a desire to sleep, and Hypnos possessed the ability to draw out that desire and force people into sleep.

‘The timing was good. Right now was the time of day when [Dark Night] exhibited the greatest power..’

Hypnos started walking closer to YuWon.

Due to releasing his mana in quite a large radius, the penalty started affecting him a little bit.

It wasn’t good for him to drag this out.

Hypnos pulled out the dagger that he had hidden within his clothes.

“No matter how good he is with the sword, he’s still just a player on the lower floors,” Hypnos spoke while pointing the dagger at YuWon’s neck. “I don’t know what’s going on, but don’t resent me too much. It’s your fault for getting on the bad side of Olympus.”

Hypnos's knife started shining.

"Now then, it's time to finish this..."

Slash—

"...!"

Hypnos took a step back, but he was a moment too late.

Splurt—!

A deep cut ran through his chest.

"Kgh—"

Tss, tsss—

The dispersed mana returned to Hypnos's body.

He tried to treat his wound quickly through mana control, but the wound was too deep to treat that way.

Vwoom, vwooom—

A dense mana was enveloping YuWon's sword.

It appeared to be a pretty advanced [Arcane Sword.]

Hypnos knew that it couldn't be some ordinary skill, considering it damaged the body of a Ranker like him.

"It was shallow," YuWon muttered in disappointment.

Lightly swinging his sword to shake the blood off the blade, he looked completely fine and awake, even just that moment ago.

"You bastard..." Hypnos grit his teeth. "Was that all an act?"

YuWon didn't answer his question, which Hypnos took as a silent admission.

It was obvious that it was an act. If YuWon had fallen to Hypnos's skill, he wouldn't have even been able to swing his sword.

From the beginning, YuWon was aiming to close the distance between them to get a one-shot.

"Such a cowardly act..." Hypnos accused him.

YuWon retorted, "I don't think you're in any position to speak."

That shut Hypnos up because he was right. No matter how talented YuWon was, he was still a player that had just arrived on the 11th Floor. On the other hand, Hypnos was a Ranker with the giant Olympus Guild backing him. On top of that, he was the test examiner that was in charge of making sure this test was operating fairly.

There was no need to measure who was more underhanded.

“Well, that doesn’t matter,” Hypnos grunted, his hand pressed tight to his wound.
“You’re still just a player. The results aren’t going to change.”

“No,” YuWon said while looking around.

His surroundings were still dark thanks to the effect of [Dark Night.]

YUWon continued, “This does change things.”

Fss, fsss—

Black mana started flowing out of the sword in YuWon’s hand. The flow of mana was ominous. It was the dark-attribute mana from the 「Edge of Nightfall.」

[Affected by the Skill – Dark Night, your stamina recovery improves.]

[Stamina recovery speed: +200%.]

[Affected by the Skill – Dark Night, your mana recovery improves.]

[Mana recovery speed: +100%.]

[Affected by the Skill – Dark Night, your mana amplification improves.]

[Mana amplification: +100%.]

The night didn’t just belong to Hypnos.

—

Chapter 75

YuWon loved the sensation of mana overflowing in his body.

‘That’s the shit,’ he thought to himself.

His grip on his sword strengthened.

「Edge of Nightfall」 was no perfect sword. It had the restriction that it could only exhibit its full power in ‘night’ or ‘darkness.’ That was a huge negative.

But right now, not only was it night, but Hypnos’s skill was creating a near-perfect darkness. And in a situation like this...

‘It’s the perfect item.’

Hephaestus’s ability felt truly great in this moment for YuWon.

“Fuuu—”

YuWon controlled his breathing while sharpening his senses. He might have been able to injure him, but his opponent was still a Ranker. He couldn’t afford to be relaxed.

‘Hypnos is a Ranker that specializes in illusions.’

Fortunately, YuWon already knew a bit about Hypnos.

‘His battle position is a close-range mage, and he utilizes dark attribute mana, ideal for illusion-type skills.’

Fzzzt—!

YuWon’s eyes had a glow in them. He could feel the overflowing power of the [Holy Fire] and the 「Dark Divine Crystal.」

‘I’m confident against guys like him.’

Crack, crack—

Both of YuWon’s arms started to inflate from activating [Gigantification,] and the [Holy Fire] wrapped around his sword.

Fsss, fss—

Hypnos’s mana that was spread out around the area started to move.

Tmp—

The distance between the two people shortened.

YuWon and Hypnos. Their fighting styles differed, but they both liked to have a similar distance between themselves and their opponent.

Whoosh—!

Hypnos’s sharp blade flew towards him. It moved fast and sharp, but YuWon didn’t let the image fool him.

Shatter—!

Hypnos’s mirage disappeared, and another Hypnos popped up right beside him. It was just another illusion. YuWon was able to see through all of Hypnos’s illusions with [Cinder Eyes.]

Whoosh—

Clang—!

Vwoom, vwooooooooom—

The two blades clashed, and two different black-colored manas rippled throughout the area.

YuWon’s sword was not pushed back by Hypnos. There was a difference in the sizes of their swords, but Hypnos still couldn’t believe what was happening.

Whoosh, whoosh—!

The purple [Holy Fire] raged on, threatening Hypnos.

Hypnos sliced the fire, and it was swallowed by his darkness.

Every time the fire got close to him, a mysterious fear crept up on him.

‘What is this skill?’ Hypnos wondered.

This eerie feeling was there the first time he saw YuWon's fire. He had never seen a fire that was purple before, and for some reason, when he looked at it, it felt instinctively repulsive to him.

But as his repulsion and fear increased, the fire burned hotter.

‘No.’ Hypnos soon realized the true nature of YuWon's fire. ‘It's not actually growing hotter.’

Hypnos stretched out his hand and snatched up the fire that was flying in midair.

With the ability to turn dreams into reality, Hypnos was able to grab things that didn't have a physical form.

Fwoosh, woosh—

The hand that he had grabbed the fire with felt hot, but it wasn't as hot as before.

‘It just feels hot.’

It was a bizarre skill.

Hypnos was shocked that it was able to provoke an opponent's fear and change in power proportionally to their emotions.

“How troublesome,” Hypnos said, shaking his hand.

Vzzt, vzzzt—

Sparks flew around him. It was a sign that the penalty was starting and a testament to how much power he had used.

Fwoosh—!

The [Holy Fire] was pushed aside in multiple directions. It was as if a huge hole was being opened up.

YuWon hesitated for a second before swinging his sword.

Vzzzt—!

Mana exploded out of the 「Dark Divine Crystal,」 adding power to the sword.

With no more reason to pay attention to the [Holy Fire,] Hypnos focused his attention on YuWon.

Cling, clang, clang—!

As the swords struck each other and slashed through the air, countless sword marks made imprints on the ground.

The two had now traded dozens of blows, and as more time passed, Hypnos became more and more impressed. ‘This is unprecedented talent,’ he thought.

At first Hypnos had brushed him off, thinking, ‘How great can a player on the 11th Floor be?’ But that preconceived notion had now been smashed.

A player on the lower floors could never beat a Ranker. That was a long-standing, unchangeable law.

Every once in a while, among the elite Pure-Bloods were ones with great talent who managed to surpass Rankers before they became a Ranker themselves. However, that always happened after they had climbed pretty far up the Tower.

‘If he were to become a Ranker in the future...’

Hypnos couldn’t begin to imagine what kind of a monster YuWon would be.

‘I can’t let that happen.’

Hypnos finally understood why Hera cared about a lowly player.

‘I have to kill him here,’ Hypnos resolved himself.

[Moon Dream]

Vzzzzt—

The penalty on Hypnos’s body grew stronger.

At the same time, a huge circle floated above their dark arena. It was as if a full moon was up alone in the night sky.

Crack, crack—

The moon started to rupture...

Kaboom—!

... And it exploded.

Shattered fragments of the moon started raining down with nowhere to escape.

“I guess you’re not afraid of the Administrator,” YuWon stated.

His words made Hypnos pause for a second. Even Hypnos’s turbulent mana froze momentarily.

But soon after, Hypnos bit his lip and responded, “My only allegiance is to Olympus.”

“What a joke.”

“Say whatever you want.”

Rumble, rumble—

The sky and the ground shook.

“There’s no way a brat that knows nothing like you would understand the greater cause.”

“‘Greater cause,’ you say...” YuWon muttered while watching the fragments of the moon coming at him.

“Keep this in mind.”

Yuwon remembered what Chronos said when he first revealed the 「Clock Movement.」

“Whoever is the one that uses this to go back in time...” Chronos said while everyone was gathered around. “They will have to carry the entire Tower on their back.”

The Tower was a collection of hundreds of different worlds. It was a world with trillions of living beings, and that world was on a trajectory heading towards doom.

YuWon knew the end of the world.

“So the one who goes back needs to be capable of holding up that weight.”

