



召唤圣剑

Table of Contents

1. [Chapter 1](#)
2. [Chapter 2](#)
3. [Chapter 3](#)
4. [Chapter 4](#)
5. [Chapter 5](#)
6. [Chapter 6](#)
7. [Chapter 7](#)
8. [Chapter 8](#)
9. [Chapter 9](#)
10. [Chapter 10](#)
11. [Chapter 11](#)
12. [Chapter 12](#)
13. [Chapter 13](#)
14. [Chapter 14](#)
15. [Chapter 15](#)
16. [Chapter 16](#)
17. [Chapter 17](#)
18. [Chapter 18](#)
19. [Chapter 19](#)
20. [Chapter 20](#)
21. [Chapter 21](#)
22. [Chapter 22](#)
23. [Chapter 23](#)
24. [Chapter 24](#)
25. [Chapter 25](#)
26. [Chapter 26](#)
27. [Chapter 27](#)
28. [Chapter 28](#)
29. [Chapter 29](#)
30. [Chapter 30](#)
31. [Chapter 31](#)
32. [Chapter 32](#)
33. [Chapter 33](#)

34. [Chapter 34](#)
35. [Chapter 35](#)
36. [Chapter 36](#)
37. [Chapter 37](#)
38. [Chapter 38](#)
39. [Chapter 39](#)
40. [Chapter 40](#)
41. [Chapter 41](#)
42. [Chapter 42](#)
43. [Chapter 43](#)
44. [Chapter 44](#)
45. [Chapter 45](#)
46. [Chapter 46](#)
47. [Chapter 47](#)
48. [Chapter 48](#)
49. [Chapter 49](#)
50. [Chapter 50](#)
51. [Chapter 51 - One More Person](#)
52. [Chapter 52 - Shortcut](#)
53. [Chapter 53 - Screw Up](#)
54. [Chapter 54 - Joint Action](#)
55. [Chapter 55 - Battle in Cemetery.](#)
56. [Chapter 56 - Like A Pig...](#)
57. [Chapter 57 - Unlucky Barney.](#)
58. [Chapter 58 - The Other side of the Board](#)
59. [Chapter 59 - An Invitation from the Keller Family.](#)
60. [Chapter 60 - Late Night Banquet](#)
61. [Chapter 61 - Unexpected Guest](#)
62. [Chapter 62 - Duel? Sorry](#)
63. [Chapter 63 - Together With Him](#)
64. [Chapter 64 - Entering The Mountain](#)
65. [Chapter 65 - Rock of Lament](#)
66. [Chapter 66 - Behind The Rumors](#)
67. [Chapter 67 - Another Cave](#)
68. [Chapter 68 - The Lost Palace](#)
69. [Chapter 69 - Who's The Hunter](#)
70. [Chapter 70 - Dilemma](#)

71. [Chapter 71 - The Holy Sword Resonance](#)
72. [Chapter 72 - Trial vs. Glory](#)
73. [Chapter 73 - Inside The Ruins](#)
74. [Chapter 74 - Back to Deep Stone City](#)
75. [Chapter 75 - Good Deal?](#)
76. [Chapter 76 - The Beginning of a Mercenary Group](#)
77. [Chapter 77 - A Big Net Quietly Spreading](#)
78. [Chapter 78 - The Enemy is in The Light, While I'm in The Dark](#)
79. [Chapter 79 - A Small Warning](#)
80. [Chapter 80 - Requesting Reinforcements](#)
81. [Chapter 81 - Heading Towards Silent Highland \(6000 Words\)](#)
82. [Chapter 82 - Entering Silent Plateau](#)
83. [Chapter 83 - Change](#)
84. [Chapter 84 - A Helping Hand](#)
85. [Chapter 85 - Land Of Fear](#)
86. [Chapter 86 - Breaking Through The Encirclement](#)
87. [Chapter 87 - Assemble](#)
88. [Chapter 88 - Resting In The Cave](#)
89. [Chapter 89 - Swordsmanship: Starfall](#)
90. [Chapter 90 - Move Forward To Retreat](#)
91. [Chapter 91 - Giant Skeleton](#)
92. [Chapter 92 - The Melancholy of Anne Georgia](#)
93. [Chapter 93 - Double Kill!](#)
94. [Chapter 94 - Anne Georgia's Determination](#)
95. [Chapter 95 - Anne Georgia's Wavering](#)
96. [Chapter 96 - Anne Georgia's Transformation](#)
97. [Chapter 97 - Anne Georgia's Secret](#)
98. [Chapter 98 - Sign Of Chaos](#)
99. [Chapter 99 - Where The Heart Belong](#)
100. [Chapter 100 - How To Use The Skill Point](#)
101. [Chapter 101 - Increase In Strength](#)
102. [Chapter 102 - Blasting Fuse](#)
103. [Chapter 103 - Accident](#)
104. [Chapter 104 - The Group of Four People](#)
105. [Chapter 105 - Another Surprise](#)
106. [Chapter 106 - Fake?](#)
107. [Chapter 107 - Mercenary Joint Meeting](#)

108. [Chapter 108 - Opposition](#)
109. [Chapter 109 - Fight Until The End!](#)
110. [Chapter 110 - The So Called Training](#)
111. [Chapter 111 - Flame of Revenge](#)
112. [Chapter 112 - Core Card](#)
113. [Chapter 113 - Loss and Gain](#)
114. [Chapter 114 - Behind The Ambush](#)
115. [Chapter 115 - Slaughter in The Dark](#)
116. [Chapter 116 - Rivalry.](#)
117. [Chapter 117 - Encounter in the Forest](#)
118. [Chapter 118 - Burning Blade in Danger](#)
119. [Chapter 119 - Hidden Nightmare](#)
120. [Chapter 120 - Saving Hiller's Soldiers \(1\)](#)
121. [Chapter 121 - Saving Hiller's Soldiers \(2\)](#)
122. [Chapter 122 - Saving Hiller's Soldiers \(3\)](#)
123. [Chapter 123 - Saving Hiller's Soldiers \(4\)](#)
124. [Chapter 124 - Saving Hiller's Soldiers \(5\)](#)
125. [Chapter 125 - Red Lotus Feast \(1\)](#)
126. [Chapter 126 - Red Lotus Feast \(2\)](#)
127. [Chapter 127 - Red Lotus Feast \(3\)](#)
128. [Chapter 128 - Red Lotus Feast \(4\)](#)
129. [Chapter 129 - A Woman's Secret](#)
130. [Chapter 130 - An Unusual Situation](#)
131. [Chapter 131 - The Tip of an Iceberg](#)
132. [Chapter 132 - Waiting at Ease, While the Enemy is Exhausted](#)
133. [Chapter 133 - Change](#)
134. [Chapter 134 - Underground](#)
135. [Chapter 135 - Ghost in the Shadow](#)
136. [Chapter 136 - Triggering Missions](#)
137. [Chapter 137 - Mission Begins!](#)
138. [Chapter 138 - Defeat Them All](#)
139. [Chapter 139 - Frank's Countermeasures](#)
140. [Chapter 140 - Kill Them!](#)
141. [Chapter 141 - Dancing with the Demons](#)
142. [Chapter 142 - Mission Rewards](#)
143. [Chapter 143 - Recovery Period](#)
144. [Chapter 144 - Basic Preparations](#)

145. [Chapter 145 - Internal Reform](#)
146. [Chapter 146 - Follow your Heart](#)
147. [Chapter 147 - An Invitation](#)
148. [Chapter 148 - A Quiet War](#)
149. [Chapter 149 - To High Cliff Village](#)
150. [Chapter 150 - On The Way](#)
151. [Chapter 151 - Spirits Of the Rainy Night](#)
152. [Chapter 152 - Reached the High Cliff](#)
153. [Chapter 153 - A Fool's Delusion](#)
154. [Chapter 154 - Struggles of Life](#)
155. [Chapter 155 - Shadow of the Past](#)
156. [Chapter 156 - Past Memories \(2 Chapters in 1\)](#)
157. [Chapter 157 - Summoning Ritual](#)
158. [Chapter 158 - Late-night Haunting](#)
159. [Chapter 159 - Midnight Battle](#)
160. [Chapter 160 - One Choice](#)
161. [Chapter 161 - A Gamble](#)
162. [Chapter 162 - Forced to the Corner](#)
163. [Chapter 163 - Shadow Devil](#)
164. [Chapter 164 - Finally Ended](#)
165. [Chapter 165 - Christie's Secret](#)
166. [Chapter 166 - Peace of Mind](#)
167. [Chapter 167 - Leaving High Cliff](#)
168. [Chapter 168 - The Incoming Sacred Glory](#)
169. [Chapter 169 - Challenge](#)
170. [Chapter 170 - Sending the Goods Over](#)
171. [Chapter 171 - Three Swordsmen](#)
172. [Chapter 172 - Gillian's Suggestion](#)
173. [Chapter 173 - The Future Plan](#)
174. [Chapter 174 - Stronghold Level Up Quest](#)
175. [Chapter 175 - Before Departure](#)
176. [Chapter 176 - Fly Air](#)
177. [Chapter 177 - Strange Premonition](#)
178. [Chapter 178 - Newbie's Invitation](#)
179. [Chapter 179 - Too Inexperienced](#)
180. [Chapter 180 - Unexpected Turn](#)
181. [Chapter 181 - Move Forward](#)

182. [Chapter 182 - The Familiar Stranger](#)
183. [Chapter 183 - The Guardian Golem](#)
184. [Chapter 184 - One After Another](#)
185. [Chapter 185 - A Bet](#)
186. [Chapter 186 - Core Guardian](#)
187. [Chapter 187 - Lightning Strikes](#)
188. [Chapter 188 - End of the Battle](#)
189. [Chapter 189 - Arrived the Mystery Hall](#)
190. [Chapter 190 - Conflict](#)
191. [Chapter 191 - Massacre](#)
192. [Chapter 192 - A Trap](#)
193. [Chapter 193 - Imperfect Ending](#)
194. [Chapter 194 - Returned to the Stronghold](#)
195. [Chapter 195 - Training Begins](#)
196. [Chapter 196 - Painful Polishing](#)
197. [Chapter 197 - Hellish Training](#)
198. [Chapter 198 - Brilliant Colors](#)
199. [Chapter 199 - Old Walker's advice](#)
200. [Chapter 200 - A Warning from Dark Fang](#)
201. [Chapter 201 - Negotiations with Dark Fang](#)
202. [Chapter 202 - Second Phase of Training](#)
203. [Chapter 203 - Be the Deviser](#)
204. [Chapter 204 - Blackrock Depths](#)
205. [Chapter 205 - Rebel of a Nonentity](#)
206. [Chapter 206 - Ten Days Bet](#)
207. [Chapter 207 - Stand out from the Masses](#)
208. [Chapter 208 - Fiends and Tentacles](#)
209. [Chapter 209 - Blackrock Depths \(Continued\)](#)
210. [Chapter 210 - Moving Deeper](#)
211. [Chapter 211 - Parasites](#)
212. [Chapter 212 - Battle in the Nest \(1\)](#)
213. [Chapter 213 - Battle in the Nest \(2\)](#)
214. [Chapter 214 - Battle in the Nest \(End\)](#)
215. [Chapter 215 - Rhode's visit](#)
216. [Chapter 216 - The Keller Family's Decision](#)
217. [Chapter 217 - Advancing Soon](#)
218. [Chapter 218 - One-thirds of the Real Rhode](#)

219. [Chapter 219 - Five Women for a Drama](#)
220. [Chapter 220 - Using His Own Way...](#)
221. [Chapter 221 - Potential ...Prey](#)
222. [Chapter 222 - Lapis's Request](#)
223. [Chapter 223 - Ambush in the Night](#)
224. [Chapter 224 - Druid](#)
225. [Chapter 225 - Let's Fight!](#)
226. [Chapter 226 - Fast!](#)
227. [Chapter 227 - Storm Slaughter](#)
228. [Chapter 228 - Behermes](#)
229. [Chapter 229 - Unicorn Peak](#)
230. [Chapter 230 - The Wind Clan](#)
231. [Chapter 231 - The Sealed Place \(1\)](#)
232. [Chapter 232 - The Sealed Place \(2\)](#)
233. [Chapter 233 - The Sealed Place \(3\)](#)
234. [Chapter 234 - The Sealed Place \(4\)](#)
235. [Chapter 235 - The Sealed Place \(5\)](#)
236. [Chapter 236 - The Sealed Place \(6\)](#)
237. [Chapter 237 - The Sealed Place \(7\)](#)
238. [Chapter 238 - The Sealed Place \(8\)](#)
239. [Chapter 239 - The Sealed Place \(9\)](#)
240. [Chapter 240 - The Sealed Place \(10\)](#)
241. [Chapter 241 - Awakening.\(1\)](#)
242. [Chapter 242 - Awakening.\(2\)](#)
243. [Chapter 243 - Awakening.\(3\)](#)
244. [Chapter 244 - Awakening.\(4\)](#)
245. [Chapter 245 - Awakening.\(5\)](#)
246. [Chapter 246 - Awakening.\(End\)](#)
247. [Chapter 247 - Zero Refining Equipment](#)
248. [Chapter 248: Ambush](#)
249. [Chapter 249: The Counterattack Commences](#)
250. [Chapter 250 - Concealment](#)
251. [Chapter 251 - Made-up Accident](#)
252. [Chapter 252 - Put on the Agenda](#)
253. [Chapter 253 - A Surprise?](#)
254. [Chapter 254 - Troubles Keep Coming](#)
255. [Chapter 255 - An Invisible Hand](#)

256. [Chapter 256 - Half-way Out](#)
257. [Chapter 257: Your Choice](#)
258. [Chapter 258 - Lize's Heart Knot](#)
259. [Chapter 259 - Eve of Midsummer Festival](#)
260. [Chapter 260 - Suggestion](#)
261. [Chapter 261 - Second Joint Conference](#)
262. [Chapter 262 - Warm-up Match \(1\)](#)
263. [Chapter 263 - Warm-up Match \(2\)](#)
264. [Chapter 264 - Warm-up Match \(3\)](#)
265. [Chapter 265 - Warm-up Match \(4\)](#)
266. [Chapter 266 - Warm-up Match \(5\)](#)
267. [Chapter 267 - Warm-up Match \(6\)](#)
268. [Chapter 268 - Warm-up Match \(7\)](#)
269. [Chapter 269 - Warm-up Match \(8\)](#)
270. [Chapter 270 - Warm-up Match \(9\)](#)
271. [Chapter 271 - Warm-up Match \(10\)](#)
272. [Chapter 272 - Warm-up Match \(11\)](#)
273. [Chapter 273 - Warm-up Match \(12\)](#)
274. [Chapter 274 - Warm-up Match \(13\)](#)
275. [Chapter 275 - Warm-up Match \(14\)](#)
276. [Chapter 276 - Warm-up Match \(15\)](#)
277. [Chapter 277 - Warm-up Match \(16\)](#)
278. [Chapter 278 - Warm-up Match \(17\)](#)
279. [Chapter 279 - Warm-up Match \(END\)](#)
280. [Chapter 280 - Incomplete Preparation](#)
281. [Chapter 281 - Rise to Fame](#)
282. [Chapter 282 - Miscellaneous Card Deck](#)
283. [Chapter 283 - The 9th](#)
284. [Chapter 284 - Celestina](#)
285. [Chapter 285 - Lydia's Suggestion](#)
286. [Chapter 286 - Accidental Trigger](#)
287. [Chapter 287 - Lydia's Promise](#)
288. [Chapter 288 - An Unpleasant Journey.](#)
289. [Chapter 289 - Road to the Deceased](#)
290. [Chapter 290 - Big Business Deal](#)
291. [Chapter 291 - A Small Invitation](#)
292. [Chapter 292 - Golden City.](#)

293. [Chapter 293 - Entering the City](#)
294. [Chapter 294 - Unavoidable Past](#)
295. [Chapter 295 - Overt Plot & Conspirac](#)
296. [Chapter 296 - The Four Guilds](#)
297. [Chapter 297 - Holy War Ceremony_\(1/2\)](#)
298. [Chapter 298 - Holy War Ceremony_\(2/2\)](#)
299. [Chapter 299 - Void Follower](#)
300. [Chapter 300 - Start of the Midsummer Festival](#)
301. [Chapter 301 - Before the Competition](#)
302. [Chapter 302 - Isolated without Help](#)
303. [Chapter 303 - Failure Requires Skill](#)
304. [Chapter 304 - The Power of Money](#)
305. [Chapter 305 - Bewildering Situation](#)
306. [Chapter 306 - Storm of Fireballs](#)
307. [Chapter 307 - Two Victories in a Row](#)
308. [Chapter 308 - Rhode's Miscalculation](#)
309. [Chapter 309 - Five Minutes](#)
310. [Chapter 310 - Anne's Counterattack](#)
311. [Chapter 311 - The Final Battle](#)
312. [Chapter 312 - Exchanging Blows](#)
313. [Chapter 313 - Victory by a Fine Line](#)
314. [Chapter 314 - It Wasn't Luck](#)
315. [Chapter 315 - Night Ambush](#)
316. [Chapter 316 - The Death of Carody](#)
317. [Chapter 317 - Rosen](#)
318. [Chapter 318 - Undercurrent](#)
319. [Chapter 319 - Hidden Snake in the Dark](#)
320. [Chapter 320 - Haze](#)
321. [Chapter 321 - Crisis](#)
322. [Chapter 322 - Night Chaos](#)
323. [Chapter 323 - Butterfly Dream](#)
324. [Chapter 324 - Magical Night](#)
325. [Chapter 325 - A Girl's Heart](#)
326. [Chapter 326 - The Match against Purple Lily](#)
327. [Chapter 327 - Test](#)
328. [Chapter 328 - A Bet](#)
329. [Chapter 329 - Self-Breakthrough](#)

330. [Chapter 330 - Aftershocks](#)
331. [Chapter 331 - The Trap of Alanic Foundation \(1\)](#)
332. [Chapter 332 - The Trap of Alanic Foundation \(2\)](#)
333. [Chapter 333 - The Trap of Alanic Foundation \(3\)](#)
334. [Chapter 334 - The Trap of Alanic Foundation \(END\)](#)
335. [Chapter 335 - Equivalent Exchange \(1\)](#)
336. [Chapter 336 - Equivalent Exchange \(2\)](#)
337. [Chapter 337 - Start of a Conspiracy \(1/2\)](#)
338. [Chapter 338 - Start of a Conspiracy \(2/2\)](#)
339. [Chapter 339 - Deciding Match \(1\)](#)
340. [Chapter 340 - Deciding Match \(2\)](#)
341. [Chapter 341 - Deciding Match \(3\)](#)
342. [Chapter 342 - Deciding Match \(4\)](#)
343. [Chapter 343 - Deciding Match \(5\)](#)
344. [Chapter 344 - Deciding Match \(6\)](#)
345. [Chapter 345 - Deciding Match \(7\)](#)
346. [Chapter 346 - Deciding Match \(8\)](#)
347. [Chapter 347 - Deciding Match \(9\)](#)
348. [Chapter 348 - Deciding Match \(10\)](#)
349. [Chapter 349 - Deciding Match \(End\)](#)
350. [Chapter 350 - Rhode's Accomplice](#)
351. [Chapter 351 - Capricious](#)
352. [Chapter 352 - Sleepless Night](#)
353. [Chapter 353 - Feelings of the Protector](#)
354. [Chapter 354 - Fighting Fire with Fire](#)
355. [Chapter 355 - System Mission Awards](#)
356. [Chapter 356 - Third Stage of Talent Tree](#)
357. [Chapter 357 - Give it a Shot](#)
358. [Chapter 358 - Death and Reborn](#)
359. [Chapter 359 - After Awakening](#)
360. [Chapter 360 - Closing Ceremony \(1/3\)](#)
361. [Chapter 361 - Closing Ceremony \(2/3\)](#)
362. [Chapter 362 - Closing Ceremony \(3/3\)](#)
363. [Chapter 363 - Wish](#)
364. [Chapter 364 - Infernal Gem](#)
365. [Chapter 365 - Twin Figure](#)
366. [Chapter 366 - Legendary Devil](#)

367. [Chapter 367 - Successfully Promoted](#)
368. [Chapter 368 - Back in Triumph](#)
369. [Chapter 369 - Activate——Phantom Guardian](#)
370. [Chapter 370 - Wrong Choice?](#)
371. [Chapter 371 - The Strongest Reinforcements](#)
372. [Chapter 372 - Who Are They?](#)
373. [Chapter 373 - What a Crazy World This Is](#)
374. [Chapter 374 - The Hottest Recruitment](#)
375. [Chapter 375 - Preparation](#)
376. [Chapter 376 - Preparation](#)
377. [Chapter 377 - Silhouette in the Dusk](#)
378. [Chapter 378 - Forest Trail](#)
379. [Chapter 379 - Lightning Ambush](#)
380. [Chapter 380 - After the Ambush](#)
381. [Chapter 381 - Civilized Border](#)
382. [Chapter 382 - Spell of the Red Lotus](#)
383. [Chapter 383 - Messenger](#)
384. [Chapter 384 - Parasitic Ghoul](#)
385. [Chapter 385 - Double-edged Sword](#)
386. [Chapter 386 - Battle in Misty Mountains \(1/3\)](#)
387. [Chapter 387 - Battle in Misty Mountains \(2/3\)](#)
388. [Chapter 388 - Battle in Misty Mountains \(3/3\)](#)
389. [Chapter 389 - Fortress Battle](#)
390. [Chapter 390 - Gloom Shadow](#)
391. [Chapter 391 - Chaotic Warfare in the Fortress](#)
392. [Chapter 392 - Purple Lightning](#)
393. [Chapter 393 - Finally Got It](#)
394. [Chapter 394 - Building the Fortress](#)
395. [Chapter 395 - Planning Completed](#)
396. [Chapter 396 - Building the Fortress](#)
397. [Chapter 397 - A Surprise](#)
398. [Chapter 398 - Heart Knot](#)
399. [Chapter 399 - Heavy Trust](#)
400. [Chapter 400 - Leavers & Stayers](#)
401. [Chapter 401 - Matt's Decision](#)
402. [Chapter 402 - The Church Emissaries](#)
403. [Chapter 403 - Wrecking Havoc](#)

404. [Chapter 404 - Shadow Behind His Back](#)
405. [Chapter 405 - Provocation or Declaration of War](#)
406. [Chapter 406 - Pre-emptive](#)
407. [Chapter 407 - Fantasy Night](#)
408. [Chapter 408 - Five Star Missions](#)
409. [Chapter 409 - A Dilemma](#)
410. [Chapter 410 - Welcome Home](#)
411. [Chapter 411 - Hard Beginnings](#)
412. [Chapter 412 - 3 Men's job \(1/3\)](#)
413. [Chapter 413 - 3 Men's job \(2/3\)](#)
414. [Chapter 414 - 3 Men's job \(3/3\)](#)
415. [Chapter 415 - Lost Eagle](#)
416. [Chapter 416 - Trouble in the Eagle City](#)
417. [Chapter 417 - The Undead Legion](#)
418. [Chapter 418 - Battle before Dawn](#)
419. [Chapter 419 - A Deadly Secret](#)
420. [Chapter 420 - Bone List](#)
421. [Chapter 421 - Chasing and Fleeing](#)
422. [Chapter 422 - Snow Woman](#)
423. [Chapter 423 - Preparing for an Ambush](#)
424. [Chapter 424 - Battle](#)
425. [Chapter 425 - Ambush](#)
426. [Chapter 426 - Grave Situation](#)
427. [Chapter 427 - Bitter Support](#)
428. [Chapter 428 - Backhand Strike](#)
429. [Chapter 429 - Roaring Sea](#)
430. [Chapter 430 - An Afternoon Secret](#)
431. [Chapter 431 - A Reward from the Angel](#)
432. [Chapter 432 - Third Talent Tree?](#)
433. [Chapter 433 - Talent Fusion](#)
434. [Chapter 434 - The Key's Whereabouts](#)
435. [Chapter 435 - A Complicated Auction \(1/3\)](#)
436. [Chapter 436 - A Complicated Auction \(2/3\)](#)
437. [Chapter 437 - A Complicated Auction \(3/3\)](#)
438. [Chapter 438 - Underground Maze \(I\)](#)
439. [Chapter 439 - Underground Maze \(II\)](#)
440. [Chapter 440 - Underground Maze \(III\)](#)

441. [Chapter 441 - Underground Maze \(IV\)](#)
442. [Chapter 442 - Underground Maze \(V\)](#)
443. [Chapter 443 - Underground Maze \(VI\)](#)
444. [Chapter 444 - Underground Maze \(VII\)](#)
445. [Chapter 445 - Underground Maze \(VIII\)](#)
446. [Chapter 446 - Underground Maze \(IX\)](#)
447. [Chapter 447 - Underground Maze \(X\)](#)
448. [Chapter 448 - Undead Keeper](#)
449. [Chapter 449 - A Walking Corpse](#)
450. [Chapter 450 - Hidden Technique](#)
451. [Chapter 451 - Chaos Blade](#)
452. [Chapter 452 - Modified Dungeon](#)
453. [Chapter 453 - Angel Phylactery](#)
454. [Chapter 454 - An Undead Angel](#)
455. [Chapter 455 - Mission Completed](#)
456. [Chapter 456 - Returning to the Fortress](#)
457. [Chapter 457 - Fantasy Key](#)
458. [Chapter 458 - Seven Fantasy Boundaries](#)
459. [Chapter 459 - Elemental Badge](#)
460. [Chapter 460 - The Various Constructs](#)
461. [Chapter 461 - A Rainy Night](#)
462. [Chapter 462 - A Special Punishment](#)
463. [Chapter 463 - The Reaper Song](#)
464. [Chapter 464 - Hostile Forces](#)
465. [Chapter 465 - An Expedited Letter](#)
466. [Chapter 466 - The Light Parliament's Scheme](#)
467. [Chapter 467 - A Bewildering Situation](#)
468. [Chapter 468 - A Step to Strike Back](#)
469. [Chapter 469 - Murder in the Rain](#)
470. [Chapter 470 - Luring the Snake](#)
471. [Chapter 471 - Turnabout Chess](#)
472. [Chapter 472 - Sneaking In](#)
473. [Chapter 473 - Countdown Begins \(1/2\)](#)
474. [Chapter 474 - Countdown Begins \(2/2\)](#)
475. [Chapter 475 - Misled \(I\)](#)
476. [Chapter 476 - Misled \(II\)](#)
477. [Chapter 477 - Misled \(III\)](#)

478. [Chapter 478 - Misled \(IV\)](#)
479. [Chapter 479 - Misled \(V\)](#)
480. [Chapter 480 - Misled \(VI\)](#)
481. [Chapter 481 - Misled \(VII\)](#)
482. [Chapter 482 - Misled \(VIII\)](#)
483. [Chapter 483 - Misled \(XI\)](#)
484. [Chapter 484 - Misled \(X\)](#)
485. [Chapter 485 - Desperate Breakout](#)
486. [Chapter 486 - Blessed Hands](#)
487. [Chapter 487 - Ancient Artifacts](#)
488. [Chapter 488 - An Abnormal Silence](#)
489. [Chapter 489 - Between Heart to Heart](#)
490. [Chapter 490 - Troubles Ahead](#)
491. [Chapter 491 - Twin Fetal Movements](#)
492. [Chapter 492 - Elves of the Wind](#)
493. [Chapter 493 - Gracier & Madaras](#)
494. [Chapter 494 - Clash \(I\)](#)
495. [Chapter 495 - Clash \(II\)](#)
496. [Chapter 496 - Clash \(III\)](#)
497. [Chapter 497 - Clash \(IV\)](#)
498. [Chapter 498 - Clash \(V\)](#)
499. [Chapter 499 - Clash \(VI\)](#)
500. [Chapter 500 - Clash \(VII\)](#)
501. [Chapter 501 - Clash \(End\)](#)
502. [Chapter 502 - Fearless Ego \(1/3\)](#)
503. [Chapter 503 - Fearless Ego \(2/3\)](#)
504. [Chapter 504 - Fearless Ego \(3/3\)](#)
505. [Chapter 505 - The Calling of a War](#)
506. [Chapter 506 - Uprising Bugle-Horns](#)
507. [Chapter 507 - Battle Briefing](#)
508. [Chapter 508 - Paphield Battle \(1\)](#)
509. [Chapter 509 - Paphield Battle \(2\)](#)
510. [Chapter 510 - Paphield Battle \(3\)](#)
511. [Chapter 511 - Paphield Battle \(4\)](#)
512. [Chapter 512 - Paphield Battle \(5\)](#)
513. [Chapter 513 - Paphield Battle \(6\)](#)
514. [Chapter 514 - Paphield Battle \(7\)](#)

515. [Chapter 515 - Paphield Battle \(8\)](#)
516. [Chapter 516 - Paphield Battle \(9\)](#)
517. [Chapter 517 - Paphield Battle \(10\)](#)
518. [Chapter 518 - Troublesome Guest](#)
519. [Chapter 519 - Gaya's Trial](#)
520. [Chapter 520 - Unprepared...](#)
521. [Chapter 521 - Dusk in Grosso](#)
522. [Chapter 522 - Rhode's Plan](#)
523. [Chapter 523 - Necromancer & Companion](#)
524. [Chapter 524 - Struggles in the Forest](#)
525. [Chapter 525 - Spreading Fear](#)
526. [Chapter 526 - Scarlet Wickedness](#)
527. [Chapter 527 - Self-directed Oscars \(1/4\)](#)
528. [Chapter 528 - Self-directed Oscars \(2/4\)](#)
529. [Chapter 529 - Self-directed Oscars \(3/4\)](#)
530. [Chapter 530 - Self-directed Oscars \(4/4\)](#)
531. [Chapter 531 - Surging Blaze](#)
532. [Chapter 532 - Just the Start](#)
533. [Chapter 533 - Another Identity](#)
534. [Chapter 534 - Guests from Afar](#)
535. [Chapter 535 - Fiery Rose](#)
536. [Chapter 536 - Celestina's Bet](#)
537. [Chapter 537 - A Wonderful Night](#)
538. [Chapter 538 - A Strange Rumor](#)
539. [Chapter 539 - Deep into the Mine](#)
540. [Chapter 540 - Escape](#)
541. [Chapter 541 - Deep Underground](#)
542. [Chapter 542 - Friends & Foes](#)
543. [Chapter 543 - That Man \(I\)](#)
544. [Chapter 544 - That Man \(II\)](#)
545. [Chapter 545 - That Man \(III\)](#)
546. [Chapter 546 - That Man \(IV\)](#)
547. [Chapter 547 - That Man \(V\)](#)
548. [Chapter 548 - Mission Failed?](#)
549. [Chapter 549 - First Battle](#)
550. [Chapter 550 - Muffled Harp Strings](#)
551. [Chapter 551 - Two Person's Fight](#)

552. [Chapter 552 - Strange Ending](#)
553. [Chapter 553 - First Victory](#)
554. [Chapter 554 - A Startling Change](#)
555. [Chapter 555 - Take The Bait](#)
556. [Chapter 556 - Unexpected Joy](#)
557. [Chapter 557 - Two Years Contract](#)
558. [Chapter 558 - Final Hurdle](#)
559. [Chapter 559 - A Hunter's Footsteps](#)
560. [Chapter 560 - Individual Aesthetics \(1/2\)](#)
561. [Chapter 561 - Individual Aesthetics \(2/2\)](#)
562. [Chapter 562 - Unexpected Invitation](#)
563. [Chapter 563 - Frozen Lake \(I\)](#)
564. [Chapter 564 - Frozen Lake \(II\)](#)
565. [Chapter 565 - Frozen Lake \(III\)](#)
566. [Chapter 566 - Frozen Lake \(IV\)](#)
567. [Chapter 567 - Frozen Lake \(V\)](#)
568. [Chapter 568 - Frozen Lake \(VI\)](#)
569. [Chapter 569 - Frozen Sorrow](#)
570. [Chapter 570 - Sword Creation Point](#)
571. [Chapter 571 - Players' Methods](#)
572. [Chapter 572 - Dreamland](#)
573. [Chapter 573 - Snow](#)
574. [Chapter 574 - Avoidance](#)
575. [Chapter 575 - Lapis' Conundrum](#)
576. [Chapter 576 - Mysterious Swordsmanship](#)
577. [Chapter 577 - Fantasy Daybreak](#)
578. [Chapter 578 - Lapis's Worries](#)
579. [Chapter 579 - Tit For Tat \(1\)](#)
580. [Chapter 580 - Tit For Tat \(2\)](#)
581. [Chapter 581 - Tit For Tat \(3\)](#)
582. [Chapter 582 - Asking For Death](#)
583. [Chapter 583 - Blackblade Guards](#)
584. [Chapter 584 - A Tough Period](#)
585. [Chapter 585 - Countdown to Destruction](#)
586. [Chapter 586 - Whistling Wind](#)
587. [Chapter 587 - Road of the Dead](#)
588. [Chapter 588 - Gap in the Heart](#)

589. [Chapter 589 - Faltering Heart \(1\)](#)
590. [Chapter 590 - Faltering Heart \(2\)](#)
591. [Chapter 591 - illusion of the Dreamland](#)
592. [Chapter 592 - Brave First Step](#)
593. [Chapter 593 - Confused Heart \(I\)](#)
594. [Chapter 594 - Confused Heart \(II\)](#)
595. [Chapter 595 - Confused Heart \(III\)](#)
596. [Chapter 596 - Confused Heart \(V\)](#)
597. [Chapter 597 - Confused Heart \(VI\)](#)
598. [Chapter 598 - Confused Heart \(VI\)](#)
599. [Chapter 599 - Confused Heart \(VII\)](#)
600. [Chapter 600 - Confused Heart \(VIII\)](#)
601. [Chapter 601 - Confused Heart \(IX\)](#)
602. [Chapter 602 - Confused Heart \(X\)](#)
603. [Chapter 603 - Resurging Waves](#)
604. [Chapter 604 - Sacred Land of the Elves \(1\)](#)
605. [Chapter 605 - Sacred Land of the Elves \(2\)](#)
606. [Chapter 606 - Sacred Land of the Elves \(3\)](#)
607. [Chapter 607 - Sacred Land of the Elves \(4\)](#)
608. [Chapter 608 - The Rite Begins](#)
609. [Chapter 609 - Double-edged Sword Dance](#)
610. [Chapter 610 - Ivory Valley](#)
611. [Chapter 611 - Twin Elves](#)
612. [Chapter 612 - He & She \(I\)](#)
613. [Chapter 613 - He & She \(II\)](#)
614. [Chapter 614 - He & She \(III\)](#)
615. [Chapter 615 - He & She \(IV\)](#)
616. [Chapter 616 - He & She \(V\)](#)
617. [Chapter 617 - She & She](#)
618. [Chapter 618 - Leaving?](#)
619. [Chapter 619 - Strong Expansion](#)
620. [Chapter 620 - Saint Monastery \(I\)](#)
621. [Chapter 621 - Saint Monastery \(II\)](#)
622. [Chapter 622 - Saint Monastery \(III\)](#)
623. [Chapter 623 - Saint Monastery \(IV\)](#)
624. [Chapter 624 - Saint Monastery \(V\)](#)
625. [Chapter 625 - Saint Monastery \(VI\)](#)

626. [Chapter 626 - Saint Monastery_\(VII\)](#)
627. [Chapter 627 - Saint Monastery_\(VIII\)](#)
628. [Chapter 628 - Saint Monastery_\(IX\)](#)
629. [Chapter 629 - Saint Monastery_\(X\)](#)
630. [Chapter 630 - The Power to Change](#)
631. [Chapter 631 - Tear of Asha](#)
632. [Chapter 632 - Winter is Coming](#)
633. [Chapter 633 - Three Big Shots](#)
634. [Chapter 634 - A True Man Admits Defeat!](#)
635. [Chapter 635 - Genuine Menfolk](#)
636. [Chapter 636 - A Battle Between Men](#)
637. [Chapter 637 - A Night has Passed](#)
638. [Chapter 638 - Anne's Transformation](#)
639. [Chapter 639 - Unsolved Problem & a Problem that Should be Solved](#)
640. [Chapter 640 - Cooperation](#)
641. [Chapter 641 - Two Letters. Two Paths \(1/3\)](#)
642. [Chapter 642 - Two Letters. Two Paths \(2/3\)](#)
643. [Chapter 643 - Two Letters. Two Paths \(3/3\)](#)
644. [Chapter 644 - Criticism & Raid](#)
645. [Chapter 645 - Town of Miracle \(1/2\)](#)
646. [Chapter 646 - Town of Miracle \(2/2\)](#)
647. [Chapter 647 - Formal Tactic](#)
648. [Chapter 648 - Eve of Departure](#)
649. [Chapter 649 - Battle on the Ice Field \(1/3\)](#)
650. [Chapter 650 - Battle on the Ice Field \(2/3\)](#)
651. [Chapter 651 - Battle on the Ice Field \(3/3\)](#)
652. [Chapter 652 - An Accident?](#)
653. [Chapter 653 - Uninvited Guests \(I\)](#)
654. [Chapter 654 - Uninvited Guests \(II\)](#)
655. [Chapter 655 - Uninvited Guests \(III\)](#)
656. [Chapter 656 - Uninvited Guests \(IV\)](#)
657. [Chapter 657 - Uninvited Guests \(V\)](#)
658. [Chapter 658 - Uninvited Guests \(VI\)](#)
659. [Chapter 659 - Uninvited Guests \(End\)](#)
660. [Chapter 660 - The Guilty Party Files a Suit](#)
661. [Chapter 661 - Pitch-black Fetal Movement](#)
662. [Chapter 662 - Pre-Ceremony Preparation](#)

663. [Chapter 663 - Between Light & Light \(I\)](#)
664. [Chapter 664 - Between Light & Light \(II\)](#)
665. [Chapter 665 - Between Light & Light \(III\)](#)
666. [Chapter 666 - Between Light & Light \(IV\)](#)
667. [Chapter 667 - Between Light & Light \(V\)](#)
668. [Chapter 668 - Between Light & Light \(VI\)](#)
669. [Chapter 669 - Between Light & Light \(VII\)](#)
670. [Chapter 670 - Between Light & Light \(VIII\)](#)
671. [Chapter 671 - Between Light & Light \(IX\)](#)
672. [Chapter 672 - Between Light & Light \(X\)](#)
673. [Chapter 673 - Between Light & Light \(XI\)](#)
674. [Chapter 674 - Between Light & Light \(XII\)](#)
675. [Chapter 675 - Between Light & Light \(XIII\)](#)
676. [Chapter 676 - Between Light & Light \(XIV\)](#)
677. [Chapter 677 - Between Light & Light \(XV\)](#)
678. [Chapter 678 - Between Light & Light \(XVI\)](#)
679. [Chapter 679 - Between Light & Light \(XVII\)](#)
680. [Chapter 680 - Between Light & Light \(XVIII\)](#)
681. [Chapter 681 - Between Light & Light \(XIX\)](#)
682. [Chapter 682 - Between Light & Light \(XX\)](#)
683. [Chapter 683 - Between Light & Light \(End\)](#)
684. [Chapter 684 - Mission Reward & System Upgrade \(1/3\)](#)
685. [Chapter 685 - Mission Reward & System Upgrade \(2/3\)](#)
686. [Chapter 686 - Mission Reward & System Upgrade \(3/3\)](#)
687. [Chapter 687 - Ultimate Army](#)
688. [Chapter 688 - Rhythm Catcher](#)
689. [Chapter 689 - Skynet Plan](#)
690. [Chapter 690 - Storm Clouds Approach](#)
691. [Chapter 691 - Undercurrent](#)
692. [Chapter 692 - War Against Fate \(I\)](#)
693. [Chapter 693 - War Against Fate \(II\)](#)
694. [Chapter 694 - War Against Fate \(III\)](#)
695. [Chapter 695 - War Against Fate \(IV\)](#)
696. [Chapter 696 - War Against Fate \(V\)](#)
697. [Chapter 697 - War Against Fate \(VI\)](#)
698. [Chapter 698 - War Against Fate \(VII\)](#)
699. [Chapter 699 - War Against Fate \(VIII\)](#)

700. [Chapter 700 - War Against Fate \(IX\)](#)
701. [Chapter 701 - War Against Fate \(X\)](#)
702. [Chapter 702 - Prologue — The Country of Darkness](#)
703. [Chapter 703 - Nightfall \(I\)](#)
704. [Chapter 704 - Nightfall \(II\)](#)
705. [Chapter 705 - Nightfall \(III\)](#)
706. [Chapter 706 - Nightfall \(IV\)](#)
707. [Chapter 707 - Nightfall \(V\)](#)
708. [Chapter 708 - Nightfall \(VI\)](#)
709. [Chapter 709 - Nightfall \(VII\)](#)
710. [Chapter 710 - Nightfall \(VIII\)](#)
711. [Chapter 711 - What's This Rhythm?](#)
712. [Chapter 712 - This is The Rhythm of Heartbreak!](#)
713. [Chapter 713 - Toughest Problem](#)
714. [Chapter 714 - Reinforcements](#)
715. [Chapter 715 - Meeting](#)
716. [Chapter 716 - The Hunt](#)
717. [Chapter 717 - Ambush \(I\)](#)
718. [Chapter 718 - Ambush \(II\)](#)
719. [Chapter 719 - Ambush \(III\)](#)
720. [Chapter 720 - Ambush \(End\)](#)
721. [Chapter 721 - A Scholar's Battle Style](#)
722. [Chapter 722 - Zombie Puppet](#)
723. [Chapter 723 - The Dead & Alive](#)
724. [Chapter 724 - An Unfamiliar Country.](#)
725. [Chapter 725 - Protest](#)
726. [Chapter 726 - Unsteady, Snowy Night](#)
727. [Chapter 727 - Pre-War Scouting](#)
728. [Chapter 728 - Penetrate the Backlines \(1\)](#)
729. [Chapter 729 - Penetrate the Backlines \(2\)](#)
730. [Chapter 730 - Penetrate the Backlines \(3\)](#)
731. [Chapter 731 - A Big Trouble](#)
732. [Chapter 732 - Expand the Elemental Tunnel](#)
733. [Chapter 733 - Darkness Approaches](#)
734. [Chapter 734 - Darkness Falls \(I\)](#)
735. [Chapter 735 - Darkness Falls \(II\)](#)
736. [Chapter 736 - Darkness Falls \(III\)](#)

737. [Chapter 737 - Darkness Falls \(IV\)](#)
738. [Chapter 738 - Darkness Falls \(V\)](#)
739. [Chapter 739 - Darkness Falls \(VI\)](#)
740. [Chapter 740 - Darkness Falls \(VII\)](#)
741. [Chapter 741 - Darkness Falls \(VIII\)](#)
742. [Chapter 742 - Darkness Falls \(IX\)](#)
743. [Chapter 743 - Darkness Falls \(X\)](#)
744. [Chapter 744 - Darkness Falls \(XI\)](#)
745. [Chapter 745 - Darkness Falls \(XII\)](#)
746. [Chapter 746 - Darkness Falls \(XIII\)](#)
747. [Chapter 747 - : Darkness Falls \(XIV\)](#)
748. [Chapter 748 - A Stalemate](#)
749. [Chapter 749 - Into the Night](#)
750. [Chapter 750 - Scarlet & Pitch-black Colors](#)
751. [Chapter 751 - Drive Forward](#)
752. [Chapter 752 - Rumbling Gunfire](#)
753. [Chapter 753 - World's Number One Princess \(1\)](#)
754. [Chapter 754 - World's Number One Princess \(2\)](#)
755. [Chapter 755 - World's Number One Princess \(3\)](#)
756. [Chapter 756 - Utterly Defeated](#)
757. [Chapter 757 - Post-War](#)
758. [Chapter 758 - Unwelcome Guests \(1\)](#)
759. [Chapter 759 - Unwelcome Guests \(2\)](#)
760. [Chapter 760 - Unwelcome Guests \(3\)](#)
761. [Chapter 761 - Pet Feeding Manual \(1\)](#)
762. [Chapter 762 - Pet Feeding Manual \(2\)](#)
763. [Chapter 763 - Pet Feeding Manual \(3\)](#)
764. [Chapter 764 - Pet Feeding Manual \(4\)](#)
765. [Chapter 765 - Self-Fear](#)
766. [Chapter 766 - Hidden Poison Fangs in the Darkness](#)
767. [Chapter 767 - Awakening](#)
768. [Chapter 768 - Rebirth](#)
769. [Chapter 769 - Choice of Freedom](#)
770. [Chapter 770 - Air Support](#)
771. [Chapter 771 - Excellent Value for Money](#)
772. [Chapter 772 - A Test](#)
773. [Chapter 773 - A Foolish Idea](#)

774. [Chapter 774 - A Crazy Invitation](#)
775. [Chapter 775 - Give Me a Reason](#)
776. [Chapter 776 - More Than One Condition](#)
777. [Chapter 777 - 5000 Soldiers?](#)
778. [Chapter 778 - Flame Army_\(1\)](#)
779. [Chapter 779 - Flame Army_\(2\)](#)
780. [Chapter 780 - Whipping Dogs](#)
781. [Chapter 781 - A Miserable Start](#)
782. [Chapter 782 - Dark Clouds](#)
783. [Chapter 783 - This is Also a Choice](#)
784. [Chapter 784 - Before The Battle](#)
785. [Chapter 785 - More Than One Enemy_\(1\)](#)
786. [Chapter 786 - More Than One Enemy_\(2\)](#)
787. [Chapter 787 - More Than One Enemy_\(3\)](#)
788. [Chapter 788 - More Than One Enemy_\(4\)](#)
789. [Chapter 789 - A Surprising Conclusion](#)
790. [Chapter 790 - Leaving His Side](#)
791. [Chapter 791 - Arrival of the Light Dragon](#)
792. [Chapter 792 - Lilian's Wish](#)
793. [Chapter 793 - Rhode's Doubt](#)
794. [Chapter 794 - A Perplexing Journey](#)
795. [Chapter 795 - Destiny at the Intersection \(I\)](#)
796. [Chapter 796 - Destiny at the Intersection \(II\)](#)
797. [Chapter 797 - Destiny at the Intersection \(III\)](#)
798. [Chapter 798 - Destiny at the Intersection \(IV\)](#)
799. [Chapter 799 - Destiny at the Intersection \(V\)](#)
800. [Chapter 800 - The Unfortunate Battle Mage Group](#)
801. [Chapter 801 - Return of a Hero](#)
802. [Chapter 802 - In a Difficult Position](#)
803. [Chapter 803 - You Should Trust Others](#)
804. [Chapter 804 - A Battle For Them](#)
805. [Chapter 805 - Wind From the East](#)
806. [Chapter 806 - The Falcon's Beacon \(I\)](#)
807. [Chapter 807 - The Falcon's Beacon \(II\)](#)
808. [Chapter 808 - The Falcon's Beacon \(III\)](#)
809. [Chapter 809 - The Falcon's Beacon \(IV\)](#)
810. [Chapter 810 - The Falcon's Beacon \(V\)](#)

811. [Chapter 811 - The Falcon's Beacon \(VI\)](#)
812. [Chapter 812 - The Falcon's Beacon \(VII\)](#)
813. [Chapter 813 - The Falcon's Beacon \(VIII\)](#)
814. [Chapter 814 - The Falcon's Beacon \(IX\)](#)
815. [Chapter 815 - The Falcon's Beacon \(X\)](#)
816. [Chapter 816 - The Falcon's Beacon \(XI\)](#)
817. [Chapter 817 - The Falcon's Beacon \(XII\)](#)
818. [Chapter 818 - The Falcon's Beacon \(End\)](#)
819. [Chapter 819 - The True Legendary Artifact!](#)
820. [Chapter 820 - A Battlefield Without Smoke](#)
821. [Chapter 821 - Heroic Spirits](#)
822. [Chapter 822 - Astral Temple](#)
823. [Chapter 823 - Moon Blade Guards](#)
824. [Chapter 824 - After the Winter Season](#)
825. [Chapter 825 - Final Pike \(1\)](#)
826. [Chapter 826 - Final Pike \(2\)](#)
827. [Chapter 827 - Response from the Land of Chaos](#)
828. [Chapter 828 - Order Refugees \(1\)](#)
829. [Chapter 829 - Order Refugees \(2\)](#)
830. [Chapter 830 - Order Refugees \(3\)](#)
831. [Chapter 831 - Into Chaos](#)
832. [Chapter 832 - The Broken Land](#)
833. [Chapter 833 - Chaos Creatures](#)
834. [Chapter 834 - Welcome to the 71st Refuge](#)
835. [Chapter 835 - Tinder \(1\)](#)
836. [Chapter 836 - Tinder \(2\)](#)
837. [Chapter 837 - Tinder \(3\)](#)
838. [Chapter 838 - Cheating Against the BOSS](#)
839. [Chapter 839 - Chaos Core \(1\)](#)
840. [Chapter 840 - Chaos Core \(2\)](#)
841. [Chapter 841 - Chaos Core \(3\)](#)
842. [Chapter 842 - Returning Home](#)
843. [Chapter 843 - Sphere of Mystery—Wind Enchanted Field](#)
844. [Chapter 844 - Devil Gulf](#)
845. [Chapter 845 - Fate Exploration](#)
846. [Chapter 846 - Bloody Agitation](#)
847. [Chapter 847 - Knights of the Moon](#)

848. [Chapter 848 - Callings of the Bloody Field](#)
849. [Chapter 849 - The Sword Stained by Blood](#)
850. [Chapter 850 - Slaughter—Shira](#)
851. [Chapter 851 - Awakening](#)
852. [Chapter 852 - A Crazy Spirit](#)
853. [Chapter 853 - The Start of the Agony](#)
854. [Chapter 854 - The Sound of Tides](#)
855. [Chapter 855 - The Mysterious Gem](#)
856. [Chapter 856 - A Game of Chess](#)
857. [Chapter 857 - Under Starlight's Flag](#)
858. [Chapter 858 - Path to the Tinder](#)
859. [Chapter 859 - The Chaos Projection](#)
860. [Chapter 860 - Second Phase](#)
861. [Chapter 861 - The Berserk Puppet](#)
862. [Chapter 862 - Illusion Crystal](#)
863. [Chapter 863 - The Tinder Origin](#)
864. [Chapter 864 - In the Name of the Holy Sage](#)
865. [Chapter 865 - Magic and Fate](#)
866. [Chapter 866 - The Test \(1\)](#)
867. [Chapter 867 - The Test \(2\)](#)
868. [Chapter 868 - The Test \(3\)](#)
869. [Chapter 869 - Guardian Humanoids](#)
870. [Chapter 870 - Battle Preparations](#)
871. [Chapter 871 - The Unmoving Library](#)
872. [Chapter 872 - Opening the Door of Order](#)
873. [Chapter 873 - The Cries of Chaos](#)
874. [Chapter 874 - A Two-sided Battle \(1\)](#)
875. [Chapter 875 - A Two-sided Battle \(2\)](#)
876. [Chapter 876 - A Two-sided Battle \(3\)](#)
877. [Chapter 877 - The Centipede Warden](#)
878. [Chapter 878 - Cannon of Destruction](#)
879. [Chapter 879 - Exceeded the Expected Results](#)
880. [Chapter 880 - Changing History](#)
881. [Chapter 881 - Strike and Transformation](#)
882. [Chapter 882 - Young Lady by the Throne](#)
883. [Chapter 883 - Unconditional Rescue?](#)
884. [Chapter 884 - An Uncertain Decision](#)

885. [Chapter 885 - The Ridiculous Fate Images](#)
886. [Chapter 886 - Crisscrossed Fantasies \(1\)](#)
887. [Chapter 887 - Crisscrossed Fantasies \(2\)](#)
888. [Chapter 888 - Crisscrossed Fantasies \(3\)](#)
889. [Chapter 889 - A Strange Warfare](#)
890. [Chapter 890 - The Fate-Smashing Blade](#)
891. [Chapter 891 - The So-Called Fate was...](#)
892. [Chapter 892 - The Tinder](#)
893. [Chapter 893 - New Presence of Death](#)
894. [Chapter 894 - Under the Void](#)
895. [Chapter 895 - Void Territory](#)
896. [Chapter 896 - Building the City \(1\)](#)
897. [Chapter 897 - Building the City \(2\)](#)
898. [Chapter 898 - Building the City \(3\)](#)
899. [Chapter 899 - Building the City \(4\)](#)
900. [Chapter 900 - Magic Monster Nests](#)
901. [Chapter 901 - Fairy Nest](#)
902. [Chapter 902 - Undead Garden](#)
903. [Chapter 903 - Unstable Music Note](#)
904. [Chapter 904 - Humanoid Customs](#)
905. [Chapter 905 - Battlefields](#)
906. [Chapter 906 - Demon of the Dark Night](#)
907. [Chapter 907 - The Last Nest](#)
908. [Chapter 908 - The Sky Contract](#)
909. [Chapter 909 - Everything is Ready](#)
910. [Chapter 910 - Path to the Future](#)
911. [Chapter 911 - A New Territory](#)
912. [Chapter 912 - A Wild... Falling Royal](#)
913. [Chapter 913 - Cost of Surrendering](#)
914. [Chapter 914 - Territory Meeting](#)
915. [Chapter 915 - Lurking Dangers](#)
916. [Chapter 916 - Highland City](#)
917. [Chapter 917 - Repeat an Old Stratagem](#)
918. [Chapter 918 - Mutual Spying](#)
919. [Chapter 919 - Creating Chaos](#)
920. [Chapter 920 - Highland City Continuous Killings](#)
921. [Chapter 921 - Ever More Critical](#)

922. [Chapter 922 - A Flaring Omen](#)
923. [Chapter 923 - Angelina's Sigh](#)
924. [Chapter 924 - The Banquet](#)
925. [Chapter 925 - : Unsettling Night \(1\)](#)
926. [Chapter 926 - Unsettling Night \(2\)](#)
927. [Chapter 927 - Unsettling Night \(3\)](#)
928. [Chapter 928 - Boiling City](#)
929. [Chapter 929 - Balance](#)
930. [Chapter 930 - Won't One Die Miserably From... Courting Disaster?](#)
931. [Chapter 931 - No One Cares if You die Miserably from... Courting Disaster "Attack!"](#)
932. [Chapter 932 - Beginning of the Siege](#)
933. [Chapter 933 - You're Seeking Death!](#)
934. [Chapter 934 - This isn't War](#)
935. [Chapter 935 - Royal Magic Association](#)
936. [Chapter 936 - The Meaning of Fate is...](#)
937. [Chapter 937 - The Original Four](#)
938. [Chapter 938 - An Unsettling Heart](#)
939. [Chapter 939 - Each of Their Own Magical Power](#)
940. [Chapter 940 - Eve of the Storm](#)
941. [Chapter 941 - We Still Don't Know What Happened That Night \(1\)](#)
942. [Chapter 942 - We Still Don't Know What Happened That Night \(2\)](#)
943. [Chapter 943 - We Still Don't Know What Happened That Night \(3\)](#)
944. [Chapter 944 - We Still Don't Know What Happened That Night \(4\)](#)
945. [Chapter 945 - Invitation From the Sacred Palace](#)
946. [Chapter 946 - History Recorder](#)
947. [Chapter 947](#)
948. [Chapter 948](#)
949. [Chapter 949](#)
950. [Chapter 950](#)
951. [Chapter 951](#)
952. [Chapter 952](#)
953. [Chapter 953](#)
954. [Chapter 954 - Dragon Souls Meeting](#)
955. [Chapter 955 - Dragon Souls Meeting](#)
956. [Chapter 956](#)
957. [Chapter 957](#)

- 958. [Chapter 958](#)
- 959. [Chapter 959](#)
- 960. [Chapter 960](#)
- 961. [Chapter 961](#)
- 962. [Chapter 962](#)
- 963. [Chapter 963](#)
- 964. [Chapter 964](#)
- 965. [Chapter 965](#)
- 966. [Chapter 966](#)
- 967. [Chapter 967](#)
- 968. [Chapter 968](#)
- 969. [Chapter 969](#)
- 970. [Chapter 970](#)
- 971. [Chapter 971](#)
- 972. [Chapter 972](#)
- 973. [Chapter 973](#)
- 974. [Chapter 974](#)
- 975. [Chapter 975](#)
- 976. [Chapter 976](#)
- 977. [Chapter 977](#)
- 978. [Chapter 978](#)
- 979. [Chapter 979](#)
- 980. [Chapter 980](#)
- 981. [Chapter 981](#)
- 982. [Chapter 982](#)
- 983. [Chapter 983](#)
- 984. [Chapter 984](#)
- 985. [Chapter 985](#)
- 986. [Chapter 986](#)
- 987. [Chapter 987](#)
- 988. [Chapter 988](#)
- 989. [Chapter 989](#)
- 990. [Chapter 990 - Cleaning Up](#)
- 991. [Chapter 991 - Devil Monarch, Grazite](#)
- 992. [Chapter 992 - Battle Against Grazite](#)
- 993. [Chapter 993 - Advent of the Moon](#)
- 994. [Chapter 994 - When BOSS meets BOSS](#)

995. [Chapter 995 - After the Battle Ended](#)
996. [Chapter 996 - Intersection of Past, Present, and Future \(1\)](#)
997. [Chapter 997 - Intersection of Past, Present, and Future \(2\)](#)
998. [Chapter 998 - Intersection of Past, Present, and Future \(3\)](#)
999. [Chapter 999 - Intersection of Past, Present, and Future \(4\)](#)
1000. [Chapter 1000 - Fate of Twins \(1\)](#)
1001. [Chapter 1001 - Fate of Twins \(2\)](#)
1002. [Chapter 1002 - Fate of Twins \(3\)](#)
1003. [Chapter 1003 - A Risky Plan](#)
1004. [Chapter 1004 - What I Can and Want to Do](#)
1005. [Chapter 1005 - The Beginning to Connect the Present and Future](#)
1006. [Chapter 1006 - Everything That is Changing](#)
1007. [Chapter 1007 - Directions to The Future](#)
1008. [Chapter 1008 - Hibernating Fragments](#)
1009. [Chapter 1009 - Fused Will](#)
1010. [Chapter 1010 - A Mysterious Visit](#)
1011. [Chapter 1011 - Joint Collaboration](#)
1012. [Chapter 1012 - When the Wind Rises](#)
1013. [Chapter 1013 - Turmoil in the Imperial Capital](#)
1014. [Chapter 1014 - Lost \(1\)](#)
1015. [Chapter 1015 - Lost \(2\)](#)
1016. [Chapter 1016 - Lost \(3\)](#)
1017. [Chapter 1017 - Lost \(End\)](#)
1018. [Chapter 1018 - Tremors of Chaos](#)
1019. [Chapter 1019 - The Road to Survival \(1\)](#)
1020. [Chapter 1020 - The Road to Survival \(2\)](#)
1021. [Chapter 1021 - The Road to Survival \(3\)](#)
1022. [Chapter 1022 - Awakening](#)
1023. [Chapter 1023 - A Messy Situation](#)
1024. [Chapter 1024 - Resurrection Device](#)
1025. [Chapter 1025 - The Resurrected Sonia](#)
1026. [Chapter 1026 - Rousing the Masses](#)
1027. [Chapter 1027 - Sudden Change](#)
1028. [Chapter 1028 - At The Center of Chaos](#)
1029. [Chapter 1029 - Gate That is Opening Gradually](#)
1030. [Chapter 1030 - Blitz \(1\)](#)
1031. [Chapter 1031 - Blitz \(2\)](#)

1032. [Chapter 1032 - Blitz \(3\)](#)
1033. [Chapter 1033 - Alice in Action](#)
1034. [Chapter 1034 - Crisscrossed Wings](#)
1035. [Chapter 1035 - Clashing Resolution](#)
1036. [Chapter 1036 - Gate](#)
1037. [Chapter 1037 - Bloodbath](#)
1038. [Chapter 1038 - Fire of Purgatory](#)
1039. [Chapter 1039 - Helplessly Sitting and Watching](#)
1040. [Chapter 1040 - Total Attack](#)
1041. [Chapter 1041 - Collapse of the Chaos Gate](#)
1042. [Chapter 1042 - Temporary Ending](#)
1043. [Chapter 1043 - A Secret Confrontation](#)
1044. [Chapter 1044 - Nothing Trivial After the War](#)
1045. [Chapter 1045 - Rest Day](#)
1046. [Chapter 1046 - Restless Turmoil](#)
1047. [Chapter 1047 - Movement & Stillness](#)
1048. [Chapter 1048 - Adapting to the Situation](#)
1049. [Chapter 1049 - Mutation](#)
1050. [Chapter 1050 - Appearing From the Flames...](#)
1051. [Chapter 1051 - Contrast Deity Warden](#)
1052. [Chapter 1052 - Wanderer in The Dark](#)
1053. [Chapter 1053 - Autumn Scenery](#)
1054. [Chapter 1054 - Scarlet Young Moon](#)
1055. [Chapter 1055 - Queen of The Blood Descendants](#)
1056. [Chapter 1056 - Victims Under the Night Sky](#)
1057. [Chapter 1057 - Glory of the Vampires](#)
1058. [Chapter 1058 - Bait](#)
1059. [Chapter 1059 - Block the Enemy's Retreat & Mop Them up](#)
1060. [Chapter 1060 - Battle of Awakening](#)
1061. [Chapter 1061 - Below the Deity Wardens](#)
1062. [Chapter 1062 - Space Shatter](#)
1063. [Chapter 1063 - Bloody Death of War](#)
1064. [Chapter 1064 - Punishment](#)
1065. [Chapter 1065 - Crazy Threat](#)
1066. [Chapter 1066 - Temporary Silence](#)
1067. [Chapter 1067 - Corresponding Illusion](#)
1068. [Chapter 1068 - Cassidy](#)

1069. [Chapter 1069 - Dogfight](#)
1070. [Chapter 1070 - Accidental Changes](#)
1071. [Chapter 1071 - What Exactly was Going on?](#)
1072. [Chapter 1072 - Return of the Dragon](#)
1073. [Chapter 1073 - Unexpected Negotiations](#)
1074. [Chapter 1074 - Fruitless Negotiation](#)
1075. [Chapter 1075 - An Irresistible Condition](#)
1076. [Chapter 1076 - An Invitation on The Day of Three Moons](#)
1077. [Chapter 1077 - Under the Three Moons](#)
1078. [Chapter 1078 - Astral Telescope](#)
1079. [Chapter 1079 - Return](#)
1080. [Chapter 1080 - The Bothersome Deity Warden](#)
1081. [Chapter 1081 - An Invitation from Hell](#)
1082. [Chapter 1082 - Each of Their Own Ulterior Motives](#)
1083. [Chapter 1083 - Hell](#)
1084. [Chapter 1084 - Steel Fortress](#)
1085. [Chapter 1085 - Meeting an Old Friend in a Foreign Place](#)
1086. [Chapter 1086 - The Guide to River Styx](#)
1087. [Chapter 1087 - Styx Brigade](#)
1088. [Chapter 1088 - Shadows of Casselly](#)
1089. [Chapter 1089 - Confrontation](#)
1090. [Chapter 1090 - Break a Siege](#)
1091. [Chapter 1091](#)
1092. [Chapter 1092 - Fated Encounter](#)
1093. [Chapter 1093 - Fated Decision](#)
1094. [Chapter 1094 - Fated Turnover](#)
1095. [Chapter 1095 - : On the Other Side of Fate](#)
1096. [Chapter 1096 - Fated Accident](#)
1097. [Chapter 1097 - Desolate Town](#)
1098. [Chapter 1098 - Rhode's Request](#)
1099. [Chapter 1099 - Two Intertwining Poles](#)
1100. [Chapter 1100 - Unnamed Road Ahead](#)
1101. [Chapter 1101 - emporary Ending](#)
1102. [Chapter 1102 - : A New Problem Arises Before the Old One is Solved](#)
1103. [Chapter 1103 - Calling of a Mission or Cell Division?](#)
1104. [Chapter 1104 - : Science and Magic](#)
1105. [Chapter 1105 - Secret of the Black Slate](#)

1106. [Chapter 1106 - Multi-party Linkage](#)
1107. [Chapter 1107 - Investigation by the Other Party](#)
1108. [Chapter 1108 - The Direction of Order](#)
1109. [Chapter 1109 - A Bothersome Suggestion](#)
1110. [Chapter 1110 - Eve of Departure](#)
1111. [Chapter 1111 - Welcome Back](#)
1112. [Chapter 1112 - Mysterious Predicament](#)
1113. [Chapter 1113 - Descend of an Angel](#)
1114. [Chapter 1114 - Original Slate](#)
1115. [Chapter 1115 - Interlocked Records](#)
1116. [Chapter 1116 - Special Investigation Force](#)
1117. [Chapter 1117 - Dancing in the Dark](#)
1118. [Chapter 1118 - Man of Cooperation](#)
1119. [Chapter 1119 - Battle in the Nest](#)
1120. [Chapter 1120 - The Attack of Chaos](#)
1121. [Chapter 1121 - Emerging Danger](#)
1122. [Chapter 1122 - Core of the Chaos Nest](#)
1123. [Chapter 1123 - Encounter and Reunion](#)
1124. [Chapter 1124 - Unrelenting Trouble](#)
1125. [Chapter 1125 - A Heavenly Object](#)
1126. [Chapter 1126 - Chaotic World](#)
1127. [Chapter 1127 - Returning Home](#)
1128. [Chapter 1128 - Difficult Choice](#)
1129. [Chapter 1129 - Opportunity and Danger](#)
1130. [Chapter 1130 - Secrets of Ancient Ruins](#)
1131. [Chapter 1131 - The Fifth Ruin](#)
1132. [Chapter 1132 - Enter the Ruins](#)
1133. [Chapter 1133 - Weak Fetal Movement](#)
1134. [Chapter 1134 - Bizarre Transforming Object](#)
1135. [Chapter 1135 - Shadows of the Ice City_\(1\)](#)
1136. [Chapter 1136 - : Shadows of the Ice City_\(2\)](#)
1137. [Chapter 1137 - Shadows of the Ice City_\(3\)](#)
1138. [Chapter 1138 - A Message Spanning Over 65 Million Years_\(1\)](#)
1139. [Chapter 1139 - A Message Spanning Over 65 Million Years_\(2\)](#)
1140. [Chapter 1140 - A Message Spanning Over 65 Million Years_\(3\)](#)
1141. [Chapter 1141 - A Message Spanning Over 65 Million Years_\(4\)](#)
1142. [Chapter 1142 - Marybelle's Decision](#)

1143. [Chapter 1143 - The Choice after 65 Million Years](#)
1144. [Chapter 1144 - Agios of Chaos](#)
1145. [Chapter 1145 - Strength of the Chaos Army](#)
1146. [Chapter 1146 - Ruined Edge](#)
1147. [Chapter 1147 - The Returning Deity Warden](#)
1148. [Chapter 1148 - Situation Out of Control](#)
1149. [Chapter 1149 - Remnant Heart](#)
1150. [Chapter 1150 - Before Departure \(1\)](#)
1151. [Chapter 1151 - Before Departure \(2\)](#)
1152. [Chapter 1152 - Departure and Battle](#)
1153. [Chapter 1153 - Duel under Order](#)
1154. [Chapter 1154 - A Disorderly Situation](#)
1155. [Chapter 1155 - First Wilderness](#)
1156. [Chapter 1156 - The Forgotten Land \(1\)](#)
1157. [Chapter 1157 - : The Forgotten Land \(2\)](#)
1158. [Chapter 1158 - The Forgotten Land \(3\)](#)
1159. [Chapter 1159 - Furtive Erosion](#)
1160. [Chapter 1160 - Startling Rebellion in the Underground](#)
1161. [Chapter 1161 - Lava Lake](#)
1162. [Chapter 1162 - Door of the Fantasy World](#)
1163. [Chapter 1163 - Ghost Under the Lava \(1\)](#)
1164. [Chapter 1164 - Ghost Under the Lava \(2\)](#)
1165. [Chapter 1165 - Ghost Under the Lava \(3\)](#)
1166. [Chapter 1166 - Door of the Fantasy World](#)
1167. [Chapter 1167 - Sleeping Beauty](#)
1168. [Chapter 1168 - Reborn Spirit](#)
1169. [Chapter 1169 - A Messy Situation with the Dragon Souls](#)
1170. [Chapter 1170 - The Journey Home](#)
1171. [Chapter 1171 - Reemergence](#)
1172. [Chapter 1172 - Return to the Void Territory](#)
1173. [Chapter 1173 - A Tough Decision](#)
1174. [Chapter 1174 - Under the Dark Night Sky](#)
1175. [Chapter 1175 - Trapped](#)
1176. [Chapter 1176 - A Tough Spot](#)
1177. [Chapter 1177 - Specter Swordsman](#)
1178. [Chapter 1178 - Spirit Rinsing \(1\)](#)
1179. [Chapter 1179 - Spirit Rinsing \(2\)](#)

1180. [Chapter 1180 - Unpeaceful Night](#)
1181. [Chapter 1181 - News from the Dark Sky](#)
1182. [Chapter 1182 - Start of an Alliance](#)
1183. [Chapter 1183 - Bugle of Assault](#)
1184. [Chapter 1184 - Advance](#)
1185. [Chapter 1185 - Air Combat](#)
1186. [Chapter 1186 - Stalemate](#)
1187. [Chapter 1187 - Burning Forest](#)
1188. [Chapter 1188 - Flame Monster](#)
1189. [Chapter 1189 - Reappearing Moon Shadow \(1\)](#)
1190. [Chapter 1190 - Reappearing Moon Shadow \(2\)](#)
1191. [Chapter 1191 - Reappearing Moon Shadow \(3\)](#)
1192. [Chapter 1192 - Seeking Countermeasures](#)
1193. [Chapter 1193 - Power of Stars](#)
1194. [Chapter 1194 - Charge](#)
1195. [Chapter 1195 - Protector of the Star Mausoleum](#)
1196. [Chapter 1196 - Enemy](#)
1197. [Chapter 1197 - Confrontation](#)
1198. [Chapter 1198 - Surrender](#)
1199. [Chapter 1199 - Awakening](#)
1200. [Chapter 1200 - Sudden Emergence of a Formidable Foe](#)
1201. [Chapter 1201 - A New Enemy](#)
1202. [Chapter 1202 - Falling Stars](#)
1203. [Chapter 1203 - Chaos Lord](#)
1204. [Chapter 1204 - Ice and Snow Child](#)
1205. [Chapter 1205 - Ill-fated relationship](#)
1206. [Chapter 1206 - Bow of Time, Arrow of Space \(1\)](#)
1207. [Chapter 1207 - Bow of Time, Arrow of Space \(2\)](#)
1208. [Chapter 1208 - Lost Young lady](#)
1209. [Chapter 1209 - Hidden Secret](#)
1210. [Chapter 1210 - The Choice Ahead](#)
1211. [Chapter 1211 - Land of Death](#)
1212. [Chapter 1212 - Escape From Danger](#)
1213. [Chapter 1213 - Tide of Dusk](#)
1214. [Chapter 1214 - Sudden Change in the Night](#)
1215. [Chapter 1215 - Queen of Blades \(1\)](#)
1216. [Chapter 1216 - Queen of Blades \(2\)](#)

1217. [Chapter 1217 - : Dark Region \(1\)](#)
1218. [Chapter 1218 - Dark Region \(2\)](#)
1219. [Chapter 1219 - Dark Region \(3\)](#)
1220. [Chapter 1220 - Dark Region \(4\)](#)
1221. [Chapter 1221 - Dark Region \(5\)](#)
1222. [Chapter 1222 - Dark Region \(6\)](#)
1223. [Chapter 1223 - Dark Region \(7\)](#)
1224. [Chapter 1224 - Dark Region \(8\)](#)
1225. [Chapter 1225 - Dark Region \(9\)](#)
1226. [Chapter 1226 - Dark Region \(10\)](#)
1227. [Chapter 1227 - Dark Region \(11\)](#)
1228. [Chapter 1228 - Dark Region \(12\)](#)
1229. [Chapter 1229 - Dark Region \(13\)](#)
1230. [Chapter 1230 - Dark Region \(14\)](#)
1231. [Chapter 1231 - Dark Region \(15\)](#)
1232. [Chapter 1232 - Ceding Territory, Paying Indemnity](#)
1233. [Chapter 1233 - The Dark Elves' Choice](#)
1234. [Chapter 1234 - Mark of the Dragon Soul](#)
1235. [Chapter 1235 - Limit of Collapse](#)
1236. [Chapter 1236 - The Fallen Princess](#)
1237. [Chapter 1237 - Dragon Prison](#)
1238. [Chapter 1238 - Dragon Inheritance](#)
1239. [Chapter 1239 - Monitoring Eye](#)
1240. [Chapter 1240 - Sleeping Beauty](#)
1241. [Chapter 1241 - The Right Way to Wake the Sleeping Beauty](#)
1242. [Chapter 1242 - Fairy Tale Ending](#)
1243. [Chapter 1243 - Dragon Soul Trial](#)
1244. [Chapter 1244 - 12 Trials \(1\)](#)
1245. [Chapter 1245 - 12 Trials \(2\)](#)
1246. [Chapter 1246 - 12 Trials \(2\)](#)
1247. [Chapter 1247 - First Stage](#)
1248. [Chapter 1248 - Strange Development](#)
1249. [Chapter 1249 - Tremors of Chaos](#)
1250. [Chapter 1250 - Insane Ceremony](#)
1251. [Chapter 1251 - Random Intrusion](#)
1252. [Chapter 1252 - Borrowing a Blade](#)
1253. [Chapter 1253 - The Valkyrie's Test](#)

1254. [Chapter 1254 - Crystal Star](#)
1255. [Chapter 1255 - Dark Arena \(1\)](#)
1256. [Chapter 1256 - Dark Arena \(2\)](#)
1257. [Chapter 1257 - Dark Arena \(3\)](#)
1258. [Chapter 1258 - Dark Arena \(4\)](#)
1259. [Chapter 1259 - Soldier From Heaven](#)
1260. [Chapter 1260 - The New Dark Dragon](#)
1261. [Chapter 1261 - Flag of War Declaration](#)
1262. [Chapter 1262 - Smoke of War](#)
1263. [Chapter 1263 - Reformed Chessboard](#)
1264. [Chapter 1264 - Time to Open Up the Land!](#)
1265. [Chapter 1265 - Stars](#)
1266. [Chapter 1266 - Welcome to the Epic Battlefield](#)
1267. [Chapter 1267 - Teeth of Steel](#)
1268. [Chapter 1268 - Shadowy Figures \(1\)](#)
1269. [Chapter 1269 - Shadowy Figures \(2\)](#)
1270. [Chapter 1270 - Shadowy Figures \(3\)](#)
1271. [Chapter 1271 - Call of Duty—Behind Enemy Lines](#)
1272. [Chapter 1272 - Secret Infiltration](#)
1273. [Chapter 1273 - Two-way Strategy](#)
1274. [Chapter 1274 - Spider's Nest](#)
1275. [Chapter 1275 - Ghost Image](#)
1276. [Chapter 1276 - Book of Death \(1\)](#)
1277. [Chapter 1277 - Book of Death \(2\)](#)
1278. [Chapter 1278 - Book of Death \(3\)](#)
1279. [Chapter 1279 - The Devoted Psychic](#)
1280. [Chapter 1280 - The Sharp Blade that Struck from Behind](#)
1281. [Chapter 1281 - Collapse](#)
1282. [Chapter 1282 - Void Storm](#)
1283. [Chapter 1283 - The Killing Begins](#)
1284. [Chapter 1284 - Ion's Confusion](#)
1285. [Chapter 1285 - Declaration of Chaos](#)
1286. [Chapter 1286 - Trouble Ensues](#)
1287. [Chapter 1287 - Time for a Break](#)
1288. [Chapter 1288 - Everyone's Will](#)
1289. [Chapter 1289 - Summoning the Book of Life](#)
1290. [Chapter 1290 - Blessings of the Light Goddess](#)

1291. [Chapter 1291 - Omen of Invasion](#)
1292. [Chapter 1292 - Whereabouts of the Book of Elements](#)
1293. [Chapter 1293 - Elemental Gate](#)
1294. [Chapter 1294 - Ice Throne](#)
1295. [Chapter 1295 - Daughter of the Sea](#)
1296. [Chapter 1296 - Sealed Elements](#)
1297. [Chapter 1297 - Unstable Borders](#)
1298. [Chapter 1298 - Each Their own Battlefield](#)
1299. [Chapter 1299 - Battle End](#)
1300. [Chapter 1300 - Lifted Seal](#)
1301. [Chapter 1301 - The Big Three](#)
1302. [Chapter 1302: - Unexpected Partners](#)
1303. [Chapter 1303 - Lapis, Towering on the Ground](#)
1304. [Chapter 1304 - Chaotic Battle](#)
1305. [Chapter 1305 - Holy Sword System](#)
1306. [Chapter 1306 - Shattered Defenses](#)
1307. [Chapter 1307 - Restless Crisis](#)
1308. [Chapter 1308 - Angel and Dragon \(1\)](#)
1309. [Chapter 1309 - Angel and Dragon \(2\)](#)
1310. [Chapter 1310 - Angel and Dragon \(3\)](#)
1311. [Chapter 1311 - Angel and Dragon \(4\)](#)
1312. [Chapter 1312 - Angel and Dragon \(5\)](#)
1313. [Chapter 1313 - Angel and Dragon \(6\)](#)
1314. [Chapter 1314 - Flesh Hunters](#)
1315. [Chapter 1315 - Bloodstained Front \(1\)](#)
1316. [Chapter 1316 - Bloodstained Front \(2\)](#)
1317. [Chapter 1317 - Bloodstained Front \(3\)](#)
1318. [Chapter 1318 - Bloodstained Front \(4\)](#)
1319. [Chapter 1319 - Under the Watchful Eyes of Chaos](#)
1320. [Chapter 1320 - Chaos Eye](#)
1321. [Chapter 1321 - Full of Misgivings](#)
1322. [Chapter 1322 - Listen to Big Brother](#)
1323. [Chapter 1323 - Path to Awakening](#)
1324. [Chapter 1324 - City of White \(1\)](#)
1325. [Chapter 1325 - City of White \(2\)](#)
1326. [Chapter 1326 - City of White \(3\)](#)
1327. [Chapter 1327 - City of White \(4\)](#)

1328. [Chapter 1328 - City of White \(5\)](#)
1329. [Chapter 1329 - City of White \(6\)](#)
1330. [Chapter 1330 - City of White \(7\)](#)
1331. [Chapter 1331 - Dark Palace \(1\)](#)
1332. [Chapter 1332 - Dark Palace \(2\)](#)
1333. [Chapter 1333 - Dark Palace \(3\)](#)
1334. [Chapter 1334 - Dark Palace \(4\)](#)
1335. [Chapter 1335 - Dark Palace \(5\)](#)
1336. [Chapter 1336 - Scepter of Victory](#)
1337. [Chapter 1337 - Twin Dream \(1\)](#)
1338. [Chapter 1338 - Twin Dream \(2\)](#)
1339. [Chapter 1339 - Twin Dream \(3\)](#)
1340. [Chapter 1340 - Garden of Seclusion \(1\)](#)
1341. [Chapter 1341 - Garden of Seclusion \(2\)](#)
1342. [Chapter 1342 - Garden of Seclusion \(3\)](#)
1343. [Chapter 1343 - Garden of Seclusion \(4\)](#)
1344. [Chapter 1344 - City of the Decisive Battle \(1\)](#)
1345. [Chapter 1345 - City of the Decisive Battle \(2\)](#)
1346. [Chapter 1346 - City of the Decisive Battle \(3\)](#)
1347. [Chapter 1347 - City of the Decisive Battle \(4\)](#)
1348. [Chapter 1348 - City of the Decisive Battle \(5\)](#)
1349. [Chapter 1349 - City of the Decisive Battle \(6\)](#)
1350. [Chapter 1350 - City of the Decisive Battle \(7\)](#)
1351. [Chapter 1351 - City of the Decisive Battle \(8\)](#)
1352. [Chapter 1352 - City of the Decisive Battle \(9\)](#)
1353. [Chapter 1353 - City of the Decisive Battle \(10\)](#)
1354. [Chapter 1354 - City of the Decisive Battle \(11\)](#)
1355. [Chapter 1355 - City of the Decisive Battle \(12\)](#)
1356. [Chapter 1356 - City of the Decisive Battle \(13\)](#)
1357. [Chapter 1357 - Problem and Truth](#)
1358. [Chapter 1358 - Back to Reality](#)
1359. [Chapter 1359 - Journey](#)
1360. [Chapter 1360 - Evil Clutches in the Dark](#)
1361. [Chapter 1361 - Breaks Between Boredom](#)
1362. [Chapter 1362 - Holy Sword Barrier](#)
1363. [Chapter 1363 - Door of Akasha](#)
1364. [Chapter 1364 - Tyrant of the Sky](#)

1365. [Chapter 1365 - Role of an Act](#)
1366. [Chapter 1366 - Under the Eternal Night](#)
1367. [Chapter 1367 - Ever-changing Phantom](#)
1368. [Chapter 1368 - Presence of the Sixth](#)
1369. [Chapter 1369 - Initiate an Attack](#)
1370. [Chapter 1370 - Regroup on the Front Line](#)
1371. [Chapter 1371 - Open the Way](#)
1372. [Chapter 1372 - Advancing Path](#)
1373. [Chapter 1373 - Chaos Core](#)
1374. [Chapter 1374 - Bitter Struggle](#)
1375. [Chapter 1375 - Evacuation](#)
1376. [Chapter 1376 - Escape From Danger](#)
1377. [Chapter 1377 - Guiding Beacon](#)
1378. [Chapter 1378 - Final Countdown](#)
1379. [Chapter 1379 - The Final Battle](#)
1380. [Chapter 1380 - Path to the Future](#)
1381. [Chapter 1381 END - A Brand New Start](#)

Chapter 1

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Dark clouds shrouded the sky, followed by the darkness and chaos that descended upon the earth. The spiral stone stairwell, bloody corpses, armories, weapons — everything was so chaotic and bleak, carrying the scent of death and danger.

Rhode took a deep breath, but he wasn't able to taste the cold and bloody air. After all, it was just a game. He shook his head and turned to look at his comrades who were sitting on the ground not far from him. Right now, they were resting quietly, restoring their own strength and repairing their own weapons. On the surface, it was no different from the usual day, but Rhode knew that this fight was clearly not as easy as before.

“How many survived?”

He asked in a low voice.

Hearing this question, his comrades looked at each other. Then a thin mage stood up.

“Guild leader, reporting! There are ninety-six people left. The Void Dragon Dungeon is even more dangerous than we imagined. A lot of our brothers are still left behind in the previous trap. Luckily we still have a diverse number of classes left.”

“That's good.”

Rhode nodded. He did not say anything else, so the others also went silent.

If it were an ordinary guild, they would have lost their courage long ago and would have fallen into disorder. After all, what they were about to face was the most powerful, most terrible, and one of the game's most elite bosses, the unconquered Void Dragon. It was the final boss of the Third Chapter in

Dragon Soul Continent Online. At the moment, it was known as the most terrible existence. Facing such a fight, ordinary guilds needed to organize at least ten parties to challenge it. But now, Rhode's guild was only left with ninety-six people, which was clearly not enough. Still, there was not even the slightest panic in their eyes, only calmness, confidence, and trust.

The person that they trusted with their avatars' lives was currently standing not far from the stairwell in front of them. He looked up to the sky with a face full of fortitude. A cold scar could be found on his brow, which left people awestruck. A shining magical armor covered his mighty body as if it was a mighty bulwark that would never fall.

Of course, it was not because of his dignified outward appearance that had made others trust the man in front of them. No matter how strong he looked, it was only an avatar design, and the scar on his brow was just a cosmetic item.

The real factors were the countless achievements and prestigious titles behind him.

First player to rank top of all professional players.

First player to be acknowledged as the top player of the most difficult playable class, 'Spirit Swordsman.'

Since the First Chapter of 'Dragon Soul Continent Online: The Coming Darkness', he had led the guild by solely relying on his own ability. His frightening degree of familiarity towards other classes had helped him sweep three quarterly leaderboards and defeat all the bosses in the first kill as the leader of the guild. All of his dungeon videos would be reproduced by numerous players. He was worshiped as the holy teacher, and he was the Dragon Soul Continent's No. 1 guild leader — Rhode.

He had personally conquered 'The Coming Darkness', and paved the way to the Second Chapter, 'The Turbulent Era'. Then, he conquered the 'The Turbulent Era', and had arrived to 'The Void Trial'. And now, he would once again use his own hands to end 'The Void Trial'. However, the new era would no longer be opened by him alone.

How many years has it been?

Rhode shifted his gaze from the distant shining thunderbolts in the sea of clouds and asked himself.

Since the death of his sister, he had been in the Dragon Soul Continent for seven years, and in the past seven years, in order to force himself to forget the pain of the past, he repeatedly set many impossible goals for himself and had reached it again and again. At that time, it had brought him great excitement and glory, which slowly lessened the deep pain in his heart.

However, it was going to stop here.

A month ago, Rhode's parents had traveled abroad. Unfortunately, their plane flew into a hurricane and crashed, killing both of them instantly. Rhode had been unable to remember what the call he received was about, and how he had felt back then when he heard the news. Now, he had made the decision to leave the game and return to real life. This was not just for his own parents, but also for his own sake. He himself was very clear that it was time for him to change.

“Lea... leader?”

A timid voice sounded, interrupting his flashback. He looked up and saw that there was a timid female mage that had raised her hand from the crowd, her eyes were shining towards him.

“Are...are you really going to leave?”

“Yes.”

Rhode nodded. Then he began to control his own complicated emotions. He shook his head and looked at his companions; these were all his memories and achievements for seven years, they were comrades that had been fighting with him for the past seven years. However, soon, he would eventually leave them. Although it was only in the game, even with a small hand gesture, he could feel what others wanted to do to some extent. After

removing the game helmet and going back to reality, it seemed like he would not be able to recognize them.

“My resume was sent yesterday. I hope that I can find a company that will take me in.”

“If I received the guild leader’s resume, I will arrange you directly as a manager of the department, just rest assured!”

A knight waved the sword in his hand. His words had also livened up the previous dull atmosphere and made everyone laugh.

“Thank you for your kindness. Unfortunately, I did not write my game experience on my resume. As you know, our guild has many enemies. If my resume were to be received by people from another guild, then my life would be over.”

Rhode also smiled and answered. After that, he coughed with a serious expression.

“I think we all know just how we have overcome these past years.”

Hearing him, the people that had laughed just now closed their mouths and began to listen to his words.

“We also know that in the forums, there are a lot of people who accuse us and say that we undermine the balance of the game, monopolize all the boss first kills, and made the word ‘competition’ lose its meaning... Frankly, they’re not wrong, but...”

Rhode suddenly clenched his fist and swung it forcefully.

“But this is what we do! We are the strongest guild, we are the strongest party! We have the strength! Then we have to do it, to rob it! The other guilds are not strong enough, therefore it’s their own problem for being defeated. If their strength was enough, they should’ve been able to contend with us. Us monopolizing the boss first kill is not by relying on orthodox methods, position or the flattery from the game company. What we rely on

is our own strength! We never give up, we never admit defeat, we will never slack, so what we have now is what we deserve. It is just that simple.”

Rhode paused and then continued.

“I love this guild. I will also miss the time we have spent the past the seven years together, but in this world, all good things will come to an end. I need to go to find my purpose in life, but I will never forget everyone, neither will I forget the guild, which carries my most painful memories, but also my happiest ones. I will always remember Starlight forever.”

Rhode said while pointing on his head.

“A lot of people said that if I left the guild, the guild will not be able to persist on. I know that there are a lot of guilds that heard about me leaving and are now busy sharpening their weapon to break our guild after I leave. However, they have underestimated us. Dragon Soul Continent Online is not a game with only me in it. I cannot establish the guild myself. I cannot create a party myself, and it is impossible for me to take the boss first kill by myself. That is why I hope that after I leave, all of you can give those people the reason why this guild is so strong...”

“Because we have the ability — the ability to take our guild to the first rank with our own strength!”

“Yes!”

“No problem, leader!”

“Leave it to us. When the time calls for it, we will give those idiots a perfect answer!”

“Very good.”

Hearing everyone’s answer, Rhode nodded, and then he turned to the right side of the crowd.

“Old Liu.”

After hearing Rhode voice, the thin mage walked out of the crowd and came to his side. Rhode looked at the mage in front of him quietly for a moment, then took out his guild token and placed it in his hands.

[System Notice: Transferring Guild Leadership, Transferring Party Leadership]

“The next era is yours.”

Rhode let go of his hand. His voice was very calm, without the slightest change.

“No problem, Rhode.”

The mage nodded, but soon, he spoke again.

“Well, as the new guild leader and as the party leader, I order you to lead everyone one last time.”

“Old Liu?”

Hearing this answer, Rhode could not help but frown. The thin mage only smiled and patted Rhode’s shoulder.

“You are the one who started this era, and you are the one who supposed to end it too, Rhode. This is how it should be.”

“...”

Rhode went silent; he looked towards his companions who were not far away. At that moment, they were ready and were waiting for his orders as usual.

Then Rhode raised his sword, pointing it to the front.

“Get ready!!”

As expected, the Void Dragon is extremely strong

Rhode had fought against almost all the higher level BOSSES in the Dragon Soul Continent and even included the other setups in the Dragon Soul Continent, but none of them was as troublesome as the Void Dragon in front of him. Its attack pattern was more complex, almost random. Its damage was several times higher than ordinary bosses. Needless to say that its speed, response, and even defense were all S-class level.

Huff...! What a difficult opponent to conquer...

Rhode held his sword and clenched his teeth, watching the monster in front of him. The fight had reached its peak, and he was the only survivor. But even so, Rhode's HP was almost empty; the flashing red alert on his retinas continuously reminded him that his vitality had reached the limit.

So what if it is the Void Dragon?

As they looked at each other's HP, it can be seen that the dragon's eyes were filled with hatred. Suddenly, Rhode had a very strange feeling; he seemed to be able to feel the dragon's emotions. As the game's most powerful and undefeated boss, it now actually fell into such a situation, it must have felt really bad.

Then, I'll go with you.

Thinking of it, Rhode raised his left hand.

Accompanied by a bird's cry, Rhode's sword suddenly burst out a blazing flame. It morphed into a soaring Fire Bird, with its head overturned, it rushed towards the Void Dragon. Facing a head-on attack from Rhode, the Void Dragon roared menacingly. It raised its forepaws high and smashed forward.

“!!!”

Suddenly, Rhode felt his body shake violently. A strong power was building up as the Fire Bird cried out in sorrow and vanished immediately. But before it disappeared, it created a strong explosion that successfully connected with the Void Dragon. The Void Dragon that was originally

waving its claw failed because of the explosion and its claw was abruptly torn apart.

After a while, an empty door opened.

Rhode bit his teeth. The flashing red alert was now in an even deeper shade of red, reminding him that the damage he suffered had reached the critical point. However, it was not within his control anymore. This was the last chance; he would either win or perish trying. He raised the sword in his hand, rushing forward. But the Void Dragon also managed to recover. It growled and once again tried to thrust down its claw. At the same time, Rhode also threw out the sword in his hand.

Thunderbolt, activate!

The sword turned into a bright light, piercing the dragon's chest. Rhode was completely focused looking at it— looking at the light that pierced through the Void Dragon's claw which tore through the dragon's body scales easily.

The Void Dragon roared in agony; after that, a huge dragon claw smashed into Rhode's body.

The red in front of him had warped his entire field of vision, Rhode could no longer anything in front of him, but in the corner, the system prompt could be seen clearly as usual.

[Congratulations to the Starlight Guild that has obtained the first BOSS kill in the Void Dragon Dungeon. An eternal evil has been wiped out.]

[The character has received fatal damage and will soon die]

It's finally over.

As he observed the system prompt, Rhode exposed a pleasant smile.

And at this time, suddenly, a bright light beamed above him, warping him to the usual respawn platform.

At that moment, a pure white light shot up and penetrated the dark sky, dispersing the dark, lingering clouds.

The players who had already respawned quickly rushed towards the respawning platform. Even the other players around the world who were furious that Starlight had once again broken the record came. All of them stared at the platform quietly, waiting for Rhode to appear.

But at the top of their screens, a system announcement flashed.

[System Notice: Player 'Rhode' went offline]

A legendary player that had conquered the three eras disappeared just like that.

Chapter 2

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The wind blew through the canyon and set off waves to the prairie.

The wild cows that were bowing to eat the green grass looked up towards the sky. There, a ten-meter long wooden merchant ship was floating in the air. The ship moved forward slowly as the sail bellied with the wind.

“No matter how you see it, this scenery sure is a magnificent one.”

A middle-aged man in leather armor stood next to the deck, looking down at the endless grassland and its beauty.

“For us merchants, this is also a rare opportunity.”

Standing next to the middle-aged man was a slightly overweight merchant. He had a weird curly hair and was wearing a merchant’s robe. His small eyes were slightly narrowed as if he was planning something while gazing at the scenery in front of him. Looking at him, it was as if he was thinking that the beautiful scenery in front of him could be sold.

“If it were not for this thing, I am afraid we won’t be able to move the goods into the central area this quickly. To be honest, I always opposed the idea of opening a market, but now it seems that my choice was correct.”

“Please forgive me for being frank, but if you do not choose a wider route, even if we went from here, although it will save more time, the degree of danger will also increase. I heard that the other side is not quiet, and I think you have also listened to the captain’s reminder that it seems there were Wind Serpents around here recently, what if...”

The man’s face darkened. He turned his head, shifting his sight to somewhere not far from the mountains. Towering peaks blocked his line of sight, making him unable to see what was behind. But he could faintly

perceive that the distant sky was not pure blue, and there was a touch of cloudy darkness.

That's not the world they should get involved with.

“Do not worry, how can there be so many ifs? Money comes from danger. This is the reason why I spend so much money to hire you! Only a few serpents, is that not it?”

The merchant stretched out his hand and patted the man's shoulder.

“Yes, what about the condition of the young man we saved? Is he still alive?”

“Lize has bandaged his wound, and now he is sleeping. His condition supposedly will not be life-threatening.”

“That's good.”

Hearing the man's answer, the merchant nodded with satisfaction, but then he quickly frowned.

“But what kind of wound is that from? Looking at the wound, it seems like it was from a big lizard, but is there anything like that in the north of Paphield?”

“I do not know, Lord, but it's supposedly a very ferocious beast. I hope we do not run into them.”

While talking, the man's eyes subconsciously swept the entrance of the cabin, then he turned his head again, looking forward.

—

Rhode opened his eyes.

W-what happened?

He stared at the ceiling; his brain was dizzy. He remembered that he had been leading his team to fight the most powerful boss in the Dragon Soul Continent, the Void Dragon, and had successfully gotten the first kill. He was sure that he had got the achievement and system prompt, but then, the Void Dragon's last attack also took his life away.

According to his plan, Rhode should've respawned and then he would log out. But the moment he was killed by the Void Dragon, his whole vision immediately become dark, as if he was forced to log off. Then he lost his consciousness.

How can this be? Did I encounter a bug in the game?

Rhode could barely turn his head, but he still managed to catch a glimpse of the blue azure sky and white clouds outside.

Where is he? What's this place? What happened? Is he dreaming? Or is he still in the game? At least he was sure that this place wasn't his small rental apartment. Doubts immediately flooded his mind.

Then, Rhode frowned and tried to get up.

“Ugh!”

Suddenly, he felt an acute pain from his chest. He bit his lips and stopped moving. He found that his left shoulder and chest had been completely wrapped by a bandage. Although he did not know what happened, judging from the blood stain that permeated it, it seemed that his injury was quite severe.

This is definitely not a game.

Rhode was undoubtedly certain of this. He knew that although the current technology was quite advanced, and as the world's first virtual reality game, Dragon Soul Continent Online had also used a lot of high-tech technology, but according to the rules, it was impossible for the player to experience pain. The reason was so that people could distinguish between reality and the game. Also, for the sake of the players, they had to reduce the pain

threshold. If the player was injured, instead of pain, the game would reduce the player's speed and use red color to block the player's line of sight. It was done so to warn and remind them, rather than the real simulation of pain. When the virtual reality simulation technology first appeared in the world, it had caused a lot of controversies. Dragon Soul Continent's operating company naturally knew it too.

Rhode lowered his head and looked at his right hand. Its shape was not like his character from the game; his body was not that full of muscle nor was it mighty. On the contrary, the arm in front of him was small and thin. Since he had almost never exposed himself to the sunlight, his skin was a little bit pale. This was definitely his own body; he was sure of it.

However, how did he get hurt? Was this place a hospital? Rhode scanned his surroundings; the whole room looked like a cabin—no lights, no phone, no call bell. A wooden table, two chairs and a fixed cabinet on the wall were the only things in the room. He did not know why, but he felt like he had seen this somewhere.

While he was studying the room carefully, the door suddenly opened.

A blonde girl wearing a white robe entered the room. She looked at Rhode who was half-sitting in surprise, with her eyes wide open.

“You have woken up? That's great!!”

The girl did not speak Chinese or English, but he seemed to be able to clearly understand it. He could not help but feel a little bit surprised because he knew the language too.

This is the Nimus language, one of the official language in the Dragon Soul Continent!

“How are you feeling?”

However, the girl did not care about Rhode's expression. She quickly went to his side, carefully checking his left shoulder and chest.

“Your injury is really serious. Frankly, I was worried whether you would survive or not...”

“This is...”

He frowned but did not know what to say. He turned his head, looking at the mirror next to the wall where a clear reflection of his face could be seen. It was indeed his face, no doubt about it, but it was not supposed to appear here.

“Did you forget?”

The blonde girl curiously blinked her eyes, her twin tails following her movement. Her blue eyes were clear and transparent, exuding a cheerful disposition.

“Two days ago, you fell in the middle of the Paphield Plains and suffered a very serious injury. If it was not because of the Silver Libra’s merchant guild floating ship passing by, I am afraid it would be even worse. I do not know what kind of monster you fought against, but the left side of your body received a very serious injury. It can be really dangerous.”

Wait, left shoulder...

Rhode froze in surprise for a moment. He immediately thought about the last battle with the Void Dragon before, wasn’t it his left shoulder that was attacked? But it was his game avatar that was injured, and there was supposed to be no connection to the player itself, right? But now, the one who got injured was him?

Although the situation in front of him was a mess, Rhode still quickly calmed down. As the top player and the world strongest guild leader, he had a strong mentality, and in the middle of the conversation with the blonde girl in front of him, he had also learned about his current situation. He was seriously injured in the Paphield Plains, and Silver Libra Merchant Guild floating ship happened to pass by, so they saved him. According to what the blonde girl had said, his condition was pretty bad, but his ability to recover was pretty good.

“My name is Lize Noir, I am a member of the Crescent Star mercenary group. I am a Cleric. You can just call me Lize.”

The girl straightforwardly introduced herself to Rhode.

“I’m Rhode Alander.”

Even though he still could not completely sort out the situation, he hesitated for a moment, but he still told her his ID from the game.

“I am an adventurer from the Eastern Plains.”

“So you are an adventurer, that was why you were alone in the vast mountain.”

After hearing Rhode’s answer, Lize did not feel surprised because, in this continent, there were many adventurers who liked to explore alone, so Rhode’s identity was not much of a problem.

“But what kind of thing did you fight with actually? How did you get such a serious injury? I remember that there should be no high leveled monsters in particular in the plains.”

Hearing her inquiry, Rhode showed a bitter smile. What could he say? Should he say that he was injured because he fought one of the five creator dragons, the Void Dragon?

“I did not see what it was because I was attacked at night. There were a lot of them and they were very quick. I think that maybe they were things from ‘the other side’.”

“I understand.”

Although Rhode did not elaborate, Lize seemed to know what it was and nodded. By then, she had also finished checking at Rhode’s wound, so she stood up.

“You have not eaten for two days, so you must be hungry. Please wait. I will get some food for you to eat. Ah, yes, I would like to report this matter

to my leader, I think he will come to see you soon.”

Having said that, she nodded towards him politely and then left the room.

Chapter 3

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Sigh.”

Finally, Rhode was able to take a deep breath, then he laid down on the bed once again.

After chatting with Lize, he confirmed that this place was indeed Dragon Soul Continent. But it was not in the era that he was in before — it was far more distant— the Twilight Era. If this timeline was compared to the game, it was supposed to be when Dragon Soul Continent Online was in its open beta testing period.

How did I arrive here?

Rhode sighed, then shook his head, no longer wanting to think about these strange and mysterious things. In any case, he was already here, and this fact couldn't change. So what was he going to do next?

First of all, Rhode decided to try what he could do for now. Soon, after giving a thought, a clear and familiar system prompts showed up in front of him. It showed his current status and attributes:

[Rhode Alander]

[Level 1]

Race: Mixed Race (??)

Talent: Locked

Racial Reward: Locked

Racial Characteristics: Locked

Class: Summoning Swordsman (Hero)

Class Skills: Summon (Rank E)

**Special Swordsmanship: Moon Shadow Swordsmanship (Rank E)
(Available Skills – Blade of Destruction)**

Other Classes: Alchemist (Expertise in Mysterious Creation)

Special Skills: Shaping (Rank E)]

This was the very ordinary yet unusual Character Status screen. But when he saw the first line, Rhode almost shouted out loud.

Mixed race? Why am I a mixed race?!

In the Dragon Soul Continent, the meaning of the so-called mixed race was no different to the one on Earth. The mixed race here was born with the marriage between humans and other races. Rhode was very sure that he was a human, and even in the game, his role was also human. But why did his Character Status show that he was a mixed race? And it was also followed by question marks which meant that his other half-blood had not yet awakened. The racial bonuses and characteristics were also still locked. It meant that to unlock it, he must understand what kind of blood he had first in order to awaken the power within him.

For Rhode, this could be considered a concern because, usually, the race reward was automatically provided after creating the character. For example, the human race bonuses were able to shorten the time in learning skills, immunity to poison, enhanced reputation and many others. But now, he would be unable to get these bonuses and characteristics until he awakened it.

But it wasn't surprising either since he also found new additions to his essential skills like Swordsmanship and Alchemy. Because he had not forgotten his Swordsmanship and Alchemy skills that he had learned, it was displayed below his status, but the color was dark. It meant he did not have the required ability and level to learn and use them. However, he did not

really have to worry about it. As long as he could raise his ability, he would be able to use those skills once again. Of course, the skill rank was also reduced to the lowest rank, which was E, rather than SS Rank.

However, Rhode did not care about those little things because what he valued the most was not the rank, but their sources. Many of those Swordsmanships were difficult to learn. Not only did he need to raise his level and stats, he also needed to complete chain quests, increase his reputation and find hidden items. To finish those, he would need a lot of money, time, and luck. In the game, it was only in the last year in Dragon Soul Continent that he managed to completely build his own character, thereby having the confidence to challenge the Void Dragon.

Unfortunately, everything had its own ups and downs. Even though his Swordsmanship had no problems, he quickly found out that his experience, level, and rank were all gone, and the most important thing that he had lost was the most crucial to the existence of a Spirit Swordsman— his Summoned Spirits.

In the Dragon Soul Continent, the Spirit Swordsman was a class with many dilemmas. In the beginning, when it was officially launched, it had garnered everyone's attention since it was an exclusive class. But after the official release of the class, because a Spirit Swordsman needed to cultivate both magic and Swordsmanship, both of them had totally different sub-stats, as well as the complexity of coordination with the Summoned Spirit. There was also the class knowledge gaining process, which meant that the player needed to play the class in all three aspects to know the class well. That was why this class was such a huge disappointment.

The Spirit Swordsman's 'summon' and the Mage's 'summon' appeared to be the same, but in fact, both of them were very different. A Mage's 'summon' consumed their own power to open a portal for the creature to enter the world, and control things by using magic. However, the Spirit Swordsman's 'summon' was different. They did not have the power to open a portal, because their power came from the world itself, and one of their abilities enabled them to awaken the soul from mysterious and historical relics. They could even make a contract and seal them for their own use.

Although it did sound very strong, it was still too bothersome. In fact, many players had been confused by the skills. They thought that by buying cheap ancient relics from the merchants, they could use the summoning skill to awaken the soul of those things and make a contract, effortlessly gaining an artifact.

Unfortunately, no matter how easy they thought it was, the truth still hurt. Not to mention, only high-level summoners could awaken the soul from ancient relics, and as a spirit, they had lost their material form, so their power was also much weaker than before. For example, the artifact that Rhode had used in Dragon Soul Continent Online, the “Dragon King’s Wrath”, was the only thing that he was able to awaken the soul from, and it was also when he had achieved the highest level.

There were three methods to obtain a summoned spirit. The first was by awakening and condensing the soul from dead magical creatures and turning it into a summoned spirit. But its stats would change based on the owner’s stats, the environment, and other factors. For example, if a Spirit Swordsman killed a Fire Snake to obtain its soul, but the soul was summoned in snowy weather or the snake had been killed by equipment with the Dark Element, it would be really difficult to find out about the summoned spirit stats. If it was a Hydra, then it would be much better if it had the Dark Element. However, if it was only an ordinary weak monster with a conflicting element, then it would be better just to cry.

The second method to obtain a summoned spirit was to defeat non-human creatures and fulfill certain conditions. Afterward, one can make a contract and seal them up as a summoned spirit. This was a more simple method, but it was also more dangerous since non-human creatures had their own will and conscious, which meant that they could resist the summoner’s order and act according to their own judgment. Of course, this method would not be welcomed by anyone since they would not want to summon something that created trouble.

As for the last method, it was by activating the special skill called ‘Soul Awakening’ at Level 10 and awaken a soul by fusing a certain number of spirits to produce a new higher level spirit. With this method, the player can control the summoned spirit to a certain extent. As long as the player was

familiar with the fused summoned spirit's characteristics, race, and stats, the player can easily tell the fusion result. But this kind of method was way too risky and might also be disappointing because the level of the new summoned spirit was unknown. When two high-level spirits were fused, it might result in a Level 1 summoned spirit; it might also result in an even higher level spirit or even a useless spirit. If it was the former, it was still okay since the level could be raised, but if it were the latter, then it would be better to just delete it.

The summoned spirit's experience gain was shared with its owner. This was also one of the reasons why a Spirit Swordsman was far slower in leveling than other classes. For the others, they could just level up by themselves, but a Spirit Swordsman must share their experience to level up their summoned spirit so that they could evolve. But from the first point, one should know that a summoned spirit's evolution was affected by the environment, its owner's attributes and other external factors. Sometimes, the result of the evolution was not necessarily what the owner had expected.

Because of its disappointing characteristic, it had turned from the 'Most Popular' class into one of the '10 Most Disappointing Classes' in the Dragon Soul Continent official website. There were even people who regarded those who had chosen this class as newbies, or rookies that were cheated on by the introduction and CGI announcement, or players that only played for fun or even gambling addicts, and the last ones were people like...Rhode.

From a simple, regular player, he had turned into a legendary phenomenon. Using this troublesome class, the Spirit Swordsman, Rhode had taken 1st place on numerous servers and had even continuously conquered the three eras. How were the other players supposed to feel?

Most other players did not like those kinds of random methods because it would make them feel like the result was not within their grasp. But it was precisely because of that, Rhode felt really happy because it was challenging. This was also the reason why he had chosen this class. In fact, in his long gaming career, he had also experienced many of those 'disappointments', but he never gave up because only by conquering those difficulties would it make him more satisfied.

But now, his seven years of training dozens of high-level spirits were gone, just like that. Although on the back of his right hand, the mysterious summoning circle still existed, he could not feel his summoned spirits' existence anymore. It was no surprise though since his body was no longer the same as the game.

But...

Rhode reached out his hand, touched his chest pocket, and quickly found a card.

It was a white card. Painted above it was a thorn circling a pure white longsword. The sword was engraved with a complex carving. There were beautiful wings beside it; just looking at it gave a kind of pleasant feeling. At the four corners of the card, there were four different symbols. On the upper right corner, there was a white semi-circle; on the upper left corner, there was a small X written. Below, on the lower right and left corner, there were two small numbers written —3. Behind it, there was a line of mysterious elegant text emerging on the surface.

[The 10th Eternal Holy Sword: Star Mark, No stats, Available for Fusion— No matter how long time has passed, it is still unable to bury its dazzling brilliance.]

It's actually still here!

Looking at the card in his hand, Rhode was slightly surprised for a moment. This was a Summon Card Deck, and he was also very familiar with this card. This rare card was something that he had obtained when he joined the official game event. At that time, he had led his guild and won the combined-server 1st place for two consecutive quarters. To honor him as the strongest top player, the game company had gifted him this card. Of course, this kind of card was often sold in the game shop, but for him, it was a waste of money to buy such things that were good-looking but useless. That was why he kept this card with him. When he received it, he treated it like a lifesaver and always kept it by his side since it did not really take up much space.

Originally, there was nothing special about it except it was a limited edition card. But now, a weak light was emitting from the surface of the card and shining on his hand.

Should I give it a try?

Rhode hesitated for a second. After that, his right hand tightly gripped the card. The magic circle on his right hand shone, blue magic lines spread out, running through all his fingers. Suddenly, the white card burst out a dazzling white light, and turned into tiny specks of dust, completely disappearing into the thin air.

At this moment, a system prompt appeared before him.

[1/10 of Eternal Deck has been obtained, The 10th Rank Eternal Holy Sword, Star Mark]

“Sigh...”

Looking at the system prompt, Rhode could not help but sigh. He did not know why this card had a summoning function in this world, while it was useless previously. In the game, before reaching Level 15, finding a +2 to all stats weapon was very difficult, and the ‘Star Mark’ sword had +3 to all stats, which was sufficient to help him cover his current weakness. In addition, it was also available for fusion which meant that as long as he was able to find a spirit that suited him, he could add it to his own. He needed the power of ‘Soul Awakening’ to use the special skill. That was why this weapon was still inferior compared to other ordinary weapons. But based on its attack power, this weapon was considered as a rare and powerful equipment.

However, it was really difficult for him to feel excited right now because he still felt strange about being involved in this kind of situation.

Is this a game? Or reality? If it's a reality then how can I go back?

Knock. At this moment, a knocking sound was heard.

Rhode looked up and saw a middle-aged man walking inside. He wore an adventurer's leather armor, with bright red hair which was casually combed back. Looking at Rhode, the man smiled.

“Hello Sir, I am the leader of the Crescent Star mercenary group, Carter.”

Chapter 4

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Hello, Mr. Carter.”

Rhode looked up, greeted the man in front of him and smiled.

“Thank you for your help.”

“No worries. It’s not a problem.”

Carter had a strong and tall body with casually combed bright red hair. From his characteristics, he should be born in the northwest of Lygatto. A long and a short sword quietly hung on both sides of his waist, and his angular faces revealed his fortitude and scrutiny. From his appearance, clearly he wasn’t some ordinary mercenary.

While Rhode observed the man in front him, Carter too quietly looked at him.

With Rhode’s appearance, it was easy to conclude that he was some arrogant young noble. His thin physique, pale skin, girly face, and attire. No matter how one looked at him, the man still did not look like an adventurer. He was more of a rich second generation young master.

However, Carter believed that this young man was not as simple as he appeared to be because of the mysterious circle on his right hand. As a Cleric, Lize could detect a trace of magic from the mysterious circle which meant that he did not lie. But based on Carter’s years of experience, it was rare to see someone directly embed magic in their own body. From this point, he suspected that this man wasn’t someone simple.

Previously, from their brief conversation, Carter could feel that this young man was neither arrogant nor humble; his expression was very calm. Carter heard from Lize that even though he had just awakened from a coma in a

mere ten minutes, he was able to grasp his current situation. Judging from this, he was sure that Rhode was far stronger than those arrogant young nobles.

“I heard that you came from the Eastern Plains.”

“Yes.”

Rhode nodded his head.

“So where were you going?”

“I’m just traveling around.”

Rhode shrugged his shoulders.

“I am an adventurer; adventuring freely is part of my life. Of course, please rest assured. I will not bring you any trouble.”

“That’s good.”

Since Rhode was being honest, there was no need for him to ask more. They were currently on a mission; naturally, they did not want to add any more trouble. So after saying a few words like ‘get a rest’, he decided not to say anything anymore and left. After all, he was a leader of a mercenary group. There were a lot of things for him to do; he could not waste his time here.

After a while, Rhode became quite bored. However, it was still enjoyable when Lize brought food for him. Even though it was only ordinary bread and meat that Rhode had eaten countless times in the game, still, that was just ‘fake’ eating and was only for restoring HP and MP. Also, it was tasteless and could only fill the stomach. However, now he was personally experiencing how it actually tasted; it could be considered a good experience.

He had to admit, the taste really didn’t live up to the item description...

“How do you feel? Does the wound still hurt?”

The blonde girl sitting beside Rhode had a worried and serious expression. Her eyes had a slightly worried look as her gaze fell on his shoulder. She just could not bear to look at it.

“It’s alright now.”

Rhode said while moving his left hand. The pain from his sternum was not as bad as before. At first, it was even difficult for him to breathe, but now, it had become much better.

“That’s good.”

Hearing Rhode’s answer, Lize’s nervous expression relaxed a lot.

“But you still have to rest. It will be a lot better after arriving at Deep Stone City. Maybe you can recover faster there.”

The girl said earnestly. Although the person lying in front of her was no more than a stranger that she just met, looking at her expression, it was apparent that she did not care about those things.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. It’s what I’m supposed to do.”

Then, she stood up. Her blonde, fluffy hair followed along with her movements. It swayed left and right, giving others a playful and lively feeling.

“Then...”

Before she could finish, the ship suddenly shook violently.

She lost balance and almost fell to the bed. Fortunately, she managed to stretch out her hand at the last minute and held on to the bedside. They looked into each other’s eyes, before quickly averting their eyes.

The floating ship sailed due to the wind; the sky was not like the ocean where there were reefs and whirlpools. However, it did not necessarily

mean there was no danger. The situation right now was obviously not normal.

“I’ll go out and see what’s going on. Please stay in the room and rest.”

Lize said in a low voice. She immediately turned around and left. After closing the door, Rhode couldn’t help but stare at the leaving figure. He was speechless. Given that he looked older than her, was it still necessary to use this kind of child-coaxing tone with him?

But in the next moment, a shadow could be seen flying from outside the window. Rhode’s expression suddenly turned serious. He turned his head slightly and stared at the window. Soon, there were three, four green figures flying from outside. At the same time, a low roar could be heard.

“Hiss——”

When he heard this sound, Rhode’s heart sank.

They were in a big trouble!

At the moment, the deck has already turned into chaos.

“I did not expect that we would encounter these damn things.”

The red-haired mercenary leader was holding a sword, standing in the forefront. With a grave expression, he looked at those green figures flying around the floating ship. Their appearance was that of a long, winged snake, about one meter in length. Although their lean figure gave people a delicate feeling, when they exposed their big mouth, rows of sharp fangs could be seen. In a short time, Carter had concluded what they were.

Wind Serpents.

“It seems like we broke into the serpent territory.”

The fat merchant was hiding beside the mercenary leader. With a pale face, he wiped the sweat on his forehead with a handkerchief.

“Damn that cunning Picco. I knew it! I just knew there must be a problem since that bastard was willing to tell me such a route with such a small compensation! That murderous b*stard! After I go back I must let him know how powerful I am!! ”

“Let’s talk after we get out from here!”

Carter interrupted the fat merchant’s hysterical screaming. Looking around, there were hundreds of Wind Serpents that had surrounded the merchant. At first, he thought that by launching a volley of bolts he could scare off this group of monsters. But the Wind Serpents’ unrelenting nature was really beyond his imagination — or it could be said that their comrade’s death had inspired them to be fiercer.

At this moment, they had already occupied the outer deck and begun to move inward. The mercenaries already threw aside their crossbows and unsheathed their melee weapons to engage their foes in close combat.

“You! Go and hide inside. Tell the captain that we must leave here as soon as possible!”

Carter used the back of his hand to push the fat merchant towards the captain’s deck, then he took two steps forward and swiftly swung the sword in his hand to cut down the Wind Serpent that rushed up to him. But soon, two more Wind Serpents replaced its dead comrade.

We don’t have enough men!

Carter could not help but frown. He swept his gaze across the deck and saw that there were only six people left and they were the ones he had brought with him on this mission. Although the merchant ship itself had guards, their experience was not enough. In fact, after the first wave of attacks, the number of guards had decreased down to one-third. Looking at their panicked expressions, he knew that they could not hold on much longer. Carter’s face hardened at the sight of those hideous monsters.

It was not like he did not have the experience of facing Wind Serpent. But it was his first time to face this many Wind Serpents at once, making him feel

slightly nervous. He once again took a step forward. His body flexibly moved, creating a half circle. Then he thrust the sword in his hands to the side, cutting into the Wind Serpent's body. The Wind Serpent fell to the ground in a bloody mess, and after a few loud roars, it turned into a dead corpse.

Carter looked up and subconsciously swept the surroundings. Then, his heart suddenly jumped.

“Lize! Be careful!”

The girl was unable to react for a second.

Healing one of the poisoned mercenaries had excessively consumed her power and made her almost lose her consciousness. Even though she had rushed into the deck only for a few minutes ago, she had healed a lot of injured people. As the only Cleric in the group, Lize, of course, had to take this responsibility.

After hearing Carter's warning, she turned her head.

What she saw then was a big mouth with two sharp fangs.

At that moment, she could only stand frozen. Looking at the Wind Serpent in front of her, she could not think and did not know how to react. In front of her, she could clearly see the cold, sharp, and shining fangs. Even the flesh inside could be seen, and a clear stench could be smelt.

Then, a hand suddenly stretched from behind, seized her back and pulled her back in the nick of time.

Chapter 5

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The Wind Serpent bit into empty air.

It would've succeeded if Rhode had not suddenly shown up from behind.

“Mr. Rhode?”

Lize, who had barely escaped the Wind Serpent attack, lifted her head in surprise. She was shocked to find Rhode standing behind her. Currently, she was leaning on his arms. Perhaps, it was because she was frightened that her entire body felt weak and powerless. She wanted to stand up, but her legs felt powerless, so she sat down instead.

“Lize!”

Seeing that Lize had escaped from death, Carter was relieved. But soon, his heart tensed up again. Because at this moment, the Wind Serpent from before had turned around. It was flapping its wings, intending to attack again.

Damn!

He gripped his sword and ran to Lize, hoping that he would make it. But no matter how hard he ran, he was unable to catch up.

Looking at the Wind Serpent, the girl could not help but hold her the breath. She wanted to do something, but she did not know what to do. As a Cleric, she couldn't use a weapon. So what should she do then?

“Leave it to me.”

Just when Lize fell into panic, she could hear Rhode's voice from behind. Then, she saw Rhode taking half-a-step forward, blocking her from harm.

Does he intend to go against the Wind Serpent?

Lize was confused, yet she still noticed Rhode extend his right hand. Suddenly, Lize noticed the mark on his right hand. It was a complex, beautiful magic circle. Magic lines were spreading out, running to each of his fingers. Then a translucent, card-like thing emerged from the center of his palm.

Then, Rhode clenched his hand tightly.

A dazzling, white light suddenly emerged.

An invisible magic had lifted the seal, turning into a visible air and spreading to the surrounding. The first Wind Serpent that had attacked was screaming and flapping its wings. It was trying to keep up the balance from the turbulence. But before it could take further action, a dazzling light suddenly burst through the air. It slashed the Wind Serpents body and sent it flying.

“Sigh...”

Rhode let out a sigh. At that moment, the dazzling light had already dissipated— replaced by a very beautiful, transparent, pure white sword that appeared in his right hand. He waved the Star Mark Sword in his hand, scattering the remaining specks of light. It was a really fascinating scene.

He did not notice that, at the moment, all the other people had been completely astonished. Lize sat on the ground blankly, looking at the man standing in front of her unbelievably. Carter also slowed down his pace, looking at Rhode’s eyes with shock in his eyes. Although he suspected that Rhode was not an ordinary person, he had never thought that he would be so ‘extraordinary’.

Although she was still sitting on the ground, Lize still could not help enjoying the sight of that pure sword in front of her. It was a thin sword engraved with simple patterns, emitting a faint light around it. It could be seen with the naked eye that the little light particles were beautiful like magic. Moreover, the folded wings on it made it look exquisite, even the

pieces of its feathers were clearly visible. Although girls usually would not be so interested in weaponry, this sword was far beyond the usual weapons. Calling it a work of art was also not excessive.

Lize was purely appreciating it, but Carter was different. As an experienced adventurer, Carter swore that he had never seen such a strange thing. In fact, when Rhode called out his weapon, Carter was stunned. Although he had seen some mages' summons, they usually used a crystal as a medium. They also need to cast a spell beforehand and after that, a few ugly monsters would be summoned. But being able to summon weapons? He really never did see such a scene.

Although Carter was not sure what the thing in Rhode's hand was, he could be sure that this kind of magic weapon could not be used by normal people. Someone who was eligible to use this kind of weapon must be a noble or an extraordinary person. Seeing the beautiful wings on the sword, Carter could not help but frown. He was certainly sure that in this continent, the angels were a very noble race. Most of them were prominent, or they were backing up some important groups. Just like the ruler of the Munn Kingdom, Lydia Paphield Mila Frederica that ascended the throne three years ago was also an angel. Even though the young man in front of him had yet not revealed his true identity, but Carter could be sure that based on that weapon, Rhode and those nobles must have some kind of connection.

As these thoughts flashed in Carter's mind, he had already arrived beside the two.

“Are you okay?”

“I- I'm fine.”

Lize's little face was somewhat pale. It was not because she was a coward. After all, it was just because of the situation. If Rhode did not pull her back in time, she would be already dead. The fear of barely escaping from death was definitely not something an ordinary person could understand.

After determining that Lize was not hurt, Carter immediately turned to look at Rhode who stood beside him.

“Mr. Rhode, are you alright?”

Rhode nodded his head, indicating that he was okay. Although the left side of his body still felt some pain, it did not affect his fighting. On the contrary, more than himself, he was more concerned about another thing.

“What are you guys going to do?”

The Wind Serpents around them kept increasing. Although the floating ship had accelerated to its top speed, they still could not get rid of most of the Wind Serpent attacks. Their situation had not improved; on the contrary, it was getting worse.

“We intend to fight until we get out of their territory. Before that, we can only keep going.”

If it was on land, Carter might have some other ways. The problem now was that he was in the air. Besides this idea, he did not have any good solution to solve the current problem.

After speaking, the young man in front of him frowned.

“Too late, Mr. Carter.”

“Oh?”

“The Wind Serpents are absolutely superior in this area. Even if you speed up, we still have no way to leave in time before the floating ship collapses.”

“Really?”

Carter was not stupid. The reason he had made that decision was because he was unfamiliar with this area. After Rhode stopped talking, he immediately understood the seriousness of the matter.

“So what should we do?”

“Land immediately.”

Rhode almost did not hesitate to give the answer. Then he reached out his hand and pointed to the side.

“Then we rush to that side.”

Carter looked at the direction Rhode had pointed towards. His eyes flew open wide as if he'd been completely shocked.

“Did you mean that we should rush to the Twilight Forest?”

“If you want to get rid of the Wind Serpents, this is our only way, and...”

Saying until here, Rhode looked around.

“Our time is running out.”

The situation was indeed worsening.

The Wind Serpents' didn't only have sharp teeth, but their corrosive venom was highly dangerous as well. Moreover, Wind Serpents were sly. Once their head-on attacks failed, they would immediately change their goals. Now, there were a lot of Wind Serpents shattering the glass and going into the cabin. Facing that kind of situation, everyone simply could not resist. Although the narrow space on the cabin limited their flexibility, their threat had not been reduced. It was precisely because of this that the cabin's current situation was a total mess. Smoke even started billowing out of the ship.

The situation is really bad!

Carter turned around immediately. Meanwhile, Rhode held his sword and blocked the front of the gap.

“Hiss!!”

A Wind Serpent flew from the right, opening its jaws wide to attack Rhode. But when it rushed over, Rhode just stepped to the left. He held his sword and smashed it into the Wind Serpent's chin. The impact sent the Wind Serpent flying away and at the same time, also blocked the other Wind

Serpents from spraying out the venom. Then Rhode quickly turned around; his silvery hand was emitting a light which accurately blocked another Wind Serpent's attack attempt from his back. While it lost its balance, he thrust his sword forward, completely ended that poor Wind Serpent's life.

But the Wind Serpent attacks did not stop there. The smell of blood had stimulated them. When Rhode was trying to remove the dead Wind Serpent's body from his sword, numerous Wind Serpents rushed to him. They came wave after wave. It looked like a green cloud from a distance, but also looked like an unknown monster that could devour him at any moment.

“Mr. Rhode!”

After dispersing a venom from a mercenary, Lize turned around and saw Rhode as she subconsciously called out to him.

An acidic stream of liquid sprayed out like rain, targeting towards Rhode. If he got hit, it would mean death.

But at this time, Rhode suddenly moved back.

The acid missed him, dripping on the deck. It created a little bit of smoke, and the corrosion sizzled out a small hole. Almost at the same time, a group of Wind Serpents was rushing to him. Taking any chances they had to destroy this dangerous man in front of them.

If it were any other ordinary person, perhaps they would've frozen in fear. However, Rhode was calm. He held his sword in his right hand and thrust forward.

Blade of Destruction, Activate.

A white light suddenly rushed towards the group of the Wind Serpent. One became two, two became four—the slashes were like a razor, moving fast and piercing every one of the Wind Serpents. A powerful air swept through the deck through as if there was a giant, invisible hand pulling them apart, ruthlessly tearing their body apart. In a few seconds, the green cloud was

completely shredded by the dazzling light, leaving only pieces of flesh and blood.

At that moment, everyone held their breath.

Chapter 6

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The Wind Serpents' attacks slowly dwindled. The chaos, anger, screams, and shouting turned into silence. Everyone looked towards Rhode's direction, speechless.

For a moment, almost everyone thought Rhode was dead. Never had they imagined that someone could escape from the Wind Serpents' encirclement. Of course, high-leveled mercenaries or knights with donned with full body armor might be able to withstand it, but Rhode did not look like a veteran at all. Besides his white sword, he did not have any other protective equipment.

He did it.

Lize, Carter and the rest of the crew could not help but stare at the young man unbelievably.

Just who is he?

No one knew if it was because of Rhode's attack or other reasons, but those Wind Serpents who were still trying to attack the floating ship began to scatter and back down. For some time, the whole deck was quiet. Only the sound of the breeze could be heard. The mercenaries were shocked by Rhode's performance, but Rhode did not seem to care what they thought of him. On the contrary, when he looked at those pile of corpses, deep down in his heart, he felt quite good.

Wind Serpents were among the many low-level monsters. Their individual strength was not particularly great since they relied on their huge numbers to win. Rhode's class, the Spirit Swordsman was a solo-oriented class but had a low attack power. The reason why everything went smoothly was because of Star Mark that gave him an additional +3 to all stats. So when he

held the sword, the monster's danger level dropped from red to green. Thus, eliminating the entire group of Wing Serpents wasn't some amazing feat.

Still, Rhode felt that something was off; based on his experience, Star Mark shouldn't be that overpowered. According to his original estimation, Blade of Destruction should have just injured the Wind Serpents badly, and he had prepared a backup plan in case things turn awry. He never thought that the Blade of Destruction could kill all the monsters.

Was his stats as a human not calculated properly?

Thinking of this, Rhode subconsciously opened the Character Status window. He didn't know what to check as his race was still unknown, hence, his stats were also hidden. But luckily, he gained 1900 EXP in this battle.

I can gain EXP? Wow, that's surprising...!

While he was checking his gains, the others thought that he was just staring at the pile of corpses.

Suddenly, Rhode felt a strange presence. It wasn't a person, but more of a dangerous one.

Where are the Wing Serpents?

This thought flashed through Rhode's mind. He seemed to think about something and then hurriedly turned his head and shouted.

He immediately realized that something was wrong and quickly turned his head to shout.

“Everybody, be careful...!”

And at this time, the floating ship suddenly shook.

The violent shake made a lot of people fall to the ground. There were even two people with bad luck that did not have time to stabilize themselves and they slipped and fell off the ship.

Then, the front deck cracked open, followed by a huge Wind Serpent's head that suddenly appeared.

“Be careful, it is the Wind Serpent Lord!”

At this time, Carter finally appeared. He shouted and rushed towards the huge Wind Serpent. The other mercenaries also quickly stood up. Although they had been injured, they still clenched their teeth and followed their leader to attack the monster.

However, Rhode's action was faster than them...

He lowered his body, a line of system prompts immediately appeared before him.

[EXP 1900/200, Level up! Received 1 Skill Point, Level 2]

[EXP 1700/400, Level up! Received 2 Skill Points, Level 3]

[EXP 1300/600, received 3 Skill Points, Level 4]

[EXP 800/1000, received 4 Skill Points, Level 5]

[Used 1 Skill Point to enhance the moon shadow Swordsmanship 1/3, Rank E]

[Used 1 Skill Point to enhance the moon shadow Swordsmanship 2/3, Rank E]

[Used 1 Skill Point to enhance the moon shadow Swordsmanship 3/3, Rank E]

[Used 1 Skill Point to enhance the moon shadow Swordsmanship 1/4, Rank D. Shadow Flash has been unlocked]

Activate.

Rhode jumped into the sky.

Everyone thought they were hallucinating. They saw the young man who was originally standing on the ground suddenly turn into a black shadow, like a sharp knife thrusting forward, and even the huge Wind Serpent Lord could not react.

Rhode raised his sword and thrust his sword into the Wind Serpent Lord's copper bell-like eyes.

“Blade of Destruction!”

Facing the incoming sword attack, the first reaction of the Wind Serpent Lord was to dodge. But after increasing the level of Moon Shadow Swordsmanship to Rank D, the Blade of Destruction's power had increased to another level. A myriad of white flashes coalesced at the tip of the sword.

One, two, three...

At first, the Wind Serpent Lord's tough scales managed to withstand the attack. But even with its Master rank of defense, it fell by the twentieth slash. Then Rhode's sword easily tore apart its scales, flesh, and blood, piercing into its body. Although the Wind Serpent Lord's body was huge, Rhode knew where to find the weak point in its body. With his exquisite control, his slash did not spread like before but instead focusing on its neck.

“——!!”

The Wind Serpent Lord let out a sharp scream and fell down to the deck. But even so, it still did not give up on attacking. Although the left part of its neck had turned into flesh and blood, the Wind Serpent Lord still raised its head and stared at Rhode. Then it suddenly opened its mouth.

Rhode dodged, once again turning into a shadow and withdrew to the back. Still, a vile venom bullet shot towards him directly, almost grazing him. As Rhode had dodged it, the venom landed into the rear of the mast instead. In no time, the poison corroded through the mast and the originally thick mast melted in a few seconds.

As expected of a BOSS monster.

According to Rhode's game experience, the average Wind Serpent was at level 3 and the Lord was at level 10. Looking at the BOSS monster in front of him, he judged that its level should not exceed 10. With his current level and with Carter and the mercenaries' attracting some of its attention, defeating this boss should not be too difficult.

But judging from that attack before, he had found out that it was not a normal Lord-class monster, but an Elite BOSS type. Because if it was just a normal Lord-class boss, then the attack just now was supposed to have sliced its wings apart. But even though he had already tried his best, he only could leave deep visible scars.

“Attack its wings, remember to distance yourself from its mouth and attack from the side!”

Rhode instructed Carter and other mercenaries while fighting the Wind Serpent Lord. Even though he was a Spirit Swordsman and not the tank, but looking at the current situation, it seemed like that there were no people that had the experience to face the Wind Serpent.

In the game, if a group died while fighting the Wind Serpents, replaying was possible. But here, Rhode could not take that risk. The wound that was beginning to heal had begun to hurt again; it was tearing him apart. If he did die here, he wouldn't know whether to laugh or to cry anymore.

Although he was still at level 5, to Rhode, as long as his opponent did not exceed level 15, he still had the confidence to win. After all, in the Dragon Soul Continent, there were three classes that leveled up primarily by killing monsters: Mages, Rangers — and lastly — Spirit Swordsmen.

Mages were known for their unpredictable magic, rangers were known for their kiting power that attacked from an ultra-long distance, and Spirit Swordsmen used a large armada to defeat their enemies. For these three classes, even if the difference in levels was over five, or even if the opponent was an Elite BOSS with a ten level difference, it was still an easy matter.

Even so, these three classes were flawed. Mages without magic were standing targets, even a group of low-level monsters could beat them. Rangers in close-range combat were just tragic. Spirit Swordsmen attack patterns were too random and their moves were too complex and impossible to follow. These were the reasons why these three classes could not really steamroll around the map solo. This game mechanic was intentionally designed for Dragon Soul Continent, to make it more realistic. To risk it yourself and go for the unusual way, or to take a steady step forward... The players are able to decide their own destiny.

The level 10 Wind Serpent Lord Elite BOSS in front of him was injured because of Star Mark. The Wind Serpent's defense was only about level 6 or 7 so that was why Rhode did not hesitate to be more aggressive. However, the Wind Serpent Lord's offensive power...

“Swoosh!!”

The violent wind shook the ground.

Rhode was startled; he quickly dodged backward, barely making it in time. The Wind Serpent Lord's wings failed to connect with its intended target and smashed into the deck, creating a large hole.

As expected from a Level 10 Elite BOSS attack.

Rhode wiped out the cold sweat off his forehead. Now he was only level 5 without any equipment other than his sword. If he was hit by that attack, he definitely wouldn't survive. He was also worried about Carter and the others.

The good news was that he did the most damage to the BOSS, so it mostly only focused on him. The bad news was that being eyed by this kind of high-level BOSS... for a non-tank class like him, the pressure was incredibly immense...

30% of his Soul Power was left. He began to feel a little bit weak. Even though he had already expected that the fight would be difficult, its power was really too overwhelming. He needed someone to help him draw its

attention so he could attack from behind. With his current stats, dodging the Wind Serpent Lord's attack was simply impossible. On the other hand, he needed to use the Blade of Destruction skill to inflict some damage and kill it in the shortest possible time.

But now it seemed that it wouldn't be easy.

The floating ship was slowly landing, but under the siege of the Wind Serpent Lord, the ship kept shaking as if it was facing a huge storm. Two mercenaries had fallen off the ship and it was almost impossible for them to be alive. Carter was still trying to drive away the Wind Serpent Lord. He was moving with his sword, attacking the Wind Serpent Lord flexibly at different angles, but it was still no use. If it was not because of Lize who was casting a healing spell from behind, the mercenaries wouldn't be able to survive until now.

I must think of a way. Otherwise, before we can even land, we will all be killed by this damned Wind Serpent Lord.

Thinking until here, Rhode bit his lips.

The Wind Serpent Lord did not stop attacking; its wings keep flapping widely on the deck. Its two claws were gripping the edge of the ship tightly. Although the attack Rhode had inflicted on it had given it a considerable amount of damage, but as a Lord-class monster, it certainly would not fall just because of this minor injury. On the contrary, the cunning Wind Serpent Lord seemed to be aware of its opponent's weaknesses. Its two sharp claws gripped the hull of the floating ship tightly and shook it forcefully.

Although the floating ship's hull was strong, due to the battle with the Wind Serpents previously, it had been battered badly. Now, coupled with the violent winds around the ship, it had begun to distort. Several cracks appeared on the deck, followed by a crisp sound of wood splintering.

“Oh Holy Soul save me..!”

Curled up in the corner of the captain's room, the fat merchant stared at the terrible Wind Serpent Lord outside. But because of his nervousness and

fear, his voice had become somewhat distorted.

“That damned Richard!! Don’t let me see you or else I will kill you! Giving me this kind of route, it’s practically murder!” Speaking up until here, the fat merchant suddenly shuddered in terror and looked at the captain beside him.

“And you! Why didn’t you remind me of such a terrible thing!?”

The captain did not reply. At this moment he was clenching at the rudder, focusing his attention on the front. But inside his heart, he was cursing that fatty. Before setting off, he had clearly reminded him that by taking this route, they may provoke the Wind Serpents, but this fatty just brushed it off like it was nothing.

Good, when something happens, you actually blame me! If I had known, I would not have taken this job even if you killed me !

Chapter 7

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The situation was bad.

Whether Rhode or Carter, at this moment, both of them had the same thought.

The Wind Serpent Lord is a really difficult opponent.

Perhaps the ship would be destroyed before we can even land!

“Hmph!”

Carter shot forward, thrusting his swords straight at its huge claws. However, before he could reach, the Wind Serpent Lord suddenly opened its mouth. Carter could taste the stench of its breath pervading his sense of smell. Before he could react, the attack had already arrived towards him.

Carter tried to dodge, but he didn't expect that the Wind Serpent Lord would release its grip on the hull to attack him. He did not have the time to dodge, so he used his sword to block it. Even so, he was still sent flying a few meters away, hitting the mast of the ship.

We can't go on like this.

Rhode frowned and shifted his gaze to the anxious girl that stood not far from him.

“Lize, I need your help.”

“Ah?”

“I will draw its attention, and when it attacks me, I hope you can cast a shield for me!”

“Sure!”

Lize nodded without hesitation. She gripped her hands tightly and a bright soft light appeared on her body. When Rhode saw this, he did not say anything; he turned his head and started to thrust forward.

Blade of Destruction!

A dazzling bright light once again streaked through the air. This time, he did not focus the light on the tip of the sword; instead, he let the light scatter to attack, so the power seemed weaker than before. It wasn't able to pierce the hard scales, but the scattered attack made some visible bloodstains throughout its wings which made the Wind Serpent Lord shriek in pain.

“Hiss!!!”

The Wind Serpent Lord was startled. It quickly turned its head; a burning flame could be seen in those pair of bright red eyes, tightly staring at the young man on the deck as it once again opened its mouth, rushing to attack Rhode.

The Wind Serpent Lord moved quickly. In the blink of an eye, Rhode could already see it appearing to the top of him opening its bloody red mouth. It made Rhode quite nervous since it was a risky endeavor. He deliberately did not use Shadow Flash to maintain a slow speed just to lure the Wind Serpent Lord to make a move. Even though it would be more dangerous, but when the opponent was attacking in full power, its weakness would also be more visible——this was the chance that Rhode wanted to seize.

The Wind Serpent Lord opened its mouth in front of him. It only needed half a second to swallow that pesky human whole, but it wasn't able to do it.

At that moment, a faint, dazzling white, egg-shaped light barrier suddenly appeared around Rhode's body, blocking the Wind Serpent Lord's fangs. The Wind Serpent's movement slowed, it then used more force to crush the barrier, but it only managed to bite air.

Rhode had already activated Shadow Flash.

Like a phantom, he dodged the Wind Serpent's fangs. Then, he raised the white sword in his hand and slit across the Wind Serpent Lord's throat.

That was its weakest point. Previously, it had shrunk back its neck, making it difficult to attack. But now that it completely gave up on defense, it unintentionally revealed its weakest point.

“——!!!”

A sharp shriek rang throughout the ship. The Wind Serpent Lord looked upwards as if it had been shocked by electricity. From its throat, dirty blood sprayed out, covering the entire deck with red. Its body gradually became weak and fell heavily on the deck, lifeless.

After its death, Rhode something dark green expanding in front of him.

“Boom!!!”

Suddenly, he felt the hull tremble and his body was thrown into the air. The next moment, his vision turned dark, completely losing consciousness.

When he woke up again, he could only feel the cold wind blowing.

“What happened...”

The first thing he saw was a beautiful night sky. Unlike the city, the night here was clear. The soft moonlight shone down as the shadow of each leaf were mapped on the ground. Not only was the night sky filled with stars, it also had interconnecting lines. They were linked together, spreading throughout the night sky.

This was one of the special characteristics of the Dragon Soul Continent. According to an ancient legend, this place used to be chaotic and desolate. But then the Five Creator Dragons came along and used their bodies to create the sky and all things on Earth from nothingness. In order to suppress the chaos, the Five Creator Dragons sacrificed their bodies to shape the world and left their soul in order to protect the world.

Each soul had its own unique form: just like the sky Rhode was looking at just now. It represented the region under the Light Dragon's protection. Its unique characteristic was the presence of light even in the night. On the flip side, the Dark Dragon's soul completely blocked the light. It didn't matter whether it was day or not, there would always be eternal darkness.

It was also because of this that the species distribution in this continent had their own rules. In the region under the Light Dragon, lush green grass could grow bountifully. As for the Dark Dragon's region, one can only see the shadow of plants. Of course, this unique characteristic also applied to the distribution of the various races in this continent. Humans were usually under the protection of the Light Dragon, so were the elves and angels. As for the undead, vampires, incubi, and other dark races were, of course, people under the Country of Darkness.

This continent had no god. To put it bluntly, the beings that they worshipped were the Five Creator Dragons. Similarly, it also included the Dragon Soul Holder.

In this continent, each soul had their own Soul of Existence, the Five Creator Dragons were no exception, and their Soul of Existence was usually hidden in a person's body. It made that person able to wield the same power as the dragon to provide its respective unique characteristic to the region. For example, if chaos is a 'virus,' then Dragon Soul's ability would be the 'firewall,' and the Dragon Soul Holder's role is the CPU. As long as the CPU is still able to operate, then the firewall would not fail and will remain strong enough to resist the influence of the chaos from the outside world. Thus, these Dragon Soul Holders were viewed as the heir of the Dragon Soul.

But these things meant nothing to Rhode.

Rhode slowly stood up. A violent pain swept through his body, especially his left chest injury, which seemed to be more serious than before. Before, he was barely able to move his left hand and now, he could not move it at all; even moving his fingers would cause a stinging pain.

But he felt relieved; this meant that his left hand was still there. If he could not feel anything—that would be a bigger problem.

Looking up to the sky, Rhode discovered the wreckage of the floating ship. Around him were tall trees, meaning that he was in the forest.

Rhode understood what happened after collecting his thoughts. Though he managed to kill the Wind Serpent Lord, the ship couldn't maintain its aerial ability as it had received too much damage.

Right now, the forest was bathed in silence; even the sound of insects could not be heard. Rhode scanned his surroundings and found many corpses; humans and Wind Serpents alike. And not far from him, a petite figure lay motionlessly on the ground.

“Lize!”

Rhode came to the girl's side, lowering his body to check the situation. Luckily, although the girl was pale, both of her hands were still clenched tightly, and her breath was steady. When Rhode called out to her, she opened her eyes after a while.

“What...what happened...”

Lize opened up her eye, blinking at the man in front of her.

“Am I still alive?”

“Yes.”

Seeing that Lize had answered him, he felt slightly relieved. She slowly stood up, shook her head, and bit her lips; apparently, she wasn't fully recovered, but to her, there were more important things she needed to do.

“Where is everyone? How about leader?”

“...”

Rhode did not answer, but it from his expression, she had guessed what happened.

“Impossible ... Crete! Charles! Leader!”

She rushed towards bodies of the fallen mercenaries, desperately calling out their names, but no one responded. However, Lize did not give up; she lowered her body, carefully checking the mercenary in front of her. After making sure that the person had truly passed, she did not cry, but only bit her lips and ran to the next person.

However, her efforts were in vain. She couldn't do anything when they were dead.

A terrifying thought gnawed her mind, but she chose to ignore it and cling on to whatever hope she had left. It was until when she saw Carter's figure that she finally broke down.

The previously spirited mercenary leader had turned into a cold, dead body. His lower half was stuck in a gap on the deck, and a broken splinter had penetrated his lower abdomen.

“Lea...Leader...”

Lize's knees gave way as she stared blankly at her leader's corpse. The ever so tiny flame of hope she had been grasping on, was completely extinguished. Eventually, she lowered her head and covered her face with both of her hands. No words were spoken, but only a heart-wrenching cry of a woman filled the quiet night sky.

Rhode gazed at her trembling shoulders helplessly. Now, all he could do was to stand silently behind her and not say anything.

Before the battle, he did not care anything about life and death, but when he saw the dead bodies surrounding him, a complicated feeling overwhelmed him. It wasn't as though he hadn't seen a dead body before in the game, but that was merely a simulation. Moreover, there were ways to resurrect the

'dead bodies' in the game. However, what he was witnessing now wasn't a game. Dead people stay dead, and death meant the end of the road.

At that moment, Rhode somehow recalled the night from seven years ago when he could only helplessly watch death devour the ones he loved without having the power to stop it.

After a while, just as he was about to say something to comfort Lize, a sudden call for help broke the silence.

Chapter 8

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Matt sat awkwardly next to the bonfire. His face showed a helpless and depressed expression. He wanted to get angry but could not.

Meanwhile, Rhode was quietly leaning against a tree with his eyes closed. Lize was silently preparing for food; although her expression was calm, her swollen eyes revealed everything.

The fat merchant was lucky because he was the only other survivor besides Rhode and Lize. As a merchant, he traveled frequently, so he had some life-saving magic props. Before the ship fell, he had taken out his protective pendant, which then displayed its miraculous ability; that was why his injury was lighter than the other two.

Rhode's injury from before had not yet healed. Because of the battle before and after falling down from the ship, his injury had gotten a lot worse. Lize was also the same. As she was rather distressed earlier, she wasn't aware that her right arm had been dislocated, and her leg was also injured. She only found out about it after everything had ended. As for the fat merchant, other than a few scratches and dizziness, he was absolutely fine.

If Rhode was a 'normal' person, this kind of injury would be enough to keep him bedridden for several months. Luckily, Lize was a Cleric and healing was her primary job. With her healing spells, his injury had closed up, but Rhode still needed some time to rest to fully recover. The presence of a Cleric was quite a blessing as the previous battle could've left him disabled or dead. After the crash, Rhode somehow managed to keep all of his limbs intact, other than the fact that he could not move his damaged muscles, everything else was normal. Lize was surprised as she hadn't thought that his body would be this strong.

It wasn't only Lize who was shocked, Rhode himself was startled. Even though he knew that he had mixed blood, he didn't think that it would be that abnormal. He was injured before, then participated in an intense battle, and finally thrown out of the sky afterward. And he was still able to move...?

It can't be that my hidden race is a Barbarian... right?

But there was still one thing that bothered him. The reason he was aware of his own body condition was because he knew his own stats. Even though he was still unsure what his other bloodline was, but half of his blood was supposed to be human.

However, Lize was also very strange; she was just a delicate girl and even a non-combat Cleric. She was supposed to be dead already judging from the previous situation. If it was him, of course, he would have survived because his physical body wasn't of a human. But why was she able to survive? It can't be that she got lucky.

The question floated in Rhode's mind for a while, it was not until when he found a trace of gold hidden within Lize's beautiful blue eyes that he finally concluded that the reason she survived wasn't because of luck.

“Umm... Mr. Rhode?”

Matt rubbed his hands, with his chubby face revealing a fawning smile.

“What do you think we should do next?”

After rescuing Matt, the trio split up and searched the wreckage of the entire floating ship separately, but did not manage to find any other survivors. In order to avoid her comrades' bodies from being eaten by the wild beasts inside the forest, Lize had asked for them to be cremated. Even though Matt felt pained to see his valuable materials go to waste, looking at Lize's gloomy little face and Rhode's indifferent attitude, he had to change his mind, and with a distressed look on his face, he burnt the floating ship to ashes. That expression he had on his face was as though his family had died.

They rested in the forest for a day to recover. While they did not face any more trouble after the Wind Serpents' attack, the fat merchant still felt terrified. Before, he still believed that Wind Serpents were nothing to worry about, but now, he had totally changed his mind... those rumors were actually true!

Those people said that we might encounter the Wind Serpents on this route...and we really did! I also heard that in the Silver Moon forest, there were man-eating wolves and weird scary birds! We won't encounter those too, right?!

The fat merchant's forehead was full of sweat. Even though he was a long-time merchant, he did not have adventuring experiences. Looking at the forest that was surrounded by bushes and trees, the fat merchant's leg couldn't help but tremble. A while ago, he heard about the guard mentioning something about poisonous snakes, wolves and many other terrifying things. All of it suddenly flashed through his mind, making him even more frightened.

Moreover, his only life-saving treasure was already unusable. In this situation, he had no choice but to rely on others.

Lize was out of the question. Firstly, he had seen this girl when he hired her. In his opinion, she was very obedient but did not have her own judgment. Moreover, she was a non-combat type. If something were to happen, it would be too late for her to save him. So he decided to depend on Rhode. Even though he had no experience in fighting, Rhode's previous performance was quite eye-catching.

As for Lize, she was still wallowing in the grief of losing her comrades.

“Do not worry, Mr. Matt.”

Looking at the fat merchant's nervous expression, Rhode nodded his head. Even though the other person was quite vulgar, Rhode did not really hate him since if it were not for the fat merchant ordering the ship to stop, he would not be able to survive. So he still somehow left a good impression on Rhode.

“I am very familiar with this Silver Moon forest. In this area, it is unlikely to encounter any dangerous existence. You can rest assured.”

What Rhode had said just now was not groundless. Inside the game, the northern Paphield Plains was a place where newbies gathered, so he was definitely familiar with the monster distribution at this place. In the plain, the most threatening existence was the Wind Serpents. Their large numbers had become a nightmare for many melee professions and non-solo players.

In the Silver Moon forest, the most dangerous existence was the Silver Wolf, but unlike the Wind Serpents that relied on their overwhelming numbers, the Silver Wolf usually attacked alone and was, therefore, easier to deal with. Moreover, after killing the Wind Serpent Lord, Rhode had gained 3000 EXP and leveled up to eight. The newbie area highest level monster was supposedly at level 10. So as long as they did not encounter the rare Lord-class monster, they would be just fine.

“That’s good, that’s good...”

Hearing Rhode’s reassurance, Matt subconsciously let out a sigh of relief. He took out his handkerchief to wipe the sweat on his forehead. After that, he opened his mouth wide and let out a yawn. Because of his nervousness, he was not able to have a good sleep these past few days; even the sound of the wind blowing would be like a wolf’s howl to him. It could be seen just how jittery he was. But now that he had decided to trust Rhode, he became more relaxed and decided not to worry about anything anymore. He curled up next to the bonfire and closed his eyes, falling into a deep sleep.

After ascertaining that the merchant had already fallen asleep, Rhode, who had been quietly sitting next to the bonfire, stood up and walked into the forest.

Chapter 9

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode, of course, did not mean to leave the fat merchant alone. The reason he left was to look for some loots.

In the previous battle, Rhode had gained a lot of EXP, but he did not get too much loot. To players, those things in the floating ship wreckage were all treasures, and since a lot of people died, there must be some treasures hidden in their bodies. But in the end, he gave up on that idea. No matter what, they had saved his life. It would be shameful if he took their belongings now that they were dead.

Even though loot was important, the most important thing Rhode had obtained was another thing. It was something that he held on his hand at the moment—a black ore. According to the Dragon Soul Continent’s archives, this ore is a condensation of dead souls which would eventually form into a Soul Core. It had strong magic power and had many usages. It could be used as a gemstone for socketing weaponry or dissolved into the weapon itself to create a Soul Weapon. To Mages, Soul Cores were an excellent weapon-crafting material. Moreover, the Soul Core drop rate was very low. That was why their price was astronomical in the Dragon Soul Continent. And to a Spirit Swordsman, it was an irreplaceable existence.

Because the Soul Core was a treasure that was needed to awaken a spirit.