YuWon only understood after coming back how truly heavy it was.

There was no way for Hypnos to know the magnitude of the weight on YuWon’s back.

“I may not, but I at least know one thing,” YuWon said to Hypnos.

The greater cause. That wasn’t something one should easily say. Not only was it embarrassing to say, but one needed the responsibility and right to be able to say it unabashedly.

YuWon didn’t truly know what it meant either, but he was sure of one thing.

“The thing about the greater cause,” YuWon snickered at Hypnos, “is that it’s meant to be said when you’re sacrificing yourself, not someone else.”

Like Yuwon, who had gone back in time just to repeat that hellish fight once again.

“That’s cooler, isn’t it?” YuWon asked.

Between the two of them, YuWon had the greater right to talk about it.

Rumble—

Boom, crash—!

Crush—!

The fragments of the broken moon covered the ground.

As YuWon was squashed under the pile of rocks, the ground underneath buckled, unable to handle the weight.

* * *

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* * *

The user of the skill, Hypnos, was fine because none of the moon fragments fell around him.

YuWon was now buried somewhere underneath the mountain of rocks.

“‘Cooler’?” Hypnos said bitterly. “How dare you say that when you don’t even understand Olympus’s will...”

Hypnos clenched his fist tight.

He was well aware that what he was doing right now was one of the unforgivable crimes in the Tower, but he had no choice.

‘Everything is for Olympus,’ Hypnos closed his eyes and repeated the same thing over and over in his head. ‘For Olympus...’

Pshk—

A hot sensation pierced through his back and chest.

Hypnos looked down and saw a black sword drenched in blood.

“Kgh...”

“You should never let your guard down in a fight,” YuWon said while pushing up on his sword.

Hypnos grabbed the blade with his hand, using sheer force to barely stop his body from getting cut in half.

However, he was unable to do anything about his hand getting torn apart by the blade.

“Ahhhhh!”

Fwoosh—!

Along with incurring a powerful penalty, mana flowed out of Hypnos’s body.

This mana was threatening enough for YuWon to pull the sword out of Hypnos’s back and jump back a distance.

Fsss, fss—

The fragments of the moon around the place slowly started disappearing.

As the scenery returned to normal, Hypnos had a shocked look on his face.

‘H-How...?!’ he thought.

[Moon Dream] was the strongest skill he had that he used in combination with [Dark Night.] It was a cheat-like skill capable of turning illusions into reality within the area of his mana.

Moon Dream showed illusions of Hypnos’s choice to his opponent. Even if his opponents suspected it of being an illusion, it was hard for them to be certain that the rocks falling right in front of them weren’t real. That was the power of visions. The ability to inspire fear in someone, even if they knew that it was fake.

And [Moon Dream] had the power to change that fear into reality.

Two conditions were needed to nullify the skill. The first was to realize that the sight in front of them was an illusion. The second was to not feel even an inkling of fear after seeing the fragments of moon fall on them.

If one doubted whether it was real or not for even a second, the illusion became reality.

“Is it because of those eyes?” Hypnos asked, staring at YuWon.

YuWon’s eyes were red. Hypnos sensed a peculiar flow of mana around them.

At first he didn’t care since there were many eye-related skills, but it seemed that this was no ordinary skill.

“They are pretty good eyes,” YuWon didn’t deny it.

In this fight, YuWon had focused his energy into [Cinder Eyes] more than anything. He already knew how Hypnos fought, so it was a matter of seeing through his illusions. Hypnos’s skill mixed reality and illusions, so it was critical to discern what was real or not.

‘There’s nothing better than the Golden Cinder Eyes for that,’ YuWon thought to himself.

[Cinder Eyes] was not a perfect skill. As it wasn’t completed into the [Golden Cinder Eyes] yet, its effects were still half-baked.

Despite that, [Cinder Eyes] was the best counter-skill to illusion-type skills. The reason why YuWon was confident in this fight was all thanks to [Cinder Eyes.]

“It’s not over yet,” Hypnos said, clasp his wound and walking towards YuWon. “If illusion-type skills don’t work, I’ll use another method—!”

“No,” YuWon cut him off, putting down his bloody sword. “It’s over.”

“What?” Hypnos said in confusion.

He knew that he wasn’t in a great state, but for YuWon to lower his guard so much...

On top of that, YuWon started to calm his fighting spirit.

‘Is he trying to catch me off guard again?’ Hypnos wondered.

However, Hypnos was no longer going to underestimate YuWon. YuWon had exhibited far too great a strength for him to do that anymore.

Clench—

Hypnos’s eyes glared while he gripped his dagger tight.

‘I will slit his throat this time,’ Hypnos thought to himself.

Vzzzzt—

Penalty overflowed from Hypnos’s body.

Hypnos had no intention of going easy anymore since he now knew YuWon could see through his illusions.

However... he could not move his dagger, as if a powerful force had taken hold of his weapon.

"Behind you," YuWon said while smiling. "Look who's here."

Cold sweat started gathering on Hypnos's forehead.

He didn't have to be told to know who would have arrived at a moment like now.

Hypnos carefully turned his head around to see a mean-faced, red-skinned, giant man.

"Sir..." Hypnos trailed off.

It was the 11th Floor's Administrator who had given Hypnos his position as the test examiner.

Chapter 76

Shatter—!

Fragments flew into Hypnos's face as the dagger broke.

Hypnos blinked, and the Administrator was a step closer to him.

"▷ Explain this," the Administrator demanded.

Hypnos felt like his entire body was being squashed. The inside of his mouth felt dry, and a cold sweat ran down his forehead.

He turned his gaze to YuWon and saw that YuWon was watching him with his arms crossed.

YuWon was a participant in this test. It was obvious who the Administrator would side with in this situation.

"Sir, the thing is..." Hypnos tried to make an excuse but couldn't come up with anything.

As he trailed off, Hypnos turned his entire body towards the Administrator and got on his knees.

"I'm sorry, Sir!" Hypnos bowed down his head.

It was likely that the Administrator already knew the full situation, seeing how he bothered to show up in person.

Hypnos had used his powers to the limit that the penalty allowed, so it would have been strange if the Administrator was unaware of the situation.

This all happened because the fight dragged on longer than he had expected.

"▷ So at least you're sorry," The Administrator said.

"I committed a grave sin, sir."

"▷ Was this an order from Olympus?"

Hypnos was startled by what the Administrator asked.

The Administrator nodded his head after seeing his reaction.

“▷ So I’m right. Under whose order was it? Ares? Hera? Or Zeus?”

Hypnos shouted, “It was my own—!” But he then quickly lowered his voice after realizing he shouted unconsciously, “—decision.”

“▷ This was your own decision?” the Administrator scoffed. It was a lie that even an idiot wouldn’t believe. “So you want to take the blame?”

“That’s not it, sir...”

“▷ But even if that really were the case, Olympus can’t escape all of the blame.”

The Administrator’s words shocked Hypnos.

His loyalty to Olympus was great, to a point that he had already put his life on the line by personally going after a test participant. But by no means did he ever intend to bring harm to Olympus.

“▷ Effective immediately, your position as the test examiner will be revoked. And I shall also be taking away all authority given to Olympus on the 11th Floor,” the Administrator said in a firm voice.

“S-Sir!” Hypnos tried to make a rebuttal.

“▷ How dare you raise your voice?!” the Administrator shouted at him.

Thud—!

Hypnos, who was trying to stand up, had his body crushed back down, his face getting firmly pressed into the ground.

“Kugh—” Hypnos grunted in pain.

“▷ Of course, it won’t end with just taking your position as a test examiner. Messing with a test participant as an examiner is an unforgivable crime. You will be punished for thousands of years, in a state between life and death.”

The test examiner was an important job. They managed floors’ tests and weeded out any cheating. Because of the importance of the job, test examiners were given huge influence and authority inside the Tower.

“▷ We’ll talk more later, Hypnos,” said the Administrator.

Fwoosh—

Hypnos’s body began to get sucked into the ground. He glared at YuWon while he disappeared.

Once that was over, the Administrator turned his gaze to YuWon.

“▷ So it’s you again.”

This Administrator already knew YuWon. That wasn’t that big of a surprise.

Administrators were beings that were hard to meet, yet YuWon was meeting his third Administrator, and each time had involved a situation that was out of the ordinary.

“▷ Your name’s Kim YuWon, isn’t it? You really aren’t an ordinary kid.”

“Thanks to you, I had quite a few troubles,” YuWon responded while looking over at the spot where Hypnos disappeared.

The Administrator instantly understood what YuWon meant.

“▷ Definitely not ordinary,” he smirked.

Yuwon nodded his head.

Administrators were terrifying beings. With power that matched the top High Rankers, they had the ability to use the Administrator’s Authority, which let them control a floor of the Tower. And in contrast to how the Rankers were spread out throughout various guilds, Administrators were consolidated.

In other words, they were the rulers of this Tower. However...

‘That doesn’t mean I have to be afraid right now,’ YuWon thought.

Administrator’s were different from Olympus. They didn’t have personal feelings or goals that defied the will of the world.

As long as you didn’t go against the law of the world, there was no reason to fear Administrators.

“There have been quite a few oddities in this test, and if I’m not mistaken, a test examiner is the proxy of the Administrator,” YuWon made his case.

“▷ So you want me to take responsibility?”

“Someone has to.”

The Administrator stared silently at YuWon.

Yuwon didn’t avoid the Administrator’s gaze because he knew that the Administrator wouldn’t do anything to him in this situation since he was the victim here.

“▷ You’re not wrong,” the Administrator said with a look of amusement on his face.

The events that had happened today were certainly something a test participant should never have had to go through. And with the intervention of a test examiner, the test difficulty had increased immensely.

“▷ Okay. I promise to give you a reward when the test is over.”

“And you won’t go back on your words?”

“▷ I’m an Administrator. You shouldn’t compare me with a bastard like Hypnos.”

An Administrator’s words were trustworthy as they were essentially the living, breathing system. Because of that, they would never do something like lying.

“I understand,” YuWon said. Having received the answer he wanted from the Administrator, he turned his attention. “Now then...”

There were a few players watching what was going on.

‘NamGung Hoon,’ YuWon noticed in particular.

Hoon was the successor of the NamGung Clan and a player that was expected to become a future High Ranker. And with the NamGung Clan backing him, his influence was greater than the average Ranker.

“▷ So we had quite the audience,” the Administrator said, shrugging it off and pretending that he wasn’t aware. “A big wave is coming. A big wave. Hahahah!”

The Administrator put his hands behind his back and started walking away. The space in front of him tore apart, and he disappeared in an instant.

Having been spectating for a while, Hoon and his companions were startled by the sudden disappearance of the Administrator,

“A wave,’ he says...’ YuWon thought as he locked eyes with Hoon. ‘I wonder..’

* * *

Reaper Scans

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* * *

Hoon had had his suspicions while following the ‘king,’ whose identity was unknown.

A test examiner Ranker going after a test participant player was the worst possible crime one could commit because it broke the laws of the Tower.

“So it was true,” Hoon said with a serious look on his face after he got the explanation of the situation from YuWon. “Olympus...”

“This is a massive incident.”

“Are we sure it wasn’t the independent actions of the examiner?”

“Why would a test examiner do this on their own? It’s definitely connected to the higher-ups.”

“Fucking hell...”

“Should we remain silent about this?”

“You think Hoon’s personality would allow that?” Hoon’s teammate said while being conscious of him, but it was also something they all agreed on.

Having witnessed this incident, their hands were tied.

Olympus had committed a grave, forbidden crime. And if this incident became public, Olympus would take a massive hit.

“But...”

“Did it really happen?”

“His opponent was a Ranker!”

“And one who’s powerful enough to be a test examiner...”

Hoon’s teammates glanced over at YuWon.

Fighting a Ranker. That was a pipe dream for players on the lower floors because their ultimate goal for climbing the Tower was to become a Ranker. This was especially true for Pure-Blooded players, so to players like Hoon, this incident hit especially big.

‘It’s the first time since ‘The Great Sage,’ Hoon thought to himself.

This wasn’t the first time a Ranker had lost to a player. Son OhGong, a current top High Ranker who was also known as “The Great Sage, Heaven’s Equal” had a record of crushing a Ranker as a player. OhGong’s value as a player peaked when that incident became publicly known.

‘The test examiner of this floor is an Olympian Ranker,’ Hoon continued to assess the situation.

When this event became known, it would have an even bigger ripple than OhGong’s incident.

‘What to do...’ he wondered.

At the end of the day, they were witnesses of this incident. As such, they had two options—they could either stay silent or reveal what happened.

There was no particular reason to pick the latter. Even with his clan backing him, Olympus was a mighty force against Hoon. And in the worst case scenario, if the relationship between Olympus and the NamGung clan were to go south, the world of the 10th Floor, the Martial Realm, would fall into chaos.

‘Even without us doing anything, Olympus will face repercussions.’

The actions of an Olympian test examiner were going to affect all of Olympus. They would lose all their influence on the 11th Floor, and Administrators of other floors would start being wary of Olympus as well.

It was clear that, starting immediately, Olympus would go on red alert.

“You...” Hoon finally decided to ask Yuwon after thinking for a long time, “What will you do?”

YuWon had already crossed a line he couldn’t come back from with Olympus.

Hoon didn’t know why Olympus was aiming for YuWon, but it was obvious that YuWon would be marked as their enemy due to this incident.

It was an impossible task for a single person to go against Olympus. Despite that...

"I will fight," YuWon responded.

His answer was beyond what Hoon considered logical.

YuWon continued, "Until I drag Zeus down to the bottom."

Zeus. One of the rulers of the Tower and the great King of Olympus.

As soon as Zeus's name was mentioned, Hoon felt his chest tighten. YuWon said the name of that giant way too easily.

Hoon had to ask, "How did you become enemies with Olympus? What in the world happened?"

"I helped a blacksmith who was being forced to make weapons he didn't want to."

YuWon was speaking about Hephaestus. "Ever since then, they decided they wanted to kill me."

"A blacksmith, you say..." Hoon muttered.

Hoon was a direct descendent of the NamGung Clan. Because of that, he endlessly heard news around the Tower.

Even though YuWon wasn't clear, Hoon was somewhat able to put together what was going on.

"I see," Hoon said while nodding.

He then turned around and started walking away.

"Huh?"

"Hey, Hoon! Where are you going?"

His teammates started chasing after him.

"It's almost time for the Grand Martial Arts Tournament," Hoon responded to them while taking out his player kit. "We're returning to the NamGung Clan."

He messaged his father, the head of the NamGung Clan and the guildmaster of the Martial Guild, NamGung JinWoon.

* * *

Afterwards, the 11th Floor's test continued under the supervision of the Administrator.

There was nothing to stop YuWon now.

The majority of the players on Team B had forfeited from the test. So YuWon went around taking flags from the remaining Team B players and finding flags around the forest.

Time passed, and the 24 hours were close to coming to an end.

"I really thought I was going to die," Halimun said to YuWon.

After seeing YuWon, his legs gave out, and he fell to the ground.

He was surrounded by blood, but none of it belonged to Halimun. Rather, it was the blood of players from Team B who had wanted to kill Halimun to win the test. All those players had been forced to run away while spilling their blood, unable to achieve their goal.

“But you didn’t,” YuWon answered nonchalantly.

Halimun shook his head, having experienced what felt like an eternal hell. Multiple times, he had thought about giving up on the test.

“You did good holding out and not giving up,” YuWon complimented him.

Halimun lifted his head upon hearing that, noticing a red flag.

It was all the flags YuWon had gathered so far.

[618]

That was the number on the flag.

Five or ten flags would already have been a lot, but here was someone who had managed to gather over 600 flags by himself.

“Ha... Haha...” Halimun laughed in disbelief. Many thoughts were running through his head.

The test was almost over, and with so many flags, he would be able to receive a tremendous amount of CP, which meant a big reward.

But right now, Halimun wasn’t laughing because of that.

‘I did it,’ Halimun thought. He was happy and proud from receiving a compliment from YuWon and that he’d managed to endure it without giving up. ‘I did it...’

Halimun’s hand shook while reaching for the flag.

That was right. He did it. He completed the role of ‘king’ by not giving up and surviving. Even if it was 90% thanks to YuWon... he had done it.

Halimun was Team A’s ‘king’ who had managed to win the 11th Floor’s test with YuWon.

[You obtained 618 flags.]

[You obtained 6180cp.]

As soon as YuWon handed over the flag to Halimun, both of them got the same message.

And a moment later...

[The test has ended.]

[Team A: 623 flags]

[Team B: 2 flags]

[The winner is Team A.]

[You may now use the CP shop.]

[You have obtained the right to move on to the 12th Floor.]

[You are now able to teleport to the next floor.]

[The 11th Floor's ranking has been updated.]

[1st: 22,360cp]

Messages were popping up for players that had participated in the 11th Floor's test.

The test was now over.

Chapter 77

[1st – Kim YuWon : 22,360cp]

[2nd – Zeus : 8,860cp]

[3rd – Hercules : 8,540cp]

[4th – Odin : 8,020cp]

[.....]

[36th – Halimun : 6,230cp]

A new record was set once again on the 11th Floor.

A player who managed to break the record of Zeus, a High Ranker and King of Olympus, had appeared .

‘So he got 36th place.’

Halimun, who passed the test with YuWon, ended up with a pretty high ranking. It was thanks to the five flags he had on-hand and the 600 flags he got from YuWon, netting him over 6,000cp.