Right now, Rhode was deep inside the forest. He lifted his right hand; it could be seen that the Soul Core that was quietly sitting on his hand was emitting a dark aura. Surrounded by the silence, the gentle breeze swept through the leaves, and the moonlight glistened through the falling leaves. After that, the magic circle on Rhode’s hand started shining. Then, the system prompt appeared in front of him.

[The Soul Core has been contaminated. Do you want it to be purified?]

“Purify.”

Soon, a dazzling light burst out once again. Streams of magical lines were spreading to each of his fingers, including the Soul Core in his palm. With the help of the sacred power, the previous black mist around the Soul Core quickly melted and disappeared. It finally showed its original appearance—it was translucent and emitting blue light as if the egg-shaped gemstone was trembling and struggling to break out of the shell.

[The Soul Core has been purified. Do you want to awaken it?]

“Awaken.”

After that, the blue egg-shaped gemstone trembled even harder. And with a light ‘crack’, it instantly broke; blue, magical lines fanned out, spinning fast and turning into a card form, then it quietly lay onto his palm.

A cool and comfortable feeling came over Rhode’s body. He could not help but feel startled, but at this time, he also learned about what kind of existence he had made a contract with. He took out his deck and saw a green, Spirit Bird soaring in the sky.

The upper right corner was a blue semicircle (representing the card attribute), while the upper left corner had a V word written on it. As for the two lower corners, there were two small numbers written as ‘2.’ Rhode flipped the card, and soon, a line of text emerged on the surface.

[The Soaring Spirit Bird (Wind Element): Flying Unit, Available for Fusion. Attack: 10% chance to trigger paralysis effect, has no effect on the enemy with magic protection. Special Skill: Phantom Wind (This skill range only affect flying units)]

[1/10 of Sky Deck has been collected, The Soaring Spirit Bird]

My luck sure is good...

Rhode could not help but laugh. A flying-type spirit was one of the important ones for a Spirit Swordsman. Moreover, the wind element could

easily penetrate through non-magic associated items, meaning that it rendered ordinary defensive equipment useless. It also had 30 meters of effective range and a special skill. At least now he could guarantee their safety; even if they accidentally met some wild boss, he still had the confidence to win.

However, the most depressing point was his stats. Until now, his STR, VIT, AGI, INT, and other stats were still hidden, which made him feel uneasy somehow. This was his true body, but now it had changed beyond the ordinary. He was sure that his stats were above a normal human, but the feeling of not knowing his own body's physical condition felt unnerving at times. When you thought that you were going to die, but you didn't— that would be a nice misunderstanding. But when you thought that you won't die, and then you died, that would be the end of the story. And since he did not know, he could only walk this path by relying on his own experience.

After the fight with the Wind Serpent Lord, he had some clue about his stats. After all, the Wind Serpent Lord's information as a BOSS was something he had studied in detail before. From the previous battle, it can be said that his Strength stat should be roughly around the same as a typical Swordsman, and his Vitality was also quite high. Since he transmigrated to this world, although he experienced several crises, his body appeared to be able to soak quite an amount of damage. At this time, he couldn't really find a Mage to give him a buff to check his stats.

Suddenly, he heard a sound coming from the trees. Rhode frowned and he put down his right hand. The light on the magic circle disappeared and the card then disappeared into thin air. After being sealed as a card and confirming the relationship with the owner, the sealed card would no longer appear in the form of an entity; it would quietly sleep in the Spirit Swordsman's magic circle called the 'Ten of the Strongest Spirit Decks', where it would wait for its owner to wake and use them.

The two cards that were already sealed in his deck was at Sixth Circle, which means they were the lowest rank of the 'King Spirit'— the difference was only that 'Star Mark' had no element, while the 'Spirit Bird' had a wind element.

Rhode did not intend to expose his ability in front of other people just yet. Although it had long been known in the game that the Spirit Swordsman was an exclusive job and had once existed in the distant past of Dragon Soul Continent, the players were the only inheritors of this job. They set foot on the journey to look for the glory of this once heroic career. But of course, this all was just bullsh*it from the character introduction, but judging from Lize's and Matt's reaction, it was clear that they did not know about this job. Thus, it was not really convenient to say anything. Moreover, maintaining a certain sense of mystery was not exactly a bad thing for him.

When Rhode turned around, he saw Lize walked out from the trees.

“Lize? Why are you out here?”

“Ah... No, it's nothing, Mr. Rhode.”

Lize shook her head, feeling somewhat uneasy.

“That...I just want to ask about your injury... Is there something I can do...”

As she spoke, her voice kept getting softer and softer. Both of her hand were clutching the hem of her clothes.

In fact, it was not only Rhode who had noticed Lize's abnormality. Matt could also notice it because he was a merchant and had traveled quite a bit, so he had a good eye for detail. The reason Rhode could see through her was because he had the experience of being the first guild leader in Dragon Soul Continent Online. One must understand that a game is quite different from reality because people tend to hide behind the avatar they created, so they must be a lot warier than in real life.

In the game, to unify his guild, Rhode must possess a keen eyesight for detail since most of the players were playing to have fun and not as a responsibility. If he wanted them to keep setting new records and obtain success, it would be very difficult if someone did not have a good grasp of it. Therefore, as the guild leader, it was very important for Rhode to observe his comrades' emotions and inner thoughts.

And now, it was very clear that Lize needed someone to rely on and so she felt somewhat uneasy about it. Rhode could see that she had received a harsh blow to her emotions because not only her comrades had left her, but there was also the anxiety and fear for her own future.

He had been observing her since the previous battle and thought that she did a pretty good job as a Cleric. She could cast healing spells on her comrades in the shortest possible time and also quickly disperse their debuffs. Lastly, when she cast a barrier on him, it was done perfectly on time. For a supporting class like hers, this kind of reaction time was quite outstanding indeed. Moreover, even in face of danger, she was still full of confidence and could clearly cast her spells accurately without hesitation.

However, the trembling girl before him had completely lost her previous self-confidence and there was only one reason for that.

Chapter 10

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode sighed when he looked at the girl in front of him.

“Lize, the person you’re supposed to worry about is yourself. You’ve not gotten even a little rest since last night.”

Hearing the word ‘last night,’ she shivered as if she had once again recalled that incident. Nevertheless, she still stubbornly bit her lips and shook her head.

“No... I...”

Slap!!

Lize hadn’t finished speaking when Rhode suddenly raised his hand and slapped her face.

What the heck?!

Holding her red cheeks, Lize stared wide-eyed at Rhode in disbelief and shock. But the young man just watched her.

“I know how you feel.” He said expressionlessly.

Hearing him speak with a quiet and indifferent tone, anger immediately outbroke from her heart. She put down her hand and clenched her fist. Just as she was about to flare up in anger, Rhode’s next sentence completely drenched her from head to toe.

“You feel that you’re guilty to have survived just because you were born different. As a mixed race—or should I say, angel—that kind of thinking does not seem to be correct though.”

“!!”

Lize was completely stunned. She gasped in shock and took a few steps backward until her back was against a tree. But even so, she chose not to say anything for a while.

How did he find out?!

No, that's impossible.

I've never told him before—even in my mercenary group, the people who knew about my race were only a few...

“How do you...”

“Your eyes.”

Rhode pointed out his finger to his eyes.

“Your irises exudes a golden light—a clear sign of a ‘messenger,’ and also a special trait unique only to angels. However, you are different from the pure-blooded angels... The reason why the golden light is slightly dimmer is because of your mixed human blood, right?”

The girl did not speak.

Although there was no answer, Rhode had confirmed that he hit the mark. The girl standing in front of him was indeed a half-angel. In fact, he had already observed Lize for a while.

As a top player, in his long-term game career, Rhode had long familiarized himself with the existing equipment and used it to determine the opponent's attributes. This allowed him to develop the most appropriate tactics in the boss battle in the shortest possible time and also enables him to make preemptive strikes in PvP battles. It could be said keen observation skills were mandatory to all of the senior players.

When he was rescued, he began to consciously observe her and soon became aware of her true identity. Although she was a half-angel, the

angel's powerful healing ability and the ability to resist injury did not disappear, which was one of the main reasons why Lize could survive after being thrown out from the floating ship.

Lize must've been aware of this; that was why she was so depressed.

"That was why I said I know how you feel."

Rhodes shrugged his shoulders.

"You know the reason why you survived. It was not because of luck, but because of the difference between you and the others. That is why you cannot accept it... If you could, you'd rather wish that you were just an ordinary human and died together with your comrades."

"...."

Lize lowered her head, her hands clutching her skirt.

"But that is not something you can decide."

Looking at her slightly trembling shoulders, Rhode's tone soothed.

"You cannot decide your own birth, neither can you stop the things that had already happened. It is all beyond your limit. Don't regret something that you can't control."

"Then..."

Lize finally spoke.

"...What should I do?"

"This is your path. You should decide it yourself."

Hearing this sentence, Lize was silent for a moment, then she looked up.

"I understand. Thank you, Mr. Rhode."

“You are welcome.”

“...However, that slap was really painful ...”

Although there was some ‘violence’ in the process, in the end, Lize had finally let go of the shadow of her self-blame and the pain of losing her comrades. On the next day when the sun rose, Lize had completely moved on from, her face replaced with her usual warm smile. This caught Matt by surprise, who did not know what happened. He constantly shifted his gaze between the two of them, and then finally turned his direction towards Rhode, smiling wryly at him. As for its meaning, no one really knew.

However, before the fat merchant could finish satiating his curiosity, Rhode’s words immediately made his heart sink into the abyss.

“I think it is time for us to depart.”

Depart?

Those words set off all the alarms in him. His content face and casual burping all disappeared; he just remembered that he was not in his warm, comfortable room, but inside the forest with endless danger...

Right, we were not here for a vacation. That damned Wind Serpent and that damned captain... Just forget it, saying this now is meaningless. The most important thing is... how do we get out of this damned forest?

Thinking of this, Matt quickly stared at Rhode. Since this young man said he had a way, then he must have got a plan. After all, they were still stuck deep in the mountains. One wrong step and they might be lost forever, not to mention that there were so many beasts lurking around. How would they escape from them? Survival skills were essential knowledge to traverse the wilderness. They had to really pay attention to the little details. If he died here because of his own negligence, then he would have lost everything he had worked hard for in his life.

Holding this idea, Matt forcefully slapped his face. His sleepiness disappeared as he carefully watched as Rhode stand up from the ground,

casually pat the dirt off his leg and casually stretching his arms before gesturing to him and Lize to move.

“Let’s go.”

...

“... Wait, Mr. Rhode. Please wait!”

The fat merchant suddenly jumped off the rock he sat on.

“Where are we going?”

“Northeast, there is a small town there. As long we arrive there, our next journey will be a lot easier.”

“Is there no need to pay any special attention?”

“No, there is no need.”

It wasn’t surprising that he said that. After all, in the Dragon Soul Continent, this was the place where the newbies gathered. All the areas of the Paphield Region had been explored by the players.

Near the beginning of the game, many players intentionally went to isolated places and explored dangerous areas that were difficult to reach—trying their best to obtain the game’s legendary artifacts. Once they had those magic weapons, they would be invincible and would unite the continent...

But of course, the reality is always cruel.

Although the players’ tireless efforts had indeed led them to find some rare, decently stat weapons, unfortunately, no one could claim that they achieved the: ‘With this artifact, the world is mine’ kind of item.

After all, those items were just too rare.

To Matt, this place was full of danger, and every step was like betting his own life. But to Rhode, this place was like as his own backyard.

In the game, as a guild leader, he had helped countless groups of newbies to grind ¹ levels here. The places with high or low monster population, what kind of quest was suitable for which job, what kind of attributes were needed to train more effectively, etc... He was extremely familiar with these things, so even though he was thrown in the middle of nowhere, he could still find his way around.

As for Matt? Rhode had already done so many escort quests to protect a merchant in the game. Perhaps even a thousand times at least. So what's the difference between then and now?

Hearing Rhode answer, Matt's chubby face immediately turned into a frozen eggplant that had wither up. He absolutely did not know why Rhode was so confident.

The fat merchant began to regret the decision he made. After thinking to himself for a while, he seemed to recall that the young man was seriously injured on the mountain before...

If he wasn't injured, then perhaps his words would be more persuasive... But the fact that he had been injured in this very forest... by saying something like this, isn't he courting death?

Though there was a little regret in his heart, this was the so-called 'riding a tiger to the south'; for him, there was no other way. He couldn't help but clench his teeth and follow the two of them towards the depths of the forest.

Under the bright sunshine, Silver Forest was terribly quiet. The sunlight permeated through the gaps of the leaves, illuminating some spots on the ground. There were sounds of chirping birds, and in the grass, traces of hares could be seen. The scenery in front of them seemed peaceful, therefore, the previously nervous fat merchant gradually relaxed and was no longer as suspicious and restless as before.

Rhode walked in the front. Although walking in a forest without road was not easy, but seeing his figure making his way through the vines and plants, it was difficult to imagine he was seriously injured before.

He was followed by Lize, whose speed was also fast; it was clear that she had been accustomed to this field of action and life. Although wearing a long dress wasn't the best for forest trekking, Lize still followed Rhode's pace and walked closely behind him. From time to time, she also reminded the fat merchant to be careful.

The more they went in depth, the more surprised Lize became.

It seemed that the direction Rhode took was quite random since he did not choose to go straight, sometimes he even turned left and right. Occasionally, he even went around in circles. But she had noticed that the forest that was quite dense before, slowly turned into a flat road, as if it were hidden in the forest, waiting for people to find its existence.

Lize had once heard the leader speak of it before; it was a high-level skill. After all, for ordinary people, it was difficult for them to find their way in the forest. Only those who lived in the harmony with the elves and often went to explore the mountains were able to master this skill. She had previously witnessed this skill once. At that time, her team was lost in the forest, and the elf that was sent to help them did not use the usual road in the forest, instead, the elf chose a completely opposite direction. Back then, Lize was also very worried, but in the end, they managed to get out of the forest without a hitch. It was also at that time that her leader told her about this skill, however...

Looking at Rhode's back, Lize felt a little puzzled. According to the leader, that skill could only be used by experienced elves and Rangers. Elves were able to communicate with nature, but there was no way for people like her to use this skill. But Rhode did it so easily. He did not even stop to interact with nature, which was proof that he was not an elf, but... looking at him, he did not seem to be a Ranger either?

Even though she barely met any Rangers, she knew that their main weapon was a bow. However, up until now, Rhode had never used a bow.

Who is he actually?

Right now, Lize was getting even more puzzled.

Rhode suddenly stopped in his tracks.

Through the shrubbery, he could clearly see a lake from afar. That place was the center of the Silver Moon Forest—the Moonlight Lake. In the game, this place was regarded as one of the field camp destinations.

“Great!”

Looking at the clear lake, Matt subconsciously licked his chapped lips. Even though this incident had not happened for too long, but to the usually pampered merchant, these days were extremely difficult. Looking at the resting place in front of him, he immediately took a big step forward. Just when he was about to move, Rhode placed his hand on his shoulder.

The fat merchant was puzzled. He looked at the young man, but Rhode did not say anything. Rhode extended his finger, made a ‘no’ gesture, and pointed to the front. Then Matt looked at the direction Rhode pointed to and his face suddenly turned extremely pale.

In the shadow of the lake, a giant Silver Wolf was quietly resting there with its eyes closed.

Chapter 11

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Since Matt was a traveling merchant, he had unquestionably seen a wolf before, but he could swear to the Five Creator Dragons that he had never seen such a humongous wolf.

It was almost as tall as a man, and its thick fur gleamed with a silver light. Right now, it was sleeping while enjoying the warm afternoon sun. Its tail was swinging back and forth, appearing extremely carefree. Lize had already contained her breathing, following Rhode quietly from behind. As a mercenary, she knew just how frightening and dangerous those beasts were. She was not as nervous as the fat merchant who did not even dare to breathe, but she still looked at Rhode, waiting for his order.

The Silver Wolf, Moon Soul, was a level 10 Elite Beast. Even though it was not classified as a BOSS, it was still very troublesome.

In Dragon Soul Continent Online, monsters were classified into 3 types: Wild Beast, Giant Beast, and Demonic Beast. A Wild Beast was just an ordinary beast monster while Giant Beasts were the Wild Beasts who had lived for a long period of time or had been stimulated by external factors and evolved. They were dangerous and ferocious. Once they had awakened their soul, they would turn into a Demonic Beast. At that time, it would be more difficult to fight them since they would not fight just by using their own body anymore.

Although the Silver Wolf's level was below the Wind Serpent Lord and killing it wasn't that hard, but...

Rhode subconsciously glanced at the two following him.

If it was still game, he would not mind killing it to gain more EXP and materials. However, this wasn't a game, and there were only the three of them. Lize was a cleric, so she didn't have the power to protect herself and

Matt... was even more vulnerable. Since this was the case, it was better to do nothing.

Rhode made a gesture and pointed towards another direction. Since Moonlight Lake was big, there was no need for him to expend unnecessary energy. Looking at his gesture, Lize and Matt looked at each other and followed him with the intention to leave. It was a pity that lady luck wasn't on their side.

Kacha! When the fat merchant turned around, he suddenly slipped and fell to the ground, crushing a branch under his body.

At this point, Rhode immediately rushed back and lifted his right hand. Soon, a bird's whistle resounded in the air and a green figure appeared from his hand, rushing to the other two.

Boom!! Accompanied by the sound of the impact, a low howl came from behind. Lize and Matt turned around and were surprised to find that the giant Silver Wolf that was previously far from them had already approached them from behind. But suddenly, its huge body was flung to the ground as if it had been hit by an external force.

After that, a shadow flashed past.

When Matt fell, Rhode already had a bad feeling. After all, in the Silver Moon forest, the Silver Wolf's perception was third highest among the monsters. Luckily, he had encountered this kind of troublesome situation before because of stupid NPCs.

Although Rhode's perception was not as high as being able to lock the Giant Wolf's movements, but based on his familiarity towards the Silver Wolf, he could immediately make a judgment. He knew that the resting Silver Wolf was unlikely to attack them immediately but was already aware of their presence. Based on its characteristics, it would most likely wait until dark to attack them.

Meanwhile, Rhode judged that it was probably better to take the initiative to attack first based on his experience.

He was right.

The Moon Soul did not expect that the other side would be so fast to attack. Facing the Spirit Bird's attack, it managed to react, but it was still too slow. The Spirit Bird's attack landed on its body, smashing it flying a distance away.

The Giant Wolf laid on the ground, but before it could recover from the impact, Rhode had already arrived beside it in a flash. He then stretched out his right hand.

“Cage!” (Elf Language: Transform)

The Spirit Bird flew back to his hand, transformed into a card, and the color instantly turned from green to white. Rhode did not need to look at it; he flipped his hand while holding the card with force, and thrust forward at the Moon Soul.

At this moment, the white card pierced the Moon Soul's right leg, nailing it to the ground. Then, a pure white sword appeared in Rhode's hand.

“_____ !!!”

The Silver Wolf made a painful howl. It opened its eyes and stared ferociously at the hateful human in front of it. When it tried to stand up, it lost its balance and stumbled.

Rhode then prepared for his second attack.

He studied the Silver Wolf's movement. One of those Elite Beast's special characteristics was their incredible speed. If he could not overcome its speed, this battle would turn into a bitter struggle. Right now, Rhode had already broken one of its legs, causing it to be unable to fully utilize its mobility. Hence, the next step would be much easier.

Though its leg was broken, the Silver Wolf did not panic. It stared at the target in front of it and when Rhode's sword was about to pierce again, it raised its paws at Rhode.

But Rhode had already expected the Silver Wolf's counterattack. He flipped his right hand and successfully wounded the Silver Wolf's paw, turning it into a bloody mess. After spending a moment to wince in pain, the next thing it saw was a dazzling sharp edge thrusting towards it.

Critical hit!

Blade of Destruction easily tore apart its scale-like fur.

Accompanied with a painful cry, the Silver Wolf's body flew into the air, hit a small tree and fell to the ground. Half of its body had been torn into a bloody mess, even its internal organs could be seen slowly flowing out.

It was truly a gruesome scene. Even Rhode who was planning to give the last blow could not help but frown. After all, in the game, a critical hit was only shown by a number and was not as explicit as it was right now. Even though he already expected this as he had seen it before during the battle with the Wind Serpent Lord, it still felt disgusting.

After being hit by the Spirit Bird and Rhode's attack, the wolf had reached its limit. The previously threatening howl slowly turned into a whine. It tried to get up, but Rhode did not give any opportunity. He took up Star Mark and pierced its head, decisively taking its life.

The fight might've seemed long, but in fact, it only lasted a minute or two. Lize and Matt only managed to catch a glimpse of the wolf being knocked to the ground, and after that, Rhode was already finishing its life by the tree.

Both of them were shocked. They knew that the Silver Wolf wasn't an easy foe to deal with. Lize was thinking that even if her mercenary group was here, it would still be slightly tough for them to kill it. But looking at Rhode performance, no matter how she saw it, it didn't look like he was killing a wolf. Instead, it looked no different than him killing a chicken!

As for the fat merchant, the feeling he had right now was even more complicated. When he fell on the ground, he had already almost said his last prayers. Of course, he understood what it meant and was terrified that the Silver Wolf would be aware of his presence. Though he had guessed the

process, he would not have been able to expect the outcome. The Silver Wolf was indeed fully aware of their presence, but it still tragically turned into a corpse before it could satisfy its appetite.

Though the danger had been removed, the fat merchant was still frightened. He looked at the young man not too far away from him uneasily. He knew this had happened because of him. What if Rhode decided to leave him here?

If it was the usual situation, he would not have to worry about this kind of thing as he had guards protecting him that he'd hired with money. However, it was different now; this young man was not his guard nor his mercenary. His relationship with him was that of equals; if he wasn't happy, he could just leave him here. If that happened, he would be finished!

“This... I... I am not...”

The fat merchant broke out in cold sweat. He licked his lips, intending to say something, but no words came out. At this time, he saw that Rhode had stood up again, then he turned around and looked calmly at him.

“Be careful when walking.”

Other than nodding, the fat merchant was unable to do anything else...

Chapter 12

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode's initial plan was to take a break in the vicinity of the Moonlight Lake before continuing their journey. But after encountering the Silver Wolf, he had to change his plan since the smell of blood from the Silver Wolf's corpse was likely to lead to more unnecessary trouble.

Rhode picked a relatively flat high ground near Moonlight Lake to set up camp before the sun went down.

After dinner, Rhode once again stood guard. Though it was straining its body, there was no other choice as he was the most familiar with Silver Moon Forest.

The fat merchant Matt volunteered to help, but when he saw how Rhode and Lize stared at his rotund body, he could already guess their answer. Thus, he could only sit by the side and grieve over his body in boredom.

Meanwhile, Lize didn't remain idle. She knelt beside Rhode, resting both her hands on his left shoulder.

Of course, Lize was not idle. Right now, she was kneeling beside Rhode, putting her hands on his left shoulder.

“Aliy-Mia.” (Dragon Language: Heal)

As she chanted, streams of light emerged from her palms, which slowly and gently wrapped around Rhode's body.

In the Dragon Soul Continent, magic casters generally adopted dragon tongue to cast spells since 70% of the spells known to humans came from the dragons. As for the other 30%, they were from the angels, elves, demons, and undead.

The oldest ancestors in Dragon Soul Continent were conceived from the Five Creator Dragons, so they naturally inherited the dragon's talent in magic and longevity. To show their respect, the oldest ancestors classified the various regions in the continent as three different countries named after the dragons: The Country of Darkness (Dark Dragon), Country of Light (Light Dragon), and the Country of Law (Trial Dragon). As time passed, no matter what political system the country took, the highest position would always be the person who inherited the Dragon Soul. Angels were in second place, followed by elves, demons undead, non-humans, and the last were humans.

Of course, as the political system in every country was different, the race composition of each country wasn't the same. As a monarchy, the Country of Darkness had a relatively strict caste system; there was no place for humanity to be among the upper caste. Meanwhile, the Country of Light practiced constitutional democracy—half of the high-level members of the parliament were all humans.

Country of Law was ruled by angels, elves, and human beings equally; their numbers were quite balanced since each race occupied one third. This is because of the religious centralism system in the country; they believed in the Way of Balance. For them, equality is perfect.

Rhode was well aware of the situation on the continent. He knew what would happen next, which made him quite worried. In the game, players were just players. If they did not want to play, they could just log out by taking off their VR helmet. However, his current situation was different. He had become a part of the continent. Then what should he do when facing the inevitable disaster?

” *Mr. Rhode...*”

“Mr. Rhode!?”

“What's up?”

Lize's voice roused Rhode from his deep thought. He looked up and saw the girl in front of him. After that time, Lize had finally regained her usual

demeanor. Though her brows occasionally revealed a trace of anxiety, compared to the ‘end of the world, going to suicide anytime’ gloomy expression from before, it was much better.

“It’s just that...”

Lize shook her head, carefully looking at Matt who was sitting beside the bonfire while counting something from his pocket with a pained expression as if being bitten by a snake. She lowered her voice, and said with a serious look:

“Before...during the fight with the Wind Serpent, I felt something.”

“Oh?”

Hearing her, Rhode creased his brow.

“What?”

“I felt a tiny dark element aura from the Wind Serpent Lord’s body”

Lize bit her lower lip.

“But the aura was very weak, unlike something that the dark monsters usually had... Mr. Rhode, the Wind Serpent should not be a dark creature, right?”

“Of course not, the Wind Serpent belongs to the wind element, and definitely has nothing to do with the dark element, but...”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

On hearing Lize’s confident answer, he could not help but fall into deep thought. Of course, he knew what had happened in the history of the Dragon Soul Continent: the Wind Serpents would continuously attack the merchant ships, leaving them with a massive loss. When the Country of Light investigated this matter, they discovered that it was actually

manipulated and instructed by the nomads from the disputed areas in the border of Southern Paphield that was under the Country of Darkness. Not too long after, the Country of Light sent their troops to attack the area and they carried out the expulsion by massacring the inhabitants. In response to this action, the Country of Darkness sent troops to attack the Country of Light's garrison and recovered the piece of land that they had claimed as their own. This event set off the spark between the two countries.

These series of events occurred during the beta period when Rhode and other players were busy familiarizing themselves with the new environment, system, and upgrades, so he did not really dig too much in-depth of what had happened. After the end of the beta period, when the game had officially launched, the war between the Country of Light and the Country of Darkness was already in motion. As for what actually happened, the players could only speculate.

There were some conspiracy theories, though. Some people thought that the Country of Light was trying to recover its territory but it turned into a tragedy, some people also thought that the Country of Darkness was deliberately provoking the Country of Light and initiated a war to expand its territory. Many people had also thought that the Country of Darkness had been eyeing the Country of Light for some time and it was their problem since they did not take care of the matter properly. Of course, the players had no position to say anything; it was just their own personal speculation to try and figure it out what had happened.

Rhode believed that some of them were right. The border of the Southern Paphield was rich in crystal mines. To any country, that was an important resource. There was no reason for the Country of Light to let go of that territory. And the Country of Darkness had a very powerful ruler in that era. In the midst of the war, even famous players were still unable to gain an advantage over him. There was even a rumor that he was not an NPC, but a player that was part of the game company.

Still, many players were disappointed with the Country of Light's parliament decisions. There were many idiotic orders that led to many complaints from the players. In the end, the Country of Light had provoked

some to use the Country of Darkness as an excuse to go against the Country of Light.

Lize's hunch was quite reliable. As a creature of the light, an angel was very sensitive to dark elemental auras. Since she inherited half of its blood, her perception shouldn't be far off. This meant that the Wind Serpent attack on the merchant ship was indeed premeditated by the Country of Darkness. Were they trying to provoke the Country of Light to launch an all-out attack?

Things don't seem to be that simple.

"Lize, do not tell anyone what you just told me."

"Yes, Mr. Rhode."

Hearing Rhode's answer, she nodded. Then placed her hand on his back, carefully checking on his injury as her pale face revealed a trace of a smile.

"Your injury is almost healed. If nothing bad happens, you will be fully recovered in about five to six days."

"Thank you."

Rhode nodded his head a little, showing his gratitude, then he bowed his head to look at his own system information.

His HP gradually turned green. If he were to lie still for a few days, he would be fully recovered. But there were still a lot of things he needed to do.

What should I do first?

Rhode frowned and fell deep into thought...

Meanwhile, the location where the floating ship had crashed, two shadows could be seen slowly walking into the forest.

"Is that the ship?"

The first man asked coldly. He was donned in full white, with a beautifully streamlined armor. There was a glittering gold pattern carved above it. If Rhode was here, he would be able to recognize the symbol on it. It was the emblem of the Border Defence Force from the Country of Light.

The other man behind was wrapped in a black cloak all over his body. His appearance could not be seen. Facing the man's inquiry, he could only nod.

“They killed my messenger.”

The hoarse voice echoed through the forest night, giving a very cold feeling.

“To be killed by such a group of dirty and incapable mercenaries, it seems like your pet really is incompetent.”

“Isn't this also because of you?!”

The black-cloaked man's suddenly shouted.

“If you gave me higher leveled creatures such as Commander level... or a Master level lords, I will not use these low-level creatures!”

“What a joke, Commander level?”

The man snorted coldly.

“Who do you think we are? We are only responsible for providing resources. If we do everything ourselves, why should we even need you?”

Then the man paused and reduced his tone.

“How long will it take to recoup the losses?”

“At least half a month. Do you think it's easy to find a Wind Serpent that can be manipulated?”

“Ten days, we will double the reward.”

Noticing that the other party was apparently dissatisfied, his face darkened. He reached his hand and took out a purse, then threw it over.

The purse fell to the ground, and a sound of gold could be heard. The black-cloaked man lowered his body, stretched out his hand, and opened the purse, then immediately closed it.

“Well, ten days. It is a deal.”

“I hope you understand that this matter cannot be known by others.”

“Of course I understand... Right, judging by the situation of the ship, it seems that three mice have run away. Do you want me to help to clean them up?”

“No need.”

The man waved his hand.

“I have my own way.”

Hearing his answer, the black-cloaked man coldly laughed.

“Well, then I’ll see what you have.”

A thick fog appeared and wrapped around the black-cloaked man. After that, he disappeared. Looking at this, the other man’s face revealed a trace of disgust.

“That greedy undead! One day, even your bones will turn into ash!”

After snorting once more, the man turned around. With a thoughtful look, he swept around the surrounding forest. He put one of his hand on the hilt and another one on his mouth and blew a loud whistle.

Soon, a Griffin hovered down from the sky and landed on the ground. At the same time, three silhouettes from the depths of the forest quietly surfaced. The man looked at them, but soon turned his body around to mount the Griffin.

“Go look for the other three mice and kill them.”

He ordered in an indifferent tone.

Chapter 13

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Shadows were streaking through the forest. They would separate from time to time, then reassemble again.

“Have you noticed?”

“There are traces from the east side. It’s likely to be the targets. Based on the time, it should be from a day ago at most.”

“They sure are quick...”

“Continue our action and pay attention to the opponent. Since they could get rid of the Wind Serpent Lord, we should not underestimate them.”

“Yes!”

After the three men finished talking, they once again transformed into black shadows and moved into the depths of the forest. Their movements were silent; not even the birds were disturbed.

After the shadows had left, a green bird that had been quietly sitting on the branches flapped its wings and flew high.

“There’s someone following us?”

Hearing the report from the Spirit Bird, Rhode’s face somewhat turned gloomy. At this time, the translucent green Spirit Bird was quietly sitting on his shoulder, shaking its head and stretching its wings from time to time, as if it was no different from an ordinary bird. Only its translucent body and the glorious aura around it were able to show its surreal characteristic.

Summoning the Spirit Bird to monitor the situation was something he thought of along the way. When a group of players intended to gather a

party for an adventure, they usually teamed up with a Thief, Ranger or other classes that could scout danger ahead.

Rhode had no option like that now, so he could only use the Spirit Bird to recon the area. Luckily, not only did the Spirit Bird have a dominant advantage in its sight, it could also sense other people's presence as its soul was well-attuned with nature.

Initially, he did so only as insurance in case something happened after killing the level 10 Silver Wolf. Never would he had thought that he would encounter a greater problem instead.

Although the Spirit Bird couldn't show what his opponent physically looked like, judging from the moving blob of light, he felt somewhat uneasy looking at the opponent's speed. Since they could run freely at that kind of speed, they could either be Rangers, Rogues, or other similar classes. Anyway, it should be an agility-based class.

Moreover, the opponent moved in order. It was difficult to believe that they were just ordinary adventurers.

Are they just passing by? Or are they specifically coming for them?

Rhode did not dare to take the risk. It was better if they came straightforwardly, but the 'lurking in the dark' kind of classes was the most difficult to deal with. Moreover, what Lize had reminded him kept making him think that this matter was quite strange. If these guys were hostile towards them, then the situation would be difficult to imagine.

But, looking at Lize beside him, his eyes couldn't help but brighten up.

He had an idea.

"Mr. Rhode, where do we go next?"

Lize asked while handing the kettle to the fat merchant who was sweating profusely beside her. Even though Rhode did not ask her to, the one who had been taking care of the fat merchant was her. According to Lize, her

mercenary group was given a job to protect this merchant. Even if she was alone, as long as the mission had not yet been completed, she would continue to do it.

Matt was naturally very grateful for it, but looking at him gasping for breath, Rhode was afraid that he would probably pass out if they continue to walk.

“Mr... Rhode, I...I am.... very exhausted, let’s... rest for a while!”

The moment Rhode stopped, Matt had already sat down, held onto his bag, took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat on his face. He rubbed it until his face turned shiny like a big lightbulb under the sunlight.

“Holy, Holy Soul bless me... I have not... walked... walked... for several years... *cough*”

The fat merchant was unable to breathe properly; he coughed for a few times until the fat on his face started jittering. After a few minutes, he finally recovered.

“We have been walk...walking for so far, I thought...I thought that I was going to die!”

“Let’s rest for five minutes.”

Rhode looked at the sky while calculating the next destination and the required time. After that, he issued a command. Hearing his words, the fat merchant who was sitting on the floor immediately cried, and then rested on the ground. Lize sat gracefully next to a rock.

After the battle with the Silver Wolf, they did not encounter any danger. With the Spirit Bird’s help, Rhode had avoided a lot of dangerous areas. Though it meant that he also lost some of the opportunity to get some precious equipment, he was not distressed. Because, in this world, there were no other players, and ordinary adventurers would not suddenly overturn the mountains and the forest. So it was not too late to grab it after safely bringing them back. However...

Rhode looked up towards a place not far from the mountains, then he stood up.

“Lize.”

“Yes, Mr. Rhode. What can I help you with?”

“I’m going to check the road ahead. After you finish resting in five minutes, take Matt and go uphill. See that piece of white stone? Go there, and walk towards its shadow. There, you will find an abandoned mountain. Both of you will wait there; I’ll follow after a while.”

Lize raised her head, looking at the direction Rhode had pointed and soon found the white stone on the hillside. She turned again to look at Rhode, puzzled as to why he knew about it. But when she opened her mouth, she decided not to ask. After traveling for a few days, she had found out that this man in front was worth relying on. Even though she did not know what he wanted, she still nodded her head, then watched him as he turned away.

Rhode, of course, had his own plan. That stone was the entrance to Zenar Mountain. It used to be an excellent trade route. The ancestors of the Northern area were poor, so they used their whole life to dig a tunnel through the mountains so they could connect the plains with other areas of the road. It had its moment of glory, but with the development and utilization of the wind magic, the air passage was, of course, safer to go through. That was why this trade route was gradually abandoned, and those people who worked and lived here had already abandoned their homes and left to find a better life. That was why this place had become barren land.

The progress of civilization will always make something that once was a miracle turn meaningless, no matter which world he was in.

But Rhode did not travel to this world to comprehend the philosophies of life.

He stopped in his tracks. At that moment, a barren land laid before his eyes.

As well as corpses.

Those bones were almost buried by the dust. Broken armors and corroded weapons were scattered on the ground. These were the corpses of a mercenary group called 'Tiger Fangs'. During their adventure, they had suffered a bandit attack and died here. Back in the game, Rhode needed to receive the quest from the mercenary guild, and then investigate their final mission according to the clues that were given. After that, he would need to follow the mark on the map all the way here and finish the quest by bringing them the letter and treasure. It was a game, after all, so it was necessary for them to follow those steps. But even so, many veterans did not follow such a stringent rule. They would rather take the letter and treasure first, then bring it to the mercenary guild. Wasn't it also the same? Not only did it save more time, but it was also more convenient. Since they could save those few steps, then why not?

But, the reason why Rhode was here was not to save those few steps...

He went to the depths of the battlefield and saw a skeleton lying on the edge of the hillside. It was wearing a steel armor that had long been corroded, and there was a dark, rusty, iron sword beside it. That was Rhode's goal. Those were also the bones of the mercenary group leader.

Walking towards the remains, he lowered his body and stretched out his hand. Soon, a mercenary badge could be seen. This was the keepsake of 'Tiger Fangs' mercenary group and also the item needed to complete the quest. Rhode carefully put it in his pocket and then looked down again. He quickly found what he wanted.

It was something that was worn by the skeleton, a dirty ring.

Rhode carefully took out the ring. On the surface, it looked like this ring was useless and no different from a scrap of metal in a pile of garbage. But the system prompt in front of him showed a totally different thing.

[Black Iron Ring. Unidentified. Contains magic fluctuations]

“Resonance.”

Rhode closed his eyes, holding the ring in his right hand. The previous weak magic fluctuations became clearer. When he opened his eyes again, the item on his right hand was not a scrap of metal anymore. On the contrary, a dark ring carved with a simple pattern was lying quietly on his hand.

[The Ring of Will has been identified. Can activate a shield for 5 minutes. Immunity against mental (MEN) attacks. Cooldown: 3 days]

Nice.

Rhode wore the ring on his right hand, feeling relieved. After he looked around for a moment, he did not find any other valuable things, so he turned back and returned to the hillside.

Rhode could clearly see Lize and Matt were struggling towards the white stone's direction. The fat merchant had no mountain climbing experience and was trembling behind Lize. Looking at his face, it seemed that if Lize wasn't a female, he would have cried and asked her to carry him up.

That good-for-nothing...

Rhode shook his head helplessly. Just as he was planning to reunite with them again, his heart suddenly froze upon hearing the Spirit Bird's report.

“_____!”

Rhode was startled. He quickly dashed towards the forest and soon, he saw three shadows flying out.

Bad!

Chapter 14

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The three black-clothed men stopped looking for traces because they already found their target when they spotted the two shadows on the hillside. They glanced at each other and quickly rushed towards the direction of the target.

They were quick, but Rhode was not slow either.

He dashed through the hillside and whistled. The Spirit Bird flying in the sky acted as if it had heard some kind of instruction; it fluttered down and rushed towards the three black-clothed men.

“——!!”

Facing the sudden ambush from the Spirit Bird, the three people did not panic. They quickly set a formation to counterattack: the person that was holding daggers in both hands rushed toward the Spirit Bird, and the other two people kept advancing towards Lize and Matt. Clearly, they were very professional. They wouldn't stop just because of such a minor attack.

Indeed, if their opponent was just an ordinary bird, it would be very difficult to stop them.

Unfortunately, the Spirit Bird was not an ordinary bird.

The Spirit Bird didn't intend to dodge the man with dual daggers. Instead, it increased its speed and drove right into the man. The previously conceited expression of the man turned fearful the next moment because he could clearly see the bird penetrating through his sword right.

Elemental creature!

The black-clothed man was shocked. He quickly turned his body around and tried to dodge its attack. But even so, the Spirit Bird successfully injured his shoulder. He felt his body instantly froze and almost lost his consciousness. He tried to balance his body, but still heavily fell to the ground. He even lost the grip of the daggers on his hand.

The other two were the same. When the Spirit Bird passed by them, they did not concern themselves with it. However, soon, a cold breeze blew towards them. They only felt their body turn numb, and couldn't help but pause for a moment.

Even though the numbness dispersed quickly, because of that delay, Lize and Matt managed to reach the white stone. Upon seeing this, one of the black-clothed men frowned. He made a gesture and pulled out a crossbow from his waist.

“W- what happened!”

Matt finally made it to the white stone with Lize's help. He was extremely tired and his whole body was half-paralyzed. He put his hand next to the stone wall while taking a deep breath, then, just as he was about to grumble. Suddenly, a thin shadow flashed by and at the very next moment, an arrow was embedded into the wall beside him.

“Waa!”

Matt quickly lowered his head. Lize's body also subconsciously shrank back, but she did not forget to grab the fat merchant and push him to cover.

“We have to hurry.”

Rhode said while looking at the three shadows on the mountain not far from him. At this point, Rhode had also kept up with Matt and Lize.

“They... who are they? What happened? Why are they attacking us?”

“Probably Rogues.”

Rhode was able to catch a glimpse of their clothes, which was a common outfit for a Rogue. Most Rogues wore similar clothing. As to who had sent them, it could only be known after they were killed.

Rhode currently didn't have the strength to kill them. Even with the Spirit Bird's ability, he could only stall them for a few seconds. It wasn't that their resistance towards elemental creatures was high, but it was because that his current level was far too low.

"Maybe you would like to ask them why they attacked. Perhaps they would be kind enough to tell you before killing you."

Even though it was rare for Rhode to make a joke, the merchant couldn't bring himself to laugh. He knew that those Rogues weren't people to be messed with. If he fell into their hands, he would most certainly die.

Matt's face was pale from all the running, but no matter how tired he was, he still forced himself to follow Rhode into the hidden passage behind the white stone.

Zenar Mountain's trading route used to be bustling with activity and was wide enough to cater for two carriages side by side. However, as time passed, rocks from the top of the mountain rolled down and obstructed most of the trading route, causing it to become rough and narrow.

Still, the trio quickly made their way forward without stopping. Rhode looked behind from time to time, and he realized that he was running out of time. If it wasn't for the terrain, perhaps they would've been surrounded already.

"Mr. Rhode, it's a dead end!"

Lize's voice made Rhode quickly turn his head. The road ahead had been completely blocked by rocks.

As expected.

Rhode shook his head. He thought that the game wanted to force the players to take the route that had been designed, so they purposely led them towards this direction. But now it seemed that it was not the case. Well, whatever, that was not his original intent anyway.

“Turn right.”

“Right?”

Hearing Rhode’s command, both of them were surprised for a moment. Then they looked at the right side of the passage and hesitated for a while.

Although the main passage was blocked, there was still a path to the left. The weird thing was, the sky was obviously clear on the left path, but the passage on the right side was foggy and creepy. Just looking at it gave them the shivers, but Rhode actually wanted them to go there?

“Hurry up, or it will be too late.”

Due to Rhode’s urging, the two of them quickly walked into the foggy passage, and soon, their shadows were completely concealed by the fog.

Seeing that both of them had walked into it, Rhode felt relieved. He looked back again and then stretched out his right hand.

“Cage!”

A white card emerged from his palm. After that, the exquisite white sword appeared once again. Then, while gripping his sword, he rushed towards the cliff.

A bright light flew out from the sword and hit the loosened rocks above the cliff. Boom! Huge chunks of rocks and earth rolled down, blocking the passage completely. When the three black-clothed men finally caught up, Rhode’s figure had already disappeared behind the fallen rocks.

“Damn it!”

One of the black-clothed men gnashed his teeth and cursed. The way ahead had been completely blocked by the rocks and they simply could not pass. Moreover, the impact had led to a chain reaction, and now the whole place was shaking. If they tried to follow the trio, the situation would be dangerous for them.

“What should we do?”

“There is no other way.”

One black-clothed man stared at the passage that had been completely blocked off.

“We can only go back and report to the captain and send people to monitor all the villages around the area. They’re intending to escape from behind. I did not expect these guys to be so smart.”

“Elemental creature... Is one of them a Mage?”

“It seems like so, but from my observation, there appears to be no Mage among them.”

While the both of them exchanged glances, the last of the black-clothed men that had been silently observing the traces left on the mountain finally spoke,

“But there is a very strong Swordsman among them.”

Having said that, the black-clothed man turned away.

“Let’s go. These three targets are not simple, but it isn’t as though all is lost. Pass my order! Immediately monitor the surrounding villages and towns, I believe they will not stay in this mountain for long.”

As for Rhode and the others, the danger had not yet lifted.

“What... is this place?”

The fat merchant looked blankly in front of him. He thought that after traveling for so many years, he had already seen many things, but the experiences from these past few days had told him that there were still many things he didn't know yet about this world.

After passing the foggy passage, the scene in front of them was a barren, abandoned town. The whole town was surrounded by thick fog, and everything was hazy. Even if he looked at the sky, he could only see a greyish sky. The sky was dull and nothing like before as if they were in a different region.

“This place is called the Fog Ruins.”

Rhode replied as he strode from behind.

“As long as we pass through here, we can reach the port of Araga, and then we will be able to leave.”

“But is it... dangerous?”

Except for a blind person, no one would think that this place was peaceful.

“Of course it's dangerous.”

Rhode did not state it clearly but the Fog Ruins was one of the five-man player dungeons in the game and was also the players' first dungeon. It wasn't difficult, but it was not completely easy either. To complete with just the three of them would be a challenge. After all, Rhode was only at level 8, and Lize was only at level 6. As for the merchant, whose combat power isn't even at level 5, Rhode did not even count him in. So the conclusion was basically: One level 8 Spirit Swordsman and one support class NPC was going to conquer a level 10, five-man dungeon. If this had happened in-game, people would have thought that he was stupid.

But he isn't stupid. In fact, he just thought of this risky idea when he looked at Lize. If not, he would not have chosen this option. And it seemed that this route was indeed the safest route for them after considering the overall risk.

“Everything will be fine if you follow my command. So...”

Rhode paused, turned his head around and faced the blonde girl in front of him.

“Lize, I’m counting on you.”

Chapter 15

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Me?”

Lize’s eyes widened in disbelief; even Matt, who was standing beside her, was also surprised.

Everyone in Dragon Soul Continent knew that the Cleric was a job similar to pharmacists, doctors, and nurses. They were basically a supporting class and their job was to bandage wounds, heal injuries, cast protective shields, and remove poison-like effects. As for fighting in the front line? That kind of thing was unheard of!

“That’s right.”

Rhode nodded his head. When he entered this place, it seemed that he had once again turned into that guild leader who commanded his team to conquer a dungeon.

“You must listen to my command. It does not require a particularly complex skill, but you need to be more responsive and aware of the surroundings. When you have familiarized yourself with it, it won’t be difficult anymore... How many times can you use ‘Holy Radiance’?”

Although he had already guessed her level, when he was healed by her, it was still better for him to confirm it just to be sure.

“I am an Outer Circle 7th Layer Cleric. As for Holy Radiance... I can only use it once a day, and it lasts for a day...if my Soul Power consumption is not too much.”

Non-combat casters’ classification was different from the combat type. Besides the level, they also differed in the Soul Power level such as Outer Circle, Middle Circle, and Inner Circle. The Outer Circle had a total of ten

layers, Middle Circle had 7 Layers, and Inner Circle had 3 Layers. This was because casters believed that their Soul Power came from the depths of their own soul. In general, from their point of view, the soul was an existence of three mutually reinforcing circles, the deeper the caster could understand their own soul, the more powerful they would be. And since Lize's strength had reached the Outer Circle 7th Layer, it meant that she was about to break into the Middle Circle.

It was very rare for level 6 Cleric to reach Middle Circle. So Rhode was even more confident of his choice after confirming her ability.

“Alright. Remember, from now on, you don't have to use Healing Light on me no matter how injured I am. Pay more attention to Mr. Matt. Give him a barrier if there is any danger... do you understand?”

“... I understand, Mr. Rhode.”

Though she did not understand some words Rhode used, she still understood what he meant, so she nodded.

“Mr. Matt, how long will our food supplies last?”

“About three to four days.”

While holding the travel bag, the fat merchant thought for a while then answered with a saddened face.

“But if we save up more food...”

“It is a good chance for you to lose weight now.”

If Rhode had said it while laughing, Matt might have thought that he was just joking, but Rhode's expression was very calm; it did not look like he was joking. This made him fall into a dilemma. He held onto the travel bag, intending to say something. However, Rhode had already turned around to face Lize and commanded her:

“Cast Holy Radiance now and show me.”

“Ok.”

Lize slightly nodded, then she stretched out her hand and closed her eyes.

Soon, a soft light slowly emerged from her palm and spread in all directions. It was unclear if it was an illusion, but the fat merchant found that the light somehow caused the fog to retreat and vanish slowly.

Then, he rubbed his eyes in disbelief and saw that the fog around them had really disappeared. Previously, they could only see a vague shadow of some of the ruins, but now, they could clearly see the nearby incomplete walls and houses. This made them feel slightly more relieved. After all, having a clear line of sight was always better.

“I’ll be the vanguard. Lize, you follow behind me, and Mr. Matt, you’ll be the last one. Don’t walk too far from us — and no matter what happens, do not act alone.”

The ruins were eerily silent.

The Holy Radiance had dispersed the fog, but it did not disperse the ominous aura. Under Rhode’s lead, everyone slowly moved forward. But soon, Rhode gave a hand signal, instructing them to stop walking.

If his memory served him right, he was almost close to the first wave of monsters’ spawning location.

Sure enough, it did not take long for them to see a weak light in the distance. It was blinking like a torch.

“W-what is that?”

Matt instantly tensed up.

“That’s a Will-o-Wisp.”

Rhode stretched out his right hand and Star Mark appeared in his hands.

“Be careful, they will not come near us if we do not provoke them.”

Just as Rhode stopped talking, the fog in front of them suddenly shriveled up, then three strange creatures appeared.

Their figure was like a human's, but their whole body was enveloped by thick fog. Only the three pairs of bright eyes on their head confirmed that they were not part of the fog.

“Lize, cast Healing Light on the first one.”

Healing Light?

Hearing his command, a trace of doubt crossed her mind. It was a healing spell, why should she cast it on a monster? But this question only lasted a second. Right after that, Lize raised her right hand and cast Healing Light on the monster in front of her.

As a Cleric, Lize's skill was quite good. Healing Light was a long-range spell; it was not difficult to cast as long as she was able to clearly determine the target's location. To Lize, it was an easy task but right now her opponent was a foe, not her comrade. It made her hesitate a bit, but she soon completed the spell.

A white light immediately emerged from the air, then it wrapped around the Will-o-Wisp. According to its original effect, Healing Light was supposed to restore health; it could even make people feel energized. It was the basic foundation of the cleric's magic.

But surprisingly, the Will-o-Wisp had a reaction contrary to what she had thought. After being hit by Healing Light, it made a loud sound as if it was screaming; even she could hear it clearly in the distance. The previously humanoid fog monster bent down and trembled as if it was hit by something. The fog that wrapped around its body fell apart as though the sun shone and melted the ice. The shocked Lize subconsciously lowered her head and looked at her hand. She could not believe that she had released such a lethal spell.

Looking at the Will-o-Wisp, Rhode's reaction was very calm. He knew that the light produced from Healing Light was of the Holy Element which was

the nemesis of the Will-o-Wisp. Moreover, Lize was a half-angel, and the Holy Elemental power from an angel's bloodline was clearly different from humans in terms of quality. To make it simple, if a human cast Healing Light, it would be akin to pouring hot water on the Will-o-Wisp, but if an angel was the one who cast the spell, it would be like pouring a high concentration of sulfuric acid into its open mouth. Alas, Lize was just a half-angel. If she had a pure bloodline, the Will-o-Wisp would have long turned into ashes.

Lize did not understand how the healing spell could result in such an effect. But the players from Dragon Soul Continent knew why. From their point of view, the name 'Healing Light' was just a deceptive name for Holy Elemental magic. Since the effect of the spell was a healing spell on living things, it was more convenient to call it Healing Light, but it did not mean that it only worked like that. In the Dragon Soul Continent's earlier days, there was even a joke about this among the players.

A Necromancer's most tragic fate was to encounter a group of undead. Because a Necromancer's spells were basically of the Dark Element, and using them to attack an undead that had the same elemental composition would only result in a healing effect rather than destroying them. It had also broken the fantasy of the players who had chosen a Necromancer as their job and thought they could create an undead army and become invincible. So they had to learn other elemental spells to ensure that they could kill other undead monsters.

Comparing their basic characteristics, a Necromancer and a Cleric were almost similar; they mostly lived based on their own capacity and could not cause harm to the environment. They would only shine when they encountered the opposing element. But a Necromancer was a lot more likely to encounter the living than the undead.

As for Clerics, when they encountered the undead, they could temporarily change their playstyle from the supporting class to one of the more offensive types. But before that, the probability of encountering an undead was much lower than Necromancers encountering the living.

Now, it was time for the Cleric to shine.

“Attack the other two behind it!”

Rhode commanded her while dashing towards the Will-o-Wisp in front of him.

“Yes!”

A delicate yet sonorous sound rang from behind.

Chapter 16

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Sigh...”

Looking at the dust-covered ground, Rhode wiped the sweat on his forehead, feeling a little tired. Along the way, they had encountered about fifteen or sixteen Will-o-Wisps. If they were a five-man party, it would have been easy, but right now, there was only one person with combat ability other than Rhode. So, there was no way to conquer it like the usual dungeon raid like before. He couldn't find a tank to help hold the aggro while everyone else would attack. Thus, he could only act as the bait and ask Lize to weaken the enemy with Healing Light before finishing it off himself as fast as possible. The Will-o-Wisp was at least a level 10 Elite monster, so even when its defense was weakened, it was still difficult to deal with. To make a critical hit, not only must he use Star Mark on his hand, he also needed to attack its vital points.

After all, Rhode wasn't an NPC. Even in the game, to make such a high demand for the attack would consume a lot of energy. Not to mention that Rhode was using his true body right now. If it was in the game, he could still replay if he failed. But if he failed here, that would be the end of his life.

To Rhode, this kind of pressure was really hard to bear. He raised his head, looking at the fog that surrounded the ruins. And after making sure that there were no more monsters, he felt relieved.

“Mr. Rhode, how about we take a break for a while?”

Lize looked at Rhode with worry in her eyes. As a Cleric, she did not really understand what Rhode was trying to do, but she was able to feel his current pressure.

“Not now...”

Rhode shook his head. Although he had cleared the monsters here, he always like there was something dangerous watching him. He studied his surroundings carefully, but still couldn't figure out the where it was. According to his memories, they should not have reached the BOSS area, so there shouldn't be an overly dangerous encounter yet. Moreover, he was very familiar with the monsters here, all of them should have been cleaned up already.

So where is this feeling coming from...?

Rhode looked around again, but he could not find anything abnormal. At that moment, the fat merchant suddenly screamed.

“Ah!!”

“What happened?”

Rhode and Lize hurriedly turned around and saw Matt's pale face. One of his hands was holding the bag, while the other one was slightly trembling, pointing towards the fog behind them.

“Just now, there was a black shadow over there...”

“Black shadow?”

Lize looked at the direction Matt had pointed towards, but beside the dim light emitting from the fog, nothing else could be seen.

“No way...”

“Get on the ground!!”

At that moment, something flashed through Rhode's mind; he finally understood what he was feeling previously. Then he shouted while pushing down Lize's head down, forcing her to crouch.

“Swoosh!”

Almost at the same time, a black shadow flashed through the air. Rhode could feel a cold claw brushing past his head, leaving quite a painful feeling.

Damn it!

Rhode's heart immediately sank. He finally realized what was that 'Black shadow.' It was a Gargoyle!

In the legends, the Fog Ruins was once a lively and glorious town, but after the trade route was abandoned a Mage moved here to save his loved ones. He decided to study the forbidden death magic in this abandoned town. In the end, his spell failed, and the Mage also died. But the death magic did not stop there; it created a thick fog and hordes of undead monster.

In this dungeon, the most dangerous creature was the Gargoyle that was left to protect the Mage's belongings. It was a level 15 Rare Elite monster!

If it was in the game, Rhode would have been very happy because the Rare Elite monster was—well, very rare. Even if he ran to the dungeon a few times, it was still almost impossible to see it even once. However, he couldn't feel happy now since his opponent was a level 15 monster and even a flying one on top of it. Not only could it move flexibly, but it was also on a totally different level from the Will-o-Wisp because Lize's Healing Light had no effect on it. Moreover, the Gargoyle's body was extremely hard, an ordinary attack could only cause a scratch. This was definitely going to be a bitter struggle!

In the game, Rhode had run the Fog Ruins dungeon for more than thirty times but he still had never seen the Gargoyle, so he almost forgot about it. Now that he entered the dungeon with his true body for the first time but he already encountered it?

Is this considered good luck or bad luck?

However, Rhode no longer had time to complain because the danger was right ahead.

A head-on attack was useless since his level was less than 10. Challenging a level 15 monster was an almost impossible thing to do. Even with Star Mark, his attack was still limited.

“Quickly run!”

He commanded without hesitation, then he grabbed Lize’s hand while running.

“Follow me! Lower your head and whatever you do, do not look up!”

It was impossible to escape now. The only way right now was to find the Gargoyle’s controller device and destroy it. Even though it was technically possible to escape from its attacking range, but looking at his team now, there was no one that could attract its attention without getting hurt. If only there was a Ranger or a Thief...

Lize and Matt kept their head down and ran forward. The fog around them also began surging. It was clear that their actions had also attracted the Will-o-Wisps’ attention; now there were even four or five Will-o-Wisps rushing towards them.

“Lize, cast Healing Light! Do not stop!”

“Yes!”

Although casting the spell while running was not easy for her, but she still tried her best and stretched out her hand. Soon, streams of white lights swirled through the air and landed on a Will-o-Wisp, after which, Rhode quickly stabbed it with his sword. Then, with a scream, it turned into ashes and disappeared. A system prompt suddenly flashed in front of Rhode.

[EXP 1900/1800, Level Up, Level 8]

Unfortunately, there was no time for him to care about system prompts at this time because more Will-o-Wisps had appeared. Although their momentum had slowed slightly because of Healing Light, their advantageous numbers made up for this gap.

Compared to the Will-o-Wisps, the Gargoyle did not care about Healing Light at all. Although the Gargoyle was also a Dark Elemental creature, as the Mage's Guardian, the Gargoyle's outer body was made of stone, enabling it to resist most low-leveled spells. After it had failed its attack previously, it had immediately identified the target and chased after the three of them while waiting for the chance to attack. Rather than an undead who attacked based on instinct, an undead who had an AI was indeed more difficult to deal with.

“Ah!”

Suddenly, Matt lost his balance and fell to the ground. The Gargoyle had been waiting for an opportunity to attack and immediately flew down. Its two sharp front claws were rushing to pierce the fat merchant. When Matt turned around, the only thing he could see was the shadow of it trying to tear his body apart.

“Oh God...”

Right at that moment, a faint golden light emerged from the air and blocked the Gargoyle sharp claws. After that, the light from the sword scattered and hit the Will-o-Wisps surrounding them. Followed by a loud flap, the Gargoyle flew back and crashed into a group of Will-o-Wisps. At that moment, Lize pulled the fat merchant up who thought that he was about to meet his family in the underworld and continued to run.

“Here!”

After avoiding the Will-o-Wisps' “encirclement”, he raised his head and finally found his goal. It was an abandoned church, the place where the Mage did his experiments. According to his memory, the controller should be there.

But this place was, of course, difficult to enter.

When Rhode ran to the church entrance, he only saw darkness. He immediately activated Shadow Flash and dodged—at his previous position a second ago was another Gargoyle sitting on the ground, its claws were

dug deep in the ground, crushing the green stone which he had once stood on.

“Tch!”

Rhode cursed. At the same time, he quickly swept a glance and found that the Gargoyles on both sides of the church entrance had been missing. Of course, he could imagine where did they go.

He actually encountered two in one run. It seems like he won the lottery today.

“Both of you, quickly go inside and find the controller!”

He faced the Gargoyle while shouting at Lize and Matt.

“Those Will-o-Wisps won’t pursue the both of you; I will face the two of them. You guys take this opportunity and immediately go in. Find the control device, and then destroy it. Be careful of traps.”

“But ... Mr. Rhode you...”

“This is an order!”

Rhode interrupted Lize coldly. He held Star Mark and slashed forward. A white light instantly appeared on its edge, causing the Gargoyles to scream as they flew up, escaping Rhode’s attack. But by doing so, they also opened the road leading to the church.

“Quick, go!”

Chapter 17

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Metal and stone clashed against each other, igniting a bright spark.

“Ugh!”

Rhode retreated a few steps back. The huge impact caused his sword to tremble, producing violent waves that traveled from his arms to his upper body.

As expected, a level 15 Gargoyle was an opponent not to be taken lightly — especially when there were two. Gargoyles were unique because of their intelligence. Normally, that was something that he’d worry about, but because of said intelligence, the AI made less threatening movements out of caution. It was especially so after it was attacked by the Blade of Destruction. When Rhode’s sword emitted a white light, the Gargoyle immediately screamed and flew back. As for the other one, even though it had not been hit, it also became hesitant, giving Rhode a chance to breathe.

But it was only for a moment.

Rhode held Star Mark firmly in his hand as he studied the hovering Gargoyles. Then, he clenched his teeth and poised himself. Although the two Gargoyles were afraid of his Blade of Destruction, he discerned that the both of them wouldn’t let go of him that easily. Even though they were in a stalemate right now, it wouldn’t last much longer. When he leveled up, he had raised his Moon Shadow Swordsmanship into Rank D 4/4, which in turn reduced the Soul Power consumption of the Blade of Destruction. Still, it would be a problem if it was frequently used. Besides, this wasn’t even the final battle; Rhode knew that he had to save some of his strength in case something went wrong. And since he was the only combatant amongst the three, if he used up all of his power, the situation would turn grave.

The two Gargoyles did not continue to stare at him. On the contrary, they flew back and forth as they extended their claws to attack Rhode, only pulling back once they found that he had the intention to fight back. This kind of never-ending battle required a lot of stamina, but since the two Gargoyles' were made from alchemy, it was not a problem for them at all. However, it wasn't the same for Rhode.

Sweat slowly trickled down his forehead. His body had been in a defensive position for an extended period of time and he knew that he would gradually become exhausted. But Rhode wasn't able to retreat. He knew that with his current ability, it was almost impossible to defeat two Gargoyles, and that was why his only hope was Lize. However...

It seemed like I forgot to remind them to pay attention to the protection circle?

After pondering for a moment, he shrugged and switched his focus to the Gargoyles in front of him.

It's not THAT dangerous anyway.

—

Suddenly, Matt yelped in pain.

“Ah!!”

He fell to the ground and his whole body twitched non-stop.

“I'm going to die! Help! Help!”

“You're just stunned Mr. Matt... You're not going to die because of that.”

Lize was flipping over the things on the dusty and cobwebbed table, most of it was just debris that had been already been eroded. She casually cast Healing Light at Matt without looking and continued to search again.

Although most of the mages would cast a lot of protective spells to protect their secrets, this church had been forgotten for a long period of time. Thus,

the power of the protective circle had weakened about 70%-80%, so it was not particularly dangerous.

As a half-angel, Lize's magic resistance was quite strong, so these weakened protective circles didn't really affect her. Under her influence, those circles that were supposed to trigger fire and lightning only created a flicker before disappearing. However, the poor Mr. Matt had helped these traps to regain back some of their self-confidence. Since he was just an ordinary person and had no magic resistance, his reaction made the protective circle seem threatening.

"This... this place is awful..." The man muttered while observing his surroundings.

Matt then removed the dust from his clothes before standing up again.

In the dark church, the only light that illuminated the darkness was the 'Holy Radiance' that Lize had cast. But this only made Matt more frightened because he could clearly detect the locations of the strange magic circles. Moreover, the light also revealed ominous piles of bones which were scattered on the black floor. This scene was enough to make his legs weak. And as if that wasn't scary enough, when he saw the bloodstains on the wall, he almost ran away in fright. If it wasn't because of Lize's calm demeanor that made him feel embarrassed as a man, and because of the Gargoyles at the entrance that was even more dangerous, most likely he would have already run away long ago.

But now he could only grit his teeth and cling to Lize to find something called the 'Controller Device' which he had never seen before.

This place is so damned messy... how can one even find an object?

He complained in his mind, but when he noticed Lize's seriousness, he decided not to express his view verbally and continued to survey the surroundings.

Meanwhile, Rhode's situation wasn't getting any better.

“———!”

The Gargoyles shrieked and attacked Rhode. But he made a quick movement as he sidestepped and dodged its attack once again. This time, the Gargoyles did not retreat like before. One Gargoyle spun around and whipped its tail at Rhode.

This is bad!

When saw the attack, his heart sunk. It was too late for him to dodge so all he could do was to raise his sword to parry the attack.

Rhode's reaction was fast, but the Gargoyles weren't slow either. When he felt the vibrations through his sword, he was already sent flying into the air. Rhode rolled on the ground several times before stopping. The clash caused his hands to tremble uncontrollably.

“Ugh!”

Rhode's body was shaking as he got up. He felt dizzy and weak with half his body totally numb. If he had not gripped his sword tight, he would have already lost it. At that moment, as he was beginning to regain clarity, a creepy sound echoed in his ears.

“Hiss...”

Cold breath trickled down his back. He hoped that he could escape the opponent by falling to the ground, but when he raised his head up, he discovered three Will-o-Wisps approaching him slowly.

While the Gargoyle did not deal him much damage, instead, it had thrown him out of the church barrier entrance area. Due to the invisible barrier, the Will-o-Wisps were unable to enter the church, however, they still lingered around the edges, relying on their instincts while waiting for an opportunity to attack.

And now, the opportunity finally came.

Of course, Rhode did not intend to let them do as they please. Facing the encirclement, he clenched his teeth and decided not hold anything back. Lifting up his sword, a hallowed light emerged and shot forward.

As the white light burst out and spread around the battlefield, one of them landed heavily on one of the Will-o-Wisp, shredding apart its protection. After which, he fluidly followed up with an attack, thrusting his sword into its core. While the unlucky Will-o-Wisp screamed and slowly turned to dust, Rhode had already passed through its body and landed inside the barrier.

What should I do next?

While Rhode was thinking about his next course of action, the system prompt suddenly appeared, startling him for a moment.

[EXP 4000/1800, Level up! Talent Tree Unlocked, Level 8]

I'm already at Level 10? But I remember that I was only at Level 8 when I entered Fog Ruins...

Rhode froze for a moment as he tried to recall what happened. He seemed to remember that the system prompt told him that his EXP was already enough to level up even before he met the Gargoyle, but he did not notice at that time. But now, it seemed as if his EXP was enough for him to level up again. This wasn't too surprising, after all, in this dungeon, almost all of the EXP was earned by him. Moreover, his level was low, killing monsters above his level allowed him to gain a lot of bonuses. That was why reaching level 10 was very normal. The only strange thing was... how did the EXP work when he was clearly living in the real world?

But now wasn't the time to worry about these minor matters. Rhode quickly opened his attribute table and made his choice since this might be his only chance to gain a quick advantage.

[EXP 4000/1800, Level up! Talent Tree Unlocked, Level 8]

[EXP 2200/2000, Level up! Talent Tree Unlocked, received 1 Skill Point, Level 9]

[EXP 200/2500, Talent Tree Unlocked, received 2 Skill Points, Level 10]

[Do you want to activate the Talent System?]

“Activate!”

In less than a second, the Talent System branched out three sets of talents.

In the Dragon Soul Continent, when the player reached level 10, each job was given a choice of three different set of talents. They could only choose one as their main, and another as secondary to compliment their main talent. The effectiveness of the talent was based on how many Skill Points the player allocated. In the beginning, many players were confused because they could only obtain 1 Skill Point whenever they leveled up. The Talent Tree, Swordsmanship, as well as spells, needed Skill Points to level up. So, in the beginning, they could only allocate a limited amount of Skill Points. Fortunately, when the players reached the intermediate areas, they would be able to use the ‘Awaken Scroll’ to finish some high-level quests and obtain additional Skill Points.

Rhode’s Spirit Swordsman class had three different kinds of talents—— ‘Summoning Master’, ‘Soul Messenger’ and ‘Hell Lord’.

For ‘Summoning Master’, when leveled to a certain level, it could increase the number of summoning spirits. Players chose the ‘Soul Messenger’ to strengthen their awakening spirit power. As for ‘Hell Lord’, when a non-human lifeform is killed, it had a special power to convert the corpse into a summoning spirit based on a certain percentage. Of course, the conversion is limited to undead attributes.

It can be said that every talent had their own pros and cons, ‘Summoning Master’ relied on numbers to win, ‘Soul Messenger’ focused on quality, but beasts were rare to find and so were Soul Cores. ‘Hell Lord’ was also a good option. If it was an ordinary person, they would have been hesitant as to which talent to give up. But for Rhode, it wasn’t a problem since he had

played the Spirit Swordsman class for seven years. He had already memorized all the skills and even held the de facto title of the 'Walking Library,' which was given by the players who respected his knowledge.

Even in the game, almost two-thirds of the entire player base chose this job because they want to build their character using Rhode's character as their class guide. That was why it was difficult for new players to decide their talents.

But Rhode was different, once he saw his Talent Tree, he immediately made his decision.

Chapter 18

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The first rule of how to play a Spirit Swordsman was to absolutely not attack alone at any point in time.

[Used 1 Skill Point to enhance the Moon Shadow Swordsmanship 1/5, Rank C——Moonbeams Unlocked]

[Used 1 Skill Point to assign talent —— Summoning Master]

[Summoning Master First Talent has been unlocked:

Soul Resonance (Every 10 levels, the character's summoned spirit capacity will increase)

Telepathy (Share your thoughts with the summoned creatures, increase the telepathy active time duration)

Integration (Dual Spirit Fusion)]

[Received Permanent Skill: Soul Resonance LV1 (Every 10 levels, the character's summoned spirit capacity will increase +1)]

[Summoned Spirit Capacity +1]

When the last line of the system prompt disappeared, Rhode came across a huge shadow. However, he didn't retreat in shock. On the contrary, he raised his sword and thrust forward.

Swoosh!

A green shadow quickly flew out from the sword and shot towards the Gargoyle.

It was the Spirit Bird.

The fact that he was unable to summon two creatures at once was his current weakness. Alas, unfortunately, Star Mark was also considered to be one of his summoned weapons.

The Spirit Swordsman class was almost similar to an ordinary Swordsman. They could also choose to equip a 'normal' weapon, but Rhode decided not to. Even though he had considered using a normal weapon instead, he could not bear to give up Star Mark's attribute bonus. And because of that, he was able to easily eliminate higher-leveled monsters which provided him with many benefits, such as additional EXP. On the flip side, he was unable to fight with his 'summoned creatures,' making him look like a full-fledged Swordsman.

This caused Rhode to feel really uncomfortable, but he couldn't help it. If he summoned the Spirit Bird, then he would need to give up Star Mark. But this way, his future battles would be more troublesome. Even though he could summon creatures, his class was still 'Swordsman' and not 'Mage'. He couldn't act like the mages who stayed at the back.

However, if he wanted to use Star Mark, he must give up on the Spirit Bird and fight like an ordinary Swordsman. That wasn't a suitable option either.

The Spirit Swordsman class had a big weakness when compared to the 'genuine' Swordsman class. It was the class penalty ——— All the Swordsmanship rank -1.

This meant that if a genuine Swordsman achieved the highest rank of SSS, the maximum a Spirit Swordsman could reach was only the SS rank, no matter how much effort they put in. Moreover, in the beginning, both classes starting point were different. A Swordsman started with Rank D, but Rhode, as a Spirit Swordsman, started with Rank E. That was the difference.

It could be said that until now, Rhode was fighting really hard. If it wasn't because of the Star Mark and his deep knowledge of the Dragon Soul Continent, he would have been very miserable. Even more so because he'd

been familiar with his summoned creatures and fighting style. It made him feel extremely pressured.

And now, after choosing the 'Summoning Master' talent, his the weight on his shoulders had finally been reduced.

Yes, though the Spirit Swordsman lacked a strong attacking power, they were not the type that would just run up to monsters and mindlessly attack things.

As the Spirit Bird flew forward, the Gargoyle could not react in time. It could feel a magic power from its opponent, but his AI could not figure out what was this thing in front of it. But it still identified the other side as an enemy, so it attacked with its claw.

But at this time the Gargoyle missed.

When the claws finally met its foe, the Spirit Bird suddenly disappeared into a puff of smoke. The air that spread within its claw drifted away in the wind, leaving no trace behind. Not giving any chance for the Gargoyle to react, Rhode rushed forward, holding the sword in his hand tightly as he swung it down.

A silver moon appeared from his sword as it flew through its target.

This was the Moon Shadow Swordsmanship 3rd Skill —— Moonbeams.

Although it was the same as the Blade of Destruction since the attack was condensed from the sword aura. But the effect was completely different —— the Blade of Destruction created a light that pierced forward. Even though it was strong, but the AOE was too small which made it very easy to dodge. But Moonbeams was different, the crescent moon-shaped attack had a large area of effect, it was very difficult to dodge.

As expected, facing the incoming sword light, the Gargoyle flapped its wings frantically, trying to escape its opponent attack. But it was too slow, and the light pierced its right wing. The Gargoyle trembled violently and began to lose altitude.

But Rhode wasn't done yet. When it attempted to maintain its balance, Rhode took another two steps forward and waved his left hand, making a strange hand gesture.

The Spirit Bird which previously transformed into a gust of wind arrived from the Gargoyle's rear and froze its body once again. Followed by a tweeting sound, the wind smashed directly into the Gargoyle's back. The collision made a powerful impact which sent the Gargoyle flying away. This made the Gargoyle even angrier as it started to scream loudly. But Rhode did not wait for it to express its anger as he drove a shimmering light into the Gargoyle.

One.. two... three!

The Blade of Destruction accurately and continuously pierce the Gargoyle's right wing. Even it was made of rock, it still could not withstand a series of continuous attack on the same spot. Cracks spread through its wings and with a snapping sound, the wing completely shattered. The Gargoyle that lost its wing screamed hysterically as it fell to the ground. When it smashed onto the floor, it created a small crater in the bluish stone asphalt.

Relying on numbers to win as well as combining quantity and quality was the Spirit Swordsman's fighting style.

Rhode finally reunited with his old fighting style. In fact, if he was holding a normal weapon right now, when he activated his 'Summoning Master' talent he could summon two creatures to attack. At that time, not to mention rare elite monsters, even if it was a boss monster, he would surely kill it.

Unfortunately, this world had no 'ifs'. Reality was harsh. He did not have a second spirit to summon.

That was why he gave up this idea and retreated immediately.

Because at this time, the second Gargoyle was already rushing over towards his direction.

Perhaps when it saw its comrade being attacked, it rushed over as fast as it could. As for Rhode, since he could now summon the Spirit Bird, he did not intend to fight it head-on. Instead, he raised his head to stare at the monster that had once made him so miserable and then blew a whistle. A strong wind quickly blocked the black shadow that was trying to attack him, throwing the Gargoyle off its flight trajectory as it fell and rolled several times onto the ground, only stopping when it smashed into the wall of the church.

Of course, Rhode would not miss such a good opportunity to retaliate.

Under his command, a green whirlwind gathered from below. The Spirit Bird then stretched its wings and attacked its enemy once again.

In a blink of an eye, he switched from defense to offense.

The Gargoyles, who previously had aerial superiority, were now grounded. Rhode who was previously under a lot of pressure managed to turn the tide. He deliberately made the Spirit Bird separate the two Gargoyles so that they could maintain the '2 vs 1' battle and made sure that the other one had no way to come to rescue its comrade.

Although the situation had turned for the better, Rhode was still unable to continue the next battle. The recent clash consumed more than half of his current Soul Power. In the game, once you level up, your avatar will automatically replenish to the maximum. But of course, reality wasn't like that. When he leveled up to level 10 and unlock the talent tree, his Soul Power did not change at all.

If he just relied on his remaining Soul Power, he definitely wouldn't be able to destroy the two Gargoyles. Since he had already consumed a lot of his power, he must ensure to avoid the 'power outage' condition. After all, the level gap between them was simply too large. The Gargoyle's defense was naturally very strong. Even with the Blade of Destruction, he could only destroy one of its wings which did not really damage them to the point of death. But since he almost consumed all of his power and there was still one more Gargoyle he had to face alone — even an idiot would know what the outcome would be.

Right now the only thing he could do was to buy some time until Lize and Matt found the 'Controller Device'

Otherwise, the tables would turn upon him again.

“———!”

Though one of its wings was destroyed, it still did not lose its threatening gaze. It crawled on the ground as if it was a dark giant dog and attacked like a goblin. This was the frightening part of alchemy creature. If someone thought that all they could do was fly around and attack, then they'll be sorely mistaken.

Luckily, Rhode understood their behavior very well. He wasn't the newbie who believed that once they lost their ability to fly, the Gargoyles would be as good as dead. But the fact still remains it still reduced some of his pressure as he did not need to worry about air attacks any longer.

A black shadow suddenly appeared behind him, it was trying to sneak attack him from behind. But he was prepared. Rhode sidestepped and blocked the attack with his sword. At the same time, he stretched his right hand and made a hand gesture. After recognizing the gesture, the Spirit Bird flew towards him and blocked the other Gargoyle that was trying to launch another attack from above.

The Spirit Bird level was low and it could not really cause much damage to the rare elite monster. But as an elemental creature, it was not a difficult task to parry an attack.

As time passed, Rhode's heart beat faster and faster as he felt increasingly anxious. His body started to become sluggish, unable to keep up with his techniques. His vitality and Soul Power was running dry. Up till now, there was still no movement coming from the church.

Could it be that they had not found the controller device?

Swoosh!!

He heard a sharp sound of wind slicing through the air beside him. Rhode was caught off guard which made him feel slightly surprised. He immediately threw his body to the side and activated his shadow flash, but due to him being slightly careless, he lost his balance and the skill automatically disengaged.

His Soul Power almost ran out!

Rhode's heart sank. Right now he could not think of anything anymore. He quickly spun around and swung his sword forward. The pure white sword clashed with the Gargoyle's claw, igniting a loud, screeching sound like metal scratching against each other. The Gargoyle quickly retreated after it failed its ambush but Rhode was too exhausted to chase after it.

Just at this moment, a voice sounded from behind.

“Mr. Rhode! We've found it!!”

Chapter 19

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Mr. Rhode! We’ve found it!”

Hearing this voice, Rhode immediately looked back and saw Matt happily standing at the church entrance. He was holding a beautiful statue. It was the statue of Two Gargoyles in a curled up position, their eyes were made of ruby, vaguely emitting a trace of dark red luster.

That’s the controller device!

Matt’s action caught the attention of the two Gargoyles. As alchemy creatures, they certainly knew what that statue was. Therefore, the two Gargoyles immediately shifted their attention towards Matt.

“Aaah!”

Discovering that the two terrifying monsters were shooting after him, Matt couldn’t help but scream. He wanted to run far away, but at that moment, Rhode yelled at him.

“Throw it over!”

Matt paused for a while when he heard Rhode’s voice, and then he glanced towards the two Gargoyles advancing towards him. He had no qualms about their ability to shatter him to pieces, but still, he steeled his mind and threw the black statue.

The fat merchant’s throwing accuracy was awful. When he threw it across, while it still it flew in an arc, the direction that he threw towards was totally opposite from his intended target. It can be said that he wasn’t even throwing it to Rhode, rather, he threw it toward the two Gargoyles instead.

If anyone was watching this scene at the moment, they would believe that Matt was helping the two Gargoyles instead of Rhode. The two Gargoyles were surprised for a moment as they stared at the gift that was being delivered to them. But they still stretched out their claws to grab that little statue.

Just as they thought that they were about to succeed, a breeze suddenly sped beside them. It was the invisible Spirit Bird! It shot through the air and snatched the statue before the Gargoyles could react.

This move from Rhode was his final attempt at whatever strength he had left. Then, he stored his sword and made a snap with his right hand.

The Spirit Bird homed back towards Rhode when it heard the sound. The two Gargoyles also stopped midway and immediately locked their sights in Rhode's direction again.

“Swoosh!!”

The Gargoyle that was on the ground spun its body and flicked its tail towards the Spirit Bird. While the impact didn't cause much damage, it still distorted the wind element that formed its existence.

However, the Spirit Bird did not give up and kept trying to increase its speed. It flapped its wings vigorously and flew towards Rhode's direction.

But things did not go as expected.

Suddenly, a claw appeared from the sky, smashing through the Spirit Bird's body. The distorted wind elements could no longer maintain its form and turned back to its original appearance, drifting away in the wind. The black statue that the Spirit Bird carried flew a distance because of the impact. In an instant, two large shadows appeared from behind. They stretched their claws and opened their mouth, trying to reach out to the statue ——— only to find out that it had fallen into Rhode's hands.

[Obtained The Gargoyle's Controller Device, Identified]

[Command——]

“Aig” (ED: The command to stop)

Rhode spoke in a low voice and the hostile Gargoyles stopped abruptly. The bright light on the Gargoyles bodies gradually turned dim and the incandescent red light on the Gargoyles also disappeared in an instant. Two large shadows flew past Rhode and crashed towards the ground.

Boom!!! Followed by a tremor, the Gargoyles that had lost their power, turned back into a statue. Right now, they were quietly sitting near Rhode. After losing their magic power, they were not as violent as before. Their remains scattered on the ground.

“Sigh...”

Rhode could finally breathe. At this moment, he felt that he had no energy left. And because of the overconsumption of Soul Power, he lost his strength to stand. Even his right hand that was holding on the statue felt powerless. But on the surface, he still wore a calm expression on his face and stood firm. He then put the statue in his pocket.

“Mr. Rhode!”

Lize and Matt ran towards him and stared at him with a worried and anxious expression.

“Are you okay!?”

“I’m okay.”

Rhode took a deep breath. Right now, he truly wanted to sit down and rest for a while. In the game, Soul Power overconsumption would also affect the character movements. But to directly feel that kind of sensation on his real body was indeed too much. He could not fall yet.

Fortunately, after scanning the surrounding fog, he found no more Will-o-Wisps in the vicinity. It appeared as though they had given up and moved away.

Nevertheless, while it did not mean that they had given up entirely, it was still good news. Rhode did not have the habit of expressing his emotions explicitly. As the team leader, he must always be calm and not panic just because of trivial things. If he screamed and yelled every time he encountered difficulties, then surely his subordinates wouldn't treat him seriously. Although the current Rhode was no longer the guild leader of thousands of players, this habit of his still affected him.

Due to his calm demeanor, it gave Lize and Matt some relief. After all, when they were still looking for the controller device, they were extremely anxious about the situation outside. Lize was trying very hard, but in the case of item identification, Matt was apparently better than her. Finally, they found this little statue placed in the corner of some room. They had to admit; their timing was impeccable. If any of them were late by just a little, maybe the current situation would be completely different.

Initially, Rhode planned to pass through the Fog Ruins quickly. But because of the two Gargoyles, he had to change his mind. After all, facing those two statues had almost wholly consumed his power. If he did not rest, then the next battle would be more dangerous. Thus, Rhode finally decided to sleep in the church for one night and continue on the next day. He did not have to worry about any ambushes because, back in the game, this church was used by players to rest and organize loots, so there shouldn't be any significant problems.

Despite being utterly terrified of the dark and creepy church, but as always... Matt did not have the right to go against Rhode's decision.

The sky was getting dark.

A thick fog surrounded the church. Peering through the window, nothing could be seen at all. Three people sat in the center of the church. Abandoned and rotting wood from the benches and tables had turned into firewood. The fire lit up the dark sky, creating warmth for the trio. A cold wind was still blowing from the broken windows and cracks in the wall, producing a weird sensation of hot and cold.

Lize carefully stretched out her hand and removed the bandage from Rhode's chest. Her brow slightly twitched when she saw the state of his injury.

"Your wound opened up again, Mr. Rhode."

"I know."

Rhode nodded and did not say anything. In fact, this wasn't the first time. After all, along the way, he was always the one fighting in front. Even though he did spare a thought about his injury, he already tried his best to avoid using his left hand. But since he had encountered many life-threatening situations, he really could not help it. Therefore, this made his wound flare up. According to Lize, his injury was supposed to heal in two or three days. But because of what happened, it seemed that he needed about ten more days or so to recover.

Lize could not complain about his situation because this happened because of them. Thus, the only thing she could do was to help Rhode change into a clean bandage to avoid infection. Fortunately, before leaving the floating ship, as a Cleric, she brought some of first aid materials.

When she removed the bandage, she saw a deep gash on his chest. Matt took a deep breath when he inspected the wound. He even touched his own chest with a lingering fear. There were deep, black claw marks on his chest and other minor scratches everywhere else. Because of the fierce battle with the Gargoyle earlier, many scars were torn open. The oozing bright red blood even mixed with the dark blood clots, just by looking at it could make ordinary people shiver.

Lize took out her handkerchief and poured some water from the pot. Then, she pressed it on Rhode's chest, which made his body subconsciously twitch. Even Matt could not bear looking at it, so he turned his head around, not wanting to see again.

"S-sorry, does it hurt?"

"It's okay."

Lize asked in a panic. Rhode shook his head. Although he did feel some pain, it was still tolerable.

Once she heard his answer, she also felt relieved and continued to wipe his wound. At the same time, she even began to secretly observe the young man in front of her.

Frankly speaking, since the first time they met, he only gave her a very ordinary impression. Since he was charming and his skin was also very white, she thought that he was a noble. But, his attitude was not like the usual young nobles she had seen, which was why she could accept him. But at that time, she had never looked at him seriously. After all, a man that looked like a woman, the first impression he gave was, 'weak'.

But since then, Lize's view slowly changed.

He was different from the usual young noble; his power was extraordinary, he was even stronger than his leader. His character was calm, and following him made people feel at ease. Even if the situation was dangerous, he wouldn't panic. Unlike his appearance, he was a tough man.

Lize knew just how severe his injury was. Since she was a Cleric, she had treated many kinds of injuries before. Men that fought fiercely on the battlefield would also yell when she treated their wounds. But from the start, Rhode had never spoken a word of complaint. Not only that, he even fought with such a massive injury...

Lize's hand suddenly stopped.

What am I thinking about? This is so messed up.

The girl shook her head and pushed her thoughts to the back of her head. After that, she continued doing her job.

Rhode didn't notice Lize's strange act. Right now, he was focusing his attention on his right hand which held two pieces of glowing, dark-red gems.

It was the loot from the battle before, the Gargoyle's heart.

Chapter 20

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The Gargoyle was one of the top picked guardians for a Mage. This was only because Mages could utilize its usefulness as much as possible. Although the Gargoyle was a useful guardian, it was a colossal waste merely to use it as a shield. As such, other than its primary use, a lot of Mages also like to use it as a safety box.

And these two Gargoyles were just the same.

Rhode found a lot of good things. As a level 15 rare elite, the Gargoyle's 'loots' were worthy of their rarity. In addition to precious gems, crystal and gold coins, Rhode also found three kinds of magical equipment.

[Ice Talisman [Elite Item]: When attacked, can automatically trigger an ice shield, able to resist 50 to 150 damage and immune to water attacks]

[Oath Keeper [Excellent Item]: Increase the caster +5 spell power, + 5 spell resistance.]

[Ring of Fog [Excellent Item]: Every 10 days could activate "Ethereal Body", lasts for half an hour.]

All of these were great equipment. If sold to the auction house, it would provide a lot of money.

Unfortunately, these equipment were meant for casters.

In the end, Rhode gave these pieces of equipment to Lize. As a Cleric, even though she was a non-combat class, these equipment were still useful to her. He gave her the Ice Talisman and the Oath Keeper but kept the Ring of Fog for himself. In the game, this ring helped a lot of players to solo a dungeon, so he unreservedly kept the ring for himself.

But Lize was delightfully surprised when she received two rare equipment by doing almost nothing. One must understand that usually within a mercenary group, even though when they adventured as a group, most of these loots were given to the mercenary leader to be sold. The money earned from it would be used to maintain the operation of the entire mercenary group. The action of transferring equipment directly to group members was rarely seen.

From this, the difference between NPC and player could be seen. As a living, breathing person of this world, the mercenary's ultimate goal was to earn money to live. So, when they found a piece of equipment, they wouldn't use it for themselves. In fact, many small mercenary groups rarely picked up difficult missions. However, in the player point of view, they were merely doing some third-rate task since all they wanted to do was to make money to survive. Those who were eligible to acquire these magic equipment were those highly respected, powerful individuals within the group. As for those who were not strong enough? They could only drool while looking at it.

But players were different. When they entered this world, their goal was to become better and stronger, acquire good gear, gain more experience, increase reputations, and upgrade their character. Those were their goals. To these players, magic equipment wasn't considered to be very rare, and so they wouldn't worry if they wore it casually ——— They could even sell it after they had found better equipment.

Just like these three pieces of equipment. To Rhode, these things were simply level 10~15 equipment. Once he over-leveled the equipment, it would be useless. Even though the Ice Talisman was quite good, Rhode did not need it. If he could procure a Water Elemental spirit, then he could also get the same advantage such as being immune to water attacks. So these 'low-level' equipment wasn't a big deal to him. Unless it was the legendary or ancient level equipment such as 'Sky Sword' or 'Saint's Heart', then maybe he would reconsider.

But to Lize, these three pieces of equipment were considered to be very 'high-level'. Even a mercenary group leader only equipped three to five magic equipment. Mages require slightly more gear. But, as a supporting

class, it was tough for her to have a share of the loot. From her class position standpoint, it was unnecessary for her to have it. But right now, as a small mercenary group's Cleric, she actually received two rare magic equipment?

It made Lize doubt whether she was dreaming or not.

But compared to Lize, Matt was more surprised.

As a traveling merchant, he understood just how precious one magic equipment was. Specifically these magic equipment. From Matt's point of view, even if the items were auctioned in the most prosperous North Carolina port, it might worth at least two to three thousands gold coins. But Rhode actually gave it casually to Lize. He was so calm as if he was handing out a piece of bread. It was also not an act of calmness where the main point was to leave a good impression. But instead, he was truthfully calm ——— meaning that Rhode honestly did not care about these magic equipment at all.

Without a doubt, this was something that an average person could not do. In his life, Matt dealt with many kinds of people, mercenaries, and nobles. Even for them, these magic equipment were extremely precious. Very few people could throw these equipment out like what Rhode did.

So what does this mean?

This meant that in Rhode's point of view, these magic equipment were simply not worth mentioning. This also reflects on his extraordinary identity.

If Matt only thought of Rhode as an ordinary member of a noble on the continent before, then now would have begun to relate him to those high nobles or royal families. Because only those kind of people had the capital to look down on magic equipment ——— Just like a man with innumerable wealth, he wouldn't care about this little money. But this 'little money' could be something an ordinary person wouldn't be able to earn in their entire life.

Just the thought of this made the fat merchant excited. As a minor figure among the merchants, he did not have the opportunity to meet with high nobles often. Usually, high nobles had their own personal backings. They wouldn't really bother to look at merchants like him. But now was his chance! If he could grasp it, then maybe there would be hope.

While these thoughts flashed through his mind, he suddenly remembered about his failed attempt at throwing the statue just now. Even if this young man did not complain, he could understand that his actions until now didn't prove himself to be worth any value to Rhode. He could only sigh when he thought of this.

Rhode truly didn't bother about those three pieces of equipment. What he considered precious was the two gems on his palm, the Gargoyle's Heart.

Artificial soul condensation medium.

Saying it like this might sound a bit complicated. But from a player point of view, if the Gargoyle was a robot, then the Gargoyle's Heart was the CPU chip.

It was extremely valuable.

In the Dragon Soul Continent, life alchemy was a very high-level skill. Only God had the ability to create souls. Even a Mage could not violate this rule, and thus, creating an artificial soul was their last resort. It was precisely because of this—a complete artificial soul core was incredibly rare and not every Mage could use it. But for Mages, artificial life alchemy was one of the highest goals in their life. It was like men who were tall, handsome and wealthy. They still must own a sports car to be able to prove their value.

Most Mages keep it close to them. It was rarely circulated in the market, and manufacturing of the artificial soul core was also very rare. Naturally, the price was very high. If sold in the normal auction, it would worth more than ten thousand gold coins, and probably even higher in the black market. Based on the color quality, the best artificial soul could even sell in millions, which was enough to buy a piece of small territory.

Not to mention, Mages were usually very rich.

But Rhode did not care about the money. His years of experience as a player had taught him that money could be earned gradually. But no matter how much money one could make, it would still never be enough.

Because there were things that even money couldn't buy.

For example, another function of the Gargoyle's Heart.

Force level upgrade and summoned spirit evolution +1

The summoned spirit's experience was shared with the holder. Usually in the battle, if Rhode earned 1000 EXP, in truth he will only receive 700. The other 300 EXP will be given to the summon spirit. Even though 30% of the EXP didn't seem like much, but it meant that the more EXP he got, the more it would be deducted.

This was another reason why the Spirit Swordsman class was more difficult to level up than the other classes. Let's say Rhode took another class. If he was a level 8 player and he received a five-man dungeon clear EXP, his level should rise to approximately level 12 or 13. But in contrast to the Spirit Swordsman, because of the Green Bird and Star Mark, he would just level up to 10 instead.

As for his summoning item...

[The 10th Rank Eternal Holy Sword: Star Mark, No attributes, Available for Fusion——no matter how long time has passed, still unable to bury its dazzling brilliance. LV:5, the victory glory ahead, sharp edge characteristic]

A summoned spirit highest level was 10. After reaching Level 10, they could evolve. After evolving, not only would they change form, but their level cap would increase by 10 again. The Gargoyle's Heart could force a summon spirit to skip 10 levels and then evolve once. This way, not only he could save up more EXP, but it could also reduce the leveling time.

What things could money not buy?

Time could not be bought with money.

Rhode did not know the level limit for the Star Mark. But according to his experience, the level of summoning card deck that positioned at the end of the deck was usually not too high, and three evolutions were the limit. If he fused it with the two Gargoyle's Heart on his hand, then at least when he fought the same level monster, the sword wouldn't rob his experience anymore because of the forced upgrade.

But...

Rhode fell into deep thought. This Holy Sword card was unique. When he got it from the B&M Company's director, he clearly told him that in this world, there's only one of this card. At that time, Rhode didn't really bother about the details, but thinking of it now, he felt a bit strange.

Only one?

But didn't the system prompt explicitly informed him that he only acquired 1/10 of the eternal deck? Then how did it became the only one? So how about the remaining nine?

Nevertheless, this deck did not even exist in the game because it was just a souvenir in reality. In the Dragon Soul Continent history, he had never heard about this sword. This could not be hidden from the game since he got this deck when he had won the game championship. Because his guild was called the Starlight Guild, the company had specially designed this deck of cards for him as a prize and memento. This kind of rushed product was impossible to enter the game system.

But no matter what, he would still try it.

Rhode stretched his right hand and held one of the gems in his hand. In an instant, a line of system prompt appeared in front of him.

[The Gargoyle's Heart was detected (Magic Item), do you want to use it?]

Use.

Rhode made an answer in his heart.

Followed by Rhode's answer, the magic circle on his right hand immediately emerge a small magic light. After that, the dark red gem broke into tiny shards which disappeared under this light. Soon, a new information appeared in front of him.

[Target?]

Star Mark.

Rhodes lowered his head and replied in his heart.

[Target – Star Mark – Forced Evolution]

[Level upgrade finished]

[Evolve?]

Yes.

The white card once again appeared on his hand, the light emitting from it made Lize and Matt curiously stare at it.

At the same time, lines of system prompt appeared in front of him.

[Evolution has finished]

[The 10th Rank Eternal Holy Sword: Star Mark, No attributes, Available for Fusion——no matter how long time has passed, it's still unable to bury its dazzling brilliance. LV:10,

The Victory Road Ahead: Sharp Edge

White Wings to Protect: Winged Guardian

Holy Light to Disperse the Darkness: Star Piercing]

[Attached skills: Sharp Edge Technique, Winged Guardian, Star Piercing. Each skill can be used three times per day]

Not bad!

Looking at these system prompts, Rhode nodded his head. Star Mark had three special skills, and these skills were directly attached to the weapon. It means that when he used these skills, it wouldn't consume his Soul Power. Three times per day for each skill each was also considered to be top grade. These skills would surely be useful in the next battle.

But the next system prompt caught him off guard.

[Magic condensation detected]

Chapter 21

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Magic condensation?

Rhode was slightly surprised, he played the Spirit Swordsman profession for seven years and had seen many strange situations. But he was sure that he never encountered this kind of situation.

The so-called magic condensation refers to the player's compatibility with the long-term used summon spirit. They would 'nurture' the summon spirit in the evolution process. According to the game, it meant that when they evolved too fast, it would result in excessive magic condensation —— In other words, it would turn into a piece of equipment.

On the other hand, when the player reached a high compatibility rating with the summon spirit, it would give them a surprise...

But this wasn't something realistic for most of the time. Firstly, the equipment level from summoned spirit wasn't often high, and secondly, these equipment were an illusion created by Spirit Swordsmen only. If it was thrown away, it would just disappear into nothingness. As a result, it could not be traded or given away, so it as good as 'half valueless.'

Rhode wasn't surprised when his summon spirit condensed. After all, this sword had been with him up until now. But what made him surprised was —— wasn't the holy sword supposed to be a piece of equipment?

Usually, only creatures with self-consciousness would have the characteristics of magic condensation?

What's going on?

Unmistakably, the holy sword wasn't a living creature.

Rhode fell deep into thought for a moment, but he couldn't make a concrete decision because the system prompt did not let him confirm anything. It merely told him what was happening, nothing more. The golden texts then disappeared as quickly as it appeared. He looked down at his hand, realizing that the deck of cards on his palm also disappeared somehow.

Lize and Matt stared at each other but did not say anything. In fact, they were not very clear about Rhode's identity. Even though it looked as if he was a swordsman, but besides his sword skills, he also did a lot of things that were unlike swordsmen.

But the two of them did not ask. Lize was an adventurer, of course, she knew that many swordsmen had their own unique abilities and legacies. On the other hand, Matt was very sure that Rhode was one of the descendants of an ancient clan, since only they would have this kind of extraordinary presence.

Although he could feel that Lize and Matt were staring at him, but he didn't feel the need explain. As a guild leader, he was very clear that he did not have to say and do unnecessary things. He remembered that when those players on the internet started a war of words, it would become incredibly intense. The moment you said one word wrong, the opponent would seize the opportunity to turn the tables.

This was particularly important when Rhode became the first guild leader. As the saying goes, great winds blow upon high hills. His enemies would take his every word and action to their advantage. The more you explain, the more loopholes would appear, it was better to say nothing and let them misunderstand. He took back his card and began to sort out his other items.

Mages were usually rich.

Not only did Lize and Matt find the Gargoyle's controller device in the church, but they also found a small pile of precious gems and magic crystals which had lost its magic. Rhode took all of these items since his other profession was an alchemist, those things were still useful to him.

What surprised him further was Lize finding a diary on the desk. It recorded the mage's life after coming to this small town.

This aroused Rhode's interest. Even as a player, he was very clear about the Fog Ruins dungeon ins and outs. But it was his first time looking at it from an NPC point of view.

Most of the diary's content became unreadable due to the passage of time, but there were still some records left.

The year of Saints, the 5th of the month of Thunder.

I succeeded! By sacrificing countless innocent lives, I finally saw her shadow in the middle of the magic circle. She smiled at me. It was the same gentle smile, I was so excited that I called out to her, but she was not able to hear my response. The spell was not complete, but I already have some hope since my idea is indeed correct!

The year of Saints, the 15th of the month of Thunder.

Praise the Holy Spirit! I finally got to see her again. I've attained enough power to conquer all things! By bringing back the dead soul, she finally could see me! I could touch her and feel her warm body, she hugged me and called out my name. At that moment, I feel that everything that I have done was all worth it. Ah... my love, Hina, she was still as gentle, beautiful, and caring as when she was still alive.

I was in a dilemma, but I still determined to confess, I told her about what I have done. But she forgave me. She was still the same as before, she smiled and forgave me. At that time, I felt like life was so beautiful, even the sun outside was splendid. I decided to take her away from here and live a normal life. I won't come into contact with evil anymore, nor will I use magic again. We will move to a remote mountain village, get married, have children, and die like ordinary people.

I do not know whether I deserve this happiness, but I will strive to fight, hope Holy Spirit bless me.

The year of Saints, the 3rd of the month of Blasphemy.

That isn't Hina. I have this...feeling... Even though her appearance and memories were all the same, I have the feeling that wasn't her. When I told her about my plan, she just smiled and agreed. It was so strange, while she was a smart girl, she was also assertive. She did not usually listen to me.

I was suspicious. What if there was any problem in the spell?

Why didn't she doubt my words?

I want to test it again, to confirm if my hunch is correct. Holy Spirit, bless me, I hope that I am wrong...

The year of Saints, the 4th of the month of Blasphemy.

Holy spirit above, why did such things happen!

That wasn't Hina! She was just a monster in Hina's body! I told her that I would kill people for her. Whether it was elderly, children, or women. I said that she alone wasn't enough, I need other women besides her. If it truly was her, then she would absolutely disagree! But what surprised me was that she only sat quietly on the bed. She smiled and listened to me then softly said yes!

This is impossible! This is not her! This is not the person of my memories! What is she? What is she? What is she? The writings began to turn messy.

The year of saints, the 9th of the month of Blasphemy.

May the holy spirit forgive my ignorance.

This... perhaps is my punishment for violating the law. Since I wanted to reverse life and death from the soul that was long gone. But I've failed, and this is my punishment. That thing was not Hina. It simply did not have a human soul, it was just an empty shell. It was living by instinct and snoopied the depths of my soul... I wanted to kill it, but I could not, it eventually sucked all of my strength...

I'm going to die; I have no power to stop it.

Be it so... Hina, since you could not come to my side, then let me cross the river of darkness to find you...

May the holy spirit be able to accept my sinful soul ...

The diary was written until here; the remaining part was left blank. Rhode closed the diary and shook his head.

It seems like this mage was indeed in love just as the rumor said... But if he chose to commit suicide earlier, many people would not have perished...

But something was bothering him. It quickly flashed through his mind without any warning.

What was wrong?

Rhode frowned and deliberated for a long time. But he still did not get the answer. However, he quickly put the matter behind, closed his eyes and soon fell into a deep sleep.

This was just a small part of their journey. The three rested for a night in the abandoned church and made their way towards the depths of Fog Ruins once again on the next day.

“Swoosh!”

A dazzling white light flashed, followed by the screams of will-o-wisps.

Compared to before, the evolved Star Mark became more beautiful. A beautiful and delicate hollow pattern engraved itself on the blade of the white sword. The pure white wings on it began to spread. A thin, silver line circled the sword handle. It resembled more like a work of art rather than weaponry. This sword should not appear on the battlefield, but in a museum or treasury instead.

“What a fantastic masterpiece.”

Staring at the shining sword on Rhode's hand, Matt couldn't help but praise it.

"Please forgive me, Mr. Rhode. I have been working as a merchant for so many years, but I have never seen such a beautiful weapon ..."

Matt said while narrowing his two small eyes.

"Were you possibly..."

Rhode waved his hand suddenly, but it wasn't to answer Matt question. He focused on the path ahead and replied.

"We've almost arrived."

"What?"

Upon hearing this sentence, Matt and Lize immediately glanced upwards, following Rhode's gaze. Soon, they noticed a plaza full of clustered weeds. To the side, two broken giant wooden doors flickered under the shrouded fog.

"As long as we pass through this door, we would reach the entrance of Araga mountain. And after that, we can exit the mountain."

As soon as he said this, Rhode felt slightly relieved. After all, ever since he awoke on this world, he had always been on high tension. Although players found adventures to be a very enjoyable thing, if they were seriously injured and full of pressure, then even the players wouldn't be too motivated.

Not to mention that this wasn't a game. He could not go offline to drink or play mahjong anytime as he pleased.

But before that, there were still difficult challenges that he needed to overcome.

Rhode frowned, carefully scrutinizing the fog in front him. He held his hand up, hinting at the two people behind him to be careful.

“What’s the problem, Mr. Rhode?” Noticing Rhode’s hand gesture, Lize reacted quickly and walked closer to him.

“Be careful. The battle isn’t over. We have yet to conquer the most troublesome BOSS.”

“...BOSS?”

“Umm... I mean monster.”

Rhode shook his head. He was already accustomed to the gaming terminology, and could not change this habit in a short time. But apparently right now was not the time to care about this little detail. He took a deep breath and turned his head around, looking at Lize and Matt.

“Do you guys know the origins of the Fog Ruins?”

Hearing Rhode’s question, both of them were surprised for a moment then shook their heads.

“It was a bustling town before. But after the air passage opened, this place gradually became desolated — After that, there was a mage that arrived here, trying to find his dead lover. He conjured a forbidden magic experiment but ultimately failed in the end.”

Rhode has stopped and scanned the fog that has shrouded the town.

“From that moment on, it became a ghost town.”

“Then Mr. Rhode, the monster that you meant was...”

Matt brows furrowed. He thought that the two Gargoyles from before was already the most difficult monster, but there was actually something more terrible than that?

“Shadow.”

The word that came from Rhode’s mouth sounded insignificant. But the way he spoke that name made the two shiver.

“This monster was born from the mage’s failed final experiment. It was the most terrible monster. If we were not careful, then all of us might die here.”

“Is it very powerful, Mr. Rhode?”

Even though she was confused as to why Rhode knew about this, but to Lize, the most important thing was the current situation. Unexpectedly, Rhode shook his head.

“Frankly, it isn’t strong. Its offense and defense are weak and almost the same as Will-o-wisp.”

“Then...”

Hearing Rhode’s explanation, Lize was a bit confused. If it was almost the same as Will-o-wisp, how could this thing be dangerous?

“Because the Shadow has a special skill.”

Rhode hesitated, but finally decided to say it.

“It can look into the depth of your heart and turn into someone that you’re familiar with. If you can’t wake up from the nightmare and steel your faith, then you will die.”

Rhode wasn’t very sure when he explained to the two. In the game, this boss would only appear when all of the adventurer party gathered. It would then pick one of the players’ avatar to confuse the other players.

When the players first encountered the boss, they found it very troublesome, and a lot of parties perished. But very quickly, some players managed to find the way to deal with it. They realized that the Shadow’s strength was actually low. Other than copying the player appearance, it wasn’t particularly dangerous.

This meant that if only one player faced it in battle, then it could simply copy his only opponent. Of course, a one-on-one battle was nothing complicated. So, after the way to defeat Shadow was discovered, many

players use it as a training dummy to practice ‘solo bossing’... It was such a tragedy.

But...

What was this feeling that hounded him since just now?

Rhode frowned. His instinct told him that things weren't that simple, but he could not figure it out at the moment.

The fog started to thicken.

Even the maximum power of the holy light could not be able to penetrate through this ocean of fog easily.

Rhode stopped abruptly.

He could feel their worried expressions. But this was the most efficient way, and also the only way.

“Swoosh!”

A sharp white edge appeared out of thin air. The clouds churned but soon returning to normal. Then the clouds started swirling around Rhode as it pushed everything out of its area, leaving Rhode alone in the center.

The air became dank and heavy.

It's coming.

Rhode began to restore his spirit by moving his fingers. The Ring of Will that he wore released a cooling sensation that made him calmer. He understood his opponent power, attributes, even its attack pattern and attacking range. Rhode thought it would be nothing difficult...

But perhaps not so.

A silhouette began to appear from inside the fog. Followed by its appearance, the surrounding air also became restless. The constant flowing

fog reflected the silhouette that was moving indefinitely. It looked extremely bizarre. Suddenly, a burst fragrance flooded the air, mixed with a peculiar scent.

That was a smell of disinfectant.

Rhode sharpened his gaze. He thought that this smell was somewhat familiar, but he did not have the time to think. The fog in front of him suddenly dispersed, revealing the presence that was hiding inside.

Rhode immediately froze. He stared at the silhouette in front of him with eyes wide open in disbelief. His mind just blanked out. Sealed memories sleeping within him flashed through his mind at this moment and resounded intensely at his heart.

Chapter 22

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode was back in the past again.

The monotonous, crackling voice through the PA announcement ¹, the dreary snow-white ceiling, the nostalgic and revolting scent of disinfectant, the bustling doctors and nurses, the faint sorrowful cries of people all seemed too surreal. A burning, numbing sensation wrapped around his body, causing him unable to move.

Turning his head to the side, he discovered a slim figure quietly laying on the bed with her eyes closed. Her sleeping expression was ever so tranquil as if a beauty from a fairytale. At that moment, it was as if she was completely isolated from the rest of the world.

Slowly, the busy crowd had begun to disperse. Leaving only two figures kneeling on the bed, sobbing.

The PA announcements became sporadic, and his paresthesia gradually faded away. But he couldn't bring himself to be happy. All he could do was to stare at that figure and wait for the inevitable truth to arrive.

Eventually, he heard a loud wail, and then the hospital ward turned deathly quiet.

At that moment, Rhode thought that his heart stopped beating.

It had been ages since he felt this tearing feeling in his heart. Now, he felt it once again.

Standing in front of him, was a young girl.

She had dark and shiny long hair which fell down her shoulders like an angel. A hospital gown wrapped around her thin, and fragile body which

made her look like she was going to break at any moment. She had an almost-identical face as Rhode. But contrary to her bleak appearance, her black, bright and round eyes emitted an indomitable personality as she stared at Rhode.

Despite having an identical appearance, their personalities were entirely different. Rhode always sported a serious expression. He was the calm and bold man. But the girl was feminine and perfect in every aspect. No matter who was it, they would think that she was the 'dream girl'. Smart, beautiful, gentle and pleasant.

“Brother...” The young girl stretched out her right hand and a trace of doubt flashed across her face.

“Where is this place? Why are you here?”

“...”

Rhode opened his mouth, but no words came out. At the same time, the unconscious self within him started to dissolve his uneasiness in his heart. He didn't know why, but he felt that he did not have to be on guard in front of her. I mean, she is his sister, right?

No. Something is wrong!

Rhode suddenly woke up from his stupor.

His sister was long gone. This woman couldn't be his sister!

It just did not match with his memories!

Rhode felt a chill down to his spine. In the game, he never encountered such a situation. When he thought about deeper into the matter, he realized that his uneasiness might have been born from the game content background description and the subtle contradiction between the player's own experience.

Of course, NPCs in the game could never sneak into a player's memories to use those experiences against other players. But the situation now was

different! He was no longer in the virtual world, meaning that there will be changes!

Rhode calmed himself down and he watched the girl in front of him silently.

What should I do?

In the game, the Shadow was supposed to turn into the player's reflection. That was the reason why he could directly cut it down without hesitation. But now? The person that stood in front of him was not his reflection, but his sister's. It made Rhode hesitate. Although his brain told him that the person in front of him was just a virtual image, the girl in front of him was too real; it was too difficult to treat her as an illusion.

“Brother?”

The girl took a step forward and stretched her right hand.

“Why won't you say anything?”

When her shadow moved, Rhode felt his surroundings slowly turn into darkness, and the surrounding air also felt heavier which rendered him panting for air. He opened his mouth, but the oxygen that went into his lungs were as cold as ice.

The darkness spread as quickly as a drop of ink falling into the water. In an instant, a fog wrapped around Rhode.

“Mr. Rhode should be okay right?”

Standing in the distance, Matt observed the swirling fog with a worried expression. He held on to the bag tightly. His eyes kept darted left and right continuously, studying at the fog that turned from white to black. Even Matt could see there was something wrong with it.

“...”

Lize did not respond to Matt question. She clenched her hands and put it in front of her chest.

At that moment, she truly wanted to rush in and check Rhode's situation. Since she was a veteran, she knew that something went wrong. But in the end, she bit down the impulse to rush in as Rhode's words rang in her mind.

“No matter what, absolutely do not come near me. Even if you manage to see my shadow, unless I walk to you, both of you are not allowed to move. The Shadow is very cunning and dangerous. I can't afford both of you to encounter any danger. To be honest, it will just endanger me further if any of you take any rash action.”

When they heard Rhode speak like that to them with his cold and expressionless face, they felt hurt. Lize's was startled by his sharp words, but as a professional mercenary, she understood the reason why he said so. After all, this was a life and death matter.

Lize sighed and kept her silence, but her hands clenched tight.

Meanwhile, inside the dark fog, the girl stretched out her hands and hugged Rhode's neck.

“Why won't you say anything?”

The girl's smile was still as sweet as before. So many years had passed, but her smile was still as gentle as a spring breeze. She had always been so.

Rhode took a step back unconsciously. He could even feel her body temperature. With her face was so close, he couldn't help but reminisce the memories seven years ago. At that time, she also behaved similarly; she sat on the bed, hugging him while he flustered and told her stories about the things that happened outside.

“Let's talk about the things that happened outside like before okay? How did you come here? What is this place?”

Her voice was gentle and went straight into the Rhode's heart.

Looking at her, Rhode suddenly smiled.

If Lize saw him right now, then she would be stunned silly. Ever since Rhode came into this world, he had never smiled before. But now, he actually laughed.

And after seeing Rhode's expression, the girl's smile became more intense.

“Brother...”

But this time, her words didn't finish.

A white edge had burst through the darkness in a blink of an eye and pierced through her body.

“——!!!”

She suddenly screamed. Her body began to twist and quickly retreated. Followed by her movements, the fog started to recede.

“Sigh...”

Rhode took a deep breath and shut his eyes, but the smile on his face did not change. When Rhode raised his hand, he could see the dark ring on his index finger emitting a magic light.

“Thank you very much to let me dream such a happy moment once again.”

Staring at the girl in front of him, he switched back to his ‘indifferent’ tone.

“But I'm sorry, I'm in a hurry,” Rhode whispered, but his hands did not stop. In fact, when the girl retreated, he already released his Moonbeams, and it flew directly to its target.

Because of her injury, she simply could not escape this blow. When she tried to dodge to the left, her chest and shoulder got punctured by Rhode's attack. For ordinary people, this kind of injuries would be enough to kill someone or put them in a near-death state. But clearly, this girl in front of him was not an ordinary person.

The girl gave a desperate scream, causing the black fog to swirl and coagulate a fog barrier in front of her. At the same time, Rhode's sword also rushed forward.

“Bang !!”

The black fog barrier shook and became visibly thinner, but it managed to block Rhode's attack. When she noticed this, the girl's eyes revealed a trace of relief ——— But the very next moment, her expression changed from relief to fear.

One, two, three.

The fog barrier that managed to withstand one Moonbeam after another crumbled after the fourth slash. It penetrated the fog barrier with ease and ruthlessly pierced the girl's body. This time, the already gravely injured girl was unable to dodge that attack. She screamed then fell to the ground.

Rhode walked in front of her.

He was very familiar with the monster like the Shadow. Since its strength was not strong, it used its skills to copy the player ability. So it was a bit troublesome.

But since it snooped into Rhode's heart to look for someone to copy, it had indeed made him suffer quite a loss. The Shadow itself also lost the power as it was in the game. Since it was a boss that used by players to practice 'solo bossing,' when it lost its only advantage, it basically turned into nothing but a punching bag.

But Rhode's heart also felt quite heavy. Luckily he activated the Ring of Will on time. Otherwise, he did not know what would happen to him. It was not a strong monster, but the words that it spoke, struck deep into his heart. Every question it asked made his heart waver, it even made him even doubt himself. Fortunately, he encountered such a boss before. As a result, he had a slight immunity to its honey trap. If it was other people, then they truly might fall into the trap.

From this point, it could be seen that the Shadow was indeed a very dangerous monster. But this kind of monster had a big weakness which was their low HP.

At this moment, the shadow that was lying on the floor lost its appearance. The girl's face was twisted and her facial features were blurred. Whenever she opened her mouth only darkness could be seen. Even her limbs had disappeared without a trace. Staring at Rhode who was slowly walking forward, the Shadow shook in fear. Then it opened its mouth again and screamed.

“————!!!”

The violent attack which was invisible to the naked eye flew in the air. But it turned into a breeze without any threat before the transparent barrier around Rhode.

The Ring of Will's protection was not something that could be underestimated.

After discovering that its attack was useless, it screamed again. It desperately tried retreat. But before it could get back to the fog, it saw Rhode's sword once again. Rhode's body flashed, in a blink of an eye he appeared beside the Shadow and pierced it again.

A white edge pierced through the Shadow's body. It screamed because of the intense pain. Its mouth was left wide open, and its eyes turned dark and empty. Such a deformed face looked extremely revolting.

But for Rhode, he was relieved. Since it used his sister's appearance previously, he still had some lingering hesitation. However, now that its face reverted back to its twisted figure, all forms hesitation had been lost.

By this time, the Shadow launched its final death throes as it stretched out its right hand and whipped it towards Rhode.

But Rhode had already expected this attack. Just as the Shadow extended its hand, he sidestepped and dodged the attack before activating Shadow Flash

to rush forward.

The Shadow did not have time to react. It held its left hand in front of itself in attempt to block, but unfortunately, it was too late.

Star Piercer, activate.

The sword edge emitted a star-shaped light. It pierced through the darkness and brightened the surroundings. In an instant, the fog that encompassed Rhode was divided into two as if a hot knife through butter. When the light reached its peak, the shining blade hacked downwards.

“—————!!!”

The Shadow split into two and finally stopped struggling. Its body twitched slightly before suddenly shrinking. Then, it converged into a tiny ball of light which danced around in the air, causing the thick fog to recede further. The light then dissipated into the air as though nothing was there in the first place.

It was until he saw this phenomenon did Rhode finally put down his sword.

Chapter 23

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The fog dispersed.

The town that had been sealed for years finally appeared under the sun once again. Followed by the death of the Shadow, the will-o-wisp that had been pestering them also disappeared.

Rhode put away his sword. His eyes focused on the pile of white dust on the ground where the body of Shadow used to be. It shone brightly under the sun. He went silent for a moment before lowering down his body to pick up a translucent, milky white gem.

Soul Core.

A Soul Core dropping from a boss-level monster was not at all surprising. After all, boss-level monsters itself had powerful magic. The power that they accumulated over time made condensing a Soul Core simpler for them than a regular demonic beast.

But Rhode did not waste too much time on these things. He just quickly picked it up and turned around. Then with heavy steps, he trudged towards the plaza entrance. Even though he did not consume much soul power in the previous battle, he somehow felt tired mentally. While he did not express it on his face, his heavy steps reflected his fatigue.

Looking at Rhode's figure, Lize and Matt let out deep sighs of relief. They rushed forward and asked about his situation. Unfortunately, Rhode's mood wasn't good, so he merely answered with few words and ended the conversation.

Both Lize and Matt glanced at each other. They realized that he wasn't feeling well and didn't want to chat. Even though they did not know what happened, it was clear that Rhode did not want to talk about it.

Lize was a smart girl, and Matt was a merchant. They did not continue to ask about this matter anymore.

In fact, the fight with the Shadow wasn't their primary concern right now... because soon, they would finally leave this ghostly place!

From the time when the floating ship crashed, until the time they came out from the mountain, only three days had passed. But because of all the hardship they went through, the three days felt like ten days. Dangerous forests, surprise attacks, strange towns, what more could they take?

It was precisely because of this, when they saw the small town on the foot of the mountain, Lize and Matt felt incredibly excited. Even the usually calm Rhode also revealed a relieved expression.

Riverwood Town was situated at the foot of Paphield Mountain. It was a peaceful place because it was located on the border. Back in the game, this place was near the Twilight Forest and was regarded as a newbie gathering place. As such, Rhode spent a lot of time here, so he was quite familiar with the surroundings. He could even casually call out the names of most of the NPCs here. But now, when he walked down the quiet street, discovering the NPCs turning into living people still gave him a weird sensation.

While there were still plenty of things that needed to be done, right now, a soft bed and delicious food was their top priority. After having a meal at the town's local tavern, they immediately dived into bed and went to sleep.

When Rhode opened his eyes, the sun was already high up, signifying that it was noon.

The sun rays were soft and warm. It shone through the wooden windows and the light scattered on the floor.

“Sigh...”

Rhode sighed. He reached out his hand stared at his battle scars. His left chest still had a slight pain. That pain caused him to return to reality.

This isn't a dream.

For the first time, he felt the harsh reality of the world.

The chaotic and dangerous battles felt surreal. Many times when he woke up, he thought that he was only dreaming. Previously, he used his gamer self to repress the reality of the situation; the monsters were simply just illusions to him. But now, when he fought the series of dangerous battles, he slowly started to understand the harsh reality of this world.

What should I do from here on?

Knock knock

A soft knock on the door disrupted Rhode's train of thought. He raised his head and spoke in a soft voice, "Come in."

The door opened slowly, revealing a blonde girl who walked in with a clean bandage and a pot of water in her hands. Noticing that Rhode was already up, a lively smile appeared on her face.

"How's your body, Mr. Rhode?"

"It's okay, no issues."

Acknowledging her concern, he nodded politely. Even though his response wasn't too friendly, Lize was already accustomed to it. She smiled gently and did not say anything more. Then she came to Rhode's side and then began to replace his bandage.

Rhode looked at her and smiled bitterly in his heart. The truth was – he truly wanted to be kinder towards her. It wasn't that he was trying to put on a poker face on purpose, doing these kinds of things were just troublesome for someone of his age.

But there was no way for him to change so quickly. His habits were deep into his personality. Back in the past, when he was young, his classmates used to make fun of his face and call him 'sissy' because his face was similar to his sister. As a male, it obviously damaged his ego.

Since then, Rhode had always been very conscious about his appearance. When he entered the Dragon Soul Continent, he did not select the advanced 'scan registration' technology, but instead, he chose to create his avatar manually. At that time, he was still young and immature, so he just sculpted it as he pleased. In the end, he modeled himself with a cold expression to emphasize his masculinity.

This was his 'chuunibyuu' ¹ phase that everyone went through before. As he got older, he didn't care about these 'little issues' any longer, but it still shaped into a habit that he found it hard to break away from.

In addition, when he became the strongest guild leader in Dragon Soul Continent, he had to manage his emotions well. This cold and collected personality was already deeply rooted within him.

The stinging pain on his wound brought him back to the present. He observed the girl that gently wiped his chest and remembered something.

"Lize."

"What's the matter, Mr. Rhode?"

"What are you going to do next?"

Hearing Rhode's question, she could not help widen her eyes in surprise. Her hands also stopped.

She sighed and lowered her head helplessly. "Frankly, I am not too sure."

"How about your comrade? Do you have a place to go back to?"

"Even if I go back, I would be the only one left..."

Speaking up to this point, her tone lowered to a whisper.

"...And the mercenary group is going to be disbanded."

So that was it.

Hearing Lize's story, he finally understood her situation.

In the Dragon Soul Continent, mercenary groups were divided into three levels. The lowest level was a small mercenary group consisting mostly five or six adventurers, up to no more than ten people. These kinds of groups mostly consist of non-bonded members. Anybody could create a group, as long as they register themselves legally.

The next level was the large mercenary group. Their member count must be above ten. Large mercenary groups were unable to disband whenever they wanted to, unlike small mercenary groups. They must submit formal copies of their identities and report to the Mercenary Association. They can also receive help from the Mercenary Association or even own their own stronghold.

The highest level was the mercenary guild. It required them to have more than a hundred members. These mercenary guilds were powerful. They owned strongholds and fortresses. Even officials or the merchant association must respect them. Huge, influential mercenary guilds often own their domain and city.

Classification of the mercenary groups was not simply divided by strength and prestige; their missions was also different. A small mercenary group had no way to receive a mercenary guild level of the mission. The Mercenary Association would directly reject the proposal. Even if they manage to complete the mission somehow, it would not be recognized. Of course, realistically, a small mercenary group wouldn't have the resources or the strength to complete a mercenary guild level commission.

Despite having plenty advantages over smaller groups, the larger the group, they had more stress and management issues they had to deal with. Every year, the Mercenary Association would conduct an assessment based on an appropriate mission's danger level. If they did not perform well enough after a year, then even large mercenary guilds would be forced to downgrade its rank while small mercenary groups would be disbanded.

Because of this, Lize was depressed. There were only ten people in her group, so it was considered to be medium-sized. But due to the mission,

their group of ten was reduced to one. Even the leader had perished. There was no way to maintain their status as a mercenary group.

Even though she still had some time left before the yearly assessment, she did not have the ability to complete it. Moreover, she was a non-combat class. It was not like she could do it even if she wanted it. Based on this situation, the only choice she had was to disband. As a cleric, a dedicated supportive class, it wouldn't be difficult for her to join other mercenary groups.

But Lize didn't want to leave.

“You don't want to leave?”

She firmly nodded towards Rhode.

“Yes, Mr. Rhode. After all, they were the ones who sheltered me. My relationship with them was akin to family... I-I really don't want this group to disband.” Her eyes started to redden as she spoke, but she clenched her teeth and continued, “They all have left. At least...at least I want to prove my gratitude towards them with my actions...”

“But looking at the situation, if you cannot find enough people then your mercenary group will disband in no time.”

“...Yes”

Lize did not avoid reality. She knew exactly where the problem lies. But, she did not plan to give up.

“But, I do not want to give up. Just like what you said to me before. Since I am alive, I must do something meaningful. Even though I still do not know to what extent I can achieve. But, I still want to try.”

Seeing her firm expression, Rhode suddenly thought of an idea. He went silent for a moment and said, “Since that's the case, I have a suggestion.”

“What's your suggestion, Mr. Rhode?”

Lize quickly raised her head and looked at him nervously. Although she only knew him for a few days. But his knowledge and strength left a deep impression on her.

Whether it was the Wind Snake, Silver Wolf, or the will-o-wisp. Those were things that she never saw before. She was certain that most of the mercenaries also never seen such monsters before. But Rhode was familiar with their weaknesses and habits which was simply unimaginable.

She was not like Matt, who was nosy as he tried to guess Rhode's real identity. Between adventurers, these things were not necessary. As long as one was powerful, then it was enough.

Even though Lize already made mental preparations, but the very next thing Rhode said, rendered her speechless.

“If you don't mind, give me your mercenary group.”

Chapter 24

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Matt swore to the heavens that he had never tasted such a delicious breakfast since he was born.

Although it was just ordinary white bread, beef, and vegetable soup placed on an old wooden table. But compared to dried meat and cold water from a few days ago, the meal they had right now was almost comparable to the sumptuous dishes from the palace.

“Praise the great Holy Spirit, thank the Holy Spirit for giving us food...”

This was maybe one of the most earnest prayers before meals from Matt. But before he finished expressing his gratitude, suddenly a voice called out to him.

“I did not expect that you were a believer.”

Matt quickly opened his eyes. He saw Rhode and Lize walking down the stairs and sat in front of him. His face was still as indifferent as before. He not could tell if Rhode was being sarcastic or not. Thus, the fat merchant could only show an embarrassed smile.

“This... I always have a certain gratitude towards food. There is no relation between being a believer or not...”

His voice slowly drifted off. It was obvious that the fat merchant did not intend to prolong this boring topic, so he quickly changed the topic.

“What are you guys planning to do after this?”

However, Rhode did not answer immediately. He ordered two breakfast and asked a question out of nowhere, “How about you, Mr. Matt?”

“Me?”

Matt was caught slightly off guard, and he gloomily shrugged his shoulders.

“For me, I will go to the Deep Stone City to apologize to the recipient. Then I must compensate for their loss. Sigh, what lousy luck! Not only did I lose all the goods, but I also need to pay a large sum of money. My luck is really not so good...”

“So sorry...”

Lize revealed an apologetic face. After all, her mercenary group was responsible for protecting the merchant and his goods. But now the products had been lost. It could be said that they did not do a good job. Although to many people, these matters would be labeled as ‘just an accident’. But as a responsible person, Lize did not want to accept it like that.

“No no no! It’s not your fault, Ms. Lize. I am also at fault.”

Perhaps it was because he had returned to the safety of civilization, Matt subconsciously revealed his merchant side.

“If I knew that such thing would happen, I would never have done it. Sigh, but now it’s already too late. It was thanks to both of you that I can sit here and not become the dinner of those terrible beasts in the forest.”

He stopped talking and showed a rare sincere smile. He reached out his hand and took out two purses.

“This is the reward for both of you. Ms. Lize, thank you for saving my life for several times. If it was not because of you, I am afraid that I wouldn’t be sitting in front of you now.”

“No no no. This is what I am supposed to do. After all, we have taken your money...”

Looking at the purse, Lize hurriedly stood up and shook her head vigorously. But Matt was an old slippery fellow. He did not wait for Lize to

finish her sentence. Then, he turned around and look at Rhode.

“Mr. Rhode, especially you... Frankly, if not because of you, the both of us would not be able to escape from Twilight Forest. I know that for high noble like you, this amount of money might not mean much, But please take it as a token of our gratitude.”

“You don’t have to be so polite, Mr. Matt.”

Rhode looked at the purse but did not reach out and take it.

“You have also saved my life. If you did not order to stop the boat, I am afraid I’d long be residing inside a beast stomach. So about the money... I think you can take it back..”

“This...”

Matt felt a bit awkward. It was alright if it was just Lize. But against Rhode, he could not merely wave it away. In fact, this money was not only for repayment for service and gratitude. Instead, he wanted to increase their relationship with each other. Even though Matt wanted Rhode to accept, but he did not dare to force him since it might cause Rhode to be dissatisfied with him. As a merchant, he had dealt with a lot of nobles before, so he knew that nobles truly regarded their reputation, dignity, and position – especially the very talented young ones. Their self-esteem was high and some of them were even eccentric. Thus, he did not dare to force him like what he did to Lize. He revealed an embarrassed smile before taking out a small silver badge.

“Since Mr. Rhode said so, then I will no longer force you. But I hope you accept this badge. This is a keepsake from the Silver Libra Merchant Guild. Although our guild is not powerful in the Dragon Soul Continent. But it can be considered quite prominent. If you need my help in the future, please do tell me and I will do my best.”

This time, Rhode did not refuse Matt good intention. In fact, he had been waiting for it.

Rhode understood how these merchants usually think. In their opinion, money was above all else. Including their own life. The reason he took out the money was only to repay his life-saving grace. But he knew that after he took the money, they would be on even grounds.

This was not what Rhode wanted to achieve. He had his own goal, and to accomplish this goal, he would need some help. Matt's Merchant Guild was of course not some large organization. But since it was a merchant guild, it had important information between the trade network that Rhode could not acquire by himself. After considering for a moment, it was more beneficial to his future to let them owe something to him right now.

Matt, of course, did not think that Rhode would think like this. His mind was filled with the preconceived notion that Rhode was a high noble with a strong family backing. For people like Rhode, why would he even try to curry favor with a small fry like him? It was Matt that should try to curry favor with Rhode instead.

This was a beautiful misunderstanding.

Of course, Rhode did not mind allowing this misunderstanding continue.

After that, the three people began to chat about some boring topics and then discussed the current plan. What made Matt glad was because Rhode and Lize also planned to travel to Deep Stone City. It wasn't strange for her to go there because her mercenary group establishment's home was in Deep Stone City. This was one of the reasons why Carter took the job to escort Matt because they headed for the same location. But Matt was surprised with Rhode's decision. When he heard that Rhode joined Lize's mercenary group, he was shocked and speechless for a moment.

It was not as if Matt did not understand Lize's situation. Choosing a mercenary group was not his business, but he was still puzzled why would he join a declining group. However, it was not something he should worry about since he had already given enough money to her. As a cleric, she would face no problem with moving to another mercenary group. If she still had nowhere to go, then he would gladly welcome her to his guild. Since

her profession was highly sought after, it was not a bad thing for Matt to accept her.

But he never thought that this soft, weak, timid girl actually planned to settle everything by herself!

That would be a challenging and dangerous thing to do.

Matt wanted to give her some advice, but seeing Rhode beside her, he did not dare to say much. In his point of view, Rhode was joining the mercenary group for fun. Since he had the power, money, and status, it was completely different with an ordinary mercenary.

Perhaps...maybe it was also because of Lize? Taking a closer look, she is quite cute and pretty...

Of course, Matt did not dare to voice out his thoughts. Since he was an outsider, he had no reason or position to pry into Rhode's personal matters. That was why he only reminded her to seek him if she encountered any difficulties. If saving her mercenary group was something in his power, he would definitely try to help. After all, many things had happened and he concluded that befriending her wasn't a bad idea.

After having their breakfast, they decided their next goal. Matt and Lize went their separate ways. Matt searched for a carriage to Deep Stone City while Lize prepped the supplies for the three of them. It was different from the time in the Twilight Forest; now they could make proper preparation.

Both of them were busy doing their own things, and only Rhode was idle. Even though Lize told him to have a good rest, but apparently Rhode did not intend to do that. After he finished his meal, he went out for a stroll.

Walking in the quiet town, looking at the scenery before him, Rhode could not help but feel a hint of warmth in his heart. In the game, this place was a newbie gathering ground. The bustling of adventurers could be seen everywhere. They were either shouting for party quests or was selling equipment. Based on Rhode's memories, this town was actually very lively

and crowded. But now without the players, all that was left was a quiet and serene town.

But soon, that silence was broken.

The noise came from the corner of the street. Rhode looked up and saw the roadside carriage. Four people were in a fierce quarrel. One of them was a young man wearing beautiful clothes with two swordsmen dressing like guards standing in front of him. The other was no one else but Matt. He just left the hotel not long ago.

What happened?

Rhode frowned and then walked towards the four.

“Don’t you think that you are something just by having some stinky money. Our Lord was giving you face!”

“That’s right; you are just a merchant. Don’t be shameless!”

“Bullsh*t. What Lord? Just a third-rate aristocrat, you think us merchants are good to bully?”

“Hey, you dead fatty. I think you are tired of living!!”

The quarrel was getting heated. Rhode did not make a sound, he looked around and patted Matt’s shoulder.

“What’s the matter? Mr. Matt?”

“Who is it? Even if you look for help... Ah !! Mr. Rhode!”

Matt who was busily swearing finally turned his head around and saw Rhode. His expression immediately changed from the Siberian blizzard into a tropical rainforest sunshine.

“You came in the right moment...”

Indeed, he deserved to be a merchant. After seeing Rhode, Matt's attitude immediately changed 180 degrees. His expression right now was different with that domineering fatty from before. But Matt obviously knew the current problem. He did not wait for Rhode to ask and blurted out everything that happened in a flash.

The matter wasn't complicated. It was just that after leaving the hotel, Matt quickly found a carriage. He successfully negotiated the price and the other side also agreed. When Matt was about to leave, three men suddenly appeared and said that they also wanted to rent the carriage. Because they were very arrogant, it caused Matt to be angry. Originally, Matt would approach the matter peacefully. But because he had bad luck for these days and even lost a shipment of goods, his mood was already awful. Now that someone provoked him, he just flared up.

Riverwood Town was just a small town. It only had one carriage. Matt wanted to leave a good impression on Rhode, so he did not want to give up the transport. But the other side also seemed urgent. They would not give in no matter what. Even the two impatient guards began to resort to force. They thought that by revealing their swords, the merchant would immediately concede. But they never expected that it would make the merchant even angrier.

I have seen wild wolves, wild ghosts, and other scarier monsters in these few days. Why would I be afraid of two small guards?

In the end, both sides were in a stalemate. No one refused to give up.

So that was it.

After listening to Matt about what happened, Rhode nodded, indicating that he understood.

But all of a sudden, one of the guards unsheathed his sword and pointed it towards Rhode.

“Who are you?! You dare to poke in our business?!”

Chapter 25

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Who are you?! You dare to poke in our business?”

The shout echoed through the quiet town. Rhode narrowed his eyes. But Matt who was standing beside him felt weak and fell to the ground.

What a brave fellow!

He knew just how powerful Rhode actually was. He could see the difference between Rhode and the two guards. It was practically heaven and earth. It would only need few minutes to defeat those two. Even though killing people in this small town was impossible, but with Rhode’s identity, if someone angered him, killing one or two people wasn’t a big deal.

Although the law on Dragon Soul Continent was very strict, the class difference was also equally strict. If a civilian or slave murdered people, it would be a death penalty. But if it was those young nobles, unless it was low-class noble, no one cared if they killed people.

Putting aside the fact whether Rhode was an easygoing man or not, Matt wasn’t clear because he rarely smiled and he always displayed a calm and indifferent expression. But whenever he spoke, there was always some kind of pressure. It may seem as if he was joking, but perhaps it was a threat. Generally speaking, he was just a young man in his twenties. No matter how calm and stable he was, he should still be somewhat outgoing. But Rhode was always quiet, and people were not able to figure out what he was thinking. However, one thing that Matt understood clearly about Rhode was, he wasn’t a young man that would endure insults with no reason behind it.

As such, Matt was initially surprised because Rhode did not get angry. He just glanced at the two and turned to speak to Matt.

“Mr. Matt, we should get going.”

“Okay, Mr. Rhode.”

Matt’s heart was lifted. Even though he did not see Rhode’s ferocious side, but him ignoring the other two insects made his day. He immediately spoke loudly and told the coachman to move the carriage.

“Get ready! We are going.”

“Wait.”

At this time, the young man that had not said anything until now suddenly spoke.

“This carriage, I want it.”

“We have already paid the money, you...”

Matt began to argue but was interrupted by Rhode.

“Mr. Matt, it’s getting late.”

“Yes, Mr. Rhode. I’ll go now.”

Rhode was not willing to waste his time in this pointless war of words. Even if there was no reason, somehow people still wanted to fan the flames. They could spread rumors, reverse black and white, exaggerate facts. He’d just waste his time if he entangled himself in useless conflict. In the game, even unfair equipment distribution would waste one to two hours among players. As a guild leader, he’d often encountered things like this. If he personally settled these issues one by one, then he was the big idiot. That was why he always ignored these meaningless wars of words.

But this action of his was seen as cowardice in the eyes of the three men. They did not know what was the relationship between Rhode and the fatty merchant, however, since they walked off without giving them a glance, naturally, they would feel mad. The young man’s face sank and he took out a bag of coins before throwing it in front of the coachman.

“Fifty gold coins. I want it this carriage!”

“This...”

The coachman’s face showed some difficulty when he saw the gold. Fifty gold coins wasn’t a small amount to someone of his caliber. But the problem was that he had already agreed with the other party and taken the fee. The villagers in this town were simple, honest people, so he would not go back on his word so easily. But he also wasn’t stupid. Those three men were people he obviously couldn’t afford to offend lest he may get beaten to death without even knowing why he died.

“Hey! What are you doing! Quickly get ready and go.”

After Rhode appeared, Matt suddenly became confident and took the carriage intending to leave.

The guard’s face finally turned cold.

“Stop it!”

After shouting, the two guards raised their sword and tried to attack Matt.

But they did not succeed.

“——!!”

A sudden chirp rang out.

Followed by a breeze, a green bird flapped its wings and flew towards the two guards. When they noticed the strange bird, their face started to change. They attempted to swat the bird away, but the Spirit Bird speed was faster than them. When its wings flapped, a breeze hit the other two and sent them flying away.

“Elemental creature?”

Staring at the Spirit Bird that was sitting on Rhode’s shoulder, the young man’s face suddenly changed.

He never thought that he would encounter such a troublesome opponent.

Was the opponent actually a mage?

He thought for a moment before suddenly realizing something wrong. He knew how mages summoned monsters, but they usually need to cast a spell. However, the man called Rhode in front of him dressed like a young noble, so how could he be a mage? Not to mention the fact that he didn't even chant.

It seemed like the opponent was not someone ordinary.

After thinking carefully, the man decided to withdraw. After all, he was only accompanying his family's young miss to play around in the mountains. He did not want to anger any important people. He was just a small guard, protecting young miss was his primary concern. If he provoked someone he shouldn't have and ended up implicating young miss in the process then he'd be dead anyway when he went back.

His face began to ease up, and he waved his hand to signal the two guards to stand down.

“Sorry to disturb both of you.”

He came forward and shifted to more respectful tone.

“On behalf of my two guards, let me apologize to the two of you. They... they were too reckless and offended you. I hope that the two of you won't mind them.”

“It's not a big deal,” Rhode answered.

He did not continue to say anything more and turned around, waving his hand, signaling Matt to prepare and leave. When the man watched them leave, he grew increasingly anxious. The young miss promised master and mistress that she would not secretly go out and play anymore. If they could not get back to the town in time and they found out the young miss yet to get back, they were going to be angry. And if the young miss got scolded,

she would definitely blame him...He initially thought that in the small suburb town like this, they would not encounter any problem. But he did not expect such a person would suddenly appear...

Still, he could not help try and remedy the situation as much as he could.

“Pl-Please wait. I still have something to ask.” the young man asked politely.

“What is it?”

When the prideful guy lowered himself to speak so politely to Rhode, Matt felt somewhat gleeful.

So this was the feeling of being under the protection of a person with power and influence...

At first, he was planning to curse more, but when he saw Rhode not saying anything, he decided to forget about it. The man could also see that Rhode didn't even put them in his sights. If still decided to not going to let the carriage pass, then it would make Rhode unhappy. So he decided not to say anything anymore and directly ask Rhode.

“This...”

The young man looked at the carriage and thought for a while.

“Yes, if the two of you don't mind, I hope we can go together.”

Together?

Matt and Rhode could not help but glance at each other.

“Yes. Judging by your looks, your destination it must also be Deep Stone City, right? We also have important things to do there, so we must go back as soon as possible. I apologize if I offended the two of you on impulse. But... It is really urgent, so...”

This time he did not take out his money anymore. He already knew that the fatty's identity was a leader of a Merchant Association. But that wasn't important since it was just a small merchant association, and the nobles don't care much about them.

But Rhode was different. Usually, nobles were not strong, but this young man finished the two guards in one move. Even though the two of them were not considered powerful, but comparing them to the average noble, it was considered to be sufficient. To be able to subtly pressure them using such a strange move...Who knew what his background was?

Moreover, the merchant was so respectful towards him, it was obvious it was a superior-subordinate relationship. He might be a high noble. It was better not to mess with these kinds of people. Luckily, looking at Rhode, he did not seem to bother about his rudeness from before. If he encountered a petty person, then it would be big trouble.

“But our carriage can only fit four people...and we still have one more companion.”

Matt furrowed his brows. He was already reluctant to bring these guys along. Just by looking at them made his mood turn sour. But since Rhode did not mind, he could not refuse. Even though this carriage was rented by Matt, since he wanted to get closer to Rhode, he did not mind Rhode making the decision. Moreover, he was supposed to be a man of virtue, Matt could not directly refuse it. Since it appeared like they were nobles, he was already content enough by swearing at them before. He would be labeled as uncivil if he kept pushing on this matter.

“There's no problem. Only one of us will ride this carriage, and the rest will ride a horse.”

Upon noticing that the other side was being amiable, he was also pleased. The reason he needed to rent a carriage was because of the young miss. If not because of her, then riding the horse back to the city would be faster.

“This...”

Matt did not answer and glanced at Rhode to make the final call.

But it was clear that he did not bother about small matters like this.

As long as it wasn't troublesome, he did not mind if one more person tagged along. So he just nodded and said. "Well, we'll meet at the town entrance in 15 minutes. If you guys do not arrive on time... then it's not my problem anymore."

Since Rhode did not mind, Matt could only nod and agree.

"Please rest assured, we will definitely make it."

15 minutes wasn't that long, and the first one to arrive was Lize.

"Ah, Mr. Rhode, Mr. Matt!"

Holding a travel bag, Lize's face lit up and ran to both of them.

Lize had a gentle aura around her; perhaps it was because she was a half angel, even if she stood quietly by the side, it would still give people a lively and cheerful sensation. The way she spoke also matched with her appearance. Rhode didn't dislike this girl at all. In fact, it wasn't a bad thing having someone like her in the group to liven up the atmosphere. As a former guild leader, Rhode knew how vital a harmonious group was.

From a certain point of view, mercenaries and players were quite similar. Quest, adventure, exploration, battle; it took a lot of time and effort to do all of these. Under constant pressure from fighting, over time, if the group did not communicate well, it might cause internal conflicts.

Whenever he looked at the blonde girl before him, she reminded him of a female mage in his guild, 'Canary.' Not only her skill was top-tier, but as her name suggests, she was a talkative girl. She loved to joke around and gossip about the latest happenings to everyone. The way she articulated her stories was also very exaggerated. She could even turn ordinary, mundane things into something that would make everyone laugh.

At one point in time, when the whole guild was at the Wasteland Cemetery dungeon, they faced continuous physical and psychological pressure. Rhode made use of her talent and asked her about interesting things, and she would gladly whip up a playful story which made everybody laugh. It made the pressure on them lessen a great deal as long she was around. In that dungeon, many players had better equipment and higher levels than them, but they still lost in the end due to the prolonged pressure on them.

Furthermore, online games were still games at its core; and cannot be mistaken for reality. Many people have various problems in real life that gave them stress; thus, they play games to relax instead. Many players in Rhode's guild had stress in real life as well as in the game, but they did not avoid playing games. On the contrary, they would allocate some online time to listen to the female mage's funny antics to relax. They could feel their burden decrease. In the end, they won the control over the Wasteland Cemetery. Though the female mage wasn't the strongest player in the group, from a certain point of view, she was indubitably an irreplaceable part of the team.

The girl in front of him also gave the same 'lively feeling'. But she was not as talkative as the female mage; but instead, she was loyal and calm. Whenever people look at her face, it would make them relax.

"I'm ready. Are we going right now?"

"Wait for a while; someone else is coming with us."

"Heading in the same direction?"

Lize asked curiously. Her ponytail swayed, following her head movement. She did not continue to ask and took out a black cloak from the bag instead.

"That's... Mr. Rhode?"

"What's the matter?"

"This, please accept it."

Lize spoke with a tinge of red on her face. She lowered her head and handed over the cloak.

“This is ...”

Looking at cloak, Rhode was surprised for a moment.

“...The wind currents in the mountains are very strong, and the night is cold. Your injury had not healed yet, if you catch a cold... you are going to get sick. It will be very bad for your body. So, I bought a cloak to keep out the cold. It is made from deerskin, breathable and very comfortable. Please accept it... ”

Lize lowered her head, causing Rhode to be unable to see her face. But he was aware that her voice was slightly trembling. He did not say anything and took the cloak.

“Thank you for your kindness.”

“You’re welcome. This is something that should be done.”

Looking up, Lize exposed a brilliant smile. Her bright expression made the merchant that has been standing aside quite surprised. He had known this girl far longer than Rhode, but he never saw her smile like this. But...

The fat merchant first looked at Lize, and then he looked at Rhode.

It seemed like something good might happen.

Meanwhile, while Matt was enjoying the sight in front of him, suddenly a high-pitched voice screeched.

“Who is the b*stard that took my carriage?!”

Chapter 26

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Everyone turned their attention towards the voice. They noticed a seventeen-year-old girl not far away from the street walking towards them. She was draped in a noble's dress with white gloves. Her short, brown hair fell upon her shoulders. From afar, she resembled a young mistress from a noble family.

Unfortunately, her dress did not accentuate her body line. It could be said that the girl's body was too big for her dress. The dress wrapped tightly around her swollen body which made her look ridiculous. The most eye-catching part was her fat chin, which wobbled with every step she made.

Beside her was the young man from before. His forehead was covered in sweat as he whispered frantically to her. As for the other two guards, they lowered their heads helplessly as they followed behind the girl and the young man. There was a bright handprint on their faces.

“So, which b*stard dared to covet my carriage?” The girl yelled as she walked towards them.

She panted as she shouted, but she did not wait for a reply and stared directly at the coachman.

“You are not allowed to take these people away! Do you hear me!? This is an order!”

“How can you do this!”

Listening to her outrageous command, Lize couldn't hold it in any longer.

“We've already rented this carriage, how can you...”

“Shut up. Who do you think you are! You dare to speak to me with that tone!?”

The oversized girl was mad and interrupted Lize. Then, she lifted her hand and pointed to the three of them.

“Just you wait! You guys dare to provoke my family, watch and see how I...”

The girl hadn't finished when Rhode suddenly lifted up his arm and snapped his fingers.

“....!!”

There was a sudden silence. The girl's mouth no longer made any sound. She widened her eyes and gripped her neck tightly. The expression on her face turned to horror when she realized she couldn't speak.

On Rhode's shoulder, the Spirit Bird stared at her and emitted a magic light.

“Young miss! Are you okay! Young miss!!”

“.....!!!”

The man frantically dashed over after noticing the girl was choking. However, when he got closer, he crashed into a transparent wall and fell to the ground.

“...!! ...!!”

The girl's body began to tremble. Her limbs spasmed awkwardly, her mouth began to enlarge disproportionately, and her eyes seemed as if it would pop out any moment.

“...M-Mr. Rhode?”

Lize felt somewhat uneasy. Although she did not know what exactly happened, she could guess that this should be related to Rhode.

In fact, Rhode did not do anything at all. Since the Spirit Bird was a wind elemental spirit, it could somehow manipulate the air around it. The only thing Rhode did was seal the air around her. If his opponent was an adventurer, it might be quite tricky to pull this off, but using it on an ordinary person without any power was simple.

“...!!!”

Rhode finally signaled the Spirit Bird to stop when the girl almost lost her consciousness.

“Poof!”

The next moment, the girl fell to the ground. She slumped to the ground like a broken puppet, her face was devoid of blood, and she panted non-stop. The expression on her face was of fear and confusion.

“Young miss! Young miss! Are you okay!”

The man got up quickly and rushed to her side. In his heart, he was exhilarated because he made the right choice to not argue with Rhode. If he did something like this to him, he wouldn't even know how he died!

“Cough... cough...” The girl coughed violently.

When she was finally able to catch her breath, she raised her head with difficulty and pointed at Rhode.

“You, what are you doing! Ben, Kill him! Quickly kill him! Qui...”

Unfortunately, she could not finish her sentence. Because at this time, the Spirit Bird that was resting on Rhode's shoulder locked her in its sights again. The girl's face immediately paled, and at the same time, she started rolling on the ground, seemingly unable to speak a word.

“P-Please! Please let her go, Sir! Miss Helen is young and ignorant, please forgive her...”

“I prefer my peace and tranquility.”

Rhode only replied one sentence before returning to the carriage. Lize felt sorry for the young girl on the ground. After hesitating for a moment, she followed Rhode to the carriage. Only Matt revealed a gleeful expression, and he leisurely strolled to the carriage while humming.

With a worried expression, Lize glanced at the suffering girl and asked Rhode. “Mr. Rhode, is it alright to leave her like this?”

She wasn’t offended by the rude girl at all. After all, it had already been a long time since she’d joined the mercenary life. Throughout her journey, she’d seen many kinds of people. Some people looked down on others, and some people found pleasure in harassing others. In the beginning, she also grew mad when she faced these people, but after becoming a veteran after many years, she learned how to control her emotions.

“I heard that they came from the Deep Stone City. Wouldn’t it be troublesome if we provoked these nobles?”

“You’re wrong, Miss Lize.”

Matt grunted and disagreed.

“Do you know who is Mr. Rhode? Third-rate nobles like them are not even worthy in his eyes. Moreover, that vulgar woman lacked basic courtesy. We can just simply ignore them.”

“Hold up.”

Rhode gazed at the sky outside the window.

“We will move off at the appointed time. If they do not arrive on time, then it will have nothing to do with me. Since I have already agreed, I will not take back my words.”

Matt did not say anything anymore when he heard Rhode’s decision. He just merely sat by the side and grumbled to himself. It seemed that his hatred towards them was quite deep.