It was a pretty incredible record since 36th put him above most High Rankers.

‘As for Hargaan...’

YuWon skimmed over the new 11th Floor rankings. There were quite a few familiar names.

OhGong was ranked 11th, which was pretty low considering his skills. But that was because he wasn't suited for team-based tests like this. Odin was 4th, and Hercules was 3rd.

Then he spotted another familiar name that popped out to him.

[6th – Hargaan : 7,860cp]

There wasn't a big gap between 4th and 6th place. It was close enough where Hargaan could have gotten 4th if he had obtained just a few more flags.

‘That's impressive.’

YuWon saw Hargaan's records here and there. Hargaan was steadily raising his rankings while climbing the Tower, and now finally on the 11th Floor, he got a result that matched the great beings of the Tower.

‘He's certainly changed.’

Hargaan was originally brimming with talent. What changed was the Tutorial and his meeting with YuWon.

Yuwon had no way to know what kind of a stimulus he provided to Hargaan, but it was a fact that he had essentially given a tiger wings with the Tutorial's reward. And right now, Hargaan was using those wings to climb the Tower with better results.

"I wonder."

After checking the rankings, YuWon took a look at his contribution points again. A CP of over 20,000.

This was a number YuWon had not expected.

He would have been satisfied just getting over 10,000cp, yet he had scored double that amount.

This was because of one reason.

[You have been awarded additional CP for an unknown reason.]

[You have obtained 10,000cp.]

This was a message that only YuWon got. It was likely YuWon's special reward for defeating Hypnos.

The Administrator had kept his promise.

10,000cp alone was enough to top the rankings.

It wasn't as big of a reward as he had expected, but YuWon had no complaints.

* * *

As soon as he arrived on the 12th Floor, YuWon immediately found himself lodgings for a hefty price.

"This was the last one left. You got lucky," the owner of the inn told him.

It was a hefty price of 20 points for a single night in a tiny 16m²* room.

*PR/N: \approx 172ft²

The world of the 12th Floor was a singular small city. Because there was so little land, lodging was expensive, and it was hard to obtain food. This made the 12th Floor the worst possible place for players to stay.

'There's not even anything to do here.'

There were no dungeons and very few facilities.

Yuwon unpacked his belongings inside his small room, and then...

"Lackey."

"> Yes. Did you call for me?"

A small fairy appeared like it had been waiting. Its eyes sparkled with great expectation.

That wasn't a surprise. Any Lackey would be interested in YuWon with how many points and CP he had.

If YuWon didn't call for the Lackey, it might have even shown up without being called.

"I want to use the Shop," YuWon requested.

"> Which shop? The Point Shop? Or the CP Shop?"

"The CP Shop. This is the only place I can use my CP anyway," YuWon answered.

The CP earned on the 11th Floor acted similarly to points. The 11th Floor's test didn't directly reward you with points but instead gave you CP, a much more valuable currency.

And this CP was usable in the CP Shop on the 12th Floor.

"> Okay. CP Shop, coming right up!"

Ding—

A shop opened in front of YuWon's eyes.

The 11th's Floor reward was special because you could 'select' your reward with CP, which was very different from rewards from other floors.

There was such a wide variety to select from that it surprised even YuWon.

'So they even have stuff like this,' he thought.

There were quite a few items and skills with a price tag of over 10,000cp that YuWon wanted.

The CP Shop had a fundamental difference from a normal Point Shop. Normal Point Shops showed all items and skills on sale, but the CP Shop only displayed things that the player could purchase with their CP.

No one knew such items were sold in the CP Shop because no player had obtained over 10,000cp before.

"What the hell?"

The higher the price tag went up, the better the items got exponentially. Around the 20,000cp mark, there were skills for sale that shocked even YuWon. This was certainly a happy problem to have, but no matter what he chose, he would feel like he missed out.

But he had to make a choice.

'I was wondering where this went...'

It was an item that YuWon was looking for.

'So it was here.'

It ended up not being a difficult choice. There were other items and skills he wanted, but it was possible to find substitutes for those. However, this item was irreplaceable.

"I'll go with this."

[You consumed 22,000cp.]

* * *

* * *

The NamGung Clan was the second largest organization in the Martial Realm after the Heavenly Demonic Cult, and it was the center of the 10th Floor's world that lead the Martial Guild. Not to mention, it was an elite clan that produced many Rankers and High Rankers.

"So you're back," a man greeted Hoon's arrival.

Step, step—

Hoon walked towards him.

It was his father, NamGung JinWoon.

JinWoon had a beard that was a few inches long, sharp looking eyes, and a body that didn't age.

He was Hoon's father and the man that turned the NamGung Clan, which was on the brink of ruin long ago, into the main pillar of the Martial Realm.

"You returned early," JinWoon said from amidst a mountain of documents.

It was an image that didn't fit a man who had wielded a sword his entire life, but as time passed, he had to spend more and more days looking through papers. This was a natural result of the NamGung Clan's power and influence having grown so large.

"Isn't there a lot of time left until the Grand Martial Arts Tournament?" JinWoon asked Hoon.

"I have something I need to tell you, father."

"You could have used your kit to contact me."

"I decided it would be best that we leave no records of this conversation."

The player kit wasn't omnipotent. Though rare, there were players and Rankers who would hack another player's kit and check their records.

And the security of this information was crucial in this matter.

JinWoon raised his head from the pile of documents and looked over at his son.

"Go ahead," he told Hoon.

"Olympus is making a move."

"Those guys are always on the move."

"I think they found Hephaestus."

JinWoon's hand paused while reaching for his cooled cup of tea, and he stared at Hoon, signaling him to keep talking.

Hoon continued, "They're preparing for the Gigantomachy."

“The Gigantomachy, you say...”

Instead of drinking his tea, JinWoon tapped his teacup with his finger.

He was reminded of an unpleasant memory. It was a tragedy that all the olden Rankers remembered, and the only ones in this Tower who remembered that tragedy fondly were from Olympus.

“Where did this information come from?”

“I heard it from Kim YuWon.”

“Kim YuWon. I’ve heard his name before.”

YuWon’s name was pretty famous in the Martial Realm. Rankers were already starting to learn of YuWon’s name, but the biggest reason for his fame in the Martial Realm was that he had passed the Heavenly Demonic Cult’s test.

For JinWoon who knew the Heavenly Demonic Cult and the Heavenly Demon, he couldn’t easily brush this information off.

However...

“Isn’t he still just a player? How does he know such information?” JinWoon asked.

Regardless of his fame, YuWon was too small compared to Olympus. A lowly player.

And that preconceived notion was something that was hard to break out of without seeing him in action in person.

“Olympus is aiming for Kim YuWon.”

“What do you mean by ‘aiming for’?”

“The truth is...” Hoon told his father the events that had unfolded on the 11th Floor.

JinWoon’s eyebrows furrowed.

It was a story that was hard to believe... But it wasn’t like he could refuse to believe his son’s words.

“He has been fighting Olympus for a while now,” said Hoon.

“Ngh...” JinWoon let out a faint grunt.

A player that was still far from becoming a Ranker was fighting the giant that was Olympus by himself.

JinWoon felt his chest ache.

“Who else knows about this?”

“Everyone in my team.”

“And your team has Gibbons, right?”

“Yes.”

“It’ll only be a matter of time until Asgard also knows.”

Gibbons was a player who was sponsored by Asgard.

JinWoon felt that a giant torrent was starting up.

The active Olympus and the 2nd Gigantomachy.

And caught in the middle was a small star that had just begun to shine.

JinWoon stood up and looked out his window. He could feel how busy his clan was while preparing for the Grand Martial Arts Tournament, and he had a hunch that this tournament would be more turbulent than usual.

* * *

Fwoosh—

Smash—!

A fireball flew fast in a straight line and smashed the target.

Embers spread out, and the crowd couldn’t hold back their awe.

“Wow...”

“He actually hit that?”

“I couldn’t even see it properly...”

The testing site quickly filled with spectators.

This was a test where you had to hit 100 targets. The test lasted an hour, and the targets became faster as their numbers increased.

YuWon gathered the [Holy Fire] in his hands once again.

A round target appeared again, but it was much faster than the previous one.

‘This isn’t bad practice,’ YuWon thought.

He knew how to handle a myriad of different weapons, but he was most familiar with the sword. However, YuWon also excelled greatly in spearmanship, and throwing spears was one of YuWon’s specialties.

Fwoosh—

A spear made of fire.

Because his focus was still weak, it wasn’t that sharp, but despite that, it was still destructive.

YuWon could see the trajectory of the flying target. And in an instant...

Whoosh—!

... The flaming spear left YuWon’s hand and pierced the target.

Boom—!

[You destroyed 1,000 targets.]

[You passed the 19th Floor's test.]

[You are now able to teleport to the next floor.]

[You leveled up.]

[Your Strength increased by 1.]

[Your Constitution increased by 1.]

[Your Perception increased by 1.]

[You obtained 50,000 points.]

Messages popped up for Yuwon, who was looking at the remains of the shattered targets.

He had achieved ten times the quota required to pass, and there were still about five minutes on the clock. However, it seemed that there were no more targets left.

‘That’s stingy,’ YuWon thought.

This message should have been happy news, but YuWon was frowning.

It was likely because there weren’t any additional rewards. There were only the increase in stats from leveling and points.

Also, with 100 Arcane Power so close in his reach, other stats kept increasing instead.

‘I’m slowly hitting the limit.’

He had reached a point where it had become harder to get stronger from just hunting and getting rewards from tests.

It was a dilemma. YuWon didn’t know if he should have been happy that his growth was faster than expected or if he should have felt disappointed that his growth was becoming stunted.

‘I guess I shouldn’t expect a proper reward anymore until the 20th Floor.’

Every 10th Floor, the tests became much harder, but they also came with proportionally great rewards. For example, he had obtained the [Holy Fire] from the Heavenly Demonic Cult on the 10th Floor.

And unlike with the 10th Floor where he had gone in blind, YuWon knew what was hidden on the 20th Floor.

‘I’ll have to stop for a moment.’

He had now obtained the right to reside on the 20th Floor, but the 20th Floor’s test was quite tricky.

Well technically it was what YuWon had to do in the test that was tricky.

[Arcane Power : 99]

He was just one point away from 100, and he knew how to get there.

The 「Great Scarlet Medicine Ball.」 It was one of the greatest elixirs that was only made once every three years in the Martial Realm, and it possessed a value of hundreds of thousands in points.

“I should start heading down.”

YuWon didn't head up after finishing the 19th Floor's test. Rather, he headed downwards because it was now one day before the Grand Martial Arts Tournament.

Chapter 78

The Grand Martial Arts Tournament was the biggest event in the Martial Realm, representing the 10th Floor, and it was a festival that drew the attention of countless Rankers.

Whenever it got close to the tournament, the Martial City became chock full of people.

“There really are a lot of people.”

“Did you manage to find lodging?”

“There's literally no place to stay, but even if there was, we'd have to share rooms.”

“What do we do?”

“I don't know. I told you, we should have come sooner to secure a spot.”

“But coming five days before the event seems like such a waste.”

“The tournament isn't the only thing here. There's plenty of other sights to see. You really are stupid.”

“Selling hot jianbing!* We also have veggie stir-fry and dumplings!”

The streets were filled with vendors selling simple foods.

People drank liquor, shared food, and debated while looking over the list of participants for the tournament.

“It's gotta be Hoon. Not only is the NamGung Clan the one hosting the tournament, he's not called a genius for no reason.”

“The NamGung Clan ain't that great. The Martial Guild isn't even one of the major guilds.”

“Do you think it'll be Hargaan then?”

“Is he also participating in the tournament?”

“Of course. He's the best High Pure-Blood in the last few hundred years. I heard that he made it all the way to the 25th Floor in a flash before waiting for the tournament.”

“What a terrifying speed.”

“At that rate, he might even be able to become a Ranker in less than ten years.”

Hargaan was one of favorites to win the Grand Martial Arts Tournament. Not only had he made it to the 25th floor, the last floor you can get to before being ineligible to participate, he had ranked highly on each floor he had passed.

“Hey! I got a big scoop!”

“What is it that it made you so late?”

“Sit down already. Could I get another aguardiente here?”

“I’d also like some more side dishes...”

“That’s not what’s important right now!” the man who had arrived late said to his group, all out of breath, “Kim YuWon is participating.”

“Huh?”

“Really?”

“I thought he would have gone on to clear the next floor.”

“I didn’t think he’d be interested in stuff like this.”

Players that participated in the Grand Martial Arts Tournament had various motives. The most common one was to show off their skills and get sponsored by the best guild possible.

Countless guilds paid attention to the tournament, so if you did well in it, it was a piece of cake to get sponsored by a guild.

Another common reason was to elevate the status of a guild.

Players on the lower floors were essentially a guild’s future. They would climb the Tower, become Rankers, and one day become a core fighting power of the guild.

Also, a guild’s reputation changed depending on the number of players that did well in the tournament, so many different guilds would push their players to participate. The more players of their own guild that ranked highly in the tournament, the more their reputation would increase, allowing them to expand.

“I doubt it’s to get the attention of guilds...”

“Do you think it’s for the prize?”

“I bet he’s participating, thinking he’s got this in the bag.”

The group of men that were eating now had a different look on their face.

These Rankers didn’t come all the way down to the 10th Floor just for fun.

“When was the last time we approached YuWon?” the man in the center of the group asked.

He was someone that didn’t bother with pointless gossip, so when he spoke, the mood drastically changed.

“It was after he cleared the 8th Floor.”

“So it’s been a while.”

“He’s managed to climb to the 20th floor since then, but it actually hasn’t been that long in terms of time, sir.”

“Still.”

“We sent a messenger, but he didn’t even bother with us.”

“I’ll personally go this time,” said the man with a face covered in blue scales as he stood up.

It was Brahnîl, a Ranker belonging to the Dragon race.

He said, “With the honor of our guild, the 12 Earthly Gods,* on the line.”

* * *

“Go away.”

That was what Brahnîl was told at the door after having jumped through various hoops trying to find where YuWon was staying.

Brahnîl had a blank look on his face. He couldn’t believe he had been told to go away. He had thought he would get invited in for some tea and have a short talk before he was rejected.

He had also wanted to take this chance to see why everyone was so desperate to recruit YuWon.

So he was dumbfounded at being treated like this.

“Aren’t you quite rude?” Brahnîl asked.

YuWon just silently pointed behind Brahnîl with his chin.

Brahnîl looked behind him and was shocked to see a familiar face.

“You’re...” Brahnîl trailed off.

“Aren’t you from the 12 Earthly Gods? I heard that things haven’t been going well for you guys, but to think the guildmaster would personally come.”

“Sariel?”

As a Ranker of the major guild Zion, Sariel was an archangel who was said to be on the precipice of becoming a High Ranker.

Gulp—

A Ranker from Zion with the position of archangel had personally come to pay YuWon a visit. Normally, Zion would have just sent a player on the lower floors to recruit someone.

‘Could it be that others are doing the same as me...?’ Brahnîl thought.

It was rare for a Ranker to personally come and make a recruitment offer, so Brahnil had intended on scooping up YuWon by getting ahead of everyone.

His thought process was that no matter how great a player might be, there was no way YuWon could beat the pressure exerted by a Ranker.

But Brahnil was completely wrong. This was not the first time a Ranker had personally paid YuWon a visit.

Yuwon had been encountering Rankers for quite a while now, even before he had stepped foot on the 10th Floor.

"It's a good sight. I hope you keep up the hard work as the head of the pack," said Sarel.

Brahnil bit his tongue at the back-handed compliment. Even if he was a Ranker of the Dragon race, it couldn't be helped that he felt miniscule compared to an archangel of Zion.

"Are you also going to tell me to go away?" asked Sarel, looking back and forth between YuWon and Brahnil.

Sarel decided that there was no need for a long talk. YuWon seemed very used to this situation.

"Well, you are my ninth and tenth visitor today," YuWon answered.

"I see."

Though he was visited by multiple guilds, YuWon denied all of them a meeting.

This was the first time a Ranker on the level of Sarel had come by, but no matter who came, YuWon had no intention of giving a different answer.

"Well, if you by chance have a change of heart, contact us here. Zion will always have a spot for you."

"I can promise you that won't happen," YuWon answered, leaving not a shred of hope.

In contrast to Sarel who started leaving, Brahnil stood in place, wanting to get something out of this encounter.

That was when a new visitor came by.

"What about me? Should I also go away?"

Yuwon, who was planning on going back into his room, stopped in his tracks.

His annoyance quickly left, and he felt a bit comforted after seeing who it was.

"It's been a while, friend," said the new visitor.

'H-Hargaan?' Brahnil thought.

A chiseled, handsome fellow with golden blonde hair and sharp eyes. Hargaan looked exactly like he had heard.

Brahnil remembered that Hargaan was a comrade that YuWon did the Tutorial together with.

YuWon said, "Yeah. Go away."

"Wait! Really?"

"I'm kidding. You can come in," YuWon said, going into his room without closing the door.

While following YuWon, Hargaan let out a baffled laugh, "Your jokes aren't funny man."

Slam—

The door closed, and Brahnil mumbled in a daze, "I should just leave..."

* * *

The inn YuWon was staying in was quite big, clocking in at about 65m².^{*} It was one of the best places one could get in the area.

^{*}PR/N: \approx 700ft²

"How did you even get a place like this?"

"By paying a pretty penny."

"You must be rich."