In a few minutes, someone opened the carriage door. It was the girl from before. Her face was still as pale as snow. She kept glancing at Rhode who was sitting on the chair with lingering fear as she constantly bit her lips. Clearly, she did not want to sit in an enclosed area with her aggressor, especially when her guard's captain, Ben sternly reminded her not to offend that man. He emphasized that Rhode was able to kill all of them without much effort. When she heard that, her heart nearly jumped out. In her eyes, Rhode was a devil, and she wanted to run far, far away as fast as possible...

But when she remembered that her father was arriving in three days, she could only yield. Since this small town had no extra carriage, it would take at least two days to reach Deep Stone City on foot. If she missed this carriage, her family would discover that she snuck out to play and she would be in deep trouble with her father. While Helen was thinking of this, she couldn't help but be reminded of her father's words, who left an overwhelming fear in her heart. Thus, she could only resign to her fate and ride the carriage.

This young miss was too spoiled. She never encountered any kind of hardships like this before. Whenever she intended to voice her thoughts, her mouth would open slightly, but she would close it immediately as she was too afraid to lose face. In the end, she gave up and sat gloomily in the carriage. It was embarrassing, but she had no choice. The expression on her face right now might even cause people to pity her if they didn't know what happened!

However, Matt secretly glanced at her and snickered in his heart. Merchants and nobles were not people of the same path. Even though both sides were cooperating, but they still secretly looked down on one another. Nobles believed that merchants were money faced while merchants thought that nobles were snobs. Now that this foolish noble appeared before him, he could finally vent his frustrations on her mentally. Of course, he would rather be vocal about his thoughts, but since Rhode was beside him, he could not mock her and drive her out of the carriage.

“Hello, My name is Lize Noir. May I ask what's your name?”

Lize thought that the atmosphere in the carriage was becoming awkward, so she attempted to break the ice. In her eyes, compared to other nobles, this fat young miss slightly better.

“...M-My name is Helen Keller.” Her voice was almost as loud as a squeak.

She secretly glanced at Rhode in fear of his ‘black magic.’ Not once in her life was she subjected to such torture. She honestly thought that she was going to die, and not only once, but twice...

Did I hear wrong?

“Helen Keller?”

Lize was surprised for a moment when she heard this name. She paused briefly, and suddenly she recalled something important.

“...Keller? Do you belong to that Keller family who owns the Nalander Mine?”

“Yes, yes! Do you know us?”

Helen immediately became excited when she found out that someone recognized her family. She wanted to say more, but once she was aware of Rhode’s presence again, she quickly lowered her voice.

“Yes. Our mercenary group is located in the Deep Stone City. We had heard about the famous Keller family before. I remembered that your family began its ascent with ore mining, and finally flourished into one of the famous big families in the Deep Stone City within mere decades.”

“Of course! My Dad is amazing.”

A woman’s mood changes as fast as the weather. Once the topic shifted to her father, Helen immediately chatted endlessly with Lize. The constraints and tension from before disappeared completely. Although she still faced a slight apprehension due to Rhode’s presence, it was still a lot better compared to before. Previously, it was as if she was trafficking illegal goods.

Of course, Rhode and Matt weren't interested in the topics they discussed. But they were still slightly surprised.

It wasn't because of the story; rather, they were surprised that Lize could actually manage to chat with Helen.

Even if chatting seemed easy and anyone could do it, in fact, conversation in itself had its own techniques. Firstly, the topic must catch the other's interest. Secondly, the other must speak out of their own accord. Thirdly, the conversation must continue to flow. These three things were not easy. Rhode had met plenty of women, even if the woman was as beautiful as a goddess, but if the moment they opened their mouth and it turns people off, in the end, having a pretty face would be useless. If both parties had different interests, there would be nothing to talk about.

In this world, there were plenty of mercenaries that could hold a conversation with nobles. But no matter what, nobles would still display their overbearing attitude. This was because most of the things that the mercenaries experienced were things that nobles never experienced before. An example would be a boss of a company speaking with his staff about a discounted product for their customers. The truth was, the employees simply do not care! It wasn't as if they would get the discounted products anyway.

The gap between them was too large. A topic that is interesting to mercenaries will not necessarily be exciting to nobles.

But now, Lize could actually converse with Helen freely about the daily life of nobles. As a mercenary, this can be said to be something new and exciting to Lize. In her life, she would never have the chance to participate in those noblewomen activities such as dancing, afternoon tea, and other things of etiquette.

They can even discuss about the 'Rose Tea'...

Rhode creased his brows. Was Lize's identity not simple?

Most of the angels from Dragon Soul Continent belong to the upper class, and half-angels wasn't too far from it.

But if she was someone of the upper class, how could she become a mercenary? Strange...

As he mused to himself, he observed Lize who was beside him. At this moment, he suddenly had the urge to find out the truth.

Chapter 27

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

A thick aroma wafted from the black tea, filling the luxurious room with a calming scent. However, it could not diffuse the icy cold atmosphere inside the room.

“Mr. Claytor, I can’t agree to your condition.”

The middle-aged man firmly disagreed as he placed down the cup on the table.

“The situation within the mines are stable. Increasing the price by a substantial amount right now is an irrational endeavor. As a member of the Association, I, without a doubt, seek to do my very best for the benefit of the Association. But regarding this matter, I won’t be of much help. I hope you can understand .”

“Please relax, Mr. Keller.” The soignée man who sat leisurely on the couch curled his lips coldly.

“The 30% increment in ore prices had already been approved by the Association. As a member of the Association, you must abide by the rules.”

“But that isn’t reasonable!”

Keller frowned.

“Right now, there isn’t any shortage of minerals. We cannot arbitrarily raise the price without giving a rational answer. And as such, Mr. Claytor, from the start of our discussion up until now, I have not received a satisfactory reason to increase the price from your mouth. You can’t expect me to agree to this outrageous request by merely invoking the Association’s authority. At the very least, give me an adequate reason for me to do it. Moreover, if the Golden City were to discover such a thing...”

“... Even if ‘that person’ realized what was happening, she wouldn’t be able to do anything to us.”

The moment he mentioned the Golden City, Claytor’s face darkened.

“Mr. Keller... the reason I, the vice leader of the Association, directly addressed you regarding this matter was because you controlled 85% of the mines in Deep Stone City. But I hope you can visualize the bigger picture, Mr. Keller. What you think you have right now, is a drop in the ocean when compared to the entire Paphield Region.”

“No matter what you say, if you cannot give me a reasonable explanation, then I cannot accept the Association’s proposal.” Keller then stood up and continued, “Since that’s the case, then I’m sorry. I don’t think we have anything else to discuss.”

Having said what he wanted to say, Keller gave a slight bow and turned away.

“Please wait, Mr. Keller.” Claytor’s face darkened once again.

“Seeing that I have no way of changing your mind, then you’ve left me with no further choice. The truth is, I don’t want to do this, but since we came to this point, you can’t really blame me...”

“What are you going to do?”

The moment he heard Claytor’s subtle threat, Keller’s face hardened.

“If you refuse this proposal, then the Association has the right to revoke your ownership over all your mines to ensure that they can operate stably and normally.”

“The Association does not have this authority!”

Keller smashed his fist on the table.

“The Deep Stone City’s mine is the property of OUR Keller family. It has no any relation to the Association. Surely you don’t mean to steal it openly,

right?!”

“Of course we will not -openly steal- it.”

Claytor narrowed his eyes and revealed a sinister smile.

“Of course, the Association will pay for the acquisition of the Keller Family’s mines for five thousand gold coins... What do you think about the price?”

Five thousand?

Keller almost fainted when he heard the preposterous offer. Keller family owned four mines, and their total revenue was in the hundreds of thousands. *This b*stard actually intended to purchase all of his mines with a meager five thousand gold coins? That amount couldn’t even buy a pit! Were they idiots?! Or did they have other intentions?*

As the head of the family, Keller naturally did not think that the Association was a fool. A trace of doubt flashed across his face as he stared at the Association’s vice president. The fact that he could become the Merchant Association’s vice president demonstrates that he had the ability.

When the Association headquarters summoned him, Keller already felt that something was amiss. The ore market had been stable throughout the year, and the surrounding countries did not encounter any disasters recently. If they were to raise the prices by 30% suddenly, not only would the Keller family cause a predicament for themselves, but it would adversely affect the market in the surrounding countries as well. This was a delicate situation. Ore trade was one of the most important sources of income for them.

If it was another person, he might have taken those words as a joke. But Keller was unquestionably certain if ‘that person’ in the Golden City were to discover this matter, every merchant was going to die. ‘That person’ wasn’t a kind-hearted being. Although everyone had to die someday, but perishing by her hand was the worst kind of death.

What is this? The Merchant Association suddenly intend to inflate the price of ores? Do they think that they can escape from 'that person's' detection?

When he thought of the consequences, Keller's back felt cold. He immediately recollected his memories of the horrors five years ago. An entire country was massacred, all because of the nobles who refused to sign 'that person's' proposal. In the end, 30% of the nobles lost their lives.

Keller would consider himself as a hardcore merchant by blood, but even someone like him who'd loved money so much, felt utterly terrified when faced with her wrath. To make matters even worse, when he thought that her massacre would cause public unrest and create turmoil throughout the country, never could he have imagined that after two months, everything would be back to normal as though nothing happened.

—

Rhode did not sleep. On the contrary, he secretly organized his stats. Back then, because everything was in a rush, he had forgotten to organize it. Keeping track of one's stats was a necessity, thus, when he was finally able to settle down, he could peacefully do what he wished to do.

In the previous battle, he began to realize that even though this body was his own, but his ability was completely different from before. This was because, in real life, he wouldn't be able to dodge and parry as quickly when compared to before.

Strength was the first major difference. Based on the previous battle, he understood that his strength was higher than the average man in this world. Back in the Dragon Soul Continent, the strength value of NPCs were roughly 4~5. This number could be considered high for ordinary people. If their strength stat hovered around 6~8, they would have the ability to wield a heavy sword single-handedly. Rhode's strength was between 6~8. While he did not attempt to wield a heavy sword, judging from the previous battle, it shouldn't be a problem to do so.

Next was his vitality. It was something that he did not worry at all. Ordinary humans had around 5~8, elves were 4~6, dwarves and orcs were mostly

between 7~10, and the highest vitality belonged to the angels and demons, which hovered around 15~20 points. While evaluating his injuries from previous battles, Rhode concluded that his vitality should be between 10~15. This kind of absurd distribution of stats does not belong to a human's body. It was practically monstrous. After all, he'd been assaulted by the Void Dragon before, but he still managed to survive until now.

As for his agility, he was unmistakably faster than an average person, but his agility was still lacking when compared to the elves. In the Dragon Soul Continent, elves boasted the highest agility, which was between 10~15 points. Rhode's agility was higher than an ordinary human who had around 5~6 points; thus, his agility should be 7~10.

The intelligence stat was the most difficult stat to judge. After the battle with the Shadow, he could finally grasp the basis of this stat. He recalled the game information regarding the Shadow's attack level and how much Intelligence he needed to resist it. Based on his speculations, his stat should have barely passed the requirements, which would mean that he had around 8~9. Comparing to an ordinary person, he would still be slightly higher, but he was definitely lower than those powerful NPCs. Rhode knew that his stats would continue to increase in the future, so he did not worry about it.

Last was the senses. The stat seemed to work completely different from the game. Previously in the Dragon Soul Continent, when one increases their senses stat, it would enhance their hearing ability, and it also provides a radar which could pinpoint dangerous entities ahead with a red dot. However, in this current world, senses worked in a totally different manner. When Rhode closed his eyes, he could still 'see' his surroundings, as though he had a pair of invisible eyes. With a thought, he could alter the distance by zooming in and out, just like a black and white infra-red camera. Rhode used his battle with the silver wolf to calculate his senses stat and concluded that it should be at 6~7, it was lower than elves which were roughly 9~10 but still higher than ordinary people at 3~4.

After analyzing all these information, he could estimate his overall stats:

Strength: 6~8

Vitality: 10~15

Agility: 7~10

Intelligence: 8~9

Senses: 6~7

If an ordinary human were to look at these stats, they would be shocked silly. Overall, all of his stats were higher than a default human character. Never in his life had he seen any characters with such high stats at level 10. One had to be reminded that Rhode's nickname was the 'walking library'; thus, he knew the starting stats of every profession at the back of his hand.

That was the exact reason why Rhode felt puzzled over his stats. He clearly surpassed the human race's stats but was still slightly lower than other races. Even after he organized his stats, he still could not figure out what kind of mixed blood he possessed.

Typically, a mixed race would inherit both of their parent's blood. Take Lize for example; her stats were similar to an ordinary human except for her Intelligence and agility. Even her soul power was of the angel-tier.

Right now, Rhode's level was low. Except for his enormous strength, his other stats were obviously beyond ordinary humans but was still below the initial stats of other races. When he realized that his initial stats were already so high, then what would happen when he awakened his other bloodline? That would mean that his stats would at least double! Moreover, his stats would still rise as he leveled up!

If such a monstrous race existed in this world, wouldn't the players have abused it long ago?

Rhode attempted to deduce his own race.

Could it be a vampire? Or was it an angel or demon?

These races faced the same kind of restriction. Although they could increase their stats drastically, the condition to trigger these effects were

reliant on their surrounding environment. Furthermore, the stat gain was a temporary thing. For example, a vampire would gain an enormous amount of stats during a full moon, but the stats would drop back to its initial number once the full moon ended. Rhode's stats were always stable and would never fluctuate; thus, these races were out of the question.

So, what race was it exactly?

Rhode fell into contemplation for a while, but even after racking his brain, he still did not acquire any logical conclusion. He shook his head helplessly and sighed.

In any case, this race should be stable. If he found out that it was half angel of half demon, he'd be doomed if he visited an area which would cut his stats in half.

After he decided to stop mulling over this matter, he chose to get some shut-eye. But the moment before he closed his eyes, he caught a strange movement.

Rustle!

From the bushes, a tiny, rustling sound could be heard.

Chapter 28

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Under the thicket, Orlando frowned when he noticed that the guards had their heads lowered down.

“Are you certain that’s the carriage?” He whispered to the person beside him.

“Yes, my lord. We had been following them since their arrival in Riverwood Town. You can rest assured that Ms. Helen of the Keller family is indeed in this carriage.”

“Then explain to me why does the number of people in the carriage seem to be inconsistent with your initial report?”

“My lord, the other three are travelers on the carriage. Although we aren’t clear on their identities, they should be unrelated to the Keller family, and their strength isn’t anything spectacular.”

“Very well then. Remind the rest to be on guard and ready to attack. Failure is unacceptable.”

Orlando did not continue speaking after that. Once he received intel about Helen’s departure from the city, he was overjoyed. They finally had the opportunity to capture her alive. To Orlando, this task wasn’t difficult at all.

“Yes, my lord.”

The man turned around and quickly disappeared into the foliage. Occasionally, Orlando would raise his head out from the bush and peek at the carriage, but this time, the carriage door swung open and a young man emerged from the carriage.

That’s him?

Orlando furrowed his brows. He couldn't understand why he felt that something bad was going to happen.

Rhode walked out from the carriage.

Under the light, the distant forest appeared darker than usual. He glanced in the direction of the noise, and his face turned serious.

Some people are hiding there.

Truth to be told, when he discovered that he was being spied on, the first suspects that came to his mind were those people in the Twilight Forest. But after thinking carefully, if it were those people, then he wouldn't be able to detect them this easily. After all, the spy was an advanced profession. No matter how high his initial attributes were, it can't be compared to an advanced profession. The only possibility he could think of was that they were careless.

After walking out of the carriage, Rhode confirmed his speculation. Since his senses could lock on their location without any difficulty, it revealed that the ambush wasn't orchestrated by a spy – or another high-level profession at the very least.

Nevertheless, it was still a bizarre situation. Ever since Rhode appeared in this world, he had not provoked anyone on purpose. Perhaps the target wasn't him?

“What happened, Mr. Rhode?”

The moment Rhode stepped out of the carriage, Lize opened her eyes. As a veteran mercenary, she had developed an inherent nature to upkeep a certain level of vigilance.

“Just some rats,” replied Rhode coolly.

Lize was faintly surprised at Rhode's calm voice.

“Was it those people that chased after us before?”

Rhode shook his head. “No, these people don’t appear to be targeting us.”

Lize was surprised, but before she could reply Rhode, a guard came up to both of them and asked,

“Hello, Sir. What’s the matter?”

After traveling for a day, Rhode naturally recognized the guard captain of Ms. Helen’s garrison, which was Ben. Even though a skilled individual should hold the appointment of guard captain, it was clear that Ben wasn’t very skilled. According to the standards of this world, he would be rated as a Level 7 swordsman who had just ranked up from apprentice swordsman. The reason why he managed to grasp this position was because of his family, which had served the Keller family loyally for many years. As such, rather than fulfilling the role as a guard to the young miss, it could be said that he was her follower instead.

To Ben, Rhode was a figure of respect. Although his first impression of Rhode was negative because of his beautiful face, which led him to the conclusion that he was a playboy, Rhode’s display of strength left him utterly speechless. At his age, it was common knowledge that most young nobles couldn’t even wield a sword, not to mention fighting with it. However, Rhode sent two guards flying through the air empty-handedly. It didn’t matter how he did it, but this young man’s power was beyond his imagination. Even after living in Deep Stone City for 20 years, apart from the young heir from the Felix family, he had never seen such a skilled person like Rhode.

Deep in their hearts, every man dreamed of being strong and powerful. And Ben, without a doubt, was no exception to this. In the Dragon Soul Continent, only the strong were respected. Thus, although he wasn’t happy because of the dispute with Rhode, after experiencing Rhode’s overwhelming power, his attitude immediately changed and became respectful.

Facing Ben’s courteous behavior, Rhode just waved his hand to beckon him to stop talking. Within the thick foliage, he could sense seven people lurking around in the vicinity.

Two on the left, right, and front. One at the rear.

Rhode easily revealed their ambush positions. However, he had some difficulty tracking the movements of the person at the rear. His movements were somewhat erratic, as though he might disappear any moment. As for the others, he could effortlessly pinpoint their locations when they were on the move.

It seems like that person at the rear is the strongest among the seven.

Rhode pondered for a moment, and suddenly, an idea struck him.

“Get your people to retreat.”

“Pardon?”

Ben heard Rhode’s words loud and clear, but he could not react in time before Rhode unsheathed his sword.

The Star Mark appeared.

A divine, white light pierced through the dark sky and an attack formed as a crescent moon, descended from the light. Ben felt a beam of light passing through him before permeating the depths of the dark forest. In a split of a second, the leaves from the surrounding trees churned violently as though a whirlwind swept past the area.

The two poor men clothed in a black cloak didn’t anticipate the enemy to launch a pre-emptive attack. When they regained their clarity, it was already too late as the Moonbeams swept past their frozen bodies.

Like the gentleness of a spring’s breeze, the Moonbeams passed through them noiselessly and disappeared into the depths of the forest.

Two shadows fell back into the bushes like a puppet whose strings had been cut.

A deafening silence fell over the forest. Orlando, who was lurking at the rear, was stunned speechless by the attack.

Their opponent was an advanced swordsman!?

Someone who was able to condensate sword energy to launch an attack was not easy to deal with. Usually, people who used this kind of skill were someone of high standing – someone powerful enough to enter the advanced stage. An example was the nobles from those large families. It didn't matter which one was it, no matter what, it wasn't someone that they could afford to provoke.

Multiple scenarios flashed through Orlando's mind as he racked his brain to find the best solution to this problem. He really wanted to slaughter the man who gave him the false intel. That man even dared to tell him that their strength was 'nothing spectacular.'

*What the heck? Nothing spectacular?! My *ss is spectacular. Telling me that an advanced swordsman isn't anything I should be concerned with?*

It wasn't that Orlando was exaggerating, after all, in the Dragon Soul Continent, NPCs and players were fundamentally different. When an NPC hits Level 10, they would unlock their Level 10 skills. But players were different. They could use skill points to improve their skill proficiency. If a Level 10 player worked extremely hard, they could attain advanced proficiency. There were even some hardcore players who had achieved advanced proficiency and master level skills altogether. Now, it was widely known that the higher the level of the skill, the more power it would consume. That was why, when people managed to obtain a master level skill but did not have enough power to use it, they would make an absolute fool out of themselves.

The sudden deviation of the situation caused Orlando's original plan to crumble. His original plan was to send his people to kill the three weak guards and kidnap Ms. Helen before leaving without a trace. However now, even before he was able to make a move, he had already lost two of his men. To make matters worse, his opponent was an advanced swordsman. Despite not being weak himself, but he had yet to reach the advanced level threshold. Thus, his opponent's actions made him break out in cold sweat.

But...

“Ahh, whatever! I’m going to fight!!”

Orlando bit his lip and put two fingers in his mouth, blowing a long, whistling sound.

Immediately after that, various shadows jumped out from the bushes and dashed past the carriage!

“Protect the young miss!” Ben shouted at his men.

Though he was taken aback by Rhode’s odd command, after realizing what was happening, Ben acted at once. He yelled orders while unsheathing his sword and the two other guards rushed towards the carriage at full speed. Lize didn’t hesitate as she responded quickly by casting a shield to protect those three guards.

Swoosh

Lize’s protective shield enveloped the three men. Not long after she cast the shield, five to six arrows flew from the bushes and struck the defenseless guards. However, before the arrows could penetrate their bodies, once it touched the golden protective shield, the projectile immediately lost its acceleration and fell to the ground.

“En Garde! Be careful of the hidden archers!”

Ben was nervous even though he shouted loudly. This was the first time Ben had encountered an enemy ambush in the wilderness. Most of the time, Ms. Helen was always at the Deep Stone City, so he was never afraid that something like this might happen. At the moment he traveled outside the city, he unexpectedly encountered this kind of situation. Such bad luck!

However, complaining about his current plight was a meaningless act. He glared at the black-cloaked assailants who was rushing towards him.

Ben clenched his teeth and yelled as he charged towards them as well.

Chapter 29

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The situation turned chaotic in an instant.

As they say, an idiot comrade does you more harm than a powerful enemy.

From Rhode's perspective, these attackers were akin to cannon fodder. Even if was a 1vs4 battle, he would still have the confidence to win. But as for Ben and his guards, they neither had the experience nor the ability to deal with the surprise attack. The two other guards yelled as they waved their swords at the black-cloaked men, entangling with them in a melee faceoff. Frankly, the presence of the guards made the situation slightly more challenging for Rhode.

But, in the end, it still wasn't a problem for him.

Swoosh!

His white sword flashed across the night sky. Rhode activated his Shadow Flash and slashed at a black-cloaked man nearby. He flipped his sword and hacked in a downward arc. A fountain of blood sprayed from the black cloaked man's neck, and the body soon fell to the ground silently.

By the time the corpse's body touched the ground, Rhode had already withdrawn and left. He stretched out his left hand and a green card appeared on his palm. Rhode then clenched his fist and shattered the card.

“_____!!!”

A chirping sound echoed through the forest, followed by streaks of green light flashing in the night sky. It transformed into a beam and rushed forward.

The men didn't expect that Rhode would kill them without hesitation. When the beam of light flashed past them, they were subconsciously stunned for a moment, but before they could react, a violent storm engulfed them, followed by the whistling sound.

“Whoa!!”

“Ahhh!”

The four victims that were caught in the storm screamed in horror. They staggered and were forced to separate into two sides. Rhode didn't waste any time. He transformed into a shadow and swooped in for the kill.

Compared to professional thieves, rangers or spies, Rhode's stealth ability can't be considered top notch, but it was more than sufficient to deal with enemies of this level. His victims weren't fortunate though. By the time the raging storm ceased, three black-cloaked men had already collapsed to the ground, dead. Without confirming his kills, Rhode's shadow suddenly flashed and appeared before the guards.

Rhode waved his hand.

“Don't waste time here. Go protect the carriage.”

“Ah, yes!!”

After being reminded by Rhode, Ben suddenly recalled his purpose here on this trip and quickly signaled his men to run back to the carriage.

Once the guards ran off, Rhode finally felt the movement of the shadow at the rear.

—

This was the best opportunity for Orlando.

After sending his subordinates out, Orlando had prepared to make a move, but never did he expect Rhode's strength to exceed his expectations once again. Even four Level 10 swordsmen could not endure his attacks.

Fortunately, they still played their role, and now, it was time for him to take the stage!

When Rhode killed the three men, Orlando had already emerged from the bushes and ran past the carriage. After observing the battle from before, he could finally grasp his opponent's strength. Other than the young swordsman, the other three guards were all useless as he expected. The Cleric wasn't inexperienced, but ultimately it was still a non-combat profession. As long he was quick enough, he could kidnap Ms. Helen and use her as a hostage to turn the tables on them.

“Who's there!”

As a thief that was almost at the advanced level, Orlando's speed wasn't slow. Apart from Rhode's keen senses, the only other person who noticed him was Lize. She quickly cast a shield on herself in reflex, but Orlando's target wasn't her, so he dashed past her and closed in on the carriage.

“Help!!!”

In an instant, Helen's scream rang out from the carriage.

Helen had already woken up long ago when the battle started, but she wasn't clear of the situation outside. Lize had merely reminded her to lock the door and hide inside without making a sound. That was why Helen crouched down at a corner of the carriage and covered her ears. Once the battle commenced, the sounds of weapons clashing, deathly throes and voices of rage, all scared her out of her wits. One had to realize that this was her first time facing this kind of situation, and her being locked in a carriage without any way of checking on the surroundings only further intensified her confusion, which eventually added to her fear.

Suddenly, without any warning, a shadow appeared in the carriage, and she couldn't help but scream in terror. Yet, before she could react, the man had already covered her mouth and carried her out from the carriage.

At this time, Rhode had already led the others to surround him.

“Don’t come near me!” Orlando spoke in a low voice as he took out his dagger and placed it against Helen’s neck.

His left arm grabbed onto Helen’s waist tightly and stared at Rhode with vigilance in his eyes. After realizing that she’d been taken as a hostage, Helen’s fear slowly caused her go into shock, so she could only stand rigidly like a statue.

“Let go of the young miss!!”

Once they saw her being taken captive, Ben and the other two guards understood that they had made a grave mistake. If they had not foolishly rushed forward, how could the young miss be taken as a hostage that easily? Now that Helen’s life was at the mercy of the enemy, what should they do?

“Hmph.”

When he found out that the crowd finally stopped advancing, the pressure within Orlando’s heart lifted slightly. Next, he would move to the next step of his plan. As long he had Helen as a hostage, he could easily escape into the forest and throw these guys off his trail. However...

There was a problem.

Damn this fatty. She’s so goddamn heavy. How many pounds does she actually weigh? Weren’t rich, noble ladies supposed to be slim and light?

They’re supposed to look like that cleric over there. How can this Helen appear like a pig! It is really tough to drag her around. Is she even the daughter of the Keller family?

After dragging her a distance, Orlando had some thoughts of giving up. He’d never expected her to be so fat. When he received his mission to capture the daughter of the Keller family, he didn’t think much of it. It was assumed that it would be another weak noble daughter of a wealthy family.

However, in the end, things always didn't go as planned. In fact, when he dragged her out from the carriage, he already felt something was amiss. The thing on his arm that he had been grabbing... wasn't a human!

It was a f*cking brick!

“S-S-Save me!! Ben!!! You b*st*rd, what are you doing over there! Quick come and save me!”

At that moment, Helen suddenly broke out of her stupor and started to react as she cried for help. But before she could finish her sentence, she could feel a cold, steel dagger on her neck.

“Shut up, fatty! Otherwise, I will take your life!!” Orlando snapped angrily.

Helen instantly shut her mouth in panic once she heard those threatening words. All her pressure and stress seemed to rise up to her puffed up face and watching her round eyes starting to water, it somehow appeared quite interesting.

“D-d-dear Sir!”

Ben was extremely tense. He hurriedly strode to Rhode side and begged him to help.

“Please help me out... Please rescue the young miss from him! Miss Helen is the last descendant of the Keller family, if she died...”

Rhode waved his hand and gestured for him to stop. As for Ben's next words, Rhode was already clear what he was implying.

Ben saw this as a negative sign, and he tried to rack his brain while begging Rhode.

Orlando did not understand the meaning behind Rhode's gesture, but at the very next moment, a green light flashed through him.

This is bad!

Orlando's first thought was to dodge, but the very next second, he felt an invisible force crashing into Helen who was standing beside him. In reflex, she bent her body downwards in pain.

“Ahh!!”

Under Rhode's command, the Spirit Bird collided with Helen. Even though the blow wasn't too heavy, it was definitely not light either. Right now, she was suffering terrible pain, and at this point in time, she did not think about the dagger as she subconsciously bent down her body.

Orlando's eyes were quick to follow her movement and it caused him to be startled for a moment. After all, his contract wasn't to kill her. The order from above was to capture her alive. What made him doubly shocked was that Rhode did not hesitate to do so, as if he did not worry about her death at all.

He reacted to Helen's subconscious reflex by shifting his dagger, so that the blade wouldn't kill her. After that, he made another action to position his dagger to her neck once again.

But he wasn't able to achieve his goal.

A faint, golden barrier appeared suddenly and blocked Orlando's action.

Protection Shield?!

Orlando grimaced as he raised his head and glanced towards the cleric. His forehead was filled with sweat because he knew that he was in trouble.

And at this moment, Rhode made his move.

Chapter 30

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The party only caught a glimpse of Rhode raising his hand, and in the next moment, his body immediately disappeared. The unsheathing of the white sword broke the silence, piercing through Orlando's right hand.

Such speed!

Facing Rhode's surprise attack, Orlando was shocked. He thought that he had mentally prepared to receive the attack, but experiencing the attack himself was a completely different feeling from observing it. He could feel his vision was starting to blur when the sword pierced through his hand.

Due to this sudden attack, he could only retreat and temporarily forget about kidnapping Helen. As for his mission, he had no expectations of completing it now. The gap between him and Rhode was too far apart, so he could only attempt to escape. Thus, Orlando immediately twisted his body and jumped into the bushes.

But Rhode did not intend to let him off.

Upon noticing Orlando's retreating figure, a grin flashed across his face as he rushed forward.

A brilliant light erupted from his sword and spilled towards Orlando as if it was ready to attack from the start.

However, there was something different with Rhode's attack. His Blade of Destruction did not directly chase toward his target, but it shifted slightly upward. It appeared as though he missed and Ben, Lize, and Matt revealed a puzzled look on their faces.

However, what happened the next moment surprised all of them.

Because at this time, Orlando suddenly jumped into the path towards the Blade of Destruction.

In truth, when he decided to jump, he already had a bad premonition. For thieves, these movements were akin to their bread and butter. Usually, when they retreated, they would instinctively execute an escape technique. That was why Rhode could exploit his knowledge to predict which direction Orlando would escape to. On the other hand, Orlando had jumped out from the frying pan, into the fire.

When Orlando finally figured out Rhode's attack trajectory, it was already too late. He tried to alter his direction in mid-air, but it was to no avail.

Due to his 'generous and selfless cooperation,' the Blade of Destruction managed to puncture his right shoulder successfully. The disheveled thief only had the time to emit a crisp scream before being flung towards the nearby bushes because of the impact.

Rhode shifted his sword downwards and walked towards Orlando.

"Ugh... Ah..."

Lying in the bushes, he could only grit his teeth while enduring the pain from his shoulder and back. When he heard the approaching footsteps, he attempted to escape but did not have the time to recover before a sword pierced through his wounded right hand.

"Ahhhh!!!" Orlando screamed.

Rhode was still calm as usual as if it was nothing which doubly assured everyone that this young man wasn't ordinary.

However, Rhode did not think himself as a mindless, cruel being. He did not deliberately try to torture Orlando; it was just that it was an of his old habit in the game. Back in the game, some players used despicable and shameless ways of attacking. The more professional they were, the more vicious their attacks. Furthermore, they were not afraid of getting hurt in the game. Thus, the only way to prevent them from escaping or logging out was

to keep them in constant combat mode. Because of this, Rhode instinctively employed the same exact tactic to an escaping individual by nailing his sword into the opponent's hand, preventing them from logging out.

But the moment he heard Orlando's shrill voice, he was reminded again that this wasn't a game ——— However, it did not matter anyway.

Rhode walked to the side of the black-cloaked man and stretched out his hand, slowly retracting the sword out from Orlando's hand.

“Aaa... Aaa!!!!!”

At this moment, Orlando was in extreme pain. The burning sensation on his right hand went past his pain tolerance level and began to twitch. His left hand wasn't able to stop Rhode, and could only slam it continuously on the ground to alleviate the pain. Looking at this scene, the others couldn't help but shiver. Even though they were not the ones facing this torture, but watching Orlando suffer made them terrified.

Lize stood from afar, silently observing the indifferent Rhode. A trace of complex emotions flashed in her eyes. She once again recalled the words that he said to her at the hotel.

I did not say this to repay your live-saving grace. Since I have brought you guys back safely, I already do not owe anything, and you too. I can only tell you I have my own purpose and it was not to repay you. I need strength, that was the reason I made this proposal. I can assure you that in less than two years, I can transform your mercenary group into a strong mercenary guild. But I would also like to remind you that I will use some means that you might find difficult to accept. So I hope that you can consider clearly. If you are willing to accept my proposal, then you must mentally prepare for what is to come. Because I will not allow anyone to hinder me or block me from achieving my goal. I have my own reason, but you do not need to know it now... I can understand your feelings, so I will not force you to agree, but I will still remind you the consequences of your promise — Since it would most likely exceed the range you could accept.

At that time, Lize could not fully understand what Rhode was trying to say, but she was still shocked by his words. Ultimately, she was still relieved that Rhode decided to speak to her about his future methods. Although it might sound rather unacceptable, it was more convincing than if he would merely assure her that everything would be alright. At least she knew that there was something for Rhode, after all, everyone is driven by their own motives. However, she still did not understand what he saw in her mercenary group which was almost disbanded, but since he didn't want to explain, then she would not take the initiative to ask.

At this moment, after observing the scene, Lize's heart began to loosen up. Previously when Rhode attacked Helen, she was still quite uncertain. Not mentioning about herself, even Ben and the others did not see it coming. The reason why she cast protection shield over Helen was purely based on her instincts, not because she was trying to cooperate with Rhode. But from this battle, she could finally understand what Rhode was trying to do.

In her mind, as long she recruited members and finish the mission, then she would be able to maintain the mercenary group. But was it really that simple? Lize was already a veteran mercenary, she understood how merciless the world was, and everybody would do anything to survive. The Crescent Bow mercenary group was once considered to be a medium-sized group, but now it had turned into this. Moreover, she was the only one who personally witnessed how this guild declined.

Can I do it? Rebuilding the mercenary group?

Lize immediately answered her own question.

I can't.

Even the previous leader, Carter, who was usually easy-going, had his cold and firm side. It wasn't that she was unable to do it, rather, she just did not want to force herself to become what she wasn't.

Her sight once again fell upon Rhode.

He did not tell her what he wanted to achieve. But his expression was firm, without a trace of confusion or doubt.

How about herself? For her own dreams and goals, what would she do?

While Lize was deciding her future, Rhode leisurely removed his sword and flicked it to a side, removing the blood stains on his sword. As for the black-cloaked man, he was busy rolling on the floor in pain.

“I think you should have anticipated what I want to ask, but just in case you forgot, it’s still better for me to remind you.” Rhode said with a nonchalant look on his face, “So... who are you? And what are you trying to achieve?”

“Ugh...ugh...”

Orlando’s body curled up, the pain from his right hand made it difficult to complete a sentence. With much difficulty, he looked up and watched the young man in front of him. How could he have such bad luck to provoke this kind of person?

“I... I... I am...”

The fear of his enemy combined with his physical pain had already worn out his caution. Right now, he already lost the power to resist and could only answer Rhode’s question. As much as he tried, he couldn’t finish his sentence because of the searing pain from his right hand. But Rhode took this action of his in another perspective.

“Oh... you do not wish to say? Nevermind then, I’m not really interested anyway.”

Orlando immediately panicked, and a sudden surge of adrenaline overtook his sense of pain.

“I, I work for vice president Claytor!!”

If he chose to die unyieldingly, then he could still accept it, but if he was killed because he wasn’t able to finish a sentence then it was totally unfair... He did not want to die so fast.

“Vice president Claytor?”

Hearing this name, Rhode’s sword stopped its descent.

“Merchant Association?”

“Yes, it is.”

“What is your purpose?”

“Kid, kidnap Miss Helen. I only know these...”

The Star Mark was on Orlando’s face, and the cold blade on his skin made him subconsciously swallow his saliva. Now, he had completely lost all hope, and he could only wish that the young man would show some leniency.

At that moment, when he saw Rhode nodded his head and said, “I know.”

Orlando suddenly felt a cold sensation on his neck. His vision began to spin and darkness completely engulfed his world.

After unsheathing his sword, he turned around and returned to the carriage. Due to his seemingly cold and heartless actions, the stares from the party were completely different from before. Helen sat beside her guards and stared at Rhode with a complex expression. After a while, Ben coughed and walked forward to address Rhode.

“This... thank you for helping, Sir.”

Although Rhode’s actions and the word ‘help’ weren’t too similar, the end result was good for him after all.

“No worries, it’s nothing difficult.”

Rhode nodded and did not say anything more. On the contrary, Ben was hesitating, but after a moment he opened his mouth and asked.

“Excuse me... if I may ask, what was their identity?”

“They said they were sent by the Vice President, Mr. Claytor to kidnap Miss Helen.”

“What?!”

Ben was shocked. He had been working as a family guard for so long, so he understood this kind of things.

“You mean that the Merchant Association sent these people?”

“He said so. But I don’t really care if it was a lie.”

Rhode waved his hand and turned away.

“I was just asking him casually.”

Chapter 31

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

As one of the busiest cities in the Northern Paphield, the Deep Stone City had a distinct characteristic that differs from the other cities. Owing to the deep pit under the town, Deep Stone City was originally a small town, but after a number of natural resources were discovered and excavated from the pit, it was converted to a bustling mining town. As such, the entire Deep Stone City was built above the pit.

If one observed the layout of Deep Stone City from above, the town was like an obverse wall decoration on top of the conical pit; it looked small and inconspicuous. But the interior of the town made it an impressive city. The road's width fits at least four carriages, and those small holes from afar that people assumed were caves, were actually big caverns that housed people. In Deep Stone City, every house, shape, and object complemented each other to form a visual experience that each visitor would remember distinctly.

Similarly to other cities, Deep Stone City also had its own public segregation, which was divided from the top to the bottommost of the town. The noble district was located at the top, where the nobles could enjoy the sun and bathe in the cool, fresh river and generally live a comfortable life. Next was the commercial district and the residential district, which occupied the three layers below the noble's district. Lastly, the lowest layer was the slums; not only the people there lived in perpetual darkness, but there was also a shortage of basic necessities. There were even rumors that the devils could casually make a meal out of someone in the depths of the dark pits. Only desperate people or specialized miners would enter the dark pits of the town.

“Deep Stone City...”

As Matt walked down from the carriage, his expression tensed up. He stood on the roadside while staring at the darkness not too far in front of him. A vast, colossal pit stretched from end to end, and Matt couldn't help but let out a sigh.

“Although I have visited many times, every time I see the city, I just can't help but gasp. Holy Spirit bless me, I really cannot believe that someone could actually dig out such a huge and bottomless pit.”

Matt licked his lips in awe and turned towards Rhode who was standing beside him before continuing, “Mr. Rhode, have you heard that in this city, even the oldest miners don't know what's inside this huge pit. It is truly a mysterious and wonderful thing. I mean, after all, it was them who dug the pit, right? But in the end, even they do not know what was inside. Hard to imagine, isn't it?”

“Indeed so.”

Rhode nodded, but he did not continue to say anything. Unlike Matt, of course, he knew what was at the bottom. It was one of the Top 10 Secrets of the Dragon Soul Continent. For ordinary people, perhaps they would not dare to take the risk to find out. But players did not care about death. If they could solve the mystery, then it won't matter even if they died a hundred times.

However, sometimes the price isn't worth the trouble.

After entering the city, the first impression the party received was silence. Contrary to their expectations of a bustling mining hub, every inch of the town around them was quiet, and the only thing that broke the silence was clinking of iron when the carriage rolled forward.

Unlike Matt, Rhode wasn't fascinated by the magnificence of this mining town. He only looked up towards the blue sky, his eyes gazing at the mountains in the distance. As though his vision could pierce through the rocks, he saw the Golden City Castle resting on Fairy Lake and also the person who lived inside... It was 'that person,' ...that slender, charming, yet strong figure.

Suddenly, Rhode seemed to have returned to the time where the last rays of sunlight crept on the blood-stained hills. Under the dimming evening sun, a person donned in a gorgeous armor was kneeling on the ground with a hundred thousand army standing at the front of her.

The blood-stained, crimson sunset traced her silhouette. When she lowered her head, her usual gleaming, well-groomed golden hair had lost its grandeur as it swept in the wind messily, and the breeze caused the broken feathers on her pure, white wings to lightly sway. However, there was no hesitation in her eyes as she turned towards Rhode. Her pale lips slightly parted, revealing a brilliant smile.

“Is that so... very well...”

She whispered to herself, and then closed her eyes.

Suddenly, everything was shrouded in darkness.

For a second time in his life, Rhode found his goal. And at that moment, he firmly decided to give up his free player identity and create a guild. With that shift in mindset, he began to change the entire game world. Eventually, he succeeded in altering the three eras using his own two hands. But he wasn't satisfied because, in the depths of his heart, there was a trace of regret.

He thought he had lost all hope to make up for it.

But now, a new chance to make amends had appeared.

Rhode knew what would happen to this continent. It would be an unprecedented catastrophe for all living beings. Even now, as everything appeared to be quiet and serene, he knew that this was just the calm before the storm. Short and fragile, like treading on thin ice, this peace might be destroyed at any time, and only chaos awaits.

However, Rhode wasn't in a hurry. He knew that it was useless to be anxious. From this point in time, if everything went according to the history he knew, then there would still be roughly one to two years of stability. It

was enough time to complete his preparations. After that, he had to consider how to survive in the calamity.

If he could, he wouldn't use this risky method, but he understood how terrible the calamity was, and the whole Dragon Soul Continent would not be able to escape the catastrophe. It would be better if he made some measures in advance before facing it.

Returning to the present, Rhode pulled his cloak and hid his face. No matter if it was the real or virtual world, his facial appearance would easily stir up trouble. Thus, it was better if he avoided it completely.

“Mr. Rhode.”

At this time, Ben brought his two men and the fatty young miss to his side. Perhaps, it was because he returned to his territory, his attitude was more confident than before.

“It's all thanks to you that we could arrive back in time.”

Rhode's eyes then swept across the people behind Ben.

“She should be okay, right?”

He casually noticed the paleness on her face.

Upon hearing Rhode's inquiry, Ben could only reveal a helpless smile.

“The young miss is alright. It's just that she's still in shock. Ms. Lize had already healed her, so there's no problem physically.”

Ben then hesitated for a moment, but he still raised his head and continued, “That... Do you have time right now? The young miss would like you to visit her house to repay your life-saving grace...”

“I still have something to do, so I won't trouble you any further.”

Rhode shook his head as he turned down Ben's invitation.

“It’s not a big deal.”

“It’s that so...”

Hearing Rhode answer in this manner, Ben felt awkward. Helen, who was standing behind him also felt disappointed, but no one caught sight of her expression.

Although his might wasn’t something noteworthy, as a guard captain, his skill with words was decent. Since Rhode had clearly drawn the line, he did not try to force it any further and eventually revealed a relaxed expression. Despite not having spent much time with Rhode, the pressure he felt wasn’t light whenever he was with him. He trembled all day, afraid that he might say something wrong. Now that the source of his pressure was on the verge of leaving, of course, he wouldn’t dig his own grave by forcing Rhode to stay.

“Since that’s the case, then I wish you a pleasant journey. When I return, I will report this matter to Master. I believe that Master will certainly be thankful for your help.”

After finishing his sentence, Ben and the fatty young miss quickly departed. It wasn’t until the distance between them were quite far would Helen then once again turn her head to look at Rhode. Then she showed an angered expression out of nowhere.

“You stupid man. Didn’t you say that you will bring him back home and tell Dad to punish him?!”

“Young miss, now is not the time to speak such nonsense.”

Facing this stubborn girl, Ben could only force himself to smile.

“You and I certainly know just how strong that man is. What if something happened to us if we annoy him?”

“But he dared to hit me!”

Helen stomped her feet furiously and clenched her teeth. She did not dare to get angry in front of Rhode, but now after he left, she could not keep it in anymore.

“Even my father had never hit me before!”

Ben could only helplessly shake his head at Helen’s words. He did not want to be involved with Rhode anymore. Even though he wasn’t clear about the difference in strength between Rhode and the Keller family, he did not want to create any trouble intentionally. Even if the young miss was unhappy, he wouldn’t do anything about it.

“Well, I’ll make sure that I will finish him next time.”

She stared fiercely at Rhode while announcing her displeasure. At the same time, it was as though Rhode heard what she said, and he turned his head to stare back at her. Helen’s face immediately paled and subconsciously cover her mouth. Ben also quickly turned around and walked forward.

“It’s time to go, young miss. If we aren’t back before Master arrives home, then there will be more trouble.”

“Ah, uh, yes, yes.”

Hearing this statement, Helen also nodded in agreement. She still had a lingering fear towards Rhode. Once she noticed that he had turned away, she slowly calmed down and quickly walked away.

“Mr. Rhode, we have arrived.”

Upon hearing Lize’s reminder, Rhode immediately turned around and saw Lize nervously standing in front of him. After a moment, he opened his mouth and asked, “This is your last chance, Lize. You can choose to refuse.”

“No, Mr. Rhode.”

However, Lize firmly shook her head and returned his gaze with a complicated emotion.

“I have been thinking for a long time. I know that I am not a suitable candidate, and I understand that I am very naive regarding this aspect. I realize that I have no experience, nor do I know what to do. But what I know is that without virtue, courage, and faith, I won’t be able to achieve my goal. If you can help me achieve my dream, then I will not refuse your offer.”

Her eyes were firm and clear, without a trace of hesitation. But Rhode did not back down.

“I think you’ve already seen my way of handling things and I want to know what do you think.”

“Eh?”

Lize was caught off-guard facing Rhode’s unexpected question and she immediately lower her head.

“I...”

“Just be frank.”

Although it appeared that Rhode was a few years older than Lize, at the moment, Lize could feel an intense pressure while standing in front of Rhode. It was just like the pressure that she had felt from the mercenary leader and her father.

“I... I do not know.”

Eventually, Lize shook her head.

“I really do not know, Mr. Rhode. I can tell you very sincerely that your method is totally different than what I have imagined. But... at least I don’t hate it.”

“I understand.”

When he heard Lize’s answer, Rhode nodded his head in satisfaction. He stretched out his right hand and placed it on Lize’s shoulder.

“I will not let you down,” Rhode said coolly.

Chapter 32

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Matt parted with the duo after bidding a quick farewell. When Matt finally distanced himself away from Rhode, his smiling face slowly warped into a grimace. He appeared as if he'd just suffered a great deal and was looking for revenge. After all, he was going to meet with his creditors after he had lost much of his cargo.

However, Rhode still reminded him not to reveal the truth about how the cargo ship had crashed. Since they were secretly tracked, and if the enemy was still seeking them out, it wouldn't be a good choice to look for trouble. But Rhode kept this a secret from Matt because he felt that it was unnecessary to inform him. Moreover, it wouldn't help the situation even if he revealed the matter to Matt. So in the end, Matt agreed to keep silent about this matter. Having been in the merchant industry for many years, he knew the pros and cons of doing so. Even if Rhode didn't remind him, he would still choose not to talk about this matter anywhere.

After parting with Matt, Rhode made his way to the Mercenary Association branch in Deep Stone City with Lize as his guide.

As a cross-continental organization, the Mercenary Association had branches in every major city. They were responsible for issuing missions to mercenaries, recording the completion of the missions, and also even responsible for the recruitment and employment of mercenaries. They were also the ones who had the authority to upgrade or downgrade mercenary groups.

The Deep Stone City Mercenary Association was located in the first layer of the pit. A distinct, engraved symbol on the wall that represented the Mercenary Association can be seen from afar. Even the rough marble door frame and the flag just outside the branch were unusually eye-catching.

However, the thick, heavy wooden door which was carved with intricate patterns could not contain the rowdy sounds from inside.

When Rhode and Lize entered the Mercenary Association building, the very first thing they noticed was a wide, dome-shaped hall. Sunlight permeated from the holes above, illuminating the white, stone floor. Many mercenaries were sitting around round, wooden tables, whispering and chatting to themselves. There were also some who hid in the corners who chose to stay silent.

The appearance of the duo did not cause much attention. Among the people that noticed, many of them just raised their head for a glance before resuming whatever they were doing. However, not all of them were like that. Not long after entering, a woman equipped with a leather armor raised her arm and waved to them, while her longbow in her other hand swayed from side to side.

“Hey, Lize. Long time no see!”

“Sister Shauna!”

A look of delight flashed across Lize’s face as she exposed a smile. She quickly walked towards to the woman’s side.

“It has been a long time! How are you?”

“I’m alright. Recently, we acquired plenty of loot after killing the gnolls. Now we’re discussing how to distribute it.” Shauna replied with a bright smile.

After Lize greeted her, more and more people turned and nodded towards them with smiles on their faces. It appeared as though the mercenaries here were quite familiar with Shauna.

“Congratulations...”

Lize’s heart couldn’t help but beat faster, but her smile was also stiff. She was no stranger to this scene. Every time she completed a commission with

Carter and everyone else, they would sit together and bicker with each other. That was once her everyday life, but now those people had already left her forever.

“What happened? Lize? You don’t seem to be happy?”

Although Shauna appeared to be a happy-go-lucky person, it was clear that she had a woman’s attentive side as well. Upon noticing a change in Lize’s emotion, she instantly knew that something was wrong. She knit her brows in puzzlement and looked towards Rhode who was standing her behind Lize.

“What happened to you? Who is the guy behind you? I never saw him before?”

“Leader... he...”

When Lize mentioned Carter, her face paled. Words couldn’t seem to exit her mouth. It was only after a few seconds later when Lize seemed to be able to gather the determination to speak about it.

“We... we have failed the mission. Except for me... Everyone else is gone.”

The moment she said this, silence suddenly fell upon the group. Even the smile on Shauna’s face also disappeared.

“Failed?”

“Yes, we encountered a little accident...”

Lize shook her head. Apparently, she did not want to say much regarding this matter. So he quickly changed the topic and introduced Rhode to everyone.

“This is Mr. Rhode Alander. He is my life-saver. Otherwise, I am afraid that you’ll not be seeing me here today.”

“Ah, is that so...”

Once Lize finished introducing Rhode, Shauna couldn't help but glance at Rhode curiously, whose body was wrapped up in a cloak. After that, she reached out her hand.

“Hello, I am Shauna, the leader of the Red Hawk mercenary group. Thank you for saving my friend.”

Rhode stretched out his hand and returned the gesture. And then he replied in low voice.

“No worries. I was just passing by.”

This made Shauna even more curious, and she started to stare intently at Rhode, non-verbally implying that she wanted to see his real appearance. But alas, Rhode had no intention to bring down his hood, and she didn't want to force it as well, so she could only turn her attention back to Lize.

“So, this time you came to...”

“Yes, I came to the Association to report the failure, and also... the things that happened to leader...”

“I understand.”

Shauna sighed as she rubbed Lize's head.

“Don't blame yourself too much. This is our job. Sooner or later, such a day will come for all of us. The fact that you are alive would be their greatest consolation. Remember, if you encounter any difficulty, you can always come visit us. Even though we, the Red Hawk mercenary group is just a small group, but as long as it is something we can help, we will never decline.”

“Thank you...”

Hearing Shauna's consoling words, Lize finally revealed a smile. However, a young swordsman that was sitting near Shauna suddenly jumped up and shattered the emotional mood.

“Yes, Lize. Don’t be too sad. Ah, how about you join our mercenary group? We are missing a...”

“Barney!”

Shauna shouted coldly, interrupting the young swordsman’s words.

“What are you saying, is now the time to say such kind of things? Shut up and sit down!”

“But big sis....”

“Shut up!”

Because of Shauna’s seriousness in her tone, the young swordsman unwillingly retreated and sat back down. Shauna turned around once again towards Lize.

“Lize, please do not mind what Barney said. You are free to choose your own path.”

“It’s okay, sister Shauna.”

Lize did not put the young swordsman’s words to heart.

“I have already decided that I will not disband the mercenary group.”

“Lize?”

Shauna was stunned for a moment. When she finally came through, Rhode and Lize had already made their way towards the depths of the hall. It made Shauna slightly awkward when she watched the two of them leave. After a while, she sat down and sighed for a moment, but suddenly without notice, she turned and stared fiercely at the young swordsman beside her.

“Don’t speak nonsense! If you still dare to talk nonsense, be careful if I tear off your mouth!!”

In the center of the hall, people were standing next to the huge stone. The majority of the constant, clamorous chatter also came from this area. In order to receive a mission, mercenaries had to shout loudly to get attention from people. There were also plenty of mercenaries who were discussing their remuneration and conditions with the employer.

Under the Lize's lead, Rhode arrived at a counter. A 50-year-old man lay sleepily on the table. It was unknown how he could even manage to get a bit of shut-eye with this banter surrounding him.

“Uncle Hank?”

Lize spoke in a low voice while walking towards the front of the man. But apparently her voice could not rival the noise, so Lize had to raise her voice while knocking on the counter.

When he heard the knock, the man finally awoke. He rubbed his eyes drowsily and glanced at his visitors.

“Who is it? Can't you see that I was sleeping so comfortably... Such a shame... I just found a good woman in my dream...”

Having not finished his sentence yet, the man eventually noticed that it was Lize who was standing in front of him. He immediately closed his mouth and exposed an embarrassing smile.

“Ah, I thought who was it, so it's actually Lize! Why have you come to see me today?”

“Yes, I have something to talk with the president, it is about our mercenary group...”

“Mercenary group?”

Hank was dumbfounded when he heard Lize's answer.

“What about the mercenary group? Where is Carter?”

Lize did not answer Hank's question directly and went silent for a moment. Then, she slowly revealed a silver badge from her hand. After seeing the badge, Hank's sleepy expression immediately vanished and was replaced by a serious and tense expression.

"I will immediately inform the president."

Hank immediately broke into a run.

Chapter 33

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode sat on a chair, observing the old man behind the desk. He knew who he was. Moby Daimler, Deep Stone City's Mercenary Association president. Back in the game, almost every player would somehow be acquainted with this man if they wanted mercenary licenses from him. Furthermore, he would be responsible for teaching the players' practical skills.

If a player had high reputation points, he would hand out certain rewards to them. So, to the players, this old man was quite a popular NPC.

However, Moby Daimler's character was obstinate, and also sometimes quite a blockhead. Of course, in this world, the people view him as someone who adhered to his belief, but to the player, he was just a stubborn old man.

But whether he was stubborn or not, it did not matter to Rhode.

"Lize, you have my deepest condolence about the matter..."

The old man then looked down at his desk, and said with his unique calm and slow tone, "Carter is a good kid. I watched him grow up, and I'm very sad about his loss," the old man shook his head and paused for a moment to sigh, "but this is a mercenary's life; we work for money, and we all know that we might die. From the moment we accepted this way of life, we had acknowledged the risks involved... Now, tell me, what have you truly come to me for?"

"I... I want the mercenary group to carry on, Sir."

Lize shivered in nervousness. Both her hands slowly turned pale as she clutched the hem of her dress tightly.

“I know it will be difficult, but I have made the decision... Mr. Rhode will be appointed as the new leader, and I believe that under his leadership, this mercenary group can continue to prosper.”

“... a wonderful idea, Lize.”

The old man sighed.

“But you do understand that this will be a gamble. Will you hang the fate of the entire mercenary group on an unfamiliar person? Can you afford to shoulder the consequences of that venture?”

“I certainly understand the risks involved, Mr. President, sir. But... I choose to believe in my judgment. My only wish is to watch my mercenary group prosper, but I know that I do not have the ability to do so. Therefore, I can only choose to believe in someone who can bring me hope.”

Lize gracefully lifted up her head and gazed firmly into the old man’s eyes. The old man slightly narrowed his eyes and returned Lize’s gaze. After a while, he said, “In any case, I hope that you can consider the risks involved. After all...”

The old man was unable to finish his sentence before being suddenly interrupted by Rhode.

“Perhaps, you should ask my opinion, Sir.”

Upon hearing Rhode’s bold words, the old man’s eyes revealed a trace of uncertainty. His eyes started to scan this man carefully whose body was fully wrapped in a cloak.

“Kid, when an elder speaks, you should be polite.”

“If you put it that way, then I think it is quite rude to ignore the existence of others deliberately.”

Rhode retaliated without hesitation nor fear. In the game, the president NPC was an extremely resolute and steadfast character. He despised spineless cowards. That was why Rhode spoke so straightforwardly as he wanted to

compare the difference between the old man from the game and this old man in front of him.

“Let’s not dwell on unrelated matters. Moving on to the main point, I understand that the mercenary group quota is limited, and every mercenary group that can hit the quota is required to experience some kind of hardship.”

“Am I right, Mr. President?” Rhode said coolly.

“Moreover... I also understand that if this information spreads out to the people, not only will the Mercenary Association’s reputation be damaged, but you’ll also trigger the combined dissatisfaction and ridicule from other mercenaries. You needn’t waste your time beating around the bush about these matters, Mr. President.”

“Good lad!” The old man couldn’t help but express his shock.

Almost immediately, the lazy demeanor expressed by the old man vanished without a trace.

“Since you understand what I meant, I’ll just be frank with you. As you’ve said earlier, every mercenary group has their own quota, and it is through their own perseverance and effort that they manage to clear the tasks required of them. No matter who you are, it is impossible for you to change the way of how the Mercenary Association operates. I’m incredibly saddened by the loss of Carter and the rest of his team, but I cannot break the Mercenary Association’s regulation.”

Rhode leisurely leaned back against the chair as he slowly picked up the teacup.

“But you also do not hold the power to disband the mercenary group either,” said Rhode casually as he stirred the black tea in the teacup, which was already cold.

Without waiting for a reply, Rhode continued, “According to the Mercenary Association’s regulation: Only within the winter recess period, those

mercenary groups who did not reach the specified level would be forced to disband. Also, the Association has no right to intervene in the internal affairs of the group.”

Upon hearing Rhode’s well-thought rebuttal, the old president frowned in silence.

“I did not expect that you were that familiar with our regulations...” the old president voice trailed off, but the next moment, his taut expression suddenly relaxed.

“Indeed, we do not have this power. But, as the president of the Mercenary Association of the Deep Stone City branch, I am responsible for every mercenary. And the most crucial aspect here... is your identity as an adventurer. We cannot possibly allow a person who has yet to be assessed by mercenaries to lead a mercenary group. ”

“Mr. President!”

Lize couldn’t sit still any longer when she heard this. She immediately shot up and opened her mouth to say something. But to her surprise, Rhode shook his head, stretched out his arm and held her shoulder. Then he slowly stood up with a calm expression.

“This means that if I pass the assessment, you’ll agree?”

“That goes without saying, lad.”

The old president also stood up.

“Do not forget, this is the Mercenary Association’s territory. People who are qualified to stand on these grounds are only mercenaries.”

“Very well.” Rhode nodded. His heart relaxed a lot. Until now, the old president’s reactions were not beyond his expectations.

“So, if I asked to be assessed right now, there shouldn’t be any issues, right?”

The room turned silent.

Both of the old president's eyes widened as he studied this young man in front of him carefully. Even he could sense the self-confidence from the young man's tone, but he did not know where that confidence came from.

This kid... does he even know what is he getting himself into? Since he understood the regulations well, I'm certain that he knows the standard of the test. While it isn't particularly difficult, it isn't a cakewalk either.

Is this kid being reckless? Or does he truly have the strength?

In his heart, the president shook his head. From his appearance, the young lad who was fully wrapped in a cloak didn't appear to emit any signs of power. However, since the lad was willing to take on the assessment, he couldn't say no. It would be the best if he could pressure him to quit, but if that didn't work... then he'll think about it later.

Once he made up his decision in his mind, the old president didn't speak any further, and he gave a smile to Rhode. He reached out and picked up a small hammer which he gently swung it against a bell on the desk. Soon, an attendant entered the room.

“What's the matter, Mr. President?”

“Is the training field empty right now?” he questioned the attendant while maintaining the smile on his face.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Very well. Inform Sereck that someone is here to take on the mercenary assessment.”

“... Yessir.”

When Sereck's name was mentioned, a trace of surprise flashed in the attendant's eyes. However, the expression in his eyes didn't linger, and he quickly lowered his head before leaving the room in a hurry.

Lize, on the other hand, openly expressed her shock and she quickly made her way towards the president.

“Mr. President! You can’t...! Mr. Sereck is...”

“Kid, this isn’t something you should worry yourself with.” The old president waved his hand and interrupted Lize. Then he turned his head slightly, glanced towards Rhode and said, “Since this young gentleman volunteered to take on the mercenary assessment, naturally, I will grant him the opportunity.”

“But...”

Lize wanted to say something, but this time, it was Rhode who interrupted her.

“Do not worry, Lize. There will be no problem.”

Rhode reached out to grab a loose end of his hood and pulled it across his face, utilizing the shadow to cover his mouth. Under the hood, Rhode’s lips curved into a smile.

“After all, this is a rare opportunity to duel with the ‘Light Swordsman’.”

When the old president heard Sereck’s nickname, he couldn’t help but widen his eyes in shock. However, since things had already turned out this way, it was unnecessary for him to say anything more. Although he found this young man’s attitude peculiar, as a veteran with decades of experience, his confidence wouldn’t be shaken that easily.

“Good... since you have the courage, I’d like to see how you will pass this assessment!” The old president snorted coldly.

“I assure that you’ll not be disappointed. But before that, I hope you can give me 10 minutes to prepare myself.”

“Of course, that’s not a problem.”

The old president didn't find anything odd with Rhode's request; rather, it'll be odd if he didn't ask for preparation time as it was such an impromptu decision.

Once again, he gently swung the tiny hammer on the bell and summoned several attendants. ¹

“Escort the gentleman and the lady to the waiting room. Start the mercenary assessment in 10 minutes.”

The attendants glanced towards Rhode in surprise.

“Is 10 minutes enough?”

“It's enough.”

—

The Mercenary Association waiting room wasn't anything luxurious; instead, it was slightly chilly. Other than the wooden furniture, there were wall decorations made up of swords and shields. Suits of armor were lined up neatly in the corner as well.

Rhode waved his hand, gesturing the attendant to excuse himself before entering the room and locking it.

“Mr. Rhode, this is too risky!”

Lize finally voiced out her concerns to Rhode.

“Mr. Sereck is a famous warrior in Deep Stone City. The president is deliberately making it difficult for you. This...”

“You don't have to worry, Lize. I have already expected this outcome.”

Rhode shook his head. He had already guessed it from the start. After all, in the game, that old man would always make it difficult for the players when they wanted to create a mercenary group. Not only would they have to gather reputation points, they would also need to undergo many difficult

quests. As for right now, since he wanted to take a shortcut, of course, that old geezer wouldn't make it easy for him.

Furthermore, Sereck wasn't a stranger to Rhode. He was a powerful warrior in Deep Stone City, and he was also a master swordsman that inherited 'Light Swordsmanship'. What made this 'Light Swordsmanship' so special was that it had light magic interweaved into sword skills. By itself, the level of swordsmanship was merely average, and it was just considered to be middle-classed to players. During this period, if Rhode's memory wasn't wrong, Sereck's level should be at 40.

With such a vast difference in level, it was practically impossible for Rhode to win.

However, this was only assessment, not a life and death battle.

Rhode decided to conclude his thoughts and took out the Soul Core he obtained from the Shadow.

Its appearance was different from the Wind Serpent Lord's Soul Core. The Shadow's Soul Core was pure white, and a layer of fog surrounded it. If one stared at it closely, it would resemble a carefully crafted artwork. Rhode glanced at his surroundings before making his way towards a brazier.

Upon reaching, he closed his eyes and stretched out his right hand.

Once again, the summoning circle appeared on his palm, followed by the system prompt which also emerged before him clearly.

[The Soul Core has been contaminated, Do you want it to be purified?]

“Purify.”

Followed by Rhode's voice, the fog surrounding the Soul Core began to thicken as it swirled rapidly around the core.

This mystical scene left Lize stupefied. But she still managed to close her mouth and not make a sound. Despite not knowing what he was doing, she knew that he wasn't to be disturbed at this moment.

As the fog around the Soul Core became increasingly thick, it created a billow of clouds which rolled in the center of his palm. This phenomenon continued as it spun faster and faster, forming a whirlpool of fog. Slowly, red streaks of light appeared within the eye of the storm, and it gradually snowballed, consuming the remaining fog, turning the entire spectacle into a bright, red cloud. The fiery cloud then started to congeal, and it finally transformed into a crimson card which levitated on top of Rhode's palm.

[The Flame Killer (Fire Attribute): Ground Unit, Available for Fusion, Attack 10% chance to trigger burning effect, Special Skill ——— Fire Breath (Born from the flame and die in flame. Bring its enemies eternal pain and destruction)

[1/10 of Red Lotus Deck collected, The Flame Killer]

But it wasn't done yet, because, at this very moment, Rhode took out the Gargoyle's Heart from his pocket.

Use the Gargoyle's Heart.

[Target?]

The Flame Killer.

Rhode spoke in his head.

[Target – The Flame Killer – Forced Evolution]

[Level upgrade finished]

[Evolve?]

Yes.

The bright, crimson card started rotating once again. A resplendent flame crept around the card, and then it slowly faded.

Rhode then grabbed the card and studied the information written on it.

A picture of a fiery hound was painted on the front side of the card. At the top corner, a red circle with the letters “VI” were printed on it. As for the bottom corners of the card, two numbers, 5 and 3 represented the summoning spirit’s attack and defense respectively.

When he flipped over the card, it displayed the card details.

[The Flame Killer (Fire Attribute): Ground Unit, Available for Fusion, Attack: 10% chance to trigger burning effect, Special Skill ——— Fire Breath (Born forth from flame, and perishes in flames. Inflicts a calamity by delivering catastrophic destruction to lay them in eternal rest.) LV 10

Received the flame baptism: the Flame Guardian.

Fire Breath: Hot enough to melt steel, and no one will be able to get in its way,

Born forth from flame; perishes in flames. Explosive Type.]

Pretty good.

Comparing it to the Spirit Bird’s meager attack and defense power, which was at the level of ordinary creatures, the Flame Killer’s attack was much better and it even reached Giant Beast level. Still, though its defense was low, Rhode believed that with the innate fire element, the card still had its uses.

After analyzing, Rhode kept the card, turned around and faced towards a dazed Lize.

“I’m ready, let’s go.”

Chapter 34

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Currently, the Mercenary Association's training field was filled with people. When they heard that there was someone who wanted to challenge Sereck, they all came flocking in droves. It wasn't always the case though, as normally, people wouldn't be very interested in the usual mercenary assessment.

'Light Swordsman' Sereck, was one of the legendary figures of Deep Stone City. Every mercenary held him in high regard. Though he rarely conducts assessments personally, this time, upon the order of the president, he had to do it. This event sparked the curiosity of the mercenaries as they gathered in the corner of the training field.

Naturally, as mercenaries, all of them had already completed their mercenary assessment, which was in actuality, a very straightforward process. The Association would appoint a recognized mercenary to assess the newbie, and as long he or she received the recognition of the veteran, then they would pass. But as for someone as distinguished as Sereck? Even many of these veterans had never seen Sereck conduct an assessment personally. Thus, they were incredibly curious about the 'newbie' that had the qualifications to receive Sereck's personal evaluation.

The first one who entered the training field was the 'Light Swordsman', Sereck.

Clad in a white, leather armor with a golden lion mark imprinted on the chestguard, he appeared out of the shadows in his signature golden hair, which was combed backward neatly. When he displayed his gentle, yet confident smile on his face, an astounding wave of cheers echoed among the surrounding mercenaries. It really wasn't surprising because Sereck had a high reputation within Deep Stone City.

“I’ll leave it to you, old buddy.”

The Mercenary Association’s president came to Sereck’s side and smiled as he patted his shoulder.

“Don’t worry Moby.” Sereck returned the president’s friendly gesture with an elegant smile. But still, he couldn’t help but inquire about his opponent.

“It’s a rare occurrence seeing you this agitated, which youngster had done it?”

“An ungrateful little devil.”

The old president grunted coldly.

“I see. Very well then. Then I will make him understand that our mercenaries aren’t easy to mess with!”

Meanwhile, Rhode and Lize finally arrived at the training field after being guided by the attendant. When the crowd noticed them, they gave the duo a puzzled look. Compared to Sereck’s entrance, the difference in reception was glaringly apparent.

“Big sister, Isn’t that Lize?”

At that moment, Barney who was within the crowd suddenly exclaimed. Shauna, who was standing beside him, frowned when she noticed Rhode and Lize but she still kept her silence.

“Isn’t it that guy from before? Is he the one to be assessed today?”

The mercenaries who saw the duo from before started gossiping to one another.

“Where did that guy come from? He could actually force the President to summon Sereck?”

“He even tries to maintain the air of mystery around him with that cloak. From a glance, I can tell that he’s not a good person.”

“What is he? Looking at his appearance, is he a mage?”

“No way. He didn’t even bring a wand. Can you see what he is holding.... eh? EH!?!? Isn’t that our usual sparring sword!?”

Even both the president and Sereck was somewhat surprised when they noticed Rhode’s choice of weapon. The sparring sword was a piece of common equipment provided by the Association, and certainly not a weapon that mercenaries would use in an assessment of this caliber. Most mercenaries would prefer to use their own weapons just for the fact that they were more familiar with it. Even if they wanted to use a common sword, they would still use something more comfortable, and not this sparring sword which had no modification at all.

Did he intend to wield this sword to fight Sereck?

When everyone was busy discussing that matter, Rhode had already walked up to the Sereck and the old president. He briefly paid his respects to both of them and pulled his hood.

“I’m ready. The two of you can start anytime.”

“Are you going to use this sword to challenge me?” Sereck frowned and said.

Since it was rare for him to conduct an assessment, he didn’t particularly have any ill feelings about Rhode. But if the opponent used ordinary weapons to fight, then it would be meaningless even if he won.

“Young man, don’t be pressured, do what you need to do. It is only a sparring match and we hope to assess your real strength and level. The outcome is not important.”

“We think alike, Mr. Sereck.”

Rhode was still calmly holding the sword in his hand.

“So, please don’t mind about my choice of weapon... Since I also wish to experience the might of the Light Swordsman.”

“Very well then.”

Since Rhode had made his decision, Sereck’s face also turned serious. In the beginning, he thought that it would be unfair if he used a magic sword against an ordinary weapon, but since Rhode took the initiative to affirm him of his own choice, then he had no more qualms about etiquette.

Sereck nodded lightly and glanced towards the president. It wasn’t until now that he finally understood why his old buddy got mad with this kid.

But who is he?

Sereck didn’t think much, he shook his head and unsheathed his sword.

“Bring it on!” His low voice echoed throughout the training grounds.

Rhode didn’t say anything as he pulled out his sword slowly while carefully observing the Light Sword on Sereck’s hand. In an instant, Rhode leaned his body forward and disappeared as he activated his shadow flash.

Swordsmanship skill?

When Sereck analyzed Rhode’s skill, he was slightly surprised, but he quickly calmed himself down and activated his own skill. The sword in his hand suddenly shattered into countless shards of light which rained down towards Rhode.

Since it was only an assessment, Sereck did not use the full power of his attack. No matter how skilled Rhode was, he assumed that Rhode wouldn’t be able to withstand this attack. Light Swordsmanship’s skills were very fast, and to escape from the myriad of light shards wasn’t an easy feat.

However, Rhode totally destroyed his expectations. Jumping and dashing from side to side, Rhode nimbly dodged the shards as he slowly closed the distance.

This isn’t possible!

It was as though Rhode recognized that this attack was used to confuse the enemy.

Now, Rhode's decisiveness and comprehension made Sereck's facial expression change visibly. He was utterly shocked.

But what he did not know was that Rhode was familiar with his skills. Even though there was a vast difference between Rhode and Sereck's level, Rhode was completely aware of the Light Swordsmanship's attack range. While this move might work against those newer mercenaries, but to him, it was still somewhat lacking.

While Sereck was being surprised continuously, Rhode managed to close in, and he lunged forward with his Moon Shadow Swordsmanship. The Light and Moon Shadow Swordsmanship were total opposites, the former was akin to sunlight, shining brilliantly and forcing those nearby to yield, while the latter was more of a shadow, lurking in the dark, waiting for the prime opportunity to strike.

So fast!

Noticing the shadow that suddenly appeared beside him, Sereck's eyes widened and hastily changed the direction of his attacks. His magic sword revealed a glorious light, drowning the shadow which attacked him.

Naturally, Rhode failed to penetrate his defenses. That goes without saying because, with a 30 level gap, it would be akin to defeating an elephant as an ant. If Sereck used his full power, Rhode would be sent flying out of the training grounds long ago. That was why, when facing Sereck's counter-attack, Rhode immediately retreated and stabilized himself with his sword.

Dodging once would be considered as luck, but twice...? Sereck started to doubt this young man who was draped in a cloak. Was he someone he knew? If not, how could someone be so familiar with his swordsmanship?

However, as an experienced veteran, Sereck soon discovered that Rhode tried to avoid direct contact with him. Since that was the case, he retracted all the light shards back into his sword and began to attack him head-on.

Once again, Sereck miscalculated. Although he was pretty confident in his speed, Rhode still managed to slip out of his fingers constantly and retreat when they fought.

After clashing for three to four times, the surrounding dumbstruck mercenaries began to murmur to each other.

“Big sister, Mr. Sereck sword is so fast, but why it can’t it hit that guy?” Barney subconsciously asked with a shocked expression.

He had simulated in his mind that if he was in Rhode’s position, he wouldn’t even be able to escape from the first attack and would immediately surrender after that. But this odd young man could escape Sereck’s attack three times and he didn’t even receive a single injury! Does it mean that this guy is also a sword master?

It wasn’t only Barney who thought this way, the rest of the other mercenaries were equally dumbfounded. They simply did not understand how could that guy dodge Mr. Sereck’s astonishingly fast attacks.

The old president’s expression turned grim because he knew what was wrong.

While Sereck’s Light Swordsmanship was indubitably fast as the word ‘light’ suggests, but the crux of the problem was that only the sword skills were fast, and not the person. To a common person, as long as one witnessed fast swordsmanship, they would assume that the person using it would be equally as fast. However, the fact was that these two were completely different.

The old president also realized that the young man was using his own speed to dodge Sereck’s attacks. It was also apparent that he understood the characteristics of Light Swordsmanship. This made him furrow his brows as he tried to guess about Rhode’s origin. Sereck had never left Deep Stone City in 30 years, and the people that fought with him were only a handful. So where did this strange young man originate from?

Meanwhile, both Sereck and Rhode had already clashed numerous times. Rhode was still maintaining his strategy of avoiding direct contact while Sereck's facial expression finally began to relax, but not to the point of losing its seriousness.

“You're really fast. You'll become a promising thief one day.” Sereck smiled and said in a depressed tone when Rhode dodged his attack once again.

“Thanks for the compliment, but I'm a swordsman.”

Rhode's voice was indifferent; his face was hidden behind the hood so no one could see his expression.

“Then show me some swordsmanship, lad.”

Sereck raised his sword and pointed towards Rhode. He had decided to take it up a notch. Not because Rhode managed to dodge his attacks countless of times, but it was because he was curious. He wanted to see if this young man in front of him still had something up his sleeve.

“As you wish.”

Just at this time, Rhode finally moved.

A faint light started to congeal at the tip of his sword. And in an instant, followed by an eruption of light, a beam shaped as a crescent moon emerged from the sword.

Sword energy condensation?

Looking at this, Sereck's face became tense. Then he shouted, “Very good!” and rushed forward while holding his sword.

A barrier of light emerged as it welcomed the crescent moon which came towards it. At this moment, Sereck the sword master, displayed his full power. A violent wave exploded out from his sword. Even the mercenaries watching from the sidelines had to take a few steps back. And when

Rhode's silver crescent moon finally clashed with Sereck's sword light, it disappeared without a trace.

Not bad.

Although it made Rhode's attack seem like child's play, Sereck was pleasantly surprised as he nodded his head in satisfaction. This man in front of him is so young, yet he is able to condensate sword energy. Also, from the previous clashes, he knew that this kid could fight wisely. Sereck even thought that it'd be a pity to have such a young promising talent to become a mercenary. He glanced towards the old man on the sidelines, thinking whether to make this young man his disciple. After all, a rare talent such as this man doesn't grow on trees.

“——!!!”

Suddenly a chirping sound could be heard, and he saw the surrounding mercenaries displaying a surprised expression.

What happened?!

He quickly turned his attention back towards Rhode. But at this time, Sereck was shocked to find a green figure passing through his light barrier towards him!

Chapter 35

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

What the...

Sereck's heart skipped a beat. When he repeatedly questioned himself whether if there was anything wrong with the barrier, he finally realized that the only possibility the green light could enter unhindered was if it exploited that small gap. Sereck sighed and raised his sword to receive the blow, and when the Spirit Bird finally collided, a raging storm arose.

“Boom!!!”

Violent winds shook the ground, and the surrounding mercenaries who were unable to withstand the intense storm began to retreat. Even though the Spirit Bird's attack power wasn't high, its wind attribute shouldn't be underestimated. Sereck narrowed his eyes and swung his sword, tearing apart the violent wind with a brilliant light. However, what he saw next wasn't Rhode.

Rhode flipped his left hand and a red card materialized out of thin air which fell to his palm. In a swift motion, he gripped the card and threw it forward.

“_____!”

Followed by a tearing sound, the red card tore apart. An intense, raging fire immediately swept the ground with a violent pressure emitting in all directions, causing the surrounding temperature to ascend abruptly. At that very moment, a ferocious roar rang out as a fiery hound appeared before Rhode. It immediately unveiled its claws and fangs as it dashed towards Sereck, and Rhode, as though in harmony with the Flame Killer, immediately activated his Shadow Flash before slashing forward with his sword.

“What the heck is that!”

Observing the unbelievable scene that was unfolding, all of the surrounding mercenaries rushed to the front to get a firsthand view of this spectacle and they couldn't help but feel surprised. Even those veterans that had experienced countless of battles felt their blood rushing towards their head at this astonishing scene.

Sereck was no different.

But unlike those mercenaries on the sidelines, time was a luxury that Sereck didn't have. When an unknown factor appeared in mid-battle, he can only put all his attention on the crisis unfolding in front of him. While he had a feeling that the appearance of the hound wouldn't be life-threatening, but as a sword master, being forced into a corner with a large number of spectators looking at him would be a shameful act. Because of that reasoning, he chose to take the attack head-on. Sereck snorted coldly and took on a defensive stance, fully welcoming Rhode's attack.

A brilliant barrier of light appeared once again, abruptly parrying the hound's direct attack. However, this act of deterrence wouldn't be able to stop the Flame Killer. Sereck's attack only merely slowed down its advance, and it suddenly jumped to the side before lunging towards Sereck with its mouth wide open.

“Boom!!!!”

The hound cast a Fire Breath, causing a wave of scorching flames to envelop Sereck, burning everything nearby to cinders. Sereck didn't hesitate any longer, as someone with a high status such as himself, his public image was as important as his life. If he was defeated right now by a random stranger whose face was hidden, then he might as well drop his decades of prestige into the mud. Thus, starting from this moment, Sereck finally treated Rhode as a true opponent.

Akin to a dying brilliance of a setting sun, in a blink of an eye, orange flames lit up the skies, and as quick as its emergence, the last of the embers came and went in a flash.

But it was enough...

The flame finally disappeared.

No signs of flames could be seen on the scorched ground. The spectators only managed to catch a glimpse of a flash of light, and then in the very next moment, it instantly disappeared. With the exception of the ashes and smoke that lingered in the air, everything else completely disappeared.

It's coming!

Rhode furrowed his brows. He knew that Sereck was serious now.

But that was his intention since the beginning.

Even though Sereck was able to defend against the Flame Killer's attack, but he wasn't able to dodge Rhode and the Spirit Bird. Rhode also didn't plan to retreat as he lunged forward with his sword.

Blade of Destruction, ACTIVATE!

“———!”

A splendorous light emerged from the ashes, rushing towards Sereck. Under the orders of Rhode, the Spirit Bird curved in an arc and flanked towards Sereck's right while the hound who had failed to penetrate his defense, retreated towards the left and prepared a collaborative attack with the Spirit Bird.

The Flame Killer then launched a Fire Breath once again, followed by a deadly swipe from its claw.

The scene was almost magical, like a fantasy.

The mercenaries along the sidelines had their jaws agape, unable to speak a word. Not one of them had seen such a way of fighting, nor have they ever seen the Light Swordsman fight at full force.

If it were any other ordinary mercenary, Rhode's tri-pronged attack would undoubtedly render them helpless if they didn't rush towards Rhode first, but Sereck's choice was different.

The first thing he attacked wasn't Rhode.

When Sereck raised his sword, it was as if time slowed down, and when he swung down his sword towards the hound, his sword appeared to fall incredibly gently, but seemingly impossible to dodge.

The Flame Killer roared in agony as he felt as though a heavy hammer smashed into its head. The sword in Sereck's hand fluidly changed its direction again and sealed the Spirit Bird's attack. And when the Spirit Bird fell to the ground, Sereck had already changed the course of his sword once again to face the oncoming Blade of Destruction.

Each moment was somehow very short, but it was also very long. Almost everyone saw what happened, but they were also unable to see it clearly. It was as if the scene before them was just a dream.

However, Rhode did not stop.

Within the tempest of light, he could feel a massive impact on the sword he was holding. In an instant, his body shook as though his internal organs shifted, and his HP bar plunged to orange from a healthy green. At this moment, his sword could no longer withstand the overwhelming impact and shattered into pieces.

Sereck immediately attacked, and a light appeared on his sword, rushing towards Rhode's chest.

However, Rhode didn't panic. He held up his right hand and paused for a moment before suddenly making a gripping gesture.

“Woo———!!!”

The black hound howled and rushed forward. Its whole body immolated in flames as it unhesitatingly made its way towards Sereck. In retaliation, Sereck snorted and swiped his hand. Following that gesture, a brilliant light split the black hound into two.

But it wasn't the end yet.

Born forth from the flame, and perishes in flames.

Sereck felt a huge energy emitting from the tip of his sword. His eyes widened, but it was already too late for him to react.

The hound which split into two pieces, began to turn bright red. It continued roaring and rolled towards Sereck, and finally, its flame resistant body couldn't contain the fiery energy within and imploded.

At this very moment, a red card materialized on Rhode's palm and he gripped it without hesitation.

“Clang!!!!”

A pair of white wings appeared out of thin air, shielding Rhode and blocking the flames.

When the fire and ashes finally scattered, it revealed two silhouettes close to one another.

Sereck stopped moving, the gap between his sword and Rhode's chest was only a few inches, but there was a thin barrier of angelic wings in between his sword and Rhode's body. At the same time, Rhode's sword stopped next to Sereck's neck.

“Elemental creatures, magic weapon, and swordsmanship mastery.”

After a long time, Sereck finally broke the silence.

“Not bad, young man. You did great.”

“Thank you for your compliment.”

Rhode nodded slightly and removed the sword from Sereck's neck. Then he made a hand gesture to recall the Spirit Bird, which soon arrived and perched on his shoulder quietly.

“You're welcome. It had been a long time since I had so much fun.”

Sereck revealed a rare soft smile as he expertly sheathed his sword.

“What is your name?”

“Rhode. Rhode Alander.”

Rhode replied Sereck calmly.

“Rhode! What a great name! I like you, boy! In the Deep Stone City, you’re the first one to make me suffer a loss!”

Sereck patted Rhode’s shoulder and laughed.

In response to Sereck’s hearty reply, Rhode only slightly nodded to express his thanks. Then he turned towards the old man who was standing on the sidelines with an ugly expression.

“So, old man, did I pass the mercenary assessment?”

“This...”

Moby revealed a rather ugly expression. In fact, when he saw Rhode’s skill, he already expected this outcome. However, this little devil still chose to ask him about the assessment directly. He could not accept this result and helplessly looked towards Sereck, non-verbally indicating for his assistance.

Facing the old president’s gaze, Sereck smiled cunningly and winked.

“Frankly, with your talent, being a mercenary is a waste... However, since this is your choice, it’s not my place to say anything else. However, with regards to the assessment, in my opinion, you’ve passed!”

Chapter 36

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

As for the mercenaries, this battle had been an eye-opener for them.

While Rhode's method of winning wasn't ethical, it wasn't a fair fight from the beginning anyway, since their level gap was like the sky and the ocean. Moreover, mercenaries weren't chivalrous knights; the winners always reign supreme over the losers.

From that day onwards, Rhode and Sereck's intense battle became a hot topic. Sereck's name had been famous for many years, but few witnessed his true power. Therefore, over time the mercenaries started to think that it was just a facade. However, after this battle, those thoughts were erased from their minds.

Apart from Sereck, Rhode's mysteriousness went up another notch. How can he, as a swordsman, summon two odd elemental spirits? Supposedly, only mages were able to that, but without a single chant? That was way too absurd. Therefore, the talk of the town was how Rhode managed to do what he did. Some people said it was a unique summoning spell, while some others insisted that he made use of a magic item. After all, this young man managed to use such a powerful magic weapon at the end of the battle, which implied that his identity was something extraordinary.

What made them even happier was that this powerful young man wanted to join in the ranks of mercenaries. From that day onwards, it meant that he would be a full-fledged mercenary. And at this moment, many mercenary groups were discussing on how could they recruit this young and powerful talent. While the results of the battle tilted towards Rhode's side at the end, but they knew of the level gap between both of them, and if it were a life-or-death battle, who knew who would emerge victorious? But since Rhode was able to push the usually calm Sereck to a corner, it was enough to prove

his ability. Furthermore, he was still very young, and his future will be promising.

Meanwhile, Rhode and Lize had already returned to the president's room. A smiling man stood beside the old president, facing towards Rhode and Lize.

“Since you've already passed the assessment, from this day on, you are a mercenary. Congratulations.”

Even though he was congratulating Rhode, the old president's smile was stiff and fake, obviously displaying his displeasure about this matter.

“As for the mercenary rules and regulations, I think you already understood it clearly, so I won't waste my breath on it.” The old president said unhappily.

Rhode did not say anything since he knew Moby's personality. Anyway, since he had achieved his goal, he didn't care what the old president said as it had nothing to do with himself. Letting the elders vent their anger wasn't a big deal.

When the old president finally calmed down, he reached out his hand and fished out a scroll from a drawer. Moby glanced towards Lize who was sitting behind Rhode and noticed a calm look on her face. However, he still could spot a trace of slight displeasure from her expression. It wasn't because she had lingering worries about Rhode and Sereck's battle, but rather, it was because that the cloak she made for Rhode was torn and tattered after the fight. He had only worn it once, and yet it was already in this state. This made Lize's heart quite distressed.

A woman's mind is mysterious indeed.

“Lize... I admit that this kid is strong... but I still have to inform you that your decision is reckless. Individual strength is different from a whole mercenary group. Take a look at Sereck and Marl. No doubt that they're strong, but they are still part of a mercenary group because strength in numbers is far greater than a lone ranger.” The old president sighed and glanced towards Rhode. “There's no problem with this lad's strength, but a

mercenary group is not something that can be sustained by two people. Even though there's some time till the winter assessment, but I'm not certain if you'll be able to solve this problem by that time."

"I understand, Mr. President, sir."

Lize nodded. As a member of a mercenary group, she knew the difficulty of what was to come. But she didn't have the capabilities to do what needs to be done. If they wanted to survive, the most important issue to settle was the lack of members, which meant that she had to recruit more people. However, reliable new members were not easy to find, and the commander's position might be shaken if the management was not done right.

Even if Lize was a veteran of mercenary life, but she was still far too young, and she held a non-combat profession. It would be difficult to suppress anyone if they tried to overthrow her authority. On the other hand, Rhode was very strong, and a lot of mercenaries had observed his overwhelming might. However, he was a new mercenary and him being the leader would only create turbulence rather than stability.

Since it was her own mercenary group, Lize had her own values and ideals of how the group should develop. Many mercenary groups performed well in the beginning, but they fell to the temptation of underhanded means to gain funds, such as assassination. There were even more groups that lowered their heads and worked directly under nobility to collect taxes. These were no longer mercenaries, but thugs instead.

Of course, Lize didn't want her mercenary group to become like those vile and cowardly groups. But she was weak. Even with Rhode's support, if everyone refused to work under both of them, then everything would just become a fantasy.

"But it is pointless to say such things now."

Discovering the determination in her eyes, the old president no longer said anything and picked up the brush before staring at Rhode.

“Well, you’ve achieved your goal. According to the rules, when a group leader is replaced, the new leader is qualified to change the group name. Do you want to change it now?”

“Starlight.” Rhode responded almost immediately without hesitation.

After hearing the answer, the old president nodded his head. He bent down, wrote the name on the scroll, lifted the seal stamp next to him and pushed down hard. Next, he spun the scroll around towards Rhode.

“Press your fingerprint on it or sign your name.”

“No problem.”

When Rhode looked at the scroll, he couldn’t help but feel a wave of nostalgia rushing up his head. The scroll was somewhat familiar, but wasn’t identical. Back in the game, it appeared as an application form, but now, the old parchment felt slightly more immersive and had a historical feel to it. Rhode glanced towards Lize, and after receiving her approval, he took a deep breath before signing his name on the scroll.

“Ding!”

Suddenly, a sound rang in Rhode’s head and soon, a system prompt appeared before him.

[Mercenary group leader position obtained; Mercenary Group System unlocked]

Rhode glanced at it for a moment before shifting his gaze away. Slowly, he was getting accustomed to the weird, unscientific system prompts. Since these things already happened, thinking about it further would be meaningless. Therefore, his expression did not change much and he pushed the scroll back after signing.

After taking the scroll, the old man face revealed a smile, but faded soon after.

“Well, I’d hope to see your exploits in the future, lad.”

“I don’t think you will be disappointed.”

“I hope so...”

“But... there is one thing I want to remind both of you. Some spies from the Country of Light had arrived in the city. Although I do not know what they’re after, I suggest that you do not to mess with these people. ”

“I understand.”

After hearing the old president’s reminder, Rhode knitted his brows and frowned.

It’s coming.

After the two people left the room, the old president gave a bitter smile. He sat down and turned towards to his old buddy beside him.

“Old thing, what do you think about this kid? I doubt that he was sent by above.”

“You mean the Golden City?”

Sereck exposed a helpless smile.

“I don’t think so. If Lize was speaking the truth, then she and this lad should have met accidentally.”

“But if it’s not an accident, then this kid wanted to form a mercenary group...”

“Of course, I know.”

This time, Sereck did not deny the old president’s judgment.

“Not only he possesses a magical weapon, but his strength is also good. And his appearance is quite... beautiful? Frankly, his features did match with ‘that person’s’ aesthetic taste, so I can understand your thought. But if

there really was such a person, then there would be news from the Golden City.”

“After all, you and I know ‘that person’s’ personality, if he was her subordinate, then she would absolutely not hide him until now. And... that unusual way of fighting, I’ve never seen it before.” Sereck sighed.

“It wasn’t a summoning skill?”

The old president expression immediately became serious after hearing his sigh.

“Of course not. Both of us have experience with mages, and I’m pretty sure you had seen summoners before, right?”

“Definitely. But I had never really understood those deeper issues about mages.”

“That’s why you are a mercenary, old friend. Go read some books.”

“Well, let’s not talk about this topic anymore.”

When he heard Sereck’s friendly mocking tone, the old president face turned red.

“I leave this lad to you, Sereck. Pay some attention to him. A few days ago those b*stards from the Country of Light secretly came to this city; I think they are up to something. At this time, such a strange kid also appeared all of sudden... We do not want to get involved in whatever trouble that is brewing... at the very least, the Mercenary Association doesn’t want to.”

“Don’t worry.”

Sereck nodded with a serious expression.

“I’ll not let them give us trouble.”

Chapter 37

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Name: Starlight

Size: Small

Leader: Rhode Alander

Members: 1

Stronghold: None

Level: 1

Reputation: Obscure

Room Facilities: Training Room (Unbuildable), Bedroom (Unbuildable), Hall (Unbuildable), Towers (Locked), Library (Locked), Alchemy Room (Locked), Smithing Room (Locked)...

Looking at the system prompt before him, Rhode felt helpless. It was much lower than the starting point back in the game. When a player formed a guild, the system would determine whether the players would have reached the qualification through the application request, and then gift a stronghold to them at the same time. However, the stronghold wasn't even mentioned here.

After thinking about it, naturally, it was because, in the game, the players were required to complete many tasks to be qualified to apply for a group. And right now, he only paid a small price in return for this mercenary group. To make himself feel better, Rhode recalled that in the original Dragon Soul Continent, NPC mercenary groups owned very few strongholds, so it wasn't too surprising...

But because it was urgent, Rhode needed to purchase a stronghold for his mercenary group as a base.

Of course, this meant that he needed money. But fortunately, this was not something entirely impossible for him.

A knocking sound rang from the door, and Lize walked into the room. After resting for a night with clean clothes, she felt more energized. Once her eyes locked with Rhode's, she greeted him with a sweet smile on her face.

“Mr. Rhode, I'm ready.”

“Well okay then, let's go,” Rhode said calmly, and he stood up, walking out of the door.

Lize stared at him, puzzled. Then she hurriedly followed behind him.

Lize could not understand Rhode's decision. Although she did not agree, she did not object it either. Because before talking about that problem, they still have one more thing to deal with Li Jie for the idea of Rod is completely ignorant, although she did not agree, there is no objection. Because before the practical problems, there is a more practical problem to deal with, which was they lack money.

(To Winnie: Please check this paragraph above and change it when you go through the chapters. I have no idea who is Rod and Li Jie.)

After pooling the total amount of money acquired from the Fog Ruins and Matt's remuneration, they had at least a thousand gold coins. Furthermore, Rhode had her sell some gems and crystals to the shops in Deep Stone City for two thousand five hundred gold coins, but she knew that it was still not enough to buy a house in the noble district. Even the houses at the corners of the noble district had an astronomical price. Who could even earn that amount of money to buy it?

However, right now, Rhode was walking towards the noble districts with a confident expression. This piqued Lize's curiosity.

How can Rhode use this measly sum of coins to buy a house here in this district? It can't be that he is trying to rob right?

Recalling Rhode's past actions, this possibility didn't seem too far-fetched.

—

Top area, southwest corner.

Compared to the elegant, well-maintained villas along the way, the mansion in front of them was a total disaster. The bricks that formed the structure of the mansion were thoroughly corroded, and long, thick weeds crept along the outer walls. Apparently, this mansion had seen its better days. The once magnificent courtyard was now littered with garbage and feces of wild animals. Even the skies surrounding the mansion seemed rather gloomy.

And as if that wasn't enough, out of a sudden, a cold wind blew, accompanied by a complementary howl from wild dogs. Lize couldn't help but shiver at this scene.

The moment they entered the courtyard, she could sense the distinct change in atmosphere when compared to the exterior of the mansion. Just outside the mansion, the streets were clean and maintained, but the courtyard... was unnaturally cold, messy and dead. If one could measure the change of scenery in meters, then, perhaps it would be comparable to the distance from heaven to hell.

“Mr.. Mr. Rhode... are you really planning to buy t-this house?”

Lize subconsciously wrapped her arms around her body and stuttered in a low voice.

Rhode shook his head.

“It isn't a just plan.”

“Because I have already bought it.”

“...”

“...”

Suddenly, an awkward silence fell upon the duo as they stared at each other.

One second, two seconds, three seconds.

“What?!!”

Lize broke the silence. Her mind reeled in shock and her eyes snapped wide open as she subconsciously rejected what she heard. If it were any other person, she would've thought that they'd be joking. But this was Rhode, and she knew that she heard his words correctly.

“You... you said that you've already bought it?”

“Yes, they only asked me for 500 gold coins, it was really a good deal.”

“500 gold coins!”

Hearing this insane deal, Lize paused for a moment, then, as though she understood something surprising, she immediately covered her mouth in shock.

“This is Cyril's Haunted House!?”

In Deep Stone City, the infamous Cyril's Haunted House was a name that almost no one would want to speak of. Everybody knew it, but no one wanted to speak of it.

The Cyril family used to be a third-rate noble family in Deep Stone City. Unlike other families, the Cyril family's humble beginning began from art sculptures. The family head was Martin Cyril. He had an unimaginable talent in sculpting, especially sculpting the human body. All of his artworks were all lifelike and vivid. And him being recognized as the master sculptor in Deep Stone City wasn't any myth.

But it all changed because of a mysterious rock.

When Martin was 29 years old, he acquired a piece of white rock that he discovered from Deep Stone City's mine. While the details were not known, the master sculptor brought back this rock to his house to create his newest masterpiece.

At first, the people didn't care much about it. After all, as a master sculptor, he had his own pursuits in life. However, after some time, nobles began to be curious about what kind of art he could create from that rock. In the beginning, Martin's work cycle wasn't anything odd, and he would often lock himself in the room for a week, busying himself with the rock. This was when people started becoming excited about his next masterpiece.

But then, from that point on, strange things started to happen.

Cyril family maids began to disappear one after another, and no one knew what happened. As a noble family, the Cyril family could afford to send a lot of people to find the missing people, but surprisingly, those people too, disappeared.

As time passed, not only the maids disappeared, other nearby people started disappearing too. It caused the nobles to panic. And not long after, a huge, major event befell the Cyril family. Martin Cyril's wife and daughter disappeared.

At this point, the people forgot about the masterpiece that Martin was working on and burst into his workroom, hoping that he had a solution to this problem. But alas, a horrific scene greeted them. They saw broken limbs scattered everywhere, and Martin's wife and daughter weren't spared either. Their remains were hanging from the ceiling while the master sculptor sat in the middle of the room, stroking a sculpture of a woman beside him.

The next thing that happened was very simple.

Martin was promptly apprehended, and he admitted that he had killed all those missing women. But he believed that their death was justified because it was for the perfection of art. By sacrificing their lives, they had performed a noble act, and it was worthy of respect.

Any sane person wouldn't be satisfied with his explanation and Deep Stone City sentenced him to death. But what happened next was incredibly surprising. After receiving his sentence, he somehow escaped the prison and turned mad. In order to catch him, the Deep Stone City garrison, mercenary association, and some nobles sent people to hunt him down. However, they did not anticipate that the weak master sculptor could actually slaughter dozens of advanced warriors and hundreds of soldiers. In the end, Martin succumbed to death after overextending his stamina in his workroom.

This tragedy shocked the entire Deep Stone City. Many people believed that the rock contained magic and tempted the master sculptor into becoming a murderous devil. And that very rock, which was carefully guarded by the city guards, mysteriously disappeared on the second day of Martin's death.

For a period, the whole Deep Stone City became unstable. A large number of Cyril family sculptures were smashed and destroyed. After that, the matter was gradually forgotten as time passed. But it was a pity that even after his death, he still attracted the attention of others.

The first victim was a noble family that had a good relationship with the Cyril family, and they came to take care of the property. However, after a month, all of them were found dead in the dining room, and in front of the corpses were decaying food that hadn't been touched by anyone for a long time.

Two years later, a second victim was struck. A wealthy merchant moved out from the city and migrated here. To assimilate into the upper society in the quickest way possible, he disregarded advice from others and bought this property. His ending was no better than the people from before. Half a month later, the wealthy merchant and all of his servants were found dead, hanging themselves from the ceiling. It was just as though they were happy going to heaven together.

The connection between these two terrible events caused people to avoid this haunted house. Even the Deep Stone City was helpless about this. And because of that, they had put the lowest price for it. Needless to say, 500

gold coins for such a large house was a terrific bargain, so, some people still gathered the courage to purchase it.

This time, the house owner was smarter, not only did he spend money to refurbish the house, but he also spent money to hire a team of strong mercenaries to guard the house.

But this time, it was even more unfortunate. The house owner didn't even last until the second day. Not a glimpse of light shone out of the house ever since then.

Of course, no one was even going to confirm the result since it was already clear as day.

Naturally, Lize had heard this since she was a resident of Deep Stone City for many years. So now that Rhode actually bought this house, she couldn't help but shiver in fright.

“M-Mr. Rhode, do you know what this place is? This place is h-...”

“Of course I know.” Rhode waved his hand and interrupted her.

Not only did he know what happened before, but he also knew what would happen after. This was a place where the hidden boss was located. Back in the game, Cyril's Haunted House was one of his first few hidden quests. Therefore, he could still remember the questline vividly. However, now, it was different from before as he had enough preparation to beat this hidden boss.

“Don't worry; it's just a house. Moreover... I have made enough preparations for what is to come.”

Rhode and Lize walked through the disordered courtyard and reached the entrance of the house. Through the slits of the decaying door, the darkness inside could be seen clearly. Rhode stretched out his hand and placed it on the door, then he turned his head and looked at Lize who had a nervous expression on her face.

“Are you ready?”

Chapter 38

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“What did you say?!”

The old president stood up abruptly.

“That little devil brought Lize to Cyril’s Haunted House??”

“I, too, just received the news, old buddy.”

Sereck made a withered smile and said, “At first, I wanted to look for them and ask about their plans. But they’re long gone by then. Not long after then I learned that they went to the City Hall to buy Cyril’s property.”

“Needless to say, after seeing his courageous move, I was very optimistic about his future.”

“Nonsense! Simply nonsense!”

The old president slammed the table.

“That place isn’t some casual area that they can visit. Immediately pull them back!”

Sereck shook his head. “It’s too late. They’re already inside.”

But soon, a smile emerged from his face.

“But thinking about it, old friend, why are you so anxious? Didn’t you hate people who broke mercenary rules? Isn’t it for the better now if both of them disappeared. Their mercenary group would be immediately disbanded and you’ll gain one more slot. Why bother with them now?”

“That is that, and this is this!”

The old president frowned. Apparently, he was very dissatisfied.

“That kid had just been appointed as a guild leader, but the first action he took didn’t have the responsibility of his members in mind. Sereck, hurry to the haunted house. Perhaps it isn’t too late to salvage the situation.”

“Do not be so nervous, old friend, maybe things are not as bad as you think,” Sereck said calmly.

The old president revealed a puzzled expression.

“What do you mean?”

After so many years with Sereck, the old president understood that he wasn’t a ruthless character. Since he said those words, he must have realized something.

“...Nothing.”

After neglecting the president’s curiosity on purpose, Sereck shrugged and spread out his hands, revealing an elegant smile.

“You had never fought him before, so you might not understand him. But I’m different... Perhaps... this young man may even create a miracle. Since he dared to buy the mansion, he definitely had a plan to resolve that haunted house issue. As for us, we just have to watch quietly on the sidelines.”

“Also, what did you say to Lize...? That this is a gamble? Yes. This is a gamble, so we also have to gamble on him. If Rhode could solve this mystery curse, then it is a good thing for us. I believe that he has the ability to do so.”

“Hmph. It’s just the pride of young people.” The old president snorted in disdain.

“Just because he revealed his extraordinary power and now he thinks he is invincible. There are many of such fools, and he isn’t any different.”

But Sereck merely grinned and countered, “But there are also many geniuses.”

“Whether this kid is a fool or a genius, we currently don’t know, but I think that it will all be revealed soon.”

The old president rolled his eyes. “I just think that it is too... exaggerated.”

“Frankly... if it weren’t for the fact that you’d never left Deep Stone City for decades, I would really doubt that you didn’t have any relation to this kid since you care for him so much.”

“...And I’d love to have anything to do with him.” Sereck sighed.

“I’m getting old... Although I did not feel like this yesterday, but after those events... sigh...”

Sereck shifted his gaze upwards and sighed once more.

“Thinking back, what did I do when I was at his age? Now, look at this group of children... Don’t you feel that we can’t keep up with the time anymore?”

“But history will still have our place.”

The old president played with his pen in his hand as he spoke.

“Young people have their own glory, and we also have our own pride. And now is not the time for you to feel old... Alright, since you believe in him so much, then I won’t interfere anymore. But, if there’s still no movement in three days, then you must be ready to take people to collect their corpses.”

—

In the gloomy corridor, the rotting wooden planks creaked under heavy pressure.

Although right now, the current state of the house was in total chaos, but once upon a time, it was an elegant and gorgeous estate with dark red velvet carpets, intricate sculptures, and brilliant crystalline chandeliers.

However, as the saying goes: time washes away everything. In this case, time slowly destroyed the splendor of the house.

The cold wind sifted through the fractures in the glass windows and ruffled the curtains. A huge chandelier sprawled on the floor, with its crystals strewn all over the room. And on the walls, the once beautiful paintings were covered in blemishes and cobwebs.

While the scene looked aesthetically unpleasing, it certainly checked all the boxes of a haunted house theme.

—

Crash.

Rhode smacked his hands together to rid the residue dust on his sleeve after he threw a rotted wooden table at his feet, to the side.

Like a frightened rabbit, Lize jumped once she heard the noise and turned around to stare at Rhode with a pale face.

“W-What are you doing, Mr. Rhode?”

“Cleaning up.”

He made a hand gesture and signaled the Spirit Bird to conjure a strong wind to sweep the dust that had been accumulating throughout the years.

Rhode then faced towards Lize with his usual indifferent expression and said, “After all, no one had lived in this ghostly place for a few years. It’s time to throw away these things... As a mercenary group stronghold, we don’t require a decor like those noble houses; it’s so much trouble, just a simple decor would do. Ah, but this carpet quality is not bad, we can keep it, what do you think?”

“Si, sir!”

Lize almost cried when she saw Rhode acting like he just bought a new house and came to decorate the layout.

The pressure on Lize wasn't little. After all, she heard nasty rumors about this haunted house. This house had claimed the lives of many young women and soldiers, and as a result, her inner danger perception was constantly on high alert. Even a slight rustle of the curtain could startle her. This couldn't be blamed on her though. Despite facing death multiple times in the face, she hadn't fought against an enemy that couldn't be seen.

Rhode obviously noticed her alarmed expression, but he did not say anything. He recalled that the first time he came here, he also acted like her, carefully examining every corner of the house since he was afraid that a monster would suddenly appear out of nowhere. But at that time, even Rhode did not expect that the danger would come at the most unexpected moment. But now, he was familiar with the quest process and was quite disappointed that he'd once felt terribly afraid of it. After all, it was his first time being that dreadfully frightened.

Even though he said he was 'cleaning', but it was nothing more than a facade. Although he had already received the deed of the land from the city hall, his mercenary group system didn't recognize the stronghold. This meant that they had not completed the requirements, which was to clear this haunted house. That was why he brought Lize here to help him as she was the best candidate with her holy skills. And since his only subordinate was Lize, he had to somehow find a way to train her to keep up with his speed. However, Lize wasn't a player, and thus, he couldn't blatantly say things like: 'C'mere, let's complete this quest together and level up.' One must realize that NPCs in the game leveled up differently from the player. As such, Rhode had no choice but to trick this poor girl to come here with him.

The sun finally went down.

Darkness crept in and shrouded the skies. Now, the already-dark house was even darker. Only the fireplace in the center of the hall emitted a source of light.

“Mr. Rhode, I think we should go back. We can still clean up tomorrow.”

Lize felt increasingly uncomfortable the darker the house became. It wasn't a physical feeling, but rather it was an instinctive sense of danger.

“No need. Let us just take a break here, since this is our stronghold.”

He was very clear about her uncomfortable feeling right now. When he entered this area he received a system prompt —— Entered the evil domain.

To the beings belonging to the light, evil and darkness was their biggest foe. The eternal opposition between good and evil clearly drawn the line between the two sides. This means that if one entered the domain of the opposition, an absolute pressure would bear down upon them. And right now, since Lize was in the evil domain, she would feel oppressed by the surroundings and would feel uneasy. After all, she was a half angel, half human, so at least she was still able to maintain this state.

It's almost time.

Once he confirmed the quest trigger from his memories, he reached out his hand and summoned a bright red card quietly.

Clang...!

And finally, at this time, a loud cry rang out.

Chapter 39

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Clang... Clang... Clang...

It was a bell sound.

The sound echoed in the dark. It was as though it rang deeply in the hearts of people. Rhode stood up and scanned his surroundings meticulously, and at the same time, he clenched the card on his palm.

“Lize.”

“Ah, yes!”

“Do you still remember what we did in that town before?”

“I remember!”

Once she recalled her previous encounter, Lize immediately remembered what she was supposed to do. Her body posture was firm as she illuminated the air around them with a warm, light ball. And as though something reacted to the holy light, a strong wind suddenly blew, causing the embers to scatter in all directions.

“Mr. Rhode, is this enemy something similar to what we fought back then?”

“Its characteristics are somewhat similar.”

“...”

Hearing Rhode’s indifferent reply, Lize’s heart finally became a lot calmer. If it were in the past, she would undoubtedly be unable to keep her composure. However, after gaining experience from the battle in the Fog Ruins, she was elated that she found out that her ability could gain the

upper hand with those terrifying monsters. After all, ever since forever, her role was to stand behind the frontlines, unable to help directly.

But now, it was all different. Under special circumstances, she could participate in battles as well and not just rely on the protection of her team. This gave Lize a staggering amount of confidence. Thus, once she heard Rhode mention about Fog Ruins, her fear of this haunted house reduced somewhat.

Since Rhode mentioned about it, then he must have a way !

Subconsciously, Lize began to trust and rely on Rhode who she had just known not too long ago.

The battle already started.

Rhode raised his vigilance. He swept his gaze carefully at his surroundings, but without any warning, in a quick motion, he flipped his right hand. The Star Mark appeared on Rhode's hand, and he immediately sliced towards the darkness without any hesitation. In a fluid motion, he followed up by throwing out his sword. Suddenly, a scorching wave of flames formed at the position of his sword, which soon unveiled a black hound covered in flames.

The Flame Killer.

The fire hound immediately went into its battle stance. It arched its body towards the back and gripped the ground tightly with its claws. The Flame Killer then gave a low roar. As an elemental creature, it had a keen sense of danger, which in turn, responded with a growl instinctively.

“Lize, cast a shield over yourself. Remember, if you encounter any danger, the first thing you must do is to use a healing spell... I think you know how to do that.”

“Yes, sir.”

After being reassured with his confidence, Lize quickly calmed down. Rhode nodded his head slightly with satisfaction. With his keen observation, he felt that this girl was almost perfect in her meticulous nature, but it was a pity that she had no definite goal. So when he issued a command to Lize, her personality immediately changed, and she wasn't the scared and frightened girl from before.

“Follow me.”

Rhode turned around and walked towards the hall.

There was a deathly silence along the exterior corridor.

A chilling wind blew continuously through the broken windows. The frame kept slamming against the window sill, causing eerie echoes throughout the house.

At the first glance, nothing seemed to be different.

However, some nasty beings were already in motion.

Rhode noticed a shadow moving, and it finally hid in a corner. The Flame Killer also growled in excitement. From behind its razor-sharp canine teeth, an intense light gathered in its throat, and tiny licks of flame flickered around its mouth.

Suddenly, a human sculpture that was missing half of its body appeared out of the darkness and flew towards him, as if something hurled it.

It's coming!

Facing this attack, Rhode flicked his sword towards the incoming sculpture, slicing it cleanly into two.

Boom!

The sculpture broke apart when it landed on the floor. At the same time, Lize felt a shiver down her spine.

She subconsciously turned around and discovered a bluish human figure on the steps of the stairs.

These were evil spirits that existed on this continent. A tragic soul that couldn't leave the world because an evil source of power had tainted them. They were nothing more than a former husk of its previous self, possessing no sentience, but only deep hatred towards the living. And of course, as a Spirit Master, Lize certainly had considerable knowledge of them.

Now that she had been through the Fog Ruins, she had even more confidence to deal with this evil spirit. Thus, she formed her own strategy in her mind before attacking the evil spirit unhesitatingly.

However, just before she could take action, Rhode stretched out his arm towards Lize's shoulder.

“Mr. Rhode?”

Sensing Rhode's odd behavior, she turned around with surprise in her eyes.

“There is a better way, Lize.”

Facing Lize's doubtful gaze, Rhode's expression maintained its tranquility. He lowered his head and whispered something to Lize. When she heard what he said, slowly, her expression turned from doubt, to surprise, and finally to joy.

“I will try my best Mr. Rhode.

“Very good, then leave the rest to me.”

More than a dozen of evil spirits appeared and surrounded the duo. Their ethereal forms floated in the air as they stretched out their arms and screamed. They rushed over with the intention to tear apart their living bodies.

However, their rash actions were futile.

To the side, the black hound that had been dying for battle, leaped and launched a sea of flames from its terrifying jaws towards the evil spirits.

The ultimate weakness of undead creatures was the holy element, but closely following that was the fire element. In this battle, Rhode possessed both of them. That was the reason why he wasn't afraid of challenging this quest. If it was only by himself, he would surely not play with his life with a measly 500 gold coins.

When faced with Fire Breath, the evil spirits screamed in agony. Their ethereal bodies were immune to physical attacks, but it was useless against magical attacks. Soon, two to three spirits disappeared as they died to the fire elemental attack. Fire Breath had no way to discern its targets and resulted in the furniture being caught in the flames as well.

The evil spirits formation began to weaken, and at this time, Rhode activated Shadow Flash.

In a flash, as though he was a swallow flying over the fence, a dull shadow passed through the wall of flames unhindered. Before the evil spirits could even react, a white sword had already penetrated through their cores. One by one, they fell like flies.

Swoosh.

An evil spirit that attempted to block the attack was sliced into two like a hot knife through butter. Soon, the rest of the evil spirits somehow managed to comprehend that he wasn't a foe to be trifled with and they retreated with great haste. They flew towards the wall and disappeared.

The stairs then began to shake.

A rusty armor suddenly made a creaking sound. It slowly raised a gigantic sword over its head and smashed down towards Rhode.

But before it could even pull the attack off, the black hound noticed and preemptively sprayed its flame towards the armor.

[EXP 360/2500]

Not enough.

Rhode glanced at the prompt with the side of his eyes and found that his experience gain was too slow. It was far below the time at Twilight Forest. But it was no mystery why. Since these evil spirits weren't elite monsters, he could easily kill a dozen of them. Thus, naturally the experience wouldn't be worth much. But to Rhode, there was more important things to be done.

Rhode saw his system prompt and found that his experience increased too slow, it was far beyond the time at the Twilight Forest. But it was no wonder. After all, these evil spirits were not elite monsters and he could easily kill a dozen, so naturally, the experience wasn't worth that much... But to Rhode, there were more important things that he needed to do.

He turned his head and stared at the girl on the stairs.

Rhode could hear the screams of the evil spirits clearly.

Observing the cold and dead figure, Lize raised her right hand as she recalled Rhode's words from before.

“The healing light's usage isn't only for healing wounds. Remember: Condense, overlap, and compress. Then cast it. I believe that you can do it.”

Condense...

She could sense the sacred power coalescing by her own will and slowly reaching its peak. According to the process, she could already cast the healing light, but she did not do so.

Overlap...

The sacred power continued to condense and fluctuate. She realized that after reaching a certain point, the concentration gradually became effortless.

Compress...

Once the two types of sacred powers began to merge, Lize's spirit power was already hitting the limit. Her palms were trembling and her expression was as though she couldn't keep it in any longer.

At this time, some evil spirits managed to use the delayed casting time to rush to her side.

When Lize regained consciousness, an evil spirit with hollow eyes brimming with deep hatred suddenly appeared before her. She subconsciously took half a step back and the energy on her hands vanished because of her fear. At that moment, a sword emerged from behind and pierced through the evil spirit.

"Again," Rhode said with a calm tone.

"Yes."

Lize bit her lips and raised her hand once again. Learning from her failed experience, she quickly condensed the energy between her hands. Staring at the evil spirit from afar, Lize clenched her teeth and reached forward with her right hand.

Swoosh!

A brilliant light appeared from thin air. The beam that was as thick as a pillar, engulfed the evil spirits in an area of attack and before those spirits could react, they turned to ashes.

"Eh?"

Lize retracted her hand and watched what happened before her with surprise. Of course, she knew that the healing spell could damage undead creatures, but she didn't expect that it was THAT powerful.

Holy soul bless me...

Can this even be called a healing spell? The power completely overwhelms the temple bishop's Hammer of Trial.

However, before she could even switch her expression from shock to joy, Rhode's calm words was like a cold bucket of water splashed across her face as he pulled her back to reality

“Keep up the work. This is just the beginning.”

Chapter 40

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

This battle was somewhat odd. It was dark and silent, yet intense.

From the exterior, no one could tell that an intense battle was raging within. The indication that a battle was happening were the sporadic flashes of light leaking out the windows.

The Star Mark curved in an arc.

Whoosh

Countless of decaying wood flew in all directions whenever the white sword hacked down. And after every slash, a bright, red flame would soon follow as it incinerated the evil spirits. As much as they tried to escape through the walls, they still couldn't outrun the sea of flames and were eventually swallowed. Besides the leftover burn marks, not even a piece of slag was left behind.

Rhode and the Flame Killer's teamwork steadily improved as they battled the evil spirits. He used this quest not only to temper Lize's skill, but also to build his teamwork with his summoning spirit. After all, the summoning spirit that he possessed had various variations, and the three cards in his deck right now were cards that he had never obtained before in the game. While he did have experience with similar cards, ultimately, the characteristics were still different, so he still had to do trial and error to find out the most efficient way. The battle with Sereck was a good example. If he was familiar with the Flame Killer's personality and character, the match probably wouldn't have ended as a draw, but a win instead.

However, although there weren't any 'ifs' in this world, it didn't mean that there was no way to make up for it either.

Rhode retrieved his sword and retreated. This sudden change in behavior caused the evil spirits to swarm over. However, how can it be that easy to overcome Rhode? The moment he retreated, the black hound switched positions with him and launched a breath of fire towards the evil spirits.

One covered while one retreated. Their timing was impeccable.

And once again, the flame swept over and engulfed the evil spirits. These low-level evil spirits who were even weaker than the will-o-wisps were ideal opponents for practice.

Lize's face was tense. Her right arm was constantly in motion as she cast light beams one after another. Whenever the holy rays poured from the heavens, multiple evil spirits would wither and perish. Indeed, this Spirit Master was a fast learner. Within less than an hour, she was already able to master it. Now, she even attempted to alter the strength and speed of the skill...

Rhode knew that this method of casting was somewhat unorthodox. Although the skill itself didn't differentiate between good or evil, but the element still had to correspond with the spell used. For example, just like a stone, as long it has the title 'stone' in it, it will be a meaning object that existed in the world. Spells were the same, while it had its own mysterious definition and letters, water spells were still water spells, and ice spells were ice spells. If one treated water and ice as one, or vice versa, then the result wouldn't be favorable.

Lize was at such a stage. Since she wasn't at level 10 yet, she didn't have the means to learn the holy spell 'Sword of Judgment'. However, that didn't mean that it was impossible to cast. Since she had an half-angel bloodline, it could make up for her other half which would weaken her holy power. And furthermore, it was beneficial for her to adapt to the attack rhythm as soon as possible.

"Keep focusing on the rhythm of the spell. The enemy's speed isn't fast, but you still have to pay attention to your own safety. Some undead monsters possess long-range abilities..." Rhode said calmly without looking at Lize,

and suddenly, his eyes flashed to the side, “For example... the one on the left!”

He tugged Lize’s collar abruptly and pulled her to safety. Less than a second later, a fiendish green light sped by her previous position and smashed into the wall nearby. After confirming that she didn’t sustain any injuries, she looked towards the source of the attack and discovered a few skeletons holding bows and arrows aiming towards them.

The eerie and desolate, empty eye sockets lit up in the darkness like fireflies in the night.

As expected, it’s coming.

Rhode clenched his sword tightly. If it were just mere evil spirits that dwelled in this haunted mansion, it would be impossible for them to last so long. Deep Stone City didn’t lack any strong warriors. Even the ‘Light Swordsman’ could singlehandedly slaughter these mindless monsters. Thus, this mansion undoubtedly housed something much more mysterious, and terrifying. Now, the actual battle had just begun.

“Lize, cast your shield above now!” Rhode shouted suddenly. He raised his sword above his head and pointed his left hand towards the front. Upon receiving Rhode’s command, the Flame Killer rushed forward immediately and broke past the barricade of evil spirits before landing right in the middle of the skeleton archers.

Fwee...

The greenish arrow shot out once again. But it was deflected off the protective shield that Lize cast.

Rhode shifted his stance and used his sword to parry the evil spirits circling them.

Suddenly, he reached out, grabbed Lize’s hand and said, “Let’s move. Don’t forget to re-cast your shield over yourself.” Before she could even reply, he

immediately pulled her out of the encirclement and ran out towards the left side of the stairs.

The skeleton archers didn't possess much threat in melee attacks. Before they could launch a counterattack, the black hound had already rushed towards their flanks and tore their formation apart with its ferocious claws. Those fortunate ones who managed to escape the first wave of attacks immediately suffered from a sea of flames.

Third floor.

When Rhode reached the third floor, he could faintly hear the clashes between the skeleton archers and his black hound. Occasionally, a roar would shake the entire mansion. Rhode knew that the black hound wouldn't last much longer against the myriad of archers. However, since it didn't matter because he could quickly resummon it after its death as long he had enough soul power, he didn't worry too much.

"S-sir, it can't be that you're thinking of burning down this place, right?" Lize asked with a worried expression.

Rhode glanced at her oddly, "No, I'm not planning to tear down this place. After all, this is our stronghold..."

After saying that, he raised his sword and swung it in a downward arc.

Clang! His sword collided with something tremendously heavy, causing Rhode's sword to bend at an awkward angle before being forcibly rammed into the wall. Although the thin, wooden wall cushioned the impact, Rhode still lost his balance.

"Now!" Rhode shouted to Lize who was hiding behind him and she immediately stretched out her hand, casting another light beam.

The beam swiftly landed on the new undead monsters, but compared to the evil spirits from before, the vitality of these undead were clearly superior. After receiving the full brunt of the attack from Lize, they merely took a

few steps back. At the same time, the area surrounding them was lit up by the attack.

Finally, they could make out the features of their foes.

A decaying skeleton that had a gaping hole in its abdomen appeared before them. The undead towered almost at two meters high; rotting flesh hung at the edges. It wore a damaged armor while wielding a sword that was severely chipped. Although it was stronger than the evil spirits, it still couldn't help but retreat several steps. After all, the holy element was not something an undead could resist.

"This is..." Lize stared at the monster with a disgusted face.

"This is a zombie... I will initiate the attack. Pay attention to both sides."

Rhode arched his body downwards and jumped nimbly towards the nearest handrail. While in the air, he twisted his body and dipped his sword downwards, generating the momentum which caused his body to spin, violently slashing towards the giant zombie's chest.

When Rhode's attack was about to reach the zombie, a sword suddenly appeared from the darkness and parried it. The zombie didn't waste time and used the opportunity to launch a crazed attack towards Rhode. It opened both of its palms and rushed forward. A normal human definitely wouldn't use this kind of self-harming move, but for an undead, it didn't feel any pain so these sort of attacks were terrifyingly dangerous.

However, Rhode's demeanor didn't change the slightest. He flipped over his right palm and a ripple effect formed by rays of light emerged from the sword.

Sharp Edge Technique, activate!

Just when the zombie was about to grab Rhode, his sword gleamed and split the left shoulder of the zombie cleanly. With the buff on his sword, his strikes became even more deadly. It didn't matter if it was dry skin or thick bones, his sword would slice through all of them easily. Another slash came

in quick succession and sliced the entire left arm off as easily as though it was paper.

The sword appeared once again as it hacked down towards Rhode.

At the rear, Lize's expression tensed up. When the zombie attempted its first sword attack on Rhode, she had detected this malicious intention lingering in the shadows. Before she could speak to him, the sword was already beside Rhode and in a few seconds, that sword would cut Rhode's head off.

But Rhode pulled off an unexpected move.

Instead of dodging the sword by retreating, he leaned his body towards the source of the attack as though he lost his balance. The sword which followed its intended trajectory, missed its target and slashed at empty space.

The body emitted a putrid stench, and Rhode couldn't help but gag slightly. But soon, he managed to regain his composure and rammed his shoulder into the decaying body before raising his sword to his front.

A brilliant light emerged from the tip of his sword, and he drew a beautiful crescent moon as he swung his sword gracefully downwards. However, while it may seem harmless, the attack was nothing less than fatal.

The undead body finally stopped moving. Dark lines slowly appeared on the body where Rhode had cut.

“Sigh...”

Rhode stood on the top of the giant undead carcass as he patted the dust and decaying matter off his shoulder. Back in the game, he couldn't experience – nor did he want to experience this foul stench. But since this was the real world now, he could finally understand why the description of the zombie was ‘zombies had a strong stench.’ He was even thinking of discarding this set of clothes that he wore today.

“Let’s continue to move on.”

Chapter 41

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The situation wasn't good.

The evil spirits on the first floor were low-level monsters, but the undead was on another level altogether. Although they were dead, they still retained their fighting instinct. On the exterior, their rotting, decaying bodies might seem fragile, but it still could withstand a full blast of holy energy. This forced Rhode and Lize to utilize the most common formation: Two at the front and one at the back. Rhode and the Flame Killer acted as the vanguard while Lize stayed at the back to cast supportive skills. At this point of time, Lize no longer retained selfish thoughts about taking part in the battle anymore.

Rhode had almost arrived at his destination.

He scrutinized the patterns on the wall and compared it to his memories. At the same time, he waved his sword and tore through the undead's defense. As an intense light spread out, it pierced through the decaying bodies mercilessly, pinning their bodies to the wall on the side.

While he continued to move forward, at the back, Lize creased her brows together in annoyance.

The undead who blocked their path did not only consist of mercenary corpses, but there were also undead servants and even undead children! All of these were the previous victims of this cursed house, and because they were under an evil spell, they were reanimated and forced to do evil acts.

"What kind of horrible being would do something terrible like this?" Lize clenched her teeth in anger as she muttered under her breath.

"Every vile being is capable of doing something evil. This is no exception," Rhode answered without looking at her. He concentrated on cutting down

the undead in front of him while his other hand resummoned the Flame Killer.

“But this is too much!”

Suddenly, an undead wearing a maid uniform that appeared out of nowhere, it opened its horrifying mouth and rushed towards Rhode.

Slash!

“The original source of power came from humans,” Rhode said while piercing the undead’s forehead with Star Mark. Then he swung his sword to his side and continued, “No matter what’s the motives, the result won’t change.”

“And that’s why, when you made a decision, you also have to face the consequences.”

“Eh?”

Lize was stunned for a moment. She never thought that Rhode would say such a thing. But before she could reply, something cold and heavy fell suddenly latched onto her shoulders.

“Ah!!”

The pain caused her to scream loudly. When she turned around, her entire body immediately stiffened.

Her terror-filled eyes locked with the empty sockets of an undead child on her back. The grey, decaying undead being opened its mouth, releasing a putrid stench of rotting meat. Its two tiny hands had clamped on her shoulders like a cat.

When it realized that Lize had discovered its presence, it quickly climbed up and targeted Lize’s neck. At this time, a white flash of light streaked past the undead child, causing it to pause for a moment before falling to the floor, headless. The body that lost its head swiftly disintegrated into dust and disappeared in a crack on the floor.

“_____”

Lize stared at the ground blankly for a few seconds. She didn't arouse until Rhode called out to her.

“Be careful.”

“Ah, yes!”

After the sudden adrenaline rush, Lize felt a stinging pain on her shoulder. She hastily removed the poison from her body and recast a shield over herself once again. However, she still felt that something was off.

No more enemies?

Staring at her front, she realized that the zombies surrounding them had already turned into dust, and the scene was eerily quiet.

“What happened...?”

“It seems like that the enemy is thinking of another strategy to deal with us.”

Rhode flicked his sword to the side and turned to Lize. When he spotted the wound, he frowned a little.

“How is it?”

“I-it's okay. It's nothing much...”

Lize stood up and replied in a low voice. The scene from before had caused some shock to her, and she had yet to recover from it.

“Let me see.” Rhode insisted as he eyed the edges of the wound before lowering himself towards her. However, he did not forget that he was in enemy territory, so he signaled the Flame Killer to be alert for any movement.

“No.. really...! It's nothing...!”

Lize started to panic. She subconsciously wrapped her arms around her shoulder and shook her head vigorously.

“Let. Me. See.”

Rhode was indifferent to her rejection and repeated himself again.

“...”

Lize went silent for a moment before deciding to put down her hand.

The wounded areas were easily spotted as there were ten blood stained holes on her back which contrasted against her white robe. Dark, red blood slowly oozed out from the wound and trickled downwards.

Rhode then wasted no time as he tore off her outer garments surrounding the wound.

“Have you removed the poison?”

“Yes, there should be no problem.”

“That’s good.”

Rhode nodded and did not continue to say anything. He took out a bottle on his waist and began to dress the wound.

“_____ !!!”

A sharp sensation came over her and Lize bit her lower lip in an attempt to alleviate the pain. When she looked up and saw Rhode focusing on bandaging her wound, her heart felt extremely complex.

“Mr. Rhode...”

“Yes?”

“This... I’m very sorry about before... I didn’t pay attention...”

“Do not apologize to me. It’s not like I was the one injured.”

“Uh...”

Lize was speechless before she suddenly burst out laughing.

“So, sorry, I...”

“As I said, do not apologize to me.”

“Ah, yes, right...” Lize said with a gentle laugh.

She finally found out the problem. She smiled and did not continue to say anything as she quietly observed at the man before her.

What kind of person is he?

Lize had questioned this herself countless of times. Before she became a mercenary, she had seen a lot of people. And after becoming a mercenary, she had met even more. But after so long, she had not discovered one that was similar to Rhode. He was just a little bit older than herself, but he was full of confidence and never doubted his own words. Sometimes, he was even overbearing, but how did she trust him so much? Of course, this man isn’t even romantic; he rarely smiled, which made him very boring...

“Alright.”

Rhode’s words cause Lize to recover from her surprise and to her surprise, she realized that her injury was already cleanly dressed.

“Try to move your shoulder. Is there any problem?”

“It’s okay if I don’t move it too much...”

As a Spirit Master, naturally, she knew how to take care of herself. If it weren’t because that the wound was located in a difficult place, she wouldn’t need to bother Rhode to help her.

“Very good.”

Rhode nodded and stood up.

“Be prepared. We will continue to move soon. We don’t have much time to waste.”

From the previous battle, the undead realized that Rhode was very strong and no longer appeared needlessly. Everything was quiet, but the two of them knew that this was the calm before the storm. He calculated based on his experience on clearing quests, and Lize relied on her experience as a mercenary as well as her angel instinct. Soon, they arrived at a door; it was the only object that was still clean and intact in the house. And in a dilapidated house with cobwebs and debris all over, without a doubt, there was something strange about this door. However, Rhode easily recognized this place. It was Cyril’s sculpting room, the beginning of everything.

“There’s something inside...”

Lize swallowed her saliva nervously. She felt her shoulder stiffen. A dense and suffocating aura of evil escaped from the gap beneath the door. This was her first time experiencing such a thick aura that could almost be felt physically.

Rhode opened the door slowly.

And what they saw next, rendered them entirely speechless.

If they wanted to use a single word to describe this... scene, what could they use?

Evil? Filthy? Dirty?

That wasn’t it.

The feeling that came from this room was ——— holy.

A white world appeared before them. Everything was clean and seemingly sanctified. Gorgeous, white pillars supported the domed shape interior, and rays of moonlight shone through the hole in the ceiling. And under that moonlight, a statue stood in tranquility.

It was a woman.

She was naked, her hand was covering her body, and her hair was long. It had a beautiful unworldly face; its meticulously crafted facial features, a touch of playfulness in its beautiful smile, anyone who saw her at first glance would not hesitate to think that this was the most beautiful work of art.

“So beautiful...”

Even Lize could not help but praise it. At this moment, the evil atmosphere, the strange undead, all seemed to be unimportant and what only matters was the existence of the statue. She had an uncontrollable impulse to walk forward and admire the statue close-up, but Rhode quickly grabbed her shoulder.

“Ah.”

When she was pulled suddenly, she felt surprised and slightly annoyed, but it also managed to bring back her clarity. At the same time, Rhode whistled and gestured forward. The Flame Killer rushed towards the statue immediately without hesitation, and when it got close, it unleashed its terrifying claws and teeth.

But alas, it wasn't enough.

“Swoosh!!”

Multiple slender arms suddenly appeared from the walls and floor and wrapped around the Flame Killer's body and limbs.

“Woo!!”

The black hound struggled with all its might. It even tried to bite the arm that wrapped around its front paw, but the slender arms did not wait for the black hound to retaliate before quickly tearing apart its trapped foe. Upon death, the black hound's explosive characteristics activated once again.

“Boom!!!”

A massive pillar of fire filled in the room, and at the same time, a sharp cry resounded from the sky!

Chapter 42

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“AHH———!!!”

The whole room shook violently when a terrifying screech pierced the air. It was as though a hundred of people screamed at the same time. The white tiles on the floor began to tear apart because of the explosion. It was until then that Lize realized why the room was entirely white — the 'tiles' were made out of bones that compressed against each other till no gaps could be seen!

A chill ran down Lize's spine. If not for Rhode's timely reminder, she could imagine herself entering this horrifying room and who knew what would happen to her after that?

Lize subconsciously turned towards Rhode who was standing beside her, his arms folded and his face indifferent as usual.

How did he know...?

Rhode felt her surprised gaze, but he eventually chose not to explain himself. Telling her that he had died here once, and resurrected again wouldn't be a wise choice... right?

Now wasn't the time to think about such things.

“Lize, get ready to attack.”

Once the sea of white bones retreated, the black and dirty stone floor revealed itself. The atmosphere of the room changed drastically, and the previous dream-like beautiful ambiance disappeared. However, the statue still stood beautifully, its holiness and purity weren't affected at all even after all that happened.

But there was no time to appreciate this beautiful disaster. He gave Lize specific instructions and rushed headfirst into the room. While he was running towards the center of the room, he thrust his arm forward, and in his palm, a bright red card materialized once again, turning into a sea of flames which enveloped his whole body.

“——!!!”

Countless of bony arms shot towards Rhode, but before it could reach him, the flames surrounding him lashed out and deflected all of the arms. The Flame Killer’s anger was apparent. Even though summoned spirits do not experience true death, but the pain they felt was still genuine.

While each individual bone arm didn’t carry a high attack power, they made up for their shortcoming with sheer numbers. Rhode didn’t have any ranged area of attack spells, and Lize’s spells just didn’t have enough power to cause significant damage. Even though they could still eventually wear this foe down by attacking and retreating carefully, but they wouldn’t be able to sustain their consumption of soul power.

Thus, Rhode had no choice but to utilize a rather odd and unorthodox strategy — throwing the Flame Killer like a grenade and resurrecting it! Then he would just rinse and repeat the process.

The poor black hound. Its pitiful, heartwrenching whimpers fell on deaf ears and could only helplessly obey its master.

Clang!

Rhode helped block an attack that was heading for the black hound. But it wasn’t because he had good intentions, but instead, he wanted to inch closer so he could throw the black hound deeper.

Sure enough, once he got closer, the massive number of bone arms quickly forced Rhode to take a defensive stance. Facing the countless arms head-on wasn’t a smart choice, thus, Rhode retreated decisively and ‘intentionally’ left his summoned spirit behind.

Any idiot would realize that this was a trap. Fortunately, these bone arms appeared to be boneheaded as well. They foolishly grabbed at the pitiful hound and dragged it back with them.

Boom!!!

Without hesitation, the arms tore the black hound apart and it blew up once again. This time, the sea of bones fell to the floor due to the impact. The white bones now were charred black, and some were even broken into thousands of fragments.

Rhode flipped his palm again and summoned the red card.

Luckily there was no way for the spirit to reject him. When the black hound appeared, it stared at Rhode with dead eyes. A great resentment filled its heart, and it lost its vicious demeanor from before. If not for the soulbound contract between the both of them, this poor 'living grenade' would immediately turn around and dash off without hesitation.

The 'cool' Rhode was yet again indifferent towards the black hound's apparent resentment, and he just whistled, indicating it to continue moving forward.

And so, the battle started again.

Surely, if the undead had brains, it would've already decayed. Thus, it didn't question why did something that was supposed to be dead, didn't stay dead. Facing the black hound that rushed towards them again, they just tore it apart like before without hesitation and tasted the explosion repeatedly. The Flame Killer's explosion on death wasn't something that can be blocked easily. After multiple explosions, the sea of bones decreased by a good 30%. It was up to this point when they decided to fill this sudden gap, but little did they expect that Rhode had already quietly crept near them.

Since Rhode had completed this quest before, naturally, he knew where the problem was. The sea of bones was just a distraction and the real enemy was the holy statue at the center.

“Lize, shield!” Rhode shouted towards Lize who was standing further back.

Soon, a golden light wrapped around Rhode’s body. This action caused the bone arms to target him, but Rhode was ready as he welcomed them with the sword in his hand.

Slash!

With a flash, Rhode tore the bones apart. Then, as a follow-up, Rhode activated his Shadow Flash and leaped to the sky.

While Rhode’s speed multiplied several times after activating Shadow Flash, it still could not totally negate the danger he was facing. When they came in a large number, speed wasn’t a problem for them. Soon, many arms trailed behind Rhode, most of them missed him, but some still managed hit the shield which resulted in their fingertips being injured.

Lize then made her move.

Raising both of her hands, pillars of holy light fell from the skies and crushed the bone arms that tried to block Rhode’s path. Bits and pieces of bone matter fell onto the floor.

Although it wasn’t a genuine spell, since Lize had a faint bloodline of an angel, it still could be cast. As though burned by fire, the sea of bones began to tremble and screamed in a fury. Soon, these bones formed into a ‘stream’ and speared towards the entrance where Lize was standing.

Meanwhile, Rhode began to lose speed.

After all, he wasn’t an angel. Even though Shadow Flash was able to increase his speed, it still had a time limit. Moreover, gravity was a constant, and it bore down on him continually, limiting his movement. Clearly, uncle Newton was not satisfied with him wanted to use him as an example to give a memorable lesson.

The bone arms were beneath him, and Rhode who had lost the momentum to cross the barrier of bones to reach the statue was in dire straits. If he fell

into the sea of bones, it would be the end of his life.

But Rhode had another plan up his sleeve.

He reached out his arm and grasp onto a green card which materialized on his palm.

The Spirit Bird.

After appearing, the bird immediately circled Rhode, generating a wind current that prevented him from falling. Then he clenched his teeth and continued to push forward.

This one move grasped the victory. When he jumped again, he managed to reach the top of the sculpture. Looking at the white and smooth statue before him, he felt pity. Then he shook his head and split the statue down from the middle.

But things did not go as smooth as he had expected.

Swoosh!!

When the sword was about to land on the statue, countless of bones suddenly shot towards him from below. However, in an instant, a pair of wings appeared in front of him and blocked the attack.

Clang clang clang!!!

The wings began to glow, and the shining bright feathers slowly fell off one by one as they floated off in the air. Now, the gap between Rhode's sword and the statue was less than a meter.

Swoosh!!!

A gust of wind suddenly swept past.

Rhode only saw a black shadow passing through him, and the next thing he felt was a massive impact on his flank. He could not maintain his balance anymore as he flew towards the wall at the side. Lize was momentarily

dazed, she tried to move forward to help Rhode but she felt a sharp pain on her shoulder, forcing her to step back.

“Mr. Rhode!”

“Hmph..”

Rhode snorted and pressed his body against the wall to stand up. He could feel pain all over his body. But at this time, the unknown wind once again swept past him.

Relying on his seven years of gaming experience, Rhode turned his head and saw what had hit him previously.

It was an extended tailbone, lifted high, like a snake coiling the statue. After being attacked twice, the bones became cautious and combined into a sharp tail.

Five meters...

Rhode calculated in his mind for a moment and came up with an idea.

At this time, the undead seemed to have lost its patience. Once again, the bones gathered and speared towards Rhode who was still leaning on the wall. In an instant, Rhode's position was filled with bones and Rhode was nowhere to be seen in the sea of white.

“Mr. Rhode!”

Lize almost fainted and her mind blanked out. She didn't know what to do next. Rhode's confidence brought her this far, even if she knew that it was dangerous, but Rhode seemed to defy all kind of common sense. However, when Rhode's position was compromised, she realized that the gap between their abilities was simply too far apart. Even right now, as she fell into thought, she didn't even realize that the bones were approaching her rapidly.

The sea of bones surged forward towards Lize and would reach her in a few seconds. However, deep in the midst of all the bones, a dim light shone.

Surrounded by a solid cage of bones, Rhode slashed frantically in all directions, causing the cage to tremble and crack. The sea of bones gathered and rushed forward again in an attempt to crush the enemy once and for all.

But this time, they failed.

The sea of bones was split into two. The turbulent waves caused by the impact blew the bone matter in all directions. However, the undead didn't give up and kept roaring. At this moment, Rhode raised his sword, and a brilliant light shone at the tip of his sword like a dazzling star.

Rhode took a half step forward, with his right hand thrusting forward.

As though the undead was aware of the danger, the sea of bones formed a wall and rushed towards Rhode. The tail of bones moved as well, piercing towards Rhode's head.

He put his hands down and dodged.

Swoosh.

The cold and sharp bones once again passed through him. But this time, there was no impact.

Because at the same time, the sea of bones had crashed to the floor. The wall of bones skidded for about two meters before finally stopping at Rhode's feet.

Rhode looked up towards the statue. The formerly beautiful statue now had a sword protruding from its head.

Soon, cracks began to spread throughout the statue. At the same time, a system prompt appeared before him.

[Stronghold unlocked]

Snap!

Followed by a loud, cracking sound, the sea of bones tore apart.

Chapter 43

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

It was finally over.

Rhode sighed. Right now, his legs felt weak and could no longer stand stably. In the end, all the continuous summoning and darting around consumed a lot of his soul power and stamina which left him extremely drained. He leaned on the wall for a moment before walking over to the remains of the statue which had turned into a pile wrecked marble and cement. Then, he reached out and picked up his sword and an odd rock from the rubble. It was an egg-like oval-shaped rock with a murky grey color. If one didn't observe carefully, it would seem no different than those roadside pebbles. But Rhode knew that this stone was the primary cause of the tragedy here.

Soul Binding Stone. An extremely rare mineral that was found in hell. It had the ability to absorb the soul of the living and influence their mind. Usually, it was utilized by the devils to manipulate humans and was considered to be quite valuable, even to the devils. Under normal circumstances, the chances of discovering this rock was almost zero. Even for a master level mage, finding it was an extremely difficult, arduous task.

To Rhode, this rock still had a significant role – Soul Imprison.

That was the main factor why the stone was sold at an astronomical price back in the game. It could imprison the soul of a creature that had been killed by the player, and return it to its the original state. In other words, this was a treasure that could create a Soul Core.

The Soul Binding Stone was even rarer than the Soul Core, which was the reason why it wasn't as well known as the Soul Core. Only after the invasion of hell event would the players discover the existence of the Soul

Binding Stone Soon, this gem became very popular in the continent and became a necessity for mages and summoning swordsmen.

Now, thinking back to the event, Deep Stone City was indeed one of the few frontline bases which were occupied by devil army. At that time, it seemed that there was nothing odd about it, but now, as he held the Soul Binding Stone in his hand, he could not help but muse over this matter. Apparently, this rock that was ‘accidentally dug out’, ultimately hinted towards the players that the mine in Deep Stone City had some kind of connection to hell.

But now wasn’t the time to think of this matter yet. The invasion of hell event was triggered by the destruction of the Dragon Soul Continent. Right now, the continent was still peaceful, and the dragon soul power did not seem to have any problem. Thinking about that world-altering event right now was pointless. Thus, Rhode stopped his train of thoughts and picked the rock up before stuffing it into his bag. Then he went on looking for more loot.

However, it was a pity that Rhode’s luck wasn’t at its best. As much as he searched, he couldn’t locate the Master Sculptor Cyril’s dagger, ‘Sorrowful Lament.’ It was a half-legendary magic weapon. Not only was its attack high, but it had a passive chance of imbuing poison and curse in every attack. For a swordsman or a thief, this magic artifact was a good choice, but unfortunately, even when he overturned the entire mansion, all he could find was a magic necklace.

Rhode sighed and said nothing. He just shrugged his shoulder helplessly and accepted his loss. After all, he was a Summoning Swordsman, and the randomness of spirit fusion or obtaining items were far higher than other classes. That was why he didn’t linger on lamenting about his luck this time. He just needed to count his blessings and concern himself about the BOSS attack patterns and mechanics instead. I mean, he still had to continue to ‘play’ right?

In the forum, there was a saying: “There is no useless spell, only useless mages.” From Rhode’s point of view, this sentence could be used for other classes as well. There was no useless equipment, only useless players. In

the end, the mind itself determined the technique. Even premium players (pay-to-win) had to learn how to play first before they could rise to the top.

Lize, who was standing at the entrance also felt weak and sat on the ground.

It wasn't her first time experiencing a fierce battle, but this battle was really carved deeply into her mind because this was the first time that she won a battle by manipulating the enemy's aggressive nature.

When she was faced with the sea of bones at the last minute, Lize's heartbeat raced astronomically. She kept casting a barrier on herself and attacked the bone arms which shot towards her in all directions with her fastest speed to date. This was the first time she made such a fierce offensive, although did it seem more like an instinctive resistance in the end. Even when the battle ended, her heart kept beating rapidly as she could not recover from this excitement. Never in her life so far did she experience such tension and excitement on the battlefield.

The girl clenched her fists and stared at her own two hands. Right now, her hands were trembling and felt powerless. However, besides fatigue, she felt a trace of satisfaction.

She succeeded.

A new day dawned upon the world.

When the sun rose, rays of light permeated through the windows and shone into the house. The formerly gloomy and dark house lost its eerie atmosphere from before. Even the weeds outside no longer looked sinister and seemed more energized.

While they were both exhausted, things still had to be done. Rhode gathered whatever strength he had left to send Lize back to the Mercenary Association to get rest and handle the procedures at the same time. Lize naturally had no objections to that.

After she left, Rhode was relieved, and he opened the mercenary group system while leaning against the wall.

After confirming that he had acquired the house, the mercenary group system finally revealed the complete map of the old house with the exception of the basement. This house had three floors, and the whole building was T-shaped if reversed. The main building had a hall, guest rooms, study, bedroom and many others. At the back, there were even servant quarters.

Rhode certainly did not intend to use this design. After all, the current model resembled a noble's house rather than a mercenary group stronghold. Moreover, typically, mercenaries came from the lower castes and had a bad relationship with the upper nobility. If the stronghold was made as luxurious as a noble's house, then it would certainly give a sense of exclusion, which was unfavorable for development. Thus, Rhode made his own construction program.

But before that, he still needed to experiment the difference between the mercenary group system in reality, and in the game.

After last night's chaos, 35% of the stronghold had been destroyed. The map before him revealed a yellow highlight, and a part of the collapsed floor was shown in a red color. This meant that the system suggested repairing this segment first.

Rhode selected the 'repair' option. Then, another system prompt immediately appeared,

[Repair Stronghold?]

Yes.

[Completely repairing stronghold will need 15000 gold coins. Repair?]

Seeing this line, Rhode furrowed his brows and did not hesitate to choose 'no'. Soon, another system prompt once again appeared.

[Please choose the repair type —— repair the house, repair the furniture ,or complete repair.]

Repair the house.

[Repairing housing will consume 500 gold coins, continue?]

Continue.

Rhode's heart dropped, then the system prompt before him immediately disappeared.

A golden light flashed before him, then it quickly expanded into a grid and encompassed the ground, walls, and ceilings. After that, everything changed.

Worn and damaged walls were repaired in an instant, and the decaying furniture also disappeared. In a blink of an eye, the hall that was previously full of garbage, was wholly renovated. There were no more holes in the floor. The decorations and furniture had also disappeared, leaving only a sword and shield decoration on the wall that gave off a clean look.

In less than five minutes, the old, dilapidated house had changed entirely. Cracks in the wall could no longer be seen, weeds were all plucked clean, and the wooden staircase was brand new. Looking at this drastic change, the whole stronghold had a different feel from before. The previous shabby, decadent look was replaced with a glorious sensation.

On the wall, a dark flag hung down. There was a cross-shaped star symbol on it. It was the mercenary group's flag.

Very nice!

Rhode nodded in satisfaction, It seems that at least the system here worked the same as the game. For him, this was enough. But the only pity was that he spent a lot of money just to repair the housing. Rhode's fat wallet has begun to slim down.

But Rhode did not care much about the money. After he understood the construction system functions and rules, he repaired the hall, study room, and bedroom. Although the mercenary group size was still too small, and he

could only build level 1 rooms, Rhode still spent about 700 to 800 gold coins. When Rhode finally repaired the whole house, just 370 gold coins remained from the initial 2500 gold coins.

As the saying goes, spend money like water. This saying was totally relevant right now.

But looking at the new information before him, he was delighted.

Name: Starlight

Size: small

Leader: Rhode Alander

Members: 1

Stronghold: 1 (Medium)

Level: 1

Reputation: Obscure

Facilities: Hall (LV: 1 mood increased by 5%), Study room (LV: 1, can investigate the information from mercenary group members), bedroom (LV: 1 physical recovery increased by 5%).

Done.

After looking at all the information, Rhode sighed in relief. He closed his eyes and slumped onto a wooden chair next to him, his index finger gently knocking against the handrails. After a few minutes, he opened his eyes, and a determined expression appeared on his face.

Good. Things are going as planned.

Chapter 44

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Things progressed smoothly. After Lize was returned from the Mercenary Association, she was stunned after noticing the new stronghold. She stood anxiously in front of the entrance while holding the supplies that she had just bought, not daring to come in. If it were not for Rhode, who found her rooted to the ground in a daze, Lize would've probably stood there until night came.

Seeing the changes, naturally, she had some doubts. Although Rhode said that he would tidy up things, just by common sense, anyone would have assumed that he'd just cleaned up the broken furniture, and not deliver a complete makeover. Clearly, Rhode did not want to explain much, so she did not ask further. After she went through a lot of things, she began to trust him unconditionally. Even though what he did was odd, but since Rhode was a very mysterious person, so there was nothing strange.

And Lize believed that one day he would tell her everything.

Rhode heard from her about the situation in the Mercenary Association. That old man was left speechless once she recounted the story that happened. It was apparent that he did not expect the both of them to conquer the haunted house. On the other hand, Sereck took their side. He even gave some advice to Rhode, reminding him that he should be more careful to avoid unnecessary trouble.

Rhode's heart felt warm about Sereck's kind and genuine reminder. While Haunted House had a bad reputation, Deep Stone City still did not send its top-tier fighters to conquer it. For a Master Swordsman like Sereck, he could easily subdue the undead. But the reason he did not do so was not that the enemy was stronger than him, but instead, it was because of some other external factors.