"Well, I just keep racking up points. I went through the trouble of stopping my ascension. Might as well rest in luxury."

"Is that so?"

YuWon poured some water for Hargaan.

The cold glass of water was perfect for a hot day like today.

As Hargaan was about to take a drink...

Bang, bang—

"Is Mr. Kim YuWon here?"

"Someone's here for you," Hargaan remarked.

"Just ignore it. If it's actually urgent, they'll enter by breaking down the door or something."

"You're real laid back. This must happen a lot."

"I've had people visiting me regularly, but it's been especially bad here."

"It's probably because of the tournament. Guilds gather around this time in the Martial Realm to recruit players."

YuWon nodded his head. It was annoying, but it was going to be a few days at best, and things were likely going to calm down again once he left the 10th Floor.

“So how did you find me?” asked Yuwon.

“You’re a real celebrity you know. All I had to do was ask around a bit.”

“I would have just told you if you had asked.”

“But what’s the fun in that? It wouldn’t be a surprise visit then, would it?”

“You didn’t really surprise me either way.”

YuWon thought Hargaan would have changed a lot, but he was still the same. A laid-back personality, earnest eyes, and a confident attitude.

He was one of the few ‘real ones’ that YuWon acknowledged.

“What about your teammates?”

“They’re resting at the inn. I snuck out to come see you.”

“Has anyone died so far?”

“Not a single one.”

“That’s good to hear.”

“We’re all going to become Rankers. They all have what it takes,” Hargaan said with confidence.

And his words had a level of truth to it. Some of his teammates did indeed become Rankers that YuWon knew in the future.

‘Though I’m not sure about Lee SungYoon...’ YuWon wondered.

The one unexpected variable was SungYoon.

He was a player from Earth like YuWon, and he had a great talent for mana, being able to use [Mana Blast] early on. So it was hard for YuWon to gauge how much he might have grown.

‘I guess I can find out by seeing him in person,’ YuWon decided.

There was not much information known about SungYoon, and he was originally a player that should have died in the Tutorial. Maybe it was because they came from the same place, but he was the most memorable out of Hargaan’s teammates to YuWon.

“I heard you pulled something real big this time,” said Hargaan.

YuWon had a confused look on his face.

He wasn’t pretending. He genuinely didn’t know what Hargaan was talking about since it could have been a number of things.

“I heard you were the one that stopped Olympus from capturing Hephaestus.”

“How did you find that out?”

“I might not be well-loved by my family, but my father is still Zeus. Besides, do you know how many people have become Rankers after being in my shoes?”

YuWon nodded his head at Hargaan’s words.

There were quite a handful of bastard children of Zeus. Famously, there were Apollo and Artemis, the High Rankers of Olympus. They were both illegitimate children of Zeus.

“I’m able to get ahold of most information. Seriously. I thought you were one real crazy son of a bitch when I heard it. Tsk tsk. What were you thinking? I’m impressed that you survived a fight against a Ranker, but now you’ve made an enemy of Olympus.”

“I’m surprised you came here despite knowing all that.”

“Well... I’ve never been one to care what others think. Besides, it’s Hera’s faction that’s all up in arms anyway.”

Hargaan had never been on good terms with Hera and Ares, so he had decided there was no need to be careful of them.

“What about Zeus?”

“... You’re the first guy I’ve ever met who says my father’s name so nonchalantly.”

“So?”

“Father has long since stepped away from matters regarding Olympus. He’s focused on clearing the next floor.”

The Tower was known to have a total of 100 floors, but that wasn’t actually true.

People called players who climbed to the 100th Floor Rankers, but that was only because the test on the 100th Floor hadn’t been cleared yet.

There was a higher place in the Tower, and people referred to the place above the 100th floor as ‘The Ceiling.’

“Anyway, Olympus is not happy because you saved the criminal Hephaestus, so you should watch yourself for a bit. When I get a chance, I’ll speak to my father and try to put in a good word for you.”

It seemed that Hargaan was unaware what had happened on the 11th Floor.

YuWon wasn’t surprised. The fact that a test examiner had attacked a test participant would be top secret. Even Hargaan shouldn’t be able to obtain such information easily.

Hargaan was showing goodwill, but YuWon was still disappointed by what Hargaan had said.

“So that’s how you see it as well,” YuWon said.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m talking about ahjussi. He’s known as a criminal within Olympus.”

After finishing his glass of water, YuWon got up from his seat.

“Do you want to come with me?” he asked Hargaan.

“Where?”

“To the 1st Floor.”

Yuwon had some business there, so he was going to stop by before the tournament started anyway.

“To meet Hephaestus-ahjussi.”

Those words made the expression on Hargaan’s face change.

Chapter 79

Klang! Klang—!

Loud, deafening sounds of hammering echoed.

A hand wielding a heavy hammer repeatedly swung it against a piece of metal. That same hand then put down the hammer and picked up a smaller hammer.

Klang—!

The smaller hammer was then used to repeat the same task.

Finally, Hephaestus stopped hammering, putting the only partially formed chunk of metal back into the furnace before taking a break.

“Phew—”

Hanging inside the workshop, the towel that Hephaestus grabbed to wipe the sweat off his forehead was hot and dry.

He felt hot and was having a hard time breathing. It had been four days since he’d been holed up in his workshop.

‘Am I pushing myself too far?’

There was a mountain of commissions he had to complete.

The commissioned items were all defensive gear. Armor, shields, or accessories with special skills.

They were all items void of any lethality.

“My hands are starting to itch.”

Hephaestus thought back to the enormous stack of minerals in his inventory.

Just off the top of his head, he could envision a number of items with over half of them being weapons. However, he was no longer making swords or spears.

The only exception was the sword he had made for his savior.

Step—

“Hmm?”

He heard footsteps coming down to his workshop.

Hephaestus, who was taking a break, got up from his seat.

“So he’s here.”

There was only one person he knew who entered his workshop without knocking. Not to mention he was contacted recently through the player kit that they were stopping by.

‘It’s finished...’ Hephaestus thought while silently looking at the gauntlet cooling in the water, ‘But I wonder if he’ll be able to handle it.’

YuWon had fought against a Ranker at the start of the 1st Floor. There was no doubting his power, and by now he might actually have obtained power that rivaled Rankers.

But that didn’t change anything because this wasn’t about if he was strong or weak. It was about if he was ‘qualified’ or not.

“Are you here?” the visitor asked.

Hephaestus asked back, “Aren’t you supposed to ask that before you just enter?”

When he saw YuWon’s face, Hephaestus had to try and act nonchalant to hide how happy he was to see him.

As YuWon reached the bottom of the stairs, Hephaestus got up from his seat and saw that there was someone else behind YuWon.

“Who’s that?” Hephaestus asked.

YuWon stopped mid-introduction, seeing that Hephaestus’s face had frozen up.

Hephaestus was staring at Hargaan’s blonde hair.

Blonde hair wasn’t all that uncommon, but shimmering, golden blonde hair was.

YuWon couldn’t avoid Hephaestus’s question. But right as he was going to answer...

“My name’s Hargaan,” Hargaan stepped forward and introduced himself.

Hephaestus wore a look of disapproval. It was clear that he knew who Hargaan was.

“So you’re father’s son,” Hephaestus said.

“Can’t you just call me your little brother?”

“I think the fight between our siblings is a bit too intense for me to be so amicable.”

Hephaestus turned his gaze to his hammer as he asked, “So, are you here to catch me as well?”

“N-No. Of course not. Not to mention I lack the ability to do so,” Hargaan quickly denied while waving his hands in front of him.

His job might have been blacksmithing, but the man was still a Ranker. And he was no half-assed Ranker but a Ranker who climbed the Tower thousands of years ago.

Hargaan might have been a player who was famed in the lower floors, but there was no way he could hold a candle to Hephaestus.

“Then why are you here?” Hephaestus asked.

“I wanted to personally meet you.”

“Me? Why?”

“Because I can’t trust Olympus.”

Hephaestus’s eyes widened after hearing Hargaan’s answer. One of Zeus’s sons had said that they couldn’t trust Olympus.

“Since I was born, I was told that you... my big brother was a criminal. Then my friend told me that he had saved you.”

YuWon had opened Hargaan’s eyes. He had showed him that Olympus, which Hargaan thought was his entire world, wasn’t perfect.

That was when Hargaan resolved himself that he would believe what he saw with his own eyes over what he was simply told.

“I wanted to see and judge for myself. Find out for myself who big brother Hephaestus really is.”

“Hmm...” Hephaestus scratched his chin, staring at Hargaan.

He saw radiant, beautiful golden hair, eyes full of confidence, and irises that were the same color as his hair.

‘He looks similar,’ Hephaestus thought.

He could see in Hargaan’s face the face of Olympus’s King, the man he used to respect the most.