In the end, this place was situated at the highest district and belonged to the nobles, which would certainly spell trouble for them if they interceded needlessly. Once the greedy nobles discovered that the haunted house was no longer cursed, matters would become incredibly troublesome. After all, 500 gold coins for a large mansion was utterly absurd, even calling it a bargain was an understatement. Naturally, some people would have sinister intentions to take the house back. As the saying goes, there was no free lunch in this world.

Rhode knew about this matter, but he was curious as to why Sereck would remind him of such things since both of them was not even close... Was it because of the battle from before that made Sereck fond of him?

But these were matters that weren't of a high priority now. The current challenge was how to further develop his mercenary group.

Rhode highlighted the first problem: Manpower.

A mercenary group consisting of only two people was certainly impossible. Indeed, by relying on Rhode's familiarity with this area, he would be able to complete the mission easily. But if there weren't enough members, then it was no way for him to make a competent team. Based on his current strength, he could only kill undead creatures efficiently. If he fought against living creatures, it would be much more troublesome. As for the usual mercenary commission such as escorting, transporting, and others, with his current member count, no one would dare to entrust these jobs to him.

However, what kind of men he should hire? At least the price must be reasonable... With this amount of money currently, he should be able to employ about one or two mercenaries. As the saying goes, use the best steel to make the knife's edge. If he chose the wrong personnel, then it would be too late for him to cry.

He creased his brows as he sat in the study room quietly. The room had plenty of open spaces. Other than a desk, few chairs and a bookshelf, there was nothing else. Although it looked quite shabby, right now, he could only accept it.

After closing the book on his hand, Rhode fell into deep into thought.

8th Month, the year of glory ——— was half a year later. The Country of Light, after investigating some matters, they declared that the Country of Darkness was the perpetrator behind the floating ship attack on the border. Then they quickly sent their troops and occupied Mount Solacen. There, they controlled the inhabitants, claiming that those men were the culprits behind the ambush. After that, they were promptly arrested and executed.

Two months later, the Country of Darkness's army made a response and took back Mount Solacen, and the Country of Light's army was annihilated.

An all-out war broke out.

The Munn Kingdom was the first line of defense against the Country of Darkness, and also the place that Rhode resided. In truth, the calamity could be avoided, but the Country of Light issued a decree, preventing them from surrendering.

That battle was the very first time that players suffered many casualties. When besieging the Munn Kingdom, the Country of Darkness sent powerful military forces. Vampires, skeleton mages, and other terrifying creatures that reached level 80. The average level of players were only level 40 to 50. Thus, the outcome was disastrous. Although some players organized various parties to try to and defend their land, it was useless in the face of the sheer level difference of the Darkness army. At that moment, the Country of Light's council made a very shocking decision ——— They declared that the Munn Kingdom was in treacherous collusion with the enemy country and sent troops to invade the Munn Kingdom.

This crushed any hope the Munn Kingdom had left. Realizing that it was fighting a futile battle for survival, the kingdom finally began to retreat. And at that time, the King of the kingdom, Lydia Paphield Mila Frederica, made a shocking decision. She sent her personal elite corps, the 'Purple Lily', to escort the players and citizens to retreat to the Trisfia Port.

Rhode still vividly remembered the scene from back then. They stood beside the refugees, and almost every player was gritting their teeth in

humiliation while staring at the burning land before them. While being overthrown by some NPCs already made them furiously mad, the betrayal from the Country of Light was the icing on the cake.

The players began hurling insults to quench their resentment. Their wide range of explicit vocabularies began surfacing: ‘F*ck GM!! How dare you toy with us?!’, ‘Die you stupid game company!’ and ‘I want to kill those group of b*stards from the council!’ were common sentences from the players. While the players were cussing their hearts out, the Munn Kingdom’s inhabitants departed in a hurry.

But only one person stayed.

As an angel, she singlehandedly withstood the Country of Darkness relentless assault until the last ship from Trisfia Port left, then she finally closed her eyes to rest for eternity. Unto the last moment, she carried her oath to the grave ——— ‘I will always stand behind my people and shield them from the storm, whether they were willing or not, was of minor consequence.’

Soon, the players’ anger couldn’t be contained any longer and broke loose like water bursting out from a dam.

Rhode could distinctly recall the time where hundreds of thousands of players leaving the official game forum in retaliation. Many claimed that this was against the will of the players and used many ways to express their resentment. Some player guilds even began to rebel by taking revenge through sabotaging the Country of Light’s army and murdering their NPCs. After these consecutive events, Rhode began to take this game seriously. He gathered the players with similar hatred towards the Country of Light and was able to form the Starlight Guild. Half of the players wanted to regain their dignity as players while the other half wanted to show the developers by boycotting the game. All in all, they wanted to vent their anger and somehow take revenge for their loss.

And they succeeded.

Under Rhode's command, Starlight grew stronger each day. They were able to sweep through the Country of Light and utterly demolish the Country of Light's council. After that, they sharpened their blades and went for the country that started this whole mess—the Country of Darkness. In the end, they succeeded and even conquered one of the Creator Dragons, the Dark Dragon. The Starlight Guild then rose to the fame as the game's most powerful guild.

While everybody was celebrating, Rhode basked in a dull melancholy, and a tiny voice constantly rang within Rhode's heart.

At that time, if I had this power, would I be able to change everything?

He didn't know the answer, but deep inside, he understood—

He understood that time wouldn't rewind itself. It was delusional for him to believe that he could start over.

...That was what he had believed, until he arrived to this world.

Now that Rhode finally found an opportunity to change this fate, he wouldn't waste it by 'playing casually.' He didn't want to experience that feeling of helplessness from before. Whether as a refugee or player, he would never allow himself to suffer from that kind of humiliation once again.

Rhode had thought of visiting the Golden City after leaving Dusk Forest. But after hearing about Lize's plight, he changed his mind. Since he could form a guild powerful enough to contend against Hell's devils and destroy both countries of Light and Darkness, he was confident that he could do it again. Even killing the Void Dragon wasn't an impossible task in the future.

He still had one and a half year of time. While it wasn't a long time, it wasn't short either.

And now, he had already acquired the Mercenary Association acknowledgment and a stronghold. He could finally start to rebuild his

glory from before. This time, he wasn't going to feel the shame from before, this was something he absolutely could not tolerate.

Since everything was going on the right track, it was time for him to begin preparations.

Admiring Deep Stone City's scenery from the window, Rhode began to recall those NPC's attributes and skills. Then an idea struck him.

“Lize.”

He stood up and knocked on the desk. Soon, the girl who was seemingly engrossed in a book, heard his call and stood up immediately.

“Let's go to the Mercenary Association.”

The Mercenary Association was as lively as usual. Mercenaries were sitting in the hall, drinking and chatting at the various tables. More people were queuing in front of the hall to accept and hand in commissions.

Rhode quickly found his mercenary group name on the stone slabs of all the mercenaries group in Paphield area. The total number of mercenary groups on the stone slab was 32, and Starlight was ranked the last with an eye-catching number beside it, 0.

Lize felt somewhat helpless when she saw the ranking. Although she had already seen it yesterday, but to think that her mercenary group which was previously around the middle, fell to the bottom of the list overnight, wasn't a pleasant thought to have.

She took a deep breath and forced herself to calm down and said, “Sir, we are now ranked last. 0 points... Even other mercenary groups have five points at the very least. We must think of some way.”

“I know.”

Rhode nodded in response and looked up. Then he saw another name —— Red Hawk. If he remembered correctly, the Red Hawk leader was a friend of Lize. It seemed like they were doing quite well, ranked at the 21st. They

belong to the standard level, without any merit, which was not too low and not too high.

The reason Rhode arrived here today was not because of them. He glanced at the other side of the hall.

The arrangement of the Mercenary Association was distinct. The left side of the hall was the place occupied by mercenary groups, and the right was the place for those idle and unorganized mercenaries to hang out. These people do not have a mercenary group and could only wait here while taking on some common missions, or wait for a mercenary group to recruit them. Because of that, this place was much quieter than the left side.

Rhode and Lize's appearance caused a lot of heads to turn. A group of rowdy mercenaries whistled loudly and greeted the both of them uncouthly. Rhode ignored the idiots who couldn't even recognize his gender, whereas, for Lize, it was just another day for her. She gave a smile as a courtesy, and did not respond. She knew that these mercenaries were actually bored, and wanted to find some fun. Whether she met their greetings with anger or happiness, they still accomplished their goal. Thus, it was better to just ignore them, lest attracting unnecessary trouble.

Rhode turned his head towards the corner and walked over...

The cup of wine was as sweet as usual...

The old man put down the glass in his hand while forcefully holding his slightly trembling right hand. He leaned against the chair, looking at the ground. He was once the member of Wind Glory mercenary group. At that time he was very confident, brave, and energized. For countless of times, he dreamed that someday he was going to be a mercenary group leader. To lead his men to go on an adventure was his hope and his dream.

But after this injury, everything changed for the worse.

He had lost the strength from before, and those who had worshiped him before, also abandoned him. And what was he now? The youngster who had a limitless future, was now a poor old man who could not do anything

besides drinking alcohol. Thinking about this, he could not help but sigh again. He looked up and glanced at the group of youngsters around him. They were too young and still dreaming. Adventure, beauty, money, fame... what were those? Everything was meaningless once they lost something to rely on, then what would become of them?

The old man reached out his hand and touched his right eye that was covered by an eye patch. Then he raised his glass signaling the bartender for another cup.

At this time, he noticed two people sitting beside him.

“Mr. Walker? Mr. Didar Walker?”

Chapter 45

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Yes, I am,” Old Walker briefly turned around and discovered a good-looking young man sitting in front of him, though he had never met this person before, the young lady behind him was someone he faintly recognized. “...and you are?” He asked Rhode with a passive tone.

“I’m Rhode Alander, leader of Starlight Mercenary Group.”

“Starlight?” Old Walker squinted his eyes as he tried to scrutinize the young lad in front of him in his drunken state. “Ahh... yes...” After a moment, his eyes twinkled slightly. He seemed to have recalled something and nodded his head, “Yes... the one who accepted Silver Libra’s-”

Suddenly he paused with his mouth slightly open, and the old man quietly raised his glass towards the blonde girl next to Rhode.

“You’re that Spirit Master... Oh, don’t take it too hard. This is how mercenaries live, rain or shine, we don’t even know when our time is up...”

“Mr. Walker, we’re here to find you. We need your help.”

“...Oh?” With only a somewhat dissatisfied tone, the old man didn’t pay much significance to Rhode’s interruption.

His eyes locked with Rhode’s.

“Yes, so, what is it?”

“I wish to recruit you to my mercenary group.” Rhode didn’t bother to mince his words and got the point without delay.

For a moment, the old man’s eyes widened, but it quickly changed to laughter.

“...Pfft, hahahahahaha.”

It was as if he heard the joke of the century. He couldn't help but smack the table a few times which caused some wine in the glass to spill to the floor. Lize was surprised at the old man's sudden reaction. On the other hand, Rhode maintained his calm. He even had the time to wave his hand, gesturing to the bartender for two more glasses of wine.

Even after the bartender left, the old man was still tearing at the tips of his eyes. He gasped like a broken fan before he finally leaned back on his chair.

“I did not hear you wrong, right? Lad, you actually want me to join your mercenary group?”

“Is there a problem?” Rhode frowned.

“Of course.”

The old man finally became serious. He sobered up, and his eyes turned sharp, looking towards the young man.

“Do you think that because I'm old, that you assumed that I'm senile? I would like to ask you a question, how many people are there currently in your mercenary group?”

“Two.”

Rhode quickly answered without hesitation.

“That's it.”

The old man clasped both of his hands.

“Two people? Mercenary group? How do you even going to take a commission? It won't be long before the end of the spring, and now your Starlight Mercenary Group's point is zero. Let's put aside the fact that you've failed a commission before, no one would pass over a commission to a two-man mercenary group... and frankly, it's not something that both of you can complete.” The old man sighed folded his arms. “Even if I'm

old, I'm not confused. Youngster, I've lived here for decades, and I know what occurred here daily. Sorry, but I'm not going to join your sinking ship." Old Walker said grimly.

This caused Lize's mouth to twitch. Meanwhile, Rhode calmly waited for him to finish.

"Mr. Walker, what are you afraid of?"

"... What do you mean?"

"I just want to know what are you afraid of."

His tone was indifferent, but his voice revealed a trace of ridicule.

"Indeed, I admit that our situation is quite bad. Our mercenary group might be disbanded at the end of the year, but ..."

Rhodes stretched out a finger.

"Even if it did disband, it is something that will happen a year later, right? Who cares if we fail? Either we end up dead, or we disband. This is the way of life for an ordinary mercenary. How about you? Look at yourself now; even if we disband, you can just stroll back here and continue to live like this. Or are you actually afraid of death?"

The old man's face darkened. "Don't think that you can provoke me with those words, lad."

"For so many years, I've seen many kinds of people. I am not afraid of death, but I do not like being deceived. Both of you will surely fail, and naturally, I wouldn't want any part of it."

"Sounds like a nice excuse." Rhode clapped his hands, mocking him sarcastically.

"When you abandoned Wind Glory, did you use this same excuse?"

"Bam!!!"

Hearing Rhode's words, the old man expression changed. He slammed the table angrily, startling the poor Lize.

“They abandoned me! You little b*stard, since you do not know anything at all, don't go flapping your gums as if you do!”

As usual, Rhode kept up his nonchalant demeanor, “Acting like a victim; everyone can do it too.” Then he merely shrugged at the old man and continued, “but what qualifications do you have to complain? Grievance? When they gave you the opportunity, what did you do? Look at yourself now, living out life like a wounded jackal, afraid of moving out from your nest. You are afraid. Face it; you've lost your confidence, so now you don't dare to face anything unknown. Is that it?”

“Swoosh!”

A cold dagger flew rapidly and stopped right before Rhode's throat.

“Shut your trap, youngster.” The old man face darkened even further, “You aren't qualified to talk to me like that.”

“That 's what I should say to you. Seems like I've hit the mark, eh?”

Rhode didn't care about the old man's threat. He vividly recalled the old man's background. Back in the game, he was a rare high-cost NPC in Deep Stone City. His attributes were good, but it did not mean that his IQ would be good too. In fact, on his personal quest to 'find the past glory', the old man's conduct was considered as idiotic by many players. In that quest, his mercenary group was ambushed by demonic beasts. After hearing the grave news, this old man decided to go rescue them, and naturally, the player needed to help him too.

However, players were very unhappy with his wishy-washy behavior because he was just as long-winded as a woman! A matter that could be settled within minutes became hours. And a simple matter that could be easily concluded, became unnecessarily complicated. Many times, he would stop to think about matters such as: 'Should I go or not..? Would they be happy to see him...?' Things like this made the 56-year-old man resemble a

fussy old lady. It caused anxiety to some players, who wanted nothing but to strangle him to death.

And because of his indecisiveness, his comrades ended up as wild beast food. It wasn't until that incident when the old man finally reflected on his mistakes and went mad. He later perished with the wild beasts in the quest 'return of the prodigal son'.

This questline was labeled as complete trash to the players. On the tedious escort quest, the old man wasted three to four hours by being indecisive. In the end, the players were caught in an encirclement of wild beasts. From that point on, they did not respect that old man any longer and only needed two words to describe him while pointing with their middle finger.

Rhode was also one of them.

But it was also because of this quest that made him aware of what happened with Old Walker. His companions gave him ample patience and time, but the old man still wallowed in his past. Just like a turtle that hid in its shell, he was oblivious to his comrades' goodwill and refused to learn from his mistakes. Even though he repented in the end, these kind of stories were only a novelty in books or dramas, in reality, no one wished for these things to happen.

*Repent my *ss, in the end, didn't you die? The people you wanted to save had died, and then you also died. What a pointless death!*

Primarily, Rhode said these harsh things because he wanted to provoke him. To deal with 'scaredy cats' such as this old man, one must force him into a corner; else, he would definitely stay inside his own little world.

The other half was because he wanted to take revenge on this old man. When he took the quest back in the game, it made his life miserable, and venting his anger in the game was useless. Thus, with the living person in front of him right now, why not kill two birds with one stone?

“At least I dared to face challenges head-on, unlike some coward who could only stick his head into the ground.”

After saying his piece, Rhode stood up, fished out a few silver coins and placed it on the table.

“I’ll give you a day to think about it. If you agree, you can come to Cyril’s Haunted House to find me. By tomorrow, if I don’t find you, then we’ll never see each other again.”

Rhode turned away. Lize who was surprised, also quickly stood up and followed Rhode out.

After the two left, Old Walker sat down again. He clenched his teeth, and his hands trembled in anger. Then he sighed and buried his head deep in his arms, not speaking a word.

Chapter 46

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

After meeting Old Walker, Rhode did not leave the Mercenary Association immediately. After all, their mercenary group still lacked a main tank and damage dealers. If he could hire a warrior or any defensive class, then Rhode's next quest would be a lot easier. Unfortunately, this time, he could not find the mercenaries he desired. Those classes that usually stand in the front line were rare. Usually, only soldiers would choose that class, because, after all, who fancied getting constantly hit? Moreover, the majority of the tankers were also taken by larger groups. Thus, it was challenging to locate them, let alone hire them. Rhode and Lize had circled the hall for a while and chatted with a few swordsmen. However, they did not meet Rhode's requirements and naturally all of them were eliminated.

Rhode gave up for today. He began to shift his focus to think about how to increase their power. Deep Stone City didn't have much to offer left. Moreover, Rhode didn't have much money. And even if he had, he had to consider how the mercenaries would feel about joining a declining group. Some might even take advantage of their status and act bossy. Thus, he simply threw the idea of recruitment aside for now, because in front of him there were more important things to do,

First was his mercenary group points.

Lize was right. The most important thing right now was to increase their points to avoid the disbandment in winter. That should be the highest priority ——— and is certainly something that Rhode must pay most attention to. At least... they should not get another zero.

Completing missions was one way to acquire mercenary group points. So far, there are two categories of missions:

Missions issued by clients, where the client would give the rewards upon completion, and missions managed by the Mercenary Association based on the client specification.

The Mercenary Association would give rewards based on the difficulty level of the mission. Missions that were managed by the Association would also provide mercenary group points.

In the Mercenary Association, mission level is divided into six levels. Regular missions and 1-5 Star-Ranked missions. The '1-5' refers to the difficulty rating system. Rewards also may differ among missions, and challenging missions usually had a stricter time limit.

Small mercenary groups were only allowed to take on Regular missions, or perhaps even 1 to 2 Star-Ranked missions. Completing Regular missions would net them 1 point when completed, 1 Star-Ranked mission would be 2 points, and 2 Star-Ranked missions were worth 3 points so on and so forth. While the small mercenary groups were limited to Regular missions and 1 to 2 Star-Ranked missions, medium-sized mercenary groups could take on 2 to 4 Star-Ranked missions. However, that didn't mean that medium-sized groups were restricted to 2 to 4 Star-Ranked tasks, but even if they cleared lower ranked missions, they wouldn't receive any points anyway. It was the same for mercenary guilds. They could only obtain rewards from 3 to 5 Star-Ranked missions.

The Mercenary Association created these rules, and mercenaries were prohibited from breaking them. This means that even if a small or medium mercenary group somehow manages to complete a 5 Star-Ranked mission, they would not be given points. But the possibility of that happening was almost zero since 5 Star-Ranked missions were all extremely dangerous, even for mercenary guilds.

With such a condition, many mercenary groups also had their methods of farming points. Groups such as the Blue Collar Mercenary Group diligently completed the lowest level missions, ensuring that their points were enough to avoid disbandment. Other mercenary groups and guilds had a choice as well, whether to play it big, or play it safe, was totally up to them.

Rhode chose to play it big. After all, his member count was way too low right now. Even if he were to diligently completed low-level tasks, the points would increase too slowly. As they say, three fists are no match for four hands. No matter what, their numerical disadvantage was not something that could be denied. Since they have no way to secure the stability, then he could only complete high-level missions to get as many points as possible.

When Rhode handed over the ‘Pavel Cemetery’ mission to Uncle Hank, the old man’s face paled as he stared at him as though he saw a ghost.

“Are you sure you’re going to take this mission young man?”

Old Hank rubbed his glasses, then seriously looked at Rhode.

“This is a four-star mission. Even large, well-gearred mercenary groups can’t say that they would return safely.”

Then, the old man frowned and knocked his knuckles on the table.

“It’s not like this old man is trying to scare you lad, but before you, the Blue Valley and Black Lion Mercenary Group had accepted this mission. All of them were veteran mercenaries, but what was the result? They received very heavy casualties. And even the leader almost lost his life. Those people had sent dozens of people but still failed in the end, and you guys...” the old man put his elbow on the table and pinched his brows, continuing, “...you guys want to complete it with TWO people? Being young and brave is a good thing, but...”

“I think there is nothing that I should reconsider.”

Rhode didn’t mind Old Hank’s skepticism. The standard of ‘strong’ among NPCs and ‘strong’ amongst players were totally different, literally ‘worlds apart’ if one would add. Thus, it was useless to compare between the two. The reason why Rhode chose this mission was that of its high points and rewards.

A necromancer named Pavel lived in an abandoned cemetery which was situated in the northern part of the mountain. The mission was to kill that necromancer and his minions. As long as he could bring Pavel's head, the mission would be complete.

Of course, Rhode had his own plans of completing this mission. Besides the level and points, it was also because the card deck he had right now. Frankly, based on his current strength, he could only defeat undead creatures at best. As for fighting bandits, it would just be more troublesome. But the thing was, that necromancer called Pavel was holding onto a skill book.

Rumors said that this necromancer Pavel was once a respected bishop, later, because of some worldly affairs, he had fallen as a necromancer. He held a holy book called 'Book of Holiness,' and it was Rhode's primary goal. Because what written there was a Spirit Master skill.

Now, it is necessary to explain the level upgrade difference between the players' and the NPCs in Dragon Soul Continent.

The player advantage was obvious from all aspects. Because of skill points, they could upgrade their skill level whenever they wanted. When Rhode was at level 10, he could already possess a level 34 NPC skill. But NPCs couldn't do that. Other than geniuses and royalty, most of the NPCs used their skills that they acquired from leveling. If a comparison was made based on this, it was clear who was superior.

On the other hand, the advantage NPCs had was that their talent classification was different from the player. Many NPC classes had their talent tree integrated with one another, and they were free to choose. This made a lot of players quite envious because the player's talent tree was separated and because of the skill limitation, they could not choose what they wanted, unlike NPCs. Moreover, many talents were exclusive to NPCs only.

Other than that, the gap between the player and NPC was too big. Players could easily upgrade their levels through experience, as for NPCs, level upgrading was like a nightmare. If they wanted to level up, there were only

two ways. The first one was: if the player and NPC had a high intimacy level, then the NPC would issue a quest which must be completed by the player in order to upgrade that NPC's level. Another way was to give the NPC a skill book; there was no restriction, and they did not need to reach a particular level to learn it. Thus, even a level 5 NPC could learn a level 10 skill which would immediately bring their level to 10.

But of course, that would take some time.

If he could obtain that book, then there should be nothing to worry about Lize reaching level 40. Moreover, the 'Book of Holiness' also taught many damage spells, these could make up for her weak offensive skills and become a full-fledged clergy that could fight on the front lines. Moreover, in the face of the inevitable war with Country of Darkness, teaching his mercenary group members to fight against undead creatures was a plus.

If it wasn't because of that, why would Rhode want to hang around the undead all day long? He was a living person that had no interest in the dead. In fact, if he could hire a mage, even a mage apprentice would also be useful. But unfortunately, mages were even rarer than Spirit Masters. Most of them never ventured far out from their house, let alone becoming a mercenary.

"I have decided, Uncle Hank. Please rest assured that we will complete the task."

"Hope so."

Seeing that he was unable to persuade Rhode, Uncle Hank sighed helplessly and shook his head. He wrote something on the paper on his table and nodded to Rhode.

"Well, Mr. Rhode, your mission has been registered. When you've completed the mission, just bring the token back as requested, once identified and confirmed we will give you the reward."

"I understand."

Rhode nodded and walked away. When his figure disappeared into the crowd, Uncle Hank shook his head in disappointment.

“That youngster is too reckless. Does he even know how difficult this mission is? Sigh... I don’t really know what to say anymore. Such a pity... He looked so young... but....”

While speaking to himself, Hank picked up the jug beside him sluggishly.

Then suddenly from behind, a clear bright voice rang out.

“What was stupid? Mr. Hank?”

“Ah, young miss!”

Upon hearing this voice, Hank’s body jolted up. He put down the jug on his hand embarrassingly and turned around to look at the person behind him while showing a trace of a bitter smile.

“Young miss, how do you have time visit me... I thought...”

“I’m the one asking you! What about the thing that I told you to do?”

“This...”

Facing this demanding young miss, Old Hank’s forehead drenched in sweat. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his face as he tried to make an excuse. “This... I am currently trying. You also saw it yourself, miss. These guys are mostly average. So far I have not found the right one yet, so...”

“So that’s why.” A beautiful voice sounded like the birds chirping in the early morning. She paused for a while and continued, “Then what happened just now?”

“Oh, that kid.”

Old Hank’s expression immediately changed and began to sigh.

“That guy was overestimating himself. Miss, you’ve got to hear this....”

As though he finally found something else to complain about, Old Hank quickly shifted the discussion to Rhode who had recently registered a 4 Star-Ranked mission. Of course, he exaggerated the story of how Rhode presented himself. But as a member of the Mercenary Association, he could not explicitly declare that they would certainly perish as the mercenaries were very sensitive to this kind of words. Since it was their job scope to deal with dangerous tasks, if he said things such as cursing him to die, then he truly had no conscience.

“Is that so.”

After listening to Old Hank’s complaint, she smiled.

“That is interesting... A mercenary group with only two people dared to take on a 4 Star-Ranked mission. It really is odd, isn’t it?”

“Yes, and I heard that Sereck was really fond of this guy. I really do not know which part that Sereck would fancy about him...”

“Uncle Hank.”

Old Hank was suddenly interrupted halfway by the girl.

“I have something that I hope you can help, but I don’t know whether you were willing?”

“Yes, as long as it’s within my ability, there’s certainly no problem.”

“Well, then...”

But after he heard that girl’s demand, Old Hank’s face turned green.

Chapter 47

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

A chilly wind swept through the prairie, producing a breezy sound. Once again, the sun rose on the horizon, indicating the arrival of a new day.

“Haa...”

Lize opened her eyes slowly.

The first thing she saw was the pale golden rays of early morning light which spilled into the room from the half-opened window. She instinctively moved her hand towards her eyes to shield against the sun as she blinked and squinted at the leaves just outside the window. Her soft and fluffy bed emitted a scent of fragrance which made her reluctant to leave her idyllic retreat to the dream world. But after a while, as her consciousness began to strengthen, she narrowed her eyes and sat upright while hugging a pillow in her arms, subtly resisting the notion of getting up.

Finally, she had her own home.

Looking at the plain, yet homely room before her, she could not help but feel a sense of warmth inside her heart. Never had she imagined that one day, she would have a place to settle down like this, but now it had finally become a reality. This meant that she did not have to live in that shabby guest room or the taverns in the future. She did not have to worry about where to put her favorite things anymore. Now that she had her very own room, she was incredibly satisfied on the inside.

On the night when she was first introduced to her room, she immediately ran to the bedside, jumped, and landed flat on the bed, rolling side-to-side over and over again. Due to her excitement, she could not fall asleep that night. And that was just the beginning. These days, she began to savor this place even more. She started to immerse herself in this room fully. The

already spotless room was being cleaned by her again, and she also picked a few flowers which she placed in a vase to decorate the room.

“Alright... time to get up!”

Lize raised both of her hands, stretched her waist, and undressed. After taking a warm bath, she walked out from the room. In the stronghold, she was responsible for the cleaning. Of course, having her own home wasn't all sunshine and bunnies. Unlike the tavern, she had to prepare her own food and wash the dishes all by herself. Although Rhode wanted to hire several servants to help with the household chores, he didn't have enough money for that luxury at the moment, therefore he could only live and adapt for now.

Whether it was her being a good mood or not, after waking up, she felt exceptionally rejuvenated despite yesterday being an extremely tiring day.

Speaking of Rhode, what was he doing?

After tidying her clothes, she made her way to Rhode's bedroom and knocked on the door gently.

“Mr. Rhode?”

There was no answer.

Isn't he in?

Lize was puzzled and knocked the door again, but there was still no response.

The next moment, she heard the sound of a bird chirping from the window.

After being continually exposed to Rhode's summoned spirits, naturally, she had already familiarized herself to the sound of the Spirit Bird. Thus, when she recognized that familiar sound, she hurriedly made her way to the window and looked down. And as expected, Rhode was there.

A figure stood quietly in the garden. When he stretched his right hand forward, a small bird flew and landed on his arm. Wherever the bird flew, a turbulent storm surged behind it. Sometimes, a deep crack would appear on the ground which was full of weeds.

When the Spirit Bird lifted off, Rhode made a gesture with his hands, and in the next moment, the invisible turbulence that trailed behind the Spirit Bird ignited into flames. As the bird soared, it drew a sphere of fire in the air and swiftly darted towards Rhode. When Rhode was about to be swallowed by the sea of flames, it suddenly subsided and turned into a brilliant, white sword.

“Swoosh!!!”

A burst of sword energy rushed past and cut the falling leaves.

Under the breeze, they danced melodiously, and upon the flames; they were scorched.

Three meters around Rhode had turned into a barren land.

“Mr. Rhode.”

When she saw Rhode put away his sword, Lize opened her mouth and called out to him.

“Lize?”

Hearing that soft voice, Rhode looked up and nodded in return.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning, Sir.”

After greeting him, she felt a little bit awkward. According to the rule, she should call him ‘Leader,’ but they were almost the same age, so she felt quite embarrassed. Moreover, in Lize’s heart, her leader was Carter. That was why she still could not call Rhode ‘Leader’ right now. Luckily, Rhode

did not seem to care about this minor matters like this. After she apologized to him, he accepted her reasoning.

Really, he was the definition of a perfect man.

Looking at Rhode, her heart could not help but thump. Young, handsome, calm and steady. He ticked all the qualities of a woman's dream man. Moreover, he was also hard working. Of course, she had to admit that he could be domineering sometimes, but that just added his charms.

If only she could...

When her thoughts began to trail off, Lize quickly shook her head. After that, she saw Rhode coming over.

“Mr. Rhode, is that old man really coming?”

Perhaps, in order to cover up her embarrassment, she attempted to change the topic. Although she was a long-time citizen in Deep Stone City, she had never imagined that this old man held such an unusual background. Clearly, Rhode knew about it beforehand, and since she already accustomed to his secretiveness, she did not ask further.

Rhode grabbed a towel hanging on the side and wiped the sweat from his forehead, “I don't know.” He shrugged ambiguously. “I've done everything that I could. The rest is up to him, if he has a tiny bit of determination left, then I think he will come. But if not, then he won't come. Of course, with or without him, our plan wouldn't change.”

Rhode's words were as straightforward and calm as usual. He was not going to let anyone doubt or refute his words.

“Lize, I hope that you are ready. Pavel Cemetery is a very dangerous place; and if it's only the two of, the danger level will be quite high. The situation will be trickier than the Fog Ruins.”

“Yes, I understand, Mr. Rhode. I will get ready.”

“Very well. Then I will head back first. As for breakfast... I’ll have the usual.”

“Okay.”

After they started living in the stronghold, Rhode and Lize’s living habits seemed different from before. Perhaps it was because they lack money, Rhode did not construct a dining room. Thus, the both of them had their meals in Rhode’s study room. Now, they were totally accustomed to it. Have to say, habits are really terrifying.

As Lize quickly made her way to cook breakfast, Rhode returned to his study room on the second floor and began to plan for their next move.

Even if he was labeled as the ‘walking library’ before, Rhode could not entirely remember the details for every single quest. Right now, he tried to recall the dangers that might occur in Pavel Cemetery and record it down. Next, he would think of the counter to that dangerous situation. If he was lucky then it would be a three-man quest, but if not, then he had to plan for a backup. Of course, a two or three man quest would mean that he had to change a lot of tactics as compared to when he was a player.

Since he could become the No.1 Guild Leader in the Dragon Soul Continent, Rhode did not only rely on his talent alone. Hard work, good observation, time management and foresight was critical to success. When an opposing guild was still figuring out what to do against a BOSS, Rhode had already finished the quest with his guildmates. That was the difference between them.

‘It’s all about the details!’

That was Rhode’s policy. Success and defeat hinged on the details of the plan.

When Rhode deep in thought, a knocking sound came from the front door.

“Who is it?”

Although the knocking sound came from the first floor, Rhode's senses had reached a degree that he could clearly catch what was happening downstairs. When he noticed that someone was at the front door, he eventually put down the pen in his hand and walked out of his room.

Did the Old Walker finally break his curse after thinking over? Coming here that early? That is certainly unexpected.

However, the one who actually knocked on his door was not that fallen old mercenary, but Hank from the Mercenary Association!

What is he doing here?

Rhode stared at Uncle Hank's awkward and embarrassed smile. After that, he glanced at the person behind him. He discovered that the person who was wrapped in a cloak behind Uncle Hank was a woman.

What's going on?

"Uncle Hank, are you looking for me?"

"Yes, Mr. Rhode. This... Can I talk inside?"

"Of course."

Rhode nodded his head and welcomed the both of them in.

From Uncle Hank's expression, it was apparent that he was surprised after discovering the luxurious hall in front of him. In fact, before coming, he had assumed that their two-man stronghold must be quite shabby. But looking at the spacious hall which was clean and tidy, he couldn't help but widen his eyes. It was totally different from his imagination and looked at Rhode surprisingly. Although Old Hank never entered the Haunted House before, he knew that it had been abandoned for many years, there were even a lot of people that died here. It was utterly impossible for a dilapidated house to look like this!

How did this young man do it?

Old Hank was finally intrigued by Rhode's mysteriousness. Having worked at the Mercenary Association for so many years, this was the first time he had seen someone like Rhode. From just his appearance, he was no different than many other men, but looking at him now, it appeared that his judgment was wrong.

“What business do you have with me, Uncle Hank?”

After inviting the two of them in, Rhode opened his mouth and asked. At the same time, he also glanced at the girl beside him. He was sure that the this 18 or 19 year-old-girl was related Hank's sudden visitation.

Sure enough, he was right. Hank revealed an awkward smile and said, “It's like this, Mr. Rhode. This young miss... wants to join your mercenary group.”

Chapter 48

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“This young miss... wants to join your mercenary group.”

After Old Hank’s introduction, Rhode glanced at the girl next to him, who took off her cloak and revealed her true face.

It was a girl that appeared to be about 16 to 17 years old.

She had beautiful facial features. Her snow-like, white hair looked particularly eye-catching. A lovely pair of wine-red eyes gave Rhode a curious look. Rhode could recognize that she was a noble from her demeanor. With an overt display of self-confidence and pride, it was no wonder that he could conclude that she wasn’t someone ordinary. Moreover, she possessed a beautiful collar with intricate patterns carved on it.

“This young miss is...”

Rhode frowned. He hoped that nothing unexpected would occur.

“Hello, Mr. Rhode Alander.”

The girl stretched out her hand. She smiled and said

“I am Marlene Senia. As you have heard, I hope to enter your mercenary group. I hope you will give me the opportunity.”

“Marlene Senia?”

Hearing the girl said her name, Rhode was dumbfounded and showed a trace of surprise.

Marlene Senia was a familiar name to Rhode; this character was quite famous among the players, she even had a nickname: ‘Queen of

Mercenaries'. Rumors said that this girl was a mage genius. When she was 19 years old, she broke through the inner circle, which was the final bottleneck of a mage. Then, she formed a mercenary group 'Free Ring', and recruited many young girls from the Munn Kingdom who were geniuses in their own right. But among the players, this girl was not too likable because she has a strange habit, which was ——— she hated men.

The game did not bother to hide it. Free Ring Mercenary Group was an exclusive group for females, and no males were allowed to join. Even if they paid a large amount of money, the male players wouldn't be able to hire any one of them. This made many players unhappy and began to dislike this woman. Thus, for most players, they did not really have a high evaluation of this woman called the 'Queen of Mercenaries.'

Although she wasn't well-liked among male players, Marlene's storyline was the typical 'hero's ending'. When faced with the Country of Darkness's attack, she and her comrades withstood the enemy's siege for three days and three nights in Golden City. Finally, when they were inevitably overwhelmed by enemy forces, they cast a forbidden spell which caused all of them to perish along with the enemy. They sacrificed themselves to protect the country. From this point on, her courage and valor became well known.

Rhode had heard her name before, but as a male, he had never met this girl in person before. Therefore, when he found out that this girl was actually in Deep Stone City and wanted to join his mercenary group, Rhode's eyes widened in surprise.

Didn't she hate men? Why would she take the initiative to seek him? Did she think that he is a woman? These strange things shouldn't be happening!

As he watched Marlene who stretched out her right hand for a handshake, Rhode continued to deduce this irregularity in his mind.

Perhaps its a person with the same name? It can't be her, right? She said that her family name was Senia, and looking at her appearance, she DOES indeed look like a noble... But ——— the Senia family is located far away in Golden City! Why was this young miss, who was supposed to attend the

Royal Magic Academy, here in Deep Stone City? Was she summoned to the countryside?

“I have heard your name, Ms. Senia.”

Rhode replied tactfully and shook her hand. He did not know much about the legend in front of him, just like other players. But he still understood the general situation.

“I apologize if this seems sudden, but... shouldn't you be in the academy right now...?”

Marlene and Hank's eyes flickered at his seemingly casual comment.

However, Marlene felt that Rhode was interesting because he recognized her identity. This means that the rumor of Rhode being a noble was actually true. Hank was equally surprised, never had he thought that Rhode had a connection with the nobles. And now, Rhode finally 'revealed' his noble identity.

“So, it's like this...”

After confirming that Rhode was also one of her 'own' kind, she began to show modesty and controlled her pride.

“My teacher said that once my power passed a certain level. If I want to continue improving, I have to experience actual battles. That's why I came here to ask Uncle Sereck to give me the opportunity to train here.”

So, it was connected to Sereck after all.

Rhode finally realized the reason. The Senia family sent her here because of that Master Swordsman. But before that, there was still something that needed to be confirmed.

“Ms. Marlene.”

Rhode took back his hand, and his face turned serious.

“Since it was Uncle Hank who introduced you to me, I think you should have a grasp on our current plight beforehand. Frankly, we lack members. And even more especially so now, since we took on a four-star mission. If any mishap were to happen, we might be disbanded. Knowing this, are you still willing to bet your life and join my mercenary group?”

Facing Rhode’s question, Marlene raised her chin slightly and revealed a confident and cunning grin.

“Of course I understand what you mean, Mr. Rhode. But I think that it is a good thing for me. Moreover, as a middle circle mage, I am very confident about my strength.”

So this is a good thing for her?

Hearing her answer, Rhode could not help but to shoot a glance at Old Hank. Although she was the infamous ‘Queen of Mercenaries’ in the game, he had never come in direct contact with her before. From his first impression, this girl was very independent and possessed a strong pride. However, the words she spoke previously made him a bit puzzled. He did not understand why a person like her would say that joining a declining mercenary group was a good thing?

Uncle Hank was aware of the meaning behind Rhode’s glance, but he was unable to explain his suffering. He was very clear about Marlene’s identity and influence. As a young noble, she didn’t lack the strength, but a mercenary wasn’t all about strength. Experience and willpower played a critical role in the mercenary life as well. Even though she was a powerful mage who doesn’t hesitate to kill her enemies on the battlefield, in the end, she was still a woman. If she was drugged and thrown onto a bed by some evil men, then even being a powerful mage would be useless, right? That was why Old Hank had always been very careful. If something happened to the young miss, then he would be put in a very difficult situation.

Her nobility-bred arrogance also made a lot of mercenaries quite uncomfortable. Old Hank tried his best to introduce her to several mercenary groups, but in the end, the other side always rejected, giving excuses such as ‘having enough members.’ After all, the status between

nobles and ordinary people were worlds apart, and the mercenaries did not necessarily trust nobility.

Marlene wasn't stupid, she, of course, knew the reason why those people did not accept her. But her pride would prevent her from lowering her status and follow those guys.

Therefore, Rhode's appearance lit a glimmer of hope within her.

Rumors said that Rhode was also a noble. If that was the case, then presumably, he should be better than those uneducated mercenaries. Moreover, this mercenary group had only two members; they certainly did not have enough members. If they whip up an excuse saying that they already have enough people, then wouldn't it be a total brazen lie?

Rhode did not understand what Marlene meant, but Old Hank knew what she was trying to do. This made him helpless. Before coming here, he tried to persuade this proud young miss numerous times, saying that the Starlight Mercenary Group was not the best choice for her. They lacked members, and the mission was too dangerous. Moreover, right now they were living in the infamous Cyril's Haunted House. But alas, no matter how much he tried to reason, this young miss still did not listen to him. This confirmed Old Hank's belief of how proud and stubborn nobles could be. Rhode was one clear example, and this young miss was also the same. Birds of the same feather flock together. Such a troublesome bunch!

If he could, Old Hank wanted to report this matter to Sereck and let him deal with it. Presumably, Sereck would not allow Marlene to undertake such danger, but unfortunately, he was not in the Mercenary Association these two days, so he could not find him. Marlene was smart and took advantage of this period when Sereck wasn't in to force Old Hank to listen to her order.

Heavens! This kind of thing... why did you do it...

Old Hank could already imagine Sereck's expression when he comes back and hears about the decision made by Marlene. What kind of face would he show?

This was the sorrow of pitiful people like him.

Rhode did not understand Hank's grief-stricken inner monologue, nor would he want to know it anyway. It was a miracle for a mage to take the initiative to come and find him. Even if Old Hank disagreed, he would just ignore him and recruit the future 'Queen of Mercenaries' to his group.

But before that, he still needed to clear up a certain matter.

"I can accept you to the group. Ms. Marlene."

Rhode's expression became serious.

"But I have some conditions."

"Please speak."

Hearing Rhode words, Marlene's eyes flashed a trace of surprise. She came here to acquire some real combat experience, but she did not expect that after she arriving in Deep Stone City, she became a caged canary instead. This caused Marlene to be quite unhappy. Thus, after hearing about Rhode and his mercenary group, Marlene found out that this was a perfect opportunity to escape from the cage.

Now it seemed that she had succeeded.

"First of all, since you've joined the mercenary group, then you will be considered to be one of my subordinates."

Rhode lifted up one finger.

"As a subordinate, you must unconditionally obey my command. During missions, without my permission, you are prohibited from doing anything. Even if you want to go to the toilet, you must also report to me in advance."

"You!—"

Hearing this, Marlene expression changed slightly. But before she could say anything else, Rhode lifted up another finger.

“Second, although you have joined our mercenary group, we are not familiar with each other. As such, I do not think that you can fully cooperate with us, so in the battle, you must completely obey my instructions. You must do what I command you to do. If I wanted you to stand your ground, even if the enemy is before you, you are not allowed to move!”

Rhode put down his hand.

“These are my conditions. If you can accept, then I welcome you to join my mercenary group.”

“And what if I don’t?”

At this moment, Marlene’s face was dark. She clenched her teeth and asked in low voice.

“I’ll have you leave immediately.”

Rhode did not hesitate in his reply.

“I needn’t emphasize further about the difficulty of this mission. If you are unable to do as I say, then we are most likely to die there. So, I must lower the possibility of accidents. If you put us in a difficult situation, then for us, leaving you is a necessary choice.”

When Rhode finished his explanation, the atmosphere inside the hall suddenly tensed up.

Chapter 49

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Marlene expression turned cold. Since her birth, she had never been treated like that. She was a rare magic genius in the family, whether it was her parents, family, or even the teachers in the magic academy, they had always been polite to her. With her ability and status, she always held her head up high, never needing to compromise with others. But she still followed her family training regime and never slacked off.

When she heard Rhode's first requirement, although somewhat unwilling, she still could accept. But the second requirement was something that she definitely couldn't compromise!

Marlene was always confident about her strength. She started training as young as 6 years old, and now 10 years had already passed. In all her life up till now, she hadn't failed to live up to expectations. Even now, when she experienced a bottleneck after entering the middle circle, she wasn't worried. Just as her teacher explained, at the moment, what she lacked wasn't knowledge, but actual combat experience. As for her talent in understanding the concepts of magic, there wasn't much difference between her and the teacher.

And now, Rhode just denied her ten years of effort!

Absolutely unacceptable!

“Mr. Rhode, I can tolerate the first condition, but I can't accept the second!”

Marlene raised her head proudly, staring straight at Rhode without wavering. Looking at her stubbornness, Rhode frowned but did not say anything.

On the side, Old Hank prayed that she would give up.

Please fail, fail, fail, then nothing will happen...

“Why?” Rhode asked.

“Because you don’t know what am I capable of!”

Marlene declared confidently. Since this was the first time they met, she was certain that he didn’t know how talented she was. Based on the information she got from Uncle Hank, she knew that he was a swordsman and not a mage. So how could he understand the intricate nature of mages and spells? If they were of the same class, perhaps she would respect him slightly more, but as a swordsman, he wouldn’t be able to offer her any help.

Marlene clenched her teeth. She wanted to stand up and curse Rhode. But in the end, she maintained her composure and bottled her anger. After all, her opponent did not show any signs of anxiousness; if she lost her temper, then it would reflect poorly on the Senia family’s prestige.

Suddenly, Rhode stood up. A trace of joy appeared on Old Hank’s face. Perhaps this youngster couldn’t take it any further. Thank god. Now, if only this youngster could curse ruthlessly so that the young miss would leave Deep Stone City, that would be for the best... Therefore, Old Hank prepared to stand up with Rhode to act as a mediator. However, Rhode’s next sentence almost made Old Hank faint.

“Then, let’s try it.”

“No problem!”

Marlene simply stood up and agreed after hearing his challenge. Both of them failed to notice Old Hank’s face turning from black to purple and purple to black. The colors on his face flashed too quickly as if it didn’t know which color was better for the situation right now.

At this time, a voice sounded from the stairs.

“Mr. Rhode, I have already prepared the breakfast. What are you...”

Lize walked down from the stairs and discovered the two extra people in the hall. At first, she was mildly surprised to see Old Hank, but when her gaze fell onto Marleen, she immediately gasped.

“You are... Marlene?” Lize asked in disbelief.

“Lize!?”

Marlene looked back at Lize. After realizing that it was really Lize, her expression eased and turned into a warm smile.

“Lize! Is it really you? I never expected that I would meet you here! Where did you go? How did you end up in Deep Stone City? Are you okay?”

The composed girl from before finally showed her cheerful and lively nature. Marlene ran towards Lize and held her hands in excitement. She began bombarding Lize with questions. Facing Marlene friendly attitude, Lize felt a little bit awkward and stole a glance at Rhode as if she was worried about something.

They both know each other?

Rhode was surprised. He thought that he was the mysterious one, but it seems as though Lize had many things hidden from him as well. Her being a half angel? Information that only nobility should know? And now she was even acquainted with Marlene Senia?

Judging by how Marleen greeted Lize, surely her position wouldn't be low. Otherwise, Marlene would not be that friendly to her.

So who is she actually?

“I'm fine, Marlene.”

Lize felt Rhode's questioning gaze on her and she quickly let go of Marleen's hands in a panic. Then, she quickly changed the topic.

“Why are you here? Shouldn't you be in the Golden City...?”

“I’ve entered the middle circle stage. Teacher said that to improve further, I will need to travel and gain some real combat experience.” Marleen explained proudly. “Yesterday, I heard that this mercenary group was lacking members, so I came to see if I can join... How about you Lize? Why are you here?”

“I...After that happened, I have always been here.”

Lize spoke in a low voice, as if she was afraid that Rhode might hear it. But she quickly changed her expression and asked Marleen.

“Are you really going to join the mercenary group? Marlene, this is not a game, this time our mission is going to be very dangerous...”

“I have decided, I must join this mercenary group.”

This time, Marlene gave up the unpleasant feeling between Rhode and her. At this moment, she only thought of her long lost best friend. How could she leave her behind? But Rhode immediately doused her flames of enthusiasm.

“Don’t make a decision too quickly, Ms. Marlene. You have not passed my test yet.”

Marlene’s face turned serious again when she heard Rhode.

“Of course. I will not run away. Moreover, I also want to see how strong you are.”

“No problem.”

Rhode always preferred direct methods and did not like dragging things for too long. He could tell that Marlene was also a decisive person. After agreeing to the duel, they did not waste any more words. Rhode led the group to the garden outside, and after all this time, Lize didn’t know what was going on.

“I won’t show any mercy.”

Marlene said softly. After that, her demeanor immediately changed. She had turned into the Marlene of the Senia family, and not the Marlene that was cheerful in front of Lize.

The luxurious purple robe accentuated her curvy figure, a flowery trim on her collar and cuffs revealed her family's identity. With a ruby wand in her hand, she took up a combat stance. Meanwhile, Rhode was staring dejectedly at the ground.

Elemental Mage, Middle Circle Level 7. According to the player level, she was supposed to be level 15...

Rhode completely read her from head to toe with just a glance. The ruby wand on her hand had an imbued fire element, and her robe had several protective magic circles which meant that it could trigger an auto-defense mechanism without her actively casting a defensive spell. From this point and coupled with his first impression towards her, Rhode already guessed her fighting style.

That was to be expected as a former leader of the No.1 guild. Rhode had done countless of PKs in his gaming life, and this wasn't any different. Furthermore, players were many times more difficult as they could move as they chose, but on the contrary, NPCs could only react based on the equipment they had. Thus, Rhode had completely predicted what attacks she would make later on.

Meanwhile, as Rhode completed his plan for this duel, Marlene had troubles finding an opening.

That was because Rhode, who was standing before her, did not move at all. He did not equip any weapon, nor take any combat stance. He was simply standing still at his own leisure.

This action made Marleen hesitate slightly. It wasn't because she hadn't fought in a duel before, but this kind of casual behavior in a duel... However, the young miss was still genius of this era. Even though she did not know what Rhode was trying to pull off, she decisively ended her

hesitation. No matter what the opponent was trying to do, as long as she put her mind to it, she would definitely win!

“Migcl!” (*Flame*)

Followed by a chant, she took half a step forward and raised the wand on her hand. Flames appeared on the tip of the gem and shot towards Rhode. Wherever the fire passed, the surrounding temperature would rise, it even caused the ground to be scorched black. The weeds immediately turned into ashes. As the temperature was too high, it instantly charred the vegetation.

The flame consumed Rhode’s figure and the two people who were watching this scene screamed in surprise. On the other hand, Marlene was sulking because she could felt that she did not hit the target! She had failed!

But a genius was indeed a genius.

After noticing that something was wrong, she immediately gripped her wand and struck it towards the ground.

“Jir!” (*Storm*)

A violent whirlwind arose from beneath her feet. The air condensed into a series of razor-sharp wind blades. That wasn’t all, the temperature within the eye of the storm dipped drastically, forming icicles which spun within the whirlwind.

As he observed Marlene’s performance, Rhode could not help but shake his head and sigh. In the game, the mage was one of the top classes in regards to DPS. He never thought that in reality, it was also as strong. Marlene’s level was higher than Rhode by only five, but her attack damage could be considered to be almost twice of Rhode’s.

Among the players, there was a saying. When a mage is PK-ing, even if he didn’t know the position of the enemy, as long as the mage cast all his available spells, he could at least kill something.

That was how strong and terrifying mages were.

But to Rhode, although he found Marlene's damage to be excellent, her casting was full of loopholes. Apparently, she did not know what she was doing right now. In fact, when she was attacking, Rhode had already used Shadow Flash and snuck behind her. However, she still stood her ground. Even though realized that something was amiss and reacted quickly by casting storm to avoid being ambushed by him, but if she couldn't find the source of the threat, casting a skill blindly would cause the opposite effect.

Rhode flipped his right hand and shot forward.

Chapter 50

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

A green card materialized and transformed into the Spirit Bird which flew towards Marleen's flank. The girl was completely oblivious to the attack. Her faith in her storm guard was absolute, and she figured that if he attacked, she would immediately counter-attack.

Screech! Alas... due to her ignorance and overreliance on her spells, when a cry suddenly echoed from behind, she was dumbfounded.

What happened? What's it?

She subconsciously turned around to check, but when she did, a huge gust of wind slammed into her.

“Boom!!”

The storm guard could indeed block most of the damage, but unfortunately, Rhode had used the most simple and most efficient way to counter it. For a creature of the wind, even if faced a raging hurricane, it would be nothing more than like a fish swimming in the sea.

As she was caught unprepared, the girl fell to the ground, unable to breathe. All of a sudden, the intricate formations on Marleen's robe began to glow, and a solid, translucent crystal barrier formed around her, allowing her to breathe once again. Once she caught her breath, she immediately attempted to get up, but the moment her head turned, she discovered Rhode standing beside her.

What?! When did he appear there?

Marlene was startled, but she still forced herself to remain calm. She raised her wand and tried to cast another spell, but this time, Rhode didn't give her a chance to do it.

The girl's magic isn't bad per se... but she still lacked the necessary experience.

After observing how she retaliated against the Spirit Bird, he intended to stop fighting with her. During the battle, she ignored an incoming attack just to ensure that Rhode's figure didn't leave her sights. This indicated that her battle awareness was amateurish. Thus, if that was the case, then he did not mind defeating her to teach her.

Rhode grinned to himself. Then, he lifted his right hand.

The green card that was on his palm swiftly turned red.

The whirlwind also changed color at the same time.

Marleen's eyes widened in shock. This phenomenon seemed to have surpassed her expectations. In a blink of an eye, a bright crimson flame melded with the wind and spun furiously as it crashed into the crystal barrier. The solid barrier shook violently under the enormous impact.

Craaaack. Spiderweb-like fractures began to appear on the barrier. Marleen knew that it wouldn't last much longer and decided to counter-attack. But she was slightly too late. A black hound suddenly emerged from the fiery hurricane and slammed into the barrier with its ferocious claws.

Bang!!

Finally, the low-level barrier couldn't absorb any more damage and broke into countless of tiny fragments. Then, the black hound flashed its terrifyingly sharp teeth before rushing towards her.

This time, she was genuinely frightened.

Since the beginning of the battle, she wasn't able to turn the tides on him even for a second. Rhode's movements were always beyond her expectations, and she could not predict what he would do next. While she had some experience in dueling back in the academy, when she faced Rhode, all her previous experiences were worthless.

It was paramount for mages' to keep a distance from melee combatants to ensure their safety before launching attacks.

Hmph. I need to protect myself before attacking?

Use my most powerful spell at the start of the battle to cause damage to intimidate the enemy?

Of course, I know that! But, how do I accomplish that now!!

Marlene almost collapsed in the face of the terrifying beast. At this point, only her arrogant pride kept her from succumbing to fear and confusion. She subconsciously raised her hand and pointed at the ferocious beast who was dashing towards her.

“Jir!”

A whirlwind condensed on the ruby on her wand and shot forward. Watching the attack approach at high speed, the Flame Killer stopped abruptly. It roared loudly, and then it retreated. This gave Marleen a brief moment of respite as she heaved a sigh of relief and raised her wand towards Rhode.

This time, the card on Rhode's hand turned white,

It was shining brilliantly.

Marlene felt her wrist turn cold, she immediately lost focus and glanced down at her wrist. After that, her entire body shivered.

The formerly gorgeous and splendid robe had been shredded, revealing her snow-like skin. However, what made her terrified was the blood that was oozing out from her forearm.

It hurts...

That was Marlene's first thoughts; then her mind started to spin out of control.

...I'm injured?

Am I hurt?

She blanked out. All she could only think of was the blood flowing down her wrist. As for the defense strategy that she had devised to counter Rhode? All of them were tossed into the drain. She even subconsciously cast her wand to the side and gripped her wrist tightly. What about the fight? What about the duel? She didn't care! In her eyes, her injured arm was the most important!

How did I get injured?

Why am I injured?

What should I do?!

Marlene could be described as a resilient flower, but in the end, she still resided in a greenhouse. Naturally, a genius like her would be filled with confidence and self-discipline. She had never encountered any major setbacks in her life... at least not until now.

Suddenly, the cold feeling of steel dragged her sorry self back to reality. She looked to the front, and the first thing she reflected in her eyes was a white, shining sword.

“Swoosh!!”

The Star Mark flew past Marleen and stabbed into the ground, mere inches away from her neck.

At this moment, Marlene was akin to a puppet with their strings cut. Her legs felt soft and she kneeled down onto the floor. Her eyes were hollow as she stared blankly at the sky.

“The ability to combine multiple elements into magic means that your understanding towards magic spells is quite profound.”

Rhode indifferent voice echoed in the garden. He spoke while raising his right hand and soon, the white card from his palm disappeared, following with the white sword which pierced the ground beside Marlene.

“But in actual combat, this is the result. If you perform the same way in missions, then I will give up on you. Lize, treat the wounds and bring her up for a rest. It seems that she unable to get a hold of herself for a moment.”

“Ah, yes!”

Lize who had been worried sick, quickly ran over to treat Marlene’s wound after hearing Rhode’s command. Marlene appeared as if she had lost her soul, staring blankly while sitting on the ground and not saying anything.

Looking at her pitiful state, Rhode frowned but did not say unnecessary. He was quite confident of her mental condition. After all, in the future, she would be known as the ‘Queen of Mercenaries’. As for the rest, it is up to her. If she continued to act like an arrogant brat, then the group would surely be destroyed. Rhode certainly knew that he was not interested in sending himself off.

It was just as he said. Marlene indeed had a profound understanding of the magic itself, but it wasn’t very useful in actual combat, which was a common problem for many people, including the players. It was just like conquering a dungeon, everyone could read the dungeon strategy guide, and the boss weakness would be revealed. But in the actual fight, what use would it be?

If things happened based on what had been written down, then that’ll be for the best, but what if there was an accident? Let’s say that the monsters were killed earlier than expected, and the boss appeared before they could get into position. When that happens, if the situation was not handled properly, the group might be wiped out!

Rhode believed that if the battle went as she has expected, then she would surely perform as well as those legendary figures in history. Unfortunately, fights, in reality, was unlike CG animations. Under an unexpected situation, her mind immediately became unstable, and that was a significant problem.

After Lize left with Marleen, he went back into the house. Old Hank's face was clearly different. He never thought that Rhode was actually that strong. That girl was the famous magical genius of Golden City. She had defeated many people with just one move. Moreover, he did not expect that this young man would be that ruthless! He actually injured the beautiful young miss.

Right now, Old Hank was feeling rather bitter. He sighed as he looked helplessly at Rhode's back and then at Marlene, who was being lifted up by Lize.

A while later.

Marlene silently stared out of the window, her eyes still somewhat vacant.

After all that had happened, Lize brought her to a room where she could finally relax. This was the most massive blow in her life so far. It was just like a famous idol who was being suddenly slapped to the ground and kicked in the face.

Rhode's words repeatedly rang in her mind. Although she could not accept it, she had no way to refute it. While she could blame her loss on Rhode's unorthodox fighting style, but she knew that if it were truly a life-and-death battle, there would only be a single person standing – the winner. If Rhode were her enemy, then she would be dead by now. How can a dead person complain if someone's fighting style was weird and crafty?

“How do you feel Marlene?”

Lize put a cup of hot tea in front of Marlene and asked in low voice.

“I'm feeling better. Thanks, Lize.”

Marlene reluctantly exposed a stiff smile. While she was happy that she could meet an old friend here, but under these circumstances, she couldn't help but feel slightly awkward. The impact of this duel weighed heavy on her. It wasn't as if she hadn't lost before, but there had never been a time where she lost in such an embarrassing manner before. Moreover, the duels

with her teacher were very civilized, and would she rarely notice any blood during the spar... Marlene shook her head dejectedly. She found that she was too weak.

“Frankly, I took things too lightly.”

She sighed.

“I thought that it wouldn’t be too difficult to finish these mercenary commissions with my strength. But... now I know that I can’t even fight properly. Obviously, in my mind, I knew that I had to execute my drills, but my body did not move as I wanted to. In the end, I don’t know what should I do.”

Marlene exposed a bitter smile as she explained.

“I used to laugh at those incompetent people. But looking at it right now, comparing me to them, there’s not so much difference, right?”

“That isn’t the case, Marlene.”

Lize stood up and held her hand. Her eyes focused on the girl in front of her.

“Actual battles and what we imagine actual battles to be are vastly different. I was also the same once. Marlene. Before joining the mercenary group, I was also full of unrealistic dreams; I believed that I could rely on my ability to heal every single one of their injuries. They helped me when I needed them and so I wanted to be able to help them.”

Lize’s eyes flashed a trace of sadness.

“But when I participated in my first real battle, when I saw real flesh and blood, I was almost scared to death. In fact, I did not have the time to treat everyone. There were too many people being seriously injured. Although the leader did not directly blame me, I could sense their disappointment in their eyes. I know that they needed my help, and I had the ability to help them. But I took a step back at the most critical moment... The leader told

me that everyone would face such a test without exception. After that, I also kept working hard and finally...”

“I know...”

Marlene looked down; her beautiful eyes revealed a trace of complicated feelings.

“I understand what you mean Lize, it was just like what he said. If I did the same things as I did now on the mission, no wonder he would not want me. But...”

Marleen clenched her fists.

“I still wanted to try. I know that my experience is limited. I also understand that the things that I was proud of, is useless for my improvement. But I won’t run away like a coward because I am Marlene Senia! I am born with my family’s pride and glory! I absolutely won’t allow myself to retreat, no matter how difficult and hard it will be, I will bite the bullet and continue moving forward. I have decided.”

“Family’s glory...”

Her face turned bitter as she murmured these words to herself. Marlene figured that something was wrong. She quickly raised her head and looking at Lize.

“By the way, Lize. You have not told me why you are here as a mercenary? Why did you leave the Golden City? At that time, I was absent, so I didn’t know what happened. When I returned, you were already gone. I had been looking for you for a long time ever since... Why did you leave?”

After hearing Marlene’s question, Lize’s expression turned somber. She bit her lower lips and answered, “Because it was the decision of the family council.”

“You were expelled?!”

Hearing that term 'Family Council', Marlene suddenly stood up. She stared at the girl who sat beside her in surprise and anger.

"How could those old geezers do that! They actually dared to drive you out? Did Mr. Drekman not stop them?"

"Father agreed the Council's opinion."

"This..."

Hearing that sentence, Marlene didn't know what else to say.

"...how can he..."

"It's not surprising."

Lize smiled and shook her head. She stretched out her hand, playing with her golden ponytail.

"Right now, I am not called Lize Calante Belgrade any longer. Lize Noir... That's my name now.

"That group of self-righteous old geezers!"

Marlene raised her eyebrows coldly and sat down again. Then she looked at Lize with concern.

"Then, you..."

"Just like now."

Lize replied softly.

"I will stay in this mercenary group. It is part of my life now. Although it is very dangerous, but for me, it isn't something bad. Mr. Rhode promised me that he would revive the mercenary group. I think that this is better and more meaningful job than me wearing an expensive dress while attending the banquets, isn't it?"

Marlene was surprised at the calm girl, who revealed a gentle smile. But still, her mind felt somewhat complicated.

That little girl who liked to cry from before... now has now grown up... eh?

Chapter 51 - One More Person

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The cold night wind blew.

Rhode stood on the balcony on the second floor, quietly watching the beautiful scenery of Deep Stone City before him. Along the edges of the mines, lights formed into bright lines which flickered in the dark sky like fireflies in the night. A calming trickle from a nearby creek, together with the gentle breeze that could be heard from afar, seemingly formed a whole new world.

Rhode felt that his existence in this world was becoming increasingly realistic.

“Thump, thump.”

A gentle pair of footsteps came from behind, but Rhode didn't need to look back to know who it was. The person also did not say anything and stood quietly by Rhode's side, bathing in the cool night. After some time, Marlene's voice sounded in Rhode's ear.

“I've heard about you from Lize, thank you.”

“I did not do anything worthy of your thanks,” Rhode said coolly.

“You saved Lize. This act itself is a very important matter to me.”

Marlene reached out her hand and flicked her long hair. Then, she glanced at Rhode's broad back.

“She is my only friend. Our friendship was the same in the past, and there's no difference now. If she died...” Marlene trailed off, but Rhode could understand what she was trying to say.

“Do you know about Lize’s past?”

“If she wants to tell me, she’ll take the initiative to do so.”

Rhode did not answer her question directly, he just shrugged and gave a vague answer. When she discovered Rhode’s point, Marlene found herself unable to reply immediately. She quietly watched Rhode and clenched her teeth. Although Lize told her that Rhode was an easygoing person, Marlene just couldn’t understand how was he easy to get along with...

“...I have decided, Mr. Rhode. I agree to your conditions. I would like to stay.”

“Oh?”

Hearing Marlene’s answer, Rhode turned around.

“Have you truly decided on it?”

Marlene proudly raised her head and replied, “Yes.”

Although she had lost miserably, she managed to grasp her own weaknesses. She believed that perhaps Rhode wouldn’t be able to give her the best suggestions, but at least someone could point out her mistakes.

Now that she had made her decision, she wouldn’t go back on her words. That was her pride.

“Well.”

Rhode didn’t speak any fanciful words and nodded slightly.

“Are you still hurt?”

“...It’s alright.”

When she suddenly heard him ask this, Marlene’s calm expression had a slight change. Subconsciously, she held her wrist. The wound wasn’t anything serious, and after receiving Lize’s treatment, not even a scab was

left. But this injury still left a knot in her heart. Just by thinking of it, it was as though she could still feel the pain.

“But you had a chance to beat me.”

Marleen was shocked. These unexpected words took Marleen by surprise, and she raised her head to look at him.

“Your injury wasn’t serious. If you had the willpower to fight back when you’re injured, then even if you failed in the end, it wouldn’t be as quick as before. Just a minor injury and you completely gave up fighting. If this were a real life or death battle, this action is akin to giving yourself a death sentence.”

Marlene’s face turned red when she heard Rhode point out her mistakes. After that, she slowly recalled the fight with Rhode and found out that what he said was true. Though defeating the youth was almost impossible, but at least she wouldn’t have lost so miserably. It was just as he said, it was a life or death battle, she would be dead.”

“I understand. Thank you, Mr. Rhode.”

“No problem, I just merely said it casually.”

After hesitating for a while, she asked again.

“Mr. Rhode, I heard that... you came from the Eastern Hill.”

“Yes, what’s the problem?”

“No... I just want to ...”

The girl opened her mouth but did not finish her sentence.

“Never mind, I’ll take my leave. Good night, Mr. Rhode.”

It should be impossible, according to the information, that family had long been extinct.

Marlene shook her head and away that thought. Then, she bid her farewell by lifting the hem of her skirt slightly and bowing.

Suddenly, a loud voice broke the still of the night, frightening her for a moment.

“Hey, you damned kid! Where are you!? I’m coming in!!”

Rhode walked to the entrance and saw Old Walker standing there impatiently. This time, the old man’s lazy and decadent attitude from before was gone, his ragged clothes were replaced with a piece of old, but clean leather armor. A thick wooden bow and quiver full of arrows were neatly placed on his back. It was as if he had a total makeover and his entire body seemed to be radiating with energy. Only his face still had an expression of as though someone owed him a living.

“I thought you wouldn’t come, Mr. Walker.”

Although Old Walker’s face clearly displayed his dissatisfaction, Rhode turned a blind eye to it. He strolled to the side of Old Walker and glanced at him, and then nodded.

“You still had 20 minutes... Well anyway, welcome to my humble abode. From today onward, you are a regular member of the mercenary group.”

“Don’t be too proud, boy.” Discerning that Rhode was trying to put on airs, Old Walker coldly snorted and replied, “I want to see how badly an arrogant guy like you would fail. Hmph, at that time I will mock you endlessly so that an ungrateful brat like you will experience the cruel reality!”

Rhode kept his calm and remained silent. This made the old man furious. Then, as though finding something to mock Rhode, he caught the dissatisfied gaze of Marleen by the side. His mouth twitched.

“Who is this chick? Is she your woman? Not bad, it’s just that her face is a little bit ugly...”

“You...!!”

Marlene immediately flared up. Ever since the start, when she heard Old Walker's loud voice, she had already classified him as those 'rude men.' And now that rude man was insulting her? This wasn't something a noble young miss like her could tolerate.

"What a rude man! I am..."

"This is Miss Marlene, an old acquaintance of Lize who will join our mercenary group for the time being."

It was clear that Rhode did not intend to let Marlene vent her anger. Before Marlene spoke, he waved his hand and interrupted them. Then he reached out his hand and made a welcoming gesture.

"So, Mr. Walker, it's already late today. I will prepare a room for you. Have a good rest. Tomorrow we will start early to go to Pavel Cemetery."

"Of course, no problem, kid. You think I was..." The Old Walker blabbered half way before actually registering what Rhode had said, "...wait!!"

He stared at Rhode in surprise. Then he jumped like a cat whose tail had been stepped on.

"Pavel Cemetery? What are we going to do in that ghostly place? You have already selected that damn mission?"

"Of course."

Hearing Old Walker's question, Rhode raised his brow.

"You crazy kid!! You actually took this mission! Why didn't you tell me beforehand!"

"Simple. First, when we went to find you, I had yet to accept this mission. Second, even if we had accepted it, you were not a member of our mercenary group yet, I didn't think that it's necessary to tell you."

"You you you..."

Old Walker pointed at Rhode furiously, his hand slightly trembling in anger.

“You actually fooled me! I quit!”

“Do as you please.”

Rhode did not even bat his eyes as he faced Old Walker’s temper head on. He knew that the old man was actually a masochist. If he did not teach him a lesson, he would definitely not follow his command in the future. That was why, in the first place, he did not bother to be courteous with him. Moreover, even if this old man left the group, it wouldn’t affect his plans by a large margin. Since he had already drafted a plan to challenge the cemetery with a minimum of two people, and furthermore, now he had Marlene’s presence in the group, so even if Old Walker failed to appear, it didn’t really matter.

“It’s not surprising for a coward to go back on his words.”

“You...you...”

Old Walker felt his blood boiling and almost fainted. At this time, Marlene who was standing at the door also chuckled, looking playfully at Rhode.

As Rhode always wore an indifferent expression, Marlene thought that he must be a taciturn person. But when she came in contact with him, she discovered that he actually spoke a lot, and sometimes his words were hurtful. His age might not be much older compared to her, but whenever she stood next to him, she always felt like he was a towering giant. Never had she felt this way before about people who were around her age.

Or perhaps he was an exception?

After staring at Rhode for a moment, Old Walker finally gave up. He put down his hand and turned his head.

“Well, kid, you win. I’d like to see how badly you will die. I will go with you, but if I feel that something is off, I will immediately run away! I may

be old, but I still don't want to put this old life of mine in the hands of a reckless kid like you!"

"No problem."

Rhode shrugged nonchalantly.

"If you can do it, then I have no opinion."

What does he mean?

He was confused and surprised at the same time. What did he mean?

Chapter 52 - Shortcut

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Pavel Cemetery was situated at the northeastern mountain area outside of Deep Stone City. It was once a prosperous small mining area, but the mining techniques were not entirely developed at that time and landslides occurred from time to time. In the end, Many miners were killed and wounded, and the dead were buried under the earth, never to be found again. As time passed, the area turned into a cemetery. Later, Bishop Pavel raised funds to build a proper cemetery, and as thanks for his charitable activities, the place was thereby named as Pavel Cemetery.

But nothing was ever certain in this world. The once venerable Bishop turned into an infamous necromancer, and the cemetery naturally became his territory. Many people had wondered how did this happen, but Rhode found it uninteresting. Against his enemies — kill or catch them, then loot as fast as possible. As of the perpetrator's motive? It could be investigated slowly after that. It's better to not do something that would waste time though.

Not before long, the well-maintained road they were traveling on disappeared. The only remaining traces of the road was a few pieces of cracked slate. Mountainous trails were difficult to traverse, but for Rhode, the most annoying thing wasn't that, but instead, it was the old man who was nagging from behind.

“I say, kid, what do you mean by taking us to this ghastly place?”

Old Walker complained incessantly as he stared at the surface of the steep mountain.

“Pavel Cemetery is on the other side of the mountain. If you are lost, I don't mind showing you the direction.”

“Thanks for your goodwill.”

As he was walking at the front, Rhode did not bother to turn back and refused Old Walker's 'proposal' sarcastically.

"I think this way is better."

Better?

Hearing Rhode's answer, Old Walker almost fainted. He looked at the road before him and compared it to the road at the foot of the mountain. Which route is better? Does it even need to be discussed?

Although he felt dissatisfied, he still suppressed his anger and followed behind. Rhode told Old Walker about the same conditions he gave to Marleen. If he did not wholly obey his command, he would immediately leave him here to die. Although he wasn't sure whether Rhode was being serious or not, Old Walker eventually decided not to take the risk.

Rhode wore an ordinary leather armor and walked at the front while Lize and Marlene followed closely behind. The steep mountain trail did not cause too much problem for Rhode and Lize; even Marlene did not seem to be troubled by it. Although she wasn't accustomed to climbing mountains, with additional support from her magic, it wasn't that difficult.

They were almost there.

Around the corner, the mountain path was growing narrower and more dangerous. But Rhode had his own plans. He compared the landscape before him to the ones in his memories, then he nodded.

In fact, since the beginning, he didn't plan to attack the enemy territory directly. Pavel Cemetery was a somewhat unique dungeon as half of the territory was located on the surface and half of it was beneath the earth, to put it more precisely, it was within the mines. If they attacked directly from the front with only four people, they would exhaust themselves to death by fighting the regular undead mobs before facing the boss. As for completing the quest, it would turn into a joke.

That was why he did not attack head-on because he had a better plan.

Players could be described as the most diligent yet laziest people in the world. They were diligent because their passion for adventure was much higher than the people from this world. Whether it was a pit, river, or gully, players would spend their time to explore every nook and cranny of the dungeon in hope to find some precious treasure or artifact to increase their strength. From this point, it could be said that even the most greedy bandits could not be compared to them.

As for their laziness — they would simply seek out for shortcuts when faced with longwinded questlines. Those ‘shortcuts’ even included exploiting of game bugs. The players would try their best to complete everything within the shortest possible time. Frankly, the players just didn’t like to follow the order arranged for them and rather forge their own path.

That was exactly what Rhode was doing now.

The reason why he did not choose the road on the foot of the mountain was that he knew of a hidden entrance in the mountain precipice above. There was a small, deep hole leading into the Pavel Cemetery. This hole used to be a mining tunnel for miners to exit the pit. If Rhode used this hidden path, he could easily enter Pavel Cemetery and shorten his journey by nearly half.

—

Around the edges of the mountain precipice, the cold wind grew gotten stronger.

“It’s here.”

A distance away from him was a hole not more than two meters in diameter. Rhode nodded in satisfaction as he walked to the edge of the hole and peered down. However, all he could see was nothing but darkness.

“Wait, kid... what are you trying to do? You want us to jump down this hole?”

“Yes, this is hole connected to a tunnel. From here, we can shorten half of the distance.”

“What a joke!”

Old Walker snorted in dissatisfaction.

“How do you know that this hole leads to a tunnel, kid? If we went down and fell into the middle of those damn monsters then what should we do? Furthermore, even if we killed that accursed necromancer then how do we escape?”

“Stupid.”

Rhode did not answer, but clearly, Marlene did not agree with him.

“Don’t you know the relationship between the undead and necromancer? They rely on the necromancer’s magic to maintain the existence of their bodies. Once we kill the necromancer, then the undead would turn to a useless pile of corpses. This is basic knowledge... are you really a mercenary?”

“I am a mercenary, not a mage.”

After being ridiculed by Marlene, Old Walker immediately backed down and grumbled to himself.

“Who knows what kind of abnormal thoughts you eccentric mages have?”

“Abnormal?! You ignorant—”

“I’ll go first.”

Rhode decisively ended the minor dispute before it turned into something big.

“Next up would be Lize, then Marlene, then you, Walker. Since you are a veteran, I think you don’t need my help.” Rhode said, and then he disappeared into the hole.

A chilly breeze swept past. Although the depth was about four to five meters, with the help of Spirit Bird, Rhode landed on the ground smoothly.

“Swoosh!”

Suddenly, a bright light appeared on Rhode’s palm and illuminated the dark passage. Rhode took a step forward carefully, and after determining that there was no danger ahead, he finally relaxed. At the same time, the other three also followed him and jumped.

Lize and Marlene easily used their magic to make them float down. While Old Walker couldn’t use magic, since he was once a veteran ranger, this kind of height was not difficult for him.

“Let’s move.”

Rhode spoke in a low voice and assumed the vanguard position.

Inside the old tunnel, only their footsteps could be heard in the darkness. Lize, as usual, assumed the role from Rhode as the ‘lighthouse’ and summoned the holy light to illuminate the way for the four. According to Rhode’s instruction, Marlene walked beside Lize to help her reduce the possibility of an ambush. Old Walker followed closely behind the rest of the group because it was a relatively dangerous and critical position. If the enemy attacked from their rear, it would become quite dangerous. It required an experienced veteran to protect them from behind. Since Marlene and Lize clearly could not bear the burden, the position of rearguard was left to Old Walker.

The dirt shifted under their feet as they walked.

Under the illumination of the holy light, the abandoned rusted tools, old mining carts, corrosive holes on the wooden columns, and spider webs were finally exposed. From time to time, a breeze would sweep through the tunnel.

Suddenly, a perilous scent drifted in the air.

“Lize.”

At the end of the tunnel, Rhode scanned the seemingly empty mining pit before him. Then, he quickly made a hand gesture. When Lize saw this, she hastily brought her pace to a halt and silently cast a barrier on the four of them. Old Walker who was rather careless at first also began to unsheath the dagger on his waist; his two dilated pupils were darting corner to corner with vigilance. Then, he crouched down in attempt to catch any sound of movement in their immediate surroundings. Although this old mercenary had been complaining and irritating them all the way, right now he revealed his professional nature.

Marleen did not react until she saw the rest of them assuming a cautious stance. She immediately gripped the wand in her hand, awaiting further orders. However, instead of scanning the area, her eyes focused on Rhode's back. Even if the enemy was in front of her, she could not fight without his permission. Although this condition was harsh, after her initial failure, Marlene was not really against it anymore. The four then slowly made their way towards the mining pit.

One step... two steps... three steps...

“Crack!”

Suddenly, a withered arm extended out from the ground and rushed towards the four of them. Facing this sudden assault, Rhode, who was already prepared from the beginning immediately waved his sword. The swordlight sliced through the darkness. Following with a sharp whistling screech, the withered arm was cleanly cut into two. Then, all of a sudden, the ground shook vigorously, and countless of withered arms flew into the air. At the same time, dark, desiccated bodies crawled out from the ground.

“Marlene, Ice!”

“Ah? Okay!”

Hearing Rhode's sudden command, Marlene was stunned for a moment. Then she hurriedly raised her wand and pointed it towards the ground.

“Caicy!” (Frost)

An icy white mist swirled at the tip of the wand which slowly engulfed the surrounding air. The temperature began to dip drastically; ice particles even started appearing in the air. The undead was clearly affected by the fluctuation in temperature and its movements stalled to a crawl. At this time, a fiery, bright flame emerged from Rhode's sword.

“Woo...!!”

Within the burning flames, the black hound emerged once again. It growled at the frosted enemy before it, and under Rhode's command, it rushed forward, its baring its sharp fangs and claws.

“Marleen! Thunderstorm!”

Acknowledging Rhode's command, Marlene nodded and raised her right hand. Soon, electrical sparks crackled around her fingers, and in a blink of an eye, bolts of lightning shot out towards the undead. The thunderstorm roasted the undead creatures, and the impact launched their limbs into the sky. Soon, before area before them was empty once again.

“This...”

Marlene stared at the scene before her in disbelief. Although she knew that her magical power was strong, she never thought that she was able to beat that many undead creatures! What made her even more ecstatic was that she merely cast two spells — and those were low-level spells to boot! Since they did not need a long casting time, the damage shouldn't be THAT significant. Even more so, she could not believe that... she actually could attack that fluidly?

Fluid and quick casting is a critical skill for a mage. If they could cast faster, they could grasp the initiative to usurp control of the battlefield. But it was easier said than done. Mages had to memorize hundreds of different spells. To be able to cycle through the spells fluidly and cast quickly at the same time was no easy feat. Only when the mage enters the Soul Circle stage and acquired a better control of their ability would they then be able to cast faster and smoother.

But still, Rhode's ability to command was simply exquisite and beyond her expectations.

Who is he actually?

Marlene could not help but stare at Rhode. While it was true that he had a deep understanding towards magic, she too, had it as well. But in the heat of the battle, she wasn't able to choose the fastest nor the most powerful from her sizeable repertoire of spells without hesitation. Not many people could do something like that.

Is he also a mage?

If Rhode heard Marlene's inner thoughts, he would definitely shake his head. Never would he have thought that studying magic was that difficult and troublesome in this world. The reason he could command Marlene to use those spells was because, back in the game, the players would usually choose to use several large-scale AOE spells when fighting against a group of mobs, and he only casually chose one of those spells. As for the principle of magic combination? He wasn't interested in understanding those boring things at all.

The battle ended in five minutes.

Under the blanket of ice, the undead creatures were frozen solid and were unable to show any further threat. They were absolutely overwhelmed by Marleen's spell. After a while, Rhode scanned around once more. When he ascertained that there were no more threats, he put down his sword and made a hand gesture.

“Clean the battlefield.”

Lize and Old Walker nodded and immediately dispersed. On the other hand, Marlene revealed a confused expression. Clearly, she did not understand what Rhode meant.

“Clean the battlefield?”

“Yes.”

Rhode said plainly and went beside a body that had been completely torn apart, leaving only the bones and fragments behind. He reached out his hand and began to search for something.

“Check to see if there are any good things in these bodies and then hand it to me.”

“T-t-touch the corpse?!!”

Marlene’s face immediately paled.

Chapter 53 - Screw Up

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The young girl had a dream.

Famous heroes armed with legendary weapons were slaughtering the evil monsters barring their path. Eventually, they achieved an overwhelming victory over the BOSS and received immeasurable honor and their fame spread across the lands — however, in the end, a dream was just a dream. It didn't explain how the heroes toiled to pick up every single loot from the remains of the monsters to gather enough resources for the next fight.

Reality is cruel.

As she stared at Rhode and the others who were stripping down the rotten corpses, a few gold coins amongst other strange things appeared from the bodies. Marlene could only stand beside them with a dark expression and protest.

“This is blasphemy towards the deceased!”

Unfortunately, her righteous objection fell on deaf ears.

“You must be kidding.”

Rhode sneered as he grabbed a few gold coins that fell on the ground and stuffed it in his pocket.

“We are mercenaries, and they are our enemies. Naturally, we have to pick up what we deserve. And... about the matter of ‘blasphemy towards the deceased,’ I would think that the necromancer had already done it once, so I guess the dead wouldn't mind if we did it again.”

“Irrational! Lize! Come talk some sense into him! What are yo—”

When Marleen turned around and saw Lize carefully retrieving a silver necklace on the corpse's neck, she couldn't bear to continue her sentence.

“Ah, this...”

Lize's face turned red and smiled awkwardly. It was not that she did not understand what Marlene was thinking. After all, when she first joined the mercenary group, she also made a huge ruckus. But now, well...

“Our mercenary group's income is very limited, so...”

While Lize sounded rather sorry and the red tinge on her face revealed her embarrassment, her fingers didn't slow down one bit as she looted the corpse.

“But, we will receive a reward once the mission is done, right?”

“Do you think that kind of money is enough for us? Missy?” This time, it was Old Walker who spoke out.

Unlike Lize, Old Walker totally resembled a graverobber. If he wanted a ring, he would yank the entire arm of the corpse. Then he whipped out a knife from his pocket and sliced into the corpse's skull, digging out a large piece of corpse oil. Looking at this scene made Marlene want to puke out yesterday's dinner.

“Every time we complete a mission, we only earn a hundred gold coins, and sometimes, even fewer. This kid's mercenary group only has a few members, that's why the lack of funds doesn't really show. But ordinary mercenary groups have at least ten members. Everyone fought with their lives on the line just for a mere ten gold coins. But what can this measly amount do? We have to maintain our weapons and armors, and we also need to eat and drink. Do you think that we don't require money to do all of these? Moreover, we will only receive the reward once we complete the mission. What if we fail? You want us to suffer from cold and hunger?”

Marlene couldn't find any words to refute Old Walker, so she stood idly to a side and stared at the three people looting the corpses with enthusiasm.

Once the trio was done clearing out the bodies, they continued as though nothing happened.

After that incident, they encountered many ambushes later on, but under Rhode's steady leadership, they waded through the storm without major issues. While they only numbered four people, Old Walker had a vast plethora of experience, Lize could easily restrain the undead, and Marlene's AOE spells were able to make easy work of the undead.

As they delved deeper into the mines, the air became increasingly dank and heavy. The darkness seemed to erode and eat away at Lize's holy light. Rhode was at the vanguard. He clutched the Star Mark tightly as he scanned the shadows before him vigilantly. Based on his conjecture, he believed that the necromancer was already alerted to their presence.

After all, they'd killed so many undead along the way. Surely the necromancer would be aware that something was wrong when he lost contact with that many undead. If Rhode had enough members, he wouldn't mind sauntering to BOSS room and challenge the necromancer head-on, however, he only had three people with him right now, and furthermore, in this world, there was no such thing as resurrection.

Rhode put down his left hand, signaling the other three behind him to stop. He scanned the surroundings once more and spoke to them softly, "We are close to the necromancer. I will lay the strategy out now, remember, you need to recall what I say here because I cannot always give commands to all of you in the battle. If you forget... then well... I don't think that I'll even have to hand out punishments as a dead body won't be able to receive them anyway."

The three of them immediately raised their guard when they heard that the final battle was close. Moreover, when they heard Rhode's usual indifferent voice, it somehow lifted their morale. Along the way, Marlene had received plenty of valuable advice from following Rhode's command. Although she had already possessed skill and experience back when she was training in the academy, under Rhode's command, she could finally comprehend the true meaning behind those skills. When she cast the spell according to what he said, she suddenly realized that something she had studied before was

supposed to be used like that. This made her stop doubting Rhode's words and began to follow his commands obediently.

As for Old Walker, although he was still unsatisfied with Rhode... at least he did not want to be the revolutionary martyr.

"Lize."

Rhode faced the cleric behind him since she held the most important role in this battle.

"I will be responsible for tying that guy down. First, you must remember to stack extra layers of barrier to the others. Unless I ask you to, you are not allowed to waste your power on me. The necromancer has a strong defense, so Marlene will be responsible for breaking its protective shield. Remember, only launch your destructive spells afterward when the shield is down. Otherwise, it would only be a waste of power."

"Yes, I understand, Mr. Rhode." Lize nodded her head.

Seeing that Lize had understood her role, he turned his head and looked at Marlene.

"Miss Marlene, as I said earlier, your job is to remove the protective shield from the necromancer. With your prowess, it shouldn't be too difficult. If there's anything beyond your ability, then quickly inform me, and I'll solve it. While I attract the necromancer's attention, it won't entirely give up on attacking you. That's why when you are casting your spells, you need to pay attention to your surroundings. Prioritize killing any undead you meet before fighting the necromancer. And lastly, you are not to engage the necromancer until I say so."

"Alright, no problem. Leave it to me."

After witnessing Rhode's judgment on the battlefield, Marlene's answer became more confident.

Once Rhode received her verbal acknowledgment, he turned to Old Walker.

“Mr. Walker, your job is straightforward. There is a gem on the necromancer’s forehead — it’s quite obvious, so you shouldn’t miss it. Your role is to shoot that gem when the necromancer is preparing to cast a magic spell. Even with your strength, it still will be difficult to break that gem. But do not fret, all you have to do is to delay him from casting a spell. Also, I hope that you can take care of these two girls, if there is any unexpected danger, please do remind them.”

Rhode spoke quite a bit, but Old Walker did not respond. On the contrary, he frowned.

“Youngster, there seems to be a sound coming from that side.”

Old Walker raised his hand and pointed towards a tunnel.

“Over there?”

Rhode’s eyes traced the direction where Old Walker had pointed to, and his face darkened.

At this moment, they were standing at a fork. One passage led to the necromancer, the other was a dead end, behind them was where Rhode and the others came from, and the last one was the tunnel which Old Walker pointed to. This tunnel was connected to the main entrance, that means that if they did not enter via ‘Rhode’s shortcut,’ then they were supposed to come from this passage.

And right now, Old Walker was saying that there was movement from that tunnel.

Rhode signaled everyone to keep silent and then closed his eyes. Soon, he could hear the faint sound of weapons clashing from the other side. It was clear that there was fighting going on, and it appeared that both of them had the same goal.

What should he do next?

Rhode frowned and looked at the other three behind him. The necromancer wasn't hard to beat, but with only four people, they would need to spend a considerable amount of time. During that time, they did not know what might happen. If they were stabbed in the back in the middle of a struggle, then it would be very bothersome.

People who played online games all knew that there was an unspoken taboo about kill stealing a BOSS. If it was an instanced dungeon, then it wouldn't be so bad, but a mission BOSS like this one... was really hard to say. After all, a wild BOSS was like a public transport — as long anyone saw it nearby, anyone could ride it. In the game, the BOSS could still respawn after a period of time, but what if there was only one BOSS...?

A river of blood would be an understatement to describe the horror... even a landscape full of bloody corpses wasn't enough.

As the first guild leader in the game, and also someone who held the title of the legendary Firstblood, indubitably, Rhode would be extremely familiar with these things. He immediately gave up on hunting the necromancer and planned to welcome the uninvited guest, but...

Rhode turned his head and looked at the three people behind him.

Lize was in a panic; she understood that encountering people at this time was not a good thing. On the other hand, Marlene was indifferent to this, but it was no surprise as she had never been a mercenary before. As for a veteran like Old Walker, his understanding of this matter was something that goes without saying. If he didn't understand, then why would he remind Rhode in the first place?

Now... what should I do? Should I go greet those guys?

“Let's go there and see.”

Not long later, Rhode came to a conclusion. If the opponents were strong, then he would use the darkness to his advantage and strike down these people before the situation could turn awry. If they were already on the

verge of dying, then he'd just watch them die. Either way, he definitely must witness their disappearance.

The battle wasn't too far away, but contrary to their expectations, the "newcomer's" situation was already quite dire by the time Rhode and his team arrived. In fact, they were already on the verge of falling apart.

The newcomers were also in the mine. Waves of undead creatures assaulted the center of the room where the 'living people' were, attempting to stop these intruders from entering their grounds. Although the 'newcomers' had more manpower than Rhode, their overall battle strength was much lower than Rhode and his team. But it was no surprise as Rhode had already scanned their formation and he shook his head.

Three swordsmen, two thieves, and one tank.

In one glance, Rhode saw through the weakness in their formation. Melee classes were indeed threatening in close quarters combat, but in a place filled with undead, all they could become was their dinner. The undead were creatures void of fear and death. As long as the melee combatant wasn't over-leveled, it wouldn't be much threat towards them. And these mercenaries here were below level ten; they were even unable to use sword energy condensation. That being said, having able to fight until here could be said to be a considerable feat.

This is as far as they will go.

A thief was attacked by an undead, he flipped his hand and stabbed the opponent's throat. His move was fast and agile; if it were a living person then they would have long been dead. But for the undead, this was clearly not enough. The undead raised its hand and slammed downwards.

"Woah!!!"

The poor thief who was unable to dodge in time was sent flying a distance before smashing into the ground. Without giving him any time to recover, a pair of cold, shriveled hands grabbed his limbs.

“Aaaaaaa!!!”

Followed by a shrill scream, blood flowed out from undead’s mouth, and the thief moved no more.

With the death of a comrade, their formation began to falter. The pressure of missing one comrade grew on the remaining survivors. Suddenly, a brilliant pillar of flame burst out from a group of undead, killing a large number of them and buying the group some time. Then, a red-haired woman staggered out from the fire, her face was pale and her whole body was covered in blood. Even her leather armor was full of blood and holes.

After looking at that woman, Lize was surprised.

“Sister Shauna!!”

Right at this moment, when Rhode heard Lize’s cry, Rhode made his decision.

“Marlene, get ready.”

Author:

PS: Today I was decorating the wallpaper and the other areas, that’s why I got back home a little bit late and updated quite late. There’s still more at night. Yes, that’s the case...

PS2: The background wall was really expensive, a wall was about two thousand...

Chapter 54 - Joint Action

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Haa!”

Once more, she repelled the undead with her sword. Shauna then took a step back and breathed deeply. The wound on her shoulder began to numb; even her arms gradually lost feeling. However, the undead around them kept increasing which made her feel discouraged.

Will I die here?

She bit her lips which made her feel some pain, but it still could not drown her inner pressure and despair. She thought that she had already fully prepared for this mission, but when she led her group to enter this place, she found that she was too naive.

As a four Star-Ranked mission, the Pavel Cemetery was going to be anything but easy. They were just like a drop in the vast ocean of endless undead; it was a matter of time before their inevitable death. While she led her men to repel the undead's assault one after another, their losses were too just too great. Up till now, their group had lost about five to six members, and the rest were mostly injured. In this kind of situation, how long can they last?

It wasn't as though she didn't consider retreating, but in the end, she still chose to shoulder her losses and go on. Right now, she was already too far in and was unable to retreat. The only option they had was to press on and kill the necromancer.

However, Shauna knew that it was an impossible task. If they had so much trouble fighting against these regular undead, how were they supposed to defeat the necromancer?

Shauna wasn't the only one who thought that way; even her men had lost hope defeating these horrifying undead. The only thing keeping them from giving up was their will to survive.

But that was their limit.

“Oh no!”

A putrid stench suddenly raided her nostrils; then she felt an unexpected impact on her arm which caused her to lose her grip on her sword. The flame on the ground also dissipated. Taking advantage of her weakened state, an undead flung open its arms and launched itself towards her.

Her mind went blank.

At this moment, Shauna's heart sank. As a veteran, she certainly knew what the consequences of blanking out in the middle of a battle. Now she can only face the consequences of her carelessness — death.

Fortunately, the grim reaper passed by her.

The moment Shauna closed her eyes, a dazzling light appeared in the air above her. It slammed down onto the undead, and it fell to the floor as though a giant hammer had smashed into it.

Then, followed by another brilliant light, a tremendous explosion rocked the earth.

“Boom”!

In a blink of an eye, the terrifying undead who plagued the mercenaries completely turned to ash. The mercenaries were shocked as they stared at the few people standing at the opposite tunnel.

“Sister Shauna, are you okay?!”

Sensing that the danger had been dispelled, Lize quickly ran towards the injured red-haired lady. Marlene, who had finished casting the spell,

proudly flicked her illustrious long hair to the back. Then she smiled confidently at Rhode, apparently hinting him to praise her.

How's that? See? I've done a wonderful job, haven't I?

Facing Marlene's gesture, he was rendered quite speechless... As expected from the honor student who followed 5 Stresses, 4 Beauties, 3 Loves. I clearly meant to finish all of them... Ah, just forget about it. After all, when he issued the order, he did not consider the possibility of Lize recognizing these people. Right now, he felt somewhat lucky that Marlene had an 'honor student' mindset, and not of a players' or there would be problems...

"It's the Red Hawk..."

Looking at the red-haired female swordsman, Old Walker muttered to himself. He and Rhode glanced at each other and both of them have the same thoughts.

"Lize?"

After barely escaping from death, Shauna did not have time to celebrate as she was shocked to see the person in front of her.

"Why are you in this place?"

"I came to complete a mission."

Lize answered as she lowered her body in front of Shauna. Then, she stretched out her hand and summoned a faint light. The wounds on the red-haired female swordsman quickly healed, even the poison from the undead completely disappeared.

That was the importance of Spirit Master in a party. Although some mercenaries did learn minor healing spells, it definitely couldn't be compared to a full-fledged Spirit Master. Mercenary groups would never slight the importance of protecting the Spirit Master in a party. Moreover, the number of Spirit Masters were low as many of them were not interested in being an adventurer. Which was why, other than the Spirit Masters who

traveled with the church, there were only those Spirit Masters like Lize who chose to be an adventurer for no clear reason.

After treating Shauna's injury, Lize stood up and walked towards the others. In this battle, Shauna and her subordinates were all injured, some of them even were incapacitated. If their injuries were not treated in time, they might become the brothers and sisters of those things they had been fighting just now.

Shauna stopped looking at Lize and diverted her attention to Rhode and the others. She quickly stood up and smiled while reaching out her hand.

“Thank you for your help.”

“You're welcome.”

Holding Shauna's hand, Rhode indifferently replied in one sentence.

“It seems like this is the second time that I've thanked you.”

Shauna put down her hand and studied Rhode with a surprised and curious expression. Even though she only saw him twice and was not very familiar with each other. She knew that he had saved Lize, and then he dueled against Sereck to pass the Mercenary Assessment. Indeed, he is strong, but it seems like... this man isn't that simple?

Shauna then looked at two people behind him. First, she spotted Marlene who was wearing a luxurious magic robe, which made Shauna gasp in shock for a moment. Mages were even rarer than Spirit Masters, how could one appear here? And... standing next to her, wasn't that Old Walker who loved to drink alcohol at the Mercenary Association every day?

How did these people associate themselves with one another?

Shauna couldn't help but turn around and look at Lize, then she turned back and squinted her eyes at Rhode.

“Excuse me, you guys are...?”

“We are here to complete the mission.”

Rhode answered straightforwardly.

“Same goes for me.”

“Only the four of you?”

“That’s right.”

If it was any other day, then Shauna might assume that Rhode was joking. Pavel Cemetery was a perilous place, a lot of mercenaries suffered losses here. If only the four of them survived, then it might sound about right. But that did not seem to be the case. After all, Rhode and the others didn’t appear to be miserable and judging from their clothing, it did not look like they had been attacked.

Then is this man actually saying the truth?

Shauna blinked her eyes in surprise. In any case, she still could not believe it. They had only four people, yet they could enter the depths unharmed? And with such ease? How can this be? Is this young man really that strong?

When the red-haired female swordsman was busy scrutinizing Rhode, Lize, who had finished treating the injured, went back to Rhode’s side and said something to Marlene in a low voice. The two of them seemed to be whispering about something. But Shauna no longer paid any attention to them, because at this time, Rhode broke the silence.

“What are you going to do next?”

“Next?”

When she heard Rhode’s question, Shauna broke from her stupor. Finally, she was aware of the current situation.

They were in the middle of a mission.

And this young man was also on a mission.

That means...

Shauna immediately felt that things have become a bit tricky.

In general, an accident like this sometimes happens during a mission. Since there were a lot of missions available, and before it was completed, anybody could take it. So, a clash like this happened quite often. If encountered with such a situation, mercenary groups with a good relationship with each other would either choose to withdraw or propose a joint action. If the relationship was slightly worse, they would directly fight to determine the outcome.

So now, which one do we have to choose?

Shauna erased the thought of fighting with each other since the other side had rescued them. It also meant that they did not have malicious intent. However, if she were to withdraw, how could she answer to her dead comrades? She had taken so much effort to reach this point, so how could she retreat? But... Shauna knew that with their current strength, defeating the necromancer was just a fleeting dream.

“If you don’t mind, I hope we can cooperate.”

Eventually, Shauna bit her teeth and made this suggestion.

“We do not need points or rewards. In fact, we came here just for a sword. According to the report, it was in the necromancer’s hands. We hope to join hands with you. As long as we can acquire the sword, then we can give up the rest of the rewards.”

A sword?

Rhode was faintly surprised.

He did not remember that there was a sword in the cemetery.

Did I forget something?

Or is there any other reason?

Rhode frowned and thought for a moment, but he still couldn't think of anything, so he decided to ask her directly.

“Miss Shauna, I don't remember that the association released this mission.”

“We received a private commission.”

Shauna shook her head and replied.

So... that was the case...

Hearing her answer, the Rhode's doubt was finally cleared. Thus, he did not say anything more and nodded his head.

“I can promise you, but I have a condition.”

The red-haired female swordsman revealed a bright expression but still nervously asked.

“What is your condition?”

“Very simple.”

Rhode made a gesture.

“In the next battle, you must listen to my command.”

Chapter 55 - Battle in Cemetery

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode's overwhelming charisma and confidence rendered Shauna completely speechless. As the saying goes, give him an inch, and he'll take a mile. Shauna assumed that they were merely in a cooperation-relationship, but when Rhode delivered those overbearing words, wasn't it the same as demanding them to be his subordinates?

Though everyone else revealed a different reaction in response to Rhode's exclamation.

Old Walker placed his hands on his chest, watching the fun that was about to ensue from the sidelines. During the arduous journey, he had witnessed and personally acknowledged Rhode's capability in commanding others. He could tell that Rhode's knowledge and resilience were top notch. It was a pity that his only flaw was his sharp tongue. If he said one, then it'll be one. If he said two, then must be two. He will not give others the opportunity to refute him. Rhode made it clear to Shauna and her team that they were too weak, and he did not believe in them. It was better to leave everything to him.

Although there was nothing wrong with his sentence, the way he said it was just like a slap in the face...

Compared to Old Walker who preferred to watch the scene unfold from the side, Marleen genuinely thought that it was only natural that Shauna should concede her party to Rhode. She did not understand how things work between mercenaries, but she knew that with only four of them, they were able to reach the depths without breaking a sweat. It wasn't like Shauna and the others. Though they had more manpower, they still fell into such a tragic state. Thus, wasn't following Rhode's commands the most logical thing to do? As for their numerical advantage...? Eh... mages had never considered numbers as an advantage.

Lize, on the other hand, felt rather awkward. She was the only one who was well acquainted with Shauna's team. And right now, her friends suddenly turned into subordinates. Furthermore, Rhode's straightforwardness didn't leave them with a speck of face. This left Lize confused about her next action. Nevertheless, she wasn't stupid, and at this time, she understood that it was better for her to stay silent.

As an experienced mercenary group leader, Shauna knew she had to respond quickly, and she looked at Rhode before her. However, she still remained quite hesitant.

The truth was simple; she didn't want to agree with this condition! Since both of them were from two different groups, and her people might be employed as meat shields. But recognizing Rhode's determined attitude, he made it clear that there was no room for compromise. If she did not agree right here and now, then the next road might lead to a dead end.

When Shauna fell in deep thought, a voice sounded beside her.

"Hmph, why should we listen to your command! Bis sis, don't listen to him! We have more people than them; it should be them who needs help from us!"

A young mercenary donning a leather armor and a two-handed sword jumped out from the rear. Then he glared at Rhode unhappily.

"Barney, it's not your place to speak."

Hearing the outburst of this young mercenary, Shauna began having a headache. She waved her hand, indicating him to stop. But it was clear that the young mercenary named Barney did not intend to stay silent there.

"But, big sis, this guy, he is too much... He just made it clear that we were going to be their meat shields and they will just snatch the rewards later! This kind of despicable person, we..."

"Despicable person?"

Rhode wasn't mad, but Marlene on the other hand, couldn't hold her rage in anymore, and she flared up.

“So that's how mercenaries treat their benefactors?! If it weren't for us, you've already died in this ghastly place!”

“Even without you guys, we can still survive!”

Barney clenched his teeth and answered. Marlene snorted coldly and lifted her chin, no longer looking at him. In her opinion, as a noble, she did not need to waste her precious saliva in a mouth fight with an uncouth mercenary like him.

Marlene's arrogance angered the young mercenary. He spat on the floor and opened his mouth to say something. However, Shauna finally became angry.

“Shut your mouth, Barney! If I hear one more word from you, you can help yourself to leave the group.”

“Big sis...”

Looking at the furious Shauna, Barney felt extremely wronged.

Who cares if they're a noble?

It took so much effort to get to this place, and yet these despicable people were trying to use us as meat shields?

Pui!

We mercenaries also have our own pride, how can we just let trample all over us?

Maybe big sister is afraid of these nobles, but I'm not!

Even though they have power and money, I will still fight with them with whatever I have until the end!

“I agree to your request.”

Shauna finally made her decision. After all, the undead were too difficult for their group. Furthermore, she was also still pondering on how to beat that damned necromancer. Since this young man is confident, then it would be the best to leave it to him.

“I need everyone to follow my commands unconditionally.”

After receiving Shauna’s acknowledgment, Rhode began to speak again as he stared at the mercenaries behind her with his usual calm expression.

“If you obey my commands, I assure you that I will try my best to keep your lives intact. Otherwise... your life will be irrelevant to me.”

When he paused his speech, Rhode studied the young mercenaries’ expressions behind the red-haired female swordsman.

“If there’s anyone who is not willing to listen to my command, you can stand up now. I don’t want any trouble in the battle.”

“Hmph!”

Barney was aware that Rhode was eyeballing him. Thus, he merely snorted and refused to move. In his opinion, this cunning noble was trying to use the threat of death to split the team. So, he would definitely not leave. Once he found sufficient evidence of the young noble’s scheme, he might be able to stop it.

No matter what you want to do, I won’t let you succeed!

The young man clenched his fist and swore secretly to himself.

—

Ever since the addition of Shauna’s team, the group’s clear speed became evidently faster. Soon, they found themselves at the bottom of the underground cemetery.

“Boom! Boom Boom!”

Followed by streaks of lightning, many undead creatures were sent flying, and their fragments soon fell to the ground, no longer presenting any threat.

Indeed, they are strong...

As she stared at the young mage, who wielded her wand as easily as breathing, and the young noble Rhode, who calmly commanded at the front, Shauna's initial doubts began to diminish. The combination of the powerhouse Marleen and Rhode's flawless command was the epitome of perfection. Those undead who once caused Shauna and her team to struggle for survival were wiped out as easily as sneezing.

There is no doubt, they ARE strong...

Shauna couldn't help but stare at the black hound following behind Rhode. While she was present on the day of the mercenary assessment, witnessing Rhode's prowess firsthand in a dungeon was always clearer than being a mere spectator.

“We're about to arrive.”

Unlike the distracted Shauna, Rhode never stopped focusing on his opponents. After clearing out another wave of undead, he scanned his surroundings vigilantly. Then, he whipped out a ring from his pocket and wore it on his finger. The Soul Binding Stone which he obtained from the haunted house was engraved on the tip of the ring. Rhode had cut the stone into three parts which he inserted into a silver ring he had bought. While his alchemy skill was rather lacking, he could still do something basic such as this.

The size of the Soul Binding Stone could decide the level of the soul it could bind. For example, a small stone was unable to bind a strong soul, but if the stone was too big and the soul was small, then it would be a waste. Right now, the size was just right. And the reason why Rhode brought out his Soul Binding Stone right now was clearly that of one thing.

Swoosh!!

A dense fog billowed out of nowhere, clouding the sights of everyone.

When the smoke dispersed, a moment of eerie silence fell upon the group. Suddenly, a black shadow emerged from the ground, swiftly rushing towards them. If it were before, then everyone would be surprised by this sudden attack. But Rhode had already made the necessary preparations, thus, the enemy's ambush failed to harm the group. Marleen was chanting furiously; she conjured a whirlwind which engulfed the team and barred the black shadow from entering.

A pile of bones slowly formed into a sharp silhouette.

“Hehehe...”

At the same time, a cold and crisp sound echoed from all directions, followed by an aura of evilness and death.

“I truly did not expect that you could break into my chamber...”

“The Necromancer!”

Shauna growled in a low voice; then she raised her sword. Shortly after, a crimson flame emerged from her sword which soon engulfed her blade with fire. This fire attribute magic weapon was something she looted from a long time ago. It was called the Burning Blade.

“Listen to my commands, and don't forget my words from before.”

Compared to Shauna's tense expression as though she was facing her eternal nemesis, Rhode was clearly much calmer. He held the Star Mark on his hand and narrowed his eyes to scrutinize each changing detail in his surrounding. The darkness became increasingly thick; it was like an invisible, heavy curtain that shrouded everyone within. As their world plunged into pitch darkness, nobody knew for certain where the next attack might come from.

However, only Rhode knew what was going to happen.

He majestically raised his sword over his head.

In the next moment, everyone discovered that Rhode's sword was emitting a brilliant light which pierced through the darkness like a lighthouse in the night.

Akin to an opening of a stage play, the curtain of darkness suddenly parted, and a Necromancer who was wearing a black robe miserably retreated to the back. In his hand, he held a gruesome looking staff formed with bones. Right now, he stared at Rhode with a surprised expression.

How did this young man see through his art of darkness?

But how could Rhode give the necromancer time to find out the answer? In the next second, Rhode raised his sword once more and slashed downward.

“Follow the plan!”

Chapter 56 - Like A Pig...

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The Necromancer snorted coldly at Rhode's incoming attack. A wall of bones formed before him and it blocked Rhode's sword attack. At this time, Shauna and other mercenaries moved according to Rhode's command and positioned themselves in a triangular formation surrounding the Necromancer.

"Hmph, such petty tricks."

Although the Necromancer couldn't retreat any further, clearly he didn't regard Shauna and the others as threats. He snorted coldly, causing an intense glow to flare up within its empty eye sockets as he gripped his staff and strafed to the side, swinging his weapon in a sideways arc.

Typically, mages were weak in their physical attacks, but the Necromancer was an exception. After losing its mortal body, it obtained a power far beyond humans. Facing the Necromancer's incoming attack, Shauna instinctively held her weapon up to block but little did she expect that the impact was akin to a barbarian waving a huge stick. Shauna's body trembled violently under the immense pressure. If her reaction was a tad bit slower and didn't swiftly retreat after the initial blow, then she might have been already thrown towards the ceiling.

"Don't clash with it head-on, keep your distance and don't stop attacking!"

Rhode discovered Shauna's miserable state and frowned before reminding her once again. After hearing his voice, Shauna and the other mercenaries immediately regained some of their spirits before surrounding the Necromancer, launching periodic mid-to-long range attacks. Since the Necromancer possessed abnormal physical and combat prowess, he was able to tie Rhode down with a wall of bones while swinging his staff like a

club on his other hand. An intense ember burned from deep within his bottomless sockets, emanating a chill aura of danger.

But that was all it could do.

After dodging the relentless assaults, the Necromancer sneered and raised its left hand, conjuring an eerie ball of negative energy at the tip of its bony finger. Then it slowly pointed outwards, waiting for the right moment to launch it...

However, at this moment, he felt that something was amiss when its wall of bones suddenly trembled.

Bang!! A raging storm surged in when the solid wall of bones collapsed like a bunch of building blocks falling apart. At the same time, a flash of light reflected off the white bones, creating a white, straight line which pierced right into Necromancer's forehead.

Damn, how could this happen!

The Necromancer was shocked. The negative energy that it had painstakingly condensed instantly dissipated. At this moment, it discovered a whirlwind emerging from under its feet and quickly dodged it along with an attack from Rhode. At the corner of its eye sockets, it found a young girl adorning a luxurious magic robe holding a wand which emitted a crimson light.

“Damn, my spell was nullified?!”

The Necromancer's expression sank. It had assumed that Marleen was just another mage apprentice, which was why her presence didn't bother it too much. But now that it discovered its magic had been nullified, it realized that her power was far beyond any apprentice, rather, it was certain that she had entered the middle circle! It was impossible to nullify its protective magic with this vast gap in levels between them, but since she could do it...

These thoughts crossed the Necromancer's mind in a flash. Then, in no time, it found a way to counter her. The staff that it was holding on

suddenly fell to the ground and disappeared.

Only Rhode caught this subtle action.

“Walker, Lize, pay attention to the surrounding!”

Rhode put down his sword and shouted towards the two. Then, at the very next moment, the ground suddenly rose.

“Boom!!!”

Numerous heavily armed undead clawed out from the crevices caused by the quake. Many of them held old, broken weapons and were bellowing in a fury. Though their pace was slow, their unwavering stance and superior numbers surrounded every one of the mercenaries. Rhode thought that this move was indeed a right choice. Fortunately, he had already reminded his men, if not, all of them would be running around like headless chickens. Now, each mercenary scattered around the battlefield to kill the spawned undead. Two mercenaries from Red Hawk immediately guarded Lize and Marleen’s front and flank. In response, Lize cast a protective shield on everyone. As for Marleen, she wasn’t the slightest bit worried about the situation as she pointed her wand towards the Necromancer while murmuring a spell to analyze the protective spells on its body.

This battle was a race against time.

“Tch!”

When the Necromancer realized that panic didn’t settle in as it had expected, it scoffed in contempt. It retreated once more and dodged two attacks at the same time. Since these attacks were so weak, it did not care about those who launched it. Even if it landed on its body, it wouldn’t inflict any injuries. However, what made it anxious was the black-haired man before him. No matter what it did, that man was able to derive a counterattack. It was just odd... how did this young man who appeared to have a girlish face, have such familiarity with its fighting style?

“Swoosh!”

Rhode could care less what the Necromancer thought about him. He swung his sword and shot forward once more. When his sword collided with the bone staff, a spark ignited at the point of contact. Then, at the very next moment, he discovered lines of magic surfacing in the air which scattered soon after.

“I did it!”

Discovering this phenomenon, Rhode’s resolve became firm. Meanwhile, the Necromancer’s expression darkened. It retreated once again while raising his the staff on his hand.

At the same time, Marlene aimed at the Necromancer’s body with her wand.

A bright, dazzling white light condensed on the tip of her ruby wand which soon shot forward. In a flash, the spell successfully collided with the Necromancer.

“Boom!!!”

An intense surge of heatwaves burst out from the point of impact. Even Rhode couldn’t help but take a few steps back. The temperature within the room soared up. At this moment, the Necromancer’s anguished roar sounded out from within the flames.

“Damn bastard!! ALL OF YOU WILL PAY!!”

The protective spell which encompassed the Necromancer had been lifted. It no longer maintained its lofty demeanor and sank into a crazed state of fury. Almost instantaneously, it conjured five to six sharp bone spears around it and shot them towards Marleen in retaliation. But before the bone spears could pierce into Marleen’s body, a Shield Warrior intercepted its trajectory and raised his colossal, steel tower shield before slamming it downwards to the ground, protecting Marleen to his rear.

Boom!! Followed by the sound of the metal screeching, it appeared that some of the sharp spears had broken into countless fragments. However,

due to the terrifying force of acceleration, the Shield Warrior also fell to the ground.

Damn it.

Waving his two-handed sword, Barney fought the undead at the front. From the corner of his eye, he spotted Rhode's figure fighting against the Necromancer. Never did he imagine that Rhode was this strong, and the scene that he saw seemed to reflect his thoughts. The Necromancer ran berserk, and under its crushing blows, that nasty noble and his big sis barely managed to avoid its attacks. If this situation went on, they might not be able to win!

Barney cut down one undead after another. Looking back, he saw Shauna's 'miserable' state, and that cunning noble was hiding behind the Necromancer, as though having no intention of helping her.

See, I was right. That guy planned on using us at meat shields, and would reap the rewards by himself! Damn it! I won't let him have his way!

Barney decided on his next course of action. He turned his body and raised his sword, charging towards the Necromancer.

“Go die, you evil monster!!”

Barney shouted while waving his sword, but he did not expect that Shauna who was supposedly 'in dire straits,' suddenly changed position and arrived in front of him.

The sound of swords could be heard.

Discovering the threat behind her, Shauna was surprised. Under Rhode's command, both her and her comrade finally managed to switch position to guard against the Necromancer's counterattack. After it went berserk, the Necromancer had used a lot of its power and was currently exhausted. Just one more push and they would win this battle. But Shauna did not expect that another person was attacking behind her?!

Right now, the red-haired female swordsman had no opportunity to back down, the only thing she could do was to clench her teeth and stand her ground. But at this time, the Necromancer used the opportunity while Shauna was confused to target her. It bent his finger while chanted a spell and sneered.

“Bang!!”

“Aaa!!!”

Shauna, who was distracted, was unable to dodge the Necromancer’s attack. A sharp bone spear penetrated through her left shoulder, and the massive inertia sent her body flying before finally falling to the ground.

The Necromancer who had finally gotten the upper hand also did not plan to linger and turned around to escape.

“Damn it!!”

Looking at the scene before him, Rhode cursed inside. He flipped his right hand and a red card appeared.

“Marlene, use your full power to attack it!!”

Rhode yelled at the top of his voice and threw the red card on his hand. Soon the Flame Killer appeared and rushed towards the enemy who was about to flee. A red shadow flashed in the dark and a violent explosion sounded, followed by the Necromancer’s roar which spread towards all directions.

Damn it, as expected, the protective spell wasn’t completely lifted.

The summoned spirit had not made contact with the protective spell and was already sent back home. Rhode immediately rushed past the black smoke.

The Necromancer’s state wasn’t good either. Right now, it had already fallen into a miserable state; its protective spell had been reduced by 70-80%. That was the reason why the Necromancer could not completely

block the Flame Killer self-destruction. The robe it wore had been blown up and was in tatters, even its bone staff was in a complete mangled mess.

“Cursed mankind!!”

Looking at Rhode who rushed towards it, the Necromancer clenched its teeth and cursed. It raised both of its hands and aimed towards Rhode.

A crimson ball of light flew straight to Rhode’s position. However, Rhode didn’t choose to dodge, rather, he held his sword forward and continued on.

He’s a dead man!

Watching how Rhode disregarded his defense and rushed towards it, the Necromancer exposed a confident smile. In his opinion, this young man was going to die soon.

But soon, the smile on his face turned into fear.

A translucent pair of wings appeared before Rhode. Soft, white feathers scattered in the wind; it was such a fantasy-like scene.

The Necromancer had no time to appreciate the beauty. Because the negative ball of red energy also turned into a breeze and disappeared.

“You are...”

The Necromancer opened its mouth, but at the same time, Rhode’s sword pierced right through it.

Chapter 57 - Unlucky Barney

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode stood up.

The necromancer who had acted all high and mighty laid before him as a corpse once more.

But Rhode wasn't smiling. His face was dark and gloomy while he stared at his left hand.

While the Angel's Wings was able to block most of the negative energy, in the end, the level gap was just too big. Currently, his left hand had become a sickening green color, and a tingling discomfort spread to the rest of the body.

If it weren't for his abnormal stats, then perhaps his arm would end up being fractured.

“Sigh...”

Rhode sighed, then he focused on the ring on his finger. The original white luster on the stone had dulled considerably. With careful observation, he noticed that the darkness within appeared to have a self-consciousness as it swirled steadily.

The soul binding succeeded.

Though there were some unexpected events during the process, he still managed to procure his objective. However...

Just thinking of the previous mishap made him furious. He was absolutely confident about this mission when he chose it. The reason why Pavel Cemetery was a four Star-Ranked mission was not due to the difficulty of the BOSS, but rather, the negative energy that the undead passively emitted

was naturally effective against living beings. Before the invasion, the peaceful era under the Light Dragon's reign didn't expose its people to fighting the undead. As such, their experience fighting the living dead was almost nil. NPCs were unlike players, who could restart the battle once more by respawning if they died in battle. This was the reason why the Mercenary Association regarded missions involving the undead as a higher tier compared to others.

But as for Rhode's opinion, since he had a Spirit Master in the party, he knew that her positive energy would be a natural counter against the undead. Furthermore, with Marleen as the recent 'talented' addition to the team, his chances of victory soared over 90%. That was if she obeyed his orders, of course. The positive development in the tunnels reinforced Rhode's opinion as the undead easily overwhelmed melee combatants but were felled in droves when faced with magic. So, judging by all of these advantages, it was just a matter of time before their victory was assured, but he did not expect...

Rhode shook his head and kept the Soul Binding Stone before turning around.

He walked towards the crowd when he realized the situation was becoming rather troubling.

Lize treated the heavily injured Shauna who was lying on the floor while the fool that caused this entire debacle watched at the side. Old Walker was cleaning the battlefield, and Marleen stood beside him with a cold expression on her face. Even the Red Hawk mercenaries didn't look too good when they anxiously surrounded Shauna, worried about her injury.

"I'm sorry, Leader... I'm sorry, Leader!! I wasn't trying to..."

Barney knelt beside Shauna with a pale face; he could sense that the others were staring at him with anger. This kind of situation hadn't happened to him before and it made him frightened and wronged. Obviously, he felt that it was unfair that Rhode was made party leader and his comrades were all dragged into a bitter struggle while Rhode merely stood behind. Therefore,

he was trying to help, why were these people mad at him? Didn't they realize how dangerous the situation was back then?

While Barney was in distraught, he discovered footsteps behind him and found the 'culprit' walking towards him.

Barney felt his blood boil inside. His Leader was injured for the sake of the group but apparently, Rhode did not care.

The nobility is a bunch of cold-blooded snakes!

With that as his basis for his anger, Barney immediately jumped up and stretched his finger at Rhode, cursing him openly.

“IT’S ALL BECAUSE OF YOU!!! If not because of your—”

Before Barney could finish, a fist flew towards him.

“Bang!!!”

Rhode punched the young man's face mercilessly. Barney screamed as he fell to the ground and rolled a distance while grabbing onto the side of his face. Then, he glared icily at the man standing before him, completely oblivious to his bleeding nose.

“Why didn't you follow my command?”

Rhode's voice was calm, but everyone was shocked; even Lize who was in the middle of bandaging Shauna's injury.

Because Rhode actually laughed!

The people who were acquainted with Rhode knew that he had a beautiful face, but he was always serious and never smiled. Many people thought it was a pity, even Old Walker joked about it, saying that if he smiled more, perhaps he could bewitch people.

But now, Rhode really laughed, and it was the bewitching kind of laughter. However, everyone somehow felt a chill down their spine.

“Answer me.”

Rhode shifted his arm, smiling while walking towards Barney. Next, he lifted his left foot and stomped hard on Barney’s chest, forcing him back to the ground.

“Ugh!!!”

“I remember, before the start of the battle, I’ve made it clear we are responsible for surrounding the Necromancer. Without my command, no one was allowed to act... Are you stupid? Or do you have a problem with hearing?”

“...Bullsh*t.”

Facing Rhode who had a condescending smile on his face, Barney instinctively felt dread as though he was coiled up by a python. But he still did not succumb to his fear and spat at Rhode’s feet instead.

“Don’t think that I didn’t notice how you hid behind the Necromancer. You want us to be your meat shields? How can I listen to your commands? Or are you saying that you didn’t hide on purpose? Everyone here had seen your cowardly acts, right Henry?!”

Henry was a swordsman who fought beside Shauna. At first, Barney thought that Henry would back him up, but he never expected him to tilt his head and avoid his gaze.

In fact, Henry was somewhat dissatisfied because Barney ruined their flawless plan. Although they appeared miserable, as long they followed Rhode’s command correctly, they would be able to dodge the Necromancer’s attack. These instructions mid-battle were extremely crucial for mercenaries. But in the end, at the direst moment, it was screwed by this damn kid!

It was akin to two people trying to tango. They put in countless hours in practicing and finally grasped the rhythm, but it just took a single drunk to appear to destroy everything.

No matter what, anyone would certainly be unhappy if those kind of things happened.

But because Barney was his comrade, he did not say anything. Even though that was the case, he still didn't stop Rhode from venting his anger.

“Hen, Henry...”

Seeing how his comrade reacted, Barney clenched his teeth. In his mind, he didn't think that his comrade was dissatisfied with him. On the contrary, he thought that he must be afraid of that noble!

So that's why he didn't say anything...

But I'm different!! I will not yield and I will never give up!

“Hmph, say whatever you like. I am absolutely not- AHHHHHH!”

Barney wasn't able to finish before a sharp sword pierced through his palm. The sudden pain made him swallow his words and replaced it with a yell. Then, Rhode pulled out the sword and kicked the young man at his waist, flinging him a distance before finally losing consciousness.

Hearing the mournful screams from Barney, Marleen couldn't help but tremble. She recalled what Rhode said when she came to look for him. At that time, she did not put Rhode in her eyes, but fortunately, after that duel, she never doubted Rhode's strength again. If she maintained her previous haughty attitude, then the one who laid on the floor right now would be her.

Recalling that duel, Marlene was sure that Rhode would not show any mercy.

After kicking the lights out of Barney, Rhode clasped his hands and removed the smile on his face. He ignored the surprised and frightened expressions from the people around him.

“Clean the battlefield.”

This time, Rhode received a bumper harvest. Since the Necromancer had made his home in the Pavel Cemetery for many years, naturally he had plenty of hidden treasures. After scavenging for a while, a large bag full of magic crystals, gems and plants laid before him. Of course, Rhode also attained what he came here for.

He lowered his body and fished out an old, dusty holy grimoire from a wooden box. He nodded in satisfaction and turned his head towards Lize.

“Mr. Rhode, what’s the matter?”

Realizing Rhode’s intention, Lize ran over in a hurry. Her expression was a bit complicated as she wanted to treat Barney’s wounds, but Rhode said ‘leave him be.’ So she could only awkwardly leave him behind. Frankly, Lize was quite unhappy with Barney’s performance as well, but as a Spirit Master, she could not disregard the lives of others just because of her personal preferences.

“This is for you.”

“This is...”

Lize received the Holy Book which Rhode handed over and flipped a few pages curiously. Then her expression immediately lit up when she realized the value of the book.

“Is this the Holy Book?”

“Yes.”

Rhode patted the girl’s shoulder.

“With your power, I believe that learning the spells on it should be no problem. Good luck.”

“Of course! I will work hard! Thank you, Mr. Rhode!”

Embracing the Holy Book, Lize exposed a broad smile. Of course, she knew its worth. In the church, only a selected number of people were

qualified to learn about high-level spells. Typically, Spirit Masters were only allowed to learn basic spells, from here, one could infer the value of the Holy Book which recorded high-level spells. Lize was confident that as long as she could learn half of it, then her strength would increase further.

At the same time, Marlene walked towards the both of them. But compared to Lize, who was overjoyed from receiving the Holy Book, her expression was absolutely mortified. Because just now, Rhode told her to take care of the Necromancer's corpse. This is undoubtedly a challenging test for Marlene as she had never done such a thing before. Although Marlene voiced a protest in the name of righteousness, facing Rhode's 'since you are also one of the members of the mercenary group, then you also must follow the command' argument, this genius young mage could only surrender and execute the command while holding her breath.

"I have finished the task, Mr. Rhode."

"Oh?"

Hearing Marlene's words, Rhode looked at her with a slight surprise.

"Did you find anything good?"

"Everything is here."

Facing Rhode's question, Marlene made a robotic reply, then she stretched out her hands, handing out the equipment that she found.

But she did not think that Rhode wouldn't take it immediately. On the contrary, he quietly stared at a ring on her hands and did not speak for a while.

"Mr. Rhode?"

Seeing Rhode's reaction, Marlene reminded him again. Rhode finally responded and nodded his head.

"Yes, I know... You've worked hard."

Rhode said while looking at her.

How lucky was this young miss... she could even find the legendary Dark Soul Ring...

Chapter 58 - The Other side of the Board

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The early morning star peeked over the horizon once more, casting a radiant ray of gold as it sprinkled through the window which fell upon the white, polished marble floor. A warm light filtered through the girl's thin eyelids and she narrowed her eyes for a brief moment. Her body slouched comfortably on the soft couch while enjoying the afternoon leisure time.

Just outside the window, a river rippled along with the gentle breeze. The lush, green branches swayed, followed by a calm, rustling hymn. A gorgeous crystal chandelier refracted a magical light, which spilled a royal palette of colors onto the golden walls encompassing the grand hall; a beautiful painting hung on the wall, perfectly matched with an exquisitely crafted sculpture. Just standing there emanated the sensation of an art paradise.

The intricately carved door of a Nine-Winged Bird quietly creaked open, and a noblewoman donning a formal gown quickly walked past the red carpet before half-kneeling at the girl who laid on the couch.

“Your Highness.”

“Yes?”

Acknowledging the noblewoman before her, the young girl's eyelashes fluttered open slowly, her green eyes giving off a lazy and playful look. The brilliant rays which shone through the windows were akin to a silky fabric which wrapped around her beautiful and charming figure, accentuating her slim figure. A pair of white, slender legs hung down from the couch nonchalantly, which was rather seductive. Her golden, lustrous hair

reflected the rays of the sun, appearing extremely appealing as though it was a crown.

“What is it, Carol?”

“Everything is ready as per your orders; the Merchant Association’s side has been processed. By your command, we ca-”

The woman suddenly stopped speaking and snapped her mouth shut. This was because she saw the girl in front of her close her eyes again. Based on her understanding of Her Highness, she decided to stop and wait for her command.

“Decaying plant matter are really disgusting,” she said. Her eyes were closed as she reached out her hands, gently stroking a black cat which curled up lazily on her lap, “but they provide the necessary nutrients for the new saplings to grow into beautiful flowers. Halting the growth process of beautiful lives isn’t something I fancy.”

“I see, Your Highness.”

Although her words appeared rather incoherent, the woman could still understand the underlying meaning of her words. She nodded in reply, but her face revealed a complex expression.

“... from the recent report, the Paphield area,” she hesitated for a moment before continuing, “...there appears to be a rat from the council.”

“Let them be.”

The girl stopped stroking the black cat and sighed.

“My cute subordinates should know what to do. The ruler and her subjects should have this kind of tacit understanding. Qualified underlings will understand what I mean. Only flowers that weathered the storm are eligible to accept my favor, I believe they know what to do.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

When the girl heard her docile answer, she exposed a brilliant smile.

“After working so hard, I believe you must be exhausted. How about accompanying me for a cup of tea? This is a fresh red tea that I just acquired recently; I think it should suit your taste.”

“Thank you, Your Highness.”

“Carol, you are too humble... But that’s the reason why I’m so fond of you. Come now, don’t just stand there, how about you come closer to me?”

“Your Highness...”

—

The wind grew stronger.

Rhode felt relieved when he returned to the safety of Deep Stone City.

On the way back, they did not encounter any interference. Just like what Marleen had said, the undead were only able to maintain their existence because of the Necromancer’s energy. Now that it was dead, naturally the undead returned to dust where it originally belonged.

The mission was a success. Rhode finally created his much needed Soul Core, Lize acquired her Holy Book, and Old Walker looted a cloak which could resist elemental attacks.

As for the distribution of the Dark Soul Ring, Rhode and Marleen had contrasting opinions.

In the Dragon Soul Continent, the definition of ‘Rare Items’ were generally divided into two categories. The first was the item itself was rare, and contained a rare skill. And the second was an item that could increase the effectiveness of the item itself. Rhode’s sword, Star Mark, belonged to the latter while the Dark Soul Ring belonged to the former. Nevertheless, both of them were categorized as ‘Rare Items’ and the Dark Soul Ring possessed a considerably valued skill, even to the players.

[Shadow Mist: The item holder can create a dark fog AOE. When inside, the item holder can move as and when he wanted, granting a passive ‘Stealth’ ability. The effect will be lost once the holder is damaged.]

Another way of describing this skill was: granting a limited dimensional space to move in. In the game, this ring was an incredibly rare accessory. Since the granted ability wasn’t limited to their class, the item was highly sought after by non-mage classes. This is because they did not possess skills that could move quickly and the Shadow Mist was a way to counter that deficiency. Its utility didn’t only limit to ambushing; if the holder was under attack, then it could help by concealing the holder to aid him to escape. The only drawback was its limited effective AOE. But for most players who spent the majority of their time adventuring, it was only but a minor issue.

Although it was an extremely rare and useful item, Rhode did not monopolize it all for himself. He slowly explained the function of the Dark Soul Ring to Marleen and then asked her if she needed it.

But never did he expect Marleen to actually express disdain! Her reason was simple. Firstly, she was a middle circle mage and possessed a plethora of life-saving spells. And secondly, she felt that Shadow Mist wasn’t as exceptional as Rhode described it to be. In the battle, when Necromancer utilized the exact same skill to conceal itself, Rhode still found him easily with his sword. She believed that it was best to not bet her life on something that was untrustworthy. Thus, Rhode took the ring.

...Really?

He did not know what to say about the players who were willing to spend astronomical amounts of money to purchase this rare accessory that had been deemed ‘untrustworthy’ by an NPC.

He wondered what kind of expression they would make.

“Thanks for your help, Mr. Rhode.”

Shauna's countenance was apparently much better than before. Although the Necromancer's attack was lethal, since this red-haired female swordsman was a veteran, she managed to dodge the attack in the nick of time, and ended up with an injured shoulder. With Lize's healing and proper rest, fully recovering wouldn't be a problem.

However, as a whole, the Red Hawk mercenary group received heavy losses when compared to Rhode's group. They turned the Pavel Cemetery upside down, but they were still unable to find the sword they were searching for. This made Shauna extremely depressed. However, it was just as Rhode expected since he could remember clearly that the drops from Pavel Cemetery were all related to the magic classes and never heard of a hidden quest involving a sword.

Previously, when he heard the mission description from Shauna, he assumed that it was an NPC exclusive quest, and players were not eligible to participate. But judging from the situation right now, it seemed that something was indeed fishy...

"Miss Shauna, are you sure that your client is looking for a sword?"

"Yes."

She sighed and shook her head helplessly.

"He said that it was their family's heirloom and that Pavel stole it. Thus, he requested me to find it. Based on the agreement, he paid us 150 gold coins as a deposit, so I doubt that it'll be a fake mission. But now, since I can't find the sword, I don't know what to do..."

It was no wonder Shauna didn't doubt the credibility of the mission, because according to the rules, the deposit received when undertaking the commission would not be returned. In other words, regardless of success or failure, the money would still be taken away. In many cases, clients paying a small deposit could be considered as a symbolic meaning. Nevertheless, they would still pay the remaining sum after the mission completion. Since her client offered her 150 gold coins as a deposit, it was almost equivalent to finishing a three Star-Ranked mission. It was such a huge boon, no

wonder Shauna didn't doubt the legitimacy of her client. After all, who would throw that amount of money just for fun?

But lamenting over it right now was pointless. The sword that Shauna had to find was an ancient sword. It was a sword that also existed in the game, but these swords were primarily used for decorations. Since she couldn't find it, her mission was a failure, and she lost many comrades in the process. Thus, she was in quite a foul mood, so she promptly bade farewell to Rhode and the others, and she trudged towards the Mercenary Association with what's left of her group following behind her. Only Barney, that idiot, was being carried by the Shield Warrior. That poor little guy had not yet woken from his coma. But if Rhode didn't guess wrong, he wouldn't wake up anymore.

When Shauna and the others finally disappeared around the corner, Rhode's eyes turned cold.

"They were deceived," Rhode said.

"Eh?"

Hearing those words, Lize widened her eyes in surprise. Even Old Walker frowned.

"What is it, boy? You said they were being deceived? Why is that?"

"Simple."

Rhode shrugged.

"If it was just as the client said," Rhode's eyes narrowed as he spoke, "then why would he entrust everything to a mercenary on something as significant as his family heirloom? Furthermore, he didn't even appear once."

Rhode said as he deduced the situation calmly.

"Yes."

Marlene nodded and agreed.

“For us nobles, family heirlooms are the spirit of the family. It can be said that it is the measurement of the family’s honor and glory. If the heirloom is lost, then as a member of the family, it is their responsibility to find it as soon as possible. If the Senia’s family heirloom was misplaced or stolen by someone, not only would I ask a mercenary for help, but I will also follow them. Only the family’s bloodline should regain the glory by personally retrieving the heirloom. If someone else, for instance, a mercenary, retrieves the heirloom, then it would stain the honor of any prestigious family. I don’t believe someone who has a family heirloom to be a nouveau riche. As what Mr. Rhode had said, there must be a problem.”

“W-what problem?”

Hearing this detailed explanation by Marleen, Lize expression immediately tensed up. After all, Shauna was her good friend, and now she discovered that she might be in danger, so of course she could not calm down.

“I don’t know.”

Rhode shook his head, then he looked up, staring at the Deep Stone City before him.

“...but I may have a clue.”

Chapter 59 - An Invitation from the Keller Family

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The odd circumstances which befell the Red Hawk mercenary group caused Rhode to harbor some doubts and became increasingly vigilant. Although on the exterior it appeared to be an accident, he felt that something was amiss. Just as Shauna had mentioned, that person gave her a whopping 150 gold coins as a deposit. That sum of money was a little too much for just some random fun.

Undoubtedly, there was something happening behind the scenes.

Rhode weighed the consequences in his mind, and in the end, he refused to allow Lize to gather information from Red Hawk. Since Barney caused a rift between both of their mercenary groups, Rhode didn't intend to cross the line and requested Old Walker to return to the Mercenary Association, assuming back his 'old-self.'

“When you return to the association, help me to watch out for any abnormal movement,” Rhode said to Old Walker while sitting behind an old wooden desk in the study while writing something on a paper.

“Notify me immediately if there's anything particularly strange. Then, if possible, find a tank for me.”

“Tank? Never heard of it.”

Rhode reached out his hand and smacked his forehead. Then, he quickly corrected his sentence.

“Err... find someone who can hold the front when in crisis.”

“Remember, we require no more than two people. Although at the moment, we lack members, the aspect we need to improve on is our teamwork.”

“Someone who can hold the front...?”

Hearing Rhode’s request, Old Walker stroked his beardless chin and fell deep into thought.

“Hmm... I have some people in mind. But kid, I think should be prepared to spend quite a bit.”

“How much?”

Rhode raised his head and looked at the old man who was sitting in front of him.

“300 gold coins.”

Old Walker grinned.

“That much?”

Rhode frowned. The gold reward for completing Pavel Cemetery was only 500 coins. Now, Old Walker said that he needed more than half of it which left Rhode slightly puzzled. Typically, recruiting a mercenary didn’t require that much money. A decent mercenary was only worth roughly 100 gold coins. There were even mercenaries who didn’t want money to join a group. For example, Marleen and Old Walker. Old Walker only wanted 50 coins while Marleen was only interested in gaining experience. But now, Old Walker wanted 300 gold to recruit people?

Old Walker smiled wryly at Rhode’s reaction. Ever since he joined the mercenary group, Rhode always kept this sarcastic attitude towards him. So, he wanted to somehow let him taste a little of his own medicine. Of course, he wouldn’t explicitly express his intent since he was already part of the group, but hehe... when gains are involved, spending money is inevitable.

“Sure.”

But to his dismay, even though Rhode expressed shock at first, he neither became mad nor unhappy. Instead, he pulled open a drawer and grabbed a bag of gold before throwing it casually on the table.

“Here is 500 gold coins. Take it.”

“Eh?”

Seeing this, Old Walker’s face turned stiff.

“Hey, boy, isn’t this our payment? You’re just giving it to me just like that?”

Rhode shrugged, “It doesn’t matter either way. At the moment, we don’t need to use the money. Since you require it, then just take it with you.”

He didn’t even bat an eyelid when he threw the bag of coins. To Old Walker, 500 gold coins was a considerable sum of money, but as for Rhode, 500 was just a mere drop in the ocean. Back in the game when he was a guild leader, managing millions of gold coins was a daily affair. Thus, these measly 500 coins weren’t enough for him to feel heartache. Frankly, he was more worried that Old Walker would hesitate to spend. If that happened, he would deduct from his share of the payment.

If only Old Walker knew what Rhode was thinking right now... he would immediately reconsider his suggestion without a doubt. Unfortunately, reading other people’s mind wasn’t his forte.

Thus, Old Walker’s impression of Rhode improved because he saw this as an act of generosity.

“Don’t worry, boy.”

Old Walker picked up the bag with a solemn expression.

“I promise that I will bring back a suitable candidate that will satisfy you.”

Old Walker bowed and exposed a subtle smile.

“I will ensure that your money is well spent.”

“I hope so.”

As Rhode’s attention was focused on the paper, he did not notice Old Walker’s odd smile. After a moment of silence, Rhode put down the pen and looked up at Old Walker.

“Is there anything else?”

“Yes, I would like to ask; when will we accept another mission?”

“I’ve already accepted one. We’ll head out two days later.”

“Two days?”

Old Walker frowned.

“Then when will I have the time to gather information?”

“Only Marleen and I will be on this mission.”

Rhode shook his head and replied.

“Lize needs time to study her new spell, and you also have your things to do. That’s why only both of us will go.” Rhode glanced at the young lady sitting in the corner reading a book. “Worry not, we are merely heading for Twilight Forest to pick up some alchemical plants. A simple two Star-Ranked mission.”

Marleen, who was aware of Rhode’s glance, exposed a proud smile in response. This haughty act made Rhode shake his head helplessly and sigh inwardly.

Frankly, Rhode wasn’t planning to bring Marleen along. He wanted to head out by himself and dig out some decent equipment which were hidden within the Twilight Forest. However, Marleen found out about this matter and insisted on tagging along. Since her priority here was to gain experience, she wanted to get out of Deep Stone City as much as possible. Facing Marleen’s demand, Rhode eventually agreed to take her along. No matter what happened before, she was now a member of his mercenary

group, plus her strength as a middle circle mage would be useful if something went awry along the way.

“Okay, I understand.”

Old Walker nodded his head and stood up.

“Then I will prepare my own matters and observe the situation within the association. I’ll be at that place if you wish to find me.”

Once he finished his sentence, Old Walker turned and walked away. But right at that moment as he was about to leave, a knock came from the door.

It was Lize. She opened the door and walked towards Rhode, handing him an envelope.

“Mr. Rhode, this was sent by the Keller family.”

There was a trace of confusion on her face when she passed the letter to Rhode. The engravings on the letter were beautiful. The gold symbol of their family emblem revealed the identity and status of the sender.

“The Keller family?”

Rhode was puzzled and furrowed his brow. Then, he reached out and took the letter from her.

“Do we know these guys?”

Hearing Rhode’s question, Lize stared blankly at Rhode.

“Umm...Mr. Rhode, have you forgotten?”

“What?”

“When we were returning to Deep Stone City from the Twilight Forest, you’ve saved a lady...”

“No impression.”

Rhode replied decisively. Judging by his expression, he clearly forgot about the matter. Lize was stunned, but she swallowed her saliva and decided not to say anything. After all, both of them weren't exactly on best terms and thought that after that incident, there wouldn't be any further communication. Unexpectedly, the Keller family actually took the initiative to contact Rhode. She didn't know what they intended to do.

“The head of Keller family invited me to a dinner party to thank me for saving her daughter.”

Rhode read the content out loud and put the letter on the table.

“So... who is going to go with me?”

Old Walker was the first to reject. He walked out of the room and waved his hand at Rhode.

“Drink tea with a group of boring noblemen? Count me out. I will head out first, kid. Rest assured that I will complete the mission you assigned me to.”

“I, I also...”

Lize said hesitantly, exposing awkward smile. Then she quietly took a few steps back.

“I'm learning that new spell recently, and I think ... I can't make it.

“Marlene?”

Seeing that Old Walker and Lize weren't interested in going, Rhode turned his attention to the last person in the room. Marleen contemplated for a moment before nodding her head.

“Though I'm not exactly interested... but I guess its good to relax occasionally. Come Lize! Let's go together.”

“Eh? But I...”

“Spells aren’t something you can learn within a day. Moreover, you’ve not participated in a tea party in ages.”

“This ... I...”

Due to Marleen’s pestering, Lize’s face flushed red, and she quickly glanced at Rhode. When she saw that he didn’t say anything, she felt slightly relieved and nodded her head.

Chapter 60 - Late Night Banquet

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Pa!”

A vase crashed onto the floor, shattering into countless fragments.

“Why did you invite that b*stard, Daddy!?”

Helen stood in the living room, glaring at Keller who looked solemn.

“Now isn’t the time to throw a tantrum.”

Looking at his daughter’s swelled face, Keller sighed. But expression immediately hardened again.

“In any case, someone else saved your life. At least you need to say something, have you forgot everything that I’ve taught you before?”

Keller raised his voice considerably, causing Helen to shrink back slightly. But once she realized her own cowardice, she stood back up straight again.

“I don’t care. Anyway, I hate that guy! I will never thank him even if you kill me!”

“You...! You spoilt...!”

He pointed his finger at his rebellious daughter and shook with anger. He couldn’t figure out why his usually docile girl would suddenly become so stubborn.

“Go back to your room. NOW! Tonight, little lady, you’re grounded!”

“I’m not going anywhere! Hmph!!”

Helen stomped her stubby feet fiercely and turned around, leaving the room in a huff. Keller watched as his daughter's figure disappear behind the door, then, he sat back on his chair and gave a huge sigh. At this moment, it was as though his face aged another ten years.

He was exhausted.

“Master...”

Ben walked up to Keller's side softly and bowed respectfully. He looked at his Master's worn expression and hesitated for a while before asking, “About Miss...”

“Keep an eye on her. For tonight, don't let her out of the room.”

Keller waved his hand and sighed once more. He pinched his brows with one hand while impatiently gesturing Ben to get out of the room with the other.

Keller waved his hand, then sighed. He was holding his forehead while impatiently waved his hand.

“Just... just go back. I'm tired, and I want to rest. Report to me when the gentleman arrives, I will personally welcome him.”

“Yes.”

After receiving Keller's order, Ben immediately left. Keller closed his eyes for a long time and said nothing. Right now, the pressure on him was too much for him to handle. Not only family matters weighed down on him, but the Merchant Association was also a problem. When they tried to kidnap his daughter to threaten him, he resolved to draw the line with the Merchant Association. Never would he have thought that those guys with only money in their brains would suddenly become so bold. But ever since he firmed his resolve, he decided not to associate with them anymore. For safety reasons, he even ordered Helen not to go out, or at least until the matter concluded. Surely he'd expected that Helen would be extremely displeased about being

grounded, but still, as the head of the family, he had to be responsible for everyone.

Keller had a feeling that something was wrong these few days, but he was unable able to figure it out. Although there was no activity in the Golden City yet, Keller knew that once that girl made her move, it

meant that his position as head of the family would be over.

Keller shook his head to throw these negative emotions and thoughts out of his head. Since he couldn't figure it out, then he wouldn't think about it anymore. This time, the dinner party would be graced with the presence of the Mercenary Association's President and the Duke. He must grasp this opportunity to discuss with them about this issue in depth as it was of utmost importance. Furthermore, he couldn't afford to wait until the last minute to solve it.

Initially, Keller did not intend to reveal certain matters since it was the Merchant Association's internal problem, but after the attempted kidnap of his daughter, he felt that something was amiss. If it were just an ordinary commercial dispute, they wouldn't have exerted such an extreme method to force him to comply.

No matter what, it was still better to have some sort of preparation.

Thinking up to this point, Keller couldn't help but recall the young man who saved his daughter's life. Although Deep Stone City was a small town, finding one single person still wasn't an easy task. However, Rhode, in particular, was somewhat infamous, thus, investigating information about him wasn't as tricky as Keller thought it would be.

Once he stepped into Deep Stone City, he was immediately assessed by the legendary Sereck and won. After that, he managed to become a leader of a mercenary group with only two people. Then, he spent his money to purchase the ill-famed Cyril's Haunted House. Furthermore, according to rumors, the young man's appearance was absolutely beautiful. Frankly, if not because of the fact that his feats were nigh impossible based on his

circumstances, then it'll be hard to believe whether he was actually trying to attract attention or not.

Astonishingly, this young man had led his 'mini' mercenary group to subdue the Necromancer in Pavel Cemetery which was a four Star-Ranked mission. Even though many people doubted the legitimacy of the mission props, the Mercenary Association's staff affirmed the people that the Necromancer's head and staff were the real deal.

Rhode didn't realize that he was the focal point of many people currently. The fact that he could lead a few people to complete such a dangerous mission meant that he must be someone extraordinary. Mercenaries were also humans. Naturally, they wished to work for the strong as they often put their life on the balance.

So, who is this young man?

What kind of person is he?

Keller closed his eyes and mused to himself.

—

When the night fell, the quiet environment soon began to brighten up.

A chandelier refracted countless of lights as many luxurious carriages moved back and forth. Now was the best time for nobles to interact with one another. Whether if it was a formal or informal banquet, they were here to enjoy themselves.

And so, tonight's banquet became extremely lively.

“This place could actually house these many people?”

The Old President walked down from the carriage, muttering unhappily while observing the nobles donned in fancy clothing.

“Whenever I come here, it feels as though I'm entering a market. Hearing thousands of ducklings yapping in my eardrums is extremely upsetting!”

“Well, old friend, Mr. Keller rarely invites us. Don’t be a grumpy old man.”

Compared to the Mercenary Association’s President who wore a casual outfit, Sereck was dressed more elegantly. The Deep Stone City’s celebrity absolutely resembled a nobleman with his stunning attire. On his waist, his iconic magic sword hung loosely.

“That man is just trying to stir up problems.”

Ignoring the dissatisfied eyes from the attendant, the Old President entered the grand hall, then, he took out his pipe and tapped on the door.

“If not, why did he become low profile? See, even Klautz that wily old fox came. It seems like there’s a really huge problem.”

“Maybe. I heard that something happened to the Merchant Association, but... if that was the only problem, he wouldn’t look for us, the Mercenary Association, nor Klautz to help him solve whatever issue he is facing. What do you think is the problem?”

“I’m not interested in these troublesome things. If there’s someone who dares to look for trouble, I will just hammer him to death, don’t you think so?”

“That may not be right, since...”

Sereck hadn’t finished his sentence before the door opened once again.

The noisy hall suddenly became quiet.

For these nobles, there were only a few things that could attract their attention. But now, they’ve completely shifted their focus to the three new faces who walked down the hallway.

Rhode was naturally at the front. He wore a dark set of clothes, emphasizing his pale skin and thin body shape which made him appear like a frail child. His dark, long hair fell onto his shoulders, and his eye-catching face combined with his usual cold expression was giving off a strange charm.

Following behind him were two ladies who were equally dazzling.

Marlene's dress wasn't much different from the usual; she was still in her luxurious robe which perfectly matched her movements. Her ruby wand by her side emitted an elegant aura.

Meanwhile, compared to the other two, Lize's dress was more modest. She was in a sparkling white dress, as though she was a white lily which aroused love and affection from people.

Everyone in this hall were outstanding individuals, but these three newcomers still stood out with their unique aura which drew the attention of so many people. Soon, some groups began to whisper and gossip.

"Hmph... It looks like the banquet was a little better than I thought."

Marlene completely ignored the crowd around her and looked around.

"M-Marlene, that's too rude."

Lize stretched out her hand and pulled Marlene's sleeve gently.

"You don't have to mind it Lize, just relax."

However, Marlene apparently did not take Lize's advice seriously.

"We're here to have some fun. Moreover, this lady is willing to participate in this low-class banquet; it's already enough to give him face."

Just after Marlene ended, a well-dressed middle-aged man with a staunch face entered the hall. After noticing Rhode and the others, his eyes lit up and quickly made his way towards them.

"Hello, Mr. Rhode... I am Claytor Keller. I've heard about you from my daughter and hoped that we could meet since then. Right now, my wish is fulfilled. On behalf of the Keller family, I welcome you to this banquet."

"Don't be modest, Mr. Claytor. It's my pleasure to receive your invitation."

Facing the middle-aged man before him, Rhode replied in neither humble nor overbearing attitude. While he obviously wasn't a noble, he participated in similar events back in the game. Though he didn't personally experience it, he saw it many times. Back in the game, he could recall at least two or three typical noble dialogues.

Hearing Rhode answer, Claytor displayed a pleasant smile. Then, he switched his attention to the people behind Rhode.

"You don't have to be that polite, Mr. Rhode. These two people are...?"

"Greetings," Marlene took half a step forward and slightly raised the hem of her skirt, "My name is Marlene Senia, very pleased to see you, dear Mr. Claytor Keller."

"Senia?"

Hearing Marlene's answer, Claytor was stunned for a moment. His face immediately flashed a trace of surprise and looked at Rhode.

Is this man associated with the people from the Senia family?

What is his identity?

Chapter 61 - Unexpected Guest

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Keller felt that Rhode's identity was too confusing. Originally, he wasn't interested in Rhode's background because even the nobility had classifications within their circles. As long as one had the money, one could purchase a low-class title and enter the ring of nobles. Furthermore, from his gathered intel, he discovered that Rhode hailed from the Eastern Plain, a place that was independent and closed off to the rest of the world. That was why Keller didn't really care about his history. But now it seems like he must change his view on this matter. In any case, having a relationship with the Senia family wasn't something that can be easily achieved by ordinary nobles. The Senia family's influence spread wide across the continent. While the Keller family could be considered to be rich, but compared to the Senia family, it was just like a small boat in an ocean.

Of course, Keller heard of Marlene Senia, the rare and rising genius mage of the century. At such a young age, the young lady managed to reach the middle circle rank. Her future was limitless. There were even rumors saying that she had the chance to join the Royal Magic Guard.

And this once-in-a-century magic genius was actually standing behind Rhode?

Was she implying that Rhode's identity was higher than her?

If Marlene could hear Keller's inner monologue right now, she would immediately throw a few fireballs at him so he could sober up. The reason why Marlene stood behind Rhode was so that she could conveniently whisper to Lize. As for her status... at least Marlene would assume that her status was higher than everyone else in the banquet.

Keller, who didn't know the real reason why Marlene was at the back, became even more respectful as he ushered them to their seats. His actions

sparked curiosity from many guests. Since the Keller family was considered a first-class family in Deep Stone City, they rarely saw him lower himself. So, this respectful act from Keller garnered even more curious stares towards Rhode.

Whether it was on purpose or not, Keller arranged Rhode to sit beside Sereck. Noticing Rhode and the others approaching him, the Swordmaster smiled and stood up.

“Hello, Mr. Rhode, I did not expect to meet you here.”

“Hello, Mr. Sereck.”

Rhode shook hands with Sereck and nodded.

“If it weren’t for Mr. Keller’s invitation, I would not have had the chance to come here.”

“Ah? Is that so.”

Hearing Rhode’s answer, Sereck smiled and said nothing. After that, he looked at Marlene with a complicated expression.

“I already heard the news from Hank. Missy, your decision was too...”

“I don’t think that my decision was wrong, Uncle Sereck.”

Marlene proudly raised her chin.

“You also know the reason why I’m here. Father sent me to learn and gain experience, but I was just being locked inside the house, which I did not see any benefit to it. I think Mr. Rhode can help me, so I decided to join his mercenary group. In the end, we’ve succeeded in completing a mission. It’s perfect, isn’t it?”

“If something happened to you, I don’t know how to explain it to your father.”

Sereck shook his head, but Marlene clearly didn’t care.

“I made the decision myself, so, naturally, I will explain it to my father.”

She replied with a slight dissatisfaction in her tone, then she pulled Lize’s hand and left.

“Sigh... This young miss is really too stubborn...”

Watching Marlene silhouette disappear into the crowd, Sereck sighed and turned around to look at Rhode.

“I’ll leave that kid in your hands, Mr. Rhode. I hope that you can take good care of her. She has the ability, but she is far too arrogant. It’s no surprise though as she possessed both power and talent. But in this world, having power and talent isn’t everything. If she goes on like this, I’m afraid she will suffer setbacks in the future.”

Sereck stopped for a while, then he scooted over to Rhode and whispered something in his ear.

“By the way, we’ve received a strange report. A spy from the Country of Light was looking for a black-haired young man who uses strange summoned spirits.”

Rhode frowned slightly but did not reply.

“Do you have problems with them?” Sereck continued.

Sereck’s tone maintained its steadiness; there was nothing strange about it. But his eyes were carefully scrutinizing Rhode, trying to detect any faint movement on his face.

But Rhode merely shook his head and shrugged.

“I don’t know, Mr. Sereck.”

Rhode narrowed his eyes and gave an ambiguous answer.

“I did not think that I’ve done something that could spark someone else’s concern.”

Sereck maintained his silence for a moment. Then he smiled and patted Rhode's shoulder.

“I understand. Don't worry. This is not the Country of Light. Those bastards wouldn't dare to do something in the open as it would bring nothing but trouble to them. However, no matter what is your problem with the Country of Light, I hope you won't involve Marlene in it since her identity is quite sensitive. Although the conflicts between the Munn Kingdom and the Country of Light isn't something new, it's better if you refrain from stirring the hornets' nest.”

Hearing Sereck's assuring words, Rhode secretly made a deep sigh. The complicated conflict between the Munn Kingdom and the Country of Light was something that had been going on for many years. Although on the surface, the two countries were in a temporary alliance, the history between the two goes quite deep. This was because of something that happened a long time ago.

Even though the Country of Light was a country in name, but it was more of a coalition than a country. When it was founded, the first generation Light Dragon formed a parliament which had 13 lords as its members. Since the Light Dragon didn't agree with the totalitarianism proposed by the Country of Darkness, the Light Dragon chose a different path. It gave up all its rights on state affairs to the parliament, and any problems would be settled using a collective voting decision.

However, the Munn Kingdom was an exception.

The Kingdom's ruling structure was fundamentally different from the Country of Light. And because of this, the tension between both countries increased even further. Furthermore, to make matters worse, the Munn Kingdom's geographical location was superb. Situated around the borders of the Country of Light, the Kingdom's trade network spanned into many directions. They had ample lakes and rivers for basic needs as well as for trade. Surrounding their domain, magic crystals and minerals were abundant, which made the nearby countries jealous of their wealth.

Of course, the Country of Light was no exception. Throughout the years, they'd been increasingly envious of the Kingdom's natural abundance. Thus, on the exterior, they tried to improve ties between the countries, but inwardly, they loathed the Munn Kingdom's achievements and assumed that the Munn Kingdom was employing the Country of Darkness's tyrannical ways of ruling which would eventually drag the whole kingdom into the abyss. Therefore the Country of Light looked down on the Kingdom and criticized them from time to time. In their opinion, they were colluding with the Country of Darkness by trading with them, and their country was the 'savior' who would vanquish the 'evil' from the Country of Darkness.

As for the Munn Kingdom, they felt that they were innocent. Neither did they steal, force, nor trick anyone. There was no reason for the Country of Light to despise them so much. Is it their fault for living in prosperity?

Thus, the Munn Kingdom's impression of the Country of Light plummeted. Furthermore, they disliked how the Country of Light acted as the 'savior of the world,' and anything they said was law while dismissing the view of other countries.

In the shadows, the Country of Light coveted the Munn Kingdom's territory and wealth. They continuously lashed out conspiracies in an attempt to pull this 'disobedient' leader off the throne so they could easily absorb their land into the Country of Light's territory in the name of 'glory and freedom.'

And this was the reason why there was so much tension between the two countries, though most of them were privately resolved. That was why, in Sereck's opinion, it wasn't too much to ask for.

But only Rhode who experienced the future, understood that the Country of Light was playing dangerously with fire.

—

Elegant music played in the background.

After thanking Sereck, Rhode walked towards the window and stared out at the night sky, holding a wine glass between his fingers.

Many times during the conversation, he thought of just revealing the truth about the Country of Light's nefarious plans to Sereck. He could easily pinpoint the current problems as well as solutions to safeguard for the future. But in the end, he did not say anything to Sereck. After all, explaining to someone that you could read the future was something extremely tedious to begin with, and even so, he needed substantial evidence to back his claims. So, in the end, what was the point of saying it? It would only bring trouble to himself.

“Mr. Rhode?”

At this time, Lize's voice suddenly sounded from behind. She walked towards him and blinked with worry in her eyes.

“What happened? You don't seem to be well.”

“Well, something happened.”

Rhode sipped the glass of wine on his hand, enjoying the sweet, lingering taste. But it wasn't enough to drown the thoughts in his mind.

“Remember those guys that we met in the Twilight Forest? After speaking with Sereck, it seems like those guys followed us here.”

“Eh?!”

Hearing this shocking revelation, Lize immediately paled. Judging by the way she clenched her fists ever so tightly, clearly, she was extremely surprised.

“Who are those guys and why are they coming here?”

“According to Sereck, they are most likely to be spies from Country of Light.”

Rhode snorted coldly.

If he could rank the most hated things in this world, the Country of Light would take the first place. While the actual perpetrator of the entire war was the Country of Darkness, being betrayed by your so-called ally was an absolute disgrace.

Rhode's current strength was insufficient to challenge the Country of Light, but since they sent some appetizers to help him warm up, he would gladly take up on their offer.

Then the music stopped suddenly.

Rhode and Lize turned around at the same time and discovered that many other people did the same.

At the entrance, a young man donning a white robe held a black cane and stood confidently with a broad curve on his lips. There was an air of superiority surrounding him, and behind him, two Keller family guards appeared quite miserable.

"Mr. Billy."

The atmosphere turned awkward. Keller sifted through the crowd in a hurry, and when he saw the man, he displayed a slightly shocked expression on his face before promptly welcoming him.

"I didn't expect you to come. Please forgive me for not greeting you."

"You don't have to apologize to me, Mr. Claytor."

The young man called Billy laughed and raised his hand. Though his voice wasn't loud, it still echoed throughout the now-silent hall.

"I'm just doing this on impulse; I suddenly felt like visiting, so I hope you don't blame me for coming here uninvited."

"You're too kind."

The smile on Keller's face didn't fade a bit, as a family whose roots originated from merchants, smiling was a crucial skill.

“I was so worried that Mr. Billy would think that this banquet was too shabby and refused to visit. It’s me who’s at fault.”

“Who is that guy?”

Looking at that young man, Rhode frowned. He did not remember someone with that appearance or status in Deep Stone City.

“He’s the special envoy from Country of Light.”

Hearing Rhode’s question, a noble who stood beside him answered. From his tone, it was clear that he too wasn’t pleased with the appearance of this so-called ‘special envoy.’

“It was a week since his arrival in Deep Stone City. I don’t know what is his purpose here, but his presence meant that the Country of Light is up to no good again.”

A special envoy from the Country of Light?

Rhode and Lize looked at each other. Clearly, they’ve never heard of such a character.

“You don’t have to be modest, Mr. Keller. The truth, I came here because of a person.”

The young man displayed a splendid smile; he turned around and walked towards the crowd before gently holding up a someone’s hand.

“Beautiful lady, we’ve finally met.”

“Bang!”

Rhode’s wine wasn’t finished, but it’s all sprayed out. Lize who was standing beside him also immediately covered her mouth in shock when she saw the young man standing before Marlene.

Right now, Marlene’s face’s also turned pale.

Chapter 62 - Duel? Sorry

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Mr. Clinton.”

Marlene coldly retrieved her hands from his grasp.

“We’re not that familiar with each other. Please uphold your dignity.”

“Tsk, tsk,” the young man curled his lips and clicked his tongue, then he replied, “that’s where you’re wrong, Marlene.”

Despite receiving a direct refusal, the young man did not retreat; rather, he became increasingly bold.

“Our family are close friends, am I right? When we were kids, our parents have been—”

“That was a long time ago.”

Marlene interrupted him coldly.

“Since your family migrated to the Country of Light, any sort of relationship we had is now void. Please mind your conduct. Don’t act like a ruffian who likes to chase after skirts. It is very much impolite.”

“Marlene...” Billy sighed, “it was just a few years since we last met, when did you become so stubborn?”

Even though he spoke these words, his proud smile on his face didn’t fade one bit.

“As they say, men struggle upwards, and water flows downwards. The reason why our Clinton family did what we did was so we could live a better life. Now, we are in a free land, enjoying unprecedented peace and

tranquility. We never have to worry about encountering any disturbances... don't you think that's wonderful, Marlene? The elders' era has already passed, we now live in the present, and we are the ones who will craft the future. Aren't you curious about the world, the TRUE reality of it...? You are still young, do not be bound by tradition or lies. If you wish so, I can give you a tour around the Country of Light, perhaps you would change your point of view then."

"...Traitor." Marlene glared at the man with disgust in her eyes. She no longer hid her repulsion towards this proud man and said, "I'm not interested in someone who abandoned their dignity to become a watchdog. You can leave now, Mr. Clinton. I hope that we will never meet again."

"You're wrong again, Marlene."

However, it was clear that Billy's face was thicker than Marlene had imagined. Even though many people were looking at him with strange expressions, he spoke to Marlene as if they were the only two people in the hall.

He revealed a brilliant smile and continued, "How can it count as abandoning my dignity? Don't we all live under the protection of the Light Dragon? Moreover, don't we have a common enemy? Why are you hostile towards the Country of Light? We are fighting for the sake of all of us... we shouldn't be treated like traitors. It's unfair to us."

The young man eloquently projected emotional words effortlessly. However, Marlene wasn't moved at all. She maintained her cold expression and glared at him in disdain, as though watching a clown.

"This place doesn't welcome the likes of you, Mr. Clinton. If you choose to ignore the words that I've said, then..."

The young genius mage suddenly raised her wand and pointed towards him.

"Then I will have to make you leave with a more direct method."

Billy's face finally revealed a stiff expression with the appearance of her wand. His mouth twitched slightly, but soon he recovered his usual composure.

"Ah..." he shook his head in dismay, "you've really changed. Marlene. You weren't like this when we were younger. What made you change this drastically? Oh, right... I heard that you're together with a man. Where is he? Did he run away after seeing me?"

"You!!"

Marlene was extremely furious. She clenched her teeth and prepared to curse him. As she was about to do so, suddenly, a calm voice sounded from within the crowd.

"I've heard that people from the Country of Light are well-versed at speaking nonsense. Today, I've managed to grace myself with the presence of the real deal, truly, as they say, knowing a man by reputation is not as good as meeting face-to-face."

Rhode emerged from the crowd and walked towards Billy.

"Esteemed young sir, you are wrong."

Even when faced with Rhode's ridicule, Billy's elegant demeanor didn't change at all.

"Is that so?"

Rhode studied the man in front of him and nodded his head with satisfaction.

"Hmm... it does appear that you are indeed a patriotic person. I apologize for my rude behavior."

"Mr. Rhode..!"

Marlene was displeased with Rhode's stance and opened her mouth to voice her complaints, but she was interrupted by Billy.

“Oh ho... it looks like you’re a sharp one to be able to understand my underlying reason. I’ve done everything for the sake of my country, but unfortunately...” Billy paused for a moment and turned his head, glancing at Marlene, “unfortunately not everyone can understand that.”

“Well, I can understand you.”

Rhode expressed himself as though he could sympathize with Billy’s situation which made his impression of Rhode improve. Frankly, when he heard that Marlene attended a banquet with a man, he was quite mad and even intended to make things difficult for him. But now that he realized that this man was intelligent enough to understand him, his anger dissipated slightly. Since his opponent was willing to play nice, he would give him some face. However, unfortunately, Rhode’s next sentence immediately caused his face to turn pale.

“This is the so-called survival of the fittest, eh? Keep the good and take out the trash. To help the Munn Kingdom prosper, you took the initiative to leave by your own accord. Not everyone can make these kinds of patriotic sacrifices for the country. I really do admire your selfless mindset.”

“Pfft!”

“Haha...”

The nobles weren’t fools. Naturally, they understood what Rhode meant. Right after Rhode finished, a few of them were already on the verge of laughter. Many nobles present at the banquet secretly loathed that man from the Country of Light, but since he was a special envoy, they did not dare to speak out their complaints. Now that Rhode spoke their mind, it made them somewhat happy. Even Marlene’s tense expression relaxed slightly. She looked at Rhode and smiled to herself. With her identity, she had interacted with many people with high statuses of the same age, but none of them were as smart or as calm as Rhode. Furthermore, Rhode looked attractive, and he was also powerful; in other words — a perfect man, only if he would smile more often.

As much as she tried to hide it, Billy still noticed Marlene's subtle giggle. And when he recalled that ever since he arrived, she had never given him as much as a smile, he boiled on the inside.

Furthermore, this man simply said a few words, and she smiled just like that?

“Good, good! Since that's the case...!”

Billy raised his voice and pointed his cane towards Rhode. A hint of anger was apparent in his tone.

“I hereby challenge you to a duel!”

“Duel?”

When that word left Billy's mouth, everyone was surprised. Keller who was watching from the side also began to grow anxious; he did not want to have any disputes in a banquet that he hosted. Before he could say anything, Rhode already spoke up.

“Duel? A duel should always have a wager, am I right?”

“This lady.”

Billy stretched out his hand and pointed at Marlene.

“If I win, then I want you to leave her. From then on, she is mine. If you win, then I will give up on her. What do you think of this condition?”

“Is that so... I understand,” Rhode nodded his head and continued, “then I refuse.”

“Very good... since you've accepted, then... WHAT? Y-you refuse?”

Not only was Billy stunned speechless, but even the other nobles gasped in shock when they heard Rhode's reply. Refusing a duel was akin to throwing away a noble's honor!

“Why do you refuse?! Are you afraid of me?”

“As expected. Possessing low IQ is the worst.”

Rhode gave a long sigh as he looked ‘endearingly’ towards Billy like how a teacher looks an underperforming student.

“I want to remind you that Ms. Marlene is not an item. She neither belongs to me, nor to you. So even if you win, will Ms. Marlene follow you obediently?” Rhode sneered, “I’ll repeat myself once more; she’s not an item that belongs to anyone, so I don’t have the power to make that decision for her. If she desires to go with you, then I won’t stop her.”

Rhode glanced at Marlene and saw her proudly raising her head. Then, she walked towards Rhode’s side and lifted her wand at Billy.

“That’s right, Mr. Clinton. I, Marlene Sena, don’t belong to anyone but myself. No one can order me to stay or leave. If you want to take me, then you can come try and get me.”

At this moment, Marlene was obviously extremely angry. Her magic robe emitted a magical light, even the ruby on her wand grew increasingly brighter.

“You...”

He saw that Marlene was actually getting serious. He could sense an immeasurable amount of magic power flowing in that petite-looking body. If he forced her, then there’s no doubt that she’d really try to kill him.

“Using force against a lady isn’t gentlemanly, Mr. Clinton.”

Although Billy looked rather pitiful, Rhode wasn’t going to let him off that easily. In his opinion, anyone from the Country of Light was to be beaten to death.

“Well, if you truly intend to fight, then I don’t mind accompanying you.”

“Count me in, kid.”

This time, Sereck walked out from the crowd.

“You must remember that you’re in Deep Stone City, a direct territory under the Munn Kingdom. If you want to fight here, I do hope you consider the consequences.”

“Sereck...”

Once Sereck became involved in this matter, Billy realized that the situation was beginning to spiral out of control. He wasn’t stupid. The people here refrained from causing a scene because of his special identity as an envoy. But if he blatantly disrespected the people further, perhaps he might be thrown out. There were many envoys, losing one of them wasn’t much of a problem...

“It seems that I’ve gone too far. I will take my leave then.”

Billy said as he clenched his teeth in anger. Then, he turned around and left.

Once Billy was gone, Marlene finally put down her wand and smiled at Rhode.

“Thank you, Mr. Rhode. Because of you, we got rid of that nasty guy.”

“No problem, I’m also not fond of those group of idiots.”

Rhode waved his hand, causing Marlene to chuckle. Then both of them raised the wine glass in their hands.

“So, to celebrate our victory, you won’t mind if I offer you a toast, hm?”

“Of course I don’t mind.”

—

The banquet went on as usual. Just outside the building, Billy got onto a carriage, his face was all red and was extremely upset.

“I’m sorry, Sir.”

At this moment, the arrogant man had turned meek as he lowered his head towards the other person inside the carriage.

“I failed to complete your request to make that man move.”

“Not an issue, Mr. Clinton.”

On the other side of the carriage, the person who was hiding in the darkness chuckled.

“We still have a chance; whether it is you, or me.”

Then he raised his head and stared at the night sky.

“We will achieve our goal.”

Chapter 63 - Together With Him

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

After everything was over, the banquet once again resumed its festivities. Because of Rhode's bold actions, those nobles who were previously doubtful of him gradually changed their attitudes. Since the relationship between the Munn Kingdom and the Country of Light was irreconcilable, and Rhode mocked the envoy to the extent of driving him away, the nobles slowly regarded Rhode as one of their own. After all, as the saying goes, the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Having an acquaintance with Sereck and Marlene also reinforced Rhode's reputation. One of them was a famous swordmaster in Deep Stone City, and the other was the only heir of the Senia family as well as a genius mage. With them acknowledging Rhode, it implied that he had the qualifications to stand toe-to-toe with them.

From now on, the people who would make things difficult for him would decrease since no one was stupid enough to create trouble with the behemoths.

Thus, from time to time, nobles would offer a toast to Rhode and made small talk with him. He could also sense many furtive glances from the rich ladies who were hoping to spend a night with him. This act of self-indulgence wasn't uncommon within the nobility as lots of rich ladies loved to meet handsome men and enjoy a good time with them. It was similar to a man who likes to boast about a one-night stand with a beauty.

Unfortunately, before these ladies could approach Rhode for a chat, Marlene's cold eyes shot down their resolve even before it began.

“Shameless.”

Another girl in a beautiful dress blushed before turning away. Marlene snorted and lifted up a wine glass, sipping a mouthful of it. As a noble,

Marlene knew what they were scheming.

“I say... Miss Marlene, are you asking me for a drink? Or to be my bodyguard?”

As Rhode was right beside Marlene, he could obviously see what she was doing. Frankly, he wasn't a stranger to these things. Before the transmigration, Rhode had a few girlfriends, but nothing memorable came out from his relationships. Rhode dumped some of them after realizing their true nature, and some felt pressure because Rhode was more beautiful than them and chose to leave.

Therefore Rhode was quite open-minded about these things. If the other was willing, he did not mind to enjoy the pleasure. Alas, at this moment, even though two beautiful women were sitting beside him... as they say, the fox preys farthest from home. Rhode did not have the faintest intention towards them. The benefit of a one-night stand was that there was no strings-attached after that.

“What? Are you interested in those kinds of women?”

Marlene said as she raised her chin and pointed to the side. The group of wealthy ladies immediately jumped in fright after noticing Marlene glaring at them. Then they quickly dispersed and disappeared.

“At least you should give me a choice to choose.”

“...Really shallow.”

Marlene stared at Rhode coldly, but he didn't seem to mind it at all.

“Marlene... it's not good to be like that. After all, this is Mr. Rhode's personal life...”

Sensing the atmosphere turning awkward, Lize, who sat opposite Rhode quickly tried to mediate the matter.

“What? Are you saying that I must let this man do as he pleases? Lize, you cannot be too tolerating, otherwise, after you're married, you'll be taken

advantage of by the man!”

“Ge, get married?!”

Lize was shocked. She secretly glanced at Rhode beside her. Then, her face turned beet red because she choked on the wine that she was unknowingly drinking.

“Cough cough... isn’t it a little too early to be speaking about these things? I...”

“What are you talking about? Last year, I was urged by my father about marriage. Hmph. Luckily there were no eligible men at that moment, otherwise...” Marlene then realized something and said, “ah, but I think you don’t care about these matters right now.”

Then she looked at Lize in envy and nodded.

“It seems like living here isn’t too bad. At least everything can be decided on your own... unlike me.”

Marlene felt that she had said too much, so she shook her head and became quiet.

The atmosphere turned heavy, but just a moment later, Rhode broke the silence and said, “Ah right, Marlene, I have something to tell you.”

“What’s up? If it’s about those shallow women from just now, I’m not going to hear it.”

“It’s about our mission.”

Marlene immediately turned around and looked at Rhode.

“What is it?”

Unlike the other ladies, Rhode wasn’t frightened when Marlene stared at him. Her eyes were sometimes very oppressive, full of confidence and pride. But it didn’t affect him in the least.

“I think it’s better for me to go alone.”

“Why?”

Marlene frowned slightly. Although her time with Rhode wasn’t long, she knew that he would rarely change his mind. If she remembered it correctly, it was her first time hearing him take back his own words.

“I think you’ve heard from Lize about our first meeting.”

Marlene nodded and tilted her head slightly. Although Rhode instructed Lize not to mention about the incident in the floating ship to anyone, Marlene was Lize’s close friend and a member of the mercenary group, so, she managed to hear about the matter.

“As I’ve said, the incident before is related to the Country of Light. Moreover, Sereck had just informed me that their spies were looking for my information. I feel that when I leave for this mission, they would definitely look for trouble with me.”

“So you don’t intend to let me get involved in this matter.”

“Your identity isn’t suitable for this mission. This matter is also quite dangerous. For the sake of reputation, they are willing to do anything to accomplish their goal. Ms. Marlene, when they attacked the merchant ship, you weren’t there. Therefore this matter is unrelated to you and is unlikely that they will involve you.”

“What about Lize?”

Marlene furrowed her brows and asked.

“Well, since she’ll be in Deep Stone City, there’s nothing much to worry about. The Country of Light wouldn’t be stupid enough to move in the open. Furthermore, I’ve prepared security within the stronghold. As long she doesn’t totally disregard safety, it should be fine.”

Rhode wasn’t concerned about safety as he had full control over the stronghold’s security system. If someone tried to invade the stronghold, he

would immediately receive system prompts, and the intruder would encounter a certain degree of resistance from the stronghold itself.

“As for Lize...”

Rhode looked at the other girl who sat beside him.

“After I leave, you will live in the mercenary association for the moment. I will request for Sereck to look after the both of you.”

“Yes, Mr. Rhode.

Lize was a little sad as she had to leave her home. She wanted to go with him, but the number of spells she knew was too little. Moreover, the bulk of her spells were the holy element which meant that it was only useful against undead. Going on the mission with Rhode would burden him instead of helping.

“Then, as for Ms. Marlene...”

After getting Lize’s answer, Rhode turned around. But his words have yet finished, Marlene already made her answer.

“I refuse.”

“Eh?”

“Although this matter is not related to me, as a part of Senia family, escaping the problem is not my style and...” Marlene suddenly narrowed her eyes, saying “This is the Munn Kingdom, our country. If those Light scums want to scheme something here, they need to ask for our permission. Mr. Rhode, I hope that I can help you. Just like how you helped me, now it’s my turn to return the favor. You are strong, but the enemy isn’t only one person. I am a middle circle mage, so I can well-versed in fighting a large number of people. At least, I hope you will consider my proposal.”

After hearing her out, Rhode closed his eyes to think.

Marlene did make some sense. If his enemies wanted to attack him when he entered Twilight Forest, most likely they would have to employ an ambush. While he could solve it by himself, Marlene could wipe them clean with much less effort.

If Rhode didn't know to what extent how dangerous this mission was, he would have never considered bringing Marlene along. But now, he was actually very clear of the situation, so if there was an extra pair of hands to help, then... why not?

“Sure, I agree to your request.”

In the end, Rhode nodded.

“But I believe you know my condition.”

“I understand that I must obey your command. After all, I don't want to lose my life just because of my boring pride.”

“Then...”

Rhode stretched out his hand.

“Welcome aboard once more.”

“I hope we will work well together.”

Marlene shook Rhode's hand firmly with a confident smile.

But the two didn't notice that Lize was staring at them with a complicated expression. Her delicate hands clutched onto the hem of her skirt tightly as she bit her lower lip.

I want to be strong...

Chapter 64 - Entering The Mountain

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The brilliant rays of the sun permeated through the gaps between the canopy.

Rhode stopped in his tracks; he stared at the hilly dirt path in front of him for a moment, then he turned back and looked at the girl who was gasping for air behind him.

“Ms. Marlene, can you move a bit faster?”

“W-wait a minute... let me... catch my breath...”

Marlene’s present state was a mess. With mud, twigs, and leaves sticking onto her robe as well as with a face full of sweat, she’d lost all of her previously elegant features. If someone saw her pitiful state right now, they’d have thought that she’d just came back from a war. But in fact, she was only climbing a hill.

“I... never thought... that it was... going to be this tiring...”

She took heavy breaths with each step as she slowly staggered up the hilly road. The enthusiasm that she displayed before had completely vanished. When Rhode saw her like this, he started to regret his decision to bring her along. After all, he wasn’t here to fool around. Physical strength wasn’t a mage’s forte; clearly he’d forgotten about this point.

During the previous mission, Marlene didn’t fall into such a miserable state because she used her magic to float up against the steep mountainous slopes. However, as the elevation here was much gentler, she refused to use her magic and insisted to walk. And that was how she ended up exhausted.

At the beginning of the climb, she was energetic since it was her first time exploring the wild without anyone guarding her. This newfound freedom in adventuring made her even more enthusiastic than Rhode.

Alas, enthusiasm wasn't something that could be eaten and converted into energy.

Therefore, her enthusiasm gradually waned and turned into anguish.

Rough roads, thorny shrubs, thickets of grass... observing nature from afar was nice and all, but walking through it was another story altogether. And to make matters worse, even wanting to take a rest was a chore. According to Rhode, she must carefully scan the surroundings just in case a poisonous snake lurked nearby.

Thank the Holy Soul. At least I am given enough time to write my epitaph.

Marlene was already extremely tired and dizzy. She even felt that this was worse than studying a ton of magic law books in the Magic Tower.

"I really don't know how Lize adapted to this lifestyle."

In the end, Marlene chose not to sit on the ground. Instead, she leaned against a tree trunk to catch her breath.

"She must have suffered... back then she was such a crybaby."

"Nothing is impossible."

Rhode gave a casual remark as he compared a nearby mountain with the one in his 'game memory.' Then, he rested his hand on the scabbard of a magnificent looking sword on his waist, the Blood Tears. This sword was given as a gift of appreciation from Claytor. It was apparent that the Keller family was very grateful towards Rhode when they presented him with this magic grade weapon.

Compared to Star Mark, the appearance of Blood Tears resembled those swords from the Middle Ages. It had a dark, crimson hue along with a rare spell that coincided with its name. Whenever the sword contacts with blood,

it would gradually become sharper and more durable. Weapons that could grow in strength were rare and highly sought after.

Rhode accepted the gift unreservedly. While Star Mark was still his favorite, it occupied one summoning slot, which he felt was quite a waste. The Summoning Swordsman's Magic Circle that Rhode possessed was the 'Ten Strongest Spirit Deck.' Within the Magic Circle, he can decide what Core Card he wanted to use for each deck. For example, in an army, if the player was the commander and the summoned spirits were the soldiers, then the 'Core Card' would be the platoon leader. Once the Core is set, the summoned spirits can be materialized as an entity without consuming soul power. If their power runs out, then they will temporarily return to the Magic Circle to 'charge up' before materializing once more.

For the Summoning Swordsman class, deciding what Core Card to use was crucial and should be done with care, as once the Core was set, it couldn't be changed unless the player chooses to delete it. That was the reason why Rhode hadn't decided on Star Mark's Core yet, since its current level was fairly low. If he found a better card in the future, then everything would be too late.

Rhode had made an error once before, so he wouldn't be stupid enough to repeat it one more time.

Marlene continued. "But, she somehow appears... strange."

"Really?"

Rhode was surprised for a moment.

Lize was strange? How come he did not feel so?

"Hmm... how do I put it..."

Marlene frowned for a moment as she pondered on how to describe it to Rhode, but in the end, she didn't know how to phrase it.

“I can’t really say, but I feel that she’s different from before. Moreover... nevermind.”

Marlene recalled the time when she was about to leave with Rhode on this mission. Lize held her hand tightly and hesitated as if she wanted to say something, but after a while, she didn’t say anything and left. As a woman, she could feel that Lize was jealous and worried at the same time. But Marlene did not know the reason why.

Was it because she wanted to tag along, so she got mad? But the Lize she knew wasn’t that kind of person...

Marlene suddenly straightened up.

A magical wave surged in the air, sending a direct signal to her body which caused her to react immediately.

Rhode also noticed Marlene’s body twitching slightly.

“What happened?”

“Someone is coming.”

Marlene turned her head and gazed at the mountain below which was hidden behind a thick foliage.

“My sigil detected people marching towards our direction. One... two... three. Three people. But there’s a chance that there might be more...”

“Let’s get ready to move forward.”

Rhode loosened the grip on his sword.

“Do it as planned.”

“Got it.”

Marlene acknowledged his order and raised her wand towards a tree beside her. Soon, a bright, mysterious sigil appeared and penetrated into the trunk.

“Let’s continue.”

“Why don’t we just ambush them and kill those group of nasty people?”

Marlene simply threw out the question on her mind. In her opinion, those guys weren’t tough. If Rhode and herself combined strength, they could easily dispatch them. So why should they be afraid of being caught being these people? It was something that she didn’t understand.

“Simple. Because this place is not too far from the Deep Stone City.”

Rhode answered her question without hesitation.

“If we engage them now, those guys will immediately send some signal for reinforcements. By then, we will lose our advantage. However, now they are unaware that we have intel of their locations. Letting these guys continue to follow us is a better option for now because we can lead them deeper without alarming them. Even if they realize that something is wrong, it’ll take too long for their reinforcements to aid them. So, rather than finishing them off here, we can keep track of their movements without worrying about an ambush.”

“I see...”

Marlene nodded and no longer said anything regarding the plan. She could guess what Rhode planned for them. But still, she was rather annoyed with the sweat trickling down her face.

“But if you’re just looking for magic herbs, do we need to walk this far in?”

They had been trekking the mountain since morning and Marlene was already dead tired. She didn’t understand why they had to enter so deep into the forest when there were other spots closer to the edges.

“Indeed we don’t. If we are looking for magic herbs, we won’t need to go this deep in. But, coincidentally, I’ve found some treasure maps which points to the Twilight Forest. If we can find it, it’ll be a boon to our group.”

Rhode's expression was indifferent as usual. It didn't appear as though he was lying, and since Marlene trusted his judgment, she stopped being skeptical about everything he did.

“Treasure?”

Marlene's eyes sparkled for a moment. She couldn't imagine what kind of treasures would be buried here. Those fantasy adventure stories that she had been reading made her slightly less skeptical about these things. After all, instead of going to some underground cemetery, a treasure hunt sounded much closer to her 'adventure fantasy.'

“Then which direction shall we head next?”

“North.”

Rhode pointed to the front.

Chapter 65 - Rock of Lament

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“There’s nothing strange about their movements so far.” A black-cloaked man spoke as he carefully observed the tracks on the ground.

“Everything is going as planned,” another black-cloaked man replied, feeling somewhat wary, “but, why do I feel that everything is going too well?”

The men were fully wrapped in a black cloth, and other than their eyes, everything else was concealed. Even their voices were suppressed. And whether they were male or female? No one could tell.

“According to our intel, this young man has an extremely cautious personality. Why isn’t he alert now?”

“That’s not surprising, I mean, after all, there’s a beautiful woman beside him...” One of the black-cloaked men joked in a low voice.

The other three men chuckled. But they soon contained their laughter and began whispering again.

“We should do as instructed. Let’s wait for them until they’ve within the depths of the forest, then we attack. Remember! We must do this cleanly.”

“What about that woman?”

“Capture her alive whenever possible. Whether we knock her out, drug her or whatever, as long we retrieve her alive. However, if we fail, we must silence her. A mage is a tough opponent to handle. All of you must be careful.”

The men nodded in acknowledgment. Of course, they knew how difficult it was to handle a mage. If they were determined to escape, almost no one

could stop them.

“Eh?”

Suddenly, one of the men detected a slight movement nearby. He swiftly made a hand gesture to the rest and slowly unsheathed a dagger by his waist. Step by step, he trod lightly towards a cluster of bushes. The others behind him immediately crouched followed him with weapons drawn. Then, in a flash, the black-cloaked man nearest to the bush suddenly thrust his dagger forward.

Swoosh! The bush shook, and a frightened squirrel shot out, crashing into a nearby tree before frantically climbing up the trunk. For a moment, it turned back and stared nervously at these humans before disappearing into the canopy.

When the men realized that it was a false alarm, they merely glanced at each other, not speaking a word. Then, they jumped into the bushes, disappearing from sight.

Meanwhile, Marlene was in a gully, stamping her foot in anger.

“Argh!” Marlene gnarled as she held her clenched fists in the air. “These guys are simply too rude! Just they wait...”

Rhode did not like to be tailed by someone. But since he allowed himself to be followed, naturally he needed to find a way to track them back. This is the so-called ‘cycle’.

Thus, after reaching the Rock of Lament, Rhode did not attempt to look for treasure just yet; instead, he requested Marlene to devise a method to counter the black-cloaked men’s reconnaissance. His primary goal was to figure out their intentions in detail. Secondly, he wanted Marlene to realize that things weren’t as simple as it seemed.

At first, Marlene didn’t put these people in her eyes. She was a pure blooded noble from an influential family. As such, for most of her life, she was only exposed to the ‘brighter’ side, and regarding the other side of the

spectrum, she wasn't very knowledgeable. In her opinion, these black-cloaked men were no more than sneaky thieves. So, when Rhode suddenly asked her to check the bushes, she complained incessantly.

But after checking carefully, she found several shadows hiding in the bushes. Marlene's face immediately paled, but her pride prevented her from saying anything. While she was proud, she wasn't stupid.

As a mage, she knew that being attacked from behind was one of her weaknesses. In a full-fledged battle, she would've cast a shield over herself beforehand so that she wouldn't have to worry about stray arrows or backstabbing. Mages' weren't able to protect themselves 24/7 — that would be ridiculously overpowered.

If she was caught unprepared when walking past the bushes, the result would be disastrous. Thus, as soon she saw these black-cloaked men, she stopped disregarding them and took them seriously.

Rhode carefully watched her and nodded satisfyingly. Since the beginning, he had already noted the strength of their foes. Based on level alone, they were much higher than him because as they were at the advanced level. Fortunately, their surveillance route and secret techniques were precisely the same as what Rhode had remembered it to be, giving him more confidence to finish these guys off.

On the surface, both Marlene and Rhode appeared somewhat passive. However, in the shadows, a great deal of movement was taking place. No matter how weak or powerful those men were, Rhode needed to find them first before they could attack. Therefore, as the one choosing the location of the ambush, Rhode had the advantage.

And during the process of finding the men, Rhode discovered an something interesting.

“An adorable familiar, you have,” Rhode said, with a faint curve on his lips, uncertain whether he was praising Marlene or being sarcastic. And in the meantime, a squirrel scuttled onto her shoulders.

“Frankly, I thought a mage’s familiar would be more unique.”

“Unique?” Marlene raised her brows and glared at Rhode.

“You think that my familiar is as weird-looking as your summoned spirits? This little one is my baby! If it weren’t for us traveling so far out, I definitely wouldn’t have brought it here.”

The poor and innocent summoned spirits were suddenly being thrown into the fire...

Rhode sighed and shook his head. He stared at the squirrel sitting on Marlene’s shoulder. It was using its small teeth to nibble on a nut.

From a female’s point of view, cute is justice. Rhode clearly comprehended this ‘fact’ since he had led a guild before. Many female players in his guild didn’t choose their pet based on their skills, talent, income or combat power. Rather, they chose the ones who were beautiful, lovely, and charming. It appears as though no matter which world he resided in, women always had this side in them...

“Let’s go.”

In the gully, overgrown bushes and shrubs spread onto the rocky walls. Whenever a gust of wind blew through, loose soil and dead leaves would fly all over the place.

“Can we really find a treasure here, Mr. Rhode?” Marlene complained, with one hand raised to her front, blocking the leaves from striking her face.

“How can this deserted place house a treasure?”

“‘Deserted’ is precisely the reason why a treasure can be found here, Ms. Marlene.”

Rhode walked into the shadows and observed his surroundings thoroughly.

“Do you know why this place is called the Rock of Lament?”

Marlene shook her head. She wasn't a native Deep Stone City citizen, how could she possibly know about this?

“Long ago, there was a bandit camp built nearby. At that time, Deep Stone City hasn't existed yet, and all the mines were monopolized by large merchant conglomerates. Not only did these merchants exploit the miners, but they also did not pay them wages or give them adequate provisions. In the end, the bandits killed the merchants and returned the money to the needy.”

Marlene's mouth twitched ever so slightly. As much as she hated ruthless nobles, she knew that it was the job for nobles to handle these situations. No matter what was the reason, for ordinary citizens to take up arms and fight for their own justice wasn't something that would make her feel happy.

With Rhode's acute perception, he obviously noticed Marlene's reaction, but he chose not to say anything. When he came to this world and interacted with the people, he found out that their culture and beliefs were vastly different from his. For example, just like now, if he told this story to the people of his world, most likely they would applaud and praise the people for their courage to fight against the strong. But it was different in this world.

While Marlene wasn't against this matter, she also did not think that it was something worthy of praise. Since she was a noble, her opinion differed from the common people. She had been raised to maintain a strong sense of noblesse oblige as well as to uphold their dignity. So, when hearing such a story, Marlene couldn't accept it completely.

For the citizens of a lower caste, they did not mind if the protagonist of the story was a thief or a bandit, as long as someone could solve their difficulties, they were a hero in their eyes.

Rhode did not intend to correct Marlene's ideology, and neither did he have the interest to change her point of view.

He began to recall the original description of the quest and continued, “in time, the bandits became famous among the people, which made the wealthy merchants jealous. Eventually, they retaliated and rallied the soldiers to surround the bandit camp. Although the bandits were outnumbered, their spirits did not waver. They fought against the soldiers courageously and perished with dignity. Later that night, after the soldiers left, the people mourned for the death of their heroes and erected a tombstone. Thus, because of that, this place is called the Rock of Lament.”

“What a wonderful story... what happened to those guys after that?”

“I do not know.”

Rhode simply shook his head, the quest description only introduced the situation, and did not mention anything like, “if you want to know what happened afterwards, read the next chapter.”

“It was a wonderful story.”

Marlene nodded her head, but she sounded a bit complicated.

“But, Mr. Rhode, according to what you’ve said, those guys, after all, are just bandits. They are a group of criminals, how could they leave any treasures?”

“Well, Marlene, let me ask you a question. Why is the Senia family so strong? Is it only because of fame?”

“Of course not,” Marlene replied snappily.

She did not like how Rhode stated it so bluntly.

“We, the Senia family, are not the kind that only possesses a glorified past. Hmph, if only you knew, Lize is the real—”

Marlene suddenly covered her mouth. Then, she felt slightly guilty while looking at Rhode. After discovering that there was no change in Rhode’s expression, she felt relieved. At the same time, she secretly shook her head,

Lize... it's better if you openly reveal your situation to Mr. Rhode. Otherwise, not only you will have to be careful, even I have to pay attention all the time. This feeling is quite troublesome.

“These bandits are the same,” Rhode said indifferently, as though he didn’t hear what she said.

She didn’t know whether did he actually hear it, or just pretending not to.

He continued, “don’t you find it odd that they had the ability to contend against the merchants in the first place? After all, most people wouldn’t dare to risk their lives to become bandits. Since they could obtain that amount of strength, they must have a someone backing them. If we can follow up on this point and investigate further, maybe we can find an unexpected harvest.”

Rhode began to insert some half-truths into his narrative. Back in the game, many hidden quests derived from rumors, legends or even stories. Players were a sensitive bunch about this part because it was a virtual reality game. Therefore, the logic shouldn’t be too far off from the ones in the real world. Any sentence contained within the game could be a trigger for a hidden quest.

In the game, the Rock of Lament questline activated when a player heard a bard singing a song in a tavern. The player’s purpose of visiting the tavern was to seek an adventure, so they waited for the bard to sing to activate the quest.

Of course, Marlene was unable to relate to it — which was exactly why she was presently staring at Rhode with her eyes wide open. She was shocked at Rhode’s ability to perceive information from a story. Marlene felt that the more time she spent with this man, the more she thought that he was becoming increasingly unfathomable. Could it be that nothing in this world was difficult to him?

Who is he actually?

Marlene’s curiosity grew once more.

“It’s here.”

At this moment, Rhode stopped in front of a cave. He carefully examined the mouth of the dark cave and went inside. Marlene hesitated for a while, but she still picked up her skirt and followed behind.

The duo lit up their torches, illuminating the dim tunnel. The only sounds they could hear were the echoes of their footsteps. Occasionally, a drop of water would fall to the ground, producing a crisp, tapping sound. Just from a brief scan, there was nothing peculiar about this underground cave.

Not long after entering, Marlene, who was in the rear, suddenly screamed as she jumped forward.

“Aah!”

“What happened?”

Rhode swiftly turned around and looked at her.

“I-I felt like someone touched me from behind,” Marlene said while she trembled slightly, clearly embarrassed by her sudden outcry.

“Touched you?”

Before he turned back to the front, Rhode thought of several possible reasons. But never would he had believed that it would be the most unrealistic one. He lifted his torch and waved it behind Marlene.

“There’s no one.”

“O-or maybe I am mistaken?”

Marlene also turned around, her face was flushed, and she did not know what else to say.

Rhode did not mind her. Soon, both of them continued walking. But after three steps, Marlene’s voice sounded again.

“Aahh!”

“Eh?”

Rhode turned around again, failing to discover anyone behind her. But this time, he realized that Marlene’s face was incredibly pale. Her whole body began to tremble vigorously as though she’d seen a ghost.

“N-no, this isn’t right... there’s something...! I don’t know what it is, but I know it touched my back... Rhode, h-help me! What... what is it tha—”

Before Marlene could finish, Rhode discovered fur-like mandibles stretching towards her neck.

“Don’t move!”

Whoosh! He swiftly waved his sword past her collar, quickly pinning the perpetrator to the wall. At that moment, both of them finally saw its actual appearance.

It was a palm-sized spider!

Although the spider’s sternum was cleanly pierced through, it still desperately tried to twist its body to escape. Brown-colored blood spurted out from the wound, and it sprayed out a white thread from between its chelicerae as though it was in severe pain.

The sight of it was truly disgusting.

While Rhode had encountered much more revolting beings than this, his rare indifferent expression changed slightly. He flicked his sword slightly, and the spider was immediately torn into pieces.

“Sigh...”

After getting rid of the spider, he finally felt relieved.

“Ms. Marlene, are you hurt? How do you fee—”

Rhode was interrupted when a soft, fragrant body flew into his arms.

“...” Rhode was speechless.

“Sobs...”

Marlene clung to Rhode tightly as she buried her head in his arms. Although he couldn't see her expression, he could hear her sobbing faintly.

Was this missy actually crying?

Rhode knit his brows together in confusion. Then he stretched out his left hand and patted her shoulder.

Surprisingly, the young maiden did not react. Her arms remained hooked around Rhode's body. He had to admit; those two soft buns were really tempting.

“Ms. Marlene? Everything is alright now.”

“Sobs...sobs... I-is that thing really dead? O-on my back, there's no more terrible monster? Mr. Rhode, please help me check, did that terrible monster leave something on my back?”

Rhode scrutinized Marlene's back with the torch. All he could see was a clean and tidy robe without any markings.

“There's nothing, Ms. Marlene.”

Once she heard his reassuring words, Marlene finally felt relieved. Then, she raised her head and quickly wiped her eyes. She suddenly remembered something, so she gave him an embarrassed smile and said, “I-I have something to do, I will come back very soon, okay?”

“... Of course, no problem, be careful.”

Her meekness was somewhat refreshing from the usual. Rhode didn't know what was going through her mind right now, so he could only watch as she swiftly ran over to a corner, acting suspiciously. Soon, the torch in the

corner moved once again, and when she came back, she was totally refreshed.

However, not only did her expression return to normal, the usual luxurious robe that she always wore... also changed?

“Ms. Marlene?”

“Eh? It’s alright. I’m sorry for acting so unprofessionally, Mr. Rhode. I panicked and slipped up... I’m okay now, let’s get going.”

“That goes without saying, but I have a question.”

“What is it?”

“Are you actually...afraid of spiders?”

“Oh... ha ha ha ha ha...” Marlene forced a laugh when she heard Rhode’s question.

“What are you saying, Mr. Rhode. You are so funny, do you know that? How can this lady be afraid of those black, rough, fur-like, eight-legged creeps? It’s impossible. I was just a little shocked and slipped up, that’s all. Those kinds of useless insects only know how to scare people with its tiny jaws. I’m totally not afraid at all!”

Sounds like she really is afraid...

Chapter 66 - Behind The Rumors

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

After the entire fiasco, the duo continued forward. But Marlene clearly didn't let her guard down. Not only did she cast a shield over herself, but she also stuck close to Rhode as much as possible, using her right hand to pinch his the hem of his clothes. Her pupils darted left and right continuously, seeking out any sudden movements. With this level of surveillance, perhaps not even the cloaked men could avoid her.

“Mr. Rhode, is it really here?” Marlene asked after she inhaled deeply, breathing in the cold, chilly air which sent a shiver down her spine.

As they went deeper into the cave, the ground became increasingly colder. Rhode was also fairly curious since he had never completed this quest before. At that time, he was completely focused on unearthing the potential of the Summoning Swordsman, so he was hesitant to activate this quest.

The reason why he knew so much about the Rock of Lament was because he read about another player's adventure on the forum. That player posted screenshots of his experiences as well as the loot he obtained at the end of the quest. His intention was mainly to show off, and many people ended up taking the bait. Before him, no one thought that listening to the bard would grant them a hidden quest, so after this incident, it spawned a revelation among many players to use similar tactics to seek out other hidden quests.

The situation right now was the same as what he has remembered in the forum post. But at that time, the player wrote, “After I walked through the cave for a while...”

...It ended there.

So... how long is 'a while'?

Only god knows.

In any case, it shouldn't be too long. Otherwise, that player wouldn't write it as 'a while.'

Damn it! It was a mistake not to research more about this questline.

Just as he said those words, a few moments later, the two of them finally noticed a change in scenery.

A bright light shone into their eyes as they left the narrow cave.

They found themselves in a wide, underground cave. Stalactites formed on the ceiling, and an occasional drop of water would fall off the tip. The wet solid cave wall also reflected the sun rays which permeated into the cave through several holes from the top. There were even some plants in the corners that tried to stretch its tendrils towards the light.

“It's beautiful...”

Rhode had seen plenty of underground caverns, so he wasn't surprised. As for Marlene, it was her first time witnessing such a sight. It wasn't as scary and dark as she imagined, it could be even described as charming and beautiful.

Marlene was completely immersed in this magnificent display of the power of nature. Meanwhile, Rhode shifted his gaze on a huge rock.

This rock matched exactly to what Rhode had seen in the forum post.

A huge inverted stalactite was carved into a smooth rock and many names were etched on it. It was the names of the bandits who had been killed. After their deaths, they were buried here, under the tombstone raised by the common people.

“They lurked in the nights and perished in the darkness, but they have brought us light.”

Rhode muttered the inscription above the tombstone, then he bowed his head and glanced behind the rock.

A long time had passed, and the graves lost its original appearance. If it weren't because of those small mounds that were neatly arranged in a row, almost no one would think that this was a gravesite.

“What should I do next, Mr. Rhode? You wouldn't ask me to become a graverobber, right?” Marlene asked Rhode worriedly. No matter what, digging up graves wasn't a noble thing to do.

“Let's split up and check the area.”

Naturally, Rhode already found the location of the treasure since he could recall the contents of the screenshots by the player quite vividly. But he wasn't silly enough to directly saunter to the treasure location and dig it up because that would indubitably trip Marlene's suspicion. He didn't want to create additional headaches for himself, so he decided to play it out naturally.

Marlene was relieved when she heard that Rhode wasn't going to order her to dig up the graves. She nodded her head and took the left side of the cave while Rhode searched the right. Up to this point,

everything was the same as the forum post, even so, Rhode couldn't help but wonder that if there would be any kind of divergence from the game.

But when he saw a dust-covered chest made out of bronze in the corner, Rhode finally felt relieved.

He walked towards the chest and lowered his body, studying the object before him.

Due to the power of time, the chest's surface had begun to weather. Rhode gently reached out and swept the dust off the lid. Then he skillfully patted several seemingly random spots with his right hand to confirm that it wasn't boobytrapped. After that, he held the lid and opened it.

Creak... Dust flew everywhere when he lifted up the lid as its aged hinges made a sad wail. After blowing the dust off the objects, his heart immediately jumped with joy.

Inside the chest were the weapons left behind by the bandits. Most of them had rusted beyond belief and already failed the test of time. However, there were a few which glittered amongst the others, as though they were brand new. This was a characteristic of magic equipment.

[Broken Fang (Dagger), Magic Equipment (Excellent), when attacking the target, it can trigger a chance of paralysis for 3 seconds]

[Forest Walker (Longbow), Magic Equipment (Excellent), by consuming Soul Power, it can activate the Hawkeye effect for 1 hour.]

[Rock Hearts (Shield), Magic Equipment (Rare), when attacked, there's a chance of triggering Steel Body and absorb 4000 damage, resistance to magic attacks increased by 10%]

[Wild Wolf Oath (Sword), Magic Equipment (Excellent), when attacking the target, it can trigger chance of Bleeding, damage increased by 30%]

In the chest, Rhode found four types of magic equipment. He even found a spatial bag which made him incredibly happy. Spatial bags were very expensive and rare to find. In the game, all players automatically had one, but now he realized that it was a luxury to have one.

After the incident in the floating ship, he asked Matt about this issue. At first, he intended to order one from Matt, but Matt told him that the spatial bags belonged mostly to mages. Since space magic were high-level spells, perhaps most ordinary people wouldn't be able to get it in their entire lifetime.

Even as a traveling merchant, Matt had no way to acquire a spatial bag. Maybe only four to five people in Deep Stone City had one. Rhode just knew that Sereck and Marlene both had one each. Alas, the missy took things too easily. She thought that their journey here wouldn't be long and didn't bring it. Marlene's robe had a similar function, but it could not carry as much as a spatial bag.

Rhode had been craving for it ever since he arrived to this world. Back in the game, players would throw away their low-leveled 10-grid spatial bag because nobody wanted to buy it. But now, not even a 4-grid spatial bag for newbies could be found. It was such a tragedy...

Although he suspected that the loot here would be quite decent, it actually went past his expectations! To put it simply, he had planned to hunt for similar equipment, but that was only in the next dungeon. However, now he could get them all without fighting any enemy! Perhaps this was the reason why hidden quests were so attractive. Unlike ordinary quests, hidden quests tested the player's wisdom and observation.

Rhode immediately stored all the loot he found in the spatial bag without any reservations. After cleaning out the entire chest, he spotted a piece of cloth hidden at the bottom. A trace of excitement flashed in his eyes and quickly grabbed it.

On the surface, this piece of cloth appeared rather unappealing. Its dull grey colors made it seem like it was dirty. But at this moment, Rhode knew that this was the reason why the forum post went viral on the internet.

[Shadow Messenger (Cloak), Magic Equipment (Mysterious), wearing it can conceal your presence by 70%, Stealth passive effect]

This cloak was the first Mysterious-tier equipment he discovered in this world. This piece of equipment was a must-have for spies, thieves, assassins or rangers. In the game's auction house, the price of it reached 25 gold coins, and it had not been reduced ever since. Besides Ancient-tier types of magic equipment, there would be nothing better for these subterfuge classes.

Furthermore, there were only ten of these cloaks in the entire Dragon Soul Continent. It once belonged to an assassin faction with a long history. Only one player managed to acquire this cloak without passing the test set by the assassins. The rest of them had to kill monsters and go through rigorous questlines to obtain it, but still, they did not succeed in the end.

And right now, this legendary artifact finally fell into his grasp.

It was a pity that he wasn't from the thief class, this factor alone made the value of the cloak significantly diminish, but it was still better than nothing.

While Rhode was busy looting, Marlene, who was at the other side of the cave, stared at a strange part of the wall curiously.

"What's this?" She murmured to herself.

The wall that she was looking at was wrapped in vines, concealing whatever that was within completely. However, Marlene felt that there was something strange in it, so, she carefully raised her wand and cast a spell to untangle the vines.

When the vines parted, the first thing she saw was a face.

"Ah!"

Marlene subconsciously screamed and waved her wand back and forth. After a while, she realized that it was only a sculpture.

The sculpture portrayed a dignified man in full plate armor holding a sword in his hand. Although it was quite worn, the sculpture itself was fully intact, and it emitted a faint characteristic of courage.

"This... isn't this a statue from the Fassicarl Era?"

Marlene's curiosity was piqued. She walked forward and examined the sculpture. Then she reached out and touched its face.

And at that moment, Rhode's voice sounded out, "What happened, Marlene? What did you find?"

"Eh?"

Marlene was surprised for a moment when she heard Rhode calling her. The moment she turned around, a sound suddenly came out from the sculpture. Both of them were startled because they realized that the sculpture's face was actually shrinking back and its eyes were shining! Then, the sculpture spun around, slicing the vines with its sword.

“What the... Marlene! Be careful! Come here!”

Rhode was equally shocked because he didn't remember any of this in the forum post. And this was obviously a natural cave, how can there be a sculpture here?

However, he had no time to put his thoughts together and he quickly pulled Marlene behind him before unsheathing his sword.

Holy Soul above... it should not be those damned alchemy creatures again, right?

However, contrary to Rhode's expectation, the sculpture did not intend to attack. It put back its sword and went silent.

A moment later, a low sound echoed in the cave.

Rumble... The stone wall next to the sculpture suddenly began to shake. Then it shifted diagonally, revealing a three-meter high passage.

“...”

Rhode and Marlene glanced at each other, speechless.

How did things turn out like this?

Chapter 67 - Another Cave

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“...”

“....”

The passage to their front was in pitch darkness. Not even a speck of light could be seen from within.

Both Rhode and Marlene stared speechlessly at the entrance of the ‘new cave.’

“So, Marlene, what did you do?” Rhode took the initiative to break the silence.

“I-I did not do anything,” Marlene said with a slight panic in her voice.

Her expression genuinely revealed that she didn’t know what happened.

Frankly, it was shocking to Rhode as well.

He was pretty confident that there weren’t any posts about a hidden cave behind a sculpture. If there was something like this back in the game, it would’ve gone viral already. However, there remained another possibility — the player actually found the entrance, but since there was nothing, he didn’t bother to spread the word.

But no matter how much he looked at the entrance, he couldn’t think of a reason why someone would craft such a deliberate mechanism just for fun.

Even if it killed him, he would still trust his intuition. A secret passage and a trap appearing hand-in-hand? There is only one way to find out the answer.

Go in and explore.

But still, he couldn't help but feel slightly hesitant. If it were back in the game, he would immediately dive in without delay. But now, his situation was different; he no longer had a 'respawn' if he died. Moreover, he had no intel of this unknown passage. What if there were many traps or monsters inside? That would certainly spell trouble for him.

Nevertheless, it wasn't an impossible task for Rhode.

"Marlene," Rhode said softly, with a trace of resolution in his voice. "Stand guard at the entrance. I'll go in and scout. If I do not appear within twenty minutes or if you hear an explosion, you need to leave this place immediately. Understood?"

In the end, Rhode made a decision. He unsheathed his sword and swung it casually, causing a red card to materialize out of thin air.

Roar! A dark hound appeared beside him.

"How can I do that!" Marlene shook her head and disagreed.

Then she furrowed her brows and said, "Do you want me to escape by myself? If I do something like that, how can I explain to Lize afterwards? Moreover, my Senia family is no coward..."

Rhode waved his hand to interrupt Marlene, "It's not the matter of courage, Ms. Marlene. We don't know what lies within that cave. What if something happens and both of us got trapped inside? If one of us stays outside, then if something happens, there is still hope."

"That's true... but..." Marlene had mixed feelings over this matter and was frowning, but suddenly, she clenched her teeth and shouted. "I have an idea!"

"An idea?" Rhode turned to Marlene and looked at her in surprise.

"I-I have my family's heirloom. It is a type of magic equipment."

When Rhode suddenly stared at her, Marlene blushed slightly and stammered.

“No matter what kind of danger I face, as long as I’m willing, I can teleport out from any space at any moment to the Senia estate. Moreover, this can be used by a maximum of two people at the same time. As long you hold my hand, we can leave together at any moment, so you don’t have to worry.”

At first, Marlene’s voice was like a squeak, but it gradually shifted back to her usual tone. Rhode was fairly surprised with what she said and stood speechless for a while.

He knew that mages had a vast array of life-saving skills and equipment, and since Marlene was the only heir to the Senia family, no matter what, he believed that she must possess some kind of trump card. But never would he have thought that she would reveal plainly it to him in this manner. One must realize that this kind of equipment or skill must be kept as an absolute secret. Until the last breath, it was something that must not be told to anyone. But now... she...

“T-That’s why I insist to go with you, Mr. Rhode.”

Marlene didn’t know why she suddenly lost her courage again when Rhode stared at her, but apparently, she still insisted on coming along.

“Although it might be dangerous, as a mage, I have many ways to protect myself. If the situation gets out of hand, I can immediately leave this place. Isn’t that reassuring enough?”

After listening to Marlene’s reasoning, Rhode pondered to himself in silence. Frankly, he didn’t wish for her to follow him. His current character wasn’t the same as before. Back then, if the gods barred his way, he would kill the gods, and if the Buddhas hindered his path, he would slaughter the Buddhas! But right now, he was a puny level 10. Even defeating a few advanced thieves would require him to plan thoroughly. Was it safe if he went inside alone?

Rhode didn’t know.

So, in the end, he agreed.

“Ok.” Rhode nodded, “but I do hope you can protect yourself.”

Since Marlene had a way to escape, he decided to trust her. At least the probability of surviving would be higher.

“Of course!”

—

There was no light source inside the cave.

Initially, Rhode was extremely cautious because based on his experiences, secret passages usually hosted many kinds of deadly traps. For example, a pressure plate trap. If he accidentally stepped on the wrong slate, it might set off a series of irreversible outcomes.

Unexpectedly, the secret passage was on level ground. And with the help of the torch, he noticed beautiful carvings on both sides of the wall.

“These are murals from Fascarl era, Mr. Rhode.” Marlene was concentrating on examining a beautiful sculpture on the wall at the moment.

She could not help but feel amazed at how intricate the designs were. Most mages were well educated. Naturally, they had read about these historical stories before. However, Rhode clearly didn’t care about that. He was currently expending all his energy on detecting traps... but it looks like there was no indication of any at all.

“Be careful and hold my hand tightly.” Rhode grabbed her hand as they made their way deeper. And not far in front of him was the Flame Killer which was responsible for being the ‘trap trigger.’ After all, a dead summoned spirit can be summoned again. Moreover, this pitiful canine had already died more than twice, so what if it died once more? It should just get used to it.

The poor Flame Killer had a different opinion though. Unfortunately, it did not have the rights to disagree.

The black hound jumped in the air from time to time according to Rhode's command. There was a ring of fire circling around its body, creating a much-needed illumination for the dark passage.

After walking for a distance, Rhode began to sense something odd. He couldn't tell what exactly it was, but it kept nagging him at the back of his head.

Why would a secret passage appear here? What can we find here?

Currently, Rhode was in the 'player mode' thought process and wasn't paying attention to his surroundings. Marlene was also no longer observing the surrounding murals. On the contrary, her head was lowered as she stared at her hand which was held by Rhode. She didn't know whether it was because of the heat, but she knew that her face was burning.

Suddenly, the Flame Killer stopped moving. Then it circled the ground two times and ran forward.

"What happened?"

Rhode's heart tightened. He didn't stop the black hound. Instead, he took a step forward and stood in front of Marlene with his sword raised. Then, he scanned each and every detail around him.

But after a while, nothing happened.

Rhode frowned. Up until now, he was constantly on the alert, and it was straining his senses. If there were monsters or traps in this passage, he wouldn't feel weary as it was something familiar to him. But he found nothing so far... and that was too strange. Of course, since he had already made it this far, he didn't intend to retreat.

—

Finally, the duo made their way out of the narrow passage and found themselves at a stone stairway leading deeper underground. The Flame

Killer wasn't too far away from them. When it noticed that its master had arrived, it arched its body and roared at the perpetual darkness below.

“Ms. Marlene, do you have any spells that be used as light?”

Rhode held the torch nearer to the stairway, but he still could not see what was down there. For safety reasons, he decided to use another approach. However, after a while, Marlene still did not respond. Her head was still lowered, staring blankly at her hand.

“Ms. Marlene?”

“Eh?”

Rhode called out to her once more and she finally recovered from her stupor.

“O-oh oh... Light magic right? I have it, please wait.” Marlene said with a flush on her face.

She immediately loosened her hand from Rhode's grip in a hurry and closed her eyes. After a chant, a bright luminous sphere floated on her palm. The light emitted from the sphere ate away the darkness and illuminated the entire area.

And the scene that appeared before them left the duo in disbelief.

Chapter 68 - The Lost Palace

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

It was a ruin.

At first glance, the whole underground cave appeared cube-shaped. A gorgeous palace rested in the center. A moat filled with water surrounded the palace as though it was guarding it. The only way out of here was the stairway that the duo found previously.

“What in the world is this place...?”

Marlene stared speechlessly at the scene. Rhode fared slightly better because he had experienced much more than her. Compared to how Marlene reacted, Rhode stood still and silently recalled his knowledge about the origin of this ruin.

Although the two were considered the brightest amongst the youths, they were not omniscient beings after all. Rhode’s knowledge was from the game, and Marlene’s forte was magic. None of them were well-versed in archaeology. If there was a scholar with them, then perhaps he could figure out their location.

“Did you find any clues?”

Rhode calmed down. He waved his hand and signaled the black hound to scout ahead while they followed a distance behind. Nevertheless, Rhode didn’t drop his guard even the slightest bit as he constantly swept his eyes over his surroundings.

The whole palace emitted a luxurious atmosphere. The pillars were intricately carved, and it appeared completely intact as though it was just built. A magic sphere was floating in the air. Under its brilliance, the shadows slowly melted away.

There were no corpse, no furniture, and no weapons.

Empty.

That was the first impression Rhode had when he toured the place.

In fact, the ‘ruins’ can’t even be considered as ruins as they were largely intact without any blemishes. Strangely though, the place housed no everyday objects other than staircases, pillars, and sculptures.

Back in the game, Rhode had seen almost a thousand types of ruins. Although each of them was unique in their own way, at least they had weapons, armors or broken furniture lying around. All of them had traces of living activity of one kind or another. But this place is different. Everything was... seemingly dead. It was as if the entire area was devoid of life. Even the surrounding moat water didn’t make a sound when it flowed.

“This place sure is strange.”

Rhode put down his sword and walked to a nearby pillar. His eyes scrutinized the complex text and patterns carved into the stone. Unfortunately, he couldn’t find any clue about their situation. Just a little behind Rhode, Marlene was doing the same thing as well, but she actually found a clue faster than Rhode.

“I think it was built during the Fascarl Kingdom’s era, Mr. Rhode.”

The Fascarl Kingdom was a mysterious kingdom at the beginning of the Creation Era. Despite being one of the strongest kingdoms at that time, it suddenly disappeared one day. Even in the historical records had only a few manuscripts about this kingdom.

The strange thing was how a country as powerful as they suddenly disappear in a puff of smoke. And no matter how hard the people searched, the Fascarl Kingdom’s relics and ruins were nowhere to be found. Not even the Country of Light and Darkness had found the remains of the Fascarl Kingdom.

Regardless any country's wealth of knowledge, no one had the records of the Fascarl Kingdom even though the name of 'Fascarl' derived from a dragon spell in the Ancient Era.

A country that was this mysterious should contain valuable equipment.

"But there appears to be nothing in this place..."

With the help of the magic light, Rhode could see the end of the palace.

No treasure chest. No swords. No nothing. Only a lonely stone altar stood erect which made Rhode somehow feel sorry for it.

Just beside the altar were two knight sculptures. They wore a full plate armor with swords lifted towards the sky. It looked as though they were welcoming visitors as well as displaying their strength.

"Since there's nothing here, we should leave."

Rhode was the type who wouldn't leave empty-handed, but this place was just too strange, and it made Rhode feel uneasy. If he died in the game, he still could resurrect. But he couldn't do that now, so he felt that if there was nothing worth spending time on, then retreating would be the best option.

Marlene was slightly discontented with Rhode's unfounded wariness, but she still followed his order and kept silent. When she stood up and planned to leave, at this moment, her squirrel familiar appeared from the darkness and ran towards her, squeaking frantically. Marlene's expression immediately changed.

"Mr. Rhode, they are here!"

*F*ck it!*

Rhode cursed inwardly but still maintained his calm exterior. He had predicted that those black-cloaked men would follow them into the cave. Frankly, it was the best place to bury them once he killed them since no one would know. Alas, their timing was unfavorable. If everything went according to plan, there wouldn't be a problem, but now they had

accidentally uncovered an unknown ruin which was a hidden factor that Rhode didn't anticipate!

Rhode turned his head and confirmed that there were no other exits. He guessed that those men were as clueless about this place. After all, only an omniscient being would know about the area that he hadn't explored yet.

"Ms. Marlene."

Rhode drafted a plan in his mind. He grabbed Marlene's hand, pulled her towards him and whispered in her ear, "I have a plan that requires your cooperation..."

—

A group of shadows appeared from the darkness, stopping for a moment before a cave entrance.

They glanced at each other silently and made a signal with their fingers.

The target is close.

Get into position.

Then, the black-cloaked men dashed into the cave.

Unlike Marlene who had spent her time gawking at the beautiful underground scenery, the men had no time for that. When they exited the narrow tunnels and discovered the large underground cavern, they pushed their bodies onto the walls and shuffled forward while hiding in the shadows.

After searching for a while, they did not find anyone.

It didn't look like there were other entrances. Did they fly away?

That was absolutely impossible.

Soon, they found the hidden passage behind the sculpture. It wasn't surprising at all since they were all professionals, and they weren't as hesitant as Rhode as danger was in their job scope.

But they still remained vigilant. They left two men behind to guard the entrance while the other three went inside the hidden passage to locate their target.

Those guys are a bit tricky...

Rhode, who was also lurking in the shadows, felt a headache when he observed the black-cloaked men's movement. He wasn't worried about being discovered by the enemy as he wasn't new to this. In the game, he was often chased by assassins and thieves. If he could not do something like this, he would've died a hundred thousand times already. For insurance, he also activated the Shadow Messenger. This magic equipment definitely deserved its reputation. After using it, his body blended into the surroundings. Even if one carefully examined his location, it would still be difficult to find him.

Rhode was confident in his abilities. Not only he had the Shadow Messenger, he also wore the Dark Soul ring.

In PVP, both equipment and skills were equally important.

In a fraction of a second, Rhode disappeared into the darkness without a trace.

The three black-cloaked men walked past Rhode without detecting his presence. They also didn't know that Rhode had already unsheathed his sword while emitting a killing intent.

Hmph! I'll let you know who is the one being hunted here!

Although he had the advantage, Rhode didn't choose to act rashly. Based on the triangular formation they moved in, he knew that any one of them could easily support each other if something were to happen. If one of them suffered an attack, the other two would react and counterattack. Unless

Rhode could kill the three at the same time, attacking now wasn't the best approach.

Furthermore, his current-self didn't have the strength to contend against all three of them together.

Thus, Rhode remained patient as he knew what the men were thinking as well as what were they going to do.

Quietly lurking behind them, he waited for an opportunity to strike.

A while later, the three black-cloaked men finally passed through the passage and discovered the stone stairwell.

However, unlike Marlene, they didn't have a spell to light up the darkness below. As such, when they saw a faint light flickering in the distance, it immediately caught their attention.

Ever so carefully, the men slowly crept down the stairway. And soon enough, they saw Marlene who was holding a torch and standing beside a pillar.

A good opportunity!

Chapter 69 - Who's The Hunter

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

An idea flashed in the minds of the three black-cloaked men.

Who wouldn't relish this godsent opportunity? A solo girl surrounded by darkness and currently preoccupied with something else... Even if she were a mage, she wouldn't be able to escape once they made a move.

However...

The three men scanned their surroundings with a slight frown on their faces, clearly a little worried about an ambush. They weren't here for on a stroll and had to be vigilant. But after contemplating for a moment, they concluded there shouldn't be much risk if they acted now.

Nevertheless, they were still rather puzzled. Why was this woman unguarded? Where was their 'primary assassination target?'

If he had died, the female mage wouldn't be so calm. Did he leave her here alone and venture deeper inside?

The three men glanced at each other and made hand gestures to communicate with one another. In the end, they couldn't think of anything else more possible than what they had already discussed. Based on their intel, this young man was quite skilled, so it wasn't surprising if he was confident about his strength and left the female mage here as he explored the ruins. While they couldn't see far in the darkness, they could at least make out a faint outline of a torch burning in the distance.

The leader of the black-cloaked men went silent. A moment later, he raised his head, revealing a pair of eyes gazing with resolution. He slowly lifted his right arm and swung it downwards in an arc.

Begin operation!

The other men dashed into the darkness stealthily once they received their orders.

Their well-honed killing intent began to surface.

—

Marlene stared at the intricately carved patterns on the pillar in front of her. She wasn't studying those patterns; rather, her head kept ringing with the words Rhode had delivered to her before leaving.

Those people will undoubtedly try to attack you. I will need you to act naturally and pretend that you don't know anything. Do not worry; I have a way of stopping them. Rest assured Marlene, I will not allow you to get hurt.

Rhode appeared to be 100% reliable when he reassured her, but to be totally cool about being the bait was completely rubbish. Therefore she could not resist secretly glancing at her surroundings once in a while.

Meanwhile, under the flickering light, a shadow shifted from time to time. If Marlene observed carefully, she would realize that someone was lurking nearby.

The pressure on her wasn't light at all. It was especially so when she heard the methods from Rhode about how they were going to deal with her. Her heart froze. Death was enough to cause fear in people. It was far better off being dead than to imagine what they were going to do with her after being captured.

Frankly, Marlene had considered summoning her magic sphere to brighten the area so she could see where the enemy was hiding. But in the end, she swallowed her fear and chose to believe in Rhode.

What an unreasonable man!

When she thought of herself putting total trust in a man, Marlene suddenly felt like she was becoming stupid. Why did she have to believe him? Why

must her life dance in the palm of his hand? Was it because he convinced her? Or was it because of other reasons...

Even when facing her father, Marlene was never THAT obedient. So why did she listen to his every word? Somehow, before this man, every word he spoke was something that she was unable to oppose.

Is it because of the duel before? That shouldn't be it.

Although he is the first man to injure me, I'm not a weak woman who would become obedient once scared, right?

Marlene shook her head repeatedly, but no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't get him out of her mind.

Then she berated herself inwardly. "Don't think about him anymore!"

Thus, in order to take her mind off him, she began to focus on deciphering the meaning of the ancient symbols on the pillar.

A woman mind is really complicated...

"...chosen knight...to protect the world..."

Her white and slender fingers traced the mysterious carvings, carefully examining the ancient symbols before her as she murmured to herself.

"...the source of power...came from...soul contract...under the void..."

Her voice became softer as her expression became increasingly focused.

Marlene completely neglected the danger around her.

—

A chance!

The black-cloaked men snorted coldly. As professionals, they did not make any rash moves. They knew that their opponent was a mage — and a genius

one at that. Therefore, if they weren't 100% confident about capturing her, attacking her and losing their stealth advantage was a silly move.

Initially, they discovered that she was quite cautious, so they refrained from making a move. But they could've never suspected that her cautiousness was because she was anticipating their arrival. Instead, they thought that it wasn't strange for a young girl such as her to be entirely calm in a dark cavern — and furthermore, she was all alone. Now that she gradually immersed herself in deciphering the weird symbols on the pillars, they finally had the opportunity to close the distance.

One of the black-cloaked men stretched out his hand and pulled out a cloth. Then, he lowered his body and crawled towards her slowly.

Unfortunately, it didn't go as well he planned.

A sharp, scarlet blade pierced through his throat noiselessly. The man's eyes widened in horror as he almost lost consciousness. He gripped his neck and attempted to shout for his comrades, but he found that he could only open his mouth and wriggle his tongue wordlessly. At this moment, a cold metallic blade opened a gap in his body.

After that, darkness shrouded his entire world.

The body that had lost its vitality slumped to the floor, but before it touched the ground, Rhode grabbed it and gently laid it down. Then, Rhode gave a quick glance at his surroundings and quickly retreated.

Shadows swallowed his silhouette.

—

It's been a while, why hasn't he made a move yet?

The man who was hiding behind the pillar frowned to himself. He stared at Marlene's defenseless back and felt a bit annoyed. Based on their plan, one was responsible for the attack while the others were supposed to back him

up if something went awry. But now, judging at how much time had passed, shouldn't he had made his move?

Or did something happened to him?

Perhaps it was intuition or instinct. The man turned around to inspect his surroundings.

But the only thing he saw was a red flash.

“_____”

Bright, red blood sprayed from his neck, and he collapsed immediately. Once again, Rhode quickly shot forward to support the body and slowly laid the corpse on the floor. If anyone observed Rhode's swift actions right now, no one would have imagined that he was a swordsman.

Number two is down.

Once he confirmed that he obtained EXP, he prepared to retreat once again.

But suddenly, a swishing sound came from behind.

Rhode instinctively rolled to the side. He felt a cold sensation on his left shoulder when a black shadow shot past him.

As expected of a professional.

Rhode clenched his teeth to endure the searing pain on his left shoulder. He wanted to quickly get rid of the three of them so he could move on to the other two guarding the entrance. If everything went smoothly, they could've easily gone home after this. Unfortunately, the opponent did not give him that opportunity.

When the first attack failed, the black shadow didn't attack Rhode again; instead, he turned around and directly rushed towards Marlene.

Rhode quickly stood up and crushed a green card in his palm, summoning the Spirit Bird who immediately shot towards the last black-cloaked man.

All of these events happened in a flash. Even when Rhode got injured by the enemy's attack, Marlene did not discover anything wrong. But once the black-cloaked man gave up hiding, it was too late. Marlene turned around hastily and saw a dagger thrusting towards her. The gap between her assailant and herself was less than half a meter!

Marlene's protective garments activated their defensive spells, but she didn't expect that the man could easily penetrate it as though he was cutting a cake.

However, the very next moment, the only thing Marlene could hear was an explosion.

Boom!! A wind blast produced by the Spirit Bird hit squarely on the man's back. It was like an invisible fist punching the enemy, launching his body towards the ground.

Rhode sighed.

When he saw the man rushing towards Marlene, he already knew that his smooth sailing plan had come to an end. Obviously, this man was aware that his strength was able to pierce through Marlene's protective spells. He made the right choice to launch an attack instead of relying on her protective spells.

And it seemed like his decision was indeed correct.

But now wasn't the time to feel relieved.

Marlene dashed to Rhode's side, and at the same time, the black-cloaked man slowly stood up. Although it appeared as though the Spirit Bird's attack created a large impact, the damage wasn't fatal at all. Moreover, the man was an advanced level assailant. Killing him wasn't that easy.

Rhode's left hand shielded Marlene while his right lifted the sword.

At the same time, the black-cloaked man also whipped out a knife and a dagger, emitting a thick killing intent from his eyes.

Chapter 70 - Dilemma

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Both of them went silent.

Rhode stood in front of Marlene, raising his sword and groaning inwardly. He was afraid of facing advanced level enemies. The fact that they were of an advanced level meant that their level was beyond the average human's standard and that they had officially entered a superhuman state. Although spies were not known for their strength, it did not prevent them from being powerful. Not to mention, a spy's speed was extremely fast: most people wouldn't be able to react to it. Moreover... it was a human this time. It would have been better if the enemy was only an alchemical creature who had a little bit of wisdom.

But now, there was no use regretting it.

“Marlene, always pay attention. Don't give him any chance to attack, understand?”

“I will try.”

Upon hearing Rhode's command, Marlene, who was always brimming with confidence, also became cautious. She had never seen such speed—plus the enemy could even get rid of her magic protective shield. This made Marlene sense danger. She took a step back and calmed down before raising her wand.

At that moment, the spy also made a move.

So fast!

In a blink of an eye, Rhode could see the dagger had already arrived in front of him. He was surprised and turned his sword around to block the dagger in front of him.

But then, he felt a huge force surge from the sword which sent him flying a few meters back, causing him to heavily fall to the ground. Even though the attack had dealt a very heavy blow, he still clenched his teeth and stood up. He brandished the sword in his hand and once again blocked the spy's dagger.

Boom!!

Rhode's body lost its balance and genuflected on the ground while the magic equipment in his hand issued a hoarse sound like a longbow.

Is he a barbarian or a spy!?

One of Rhode's hands was holding the sword's hilt while the other hand was holding the sword's body. He groaned inwardly.

This guy is really difficult to handle. His speed and strength are far beyond mine. If not for my experience, I would already be a goner.

“Eh?”

Looking at Rhode's miserable state, the spy was puzzled.

He was not underestimating Rhode. From the moment his two subordinates were killed in silence, he had seen that the young man was brave and had fighting experience. Rhode actually could feel his presence and dodged his surprise attack. This meant that the young man was not easy to deal with. That was why he was at a loss when his first attack failed and decided to leave the outcome to fate.

He never imagined that this young man's performance was completely beyond his imagination once he attacked again.

He actually was incapable of blocking his attack?

Looking at the young man who was resisting his attack, the spy was puzzled. Naturally, he knew a person who was not even able to block his attack definitely was not an advanced level. But how did a swordsman who

had yet to enter the advanced level kill his two subordinates in silence? It was just too strange.

Generally, a person's combat experience and strength were bound to each other. When a person has a lot of combat experience, his or her strength would also be powerful. But although this person had a lot of combat experience, his strength was very weak. Why was that? The black-cloaked spy of course did not know that Rhode had gotten his combat experience from a totally different world. As a spy, being cautious was his nature. Since something was out of the ordinary and his enemy was acting so decisive and resolute, the scene before him might be fake. That's why he needed to be careful to not get caught in the trap, or it would be troublesome.

Thinking of this, the black-cloaked spy could not help but use less of his strength.

Aware of it, Rhode quickly reacted. Although he did not know why would the spy do something like that, he couldn't afford to let this opportunity slip away! Opportunity only knocks once.

He stretched out his left hand and directed it towards the sword.

A bright, red flame suddenly appeared from Rhode's hand and rushed towards the spy. Followed by the sound of a roar, the black hound once again appeared out of the flame, opening his mouth and rushing forward.

“What the hell is that thing!!”

Looking at the flame before him burning relentlessly, the spy was stunned. He quickly retreated to escape the flame attack. But the Flame Killer did not wait until the spy recovered from his surprise, appearing out of thin air and opening his mouth. His sharp, white fangs had also made the spy secretly stunned. But as an advanced spy, he still wasn't at the point of being afraid of this thing. Facing the black hound, the spy only coldly snorted. He waved his hand and two bright lights flashed through and slashed the Flame Killer body.

The spy moved his hand, intending to dodge the black hound corpse. His choice was correct, but he had only taken the Flame Killer's characteristics into account...

Boom!!!

A violent explosion ignited from the ground. Bright red flames emitted smoke and spread around; even the palace began to shake in its entirety. The spy miserably retreated, no longer as calm as before and his eyes even showed a little panic.

As expected! This young man is indeed strange!

He threw away the dagger that had already melted in his left hand and clenched his teeth. He had never seen such a strange summoning spirit spell. It could be directly launched without any chanting and preparation. Moreover, the summoned spirit could produce such a result?

Is this the power of some kind of magic equipment, or his own ability?

While the spy was busy speculating, a sharp light pierced the smoke and fly towards him.

It was a pure white sword!

“Damn!”

The black-cloaked spy had been through countless battles. He knew the situation he was facing had turned adverse as his opponent attacked him mercilessly. Moreover, Rhode's strange way of fighting also made things even more difficult. He brandished the dagger in his hand and threw it to block the incoming sword, then quickly backed down. Right now, the spy had given up on the offensive and temporarily focused on defending and retreating. There was still time; after all, it was impossible for them to stay here for long!

But at this moment, an unexpected occurrence happened once again.

When his dagger was thrown to block the sword, the sword suddenly transformed into a green, translucent bird. It floated in the air, then circled and rushed towards him.

*What the f*ck is that thing!!*

Even if he had gone through countless battles, he was completely stunned because the scene that presented itself before him was beyond normal. A summoning spirit that was able to explode, then a bird that was able to turn into sword? Or a sword that was able to turn into bird? *Holy soul bless me, can it get even weirder?*

Although he was getting very depressed, he did not show it. This was because he could clearly see that not far from the bird, Rhode's figure had passed through the smoke and rushed towards him with a sword.

“Hmph!!”

At this point, the spy no longer hesitated. His left hand drew a dagger from his waist and threw it at the Spirit Bird while his right hand clutched another dagger in front of his chest. After the confrontation from before, he had learned a lesson. If the bird he summoned was also able to explode like the hound from before, then would he not be very unlucky?

As expected.

Rhode was joyful when he saw the spy's reaction. When the spy retreated, Rhode was a little bit puzzled about him not taking the opportunity to kill him. Rhode thought that he liked to play with his prey. But now he finally understood: the truth was that the opponent was afraid of him!

Or to be exact, the opponent was afraid of how he fought.

With this in mind, Rhode immediately made a decision. After all, opportunity only knocks once. Since the opponent did not understand how he fought, he definitely had his considerations. In this world, there was no Summoning Swordsman, so they naturally did not have the experience of fighting one. It resulted in his constant hesitation. But it was definitely a

good opportunity for Rhode: if the enemy had him figured out, then Rhode's death was only the matter of time.

Rhode was also not stupid; since the spy was very wary of him, he would not attack him directly. Rhode stopped and threw the red sword in his hand forward.

A light pierced through the darkness and flew forward.

What is he doing!?

Looking at Rhode's sword, the spy immediately threw the dagger in his hand.

Sword condensation, separate attack! He's clearly an advanced swordsman! I was deceived!! Look at his act, I almost fell into his trap!

With this in mind, the black-cloaked spy broke out in sweat.

Does this young man have a hobby of playing with his prey?

His speculation was the exact same as Rhode had thought of him a minute before.

Such a beautiful misunderstanding.

Facing the sword condensation, the black-cloaked spy went as far as blocking it with his bare hands. He jumped back to escape the attack, but the sound he heard after that had made his blood run cold.

Swoosh!!!

Because at this moment, Marlene had finally locked onto her target. She raised her wand and pointed it to the front!

Invisible wind blades appeared out of thin air and flew towards the target.

“Hum!!!”

A deep grunt sounded.

Although the black-cloaked spy's skill was not bad, his speed was limited as a human. He tried his best to dodge Rhode's surprise attack. Facing Marlene's wind blade, he no longer had the power to resist; the only thing he could do was roll on the ground and desperately try to dodge it. Even so, he was still hit by some blades.

When he stood up, his body was already covered in wounds. Even the black veil on his face had fallen off to the ground.

“Eh?”

After clearly looking at the spy face, Marlene was dumbfounded.

Because what hidden behind the black veil was actually a girl's face.

Currently, her pure white face wore a livid expression. Her blue eyes were burning in anger, unwilling to accept that her true appearance had been exposed. The spy no longer thought of retreating. She shouted and, holding a dagger, rushed towards Marlene!

“Marlene, attack!”

Although she had heard Rhode's command, and her magic had also gathered in the center of her wand, she was unable to raise her wand when she saw the girl in front of her. It was as if her short wand weighed a thousand kilograms that she could not lift.

That was a girl almost the same age as her! Do I really have to kill her?

This thought flashed through her mind and made her lose her concentration. In these few moments, Marlene had lost the best opportunity.

“Die!!”

Like a leopard, the black-cloaked spy had appeared in front of Marlene, shouting loudly while lifting her dagger.

“Damn it!”

Seeing the scene before him, Rhode clenched his teeth. He did not run towards them, and instead took a step back.

Next, the darkness engulfed his shadow.

“Ah...”

The girl’s angry roar and the cold wind the dagger brought jolted Marlene to her senses. Although she tried to focus her attention, she saw that the grim reaper’s scythe was already before her.

Waiting to take her life.

“———!!!”

At this moment, Marlene’s blood ran cold. She closed her eyes while tightly holding the wand in her hand. Her mind was completely blank.

Am I going to die?

That was Marlene’s only thought at the moment.

The dagger had fallen to the ground and pierced through the shield, followed by flesh and blood.

“Rip!”

But Marlene could not feel any pain.

Am I dead already?

She opened her eyes in surprise. The first thing that appeared before her was a big hand and a sharp, cold dagger that had penetrated the hand.

There was only one owner of the hand.

“Mr. Rhode!”

“Hmph!!”

Rhode’s one hand was blocking the spy’s attack. He coldly snorted and waved his other hand that was holding a sword.

The girl’s expression was unwilling and angry and her eyes bloodshot. Then, a crescent moon-shaped light flashed by her and her head fell heavily to the ground. The body that had lost its balance also fell to the ground. Bright red blood was spraying out from the neck, and the corpse did not stop twitching. The body looked like a dead fish, struggling to live with no more hope.

“Sigh...”

Only when he saw the enemy fall was Rhode finally relieved. He kneeled to the ground while clenching his teeth. Then he pulled the dagger out from his hand forcefully. After that he turned around and angrily stared at Marlene.

“I told you to attack, why didn’t you move!”

“...”

Marlene staggered.

She had never seen Rhode angry. In the past, Rhode’s expression was mostly calm, and at most he just frowned his brow and snorted. But this time, he was clearly very mad; his beautiful face looked somewhat ferocious, and his two eyes reflected coldness as they pierced towards her.

“Say it!”

“I-I’m sorry...”

Marlene felt that she was really useless, and facing Rhode’s anger, she was speechless. If she followed Rhode’s order at that time, then she would not have faced any danger. But she lost her focus and was unable to make any response. No matter what, it was her fault, and this had made her feel a deep frustration, a feeling that she hadn’t felt for a long time.

“I... It’s all my fault...”

Marlene lowered her head.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Rhode. I shouldn’t have dozed off...”

“It’s not like I don’t know what you were thinking. But you have to know, at this kind of time, if you hesitate you might lose your life!”

As for Marlene’s apology, Rhode did not verbally accept it, but neither did he verbally reject it.

“Fortunately, I am prepared, but what if it was Lize? What if the enemy’s target was Lize? The moment you hesitated was enough for you to hold her dead body to cry for a lifetime!”

“...”

Marlene shrunk her body and could not say anything.

“...Since you know that you’re wrong, I will be meting out punishment. You will accept it, right?”

“Of course, Mr. Rhode. What do you want me to do!?”

Upon seeing Rhode give her an opportunity to mend her faults, Marlene hurriedly looked up and asked. But the next thing Rhode did was give her a sword.

“Use this sword and behead those two corpses, then burn them.”

“Eh?”

“If you are not used to killing people, then you can first kill dead people as practice.”

To Marlene, it was indeed a very difficult to do. She hesitantly looking at the sword that Rhode given to her. She trembled while reaching out for it. In the end, she clenched her teeth and took it over.

“I hope that you can remember. If you don’t kill them, then the head that is now on the ground would be yours or your friend’s... I hope that you remember this point.”

Seeing Marlene take the sword and walk towards the two corpses, Rhode finally sighed. He leaned to the pillar and sat down while clenching his teeth. *I have to say that it really hurts.* The dagger was piercing through his palm. The intense pain was really hard to endure, and moreover the dagger was coated with highly poisonous toxins...

Fortunately, my vitality is high.

Rhode raised his left hand and saw a shocking dark-green color in the middle of his palm. He took a deep breath. He had seen the system information indicate that he had completely resisted the toxins. If not, he would not be so stupid as to waste his time to teach Marlene how to kill. Instead, he would have cleared the toxins.

But neither Rhode or Marlene noticed that the blood dripping on Rhode’s left hand had fallen into the slate. But it did not dry like ordinary blood. On the contrary, the blood seemed to have a life of its own. It flowed to the sides of the palace lake and quietly spread forward.

Shrouded in the darkness, a place where no one could see, an invisible force had attracted the blood. It flowed upstream, ascended the stairs, pillars, and finally in the altar, it condensed and converged...

“M-Mr. Rhode, I’m done.”

At this time, Marlene had also completed Rhode’s command. Her face was pale, it could be seen that it was a hard blow to her. But Rhode did not say anything. He looked at the three corpses not far before him and stood up, then nodded towards Marlene.

“Well done. Make a preparation to leave this ghostly place; there are still two people outside, and we must finish them. Remember, do not do the same mistake...”

“Ah!!!”

Rhode did not finish his sentence. The scream from afar had interrupted him.

What happened?

Rhode vigilantly looked towards the source of the voice: it should be from the secret passage. Were two other spies killed? What was happening?

“Be careful, let’s go!”

He no longer cared about bandaging his wound; Rhode immediately pulled Marlene and planned to leave. They had not gone far when suddenly a golden light flashed.

A mysterious and strange character appeared out of thin air, forming an indestructible wall that sealed all the passages. At the same time, Rhode saw that the two statues on both sides of the pillar were emitting magic light!

*What the f*ck is happening...*

As if they were replying Rhode’s thoughts, the statues turned towards Rhode and raised their swords!

After that, a deep voice sounded in the air.

“Descendents of the Guardian Knight, have you finally come to accept the test?”

Test?

Rhode and Marlene glanced at each other.

What test?

“I-I read some information from the pillars just now, Mr. Rhode,” Marlene stammered.

“It seems like this place was used for a knight to pass a test. They came here to train, then when they were acknowledged, they would be given a title of guardian... I don't know what are they guarding, but it seems precious...”

“No matter what are they guarding, it has nothing to do with us.”

The pain in Rhode's left hand was excruciating. Lize was not here, so it could not be taken care of. Although Rhode had bandaged himself, but it was barely better than not treating the wound. It seemed that this was a hidden quest, but with Rhode's current condition, he was not interested in challenging it. He was injured and had wasted quite a lot of power battling with the spies from before. Not to mention, he had used the Dark Soul ring. In this kind of situation, no matter what test, he would have to refuse it.

“I'm sorry, we went the wrong way,” Rhode said while patting Marlene's shoulder. “Let's go.”

But no voice replied Rhode's answer. It only paused, then continued to say.

“As long as you are able to defeat the divinity, then you will take over their power and responsibility before inheriting the title of guardian.”

...Isn't this a real world? Can't it be humanized? Must it be done like computer game graphics?

Even though he was criticizing, but Rhode also knew that this voice was probably left by damn predecessors and it was useless to talk with it.

“Marlene, activate your magic equipment. Let's go,” he said, holding Marlene's hand.

“Sure, Mr. Rhode.”

After she listened to Rhode's words, she nodded her head and closed her eyes. She stretched out her right hand and placed it in front of her chest. Soon, a white light appeared and wrapped them inside... But then, it suddenly dissipated and returned to nothingness.

“The space is sealed! Mr. Rhode, this space is being sealed!”

Marlene became nervous, uneasily lifting her wand and vigilantly looking at the surroundings, not knowing what to do. At the same time, the voice rang once again.

“Accept the trial, Descendents of the Guardian.”

Following the voice, the two statues pressed forward. Each statue held a sword in one hand, with the other reaching out.

Wait, wait, this gesture is...

Rhode’s expression changed.

As if it was replying Rhode’s thoughts, a mysterious magic circle suddenly appeared from the hand of the statues. The two then began slowly rotating in the air.

Next, the statues growled and held up a card!

“Whoa!!”

The dust whirled around in the air, and two statues resembling cheetahs appeared from the ground, surrounding Rhode and Marlene. With widened eyes, they stared at Rhode intently.

Chapter 71 - The Holy Sword Resonance

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“...”

Rhode didn't know how to react when he saw what was happening.

Goddamn!

There were two Stone Statues roughly two meters tall. Rhode clenched his teeth and took a deep breath. He knew right away that this palace was somehow connected to his Summoning Swordsman class.

According to the legends, the Summoning Swordsman was an ancient mythological class. When the player chose this class, he or she would be labeled as its only successor that appeared on the continent once again.

Wasn't the class description and prologue meant to give the player a false sense of superiority, thinking that their chosen class was the 'one and only' unique class?

Now, it was hinted that the Summoning Swordsman class wasn't created specifically for the player, but it was actually connected to the Fascarl Kingdom.

Though currently, it wasn't the time to be thinking about these things.

“Mr. Rhode!”

Marlene's voice sounded behind him. When he turned his head, he realized that a golden barrier had divided the both of them.

Marlene stood at the other end of the barrier, staring at Rhode with uncertainty in her eyes.

Ah... so it is a solo test... What a waste. I can't even bring a helper along.

Rhode didn't dwell too much on it since it was meaningless to spend his time deliberating on the inevitable. The only thing he was concerned about was how to get out of this place alive.

Four against one? Do you want to bully me with numbers?

"Hmph." Rhode snorted inwardly.

He took half a step forward while raising a sword in his right arm. At that very moment, strands of light streamed down from the sword's hilt to his hand, then to his entire body, and finally down to his legs. A beautiful formation expanded below Rhode. Floating around him was a green and red card, seemingly intertwining both elements of wind and fire.

"———!!"

The Flame Killer and Spirit Bird made a majestic opening scene. Both of them roared to flaunt their strength at the two Stone Cheetahs.

But that wasn't all.

When he completed the Pavel Cemetery dungeon, the EXP he received took him straight to level 10; just a tad bit would enable him to level up once more. After killing the three black-cloaked men, the EXP he received was pretty good, especially the leader who appeared quite young. Altogether, he earned 2000 EXP for killing them, and it brought him directly to level 12. Two levels in one go.

It might seem as though killing them was quite profitable, but...

Rhode glanced at the wound on his left hand and sighed.

He wasn't able to easily shrug off that kind of injury.

[EXP 6000/2500, Level Up, Talent Tree Unlocked, Level 10]

Level up!

Rhode immediately wanted to make a choice, but the next system prompt shocked him.

[EXP 3500/3000, Level Up, Talent Tree Unlocked, Received 2 Skill Points, Level 11]

[EXP 500/4000, Talent Tree Unlocked, Received 4 Skill Points, Level 12]

Obtained 2 Skill Points?

Rhode wanted to rub his eyes. He thought that he was dreaming, but the fact was that the system wouldn't lie. Indeed there was a '2' in front of him.

Huh?

If I remember correctly, players only get 1 point per level. Why did I get 2?

Did the system change? Or is there a bug?

Although his mind was filled with doubts, Rhode didn't hesitate to add his newly obtained Skill Points. What happened later can be discussed afterwards. But if he died now, he would lose any chance to do anything. So no matter what, if these 4 Skill Points were real, then he should just use it!

[Used 1 Skill Point to level up. Soul Resonance LV2 (Every 10 levels, the character's max number of Summoning Spirits will increase +1)]

[Used 1 Skill Point to level up. Soul Resonance LV3 (Every 10 levels, the character's max number of Summoning Spirits will increase +1)]

[Summoning Spirit +3]

[Available Summoning Spirit 4]

[Used 1 Skill Point. Summoning Master First Talent has been unlocked: Integration LV1 (Fusion of two Spirits to create a new Summoning Spirit, will consume 1 Spirit)]

[Received Permanent Skill: Integration LV1]

[Used 1 Skill Point to level up. Integration LV2 (When using Soul Core, it will not consume the Spirit)]

[Soul Core detected. Use Integration?]

Rhode stretched out his left arm.

In his hand, he held the Soul Core he obtained from the Necromancer. A dark fog swirled around the fragile gem.

“Fusion!”

Followed by his shout, the formation below him shone even brighter than before. Both the Spirit Bird and Flame Killer turned into cards once more and spun around Rhode. As the cards slowly closed into the center, at the same time, the Soul Core began to tremble. A black fog appeared and condensed into an astral object. The two cards attracted to one another as though they were magnets, and once they got close enough, it suddenly collided.

Swoosh!! A dense fog billowed and engulfed Rhode. Marlene was shocked when she witnessed this scene. Even the Stone Statues and the Stone Cheetahs also revealed some form of vigilance.

A while later, a black card appeared inside the fog. It slowly descended onto Rhode’s palm. Above the card was an image of a Centaur Knight which donned a heavy, black-colored chest plate. On its head, it wore a fitting black helmet which hid its glowing red eyes. And in its arms, it held a sharp pike.

[Obtained Army of Abyss 1/5, Soul Hunter Knight]

[Soul Hunter Knight (Dark Element): Available for Fusion. Attack has a Corrosion Effect. Special Skill — Charge (Pressing forward without looking back is the fate of a Centaur) LV5.]

Received the baptism of Wind and Fire. Inherited the elemental characteristics.

Weak attacks are unable to penetrate its armor, Heavy Armor Type]

[Offense: 3, Defense: 4]

Nice!

Holding the card in his hand, Rhode felt a wave of assurance surging through his body.

And now...

When he was about to begin the battle, suddenly another system prompt appeared.

[Magic condensation completed, your sword has begun to resonate. A Soul Core will soon be absorbed.]

What is it doing?

Looking at the information on his system prompt, Rhode frowned. Although he had already acquired several Summoning Spirits, he still wasn't quite sure about the mechanics of the Holy Sword Deck. Previously, when he forced the deck to level up, the system prompt had informed him about magic condensation and he chose to ignore it. But he didn't even summon it right now, why would the prompt appear on its own? Why did it want to absorb the Soul Core?

Rhode understood that protesting was futile, so he decided to not think about it anymore. Anyway, the Summoning Swordsman class had always been a troublesome profession. He was absolutely certain about that.

The Soul Core on Rhode's hand was destroyed and turned to dust. A white card suddenly appeared on his palm.

[Please Select Swordsmanship Binding]

What the hell is happening?

If this had happened in the game, he would definitely record all of this information down and post it on the forums so everyone could analyze it together. But now he was obviously unable to do so. Moreover, the system didn't even give him the chance to choose 'No.' So, should he answer 'Yes,' 'Ok,' or 'Sure'?

He had no choice in this apparently.

[Swordsmanship Binding: Moon Shadow Swordsmanship]

Rhode cursed inwardly, but he still chose the Moon Shadow Swordsmanship since it was the best out of the bunch.

However, the next prompt made him slightly happier.

[Swordsmanship Binding completed, please choose 'Yes' or 'No'...]

Without hesitation, Rhode chose 'Yes.'

At that very moment, a light appeared.

The fog which shrouded Rhode previously was split apart by the light. In fact, it shone so brightly that Marlene was forced to close her eyes. A moment later, the light disappeared and everything returned to normal. When Marlene opened her eyes, she couldn't help but stare wide-eyed at the scene before her.

Rhode was still standing motionlessly at the same place. On his left was the black hound, and on his right was the two meters tall pike-wielding Centaur Knight. And as usual, the Spirit Bird perched on Rhode's shoulder, focusing its sharp gaze to the front.

But there was an additional figure amongst the summoned spirits.

A young, petite figure stood next to the Centaur Knight.

It was a girl, an angel, to be precise.

Her long and lustrous white hair fell upon her shoulders, accentuating her delicate and beautiful face. She wore a Valkyrie-esque helmet, and her deep, blue eyes emitted a cool aura. She was also donned in an intricately carved ornate armor which emitted a faint white glow, and the white wings on her back flapped ever so slowly as she slowly descended to the ground. In all, her appearance was just like a sword that left its sheath; sharp, yet beautiful.

She single-handedly raised her sword with an indifferent expression on her face.

“10th Ranked, Eternal Holy Sword, Star Mark heeds your call, Master.”

“Very good.”

When Rhode laid his eyes on her, he couldn't help but feel amazed.

But he still managed to hide his astonishment and nodded his head to acknowledge her. Then he lifted the sword in his hand and pointed forward.

“Well then, time to get started!”

Chapter 72 - Trial vs. Glory

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

It was an unfair battle.

And it stayed that way from the beginning until the end.

“———!!!”

The Stone Cheetah rushed forward and pressed Flame Killer to the ground. The black hound retaliated by wrapping the enemy with the flames on its body, constraining the Stone Cheetah's movements. The other Stone Cheetah took the opportunity to attack the black hound from the side, but before it could sink its razor sharp teeth into the black hound's flesh, a violent whirlwind came crashing down from the sky, flinging the heavy Stone Cheetah a distance away.

After watching the cheetah slowly getting up, the Spirit Bird stopped attacking and observed it attentively with its eagle-like eyes. Apparently, it knew that it had successfully garnered the attention of the Stone Cheetah when it saw the two gleaming pupils of hatred. However, a split second later, a large shadow enveloped the cheetah's body.

The Centaur Knight trampled forward and snapped the Stone Cheetah's head. Its left hand gripped a heavy golden shield, while its right held a long pike.

Meanwhile...

Shik! The stone sword issued a sharp screech when it slammed against the floor.

Rhode had sidestepped the Stone Statue's attack, and at the same time, he slit a shallow gash on his left palm with his sword.

Blood smeared onto the blade, causing the crimson tinge on his sword to increase in intensity.

For a moment, the Stone Statue stopped attacking Rhode, instead, it held its sword close to brace itself for an attack. When Rhode had dodged its attack, the white-haired angel launched a surprise attack from behind. She swiftly closed the distance and slashed downwards like a falling meteor.

As her white wings fluttered gracefully in the wind, the heavy Stone Statue's sword began crumbling from the impact. At the same time, a bloodied blade appeared from behind, piercing straight into the Stone Statue's body. Immediately, the statue's movements turned sluggish, and before it could pull away from Rhode's sword, a silver light landed on its torso.

Boom!!! Its body couldn't endure any further and exploded into pieces, scattering everywhere.

On the other side, the Centaur Knight's pike had pierced through the other statue's torso. The relentless assaults from the Stone Statue weren't able to hurt the Centaur Knight other than leaving a few white scratches on its black armor.

Marlene was stunned silly. Her eyes widened and her mouth gaped. From her perspective, these kinds of battles would only happen in myths or legends. The king's trustworthy subordinates surrounded him, lifting their sword up high and rushing into battle without fear. They crushed any foe who stood in their path. If there were a hundred, they would kill a hundred; if there were a thousand, they would slaughter a thousand! Right now, although the enemy wasn't a thousand-man army, still, Rhode being the central command of his spirits gave an aura of an indomitable king.

However, that was just a perspective from an outsider. In reality, Rhode was feeling quite frantic. He summoned four spirits so that he could end the battle as soon as possible and couldn't maintain it for long. His first phase of attacks was successful in destroying one Stone Statue and one Stone Cheetah. Now, he wanted to commence phase two.

At the same time, the remaining Stone Statue waved his weapon and commanded the Stone Cheetah to attack Rhode.

But Rhode was faster.

Upon receiving Rhode's command, the Centaur Knight howled and went into a rage. It galloped towards the Stone Cheetah with Rhode, Flame Killer, and the white-haired angel following closely behind.

They looked like as though they were unstoppable.

However, Rhode knew that he had overdrawn his strength. He must quickly end this battle otherwise it would put him in dire straits. While he did not know what was the real purpose of this trial, according to his experiences in the game, his decision shouldn't be far off.

Screeeech! An ear-piercing sound echoed.

Rhode suddenly found out that his path was blocked by another four Stone Statues that appeared out of nowhere. Several Stone Cheetahs were circling them as well, biding their time for the right moment to attack.

Rhode didn't waste his time to think of the reason and chose to speak with his sword. The Flame Killer took to the front and rushed recklessly towards the group of Stone Statues. Its body was riddled full of holes in no time, sparking off an explosion which temporarily created a gap in the enemy's formation.

This gap was enough for Rhode and the others.

The Centaur Knight dashed forward and spun his massive pike, smashing it into any foe that barred its path. Due to the explosion and the impact from the Centaur Knight's swing, one of the Stone Statue lost its balance. At the same time, the Centaur Knight lunged its pike towards a Stone Cheetah that tried to launch an attack from the air.

"Finish them!" Rhode yelled as he ran past the Centaur Knight. After recognizing Rhode's orders, the Centaur Knight raised its pike and beat it

onto its shield with an immense force as it swept its eyes at any nearby foe. The Spirit Bird was still circling in the air, producing whirlwinds which smashed into unsuspecting statues.

Stone fragments scattered everywhere.

From the beginning of the battle until now, only three minutes had passed. Rhode felt his stamina being drained rapidly. When he abandoned the Flame Killer, he was already extremely spent. Moreover, after allowing his sword to absorb blood, even though his attacks became more lethal, the excessive blood loss caused his face turn deathly pale. His limbs even began to tremble; it was definitely not a good sign.

Bang! Rhode took a step backward after blocking an attack. The invincible sword that could even cut through stone finally met its foe. An ear-piercing sound once again echoed in the air. This time, he has finally found his target.

It was the massive Stone Statue that he had met before. It was clear that the material on its body was vastly different from the others.

Rhode was in trouble.

The Stone Statue before him was much larger than the other Stone Statues. Fortunately, it wasn't holding a weapon. However, its presence was still an issue because its huge frame blocked two-thirds of the door behind it.

Anyway, no matter what, this guy wouldn't be easy to deal with.

“Show me your Glory! Successor!”

Only the ghosts know what you are saying.

Rhode grieved inwardly, but he didn't forget to signal the white-haired angel to come to his side. He knew that this BOSS wasn't something that could be overcome with brute force. It must have its own condition or weaknesses. If he faced a magic immune BOSS with a God-Tier magic spell, it would still deal no damage. On the other hand, if he used a wooden

stick, he might be able to defeat it easily. Since the statue didn't attack immediately and even spoke to him, Rhode concluded that this BOSS couldn't be defeated through battle.

“Glory! Successor!”

The giant stone sculpture's voice echoed throughout the palace, causing a slight headache.

Glory? What glory?

Rhode's brain began to work. He recollected every detail about the Summoning Swordsman class. History, walkthroughs, quests... but he still couldn't locate the so-called Glory. In the game, the information about the Summoning Swordsman class wasn't plentiful. The players were more interested in the adventure rather than the story.

When all these thoughts were flooding his brain, the white-haired angel took half-a-step forward.

“Dear Guardian, I'm here to reveal my master's Glory!”

Followed by her words, her body suddenly emanated a soft light. Her two wings spread over a gorgeous magic circle. Then she began to float upwards, but the very next moment, a light flashed, and her figure instantly disappeared. What was left was a white sword bathed in a holy aura.

Star Mark.

This was the 'Glory'?

Rhode stared curiously at the sword that was floating before him. His heart felt strange; a humanlike lifeform turning into a sword wasn't something you see every day.

In the end, Rhode still reached out his hand and grabbed the hilt.

Mellow, cold and smooth, seemed to be no different than before. If he did not personally witness it, he would not believe that such a weapon could

turn into a person.

While holding the sword, Rhode thought to himself.

What is my Glory?

Why is this sword my Glory?

Wait... does the Glory this guy refer to...

A spark lit in his eyes. Rhode no longer hesitated. He raised his sword and pointed towards the gigantic Stone Statue.

Yes...! How could've I missed it?

It's my past Glory!

The Glory that I've fought for and was acknowledged for!

... My past Glory.

MY FORMER GLORY!

At that very moment, a light shot out from the sword and flew into the Stone Statue's forehead, disappearing without a trace.

“_____ !!!”

After the light entered its body, the huge statue began to collapse. Soon, its body turned to dust and disappeared into the air.

At the same time, a system prompt appeared before Rhode.

Chapter 73 - Inside The Ruins

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

[Trial Successful. Obtained the Holy Symbol of the Guardian — Recover the lost Glory, recreate the Glory of the past]

The system prompt was easy to understand, but for it to appear now was kind of weird.

Rhode, of course, knew what his Glory was. Especially considering that it was derived from his own effort. The series of trials he had to go through to attain the title of the most powerful Summoning Swordsman was no easy feat. He had to participate in a PVP championship with over ten thousand other players competing against each other via dueling. Everybody knew how the story went from then on; Rhode emerged victoriously and was crowned the title of the Top Summoning Swordsman in the entire Dragon Soul Continent.

Now, it seemed that the current quest was pushing him on the path to attain his past Glory once again.

But it was strange; he knew he wasn't in the game world any longer. There were no players, no game company, and unquestionably no global PVP championships. It was akin to being transmigrated to the Tang Dynasty era and then receiving a quest to win an F1 racing cup.

Rhode had seen the Holy Symbol of the Guardian before. In the game, many other classes had something similar to the Holy Symbol that he possessed. Mages had their magic circle, swordsmen had the Symbol of Bravery, Knights had the Code of Chivalry, and Clerics had the Holy Heart. Even Thieves and Rangers had a Magic Tattoo. These items were only obtainable after a test. The Summoning Swordsman class also had their own Magic Tattoo, but it wasn't equivalent to the Holy Symbol of the Guardian, instead, it was more like a Soul Contract than anything else.

Two lines of silver and black intertwined with each other, forming a complex, yet beautiful pattern on his hand. The pattern then linked with the summoning circle on his palm. When Rhode willed it, the pattern hid under his skin, concealing itself from sight.

[Holy Symbol of the Guardian (Recovered the Heart of Honor)]

Heart of Honor: All Summoning Spirits consumption is reduced by a third; the duration of summons increases by a third (Mine Honor is my Life)]

(ED: CN direct translation is Glory is my Life, but I think Shakespeare's quote feels better in this context.)

It's done!

Rhode finally felt relieved. He slumped on the ground and reverted the holy sword back into a card. Currently, Rhode was extremely spent; his face was incredibly pale as he had lost a significant amount of blood. The bloody gash on his hand already formed a scab. Indeed, Blood Tears was an extraordinary weapon, as long it absorbs enough blood, it could display a shocking amount of power.

...Though it'd be better if he didn't have to use his own blood.

"Mr. Rhode!"

Once the trial ended, the barrier that blocked out Marlene had shattered. During the fight, all she could do was anxiously watch Rhode battle against overwhelming odds, so now that the barrier had been destroyed, she quickly ran over to Rhode.

"You're injured?!" Marlene screamed out of concern when she saw Rhode's lacerated palm which was full of blood and flesh.

Rhode waved away her worry and said, "Just a minor wound."

He tried to stand up, but after losing so much blood, he lost his balance and fell back to the ground. Fortunately, Marlene caught his arm in time and

supported him from the side.

Seeing him in such a weakened state, Marlene furrowed her brow and said softly, “You should rest. There are no more enemies around. After you recover, we can proceed on.”

Facing her insistence, he did not say anything else. His excessive blood loss and overconsumption of Soul Power had weakened him greatly. It wasn't a good choice if he forced himself to walk, thus, with Marlene's help, he settled against a nearby pillar to restore his strength.

While Rhode was resting, Marlene wasn't idling. She fished out several crystalline gems and placed it beside Rhode before softly chanting a spell. Soon, a translucent hexagonal prism appeared and enveloped both of them.

“This is an intermediate protective spell,” Marlene explained with her head slightly lowered, apparently aware of Rhode's gaze on her. “It can recover injury and strength to a certain extent. I-I think that you should take a good rest after going through so much. This is the Senia family's heirloom; it isn't something that anyone can break...”

Marlene's voice was trembling slightly when she spoke. From the two days they had spent traveling to the Rock of Lament, Rhode had constantly kept his vigilance. Once there was a bit of movement, he would react immediately. From time to time, he would command her to check on the men following them. Frankly, this made her extremely worn out as she had to sleep on the cold hard ground. The rough, jagged stones and the smell of bushes made her miss her fluffy bed in Golden City. She just wanted to lie around and not do anything; however, she knew that what she was experiencing was nothing but trivial when compared to Rhode.

On the surface, it appeared that everything had gone according to Rhode's plan. If there was a problem, he was there to solve it. But after traveling with him, Marlene understood how much effort he needed to put in to guarantee his success.

It could be said that she was quite similar to Rhode. Since young, she had many prestigious titles labeled after her such as, ‘Pride of the Senia family’,

‘Magic Academy Genius’, ‘Magic Fairy’. From the perspective of outsiders, she was the genius that could memorize any kind of spell in one sitting, and her understanding of Soul Power was far more profound than anyone else. But they did not see how much effort she had to expend behind the scenes. When the other kids were playing outside, she sat in a room with piles of ancient books surrounding her. While the other young ladies were attending a banquet, she was alone in a cold, underground room practicing her spells over and over again.

Even when it was bedtime for the children, she would be busy practicing social etiquettes in front of a mirror. The latest example would be her current plight. At the moment, the nobles back in her hometown were practicing horse riding. As for her, she had to face several dangerous situations in this forest with Rhode.

Many people were envious of her. Naturally, accepted all the envy. She was proud of her talent and her ability because she was willing to work hard for it.

On the other hand, Marlene would not allow anyone to look down on her. In her opinion, if her hard work were demeaned by those who only knew how to play or complain all day long, it would simply be an insult to her.

That was precisely the reason why Marlene could understand Rhode. Even when he reprimanded her, she would accept his opinion and keep silent because she knew that the man in front of her was smarter, more talented and more hardworking than her. Since she couldn’t accept anyone trampling on her effort, naturally she wouldn’t neglect other people’s effort.

Of course, neither did Rhode know what Marlene was thinking about, nor did he want to guess. Back then, when he was young and innocent, he had tried to simulate his ex-girlfriends thoughts. When she broke up with him, he was confused. He thought that he knew what she was thinking. Then his imagination started to go wild. Did she lose interest? Did she find another man? Were they not suitable for one another?

It was only until later when he found out the truth. The reason why she broke up with him was that he attracted a lot of attention from his looks,

making her feel incredibly pressured. And for the average modern women of today, having a boyfriend that was more beautiful than them was nothing worth envying.

From that moment on, Rhode no longer cared about these things. Since Marlene had guaranteed their safety, he did not say anything else and closed his eyes to begin recuperating. Moreover, according to his knowledge, it was indeed a strong barrier.

Although the pillar was cold and hard, he did not mind at all.

“Mr. Rhode,” a soft whisper entered his ears.

Rhode opened his eyes and turned towards Marlene. He saw her laying his cloak on the floor. Then he noticed that she was looking at him hesitantly.

Marlene’s body froze for a moment when she felt his gaze.

T-that’s right... this is n-nothing more than repaying my gratitude to him.

He was hurt because of me, as a member of the Senia family, I must compensate for it, and be proud of it.

Mmm, yes, yes! That’s right. That must be it!

“...If you don’t mind... you can lie here...”

Marlene gently patted the top of her thighs; her face was so red as if she was squeezing out blood.

“I-I think you can rest better like this. It’s healthier than leaning on the cold pillar. An...and your hand is hurt, although I didn’t help you in the battle, the least I can do is to help you treat it. My healing spell is not as good as Lize, but as a mage, I still know some basic spells...”

“May I?” Rhode nodded and replied after a while.

When Marlene saw him nod, she immediately stared at him and made a firm expression as though she was willing to do anything.

“Of, of course! N-no problem! This little act simply doesn’t count as anything!”

“Okay then, sure.”

He did not wait for Marlene to say anything else. He rested his head on her lap and closed his eyes. Because of Rhode’s sudden move, Marlene’s body turned stiff for a moment. When she recovered, he had already fallen into deep sleep.

“...how rude!” Marlene glared at the young man who was sleeping soundly on her lap.

After a while, she shook her head and sighed. Then she carefully took Rhode’s left hand and placed it on her own.

Using her other free hand, she conjured a spell that brightened up the surroundings. When she saw his injury clearly under the light, she gasped once again. Other than his thumb, all of his other fingers were broken; his blood flowed down his arm, dripping onto the floor.

“It’s actually quite serious...”

She knew that Rhode’s wound wasn’t light, but now that she could study it closely, she could not help but tremble. With great care, she slowly took out her handkerchief and gently wiped the blood.

As a mage, Marlene had learned some basic first-aid skills, but she had never used them before because she rarely got hurt. And even if anyone she knew got injured, they wouldn’t be in a near-death state... at least that was the case for most of the time.

However, currently, as she realized her clumsiness in bandaging, she couldn’t help but scold herself. If only she had learned how to bandage by looking at it Lize...

When she stared at Rhode’s finger right now, it totally resembled a carrot.

Ahh...if only Lize were here...

Marlene's body suddenly stiffened.

Marlene did not know why, but when she recalled Lize's figure, deep down her heart, she felt a trace of annoyance. Why was she behaving like that? Lize was her best friend, and she was a cleric. If she were here, she would have easily taken care of Rhode's wound. Marlene did not know why, but when she imagined Lize healing Rhode's wound, she felt unhappy.

Is it because that I'm too tired these few days?

She frowned and pondered to herself. In the end, she could not find the answer, so she decided to put aside this matter and continue to bandage Rhode's injury.

In the ruins, only a magic light moved back and forth in silence...

Chapter 74 - Back to Deep Stone City

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode opened his eyes.

He had no choice but to admit that it was probably the best sleep he got after leaving Deep Stone City. The feeling of letting everything go and focus on relaxing was indeed quite addictive; it was particularly so when he had a comfortable and fluffy ‘pillow’ under his head which emitted a light fragrance.

After waking up, the first thing Rhode saw was Marlene’s sleeping face. Her exhaustion was quite evident. She leaned against the pillar, eyes closed, with her hands on her knees. The light spell that she previously cast had already dispersed, and only the orange glow from the torch was left.

Rhode slowly sat up, but when he pushed his left hand against the floor, he realized that the sensation was quite peculiar. Subconsciously, he turned his head and looked at his hand. When he noticed the five ‘carrots’ which was supposed to be his fingers, he became utterly speechless.

As expected of a noble young lady...

Rhode sighed and shook his head helplessly.

He proceeded on to remove the bandage and discovered that the gash on his palm was almost fully healed. Whatever his race was, the self-healing ability was off the charts. If he were an ordinary human, perhaps this gash wouldn’t recover even if he gave it two weeks.

At this moment, Marlene’s eyelashes fluttered.

“Mmm...”

She made a soft groan and opened her eyes. Both her and Rhode's eyes connected.

Rhode chose not to avoid her eyes and returned her gaze. After interacting with her for the past few days, he had discovered some interesting thing about her. For example, she had low blood pressure.

For a mage, lightheadedness wasn't a good thing.

Frankly, when Rhode first found out about this, he was quite shocked. He wanted to wake Marlene up from her dream, but she hugged him tightly in her arms. Although she appeared quite fragile on the outside, Rhode knew how powerful her spells were. If it weren't for her being stuck in a dream, most likely she would've blasted him to death already. Furthermore, what was even more frightening was that she didn't remember anything about it!

(ED: I rearranged a few paragraphs so that you guys can understand better. But IMO, it's still quite confusing in the original TL and raws. What does it have to do with low blood pressure lol? I'm just guessing that the author is referring to lightheadedness, one of the symptoms of low blood pressure.)

From that moment on, Rhode decided to keep a distance from her — especially before she woke up.

Even now, both her eyes were blank, as though she was under hypnotism. She resembled an obedient doll, and in addition to her exquisite face, her current state could easily drive a male to act on their primal instincts.

But Rhode knew, that if anybody did that, they'd be dead in the next moment.

Because, the very next moment, her body began to sway like a pendulum.

One.

Two.

Three.

A short, stifled scream left her mouth.

“Ahhh!” Marlene’s formerly sleepy eyes snapped open when she noticed Rhode staring at her. “M-Mr. Rhode, are you awake already?”

Seems like she’s finally awake.

“Good morning, Ms. Marlene.”

Rhode waved his hand to greet her.

“It looks like you had a nice dream.”

“Well... I did not have much sleep last night,” Marlene replied helplessly.

She swept her gaze around the area, but she then realized that it was underground, so she wasn’t able to tell the time.

Marlene attempted to stand up, but her legs felt numb and she fell to the floor with a bump. “Ah, so painful...”

“Get ready to move out. We are returning to Deep Stone City.”

“Okay...” Marlene lowered her head when she replied, apparently she was still quite embarrassed.

She stood up once again and made her way to the crystalline gem before picking it up and shoving into her storage. Suddenly, Marlene thought of something. She walked towards Rhode and took out a few objects from her pocket.

“That’s right, these things...”

“What are these?”

“According to you, it would be referred to as ‘loots.’”

She’d finally reverted to her usual self.

“I found these things on those assassins. I think it might be useful to you...”

“Eh?” Rhode was slightly shocked; he knew that she hated dealing with corpses and recalled that she previously claimed that she wouldn’t do it ever again.

But what was this?

It wasn’t Marlene’s style to retract what she had said, or did the young lady had a change in attitude?

Marlene appeared to be oblivious to Rhode’s doubt. Whether did she notice or deliberately disregard it, no one knew but her. She merely took out all that she found and handed it to Rhode with an ‘it’s all yours’ expression.

Ah, what an arrogant lady.

Rhode sighed to himself inwardly and chose to keep silent as he received the items Marlene had looted.

Although Marlene hated to do it, she was still quite a decisive lady. Once she set her mind to it, she would accomplish the task meticulously. From the bodies of the three dead men, Marlene discovered four Magic Equipment. Most of them were fairly ordinary, which increased Sense and Intelligence. Rhode felt that it was better than nothing. Since the mercenary group was in its infant stage, these Magic Equipment could still be used or sold for money.

However, one Magic equipment attracted his attention. It was the dagger that the female assassin previously used. It had a passive attribute that could penetrate middle-tier protection magic. Moreover, it also possessed an innate paralysis poison attribute. The weaponsmithing was also rather exquisitely done; its blade was tempered with an iron-gold alloy which made it a perfect weapon to kill.

Unfortunately, Rhode’s current roster had no thief, and his swordsmanship didn’t allow him to fight with a dagger. It was a bit wasted, but according to his estimation, if he auctioned this dagger on the black market, he would

surely be able to gain a significant amount of money. But he was worried that if he revealed this dagger to the public, it might bring him unnecessary trouble.

After checking his acquired loot, Rhode nodded in satisfaction and shoved it into his spatial bag.

Their quest was finally done.

When they were leaving, Rhode discovered the bodies of the two unlucky men who guarded the entrance. After Rhode and Marlene left the secret passage, the stone entrance automatically closed and the sculpture returned to its original place.

If he had a choice, Rhode wouldn't want to come back to this place ever again.

The duo dragged their exhausted bodies back to Deep Stone City. When they reached the city gates, it was already two days later in the evening. They immediately made their way to the Mercenary Association to submit the mission to Old Hank. After handing over the magic herbs, Rhode also passed the badge which he had found in the Twilight Forest. Now that Starlight had completed three missions, their rank rose to the 6th from the bottom.

Well, at least he finally managed to escape the last place.

“Kid, you did a good job.” Old Hank patted Rhode's shoulder in a friendly manner.

“In only half a month, you managed to complete three missions and earned yourself five points. I really need to get those group of lazy mercenaries to learn from you. Hmph, if they don't work hard, they can only cry when they get disbanded!”

“It's nothing.” Rhode shook his head.

He really did not focus on mundane matters. On the contrary, he was more worried about other things.

“How’s Lize? She did not encounter any trouble, right?”

“Lize is well behaved... It isn’t really a problem, but...” Old Hank frowned as his words trailed off.

After a while, he continued, “I don’t know what happened recently, but all she did was lock herself in her room, claiming that she was learning new spells. Her daily meals were personally delivered by me, otherwise, I’m afraid that she might even forget to eat. I don’t know why she is working so hard... she’s still young and has much time to learn. Wouldn’t it be a waste if she hurts her body in the process? Kid, help me persuade her. She will only listen to you.”

“Okay, no problem.”

Rhode nodded his head. He also did not wish Lize to fall ill because of her excessive training. Her ability only allowed her to heal physical wounds; if she fell sick, it would be troublesome.

Rhode waved to Old Hank and turned to Marlene beside him.

“Let’s go.”

“Okay...”

Marlene revealed a complicated expression, but she quickly slapped her face gently with both hands to freshen herself up.

When both of them was about to leave the Mercenary Association, suddenly a voice sounded from behind.

“Hey boy, you’re finally back!”

They turned towards the source of the voice and saw Old Walker’s flushed face as he walked out from the crowd.

“I thought that the wolves had already eaten you guys. But looking at both of you now, it seems like you guys have worked hard!”

“Mr. Walker,” Rhode frowned and asked, “why are you here?”

“Me?”

Old Walker took out a jug of liquor from his waist and drank a mouthful of it. Then he narrowed his eyes and smiled while looking at the man before him.

“Thank me, boy. I’ve got the person that you are looking for!”

Chapter 75 - Good Deal?

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Old Walker strolled towards Rhode and made a gesture to the bartender who immediately whipped up a large pint of cold beer. Old Walker grabbed the handle and gulped down in one go, wiping his mouth satisfyingly as he grinned at Rhode.

“It’s done. The person you asked me to hire is waiting in our stronghold. Shall we go back and have a look? It cost us 300 gold coins... it’s quite expensive...”

“I hope that the person you’ve recruited will meet my requirements,” said Rhode as took back the money from Old Walker. “otherwise, I will cut your wage to make up for the loss.”

“W-what?! Hold on,” Old Walker’s expression stiffened, “I did not hear you say anything about that back then!”

Rhode shrugged as though it had nothing to do with him. “You didn’t ask, so I didn’t mention.”

Then he stuffed the money back into his pocket, ignoring Old Walker’s contorting expression.

“You actually dare to deceive me!”

“I did not deceive you, Mr. Walker,” said Rhode nonchalantly.

“If the person you’ve recruited met my requirements, you shouldn’t be worried. Or... are you playing with me?”

“O-of course not.”

Old Walker stroked his beard angrily when Rhode accused him of not doing his job properly and chose to keep silent in the end. Indeed, if he was confident, he did not have to be afraid! However, the expression that he had, made him look like he had done something wrong!

When Old Walker thought of this, he shifted his gaze to Marlene who was silently spectating the drama. Since he already knew that she wouldn't back him up, it was useless for him to say anything else.

“Anyway, I’m quite confident that I’ve found the one you’re looking for. Don’t look down on my age, I’m no fool. You can verify it for yourself if you wish.”

“Alright, that’s good. Let’s find Lize and return home.”

Rhode didn't dwell on the topic any longer; he nodded his head and turning around.

The place that Lize temporarily resided in was just an average guesthouse in the Mercenary Association. According to Old Hank, she had shut herself in the room to practice her spells. In fact, she was so hardworking that even when Rhode's entourage arrived at her door, they could hear her muttering some kind of spell.

Rhode raised his hand to stop Old Walker from disturbing her. Once he heard no sound from behind the door, he knocked on the door twice.

“Who is it?”

“It's me, Lize.”

“Eh?!! Mr. R-Rhode! Please wait, I'm coming!!”

When she recognized Rhode's voice, the pitch on the other side of the door immediately went one octave higher. After that, a myriad of sounds of multiple objects moving began to escape from behind the door; the wooden floor even trembled slightly as though an earthquake was occurring.

The chaos only lasted for five minutes. Soon, the door slowly creaked open which revealed Lize's beaming face, though some traces of sweat on her forehead were evident.

"W-welcome back, Mr. Rhode and Marlene."

Lize frolicked towards Marlene and held her hand in hers.

"It's great that you guys finally are back. I've been extremely worried! Is everything alright? Did anything bad happen? "

Lize began bombarding both Rhode and Marlene with questions, the worry on her face was evident. Marlene, however, revealed an unnatural expression, though Lize didn't seem to be aware of it. Her face was filled with joy as her worries were all swept away in one go.

Back then, after Rhode embarked on the mission with Marlene, Lize discovered that she couldn't sleep in peace. The constant worry in her heart prevented her from relaxing. Therefore, when she finally saw Rhode and Marlene unharmed, a huge load seemed to have left her chest. Although Rhode did tell her not to worry, she knew that the enemies were from the Country of Light. So how could she rest easy when she clearly understood what kind of power they had?

"Everything went as planned." Rhode nodded and smiled. "...But now isn't the time to talk about that. I will explain the details once we return to the stronghold. Go and pack your belongings for now."

"Okay!"

Lize nodded and made her way towards the bedroom to pack her belongings.

It felt quite odd; she had been living in this guesthouse for as long as she could remember, but now that she owned her own home, staying here wasn't as enjoyable as before. Although there were room service and three meals a day, she couldn't comprehend why she longed for her own home. Therefore now that she could finally return home, her joy-filled face was

even more jubilant than before. She quickly packed her belongings and exited the Mercenary Association with Rhode.

Currently, it was late in the night, and the streets were no longer crowded. Instead, the only people on the streets were soldiers who were patrolling the area on their horses.

While strolling down the road, Rhode inquired about Lize's progress since he was also curious how much she could pick up.

"I'm still trying! Mr. Rhode, as long you give me enough time, I can definitely learn the Arrow of Light!"

Lize spoke with confidence when she described her progress. Studying spells weren't easy; let alone having a breakthrough. Frankly speaking, Lize wasn't weak. However, the lack of spells and skills suppressed her true potential. By learning more spells, Rhode was confident that her overall strength would breakthrough to the next level.

However, noticing her excited expression, he felt that it would be better not to tell her.

"Being hardworking is a good trait to have, but you still need to pay attention to your body. It can become dangerous if you're too rash. To become a good caster, you must learn how to keep calm. Take it easy; learn one step at a time." said Rhode, then he raised his brow and gazed into Lize's eyes. "I've heard from Uncle Hank that you didn't step out of the room for a few days because of studying. Although your perseverance is commendable, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's a good thing. You must understand that your position in the mercenary group is irreplaceable as a supporter."

"...Yes." Lize's excitement dimmed and she immediately lowered her head. Marlene quickly ran to her side to comfort her.

"Mr. Rhode is right, Lize. You cannot be anxious when learning spells, let alone Spirit magic. I can feel your resolve, but I believe that if you can calm

down, it will be only a matter of time before mastering it. Take it easy, Mr. Rhode is thinking of your health.”

“Yes, I understand. I was too excited. Thank you, Marlene.” Lize smiled helplessly.

“No problem, but...” Marlene returned Lize’s smile and then shifted her gaze to Rhode.

“Mr. Rhode, have you learned magic before?” she asked curiously.

“Of course not. But even as a swordsman, one cannot learn swordsmanship when anxious. I assumed mages must also be the same. Anyway, just be careful. Don’t get too carried away otherwise the end could be tragic.” Rhode answered her question indifferently.

He certainly hadn’t learned swordsmanship before. As a player, they could just learn any skill by adding skill points. That was why they didn’t need to feel wary about being carried away. The reason why Rhode cautioned Lize to be careful was because he wanted her to be safe, and also he had received a quest about a similar incident.

At that time, a female mage NPC was so incredibly desperate to breakthrough that she took the risk to practice a high-level summoning skill which ultimately backfired, causing her to summon an uncontrollable tentacle monster. What happened later... one could just imagine.

If it happened to a stranger, Rhode wouldn’t mind feasting his eyes on it. But if it happened to someone he knew, then it would be a completely different matter altogether.

They chatted until the entrance of the stronghold. Under the moonlight, they saw someone standing by the door, as if enjoying the night breeze. Noticing the group approaching, the unknown person waved towards them.

“Ah, old man, you’re finally back!”

“Pfft!”

Marlene and Lize tried to stifle their laughter, but they failed in the end.

Old Walker face turned pale. He glared at the unknown person and shouted. “How many times do I have to tell you, brat! Don’t call me old man!”

“You can call Anne ‘brat,’ then why can’t Anne call you old man?”

(ED: The unknown person is speaking in 3rd person.)

Everyone finally saw the appearance of the unknown person who had her hands on her hip.

Just by the door, was an energetic young girl with a charming face and golden, curly hair. Her eyes were lavishly green; and her long, slender legs were slightly leaning to a side. Back in Rhode’s world, this girl could’ve easily been an idol or a celebrity.

The only thing that didn’t match her appearance was a golden shield which was at least a meter in height. At one glance, Rhode could tell that it was the Shield Warrior’s standard gear, the Charge Shield. It was a rather unique piece of equipment as its main body was divided into two different sections.

In most situations, the Shield Warrior would fight with the two parts attached. They would slip their arms between the enarmes to hold the shield in place. When faced with certain dangerous circumstances, they could activate a trigger near the enarmes and divide the shield into two parts, extending the base row further downwards. Additionally, a golden pole extruded out at the bottommost base point which granted the Shield Warrior the ability to dig the shield into the ground, giving them a chance to hold their position.

(ED: Enarmes is the strap at the rear of the shield. The Base Row is the lowest section of the shield.)

As a whole, it had a delicate structure, so the Shield Warrior must combine other regular shields to increase its defense. Otherwise, once the inside mechanisms receive damage, it wouldn’t be able to function until repaired.

However, Rhode also knew that the Charge Shield was classified as the fifth most heaviest equipment in the whole of Dragon Soul Continent. Most people wouldn't be able to hold it as the shield's weight could rival two-handed swords. Even for the players, if they didn't choose the Barbarian or Dwarf race, it would almost be impossible for them to lift it up.

When Rhode saw the girl waving her shield around singlehandedly, it made him wonder if that shield was just a fake.

“Old Walker? Is this the person you're talking about?”

Rhode's face remained indifferent, but his question still showed revealed his attitude towards this matter.

“Who else can it be, kid?”

Old Walker immediately stopped arguing with the young girl and stood beside her, facing toward Rhode's direction.

“Don't judge a book by its cover. Let me tell you; this girl right here is strong. If it weren't because of the money, eh... you wouldn't be able to recruit her.”

“...Oh? Then I want to hear how strong she is... And, why didn't you find a man?”

“Hehehe.” Old Walker grinned mischievously and walked towards Rhode, whispering in his ear.

“Simple. Do you think it's easy to look for a Shield Warrior? If you could find it easily, then you wouldn't ask me to do it, right? And as for her gender.... heheh..., since you're a young man... what do you think?” Old Walker's grin widened, then he shook his head slightly and said, “You don't have to thank me. Since we're both men, I can understand. Just look at her appearance, the money didn't go to waste, right?”

“...”

Rhode immediately walked forward and ignored Old Walker. Before Rhode could say anything, the girl jumped towards him.

When she was right before him, her actual height was revealed in all its glory. Rhode was 180cm tall and couldn't be considered as short. On the other hand, Marlene and Lize only reached half of his head, but this girl — this girl was almost as tall as him!

The girl stretched out her hand for a handshake and said, “Are you the leader of this mercenary group? You look very young! Pleased to meet you, big sister!”

The air immediately turned frigid.

Chapter 76 - The Beginning of a Mercenary Group

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

People who associated with Rhode would undoubtedly know this one thing about him.

He absolutely hated to be mistaken for a woman.

After having interacted with Rhode for a period of time, Lize was naturally informed of his reverse scale. As for Marlene, after some time, she eventually realized as well. Even Old Walker did not dare to joke about it, because he knew that it was a boundary that he shouldn't cross.

And now, this unfamiliar girl had called him 'big sister' in a casual tone.

The icy-cold air made the three shiver.

"... I beg your pardon, Miss," said Rhode softly, "but I'm a guy."

Surprisingly, Rhode didn't blow up like they had thought he would. Instead, he just shook her hand.

The girl was equally surprised. "A guy?"

She began to inspect Rhode carefully while maintaining an innocent smile on her face.

Then she patted Rhode's shoulder and said, "Big brother, I didn't see that coming! You're too beautiful."

The faces of the trio paled further. The girl had progressed deeper into the land of no return when she called him 'beautiful.'

“Miss...”

“Anne. Anne Georgia. You can just call me Anne, big brother.” The girl called Anne introduced herself.

“Then, Anne...” Rhode placed his hand on his forehead and paused for a while before continuing, “Although I’ve instructed Old Walker to recruit you, I’ve yet to accept you as a formal member of my mercenary group. First, you must pass my test, and only then would you be able to join. Otherwise...”

Rhode turned his head slowly and glanced at Old Walker who began to shrink back.

“I will cut his wages to make up for the loss.”

“No problem!”

Whether or not the girl heard him, or perhaps did not plan to hear him, she immediately agreed to Rhode’s conditions. Then she tapped the shield on her hand gleefully, revealing a confident smile on her face.

“Anne will accept no matter what kind of test it is!”

“Very well.”

Rhode nodded, then he turned around and glared coldly at Old Walker once more whose face became increasingly paler.

“Then, Mr. Walker, you don’t mind helping me, right? This is an order, by the way.”

“...”

The old man rolled his eyes.

Since it is an order, why bother even asking me in the first place?

Rhode's test was simple. He asked Anne to protect Old Walker for a period of time. She would pass the test as long as she could hold out until the end. Of course, Rhode had his own reasons for doing this.

After arriving to this world, Rhode noticed that a lot of skills had subtle differences as compared to the game. For example, the tanking class. In the game, as long as the player used Taunt, the monsters would obediently follow them to their deaths. However, in this world, it wasn't as easy as before. Even low-leveled monsters would be drawn towards the person who dealt the most damage, and that didn't include beings of higher intelligence.

A good example would be the fight with the Necromancer. Rhode attempted to get the Red Hawk's tank to draw the Necromancer's attention. Unfortunately, no matter how hard he tried, the Necromancer wouldn't even look at him. Instead, the Necromancer focused on Rhode. Rhode didn't deal the most damage, nor was the most threatening in that battle... This meant that reality was somewhat different from the game although it did share some similarities.

Therefore he concluded that a tanking class in this world wouldn't be as effective as before. No matter if it was in current times or back in the game, a tank's job was to focus on defense. In the game, the tank could taunt the monsters so that he or she would receive damage instead of the team. However, currently, the tank could only act in a defensive role. This meant that they must have good reaction speed, good defensive capabilities and the ability to adapt to situations. Otherwise, no tank would be able to live after their first few encounters.

And this was exactly what Rhode wanted to test.

“Hey, kid! You ordered me as a pretext to settle the grudge!!”

Old Walker face was pale. But Rhode had clearly made his decision, and no one could say no.

“This is a very fair arrangement, Mr. Walker. This young lady was chosen by you, so you must believe in her strength. You should just relax and let her do her job.”

“Don’t think that you can deceive me by using those sugar-coated words! Your wicked kid!”

Old Walker waved his fist angrily at Rhode, but in the end, he still shifted his gaze nervously to Anne who was standing in front of him with the shield on her right arm.

“Little brat, I’m leaving my life in your hand, you must protect me!”

“Rest assured, old man. There would be no problem. Probably.”

“What?! Probably?! You better take back that word since I trust you this much!”

However, Rhode did not wait for Old Walker to finish complaining and made the first move.

He stretched out his arm and materialized three cards before him. The cards floated mysteriously in the air, and a summoning formation expanded below Rhode. In an instant, the Centaur Knight, Flame Killer and the Spirit Bird appeared at the same time.

“That was so cool! What are they?”

Anne stared at Rhode in disbelief; her widened eyes almost gave Old Walker a heart attack.

“Brat! Don’t get distracted! That fellow only knows petty tricks. Jus focus! Don’t touch that black dog; it can explode!”

“You have three minutes. As long you can hold out for three minutes and prevent Old Walker from getting injured, you’ll pass the test.”

After his explanation, Rhode glanced at Marlene and said, “Help me count.”

“Yes, Mr. Rhode.”

Marlene nodded and fished out a pocket watch. Then, Rhode snapped his fingers, signifying the start of the test.

“Attack.”

“————!!”

The three spirits immediately rushed forward upon receiving Rhode’s command.

As usual, in the vanguard, was the brave Flame Killer. After self-detonating so many times, it appeared to have developed some kind of masochistic personality. The poor dog now had an excited expression on its face when it faced its death. If the Flame Killer were a human, then it would probably be best to send him to see a psychiatrist.

Meanwhile, the girl who had been smiling throughout finally withdrew her grin and became serious. She bent her body and placed the shield in front of her, adopting a standard blocking stance. Then, followed by a ‘clang,’ multiple sharp hooks jolted out from both sides of the shield, reflecting a cold, hard light. The black hound acted as though it hadn’t seen it and rushed forward menacingly.

Anne made a warcry and propelled herself forward, charging towards the black hound like a train.

The massive shield that weighed more than 10kg was swung with one arm as if it was light as a feather. However, the impact sound proved that the shield was indeed heavy. The Flame Killer didn’t expect that the opponent would be so agile, and it was soon sent flying. It whined in agony as it soared through the air, and when it finally landed on the ground, it made a heartwrenching yelp.

At the same time, the Centaur Knight already made its way in front of her.

It swiftly lunged its pike forward, but before its weapon could collide with Anne’s shield, she suddenly tilted her body and avoided the Centaur Knight’s attack. Anne did a spin and followed up with a bash, which smashed into the Centaur Knight’s flank as it was launching its pike towards Old Walker, causing it to stagger. The impact also caused the Centaur Knight’s pike to miss its target.

Although the immediate danger had been removed, Anne didn't lose focus. On the contrary, after disarming the Centaur Knight, she immediately pulled her shield downwards and plunged it into the ground.

Kacha! The whole shield transformed; it expanded and wrapped around her body. At the same time, the Centaur Knight, who also possessed a shield in its other arm, used it to bash against Anne's bulwark.

Bang!! A deep sound caused their heart to jump slightly. The impact caused the Centaur Knight to take a few steps back. Meanwhile, the girl also backed off. But unlike the Centaur Knight, she had a different agenda.

The Spirit Bird who had been hovering in the air finally swept down.

As a wind elemental summon, the agility of the other two Spirits couldn't be compared to it. Only a flash of light could be seen shooting towards Old Walker.

This is the end.

Upon discovering the Spirit Bird shooting to his location, Old Walker knew that something bad was going to happen, but he wasn't able to stop it. After all, the Spirit Bird was way too fast; even if he wanted to react, it was impossible. At this moment, Old Walker was already crying inwardly.

Are my wages going to be cut?

Suddenly, Anne appeared and grabbed Old Walker's collar, pulling him to the ground. Then she used her shield to block his front.

Old Walker had no time to react; at the very next second, he realized that he was lying on the floor. However, this action caused the Spirit Bird to lose its target, though it did not immediately give up. Instead, it whistled and conjured a whirlwind to crash into the shield.

“Boom!!”

Woah!!

Old Walker felt a huge impact coming from the other side of the shield. The vibrations caused by the impact eventually traversed through the shield, to Anne, and finally to himself. The poor old man felt like a piece of flattened meatloaf as his breath was constantly being taken away. When he wanted to cry for help, he suddenly felt his body lighten. At that moment, he realized that the girl had already jumped up.

Time seemed to slow down. The girl was suspended in the air, her face dead serious. She faced the three summoned spirits and stretched out her left hand, revealing the secondary shield embedded in the Charge Shield.

Woo!! The sharp blades on the shield began rotating at high speeds, then it soon formed a whirlwind barrier which completely blocked the three summoning spirits.

Looking at this scene, Rhode frowned. Then he unsheathed his sword and rushed forward.

A light flashed, the silver sword pierced through the night sky and straight towards the whirlwind.

Boom!!

Followed by a loud burst, the sword also stopped moving.

Old Walker took a few steps back and plopped to the floor, the fright on his face was evident. Just next to him was a deep crevice with lingering traces of sword condensation.

In front of him, the girl still held her shield up, but he was shocked when he discovered the scars on her body.

At the same time, Marlene raised her pocket watch.

The three minutes was up.

“Not bad, Ms. Anne.”

Rhode put away his sword.

“I have a rough grasp on your strength. Frankly, you’ve already met my requirements. But this is just a test, I hope to witness your performance in actual combat.”

“Don’t worry, big brother.”

The girl put away her shield, and the energetic smile on her face emerged once again.

“I will not let you down!!”

“I hope so.”

He nodded and turned his attention to Lize.

“Lize, let her choose a room. Marlene, you can go to rest. As for you...”

Followed by a pause, Rhode stared at Old Walker who was getting up from the ground.

“Mr. Walker, come to the study room later. I wish to hear your recruitment process.”

Chapter 77 - A Big Net Quietly Spreading

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

When Old Walker entered the study room, Rhode turned to him and asked, “So, what really happened?”

“What? What happened?”

Old Walker was a little bit confused at Rhode’s sudden question.

“Haven’t you mention before that a Shield Warrior was hard to find? But you easily hired one with money?”

Rhode sat behind the desk and knocked the table with his fingers.

“Aren’t you going to give me a report?”

“Oh, so that’s what you want.”

Old Walker finally understood what Rhode meant. He sighed and sat down on a chair.

“To tell you the truth, I brought her from the Mark White mercenary group.”

“Mark White?”

Hearing this name, Rhode frowned.

“Isn’t that Deep Stone City’s third-ranked mercenary group? How did you get her to join us?”

“It went like this...”

Old Walker began to explain how he recruited her. At the end of the report, Rhode finally understood why that girl called Anne would be willing to join them.

To put it simply, the whole matter was related to Mark White's internal power struggles.

In their previous mission, the leader of the mercenary group was mortally wounded and did not survive the journey back. Naturally, they had to elect a new leader, so the two vice-leaders who were the next in line for the position ended up competing against each other. As each vice-leader had their respective faction within the mercenary group, the competition between the two became rather messy.

Anne was caught up in the internal struggle and wasn't happy about it. She was an orphan adopted by the former leader and was inexplicably close to him. Now that he had passed, Anne trembled in fury when she found out that the members fought against themselves instead of respecting their deceased leader. Even when she had attempted countless times to mediate the matter between the two factions, it proved to be mostly fruitless. Thus, after some time, she gave up on persuading them.

Perhaps because she was picked up by the leader when she was young, she developed a similar straightforward nature. As the saying goes, what the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve. Since they weren't listening to her, it didn't mean that she couldn't hide from them. That was precisely why she decided to leave the mercenary group.

Even if Anne was the deceased leader's daughter, she had the right to leave whenever she wanted. Mercenary groups had no power to force a member to stay. While the relationship between mercenaries and mercenary groups were somewhat similar to staffs and their companies, in the Dragon Soul Continent, there was no contract to bind their members down.

Even that being said, typical mercenaries would stay in the group forever unless something major cropped up such being dissolved or being wiped-out in a dungeon.

After all, the risk of death while running solo was much higher. And at times, leaving a mercenary group was equivalent to betrayal, making them less desired by others group. Therefore, it a bold move by Anne when she decided to quit the group,

In her case, even if Anne wanted to stay, the two vice-leaders did not want her, just because she belonged to the former leader's faction. Such was life. Despite being a young, talented lass that had an unfathomable gift as a Shield Warrior, the two vice-leaders could not disregard her influence, especially so after she grows up. They were afraid. Afraid of her gathering her supporters and overthrowing their leadership. Yet, if a prominent figure such as her were to quit without warning, many people were going to gossip. Thus, they came up with a simple solution: if someone could afford her for three hundred gold coins, that person could take her away.

Three hundred gold coins wasn't a small sum for mercenary groups. They need the money to feed its members as well as maintain certain group functions. While the total rewards awarded after completing a mission wasn't little, the leader still had to distribute the money among its members, leaving each individual with an even smaller portion.

And even if the larger mercenary groups could afford it, those groups would be aware of the internal conflicts of the Mark White mercenary group. Regardless of who is the leader in the future, Anne wouldn't be able to stay for long.

Most large mercenary groups were associated in one way or another. Unless there was a bone-deep hatred, they wouldn't want to make an enemy out of each other just because of one person. It just wasn't worth it.

Although Anne's ability was nothing less than excellent, large mercenary groups often didn't lack manpower. The addition of one Shield Warrior to their team couldn't increase their combined strength significantly enough to warrant getting involved in Mark White's internal struggles.

Of course, the enemies of Mark White mercenary group also wanted to purchase Anne so they can take revenge. Unfortunately, Mark White's

enemies were also Anne's, even though she was currently at odds with the mercenary group, she still wouldn't betray them by joining the enemy.

Lastly, there were those wealthy nobles who wanted to claim her as their concubine or escort.

Anne wasn't stupid enough to accept the proposal of these people. Other than mercenary groups, she wouldn't agree to join anything else.