Rumors traveled fast. Even Hephaestus, who cared very little about what was going on in the world, had heard Hargaan’s name a few times because he was becoming more famous than your average Ranker.

Hargaan had inherited more of Zeus’s genes than anyone else.

“So. What do you think?” Hephaestus asked.

Hargaan responded, “I can’t really figure out much from only seeing your face...”

His eyes then darted around the interior of the workshop, and the only things he could see were armor, shields, helmets, and the like.

“It seems that you don’t make weapons,” Hargaan remarked.

“...”

“That wasn’t always the case, right? I know of countless weapons in Olympus that you’ve made.”

“It wasn’t,” Hephaestus said while looking over at the sword on YuWon’s waist.

It was the most recent weapon he had crafted, and he had felt so elated when making it.

“How long has it been since you stopped making weapons?”

Hargaan’s question made Hephaestus close his eyes.

The sudden stop to the conversation made the silence feel much longer than it was, but Hargaan didn’t pressure Hephaestus to answer quickly.

Various expressions came and left Hephaestus’s face. He only answered after he managed to wipe the pain from his face.

“It was after the Gigantomachy.”

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* * *

YuWon stepped outside and waited for Hargaan and Hephaestus’s talk to end.

The two conversed for a long time.

Gigantomachy. After that word was uttered, Hargaan’s heart started beating rapidly.

“The weapons I made pierced the hearts of the Giants.”

The Giants were one of the races that ruled the Tower, achieving that position through their natural strength and large physique.

Hephaestus continued “They viewed Olympus as allies.”

He then shook his head and mumbled, “No. They saw us as friends, or both actually.”

Hephaestus raised his head and stared into Hargaan’s eyes.

“Others might point fingers at them for being hideous, but we shouldn’t have done so. Olympus only got to where they are thanks to the Giants.”

“Such a thing happened?” Hargaan asked.

“This is a story that kids nowadays don’t really know. You might know if you’re an old Ranker, but young ones have probably only heard the inaccurate retelling.”

Hephaestus pulled out the ‘back in my day’ card. As a Ranker who was thousands of years old, there was much that he knew.

Hargaan’s brow furrowed as he asked, “What was the reason?”

“It was political. Others weren’t viewing them very kindly, but also by taking care of them, Olympus could take full control of the floors they shared with them.”

“They did that for such a petty reason?”

“I’m glad.”

“Excuse me?”

“You might think it’s petty, but most people don’t see it that way,” Hephaestus mumbled, “including our father.”

“...”

“And the war that we waged against the Giants was the Gigantomachy. It involved Asgardian Giants, Olympian Giants, and Rankers from various guilds who wanted the rights we were fighting over. The war continued to get bigger, and the weapons I made ended up taking the lives of my friends.”

YuWon, who had been eavesdropping, lowered his head.

This was the second time he had heard this story, and because Hephaestus was even closer to YuWon back then, Hephaestus had shown his vulnerability. Hephaestus had let out massive sobs while he told YuWon about the past.

YuWon was certain that Hephaestus was feeling just as torn up right now as back then, but Hephaestus was probably holding back his tears as hard as he could to save face.

“They were sacrificed for Olympus to increase their influence and to wash off the dishonor that Olympus was once an ally of the Giants,” he said. “And was that when... When I stopped doing anything for Olympus and also when I stopped making weapons.”

Grit—

Instead of crying, Hephaestus clenched his teeth and showed anger.

“But then a few decades ago, they suddenly asked me to make weapons again.”

Hargaan caught on quickly.

“Are they...?”

“There are still Giants left.”

“So will the Gigantomachy be happening again?”

“They’re probably still only in the planning stage, but it’s highly likely,” he couldn’t deny the possibility.

Hephaestus was the greatest blacksmith in the Tower. The weapons he made made a bigger impact the larger the war was.

There was a reason why some people say that Hephaestus was one of the people that made Olympus into what it was today.

As such, preparing for the next Gigantomachy was a possible reason why Olympus was hellbent on capturing Hephaestus.

"It's your choice which side you want to believe. It's entirely possible that I'm lying," Hephaestus said while getting up. He didn't have much more to say. "I am going to fight against Olympus."

It was time. YuWon got up from his seat and reentered the room.

Hephaestus looked over at YuWon and said, "I know that you didn't come here just to introduce him to me."

"Yes."

"The stuff's in the storage over there," he said while pointing to the basement storage of the workshop. "Follow me."

* * *

He had a lot to think about.

On the surface, he might have seemed like a carefree, loose cannon, but he was actually quite thoughtful.

'I'm sure he needs some time to process this,' YuWon thought.

Yuwon was aware that Hargaan didn't blindly trust Olympus. Just take what happened on the 1st Floor as an example. That wasn't something where one could say that Olympus were the good guys.

However, the Gigantomachy was a whole different problem.

'If he accepts ahjussi's words as the truth, Olympus will no longer be the good guys to him.'

For Hargaan, the pillar that he had relied on his entire life would be shaken, so it would likely take him quite a bit of time to make a decision.

While leading the way, Hephaestus said, "He seems like a good kid."

It was rare for him to compliment anyone.

"I could tell why you brought him."

"Really?"

"Are you going to continue traveling with him?"

It appeared that Hephaestus thought Hargaan was a part of YuWon's team.

Yuwon didn't answer right away as he was still thinking about it.

"You think way too much," Hephaestus grumbled.

"I don't think you're in any position to be telling me that, ahjussi."

"What? Me?"

“I know you don’t fully trust him yet.”

“He’s still at an age where he can be swayed easily. Since there’s no way to tell which direction he’ll go towards, I have no choice but to continue observing.”

“Is age the only reason?”

“Of course not, or else I wouldn’t be able to trust you either.”

Thunk—

Creak, creeeeak—

Multiple layers of chains were undone, and a thick steel door was opened.

“I did end up making it, but a bit of a troublesome thing ended up getting created,” Hephaestus said while undoing a sealing chain.

As soon as the door was opened, black-colored mana started to slowly flow out, giving YuWon the chills.

“I already named it,” Hephaestus said, having disliked the name YuWon had given his sword.

Opening the doors wide, Hephaestus introduced his new masterpiece, “This is Kyneē.*”

Chapter 80

After Hephaestus’s proud introduction, YuWon stared at the black glove that was in the middle of the room.

The glove had a simple shape with a plain black color. It looked more like a fabric glove rather than a steel glove.

‘This is Kyneē?’ YuWon thought.

He was surprised by the introduction. He knew that Hephaestus was the one that had named the original 「Kyneē」 but he didn’t think the same name would be given to a different type of item.

‘Fascinating,’ he thought to himself.

YuWon approached the new 「Kyneē」 that was different from the one he knew.

The glove was floating in mid-air, and it was radiating black mana.

“Like you asked, I made it in the form of a glove. The crystal is imbued on the outside, but it shouldn’t be visible,” Hephaestus explained.

YuWon took a look at the shape of 「Kyneē」. To the naked eye, it really was an ordinary glove, which was characteristic of the 「Kyneē」 in his memories.

The 「Kyneē」 that Hades used to use was also a plain black helm with no special patterns.

“Can I try it on?” YuWon asked.

“Of course. That’s what I made it for,” Hephaestus said with joy. He was eager to explain the item he made. These were always the times that Hephaestus looked the happiest.

Rustle—

It had a strange feel to it. Despite appearing like smooth fabric, the sensation that YuWon felt at the tips of his fingers was something in between metal and fabric. He had never felt anything like it.

Its texture wasn’t the only thing that was bizarre.

“It’s quite hefty,” YuWon noted.

「Kyneē」 wasn’t as light on his hand as it appeared. Even a fully steel gauntlet wouldn’t weigh this much.

“It’s very thin, isn’t it?” Hephaestus asked.

“Yes. To the point that I can’t believe that it’s made with adamantium.”

“I used everything you brought.”

Hephaestus’s explanation made YuWon look at 「Kyneē」 with eyes full of surprise.

The glove was at best only one millimeter thick, nor was it particularly big, so naturally YuWon assumed that Hephaestus might not have used all the adamantium he gave him. But after being told that it was made with all the adamantium, its heavy weight made sense.

‘He must have decreased the volume somehow.’

The glove was still lighter than the adamantium YuWon gave him originally. It was just that it was much heavier than it looked.

Yuwon was once again surprised by Hephaestus’s skills as he equipped 「Kyneē」 onto his hand.

And in that moment...

Fwoosh—!

His vision changed in an instant.

The already dark storage room now appeared pitch black.

Yuwon felt like he was caught in Hypnos’s skill again.

‘No. This might be even darker than that.’

YuWon was not taken aback by the sudden change in scenery, nor did he take off 「Kyneē.」

This was a test from 「Kyneē.」

Split—

A space opened up in front of him, and a large yellow eye appeared.

The eye was far taller in height than YuWon, and this eye blinked a few times while it stared at YuWon.