During this incident, many groups exchanged information with each other. Naturally, Old Walker caught on the news as well, and he immediately recalled Rhode's intention to recruit someone who could hold their ground.

Anne appeared to be satisfied with Old Walker's invitation. A small mercenary group meant less pressure and less troubling situations. Since other larger mercenary groups didn't want her, she also didn't want to join them.

Anne was tired from the constant power struggle in Mark White; instead of thinking of complicated matters, she just wanted to live an ordinary mercenary life and complete missions to pass the time.

—

“So that's what happened.”

After hearing Old Walker explanation, Rhode nodded with satisfaction.

“Then, let's talk about proper business... The thing that I asked you to investigate... How is it?”

“Well, the situation sure is a little bit strange, kid.”

Old Walker immediately tensed up.

“Following your orders, I've investigated 32 mercenary groups, and you know what I found? Other than their current mission, all of their previous missions were all connected to dead spirits, and furthermore, all of them started at the same time!”

“All of the missions were accepted by them?”

“No, not all.”

Old Walker shook his head and waved his hand.

“All the mercenaries understood how difficult it was to deal with the undead. Other than those larger mercenary groups, no one would be stupid enough to risk their lives. Based on what I’ve heard, these missions were entrusted by someone who had offered a large sum of money, so the mercenaries agreed to take the mission.”

“How about now? What’s the situation?”

“Only five mercenary groups came back alive. But most of them had suffered heavy casualties... similar to Red Hawk’s situation. Hence, many of them are lacking manpower right now. I’ve also heard that many couldn’t even complete the mission, leaving a deep wound on their morale.”

“Do you know about the specific location and content of their mission? Additionally, is there any information on their client?”

“This... I’m not too sure, kid.”

Old Walker helplessly spread his hands.

“What you’ve requested are all secrets. They wouldn’t tell me even if I asked. But I believe that the Mercenary Association would have some record as these missions must be approved by the association. Anyway, the entire situation is really a mess. Usually, no one would offer so much money even if the mission involves eliminating the undead. Makes me wonder what is happening...”

“I can only speculate for now.”

Rhode sat on the chair and pondered while tapping on the desk lightly. For sure, things weren’t quite as expected. Rhode tried to recall what happened in the game and suddenly he thought of something.

Right! At one time, many players from the Country of Light suddenly appeared here. If Rhode wasn't mistaken, they came here to complete a very rewarding quest, but about the quest content...

Rhode began to frown.

So that was the case...! Rhode appeared to have remembered crucial, but he still had to continue the investigation to conclude his speculation.

"One thing is for sure, all these things are connected to one another. I will drop by the Mercenary Association tomorrow to look for some clues."

"Mercenary Association?"

Old Walker raised his brow.

"You want to deal with those guys? Don't blame me for not telling you but their lips are tightly shut. It's not going to be easy for you to gather information from them."

"I know what to do."

Rhode shook his head, then he closed his eyes and continued to think.

"Your next assignment is to find out what they are doing. Also, check for any unfamiliar mercenary groups that recently visited Deep Stone City."

"Unfamiliar mercenary groups? Those appear every single day. Deep Stone City is a big city. Isn't it very normal to attract new groups?"

"Indeed you are right. It is normal. But if many groups appear in a short period of time, then it's not normal."

"Do you mean..."

Following Rhode's sentence, Old Walker's face changed. He wasn't stupid; there were many strange things that Rhode asked him to investigate, so he had naturally formed his own speculation about the matter. But of course, he did not know who dared to do something like this.

“There’s someone plotting against the mercenary groups in Deep Stone City? Kid, do you have any evidence of this?”

Looking at Old Walker’s serious expression, Rhode rolled his eyes.

How could he have any news? If he were a regular joe, Rhode would’ve only felt that something strange was going on and not bother to take any action.

However, Rhode was a transmigrator. He knew what was going to happen in the future, which was why he was extremely vigilant towards ‘odd happenings’.

“When I have news, I’ll naturally inform you about it.”

Chapter 78 - The Enemy is in The Light, While I'm in The Dark

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

There's nothing better than one's home.

That was the first thought that came into Rhode's mind when he opened his eyes. It was currently morning, and the sun had already risen on the horizon, sending a bright, warm ray of light through the window, signifying that a brand new day had begun.

Although it had only been one day since his return, Rhode didn't choose to relax but instead, he sprung up from his bed, changed, and went to the back garden to practice swordsmanship. It was a habit from the game that he couldn't easily forget. After logging in, he would search for a place to warm up and once done, he would find other things to occupy his time. This daily routine improved his basic statuses and increased his agility in battle. Therefore, after transmigrating, he still brought his habit along with him. At the very least, his routine would bring a sense of familiarity and put him at ease.

The stronghold was peaceful in the morning. On the third floor, Rhode occupied the largest room in the stronghold which was the study and his bedroom combined. As for the female mercenaries, all of them lived fairly comfortably in the guestrooms on the second floor. Only Old Walker slept on the first floor in the servant's room — but of course, this was only a temporary arrangement. Rhode wasn't satisfied with the current accommodations, but since they were low on cash, it couldn't be helped.

When Rhode was walking down the stairs, he could hear a lively voice calling out to him.

“Ah leader, good morning! You woke up so early.”

It was that one girl who would dare to talk to him in that manner.

“Aren’t you the same?”

Rhode shook his head and glanced at Anne who was standing by the balcony.

“I say, Miss Anne. Are you heading out with that kind of attire?”

“Hm?”

Tracing Rhode’s gaze, Anne looked down at her clothes in curiosity. Right now, she wasn’t wearing the light armor she wore last night. Instead, only a thin undergarment covered her slender body which ‘proudly’ emphasized her upper half. When the wind blew, Rhode could vaguely catch a glimpse of pink through the translucent cloth Anne wore right now.

“Hmm? It’s fine, isn’t it? After all, it’s cool and refreshing having dressed like this.”

As the girl spoke, she raised her arms and stretched her waist, revealing even more tender skin under the thin cloth. Rhode had to admit, Anne’s figure was certainly ideal. She had the necessary curves while still being slender at the same time. Furthermore, her lazy demeanor could be somewhat tempting for certain individuals.

“Isn’t it a little bit too refreshing...?”

About B+...

Rhode’s eyes fell on her chest and immediately made an evaluation, a second later, he quickly shrugged and said, “After all, this is a mercenary group. I hope you can mind yourself.”

“Ah... that’s boring! Back when Anne was still in Mark White, father would ask me to do the same. Now that Anne is here, leader is telling me the same thing.”

Anne twitched her mouth in dissatisfaction.

Then she added, “Men sure are weird. Leader, Anne clearly didn’t strip. But if she did, will guys be excited about it? For Anne, even if a man is naked, Anne wouldn’t feel excited at all.”

“...”

Black lines stretched on Rhode’s forehead. When he first saw her, Rhode guessed that things wouldn’t be simple, but now he was convinced that Old Walker had given him a big headache.

At that moment, a savior finally appeared.

“Hm...Ms. Anne? You’ve woken up? I heard Mr. Rhode’s voice...”

While rubbing her eyes, Lize yawned as she staggered sleepily out of the room. When she saw Anne’s clothing, Lize’s eyes immediately snapped wide open.

“A-A-Anne! What are you doing?!”

“Eh? Anne was only going out to get some fresh morning air?”

“You’ll catch a cold like this! That’s not right, why didn’t you wear any clothes?”

“But Anne is wearing clothes? You see, you see, isn’t this clothes?”

“Waaaa, don’t lift it up!! Mr. Rhode is here! Please behave!”

“But Anne is behaving? It isn’t as though Anne is naked. This layer of clothes shouldn’t be a problem, right? Only seeing beyond this layer of clothes is the problem, right?”

“That’s not it!! M-Mr. Rhode, please leave. Ms. Anne, come with me, you absolutely *cannot* go out like this!!”

“Eh...But it’s very comfortable like this...”

“No means no!!”

After staring at Anne who was being unwillingly pulled back into the room by Lize, he turned his head away, sighing. Anyway, he was lucky enough to witness such a 'beautiful scenery' in the early morning.

Rhode had to admit; she was indeed a unique individual. She had a cheerful, lively, energetic and straightforward disposition but was also someone who had close to zero social awareness. If she wanted to do something, she would just do it her way and would not think of how other people would perceive her. To put it nicely, she could be described as a bold and steadfast individual. On the flip side, she was someone who acts before thinking. Rhode finally understood why the two vice-leaders from Mark White wanted to kick her out...

Marlene and Lize also quickly realized this point.

After the 'incident' in the morning, everyone finally gathered to have breakfast. When Rhode and Lize were the only inhabitants of the stronghold, they could eat casually but now that there were more people, Rhode had to tidy up the table to have breakfast.

Old Walker took on Lize's duty of cooking three meals a day and surprisingly, his cooking was actually good! It was so good that Marlene even praised the food he made. Of course, everything would be perfect if he would stop drinking beer at every meal.

"All of you can have a rest for today," Rhode said and began discussing today's schedule while holding a piece of steaming hot bread in his hand.

"I need to go to the Mercenary Association to gather information. You guys can do whatever you like but just don't create unnecessary trouble. If anyone of you wishes to go out, please bring someone along with you."

"Mercenary Association?"

Marlene raised her brow as she picked up her handkerchief to wipe her mouth.

"Something happened?" she said.

Rhode shook his head. Even *he* wasn't too sure about what was happening, but it would still be good to give Sereck and the others a heads up.

"I cannot say anything for now. I'm just going to check the situation."

"Do you want me to follow you, Mr. Rhode?"

"There's no need. You must be tired after traveling together with me for so many days. You don't have to go today."

"...Mr. Rhode."

This time, Lize raised her hand timidly.

"Do we need to prepare for anything?"

"We will depart in two or three days; you can just prepare for that."

"Okay, I understand."

When everyone was busy discussing, Anne, who sat quietly among the ladies, suddenly interrupted.

"Big sister Marlene, Big sister Lize, Anne feels that this is quite weird. Why don't you guys call leader as leader?"

"Eh?"

Both Marlene and Lize were caught off guard for a moment.

"In Anne's former mercenary group, everyone called the leader as leader. Why are both sisters calling the leader by his name?"

"This..."

Both of them displayed an awkward expression, even Old Walker who was sitting beside also felt somewhat uncomfortable and raised his pint to cover up his expression. However, Rhode helped them out from their unspeakable dilemma.

“All of them have their own reasons. Marlene is only temporarily joining our group. As for Lize, I’m sure she has her own reasoning. Moreover, I don’t really mind what you call me. It isn’t mandatory to call me leader, so feel free to call me anything you like.”

“So it’s like that...”

Anne blinked her beautiful green eyes and took another curious glance at everyone. Then, she did not say anything else and once again focused on the food before her.

Lize, Marlene and Old Walker finally felt relieved, but they still had a hint of complexity in their eyes.

At this moment, there was a knock on the door.

Lize quickly stood up and got the door. She spoke with the people outside in a low voice for a few moments before accepting a letter. Then she returned to the table with an odd expression.

“What happened Lize? Did something happen?”

Marlene asked curiously when she saw Lize’s expression. Lize passed the letter over and said, “Mr. Rhode, it’s an invitation from the Mercenary Association. Mr. President and Sereck want to see you; they hope that you can go there to solve a dispute.”

“Dispute?”

Rhode felt a little bit strange. How could there be any dispute between him and Mercenary Association?

“It’s like this...”

Lize’s current expression became even more strange, she looked at Marlene with worry, and then back to Rhode.

“According to the messenger, Mr. Clinton from the Country of Light approached the Mercenary Association and claimed that you had killed his

subordinates. He asked us to give an explanation and compensate his loss..”

“That’s simply outrageous!”

Before Lize could finish, Marlene slammed the table and stood up in anger.

“Those group of bastards... it was clearly them who had sent people to assassinate us in the forest. Hah. Now they’re twisting the truth! Must we stay still and give up our lives to satisfy them?”

Then Marlene turned around and stared at Rhode with anger in her eyes.

“Mr. Rhode! Let’s go to the Mercenary Association together! I want that bastard to understand that our Munn Kingdom isn’t that easy to be bullied!”

“Enough. Marlene, don’t get too worked up.”

Rhode was unexpectedly calm. He reached out and took the letter from Lize, carefully scrutinizing the contents. After reading, he shoved the letter into his pocket and stood up.

“Go and have a rest. I’ll go to the Mercenary Association by myself. I think there must be some kind of misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding?!”

Marlene sneered.

“Mr. Rhode, how can it be a misunderstanding? Isn’t it obvious? The people of the Country of Light have refused to let this matter go...”

“I have a different opinion about it.”

Rhode waved his hand and dismissed Marlene’s complaint.

“We’ve never done such a thing, that’s why there must be some kind of misunderstanding. Clinton accused us of doing it, but I still don’t know what is he talking about.”

“...”

Everyone was speechless.

All of them stared at Rhode who was as calm as a cucumber, acting as if nothing happened.

(ED: Anne is adorable.)

Chapter 79 - A Small Warning

Chapter 79: A Small Warning

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

A lingering chatter droned on and on.

Peter stretched his body and distanced himself from the parchments in front of him. When he took off his glasses, he noticed his vision growing slightly blurry. But this was good for him... At least he did not have to see those annoying faces otherwise it would be difficult to imagine how he could continue.

“Silence, silence!!”

A deep voice sounded and drowned the noise.

“Please, everyone. We’re not gathered here to quarrel.”

A man who wore a luxurious robe stood up and spread his hands.

“In recent months, there had been a string of continuous attacks on cargo ships near the border areas which caused not only the dissatisfaction of the Merchant Association but also a rapid increase in price in the Country of Light. We must develop a countermeasure as soon as possible!”

“What else can we do?”

Another person put down the parchments in his hand and helplessly spread his arms.

“We have already sent out an investigation group, but we still have not received a clear report of the situation. We need to find out what is going on in order to catch the culprit behind it.”

“It takes time. After all, we only have a few clues so we need to continue to investigate.”

“There’s no time! The price increase is drastically affecting our public support. We must think of a way to reverse this situation right now or the whole country will fall into chaos soon.”

What’s the point of saying that? You’ve might as well say nothing.

Peter pressed his palm against his forehead and sighed. They had been meeting every day, but they weren’t able to find a solution. At this moment, a dark figure stood up.

“I have something to say.”

Borde.

Hearing this voice, Old Peter suddenly grew interested. He quickly grabbed his glasses and readied the quill pen in his hand.

Borde was in his forties. His thick lips and golden hair meticulously combed to the back gave off a dignified feeling. Dressed in a simple black jacket, he stepped towards the podium, causing the noisy parliament hall to quiet down.

“I think this discussion is a waste of time. We should not be thinking how to solve it. No matter how we deliberate, we have to accept what already happened. Right now as we speak, the commodity price is still increasing. While the difference isn’t big, it is still making the people unhappy. Haven’t you guys heard?”

Borde proceeded to point towards the window.

“That’s right. That’s the sound of protest. We’ve been entrusted with a heavy responsibility — we cannot let them down now. While I agree that we still have to continue to investigate the attacks, our priority should be to stabilize the price to avoid further turmoil. This is what we’re supposed to do!”

“But how do we do that, Mr. Borde?”

Hearing a parliament member inquire, Mr. Borde smiled.

“We can ask the Munn Kingdom for help. Let them solve our current shortage and re-stabilizing the market price.”

“I object!”

“I also object!”

Someone immediately stood up and expressed their opposition.

“Our relationship with them is the same as before. There had been no response from the Munn Kingdom after such a long time. That simply means that they do not want to help us! If we take the initiative to request aid from them, they might use this as a foothold to force us to make future concessions and compromise!”

“That’s right! That tyrant of a dictator... I don’t believe that woman would be kind enough to help us without benefits.”

“Why would she bother about whether we live or die? She’s an evil being that wouldn’t hesitate to kill her own people as long as she can stabilize her reign. How can this kind of person be an angel? It’s just difficult to imagine. I object to this proposal, Mr. Borde. Our Country of Light’s thrives on liberalism, I absolutely refuse to bow down to evil.”

“Nevertheless, no matter what, the Munn Kingdom is ultimately still our ally.”

Facing the majority opposition, Borde waved his arm passionately.

“We have no other option. The other countries neither have enough resources nor the ability to help us. We should send our messenger to express our goodwill to her Miss Lydia as soon as possible. As long as they are willing to trade with us with low rates, we can let them decide the requirements of the proposal. I hope everyone here can understand where I am coming from. Right now, our petty squabbles will put nothing on the

table, and I'm sure you don't need me to remind all of you about the forecasted results of next year's election if we do nothing about this matter... I think all of you should understand what I'm saying."

Hearing this, those who opposed Borde's views appeared to quieten down. They looked at each other helplessly, seemingly unable to reply with anything constructive. However, there were still people who voiced out their opinion.

"But... but what happens if the people found out that we requested assistance from the Munn Kingdom? If this spreads, we will receive quite a heavy blow as well..."

"I think all of you needn't worry regarding this point."

Borde pressed his hands down.

"The people are mainly worried about the increasing prices. As long as we don't talk about it, no one would know where the food and goods came from. Bowing down to the Munn Kingdom isn't something to be proud of, but for sake of the people of our country, we must relinquish our pride."

Borde paused for a moment.

"They didn't know about our matters before, so naturally they aren't going to find out about this one now."

When the parliament members heard this, the anxiety in their eyes finally dissipated and was replaced by happiness. Indeed, this matter had bogged them down for so long; hence it was natural that they felt relieved. These members of parliament undoubtedly knew that as long as they could appease the public's anger, they would be able to clinch next year's election.

As for face? What's that? Can that be eaten?

"Then, Mr. Borde, the matter regarding the messenger..."

"I will go in person."

Borde puffed out his chest and said confidently, “I will show our parliament’s greatest sincerity to Miss Lydia.”

Then Borde held his head up towards the front.

“I hope the parliament will grant me this approval.”

Facing Borde’s resolution, the old man who was sitting on the top did not speak for a while. Then he sighed. After scanning the room briefly, he reluctantly nodded his head.

“I accept your request, the parliament will vote for it at the next meeting.”

That old thing.

All the parliament members thought the same thing and glanced at the old man in disdain. He was already so old, how long did he want to stay in that position? Damn, if it wasn’t for him, how could have the parliament become this passive?

Hmph. It looks like he’s going to be pulled down on the next election. By that time...

As many of the members thought of this, they still maintained their attention on the man who stood confidently at the podium.

It might be the arrival of a new era.

—

At this moment, in the distant Deep Stone City, another scene was going on in the Mercenary Association.

“That damned bastard!!”

The mercenaries were surprised to see Billy. His face was pale as he slammed the door behind him. He stomped through the hall and left the Mercenary Association before entering a luxurious carriage just outside the building.

“What’s the matter?”

A man who was hiding in the shadow asked.

“That guy denied everything.”

Billy spread out his arms helplessly.

“Although I’ve have done it according to your request and showed every evidence and magical projection that could prove that he was the murderer, he wasn’t moved at all and said that it was something that we fabricated!!”

Recalling Rhode’s calm expression, Billy gnashed his teeth in anger. He really wanted to cut off Rhode’s head by himself. He spent so much time, said so many words, and even revealed the evidence, but that guy actually reversed all of it.

“What’s the Mercenary Association’s response?”

“They said that they will continue to investigate.”

Chapter 80 - Requesting Reinforcements

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Old President and Sereck weren't dumb. Naturally they wouldn't want to be entangled in the hot mess between the Munn Kingdom and the Country of Light. Meanwhile, they were also grateful to Rhode for providing them the information regarding the mercenary groups and the undead. As they kept a record of commissions, they came to the exact conclusion as Old Walker, stating that it was truly an unusual occurrence.

The Mercenary Association could ignore the problem between the two countries, but they could not disregard the danger before them. As the highest-ranking members of the Mercenary Association, the President and Sereck had already caught a whiff of matters even before Rhode's warning. It was especially obvious when several mercenary groups came back with severe casualties.

“Looks like something is lurking in the shadows.”

Putting down a parchment on his hand, Sereck's expression darkened.

“Something like this actually happened... I really did not expect it. If I knew it earlier, I would've stayed.”

“It's too late to regret it now, old friend.”

The Old President sighed and rolled his eyes towards Rhode.

“What do you think about it?”

“Perhaps it's because those undead creatures are valuable?”

Rhode was clearly ignoring him, causing the Old President to roll his eyes again. He sighed deeply in his heart, questioning himself why he even bothered asking Rhode anyway.

“The commissioners came from different regions. The only thing they have in common is that they’re all not locals...”

Reading the record on his hands, Sereck expression became slightly more stern.

“I can’t tell if it’s a conspiracy or not from the information we’ve gotten so far, but even for a coincidence it’s slightly unbelievable.”

Knock knock knock!

At this moment, a rapid knocking sound suddenly came from behind the door and broke the dull atmosphere in the room. The three of them glanced over, and the Old President’s expression turned solemn.

“Come in.”

“M-Mr. President!”

The door pushed open and a mercenary drenched in blood rushed in with Old Hank following closely behind. From his clothing, it can be said that he resembled a thief.

“What happened?!” The President abruptly sprang up and asked.

The bloodied mercenary appeared using all his remaining strength to stand before the President, and it was evident that he couldn’t hold on for much longer.

“S-Sir, our mission failed... I finally managed to escape... Please, please send reinforcements to help my comrades...”

“You are...”

Sereck quickly walked towards the mercenary. After carefully looking at him he said, "Aren't you Chad from the 'Victorious Wine' mercenary group? What happened to you?"

"We, we accepted a commission to the Silent Ridge. But, we didn't expect so many undead there... The vice-leader had already died and our leader barely saved our lives. However, they are being surrounded by undead right now as we speak... I don't know how long they can hold on..."

"What the heck? Silent Plateau?!"

Sereck no longer remained calm after hearing this.

"That's a five Star-Ranked mission! Your mercenary group isn't qualified to take this mission!"

"We, we know... But our mission was only to search for an item within the outer borders... so we thought that it wasn't going to be dangerous. Who knew that..."

"Forget it; there's no use saying these now."

Sereck sighed.

"Hank, take him to receive treatment immediately. I will think of a solution with the President."

"Yes, Sir Sereck."

Old Hank agreed and carried the mercenary back. When the mercenary left, Sereck shook his head.

"Foolish! How can they be that stupid! They actually dared to venture into Silent Plateau? That place is the Country of Darkness's border. Bunch of fools... just because of money they dared to disregard their lives."

"What should we do now?"

“Since they requested for reinforcements, we must help them. This is the responsibility of our Mercenary Association. Even if it was a casual group, as long as they’ve formally registered with us, they will be protected under our wing.”

“But...”

The President’s old face revealed a troubled expression.

“Firstly, let’s not even mention how dangerous that place is. Even if we wanted reinforcements, there are only a few available mercenary groups left in Deep Stone City. Both of us know that they’ve just returned from a devastating defeat. Requesting reinforcements from them is practically impossible.”

“So... should I go alone?”

“Don’t joke, old friend.”

The President immediately shook his head.

“What’s the use if you go there alone? This is a five Star-Ranked mission! Yes, you are a master swordsman and you can guarantee your own life... but can you also bring the others back safely?”

“...”

Sereck did not answer.

He was clear of his own strength. Much of his talent lies within his swordsmanship, so he wasn’t good at commanding mercenary groups. Going there to kill the undead wasn’t an issue, but killing the undead while bringing a group of injured people back... Hahaha, gotta be kidding...

At this time, a voice sounded.

“I think you have forgotten that there’s still a mercenary group without any injuries.”

“Hm?”

President and Sereck immediately turned towards Rhode who had remained silent for the whole time. Right now he was crossing his arms while leaning against the chair, quietly watching them.

“You mean Starlight?”

The Old President shook his head and laughed.

“Kid... your mercenary group only possess five or six members right now... Even if you have twice or trice of that, Silent Plateau isn't a place for your level. Don't make things even more troublesome.”

“That's your opinion, not mine, old man.”

Rhode didn't back down. Instead, he moved his body to get more comfortable.

“I have confidence in my subordinates, and believe me — my familiarity with Silent Plateau is far more than you can imagine...”

“Oh?”

Both of them were stunned momentarily, then the Old President laughed and opened his mouth to say something. However, Sereck stopped him. He walked towards Rhode and carefully scrutinized the young man.

“Are you sure you can handle it?”

“I never take on a mission that I'm not sure of. Moreover, you're coming with me right? I have no doubts of your strength.”

Rhode stood up.

“I have two conditions, however.”

“What conditions?” The Old President was puzzled.

Rhode whipped out one finger.

“First, you must look for four clerics for me. There must be some within the Association, right?”

“There is, but...”

The Old President frowned and stared at Rhode suspiciously. He didn't understand what he was going to do with four clerics.

“What do you need them for? You should realize that those kids do not have much adventuring experience since they are mainly responsible for the Association's internal first-aid department. Let me inform you — they do not know any offensive spells. Don't expect them to help you kill the undead.”

“That is my problem. You only have to wait for me to bring them back safely. You have my word. Now, I want to know whether you agree to this condition.”

“Sure.”

The old President didn't hesitate long before agreeing to Rhode's condition. Anyway, it wasn't a big deal, and he was also curious why would he ask for four clerics.

“I'll get them to prepare. After that, they'll follow Sereck to join you guys. What about the second condition?”

“The second condition is simple.”

Rhode held out another finger.

“I want to know how many points I can get after this mission.”

The Old President's face finally turned green.

“You greedy bastard! You can actually speak of this condition at this kind of time?!”

“That’s exactly why I must talk about the conditions with you, old man.”

Rhode put down his right hand and shrugged.

“After all, this is also a mission and we are risking our lives... Isn’t some kind of compensation appropriate?”

In the end, the President agreed to Rhode’s conditions. Old President could choose to bargain further, but he knew that this matter was urgent and thus relented to Rhode’s conditions.

If Starlight could complete the mission and come back safely, the Mercenary Association would give them a five Star-Ranked mission reward together with gold coins and some magic equipment.

The reward can’t be said to be abundant, but also can’t be said to be meager for a five Star-Ranked mission.

After everything, they finally agreed to prepare to move out the next day at dawn. Rhode promptly left the Mercenary Association after the discussion.

“I really don’t know what you are thinking!”

The Old President was in a huff as he slumped in his chair angrily, giving a dissatisfied look at Sereck who returned his glare with a smile.

“Do you really think that kid is telling the truth? I think that he’s just uttering nonsense. Is the Silent Plateau a resort where he can choose to come and go as he wishes? He even said that he is familiar with it? Nonsense!”

“I don’t think so.”

Sereck smiled bitterly and shook his head.

“You must recognize his achievements as well. When the kid had just established his mercenary group, he immediately took on Pavel Cemetery and came back without any casualties while saving the Red Hawk mercenary group in the process. That young lad said that he is familiar with

the undead... is it really a coincidence? He even felled the Necromancer who had lived for so many years.”

“What are you trying to say Sereck?”

“I’m not trying to say anything...”

Sereck turned his head and gazed out the window.

“I just think that young man is a fascinating fellow...”

Chapter 81 - Heading Towards Silent Highland (6000 Words)

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Before the sun rose on the second day, Rhode arrived at the Deep Stone City's entrance with his group. Sereck, who was equipped with his usual leather armor and magic sword, was even earlier than him. At this moment, Sereck indeed resembled a mercenary. Upon seeing Rhode's arrival, Sereck stepped forward and waved at them.

“You're just on time.”

Sereck nodded in satisfaction. Then, he swept his gaze over Lize, Marlene and Old Walker. His eyes stopped upon resting on Anne, who made him surprised for a moment. Though he quickly recovered and greeted everyone with a smile.

“Looks like you're ready.”

“Yeah.”

Rhode answered calmly.

While the group might seem calm and collected, when Rhode dropped the bomb on them last night, everyone expressed their shock differently.

Lize felt worried for the safety of the group, naturally.

Marlene was full of spirit as she didn't know where Silent Plateau was.

Old Walker complained that Rhode was seeking death.

And Anne had no opinions on the matter as she had only been freeloading so far. Thus, her reaction was as though they were about to go on a field

trip.

“What about the people I requested for?”

“They’re here.”

Sereck waved his arm and four young girls came from behind him. The oldest among them was about twenty-five years old, and the youngest was approximately around Lize’s age.

Contrary to the veteran mercenaries, these four Clerics explicitly revealed their fear on their faces. It was not surprising as not many Clerics would be willing to follow a mercenary group out into the wilderness. Lize was a special exception indeed.

“All of them can cast healing spells and Barrier. Well, lad, I must remind you that they belong to the Mercenary Association. Although my old friend forced himself to agree to your request, it doesn’t mean that you can send them to their deaths. I will make it clear right now — if anything happens to these children, I will leave with them immediately. As for the journey afterward, you can only rely on yourself.”

“Not a problem.”

Hearing Sereck’s reminder, Rhode didn’t say anything else and thanked him. Then he made his way towards the four Clerics who looked at him with skepticism and uneasiness. Frankly, they didn’t want to go, but as a member of the Mercenary Association, they must obey their orders.

In some ways, Clerics were more fragile than mages.

“I think you guys should be aware where we are heading to.” Rhode ignored their gazes and spoke calmly, “You should know that it’s incredibly dangerous there and you might die. However, as long as you follow my command, you will be safe.”

Rhode spread out his hands.

“Please remember to follow my command. If I tell you to do something, just do it and believe in the results. If you do as I say, you will not encounter any danger. I understand that right now, it’s my word against yours, but the facts will soon prove my credibility. As such, I don’t want anyone to disobey my command no matter what situation arises. I hope that none of you will do something that would make me unhappy.”

Rhode paused for a moment and swept his gaze over the four Clerics who had various expressions.

“I will leave you to Lize. If you have any questions, you can ask her. I know that some of you might be superior to her in strength, but with regards to teamwork and adventuring, neither one of you can hold a candle to her. If you don’t want to suffer, then you’d better listen to her instructions.”

Rhode said no more and he signaled everyone to begin moving. Meanwhile, Sereck made his way towards Rhode with a bitter smile.

“Honestly... aren’t you a little too harsh on these ladies?”

“I’m not interested in currying their favor.”

Rhode shrugged and shook his head.

“We’re here to carry out the mission. This is neither a field trip nor a blind date, so I don’t have time to care whether they like me or not — I only need them to follow my command, that’s all. In any case, I will have nothing to do with them once we complete this mission.”

“Nothing is for certain.” Sereck smiled. “The way you talk is somewhat like an army officer.”

“Is that so?”

Hearing that comparison, Rhode frowned.

“That’s right, that kind of determination and decisiveness when facing a mission... Well, in my opinion, an ordinary mercenary won’t have such a skill.”

Rhode didn't reply as he turned around and walked to the carriage.

Silent Plateau wasn't a place near Deep Stone City; furthermore, there were people in the group who weren't accustomed to adventuring. Hence, Sereck arranged a caravan to be used for transportation. The caravan had six wheels and required eight horses to pull them forward. Since the Mercenary Association wasn't as strict as the army, caravans like this were often used as transportation for members of the Association.

Although there were strong offshore winds in Silent Plateau, the Mercenary Association forbid them from using a floating ship to travel there. The reason was simple. Firstly, because of the recent attacks on merchants, floating ships were wide open targets. Secondly, that place had no port and Rhode and his entourage had no experience in jumping from high altitudes. This world had no parachute, and even if they landed safely, they might be eaten by an undead instead.

Dying before accomplishing anything wasn't something worth boasting.

Thus, while a caravan might be slower, but it was far safer than the floating ship.

Unfortunately, things do not always go as planned.

The road to Silent Plateau wasn't fun — it was riddled with bumps and weeds as almost no one would dare to travel to this haunted place. Even Lize and Old Walker who were seasoned mercenaries could not take it, not to mention Marlene and the other four Clerics. They no longer cared about their image as they crawled out of the caravan and puked. Though oddly enough, Anne had a calm expression as she slept alone in the corner of the caravan.

According to their original plan, after reaching Silent Plateau, all of them would get off and move out immediately. Alas, everyone was currently blue in their faces, and their legs felt like jelly. They hadn't even encountered their first enemy... but were already on their fours. Rhode and Sereck had no choice but to rest for half a day before setting off.

“I hope that those guys can hold on until we arrive.”

Rhode whispered to himself as he stared at the ominous clouds above the dark, eerie forest.

Night had already fallen, but the forest was abnormally still — not even a single animal sound could be heard from within.

Rhode knew what was ahead — it was nothing else but the aura of death. He really hoped that those people could hold on until they arrived.

But Rhode did not put much faith in their ability to survive as he had experienced plenty of similar quests back in the game. Most of the time, NPCs would succumb to death before their reinforcement arrive, which was truly a depressing matter considering how much effort Rhode had to put in to fight his way to the rescue location.

“No need to worry.”

Sereck was more optimistic than Rhode.

“I know the leader of Victorious Wine. He is a vigilant young man; he won’t die that easily. Even if his chance of survival is close to zero, we still have to try since we are all part of the Mercenary Association.”

Responsibility.

Rhode didn’t reply Sereck. The Mercenary Association appeared to be a strong organization on the surface, and they were highly-regarded among mercenary groups. However, it didn’t mean that they had the power to forcefully disband a mercenary group to enhance their status. Power and responsibility always came hand-in-hand. The mercenaries would listen to the Mercenary Association’s orders, and in turn, the Mercenary Association would aid the mercenaries whenever needed.

Requesting for reinforcement was one such perk members of the Mercenary Association had. Whether they were alive or dead, once the Mercenary Association receives their request, they will send people to their rescue.

This display of reliability proved to be far stronger than any contract; in fact, the reason why most mercenary groups dared to explore was also because of this.

Trust was priceless.

“I... I can't go on anymore, Lize.”

Marlene sagged against the tree. Her legs wobbled like jelly, and her head was spinning uncontrollably. A nauseous sensation took over her body; it felt even worse than the magic plant she had accidentally eaten. She tilted her head upwards to suppress the vomit rushing up to her throat while Lize quickly cast a spell to alleviate her condition.

“Bear with it Marlene. Take a deep breath and rest for a while.”

“Take a deep...urghh...!!!”

Marlene's body suddenly arched and her throat convulsed uncontrollably.

...It seemed like she had barfed last night's dinner.

The other Clerics fared no better than Marlene. Fortunately, they were blessed with healing spells. However, they still appeared to be haggard as they lay on the ground, exhausted. If anyone saw their plight right now, they would've thought that they had encountered an undead attack.

“Yawn...”

Only one person was totally unaffected by the ride.

Anne.

She yawned as she climbed down from the caravan and proceeded to stretch her stiff body. After stretching, she looked strangely at the people eyeing her and found that all the girls were staring daggers at her.

So unfair...

Then she turned towards Rhode and said, “Ah, leader, have we arrived? When should we start?”

“Three hours from now. Let them rest for a little bit.”

Facing the girl who had hopped over to him energetically, Rhode quickly pointed towards the base camp and replied.

“You also should go eat something and take a rest. After that, we will start our mission. Don’t forget your duty.”

“Of course~ Rest assured leader. When Anne is here, there will be no problem!”

After answering him, Anne hummed her way to base camp and whipped out a few pieces of meat from the bag to eat by the campfire. Comparing this girl who had plenty of energy to spare to the half-dead Marlene and gang, it was quite... a contrast.

“I didn’t expect you to recruit her.”

Sereck took two cups of hot water and sat beside Rhode. At the same time, he handed one over.

“It looks like you have something up your sleeves.”

“You know Anne?”

Rhode took the cup Sereck offered to him and asked casually.

“I have met her a few times before. While her personality is indeed quite troublesome, her ability is top-notch. Don’t judge her by how easy-going appears to be, because when she gets serious, that girl can be really powerful.”

“I think so too.”

He hadn’t interact with Anne often, but looking at her performance from the recruitment test, he could clearly see that her ability was unique, and...

“Do you know about her past?”

With that petite body, Anne was able to pick up a shield in one hand and throw it with ease. Rhode couldn't help but frown. He thought that his Vitality and Strength stat was already considered fairly high, but to pick up a shield that weighed dozens of kilograms was definitely not an easy feat. In fact, before coming here, Rhode had given Anne the Rock Heart Shield which he acquired from the Rock of Lament to add some additional impact to her attacks. And that shield certainly wasn't something light.

Anne was so ecstatic after receiving the magic shield that she even rushed over and kissed him. This made Rhode smile bitterly, but since her personality was like this, he could only leave it at that.

“I can't say for certain, but I do know that the Mark White mercenary group found her on the mountain. At that time, she was only one or two years old, and she lived together with a wild beast. That old fellow brought her out and fostered her. It sure as hell wasn't an easy thing... I recalled that she would bite anyone who touched her and that old fellow was bitten numerous times by her. ”

“Frankly, a lot of people told him to sell this girl, after all, there was no use in keeping her. But that old fellow was stubborn and insisted on keeping her. Eventually, he taught her how to talk, write and learn like a human. Perhaps at that point, he already thought of her as his own daughter. The child gradually grew to resemble more like a human, but her personality... well, I've heard everything that happened to Mark White and leaving was a good thing. This child's strength is insanely strong, we've suspected that she was of a Barbarian descent, but...”

Then, Sereck smiled.

“I have never seen such a slender Barbarian in my life before. Even if she's a dwarf, she's a little too tall. Furthermore, she's also quite a beauty.”

Sereck paused, and his expression suddenly turned serious.

“Alright, enough of the chit-chat, let’s get back to the real topic. I want to know how you will bring us into the Silent Plateau safely. You said that you are very familiar with this place... I don’t know whether it is true or not, but I believe in you. As your comrade, I want to know your plan.”

“Of course, that’s not a problem.”

Rhode raised his head and revealed an expression of unprecedented self-confidence.

It wasn’t just a false front; he truly had the experience to back his confidence. Back in the game, the Silent Plateau was a troublesome dungeon. Many players even called it the ‘Holy Land of Guild Extermination,’ and anyone who stepped into the area would face death. This was why everyone skipped this dungeon because according to many, the loots weren’t lucrative either. Since the dungeon was difficult, yet its rewards were miserable, no player would want to run it at all.

As the King of First Kill in the game, Rhode had undoubtedly completed this dungeon and created a popular formation among the players called the ‘9+1 formation.’

The ‘9+1 formation’ consisted of nine Clerics and a player with huge AoE attacks. In the dungeon, Rhode would protect the Clerics who used their holy spells to suppress the undead.

After that, the Silent Plateau that was once hailed as the ‘Holy Land of Guild Extermination’ became a place for Clerics to farm experience. Since they were only a supporting class, it was difficult for them to level up besides going to dungeons with other players or clearing Silent Plateau with the ‘9+1 formation.’ Therefore, the dungeon became a Cleric’s primary leveling spot. Whether they were aspiring to be PKers or PvE players, as long as they could complete Silent Plateau smoothly, they could be considered to have mastered their class in skill and experience.

As the guild leader, Rhode would often bring his Clerics to level up and practice in the dungeon. As for himself, he could probably walk through this place with his eyes closed.

There was another matter which was somewhat interesting. At one time, he brought some Clerics to clear the dungeon, and at the final stage, the BOSS somehow didn't appear. This left him no choice but to leave the dungeon to reset. After this incident spread, a lot of players said that the BOSS had been killed by Rhode far too many times and was scared to appear.

That was why although Silent Plateau was feared by many, Rhode had nothing to be afraid of.

This time, Rhode had brought five Clerics which clearly wasn't sufficient for the '9+1 formation', but he wasn't worried at all. After all, he was the one who developed this formation, so he knows the ins-and-outs of it at the back of his hand. Furthermore, the Mercenary Association wouldn't provide him with eight or nine Clerics, so four was adequate. Lize had an angel bloodline and could fill two slots in the formation and Marlene had AoE spells, so that was not a problem.

Lastly, Sereck also participated in this mission. A level 40 Swordmaster was enough to fill the remaining gap.

Thus, Rhode was extremely confident.

“For this mission, the Clerics will be our main source of damage.”

“Clerics?”

Sereck couldn't help but feel slightly surprised.

“Although I have anticipated this... but lad, you have to understand that a Cleric isn't a Soul Knight. They do not possess offensive spells, and furthermore, these people have no combat experience. Do you really want to push them to face the undead?”

Rhode shook his head.

“There's no need for them to enter the frontlines. It's better for them to attack from the rear.”

“So I hope Mr. Sereck can join them in the rear and protect them. Our pressure will surely lessen if you’re there. However, I’m still slightly worried as you’ve said that they had never been in a battle before.”

“Our pressure will lessen?”

Sereck was confused. He visited the Silent Plateau before and understood that the undead would endlessly rush them in waves. Even he, as a Master Swordsman would have difficulty facing the undead horde. So how can this young man say that their pressure will lessen if he went to the rear?

Perhaps he’s not afraid of the undead?

Is he bluffing? Or does he really have a way?

Suddenly, as Sereck was deep in thought, Old Walker’s silhouette appeared from the forest with a grim expression.

“I have found the tracks they left behind.”

He walked to Rhode and said in low voice.

Chapter 82 - Entering Silent Plateau

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Everyone finally recovered after resting for a while and began their journey into the forest.

The forest was dead silent; not even the sound of crickets could be heard.

As the group made their way into the dense foliage, their shadows quickly blended into the darkness. Most of the light couldn't permeate through the leaves, shrouding the whole area in darkness.

Since this area was in between the Country of Light and the Country of Darkness, it was considered the darkest place among the people from the Country of Light.

“There's someone over there!”

One of the Clerics was startled and quickly pointed towards a direction. Not too far from them, a pale face silently watched them.

“Ignore them, let's continue moving.”

Rhode didn't bother to turn his head and continued to press forward. However, a lingering fear caused the Cleric to hesitate.

“But those evil spirits... they...”

“If you don't bother them, they won't bother you.”

At this moment, Rhode felt like he was bringing along a bunch of noobs. Every time they witness something scary, they would scream. Especially those female players... though their expression varied among the first-

timers. Some were indifferent, some were calm, some screamed their head off, and some just froze in fear. Rhode had seen them all. In the beginning, Rhode was kind enough to give them advice, but after several batches of newbies, he finally got tired of it.

They were just scaring themselves; if they could be distracted by these things, what would happen when they enter the inner areas of Silent Plateau? Wouldn't they have a seizure and fall to the ground?

“B-but...”

Seeing how Rhode nonchalantly dismissed her fears, the Cleric felt offended. From her perspective, evil spirits were the bane of the living. Since Rhode had the numerical advantage right now, why won't he give the command to attack? And now, as they walked deeper into the forest, the number of evil spirits began to increase. The evil spirits lurked in the shadows, flashing from one tree to another as they observed the group of humans with its dead eyes.

As they went advanced deeper into the forest, the number of evil spirits kept increasing. Even Marlene, Lize, and Old Walker couldn't help but feel nervous. They kept a constant watch on their surroundings in case an evil spirit would suddenly rush out and eat them. The four Clerics almost couldn't walk, if it wasn't because of Rhode's quick pace and the fact that they didn't want to be left behind, perhaps they would've already stopped walking in fear.

Only Rhode and Sereck remained calm. Rhode was confident that the evil spirits wouldn't attack them. Even though their numbers might appear intimidating, it was just a mask to hide their weakness. If no one provoked them, they wouldn't attack. Nevertheless, they would still become aggressive and prey on those who couldn't bear the pressure.

However, Rhode still assigned Sereck to the rear as a contingency plan. If any of the Clerics decided to flee in terror, at least Sereck could prevent them from committing suicide.

Though in the end, none of them were as cowardly as Rhode thought. Yes, they were scared, but throughout the journey, none of them chose to run away. Rhode was slightly impressed and his admiration for them rose. Perhaps it was due to their class which made their mental fortitude somewhat higher than casual players since they had seen real dead bodies before. For players, they might appear confident and brave when speaking about the deceased, but when faced with a real dead body in front of them? They were no better than the other next to them.

Alright, at least right now we won't have this problem.

Rhode swung his scabbard to clear the overhanging branches, revealing a magical scene in front of everyone.

The dense forest was akin to a thick curtain that blocked the backdrop of the stage. Now that the curtain had finally been drawn, everything was laid bare for all to see.

A vast prairie stretched out from end to end. Worn-out weapons and rotting equipment could be seen sprawling on the wide, open ground in the tall grass.

A long time ago, this place had been a tragic battlefield. The Country of Light and Darkness competed and fought for this prairie for two hundred years. In this long and arduous period, countless of people perished, and their blood nourished the prairie's soil. However, even after death, their presence did not vanish completely.

Whether they were the living or the dead, no one knew. Even the upper echelons of both the Country of Light and Darkness could not answer this question. In this wide open prairie, the souls of the dead were summoned once again as they wandered the land, fighting each other for all eternity.

And that was the current situation that Rhode was observing right now.

On the surface, it appeared like the prairie was empty, but in the distance, there was a light that would flash at certain intervals which lit up the darkness momentarily. One can imagine it as a ballroom with the lights

turned off — whenever the light was turned on, it would sweep through the dark and reveal shadows of people clashing, shouting and killing each other.

Just at the front of Rhode was a shadow of a warrior whose body resembled an arrow pincushion. It crawled towards Rhode, slowly revealing its skeletal face that was devoid of flesh and somehow managed to produce an expression that clearly reflected its anger.

Suddenly, the warrior gripped its sword and dashed towards Rhode, swinging it downwards at frightening speeds. But as soon as it arrived right in front of Rhode, the light went off, and so did the shadow.

It was as if everything was just a show.

That was the most troublesome and challenging part of Silent Plateau. The undead would appear at random, unpredictable points in time and if the undead did not disappear, their attacks must be blocked. What would happen if the light suddenly chose to shine in the middle of the group?

They would just run...

In this place, the Mage spell Black Curtain was useless. The darkness here wasn't an ordinary kind of darkness; it was even different from the Country of Darkness. The dark in this place had combined with the light and completely turned into another element; it simply couldn't be described just how strange it was.

Then what should they do? To a lot of players, it wasn't a complicated thing.

The best way to avoid being passive was to take the initiative.

“Lize, Holy Light.”

Rhode gestured towards Lize.

A magical ball of Holy Light immediately appeared on her palm and illuminated the surroundings.

The warrior who previously tried to attack Rhode once again appeared, but before he could swing its sword down, Rhode used the pommel of his sword to smash the warrior's skeletal body, causing it to crash to the ground and break into pieces. Then, pieces turned into dust and disappeared with the wind.

“All of you should be aware of the dangers of this place by now.”

Rhode turned around and addressed the people behind him. Lize and the other mercenaries turned serious. They weren't fools; they understood Rhode's intent of showing them the dangers of the Silent Plateau. They thought that even if was a heavily-armed mercenary group, they would probably think twice before coming here.

“Well, I have good news. All of you don't have to worry about the random appearance of that odd light because I can assure that from this moment on, the enemy will appear from everywhere!”

Rhode didn't turn his head as his sword made a quick motion. A silver arc flashed in the darkness and sliced an undead into two.

“Which is why I need all of you to focus. Old Walker, you must pay close attention to the rear. Marlene, Lize, I need both of you to occupy the left and right side respectively. Anne, it's your job to protect them. Remember, do not stop moving! This place houses countless of undead, and as long as we can pass this prairie, we will win. Do all of you understand?”

“Yes, leader~!”

Anne was relaxed as usual. She smiled and waved her hand playfully as she answered Rhode's command. Her behavior made the others think that this young miss did not understand the gravity of the situation.

Especially those Clerics — initially, they thought that they could rely on the Shield Warrior for protection, but after looking at her behavior, it wasn't surprising why they were beginning to feel like Anne wasn't reliable.

If it weren't for Sereck, perhaps they would've already ran away.

“Follow me.”

Rhode took a step forward.

The very next second, something terrifying happened.

The light which penetrated the darkness. Hundreds of undead who were clashing with one another appeared once more. After being exposed to the light, as though as they had been rehearsing for this moment, all of them screamed in unison and rushed towards Rhode’s group at the same time!

This is it.

Sereck’s expression drastically changed when he watched this scene unfold. Previously, when he had a trial in this place, the incident that left the greatest impression on him was this — the countless of undead that emerged endlessly from the darkness.

When looking at a vast army, though it may seem slightly hopeless, at least they could use their eyes to estimate how many people were there. However, in this ghastly place, one can never see the end of the waves of undead, and can only fight until they were exhausted. It was also because of this that many people weren’t able to endure.

There’s nothing scarier than the feeling of hopelessness.

Then how would Rhode deal with it?

Sereck couldn’t wait to see it. He focused on defending the rear while periodically glancing at the battle to the front. He wanted to see what Rhode would do to ‘lessen the pressure.’

When Sereck’s eyes fell upon Rhode, he was surprised as Rhode wasn’t feeling nervous at all!

“Lize, cast Divine Brilliance to the front.”

Rhode calmly pointed towards a direction.

“Yes, Mr. Rhode!”

While wielding the Holy Light on her left hand, Lize stretched out her right arm, and soon a divine beam of light dropped from the heavens and enveloped the undead inside.

“The same goes with all of you. Cast Divine Brilliance at the same place.”

The four Clerics was slightly taken aback when Rhode suddenly addressed them. Still, they followed his command meticulously and lifted their arms to cast Divine Brilliance.

A few beams of divine light enveloped the undead, causing their movement speed and reaction time to drop further. By the time when all the Clerics finally cast Divine Brilliance, the undead’s movement was akin to an old grandma, seemingly unable to move as though trapped in a swamp.

“Marlene, Chain Lightning.”

A crackle emerged from her fingertips, and in a blink of an eye, it shot toward the undead horde.

At first it was a single, faint arc of lightning, but when it hit its first victim, the lightning forked and struck a few undead that were close by. The lightning continued to spread from one undead to another, and soon, the whole battlefield dazzled in a brilliant light. After a series of explosions, hundreds of undead fell to the ground and stopped moving.

“What...?”

Marlene was shocked when she saw how potent her spell was. She looked at her finger absentmindedly as she tilted her head in disbelief. Chain Lightning was one of the lowest-level spells — each lightning arc didn’t pack much power, and after forking to the next target, the damage of the spell would diminish slightly. Marlene initially thought that Rhode would’ve asked her to use a more powerful spell, but look at the situation now... she honestly doubted whether she was fighting a horde of undead or a horde of scarecrows.

Is such a way even possible?

Sereck, who was at the rear, also felt surprised. He knew that high-leveled Clerics and Soul Knights could use their spells to destroy the undead, but how could low-leveled Clerics do the same?

Hmm... That isn't right...

A high-leveled Cleric's Hammer of Judgement or the Soul Knight's Light of Sanction would destroy the undead within seconds, but all these low-leveled Clerics could do was slow its movement. However, it was sufficient.

Sereck could not help but glance at Rhode.

How did this young man figure out this method?

It wasn't only Sereck who was caught off guard. In fact, the four Clerics also felt pleasantly surprised! They reacted in the same way as Lize had when she first realized that her power could significantly influence the undead. Some of them even stared at their hands in doubt.

Unfortunately, Rhode didn't give them the time for them to slap themselves to check whether it was real or not.

“Now you know what you can do. Let's continue moving.”

Facing the countless of undead that once again appeared under the light, Rhode raised his sword and pointed forward.

(ED: Healing Spell -> Divine Brilliance)

Chapter 83 - Change

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

A fiery blaze roared past.

Then, an explosion erupted among the undead, sending waves of searing heat spreading in all directions. Anything the flame touched instantly turned to ash.

Marlene retrieved her hand; she could not remember how many undead she had already annihilated. However, never in her life had she been so exhilarated when casting a spell. Every wave of her hand would eradicate hundreds of undead. It gave her that awesome sensation of 'I can destroy anything!' She had seen her teacher wield the same kind of power, but the magic she used were high-level spells that Marlene couldn't cast. Now, Marlene was basking in the same sensation as her teacher; the only difference was that she was using a basic low-level spell.

Meanwhile, other than Marlene, the other Clerics also immersed in their role. Under Rhode's guidance, they launched Divine Brilliance one after another, sweeping its Holy Light to every corner and weakening the undead. Marlene, Rhode, and Sereck would then take advantage of their vulnerability to kill.

Old Walker stood in the middle of the group and shouted in several directions from time to time, pre-empting the group of which direction the undead was approaching from.

Anne also revealed her reliable side.

At the corner of her eye, she saw several skeleton archers launching a volley of Bluefire arrows towards them.

Anne swiftly reacted.

The shield on her right hand extended as she dashed to one of the Cleric's side. She lifted her shield in a timely manner and blocked some of the Bluefire arrows. Then, she spun around, twisted her body and threw her shield into the air.

The large, thick shield spun in the air, circling into the sky in an arc which swept away most of the arrows which were falling towards them. After that, the shield automatically circled back to Anne, who caught it easily with her right hand. The huge impact only made her lose a balance slightly.

Rhode didn't summon his spirits. In this place, the undead's strength relied heavily on their numbers; their individual strength was nothing at all. But if it was 'him' before, he might have to struggle quite bitterly here. Now, with the help of everyone, things have gotten much easier. After being suppressed by the Holy Element, the undead were as good as chicken sent to the slaughter. As they say, why use a sword to kill a chicken? Rhode didn't plan to waste his precious Soul Power on small fries.

Anywho, how did that Victorious Wine leader cross this treacherous path with his group?

If not because of him receiving the exact location from the survivor, he might think that he was bragging. If it was just a lone thief, perhaps it might not be too difficult to leave this place, but bringing a group of people? That was a whole different matter altogether. Still, Rhode thought that those were plainly lucky to be able to cross this place.

Unfortunately, good luck couldn't always stay with them.

"To the left!"

Rhode took out his sword and pointed in that direction. Everyone immediately turned around. He didn't pick the shortest straight line between two points because he knew that this prairie was a battlefield, and in the center, there were stronger types of undead. No, it wasn't just those skeleton archers or death knights, Rhode was referring to the spirits that had turned into magical beasts! Rhode didn't want to provoke these creatures

unnecessarily which was why he chose to circle around the center. That way, he had a lower chance of attracting the beast's attention.

No one spoke, even Sereck. Everyone quickly turned around, Anne switched her position from left to the right while the Clerics also moved to another location under Lize's leadership. During the change of formation, the Clerics had to suspend casting Divine Brilliance temporarily, causing the Holy Element to diminish slightly. At this moment, a horde of undead rushed over from the darkness and pounced on the group.

A sword flashed in the darkness.

The flash of light formed a wall of swords, and when the undead clashed into the wall, all of them completely stopped moving. When the light disappeared, what was left on the ground were incomplete corpses.

Sereck's mouth twitched as he retrieved his sword.

His admiration of Rhode grew even further. He had no choice but to admit, Rhode was much younger than him, yet he could command the mercenaries to fight with such efficiency with his experience. In the beginning, he thought he was going to utilize the same method again to deal with the undead, but halfway through, his way of fighting changed all of a sudden.

Sereck thought that Rhode would yell at the Clerics to cast Divine Brilliance, but he was wrong. Instead, he dived right into the horde and dealt with the stronger undead which could pose a threat to the Clerics, leaving the less threatening ones to the rest.

It wasn't as though Sereck hadn't thought of it; rather, it was that he couldn't make such a brilliant decision and micromanage his assets in the midst of the battle. Unlike him, Rhode seemed to be familiar with every class. He made the right decisions and commands at the right time. Thus, the group could understand his orders loud and clear. Sereck could even feel the dissatisfaction from the Clerics gradually fade away as they tried their best to complete their role.

Now, they were already two-thirds through their journey.

“Hey, the four of you. How long more can you hold out?”

Rhode said as he stared at the dark forest that was in the near distance.

“I can still cast at least four more Divine Brilliance.”

“Probably three more times?”

“I still can cast four to five times.”

Hearing their answer, Rhode frowned. The speed was too slow. It was no surprise though, after all, there were only five Clerics... that number was clearly insufficient to overwhelm the countless undead.

“Everyone gather! We’re going to rush in! Pay close attention to your surroundings — Anne, prioritize the Clerics, don’t let any of them fall behind. The four of you! Wait for my command and watch where I ask you to aim Divine Brilliance. Now... three, two, one... RUN!”

Upon hearing ‘run,’ everyone quickly sprinted and followed Rhode as closely as possible.

After the Holy Element field dispersed, the undead which were formerly suppressed, suddenly regained their agility and immediately chased after them. They rushed towards Rhode’s group in all directions. A few of the Clerics couldn’t keep up and looked back at the undead who were quickly catching up. Fortunately, Lize and Old Walker kept an eye on them, so they weren’t left behind.

“NOW!! RELEASE!”

A white flash of light swept around the undead horde four to five times consecutively. The undead which were nearby were forced back by Rhode. His sword sliced off an undead warrior’s head that was blocking his way, then he flipped his sword and swung it forward. Followed by a sharp, whirring sound, a silver light emerged from Rhode’s sword which enveloped the battlefield in an instant. In a blink of an eye, a large number

of undead were immediately shredded, leaving a huge, blank space in the middle of the battlefield.

Meanwhile, Marlene's spell was finally complete. A condensed magic phenomenon gathered around the tip of her wand; at first it flashed, then it soon formed into a terrifying hurricane.

The hurricane cleared another huge bunch of undead that barred their path. For a moment, the undead could only stare at the terrifying magic torrent which suddenly appeared. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Rhode finally made their way to the edge of the prairie — which was the meeting point.

“Enter the forest, quick!”

Rhode stopped and pointed towards the dense forest. While the darkness within the forest didn't appear safe, it was at least much better than being chased by waves of undead.

However, not everyone had Rhode's stamina and speed.

“Ah!”

A Cleric slipped and fell to the ground. When the another Cleric saw her fall, she also quickly stopped advancing and moved back to help her. But she didn't expect that her legs would give way as well. From the very beginning, these Clerics weren't suited for extreme physical activities. Having walked for such a long time and facing several hours of high-intensity battles, these Clerics were already at their limits.

“Quickly!! Get up!”

Sereck who was following close behind them hastily turned around and formed a sword barrier which blocked the undead from advancing. He didn't have any other way to deal with the endless undead while protecting the four Clerics.

“I-I can't stand up!!”

The Cleric who fell shouted in a trembling voice and began to cry. She could see that the undead were almost upon her, and although her survival instincts told her to stand, fear ultimately caused her legs to disobey her will. The girl panicked and used her hands to force herself to crawl forward. She wanted to get away from the undead even just by a little bit...

At this moment, a rotten hand suddenly emerged from the ground and caught her leg. In another direction, the undead finally broke the barrier and dashed forward.

“No!!”

When the two of them screamed, a shadow suddenly appeared.

Anne dashed forward like a cheetah. She expanded her shield and smashed into the undead like a train. Meanwhile, on the other side, a red sword pierced through the darkness and cut in a straight line. The hand which held the Cleric was immediately sliced in half. At the same time, Rhode’s voice bellowed.

“Lize, remove the spell!”

The white light immediately disappeared.

Everything turned into darkness.

The undead also disappeared.

“Sigh...”

Since the beginning, everything had gone smoothly... until now. Still, Rhode felt relieved. He lowered his sword and looked around.

“Are you guys okay? Is anyone injured?”

“W-We’re okay.”

The two girls that had almost died were trembling as they held each other tightly. They had never been so close to death before; it was as though they

would die once they closed their eyes.

“Anne?”

“Anne is very energetic! There’s no problem!”

“Mr. Sereck?”

“I’m fine, I’m not injured.”

“Can the both of you stand up?”

“Umm...”

Although the darkness hid their expressions, judging from their hesitant voice, Rhode could already guess the answer.

Really troublesome.

“Mr. Sereck, you and I will take care of one.”

“Okay.”

Saying until here, Rhode bent his body to carry one of the girls. This made her startled, but Rhode didn’t care.

“We must leave this place immediately. The journey ahead is still long... we can’t afford to delay any longer.”

Chapter 84 - A Helping Hand

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Everyone was dead tired after entering the forest. However, Rhode didn't allow them to stop and rest. Instead, he carried the Cleric who couldn't walk all the way until he found a spring. It was only until then did he let everyone take a breather.

“Haa...!!”

Finally! They were allowed to relax. Many of them slumped to the ground, refusing to move an inch. Old Walker whistled in a low voice as he sat on a rock to relax.

Sereck and Anne were the only two who were unaffected by fatigue. Both of them stared silently at their surroundings and at that one person who was running back and forth to distribute rations from time to time.

“How much longer do you need before you can recover your power?”

Rhode asked as he sat on a rock next to the Clerics. Since this wasn't a game, their HP and SP couldn't be replenished by merely sitting around, eating bread and drinking water. Soul Power was something that came from one's soul; perhaps it can be said to be similar to stamina. However, the only difference compared to stamina was that if one runs out of Soul Power, one could face permanent disablement — or even death.

In the game, once the SP was low, the character's stats would drop by half and if they couldn't find a place to restore their SP, well, they would soon become a non-combat liability.

In his current world, Rhode found out that it followed the same law. That was why casters like Marlene and Lize rarely used their Soul Power. They knew that once they couldn't keep up with loss of Soul Power, they were going to die.

“W-we need a-at least half an hour...”

Rhode frowned. That was too slow! One must realize that this place was nowhere safer than the battlefield from before. He didn't voice it out as he wanted to keep the morale strong, but he knew that the evil spirits in this place were different from the ones before. They would lurk in the shadows and attack at any moment. Their spirit characteristic made them difficult to catch, and the group would need the help of Clerics — especially Lize's Holy Light to hunt them efficiently. Alas, at this moment, Lize was leaning on Marlene's shoulder with her eyes closed. Rhode knew that she wouldn't be able to recover in a short period.

With so many delays... can those people still be saved?

Sereck caught Rhode frowning to himself.

“What's wrong?”

Rhode raised his head and saw the Swordmaster smiling at him.

“I'm just a little bit worried that we wasted too much time.”

Rhode shook his head.

“Wasted?”

Hearing him say that, Sereck couldn't help but break into a fit of laughter. Then he shook his head helplessly at the young man and remained silent for a moment. He just didn't know what to say at that moment!

In his opinion, what Rhode did was already perfect. From the time after entering Silent Plateau until now, their group didn't even take more than four hours. Even the battle on the prairie can be said to reflect his exemplary performance. There were neither any casualties nor injuries... only a bunch of tired people. Perhaps no one in the whole of Deep Stone City could match Rhode's skills in commanding.

When he saw Rhode frown, he thought that he was worried about some big problem. But in fact he was just disappointed because the group's progress

was too slow?

If word of this spread out, many mercenary group leaders would be ashamed of themselves...

“I think that what you’ve done is already quite good.”

Sereck didn’t know what was Rhode thinking about, so he smiled and tried to console Rhode by patting him on the shoulder.

“Even when I’m alone, it’s basically impossible for me to reach this place in such a short time. The fact that you can bring all of them here safely proves how strong you are as a mercenary group leader. At least in Deep Stone City, I’ve not seen one as reliable as you. But what makes me curious is...”

Sereck narrowed his eyes and scrutinized the young man in front of him.

“When did you figure out that the Cleric’s Divine Brilliance could weaken the undead? It shouldn’t be something that you’ve just thought of recently, right?”

“When I was in the Eastern Plains, I’ve fought countless of the undead. As you already may know, in some situations, people have no choice but to try various ways to try and survive.”

Rhode conjured a lie without batting an eyelid. But not all of his words were without basis. The Eastern Plain was situated along the border of the Country of Darkness. Though it might be the most secluded place in the Munn Kingdom, the conflict against the Country of Darkness never stopped. Due to the harsh nature and survival conditions, that place gave birth to a special class — Soul Hunter.

These warriors grew up in the Eastern Plain and can be said to have acquired a multitude of experiences when dealing with the undead. Stories told that when they first wield a sword, their first kill would be an undead. The battle between them lasted for a century, but both sides remained at a

deadlock. Eventually, everything was solved in private, so the conflict didn't blow out of proportions.

Sereck nodded. He didn't doubt Rhode's explanation since he knew Rhode's background. Instead, he was curious about why someone like him would leave that secluded place. Everyone in the Munn Kingdom knew that the Eastern Plains were a mysterious and solitary bunch. They didn't trade with other towns, and it was difficult for an outsider to enter their territory. They just stayed in their land and minded their own business, not caring about the outside world.

Sometimes Sereck wondered whether Rhode was that kind of person, but seeing it now with his own eyes, he realized that Rhode and the people of the Eastern Plain in his imagination had a vast discrepancy.

"I've heard rumors of the brave warriors of the Eastern Plain who battled against the undead day and night. Seeing one in person now... seems like the rumors are true."

Sereck was smart and chose to not linger on this topic any further. He shrugged and scanned the surroundings once more.

"This isn't a safe place."

Clearly, the Swordmaster could sense danger lurking in the forest.

"I know, but we can't do anything about it."

Rhode furrowed his brows. Honestly, he didn't want to reveal too much of his power because that generally wasn't a good thing. But now it appeared that he had no choice as the group's overall strength was at an all-time low.

Using Holy Element power is the easiest to deal with this situation, then...

Rhode stood up.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to find a friend; I will come back right away."

Sereck didn't ask further as he knew that Rhode didn't plan to explain anything. As a Swordmaster, he admired Rhode's attitude.

Old Walker, Marlene and the rest also planned to stand up and follow him, but Rhode quickly stopped them, gesturing them to sit down. Then he told them that he had something to do and will come back shortly.

After watching Rhode leave, some people had doubts in their hearts, but they still obeyed his command and rested. After spending so much time with Rhode, they began to trust him unconditionally. That was why they followed his command without a word.

Rhode scanned his surroundings in the nearby forest. Once he confirmed that no one else was around, he stretched out his right hand.

A summoning circle formed on his palm and a white card floated down slowly before him. Suddenly, the card transformed into a beautiful sword that floated in the air.

[The Holy Sword has been detected. Transform to human form?]

Yes.

Rhode nodded. Then, the beautiful angelic sword shone brilliantly. White rays of light shot in all directions and dimmed almost immediately after. The particles of light swirled into a vortex and formed a beautiful girl once again.

“Master, I've answered your summoning.”

The beautiful girl half-knelt on the ground before Rhode, and her right hand held her sword that was firmly stabbed into the ground. She then gazed into Rhode's eyes solemnly. Her eyes were crystal clear, and a faint golden light reflected off her irises, giving off a slightly seductive charm.

(ED: No idea why it would be seductive...)

Contrary to Lize, this girl was a true pure-blooded angel.

“Stand up, don’t act on ceremony.”

He wasn’t accustomed to the girl kneeling before him. Although there were multitudes of female spirits among the vast sea of summoned spirits, most common female summoned spirits were Water and Wind Spirits — who, by the way, were very popular among players.

However no matter what form they took, in essence, they were still spirits. It was the first time that Rhode saw a summoned spirit taking the form of a sword that could transform into a girl. When he thought of it this way, he couldn’t help but feel slightly odd.

“In the next battle, I will require your help.”

Since he summoned her, he didn’t have to be modest.

“You should be able to feel the undead aura nearby. These guys are quite troublesome. Do you think you will die?”

“I will not, Master.”

Hearing Rhode’s inquiry, the angelic girl smiled and nodded.

“I’m a very pure existence, that’s why I’m not afraid of death. As long as you can maintain your power, I will continue to exist.”

“That’s good.”

Rhode nodded in satisfaction.

“I’ll bring you out after a while. Remember, from now on you are...”

“... do you have a name?”

Rhode found out that he didn’t seem to know whether she had a name or not.

“I do, Master.”

The girl saluted with her right hand over her chest.

“I’m the 10th Eternal Holy Sword, Star Mark. While I’m in my human form, you can call me Celia.”

“Well Celia, you must remember that you must not reveal your true identity in front of other people. If you have any questions, you can just ask me. Do you understand?”

“I understand, Master.”

Rhode nodded and turned around, heading back to the spring.

When he reached the spring, everyone had more or less rested.

“Eh, boy, where did you go?”

Old Walker slipped his jug of wine onto his waist and asked curiously. When he saw the heavily-armored girl behind Rhode, he froze immediately.

“...Mr. Rhode?”

Lize was also surprised. She quickly stood up and scanned the new girl from head to toe curiously. The same went for the others in the group. It wasn’t surprising though, not only did Rhode bring back a girl out of nowhere. That said girl also sported a large pair of wings on her back. It was as though implying she was an angel...

It was common knowledge that angels were noble creatures within this continent. Most of them held high ranks — even the lowest-level angels had high statuses among common people. In the remote Deep Stone City, not even the City Lord had seen an angel before. But what now? Rhode just went out for a stroll and brought an angel back?

Who is she?

Sereck’s mind was filled with countless questions.

Chapter 85 - Land Of Fear

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Introduce yourself.”

Rhode ignored the strange stares from everyone and gestured to Celia to introduce herself. She held her sword in her right hand and made a knight’s bow.

“I am Celia, Master’s subordinate.”

After that, the girl raised her head and kept silent as if her duty was complete.

But everyone was still shocked by her short self-introduction.

Master’s subordinate.

While the girl didn’t explicitly reveal who the Master was, everyone knew just by looking at her behavior. Their gaze slowly turned towards Rhode.

Angels were noble creatures who were far above them in status — who would’ve thought that one would actually call a human ‘Master?’

Who is this young man?

“Mr. Rhode, erm...”

Lize hadn’t figured out what was going on. On the other hand, Marlene frowned and stared at Celia. She could vividly remember Rhode summoning her at the underground ruins, and now she appeared again.

As she thought of this, she looked at Rhode with a complicated expression. On the other hand, Rhode seemed to have figured out what she was

thinking, so he nodded to her in response. Even though he didn't say anything, Marlene understood what he meant.

“We will move out now. Our pace will be almost equivalent prior to our journey here.”

When Rhode thought of this order, he had already planned to not entertain any questions.

Soon he began to issue commands and assign each individual their respective tasks.

“As we now have Celia, rest assured that her power is sufficient to protect all of you. Anne, your role is to work together with Celia. The fighting style of angels differs quite a bit to humans, so I hope you can quickly adapt to Celia's attack patterns. If you are unable to do so, please do let me know, do you understand?”

“Yes, Anne understands!”

Anne, as always, raised her hand to show that she had clearly understood. Still, she stared curiously at Celia. Apparently, she was fairly intrigued with this young woman with wings.

“Since everyone is ready now, let's make a move.”

When Rhode clapped his hands, everyone quickly got to their feet and assembled into formation before marching off into the depths of the forest.

“Lad, you're growing more and more mysterious each second.”

Sereck's lips curled upwards as he whispered to Rhode.

“If I could, I'd rather be inconspicuous.”

Rhode replied calmly at Sereck's attempt to test him and turned around to the front. When Sereck saw that, he went silent smiled wryly to himself. Eventually, he took out his weapon and followed behind Rhode.

—
“———!”

Sharp screams tore apart the stillness of the forest. Countless white shadows phased through the trees; their eyes were pitch black and burning with hatred. They stretched out their long, slender arms, trying to grasp at the living entities before them. From a distance, they could sniff the foul stench of humans, and the way they clawed at these people appeared incredibly desperate as though they had lost something precious.

Then, a brilliant light flashed.

The angel blocked the evil spirits, and after sampling the bane of their existence right before them, they quickly retreated in fear. Celia's beautiful face showed no emotion as she grasped her sword which was engraved in ancient Holy symbols. She waved her sword mercilessly and sliced the evil spirits into half, completely erasing their already meager existence.

Rhode could tell that there were a lot of people staring at Celia. It was no surprise though since he appeared to have just casually gone for a stroll and brought back an angel with him. It would be even stranger if no one paid any attention to her.

Even though Celia was the center of attention right now, she didn't seem to be affected by it at all. She just plainly followed her orders given by Rhode.

Sereck stopped looking at her.

As a Swordmaster, he had seen his fair share in life. This woman was definitely a real angel and not some illusion that was projected by the undead. Although there were rumors about high-level undead disguising themselves as angels, they could not replicate the Holy Aura surrounding Celia.

The calm and comfortable aura that soothed the mind was proof that Celia was an angel. However, what Sereck found most interesting was the

swordsmanship that she used. Judging from her consecutive attacks, he noticed that the swordsmanship she used was the same as that young man.

It seems like there's some sort of relationship between them.

A moment later, Old Walker suddenly stopped and called out to Rhode, "Boy, hold up."

Old Walker bent his body and pressed his hand on the ground. After a while, he stood up and faced Rhode.

"There's a human trail here. About seven to eight people traveling to the north. And judging from the freshness of these traces... I would say approximately no more than three days."

When everyone heard Old Walker's analysis, they were thrilled. Finding human tracks in this dense forest was like looking for a needle in a haystack. If not because of his experience as a Ranger, most likely they would've traveled around in circles for days.

Contrary to the others, Rhode wasn't excited at all. After hearing Old Walker's report, his expression immediately turned dark.

"Are you sure it's north?"

"Well... yes, I'm sure. It seems like they were being chased by something fast... and their group is a little bit disordered, but it seems..."

Old Walker walked around once again and replied with confidence.

"It seems like no one got left behind."

Rhode didn't answer. He stared at the path towards the north. Under the veil of darkness, nothing but shadows could be seen in that direction. Even the Holy Light couldn't penetrate that far out. However, Rhode could easily guess what was in that direction. Withered forest, dark cave, and...

"Sigh... there's a path to heaven, but they chose the entrance to hell instead."

Rhode immediately thought of giving up; he wanted to turn around and tell everyone to pack up to go home to sleep. But he knew that it was only his fantasy. This world wasn't a game anymore, and he had no way to escape the harsh reality. Thus, he could only bite the bullet and continue moving on.

“Everyone follow me. Our next journey will be extremely difficult. Don't fall behind!”

After addressing his group, Rhode looked at Celia.

“Go check the situation ahead, but don't stray too far.”

“Understood, Master.”

Something changed within the dark forest.

Even the slowest-witted person would be aware of this change. If the lush forest from before was silent, then the forest now was dead and creepy. The bushy trees were replaced with thin, withered trees and their twisted branches grew in awkward angles, creating a rather creepy form. When one stared closer at it, it was like an arm of a person that was struggling for help.

Celia walked in the front, the boundless darkness didn't affect her the least. She didn't care about anything else other than to complete her Master's command.

Suddenly, she made a quick movement.

When she turned around, a huge shadow fell from the sky. Although she reacted in time and lifted her sword to block, apparently there was a gap in strength between her and the shadow. She could only hold her ground for less than a second before being sent flying in the air.

“Miss Celia!!”

Lize screamed. At that moment, as if it heard her voice, that huge shadow turned around and looked at her with coldly. After locking her gaze with

that terrifying shadow, Lize couldn't speak another word as though some invisible force was constricting her body.

“Clerics! Cast Divine Brilliance now! Sereck, guard the rear, these things are very troublesome!”

Rhode wasn't surprised at the ambush. He raised his sword and commanded his group while rushing forward. When Rhode finished giving his orders, he was already at the huge shadow's side.

“_____!!”

As if it could sense the threat before it, the huge shadow lifted its arm and smashed downwards. However, Rhode was already a step ahead of it. The very moment its arm came smashing down, Rhode retreated to the back.

The huge shadow's hand smashed into the ground and shook the earth.

At this time, the Holy Light finally revealed the monster's true appearance. When everyone including Sereck saw what it looked like, they couldn't help but hold their breath.

“Holy Soul bless me! What the hell is that!?”

The huge shadow was actually a Giant Baby.

Its shape was almost the same as any ordinary baby. Bald head, two big beady eyes and the fats on its naked body made it look quite obese. However, the creepy part was that it had a sea-green colored skin and various scars on its body. If it was an ordinary baby, clearly it should have died.

But, it was alive.

It seemed to have absorbed all the evil aura surrounding this place, which turned the small, fragile infant into a three-meter terrifying monster. It rumbled as it turned around; the eyes that had lost its luster reflected the shadows of everyone. When the Giant Dead Baby opened its mouth, there were no teeth at all, but what came out next was a low roar.

“Mooomm.... Moooooommm...”

Hearing that deep, eerie voice, every female in the group felt their hair stand on end. They shivered in fear and fright. Even the undead or the evil spirits didn't break their resolve, but one roar from this Giant Dead Baby caused them to hold on to each other in terror. Anne who was usually carefree and smiling also had a grim expression on her face.

Damn, I knew this would happen.

Rhode studied everyone's expression and frowned. However, he didn't stop moving. By the time the Giant Dead Baby's fist hammered the ground, he had already activated his Shadow Flash. The sword in his hand reflected a red light and pierced towards the Giant Dead Baby's neck.

The putrid-looking skin was harder than steel. Even though Rhode had used all his strength to attack, it only created a small wound. The injured Giant Dead Baby screamed like a child who was bullied and used its hands to catch Rhode.

“Old Walker, use Fire Arrow and target its eyes. As for the others, hurry up and cast Divine Brilliance, what are you guys waiting for!”

Rhode shouted angrily and woke the others up from their stupor. The old Ranger quickly retrieved a bow and arrow from his back and lit the tip of the arrow in flames. He pulled back the bow and shot it towards the Giant Dead Baby, piercing its eyes with pinpoint accuracy.

“Ouch!”

The sudden intense pain caused the monster to fall to the ground. At that moment, a concentrated holy pillar of light fell from the sky and crashed into the monster's body, causing it to writhe in agony. It struggled to lift both of its hands in an attempt to resist, but Rhode's Blade of Destruction had already pierced through its head. Disgusting dark liquid splashed out from the wound and fell onto the ground, creating a wisp of smoke whenever it touched something. Finally, the angel appeared once more to

deal the finishing blow. Her sword thrust into the Giant Dead Baby's heart with full force.

A wave of holy flames emerged from the sword and enveloped the monster's entire body. In a blink of an eye, it turned into ashes.

At that moment, several low roars echoed from their surroundings.

Soon, a few huge shadows slowly emerged from the darkness.

Chapter 86 - Breaking Through The Encirclement

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Gather into ring formation now!”

(ED: See Igel (hedgehog) formation.)

After hearing the multiple roars, Rhode immediately tensed up.

“Anne, take the left side! Extend your shield and hold your ground! Marlene, support the right with your level 5 Ice Shield now! Sereck, the rear is yours. No matter what, you cannot let them pass through!”

“Clerics, prepare to cast Guardian Shield — I want four charges in three seconds! Lize you are to cast Divine Brilliance in the center of the formation and Old Walker, you are responsible for filling in the gaps if there are any.”

“Understood!”

Everyone responded in unison after receiving their orders.

Anne took two steps forward and released her the latch on her shield. A crisp sound echoed, and the boss that covered the exterior of her shield slid down, revealing a sharp, metal drill. The heavy shield then smashed into the ground, producing a muffled impact and causing Anne’s body to crouch. She pulled a short metal handle within the concave side of the shield and suddenly, multiple razor-sharp spikes shot out from the shield’s exterior. Now the entire surface appeared like a hedgehog.

On the opposite side of Anne, Marlene was equally serious. She lifted her wand in an unfamiliar way and chanted. A thick ice wall emerged and stacked over each other layer by layer. Then, as if the spell reached its

climax, Marlene chanted louder, causing sharp icicles to protrude from the ground towards the front like spears.

Celia spread her wings and flew towards Rhode. It was unknown when, but now she wielded a sword in both hands. Her face was chilly, and her pupils shone even more brilliantly than before.

Sereck didn't appear as tense as Anne and Marlene. After hearing Rhode's command, he didn't move at all, but if one carefully observed his expression, it was clear that he was dead serious. He narrowed his eyes at the monsters, and the hand that was holding the hilt of his sword began to slowly move...

A splendorous golden light flashed.

Meanwhile, the Clerics eventually finished casting Guardian Shield and a circular holy barrier wrapped the four of them. Lize also began casting while focusing her attention on the man before her.

The low roars were getting louder and nearer.

“We cannot afford to fail. No matter what you see, don't panic! You absolutely cannot fall out of formation!”

At this point in time, all Rhode could do was to remind them. This place was the most troublesome area of Silent Plateau, and frankly, newbies shouldn't be here. If it wasn't because of their inexperience, perhaps this place could still prove to be suitable for training, but anyway, he couldn't expect a group of preschoolers to take a postgraduate examination, right?

The huge shadowy figures were getting closer. Their appearances were slightly similar to the Giant Dead Baby from before, but their movement was much quicker than its predecessor. Soon, they appeared from in between the dead trees. Marlene clutched her wand tightly and didn't dare to breathe. Their disgusting rotting skin filled the cold air with a foul stench which made the group gag... it was indeed a brutal punishment.

“Ignore them, don't track their movements.”

Rhode didn't need to look back to know that the group was trying to study the monsters' movements.

“Just focus what's in front of you. Our area of exposure is minimal so they don't have many opportunities to engage us. Don't lose your focus; just deal with anything in front of you and leave the rest to the others. Mr. Sereck, I will need you to support both sides because we don't have enough people. I believe that wouldn't be too much of a problem for you.”

“I'll try my best.”

The sword of light appeared once more and shone magnificently in the darkness.

The shadows were getting increasingly faster — it was almost impossible to predict their movement now. However, everyone still focused on their immediate front, including the four Clerics. Rhode had already instructed them to cast Guardian Shield whenever necessary.

“Fu...fu...”

Followed by a heavy breathing sound, the huge shadowy figures vanished.

A sudden silence fell upon the group. In a blink of an eye, the creepy sounds disappeared as though nothing was there in the first place. However, the prevailing rotten stench still lingered in the air, albeit getting stronger every second.

“Ten, nine, eight, seven...”

Rhode was counting in his mind. He lifted his sword and stared intently at the empty space before him.

“Three, two, one... Lize, cast Divine Brilliance now!!”

Upon receiving his command, Lize quickly raised her arm. She immediately cast the spell that she had prepared beforehand. The Holy Element burst out into a bright light, enveloping everyone inside. A warm

aura dispersed the eeriness from before. And at this moment, a pleasant sensation filled all of their five senses.

The black shadows suddenly rushed out.

As anticipated, when the shadows rushed towards them, Lize's Divine Brilliance had already covered everyone inside and at the same time illuminated the surroundings. When the shadows touched the light, the Holy Element caused them to suffer.

They still tried their best to break in, but it can be seen that they were struggling against their greatest weakness.

While it was insufficient to kill them, the group felt that it was enough.

Sereck snorted and waved his sword, summoning a rain of swords which pierced through the darkness. The 'light show' was as dazzling as lightning. His swordsmanship had always been like this — flashy. Regardless of its damage, Sereck's skills were always pleasing to the eye.

One of the Giant Dead Baby closed its fist and threw a punch the spiky shield.

If it was a living creature, perhaps the pain would've caused it to retreat. But as an undead, it could not feel pain and thus, it wasn't much of an obstacle. The Giant Dead Baby shook its body and raised its right fist once again.

But this time, Anne stretched her feet and kicked the bottom of the shield with full force.

The part of the shield which was buried in the ground flipped upwards. At the same time, sand and dirt flew up into the air, temporarily creating a mini smokescreen. Because of that, the Giant Dead Baby's sight was blocked. Then, taking advantage of its momentary blindness, Anne pressed the switch on her shield again.

“_____!!!”

A violent surge of air swirled at the edge of the shield. The thick, metal drill flew into the air and pierced the Giant Dead Baby's head.

Boom!! The headless monster finally lost its strength. Its body swayed to the left and fell to the ground, never to move again.

Marlene raised the wand in her hand.

Like a river flowing forward, a thick layer of ice quickly spread outwards from her feet. A weakened Giant Dead Baby who was already under the effects of Divine Brilliance stepped onto the cold, slippery ice and fell to the ground.

The layer of ice broke and turned into many sharp icicles which pierced the Giant Dead Baby's body. Before the monster could touch Marlene, its whole body had already been riddled with countless holes which had sapped its remaining life. Its blank face stared at the girl, unknown whether it was smiling or angry. Facing this terrifyingly gruesome monster, Marlene had a calm expression on her face unlike before. She lifted her wand and cast a spell that was condensed at the center of the ruby.

“Airy, ari!”

A flame enveloped the Giant Dead Baby's body, swallowing its lamenting wail and everything else with it.

As the black shadow fell from the sky, Celia was already prepared as she raised her sword.

This time, she didn't get blown away like before; instead, a sacred symbol formed into a shield which blocked every attack the enemy made. The Giant Dead Baby that fell from the sky pounded on the shield but wasn't able to penetrate her defense no matter how hard it tried.

Rhode took out his sword and swiped his left palm on the blade of his sword.

Once it absorbed his blood, a red light glowed brilliantly and the smell of blood made the undead go crazy. They roared again and increased the intensity of their attacks. Even the Guardian Shield could no longer maintain its form and began to distort.

Celia withdrew her barrier and retreated. It wasn't because that she couldn't hold on, rather...

Blade of Destruction shot out from Celia's side and collided with the undead. The powerful impact caused them to back off. While their disgusting skin appeared tattered and torn with blood and scars, to the undead, it wasn't a big deal. It rolled its eyes and issued an evil snicker.

But then it suddenly froze.

A silver moon-shaped arc slashed through its neck and disappeared in the darkness.

In the sky, the angel was holding her sword, her expression devoid of any emotions.

Everything went back to silence.

"They've temporarily retreated."

Rhode recovered his sword and wiped the blood on his hand. Rhode expression didn't change for the better.

"Continue moving forward. Hopefully we can find those idiots before we encounter another one of their surprise attacks."

Chapter 87 - Assemble

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Not long after the undead retreated, Old Walker finally found a new clue.

“They left a trace!”

Old Walker and Sereck became excited once they saw a strange marking engraved on a nearby tree trunk.

“They’re nearby... I think they should be over there!”

Old Walker pointed towards a dark cave not far away from them. Even if Old Walker didn’t point out to them the similar symbols engraved on the cave surface, everyone could guess what happened from the undead corpses scattered at the entrance. A messy trail of footprints also revealed that there was some human activity though it was evident that something wasn’t right.

“Let’s go.”

Rhode didn’t want to linger in this forest for too long so he quickly beckoned his group to move. While the journey had been fairly smooth sailing so far, they were only about two-thirds through Silent Plateau. They still had one-third more to travel once they rescued the mercenary group.

However, other than Sereck, everyone else appeared to be exhausted. The short rest from before couldn’t recover much of their strength. Looking at their status right now, Rhode felt like they were similar to those NPCs that didn’t want to hinder the player and would sacrifice their lives to help pave the way to conquer the final boss.

Rhode certainly didn’t want things to turn out like that. Attempting to fight the final boss alone without teammates was just suicidal. Thus, he quickly prompted the group to follow closely behind him as he entered the dark cave.

Woosh! When Rhode entered the cave, all of a sudden, a dagger flashed in the darkness and ruthlessly lunged towards Rhode's neck. Clearly that attack was meant to kill.

If it were anyone else, perhaps their life would end right there without any resistance. Unfortunately, the hidden assailant didn't know that Rhode was different. As the top player in Dragon Soul Continent, Rhode often encountered sneak attacks from PKers. As such, the moment the hidden assailant attacked, his automatic reflexes kicked in.

He used his sword to parry the dagger and counterattacked immediately. The hidden assailant was slightly surprised that its attack was seen through and quickly attempted to retreat, but Rhode didn't give it a chance to do so as he thrust his sword towards the direction of the dagger, stopping directly before its throat.

“Stop! Rhode, it's an ally.”

Sereck quickly stopped Rhode when he recognized the dagger. Lize ran forward and illuminated the cave with Holy Light.

Finally, Rhode could see the appearance of his assailant.

Half of her face was covered in a black mask. Her tight, black leather armor accentuated her slim figure and emphasized her well-endowed chest which moved up and down due to her ragged breathing. Her long ears trembled as her eyes focused on the sword at her neck.

It was a half-elf.

“Are you the member of Victorious Wine mercenary group?”

Rhode retrieved his sword and asked emotionlessly as if the person who attacked him wasn't her.

“Yes, I'm a member of Victorious Wine. Are you guys from the Mercenary Association?”

“That's right.”

Sereck walked forward.

“I am Sereck. We’ve received a reinforcement request from one of your members and rushed here as fast as we could. It seems like we’ve arrived on time.”

“Y-you are Mr. Sereck!”

The half-elf girl’s eyes lit up.

“You guys really came! Great!! Quickly save my comrades!!”

She grabbed Sereck’s hand and pulled him towards the depths of the cave.

“We followed our leader’s orders to flee here...”

As she led the way, she briefed the group about their current plight.

“Initially, our leader didn’t plan to enter the depths of Silent Plateau because we know how treacherous this place was. But when we were at the outer borders, we were attacked and surrounded by the undead. We decided to flee — but by the time we realized, we were already in the depths. Although we did try to break through the waves of undead, we never succeeded. So... we had no choice but to venture deeper to look for a way out.”

“Well, you know the rest of the story. Many of us got injured and our leader had to send someone to ask for help. Fortunately, you guys arrived so quickly... otherwise...”

You guys sure know how to choose the most dangerous place.

Rhode frowned and thought to himself.

“Who is it?”

When everyone arrived at the end of the cave, a deep voice echoed.

“It’s me. The people from Mercenary Association have arrived!”

“What?!”

That deep voice immediately went one octave higher.

“They actually came?! Quick, quick bring them in!!”

Soon, a deep, rumbling sound shook the cave slightly. A boulder at the end of the cave rolled to the side, revealing a hidden passage. At the same time, a tall and muscular man came out from the entrance. When his eyes met Sereck and the others, his face lit up with joy.

“Mr. Sereck? I didn’t expect you to come here personally. We are eternally grateful...”

“Don’t mention it. It’s something that the Mercenary Association should do.”

Sereck waved his hand and smiled while turning towards Rhode.

“If you want to thank someone, thank him. We wouldn’t be here if not for him.”

“Eh?”

The man was slightly taken aback when he heard what Sereck said. He stared curiously at Rhode for a moment before shifting his attention back to Sereck. He thought that Rhode was merely Sereck’s subordinate... but that didn’t appear to be the case now...

After a while, he stopped trying to analyze Rhode and invited the group in.

“Everyone quickly come in. It’s dangerous outside. Those undead are seriously tough opponents.”

For a mercenary group to be named Victorious Wine, one would think of their exceptional fortune. Unfortunately, its members didn’t seem to be blessed by its name. After entering the tunnel, the scene before them caused Rhode’s group to take a deep breath.

Five to six people were heavily injured and were leaning against the wall of the cave. They were covered with blood and scars — some of their wounds even had rotting flesh dangling out! Continuous groans of pain filled the cave, but when they saw Rhode and the others enter, a spark of hope lit in their eyes.

“Lize.”

Rhode didn't need to say much. Lize and the four Clerics understood their roles. They hastily rushed towards the mercenaries and began to heal their injuries.

“I'm Kudla, the leader of the Victorious Wine mercenary group.”

The muscular man used his superhuman strength to shift the boulder back in place before walking forward and politely bowing.

“On behalf of my mercenary group, I want to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart. Frankly, I didn't think that we could survive until now. Mr. Sereck, thank you...”

Then the man called Kudla turned towards Rhode.

“...and he is?”

Kudla couldn't help but study the young man in front of him. From Sereck's previous explanation, it was this young man who was the one that saved them. Who was he?

“He's the leader of Starlight. I think you might've heard his name before?”

“He's the leader of 'Starlight' mercenary group, I think you have heard about him before.”

Sereck smiled and introduced him. After hearing Sereck's introduction, Kudla showed a surprised expression.

“He is the rumored... But... Why...”

“The Mercenary Association lacks manpower at the moment.”

Before Kudla could finish, Sereck filled in the blanks. His face also turned dark.

“You might not be aware but every mercenary group in Deep Stone City were sent to destroy the undead though none of them succeeded. Five to six mercenary groups returned, but they faced multiple casualties. Other than that, there’s no news about other groups.”

“How could this happen!!”

Kudla was shocked.

“I thought...”

“The Mercenary Association is currently investigating about the commissions and commissioners. What kind of commission did you guys get?”

“We were tasked to retrieve a keepsake of a traveler.”

Sensing the seriousness of the matter, Kudla’s expression also turned solemn.

“I heard that a traveler died at the outer borders of Silent Plateau. The commissioner claimed to be the older brother of the traveler and he was worried because his brother didn’t come back, so he asked us to look for him. I disagreed initially, but the person appeared to be very sincere. He even gave us a deposit of three hundred gold coins...”

That last sentence was the key point.

“Was he from Deep Stone City?”

Sereck asked.

Kudla went silent for a moment before shaking his head.

“No, from what I’ve heard, he seemed to be from the South... Anyway, he certainly not a person from the Paphield Region. He also said that he often traveled and didn’t live here for long.”

As expected.

Sereck and Rhode exchanged a glance; both of them understood what each other mean.

It seemed like Victorious Wine was also one of the victims. That traveler’s keepsake was also fictitious — similar to Red Hawk trying to find a sword that didn’t exist. In the end, it was just an excuse to deceive them to go to high-risk areas. But, taking into account that they must’ve spent hundreds of gold coins to do this... how could they be so generous?

What are they trying to do?

Chapter 88 - Resting In The Cave

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Accompanied by Rhode and Sereck arrival, the member of 'Victorious Wine' mercenary group finally relieved. In fact, after they asked for reinforcement, the only thing they could do was to wait. But in this world there's no phone satellite, although a mage could communicate from the distance, but it surely wasn't something that a small mercenary group could afford. They didn't even know whether the person that they have sent could escape from Silent Highland safely. Sometimes, they would look at the darkness before them, they would even be somewhat hopeless, thinking perhaps the person that they have sent was unable to escape and fell in the corner of the darkness. Then what's the point for them to live? It's only increasing the pain.

But when they were lifting their sword trying to commit suicide, they could not suppress the human instinct to live on their heart. Maybe the person that they sent has successfully escaped from here and people from Mercenary Association were rushing here. If that's the case, as long as they persist, there's still hope!

For them who were in danger, these few days were an unimaginable torment. Survival and death, hope and despair. Every time they opened their eyes, they couldn't wait for them to come, to prove that they did exist. Day by day, the food supplies were decreasing, these people were suffering even more. In the Silent Highland where everything were undead creatures, beside a corpse they couldn't find anything to eat. Even if they went crazy and eat the corpse, those corpses that have already rotted, deteriorated, and smelly could only push them into death even closer and not extending their lives.

They were already at their limit, if Rhode didn't appear maybe they have already gone crazy because of despair and pain of losing.

Fortunately, this possibility has been eliminated.

Under the spirit masters treatment, the mercenaries injuries were soon healed. After eating the food they have brought, the mercenaries could finally relax on the ground and had a good dream. Different from before, because of the suffering and darkness, they wasn't even sure whether they would have the opportunity to wake up.

Those exhausted Spirit Masters too, finally have the opportunity to rest. After all beside Lize, all of them has no adventuring experience. Although they have rested for a few times before, but these spirit master weren't able to be calm, they were always worried about those terrible undead creatures would come from somewhere. In addition, Rhode has always been asking them to hurry up, that's why they didn't have time to adjust their composure. Until now, after they gave treatment to the injured, the finally were able to relax.

Marlene was a lot better than these Spirit Master. Although after arriving in Silent Highland she also contributed a lot, but it was still not as much compared to those Spirit Masters. Compared to those Spirit Masters who were 'physically and mentally exhausted', she was only a bit tired because she strained herself too much. Right now she was sitting on the corner of the bonfire, eating food while talking with Lize in low voice. Anne who was energetic before also came beside the two of them and slept. Looking at her peaceful sleeping face really did made people doubt how her brain works.

Old Walker wasn't together with these girls. He sat on the other side on the corner, drinking his wine while looking at the bonfire before him in a daze, didn't know what was he thinking about.

It's really a group of strange people.

Looking at the people before him, Kudla couldn't help but wonder. Frankly, he never seen a mercenary group that has such a strange member constitution. According to the general mercenary group, melee occupation like swordsmen, thieves, ranger, and warriors were the most important role. On the contrary, there's a lot of mage and spirit master. Firstly, these

occupation were very rare and difficult to be found. Secondly, no matter mage or spirit master, they wouldn't like to be mixed with each other. Because mages were noble and didn't want to reduce their worth by hanging out with those vulgar people. Moreover, mages were confident in their own intelligent, even they forced themselves to follow mercenary group, they would still want to have the authority to command and the latter was because of their own identity restrictions, it was difficult for them to move together with a mercenary group. After all, spirit masters couldn't use much skill to protect themselves. If the whole team was in crisis, they would be the first one to collapse.

This was also the reason why many dangerous mission related to undead creatures in Mercenary Association were all located in Silent Highland. Undead creatures were not afraid of death and injury, they were nemesis to melee occupation. Like a police who couldn't stop zombies attack with firearms, it could be imagined what the result would be when this mercenary group used a normal weapon to face those endless undead creatures.

Although ranger could attack undead creatures from long range, but a creature that has long been dead wouldn't care less being shot by one or two arrow right?

On the other hand, looking at Rhode's mercenary group could be said was varied. Mage, spirit master, swordsman, range, shield warrior, looking at it, it didn't seem to look like a mercenary group. Not to mention...

Kudla looked at the girl who closed her eyes while standing beside Rhode. The white wings behind her was like a beautiful cloak.

An angel.

Kudla could swear by holy soul that he has never seen an angel who joined a mercenary group. At first, he thought that the angel girl was Sereck's acquaintance. Since Sereck's has a high status and was one of the important person in Deep Stone City's Mercenary Association. To a small mercenary group, it's not strange for an important person to be mysterious and unpredictable. But when he looked at Celia who politely called Rhode as ‘

Master, this barbarian mixed race who dared to fight with those terrible undead almost fell to the ground.

Who is this young man actually?

Kudla didn't know and tried to ask Sereck ambiguously. But this master swordsman didn't give him an answer, making him feel that Rhode was getting more and more mysterious.

However, no matter what he still need to thank him, and...

Thinking until here, Kudla stood up and walked towards Rhode.

“Mr. Rhode, I'm very grateful that you participated in this rescuing operation. I am here to show you my utmost respect for you and your mercenary group.”

Although this appearance was big and tall, but hearing Kudla's speech, it clearly shown that this barbarian also has a cautious side. Also he kept remembering Sereck's warning, to not to mention anything about Rhode's face, or else... it would be difficult to guess what will happen next.

It's also not difficult for Kudla to understand what Sereck meant. Just when the first time he saw Rhode, he was also shocked, but now...

“We, ‘Victorious Wine’ won't forget the help that your mercenary group has given to me. Please rest assured, after we go back we will definitely give you enough compensation... For brothers who have sacrifice for us, we won't let them die in vain!”

What is this guy talking about?

Rhode looked up and felt puzzled looking at the man before him. He completely didn't understand what was he talking about. At the same time, Sereck smiled and spoke.

“You are wrong, Kudla. To tell you the truth, from entering Silent Highland until now, there's no one got left behind. Don't underestimate his commanding skill. Frankly, in my opinion, you can't be compared to him.

That's why don't curse him by saying something like sacrifice and die in vain. Be careful, he might turn against you."

There's no one died?!

Hearing until here, Kudla was shocked. This time looking at Rhode, his eyes was full of fear. No wonder, what kind of place was Silent Highland, all the mercenaries clearly knew it. Let alone small mercenary group, even if it's a fully armed Mercenary Association, they would still have to made mental preparation in case someone died.

But now, Sereck actually told him that no one injured and died!

How does this young man do it!?

If it's someone else who said this, Kudla might not be able to believe it. But hearing it from Sereck's mouth who was one of the strongest people in Mercenary Association, of course there's a credibility in it. Thinking until here, Kudla was panic. After all, he was also a mercenary leader, the knew the taboo between mercenaries. Speaking something like that in front of others was clearly not a good thing.

"I'm sorry, I..."

"You don't have to apologize to me, Mr. Kudla."

Rhode calmly stopped Kudla's alibi. He really didn't care about those small things, moreover he didn't do it on purpose, he didn't really mind it.

"But I have my own condition."

"Please say, Mr. Rhode."

Hearing Rhode has changed his tone, Kudla also relieved and exposed a warm smile.

"Just as Sereck has said, I can ensure everyone to get out safely from Silent Highland. But I have my own condition, I know that you're also a mercenary leader, but frankly I didn't believe in your commanding skill. So

my condition is, before we leave I want all of you, including yourself to obey my command unconditionally. If you can promise me this one thing, I can ensure that everyone of you will safely get out of here. But if you're unable to do so..."

Saying until here, Rhode paused and looked at Kudla's face that began to darken.

"Then, to protect everyone, I have to make some sacrifice."

He believe that Kudla must be able to understand what he meant.

Of course, after hearing this words, Kudla expression kept changing. At first it turned blue, then it turned red. He clenched his fist then let it go, and once again clenched it. Currently, there's no more smiling expression in this barbarian's face. He gloomily and silently looked at the young man who was younger than him by almost twenty years.

The truth, he couldn't accept what Rhode has just said. He thought that there's no problem in his commanding skill, or else he wouldn't be able to keep his people to persist until now in this Silent Highland? But thinking thoroughly, he also admitted that Rhode's words weren't wrong. After all, if he could bring everyone here without any casualties, it has clearly proven this young man commanding ability. Although taking into account of Sereck's strength as master swordsman, but his help would still be limited, as a qualified mercenary group leader, Kudla clearly understood that part. Sereck was just only one person and couldn't take care many aspect of a mercenary group.

Then what should he do?

"I understand, I will tell it to my subordinates."

In the end, Kudla nodded, turned around and leave. The politeness and respectfulness from before has been gone at this moment.

"You shouldn't have treated him like that, Rhode."

Looking at Kudla's figure, Sereck bitterly smiled and shook his head.

"I'm just talking about the inevitable thing."

Rhode didn't look back and gave an answer. The reason he was this rude was because this matter couldn't be discussed and another reason was because Rhode was not happy with this Kudla. If it wasn't because of he brought his mercenary group to come into this dangerous place, they could complete the mission easier and faster in the first place. But now... thinking until here, Rhode couldn't help but be angry. Although strictly speaking it has nothing to do with Kudla, after all it's his first time coming to Silent Highland, so he didn't know which place was dangerous and which was not. However, to him, ignorance was never a good excuse. Not to mention there's no slightest psychological burden in his anger... In the game, Rhode already experienced it before, as long as someone caused danger to his mercenary group, then whether they did it voluntary or forced, intentional or unintentional, good or malicious, regardless of their motives, the result still wouldn't change.

Since the result wouldn't change, then his explanation to him was meaningless.

Just suck it up and move on has never been his style.

Hearing Rhode's answer, Sereck didn't continue to say anything. Since he was from Mercenary Association, it's not good for him to get entangled between two mercenary groups. Moreover this young man was prideful and confidence, he wouldn't let anyone to doubt this part of him.

This made Sereck felt somewhat familiar but unfamiliar. Familiar, because he saw a strong commander that this kind of persistence. It was actually a necessary cycle, only people who believe in themselves would be able to persist until the end and wasn't affected by one to make a decision. Although sometimes it might not be a correct decision, but it's still a very authoritative move.

Unfamiliar was because he never saw any young man who did that. They either arrogant or ignorant, and didn't even know what was fear. This made

them showed a blinded self-confidence, and this fake self confidence could made people confused at first. It's just like a paper made tiger, when they're on the real combat, they would show their real character.

However, Rhode was different. From him, Sereck could feel an aura that could only be felt from a real commander. If he knew that Rhode was once the strongest guild leader in the game, maybe he would understand why Rhode would have that kind of aura, confident, and persistence.

After replying Sereck's words, Rhode didn't say anything more because right now he has a more important thing to do.

Silent Highland as a high level dungeon, although the equipment looted from it was a bit too shabby, but there's a lot exp point to gain. After he brought everyone passed through the light and dark battlefield and blocked those undead creatures attack, the experience Rhode gained has made him broke through level 15.

To Rhode, it's a very good news. At the same time he also got another system prompt.

After he passed through level 15, the system finally prompted him that he has met the second sealed swordsmanship requirement and it's unlocked.

Chapter 89 - Swordsmanship: Starfall

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode didn't think that he lost much even after transmigrating to this world. Other than his inventory and swordsmanship skills, he somehow managed to salvage the rest such as his memories and the holy card deck which was now mostly a memento.

Rhode couldn't retain his swordsmanship because he lost the prerequisite stats to use them. However, he felt that it was fine because he knew how to obtain them back. Some were learned through accumulating reputation points, some were found in ancient ruins, and some rarer skills even needed to fulfill certain conditions before he could learn them. But after adventuring for several years in the game, he could pinpoint the location and requirements of most swordsmanship skills.

Nevertheless, no matter whether the skill was hard or easy to learn, Rhode knew that the hardest part was always the beginning. And since now he had the opportunity to reduce the time to learn, naturally he would be elated. Now all he had to do was work hard to reach the prerequisites of the skill and he would unlock the skill.

Of course, as a former player, Rhode could vividly recall the prerequisite conditions to unlock the skill. Unfortunately, there was a major problem.

He couldn't check his stats.

Rhode hadn't unlocked his bloodline so all of his stats were in '?' Before reaching level 10, he could still roughly guess his stats, but after unlocking the talent tree, his stats had been increasing with his level which he eventually lost track of. This was because each race had a different stat

growth rate and thus, he had to leave everything up to fate to give him a matching swordsmanship skill.

The skill that Rhode wanted to obtain was 'Dark Dance.' As the name suggests, the skill was a stealth-type swordsmanship. It would drastically reduce the user's presence while amplifying their damage and critical chance at the same time.

As the Summoning Swordsman class was somewhat a hybrid, Rhode would preferably refrain from fighting head-on with other pure melee classes especially if they were much higher level than him. So, Dark Dance would fit him perfectly. The only downside of this skill was that it required high dexterity. The skill originated from fallen elves as an evil technique, so it naturally inherited elven characteristics. Without having a nimble body, learning this swordsmanship skill would be a fleeting dream.

Alas, it was a pity that it didn't go as he wished.

The swordsmanship Rhode obtained was not the 'Dark Dance' he was looking for, but instead it was 'Starfall.'

Rhode stared at his newfound skill; frankly, he was feeling quite depressed. While it was true that he named his mercenary group as Starlight, it didn't mean that he wanted to attract words beginning with 'Star.' Well, nevertheless a skill was still a skill.

As a rare swordsmanship skill, Starfall eclipsed Moon Shadow in both strength and value since the latter was a basic swordsmanship skill.

Other than that, there was one more thing Rhode couldn't understand. Every time he leveled up, he always received two Skill Points. Previously in the ruins, as he was busy in the middle of a battle, he didn't think much of it. But now he still couldn't find an answer even after thinking for half a day.

In the game, he had overheard that someone managed to obtain a random bloodline that could increase stats and Skill Points when leveling up. So all

he could do now was to assume that his mysterious bloodline would be somewhat related to that ‘random bloodline’ that person mentioned.

He faced the system prompt before him.

Without the slightest hesitation, Rhode used the Skill Points. A familiar system prompt appeared once again.

**[Used 1 skill point, ‘Starfall Swordsmanship’ unlocked, rank E ———
Special skill: Wrath of Judgement]**

After receiving this information, Rhode felt a warm feeling emerging from his chest which quickly spread to his entire body. Then another prompt appeared before him.

**[Wrath of Judgement: Using the sword as the instrument of death,
guide the power of the soul so that the enemy will tremble before your
wrath — the power of absolute destruction...]**

Rhode clenched his hand in glee, and his eyes flashed a trace of confidence.

Everything went smoothly.

As for the other five skill points, Rhode chose to keep it. Suddenly, he thought of something. If everything went as smoothly as this, maybe he could make another attempt...

But Rhode didn’t have that much time because there was trouble in front of him.

He didn’t know when, but everyone finally recovered. The mercenaries who had been covered in injuries were totally healed and the Clerics who were exhausted had also regained their stamina. While they wanted to stay in the safety of the cave, the rational part of their mind told them that was just a delusion.

In the end, they still have to leave.

Although reluctant, Kudla kept his word. He gathered his members and instructed them to follow Rhode's orders. While Rhode could tell that he didn't obtain their 100% cooperation, they still respected Kudla enough to keep quiet and follow his orders.

Still, there were always one or two black sheep.

"I disagree."

A clear, sharp sound echoed in the cave. A female walked out from the crowd; apparently it was the thief that was almost killed by Rhode from before.

Even though her face was hidden behind a black mask, it still couldn't conceal the doubt in her eyes.

"Leader, I think you've done well so far. Everyone here is still surviving because of your leadership, but now you want to leave our lives in the hand of a stranger? I will not agree! I will only believe in my leader."

"That's your problem."

Rhode didn't even raise his head.

"Whether you agree or not doesn't matter. If you want to escape this place safely, follow my orders. I've already faced so much trouble just to come here and I don't intend to bring a bunch of corpses back. I don't wish to see my hard work in vain. So whether you protest or not, it won't affect my decision."

"You... Mr, Sereck, are you also..."

Hearing Rhode's answer, the girl clenched her teeth. She looked to Sereck for help, but he only revealed a wry smile.

"I'm sorry, but I think it's better like this. Just as Rhode had said, we can't afford to fail after the amount of effort taken to get here. Since we've found you, we will help escort you back to Deep Stone City. Since Kudla had

requested us for help, it means that he is unable to bring all of you back safely. Otherwise, why would you seek us out for help?

“...”

She was speechless for a moment. Indeed it was so. If Kudla had the power to bring them back safely, why would they need the Mercenary Association for help?

“B-but we don’t know this man...”

“You guys don’t believe in our leader!”

Suddenly, another voice interrupted the girl. The mercenaries turned and found out that the voice belonged to Anne who was quietly standing by the side. Contrary to her usual joyous expression, her face was now ice cold.

“Anne believes in our leader. If leader says he can bring all of you out safely, he definitely can do it. Since you guys can’t do it yourselves, then stop wasting time alright?”

“What did you say?!”

The thief was angered as she jumped and revealed two gleaming daggers in her hands.

“Are you looking down on us?”

“Anne is just telling the truth since you can’t see it even if it is right before your eyes!”

Anne snorted coldly and raised her chin. The shield on her hand immediately glowed when she took a battle stance.

“If you don’t believe me, then go ahead and try!”

As the conflict was about to reach its peak, like a bucket of ice water Rhode’s cold voice drenched the two heated women.

“Both of you shut up and stop.”

Rhode’s voice wasn’t loud, but somehow after hearing it both of them couldn’t help but tremble. Anne pouted and retrieved her shield. Since her opponent also put away her daggers, Anne also chose to stop.

“I’ll say it one more time.”

Rhode’s hand pressed against his forehead.

“This matter is already decided. All of you don’t have the rights to refuse. I won’t use Mr. Sereck to pressure you, but do understand that Mr. Kudla and I already agreed on this. If there’s someone who is still unsatisfied with this decision, you can go look for Mr. Kudla. We can’t afford to waste any more time right now, and if both of you do similar things in the future, then I will leave you behind to join the undead family.”

“...”

The atmosphere was tense, but fortunately no one else objected to Rhode’s authority. Finally he could move on to the next step.

Both Sereck and Kudla had suggested to return using their path from before. But Rhode’s plan was different.

“That’s a foolish decision.”

Rhode said coolly.

“Why?”

Sereck stared at Rhode, puzzled.

“It’s true that we’re already familiar with that path, and if we returned from there we would be faster...”

Rhode then shook his head.

“... however, we won’t be able to pass through the prairie again.”

“But when we came...”

“It’s different from before.”

Rhode thought that Sereck’s skill with his sword was outstanding, but as for his other aspects, he was still lacking in various areas.

Rhode waved his hand and explained to him patiently.

“Previously, I had carefully arranged our numbers before setting out and five Clerics were already barely enough to support the group. Now that we have another six, our formation would surely expand. This means that we have more ground to protect with the same number of Clerics. If they run out of stamina halfway, it would spell death.”

“So that’s why.”

Sereck’s eyes lit up after understanding Rhode’s point. Kudla who was standing quietly by the side also nodded his head as if he was thinking of something. Then he asked doubtfully, “So what should we do next?”

Facing his doubt, Rhode answered without hesitation.

“Continue to move forward.”

“What?!”

Both Sereck or Kudla were shocked. They looked at Rhode in disbelief wondering if they heard him wrong.

Oh Holy Soul... just to travel here was already so dangerous. Why would this young man want to press forward instead...? Why...?

Chapter 90 - Move Forward To Retreat

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

After noticing the doubt on their faces, Rhode quickly explained, “We simply don’t have sufficient strength to go back that way.”

“Each undead by itself isn’t a problem, but it gets tricky when they rush in a horde. Since our group got bigger, we have to increase our protection radius and that would mean that we have to face more enemies. If we press forward, although the strength of each undead would rise, at least we won’t have to deal with a large number like before. Moreover, high-level undead tends to roam alone and rarely work together which gives us a better chance of survival.”

“But some high-level undead have the power to command low-level undead...”

Apparently Sereck knew quite a bit about the undead.

“Don’t worry, that won’t happen.”

Rhode held his sword and drew a simple map on the ground. First, he drew a circle and then followed by a line.

“We are here. Fortunately, this place is considered to be the along the borders so we should be able to leave quickly as long we speed up a little. Then we will pass through here...” Rhode pointed at the line near the border and continued, “then we will arrive at another area of the plateau. There’s a valley here and as long as we pass through this valley, we can leave this place.”

“How do you know?”

Kudla couldn't contain his curiosity. He stared at the young man before him thinking that he might just be uttering nonsense.

“Because I've visited this place before.”

As usual, Rhode didn't elaborate further and merely replied Kudla monotonously.

“There are two kinds of undead in the valley. The first one is the Giant Skeleton... I think that most of you can guess what it looks like by its name. It is a giant frame of bones that possess monstrous strength. What it lacks in agility is made up for by its strength.”

“It has a unique ability to self-destruct at critical moments. Even if the battle seems like it's over, don't assume that you've already won. The numerous bones on its body can attack you even if separated from the main body. It has a weakness though — there is a Soul Fire hidden within its skull, so as long as we crush the skull, we can defeat the monster. The Giant Skeleton doesn't possess high intelligence, if we work together and dodge its attacks, we should be able to defeat it.”

Rhode explained the strengths and weaknesses of the Giant Skeleton in a clear manner. Sereck and Kudla nodded their head after understanding how to deal with it.

“Next, near the end of the valley is the Death Knight's territory.”

Rhode used his sword to draw another circle.

“The Death Knight is incredibly powerful. You can imagine its strength to be similar to Mr. Sereck. Also, as Mr. Sereck had mentioned previously, it is a high-level undead that has the ability to command low-level undead. The minions that he will command are those Giant Skeletons.”

Rhode's hand stop moving.

“Which is why we must clear all the Giant Skeletons as soon as possible. Although the Giant Skeletons cannot telepathically alert the Death Knight

even if it were attacked, if the battle becomes too loud and the Death Knight picks up the scent of us... then even a fool will understand that is a problem.”

Kudla was slightly surprised and couldn't help but agree with Rhode's strategy. At first, he thought that Rhode was too young to be a commander, but now after hearing his detailed breakdown of the monsters and how to defeat them, all of his previous doubts washed away entirely.

Rhode revealed a way of instructing the group that he had never seen before. First, he would explain what kind of attacks the enemy would make and teach the group how to counter these attacks. It was so detailed that he even stated the type of skill needed to be used. What was even more admirable was his intricate grasp of these skills and seemingly immaculate knowledge of it.

In this area, Kudla knew right away that he wasn't of Rhode's caliber because he knew no other mercenary group leader utilized this method of command. At most, a regular mercenary group leader would just give the order to attack, defend or retreat and Kudla had firmly believed that was the way to command a mercenary group. He thought that the tricky part of commanding would be the mercenary leader's reaction speed and his subordinates' tacit understanding of each other. However, Rhode opened a new world to him.

Kudla was shocked. It was simply unimaginable.

Each mercenary had a different skill level, and their fighting style wasn't the same. Thus, it was almost impossible for the commander to teach them what to do individually...

Without a doubt, if Kudla were a player, he wouldn't be making a mountain out of a molehill. As Rhode had said before — prior to fighting any BOSS, every player will have to make their necessary preparations.

“Well, that should be it.”

Rhode clapped his hands.

Back in the game, after his briefing, Rhode would usually add something like this: “If you don’t pay attention, I’m gonna directly kick you out later.” But since he wasn’t playing a game right now, even if something went wrong, there would be no chance for redemption.

Rhode had no interest in arguing with dead people.

After finishing his discussion with Sereck and Kudla, Rhode gathered everyone and explained what kind of danger they would face as well as administer their individual responsibilities. This time, the formation was slightly different. Rhode, Celia, and Sereck would lead the main offense while Anne would be responsible for protecting the Clerics. As for the mercenaries, they didn’t bear any heavy responsibilities because Rhode wasn’t familiar with them. Instead, he arranged for them to guard the rear together with Kudla since he was already briefed on how to deal with the Giant Skeletons. Rhode saw that he was a smart person, so there shouldn’t be any problems.

However, there were two significant changes this time.

“What about me? Do I not have to attack?”

Marlene frowned.

“Your large area of effect spells will cause a great disturbance to the surroundings. Our objective is to finish the battle in the shortest possible time without drawing much attention to us.”

“I see...”

After hearing Rhode’s explanation, Marlene nodded. Then, after a moment, she added, “If that’s the case, why not let me cast Silence? That way, I can prevent the enemy from hearing anything.”

Rhode was subtly surprised for a moment.

“You can cast Silence?”

“Of course!”

Marlene nodded as if the sun had always been rising from the east.

“Aren’t you an Elemental Mage?”

“I’m proficient in elemental spells, but I’m also fairly well-versed in illusory and arcane spells.”

“...”

Rhode stared at Marlene who proudly raised her head. Rhode finally understood why the people called her a rare magical genius of a hundred years... No wonder many players complained about not being able to defeat her. This young miss was simply a copy of a BOSS in the making.

“Kid, I know what you want me to do...”

Old Walker fondled his chin and revealed a complicated expression. His previous role was to scout and detect enemies from afar. To put it bluntly, he didn’t participate in battles at all. However, Rhode decided that he needed to contribute his strength this time.

“You want me to attract that monster’s attention, aren’t they very sensitive?”

“That’s right.”

Rhode nodded.

“But don’t worry, I will tell you what to do.”

As for both Anne and Lize, their role didn’t change much. He didn’t even have to tell Lize what to do and merely asked her to master the attack rhythm. Not only was the upcoming battle a test, but it was an excellent opportunity to gain more experience. Lize had been rather consistent in combat, so he didn’t have to worry about her.

Rhode didn’t have to say much to Anne as well. But he finally understood why the vice-leader of Mark White wanted to find an opportunity to kick her out. The way she expressed her thoughts was too direct. Most of the

mercenaries were glaring at her right now, let alone the half-elf thief who would've killed her if she had the chance.

Still, under this tense atmosphere, Anne had the guts to continue humming a song as though nothing was wrong, albeit unintentionally. Have to say... she truly deserved to be called a tank. The way she pulled and held the aggro was top-notch.

After pushing away the boulder, a cold wind blew in and made everyone shiver.

“Let's go.”

Rhode said coolly as he walked out from the cave with everyone following closely behind him.

Perhaps lady luck was blessing them as they didn't encounter an ambush when leaving the withered forest. When they finally left the forest, everyone felt relieved, but before they could relax, they immediately fell upon a new hurdle.

Boom! Boom! Lize immediately snuffed the Holy Light. They were now at the edge of a cliff, quietly looking down at a huge shadow that was moving back and forth in the valley. Everyone could feel a chill when they saw the monster.

Giant Skeleton.

As their name suggested, they were giants without flesh. They towered over three meters tall, and their skeletal structure didn't seem weak and brittle at all. But all they did was mindlessly wander around the valley, only turning its huge head to look around from time to time. Inside its empty sockets was the Soul Fire that gave it life. It shone like a small sun, emitting a green light that swept around the valley like a lighthouse.

Facing such a powerful enemy, can they really win?

No one had the confidence.

“Okay, listen to me closely.”

Rhode took a deep breath and lowered his voice. He turned around and gestured to Old Walker.

Old Walker quickly bent down and came forward. Two shadows quietly stepped towards a huge boulder near the valley.

“See that?”

Rhode pointed towards the Giant Skeleton not too far away from him. It wielded an enormous bone club as it sauntered back and forth. Old Walker traced the area where Rhode pointed to and nodded.

“Shoot the arrow there. Remember, don’t at shoot it, but near it. About five meters away from it.”

“Yes.”

Old Walker nodded. Then he pulled his bow and aimed towards the target with intense concentration. Everyone else couldn’t help but hold their breath while watching him.

When the Giant Skeleton looked back and walked towards the other side of the valley, Rhode shouted.

“Now!”

Chapter 91 - Giant Skeleton

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Whoosh! The arrow shot whizzed through the air and collided into a pile of stones not far from the Giant Skeleton. The minute sound made by the arrow caused the Giant Skeleton to turn around and investigate the disturbance. Its fearsome, empty eyes emitted a dazzling light and shone at the pile of stones.

Holy Soul... what a quick reaction!

Old Walker swallowed his saliva subconsciously. He thought he had already mentally prepared himself but the Giant Skeleton's reaction speed still overwhelmed his expectations.

How can such a giant frame of bones have such a keen sense? That's just too terrifying!

Just as he was about to take a deep breath, Rhode's low voice sounded beside him.

“Retreat.”

Both of them slowly traced back ten steps. Then, following Rhode's orders once more, Old Walker shot another arrow which hit another area.

The Giant Skeleton lumbered forward to the noise.

From afar, it seemed as if its movements were tremendously slow, but it only looked that way because of its massive body size. In just a few steps the Giant Skeleton already arrived close to the group. It opened its mouth and revealed the terrifying boundless darkness within. Then, it leaned over and scanned the surroundings with its two fiery eyes.

Rhode raised a finger.

That was the signal.

Marlene raised her wand and a gray light shot out in a straight line towards the Giant Skeleton. Within less than a second, the gray light formed a hemispheric barrier which enveloped the Giant Skeleton like a bird trapped in a cage. The barrier then flashed for a moment before disappearing into thin air. However, a thin line remained connected between Marlene's wand and the Giant Skeleton. In a blink of an eye, everything went deathly silent.

“We have 30 seconds!”

Marlene gripped her wand tightly while channeling the magic spell. She then quickly reminded the group of the duration of Silence. For such a massive monster like this, 30 seconds was already her limit.

But 30 seconds was more than enough for Rhode, Celia, and Sereck to reach the Giant Skeleton.

“———!!!”

The Giant Skeleton's acute senses immediately picked up the enemy and raised its head. Its intense gaze met the angel's Holy Aura which made it furious. In a flash, it raised its giant club and roared at its eternal nemesis.

As though wielding a toy hammer, the Giant Skeleton swung its bone club and pulverized a few large boulders near the cliff. Some loose rocks rolled off the precipice and smashed to the ground below without creating any sound. It was quite a strange occurrence... somewhat like watching a mime perform.

Celia swung her silver sword to meet the Giant Skeleton's club. Although no sound came from the clash, the many sparks revealed the intensity of the battle. Initially, the Giant Skeleton's immense strength caused the angel to stagger, but she quickly used her wings to unleash a jet stream which propelled her forward, leading to a stalemate. Clearly, the Giant Skeleton wasn't going to give up as it took a step forward and lifted its club to launch another attack. It just wanted to pummel this small insect to death as soon as possible.

But it was unable to do so.

A rotating blade sliced at the giant's arm, forcing its attack trajectory to tilt and miss Celia by a hair's breadth. Although the strong wind still caused her to stumble, at least she escaped from being crushed. Then, the Giant Skeleton shifted its attention to Rhode who suddenly appeared at its feet.

“_____!!!”

This provocation made the Giant Skeleton even more furious. As the Death Knight's minion, it clearly wasn't a creature with high intelligence. The purpose of its existence was to destroy life which could grant it a brief respite after each kill. However, after such a long time, nothing of that had happened. This made the Giant Skeleton angrier and desperate. Now that it had finally found an opportunity to vent its anger and hatred, it would stop at nothing until either itself or its foes were dead.

The Giant Skeleton lifted up its club once more, ready to turn Rhode into minced meat. Sensing an incoming attack, Rhode retreated a few steps back to dodge.

Meanwhile, a pillar of Holy Light fell from the sky and wrapped the Giant Skeleton.

Lize lifted both of her hands. She bit her lip nervously as she concentrated on her spell. Just beside her were the other Clerics who were also casting Divine Brilliance to weaken the Giant Skeleton.

Marlene was still holding the same position. She clenched her wand in slight displeasure as she couldn't help the group with anything else. According to the plan, she wasn't allowed to use any powerful elemental spells because the impact might attract other undead. It was quite a distasteful position for her.

“20 seconds!”

The Giant Skeleton's club smashed into the ground, propelling pieces of stones and debris in all directions. Some stray debris managed to hit

Rhode's body.

Rhode could dodge it, but he didn't as he was charging an attack. Sword energy began to condense around him when he consumed his Soul Power. After a moment, Rhode took half-a-step forward and raised his right hand before slashing down with all his might.

On the surface, the attack appeared rather ordinary, but when the sword was in mid-arc, the tip suddenly lit up. When his sword touched the ground, the brilliant light that condensed at the tip suddenly burst out. The flat ground immediately split apart as though a giant sword divided the earth. Everyone was shocked at the light which instantaneously spread to their immediate surroundings.

That was the new Swordsmanship skill in 'Starfall' — Fury Trial.

Compared to Moon Shadow and Dark Dance which utilized intelligence and agility respectively, Starfall was a Swordsmanship based on pure strength. Starfall didn't boast flashy or quick moves, but instead, it flaunts its raw destructive power. Even though the Giant Skeleton's strength was nothing to laugh about, Rhode was confident that this skill would be able to contend with it.

The Giant Skeleton who was in the midst of an attack couldn't block the incoming strike. Its massive body lost its balance and tipped backward, but before it could regain its footing, another light already aimed towards its unprotected torso.

Silence swallowed all sources of sound. And at this moment, the Giant Skeleton's body was no longer intact. After the violent attack, its ribcage cracked and the rest of the bones shook as though it would break at any moment. It appeared that they were on the verge of victory, but Rhode knew that this was the most dangerous moment.

"10 seconds!"

"Sereck!"

Sereck, who was hiding, finally appeared after making his preparations. His entire body turned into light and rushed forward — his sword in his hand burst out with glorious brilliant circles which shot towards the Giant Skeleton. Both Celia and Rhode followed up and attacked, sending two crescent moon slashes towards the Giant Skeleton.

When it detected the aura of the Swordmaster, the Giant Skeleton reacted. It instinctively stretched out its left hand in an attempt to block the attack but failed miserably.

A full-power attack from a level 40 Master Swordsman wasn't something that could be easily blocked by a mid-level undead. In fact, Sereck's sword had not even touched the Giant Skeleton's hand and it was already showing signs of disintegration. The next moment, Sereck's sword pierced through its mouth.

In a blink of an eye, the giant's skull blew into pieces. Everything from the lower jaw to the chin was missing, and the rest of the skull was filled with cracks. The Soul Fire flickered as if it was about to do something, but at that moment, another crescent moon slash passed through it and completely extinguished the flame.

Followed by the loss of its life source, the massive body crashed down to the ground the same time Marlene's Silence spell ended.

Chapter 92 - The Melancholy of Anne Georgia

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

After defeating a few Giant Skeletons, the group slowed down even more.

During the briefing, Rhode had warned them that they were rushing against time and had to hurry up, so everyone assumed that they would be running all over the place defeating enemy after enemy then moving on to the next.

But that wasn't the case.

The whole group moved as slow as a turtle. Whenever they took three steps forward, they would take two steps back. It was painfully slow — even slower than taking a casual jog in the forest. But when encountering an enemy, Rhode would suddenly speed up and kill them as fast as lightning, roughly finishing the fight within thirty seconds before quickly hiding and repeat the process on the next enemy once more.

To be honest, these kinds of guerrilla tactics weren't well-received by some in the group — it could even be said to be downright embarrassing.

“Hmph.”

The half-elf snorted in disdain when she saw Rhode stop abruptly and proceeded to sneak around like a criminal.

“Just look at that man creeping around. That's so not impressive. Leader is obviously much more honorable than him.”

“Anne thinks that you're full of nonsense.”

Of course, Anne had a differing opinion.

“If not because of Anne’s leader, with your inadequate abilities, it would be impossible for you to defeat these Giant Skeletons.

“Hmph. It’s not like I would’ve followed this stupid plan to come here in the first place.”

The half-elf couldn’t care less about Anne’s retort.

“If our leader was in charge of the group, we would’ve gotten out of here already.”

“Since you think of it that way, you don’t have to follow Anne and the rest.”

Anne’s lips curled, her eyes cold.

“You only know how to flap your lips. If you guys had the ability to escape by yourselves, your leader wouldn’t have chosen to follow my leader’s command.”

“Don’t joke around. Our leader is only following him because you guys heeded our distress call. We aren’t ungrateful brats.”

The half-elf turned around in a huff, refusing to speak any more. She stared at the dark, eerie valley which brought an unknown chill to her but even so, she refused to look at the person beside her.

“Hmph...”

Anne didn’t want to stop though. She glared at the half-elf and took a deep breath.

“So for the sake of pride, you will even abandon your life. Such foolishness. You really deserved to be trapped here.”

“You!!!”

That string of words somehow caused the half-elf to snap. She couldn’t keep her calm any longer and glared angrily at Anne. Anne, however, also

didn't back down and returned the favor.

Anne still maintained a smile on her face, but the half-elf thought it was terrifying. She felt her face turn cold as though the one staring at her wasn't a human but a dangerous beast instead.

Suddenly, the face before her warped into a shape of a ferocious monster with razor-sharp fangs. The half-elf immediately grabbed her dagger out of instinct, but luckily her rationality told her that it wasn't smart to make a move at this time.

“What are you guys doing!”

Marlene's voice broke the tense atmosphere. She stopped walking and turned towards the two girls behind her.

In some ways, Marlene acted as the mercenary group's vice-leader. She would take care of matters that Rhode couldn't afford to waste time on. While Lize and Old Walker were also senior members of the group, one of them didn't dare to take charge and the other just didn't have the patience to manage the group.

Since Marlene saw the hostile atmosphere between the two girls behind her, she certainly couldn't sit idly.

Marlene shifted her gaze to the mercenaries next to them who appeared as though nothing had happened. Indeed, it was the right decision for them not to poke their noses into places that they didn't belong as both groups ultimately walked a different path.

“Sister Marlene, she...”

“We are in a dangerous situation right now.”

Marlene interrupted Anne. While she wasn't exactly close to Anne, she could somewhat figure out Anne's peculiar train of thought.

Usually, when normal people interact, it is because they have something in common or their personality matches with one another. Even if they can't

get along, at least they will choose to maintain a reasonably passive relationship. Marlene is a good example. Even if the man in front of her is as ugly as a pig, if he were her friend or relative, she would still display a polite smile. That was how 'mature' people conversed with one another.

Anne, however, was totally different. She didn't care whether her actions would bring her any benefit or not. She simply chose her friends based on instinct... like an animal. To put it cutely, like a puppy, it would wag its tail at a person it fancied even if he or she didn't give it any food. On the flip side, it would bark at the people it disliked even if it were the owner who fed it every day.

What a headache...

This was the reason why Marlene didn't bother to persuade the both of them to stop quarreling because it was pointless. Besides, she was more concerned about other more important things right now...

"Whether you guys like it or not, we've already come this far and there's no turning back. We have to keep moving forward, so I hope both of you can focus on the task at hand."

Without saying anything else, Marlene turned her head to the front and continued walking. The displeasure on the half-elf's face was evident, but she still chose to keep silent as she was dealing with a Mage. In this continent, Mages were a dangerous group of people that shouldn't be provoked. Rather than to put herself at unnecessary risk, it was better for her to shut up.

Rhode didn't notice the small dispute. Right now, he was busy hiding behind a boulder as he studied the area before him with a gloomy expression.

They had already spent five hours clearing the Giant Skeletons one by one and the sky was still dark. There was no difference between day and night along the borders between the Country of Darkness and Light as the whole region was mostly in perpetual darkness. But that wasn't why Rhode frowned.

Right now, there were two Giant Skeletons left in the valley who were fairly close to each other.

Previously, Rhode could successfully lure the Giant Skeletons one at the time because they were far apart, but these two were different. Like gatekeepers, one stood on the left and one on the right with their backs facing one another. Although the two Giant Skeletons still did wander off a little from their positions, they still weren't far apart enough for Rhode to employ the same tactic as before.

This was difficult.

Even though the group was fairly well-versed in fighting Giant Skeletons by now, facing two at the same time was a different scenario altogether.

If it were only two Giant Skeletons... then perhaps it was still possible. With Marlene in the rear utilizing her powerful magic ability supporting him and Celia, he could see himself taking down one Giant Skeleton. Then Sereck could take on the other and everything would be fine and dandy, but...

Unfortunately, the reality wasn't that simple.

Rhode knew what was behind that valley...

The Death Knight.

He knew for sure that if Marlene cast a magic spell at this distance, the Death Knight would immediately detect it. High-level undead were exceptionally sensitive towards surges of magical energy, which was why even if they used Silence, it would be impossible to escape detection.

Judging from the past battles with single Giant Skeletons, Rhode knew that the group wouldn't be able to finish off those two Giant Skeletons in time before the Death Knight arrived. Besides, even if they could deal with the two skeletons in time, they still had to confront the Death Knight immediately afterward without a rest.

Frankly, Rhode was very reluctant to confront the Death Knight directly. Although its level was lower than Sereck, it was merely a five to six level difference. This gap was simply negligible when the battle was between humans and undead monsters.

For example, even if a knife stabbed into the torso of the Death Knight, nothing much would happen. But what would happen if Sereck was the one being stabbed by the knife?

It would be best if he'd quickly penned down his last words to the woman he loved throughout his life.

Rhode's original plan was to get Sereck to hold the Death Knight's attention while the others escape, then he and Sereck would quickly leave afterward once everyone safely exited Silent Plateau. Once they left the area, the Death Knight wouldn't be able to follow them. This method was way safer than attempting to defeat the Death Knight.

However, no matter how hard he tried, he knew his plan was clearly going to fail. If the Death Knight came to them instead, then based on the terrain, the new plan would be called 'one man hold back a thousand man army,' and that 'one man' would be referring to the Death Knight.

They were in a narrow valley right now, which meant that the Death Knight would totally bottleneck their way forward if it were drawn here. But Rhode didn't have an alternative; he couldn't forcefully proceed, yet it was also impossible for him to turn back.

What to do?

It wasn't as if there wasn't a way out, After defeating the Giant Skeletons, all he had to do was to use a bait to lure the Death Knight so that the rest could escape. As long as that person could hold on, Rhode and Sereck would immediately rush back and fight the Death Knight together, at that point, everything would be just as planned.

But who will be able to it?

Rhode turned around and looked at the group.

Both Marlene and Lize were casters, so asking them to be bait was equivalent to sending them to die. Sereck possessed the most strength; thus, his role was to deal with one of the Giant Skeletons. Even so, it would be difficult to say whether he could defeat the Giant Skeleton before the arrival of the Death Knight. In previous battles, Rhode and Celia helped him to divert the monster's attention and Sereck would deal the final blow, but now he will have no one to help him, so he had to figure it out by himself.

Old Walker? Kudla and his mercenaries?

What a joke. These guys can't even block ordinary undead. To ask them to tank the Death Knight was simply sending them to their deaths. Furthermore, Rhode's objective was to bring them back safely, if they died here then why would he even bother coming here in the first place.

Then...

Rhode went silent for a moment; then he waved his hand to the back.

"Anne, come here."

"Leader, what's the matter?"

Hearing his call, Anne immediately ran towards him. Her two beady eyes focused only on him, the only thing missing right now was a tail wagging behind her...

Ahh, she does really look like...

"I have a plan."

Rhode said as he walked closer towards Anne. Then, he lowered his body and whispered. After a while, he raised his head and looked at her with seriousness.

"Do you understand the gravity of what I've said? Are you willing to take on this duty?"

“Of course!”

Anne did not hesitate and nodded quickly.

“I will do anything leader ask me to do.”

If it was the usual, Rhode wouldn't have bothered to say anything more, but this time, perhaps because of the severity of the situation, he frowned and said, “The Death Knight is about level 35. It has a strength close to a Commander. If you think that this is too much for you, please let me know now and I won't have you take on this risk. If you can't handle this but still insist on going, the risk will be even larger.”

“I understand, leader.”

Anne nodded.

“But I believe this is the reason why I am here — because I'm confident.”

“...”

Looking at her clear eyes, Rhode went silent. He studied the girl before him for a while but still didn't understand where she got that confidence from.

Rhode wasn't good at woman psychology. Besides, he had only interacted with her for only a few days.

But still, that was no reason to send her off to die.

In the game, if the party's tank died, then so be it. They could easily resurrect later and have another go again. In this continent, everything changed. There were no second chances. Rhode didn't want to send her out, but now it looked like there were no other choice.

Meanwhile, Lize and Marlene observed the two of them quietly at a distance. They were feeling uneasy because they didn't know what Rhode was whispering about. But since Rhode didn't attack, they knew that there were some changes to the plan.

“I will finish it as soon as possible. But before that, you need to hold on.”

Rhode patted Anne’s shoulder.

In the face of the possibility of death, the girl revealed her usual energetic smile.

“No worries, leader, I’ll be fine.”

Chapter 93 - Double Kill!

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

After receiving Anne's 'consent,' Rhode called the rest and briefed them on the current plan. Once they heard what Rhode was planning to do, everyone was surprised.

“Why am I not the one to take on this dangerous task?”

Naturally, Sereck questioned.

“You'll have to face the Giant Skeleton alone which is already quite different from before.”

Rhode shook his head and answered Sereck before shifting his gaze to Marlene.

“Ms. Marlene, you won't have to use Silence anymore since the Death Knight will notice us anyway. For the upcoming battle, I will require you to use your offensive spells on the Giant Skeletons. They have quite a decent amount of magic resistance, but I believe you will have your way to deal with it.”

“I will try my best!”

Unknowingly, Marlene clenched her fist and raised her voice. The pressure on her was indeed quite significant; not only would the battle be difficult, but also...

Her thoughts trailed off as she turned her head to glance at the group of people before resting her eyes on Anne.

“Lize, once the two Giant Skeletons are down, we will need to find Anne immediately and assist her. This is of utmost importance.”

“Yes, Mr. Rhode. I will try my best.”

Lize clenched her fist tightly and nodded.

“Mr. Rhode, what about us?”

Standing behind Rhode, Kudla couldn't help but ask.

“We also can...”

“Our mission is to save you guys. Now, we are only one step away from mission success; therefore I cannot let you take this risk. Moreover, someone needs to protect the Clerics. If you guys take part in the battle, who are they going to depend on for protection?”

Kudla was at a loss. He looked at the nervous Clerics beside him and immediately knew that they wouldn't be able to make it to the exit without help. He was also unsure whether he would be able to delay the Death Knight. According to Rhode, the Death Knight was almost as strong as Sereck and it was a high-level undead that was on the verge of the Commander level. Kudla felt pretty certain that he wouldn't be able to block a full-strength attack from a monster like that. So, he quietly nodded his head and gestured towards his mercenary group.

“Alright, everyone! Get into your positions!”

Rhode clapped his hands and shouted. Then, he glanced at Celia who was beside him.

“After defeating the enemy, fly over immediately. Remember you must protect Anne at all cost. Do not let anything happen to her.”

“Understood, Master.”

If Anne died, no one would be able to resurrect her, but if a summoned spirit died, Rhode could still resummon it later. If not because of Celia's passive ability that was incredibly useful to help kill Giant Skeletons, Rhode would rather send Celia to delay the Death Knight instead of Anne.

Sending Anne was the best decision Rhode could make based on their current situation. Even though Rhode had a rough gauge on her strength due to the test he had given her, their time together was simply too short for him to realize the true extent of her power. Therefore, all he could do now was trust her as she was the only person that had the highest chance of succeeding.

The spark to start the battle was no different from before.

Old Walker shot an arrow and lured the two Giant Skeletons as per normal. Both of the monsters lumbered slowly towards the noise. This wasn't a good sign because it confirmed Rhode's fears.

Although Rhode wanted to keep using this tactic to lure these two Giant Skeletons as far as possible, as if detecting something was wrong, the monsters suddenly stopped.

Once Rhode saw this, he knew that it was time to begin. He clenched his teeth and shouted.

“Move!!”

Marlene raised her wand and shot a spell at one of the Giant Skeleton's skull. The very next moment, grey, tumultuous clouds formed above the skeletons.

The battle-starved Marlene who had held back for the past five hours finally released all her pent-up frustrations with a humongous lightning bolt that fell from the sky.

Craaack! Countless streaks of lightning came crashing down onto the helpless Giant Skeletons. The sound of the electrostatic discharges caused a few people to tremble, and the ground shook along with the thunderous impact. For the sake of her comrades and victory, Marlene didn't hold back her power. She depleted most of her Soul Power for that one single destructive spell.

As a result, the Giant Skeletons that were caught unprepared appeared to be under significant pressure.

Even if they had flesh no more, they still had a decent resistance towards magic. But it wasn't unlimited. After ten seconds, the Giant Skeleton's body began to crack under the immense pressure of mother nature.

One after another, bolts of lightning assaulted the two Giant Skeletons. It roared loudly in pain and anger, but it was futile as they were still trapped within Marlene's 'thunderbolt prison.'

More... just a little bit more!!

Everyone stared at the miserable monsters that were being pounded by millions of volts of electricity again and again. They clenched their fist and silently prayed that everything would go smoothly like this until its death, but unfortunately, that was only their wishful thinking.

The thick gray clouds suddenly dispersed. Marlene's arms slumped down, her face pale. At the moment, she was leaning against a tree with her face full of sweat; she found out that both of her hands were trembling uncontrollably and wasn't able to lift them up. She might be a magical genius, but there was still a limit to her power after all. The spell she cast consumed a lot of Soul Power, and to channel it for such a long duration was already an incredible feat.

Sssss!

Wisps of smoke trails rose up into the air. Their bones were filled with fractures and covered in a thick layer of soot, but they were clearly still standing.

“Damn it!”

Rhode cursed under his breath. A trace of disappointment flashed across his face; but as an experienced leader, he knew it was pointless to complain.

He swung his sword and pointed forward.

“Go!”

Immediately after saying that, he shot forward with Celia towards the leftmost Giant Skeleton. Meanwhile, Sereck also made a move on the rightmost Giant Skeleton.

Before it could recover, the duo was already before the Giant Skeleton. One holy sword and one crimson sword slashed down in concert one after the other.

As Celia had wings, her flying speed was faster than Rhode. She reached before him and swung her sword at the Giant Skeleton. As the Giant Skeleton hadn't recovered fully from the lightning attack, it didn't think much and used its hands to block. This time, Celia wasn't thrown back by the impact; instead, she ignited her sword with holy flames and burned the Giant Skeleton's hand.

At the same time, Rhode arrived from behind!

Celia waved her silver sword and sliced off the Giant Skeleton's right leg. After losing its support, it roared angrily and fell to the ground. However, that didn't mean that it gave up, on the contrary, the moment it fell to the ground, all its bones scattered everywhere on the floor.

*F*ck!*

Rhode cursed again. From his countless experiences, he knew what was coming up. Unfortunately, the one thing he wished not to happen was about to become a reality.

Rhode clenched his teeth and held out his palm. A red card materialized and flew out, forming into the flaming black hound who immediately rushed towards the skull.

Suddenly, the scattered bone fragments that were idle a moment ago began to swirl rapidly around the skull. After a while, it formed a huge whirlpool in the air, creating an impenetrable fortress that blocked Rhode's attack.

Rhode waved his sword and sent a Blade of Destruction towards the whirlpool. However, the light was eventually swallowed and disappeared without a trace. Meanwhile, Celia fluttered her wings and tried to enter from above, but when she was halfway through, the spinning bone fragments blocked her way forward.

This is going to be troublesome...

Rhode panted as he stared at the whirlpool of bones before him. The only thing he could do now was to wait.

Then, a sudden dazzling light fell from the sky and crashed into the whirlpool. Due to the impact, the bones shook violently, and together with a loud roar, a faint explosion surfaced from inside the bone fortress. Soon, the bones began to slow and several fragments were strewn to the ground. Apparently, the black hound had used its self-destruct on the skull which took out half of its face. The Soul Fire in its remaining half was evidently dimmer than before.

Although Marlene's spell couldn't destroy the Giant Skeleton, the damage that it had done was considerable. At this moment, it finally had shown its effectiveness.

“Celia!”

The angel rushed forward without hesitation. While in mid-air, her sword transformed into a silver light and pierced through the Giant Skeleton's skull. The surrounding bone fragments finally fell to the ground and stopped moving once its life source was destroyed.

Rhode didn't bother to watch Celia finish off the monster because he had already rushed towards the other side in with full speed. Sereck was in the same situation as he, fighting the Giant Skeleton's whirlpool defense. Rhode knew that they were already running late on time, so he had to finish it fast!

But he was still too late.

“Hiss———!!”

Suddenly, there was a sharp, resounding neigh of a horse in the distance.

Rhode froze.

The Death Knight has arrived!

Chapter 94 - Anne Georgia's Determination

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Darian slowly opened his eyes.

Dark skies and white fog surrounded him. The Death Knight silently scanned the area as he caressed his horse's mane below him. Nightmare, his horse, felt his touch and neighed softly in response.

It was said that an undead's world was colorless. When they chose to abandon their fleshy husk and enter eternal life, they also forsook their ability to witness the beautiful world. No matter how brilliant or extravagant the color was, it was only black and white in the eyes of an undead. Also, this was the reason why the undead were always so bloodthirsty and aggressive. In their eyes, nothing was worth remembering or cherishing anymore — only death and destruction could give them the feeling of superiority.

Darian was once a knight belonging to the border army of the Country of Darkness. He had violated the military rules and was forced to flee the country before settling down in this desolate valley.

For two hundred years he had been wandering around this valley. To most humans, this was a very long time, but Darian knew that with regards to other 'immortal' undead, two centuries was nothing but a fleeting moment.

It was still too early for him to go back to the Country of Darkness. If he went back now, he would've probably gotten himself a death sentence.

Must I stay in this desolate place forever?

In the beginning, Darian asked himself this question repeatedly. But after a while, he found himself no longer caring about these trivial matters

anymore. Ever since becoming an undead, his human desires slowly faded away, and so did his flesh. His concept of time, loneliness, and needs completely disappeared. From a certain point of view, the undead were like puppets with consciousness.

Darian was an exception though; he still retained some of his human emotions which was why he was able to violate the order from his superiors.

Darian trembled slightly.

He could sense the aura of his subordinates, the Giant Skeletons, weaken. It was an unusual situation that had never happened before ever since he stepped into the Silent Plateau. These Giant Skeletons didn't originate from the Country of Darkness, instead, Darian tamed the 'native species' of undead after arriving here. Although their strength wasn't even one-tenth of the Skeleton Guards in the Country of Darkness, he was confident that no one would be able to rival them in this desolate place.

But now, something was wrong.

A surge of magical energy spread in the air.

Darian turned around and saw thunderbolts falling from the sky.

Someone is attacking!!

Darian immediately turned vigilant. He picked up his lance and a giant shield by the side before shutting the visor over his face. Then, he pulled Nightmare's reins and steered it towards the battlefield.

As a high-level undead with consciousness, he could easily detect the chaotic magical surges in the air. Just like a raging tidal wave in the ocean, it smashed into his dormant heart that had been dead since a long time ago.

Huh, a Mage? A middle-circle Mage? Were they people sent by the Country of Darkness to kill me?

An alarm rang in his mind, but it soon disappeared. He was just a minor figure in the army who didn't know any military secret. The Country of Darkness wouldn't send an assassin just to kill someone like him.

Then there are the undead mages, but they wouldn't have this kind of power...

It's the aura of the living...

Is it an adventurer?

Darian felt somewhat nervous, but at the same time, he was feeling eager. As an undead, he derived satisfaction from slaying the living — watching their flame of life gradually fade away brought him joy and happiness comparable to living beings giving birth to a new life.

Darian was no exception.

Nightmare began to gallop towards the direction of the disturbance.

It's coming!!

Anne stood in the middle of the valley with a focused expression. The little figure's eyes met the gaze of the monster in the darkness. For someone who even smiled in the face of danger, Anne sported a serious expression.

It wasn't because she was afraid; rather, the aura of the dead always brought an uncomfortable sensation to the living.

She knew that she could no longer escape.

With her shield in her hand, she stood upright and steadfast.

As Marlene had guessed; Anne wasn't uninterested in relationships, but the way she determined friend or foe was solely based on her instinct. After the death of her old leader, her mercenary group made her very unhappy. What people didn't know was that Anne actually didn't mind a change in leadership, she just wanted a place to stay that made her feel happy. When the old leader was there, everyone in Mark White seemed to like her and

cared for her. They were able to tolerate her behavior and problems, so Anne was also willing to work hard to guard her happy life. In every single battle, she would put in her 100% and stand bravely at the front. This way, she would receive praises at the end of the mission, and for Anne, that was more than enough.

But after the passing of her old leader, the entire mercenary group seemed to change. The happy days from before gradually disappeared as the people who used to smile at her distanced themselves. The older mercenaries who had nurtured her told her to grant the old leader's unfulfilled wish.

But Anne didn't understand! The old leader left peacefully, how could there be any unfulfilled wish?

What did these people actually want? Anne was clueless.

What she knew was the previous lively and warm home had now turned into a cold and broken place that she didn't like.

She also didn't think that the old leader wanted her to do anything, so she decided to leave. And in the end, she arrived at Rhode's Starlight mercenary group.

Starlight had the same atmosphere as her old Mark White mercenary group. While Rhode's face was always one-toned, the way he talked still made her feel some warmth. It was the same as the old Mark White — she would always get scolded by the old leader, but she knew that he didn't hate her at all.

Being with Marlene and Lize also put her at ease. The two sisters were older than her but they didn't have the 'fake' aura that she felt from the many female mercenaries in Mark White. It was something that Anne couldn't understand at all.

In all, she was glad that everyone was genuine and didn't exclude her from anything. No one distanced themselves from her, and nothing was complicated. Everything would be fine as long as she does well in her mission. Anne cherished this kind of life.

So, it was natural that she didn't want to lose it once again.

When Rhode called her out and asked her to take on this heavy responsibility, she didn't hesitate at all and quickly agreed.

Not only did she want to preserve her current lifestyle, she also wanted to protect everyone — and Anne was confident that she could do so.

Even after attending Rhode's earlier briefing, she still didn't understand what a Commander level monster or non-Commander level monster was. But when she heard the ground tremble and the sound of the incoming hooves, Anne knew that it was a dangerous foe.

But she didn't feel afraid at all. She only felt her blood pump rapidly like a raging inferno.

She lifted the shield up and formed a fist with her left hand. Then she hammered her shield multiple times.

Boom... boom... boom...

War drum?

Darian was surprised for a moment when he heard the sound, but at the same time, he also saw a flame of life burning before him.

The Death Knight felt that this light was a little too dazzling, and he discovered that the drum sound was also being emitted from there!

You want to challenge me? Interesting!

The Death Knight couldn't help but sneer. He pointed his lance forward and shouted.

Nightmare recognized its Master's command and immediately accelerated. In a fraction of a second, only four burning hoove marks were left on the ground; the rider and the horse were nowhere to be seen!

Darian leaned over and aimed his lance at the flame of life which was still at the same location. At this point, he couldn't help but imagine how it would look like after being pierced by his attack... the expression of despair and suffering would be extremely tasty...

Anne also noticed that the enemy suddenly accelerated and immediately reacted by extending her shield. The long metal drill flew forward while countless sharp spikes appeared on the surface of her shield. This time, she didn't bury the shield in the ground like before, instead, she actively dashed forward to attack!

Darian saw what she did, and he couldn't help but feel excited. His lance aimed directly at Anne's shield as he rushed forward.

Come!!!

Chapter 95 - Anne Georgia's Wavering

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The Giant Skeleton fell before Rhode.

Sereck stood up, relieved. With his strength, defeating a Giant Skeleton wasn't too difficult, but to kill it within the time limit was another story. If he was at Legendary, perhaps he would be able to disintegrate the Giant Skeleton with one wave of his sword.

Done!

Rhode confirmed its death when he received his EXP points. He once again appreciated the usefulness of the system prompt. As long as he had this, it was almost impossible for an enemy to fake its death before him. But he had no time to celebrate as...

Boom...boom boom...boom!

At that moment, a deep drumming sound came from afar and broke the silence.

War drums!?

Rhode was shocked.

He was really shocked.

What is Anne doing?! That wasn't in his plan!!

Many believed that duels could only be held between knights because they naturally associated them with honor and glory; but in fact, not only knights had those traits.

Because there was a class that could rival their prestige!

The Shield Warrior!

Swords and shields were always opposite each other, like how offense and defense were eternal nemeses.

The war drum was a signal that a Shield Warrior would declare when they requested a duel with a knight. Rhode remembered that he had seen a battle record a long time ago in the game. It was a brilliant battle between a large country and a small country. The former had a sizable cavalry while the latter had no horses and no weaponry. Out of desperation, the weaker country built a barricade layer after layer to buy time for their final confrontation. They had no weapons, but at least they could use this barricade to slow the invaders down.

The two armies finally collided; the larger country's army was spirited and overconfident as their heavy armor shook the battlefield. And as for the weaker country? They hid behind their construct, trembling in fear as they waited for the calvary to clash with their defenses.

Pale-faced and frightened, no one believed that they would survive.

But suddenly, out of nowhere, a drum sound echoed.

Boom, boom boom...

The low and deep sound reverberated around the battlefield, penetrating into the hearts of the frightened men. Those fearful souls who heard this sound suddenly felt calm and began to knock their shields according to the beat of the war drums. As time passed, they beat increasingly louder... and soon, without them realizing, their expressions turned from fear to confidence.

That fateful day, when the resounding beat of the war drum reached its peak, was the first time the invincible calvary felt overwhelmed. It was as though the tiny blockade in front of them transformed into a towering bulwark.

After that battle, the Shield Warrior became a selectable class in the game. The war drum became an iconic trait of the Shield Warrior and, at the same time, also the knight's humiliation.

There was no offense they could not stop once they displayed their shield on the battlefield! No matter if it was a Mage or a powerful Ranger, they could only rely on the sturdy fortress, aka the Shield Warrior, to defend their front.

Buuuut... no offense that could be stopped...eh? Right now it had completely turned into a joke.

Ever since then, the knights and the Shield Warriors had become eternal nemeses. The knights thought that Shield Warriors were wrongfully dishonoring them — and that was precisely why the Shield Warriors felt gleeful as they had broken the legend of the 'Undefeatable Knights.'

To put it nicely, the war drum behaved like a sort of taunt towards the knights as well as an indication of a duel.

But in the game, the inhabitants took it as...

"Hey you, knight brat. Your shield grandpa is here. Come and see if your huge toothpick can break through grandpa's shield?"

It's an intolerable insult to any knight.

Thus, when Rhode heard the drum war, he was surprised!

What was Anne trying to do? That was a direct declaration of war! He clearly instructed her to hold her ground against the Death Knight, but right now she was actually provoking him...

Damn it!

Rhode quickly gave Celia an order by telepathy. Then he quickly turned around to face the others.

“Kudla, lead your group to the exit immediately. Follow the direction I’ve told you previously. Move!”

He then shifted his gaze to Lize, beckoning her with his hand.

“Lize, come with me!”

Rhode no longer wasted any more time and threw out a black card. Soon, a centaur appeared out of thin air, causing the mercenaries to gasp in surprise as Rhode had never shown his summoning ability along the way.

Rhode ignore them as he had more important matters to attend to right now. In a swift motion, he mounted the centaur and pulled Lize behind him. Fortunately, the Centaur Knight’s back was broad enough for two of them. Then, he patted the centaur’s shoulder and signaled it to move at full speed.

Sereck, who was by the side, was equally surprised. He didn’t ask anything unnecessary and followed Rhode closely behind.

“Mr. Rhode, what happened?”

Lize asked with a hint of anxiety in her voice. She had never been in such close contact with Rhode. Her rational mind told her that Rhode wasn’t trying to take advantage of her and that probably something dire had happened, but she couldn’t help but turn red slightly.

“That fool...!!”

Rhode didn’t answer her. Instead, he frowned and creased his brows.

By doing so, Anne would undoubtedly attract the Death Knight’s attention, but it was equivalent to a death wish. She could just pester him with regular attacks... and that would be more than sufficient... so why would she make this kind of decision?!

A Shield Warrior’s honor?

Rhode refused to think that Anne would care about that. It was just that her personality was far too skewed for him to believe that she would care for

something such as honor or pride. But why would she make this move?

Since this was her first official mission after entering the mercenary group, Rhode didn't think that she would regard Starlight as her home yet. Perhaps if she was a senior member of the group, then maybe he could understand why she would make this move.

This was completely irrational!

Though mercenaries acted on orders, they weren't soldiers. A soldier's primary objective was to follow orders; even it meant their death. But mercenaries weren't the same. They could choose not to follow orders based on their thinking!

After a short while on the centaur's back, Rhode finally saw what was happening.

Anne clenched her teeth; her usual smile had disappeared, replaced with a serious expression. She was holding up her golden shield that was embedded with Rock Heart. Needless to say, Rock Heart was handy for absorbing damage.

In front of her, the Death Knight held his lance while glaring at the center of the shield. Countless sparks scattered around as he threw lunges at the shield one after another.

Celia, who had already arrived, didn't choose to attack. Instead, she floated in the air as she watched the battle.

“F*ck it!”

Rhode cursed. Of course he knew what Anne was trying to do. It was the most frightening skill of a Shield Warrior ——— Reverse Block!

To put it simply, when a Shield Warrior used the skill, he or she would spin around and entangle with the enemy's weapon, forcing them to fight one-on-one. If the enemy wanted to withdraw their weapon, they would be pushed forward and sucked towards the front of the shield.

That was how she could maintain her aggro with the Death Knight. According to the players, it was a skill used to mock others, and it was also a skill where it was extremely difficult to break out from.

It was a skill that defies the law of physics. Rhode also didn't understand how it worked, but every class was afraid of getting entangled with this move. Once this move was used, the battle would only end when either one fell.

That was why Celia didn't make a move. Though the Death Knight was being thoroughly engaged and wasn't vigilant of its surroundings, she could indeed inflict heavy damage on it if she attacked right now. But her attack might also affect Anne who was concentrating on her opponent. If she lost concentration, the consequences would be unimaginable.

“W-wha...”

Lize was stunned when she saw them fight. It was as if time had stopped; the way they were still moving was eccentric. She really didn't know what to say.

“Lize.”

At that moment, Rhode spoke with a gloomy face.

“I will count later. When my count reaches ‘one,’ you must cast barrier on Anne and heal her at the same time.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Lize nervously clenched her fist and bit her lip.

After speaking to Lize, Rhode took out his sword and narrowed his eyes, focusing on the Death Knight's most vulnerable location. Rhode knew that both of them were competing in endurance and concentration. With the Death Knight's perception, he should be able to notice him. If he lost his focus, Anne's winning chance would be higher. After all, having someone stare at your most vulnerable part wasn't a pleasant thing.

Meanwhile, Sereck finally arrived. He looked at what was happening and was equally dumbstruck. But soon, the Swordmaster immediately calmed down. He held his sword and began to study the Death Knight carefully. Apparently, he has the same idea as Rhode.

Kudla and the others continued to run out from the valley. When he looked at the battle, his expression also changed. Still, he didn't stop running. Instead, he made a hand gesture and signaled his subordinates to lead the Clerics to run to the other side quickly. According to Rhode, as long as they get out from that area, that they would leave the border and Silent Plateau.

But time was something they lacked.

Rhode's expression darkened. He could see that Anne's hand was trembling and her face was drenched sweat. She could no longer keep up anymore. It was no surprise though—after all, her opponent was a Death Knight! If it was any other ordinary Shield Warrior, perhaps he or she would've already been sent to heaven. But Anne was able to hold for so long before showing signs of losing; it was already considered to be quite good!

Unfortunately, no matter how well she did in the process, she still eventually lost.

Right now, Rhode wasn't thinking about how to win. He was thinking about the current biggest problem, which was how to protect Anne's life!

Clang!! Suddenly, the frozen time finally returned to normal.

The shield on Anne's hand was flung aside, and the very next moment, a sharp lance lunged towards her body at frightening speeds.

Chapter 96 - Anne Georgia's Transformation

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The moment the Death Knight sent the shield flying, Rhode, Sereck, and Celia had already made their move.

The trio had plenty of fighting experience. They wouldn't wait for Anne to lose before beginning their attack. In fact, they had already approximately estimated how long she could hold before losing.

They dashed towards the Death Knight in different directions, aiming their weapons towards its weak spots.

Facing three opponents at the same time wasn't something easy even for the Death Knight. However, as an undead, he had a natural home ground advantage which he unhesitatingly utilized.

Darian's right hand held out his lance to the front, and at the same time, he waved his left hand and blocked Celia's attack. As for the other two, Darian ignored them, giving both a chance to slash his shoulder and abdomen.

Celia's attack was naturally imbued with the Holy Element; Darian turned his head and noticed that a silver flame was burning on his left arm. However, he easily shook it off and threw the residue sparks towards Rhode and Sereck.

The both of them intended to take advantage of this moment and critically injure the Death Knight, but they couldn't help retreat when the Death Knight counterattacked.

That was the most troublesome part of the undead; they didn't feel pain. If Darian were a living creature, even if he didn't die, he would have at least

became disabled. But to a Death Knight, an attack of this caliber was only enough to leave scars on his body.

While the Death Knight repelled the three attackers, at the same time, his right arm thrust his lance towards Anne as if it was a different entity altogether.

The sharp tip shot through the air and lunged towards Anne's body. A golden barrier appeared before her, but it only lasted less than two seconds before shattering apart.

A silver light silently passed through her body.

“Anne!!”

Lize almost fainted when she saw Anne impaled by the lance. Anne curled her body while her legs began to fall to the ground as though she had no strength left to stand.

However...

“Hmm...?”

The Death Knight narrowed his eyes and glanced towards the fallen Shield Warrior. That was the first time he lost focus to look at a living creature that was apparently supposed to be dying.

The next moment, a dazzling bright light shot up into the sky, penetrating through the layers of dark clouds.

Anne wasn't kneeling on the ground.

Instead, both of her hands were grabbing onto the tip of the lance as blood streamed down her arm and face. She lifted her head slowly and stared at the Death Knight with resolution in her eyes, even the smile that she always had was now back on her face.

“I finally caught you.”

“What!?”

The Death Knight tried to retrieve his lance, but he realized that it wouldn't budge an inch. He was shocked; he even thought that the person before him wasn't human. Even after using all his strength, he couldn't cause her to move.

Meanwhile, Rhode didn't have time to admire her courage. Any slightest hesitation on his part might cause Anne's effort to go down the drain. When the Death Knight was distracted, he activated Shadow Flash and appeared beside the undead. The bloodied sword in his hand soared through the air and slashed towards the Death Knight's chest.

The Death Knight sensed that this move was dangerous, so he decisively abandoned his main weapon and unsheathed a sword on his waist to parry the incoming attack.

Clang!! Sparks flew all over the place. Faced with the immense strength of the Death Knight, Rhode was sent flying and only stopped after rolling on the ground. However, even though his attack failed, there were no panic or uneasiness in his eyes. On the contrary, he had a smirk on his face when he saw the Death Knight's left shoulder. While he hadn't been able to mortally wound the Death Knight, he still managed to leave quite a deep gash on it.

“Damn you living creature! I will make you taste eternal...”

Before the Death Knight could finish, Sereck made his move!

After losing strength in one of its arms, the Death Knight couldn't entirely block the next attack.

A torrent of swords fell from the sky like lightning bolts. However, Sereck wasn't a fool, he knew that though the Death Knight had lost a little of its strength, he still couldn't be underestimated.

Thus, before the rain of swords landed on the Death Knight, he condensed them into one thick bolt of lightning before thrusting it out.

Sereck's moves had always been flashy. These moves were highly effective on creatures that were easily prone to fear, like humans. But when facing against undead who were often resistant against fear, flashy moves were mostly meaningless. To put it simply; it was akin to showing a blind man a Van Gogh painting.

The Death Knight reacted quickly by lifting his sword to block the lightning bolt. He could feel the feedback from resisting the attack, which meant that he successfully directed most of the damage away from his body. Then, as long as he could...

A terrifyingly huge tear appeared on the chest of the Death Knight.

Darian stared at his chest, and at the sword that was burning with holy flames. Then, he raised his head and looked at Sereck's attack that he had blocked. Though it was too late, he had finally realized what happened.

First, this cunning living creature was just a decoy.

Second, he forgot about the angel.

Third, he is finished...

The silver flame on his chest suddenly burst into an inferno. The Death Knight tried to open his mouth to let out the final throes of his existence, but the fire had already engulfed most of his vocal cords.

Darian then laid to rest for all eternity.

The silver flame spread to the sky, even the clouds were shining brightly under its light.

However, Lize wasn't in the mood to watch this beautiful scene. When the Death Knight gave up his lance, Lize already ignored the danger and dashed to Anne's side. Although she already prepared her heart, Lize still couldn't help but hold her breath.

Anne had already fallen to the ground. After the Death Knight gave up his weapon, she had no more strength to harass him. The thick lance left a

shocking injury on her abdomen. When Lize arrived beside her, she saw Anne clenching her teeth while she pulled out the terrifying weapon that was lodged in her body.

Puff! The lance was finally out, but it was followed by a huge wave of blood that gushed out from the wound. Anne bit her lips and reached out her trembling hand in an attempt to plug the wound.

“Anne!! Don’t move, quickly lie down!!”

Lize screamed when she saw Anne trying to move. She immediately cast several healing spells on her, but it somehow didn’t seem to work. One hand was pressed against her wound, while the other supported her body. Then, out of a sudden, a roar escaped from her mouth.

From Lize’s perspective, it was only natural as the pain must be unbearable. She ignored it and continued casting healing spells on her.

However, Anne’s body was starting to lean towards the side. It didn’t seem like she was disturbed by the pain; instead, it was as though she was desperately trying to flee.

“Don’t...come...near...”

Anne growled, but the intense pain made her unable to continue. Even her voice subconsciously distorted.

“Don’t...co...he..a..Big sis...go..go aw...”

Her right hand clenched tightly onto the dirt.

“Go, go away, quick, qu,qui!!”

“Anne?”

At that moment, Lize finally realized that Anne was acting strangely. She raised her head to look, but at that moment, Anne used whatever strength she had left to push her away.

“Get away from me!!”

“Wuaaa!!”

Lize, who was caught off guard didn't stand against Anne full power. She flew quite a distance and fell to the ground.

“That hurts...”

Lize was in a daze. She couldn't even figure out what was happening. Wasn't she helping Anne to cure her wounds? Why is she here? That's right? Anne?

Lize quickly lifted her head. After that, what she saw caused her to be dumbstruck.

Anne crawled on the ground, her body trembling. She didn't know whether she was imagining things but Lize saw that Anne started to grow in size.

It wasn't her imagination.

Her beautiful green pupils changed, replaced with a green slit reflected the moonlight and brought an indescribable coldness. Anne kept staring at Lize like this, then she looked up to the sky and opened her mouth.

“Aaaa————”

Followed by a cry, her armor ripped apart; her face began to change, and a layer of fur grew on her naked body. After a moment, what was left of her was a three-meter-long black giant wolf!

It stood up and looked up at the sky.

“Woo————!!”

The sudden howl echoed throughout the valley, giving everyone a terrible shock.

Chapter 97 - Anne Georgia's Secret

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Woo———!!”

Looking at this scene, whether it was Lize who hasn't yet stood up, or Marlene who was watching on the side, or Celia and Sereck who had just pulled out their weapon from the Death Knight dead body. Even Kudla and the others were all stunned.

Rhode was also not an exception. He stood up and stared at the giant wolf that was wailing in the wilderness; he was shocked.

Right at this moment, he found out Anne's real identity.

Half beast!

Like an angel and human, human and elf, demon and mixed human breed, they all would produce offspring. A high-level demonic beast was also the same; they could transform into a human form to copulate with humans and give birth to the next generation. For races like the half angel, half-elf, or half demon that could be readily accepted by people, the half beast was considered to be a very rare race. Since demonic beasts and human were different, only high-level demonic beasts were able to transform into a human.

Comparing it using the phrase from Rhode's native country, it could be said that an animal needs to cultivate at least thousand years to able to transform into human form. High-level demonic beast were very rare and strong. Even an ordinary level 40 swordmaster like Sereck was nothing to a high-level demonic beast; it doesn't matter if there's ten of him, it will still be nothing. Not to mention, although they could transform into a human, their real body remained as a wild beast. Unless they lived in the human society for a long time, it basically wouldn't choose a human as a mate. Like a house dog, no

matter how good it was to its master when it is aroused, it would still look for another dog... Hmm, but this example somehow isn't too appropriate.

It wasn't like Rhode never seen a half beast. In the game, some strong warriors belong to half beast race. But beside her incredible strength, there's nothing different about Anne. That's why Rhode didn't think about it, but now, what should he do?

Staring at the giant black wolf, Rhode's heart sank.

“This is... really unexpected...”

Sereck also took a deep breath and came to Rhode's side.

“This fellow actually hid this kind of secret. What should we do now?”

What should we do?

Rhode frowned but didn't answer. He was currently thinking about his knowledge regarding half beasts to solve the situation. According to his experience, the reason Anne transformed was that she was heavily injured and could no longer maintain her human form. This also meant that she has completely lost her consciousness and only beast part of her was left.

Then...

Rhode shook his head, he stopped thinking and sighed.

“Leave it to me.”

He waved his hand then walked towards the giant black wolf.

“Mr. Rhode?”

Seeing his action, Marlene and Lize subconsciously called out to him. Frankly, right now they were feeling rather complicated since it's hard for them to accept that the girl that has been living with them for these few days could suddenly turn into a wolf. Although as a mage, it wasn't like Marlene didn't know about this kind of thing, but reading it in a book and

actually witnessing it using her own eyes were totally different. Not to mention, it was someone that had been interacting with her for quite some time...

Right now Marlene was looking at the giant black wolf, and her heart was feeling complicated. She didn't know what Rhode was trying to do. But she knew that there is no place for a half beast in human society. Although logically speaking, they came from noble birth, whether it's half angel, half-elf, or even half demon, they still appeared in human form and they were born that way. However, the other half of a half beast was a real demonic beast. Judging from the strength, anyone who was born half beast were stronger than other races, but maybe because of how the human mind works, they couldn't fully accept half beasts even though they could accept other mixed races.

Marlene has read in quite a lot of book that people who were born half beast usually live just like a human being before their identity was found out. But once their identity was exposed, they were rejected. Some of them were even caught and beaten to death or burned to death...

What will Rhode do?

Watching Rhode walking towards the giant black wolf, Marlene didn't know what to say or what to do. Although the time she has spent with Anne wasn't long, she didn't hate Anne at all. Moreover, in the Magic Academy, there were a lot of half beast; hence, she wouldn't feel unfamiliar or fearful towards it. However... she didn't know what kind of decision would Rhode make.

She didn't think that Rhode would kill Anne because of fear. But now, facing this giant black wolf, what will he do?

As if aware of Rhode's arrival, the giant black wolf stood up and stared vigilantly at him. In its glittering green eyes, there was not even the slightest friendliness.

Ahh... this will be troublesome.

Aware of the black wolf eyes, Rhode frowned. He was sure that Anne's consciousness was still 'sleeping' the Anne before him completely move based on her instinct. If he could, he didn't want to take this risk, but Anne has risked her life to protect them, she sacrificed herself to protect all of the people here. It wasn't something to be entirely proud of... she did not follow his command and acted on her own.

But now...

Rhode shook his head and didn't say anything more.

"Lize, cast a healing spell on me later."

Rhode didn't turn back and gave a strange command to Lize. After that, he walked in front of the black wolf and stretched his right hand.

"——!"

As if following its instinct, the black wolf opened its mouth and bit Rhode's hand.

This sudden change made Sereck expression turn grim, even the angel gloomily gripped the sword in her hand. Lize was shocked, she bit her lips to force herself not to scream.

So heartless!

Feeling the pain from his hand, Rhode clenched his teeth. He could feel the giant wolf's sharp fang pierce through his hand. If it used more power, maybe his whole hand might even tear apart! But he didn't back down or make any sudden movements. He was betting, betting whether Anne would think of them as the enemy or not.

If Anne was an intelligent person, then Rhode definitely wouldn't bet on it. This is because most smart people like to hide their feelings. Except for themselves, no one would know what were they thinking. Imagine if this kind of people lost their sanity, it isn't strange if they dared to do anything. But Anne was different; she always lived her life by her instinct, Rhode

could feel that she was genuinely fond of Lize, Marlene, and himself. So, this kind of feeling might be connected to her instinct... It would be better if it's like that because if not, he would just hit her until she loses her consciousness. Since no matter what, there's no way for him to kill her.

Because she already did so much to this mercenary group.

Rhode endured the pain, he reached out his other hand and patted the black wolf head.

“——!!!”

Feeling Rhode's movement, the black wolf roared. But soon, it narrowed its eyes and began to loosen its jaws that tightly clenched on Rhode's hand.

It's working!

Feeling the change in black wolf's attitude, Rhode was relieved. He was still softly patting the black wolf head; then he moved his hand down to touch its face and its nose. The black wolf didn't dodge his touch, on the contrary, it nuzzled Rhode's fingers affectionately. Then it carefully opened its mouth and backed down. It stretched out its tongue to lick the wound on Rhode's hand, it tilted its head and stared at him uneasily, then it slowly sat on the ground. He didn't know whether it was trying to apologize or was afraid, but when Rhode stroke its head continuously, it satisfyingly shook its head, closed its eyes and finally fell into a deep sleep.

Soon, the huge body shrunk down, the thick fur and tail also slowly disappeared. After a while, a naked woman appeared before Rhode, but now the wound was no longer there and she was sleeping soundly.

“Sigh...”

Until now, Rhode finally relieved. He put down his right hand and turned back looking at Lize who was walking towards him in a hurry.

“Please heal me.”

After going through this unexpected accident, everyone finally relieved.

The Death Knight had been killed and there were no undead creatures left. Only after getting out of here would it be considered a victory. The only thing that made Rhode depressed was the Death Knight's equipment. Although the Death Knight had multiple good pieces of equipment, for example, the 'Curse Ring' could add a poison effect or the 'Death Gaze' that allowed the holder to possess night vision. Unfortunately, these equipment had been contaminated by evil, when Celia used her holy flame, they were already burned into ashes. Looking at the messy corpse, Rhode was simply helpless. Even so, he still tried to be optimistic and asked Marlene to clean the battlefield, hoping that her lucky hand could bring something...

Have to say, Marlene's hands were really lucky. It seemed a bit wrong to say it like this, but she actually found a space bag from the Death Knight armor. As a magical item, naturally, it wouldn't get burnt by the holy flame. It's also the only thing that Rhode obtained, as for the stuff inside, Rhode didn't plan to open it in front of everyone, since it wasn't too late to check it after they went back.

After that, Rhode, Lize, and the others gathered with everyone. When they walked towards Kudla, a shadow stepped out from the crowd and blocked in front of Rhode.

"What does that mean!"

"The half-elf girl glared at Rhode angrily.

"What do you mean by what does that mean?"

Facing the girl inquiry, Rhode replied expressionlessly.

"That woman!"

The half-elf stretched out her hand and pointed towards Anne who was covered in a cloak while sleeping soundly behind Old Walker's back.

"You actually employed a mixed half beast to protect us, what are you doing! Don't you know, that b*st*rd was very dangerous?! What if the

beast inside of her attacked us, you definitely did this on purpose!”

Upon hearing her accusations, Lize’s and Marlene’s face darkened. Behind the half-elf girl, those spirit master from the Mercenary Association also showed unhappy expression. Although they only interacted with Anne for a short time, along the way, it had been Anne who was protecting them. Although her identity as a half beast did shock them a little, but these spirit masters didn’t think that it was something that couldn’t be accepted. That was why when they heard the half-elf girl insult their savior in front of them, they were feeling miserable. Sereck and Old Walker also turned serious and looked at the half-elf girl in dissatisfaction.

“Hey, you!”

Even Kudla also grunted awkwardly. Not only him, but the mercenaries beside him were also the same. No matter what, Anne was their lifesaver, and having half beast in their group was their own problem. Why do you even bother to bring that up?

“Dangerous?”

Rhode didn’t say anything. Instead, it was Marlene who coldly snorted. At first, she didn’t want to bother with herself with these boorish mercenaries but hearing the elf girl words; she couldn’t help but become angry.

“If it weren’t for Anne, you wouldn’t be able to walk here safely. Not only you aren’t thankful; you are even blaming us? Boorish people like you make me want to throw up.”

“You... don’t you think that I will be afraid of you just because you’re a mage.”

Facing Marlene’s insults, the half-elf girl stood frozen but soon recovered.

“Moreover, she didn’t really do anything; she just hid behind like a coward. What was she doing? Hmph, I think this b*st*rd just...”

Rhode didn't let the half-elf girl finish her sentence when he punched her in the face.

Naturally, since she did not expect an attack, she was sent to the flying to the ground, but Rhode didn't wait for her to say anything. Rhode followed up with a kick to her stomach causing the half-elf girl to curl up in a ball as a subconscious reflex and began to throw up. Rhode finally stopped and patted his hands emotionlessly. This made Kudla couldn't help but feel awkward.

“Mr. Rhode...”

“Because she kept insulting my subordinate, I'm not happy. That's why I wanted to hit her, but now I have hit her, I'm happy. Now we're all even, that's why you don't have to apologize to me, or else I will think that I owe you something.”

Rhode interrupted Kudla. After finishing what he wanted to say, he turned around and walked towards his comrades.

“The mission is complete. We should leave this ghostly place.”

Chapter 98 - Sign Of Chaos

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

When they arrived in Deep Stone City once again, Kudla and his subordinates felt as if they had been cut off from the outside world for ages. When they curled up in Silent Highland's narrow cave, no one would have thought that they would once again see this familiar scene. Some of the surviving mercenaries burst into tears, sobbing and lying on the ground.

Kudla only dozed off for a while; then he felt frustrated and depressed. On the way back, there have been two or three subordinates that spoke with him privately; they were trying to leave the mercenary group and quit being a mercenary. It's something often happened in a mercenary group. Mercenaries were still humans; if they were put near death situations regularly, naturally some would fear for their future. This time they were lucky because the reinforcement from Mercenary Association made it in time. But how about next time? And the next?

It's not surprising for them to succumb to fear. Although Kudla tried many methods to keep them, it didn't seem to be working out anymore. What worried him was the number of mercenaries in his group. It was decreasing faster than the replenishment rate. After this incident, some people chose to leave. This meant that there were only three to four people left. Not to mention, Kudla also found out that even among them, there were some people who thought of quitting too...

The problem before Kudla wasn't only the lack of people in the mercenary group, but it was whether the whole team could continue to exist.

Unfortunately, for now, he didn't have any practical way to stop all of this.

“Sigh...”

Kudla sighed and lifted his head, observing Rhode and Marlene discussing something privately. Their eyes were looking towards the carriage where

the half-beast girl was resting at.

Thinking until here, Kudla could not help but glare at the half-elf girl behind him. This time, he was very clear about Rhode and his mercenary group's ability. Although the number of members was rather limited, according to Kudla's experience, under Rhode's command, the power that these people had displayed could rival two fully armed mercenary group. Kudla who was dissatisfied in the beginning also begun to admire him, although he still doubted as for why Rhode had such rich experiences and such a skilled commanding ability, at least he knew that this young man was powerful.

If it was before, he still hoped to be able to discuss with Rhode to let his defeated mercenaries join his group. But now, even that last trace of hope was shattered, because the matter regarding Anne, the atmosphere between them had been reduced to the freezing point.

Along the way back, it was clear that Rhode was ignoring them as if they didn't exist. That mage girl was even more terrible; she would even glare at him and his subordinates. Anyone could see that she was quite offended, even that gentle spirit master was also cold towards them. Kudla had requested to have a chat several times but was still politely rebuked.

What made him worry the most wasn't Rhode and his group, but rather it was Sereck and the other spirit masters from the Mercenary Association who were fairly dissatisfied towards them. One must realize that the Mercenary Association was an essential organization to them. Once blacklisted, their future days would be miserable.

Thinking about it carefully, another reason they were trying to quit was also because of this.

“Leader Kudla.”

When Kudla helplessly sighed, Sereck came before him with a serious expression.

“Rhode and I will return to the Mercenary Association since the mission is completed and all of you have safely returned. Right now all of you can go back to rest, but I hope to receive the detailed report tomorrow morning, I think it won’t be difficult for you.”

“Yes, Mr. Sereck!”

Kudla nervously replied. After hearing his reply, the swordmaster expression eased. Then he looked at the people behind Kudla and smiled wryly while shaking his head.

“You’ve also suffered a great loss this time. Forget about it, I won’t say anything more, but Mr. Kudla, I hope you can restrain your own mercenaries. After all, we, the Mercenary Association spent a lot of effort to find someone to help you, but now the relationship between the rescued and the rescuer... made the Mercenary Association feel awkward. Frankly, Mr. Kudla, I hope to see your sincerity, I think it’s something necessary for a mercenary group.”

“Yes, Sir, I understand what you mean. I will definitely deal with this problem!”

Kudla naturally understood that Sereck was dissatisfied and immediately made an answer. After accepting his answer, Sereck nodded satisfyingly and turned around to leave.

Meanwhile, on the other side, Rhode finished speaking with Marlene. According to the process, after they completed the mission, everyone should return to the Mercenary Association to accept the President’s rewards. But since Anne was still sleeping, Lize wanted to stay by her side. Moreover, Marlene didn’t care about a mercenary’s glory, which was why she was uninterested in the reward. For some reason, Old Walker apparently didn’t intend to go to the Mercenary Association to accept the rewards, for him, it’s better for him to take a rest.

That was why Rhode had let them go back to recover and followed Sereck by himself.

As for Celia, after they left the Silent Highland, Rhode withdrew her back and told the others that she left after completing the mission. It wasn't because that the summoning spirit had a time limit, but rather it was because Rhode's soul power wasn't enough to sustain her manifestation permanently...

But before they left, Marlene pulled him aside, asking him about Anne. As a mage, she knew the fate that would befall Anne after exposing her identity. Right now she was worried because once people spread her true identity, the people from Deep Stone City would ask them to expel her from the mercenary group. Marlene was quite careful about things like this.

But Rhode didn't think as much as Marlene, he comforted Marlene and told her that people's opinion about half beasts wasn't as strong as other places in border cities. Especially in Deep Stone City, as long as Anne didn't make any trouble, no one would do something to her. Moreover, if something did happen to her, he could ask the Mercenary Association to intervene, as long as Anne wasn't in the wrong.

After hearing Rhode's answer, Marlene finally calmed down, then she got into the carriage and left with the others. Without a doubt, it seemed like this girl resembled more and more like a vice leader...

“Mr. Rhode?”

When Rhode looked at the carriage that was getting further away, a voice sounded beside him. Rhode turned around and saw a beautiful girl standing there. She fidgeted with her hands as she raised her head and stole glances at him. After meeting Rhode's eyes, she once again lowered her head.

“Is there any problem?”

Facing Rhode's question, the girl hesitated for a moment. She trembled and backed down, then Rhode discovered a few spirit masters not far away, smiling at the girl in front of him. The girl turned around briefly, and as if she regained her strength after looking at her comrades, she turned back to Rhode and bravely lifted her head. Bits of her face was still flushing red.

“It’s... It’s like this, that...before in the Silent Highland, you rescued us from those terrible undeads. I haven’t yet to say thank you, and it’s really rude...that...so I’m very grateful that you saved me...”

Saying until here, the girl once again lowered her head.

Looking at the girl who was embarrassed, Rhode couldn’t help but sigh. It seemed that it was because of the difference of life experience between them, even though they’re both spirit masters, and Lize sometimes was also weak, at least she wasn’t timid. But this girl absolutely looked like a greenhouse flower... the two of them really couldn’t be compared.

“You don’t have to thank me.”

Rhode waved his hand.

“I just did what I should have done. Moreover, if you want to say thanks, Anne should be the one that should accept it,”

“I understand what you mean, Sir.”

Hearing Rhode’s reply, the girl smiled. It seemed as if she wasn’t as nervous as before.

“I have discussed it with the others. After Anne wakes up, we will go to see her. No matter what, she had done so much for us, and all of us have to thank her for that.”

Saying until here, the girl paused for a moment before continuing to speak slightly shyly.

“That... Mr. Rhode, regarding Ms. Anne, all of us were quite shocked, but we can assure you that we are not afraid of Ms. Anne because of this! We are spirit masters, so we must heal any type of patients, that’s why we are very clear that half beasts aren’t as terrible as the legend said. And... If you need our help in the future, please call us at any time. As long as we can be any help, we definitely won’t decline.”

The girl flushed and bowed towards Rhode, then spun around and ran back to her comrades. At this time, Sereck smiled wryly and appeared before Rhode.

“Having good looks is great and all, but I have to tell you that the spirit masters from our Mercenary Association cannot be taken away as you wish, or else that old fellow definitely won’t let you off.”

Upon hearing Sereck joke, Rhode rolled his eyes at him, shrugged his shoulder then shook his head.

“If it’s truly mine, then I wouldn’t let it be taken away by anyone. If it’s not mine, then even if I want it, I still won’t have it. I don’t really care about it, Mr. Sereck.”

“If those kids heard what you said it’ll definitely cause a misunderstanding. Anyway, let’s drop the nonsense, don’t we have more important things to do?”

From the exterior, the Mercenary Association seemed to be no different from the usual.

But when Rhode and Sereck walked into the hall, they immediately found that the atmosphere within the Association changed dramatically.

At this moment, the lively hall was no longer crowded. Those mercenaries that sat in front of the table were no longer as energetic as usual. They were either sighing or drinking liquor. When they discovered the presence of Rhode and Sereck, they only looked up and bowed their head, seemingly lifeless.

Rhode and Sereck glanced at each other, although they didn’t say anything, both of them could understand what they were thinking.

The matter had become more serious.

They wanted to get confirmation from the Old President.

“We looked into it, but it was too late.”

Sitting behind the desk, the Old President seemed a little older than usual, the liveliness from before has disappeared.

“Since then, I’ve sent an urgent notice to all of the mercenary groups, informing them that there was a problem and requested them to stop every mission, of course, without incurring penalties. But we were still too late. Of the 32 mercenary groups, including ‘Victorious Wine,’ 21 mercenary groups had a significant reduction in members, 3 mercenary groups were dissolved. And as for the last 5 mercenary groups... there is still no news on the situation according to the members that stayed behind, but I think they’re a hopeless cause. Now in the entire Paphield area, including your Starlight mercenary group, there is only four mercenary group left that didn’t suffer any loss.”

Old President frowned and his face turned serious as he delivered the bad news.

“According to the news report, this time... it’s a big disaster. Ever since the Deep Stone City Mercenary Association was built, until now, there had been no such situation! This really... Sigh...!!”

Saying until here, the Old President face turned gloomy. Clearly, the situation was not good for him.

“What’s their benefit from deliberately trying to ruin us?”

Sereck stroked the beard on his chin, spoke and muttered.

Rhode didn’t answer his question; he almost grasped as to why the Deep Stone City would encounter an attack from Country of Darkness. But now there’s no use saying these, it was impossible for Sereck and the Old President to believe him. He didn’t care about it though; many people thought that they could only stop the enemy as long as they could find the motive. On the other hand, Rhode knew that obstructing the enemy and finding the motive afterward wasn’t too late... Like the story in many novels, where the prisoners couldn’t be identified because there’s no motive was only an exaggeration. Of course, Rhode wasn’t interested in following along these two to add the artistry.

“What happened to those 21 mercenary groups?”

Rhode asked quietly.

“Half of them united themselves to form a new mercenary group. Some of them hadn’t given up yet and planned to recruit more people. No matter what, vacancies in these 32 mercenary groups were inevitable,”

“What will happen to these vacancies?”

“According to the rules, we must bring forward a few names from the existing mercenary group to fill the vacancy. And the other mercenary group is also having a hard time, frankly...”

At this time, suddenly there’s a knock on the door, interrupting the Old President. His face turned even darker, but even so, he still resisted his temper and spoke.

“Come in.”

A young man aged around 27 years old walked in.

He was wearing a red armor that emitted a weak magic light; it was evident that the armor price was extraordinary. A green sword and a black dagger hung around his waist. His handsome face showed a confident and proud smile. He narrowed his eyes and showed a trace of calmness.

The young man walked in towards the three people in the room. He was surprised for a moment, but still smiled and came before the Old President before respectfully bowing and handing him a scroll on his hand.

“Dear President, I represent the ‘Jade Tears’ mercenary group. I am applying for my group, and this is our draft.”

“Oh?”

Hearing the man’s words, the Old President took the scroll from his hand and took a look at it. He nodded before taking out the quill pen beside him to sign his name on it.

“Yes, there’s no problem. The Mercenary Association will now officially recognize the ‘Jade Tears’ regrouping. From now on, you can recover your identity as a mercenary group. I hope you can work according to mercenary rules and not doing anything that will ruin our reputation.”

“Please rest assured, Mr. President. We will try our best.”

Saying until here, the man respectfully bowed towards him, then turned around to look at Sereck with a serious expression.

“It’s my pleasure to see Mr. Sereck. I never thought that I could see you here. If you have the time, please come to the ‘Jade Tears’ mercenary group to have a look. Right now, our mercenary group is very depressed; if you could appear in front of them, I think their spirits would rejuvenate again.”

“I will consider your invitation.”

As for his words, Sereck only nodded and didn’t say anything. The man also seemed to be unaffected by it. He then turned around to look at Rhode, thinking for a moment before warmly reaching out his hand to him.

“You must be Mr. Rhode, that rumored mercenary group leader that went to the Silent Highland to assist in the rescue operation. It’s nice to meet you, my name is...”

“Mr. Frank Chelis.”

Rhode stood up to shake his hand. Rhode was emotionless, in contradiction with the man face that smiled warmly.

“It is rather surprising to see the third heir of the dignified Chelis family here. Aren’t you suppose to stay in Barce, what are you doing here in Deep Stone City? I remember that your family is famous for business, since when they were interested in mercenaries?”

Hearing that last sentence, the man expression changed!

Chapter 99 - Where The Heart Belong

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Frank could swear that he had never seen this man before. Since Rhode's physical features were very distinctive, it's impossible for someone to forget after seeing him once. But he actually mentioned about his identity, this made his body shivered somehow.

How did he know about my identity?

In Chelis family, I was someone without any status.

Even in Barce's noble circle, only a few people knew about my name.

So how did this young man find out?

Although he was secretly shocked, Frank quickly recovered his smile and replied as if nothing has happened.

"I never thought Mr. Rhode recognized a nobody like me. It is really surprising."

"There's nothing surprising. Barce isn't too far from my homeland, I have seen you a few times, but it seemed that Mr. Frank has forgotten. It's no wonder, since we have never really interacted much before, but..."

Rhode expression was still as cold as usual, but his eyes flashed a trace of ridicule.

"The noble circle is really small, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is, Mr. Rhode."

Hearing Rhode's words, Frank was a bit skeptical. He inquired some things about Rhode, so he knew that he came from the Eastern Plain. Although that place was indeed not too far from Chelis family in Barce, that place was well known for being isolated. Even the Munn Kingdom wasn't familiar with that area, let alone Barce. Although the nobles from both sides have some kind of interaction, it only happened a few times. Indeed, he has seen some noble from the Eastern Plain, but... there's no such person?

However, at this moment Frank wasn't only puzzled, but also a little bit anxious. He has always liked to be low key, so he was slightly in a panic. After all, Rhode didn't hesitate to expose his identity, which made Frank very disturbed. He could even feel the suspicion from the Old President and Sereck. But now, there's no way to escape anymore.

So, he could only continue to maintain his bitter smile and replied.

"I also didn't expect it. In fact, my father told me to travel to expand my knowledge, and I have been learning swordsmanship since young because I have some talent in it, that's why I joined a mercenary group to gain some experience. But I never expected that something like this happened recently... to maintain my mercenary group, I can't help but doing this."

"A noble heir wants to become a mercenary?"

Rhode looked curiously at him.

"Mr. Chelis won't agree of such a thing, right? After all..."

"I also didn't intend to ask for my father consent. I know that you mercenaries don't have a good impression towards nobles, but from many days of interaction with the others, I can feel that being a mercenary isn't as bad as the rumors. I have a deep relationship with my comrades, to help them, I will even disobey my father's order."

"So that's why."

Rhode nodded, and he let go of Frank's hand.

“I hope you can succeed.”

“Thank you for your blessing, Mr. Rhode. I also wish your mercenary group all the best.”

Frank nodded towards Rhode. Then he turned around to leave.

“Do you know him?”

After the door closed, the Old President frowned and stared suspiciously at Rhode.

“I saw him before from afar. I knew him, but he didn’t know me.”

Rhode directly replied and pretended he didn’t care, then asked.

“But I never thought that he would come here to be a mercenary.”

“He has already been here for a year.”

The Old President said.

“Back then when I saw that noble, at first, I didn’t want to accept him. But this fellow was such a smooth talker and smooth talking was also his strength which isn’t bad. That’s why on the mercenary assessment I recommended him to ‘Jade Tears.’ I’ve heard positive news about him. In the battle with undead creatures, both the Jade Tears leader and vice leader was injured badly, right now he handles the entire mercenary group. From the looks of it, he did quite well.”

One year ago?

So they have deliberately planned this for such a long time...

Hmph, the Country of Light is sure playing big.

After hearing the Old President introduction, Rhode frowned, but he no longer continued speaking. Clearly, the Old President was already spent,

since many things had happened in the Association. He, as the leader, would be very busy.

“Ok, that’s enough. Youngster, do you still have any business with me? If not then please leave, I’m tired and want to rest.”

“Wait, Mr. President. About the reward for this mission... According to the agreement, as long as I can bring everyone back safely, you would double my reward. Now that I brought everyone back safe and sound, my subordinate was wounded in the process; you should show some sincerity, right?”

“You...you... Sigh...”

“As you can see, right now we have a big problem in Association. Can’t you even wait for a while? Are you in a hurry to buy a coffin or something?”

“This is this, and that is that. Of course, I know about the Association’s situation, but it’s not an excuse for you to reject rewarding me. According to the agreement, please give the reward to me.”

“You greedy b*stard!!!”

At that moment, the Old President’s angry roar echoed through the entire Deep Stone City.

Anne opened her eyes.

She stared blankly at the white ceiling and turned around to look at the window. It was already evening. The night is almost upon the city. A tiny flame burning on the candle wick gently swayed as it brought a warm and peaceful feeling to the room.

“I...”

Anne woke up and shook her head. The soft bed, decorated room, smell of weeds and flowers filled the air. This gave some clarity to her previously muddled mind.

“That’s right... I was fighting with the Death Knight, and then I...”

Thinking about this, the healthy colors on her face drained and turned pale, as if she suddenly thought of something terrifying. She couldn’t help but shake uncontrollably.

I-I, I... transformed...?

...In front of leader?

In front of sisters?

I really, I really did that ?

“Knock knock knock.”

The sudden knocking sound gave Anne a shock, and she subconsciously screamed.

“Who is that?!”

“It’s me, Lize. You finally woke up? Anne?”

Followed by this sentence, Lize brought a hot soup and walked into the room. Looking at Anne’s face, she relieved.

“Great! You finally woke up! How are you feeling? You’ve been unconscious for almost two days and must be very hungry. This soup was made by Uncle Walker, I think it might suit your taste.”

Having said that, Lize placed the bowl on the table. It was clear that Anne was not as energetic as usual. On the contrary, she held on tightly to the edges of the blanket to hide her body and face. Only revealing her blinking eyes that were filled with uncertainty.

“Sis, sister... are you not afraid?”

“Eh?”

Hearing Anne's question, Lize curiously turned around to look at Anne.

"I, I transformed, right?"

But, Anne ignored Lize eyes completely, she only stammered and spoke in a timid voice.

"Didn't I transformed into that? Sister? Everyone was definitely frightened, I...I..."

"Half beast, right?"

Hearing those words, Anne's shivered again. Her hands clamped harder on the sheet and lowered her head. She didn't even dare to look at Lize. Right now, she was feeling anxious because she didn't know what to do. It was her fault; she should have revealed it to everyone from the start. But she didn't have the courage because the old leader told her to keep her identity a secret. The reactions of the people in her former mercenary group after she transformed was etched into her mind for eternity. Everyone displayed faces of fear and hate. Now that it happened again, how would Sister Lize, and Leader react?

Do they no longer want me? Do they want to kick me out?

When Anne's thoughts began to wander off, a hand suddenly rubbed her head. Softly stroking her hair.

"You stupid girl."

Lize stroke her head softly as she gently smiled while looking at the girl who was trembling in fear in front of her. When facing the Death Knight, she didn't even quiver, looking at her now, it was as if the world was coming to an end.

"Frankly, everyone was quite shocked. But they weren't afraid. Marlene, Rhode, and me, we all weren't afraid. Don't think about such nonsense anymore, you'd successfully blocked such a dangerous enemy to save us, we must even thank you, why would we be afraid of you?"

“Sister Lize...”

Anne lifted her head and gazed at Lize; her beautiful green eyes shone radiantly as if they could pierce through a person’s heart. Lize didn’t dodge her eyes as she looked at her with warmth. After a moment, Anne once again revealed her pure and energetic smile. She then quickly threw herself into Lize’s embrace.

“I like you all the most!”

“An, Anne?”

Watching how Anne hugged her, Lize couldn’t help but smile. If Anne had a tail right now, rather than resembling a wolf, her tail would wag like she was a...

“But, Anne, you must prepare yourself.”

“Eh?”

Anne stopped moving when she heard Lize’s sudden change in tone.

“You have gone against Mr. Rhode’s command. This made him very angry, on the way back he kept insisting that he wanted to punish you. That’s why you must make mental preparations; you must know that Mr. Rhode’s punishment is very scary.

“This, this...”

Hearing Lize’s words, Anne revealed an awkward expression. When she wanted to think of an excuse, a sound of protest emitted from her stomach.

“Growl...”

(Author: For monthly vote, the new book has ranked in top 6, go!~~~) (To be continued. If you like this work, welcome to Qidian (qidian.com) Please vote, monthly vote. Your support is my greatest motivation.)

Chapter 100 - How To Use The Skill Point

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Everyone was happy when Anne woke up, and Rhode was no exception.

However, them being happy didn't mean that Anne wouldn't have to suffer the consequences of her actions. Though they had successfully killed the Death Knight, Anne still disobeyed Rhode's order. After pondering for a while, Rhode decided to punish her by locking her in a dark room for three days.

While it might seem quite barbaric of him to do that, Rhode wasn't going to allow disobedience to become a habit in his guild. Anne stared at him with puppy eyes hoping that he would change his decision, but Rhode wouldn't budge an inch.

Back in the game, players violate orders for many reasons because even if they failed and died, they could still respawn and come back for round two.

Anne is different.

As an NPC, once dead, it's game over. Yes, although she did manage to do her job and held the aggro well, in the end, she was seriously injured. If it wasn't because of her half-beast bloodline, perhaps she would've been already dead. Rhode would absolutely refrain from these measures unless they were left with no other choice.

So what if everything turned out to be okay? If everybody started to do things on their own accord then what's the point of being a leader?

Both Lize and Old Walker tried to plead for mercy on Anne's behalf. Even the usually stern Marlene also hoped that Rhode would rethink this matter. In the end, Rhode still held firm to his stance.

Fortunately, Rhode gave a little slack to her. Though he forbade Anne to go out, others could still visit her so she wouldn't be too lonely. Still, for someone with a personality like Anne, not being able to gaze at the clouds and lie back on the soft grass while enjoying the warm sun, it was quite a cruel punishment.

After returning from Silent Plateau, Starlight entered a temporary resting period. The other mercenary groups were the same. They had received heavy casualties and thus needed to recuperate before they could begin accepting missions once more.

But the news that garnered the most attention was Starlight jumping straight to the third position in the ranking. After successfully completing Silent Plateau, Starlight obtained a total of nine points, placing them just below Burning Blade and Dark Fang who didn't suffer any losses from the previous mission.

The top two mercenary groups, Burning Blade and Dark Fang, were no stranger to the mercenaries in the Paphield Region. Both were well-known strong mercenary groups who competed for the promotion to a guild.

No one would think that instead of the two behemoths, someone else would claim victory over a mission as tough as Silent Plateau. Moreover, the mission was completed by a group of five people, which was quite a ridiculous number to challenge such a difficult mission.

If Starlight jumped to the top position just because of this single mission, perhaps the people wouldn't have been so shocked. After all, Starlight could have rented help and the result might not prove their true ability. But if one studied their past achievements, he or she would realize that they had been creating miracles one after another.

Cleanup Pavel Cemetery – 3 points

Novice mission, Collect Magical Plants – 1 point

Rescue mission in Silent Plateau – 5 points

Out of these three missions, two of them were related to the undead and were considered high-risk missions. However, Starlight managed to complete it twice without suffering any casualties.

Many other mercenary groups accepted less dangerous missions compared to Starlight, but they still suffered heavy losses. Let alone completing their mission, being able to come back alive was already considered lucky enough.

Rumors of Starlight spread like wildfire; it even suppressed the gossip over the two other famous groups. It was no surprise though. Burning Blade and Dark Fang had a long track record and had already completed a lot of missions, so they were able to maintain their position. If they'd participated in the mission, perhaps the outcome would be hard to predict.

On the other hand, even though Starlight were few in numbers, they still took the initiative to complete the rescue mission. Thus, in the eyes of many, they felt that Starlight was stronger than the two large mercenary groups.

But Rhode didn't bother with these trivialities. After dealing with Anne, he locked himself in a room and began drawing something on paper. Currently, he was on an incredibly important mission — planning how to use his Skill Points.

Skill Points are essential to the existence of the player, even more so than EXP or equipment. This is because Skill Points could not only unlock and upgrade the Talent Tree, it could also increase the proficiency of various skills.

Each class had three different Talent Trees, and each route required at least 35~37 Skill Points to max it out fully. But that didn't mean that once the player was done with their Talent Tree, there would be nothing left to add. Remaining Skill Points will be used in upgrading the proficiency of various skills.

There are three ways to increase the proficiency of skills. The most common way was to use the skill often. After using it around a hundred to a

thousand times, the proficiency of that skill would increase.

Another way was to find a skill book that was related to the skill and read it.

The last way was to use Skill Points to increase the proficiency directly.

Players would find the first method a waste of time. The second method was still rather time-consuming, after all, the skill book itself was a rare drop. Moreover, advanced-level skill books were almost as rare as Ancient-grade equipment. So, many players found the third method way more convenient. After leveling up, they would obtain one Skill Point which they could use it however they wished.

How about the players who wanted to increase their proficiency with their own ability? Yes, it's totally possible. Look at Sereck. Right now, his proficiency is at Rank A. If the player is willing to put in several years of practice for a single skill, it's not impossible to master that skill without Skill Points. But which player on Earth would have the patience to practice a single skill for a few years?

Yet, almost every skill required a large number a Skill Points to max. For example, if Rhode wanted to max out his Moon Shadow Swordsmanship to Rank M (the highest level), he would have to gather at least 25 Skill Points to do so. Therefore, just to level one skill to the maximum would allow the player to finish an entire route in the Talent Tree.

This system was quite harsh towards Summoning Swordsmen as their initial skill level was one lower than the pure classes. That means that a Summoning Swordsman would need to waste one more Skill Point for every skill. It's definitely something not worth boasting about.

In Dragon Soul Continent Online, after the player reaches the level cap, the game would award them with 100 bonus Skill Points. Taking special quests, props, and equipment into consideration, the total number of Skill Points that an ordinary player would receive in their playthrough would amount between 200 to 300. However, Rhode had around 500 Skill Points. That was one of the reasons why he could stand at the top. The more Skill Points

he had, the more skills he could enhance and therefore perform much better than other players. Whether it was back then or now, this rule didn't change.

When Rhode defeated the Death Knight, his level shot up to 16 because the Death Knight was a BOSS far above his level, obtaining 7 Skill Points.

Rhode assigned five points to Soul Resonance and Integration in his Talent Tree. Then, he intended to enhance his Moon Shadow Swordsmanship and Starfall Swordsmanship which was Rank C and Rank E respectively. As for his remaining five points, he would save it for later.

If it all goes as planned, before reaching level 100, he would have 190 Skill Points.

But, that was still a long way to go, and what he must worry about was the problem before him right now.

Rhode stopped moving the pen in his hand.

If any player saw what he had written, their eyes would most likely pop out of their sockets. On the paper, Rhode drew a relationship diagram of the whole Summoning Swordsman's Talent Tree, the number of Skill Points that Rhode needed for his current Swordsmanship, his talents, and his skills. Without a computer, he could only refer to his memories, and Rhode had perfectly displayed that information. He really lived up to his name as the Walking Library.

What should I add?

He focused on analyzing the data before him.

If it were any other player who received a sudden amount of rewards, their first reaction would be to enhance all their Talents. Initially, Rhode wanted to do that too, but when he slowly pondered to himself... is there really a need to do it?

One will have to realize that this wasn't a game anymore. If it was still back in Dragon Soul Continent Online, Rhode could think based on a player's

mindset because it would give him an edge in PvP. However, now he had no need to do so. The people here do not know what Skill Points and proficiency were. They were not even informed about the Summoning Swordsman's class. Since they had no idea of these things, Rhode couldn't plan his skills by using a player mindset.

Hmm... should I add all into one route? But it will be quite wasteful as I don't have enough to max it out...

Rhode didn't consider adding Swordsmanship yet because he hadn't unlocked the Swordsmanship that he wanted.

So what should he do?

First, he had to consider what he wanted to achieve. Rhode really wanted to level up fast since there wasn't much time left. He needed to farm EXP points effectively.

Suddenly, a spark of inspiration flashed in his eyes; he recalled something from long ago in the forums. A player was asking him about increasing the Talent of the Summoning Swordsman class. While the player did lay out a rather creative approach to adding points, but at that time, because of restrictions, he didn't succeed. Rhode also didn't recommend him to do it, but now, in this world, his method might be possible...

“If he could combine the quality with the quantity...”

Rhode leaned against his chair and closed his eyes. The Talent System appeared before him, and he focused his attention on the Talent just next to ‘Summoning Master’ which was ‘Soul Messenger.’

The first level of Soul Messenger:

[Spirit Armor (When the summoned spirit is active, it will receive protection from Spirit Armor. Increases defense stats by 10%,20%,30%)]

[Three In One (When there is one or more summoned spirit active, the spirit attribute increase by 5%, 10%)]

[Shadow Follower (Allow the summoner to have the same attributes as the spirit. Increases attack stats by 30%,60%,90%)]

Alright, I've decided!

Rhode took a deep breath. He opened his eyes and went through the data before him once again. Then, he calmed down and stretched out his hand to open the Talent Tree that floated in front of him. Soon, the system prompt appeared.

**[Used 1 Skill Point to unlock the Talent that had been selected ——
Soul Messenger]**

Rhode suddenly felt that his body shaking violently inside. After that, a surge of heat spread throughout his entire body.

**[Unlocked Soul Messenger first level of talent: Spirit Armor LV1
(When the summoned spirit is active, it receive protection from Spirit Armor. Increases defense attributes by 10%)]**

[Obtained skill: Spirit Armor LV1]

[Used 1 Skill Point to level up Spirit Armor LV2 (When the summoned spirit is active, it receive protection from Spirit Armor. increases defense stats by 20%)]

[Used 1 Skill Point to level up Spirit Armor LV3 (When the summoned spirit is active, it receive protection from Spirit Armor. increases defense stats by 30%)]

Good!

Rhode clenched his fist in joy. But, things didn't stop here.

**[Unlocked Soul Messenger first level of talent: Shadow Follower LV1
(Allow the summoner to have the same attributes as the spirit.)]**

Increases attack stats by 30%,60%,90%)]

[Obtained skill: Shadow Follower LV1]

[Used 1 Skill Point to level up Shadow Follower LV2 (Allow the summoner to have the same attributes as the spirit. Increases attack stats by 60%)]

[Used 1 Skill Point to level up Shadow Follower LV3 (Allow the summoner to have the same attributes as the spirit. Increases attack stats by 90%)]

Rhode heaved a sigh of relief when everything was done. He stood up and stared at his right hand. After that, a thought flashed through his mind, and soon a black card appeared before him.

Swoosh!! The card on his hand was crushed and turned into a dark fog. It swirled around his finger and enveloped Rhode in a blink of an eye. Then, when Rhode opened his eyes, a strange red light glowed in his irises.

A huge dark lance appeared on his right hand and on his left, a black card that he has never seen before appeared. At the same time, a transparent blue barrier surrounded Rhode.

[Activate Skill: Spirit Armor LV3]

[Activate Skill: Shadow Follower LV3]

[Elemental protection, heavy-armor type]

Done!

Looking at the system prompt, Rhode pumped his fist.

He once again upgraded himself successfully.

At that moment, a series of footsteps could be heard from outside.

Hearing the sound, Rhode expression changed. The dark fog and Spirit Armor were dispelled immediately. Then, Rhode sat down. Before he could clean up the scattered documents on the floor, a knock sounded at the door.

“Come in.”

The door slowly opened, Old Walker stepped inside and glanced around the room that looked as if a typhoon had just ended. He was surprised, but didn't say anything. He walked towards Rhode and nodded.

“Kid, remember the things that you've asked me to investigate? I've got results.”

Chapter 101 - Increase In Strength

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Oh?”

Rhode raised his brow.

Then, he leaned back against the chair, crossed his hands and waited for the old ranger to speak.

This is about the investigation of the Jade Tears mercenary group. I found out that they are expanding rather aggressively and their new leader had tried to recruit members from other mercenary groups. I would say that his offer is quite enticing, and coupled with the fact that recently many groups faced a near wipeout, those groups that were planning to dissolve agreed to merge with Jade Tears.”

“What is the current strength of their group?” Rhode asked.

Old Walker frowned and pondered for a while before saying, “Right now, Jade Tears has roughly around 30 mercenaries. From that number, they can already be considered as a large mercenary group.”

“How about the class distribution?”

“Almost the same as other mercenary groups. Most of them are the ordinary Swordsman, Thief, Ranger you would find in mercenary groups—ah yes, and also a few Shield Warriors. Since many of their members are survivors from the previous undead mission, many of them are quite formidable. Perhaps if they carry on like this, it wouldn’t take long for them to rise up again.”

“I see... so that’s it...”

Rhode changed his sitting posture, his fingers against his chin, pondering silently for a while. Then he once again asked.

“What about that second thing that I asked you to do?”

“That... is difficult, kid.”

When Rhode mentioned this, Old Walker frowned and his expression turned ugly.

“Honestly, some groups are rather interested in your request, but they some aren't too enthusiastic at the same time. The ones that weren't interested wanted to stand independently on their two feet. It's already a miracle that they didn't kick me out the door. I'd told you, kid. It's only natural for people to ignore your request. You can't even find enough manpower for your group, and you want to swallow a group that is bigger than yours?”

“Sigh... and as for those who wanted to join you... I believe they have ulterior motives. It is already quite widely known that Jade Tears mercenary group offered a tempting sum to those who were willing to merge with them. That's why I believe that the mercenary groups who chose us over Jade Tears have something up their sleeves.”

Though Old Walker tried to advise Rhode, his judgment was quite baseless.

Yes, the money Rhode offered can't be compared to Jade Tears, but in some ways, Starlight was more promising than Jade Tears. Not only did they have a genius Mage, they also had a Cleric. Not to mention that Rhode's strength couldn't be underestimated.

The recent mission to Silent Plateau highlighted Rhode's strength. At first, many people thought that Rhode relied on Sereck to complete the mission, but after Victorious Wine confirmed that Rhode was actually the head of the operation and even spearheaded the defeat of the Death Knight, many of their doubts died down.

Moreover, there was even a rumor that Rhode had an angel under him...

While nobles were uncommon, the people still managed to catch a glimpse of them from time to time, but they had never seen a noble with an angel as a subordinate...

Think about this: Starlight had a strong leader and a noble status. They even had an accomplished Mage and a Cleric to heal when in times of need. This lineup would make missions a lot easier than having a bunch of melee classes fumbling around in dark dungeons. Moreover, Rhode was also close to the Mercenary Association—even Sereck admired him.

And now that this mercenary group was actually recruiting?

What would the people choose? Money, or connections?

This is a matter of perspectives.

“You don’t have to tell me about this, I know.”

Rhode shook his head then frowned. It looked like everything didn’t proceed smoothly...

“So no one wants to talk with us?”

“There is, but I think you won’t be interested.”

This time, Old Walker answered decisively.

“Oh?”

Rhode expression changed.

“Tell me?”

Old Walker didn’t answer immediately. Instead, he grinned and revealed a strange smile.

“This group isn’t alien to you since you’re their lifesaver...” Old Walker said.

“Red Hawk. It’s the Red Hawk mercenary group belonging to Shauna. I think you should know what happened to them previously in Pavel Cemetery. Many of them died, some of them quit, and now Red Hawk is left with only four people including Shauna. Seeing that there was no point, she thought of disbanding the mercenary group. That’s why I talked I talked to her and asked for a chat. It appears that she’s rather interested in negotiating with you.”

“No problem.”

Rhode nodded.

“We can schedule the time if she wants to negotiate. Is there anyone else?”

“Well, other mercenary groups didn’t have much to say. But some people from Mark White came to look for me and hoped that I could help them. It looks like after Anne left, Mark White had finally elected their new leader and have begun purging the opposition. I think that those people who looked for me wanted to follow Anne. I trust these people, but it might be a waste of resources.”

“How many people?”

“A small group of four people, three males, one female. Their leader is Edward. I think it’s better to ask Anne directly since she knows them better.”

“I understand, I will ask Anne about this matter. But I still hope that you can look for some information regarding these people. At the same time, I want you to find out what is happening to Mark White mercenary group.”

“No problem, kid.”

Old Walker gladly agreed. But after that, he touched his beard and looked at Rhode curiously.

“But kid, why do you suddenly want to recruit people at this time? Is it because of the recent situation? Also, why do you want me to keep an eye

on that Jade Tears mercenary group? Did their leader piss you off or something?”

Rhode didn't answer immediately.

He turned around to look outside the window before saying,

“Mr. Walker.”

“Yes? What?”

“When you encounter a young wild beast, will you kill it right away? Or wait for it to grow up, eat people, and then kill it? ”

“Uhh...”

Old Walker hesitated a while before answering,

“Of course I would finish it before it has the opportunity to grow up. Otherwise, wouldn't it be too late if it ate people already?”

“That's right.”

Rhode stood up and walked to the window.

“It's too late to kill it after it had killed someone. What I'm trying to say is that it's better to take preventive measures.”

“But kid, how would you know if the beast will kill people?”

Looking at Rhode's back, Old Walker scratched his head, thinking that this young man's reasoning was really too strange.

“Maybe it won't... but it's always better to take preventive measures.”

Rhode turned around and looked at Old Walker.

“Mr. Walker, I need you to help me with one more thing.”

“Again?”

Old Walker immediately rolled his eyes.

“I say, kid. I’m a mercenary, not your attendant. Why must I always do everything! Do I have to help you change a diaper next time? I’m telling you, I’m a mercenary, not your lackey. If you have something, go ask for Lize, that girl would definitely follow you, even if you asked her to warm your bed, I believe she wouldn’t decline.”

“Help me look for people that are well-informed, neat and smart. I think that this shouldn’t be difficult for you with your connections in Deep Stone City.”

“I will give you some money, spend it as you see fit. Get that person to keep an eye on Jade Tears. I want to know what they did, and what they intend to do—especially information about their leader. They need to tidy up the information and pass it to me discreetly. Of course, I don’t need to remind you that I don’t want anyone finding out about it.”

“Hey! Kid! Did you not hear what I said?! I said that I’m not your attendant, go ask someone else!”

“Here is 500 gold coins.”

Rhode said as he grabbed a purse and threw it on the table.

“Spend it however you like, I won’t deduct it from your pay.”

“You...”

Old Walker glared at Rhode. After a while, he sighed and shoved the purse into his pocket.

“Sure, sure. I don’t know what kind of curse I possess to have a leader like you. I will help you to find these people, but if the money isn’t enough, I will ask you for it.”

“If only the money is ‘not enough’.”

Old Walker didn't intend to continue to bother him. He stood up, glared at Rhode and turned around to leave. But when Old Walker reached the door, he thought of something and quickly turned around.

“Ah, I almost forgot. When I went to Mercenary Association, I was instructed to deliver a message. Three days later, the Mercenary Association will hold an emergency meeting. All the mercenary group leaders must participate. I have already delivered the message, don't blame me if you forget.”

After saying his piece, Old Walker pulled the door and walked out.

Rhode sat on the chair silently and stared emotionlessly at Old Walker's figure disappearing down the hallway.

“At least learn how to close the door, Mr. Walker.”

Chapter 102 - Blasting Fuse

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Amidst the fatigue from the matters of her group, Shauna was still energetic as usual.

“Hello, Mr. Rhode.”

Shauna greeted Rhode with a smile.

“Frankly, I thought I was dreaming when I heard about you from Old Walker.”

“I’m also quite surprised to see you.”

Rhode nodded and replied as he shook Shauna’s hand.

“Never thought that I would get a response from your group.”

Shauna smiled helplessly. Her emotions were slightly shaken, but she soon stabilized herself and gestured towards the three other people behind her.

“There’s no need to introduce them. Henry, Martin and Levi... right?”

Rhode recalled their names and briefly recited them.

The three were surprised as they had only fought together once, yet Rhode could still remember their names.

“You actually still remember us, Mr. Rhode.”

The Swordsman named Henry smiled and said.

Henry was present during the battle in Pavel Cemetery. He was convinced of Rhode’s strength when he witnessed how he commanded and defeated

the Necromancer. That was the reason why he actively supported this meeting.

“Of course I remember.”

“But I think the person that left a deep impression on me isn’t here?”

Shauna and the others smiled awkwardly as they knew who Rhode was referring to. Luckily, that matter had already been solved, otherwise, Shauna wouldn’t be able to meet Rhode at all.

“If you are referring to Barney... you don’t have to look for him anymore because he had already left our mercenary group.”

“Oh?”

Rhode was slightly surprised.

“That’s quite unexpected. He left the group? Why?”

Shauna was already prepared for this question, so she gestured Rhode to sit down and began to explain.

“Before we met Old Walker, we received an invitation from Jade Tears. Barney was quite interested in the invitation, but the four of us weren’t keen on accepting it. Thus, we could only let him follow the path that he wants and removed him from the group.”

However, Shauna only stated half of the truth. After the battle in Pavel Cemetery, Red Hawk had received heavy casualties, so Shauna’s position as leader was inevitably shaken. Being a female mercenary already left her at a disadvantage, and now, coupled with the heavy losses under her leadership, her position began to falter.

Shauna had planned to recuperate before initiating the recruitment process, but she didn’t expect her subordinates to betray her during the downtime. Barney made his stand blatantly obvious. He even visited Shauna privately, requesting her to pass him the position as mercenary leader.

Barney promised that he would evolve the mercenary group, but Shauna could understand what was Barney thinking about. Naturally, she rejected his proposal, causing Barney to seeth in anger.

Purely based on her female instincts, she quickly concluded that he intended to sell the group to Jade Tears for a large sum of money. However, after the incident in Pavel Cemetery, she felt wary of people who offered something that was too good to be true.

Thus, after ending their relationship, Barney and his followers left Red Hawk for Jade Tears. That was why only four members remained. Of course, this made Shauna incredibly furious, but when Old Walker visited her, it was as though a bright light dispersed the dark, gloomy clouds over her.

However, since this was a private matter, Shauna didn't plan to bring it up during the negotiations. Rhode also wasn't very keen on internal conflicts, so both of them quickly shifted to the main point of the negotiation.

“Frankly speaking,”

Rhode stretched out his hand to grab a glass of wine on the table.

“Your strength is quite lacking... I don't know if you can handle the upcoming battles.”

“I... understand.”

Shauna had already made mental preparations to be rejected. She knew that she couldn't possibly compare to a Mage like Marlene in dealing damage, nor could she compare in soaking up hits like Anne.

There were four people left in Red Hawk. Shauna and Henry were both Swordsmen, Martin was a Shield Warrior and lastly, the Barbarian, Levi.

If they were ranked accordingly by their power level, Shauna held the first place. The other three were more or less the same. But Shauna knew that

even though she might be regarded the top in her mercenary group, when faced against a group like Rhode's, she was nothing but a small fry.

If that was the case, what kind of jobs would he assign her group to if they merged?

Shauna felt a little uneasy thinking about this. However, Rhode soon eased her worries.

“I think you are aware that Starlight is still quite small. Thus, when we head out for a mission, no one would be present to guard our stronghold. This matter has been on my mind for a while, so if you're fine with guarding the stronghold, I will welcome you with open arms.”

Shauna and the others didn't answer hastily. They sipped a few mouthfuls of wine and pondered for a while.

After a moment, Shauna narrowed her brows and said.

“I really appreciate your trust, but... isn't that responsibility a little too heavy for us?”

While at first glance, it might seem that guarding the stronghold was a mindless job and probably one of the least important roles among the others, but it was actually the opposite. One must realize that the stronghold was the core of any mercenary group. Only members who were trustworthy were allowed to guard the stronghold while their leader was out. Thus, Shauna's concerns weren't unfounded. Though she might have relations with Lize, it wasn't a good enough reason for Rhode to fully trust them. Weren't they afraid that they might take advantage of the situation while Rhode wasn't in?

But contrary to her expectations, Rhode didn't seem to show any worry.

“I've already said that we are lacking in manpower. And since you're honest enough to remind me of such matters, I believe you wouldn't do such a thing. Furthermore, this important responsibility will be shared with other mercenaries other than you three in the time to come. When that time

comes, they will be under you. I'm sure that you'll be able to handle them as you already have experience as a mercenary group leader.

“...”

Shauna wanted to speak, but she hesitated in the end.

If she hadn't met Rhode before, she would've thought that he was joking. Rhode had just offered her one of the most critical roles in a mercenary group. However, what did she do to deserve such a position? Besides, she hadn't even joined Starlight yet!

For a while, the red-haired female mercenary pondered deeply.

Rhode, on the other hand, merely kept silent and waited for Shauna to decide. It wasn't that he was oblivious to her concerns, but because of the system prompt, he had a method to observe his stronghold any time he wished. In other words, if Shauna were to do something bad, Rhode would be alerted immediately and could activate the security system to imprison everyone inside.

Thus, he didn't have to worry about anyone trying to destroy the stronghold from inside. Instead, he was more worried about people attacking from external sources. Although the stronghold's defenses were difficult to breach, if someone were to attack the stronghold continuously without anyone to stop them, the situation would turn dire. It would be meaningless to activate the security system if there was no one guarding inside.

Shauna's Red Hawk mercenary group might not be the best option for him, but right now, it was the most feasible method.

“I understand.”

After confirming Rhode's offer, Shauna turned towards her remaining members and discussed the matter with a serious expression.

Then, a while later, she turned back to Rhode and said,

“Since Mr. Rhode displayed his trust in us, then we can’t possibly decline your benevolence. We can assure you that we will do our best to defend the stronghold!”

Upon hearing Shauna’s reply, Rhode nodded, satisfied with her choice. Then, he stood up and shook her hand.

“Well then, let me be the first to welcome you to Starlight.”

Once both sides reached an agreement, the remaining details were not difficult to settle. Soon, they reached a consensus on compensation and salary.

Each month, Shauna and the other three would receive ten gold coins. While it was less than they had got previously, it was still a generous pay considering their low-risk job. On the other hand, if Shauna or any other were to neglect their duty and cause the mercenary group to suffer a loss, they would have to compensate with their personal funds. There was no objection to this clause as it was logical. Now, the final step was for Shauna to send in their letter for disbandment to the Mercenary Association and report that they were joining Starlight right after.

When it was time to sign her name on the disbandment form, Shauna still showed signs of hesitation. After all, it had been several years since she had formed Red Hawk. She had done so to prove that she didn’t need to rely on men to be strong. She worked doubly hard to create a name for her mercenary group, but in the end, reality still slapped her in the face.

Shauna’s hand that was holding the pen suddenly stopped moving. She lifted her head and looked at Rhode who stood beside her.

Will this man be different from the others?

He managed to attract Lize, so he must have something that compels others to follow him. But... what does she see in him?

Still, thinking about this right now is pointless.

After a while, Shauna bit her lower lip and signed her name on the paper.

From that moment on, Red Hawk was officially disbanded.

When Shauna exited the Mercenary Association, it can be seen that she appeared tired, but her expression was still rather calm.

“You’re my leader now, Mr. Rhode.”

Shauna smiled wryly and patted on Rhode’s shoulder.

“After packing up, come to my stronghold and I will show you around. You should already be aware of its location by now.”

“Of course.”

After speaking with Rhode, Shauna turned around to leave, but at that time, a familiar voice sounded nearby.

“Big sister? Why are you here?”

When she heard this voice, Shauna’s expression changed. Rhode also frowned and turned around.

A young man walked towards her, wearing a brand new leather armor. His eyes widened when he saw the red-haired woman.

“Big sister? What are you doing here? Are you taking a mission?”

“That’s none of your business, Barney.”

The woman’s former smile disappeared and was replaced by a cold expression.

“I-I’m only asking...”

Barney’s mouth twitched when he heard her cold remark. Then he shifted his dissatisfaction to Rhode nearby.

“Big sister, why are you together with this... guy?”

“None of your business, Barney.”

Shauna repeated herself coldly.

“You’re not part of Red Hawk now, why do you even bother? Moreover, Red Hawk is already disbanded. I’m now a member of Starlight.”

“What!?”

Barney jumped, startled like a cat whose tail was stepped on.

“Big sister, are you saying that you disbanded Red Hawk because you want to join this b*stard’s mercenary group? How can you do something like that?! How can you give up on Red Hawk, I...”

“Shut up!! You are no longer a member of Red Hawk. You don’t have any rights to tell me what to do!”

“...Have no rights?”

Barney’s expression turned dark.

“You always say things like that... telling me that I have no rights to do anything. Didn’t I just state the truth?! It is you who refused to hear it! Even when I was still in the mercenary group, you always shut me up by saying that I have no rights. Now that I’m not a member any longer, you still tell me that I can’t speak my mind? In fact, it is actually you who no longer have the rights to tell me what to say!”

Barney then reached out his hand and pointed towards Rhode.

“I will say this now. This b*stard’s dirt broke mercenary group is nothing compared to Jade Tears. Am I right, everyone?”

“Yes!”

“Yeah!”

The people that had followed Barney started chiming in.

“How can anyone want to join a trashy mercenary group like Starlight?”

“Hey... maybe that guy used his beauty to seduce people? Look at his face, doesn't he resemble a sissy?”

“Hahaha! He does really look like a sissy! Perhaps he might even be a woman in disguise! Is it because that she's too flat chested so she decided to dress as a man? Hahaha, that's too funny. Anyway, a flat chested woman in bed is still a woman, someone like her...”

Before that man could finish, a bright red light flashed past his head. In a fraction of a second, half of his head flew into the sky followed by his brain matter splattering all over the place. His body was still halfway maintaining a vulgar pose, but after convulsing a few times, it dropped to the floor with a thud.

Dead silence.

Everyone was in shock. All of them stared at the dead body in disbelief.

“Only level 5? Hmph, even the EXP he gave is only 5. What a noob.”

Rhode spun his sword a few times and flicked away the ‘dirtied blood’ on his blade. Then, he coldly curled his lips into a smirk and stared at the rest, sending chills down their spine.

“Y-you, what are you doing!!”

Barney finally reacted. He stopped staring at the dead body and pointed a finger angrily at Rhode. But at the same time, he subconsciously backed a few steps away from him. It wasn't until he was reunited with the rest of his followers was he then finally relieved.

“You dared to kill a person in public!! Do you know that he's a member of the Jade Tears mercenary group?! Doing something like this is the same as declaring war!”

“Killed a person?”

Rhode glanced at the dead body and tilted his head, smiling coldly.

“I can only see a dead dog. I don’t see any person here that you speak of... including you.”

Rhode then lowered his head slightly and stared at Barney menacingly with his one side of his lips still curled upwards.

“For the sake of the peace and stability of this world, and as a respectful resident of this city, I have a duty to put down stray dogs that might infect others with their... contagious diseases.”

Rhode slowly walked towards Barney.

“And as for you... perhaps you’ve forgotten the pain from before, Mr. Barney? Since my gift was so easily disregarded, do you think that I should give you something to remember me by—permanently?”

“Ah...ah....”

Barney’s heart thumped harder at every step Rhode took and found himself frozen in fear. Although he had more people than Rhode, he didn’t feel safe at all. From his perspective, the cold light gleaming in that man’s eyes was like a monster that could gobble him up without breaking a sweat.

“M-m-mov...”

His teeth chattered as though something struck his throat. It was clearly only two simple words, but he didn’t know why he was unable to say it.

Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!!

Rhode was getting nearer and nearer. Barney could feel his previous injury that was already completely healed starting to hurt again.

Droplets of sweat trickled down his forehead, but he was still unable to move.

Am I going to die like this?

Swoosh!

Suddenly, a black shadow emerged from Rhode's back. With a quick motion, a sharp dagger deftly shot towards Rhode's rear.

The moment the dagger arrived behind him, he suddenly disappeared and reappeared behind the assailant. Her hands suddenly became numb and she lost control of her dagger which fell to the ground soon after.

Bad!

Realizing that her attack had failed, she planned to retreat. But before she could do so, the very next second, she found herself pinned against the wall with her neck grabbed tightly.

“That’s already the second time. Looks like there’s another one who didn’t learn their lesson.”

He glared mercilessly at the half-elf girl who struggled against the wall.

“I didn’t think that you’d also join Jade Tears. It looks like that mercenary group is full of trash. They basically accept anything.”

“Ugh..ugh...”

Both of her legs kicked against the wall, reaching out her hands in an attempt to pry open Rhode's vice-like grip. On the other hand, Rhode didn't budge an inch. Instead, he turned around and shot a glare at Barney.

“Is she your comrade? Maybe I should start with her?”

“S... stop!! Let her go!”

As though his words had woke him up, Barney suddenly had a surge of momentary courage and whipped out his sword, pointing the tip towards Rhode.

“Quick, let her go! Otherwise, I won’t hold back!”

“A man must learn to talk less and do more.”

Rhode smiled coldly at Barney’s ‘threat.’ His fingers slowly clamped tighter on her neck, causing the girl to gasp for air. Her strength also seemed to dwindle as her legs which was previously actively kicking against the wall began turning limp.

“Everyone! Go!!”

Noticing that the situation was turning bad, Barney hesitated no longer. He waved his sword and gave the order to attack. Once they heard his command, the other mercenaries also took out their swords and rushed towards Rhode.

Then, at that moment, a deep voice boomed.

“Everyone, STOP!!!”

Chapter 103 - Accident

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Barney and his crew were shocked by the voice and quickly put down their weapons before turning around.

Rhode frowned, but his grip didn't loosen the slightest.

“What's happening?!”

A man who wore a stunning magic armor appeared from the crowd which gathered to see what was happening. It was Frank, the leader of Jade Tears mercenary group. When he saw that the troublemaker was Rhode, a flash of coldness shone in his eyes, but it soon disappeared.

“Mr. Rhode, please release her. No matter what happened, what you are doing now is a provocation to my Jade Tears mercenary group.”

“What if I don't let her go?”

Rhode loosened his grip slightly, allowing the half-elf girl to breathe again. However, she still had no strength to move, just like a puppet under Rhode's control.

“If you're smart, let her go. That would be the best outcome for the both of us.”

Both of them stared at each other intensely, unwilling to back down. The bustling crowd, who gathered to watch the commotion also began to quieten down.

“Alright, sure.”

Rhode pondered for a while and nodded. Then, he waved his hand and threw the pitiful half-elf girl to the ground while she screamed. Soon, some

Jade Tears mercenaries came to carry her to safety.

“Leader, that guy, he...”

“I know.”

Frank held his hand up and stopped Barney from speaking. He glared at Rhode coldly as he slowly shifted his hands to the sword by his waist.

“Mr. Rhode, although I don’t know what actually happened here, isn’t it enough since you’ve already killed one of my men?”

“Well, for a start, stop contradicting yourself. You just mentioned that you didn’t know what happened here, so why are you telling me that what I’ve done is too much?”

Rhode maintained his terrifying smile. The sword in his hand gleamed in the sun with killing intent.

“Perhaps you can give me an explanation?”

“Sorry, I’m not interested in doing that. Moreover... I’m not done with that man over there.”

Rhode lifted his sword and pointed it towards Barney.

“I’ve already given my word that I’m going to bequeath him a gift that he will not forget. Are you going to stand in my way, Mr. Frank?”

“... Mr. Rhode. I hope you understand the implications of what you are doing.”

Frank’s face turned darker.

“What you’re doing now is declaring war with Jade Tears.”

“Declaring war?”

Hearing Frank’s response, Rhode smiled.

“If I’m not mistaken, what you meant was... you’re attempting to wage war against Starlight?”

Rhode lowered his voice until it was almost inaudible, but anyone who heard him felt a chill down their spine.

“And since that’s your true intention...”

Rhode slowly lifted the sword in his hand.

“Then I won’t hold back!”

Shadow Flash, activate!

A shadow flickered, followed by a bright red sword light piercing straight towards Frank’s heart. Meanwhile, Frank also yelled and pulled out his swords to parry the attack.

Clang... clang... clang!!

Numerous sparks flew out each time the swords clashed. Both sides took a few steps back and stared at each other for a moment. And as if it was a planned performance, the two of them suddenly rushed forward again at the same time.

Frank swung his swords and lunged at Rhode’s vitals. In response, Rhode spun his sword around and blocked the attack to his chest. At that moment, Frank discovered that Rhode threw something with his left hand. Three cards of different colors flew out.

“——!!”

In a blink of an eye, a dark fog filled the air and enveloped the two men within.

What’s happening?!

Frank had no time to react. A black spear suddenly appeared from within the fog and pierced at him.

What the heck is that?!

Frank was startled. He quickly retreated to dodge the spear, but before he could relax, a black hound covered in flames appeared from the fog, roaring and rushing towards him.

“Damn it!!”

Frank’s expression darkened. He crossed his swords to block the attack reaching for his chest, and when the black hound was just before him, Frank’s body split into three illusions, slashing at the black hound consecutively. The black hound was immediately split into several pieces, and at that moment, the flames within its body burst out.

Boom!! The explosion turned the ground to glass, mercilessly sweeping out everything around it. Even the surroundings became hazy as the air filled with dust. After this, anyone who is tasked with cleaning this place would probably curse and swear.

Meanwhile, Frank was in quite a sorry state. He rolled on the ground a distance away from the explosion; his beautiful clothes were now incredibly dirty. Even if he tried to wash it, it would probably take a long time.

However, there was a much more imminent threat than his dirty clothes.

A holy flame split the dust cloud apart. The angel girl turned into a flash of lightning and shot towards Frank. Her white wings shone even under the cloudy sky. No matter how much dirt landed on her, the holy flames would keep her clean and pure.

Angel!?

When he saw Celia, Frank’s eyes narrowed. He stared helplessly at the sword that was almost on him. Then, he stretched out his hand and held onto a beautiful pendant on his neck.

The next moment, he crushed the pendant.

The holy sword pierced through his body, but it didn't cause him any harm. With the power of a magic equipment, Frank escaped from being mortally wounded and fled the danger area.

But that didn't mean that Rhode was done.

The sound of hooves echoed from behind.

Frank, who had already spent all his concentration on the angel, didn't have time to dodge the attack that came from his rear. The Centaur Knight lifted its shield and bashed onto Frank's face, sending him flying towards Rhode. At the same time, a red sword glowed brightly and scattered into a thousand fragments, shooting towards Frank.

Is it the end?

As he stared helplessly at the attack coming for him, his heart sank. He had just begun his journey, was he going to die without accomplishing anything?

I am not willing, I am not willing!

“Stay your hand!”

Accompanied by an old voice, a mysterious rune barrier appeared and blocked the fragments. Rhode narrowed his eyes when he heard this voice. He flipped his hand and a card reappeared on his palm which quickly disappeared into thin air.

A gust of wind blew away the dust.

Everyone could finally see the scene before them.

The street was now full of holes. Rhode stood quietly by himself, staring at Frank emotionlessly. As for Frank, he was lying unconsciously on the ground.

An old man wearing a white robe stood beside Frank.

Space Barrier... an inner circle Mage.

Rhode clenched the sword on his hand.

A big fish was finally lured out.

“Young man, you’ve gone too far.”

The old man looked at Frank’s wound before studying Rhode. Facing his gaze, Rhode looked at him without the slightest fear.

“I don’t think I have done anything excessive.”

Rhode said while putting down his sword. At the same time, Sereck and the Old President walked out from the crowd anxiously. Since such a big thing happened outside, there was no way they didn’t notice. It was just that Rhode moved too fast and they didn’t have the time to stop it. Seeing the situation finally eased down, the two of them quickly stood forward.

“Stop it! Are you crazy? You actually dare to make a fuss in front of Mercenary Association’s entrance! Do you even still put mercenaries as people in your eyes!?”

“Old man, I’m also a mercenary.”

“You... alright enough, cut the b*llshit, I will carefully investigate what was happening here! Wait here. Before I clear up the mess, you are not allowed to go anywhere!”

“I’m not planning to go anywhere.”

Rhode shrugged.

“It’s just that Mr. Frank’s Jade Tears was declaring war on me. I only agreed to his request, it’s that simple, isn’t it?”

“Don’t falsely accuse people and talk nonsense!”

Barney heard Rhode’s voice and quickly spoke out.

“You clearly were the one who killed our men first and now you’re trying to alter the facts? Mr. President, this b*stard...”

“That’s right, I actually forgot something important.”

A sword flashed.

Barney’s suddenly stopped speaking and his voice immediately turned into grief.

“Aaaahhhh!! My ear! My ear!!!”

He stretched out his hand and held his left ear that was already gone. Only blood flowed out from in between the gaps of his fingers.

“Let’s go Shauna. The show is over.”

Rhode said without even turning back. The girl was dumbstruck. Before she could react, Rhode had already left.

Such a pity, it was a very good opportunity to kill a dangerous rebel...

But... the there’s always another opportunity.

Chapter 104 - The Group of Four People

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The investigation results came out in less than half a day. Not surprising though, since the whole fiasco took part in front of the Mercenary Association, and with the numerous onlookers witnessing it, they had no choice but to put in extra effort in the investigation.

Sereck had a headache. He wanted to persuade Rhode to reconcile with Jade Tears, but he didn't expect that the Rhode who had been relatively easy to talk to actually ignore him. He couldn't understand why this young man's attitude suddenly took a turn without any warning.

Meanwhile, the Jade Tears mercenary group were unexpectedly calm. Though many mercenaries were furious, since their leader was injured and currently unconscious, they were unsure of what to do. If their leader, who was much stronger than them, still lost to Rhode, what could they do?

As for Rhode, he was lamenting about not being able to kill Frank.

He knew clearly what role Frank would play in the future. If he could get rid of Frank now, the Country of Light would be unable to create trouble in Deep Stone City for at least one more year.

With that one year, he could reinforce Deep Stone City with enough measures to resist the Country of Light.

However, Rhode's plan failed. According to Old Walker, he only needed to rest a month to heal. Rhode felt that it was too short.

Still, he managed to succeed in provoking the hostilities between both parties as planned...

In fact, when Rhode realized that Frank was the leader of the Jade Tears mercenary group, he had been trying to find ways to create conflicts. In the future, he would inevitably launch an attack against Jade Tears to counter the internal invasion from the Country of Light. If he did that without reason, the opponent would definitely be suspicious of Rhode. Even though Rhode knew what the Country of Light was planning to do, he didn't want to reveal to others just yet.

Rhode decided that the safest way to conceal his intentions was to act hostile to Jade Tears. As the rivalry between mercenary groups was uncommon, he could disrupt their plans on purpose without being found out.

If the Country of Light found out that Rhode somehow discovered their plans, they would use many methods to try and silence him. However, if it were only something like a dispute between mercenary groups, they wouldn't risk exposing themselves for a mere conjecture.

It's just like a fight between two yakuza gangs. It's very normal for them to fight. If one of them dispatched the CIA or FBI to help one side, then the other party would definitely become suspicious.

The woman sitting at the top of Golden City was no fool. That was why the Country of Light had been treading lightly around her.

Initially, Rhode was thinking hard on how to provoke Jade Tears without being it being too forced. But he had never thought that Barney would be thoughtful to deliver himself on a platter.

After this clash, Rhode felt certain that he didn't have to worry about the relationship turning harmonious.

However, there was one thing that went beyond his expectations — the attitude of the other mercenary groups.

Normally, uninvolved groups would usually be indifferent to these kinds of fights between mercenary groups. But surprisingly, many mercenary groups revealed their support and ridiculed the Jade Tears mercenary group.

This made Rhode a little surprised, but after thinking about it, he understood why they behaved this way.

After all, nearly two-thirds of the thirty-two mercenary groups in Paphield received heavy losses. However, during this time, Jade Tears actually flaunted their money and poached mercenaries. It was like putting salt on one's wound.

If Jade Tears was like Starlight who managed to come back from Silent Plateau without any casualties successfully, perhaps their stance on the matter might be different. However, Jade Tears weren't strong like Starlight. Moreover, they used their money to poach mercenaries which made a lot of groups unhappy.

No matter where one went, a show-off would always be shunned.

Many criticisms against Jade Tears floated in taverns and inns as many mercenary groups drowned their worries in liquor. They had no choice but to complain privately as the strength of Jade Tears rose quickly to a first-class mercenary group just by numbers alone while their groups were unable to recover.

However, they didn't think that Starlight would suddenly appear and beat up Jade Tears. This left them extremely satisfied. There was actually someone who was willing to help clean up the trash, so they didn't mind supporting them from behind. Even though Rhode understood that verbal support had little to no significance, at least it wasn't totally useless. It made clear to the Mercenary Association that the reputation of Jade Tears was falling. And that was more than enough for Rhode since they would take this point into account when dealing with Jade Tears in the future.

But that wasn't the most important matter right now.

“Is it... here?”

The girl looked up; her beautiful face revealed an uneasy expression. She clenched her cloak tightly, looking at the massive house before her. Beside

her, a young man who was also wrapped in a cloak patted the girl's head to comfort her.

“Lapis, don't worry. I believe there won't be a problem.”

“Um...umm.”

Although she nodded her head, her expression didn't relax the slightest. Looking at her current appearance, the young man beside her couldn't help but smile wryly; then he glanced at his other two comrades. Clearly, they were also nervous.

These four people were almost the same age, and they were wearing mercenary clothes. A man and a woman in front looked like a pair of siblings. The brother was carrying an old wooden longbow and five or six flying knives hanged from the belt on his waist. The green cloak wrapped around his head and body, only leaving his chin pointing out, looking very much like a Ranger's outfit. While the girl beside him dressed just like him, she didn't possess a Ranger vibe, unlike her brother.

She was holding his hand looking around uneasily; she resembled more like a child who had run away from home.

The other two behind them was a Swordsman wearing heavy armor while the other was a Thief who yawned while kneeling on the ground.

Although each one had a different expression, they were all looking at the old mansion before them.

These four were newcomers who wanted to join Starlight. Before, they belonged to Mark White and were also Anne's subordinates.

At that moment, these four people were feeling complicated.

Mark White was their first mercenary group. Before that, they didn't have much adventuring experience, that was why they were often excluded after joining the mercenary group. It was Anne who helped them and brought them into her clique until they gradually got used to mercenary life.

Initially, they thought the days would go on just like this, but they were taken by surprise by the old leader sudden death and what happened afterward. The fight for leadership also made Anne distressed and confused, making them worry about her. But as newcomers, they didn't have the authority to speak their views openly; they could only slowly see how the group eventually abandoned Anne.

Later, once the dispute ended, the newly appointed leader began cleaning up the former leader's forces and transferred them into other mercenary groups. This included the four standing by the door right now.

Eventually, they found Old Walker through an acquaintance. Since they couldn't stay at Mark White any longer, they decided to move in with Anne.

However, they still unsure what would happen to them once they joined Starlight. They investigated some matters regarding Starlight and while most of them were good, such issues such as killing the Jade Tears mercenary made them feel slightly uneasy. What if their new leader was cruel and tyrannical?

But since they had no choice after being kicked out of Mark White, and also out of concern for Anne, they could only leave it up to fate.

When the four of them arrived at the entrance, a red-haired mercenary walked forward. She looked at the four of them with a stern expression, her right hand was holding a sword, blocking their way.

“Who are you guys? What are you doing at Starlight's stronghold?”

“Erm....”

Shauna was only older than them by a few years, but since she had the demeanor of a former mercenary leader, the authority in her voice was still there. Not to mention that the people that appeared before her were newbies who at most had only a year of experience.

Discovering Shauna's sharp gaze, the girl who was wearing a cloak quickly hid behind her brother's back. Her brother coughed lightly and lifted his

head up.

“Sorry, miss, but we are—”

“Aren’t you Shauna, the leader of Red Hawk!?”

Before he could finish, the Ranger suddenly exclaimed with shock in her voice when she saw at Shauna.

“You guys are...”

Shauna looked at them curiously and asked.

“We are Anne’s former subordinates. We came here to...”

“Ahh... so it’s you guys.”

Shauna nodded her head after confirming their identities. She put down her hand which was resting on her sword and turned around towards the mansion.

“Follow me.”

Under Shauna’s lead, the four of them entered the mansion and the interior of the mansion before them caused them to gasp in surprise.

The reason why Rhode’s mercenary group was famous because their stronghold was formerly Cyril’s Haunted House. As the name suggested, the house was famous for being ‘haunted.’

This was why the four thought that the house would be old and eerie. But what they saw blew their expectations away. Instead of cobwebs and broken furniture, what they saw were clean courtyards and comfy sofas. While it can’t be said to be overly luxurious, at least it was tidy. No one would believe that this place was the famous legendary haunted house.

“Ms. Shauna.”

Looking at the red-haired girl figure, the Ranger hesitated for a moment but still chose to ask.

“Why... are you in Starlight?”

“Because Red Hawk has already been disbanded.”

Shauna shrugged while answering the Ranger’s question. Although she answered it casually, there was still a trace of helplessness. After all, it was a mercenary group that she put her blood, sweat, and tears into it. Now that it was gone, of course she felt unwilling.

The four of them caught the slight helplessness in her voice, so they stopped asking. The girl also secretly glared at her own brother; clearly, she was blaming her brother for what he should say and what he shouldn’t say. After being glared by his sister, the Ranger could only shake his head. In the end, he still decided to bite the bullet and change the topic.

“Ms. Shauna. What kind of person is Starlight’s leader?”

Shauna stopped walking. The other four who were following behind her also stopped in their tracks. They stared at the red-haired girl curiously, waiting for her to speak. After a moment, Shauna turned around, but contrary to what they expected. She was actually smiling! What does that mean?

“Umm... describing Mr. Rhode is hard. That’s because even I haven’t interacted with him for long. But I have one advice for all of you.”

“Please speak.”

The four of them quickly became nervous.

“Firstly, Mr. Rhode is almost the same age as us. But definitely don’t look down on him, he’s very capable... Also, please note that he rarely smiles, and one more thing, don’t mention anything about his face in front of him... This is very important—the importance is tied to the existence of your life.”

“...”

The four of them couldn't help but gulp in nervousness. Even the smile on the Thief's face gradually disappeared.

“Does the leader look scary?”

The girl who kept hiding behind her brother's back couldn't help but ask. It seemed like whether young or old, a female always cared about appearance.

“It's not like that.”

Shauna smiled wryly and waved her hand. After thinking for a while, she still didn't know how to explain it to everyone.

“Anyway... I hope that you guys remember this, he is a man. Don't be mistaken by his looks.”

After saying her piece, Shauna opened the door.

“Please come in. Mr. Rhode is waiting.”

Chapter 105 - Another Surprise

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode looked at the four mercenaries standing nervously in front of him. Although Old Walker did remind him that they were newbies, he didn't expect them to be that nervous.

“Hel, Hello, Mr...Rhode.”

The Ranger finally understood why Shauna reminded them that Rhode was a man. Honestly, if Shauna didn't inform him beforehand, it would be difficult for him not to call Rhode a 'beautiful young miss.'

Once he did that, it would be the end of him.

“Welcome, Anne informed me about the four of you.”

Rhode nodded towards them as a greeting.

The Ranger stood straight and began to introduce themselves.

“Yes, Mr. Rhode. We are Ms. Anne's subordinates. I am Randolph Cary, and this is my sister Lapis, we're both Rangers. The one who is wearing heavy armor is Andon, and the one beside him is Joey, although he looks like that... he's a trustworthy thief.”

“I know.”

Rhode said after Randolph introduced the others.

“Anne's testimony of the four of you is quite high, but I still need to witness your performance personally. I'm going to conduct a trial for the four of you; as long you can pass, I will permit you to fight alongside the rest of us in the frontlines. However, if you are unable to pass, I will assign you to some other task. Alright, you can prepare as and when you wish from now.”

“Yes, Mr. Rhode.”

Randolf finally felt relieved. Rhode was just as expressionless as Shauna had said, but at least his tone wasn't cold.

“Mr. Rhode, is Ms. Anne here? It's been so long since we saw her...”

Randolf asked curiously.

“Anne?”

Rhode went silent for a while, then he nodded.

“I can bring you guys to see her. But you must understand that she's in the middle of a punishment, so she can't go outside.”

Punishment?

They glanced at each other nervously.

What kind of punishment did Anne get?

Why did she get punished?

It wasn't difficult to imagine why she was punished. Back in Mark White, Anne was often penalized because spoke her mind and always did things at her own leisure. Therefore she often caused trouble in the group, but all of these were small matters since the old leader could cover up for her. However, once the old leader died, the trouble she caused went out of hand and was often punished for it.

Randolf thought that perhaps Anne would behave better in a newer environment, but it seemed like that was not the case...

What did Anne do to make Rhode angry?

Is she okay?

At that moment, these kinds of thoughts crossed their mind.

All of them were worried about Anne's situation. They imagined her being imprisoned in a cold and dark underground cellar. If she was treated like that, how could they possibly stay in this mercenary group in peace?

But they were left dumbstruck when Rhode opened the door.

Both of her hands were tucked in as she sat on the edge of the bed, bored. When she heard the door open saw Rhode, the girl immediately bounced up and ran towards Rhode.

“Ah, leader, you finally came! Is it time for me to go out now???”

Randolf and the others stared at the girl with their mouths wide open. If she had a tail right now, there's no doubt that it would be wagging intensely.

Still, Rhode seemed unaffected by her natural charm. He pointed at the clock and said, almost emotionlessly.

“No, 12 pm tonight.”

Eh, that's... punishment?

“Anyway, your friends came to see you.”

Rhode lightly caressed Anne's head and pointed to the people behind him. Anne popped her head to the left and saw the four mercenaries behind Rhode staring blankly at her.

“Ah, Randolf, Lapis, you guys finally came!”

“Sister Anne!”

Lapis who was hiding behind her brother's back rushed and hugged Anne. Anne rubbed her head and smiled just like Rhode before.

“Lapis is still a scaredy cat like always~ You cannot continue to be like that, okay? You are a mercenary now! If you're not brave enough, you'll be laughed at by others!”

“I-I’m not scared! I’m just nervous!”

The girl quickly raised her head and tried to defend herself, but her face still flushed red.

“Ms. Anne, I’m happy to meet you once again.”

Randolf and the other two also walked towards Anne and greeted her.

As for Rhode, he had already made himself scarce. Clearly, he was giving them privacy for their reunion.

“Randolf, Andon, Joey. You guys look like you’re doing well.”

Looking at the three of them, Anne laughed and said. But then her tone suddenly turned serious.

“But, in Starlight, don’t call me Ms. Anne anymore. I’m just an ordinary mercenary here, so just directly call my name in the future. You must remember that this mercenary group belongs to Mr. Rhode. Don’t get it wrong now, okay?! Otherwise, I’ll get really mad!”

The four of them was mildly surprised because Anne rarely got serious.

“Of course, Mi... no, Anne.”

“Ah, Sister Anne, what actually did you do to get punished? Did that person bully you?”

Lapis raised her head and asked curiously.

“It’s not that serious...”

Anne’s expression turned awkward when she heard Lapis’ question. The four of them looked at her strangely. They had followed Anne for a year, so it could be said that they understood her relatively well. Even when dealing with the old leader, when Anne was at fault, she rarely acknowledges it. However, she was actually hesitating now!

“It’s just that... I didn’t follow my leader’s command in our previous mission. That’s why leader is furious and told me to reflect on my mistake. I don’t understand what exactly he wants, but that was what I was told to do. Hmph! Leader is too strict!”

Looking at the girl who sat on the bed twitching her mouth dissatisfyingly, the four looked at each other and smiled wryly. They never knew that Anne had this side of her. She had always been so unafraid of everything. What did Rhode do to cause Anne to turn so docile?

Since they couldn’t find the answer to this question, they proceeded to the training field in the courtyard, with Lize leading them, of course. In the beginning, they viewed Rhode as tyrannical and powerful, but now they saw him as friendly and mysterious. They were relieved when they found out that Rhode was rather caring towards his subordinates.

When they reached the training field, they saw Rhode and Marlene standing next to each other.

“That’s the four?”

Marlene frowned, evidently dissatisfied with their bearing.

“Frankly, they don’t look like they can fight well.”

“It’s okay as long as they have the potential.”

Rhode shook his head.

“With our current situation, it is impossible for us to hire people with powerful abilities. Since we lack manpower, they will have to suffice. Moreover, it’s not like they’re totally powerless; with training, I think that these guys still can make it.”

After saying that, Rhode walked towards the four of them. In their eyes, Rhode saw hesitation, uneasiness, and expectation. It made him reminiscence of the game days when he brought newbies on a mission just

after forming Starlight. At this moment, these four mercenaries somehow resembled those players.

Well, since it's like that, he would just test them using the same way.

“The test is simple. As long as you can injure my summoned spirit, it means you win. You can do whatever you want; I just want to see your real strength.”

Rhode said as he took a step backward. Then, a black card appeared on his palm.

Without waiting for them to react, a huge Centaur Knight rose from the fog. It lowered its head and gazed at everyone with its bloodshot red eyes before roaring menacingly.

What is that? Where did it come from?

They were shocked at the sudden appearance of a monster. But before they could say anything, Rhode snapped his fingers and spoke.

“The test begins now.”

“——!!!”

The Centaur Knight roared. It lifted the spear on its hand high and swung it in a downward arc.

“Not good!”

Randolf quickly rolled to the ground to dodge the Centaur's vertical attack. Then he promptly equipped the bow from his back and drew an arrow, aiming towards the Centaur Knight.

“Everyone, prepare for battle formation, Lapis!”

“Yes, brother!!”

Lapis who was hiding behind stretched out her hand to take an object from her body and threw it forward.

“Eh?”

Both Rhode and Marlene raised their brows at the same time. They saw her throw two small glass bottles with a translucent liquid inside. When the bottles hit the floor, it broke into many tiny fragments and the liquid inside blended together. Then, out of a sudden, the liquid that seemed harmless turned into a sharp blade made out of ice and shot forward!

At that moment, Marlene who was standing by the side spoke with surprise in her voice.

“Ice Potion?”

“Elemental Fusion... It’s alchemy.”

Rhode said.

He, too, was looking at that girl in surprise.

Did he unknowingly pick up a treasure again?

Chapter 106 - Fake?

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The ice didn't hinder the Centaur Knight's movements at all; it merely raised its shield and blocked the shards.

Facing the Centaur Knight's unstoppable charge, the heavily-armored Swordsman was also forced back.

But the moment he turned around retreated a few steps back, his fate was already decided.

The heavily-armored Swordsman lifted his sword, intending to counterattack. Suddenly, a towering shadow loomed over him. When he looked over his shoulders, he saw the Centaur Knight's huge body just a few centimeters away from his face!

*Sh*t!!*

That was the last thing he could remember saying before his mind was sent into a whirl. The Centaur Knight smashed its shield into his chest and sent him flying, landing on the ground a few moments later. All he could do now was moan in agony while clutching his stomach.

He was out of the battle.

“Andon!”

The Ranger who was about to attack apparently didn't expect that his comrade to fall in one hit. As a result, he panicked and released an arrow towards the Centaur Knight before quickly backing off. Their original plan was to let the Swordsman hold the Centaur Knight's attention while the other three would find opportunities to attack. Alas, the plan hadn't lasted ten seconds before it shattered. The Ranger wasn't ready for such a drastic

change in the plan at its initial stages, so he could only back off and think of other options.

At that moment, the Thief who had been concealing himself also made his move.

If he knew that Andon would fail so miserably, he would've hesitated and retreated like the Ranger. But it was too late as, by the time he attacked, Andon had already been knocked out. In a blink of an eye, his outcome was decided.

An intense wave of pain swept through the Thief's body. The Centaur Knight kicked backward using its two hind legs, stamping two black hoof prints on his chest. After that, the Thief was no different from the Swordsman and was left groaning on the ground.

If the Centaur Knight hadn't held back its strength, perhaps his ribcage would already have been shattered.

With two down, the Centaur Knight now shifted his attention to Randolph and rushed towards him.

“Lapis!”

Randolf quickly pulled his bow and yelled. He shot another arrow towards the Centaur Knight's chest, but its armor deflected it easily. The girl who Randolph shouted at recovered from her shock and grabbed another flask before throwing it onto the ground in front of Randolph.

On the surface, nothing seemed to have changed. But when the Centaur Knight galloped near Randolph, its huge body halted abruptly and tilted forward. Because of the inertia, the Centaur Knight ended in an awkward position; its two front hooves were stuck in the ground as though it was made out of mud. It began struggling wildly, but its legs sunk deeper into the ground the more it tried to move.

“That is indeed Elemental Fusion.”

Marlene said as she propped her chin with her fingers. She stared at the girl curiously with a glimmer of delight.

“That’s strange... since she has already learned about Elemental Fusion, why would she use such elementary spells?”

When Rhode caught Marlene talking to herself, he chose to stay silent. He was also paying close attention to the girl named Lapis. As for the matter Marlene was thinking about, Rhode naturally knew her doubts.

Typically, when someone manages to reach the level of Elemental Fusion, it means that his or her ability is comparable to that of a full-fledged Alchemist. Alchemists were able to produce magic items and cast low-tier spells via concoction, but Lapis hadn’t shown any magic instruments nor used any low-tier spells. All she did was imitate apprentice-level spells. Although her spells were passable, other than in training, there was no point for her to store these spells in flasks as they could be learned easily.

The purpose of alchemy was to make complicated things easier, but all Lapis was doing was making it more complicated.

As for the level of this alchemy, not only could Marlene passively ignore it, it could also be blocked by Lize’s barrier. Rather than wasting time to concoct the spells into a flask, wasn’t it better to use her Ranger skills?

When the two of them were still trying to figure out her intentions, the battle had already been decided.

Although they took the Centaur Knight by surprise, Randolph still didn’t manage to win. When the Centaur Knight realized that it couldn’t leave the trap, it hurled its spear at Randolph when he least expected it. As Randolph was in the midst of nocking his arrow, he didn’t manage to react in time and was the third person to be sent flying.

Lapis, being the last one standing, knew that her brother was in a difficult position. She once again tried to attack the enemy by using alchemy, but her performance made Rhode and Marlene sigh at the same time.

The Centaur Knight caught sight of her movements and tossed its shield towards her. With an ear-piercing screech, the shield shot past her head. Lapis immediately lost her courage and squatted down with her hands on above her head. Apparently, she forgot what she was supposed to do.

A group of newbies.

From the beginning to the end, it took no less than thirty seconds for the Centaur Knight to wipe the floor with them. Rhode shook his head in disappointment. Frankly, this standard was even worse than the newbie players.

Ask them to go on a mission with him with this standard?

Impossible.

Rhode then recalled his summoned spirit.

From Rhode's gloomy expression, the four of them knew that their performance was unsatisfactory.

“To be honest... your performance is far below my requirements.”

Rhode didn't coat his words in sugar. This caused their already de-spirited expressions to turn even worse. However, they knew that what Rhode said was a fact.

“But, I will give you another chance. In the following days, I will teach you how to improving using your own strength. If you can successfully improve, you may have the opportunity to become a formal member of my mercenary group. But if you fail, then I'm sorry...”

Rhode spread out his palms.

“You can only be servants here.”

The four of them were shocked and lifted their heads to look at Rhode. Randolph opened his mouth, but no words came out from it. They weren't

supposed to be treated like this, still, Randolph could tell that their performance was truly substandard.

In the past, they could still get away with their level of skill because Anne was there as the backbone of the team. But now, she had left, and they found themselves unable to function properly as a team when faced with a strong opponent.

Can they still be considered mercenaries?

While Randolph sunk deep into thought, Rhode's voice brought him back to reality.

“Your answer?”

“Yes, Sir!”

Randolph quickly stood up and lifted his head.

“We assure you that we will comply with your request.”

“I hope so.”

Randolph's answer didn't assure Rhode at all.

Luckily Shauna had warned them about Rhode's lack of emotions otherwise Randolph would think that he didn't care at all. But Rhode's attitude still left him somewhat frustrated. Perhaps they wouldn't be this uneasy in his presence if he could at least give a smile,

“But I have one more question regarding Lapis.”

Hearing this, Randolph immediately tensed. Lapis was still holding onto her brother's sleeve, carefully watching the young man who was only older than him by a few years. Although Rhode was aware that both of them were nervous, he didn't plan to stop and continued to speak.

“I can see that she's at the level of Elemental Fusion. But why didn't she use magic instruments? It wouldn't be difficult for her to concoct low-tier

spells. What's the purpose for spending effort crafting elementary spells?"

"Yes...umm"

Randolf's expression eased up a little after understanding Rhode's intentions. It wasn't a strange question as Mark White had asked them the exact same thing during their recruitment.

"Lapis isn't very talented. She likes alchemy and had been always able to comprehend every theory since young, but somehow, she hit a bottleneck and was unable to improve since. Yes, she has the ability to perform Elemental Fusion, but she can't concoct higher-tier potions..."

"Wait."

Rhode face turned strange and stopped Randolf from continuing. By the side, Marlene expression also turned weird.

"You mean that... she can comprehend every subject in alchemy? From mysterious creations, potions to construction? All of it?"

"Y..Yes, Sir."

This time, Lapis answered personally, albeit timidly.

"I, when I learned alchemy, I thought that every alchemy subject must be studied together, so I..."

"..."

Rhode and Marlene glanced at each other, speechless. They finally understood why she did that.

Just like a person who studied foreign languages, they would usually study one language at the time. But for Lapis, she chose to it learn all at once. That was why her performance and ability differed so much. Elemental Fusion was indeed the basics of alchemy, but more than often people would only excel in one division of it. If she majored in mysterious creation, her Elemental Fusion would be to create magic instruments. If she majored in

potion-making, her Elemental Fusion would be concocting potions. And if she majored in construction, her Elemental Fusion would be used as a core to enhance magical constructs.

Different divisions had different outcomes, but this greedy girl wanted to eat everything all together.

Maybe this is the so-called saying that ignorant people have no fear.

But what struck Rhode and Marlene speechless was her ability to learn all three divisions. Typically, an ordinary person could only dedicate their entire life to one division. Even if they were greedy and wanted to learn one more, they had no time.

Even the superhumanly player couldn't escape from this limitation. When a player chose a division, it would consume 1 Skill Point. If they wanted to unlock another division, they would need to use 5 Skill Points. These Skill Points could directly level a single division to 6. Therefore, using so many Skill Points to do something like this was just plain wasteful. Moreover, every division had a different set of skills and knowledge requirements. Even the most bored player who wanted to become the king of alchemy couldn't do it without dedicating around five years to it.

At least from what Rhode remembered, from his many years of playing Dragon Soul Continent Online, he had never seen someone who was successful in learning all three divisions in alchemy.

But now there was actually a weird person before him that managed to do so, at least in the theory part.

Is she a genius or not?

At that moment, Rhode felt utterly helpless. He had the urge to pat her shoulder and give her this advice:

Kid... that's enough. Just... delete your character and replay.

Chapter 107 - Mercenary Joint Meeting

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Of course, Rhode was kidding. There isn't a way for her to delete her character since this world isn't a game.

Rhode and Marlene pitied her. She had the talent, but she didn't have a proper tutor to guide her the way to study alchemy. Perhaps if she had, she would be one of the next alchemy geniuses on the continent.

But Rhode didn't plan to give up on her just like that. Since Lapis had already joined Starlight, he could still try and salvage what he could. Although Lapis did what no player could do, it wasn't all that surprising as NPCs had different characteristics from players. Rhode turned towards Marlene and looked at her. Just like that young genius mage beside him who excelled in 'all forms of magic.'

"It's impossible, Mr. Rhode."

Marlene said, as though she read Rhode's mind.

"While I did learn how to concoct potions, I'm not too sure about the other two divisions. Even if you want me to teach her, I can't teach something I don't know."

After all, being a genius doesn't mean that she's omnipotent.

"Just give it a try."

Rhode understood Marlene's difficulties as his class had a similar problem. One of the skill requirements for the Summoning Swordsman class was also mysterious creation.

Marlene had a look of bewilderment on her face; her usual confidence was nowhere to be seen. Rhode knew that he shouldn't force things to progress quickly so he didn't require her to complete the task if she couldn't. It's just that he didn't have anyone else who had more knowledge of magic than her, thus he could only give it a try.

After hiring the four of them, Rhode told Old Walker to halt the recruitment.

With the addition of Shauna, Randolph, Lapis and the others, Starlight had met the minimum requirements of 12 members. It took some time, but Rhode finally did it.

Although there were no geniuses among the new recruits, Rhode didn't worry about it. These mercenaries were still young and had enough time to train. Rhode was once the leader of a massive guild, so he had plenty of experience in developing newbies. As long as he had enough time, he was certain that he could bring them up to a similar standard to that of a regular player. While he couldn't guarantee that he could train them up to a level similar to Marlene, at least they would be self-sufficient when going for missions.

Now that's settled, Rhode still had one more thing to do.

Attending the Mercenary Association Joint Meeting.

When Rhode arrived at the Mercenary Association, it was already dusk.

“Hello, Mr. Rhode.”

The mercenary who was responsible for greeting the guests promptly paid his respect to Rhode and politely ushered him inside. When he entered the hall, he found that the Mercenary Association looked different than the usual.

The tables and chairs the mercenaries sat on were gone; the only traces of furniture was the 32 chairs placed in a circle at the center of the hall. Many people had already arrived, making the large hall seem somewhat crowded.

Some were discussing something quietly while others quarreled openly. And among them, some people were unhappy, while others were coldly watching by the side.

These people were Paphield Region's 32 mercenary group leaders. At this moment, all of them were assembled together.

Rhode's arrival caused many people to stop talking as they shifted their attention to the appearance of the rising star. Ever since Starlight was formed, it was a group that didn't shy away from controversy. From how it was created, to where its stronghold was located and to the attractive rewards from the missions they received. Moreover, the recent conflict between Starlight and Jade Tears also sparked another wave of controversy among the mercenary groups. These events put Starlight in the limelight, and the mercenary group leaders were curious about who this mysterious young man was.

Under the attendant's lead, Rhode finally made it to his seat and sat down. The chairs were arranged according to the rank of the mercenary group, and the Starlight mercenary group's seat was the second to the left, which was the third-ranked seat.

Some people were unhappy with Rhode occupying the third rank, but before they could display their dissatisfaction, the Old President slammed his hammer down and silenced the crowd.

"Enough! Since everyone is now present, I now declare the commencement of the Mercenary Joint Meeting."

All the leaders immediately stopped speaking and gazed at the old man in anticipation.

This old man has such high prestige? That's unexpected.

Rhode sat on the chair with his arms crossed, looking at the Old President in amusement. He didn't stare too long before glancing around to look at the other leaders since some of them might be his future allies or foes.

Rhode was familiar with three of them, though. The person sitting in the first seat was a Swordsman who wielded a two-handed sword, 'Flame' Hiller. He spent twenty years to bring his mercenary group to the top. He also obtained the 'Flame Spirit Blessing' which was an artifact envied by many players.

It was even said that the massive two-handed blade on his back was made out of pure fire elemental condensation. Once the blade touches something, its temperature would shoot up to the point of melting anything around it.

Contrary to the fiery sword that appeared tyrannical, its master, 'Flame' Hiller, was a calm and brave man. Hiller's luck wasn't that good. During the past two decades, he upgraded his mercenary group to a guild several times, but they quickly relegated back into a mercenary group in the very same year. Still, though Burning Blade couldn't be compared to a mercenary guild, among the mercenary groups, it's still first in its class.

Sitting next to Hiller was 'Shadow' Shawn, the leader of the second-ranked 'Dark Fang.' He wore a white mask with a black cloak covering his entire body. It was rumored that he used to be a Rogue in one of the northern countries, but because of a mistake, he fled to Deep Stone City and took refuge there. Compared to orthodox mercenary groups like Burning Blade, Dark Fang was more of a society for Thieves and Assassins. The way they trained was based on subterfuge and hidden weapons. This made the mercenary group popular among dexterity-based classes like Rangers and Thieves.

However, Shawn didn't seem interested in promoting his mercenary group into a guild. He led Dark Fang for many years, and each year he consistently held the second rank, but never the first. Because of this, Dark Fang being referred to as the 'Eternal No.2' was an open secret. But after some time, this nickname of theirs faded away.

Just next to Rhode was the leader of Anne's former mercenary group, Mark White. He stared at Rhode with open animosity as Starlight had overtaken their position as third. Moreover, Rhode had 'bought over' some former Mark White members. Although it was a fair trade, the presence of their ex-members still made them feel slightly uncomfortable.

Just when Rhode stopped studying the appearances of all the leaders, the Old President also completed his boring opening speech. After that, he coughed and tapped the hammer on his hand.

“As you all should know, the recent incidents have caused considerable damage to all mercenary groups in Paphield. This meeting is to decide what happens next. Now, I’m going to announce the final decision determined by the Mercenary Association as we’ve discussed earlier.”

Many mercenary group leaders were surprised. Even the leader of Burning Blade frowned. If the Mercenary Association made the final decision, the mercenary groups wouldn’t be able to defy it unless they wanted to go rogue.

“The Mercenary Association has decided that because of the complexity of this incident, we will postpone the assessment to ensure that every mercenary group has enough time to rebuild. During this period, the Association will not release any missions and also forbid any mercenary groups to receive missions in private. If you violate this rule and undertake a mission, the Mercenary Association will not be liable for your loss and will not compensate you in any way.”

Once the Old President finished, the quiet hall turned rowdy. Then, a man suddenly jumped up from his chair and yelled.

“I object!!”

Chapter 108 - Opposition

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Everyone looked towards the voice in surprise. Even Rhode felt curious and opened his eyes to see who dared to oppose the Mercenary Association's decision.

Many people thought that it was Jade Tears because they took advantage of the situation to 'steal' people from other groups. However, the one who opposed the decision was actually the mercenary group ranked second from the last, Mad Dog.

What are they trying to do?

Many mercenary groups glared at them silently.

Mad Dog was also one of the mercenary groups which suffered heavy casualties from the recent incident. They shouldn't be opposing this decision. If the Mercenary Association decided to amend its decision, weak mercenary groups like Mad Dog would suffer even more. So why did they oppose it?

"Hmph."

Shawn, who sat beside Rhode, snorted in disdain. The voice that reverberated from behind the mask was deep and cold.

Hiller's eyes were closed and didn't react, giving people the impression that he didn't care.

As for Rhode, he suspected that something was fishy. He turned and glanced at the representative for Jade Tears who wasn't sitting too far from him.

Frank was still unconscious and bedridden for a month and a half, so he wasn't able to attend the meeting. Instead, they sent the vice-leader to represent Jade Tears. Rhode was no stranger to this man. Back in the game, both Frank and his vice-leader were like accomplices in action and Rhode often met both of them together. It was a pity that he wasn't there when Frank challenged Rhode though; if he could kill either one of them, it can be considered a victory for Rhode.

Hmm, then what about now?

Rhode rolled his eyes and began to think of how to get rid of him openly in this meeting...

The vice-leader of Jade Tears sat on his seat with a blank expression on his face as if nothing concerned him at all. However, Rhode knew that Jade Tears had something to do with this.

Everyone knew that Jade Tears was loaded with money. Mad Dog mercenary group was clearly bribed. It wasn't surprising though since mercenaries needed money to live and wealth was the foundation of their existence. This was especially so for lower-ranked mercenary groups who had no history, no pride, and no dignity. As long the money was enough, they could crawl on their knees and lick the shoes of their 'benefactor.'

Perhaps Jade Tears had gotten a whiff of the Mercenary Association's decision from their hidden sources and paid some low-ranked mercenary group to become their 'spokesperson.' For those groups, regardless whether the Mercenary Association made this decision or not, they were unlikely to get any benefit from it.

Let's take Mad Dog's situation for example. Their rank was currently at the second from the last, even if the meeting didn't happen, they couldn't escape from being dissolved sooner or later. Rather than wait for the inevitable, wasn't it better to receive money before disbanding?

This scheme was indeed quite clever since Jade Tears figured out that they weren't welcome in the mercenary group's circle. Even so, they knew that they couldn't publically oppose the decision made by the Mercenary

Association as that would give everyone another reason to hate them. Moreover, not only would they receive the hate, the Mercenary Association wouldn't change their decision.

Now, with the 'help' of other groups, Jade Tears successfully created an internal conflict within the circle of mercenary groups.

Just as Rhode had predicted, when Mad Dog's leader stood up to oppose, another three mercenary group leaders stood up simultaneously. And of course, they were all from the lower ranks.

"We also disagree with Mercenary Association's decision."

"That's right; it's too unfair! Too unreasonable!"

Inevitably, these words would spark arguments from the other side.

"What the heck are you saying? Is there something wrong with your brain? You only have a few people in your group yet you want to resume the missions? Bullsh*t!!"

"We just want to protect the Mercenary Association's tradition! Ever since the beginning, there had never been a point in time where we stopped giving out missions. Indeed, this time we're unlucky, but it's a problem we have to overcome ourselves. Isn't this situation due to our incompetence? Look at Starlight; they had lacked in members when they first registered as a mercenary group, but look at them now! If we are going to follow the rules strictly, shouldn't Starlight need to wait for enough people before calculating the points?"

Once Starlight was mentioned, the crowd's rage immediately diminished. Many took the chance to turn towards Rhode, waiting for his reaction.

F*ck those Jade Tears scum, I knew those b*stards were up to something.

Rhode snorted deep down inside his heart. He understood that Jade Tears was trying to drag him out. If they couldn't press him using force, they would use underhanded tactics such as this to enact revenge.

“Kid, don’t you have anything to say?”

The Old President said sternly. Rhode guessed that the old man must be grinning over his misfortune under that cold expression. He must be feeling so very happy now that he might even live until a hundred years old.

But Rhode didn’t plan to satisfy that old man’s desires.

“Nothing much. It’s just as Mr.IdontKnowHisName said,” Rhode shrugged and answered with a distinct mocking tone.

“We are indeed strong, but we are still part of the Mercenary Association so we will thoroughly comply with the Mercenary Association’s decision.”

Everyone’s expression eased a little when they heard Rhode’s words. Although Jade Tears was the largest suspect who also benefited the most from this situation, it was all just conjecture and without evidence. It was completely different from Starlight which didn’t have enough members but still succeeded in pulling off many incredible feats. Before the incident, they had already completed dangerous missions one after another. So if the Mercenary Association didn’t give all the mercenary groups a break, won’t Starlight dominate the entire scene?

Now that Rhode had shown that Starlight was willing to comply with the Mercenary Association’s decision, that meant that Starlight wouldn’t be able to complete any high points mission the next month which could be said to be unfavorable to them. However, this made the other mercenary leaders look upon them more positively as they understood that Rhode wasn’t going to use this opportunity to beat them while they were in recovery mode, which was more than enough for them.

(ED: Evidence has shown that he’d already beat most of them even if they were in full strength, please.)

Everyone now turned to the two men seated in the higher ranked seat.

Despite the Mercenary Association holding full authority and prestige over mercenary leaders, it didn’t mean that every mercenary leader must follow

their decision. Sometimes, to protect their own group, mercenary leaders would oppose the decision made by the Mercenary Association. According to the regulation, the only ones who had the right to reject the Mercenary Association's decision were the three highest ranked mercenary group leaders!

Rhode had declared his stance. Then what about Burning Blade and Dark Fang?

Hiller finally opened his eyes. While looking at Rhode, he said.

“Burning Blade agrees with the Mercenary Association's decision.”

As for Shawn, he was as quiet as usual. But from his slight nod, it seems like this man also agreed to the Mercenary Association's decision.

Since the three highest ranked mercenary leaders didn't have any objection, naturally the lower ranked ones also didn't have any complaints. Only those guys who were bribed tried their best to protest but to no avail. In the end, the Old President swung his hammer down to end all the objections and delivered the final verdict.

“For thirty days starting from tomorrow, the Mercenary Association will henceforth stop issuing any missions. Until the verdict is lifted, all mercenary groups are strictly prohibited from taking any private commissions. If anyone violates this regulation, their points will be promptly deducted.”

Although most have expected this outcome, what the Old President said afterward gave them a shock.

“Also from now on, each mercenary group member must be a registered resident in the Paphield Region and must have experience of more than a year. After the month ends, the Mercenary Association will inspect each mercenary group. If anyone is found violating this rule, that person will be evicted from the mercenary group immediately.”

Many mercenary group leaders glanced at each other. They were confused about the meaning behind this bizarre regulation. To put it simply, the Mercenary Association will only allow citizens of the Paphield Region to join mercenary groups.

(ED: Welp, I think there's an error here. Rhode would be expelled from Starlight if that were the case.)

Before, the Mercenary Association didn't interfere with this kind of thing as long as the member was already registered in the Mercenary Association. However, the Mercenary Association in Deep Stone City actually came up with this bizarre rule. Why would they do that?

Rhode understood why. It seemed like Sereck and the Old President have realized the graveness of this matter.

After announcing their verdict, the Old President no longer cared about anyone protesting regarding this point. Then the Old President brought up the next agenda.

“Subsequently, we, the Mercenary Association, will make a resolution regarding the conflict between Jade Tears and Starlight a few days ago.”

Everyone started murmuring to each other after hearing these words.

Chapter 109 - Fight Until The End!

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

It looks like everyone was eager to gossip judging by their expressions. It seems as though they cared about this problem more than the life and death of their mercenary group.

The man who was emotionlessly sitting on the chair immediately shot an exciting look at the Old President.

On the opposite side, Rhode rested on his chair lazily. Looking at his relaxed expression, it seemed that he didn't even put the Old President in his eyes.

That stinky kid!

The Old President almost verbally blurted out his displeasure. He thought that Rhode would at least care for the matters relating to his mercenary group and wanted to wipe off that placid look on his beautifully emotionless face. But on the contrary, it made him angry instead.

Hmph. There's still plenty of time for us to settle this later, kid!

The Old President glared fiercely at Rhode, but he suppressed his anger and continued his speech.

“According to our investigations, we have enough evidence to prove that Jade Tears is the instigator of the matter. However, Starlight's leader clearly overreacted. So we have made a decision what to do with the both of them. But before I reveal the decision, I want to ask if the both of you have anything to add.”

At that moment, the man who had stayed silent from the start finally stood up.

“The Jade Tears mercenary group can’t tolerate this act of provocation. Until the leader of Starlight is willing to apologize, there will be no peaceful resolution between the two of us.”

After those words were said, everyone felt shocked. Then, they turned their curious gazes to Rhode.

Rhode didn’t disappoint their expectations. He opened his eyes and glanced at the man before revealing a gentle smile. From the others’ perspective, however, this smile gave them a chill as though they’ve dipped in freezing water.

“I will pay back any grudges ten times fold. Anyone who insults me will get punished accordingly. For a group that collects trash as members should be regarded as trash instead of being allowed to attend this meeting.”

The atmosphere immediately tensed.

Everyone looked at each other. They didn’t expect that Jade Tears would be so daring in front of the Mercenary Association. Rhode was also being unyielding and he even blatantly said that he intended to destroy Jade Tears. This meant that both mercenary groups have declared war against each other.

The crowd finally realized that matter had become big!

There’re plenty of mercenary groups who didn’t get along with each other, but if they lost their lives because of disputes like these with no clear reason or benefit, it’s just not worth it.

However, Jade Tear’s leader had been left bedridden by Rhode. Surely they wouldn’t accept their leader being beaten up and their group being ridiculed because of their bribes? If they chose to bow their heads now, wouldn’t they become a laughingstock in the future? By that time, even if Rhode didn’t do anything, Jade Tears would probably be too embarrassed to stay here.

What Rhode had did made everyone feel a little scared. Yes, he was insulted, and as a man, they empathized him. However, even if he got

angry, he shouldn't kill an entire group just because of anger, right? That's tyranny!

If it were anyone else who claimed what Rhode had said, everyone would only think that they were merely venting their anger. But recalling Starlight's recent achievements, Rhode defeated them in front of the Mercenary Association's entrance. So it does indeed show that he had the strength to back his words.

What should they do?

Although the times they lived in weren't lawless, ordinary laws did not apply to mercenaries. If a mercenary killed an ordinary citizen, they would be dealt with the law, but if a mercenary killed another mercenary, the decision would be left to the Mercenary Association to decide.

However, its effectiveness was hard to say. Of course, if what both parties had done were too much, the Mercenary Association could also give a punishment similar to life imprisonment, or even capital punishment. But such a situation was rare.

And this time, both of their positions were rather special.

Rhode and Frank were nobles, except one of them was from the Eastern Plains, Munn Kingdom, and the other one was a noble from Barce Dominion, Country of Light. It can be said that this fight wasn't only a collision between two mercenary groups, it may even rise to fight between noble and noble, or even turn into an 'international issue' between the Munn Kingdom and the Country of Light!

Everyone waited for the Mercenary Association's decision.

No matter what decision they made, it definitely would benefit only one side. The Mercenary Association wouldn't be able to punish them too severely, so wouldn't they cause trouble again soon?

Rhode had killed someone in public, so Klautz, the Duke of Deep Stone City, already sent people to investigate the matter. If they continued to make

trouble...

Anyway, Old President and Sereck were puzzled. In their opinion, Rhode was a very stubborn individual. But this was the first time that he mercilessly attempted to kill someone. Although they suspected Jade Tears was up to something, it was only a conjecture, after all. But it seems like Rhode would kill 99 people than to let one escape.

Old President could never tell what Rhode was thinking. However, he was sure that he was standing on the Munn Kingdom's side. Still, his actions were sometimes inexplicable. When he met Frank for the first time, he easily exposed his identity and then actually killed someone in broad daylight without hesitation. If it wasn't for that mysterious old man who suddenly appeared, Frank would've definitely have died that day.

It wasn't as though Jade Tears was innocent. After the incident, Old President sent out people to investigate the mysterious old man who saved Frank but couldn't find any traces of him as if he didn't exist at all.

Since both Jade Tears and Starlight were acting very strangely, there must be something happening behind it!

The Old President sighed and said.

“According to the Mercenary Association regulations, Jade Tears mercenary group started the provocation first. Their punishment will be two points deduction and a fine of one thousand gold coins. Starlight mercenary group— though have their reasons, — leader Rhode still killed someone in public and gave a bad public image. Their punishment will be two points deduction and a fine of one thousand five hundred gold coins. From this moment on, both sides are strictly prohibited from resuming the conflict or similar reoccurring incidents. Otherwise, the Mercenary Association will dissolve the mercenary group!”

Everyone was surprised.

It seemed like the Mercenary Association gave them quite a heavy punishment.

But, will Jade Tears and Starlight let this matter go?

Looking at Jade Tear's vice-leader gloomy expression and Rhode's impassive face, even the Old President didn't believe that this matter would end just like that.

Both sides were silent and that made the everyone worried. The punishment handed to them wasn't light. If a similar incident happened, they would be forced to disband and to a mercenary group, that was the worst outcome.

They wouldn't continue to fight... right?

So, the mercenary joint meeting finally ended. Everyone left with different opinions about the situation. Although many things happened during the meeting, most mercenaries were satisfied with the outcome. At least they were given enough time to recover and bolster their strength before taking on missions again. And as for those mercenary groups that didn't receive heavy casualties, this was the best chance for them to take a rest.

Rhode also had a similar plan.

The 30-day prohibition didn't only benefit other mercenary groups, but was also an excellent opportunity for Rhode to develop his ability.

He wanted to take advantage of the time to train all the newcomers until they reached his requirements. If they were better than expected, then that would be the best outcome.

So, after returning to the stronghold, he immediately gathered everyone and told them to prepare for training. In three days, they were going to the Twilight Forest!

Chapter 110 - The So Called Training

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Twilight Forest.

Lize had mixed feelings about this place.

Although they weren't there for a mission, Lize still couldn't relax. The forest brought back bad memories from before. Whenever she walked on the grass, she remembered the deaths of her previous leader and her comrades somewhere within the forest. It was a terrible feeling.

It's no surprise though since it was her first time experiencing a complete wipe. She slung her bag over her shoulders as she walked silently behind the group, her mind preoccupied with the past ordeal.

Even Marlene, the only one who had a good relationship with Lize besides Rhode, was unable to comfort her because she was also preoccupied with something at the moment. The genius Mage was looking rather dull as she dragged her feet next to Lize. Clearly, her mind was wandering somewhere else, and the culprit that made her like this was no one else but the new Ranger Alchemist Lapis, who was not too far away from her.

After that day, Marlene agreed to Rhode's request and tried to teach Lapis about 'standard' alchemy. At first, Marlene didn't think that it would be difficult, but oh my, she was so wrong.

Although she didn't study mysterious creation and construction, at least she knew how to concoct potions. As long as she can teach her on that topic, it shouldn't be much of a problem.

However, when she discussed with Lapis about potions... she finally realized that she wasn't omnipotent. Even though Marlene was confident

about her knowledge regarding the topic, Lapis was just too abnormal. Her knowledge regarding alchemy was far beyond ordinary people's comprehension.

Here's a simpler way to describe their conversation:

"Lapis, after we grind an apple into juice, it will still retain its rich nutrients. Then, after altering some stuff, we can create a relaxing and energetic effect..."

"But Sister Marlene, after cutting the apple into pieces, we can also use for beauty purposes..."

"Now, Lapis. We're not talking about beauty. The main point is about the juice..."

"But why can't we use it for beauty purposes after making it into juice?"

"..."

That's just how Lapis' mind works. Marlene decided to give up after bearing with her for two days. Being the genius she was, Marlene rarely puts down her pride. But in the end, she told Rhode that she wanted to quit being her instructor. Rhode could not force Marlene to do something against her wishes, so he could only give in to her request.

As for Lapis, Marlene wasn't sure how her future would be. She acknowledged that Lapis' way of thinking was unique and different from the Magic Academy's teaching style, yet it was also Lapis' greatest weakness.

One must realize that alchemy knowledge had been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. It took countless Alchemists to form an effective learning system. Lapis was unable to enjoy the benefits of this learning system and had to create her own path in alchemy. If one division already took hundreds of years to master, what about all three divisions?

Rhode felt differently; he came from the modern world, so he knew that there were many individuals with unique gifts. He read many novels where the main characters were oddballs, and yet they still succeeded in the end. Maybe Lapis was the same?

Still, it didn't matter even if Lapis failed. Rhode had already made preparations to let Lapis become a maid in the stronghold. At least she would be pleasing to the eye and Rhode wouldn't have completely wasted his money he had spent on training her.

“Sister Lize, are you okay?”

Anne, who was as cheery as always, came to find out that Lize was in low spirits.

Lize raised her head and smiled bitterly. Despite the scenery of Twilight Forest in spring to be beautiful, Lize was in no mood to enjoy it. She knew that she was acting strange, but she couldn't control her emotions.

“Nothing, it just that I'm not feeling very well.”

Lize didn't explain further. She didn't want to bring her past up. But... why can't she let it go?

Even Lize herself didn't know the reason why.

“Hmm...”

Hearing Lize's vague answer, Anne stared at her for a while and once again revealed her energetic smile.

“Although Anne doesn't know what happened to sister, Anne still think it's better for sister to be happy. Otherwise, the people who care about you will be sad too. If you're happy, everyone will be happy too, isn't that a lot better?”

Anne didn't say anything more and ran to the back in high spirits. Lize looked at the girl who skipped away with complicated feelings. She stretched out her hand to touch her face.

“... Those people who care about me... will be sad too... is that right?”

She said to herself.

Then she lifted her head to look at the sky through the gap between the leaves.

Everyone arrived at the destination before the sun went down.

The site was a clearing along the borders of Twilight Forest and Paphield. A warm and gentle breeze rustled the grass on the flat ground, giving off an aura of tranquility.

Shauna and her subordinates quickly began to set up camp. They were extremely proficient; in a mere ten minutes, they've already managed to set up a decent base camp.

Their base camp was established on a hill with a nearby creek flowing downwards into the forest on both sides. Old Walker and Randolph demonstrated their Ranger skills by setting up many traps around the base camp. Although it was supposed to be a 'leisure' trip, it was still better to be safe than sorry.

While they were setting up traps, they managed to catch some wild rabbits escaping from a hawk. So, it seems like they were going to have meat for their next meal.

The whole journey was rather relaxing from their departure until now. But after indulging themselves in a delicious rabbit stew for dinner, Rhode reminded them that they weren't here for recreation.

“This is the training schedule.”

Rhode said while handing pieces of paper to Shauna, Randolph, and the rest. While they were reading the content, Rhode opened his mouth and continued,

“All of you should know what this is. My first requirement of you is to master these skills. Of course, they are not difficult, and you've already

probably heard of these skills, but my requirements are stricter.”

“Sir, this is...”

At that moment, Randolph and the rest had just finished reading the contents of the paper. They were surprised and looked at Rhode unbelievably.

Randolph’s eyes widened in shock. What was on the paper right now, were the various skills belonging to Rangers. The skills were arranged in a manner that was unfamiliar to him. Based on the skill’s duration and cooldown, the paper informed him what are the first skills should be used, followed by the second skill, and then the last skill. Moreover, it also showed him which combination of skills to use in different kinds of situations!

However, if a player were to see this piece of paper, they wouldn’t be as surprised as Randolph and the rest. If they were a being a burden in the game, they would’ve opened their browser and searched on the web on ‘How to get the highest DPS’ — and what they found would be what Randolph was looking at right now.

(ED: In MMORPG terms: Skill chaining/skill combos/skill trains or I believe more commonly known as skill rotations.)

That was the training method Rhode had thought of.

Previously, Rhode had asked Randolph and the rest of their learned skills. Of course, as NPCs, they won’t have any ‘player abilities’ so they weren’t as strong as the players. But if he gave them a good skill rotation to use, he could still create a perfect attack plan.

That was indeed Rhode’s purpose.

Since these newbies can’t figure it out on their own, he should teach them step-by-step on how to use their skills efficiently. No matter how stupid they were, after reading this detailed ‘skill guide,’ they should be able to improve themselves significantly.

If they are still unable to perform well... at that time, he would consider to let Randolph wear the maid outfit and stand in front of the entrance of the stronghold.

Frankly speaking, in terms of battle experience, Randolph and the rest were complete newbies. But they were still mercenaries who've passed the assessment, so they must at least have some insight on their own skills.

Randolf and the rest were pleasantly surprised to find that Rhode had given them such a valuable gift. One must realize that it was no easy feat to produce something such as this without years of experience, and if they aspire to reach Rhode's level of competency, they would have to sacrifice many years of their life to gain experience.

The difference between the experienced and the inexperienced was akin to day and night. When comparing two Swordsmen using the same skill, if one of them had years of experience while the other was a newbie, the way they used the same skill would result in a completely different outcome.

So, now that Rhode developed a skill rotation for them that maximized their DPS, they were extremely ecstatic.

Thus, the way that Randolph and the rest stared at Rhode somehow turned into admiration.

How does he have the knowledge of so many skills?!

Chapter 111 - Flame of Revenge

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Inside a dark room.

An oppressive atmosphere made everyone unable to breathe.

“That b*stard said that?!”

Frank clutched the bed while gritting his teeth. His formerly handsome face was now warped and distorted.

“Yes, Sir.”

A man quietly stood beside the bed with his head bowed down.

“Good, very good...”

Frank gnashed his teeth and said to himself. Then, he shook his fist and slammed it onto the bed.

“That b*stard thinks he’s something! Hmph! He’s just a low-ranked noble of a barbarian country. How dare he oppose me!”

The man shivered as his master bellowed in anger.

As an attendant who had followed Frank since he was young, he naturally knew of Frank’s past. In Barce, although he was the third successor of the top family, he had never received his family’s respect. Frank didn’t receive recognition because he wasn’t as outstanding as his two other brothers. His mother was frail and couldn’t even fight for her own authority in the family, so how could she possibly help her son?

After a huge conflict between him and his family, Frank chose to leave. From then on, he swore to himself that he must succeed before going back

to claim what was his. To achieve his goal, he forced himself to endure any humiliation and bitterness along the way. In the end, he managed to grasp a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and as long as he can complete his task, he will be able to return to his hometown with his head lifted high.

When that time came, he can do whatever he wanted without worrying about his two brothers. His mother who had always been looked down upon didn't have to suffer like a servant anymore.

That was why he had to come to Deep Stone City and work with these mercenaries.

Similar to most people from the Country of Light, Frank held a deep animosity towards the Munn Kingdom. In his opinion, the Munn Kingdom was full of cowards. They sold their soul just for money. These people were like a Ganon of leeches who had no future or hope. Just like the beggars on the street, they blindly followed the person who threw them the most money, pretending to be deaf, mute or whatever they needed to become to acquire wealth. Pitiful.

However, for the sake of his future, he had no choice but to live with these spineless cowards. On the exterior, he worked hard to mingle with these people, but within the depths of his heart, Frank never felt anything else but contempt towards them. From his perspective, they were nothing more than tools that he had to use to pave the way to success.

According to the plan, he had to acquire Jade Tears mercenary group, which he promptly did and Frank saw himself completing the task within one year as long as everything went smoothly...

But here came someone called Rhode who suddenly appeared out nowhere and destroyed his hopes and dreams.

Frank had never been so close to death as he had been back then. Although he had already worked as a mercenary for close to a year and encountered many dangerous situations, it was not as terrifying as his confrontation with Rhode.

Luckily, he managed to live.

If that person didn't happen to be beside him, he would've already been a corpse.

The thought of his death caused his body to shiver once more. However, he began to be suspicious of something.

That man... Rhode... why would he want to kill me so eagerly? Is it because of the declaration of war? That can't be right... isn't he overreacting?

Doesn't he fear the backlash he will receive from the other mercenary groups if he kills me? Or is he just batsh*t crazy?

Still, the information that I received from Clinton tells me that he isn't a simple person. According to Clinton, he sent his subordinates to kill Rhode, but they ended up being killed by him instead.

Perhaps... he found out about my mission...?

When he thought the about the possibility of his mission being leaked, Frank couldn't help but feel a chill down his spine.

Does that mean that he had already figured out their plan so he decided to counterattack first?

“What's the situation in Deep Stone City? Is there any new information regarding Klautz?”

“The Mercenary Association only gave that notice?”

“Yes.”

Frank frowned after receiving his subordinate's report. If that man discovered his plan, Deep Stone City should be making its move. Or were they waiting for him to make a mistake? On the other hand, there was also the possibility that he was overthinking it.

In any case, the Mercenary Association's new regulation would cause difficulty in implementing the next stage of his plan.

What should he do?

“Send some people to contact Wolf's Den and report the current situation to them.”

“Yes.”

After acknowledging Frank's command, the man straightened his body and planned to leave. But at this moment, Frank once again called him up.

“That's right, is there any news about Starlight?”

“They have left Deep Stone City.”

“Eh?”

Frank raised his brow.

“Do you know where are they going?”

“According to the report, they are heading for Twilight Forest. But as for what are they doing there... I don't know.”

“Twilight Forest? Wait, I remember...”

A trace of joy flashed past Frank's eyes. After that, he forced himself up and looked at his subordinates.

“Look for Clinton and tell him that Starlight is in Twilight Forest... and I want...”

The last few words were almost inaudible, but the intent was clear from the malicious look on his face.

Meanwhile, Rhode had just begun his 'Basic Training' for Randolph and the rest.

Rhode didn't give them a divine book that would instantly give them cheat-like abilities, but it was still handy for them to improve their strength.

In this era, skill training was still quite vanilla. Although they could learn techniques from the instructor, the ability to combine the skills was another issue altogether. This is because everyone's character and fighting style were different. Thus, the way the instructor teaches also varies.

Everyone was unique; what one would consider perfect could be insufficient to another. Due to that, people would travel far and wide to experience real battles. During that journey, they would gradually master the skill and develop their personalized fighting style. That was the main reason why adventurers must travel as fighting experience from training and life-or-death battles were entirely different.

Perhaps after a few years Randolph and the others would master their skills and develop their fighting style, but Rhode couldn't wait that long for them. Judging from the skill level of these guys right now, it was more likely for them to die at the start of the journey than being successful.

The paper that he passed to Randolph and the rest were 'entry-level' strategies that he developed with the input of millions of players.

Although it was only 'entry-level,' it recorded all the basics on how and when to use the skills. In Dragon Soul Continent Online, if a player wanted to play well, many veterans would tell them to look at a guidebook for beginners. If they understood the concepts and principles well, conquering most dungeons shouldn't be an issue.

If skills were a language, it would be considered as a word. And when combined, these words would form sentences with meaning. If one desired to turn these words into fluid sentences with excellent vocabulary, that would be the same as the challenges of using high-leveled skills.

To put it in context, Randolph and the rest were just like children who'd just begun studying the language and were unable to spell out the words to express themselves. So, how do we teach children languages? By getting them to repeat them over and over again until they understand it of course.

As long as they were able to learn these words, in time, they would be able to form their own sentences. As for whether they could completely utilize the meaning of the words... it was something that Rhode hadn't thought of it yet. Anyway, let's just study it first!

And then that's where the tragedy began.

Rhode didn't give them an explanation on why were they doing this as they didn't require to know the reason. As long as they could read and regurgitate the theory into action, they would naturally understand the reason later on. In Rhode's opinion, this method of training was way better than bringing a group of newbies to enter a dungeon.

The next morning, a strange scene was happening in Starlight's base camp.

Randolf lowered his body and jumped up. At the same time, he pulled his bow and aimed towards the tree in front of him. After shooting, he didn't pause and immediately did a roll backwards. In a quick motion, his left hand nocked another arrow and pulled on the string once again.

As for the heavily armored Swordsman, Andon kept repeating a monotonous set of movements with his sword and shield.

Forward, retreat, swing the sword, block, turn around, swing the sword again.

He repeated the notion again and again under the hot sun, drenching his entire forehead with sweat. Still, his eyes maintained its focus and stared at the empty space in front of him as though a dangerous enemy was waiting to strike him.

Joey was no better. No longer had he had a relaxing smile on his face. At that moment, he was frowning as he dashed around nimbly while wielding his dagger.

"I say, kid. Does this method really work?"

Old Walker said with worry as he looked at the three men training and continued.

“The actual battlefield is ever-changing. How can they expect to use these set of movements for every scenario? If the enemy didn’t fight like that, wouldn’t they be finished?”

“I don’t care how they fight, but they must do as their told. This is my requirement.”

Old Walker almost passed out when he heard Rhode’s answer. Then he rolled his eyes and shifted his gaze away from Rhode, clearly dissatisfied with his response.

“Ah... that’s enough, kid. I’d like to see what you can come up with. It’ll be weird if there’s no issue with this inflexible way of fighting.”

“That’s my problem, not yours, Walker. What about the things I asked you to do previously?”

Old Walker shot a glare at him and stood up.

“Well, I’ve found some places fitting the requirements that you’ve mentioned. I’ve also gathered some information since those guys aren’t difficult to handle... but do you really intend to...”

Old Walker cut off his speech. When he saw the look in Rhode’s eyes, he already knew his answer. He shrugged and didn’t bother continuing.

“Anyway, just take it like I didn’t say anything. But kid, Lize is in a bad mood these days, if you have the time, you should look for her. You should know morale is a big issue for every mercenary group, especially so for serious individuals like Lize...”

Old Walker stood up and put his hand on Rhode’s shoulder before turning around to leave. He believed that he didn’t have to finish what he had to say because he understood that Rhode wasn’t the dense type of man.

Rhode didn’t reply. He only shifted his gaze towards the base camp.

There, three beautiful girls in the mercenary group were leisurely having fun.

Rhode didn't assign any tasks for the three women. After interacting with them for a while, Rhode understood the characteristics of their techniques. Lize was precise; the way she managed her cooldowns was better than players. Rhode was sure that even if the strongest Cleric player, Thousand-hand Guanyin, transmigrated to this world, she would be no better than Lize regarding this aspect.

Marlene wasn't as precise as Lize, but her talent for being proficient in the whole magic system was also something that could be compared to most high-levelled players. Even if Rhode wanted to assign training for her, it would be impossible. While he was familiar with Mage spells, ultimately he wasn't a Mage, so there were things he wouldn't completely understand.

As a 'regular' genius, Marlene comprehension towards a variety of combat skills was quite good. In Pavel Cemetery, Rhode didn't have to spell out what she should do, and Marlene would understand what he wanted. She was slowly changing, and Rhode could see that.

If Marlene was the 'academical type,' Anne would totally be the 'practical type.' Rhode could feel the wildness in her. Violent, unique, irregular, and unstable, but could create an unexpected result. Anne's ability to think on the spot and react was superb. So, he didn't think that there was much to teach her.

As for the pitiful men who hadn't met Rhode's expectations, they trained hard around the base camp.

The world out there isn't kind. Only failure awaits if one doesn't succeed.

Then, Rhode stood up and walked towards the hillside.

Chapter 112 - Core Card

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The three girls noticed that Rhode was walking towards them and lifted their heads in response.