“> You. Who?”

The eye asked YuWon the question that he wanted to ask it.

“Kim YuWon.”

“> Other time. From. Strange.”

YuWon, who wasn't phased when the giant eye appeared, was shocked. He couldn't fully understand because it spoke in broken segments, but one thing it said caught YuWon off guard.

‘Other time.’

‘What is this thing?’ YuWon wondered.

Including 「Kyneē,」 which was made from the 「Dark Divine Crystal,」 not much was known about the Three Sacred Treasures of Olympus.

They disappeared in the invasion of the Outers, and the only information YuWon knew were the bits and pieces he had heard from Chronos.

“Who are you?” YuWon asked.

“> I'm. Eye. Mouth. No. Speak...”

“Are you saying that you can't speak because you're an eye and not the mouth?”

It did not answer.

It was quite a frustrating conversation partner.

‘I don't think a proper conversation is going to be possible.’

YuWon wanted to find out if this guy was something sealed inside the 「Dark Divine Crystal,」 or if it was a medium that drew out the Crystal's power, or if it was the Crystal itself.

And YuWon was also hoping that this would be the moment he'd be able to properly utilize the powers of 「Kyneē.」

Around the time that YuWon had mostly given up on talking to it...

“> Egg...”

The Eye spoke again.

“Egg’?” YuWon thought.

“> Who Egg? Where?”

Another string of words to interpret, but YuWon managed to get the gist of it.

‘Is it asking whose egg it is? And where it came from?’

YuWon thought back to the Egg inside his inventory.

The Egg had remained dormant since he had obtained the [Holy Fire,] and it had been a while since it had sent YuWon a message.

That was when...

Vrrr—

A small movement was felt inside his inventory.

[?’s Egg rises up.]

[?’s Egg lets out a scream.]

The Egg moved for the first time on its own in months.

Fss, fssss—

An ominous black mana started flowing out. It was much thicker and denser than the mana YuWon had been wielding through the 「Dark Divine Crystal.」

‘This is dangerous,’ YuWon thought, evading it instinctively.

Dark-attribute mana of this level could easily decompose part of a body on contact.

‘I have to evade it...’

Whoosh—

The mana was already spreading out, and there was nowhere he could escape to.

The mana was moving towards YuWon to swallow him whole.

‘It’s too late.’

Fwoosh—

YuWon shot out [Holy Fire] with all his strength. There was no way for him to figure out right now how to control 「Kyneē,」 and with no way to avoid it, his only option was to resist it.

That was when...

Vzzt, vzzt—!

The dark-attribute mana that was rippling out, rather than attacking YuWon, plunged inside the inventory on his waist.

Yuwon, who was going to resist with his [Holy Fire,] ended up momentarily frozen.

The mana flowing out from the Eye apparently had no intention of attacking him.

‘Then why did I...?’

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[?’s Egg’s incubation rate increases.]

[Incubation rate: 14.12%]

[Incubation rate: 15.23%]

[Incubation rate: 17.97%]

[Incubation rate...]

A flurry of messages.

Yuwon’s eyes widened.

The Egg’s incubation rate was increasing, its incubation rate growing higher the more black mana it consumed from the Eye.

The reason it woke up from its sleep was likely that it had found a delicious target while it was famished.

[Incubation rate: 41.29%]

The final incubation rate it reached was 41%.

It was quite a high percentage, especially considering how it had only managed to rise 13% after eating Orochi’s corpse.

“Do you know what this is?” Yuwon asked the Eye that had managed to cause the Egg’s incubation rate to shoot up.

The nameless Egg that Yuwon possessed had come from the Outers. Yuwon got the idea that perhaps this Eye would know something about where they came from.

Fss, fsss—

The shade of the Eye started to get faint, and the darkness that enveloped him broke away. Yuwon felt the chilling energy that had filled the air dissipating.

“> Will. Watch...”

Its speech started to sound clearer as it faded away.

And with the darkness lifting, sounds from the outside rushed in.

The heavy sound of a hammer.

Yuwon felt the shock of the air shaking, and he saw the hammer falling on his head.

Fwoosh—

“Ahjussi!” YuWon shouted in a hurry, seeing whose hammer it was.

He was even ready to draw his sword if necessary.

“Huh?”

The hammer stopped halfway, and Hephaestus’s face became visible as the darkness fully dissipated.

Hephaestus looked shaken.

“Are you okay?” he asked YuWon.

There were various hammer marks on the ground.

It appeared that he thought something bad had happened to YuWon and had been furiously swinging his hammer.

YuWon couldn’t answer the question right away because he had just encountered near-death. Had he been hit by Hephaestus’s full swing of his hammer, it wouldn’t have ended with just an injury.

‘Well, whatever the case is, it’s over now,’ YuWon thought to himself while looking at the black glove he now wore on his hand.

It felt pretty good, with a smooth and soft texture. If it weren’t for the weight, he could have forgotten about it and think that it was just a part of his body.

「Kyneē.」 An item that symbolized Hades, one of the three great gods of Olympus.

‘It said it would watch me...’

Those were the final words the Eye of 「Kyneē」 said before disappearing.

‘But it did manage to say something proper before it disappeared.’

It was hard to make out the other things it said, but the final part was clear.

Clench—

YuWon tightened his fist.

‘The Dark Divine Crystal...’

It was an item that was also called a fragment of 「Kyneē.」

Who would have thought such a secret hid in this item.

‘There are two fragments left.’

There were three total fragments in YuWon’s memory.

‘I’ll need to gather the rest to figure out what’s what.’

His next objective was now the Trident’s fragment.

* * *

* * *

The workshop shook.

Hargaan, who was lost in thought, jolted up and ran in the direction that YuWon and Hephaestus had gone off in.

Hephaestus and YuWon were exiting the storage room.

Hargaan could see an unfamiliar glove on YuWon's hand. He guessed that it must have been a new item that YuWon had obtained.

"Who knows," Hephaestus said.

The answer he got just made Hargaan more confused.

"I don't know either," YuWon responded.

"Wha—?" Hargaan said, dumbfounded.

"Just ask him, though he might actually not know anything," Hephaestus said as he walked away.

Hargaan presumed that the noise earlier must have been from Hephaestus swinging his hammer since he was wielding it in his hand.

"So what did he mean?" Hargaan asked YuWon.

"Who knows?"

"You're also going on about that?"

"No. I'm saying that because I really don't know."

YuWon genuinely didn't know what the fragment of 「Kyneē」 was, and the commotion was from Hephaestus trying to save YuWon, sensing that the fragment was too dangerous.

"You guys didn't fight?"

Not knowing a thing, the only assumption Hargaan could make was that Hephaestus and YuWon had gotten into a spontaneous fight.

"No," YuWon answered.

"That's good then."

"Did you manage to think things over?"

"I'm still conflicted," Hargaan said while scratching his head.

It wasn't that Hargaan didn't trust Hephaestus's words. There were people who hadn't had a good opinion of the Gigantomachy for a long time.

“I think I need to first go meet my older brother and sister,” Hargaan told YuWon.

“And who would those be? It’s not like you have just one or two siblings.”

“Big brother Apollo and big sister Artemis.”

They were two children that Zeus had with someone other than Hera, just like Hargaan.

It appeared to YuWon that they were closer to each other than their other siblings as they were in the same situation.

“They must know something,” Hargaan said.

Apollo and Artemis were two of the top ten High Rankers within Olympus, and as they had directly participated in the Gigantomachy, they should have a lot of information.

It seemed that Hargaan was being very thoughtful and careful about this ordeal.

“Though I’m honestly not sure. For now, I should just focus on the Grand Martial Arts Tournament. I need to make my name better known for my influence within Olympus to grow.”

“I’m surprised that you care about things like that so much.”

“It can’t be helped. I’m different from big brother Ares. In order to create a faction that follows me, I have to keep proving my worth,” Hargaan said with a voice filled with resolve.

YuWon couldn’t know how Hargaan felt growing up and the current state of his emotions.

“There’s no better stage for that than this tournament. I heard that there are more Rankers spectating this tournament than ever before,” Hargaan continued.

The Grand Martial Arts Tournament was always an event that people paid a lot of attention to, but the scale of it changed every time because the number of Rankers watching (as well as the fame of said Rankers) depended on the quality of the players participating.

In that regard, this Grand Martial Arts Tournament was being watched by the greatest number of people in its history, and there was a simple reason for this—the quality of the players was outstanding.

Of course, about half of them were primarily interested in YuWon.

Hargaan listed the Rankers and guilds that came to watch the tournament, “... And I heard that a few wandering Rankers were also present. Oh, right, also...”

There was also another reason why this tournament was so greatly in contention.

“I heard that the vice-lord of the Heavenly Demonic Cult is going to be there this time around,” Hargaan continued.

The sleeping tiger had left its den.