In all honesty, they were Starlight's trump cards because Starlight lacked experienced mercenaries and they were all beautiful females nonetheless.

Some mercenary groups got jealous when they saw the three capable yet beautiful women. They even secretly called them prostitutes when the three were together.

Of course, these things could only be spoken secretly; no one would dare to publically denounce Starlight when they heard news of Rhode beating up Jade Tears into such a miserable state.

Still, it didn't prevent them from being jealous of Starlight.

Among the three women, Lize was the adorable type. Her white Cleric robes matched with her luscious golden hair made her look like a delicate lily. Although she was smiling right now, a trace of gloominess still hid deep within.

Marlene was as prideful as always. She placed her hand on her knee while her white, long hair waved around as she moved. Her crimson red eyes emitted a beautiful gleam, just like a flower that grew on a mountain; hard to reach, but incredibly beautiful.

Anne was much bolder than the lot of them. Even if someone were to scribble the word 'bold' on their head, they still can't possibly rival Anne in revealing her innocence to the world.

Anne yawned as she lay flat on the grass and enjoyed the warm sunshine. Her golden hair was tied up in a ponytail, emitting a youthful and wild

charm. Contrasting against Lize's and Marlene's conservativeness, Anne seemed to prefer to show off her figure. The armor she wore right now was tight-fitting and emphasized her slim waist. With her vivacious personality, who knew if she intentionally picked this set of revealing attire.

Randolf and the rest were almost immune to Anne's outfit as they were already used to it. On the other hand, Shauna's subordinates eyes glued onto Anne. This made Shauna angry, and she scolded them for being a group of good-for-nothings that couldn't control their inner desires.

Honestly speaking, Shauna can be considered to be a beauty herself. While she wasn't as striking when compared with the other three, a strong and mature woman like her did attract plenty of men.

If Rhode were an ugly, lecherous fatty, perhaps everyone would've called him a lewd b*stard. But even though they knew that he recruited many beautiful women into Starlight, no one called Rhode lewd. So why was that?

The reason was simple. It was because of his appearance! His looks weren't far off from the rest of them. Saying that he was lewd? Wasn't it better for him to buy a mirror to look at himself if he'd ever felt lustful?

While many were busy with training, the three women chatted about a variety of topics... well, actually it was only Marlene and Lize who was having a chat. At the side, Anne's blissful facial expression revealed that she was having a pleasant dream.

"Ah, Mr. Rhode."

Lize quickly stood up. Marlene also smiled and nodded.

"How do you feel?"

Rhode asked Lize.

"It's slightly weird... the last time we came to Twilight Forest was for a mission and didn't have time to take in the scenery. This is my first time

coming here without taking on any mission.”

Lize said with a smile as her gaze fell upon the sea of trees not far from her.

“It’s really beautiful. I recall that I was so nervous that my head started to spin when I first took on a mission here. At that time, leader and the others would laugh at me...”

Lize stopped speaking and gazed at the forest silently. She knew she shouldn’t say these things, but she couldn’t help but think of it.

Looking at her gloomy expression, Rhode frowned. It’s not like he didn’t notice her mood, but her painful memories weren’t something that could be erased easily.

If it was a problem in battle, Rhode might be able to think of a solution, but this was a psychological problem, and Rhode’s ability to guess what people were thinking was as good as the average person next to him.

Lize looked fine on the outside, but deep inside there was a scar that no Cleric could heal. If a similar accident were to occur, perhaps this scar might once again open up and bring a greater injury to her mental state.

“I will go and check on everyone.”

Lize seemed to have noticed something, so she made a faint smile and made her way to the others. Rhode stared at her leaving figure and was lost in thought.

“Seems like that accident left a deep scar.”

Marlene, who had been quiet for a while, finally opened her mouth.

“Indeed...”

Rhode nodded.

“Do you have a plan, Mr. Rhode?”

“For now? No.”

“Since its something hard to bring up, we can only act according to circumstances. Marlene, can you inform me if anything happens to her?”

“No problem, leave it to me, Mr. Rhode.”

Marlene had no reason to reject as Lize was her best friend. Even if she was a genius Mage, she was no psychiatrist either. Other than staying beside her, there was nothing she could do.

Rhode nodded. Then he walked towards a stream by the hillside.

Marlene frowned when she saw Rhode’s figure. She felt that it was familiar.

Ah, yes... it was just like in Silent Plateau. He went into the forest and summoned an angel, right?

But what was he doing now? Was he going to summon someone again?

Marlene fell deep into thought for a while before shaking her head. Rhode had too many secrets. It was no point for her to pry his secrets. She believed that he would tell them the truth when the time came.

But when she looked at where Rhode was heading to, she couldn’t help but think about the underground palace. The Fascarl era buildings... the strange statues and the trial...

Is he really...?

Suddenly, her eyes flashed a trace of shock. She didn’t realize that her heart was beating really fast. An unbelievable thought just hit her. If it’s just like she thought, then Rhode is...

She shook her head and threw away the frightening idea.

At that moment, Anne, who was supposed to be sleeping, quietly opened her eyes and peeked at Marlene. Her beautiful and refined face was currently flushed red.

Rhode felt that this forest was somewhat fated with him.

He walked towards a dense thicket, and after making sure that there was no one around, he took out a small Soul Core. It was the second Soul Binding Stone. Inside the stone was the soul of the Death Knight that he previously defeated. Frankly, Rhode didn't expect to bind its soul since he was actually trying to avoid the fight. However, Anne's stubbornness altered the plan. So, Rhode changed his mind and took out the Soul Binding Stone to seal the Death Knight's soul.

Unlike the Necromancer, the Death Knight's soul wasn't pure black; it was grey. Rhode couldn't help but feel nervous when he saw the swirling fog.

The Death Knight was a monster above level 30 and he was currently only level 15. He wasn't even half of its level. A Soul Core from a higher level monster would enable him to summon a high-level spirit. All he had to do now was to suppress its instability to the lowest.

High-level cards were very rare. In the game, the majority of the Summoning Swordsmen players had to fuse three high-level cards to get it. Of course, if one obtained a high-level Soul Core, he or she might acquire a high-level card as well though the success rate of obtaining one was much lower than fusing three cards.

Rhode hoped that the level 30 Soul Core wouldn't turn out to be trash. After thinking for a while, Rhode finally made the decision to go for it.

“... Sigh.”

Rhode took a deep breath as he stared at the foggy Soul Core in his hand. Once again, he scanned his surroundings to make sure that no one would disturb him. Then, he closed his eyes and began.

Soon, a stream of mysterious lights appeared from his hand. Like a river of water, it flowed from his body to the ground. After that, with Rhode as the center, it formed into a huge and majestic magic circle!

Then, a deck of cards floated in the air; they were hovering inside the circle, all of them shining with a different kind of light.

At that moment, Rhode lifted his right hand to present the Soul Core to the deck.

This was a method he thought of. Rather than letting the Soul Core form itself, it was better to place it into a card he had. By doing so, he can obtain a higher success rate of getting high-level spirits. That was his conclusion after countless trials and error and research from the forums.

And now, he finally got the opportunity to experience it.

As if aware of the Soul Core, the deck began shining with a mysterious light. The Soul Core began to change color as though it was communicating with the deck. The Soul Core flickered and changed colors rapidly from white to black, to red, and to green. The colors started to change faster until Rhode's eyes couldn't keep up with it.

But suddenly, Rhode's expression changed.

He found out that something wasn't right.

The Soul Core on his palm began to tremble, and the magic circle also began to distort.

What happened? He had never encountered this kind of situation before.

Rhode calmed down and kept his doubts in his heart. He tried to suppress the magic circle, but he didn't expect the feedback was getting even more violent and the formerly stable magic circle exploded with a powerful force.

Crack.

When the Soul Core on his palm broke, his body suddenly felt extremely painful.

There was only darkness before him; he lost consciousness.

Chapter 113 - Loss and Gain

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Rh... de...”

It’s dark.

“... Rhode...”

A faint voice rang in his mind. The pain was intense as though someone pierced a hole in his brain. It couldn’t help but made him feel disgusted and wanted to throw up.

“... Mr.Rhode...!!”

The fuzzy voice suddenly became clear, after that a warm light tore down the darkness.

Rhode opened his eyes.

The first thing he saw was Lize’s worried expression.

“Mr. Rhode, are you okay! What happened??”

Me? Injured?

Rhode shook his head trying to regain his consciousness. He held onto the tree and slowly got up. After that, he looked at his surroundings. He could see that Marlene was standing beside him with expression. Although she didn’t look as worried as Lize, she still couldn’t hide the concern in her eyes.

“After I felt a surging wave of magical energy, I quickly ran here and saw you lying on the ground. What... did you do? The area around you is completely devastated.”

What did I do?

Rhode looked around with a strange expression. He could see that the originally quiet forest was in a mess now. The trees that filled the forest were dead and dried leaves were falling like snowflakes. The grasses have also dried up, it was as though this place had totally turned into a lifeless desert!

What... happened?

Rhode was shocked. He had never seen such a thing happening before. Also, if one thought logically, it was impossible for this kind of thing to happen. As a Summoning Swordsman, he had summoned spirits for countless times. Back when he was still level 50, he had awakened a level 80 Soul Core and there was no backlash like this. So how did such an event happen?

“Mr. Rhode? Are you okay? How do you feel? Are you injured?”

Lize’s series of questions woke Rhode from his reverie. He quickly opened his attributes information and was dumbfounded.

He found out that his EXP points had reset to zero!

He had about 5000 EXP points left after defeating the Death Knight and just a little more he could’ve leveled up to 17. But Rhode found his 5000 EXP points missing! Where did they go?!

The series of events left him even more confused. He had never encountered this kind of thing in the game. Could it be that he hit a bug? If it was the game, he would’ve easily concluded it as such... but what about now?

Rhode’s face darkened. It was strange enough for a system prompt to appear in reality, but since he couldn’t understand what caused it to appear, he just threw the thought to the back of his mind. No matter whether he liked it or not, it had already happened.

However, what occurred now made him feel quite uneasy. If it was a system bug in the game, he could request for support from a GM. But what about now? If the bug originated from his body, who should he look for an explanation?

Did he have to write 'Pls fix the bug' on a sign and wave it around in the middle of the street?

...

"Mr. Rhode?"

The flickering expressions on Rhode's face made Lize and Marlene a little bit uneasy.

"Are you okay? Are you feeling uncomfortable somewhere?"

"Mr. Rhode, if there's any problem, I think it's better for you to tell it to us..."

"No... there's nothing wrong with my body."

Rhode finally recovered and waved his hand. He was certain that there were no issues physiologically, and based on what he could see, there seems to be no problem with the system. His attributes were normal and his level was still the same. If there was nothing wrong with his skills, talents, and level, why did his 5000 EXP disappear suddenly?

As he was thinking over the matter, Rhode suddenly thought of something.

Why did he collapse?

What was he doing before that?

That's right! What happened to my card?

Rhode's heart sank. After that, he stretched out his right hand.

With a mere thought, a bright red card appeared on top of his palm. Rhode's eyes widened in shock when he saw the card. In the upper corner of the card, there was a large 'I' symbol on it. An exquisite flower engraving outlined the edges of the card like a creeping flame. This made the card look rather ancient and mysterious. However, what puzzled Rhode was the deep red color in the center of the card that supposedly was the icon of the summoned creature.

It's empty...?

What's going on?

Did he summon air?

He frowned and flipped the card. Soon, a line of text appeared.

[2/10 of Red Lotus Deck has been collected, Seven Love]

[Seven Love (Fire Commander Attribute): Lord Commander Level, Not Available for Fusion]

[Elemental Domination. Able to burn through anything.]

[Special Skill ——— Red Lotus (Causes a sensation that burns as passionately as a flame. Strong enough to cause the entire world to turn mad.)]

[Fire Manipulation (Every element would turn into its Passion)]

[Lord Level Control (Can summon low-level spirits in the deck without limit)]

[Red Lotus (Not yet complete)]

[Warning: The card level exceeds the current commanding limit. Each time the card is summoned, the holder will lose five percent of their EXP.]

[System prompt Summoned number: 1]

So that's it.

Rhode finally felt relieved after looking at the system prompt. His 5000 EXP didn't disappear due to a bug. Instead, it was consumed by this card.

Rhode felt that the loss of EXP was reasonable as the card was above his expectations.

A Commander Level Spirit!!

Those three words were enough to make him feel like what he had done was all worth it.

The so-called Commander Level Spirit was a term that humans used to determine a magical beast's level.

After becoming a magical beast, the creature would possess elemental power. According to the ranking, the magical beast would fall into three levels: Special, Master, and Commander.

Special Level Spirits referred to magical beasts who possessed power but is unable to use it freely. For example, a lightning element cat would constantly generate electricity through instinct as it moves. These beasts were often newly promoted and considered the less dangerous type of magical beast. Rhode's Flame Killer is one such example of a Special Level Spirit.

Master Level Spirits could manipulate and control its power according to its wishes. This kind of magical beast is troublesome to handle because they possess a certain level of intelligence. Combined with its natural talent, it would prove to be a dangerous foe to most adventurers.

If a Master Level Spirit was considered to be dangerous, then a Commander Level Spirit would be every adventurer's nightmare. Commander Level Spirits had the power to command the elements. They were apex magical beasts that ruled over the other living creatures and what was even more frightening was that they could be considered as the five elements proxy in the entire continent.

Not only were they able to bend the elements at their will, they could also manipulate the elements to forcibly alter a low-level creature's elemental property.

This meant that if the target had ice elemental properties, but hadn't reached Commander Level, a Commander Level Fire Elemental Spirit could replace the ice element with fire. Sometimes they could even burn the opponent into ashes in a blink of an eye.

Back in the game, there were only five players that had a Commander Level Spirit, and they were all above level 80. Even Rhode's Starlight only managed to obtain a pyrrhic victory after waging war against them. So a summon restriction was totally reasonable for a card that could summon a Commander Level Fire Spirit.

The strength of Commander Level Spirits was not exaggerated. If it weren't for the restriction, perhaps Rhode could've conquered the entire Munn Kingdom. Not to mention a city as tiny as Deep Stone City. It would be completely pulverized into nothingness in a blink of an eye.

However, Rhode was confused because he had battled against the five different elemental Commander Level Spirits before and the Commander Level Fire Elemental Spirit was supposed to be 'Ragris.' So where did this Commander Level Fire Elemental Spirit 'Seven Love' come from?

He had the sudden urge to summon this spirit and test how it worked, but he had no choice but to suppress his curiosity as he couldn't afford to waste another 5000 EXP just to satisfy his cravings.

If he wasted another 5000 EXP points, he would be forced to downgrade a level.

Rhode couldn't help but put the card back. After pacifying Lize and Marlene, he finally left.

However, before he had the time to slowly think about the card, Old Walker quickly approached him when he was nearing the base camp.

“Kid, I’ve found something.”

The old ranger said with a serious expression.

Chapter 114 - Behind The Ambush

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

To Old Walker, Rhode was a very contradictory existence.

Usually, he's always firm, stubborn, even sometimes quite tough, violent, mad, and even brave enough to kill people in front of Mercenary Association. In Mercenary Joint Meeting he didn't even try to conceal his intention of wanting to destroy a mercenary group. This made Rhode looked like a madman, but on the other hand he was also cautious, even a little timid. This time, they traveled to the Twilight Forest and Rhode asked Old Walker to explore the surrounding to see whether if there were any anomalies around them. Clearly, this time they didn't come here to complete a mission.

Old Walker also knew that it was reasonable for Rhode to worry since he completely antagonized Jade Tears during the joint meeting. In Deep Stone City, Rhode had no need to be cautious as the Mercenary Association was watching them, but it was hard to say the same when they were in Twilight Forest. If Jade Tears secretly decides to launch a surprise attack, all of them could die here. Even if the Mercenary Association wanted to investigate, they wouldn't be able to find concrete evidence.

That was why Rhode asked them to stay alert. Old Walker couldn't help but admire this part of him and felt relieved because Rhode's actions proved that he wasn't a reckless b*stard that only cared for himself. If he created enmity with Jade Tears just because he felt like it, it meant that Rhode was just another scum who acted on instinct without thinking of the consequences. If he was truly like that, then things could really be very troublesome.

But Rhode didn't only remind him verbally, he even specifically pointed out several directions to him, so he could be more cautious. This made Old

Walker surprised. He couldn't understand how a person in his early twenties could be so skilled in underhanded tactics.

And something really happened from the direction Rhode previously mentioned.

“There.”

While hiding in the bushes, Old Walker pointed towards the faint black spot from afar and said to Rhode. Rhode looked towards the direction and after a while, he spoke.

“How many people are there?”

“About six to seven people.”

“Have they discovered us?”

“I think they followed the tracks we left behind.”

Old Walker said confidently.

Since tracking and counter-tracking was a Ranger's ability, if he couldn't even do that properly then it was better for him to retire and go back home.

“How about other directions?”

“There's no other movement for now.”

Old Walker looked at Rhode as he spoke.

“What are you planning to do?”

“What am I planning to do?”

Hearing Old Walker inquires, Rhode only snorted and answered in an 'as a matter of fact' tone.

“Of course I’ll kill all of them. Since they all dare to come here I definitely won’t let them go back.”

Saying until here, Rhode stopped.

“I need your help. Inform Shauna and Randolph to increase their vigilance. Furthermore, tell Randolph to set traps five meters around the base camp.”

Old Walker was surprised.

“Just the two of us? How about the others...”

“They don’t have to know.”

Rhode shook his head. He wasn’t planning to let the newbies join the battle. Firstly, they were not strong enough and secondly, Rhode hadn’t trusted them yet.

One has to realize that battles between two mercenary groups were different from killing monsters. Most people would feel guilty after killing another human. Perhaps after facing many different trials and dangers would they gradually accept it, but it didn’t mean that they would enjoy it. Moreover, they were still in the ‘prohibition period’ set by the Mercenary Association, so he didn’t wish to see a time bomb within his group.

“That’s why this matter is only known by you and me.”

“I will stay here and observe their movements. You can go ahead and look for Marlene and Shauna. In addition to informing them, I need you to observe other areas. I’m quite certain that Jade Tears wouldn’t be stupid enough to think that these people were enough to finish us. I suspect that they are planning something so I’ll leave the scouting to you.”

“No problem.”

Hearing Rhode has assigned him the task, Old Walker nodded solemnly.

“I will go now.”

Night fell.

A bright flame lit up the base camp. From afar, one could catch a whiff of a wonderful fragrant aroma arising from a large pot.

The mercenaries who had been tired all day couldn't help but drool when they saw the delicious meal. However, they couldn't help but contain their urges when they saw the person sitting on the rock at the edge of the base camp.

Lize was feeling under the weather.

Her gloomy expression wasn't due to the previous incident, rather, it was because Rhode hadn't shown up yet. Back in the afternoon, Old Walker had relayed Rhode's words to her informing that he wouldn't be back tonight because he had something to do. He even asked Marlene and Shauna to increase their vigilance and also sent an unexpected person to join their camp...

Lize lifted her head and looked at a lonely figure.

The angel girl sat silently on a rock. Her white wings softly fluttered in the night breeze as though she enjoyed basking in the moonlight. Both of her eyes were closed and her face was equally emotionless. She appeared like a sharp sword, giving people a feeling of coldness.

She was familiar with the people who had joined the fight in Silent Plateau and knew that the angel girl was one of Rhode's subordinates. But as for Shauna and Randolph who had yet to meet the angel girl, they felt incredible shock when they first caught sight of Celia.

Angels were noble beings who rarely ventured outside. However, a distinguished being such as Celia was actually a subordinate of Rhode and was commanded to protect them. They couldn't help but feel shocked.

Because of this, many people who acted unscrupulously before calmed down. Although Celia didn't seem to bother the humans around her, they

couldn't help but feel an invisible pressure on them as though they were a bunch of crooks.

Legends said that angels were the messengers of the five dragons. Although that era had long passed, the legend still left a deep impression on the people.

Still, the mercenaries were mostly baffled over why a noble angel such as her was under Rhode.

Randolf and the other newbies couldn't help but feel slightly scared. Even Shauna who had interacted with Rhode before also felt shocked. She knew that Rhode was a noble, but she didn't expect that he would be able to recruit an angel as a subordinate.

Just who is this man...?

At that moment, not only were they stunned, they were also feeling relieved of their choice to join Starlight. Although in theory, joining Jade Tears would be more rewarding, but following this unpredictable young man was proving to be more promising.

It just that, different from others, towards Celia, Lize always felt a little bit puzzled.

Lize felt that this girl named Celia showed up too suddenly. She had never heard Rhode mention that he had an angel as a subordinate. So Lize was very curious about her origins.

Where did she come from?

Who is she?

In the mercenary group, only Marlene knew about Celia's real identity but she wasn't a blabbermouth. She knew that Rhode didn't want to spread this matter so she didn't tell the others about it. This matter could be considered as a tiny secret between them...

As for Anne, she was as energetic as always. When she saw Celia again she ran towards her and held the angel's hand. Moreover, she even dared to touch Celia's wings. Many people were shocked and even afraid that the noble angel would get angry, but fortunately, the angel didn't seem to mind.

Lize sliced a few pieces of tender grilled hare meat and offered it to Celia.

"Ms. Celia."

Hearing someone calling her name, she opened her eyes and turned around. She saw Lize standing beside evidently feeling quite uneasy while handing the plate towards her.

"That... are you hungry? Do you want to eat something?"

"I'm not hungry."

Celia shook her head and quickly answered. This made Lize feel a little bit awkward. She stood beside Celia just like that, not knowing what to say. Before, Lize only did it on a whim because she suddenly wanted to talk and understand her better. However, she didn't think that things would turn out this awkward...

While Lize was in a dilemma, Celia suddenly opened her eyes again and stared at Lize.

"I can feel my bloodline run in your veins..."

"Eh?"

Lize couldn't help but gasp and take a step back. She lifted her head and looked at Celia, waiting for her to continue.

Unexpectedly, after saying those words Celia once again closed her eyes to enjoy her 'moon-bathing' as if their conversation has ended just like that.

"..."

This made Lize want to cry.

Chapter 115 - Slaughter in The Dark

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode didn't know what happened at the base camp because he had more important things to handle.

Lurking in the bushes, Rhode vigilantly watched the base camp not far from him. It had to be said that the Jade Tears mercenary group really had done a full preparation. They followed the trace that Rhode and others left behind along the way. They patiently trailed them from far behind; had Rhode not been well prepared from the start to let Old Walker check the key location where they might appear, the group might have successfully passed through them. And if that happened, things were going to get troublesome.

Although he was determined to kill all these worms, Rhode didn't attack immediately. He spent the whole afternoon circling the Jade Tears mercenary group. After he made sure that there was no other reinforcement, he was finally relieved.

Rhode was no stranger to this kind of battle. Although the Jade Tears mercenary group was fully prepared, it was still far inferior to the other players. In the game, when attacking the enemy, a player would use any means to face them. Especially in large guilds like Rhode's, they would very easily become the target of others. It was common for guilds to sneak up, scheme, and even lose decorum against others. Rhode had also been ambushed by others and set up ambushes himself too. After engaging in many years of battle with other players, he had become familiar with these tactics.

But still, after the catharsis of meeting players that were a combination of personalities that were dirty, shameless, and held sinister intent, the Jade Tears mercenary group's ambush was like a woman that was undressed with

not a single piece of cloth to cover her. With only a little bit force, she would immediately fall to their schemes.

Originally, Rhode worried that the Jade Tears would also use dirty tricks, but now it seemed that he had worried too much. The Jade Tears didn't even expect that they would be found out—they just dispatched some scouts to patrol outside from time to time. If they were seen by others, they would only think that those people came to the forest just to adventure.

Rhode had lost interest towards these guys. Since they were from the Jade Tears mercenary group, they definitely needed to be killed. The more people dead, the less troublesome it would be in the future. Not only that, if their mercenary group dwindled without a battle, it would deter the other mercenary groups as well. If he could completely finish the Jade Tears using this method, he wouldn't mind at all.

The night was getting dark.

To prevent arousing suspicion, the Jade Tears mercenary group didn't light any bonfire. The surroundings gradually became quiet, with only the sound of insects echoing from time to time, as if the night was playing a lullaby.

It was time to move.

Rhode gestured towards Old Walker, who was beside him. Their figures disappeared in the darkness like that of two poisonous snakes.

Bell walked out of the tent where the cold wind was blowing. "Damn it."

Feeling the chill, Bell cursed in low voice. If not for the generous reward, he definitely wouldn't have come to this haunted place to suffer.

Bell's heart was filled with dissatisfaction, but he didn't say anything. As an old Jade Tears mercenary group member, he had long been swayed by Frank's money. In his opinion, there was nothing more important than money in the world. With money, you could have position, authority, and women. Without money, you would not have anything. Money, he believed, was the supreme existence in this world.

Precisely because of this, he had become Frank's henchmen.

Bell didn't know what Frank wanted to do; he only cared about how much money he could earn. So when Frank sent him and his men to Twilight Forest in order to destroy the Starlight mercenary group, Bell didn't hesitate and immediately agreed. For no other reason than seeing a bag of gold coins on his desk, the warrior made this kind of decision.

After glancing around the tent and making sure that those fools didn't notice him, Bell slowly walked to the edge of the base camp. Soon, he could see the female ranger that he assigned to guard the area. At this moment, she was bored, yawning while leaning on the tree. Seeing Bell arrival, the girl didn't look surprised. To the contrary, she smiled at him.

Bell smiled back and walked to her side. He couldn't wait to reach out to explore beneath her leather armor. He began kneading the two soft, plump peaks on her body. This female ranger had joined Bell's group after being hired by Frank. When he saw her for the first time, he was already attracted by her. After spending a huge sum of money, this woman who originally intended to act prudish immediately fell to his knees and become his intimate companion on the bed. The reason he sneaked out from the tent was to kill some time due to boredom. After all, in this era, it was the only night activity which was mentally and physically a joy without having to waste too much time.

What Rhode said about the Jade Tears mercenary group being a group of trash wasn't necessarily considered wrong, as a person bought by money had no loyalty at all. Naturally, their morals and integrity didn't exist. Frank himself also knew that his men had no other use beside adding more number to his mercenary group's strength. Maybe that's also the reason why they followed him quietly from behind like a thief.

“Hehehe, it seems that you really cannot wait anymore...”

“Leader, you have finally come, I've been waiting for you.”

Facing Bell's teasing, the girl smiled and walked forward. She pushed her voluptuous chest towards his, then reached her hands towards his neck and

kissed him on the lips.

“Uu...mmm...”

Bell reached out to pinch her chest, then chuckled. Facing the man before her, the woman showed a tempting expression: she lightly smiled and took the initiative to get closer to Bell's arms. She didn't hide her attitude, smiled, then stretched out both of her hands. Facing the temptation, Bell also didn't plan to retreat. He revealed his manhood and couldn't wait to hug the woman. Then the sound of growls and excitement echoed.

Rhode quietly lurked in the bushes, holding his breath while watching the intense movement from the two people before him. Although faced with such an unexpected scene, he didn't feel embarrassed. He was only surprised, but immediately calmed down. He didn't attack immediately, instead enjoying the “Moment of Bliss” before him.

Completely unaware that they were being watched, their movements were getting even more intense. Perhaps, it was because it was even more exciting to do it in the wilderness. They were slowly being intoxicated in it and even began to roar and moan in low voice. As the proverb says, a moment of bliss is worth a thousand pieces of gold. If they didn't enjoy this beautiful night, then there might be no more chance to do it.

In fact, it was indeed too late already.

Because at this time, Rhode gracefully jumped out of the grass like a cat.

His red sword quietly pierced through Bell's chest and the woman's throat, holding them against the tree.

“——!!”

Death always came suddenly—just like that.

Bell instantly stopped shaking and the woman horrifyingly opened her eyes wide. There was not even a slightest hint of anger in their eyes. On their

body, yellow liquid mixed with spurts of white, flowing down and falling on the grass. It emitted a disgusting smell.

Rhode pulled back his sword and the bodies that lost their support fell to the ground, breathless.

But to Rhode, it seemed as though nothing had happened. He only glanced around, then once again slinked into the darkness without a trace.

At this moment, the base camp was all silent inside.

Old Walker set down the dagger in his hand. Under his feet lay a man whose neck had been slitted. His eyes were wide open, looking at the starry sky before him. It looked like he wasn't even aware of what was happening. Maybe he also had no need to be aware anymore.

“How was it?” Rhode walked out from the bushes and whispered.

“I finished the people over there, how about you, kid?”

“It was easier than expected. I never thought I would see a pair of wild couple there. They didn't even notice my existence. It looks like the Jade Tears mercenary group is just as unskilled as I thought they were.”

Rhode stopped speaking. He looked at the base camp with serious expression, then gestured. “Leave the rest to me.”

When the only survivor had woken from his deep sleep, Rhode and Old Walker's cold faces appeared before him.

“Who are you!?”

After clearly looking at the two people before him, he immediately jumped up. At the same time, he quickly reached out and touched his side. But he no longer had any weapon. Instead, he suddenly felt an intense pain.

“Whoa!!!”

The red sword mercilessly pierced through his arm and set him against the ground. His scream echoed through the forest. The birds that had originally fallen into deep sleep were immediately startled awake after hearing the scream. They fluttered their wings and flew towards the sky.

“He-HELP!!”

“I think it’s better for you to save some energy, Mr. whose name I don’t know.”

Facing the man who was trying to struggle, Rhode was still as relaxed and calm as usual. He pulled a chair and sat before that man.

“Your comrades have died; only you are left. If your performance is good, then I might consider letting you live. If your performance is not good enough...”

Rhode didn’t finish, but the meaning behind his words was already clear enough.

At this moment, the man no longer tried to resist. He only held his arm while nodding his head. He was not stupid; he screamed very loudly, but no one came to check on him. That probably meant that everyone had already died. No one—including him—wished to welcome their own death.

“Very good.”

Seeing that the man had nodded, Rhode clapped his hand in satisfaction. Then, he moved closer towards the man, his eyes showing a trace of coldness.

“Then, next... I have some questions to ask you... I hope you can answer them truthfully.”

Chapter 116 - Rivalry

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Psst.”

The blood-stained sword pierced through the man’s head and a trace of fear flashed through his eyes, but his expression then turned empty.

Rhode stood up and swung the blood-stained sword. After that, he looked at the surrounding forest with serious expression.

What that man said and what he thought were almost exactly the same. The Jade Tears mercenary group didn’t just send one unit here. According to that unlucky worm, this time the Jade Tears mercenary group sent two-thirds of their forces. They were divided into three units to follow and attack Starlight when necessary. Strictly speaking, the team that Rhode attacked wasn’t even considered as a combat unit. They were only responsible for reconnaissance. According to the Jade Tears mercenary group arrangement, some were responsible for scouting while the combat unit was supposed to surround their target. The last unit disappeared just after they entered the Twilight Forest; they were reinforcement, but the man Rhode asked didn’t know where they were located.

Originally, these two units shouldn’t have been too far from each other because if something happened, it would be easier for them to back each other up. However, the situation was completely the opposite. According to the report, the person that led the main force was someone that just recently joined the Jade Tears, and Bell wasn’t willing to follow the command of such a person. That was why after they entered the Twilight Forest, two sides became hostile towards each other, so Bell took his own unit and left. Clearly, they weren’t planning to meet each other anymore. In Bell’s opinion, he only needed to wait until right before the attack began and then send people to notify the main group. If not for him, it was basically impossible for all those fools to find their target all the way out here!

Although Rhode knew from the beginning that the Jade Tears was a group of trash, their extent of trashiness really made Rhode quite surprised. He even began to wonder whether the opponent was deliberately acting weak to lure himself into falsification. Otherwise, didn't that mean that their move was very suicidal?

What caught Rhode's attention wasn't where the main force whose location remained unknown was, but the reinforcements.

No one lived in the Twilight Forest and the only things that passed by were floating airships. Naturally, thieves and bandits didn't exist, since they didn't have wings to fly and snatch goods. That was why from another point of view, it could be said that the Twilight Forest was deserted. Perhaps, there would be some adventurers at times, but no normal people would choose to live here for long. However, to actually seek reinforcements in the forest? Were they planning to talk with those wild beast or something?

As for Rhode's understanding towards Frank, he believed that Frank wasn't an extremely stupid person. Most likely, the so-called reinforcement was the real main force of this attack and these mercenaries were just a pretense. Else, they wouldn't need to wait until the reinforcement arrived to attack.

Although Rhode still wanted to ask about it, the man was only a subordinate and didn't know much about the details of the actual situation. Perhaps the captain would know, but unfortunately he had already died in the woman's arms. Until then, Rhode didn't realized that the man he had easily killed before was the leader of the unit. Holy soul bless, he thought that man was just a normal lonely mercenary looking for fun.

“What should we do now, kid? Should we finish those guys?”

“Just the two of us?”

Rhode shook his head. There were more than 20 people in the main force; although they could both retreat safely after going, they still couldn't guarantee that the enemy wouldn't be startled. Rhode definitely didn't want to wake up a sleeping wolf. His policy was to do it clean or do nothing, and he didn't intend to do anything halfway.

In the end, Rhode made the decision to temporarily retreat.

In any case, without scouts, it would be difficult for them to find him. According to that unlucky worm, the two groups didn't didn't exchange any information. It was likely that the opponent wouldn't be aware of the problem. As long as they could finish everything before the other side found out, the situation was still very favorable to them.

Of course, Rhode left Old Walker behind and let him investigate the direction that captive has told them for precautionary reasons. The poor old ranger had run all night long following Rhode; he just wanted to go back and sleep alone but was instead ordered to stay behind in the forest to suffer. This made the old ranger impulsively want to make a flipping table gesture, but facing his complaint, Rhode didn't even say anything and simply left. The poor old ranger was stunned for a moment, and in the end he just shook his head and sighed. After that, he continued to do the task assigned to him.

When Rhode returned back to the base camp, it was almost dawn.

After hearing from Celia that nothing happened, Rhode took her back. Although she had now reached level 15, his soul power was about the same as lower ranked mage. To maintain Celia's existence, he needed to spend 30 soul power per hour, which was a huge price to pay. This was also the reason that he chose to temporarily retreat. After maintaining Celia for a night, he had spent nearly a third of his soul power. In such condition, he certainly couldn't risk himself.

After greeting Shauna who was in charge of the night watch, he informed the other mercenaries that they were going to start a new training. After that, he walked back to his own tent wearily and quickly fell into a deep sleep.

When Rhode woke up the next day, it was already midday.

Outside the tents, the mercenaries that heard the command had finished the preparation. They put out the fire, recovered the trap, and turned everything back to normal. Marlene and the others looked a little bit bored at the

moment. Looking at the beautiful girl who was enjoying the scenery, the others also didn't object to letting her enjoy this rare vacation.

“Sir, everything is ready.”

Seeing that Rhode has come out, Shauna hurriedly walked to welcome him. In this moment, her attitude was more respectful than before. Before, she called him “leader” just out of obligation. After looking at Celia, she no longer had that kind of thought. It was just natural to call him “Sir,” since he could even make an angel his subordinate.

Rhode also realized that the other newcomers also showed similar changes. Their tones and attitudes were more respectful, and there was a trace of awe in their eyes when looking at him. Even Lapis who was always cautious towards him and always hid behind her brother back had begun to act like a fanatic fan, looking at him with worshipping eyes.

Of course to Rhode, that was a good thing. He used to have to pretend to be a noble by relying on his knowledge, the way he talked, and his demeanor. But now, he seemed to have nailed his noble status. There would be no person who would doubt him. After all, would any ordinary person have an angel as a subordinate? It was basically impossible!

On the contrary, Lize's attitude was rather weird. Several times when she tried to talk to him, she seemed to have something to say. Although Rhode asked whether she had any problem, she only shook her head. Facing this kind of Lize, Rhode didn't know what to do, so he could only let her be.

Rhode obviously was very familiar with the Twilight Forest. Not too long after they left the base camp, Rhode brought them to a valley.

“I think all of you are already familiar with the training before.”

Facing Rhode's question, the mercenaries nodded. Since Rhode's training program wasn't too complicated, they could already use those skills in the first place; it was just that they never expected those skills could be used in such a way. Now, they had memorized those combinations. Next, they just needed to see how well they mastered it.

“Very well.”

They nodded and Rhode also didn't say anything more and waved his hand, pointing towards the valley ahead.

“This is the second part of training. The content is very simple. I want all of you to enter this valley. At the end of the valley, there is a clear spring and an ice stone that can only be found there. I want you to bring back those stones to me after entering the valley. Of course, I'm not afraid to tell all of you that there's some wild beast that resides inside the valley. They will attack any enemy that invades their area without permission. Be careful, the time limit is 3 hours. I hope you can get back here before dinner. Now, go!”

Although the mercenaries were a bit panicked and felt overwhelmed after Rhode issued his order, they bit the bullet and entered the valley. Soon, their shadows disappeared into the forest. Only Rhode, Anne, Lize, Marlene, and Lapis were left standing outside. Seeing that her brother's figure had disappeared, Lapis was a little bit worried, but she knew that based on her current strength, it was impossible for her to join them, so she could only patiently waiting outside.

Lize also anxiously looked at the valley, and walking towards Rhode, she asked, “Will there really be no problem, Mr. Rhode?”

Anne sat in the big tree beside Rhode, and nibbling the apple in her hand, she asked, “Does Anne need to help them?”

“No need.”

Faced with their inquiries, Rhode shook his head. Since he dared to bring those newbies here, he must have already thought about it. This was one of the newbie group quest. Although it was a group quest, but the number of the monsters weren't too many; there were only wild wolves, dogs, and such. It was basically not too dangerous—at least compared to formal dungeons, the danger level of this group quest was a lot lower. If those newbies couldn't even get away from this level of danger, then Rhode would really consider whether or not they were really suited to join his mercenary group.

“It’s not too dangerous inside, so there should be no problem. It’s said that even a lion will push its own cubs to the abyss and let them climb on their own. If they can’t even pass this kind of test, then it is useless to let them stay.”

“Leader... That’s a lion and its own cubs...”

Facing Anne’s grin, Rhode’s face was still emotionless. “In my hometown, there’s a saying: once a teacher always a teacher. I already can be considered as their half teacher,” Rhode calmly answered.

Chapter 117 - Encounter in the Forest

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Ugh...!!”

The fierce, wild wolf rushed forward. The hidden trap in the bush activated and trapped its paw, but the wild wolf didn't back down. To the contrary, it roared and kept rushing forward, its sharp claws passing through Randolph and the others, heavily scratching the ground.

Randolf rolled to the side to dodge the attack and then shot an arrow towards it.

The wild wolf that had already been trapped simply couldn't escape as the arrow flew towards it. It struggled to dodge, but the arrow still shot its leg. This made the wild wolf feel even more pain and it stopped struggling, opening its mouth to vent its anger. However, a second arrow that easily pierced through its head completely sealed the incoming howl.

“Haa...”

After pulling the Fire Blade out from the last wolf's body, Shauna wiped the sweat off her forehead then turned around.

“Is everyone okay?”

“There's no problem.”

“I'm okay.”

Faced with Shauna's question, everyone raised their hands to show that they were safe. After making sure that everything was normal, Shauna nodded. She continued to lead them inside. As Rhode had expected, this test wasn't

too difficult for them. Even without the skills that Rhode had just taught them, they still could deal with the wild beasts just by relying on their ability. However, they knew that the reason they came here wasn't to finish a mission, but to improve their skills and standard. If they were just going to muddle along, they definitely wouldn't succeed.

Randolf reached out to remove the claws from the dead wolf to make an exquisite metal clip. Looking at Andon and Joey, he could see traces of joy and surprise on their face.

At first, their attacks didn't seem strong because their training opponent was just the air, but in a real battle, it was completely different. After they gradually began to get familiar with the pace of the battle, they also began to realize their improvement. Before, they were thinking similarly to Old Walker: worrying about whether this kind of training could be used in real battles. After all, even newbie mercenaries knew the ever-changing situation in the real battles. It was impossible for everything to go according to plan, so they were also a little bit puzzled. But after they did it, they finally found the effectiveness of the skill Rhode has taught.

Indeed, real battles were ever changing and couldn't be predicted, but by using the skills Rhode taught them, they basically didn't have to think about how to deal with the opponent because the opponent wouldn't have the time to react.

Although their professions and skills learned from Rhode differed, everyone finally noticed a similarity after battling for a while. The skills Rhode had imparted allowed chaining without being easily disrupted. At the same time, it was also dangerous. Whether it was a thief who could move as fast as lightning, a swordsman, or even heavy swordsman, it was all the same. When they attacked, the next attack would make the enemy completely powerless to fight back, regardless of whether they were in a defensive or healing position. That way, they minimized the risk of being attacked back in the fight. This feeling also made them feel excited and thrilled.

They thought that overwhelming and high pressure attacks could only be done by highly skilled people. But they never expected that they could actually do the same thing. The wild wolves and dogs in the bushes and

forest turned into their practicing target. Although the wild beasts were not easy not deal with at first, now the mercenaries beat them until they couldn't get up, which made them feel satisfied from the bottom of their hearts. Even later, the beasts didn't even dare provoke them again. But these mercenaries didn't stop until there; they were like goblins that began to look for enemies.

However, Shauna quickly stopped their reckless act. Before the departure, Rhode told them that the skill he taught them was only a basic combination skill. Even though it was effective, it was not invincible. Currently, he only hoped that they could master those skills to develop their own attack power instead of just relying on it like an amulet. If they kept on doing that, it would be very dangerous.

Shauna obviously understood what Rhode meant. Indeed, although this combination could improve their strength, but it still wasn't completely reliable. The reason their actions looked so mighty was because the enemy wasn't strong. If they encountered a stronger enemy, then no matter how perfect their skill combo, the opponent would still be able to send them flying into the heavens. After all, the level gap was already very clear, and strength couldn't be replaced just by using these skills.

As a former mercenary leader, Shauna was very sensitive towards the changes in the team. When she saw that everyone was overly high, she immediately threw cold water at them to wake them up.

“Be serious. We haven't yet passed the test, so don't get too excited. Stay vigilant: the end is already in the front!”

After hearing Shauna's shouts, the others were finally awake. They reassembled and walked forward under Shauna's leadership.

Soon, without feeling any pressure, they came towards the spring that Rhode mentioned. The spring was located under the cliff, and the water looked very clear and transparent. Inside, there were transparent gems reflecting the sunlight. They were Ice Stones, a low grade stone produced inside water. It was also the reason Rhode chose this place. Not only he could let his subordinates train, but he could also collect the stones for

Lapis's alchemy material. If he could kill two birds with one stone, then why not?

As a mercenary, Shauna had collected this stuff before. She took out a jug from her waist and poured out the water inside. After that, she told the others to take the jug and pour the water and stones inside together. After filling two large jugs and making sure that there was no problem, Shauna gestured for everyone to leave.

“Wait!” Suddenly, Randolph yelled. He frowned and twitched his nose.

“There's the smell of blood here.”

“Smell of blood?”

Everyone was surprised for a moment. After that they immediately took out their weapons and formed a circle back-to-back to watch the surroundings. After the crazy killings from before, the wild beasts were already completely scared and didn't dare look for more trouble. That was why no one got attacked when they arrived at the spring. Did a boss finally appear?

Feeling uneasy, they were trying to calm down and listen to the surrounding sounds closely. Shortly afterwards, a low voice was heard through the wind.

“Ughh..aaa...”

“There's someone!”

Shauna immediately jumped and ran to where the voice located while holding her sword. The others also followed from behind. Soon, in the bushes not far from them, they found an injured mercenary.

He looked like a swordsman, but there's no weapon inside his sheath and his body was covered in wounds. Judging from the heavy injuries on his back, it looked like the mercenary had fallen from the cliff. If not because of the thick bushes, most likely he would have already become a wild beast's meal.

“What should we do, Big Sis?”

The mercenaries that surrounded the man were all worried. They quickly looked at Shauna. After all, she was the current commander of the team.

Faced with their inquiries, Shauna didn't answer immediately, but took a closer look at the mercenary. After looking at the badge on his chest, Shauna's eyes lighten up.

“Bring him back. Maybe Lize could save him.”

Shauna no longer hesitated and quickly gave an answer. After that, another person walked forward and carefully carried the injured man for the journey back.

Shauna silently stared at everyone's back, then lowered her head to look at the badge in her hand.

It was exactly the badge that she took from that mercenary.

They could only imagine just how surprised Rhode was when they brought back an injured person from the forest. He wasn't clear on what happened: why did they bring a person back, instead of what he had asked for? However, Rhode still told Lize to heal that man. After that, he walked towards Shauna and asked.

“What happened? Who is he?”

“I'm also unclear.”

Facing Rhode's question, Shauna shook her head.

”We followed your instructions and arrived at the spring. We found him nearby, and it seems that he had experienced a very violent battle. If it's not because of his luck, he wouldn't be alive until now. And... I found this on his body.”

Shauna stretched out her hand and gave Rhode the badge.

After he took the badge, Rhode's eyes narrowed.

It was a red-colored badge. On the top, there was a round, burning flame symbol and in the center, a blade as if born from flame.

Rhode was familiar with this badge. A few days ago, he had seen something similar at the Mercenary Joint Meeting.

It was “Burning Blade” mercenary group symbol.

Chapter 118 - Burning Blade in Danger

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Looking at the symbol on his hand, Rhode was lost in thought.

He was familiar with the Burning Blade; it was a long-established, strong, well-loved, and well-respected mercenary group. Although they were always in the middle of leveling up and down between mercenary guild and mercenary group, it could be seen from their member turnover rate, that the Burning Blade was a very attractive mercenary group. Their leader, Hiller, was also not bad; he was very calm, brave, and smart. From what Rhode remembered, it was Hiller who brought his men, bravely trying to “bring order out of chaos.” Unfortunately, they were only a single force. In the end, they still disappeared in the sea of people.

However, that would be a story told in the afterword. Now, what Rhode cared most about was whether or not the injured mercenary really was a Burning Blade mercenary group member. If he was, then why was he in such a bad condition? Since the Burning Blade was that strong, there should be nothing here in Twilight Forest that could threaten them. He even brought his own Starlight to come here for vacation. But the Burning Blade actually encountered trouble?

The first thought that flashed through his mind was that the Jade Tears that attacked the Burning Blade. However, he quickly erased the thought due to the message Old Walker had sent via the Spirit Bird. The Jade Tears weren't yet moving and didn't seem to be in a hurry either. Rhode's group looked like they had come here for vacation, but the group of people that were suppose to come kill them were actually the ones who came here for vacation. It seemed like they didn't give a sh*t about him. They were just a bunch of trash that took money without working. Indeed, a professional

person wouldn't betray their own mercenary group because of money, right?

Moreover, the Burning Blade was strong; even if there were ten Jade Tears, they still couldn't be compared to the Burning Blade. So, would they even dare attack the Burning Blade? Weren't they afraid that if they offended the Burning Blade mercenary group, they might get flattened to the ground? Although the Mercenary Association had prohibited the fight, if one of the top three mercenary groups wanted to completely destroy the Jade Tears mercenary group, then even the heavenly king wouldn't be able to protect them. Frank also wasn't a fool; why would he made such a mistake?

He was holding onto the badge while thinking, but in the end, he still couldn't think of anything. According to the current situation, it might be because the Burning Blade's mercenary came here for an adventure, accidentally encountered something, and then fell from the cliff. That sounded more logical. As for what actually happened, he still needed to wait until the injured person woke up.

Rhode quickly commanded everyone to take a break. He had a bad feeling about this deep within his heart; he knew the reason why, but Rhode was still very cautious and once again contacted Old Walker via the Spirit Bird. From the news he had gotten, it seemed that the Jade Tears mercenary group still didn't have any movement.

It seemed the danger wasn't from them.

Then, where did the dangerous feeling come from?

Rhode didn't get the answer immediately as he had hoped. Although the mercenary still managed to escape death, it was only because of Lize's healing spell. According to Lize, he was still injured very badly and wouldn't be awake anytime soon. Besides waiting, there was nothing else he could do.

Of course, he could only hope that nothing bad had happened. There was already enough trouble recently.

But life was always like this; the more you wish for something not to happen, the more it will happen.

Looking at Lize who was standing before him, his head couldn't help but start hurting.

“You want to ask about Celia?”

“Yes, Mr. Rhode.”

Lize tilted her head, feeling curious.

“I was really curious about the relationship between the two of you. Is she really your subordinate? And why have I never heard about it before?”

“...”

Rhode scratched his head, not knowing to answer. He was not a magician that never dated a woman before. Whenever a woman mentioned another woman, it usually wasn't good.

At first, he hoped that the other two woman would take the opportunity to stand up and help him, but he was disappointed.

Anne was sleeping on the soft grasses as always. It seemed like there was nothing in her life beside eating, drinking, and having fun. Marlene also seemed to have been infected with the same disease with Lize. Her hands were holding her cheeks while dozing off, and Rhode didn't know what she was thinking of.

In any case, there was no reinforcement.

“She really is my subordinate.” Rhode really didn't lie. From another point of view, summoning spirits were indeed his subordinates. “Well... because of a lot of things that happened before, she decided to look after me and help me. It's just like that.”

Rhode was very clear: when talking with a woman, he must be vague and shouldn't explain the meaning too clearly. Men were sometimes too logical

and wanted to explain everything clearly. However, in a woman's opinion, that would make it seem like he was either underestimating her intelligence or else feeling guilty. Since they both weren't stupid, the matter was already obvious enough and he didn't have to explain it in details like asking her why did she have to use a skirt and such, right?

This was the difference between men and women. For men, they would need a very detailed and clear explanation even if it had happened in the past. That was why men couldn't understand why women still kept pestering them even though they had explained so clearly. However, it was different for women. Especially it was regarding another woman. Since he could even clearly remember the nail polish that she wore and the reason she came here, then if it not because he cared about the woman, why would he remember that much?

He wouldn't repeat his mistake from when he was young... It was really a life lesson.

As expected, after hearing Rhode's answer, Lize nodded. She seemed to have understood what Rhode meant.

Done.

Although she still seemed confused, she didn't continue to ask. Rhode finally felt relieved. Even though he didn't know what Lize thought about his answer, since she accepted it, he knew didn't have to continue thinking about this problem. In this world, it was happier to know less.

At this time, a painful sound echoed.

“Ugh...”

“He's awake!”

After hearing the sound, Lize quickly turned around and ran towards the tent. Rhode's expression turned serious as he followed her. When he arrived at the tent, he saw that the mercenary was gulping a lot of water right after he woke up. It looked like he almost died in the desert and finally found an

oasis to satiate his thirst. Lize was sitting beside him, carefully holding the water bag to avoid any trouble.

“Ah...”

After drinking half of the water bag, the mercenary sighed deeply. After that, he turned around and look at Rhode.

“Thank you, thank you for saving me. If not for you guys, I might have already...”

“No problem, it’s what we’re supposed to do.”

Rhode waved his hand and stopped his words. After that he stretched out his hand to hand over the badge.

“This is yours, right... I’m really curious, as a member of the Burning Blade, how could you be so badly injured here?”

“This...”

Looking at the badge, that mercenary was surprised for a moment. After that, he seemed to have remembered something and suddenly jumped up.

“That’s right, we encountered an attack! Damn it!! I need to go back quickly, ah...”

But just when he woke up, he could felt an intense pain in his body. His face turned green and sweat fell from his forehead. It could be seen just how severe his injury was. Lize quickly held him and helped him lie down once more.

“You cannot move; you have suffered a very heavy injury which hasn’t fully healed yet...”

“But but I cannot waste my time here. I need to quickly go back to the Mercenary Association and ask for their help... Damn it...”

“Did something happen to the Burning Blade?”

After hearing what he said, Rhode frowned. It seems like it was just as he expected. However, Rhode was still very curious. In Twilight Forest, what could injure such a strong mercenary group until they asked for the Mercenary Association for help?

“That’s right, Lil—Mister.”

After carefully looking at Rhode, the man quickly corrected his sentence, lest trouble befall him.

“If I remember correctly, you are the Starlight mercenary group leader, right?”

“That’s right, it’s me.” Although the sentence from before made Rhode frown, since he managed to quickly rephrase it, Rhode would just pretend that he heard nothing. “Can you tell me what happened? If you need, I think I can help you.”

“It’s like this...”

After hearing until here, or maybe because he knew that he was badly injured and unable to finish his mission, he could only sigh and quickly started to explain what happened.

After the Mercenary Joint Meeting has ended, Hiller brought his mercenary group to the Twilight Forest. First, because it was on to their way back to Lightwind City, and second, because he has the same idea as Rhode. He wanted to train his subordinates. Although the prohibition was one month, as a mercenary, it was important to keep fighting from time to time.

At first, things went pretty smoothly. However, something suddenly happened, and the Burning Blade entered Wind Snake territory and was attacked. In the beginning, they didn’t really care about the Wind Snake, since it was a magical creatures that was often seen. But the things that happened next were beyond their expectations, and the Wind Snakes kept increasing. When they realized it was that bad, they had already been surrounded by the Wind Snakes.

Since it was difficult to escape from that situation, Hiller decided to send a small group to break out of the Wind Snake encirclement and look for help.

However, their luck wasn't very good. No matter how weak ants are, but hundreds or even thousands of them was enough to make people die. Same goes for the Wind Snake; although they managed to break the Wind Snake encirclement, but they were still heavily injured. As the last survivor, this mercenary fell off the cliff when the Wind Snakes chased after him. Luckily, he was saved and survived.

“Encircled by the Wind Snakes?”

After hearing it, Rhode found it somewhat unbelievable. A group of Wind Snakes numbered only in the hundreds; it might be strong enough to attack a small mercenary group. But it wasn't supposed to be strong enough to attack a fully-armed mercenary group, right?

“How much do they number?”

Upon hearing this question, the mercenary that was originally calm exposed a frightened expression.

“Thousands! It's thousands of them!”

After hearing this, Rhode's heart sank.

He lifted his head to look at Lize. At this moment, she was clenching her hand as if she thought about something and glanced towards Rhode.

It seemed that they guessed it.

Chapter 119 - Hidden Nightmare

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Under the dark night, the girl was blankly looking at the world.

There was no one in that bleak, withered ground. There only seemed to be a 'tsktsk' sound echoing through the air, giving people goosebumps.

“Mr. Rhode? Marlene?”

Lize hesitantly took a step forward. She called on her comrade names in low voice, but she didn't hear any reply. Where was this? Why was she here? Lize didn't know the answer. She could only feel her heart beating fast and her breath getting unstable...

A drop of icy raindrops fell from the sky and onto her face.

It was raining?

Lize subconsciously touched the icy raindrops on her face. When she spread her hands, she found that her finger was covered with a bright red color. When she lifted her head to look up at the sky, she was stunned.

Above her, Marlene was looking at her with her wide eyes. Her body was being torn apart. Countless Wind Snakes were tearing her body apart with their sharp fangs. Marlene was hanging up in the sky like a broken puppet. Her hands were dangling and blood was flowing down from her fingertips, slowly dripping to the ground. Beside her, only Rhode's head was left. His head was pierced by the Wind Snake's sharp fangs and the light in his eyes were long gone. At that moment, Lize found out that the things that were blocking the sky weren't clouds, but a pile of Wind Snakes. They didn't stop fluttering their wings while greed and desire glittered in their green eyes. The darkness before her seemed endless.

The sound of the fluttering wings gave off a heavy pressure.

“Marlene!! Mr. Rhode!!”

Lize shouted out loud. The feelings of fear and sadness pierced through her heart. Her body trembled, even the scene before her became blurry. The Wind Snakes that were enjoying their meal seemed to hear her shouts. They screamed and rushed toward her like a locust. It was too late for her to lift her right hand. In the next moments, she felt their sharp fangs pierce through her throat...

She opened her eyes.

She was blankly staring at the tent in front of her and finally recovered. She turned around and saw Marlene was sleeping beside her. From her smile, it could be seen that she had a good dream.

“It’s a nightmare... It’s only a nightmare...”

Lize was relieved. She finally realized that both of her hands couldn’t stop trembling. The things that happened in her dream were too real; even now, she could still remember the faces, the blood. It was really disgusting...

“Ugh...!!”

Thinking until here, Lize felt an irreducible nausea. She quickly covered her mouth and went outside the tent. She crawled next to the gully and vomited.

“Uaghh...”

Crawling on top of the stones, her body felt weak. She couldn’t stop trembling. The cold wind blew and made her shiver like a rabbit feeling cold. Even so, she was still unable to forget the nightmare from before. It seemed so real. She subconsciously touched her throat and the scene of her throat being pierced by the sharp fangs once again flashed through her mind.

“Ugh...”

Lize looked down.

Why did it turn out to be like this? Didn't I get over it? I should feel okay, Mr. Rhode also said that I'll be okay. But I also don't know why... It's only a dream, Lize, cheer up. That kind of thing won't happen again. You must remember, don't be afraid, don't be afraid...

Lize tightly held her hands and didn't stop talking to herself. However, her body was trembling even more; the coldness had pierced through her body. Her body that was breaking in cold sweat at first had completely turned numb, no longer listening to her command. At the same time, she felt really tired. She closed her eyes and fell into sleep...

At this time, a voice suddenly pulled her back to reality.

“Sister Lize, what happened?”

Lize lifted her head. She saw that Lapis was pulling her cloak, carefully walking out of the tent while looking at her. When she saw her, she seemed surprised, so she quickly got out from the tent and ran towards Lize.

“Sister Lize, what happened? Are you okay? Should I call...”

Halfway, Lapis paused. The one who was responsible for healing in the group was Lize, but now that Lize was the one sick, Lapis didn't know who should she look for... She couldn't ask Lize to take care of Lize, right?

“There's no need,” Lize said, pulling Lapis's hand. She bitterly smiled and shook her head.

“I had a nightmare and felt a bit tired... Can I sleep with you?”

Originally Lize planned to sleep in her own tent, but when she thought about Marlene, she immediately changed her mind. She wouldn't be able to forget her nightmare after seeing Marlene again. She also didn't want to wake Marlene up and make her worry, since this was Lize's problem.

“Of course, there's no problem!”

After hearing Lize's request, Lapis agreed without hesitation. After that she carried Lize and carefully brought her into her tent.

Unlike the others, Lapis's tent only had one resident. It wasn't because she wanted to be special like Rhode, but as an alchemist, a quiet environment was very important to her. At this moment, a pile of alchemical tools were neatly placed next to the wooden plate in Lapis's tent. There was a dark, green liquid rolling inside and it emitted a strange, pungent taste.

“Why haven't you slept yet?”

“Leader told me that I must finish these things.”

Hearing Lize's question, Lapis's expression turned bitter and she helplessly answered. Hearing her answer, Lize smiled. Of course, she also knew why Lapis had such a tragedy. During the daytime, Rhode brought Shauna and others to find magical herbs in the forest. After that, he gave all the herbs and a certain formula to Lapis. Rhode wanted her to make a potion based on the formula. Although Lapis still wanted to argue some more with Rhode, he coldly told her to 'stop blabbering and do what I told you to' and scared her back. At this moment, she could only do what Rhode told her to, and she didn't even know what that was. Rhode didn't want to explain it to her and only wanted her to do what he asked for. As for the rest, he didn't seem to care.

Although Lapis felt that the leader was a little bit tyrannical, she has no other option, right?

She could only bite the bullet and agree. Since no matter what, the others already contributed to the mercenary group. Only she didn't do anything. This made her feel a little bit guilty. Naturally, Lapis felt happy that she could finally contribute something to the group now.

“Come, Sister Lize. This is an herbal tea; it should make you feel better.”

Lapis handed a cup of tea to Lize. Lize took the tea while looking at the warm tent before her. It made her body and mind felt a lot better now.

“Thank you, Lapis. But... do you also look like this when you're in the tent?”

Looking at the girl before her, Lize couldn't help but feel curious. Although it was in the tent, Lapis kept her cloak on. It seemed that she didn't plan to take it off; and not only her, her brother also did the same. Frankly, Lize had been curious about it for a long time.

“I have long since been used to this kind of appearance. Anyway, Sister Lize, are you really okay?”

Seeing Lize drink the warm hot tea cozily, Lapis uneasily asked once again. However, this time Lize bitterly smiled and shook her head.

“It's really nothing, Lapis. I had a nightmare... It's a nightmare that I don't want to remember and talk about anymore.”

“Oh...”

After hearing what Lize said, Lapis seemed to understand and nodded. She didn't clearly understand what Lize meant, but she knew since Lize didn't want to talk about it, then it was better for her not to ask again. After that, she no longer said anything and turned around to sit in front of the wooden plate and continued to make her potion.

That's right, it's only a dream...

Sitting beside her, looking at Lapis's figure, Lize gradually closed her eyes and felt extremely drowsy. After that, she closed her eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

Lize didn't realize that when she was asleep, Lapis, who was busy making a potion, turned around and secretly glanced at her. She carefully walked towards Lize and covered her with a blanket. After that, looking at Lize's pale and calm face, Lapis hesitated for a moment, reached into her pocket, and took out a greenish-white magic badge and put it on Lize's forehead.

A green, comfortable light quickly emitted from the badge and warped around Lize's body. After a moment, the light gradually faded. Lize's originally stiff expression became a lot calmer. On the contrary, it was Lapis

who frowned. She tightly clenched both of her hands, timidly and secretly glanced at Lize, then she looked outside the tent.

“It’s better if I tell leader about this...”

Lapis said to herself. She turned around and walked out from the tent.

Chapter 120 - Saving Hiller's Soldiers (1)

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“There’s such a thing?”

Rhode thought for a moment, then he lifted his head to look at Lapis, who kept pulling her hood and wrapped her whole body inside her cloak. Whenever he looked at Lapis, he really wanted to complain as to why she was afraid of him: did she think that he might eat her?

But now was not the time to complain.

“I got it. You can go back now. Remember, don’t forget to finish your task.”

“Yes, leader.”

After hearing Rhode’s words, Lapis sighed deeply. She ran away from Rhode’s tent like a criminal. Looking at her panicked figure, Rhode helplessly sighed but said nothing. He had nothing to say.

Lize’s condition was just as he had expected. There were some things that one couldn’t easily get over. Although Lize had tried her best, in the end, she still couldn’t walk out from the shadow of her heart. It was not strange, since even though Lize thought she had tried her best, she was still subconsciously was avoiding everything. Now, when she could no longer avoid it, she could no longer suppress the problem in her heart. Although Marlene said that she could help her, Rhode didn’t think Marlene could because Marlene had never experienced it before. So of course she wouldn’t understand how Lize felt. Rhode thought that one of the worst things in the world was when someone who had never experienced the same thing said “I understand your feeling” to another person with a sympathetic tone. It

was basically b*llsh*t since they never experienced it. How could they still say that they understood?

But the help that Rhode could give her was also very limited. He knew that this kind of thing couldn't be solved by relying on others. If Lize herself couldn't pass this ridge, then no one would be able to help her. Rhode also understood that it was extremely difficult to make Lize pass the ridge by herself.

However to him, there was still a very good opportunity before him.

After knowing that the Burning Blade mercenary group had encountered a danger, Rhode quickly decided to help them. Although it was dangerous, but it was a good opportunity to train his subordinates. Moreover, after the floating ship incident, Rhode had been suspicious that the Wind Snakes were being controlled. It was too unusual for the Burning Blade to be attacked at this kind of time. Probably, they encountered the person who controlled the Wind Snake and got encircled in it. Or else, an ordinary Wind Snake group wouldn't reach thousands or millions. If that was the case, then to Rhode, it was the best opportunity for revenge. He wouldn't let go of someone that had injured him that easily.

When Rhode had just transmigrated to this world and was heavily injured, he could still break through the opponent encirclement and had escaped. Now, Rhode was no longer as "weak" as before. He would level up soon, and he was confident that he has enough strength to finish those guys. In addition, he still had a trump card...

After resting for a day, Lapis finally finished the task Rhode gave to her. With two dark circles under her eyes, she handed a bag full of potions to Rhode. Originally, the pitiful Lapis had planned to sleep after that, but she didn't expect that immediately after Rhode took the potions, he told them to depart. Facing this tragedy, Lapis couldn't help but follow the others and bitterly continue the journey.

On the other hand, Lize seemed to have forgotten about what happened last night. At this moment, she was walking beside Lapis while restoring her energy and comforting her. It seemed that she was no different than usual.

“I never thought that Uncle would be in trouble...”

Following Rhode from behind, Anne was still as carefree as usual. She was munching on an apple that she plucked out from nowhere and said, “You knew him?”

Hearing Anne’s words, Marlene curiously asked while holding the magic wand in her hand.

“I’m not sure how to say it. I met him a few times before with the old leader. He was a very taciturn fellow; he had a flat expression and didn’t even speak for the entire day. I remember when I first met him, he only said ‘Ehn’ to answer his subordinates. Honestly, at that time, I thought that he was a mute.”

Anne laughed.

“It just that Uncle is very amazing. I think he’s almost the same as the leader? He’s also very very strong, especially his sword. Yes, it’s really too much. Moreover, he’s the type that won’t show any mercy to women just like leader... Yes, I think leader will be very compatible with him?”

“Haa...” Hearing Anne’s answer, Marlene glanced at Rhode with a complicated look in her eyes but said nothing.

After that, Rhode rejected the request that mercenary had asked of him. The mercenary wanted him to ask for the Mercenary Association for help. But in Rhode’s opinion, it would just be a waste of time. When they got out of the Twilight Forest and went to look for reinforcements from the Mercenary Association, perhaps the Burning Blade mercenary group would already become history. Since Wind Snakes were a low level monster and a lot easier to deal with than undead creatures, Rhode quickly decided to let that mercenary to lead them to the Burning Blade mercenary group’s location and try to save them.

Although the mercenary doubted and hesitated for a while, he also knew that if he went back to look for the Mercenary Association’s help, it would

definitely be too late. It was better to let them try it. Since Rhode had also saved “Victorious Wine” in Silent Highland, he was supposed to be strong.

After hurrying up for the whole day, Rhode and others finally arrived at the location.

“It’s, it’s here.”

Pointing to the forest not far before him, the mercenary wiped his sweat and helplessly said.

“Leader and others are trapped inside, if we don’t hurry then...”

In fact, even without him mentioning it, everyone else also noticed the strange scene in the forest.

Numerous Wine Snakes formed a neat formation and shrouded the sky above the forest like a cloud. They were circling around from time to time, then flew up again. From the surroundings, it could be seen that a lot of Wind Snakes were spreading around and watching.

As expected, they were being controlled by someone.

Looking at this scene, Rhode could fully affirm that it wasn’t a natural disaster but a man-made one. This was done by a contracted mage who could manipulate a group of monsters by controlling the leader’s soul. It was almost the same as a Summoning Swordsman, since they also relied on numbers to win. What differentiated them from the Summoning Swordsman was that they couldn’t use their ability freely. Controlling tens of thousands of Wind Snakes like this could only be done in the wild, and they also had to ensure that the contracted monster didn’t die. Else, not only the monster would no longer obey the contracted mage, but might also hurt the mage back.

“It’s a contracted mage.”

Marlene quickly noticed. She frowned slightly and look a little bit troubled.

“Can we find him? Since he can control such a huge number of monsters, maybe he has reached the third middle circle, and the monster he controlled was probably at the commander level.”

“It’s useless even if we found him. It won’t do us any good.”

Rhode shook his head and rejected Marlene’s idea. Although there was an iron law—before shooting people, first shoot the horse and before capturing the thief, capture the King—it still depends on the situation. Since there were so many Wind Snakes, if they couldn’t attack first, then they would be cornered by the Wind Snakes, and Rhode didn’t want that to happen.

“Our main goal is to assemble with the Burning Blade first. With Hiller’s help, it will be easier to deal with those guys. We must also get ready; when it gets dark, we’ll start to move.”

It had to be said that Hiller was really a very wise person. Being surrounded by such a large number of snakes, he could actually still think calmly and brought his subordinates to the thick bushes to resist the enemy’s attack. It was a difficult decision because once people saw the number of Wind Snakes, they would usually be too afraid to do anything.

It seemed like the number 1 mercenary group in the Paphield area really lived up to its name.

As soon as he gave the command, Rhode glanced at Lize. At this time, she was expressionless and only quietly sitting next to him. There was a complicated look in her eyes while looking at the Wind Snakes not far from her. Rhode didn’t specifically go to comfort her; he understood that if Lize could rely on herself to get over it, then it would be better,

The night fell.

Under Rhode’s command, the mercenaries that were prepared long ago set out immediately. They were lurking in the forest and slowly moving forward with the help of the bushes and leaves to block the Wind Snakes from seeing them. At the beginning, things went pretty smoothly. The Wind Snakes that were floating in the air never thought of going into the forest to

inspect. In their opinion, those narrow spaces were very dangerous and made it difficult to move. That was why they always move in the plains. Forests full of leaves and bushes definitely weren't the best choice for them.

However, very soon, everyone encountered danger.

As they went deeper, the number of Wind Snakes also increased. They didn't come to attack Rhode; on the contrary, they were here to attack the enemies that they should have destroyed.

“Things cannot go on like this Mr. Rhode.”

Marlene held the wand and frowned. Hearing the fluttering wings and roaring sound not far from the forest, Marlene uneasily said, “Although according to the book, Wind Snakes have very poor sight in the dark, they are still very sensitive to sound. In such a big forest, we...”

“Don't worry, I have already made the preparation.”

Rhode took four bottles of potion out from his pocket. After that he handed it to Shauna, Anne, and Randolph.

“Open it.”

After hearing Rhode's command, the three of them quickly opened the bottles. Soon, an unpleasant and pungent stench filled their surroundings.

Chapter 121 - Saving Hiller's Soldiers (2)

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The pungent stench from the bottle quickly spread to the surroundings, which made many people frown and cover their nose. After all, the smell was really too strong; even Anne who was usually laughing leisurely was currently fanning her face with bitter expression. Apparently even she couldn't stand this kind of smell.

On the opposite, Lapis, the “culprit,” looked indifferent. The smell didn't seem to have any impact on her. After all, she was an alchemist; she made potions all day long. She could even bear smells more horrible than this. In her opinion, this had only reached an the appetizer level.

Marlene was a bit pale at this moment. However, the reason wasn't because of this pungent stench. She reached out with her finger and closed her eyes. After a moment, she frowned. She glanced at Rhode with surprised and uneasy expression.

“This is a gas element precipitation!”

As a mage, and a talented one, Marlene could easily feel the elemental wave in the surroundings. From the moment that strange smell spread, she could already feel the original active gas element precipitate and sink. It was just like children who were suddenly getting scolded by the adult while originally playing and having fun—they would sit down on the ground, quiet and motionlessly in a disconsolate manner.

As a mage, of course Marlene knew what that meant. For the gas element to suddenly precipitate, it means that the associated spells would be difficult to cast. Her favorite storm shield's power would be greatly reduced, even assuming she could cast it. The relationship between magic and elements

was like workers and factory. If the workers worked in full swing, the factory would naturally be able to generate a powerful energy. But if the workers worked swinging one by one, then it would naturally be impossible to create any threat.

However, at that moment, Marlene was exceptionally surprised because element precipitation was a very rare potion effect and most alchemists simply couldn't make it. However, Rhode seemed very familiar with it. After all, it was him who gave Lapis the recipe. Marlene wrote the recipe according to what Rhode had said; the quantities of the recipe's ingredients were so detailed—even to its gram. Even a potion master like Marlene didn't know the exact effect of this potion even after getting the recipe. She could only vaguely judge that based on the magical herbs in it, the potion would create a wide-range smoke.

But right now, Marlene was really surprised. She couldn't understand how Rhode got this recipe and how he could remember it so well. He was not an alchemist; he shouldn't be able to understand these kinds of things. Moreover, this element precipitation potion was very rare.

Is he really...

Marlene clenched her fist and placed it on her chest. She could feel her heart beating really fast.

At this time, the strange smell gradually filled the air and a strange scene suddenly appeared before them.

The Wind Snakes that were originally flying around in the forest suddenly wailed and fell to the ground as if they were hit by a huge boulder. Some Wind Snakes that were lucky enough to escape that catastrophe were running around as if they saw a ghost. They were screaming and desperately flew away. They didn't even care if their wings and body were scratched by sharp branches. They just kept flapping their wings swiftly to get away from the forest in fear.

In a blink of an eye, the forest became empty; beside the Wind Snakes that fell to the ground and kept crying out in despair, there was no other sound.

“Hmph!” Looking at the scene before him, Rhode coldly snorted.

He was familiar with this scene. In the game, many part-time alchemists killed the monster like that. Wind Snakes weren't like birds that were born with a body suitable for flying in the sky. The reason why they could fly in the air wasn't because they had wings; it was because they had a special ability as a gas elemental creature. They could use their skill to fly freely in the sky. If the sky was the ocean, then the Wind Snakes were like the boats that were floating on it.

But now, after completely suppressing the gas element by using a precipitation potion, the ocean had turned into a dry pond. Without water, fish could only helplessly struggle. This was the exact portrayal of what happened to the Wind Snakes before them right now.

They were just a group of stupid monsters that hadn't even reached level 5, and before, they actually made me look so pitiful. If I don't take my revenge, then my name isn't Rhode!

Rhode stomped on a Wind Snake that was still struggling. Below, the Wind Snake kept screaming and making shrill sound, but Rhode didn't seem to be bothered by it. He used his full force and crushed the Wind Snake into meatloaf. After that, he turned around and issued a command.

“The potion effect won't last too long! Speed up and get going!”

Hearing Rhode's order, the mercenaries wore a different expression on their faces and quickly began to get going. They followed Rhode and continued to walk into the forest under the Burning Blade mercenary group's survivor's lead.

No one noticed that Lize's face had turned pale while looking at the sky.

The dense leaves were blocking the starry sky, and sharp, hoarse cry of the Wind Snakes could be heard everywhere. It made her immediately remember the nightmare she had last night. The darkness-shrouded everything, the endless group of Wind Snakes, and...

Lize couldn't help but shiver.

That was just a nightmare, that's right, it was just a nightmare...

Just then, a hand patted her shoulder.

“Sister Lize.”

“Ah!!”

Lize, who was frightened, subconsciously jumped up and turned around. Only then, she saw that Anne was standing beside her. The girl who only knew how to eat and sleep everyday curiously looked at her. Her pair of clear, emerald eyes reflected Lize's frightened and uneasy expression.

“Are you okay? Do you feel uncomfortable?”

“No, I just... dozed off a little...”

Lize also didn't know how to explain. In the end, she only said so.

“Hmm...”

After she listened to Lize's answer, Anne carefully looked at her for a while then revealed her usual lively smile once again.

“When we fight, Sister must stand behind Anne, alright? Anne will definitely protect Sister!”

“Ah... Hm, I know, thank you, Anne.”

Facing Lize's panicked answer, Anne no longer said anything. She only smiled and patted Lize's shoulder. After that, she energetically jumped forward. Looking at Anne's figure, Lize couldn't help but sigh. Then, she stretched out her hand and slapped her cheeks forcefully.

That's right, now is not the time to doze off. I need to work hard!

Thinking until here, she took a deep breath. After that, she clenched both of her hands and looked at the front with a serious expression. The originally chaotic pace had become steadier.

Swoosh!!

A red light flashed through and broke the darkness like a fire dragon. The poor Wind Snakes that rushed towards the front didn't manage to dodge in time. They were swept into the beam and turned into ashes in a blink of an eye.

“How's the situation?”

Hiller looked at the dark forest and asked without turning his head.

“Very bad, Leader. Two-thirds of the people are heavily injured, five people among them are in bad condition and seem to be poisoned. Although we have tried our best... the number of survivors will be difficult to say.”

“Is that so.”

Hearing his subordinate's reply, Hiller's expression didn't change. He held a giant, burning sword in each of his hands while coldly watching the surroundings. The Wind Snakes that lost their companions were no longer as aggressive as before. This also gave an opportunity for Hiller to rest. But clearly, this experienced mercenary leader didn't take things lightly because he knew that the situation wasn't very good.

Hiller's mercenary group was attacked by Wind Snakes on their second day in the Twilight Forest. At first, they didn't really think highly of those Wind Snakes, since the Burning Blade was a first-class mercenary group, and those kind of monsters simply weren't even qualified to threaten them.

However, as time passed, the number of Wind Snakes also increased. Hiller finally noticed that the situation wasn't the same as he had imagined and how unusual it seemed. He made the decision and led his men to the forest. After that, the situation that developed was even more strange. In general, after entering into the forest, the Wind Snakes would choose to retreat.

However, this time they didn't leave as usual. On the contrary, the Wind Snakes completely surrounded the forest, encircled them, and kept attacking them day and night.

Since Hiller was no fool, he also realized that the Wind Snakes were being controlled and manipulated by someone.

The next battle has validated his speculation.

“Tell everyone to prepare; we will try it one more time.”

Hiller lifted the giant swords in his hands. The burning flame followed his movement and once again began raging up.

“We have to broke the encirclement as soon as possible!”

“... Yes, leader.”

After receiving Hiller's order, his men didn't feel the slightest hesitation. Although they were being attacked and some of them were injured, as long as it was the leader's order, they would follow it without hesitation. That's why after hearing Hiller's command, his subordinate didn't hesitate the slightest and directly told his companion about the order.

At the same time, a scream sounded.

What happened? Did those Wind Snakes start to attack?

The sudden changes immediately aroused Hiller's attention. He quickly looked at the surroundings in vigilance, but to his surprise, what he saw wasn't a scene of Wind Snakes rushing towards him. On the contrary, the Wind Snakes were retreating in panic and rushing to leave the forest.

What happened?

Hiller hadn't yet grasped the situation when he smelled a pungent stench. After that, he saw some people walk out of the forest before him.

“I’m happy to see that you guys are still alive,” the young man who stood at the front said.

Chapter 122 - Saving Hiller's Soldiers (3)

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Hiller put down the weapon in his hand because he had identified the two men who were walking in front of the group. The first man was the one that he had dispatched to seek the Mercenary Association's assistance and the other was the Starlight mercenary group leader, Rhode.

Why was he here?

Hiller's first thought was that Mercenary Association had received their reinforcement request and sent Starlight over. However, he quickly erased that speculation because the time was too short. He has sent his people a day ago; no matter how fast, it was still impossible for them to arrive at Deep Stone City and ask for reinforcements. But Hiller didn't say anything and put down his sword while looking at his subordinates with interrogating face. He knew that his mercenary would definitely gave him a complete answer.

"It's like this, leader." After looking at Hiller, the mercenary hastily said. "When we left, we were attacked by a group of Wind Snake. We didn't have the time to escape, including me... Fortunately, Mr. Rhode's Starlight mercenary group happened to be there and saved me. After hearing our circumstances, they volunteered to help us..."

After listening to his subordinate explanation, Hiller slowly looked toward Rhode. He extended his hand and heavily patted his shoulder. "Thank you."

These two words completely explained Hiller's feelings in this moment.

Since they were in the middle of escaping, naturally they wouldn't have the time to drink and talk to get to know more about each other. Soon, Lize and

Lapis were sent to help heal the injured and disinfect the poisoned. At this kind of time, the benefit of having spirit masters could clearly be seen. Although huge mercenary groups like the Burning Blade also had spirit masters, Hiller usually didn't bring them on a mission, given their characteristics. It was both to protect the mercenary group's valuable assets and prevent danger in these kinds of emergency situations.

While Lize and others were treating the wounded, Rhode began to discuss the problem with Hiller. Or to be exact, Rhode was discussing with Hiller's adjutant because in many cases, Hiller rarely spoke. His adjutant would have to help to convey his meaning. Except saying yes, Hiller would only occasionally shake his head to say no, and didn't seem to be planning to talk at all.

If Rhode's expression was like an iceberg that couldn't be melted, then Hiller's silence was like a-thousand-year-old rock. He only stood quietly while aging and almost never expressed his own opinion. But even so, people still couldn't ignore his existence.

"We also tried to break the Wind Snake's encirclement and did succeeded several times, but ultimately still failed in the end. The Wind Snakes were not that difficult to deal with, but they have a commander-level lord, which is really troublesome."

"Was there many commander-level lords?" Rhode asked sharply.

"Yes." The adjutant nodded.

"There were a total three Wind Snake Lords. No matter where we went, they would block us and... We were occasionally attacked by magic. I think there is someone manipulating the Wind Snakes from behind... No matter what, his purpose is to trap us here. Although we don't know who exactly the opponent is, but he seems to be a very dangerous guy." Having said those words, the adjutant looked up at Hiller, to which Hiller slightly nodded.

"By using a gas element precipitation potion, ordinary Wind Snakes shouldn't be able to get close to us. The abnormal changes in the Wind

Snakes must be caused by the Wind Snake Lords. I think those guys should be on their way here at this moment. That's why we must immediately move and leave this place."

Rhode opened his bag and took out four bottles of potion. "These are for you. To use it, just open the cap and hold it in your hand. The element precipitation will make ordinary Wind Snakes unable to come close. As for the Wind Snake Lords, although they are a little bit trickier, without help from groups of Wind Snake group, it shouldn't be too hard to finish them with our ability. The only trouble is that mage..."

Rhode frowned. It's not like he didn't think of the possibility that the opponent had noticed them and was trying to kill all of them here. Although the idea was very commendable, it didn't mean that he would willingly become the sacrifice of this conspiracy.

"Do you have information regarding his level?"

"This..."

The adjutant glanced at Hiller and uneasily said.

"We are not mages, so we don't really understand these things. But I can only say that the first time, we were sent back by a tornado, and the second time, there was a lightning bolt barrier that spread to the surroundings. These two times made us very terrified. We also tried again several times, but we never encountered any magic after that since we were already exhausted and blocked by the Wind Snake Lords."

"We don't have much time now." Hearing this, Rhode thought for a moment.

"Get ready to fight, we will move on right away. What do you think, Mr. Hiller?"

"Sure."

Hearing Rhode's inquiry, Hiller stood up and replied shortly, though with a determined tone. After that, he patted Rhode's shoulder, then pointed toward the mercenaries behind him and made a hand gesture.

"... What leader mean is, we'll all listen to you." Have to say, translating was really tiring.

"I hope we won't need this messy communication during the battle."

Faced with Hiller's attitude, Rhode helplessly rolled his eyes.

Soon, under the crowd's urge, the Burning Blade mercenary group quickly packed their luggage and dragged their weary bodies to follow Rhode on the way back.

The black-robed mage opened his eyes. "Interesting."

He quietly floating in the night sky, looking at the forest from afar. As a mage, it was basic to not expose himself to danger. It was especially for a contracted mage because contracted mages mostly only learned how to tame boss-level monster, so their magic level was a lot lower than that of average mages. Although the black-robed mage was considered strong, he was still reluctant to take the risk. He relied more on his skill in commanding rather than brute force—that was kind of thing better left to his subordinates. In his opinion, if a mage was already forced to the point that he couldn't help but face the opponent up front, then it meant that he had already completely lost.

That was why unless it was the last resort, he definitely wouldn't expose himself.

At this moment, with the power of his magic spell, the black-cloaked mage could clearly see what happened from afar.

"Those barbaric idiots actually didn't lose. It's really beyond my expectations. And uninvited guests has broke in... Hm?"

Through the manipulated object's eyes, the black-cloaked mage carefully looked at Rhode, then he closed his eyes and pondered.

“Speaking of it, that guy looks a little familiar. Ah, that's right, yesterday Frank asked me to... the target seemed to be that guy. Really unexpected that he actually take the initiative and come here by himself!”

The mage talked to himself, madly laughing, and lifted his right hand. He seemed to be muttering something. After hearing the spell he had casted, the surrounding Wind Snakes once again issued sharp cries, then rushed forward in union!

“Get ready, go!!”

The group of Wind Snakes didn't seem to affect Rhode. On the contrary, facing these terrifying monster, he was rather calm. After that, he took the potion from before and threw it aside. Soon, a pungent stench spread around and made people wanted to throw up,

The original advancing Wind Snake completely lost their previous demeanor. They fell to the ground one by one like a meteor. The Wind Snakes that lost their gas elemental support were unable to control themselves. They rushed towards sharp branches and splitted into two without mercy.

“Marlene!”

Upon hearing Rhode's order, Marlene was already prepared and immediately raised her wand. Soon, a brilliant lightning bolt flew out from her wand and swiftly flew toward the group of Wind Snakes. Followed by the continuous sound of explosions, the stench of blood from the Wind Snakes also spread around the forest. Mixed with the pungent stench from before, it was really disgusting.

“Oh?”

Noticing that his attack failed, the black-cloaked mage frowned. He closed his eyes, then revealed a trace of joy on his face.

“I didn’t see that coming; there’s actually a person who could think of such tactics. Not bad, it seems that this kid is smarter than those barbaric idiots. Then next... how will you deal with this?”

After mumbling by himself, the black cloak mage put his finger inside his mouth and whistled. Then...

“———!!”

Sharp, loud roar echoed. Three huge, six to seven meter-long white Wind Snakes suddenly appeared from the clouds. Their red eyes were full of killing intent and anger. They quickly fluttered their wings and rushed forward.

“They’re lords! Be careful!”

Hearing the sharp and loud roar, Rhode hurriedly raised his sword and quickly reminded others. At the same time, the three huge figure hovered down and blocked the path in front of them.

Boom!!

The powerful force overwhelmed even the oldest trees. With a gentle toss of a Wind Snake Lord’s tails, dozens of trees were sheared off. They hissed, then lower their heads, preparing to attack their prey.

At this moment, Rhode finally issued an order.

“Attack!”

Chapter 123 - Saving Hiller's Soldiers (4)

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Hiss——!!”

Followed by the hissing sound, the Wind Snake Lord lurked in the forest like a fish. Although the gas element precipitation potion had affected them to a certain degree, but it didn't reach a lethal effect like it did to ordinary Wind Snakes. On the contrary, after they noticed the precipitation of the surrounding gas element, the Wind Snake Lords became furious and tossed their tails while roaring. In a blink of an eye, a huge tree was cut down and sent rolling toward the crowd. However, before it hit them, a fire dragon fell from the sky, transforming the tree into ashes.

Hiller held a giant sword and stood beside Rhode.

“What should I do?”

“Just focus on the attack.”

Rhode answered without hesitation and quickly signalled the crowd behind him.

The first one to move was Anne.

She leapt to the front of other mercenaries like a cheetah. Her step was very light, as if the heavy golden shield in her hand didn't seem to exist. In the next moment, Anne stretched the shield on her hand and sharp blades emerged out and rotated around. But this time, she didn't throw it out. Instead, she grabbed the handle and pulled it open. The intricate gold shield was divided into two layers, inside and outside. It suddenly slid to two sides, like a blooming flowers slowly stretching out its petals. The Rock Heart that was embedded in the center of the shield expanded and rotated

rapidly. When everything was over, the shield in Anne's hand already turned into a giant the size of a round dining table that could envelope two Annes.

After that, Anne crouched down and swung the shield with force.

The rotating shield flew across the dark forest, occasionally reflecting a cold light. The Wind Snake Lords noticed the threat and quickly stopped. They moved to the side to dodge the shield blade that had torn through countless leaves and branches, leaving them looking like broken bamboo.

However, Rhode had already started to attack.

A little star-shaped light condensed from the Broken Blade and flew across the night sky. After Rhode has leveled up, the Broken Blade became more powerful and more threatening. If the previous Broken Blade was like a laser beam, then now the rotating light made it look more like a meteor shower that pierced through the night.

It was followed by Marlene, who was indeed a rare magical genius. Although she had only experienced a few missions with Rhode, her performance was like that of someone who had been cooperating with him for few years. After casting the spell with dragon language, the red ruby on her wand turned into a transparent white color. The temperature in the air had also decreased. The wand passed through the sky and brought about a faint white mist. After the fog dissipated, hundreds of icicles condensed into long swords and floated beside her. With a light step, Marlene jumped forward.

The others also didn't stop moving, and the Burning Blade mercenary group quickly went onwards. The rangers raised their longbow and aimed at the eyes of the Wind Snake Lord. Thieves who were skilled in poisoned flying knives threw their flying knives toward their targets. The swordsmen went around the perilous spot and arrived at the monster's side and began attacking. They were stopping another Wind Snake Lord from approaching.

The Burning Blade mercenary group finally demonstrated their strength as a strong mercenary group. Even if the leader didn't give them a clear

command, they still could perform they own duty clearly, without the slightest hesitation.

The Wind Snake that had just escaped from Anne’s flying shield attack didn’t expect that the following attacks would be so violent. The shining meteor easily penetrated its thin wings and relentlessly tore them apart, creating bloody wounds after bloody wounds.

The injured Wind Snake Lord immediately crashed to the ground. Originally, it was relying on its wings to compensate for the lack of a gas element and support its own body. However, now that its wings was injured, it was just like a damaged aircraft. Since there was no way for it to land, its only choice was to fall down.

The Wind Snake Lord was struggling to lift its head up, but it had not yet expressed its anger when hundreds of swords floated into the air and quickly flew towards it in three different directions. In a blink of an eye, the ice swords tire the Wind Snake Lord’s body apart.

As an elemental creature, the Wind Snake Lord’s resistance to magic wasn’t low, but it still depended on the attributes. If Marlene used the wind element, then the situation would already have turned into chaos. As a mage, naturally Marlene knew the most important thing when facing an elemental creature. Although ice swords weren’t the best option for restraining a Wind Snake Lord, but it was still enough to limit its action.

As expected, the Wind Snake Lord was unable to move in time and the continuous explosion was enough to stagger it. Since it had a resistance to magic, Marlene’s ice swords were only like mosquito bites. However, no one could stand being bitten by hundreds of mosquito at the same time.

At this moment, Hiller rushed forward and lifted the Fire Blade in his hand up high. The flame on the blade became more and more exuberant—as if it were a small sun—and then he swung it down.

“——!!”

The scorching flame on the blade easily cut through the Wind Snake Lord's proud scales. Blood sprayed out and the Wind Snake Lord screamed in pain. It immediately looked up and opened its mouth to reveal sharp fangs, immediately rushing down. This was the Wind Snake Lord's best move. It could move extremely fast by suppressing its muscles. Many people would neglect this part after they almost succeeded in defeating the Wind Snake Lord and turned into its delicious dinner.

Of course, it was impossible for Hiller to neglect this part.

His action could be considered very fast. After the sword hit the Wind Snake Lord, Hiller immediately jumped back to block the attack with his sword. However, even if he had calculated the movement in advance, the Wind Snake Lord's sharp fangs still stabbed into Hiller's giant blade. The red flame started burning, followed by a pungent smell.

Hiller's body shook slightly the moment the Wind Snake Lord's fangs collided with his blade and the Wind Snake Lord sprayed out its venom. Fortunately, the Fire Blade vaporized the venom in time, but that didn't mean that no harm was done.

A strange, black fog wrapped Hiller inside, and the deadly gas that emerged out was so disgusting and it could even kill a frail person. At this time, the Wind Snake Lord repeated its attack, since the previous attack had succeeded. It shrank its neck once again and rushed down.

However, at this moment, the Wind Snake Lord lifted its head quickly, its force so immense that it toppled many of the surrounding firm branches. But it didn't seem to care about it, and instead turned its head to angrily look to the side in pain.

Rhode, who didn't know what had arrived beside the Wind Snake Lord, withdrew his sword. The attack almost cut off the Wind Snake Lord's wing and left a shocking wound on it. The Wind Snake Lord that was attacking furiously glared at him. Soon, the air around the Wind Snake Lord rapidly rotated and turned into sharp sword aimed at Rhode. Waiting for the moment while Rhode jumped to dodge its attack, the Wind Snake Lord

once again shrunk its head as if he wanted to tear this damned prey into pieces.

It didn't see that when Rhode was jumping, he threw something with his right hand. It could only see that Rhode's figure flashed before him. Following its instinct, the Wind Snake Lord quickly chomped down and the feeling of blood and minced meat in its mouth made it feel joyous.

But this joy lasted less than half a minute.

An intense pain broke out in his mouth, and the intense air tore at its mouth and tongue. Currently, its teeth was breaking apart, and when it opened its mouth, the Wind Snake Lord was no longer as fierce as before. After being fatally injured, it began to desperately retreat, trying to escape the godforsaken place. Although an invisible force was still holding onto its body firmly, the force was still powerless in the face of survival instinct.

The Wind Snake Lord was retreating while using its natural force to create a wind barrier. The only thing it wanted to do now was to leave this place. Even it had forgotten that the sound that echoed in its brain couldn't be easily ignored.

Precisely because of that, the Wind Snake Lord didn't notice a small uplift on the ground that was aimed toward it and easily broke through the wind barrier toward the Wind Snake Lord.

When it finally realized the changing in the ground, it was already too late.

The sharp rock already pierced through the ground and penetrated through the Wind Snake Lord's body like a skewer. The element opposition had reached its limit, and the Wind Snake Lord's struggles and screams still wouldn't change its fate. Its tail swept around and toppled the surrounding trees. Blood sprayed out from its wounds. Following the Wind Snake Lord's intense movement, it left a trail of white smoke on the ground. A moment later, the exhausted Wind Snake Lord finally stopped moving. Its body was pierced just like that and it was no longer breathing.

“Sigh...”

Marlene was relieved. She put down her wand and immediately turned around to look at the other side.

The battle with the Wind Snake Lords was easier than they expected because Rhode and Hiller's collaboration compensated for each other's weaknesses. Rhode's Starlight mercenary group was stronger in one-on-one combat, but weak in group combat, while Hiller's Burning Blade mercenary group was exactly the opposite. Although among them, there was no one besides Hiller that was particularly outstanding in combat ability, neither of the two wished to face two Wind Snake Lords at the same time even if they were in a different environment. Rhode was worried about being overwhelmed by the opponent's number because he only had a few people, and Hiller was afraid of collapsing because of his group's weak average strength.

But now, the collaboration between the Starlight and Burning Blade mercenary groups made up for each other's disadvantage. When Anne, Marlene, and Rhode joined, their strength could no longer be contested by Level 25 Wind Snake Lords. On the other hand, the increase in the number of the mercenaries also made Lize's group healing spell more useful. While Rhode was focused on attacking his target, Lize kept casting her spell so that the mercenaries facing the other Wind Snake Lord wouldn't collapse. When Rhode assembled with the other mercenaries, the outcome of the battle was already tilted to the extreme.

The black-cloaked mage opened his eyes.

He knew what was going on. To the caster, the moment the soul connection broke off wasn't just like seeing his first girlfriend embracing another rich man without hesitation, but also led to an unimaginable anger. However, as a powerful mage, he calmed down and gently stroked the Wind Snake Lord below him, expressionless.

He knew the reason why the Wind Snake Lords he sent lost. In a gas precipitation environment, they were unable to react effectively, which was very deadly to a Wind Snake Lord. Now, he had to wait.

He believed that a suitable time would soon come.

Chapter 124 - Saving Hiller's Soldiers (5)

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Hiller put down his sword and looked at Rhode, who was standing not far from him. Rhode was looking at the Wind Snake Lord corpse below him, thinking about something Hiller didn't know.

Frankly, he didn't really have a good or bad impression of the Starlight mercenary group.

When he first found out about its existence, he only thought that it was unbelievable. But it was only to that extent, and he didn't really care about them anymore. It had been so many years since he first became a mercenary; he had seen a lot of things and so he didn't really feel strange about it. This kind of thing could happen anywhere. New mercenary, new leader; no matter what, it wasn't his problem.

After meeting Rhode for the first time in the Mercenary Joint Meeting, Hiller became quite curious about the handsome young man. It wasn't because of his appearance, but rather because of his attitude. During the Mercenary Joint Meeting, Rhode said that he wanted to destroy the Jade Tears mercenary group, but the way he said it didn't make it seem like he held a deep hatred toward them. It was purely because of contempt, just like a person standing high above and looking at the ants below him. He just felt angry because those ants were blocking the way.

He didn't even seem to think about them as a human beings.

Hiller didn't know why did he felt like that. In general, he thought he was supposed to feel that Rhode was a cruel guy—his heart already distorted and a man without common sense. However, he didn't feel like that toward Rhode. Rhode was smart, rational, calm, and composed. Rhode had also

chosen to save him, which meant that he didn't lack any positive characteristic that a human was supposed to have.

But his attitude was still the same.

Hiller could feel the way that Rhode look at him. Beside calmness, there was a trace of admiration in his eyes. But it wasn't an admiration toward a human being. To the contrary, the way Rhode looked at Hiller was like someone looking at a painting or a legendary sculpture.

Who is this young man?

Rhode didn't know what Hiller was thinking about right now. After fighting hand in hand with Hiller, it had reminisce him about his previous life as a player. During those times, he would also accept this kind of quest, battle together with an NPC, gain EXP points, level up, complete quest, obtain equipment, and receive rewards. It really never got old.

Now, it seemed like he had gone back to those days.

“Two Wind Snake Lords.”

Rhode looked at the battlefield, and there was a slight disappointment in his calmness.

“It's one less that what they said, and the mage didn't appear either.”

“I think he's going to show up soon.” Holding the wand on her hand, Marlene's face turned gloomy. “Although it's only a little, I can feel the magic wave. He should be monitoring us... This is clearly not a good sign, Mr. Rhode. Even though I cannot make an accurate judgement, I think the opponent's magic level is higher than mine. It's going to be troublesome.”

“How many bottles of the precipitation potion do we have left?”

“Eight bottles; they can only support us for an hour at most.” Lize quickly checked the inventory and answered.

One hour.

Rhode lifted his head to look at the sky. The Wind Snake group was still surrounding them from afar and didn't seem like it was planning to retreat. That meant that even though they still could persevere for one hour, it would still be useless.

“What should we do next? Leader?”

Anne held the gold shield in her hand, her face covered in blood and overwhelmed with fright. But she looked like her energetic self and stared at the other mercenaries who sat on the ground in silence. During the battle, Randolph and others didn't instantly use the skills they learned from training with Rhode. When facing this kind of enemy, they seemed to have just forgotten about the skills they learned and reverted back to their usual fighting style. Naturally, the outcome was just as he has expected. If not for Shauna's command and management, the current strength of Starlight members would have decreased.

Lapis's performance was even worse. At first, she gathered her courage to fight, but when a Wind Snake Lord's tail passed by above her, the pitiful girl immediately screamed and squatted down while protecting her head. She stayed in that position until the battle ended. Although this form of self defense seemed extremely weak, it did still managed to hold. While mercenaries were lying on the ground because they were injured by the Wind Snake Lord's counterattack, she actually lasted until the end of the battle without injury.

However, that didn't mean it cost her nothing. Because she squatted for too long, right now she was unable to stand up...

“Call Hiller here, we have to discuss about the next battle.” After thinking for a while, Rhode made a decision.

“What, lure him out?”

Hearing Rhode's words, Hiller's adjutant immediately blurted out. Hiller also frowned. Although he didn't say anything, the way he looked at Rhode clearly showed his bewilderment.

“That’s right.” Rhode nodded and quickly explained. “There’s isn’t much precipitation potion left. To protect this many people, it will only last for one hour. Within one hour, it’s impossible for us to get away from here. But, if we wait until we used up the precipitation potion, things will get very troublesome. During that time, the mage who was hiding from us will use the same tactic to trap us here. That’s why we must lure him out and force him to confront us. If we can finish him, then we will be done.”

“But mage rarely fight upfront.” The adjutant said while looking at Marlene, whose eyes were closed.

“Moreover, since there are only eight precipitation potion left, then couldn’t we leave before we used them up? Or, we can make more of it...”

“The material has been used up.” Rhode shrugged. “And there’s no time to make these potion anymore, but... This is exactly what I’m going to say.”

“What do you mean by that?”

Hearing Rhode’s words, the adjutant was surprised.

“Very easy, even though we know that we only have eight bottles of precipitation potion left, the opponent doesn’t know about it. We could pretend to keep using the potion to face the Wind Snakes. At that time he will inevitably come out himself. My idea is very simple. First, we will be using the potion’s effect to keep moving forward to show him that we’re not in any panic. Then, we will rest to show that we have the power to make that potion anytime. By doing so, he will inevitably came out personally since Wind Snakes are afraid of gas element precipitation. But as a contracted mage, it’s not a big deal for him. As long as we can successfully lure him out to fight us, it means we have succeeded halfway. Next, we will just have to finish him.”

“But... What if...”

“Then we will inevitably die.” Rhode of course knew what he meant.

“But if we use up the precipitation potion, our fate will be almost the same. That’s why at least, we need take the initiative since many mages are...” Speaking until here, Rhode looked at Marlene and then continued talking. “Conceited and think that their intelligence can see through any scheme. I think... we can do something about this.”

“But, but...”

Hearing until here, the adjutant stood up, but he didn’t manage to finish his words and was stopped by Hiller. This serious and calm man looked at Rhode for a moment then nodded. “... Let’s do it.”

It really was a dejected translation and helpless explanation.

The black-cloaked mage quickly noticed his target began to move.

However, it was different from what he had expected. They didn’t try to leave the forest in rush. To the contrary, their movement was strict and disciplined, but also not too fast. It seemed like they were walking toward the Twilight Forest outer border. What happened? Weren’t they afraid of being surrounded by Wind Snakes?

Seeing this scene, the black-cloaked mage frowned. He began to regret underestimating the opponen, which caused him to lose two Wind Snake Lords. But since he still had his trump card, there was no problem in losing some small fries: at least he was able to see their strength. Among them, there should be no one with enough ability to threaten him. The same with the mage girl that he noticed before. Although the girl had entered a middle circle at such a young age, which made him quite surprised, she was still lacking a lot compared to him.

However...

Thinking until here, the black-cloaked mage narrowed his eyes. The girl was very talented and made him felt quite threatened. He spent almost 50 years to finally achieve his current strength; that girl was only about 17 or 18, but has already in the middle circle. If he didn’t finish her now, there

might be another strong warrior in this country in the future. To him, it was definitely not good news.

He needed finish her now before she grew up.

Thinking until here, the black-cloaked mage clenched both of his fists and gradually condensed his magic.

The mercenaries carefully moved forward under the two leaders' command.

Although they were puzzled as to why they didn't leave this ghostly place immediately, they didn't ask and only quietly followed from behind, carefully looking at the surroundings while recovering their energy.

At this moment, Rhode was walking beside Marlene. "Are you really unable to find out the opponent level?"

"It's very difficult, Mr. Rhode. I can only be sure that the opponent is a lot stronger than me. His control toward elemental magic is also higher than mine. I'm unable to accurately pinpoint his strength. Except in an upfront battle, it's going to be a very difficult thing to do."

It was going to be troublesome.

Rhode frowned. He was not afraid of the opponent since if he couldn't finish the mage, he could just summon Qilian to solve the problem. It was just that Rhode didn't want to use this method because summoning the card require too much sacrifice; it would be better to save it for later.

At first Rhode still hoped that he could solve the problem by relying on his own strength, but it seemed that the current situation wasn't too good.

Although they defeated the Death Knight, which was a strong opponent, it was an upfront battle, so as long as they had enough people and enough strength, it wasn't difficult. However, mages was different—they were sly and feared. They have many methods to keep their life; except in the case of a deadly strike, they would still be able to completely escape. The only subordinate that Rhode could set for battle was Marlene. But although she

was a genius, but she wasn't ultimately a warrior. Marlene was still lacking experience in this kind of confrontation.

Then what should he do? Should he use Qilian?

Let see how the situation turns out.

Thinking until here, Rhode lifted his head to look at the sky once more. His expression suddenly turned serious. He quickly held onto Marlene and rolled to the side.

“Be careful!”

At the same time, a thunderbolt hit straight down from the gloomy dark clouds, to the spot where Marlene stood just now.

Chapter 125 - Red Lotus Feast (1)

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“I’m sorry, Mr. Rhode. I can’t do this...”

Marlene clenched her hands while looking at the man beside her who was listening to her reply with a pained expression. She could feel a trace of unwillingness in her heart. She was not a self-centered person; although she had been called as a genius for more than ten years, she learned the fact that there was always someone else better than her. Indeed, she was talented and capable. However, they were different compared with strength. Perhaps it was because of her age, so there was no one who could surpass level. But if it was the entire continent, there were a lot of mages who were still stronger than her. There was no way she could request having an opponent the same age as her; it was just not being realistic.

That was why Marlene was never ashamed to admit her deficiencies. However, this time she felt unwilling. Based on her sensitivity toward elemental reaction, she seemed to be able to catch the magic residual that the opponent left. With just one more step, she could already determine just how strong the opponent was. After going through many battles, she clearly understood just how important it was to find out about the enemy’s strength beforehand. If she did it after the battle started, there wouldn’t be enough time and it would be too late already.

But she just couldn’t do it; that mage’s controlling magic level was below hers, but he had more experience than her. She tried many times, but she was unable to figure anything out. She knew that the opponent’s level was higher than hers, but she couldn’t find out to what extent. It was just like looking at the moon in a foggy sky.

If I’m just a little bit stronger...

Thinking until here, Marlene dozed off.

Because of that, she didn't notice the huge magic wave that quietly condensed above her.

Boom!!

An earth-wrecking sound echoed in her ears.

The cold touch behind her back brought Marlene back to reality. The first thing he saw was Rhode who was tightly clinging to her, which made her flushed. However, at the next moment, after looking at the circling dark clouds in the sky, Marlene's expression changed.

She hurriedly extended her hand and the wand in her hand flashed. Soon, a polygonal barrier appeared and completely covered her.

“Everyone scatter! Rangers and thieves stay in place, everyone else is responsible for defense!”

Rhode had no time to ask anything; he quickly rolled and climbed up. At the same time, he gave commands to the others: what happened completely beyond his expectations. He didn't think that the mage would actually be so impatient as to immediately attack himself. Originally, Rhode thought that he would patiently lurk in the dark. But, he actually attacked so quickly and...

Thinking until here, Rhode was puzzled and glanced towards Marlene.

Instead of walking in front of the group, they were walking near the center of the group. They weren't supposed to be attacked. Rhode was aware of a mage's weaknesses: they were good at large scale attacks, but it would be more difficult for them facing a group attack. That was why, in general, before a mage launched an attack, they would usually cast a protection spell for themselves. They would attack the main lead after finishing the small fries. This was also the reason why Rhode didn't expect that the mage to attack him in the first place. He thought that the mage would choose to launch attack from the middle or the rear, then launched an attack on a large scale and leisurely finish the others. He didn't expect that he would actually attack Marlene.

Although taking into account that there was only one mage in his group, and if the enemy was able to finish her first, then the next move would be easier, Rhode still found it strange. A mage that could control a group of Wind Snakes and encircle the Burning Blade mercenary group for a few days actually lost his patience just because of their sudden appearance?

It seemed that the matter wasn't that simple.

At this moment, a thunderbolt heavily hit the ground. Apparently, the mercenaries had already prepared well. After they heard Rhode's command, they quickly scattered and hid themselves in the terrain. Although this might give them some pressure when facing the Wind Snakes, if they assembled together, there might be a chance to catch the mage. There were only a few newbies here, so most of them knew these theories.

Rhode pulled Marlene and Anne brought Lize to hide behind two boulders. Thunderbolts kept falling beside them, mixed with an earth-wrecking sound and shining light that almost completely blinded everyone's eyes. The soil on the ground had collapsed under the impact of the thunderbolt, the trees fell to the ground, and the remains were covered with flames and smoke.

For some times, it was as if the end of the world was about to come.

This was the true strength of a mage.

Luckily, this thunderstorm didn't last long and ended in about two to three minutes. However, Rhode and others didn't have time to relax when they suddenly heard a bursting sound from the air getting closer!

“Mr. Hiller, follow the original plan!”

Through the forest barrier, Rhode immediately could see the figure who was floating in the sky. A mage could only cast a magic spell in a place that he could see and the distance between them was Rhode's only advantage. But even after the culprit showed himself, it still didn't mean that he was easy to deal with. Looking at the Wind Snake that he sat on, it could clearly be seen that things weren't quite so simple.

After hearing Rhode's words, Hiller also ordered the others to quickly make a defensive preparation to face the upcoming Wind Snakes. This time, they didn't immediately use the gas element precipitation potion. This was what Rhode had planned: if they used it from the beginning, then the mage would likely retreat and defeating him afterwards would be more difficult. The plan was to use their own strength first to withstand the Wind Snake's attack; after the mage realized that they could no longer use the power of the potion, he would likely to take further action. If they could take advantage of the sudden outbreak at that time, maybe there was a possibility of defeating him.

This was a war between mages.

Marlene was wrapped in the protection spell. She stood up and solemnly look at the sky. She was muttering an ancient spell; at the same time, the mage who was sitting on top of the Wind Snake also clenched his fists. Now, the magic once again condensed and turned into a roaring Thunder Snake.

Then, the black-cloaked mage pressed down his hands. At the same time, Marlene heavily pressed her wand to the ground.

The condensed Thunder Snake opened its mouth and aimed towards her. At the same time, the ice crystal on Marlene's wand also began to surge and condensed into an Ice Eagle that spread its wings.

Two sides once again collided.

An explosive sound echoed in the air. For some times, even space seemed to be distorted because of the different elements in their magics. The ice crystals scattered around, turned into snow, and fell to the ground. It somehow looked beautiful.

However, both sides didn't stop attacking.

Marlene lightly muttered and a few flame-burning tornadoes came to the surface. They pierced the clouds and roared toward the black-cloaked mage. However, this time, he didn't wait for her to react; the Wind Snake suddenly

opened its mouth and screamed. The next moment, the whistling storm turned into a surging wave, forming a barrier that was several meters tall.

Both sides instantly met each other.

But this time, Marlene's expression changed.

When the storm barrier which stood upright like a wall came in contact with the flame tornado, it completely engulfed its power. The terrible force was enough to conquer a city, dissolve it by an intangible energy, and then reintegrated the energy into a barrier. Marlene could feel a surging wave reverse towards her; she couldn't help but back down a few steps to stabilize her stature. However, the originally shining gem had already turned dull; clearly, that mysterious force has caused quite a huge damage.

It was master level lord!

This thought flashed through Marlene's mind. She couldn't help but be surprised. Of course she knew what it meant to face a master level Wind Snake Lord: the opponent could freely control anything that was related to the wind element. Which meant that she could no longer use wind magic to injure the opponent, or else who knew what might happen to her if she casted that spell.

Facing the enemy that was floating in the air, if she didn't use wind element magic, then how was she supposed to deal with it?

The mage didn't wait until Marlene thought of the answer, and a thunderbolt emerged from that wind barrier once again and flew toward Marlene. Although she quickly reacted, she only managed to lift her wand when the thunderbolt arrived in front of her. The protective shield was broken, finally reaching its limit this and getting crushed like porcelain. It completely collapsed and the thunderbolt was rushing forward in a flash. It almost succeeded until a golden barrier appeared and blocked it.

Boom!!

Regardless of whether the enemy was successfully destroyed or not, even though the thunderbolt was blocked, it still created a violent explosion. Among the flames, Marlene's figure flew back and fell heavily on the ground. Soon, one hand held her shoulder, and then warm light wrapped around her body and healed her wound.

Lize squatted down beside Marlene. Her expression was very serious; in front of her, Anne was lifting the shield up high while focusing on looking at the person that was floating in the air.

“This really is unexpected...”

Looking at the four girls before him, the black-cloaked mage snorted. He glanced toward the Wind Snakes that followed his order and began to attack, but those vermin were blocking the snakes' advancement. But this was nothing; they'll be dead sooner or later—it was just a matter of time. However, the most important thing right now was to kill this mage.

Although they only have fought for a few strikes, the black-cloaked mage had already seen through Marlene's strength. Based on her current age, it was really unexpected for her controlling and reacting ability to reach that kind of extent. The black-cloaked mage had never seen such a frightening kid. Right now, he had completely given up the idea of bringing her back to become a servant. He was planning to kill all of them. After all, with such a talented kid like her, even if he controlled her sometimes, it would still difficult to ensure that no problem would arise in the future.

It was clearly an unwise decision to plant the seeds of a future calamity when women were abundant in the world.

Thinking until here, the black-cloaked mage narrowed his eyes. He patted the Wind Snake Lord's head and carefully looking at the people blocking the path in front of him.

Wait. Where did the man dressed in all black go?

Suddenly, a light piercing sound echoed from his back.

In the next moment, Rhode held onto a red sword aimed at the black cloaked mage's heart.

Chapter 126 - Red Lotus Feast (2)

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The black-cloaked mage couldn't react in time, but that didn't mean that was he going to die. When Rhode's sharp sword almost reached him, the Wind Snake Lord under the black-cloaked mage swung its tail violently aimed it toward Rhode!

Facing the Wind Snake Lord's counterattack, Rhode quickly reacted. Without hesitation, he had given up on the "first blood" attack that had almost succeeded and managed to dodge the Wind Snake's tail. If the tail hit him, then the "first blood" would be him.

At this moment, the black-cloaked mage turned around and coldly glared at Rhode.

This was not strange. After all, the black-cloaked mage was floating in the air. In this kind of situation, it was very unlikely for anyone to attack him from behind. That was why he only casted a protection arrow and a magic protection spell and didn't really make any preparation for a direct confrontation. Since a mage's soul power was very precious, it was better to save it up. If it's a battle on the ground, he definitely wouldn't do that. However, he was floating in the air, which was why the black cloaked mage didn't think about it.

But it seemed like he should change his mind.

The black-cloaked mage quickly retreated, and the Wind Snake Lord blocked Rhode. A mage wouldn't choose to fight a swordsman in an upfront battle. It definitely wasn't a good choice at anytime.

How did he fly here?

The black-cloaked mage narrowed his eyes and carefully look at Rhode. After that, he quickly turned his gaze on the transparent wings behind him.

What's that?

This sudden find made the black cloaked mage felt a little bit strange. Angel? Angels aren't supposed to have transparent wings? And the wings were a little bit too small; it didn't seem like an angel's, more like a bird's. It seemed to be a magic equipment, but he couldn't trace any magic wave when he used it.

“Tch!”

Just when the black-cloaked mage cautiously and carefully looked at Rhode, Rhode was still holding the sword on his hand and secretly cried in his heart. By relying on the Shadow Follower skill on Soul Messenger, he combined himself with the Spirit Bird and gained the ability to fly in the air.

Originally, Rhode intended to take advantage of the time when the black-cloaked mage fought with Marlene and deal him a fatal blow. Since mages weren't good at close combat and they were also lacking in resistance—in the game terms, it could be said that they had low HP. That was why in Rhode's opinion, if he could finish the mage now, then he would be greatly injured and easier to deal with later.

However, it was a pity that even a wise man could make mistake.

Rhode glared at the Wind Serpent Lord before him and clenched his teeth. That Wind Serpent was on a totally different level with the other two Wind Serpents from before. *A Master Level Wind Serpent Lord, it's really troublesome and...* Thinking until here, Rhode couldn't help but look at Marlene who was lying on the ground not far from him. He didn't know her situation right now, but it seemed that he could no longer depend on her.

“Marlene! Cheer up!!”

“I...”

Marlene forced herself to sit down, but her whole body felt powerless and weak. On the surface, the collision didn't look serious, but in truth, the collision between powerful magics at that moment turned the soul power

inside her body into confused state. Right now, she couldn't even use any magic to adjust the power inside her, let alone consider attacking.

“Damn, that guy is pretty though, I have to help him.”

Marlene held her wand and felt a trace of disappointment in her heart. She looked at the sky and saw three fuzzy figures was confronting each other. Of course she knew Rhode's plan and knew what her position was supposed to be in his plan, but now it seemed that his plan has failed... Then does he still have another way?

Marlene also didn't know.

But soon, she noticed that a hand was holding onto her body.

“Don't move first, Marlene. Your current condition is not too good.”

Lize shook her head and stopped Marlene's action. Then she also looked up towards the sky.

“I think, I can try to do it.”

“You?”

Hearing Lize's words, Marlene was surprised. As if she suddenly thought of something, her eyes widened.

“You want to use that? But you still can't control it properly! Lize, you can't do that; you're also a caster, you must also understand the risk of using a skill that you are still unable to control! If Mr. Rhode is here, he will definitely stop you from doing so!”

“But now he's not here, and we have no other choice.” Lize said while turning her head to look at the forest not far from them.

There, under Hiller and Shauna's command, the mercenaries were fighting against the Wind Serpents. The gas precipitation potion effect had begun to weaken and some of the Wind Serpents also began to come near them. It was still unknown for how long that they could resist.

“I will never let my nightmare come true; I will protect everyone. I definitely can do it!”

“You can’t! Anne, stop her!”

“Anne, I need your help. I hope you can protect us when I’m casting the spell.”

“No, Anne! Stop her, it’s suicidal!”

“Eh?”

Anne looked at Marlene’s worried expression and Lize’s serious expression. She showed some hesitation. Since it was her first time facing this kind of thing, Anne didn’t know who should she listen to.

“Anne, believe in me.”

Lize placed both of her hands in front of her chest and her expression was very serious.

“Do you still remember the battle between you and the Death Knight in Silent Highland? I’m also the same; I just want to protect everyone. I don’t want anyone to get hurt and I can do this. Believe in me, I’m not risking my life—I’m sure that I can do this. Now is the best opportunity to do so, or else, it’s hard to say what’s going to happen next.”

“... Alright, Sister Lize.”

Hearing until here, Anne finally nodded and lifted her shield.

“I will protect the both of you. Hang in there!”

At this moment, Rhode once again fought with the Wind Serpent Lord.

The Wind Serpent’s tail swung pass through Rhode. Violent airflow made him lose his balance and the Wind Serpent Lord’s sharp teeth suddenly appeared beside him. Just a bite was enough to turn his body into pieces. At this moment, the Spirit Bird “agile” characteristic finally came into use.

When the Wind Serpent Lord was biting down, Rhode's figure suddenly turned into a green straight line and quickly flew back, escaping from the Death God. However, that was not the end; after noticing that its attack has failed, the Wind Serpent suddenly widened its eyes and glared at Rhode. After that Rhode suddenly felt his body became heavy. The Spirit Bird that was originally attached to himself was being mercilessly forced to get out from his body by a powerful force. Then, it transformed back into a card and disappeared in the air.

Not good!

Rhode's heart sank; he had looked out for this move since the very beginning. Since the opponent was a Master Level Lord, this meant that it had an absolute control over the wind element. The Spirit Bird itself was an wind element creature; it was impossible for it defy a Master Level Lord. Originally, he intended to retreat immediately once his attack had failed and wait, but it seemed that the opponent's movement was even faster that what he had imagined. According to the previous attack, Rhode had also almost figured out the level of the black-cloaked mage controlling the Wind Serpent.

A contracted mage that was able to make a contract with Master Level Wind Serpent Lord meant that he was at least a Level 50 Grand Mage!

Thinking until here, Rhode couldn't help but secretly curse at heart. *Those b*stards from the Country of Light really are generous; they actually brought a Level 50 middle circle mage that could become a Magic Association agent in small city to become a thief here. It seemed like the Country of Light really want to finish their lives!*

But now was not the time for him to complain. After he lost the Spirit Bird's help, Rhode no longer had the ability to fly and immediately turned back to his human form. He landed down, following the gravity; at the same time, Rhode caught a trace of bright light in his eyes and countless thunderbolts appeared from the sky, aiming toward him.

That guy sure is fast. Ah, I don't care anymore!

Thinking until here, Rhode quickly made up his mind. He instantly stretched his left hand and a summoning circle appeared in the air; the Holy Sword card once again appeared in his hand, and he took it and clenched it with force.

After that, a white, soft hand caught him.

Celia fluttered her wings and slowed down Rhode's fall. She didn't look up and quickly stretched out her wings. She leaned to protect Rhode by shielding him with her body. After that, a thunderbolt struck down and hit her body.

Boom boom boom!!

Followed by the earth-wrecking sound, sparks were igniting and broke her white wings. Her body seemed to tremble like a small boat struck by a stormy sea, but she still clenched her teeth and suffered the thunderbolt's continuous attack.

“Angel?!”

Looking at this scene, the black-cloaked mage was taken aback and his movement became slower. He didn't know where did the angel suddenly came from. As a Country of Light's inhabitant, he naturally knew that angels had a noble position in the mainland. If others knew that he did killed an angel, he would definitely be finished!

The black-cloaked man shook his head and put aside his hesitation. There was no use regretting it now. Since he started it, it would be just fine as long as he could kill the people here so he wouldn't have to be afraid of being exposed! This angel also didn't look strong; it didn't seem like it'd be difficult to get her!

This matter couldn't be delayed, so the mage moved immediately.

Thinking until here, the black-cloaked mage immediately raised his hand, once again wanting to control his power and deal a fatal blow on the target.

At this moment, a dazzling gold light suddenly appeared and caught his attention.

When the black-cloaked mage turned his head around, he saw a gorgeous, dazzling light beam.

Chapter 127 - Red Lotus Feast (3)

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Lize spread out her hands.

A white holy light condensed in her hands and flowed in a way she had never experienced before.

Currently, the holy power that used to flow like a clear spring was showing a fierce side it had never showed before. The power was surging forward from Lize's hand like a wild horse that was struggling to get out of its shackles. Right now, Lize was biting her lips firmly, trying to control the power for her own use. However, it wasn't easy; as a Cleric, she had always been biased toward supporting power rather than offensive power, so she was naturally lacking in experience. It was just like a man who usually drove a classic car, but was suddenly given an F1 car—it was impossible for him to be good at driving it.

But Lize was still resisting. Sometimes she could even feel that it was not her who was manipulating the spell, but rather the spell that was manipulating her. It was just like a greedy beast that sucked on her strength for its own use. She felt her body begin to get tired and even her strength somewhat subsided. But she still resisted. She didn't want the nightmare to become a reality; no matter what, she wouldn't accept that kind of future! As long as she was still here, then she would never allow herself to be powerless and just watch her comrades die one by one just like before!

This is my mercenary group; I will protect it no matter what!

The power was getting stronger and the resistance more violent.

Lize still persevered and she slowly moved her hands to hold the power. She secretly mumbled the ancient spell and the dragon language could be heard. The language was strangling the power that was out of order forcefully, making it to listen to her order. Lize looked up towards the sky.

Countless golden beams burst out from her hands. They spun around and aimed toward different directions. A dazzling light shrouded everyone for a moment, even the sun in the sky had temporarily lost its color

“Holy Verdict!?”

Looking at the scene before him, the black-cloaked mage’s expression changed. Although mages and clerics could both be classified as a caster, the energy that they controlled was different. While cleric attack spells didn’t vary in complexity like a mage’s spell, in terms of penetrating power, it was even more terrifying than mage’s. He was confident on blocking Marlene’s magic by using his own magic, but when facing Lize’s spiritual power, he couldn’t help but get serious and carefully deal with it.

The black-cloaked mage quickly reacted. He lifted his left hand and thunderbolts appeared from his fingers, expanding and connecting to form a net. It was aiming toward the golden beam.

Soon, two sides collided.

The continuous golden beam hit the thunder wall and a burst of explosions sounded. With the flashing thunderbolts and explosion, the entire sky looked as if it was torn. It was a very frightening scene.

After casting the spell, Lize fell to the ground. The offensive spell was far beyond her ability, depleting almost all of the energy in her body. If not because the half-angel blood that ran through her veins, she might have been unconscious already.

Anne hurriedly held onto Lize’s body and brought her to Marlene’s side. At the same time, a thunderbolt struck down from the sky. Fortunately, Anne had long been prepared. She quickly pulled Lize back and placed the shield in front to protect the three of them. At the same time, the stone hard surface quickly covered her skin, and in a blink of an eye it completely wrapped around her and turned her into a perfect statue.

Boom!!!

The thunderbolt hit the fine gold shield heavily. A huge force shook her body, but she still clenched her teeth and persevered. But it was not without any sacrifice. The stone-hard surface that had covered her skin before had been completely shattered to withstand that impact. If she did it again, most likely she would not be able to hold it anymore.

At this moment, a hand patted her shoulder

“You did well, Anne.”

Anne turned her head in surprise, then she realized that Rhode has come to her side. He looked pitiful, but his expression remained calm as usual.

“Leave it to me.”

Hearing Rhode’s words, Anne didn’t refute. She quickly retreated to take care of Lize and Marlene. From the distance, it could be seen that the mercenaries could no longer hold on anymore. They began to act on the defensive, and there was someone who turned around and shouted toward them, but what they said couldn’t be heard clearly. Another pungent smell spread out, meaning that the mercenaries had already started using the next four gas precipitation potions.

Rhode looked toward the sky and the smoke gradually disappeared. The black-cloaked mage and the Wind Snake Lord once again appeared.

Rhode frowned.

Honestly, Rhode didn’t want to use his trump card unless it was necessary, because first, it costs EXP points, and second, his information regarding the card wasn’t clear. He didn’t want to use a power he didn’t fully understand, but it seemed that he had to do it now.

Rhode made this decision after realizing the black-cloaked mage’s true strength when he failed in his surprise attack. Indeed, a Level 50 Mage really was hard to deal with. Although the contracted mage’s offensive powers weren’t as strong as an elemental or arcane mage’s, it also depended on the opponent. If Rhode was on the same level as him, then he definitely

would have already beaten him, but the gap between them forced Rhode to change his mind. This battle was just like a battle between Level 80 Cleric and Level 10 Warrior. Even if the cleric didn't use any skills, a stick would be enough to kill that fully armed warrior. This was the difference between them. Since Rhode couldn't make up for the gap, it meant that the battle had ended.

This is the only way.

Thinking until here, Rhode extended his hand and soon, a red card slowly rotated and emerged in his hand.

Following the appearance of the red card, the surrounding temperature gradually began to rise...

A sword light flashed.

The Wind Snake screamed as it turn to ashes in the flames. Hiller put down the sword in his hand and took a few steps back to take a breath. He subconsciously turned around, but he had not yet received Rhode's signal. *What happened? Did Rhode encounter any trouble? Or...* Thinking until here, Hiller shook his head. *It's meaningless to think about that now. The only thing I can do is to lead my men to counterattack.*

Hiller reached to take out the precipitation potion. He didn't know why, but the Wind Snakes had begun to adapt to their current environment. In the beginning, only a few lucky ones could break through, but now their number kept increasing and it could be seen that they were not stupid. After they noticed that the melee attack was ineffective, they began to spray out their venom from afar. It was really troublesome...

A burning, hot wind blew through from behind.

Hiller couldn't help but tremble when the air passed him; he could even feel as if he was leaning back against a stove.

After that, the flame that burned on his blade began to weaken.

What happened?

Looking at the blade in his hand, Hiller was surprised. This elemental weapon had been following him for so many years and he had never seen such thing happen before. This blade was made of a complete fire element; as long as there was a fire element in the air, it would never be destroyed. But what's going on now?

What happened?

Hiller wasn't the only one thinking about this question; at this moment, the black-cloaked mage who was floating in the air also thought the exact same thing.

The smokes from the explosions dissipated, and the black-cloaked mage easily saw the bugs who were standing below him. Clearly, they no longer had any more tricks up their sleeves. Although he still couldn't figure out how that strange young man could float in the air, apparently the young man didn't expect the Wind Snake Lord to have the ability to expel lower level wind elements. This Wind Snake Lord was something that he obtained through difficulty and couldn't be compared to the previous two wastrels.

Well, it's game over.

The black-cloaked mage raised his right hand and pointed to the crowd. Energy began to condense between his fingers; as long as he wanted it, the energy would turn into a strong thunderbolt and completely destroy the bugs in front of him.

Just then, he saw the black-haired young man also raised his right hand, and a hot wind suddenly flashed in a blink of an eye.

At this moment, the black-cloaked mage was surprised that he couldn't cast the spell that he had prepared to do so!

It was as if it had been sealed by something and couldn't be launched.

What happened?

Is it the young man who sealed his spell? How could this be?

The black-cloaked mage began to sweat out, and he looked at Rhode with puzzled expression. It was impossible; that young man definitely couldn't have such a power. If he could really seal the mage's spells, then the mage would probably be dead by now. *What is he trying to do?*

The black-cloaked mage carefully observed him curiously. After that, he finally noticed.

Red-colored force was rotating in the air with Rhode as its center. It was just like a red smoke condensed into a whirlwind and moving closer to the center.

There was no powerful magic.

There was also no terrifying roar.

But the black-cloaked mage didn't know why he felt such fear; it was as if he was standing beneath a cliff while watching boulders fall down. He couldn't even move, as if there was a big hand somewhere that firmly grasped his body. It was useless no matter how much he struggled.

At the same time, Rhode tightly grabbed the card in his hand.

Following his movement, the red smoke started to draw in and assemble together.

A bright red lotus flame rose to the sky.

Chapter 128 - Red Lotus Feast (4)

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

At that moment, it was as if the world had lost its color.

Everyone in the battlefield couldn't help but turn around to look at the red flame pillar that rose to the sky and penetrated the clouds. The violent Wind Snakes were trembling and retreating back, not daring to come near.

The flame pillar appeared and disappeared so quickly that everyone felt as if a light had briefly flashed. In the next moment, the huge flame pillar disappeared without a trace, and it was replaced by a person who floated above Rhode.

It was a girl.

Or, to be exact, it was an existence enough to make everyone stunned and hold their breath.

She had flawless, porcelain white skin, a small nose, pink lips that gently tilted up, a smile with a touch of temptation, and two large, sparkling eyes gave people a playful and cute feeling. Her pale, pink hair was tied back in a ponytail with a blue bow that reached down to her foot. The outer red robe and inner white robe went down from her shoulder. Her slender neck, lovely doll-like shoulder, and plump, round chest showed off her cleavage. Just looking at her was enough to make men feel excited.

The sides of the robe were completely cut off from the waist, boldly exposed her beautiful, slender legs. The black stocking and knee-length skirt were really eye-catching.

She was like a contradiction between innocence and seduction. She looked as if she didn't know anything about the world, but she actually revealed her allure. Any men who saw her couldn't help but want to be on top of her

and ravage her body to fulfill their unparalleled pleasure and their desire to conquer.

However, the brown, fluffy ears and tail on her body exposed her identity as not being human.

“Master finally summoned me; do you know how long I’ve been waiting?”

When everyone had not yet recovered from her sudden appearance, she chuckled and rushed down. She affectionately hugged Rhode from behind.

“Master, shouldn’t you summon me at the start? If you did so, there’d be no way for that trash to toss you around like this. Please rest assured; since I have come, I won’t let this trash hurt you anymore! Please wait and enjoy how I deal with this group of trash! I will let these guys know the result of annoying Master. They will taste eternal pain in the Red Lotus Flame. Fufufu...”

After saying this, she chuckled and didn’t wait for Rhode to react, flying up to the black-cloaked mage’s side. The smile on her face was enough to seduce a man, but the words that came out from her mouth were completely different from her expression.

“So, are you ready to atone for your rude behaviour, incompetent trash? Such a low creature like you actually dares to hurt my beloved master. I think it’s time to let you know just how painful the anger of the Red Lotus Flame is...”

“You, what are you!”

The black-cloaked man was terrified, trembling as if the person who stood before him wasn’t a girl, but a very terrifying beast. The light that reflected from her eyes as she glared at him made the black-cloaked mage feel scared. After he reacted, he quickly backed down and lifted his right hand in anger.

“Finish her! Wind Snake Lord, hear my command! Attack!”

“——!!”

Unexpectedly, the Wind Snake Lord that he originally contracted and was supposed to listen to his order shivered and curled up. The violence from before had disappeared and was replaced by fear. Facing such a strong opponent, it was the instinctive reaction of the weak.

“Attack, I command you to attack!”

Seeing the Wind Snake Lord anomaly, the black-cloaked mage couldn't help but be surprised for a moment. But he still didn't give up and slowly backed down while continuing to use the power of his contract and forced the Wind Snake to obey his command.

“Ha...a.”

The girl narrowed her eyes and looked at the black-cloaked mage like she was watching a boring drama.

“Low class is low, even lower than an animal... However, this might be the interesting part of a human. Well, I grant you the qualification to fight me and use your meaningless power to make a final struggle. Perhaps this will be more interesting, no?”

She lightly laughed and quickly backed down. After that, the pressure that enveloped the black-cloaked mage and Wind Snake Lord disappeared.

“Attack!!”

After noticing that the pressure on his body was reduced, the black-cloaked mage immediately issued an order. He didn't know whether it was because his will had completely controlled the Wind Snake, or if it was a instinctive resistance when facing death, but after hearing the black-cloaked mage's order, the Wind Snake Lord opened its mouth and rushed toward the girl. Under its call, the Wind Snakes that were responsible for attacking the mercenaries immediately changed direction. Since the effect of the precipitation potion had disappeared, they once again overwhelmed the

situation, enveloped the sky, screamed from all directions and rushed toward the girl.

They opened their mouths, exposing their sharp fangs, screaming one after another. Not only the Wind Snake Lord, but even the Wind Snake group was in fear. It was their biological instinct to resist the strong! This was their final struggle!

After a while, thousands of Wind Snakes crossed the mercenaries' defense line and escaped from the dangerous, precipitated area. They rushed toward the girl who was floating in the sky. At this moment, the black-cloaked mage began to chant his spell. Followed by a roar, dark clouds began to rotate rapidly and lightning kept flashing, showing off its powerful force.

“Holy soul bless...”

The scene before them couldn't help but affect everyone's emotion. Lize subconsciously covered her mouth; it was just like the nightmare she had last night—the Wind Snakes would tear them into pieces. Marlene couldn't help but tremble, though not because she was afraid. It was because of the powerful magic in the surrounding.

“This, how's this possible, such a powerful force...”

Rhode stood on the ground and frowned, carefully observing the girl who floated in the air. Although he completely believed in the Commander Level Lord's strength, her performance didn't look reliable. But at the same time, Rhode was also curious. *How would she eliminate those guys?*

“Ah... really boring.” Facing this group of terrifying Wind Snakes, the girl boredly yawned. After that, she flipped her left hand and pulled a piece of paper from nowhere, grabbing it with her right hand. A pen suddenly appeared. The girl looked down began to concentrate on writing on the paper.

“Since trash can fight to this extent, I won't play with you guys anymore... Just die.”

Saying until here, the pen in her hand fell on the paper.

At this moment, suddenly a few strange things happened.

Three beautiful magic runes appeared and wrapped around her, constantly rotating. However, this time, the Wind Snake group also reached her.

In the next moment, everyone witnessed an unforgettable scene.

Fireballs.

Countless fireballs were fired out from the magic runes and aimed toward all direction. The sky was filled with red flames, spreading around like a storm and swallowing all the Wind Snakes around it.

Facing this attack, the Wind Snakes could only scream and flap their wings, trying to turn around to escape this terrible hell. But the fireballs didn't wait until they moved, smashing into the Wind Snakes and turning them into ashes.

In just one round, almost half of the Wind Snakes were completely engulfed in the Red Lotus Flame. The rest of them no longer planned on continuing the attack; the only thing they could do was to leave this terrible hell.

However, a cry stopped their movement.

Perhaps because it was aware that its death was coming, the Wind Snake Lord fluttered its wings, screamed, and rushed over. The whirlwind beside it turned into a violent tornado shield. The tornado shield rushed to cover up the sky full of fireballs. It was its pride as a Lord; it had to die in the battle with the enemy!

However, facing the Wind Snake Lord's counterattack, the girl who was writing something on the paper just glanced at it and once again turned her head.

“Such a desperate struggle.”

At this time, the runes changed once again.

The runes that were firing out fireballs from before suddenly fired out a light beam. It was aiming toward the distance, forming into fireballs, and then exploding. It was a very beautiful scene. From afar, it looked like glittering fireworks in the sky. Sometimes, the mercenaries on the ground even looked happy and relaxed, almost forgetting that they were in the middle of a battlefield.

But the Wind Snakes didn't have much leisure. Every fireball explosion would only bring more fire. Facing such a crazy attack, the only thing they could do was to hide and escape. The wind barrier on the Wind Snake gradually weakened. The fireballs continuously exploded; it was just a matter of time before the Wind Snake Lord's wind barrier would collapse. Although it tried very hard to set off a storm, under such a splendid attack, there was no way for it to set off even the slightest wind.

To end this, the girl only wrote a sentence.

“Let's stop here.”

The fireballs stopped.

The previously hot temperature dropped back to normal.

“Just die!”

At this moment, the black-cloaked mage was finally ready for his attack. Followed by his shouts, thick clouds gradually covered the sky, and a huge thunderbolt flashed down toward the girl.

It was a success!

Looking at the girl who looked defenseless, the black-cloaked mage felt joyful. This was his most powerful spell; the power could even destroy half a city. As a contracted mage, the black-cloaked mage knew his weakness, so he modified this spell to be fiercer and more violent. Facing such a powerful spell, even a Grand Mage needed to get serious, but the opponent actually dared look down on him. This time, she was dead!

However, the next scene left him completely stunned.

The thunderbolt indeed flashed down, but it didn't hit the target. The girl didn't dodge it, or even try to escape from it. The thunderbolt just *stopped* beside her.

That's right, it was as if the time had stopped. It just stopped beside her. Such powerful attack like a fierce beast had now become a obedient lamb without any resistance.

“How's that possible?”

The black-cloaked mage panicked and looked back down. The scene before him didn't make any sense.

How did she do it?

How did she do it?

It's impossible, no one could take control of that spell so easily. No one...

Thinking until here, the black cloaked mage seemed to be realize something. He turned around and looked at her ears and tail.

“I-it can't be...”

“A trash with only this kind of strength shouldn't even bother to annoy Master.”

The girl didn't even lift her head and just waved her hand. After that, the thunderbolt suddenly turned its direction and aimed toward the black-cloaked mage.

“No!!!”

Facing the incoming thunderbolt, the black cloaked mage who was in despair desperately flew back. But it was still too late.

The thunderbolt pierced through his body, and followed by the incoming flame, everything was completely devoured.

After a moment, there was nothing left beside the girl.

There were only pieces of dust that fell to the ground like a snow.

That was all that was left.

Everything was over.

Chapter 129 - A Woman's Secret

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

It was too frightening.

Looking at the sky full of snow-like dust, Rhode couldn't help but feel a chill down his spine. Although he knew that a Commander Level Lord was very strong, this overwhelming power still made him surprised. Although he had never fought similar opponents before, the Spirit Swordsman would usually take advantage of numbers, speed, and outbreak. That's why he was better in a fast-paced battle. Rhode had only seen this kind of magnificent battle scene, and that had left a deep impression of a very OP boss battle.

Now, he finally experienced seeing such a powerful force again.

Beside him, Lize, Marlene, and Anne could only stare at the sky. They were at a loss. Even Rhode, who had experienced countless battles couldn't help but feel surprised at the scene before him, not to mention these "newbies" who had never seen a Commander Level Lord battle.

"Fufufu..."

At this moment, followed by a laughing sound, the girl leisurely passed through the sky, accompanied by the glimpse of red line streaking behind her and came toward Rhode. Both of her hands were placed behind her back, and she stood straight and proudly looked at Rhode.

"How is it, Master? Are you satisfied with what I did?"

"Not bad."

Rhode only nodded when facing this summoned spirit. At the same time, he curiously observed her. He didn't know why he felt that this girl was a little bit different from his other summoned spirits. Compared to Celia, she was more aggressive and uncontrollable. The summoned spirits that Rhode had

previously summoned all of had their own conscious, but they only move according to Rhode's command. Just take the tragic self-explosion of the hound: at first, it wasn't willing to follow Rhode's command to die and was just like any person that was being threatened by a gun from behind to go onto the battlefield. Now, it actually very actively sacrificed itself once summoned; it seemed like long term brainwashing under high pressure was really effective.

But they acted completely different from the girl. They accepted Rhode's command unconditionally; but for the girl, Rhode was suddenly unsure if she would do the same.

In the game, he never had the experience of summoning a Commander Level Lord. Frankly, there was also no other player who did. Even though there were cases where a summoned spirit betrayed a contracted mage because the summoner's level and soul power weren't sufficient, it was still quite stable for spirit swordsman.

After hearing Rhode's answer, the girl smiled wider.

"Then, can I ask for a reward?"

"Reward?"

Rhode hadn't yet reacted when she suddenly extended her hand and held Rhode's shoulder. After that, her soft body tightly pressed toward Rhode.

In the next moment, Rhode could feel a cold, gentle, and seductive touch on his lips. Her soft tongue easily penetrated inside and wrapped around Rhode's tongue. The sweet fragrance on her body suddenly got stronger and Rhode could feel a burning hot saliva flowing from her mouth and spreading into his entire body. This made his whole body feel hot at that moment.

After awhile, she finally let him go. She smiled at Rhode, sticking out her tongue to lick her lips.

At this moment, the other three girls beside Rhode were completely frozen.

Marlene was staring at both of them. Her face was flushed. Lize was also surprised, her mouth was wide open, but she didn't know what to say. Anne covered her eyes with her hands, but she secretly peeked at this scene from a gap between her fingers.

“What does this mean?”

Rhode rubbed his lips and felt confused. It wasn't that he had no kissing experience, but it was his first time being forcefully snatched. His body was still burning hot, as if he still could feel the soft body that was pressed against his. In this kind of situation, a man with low self-control might have already rushed toward her right now.

Fortunately, Rhode's expression only changed and frowned while he looked at her.

After seeing Rhode's expression, she showed a grateful expression and smiled. She placed her finger on her lips and playfully smiled.

“This is my reward, and this is to celebrate our reunion. Master, it's been a long time.”

Reunion?

After hearing this word, Rhode was stunned. He frowned and carefully looked at the girl before him and once again confirmed that he had never seen the girl before.

“I've never seen you before.”

“Bubu——!”

Hearing Rhode's reply, she only lifted both of her hands and made an 'x' gesture in front of him.

“That answer is wrong. Master, as a man, after seeing such a beautiful girl like me, you should at least pretend or something. Answering me shortly like that really hurt me. Just now, my affection toward you has begun to drop like a stock; if you don't take any measure, it will be too late already.”

“Ah? Really, then...”

Facing her jokes, Rhode seemed to want to say something, but afterward, he suddenly stopped and raised his head in surprise.

“You...”

Seeing his surprised look, the girl once again exposed a proud smile.

“Haven’t I said it clearly? This is my reunion with Master. Finally, we can meet each other in real world.”

Saying until here, she once again lifted her finger and placed it on her lips.

“I know what Master is thinking, but right now I still cannot answer that question. Although I’m your summoned spirit, I still have the authority to stay silent, right?”

“Not answering, it means... you know what’s happening?”

After glancing towards the people beside him, Rhode lowered his voice.

“That’s right.”

Facing Rhode’s question, the girl firmly nodded.

“However, Master doesn’t have to know these things... Master just has to do what he wants to do. There’s no difference between usual. And...”

Saying until here, the girl paused.

“... Wait until the time comes, and I will definitely tell Master about this. But before that, please be patient, okay? An impatient man isn’t well-loved by women.”

Hearing these words, Rhode clenched his hand, then quickly let it go.

“Then, at least tell me your name, Miss.”

“Naturally.”

The girl proudly lifted her head while wagging her fluffy red tail.

“My name is Gillian. I used to be Master’s most loyal companion. I hope Master won’t forget about this, then...”

Saying until here, Gillian stopped, After that, she looked at the other three girls who stood behind Rhode, then winked at Rhode.

“I don’t have much time. I hope next time I can spend the time more leisurely. It seems like the days you spent here are not bad; you’ve found three women in such a short time. Although they’re not as good as me, they still look qualified to fulfill Master’s desire. Yes.. but I suggest you should quickly have a taste of them. Woman are just like dessert; they will expire if you neglect it for too long. Of course, if they like to be neglected, I have no comment.”

“...I will remember.”

Facing Gillian’s sly smile, Rhode helplessly pressed his forehead. Facing this summoned spirit that always said unexpected things made Rhode’s head hurt.

“Very well, then please accept this.”

After getting Rhode’s reply, Gillian satisfiedly smiled. After that, she spread out her hands and handed out a letter to Rhode.

“This...”

Rhode curiously took the letter. The letter was folded and sealed from the outside with a heart shaped wax seal that looked extremely eye-catching.

“This is a love letter. The interaction between a man and woman should start gradually. Although I want to write more, but I don’t have enough time and could only make use the time from before to write something. I can guarantee that the content is filled with all my heart. It just that, Master, I’m

incapable, so please look after me. I look forward to your response the next time we meet.”

“Haa...”

Holding the love letter on his hand, Rhode was completely speechless. It wasn't like he hadn't seen the way Gillian fought from before; it was just that he thought that it was her unusual way of fighting. In the end, she actually wrote a love letter for him?

The black-cloaked mage and Wind Serpent Lord's death were really to unjustified...

“Time is running out, so I'll stop here.”

Gillian once again spread out red air to the surroundings. She smiled and lifted her hands, and then she looked towards the three girls beside Rhode.

“Then, I'll leave now everyone. I hope you guys can be Master's right hand. See you again!”

“Ah...okay...see you...”

“Pfft!”

Hearing until here, Rhode almost spat out blood. Facing Gillian's goodbye, those three girls only stood frozen and waved their hands. After that, Gillian's laughing sound completely disappeared and she turned back into a red card that silently floated in the sky, which disappeared after a moment.

“...”

The surrounding turned silent. After a while, Anne finally recovered, curiously looking up at Rhode who pressed his hand against his forehead, who wasn't standing far from her. She didn't know what was he thinking about.

“Leader?”

“Yes?”

“What did that girl mean?”

“...”

Chapter 130 - An Unusual Situation

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Rhode of course wasn't stupid enough to explain Gillian's last words since he still didn't want to die yet. Now, Rhode finally found out a very important piece of information. It was something Gillian had told him from before. Rhode noticed that she wasn't so simple because from the way she talk and the words she used, it seemed like she wasn't a part of this world. Or else, she wouldn't use words that only people from his world would understand.

Not only that, from Gillian's words, she also seemed to know the game system Rhode used. Rhode was certain that the strange summoned spirit didn't just know that. She said that he finally reunited with her in this world. That meant that, in the game, he had met her before?

Rhode still couldn't understand it.

As a spirit swordsman, Rhode was naturally familiar with his own summoned spirits. When talking about fire elemental creatures, the summoned spirit that he liked the most was the Heavenly Phoenix. However, Gillian didn't seem to have flying unit summoned spirit characteristics, and she also didn't look like the Efreet or Lava Lizard kind of monster. In any case, he thought about all of the fire spirits that he used before, but none matched with Gillian's characteristics. Although other spirit swordsmen had also summoned female fire spirits before, from the picture they have shared online, they looked completely like elemental creatures and none had Gillian's beast characteristic.

Usually, every summoned spirit was unique, and the spirits that were summoned by Spirit Swordsmen also varied. From the flying unit fire spirits, there were Fire Birds, Fire Eagles, Fire Serpents, and others. That

was why, to a Spirit Swordsman, their every summon was a gamble because they never knew if the spirit they summoned was actually the one they wanted. For example, a Spirit Swordsman could want a flying unit creature, but actually get a water unit or earth unit spirit. Even if he was a little bit lucky and got a flying unit fire spirit, its race still had to be identified. The huge difference between a Fire Bird and a Phoenix couldn't be easily bridged.

Because of that, there was no way for a Spirit Swordsman in their entire lives to summon the same spirit twice.

The same goes for the spirits that Rhode had summoned previously; none were spirits Rhode had used before. Their attributes might be similar, but they were still completely different. The same with Gillian; Rhode could be sure that he never owned such a strong spirit before, or else there was no way he didn't have any impression toward it.

However, the fact that she knew him also didn't seem to be a lie... or it could be said this kind of lie was meaningless. Rhode was very confident about his memories. If he had seen it, then he definitely had seen it. If he had never seen it, then he had definitely never seen it. He wasn't like some men, who will lost themselves after being bewitched by a beautiful girl. They couldn't even answer how much is 1+1 was; how could they remember whether they met her or not? But since the beautiful girl said so, they definitely had met before.

And from the previous conversation, Rhode could be sure that Gillian knew that he wasn't the type that could be seduced easily. If she said such a blatant lie, then it meant that she was underestimating his intelligence.

But...

Rhode shook his head. Since he couldn't figure it out, it was useless to think about it anymore. She was in his hand; he could just ask her later.

Of course, this didn't mean that he had nothing to do.

Or it could be said that he was at a huge loss.

Although summoning a Commander Level Lord indeed easily solved all his problem, he couldn't help sighing after looking at his status. There really was no free meal in any world.

The EXP points gained from killing a Master Level Lord and Level 50 Mage could level him up to Level 20 or even more. But what made him feel unhappy was that he got nothing beside the EXP points from killing those few Wind Serpents earlier. This meant that the biggest EXP points were all being eaten by Gillian!

She didn't even leave a little to him!

Not only that, Rhode couldn't even take any loots. Whether it was the black-cloaked mage or the Wind Serpents, they all turned into dust in the battle from before; there wasn't even the tiniest bit of nail left, not to mention loots.

But, facing this kind of situation, Rhode could only helplessly accept the fact. The only thing he wanted was to keep living. As for EXP points and such, it was good if he had it, but if he didn't, then there was no other choice. Since no matter what, it was enough as long as they lived.

After resting for a while, everyone continued their journey.

As a leader of a large mercenary group, Hiller smartly didn't ask Rhode any questions regarding the previous battle. All of them saw the magnificent scene from before, and as mercenaries that faced the Wind Serpents, they of course knew just how strong they were. Hiller knew that every person had their own secrets, and since Rhode didn't plan to say, he also wouldn't ask. No matter what, Rhode saved them, and that was already enough. Not only that, he also told his subordinates not to continue investigating the matter regarding the Starlight mercenary group. This action of Hiller's also left a good impression on Rhode.

The next journey went very smoothly.

Originally, Rhode planned to kill the remaining members of the Jade Tears mercenary group, but before he could, Old Walker hurriedly reported that

the Jade Tears mercenary group members were all wiped out.

According to Old Walker, he had followed Rhode's original plan to observe their movement. However, fireballs suddenly fell from the sky and the entire mercenary group was wiped out in that flame. This scene made Old Walker feel a chill down to his spine; he hid behind and looked as those mercenaries died tragically and didn't know what he should do. After the fire dissipated, he walked closer to investigate, but everything already turned into ashes and there was nothing left.

Rhode, of course, knew what happened. Now he finally knew where those fireballs went.

From this, it could be clearly seen that a Commander Level Lord card deck was indeed different from other cards. Other cards were only conscious once they were summoned, and in the remaining time they usually just slept inside the card. However, Gillian was different; she knew what was happening outside. Or else, there was no way she would do such a thing. It had to be said that there was a thousand miles of distance between the battlefield where Rhode was and the place the Jade Tears mercenary group was located.

However, from this matter, Rhode started to understand Gillian's personality. Her appearance looked innocent and harmless, but her actions were unambiguous, decisive, and well thought out. Of course... her personality still gave him quite some headache.

After summoning her, the remaining summoning time became zero. According to the system prompt, this card was currently in a cooldown period. If Rhode wanted to summon Gillian again, he had to wait until the cooldown period ended.

Or sacrifice his EXP points to summon it.

But after looking at the cooldown period, his entire face almost turned green.

Three months!

This card need to cool down for three months!

Not only that, Rhode just found out that the cooldown period would carry over if he was forced to summon it during the cooldown period. Not only did he have to sacrifice his EXP points to summon it, even after summoning it, the cooldown period would become six months from three months. If he continuously summoned her three times, the card would be sealed for one year.

After seeing the system prompt, Rhode somehow felt that he had fallen into a trap. It really was such a disappointment that he never saw this kind of summoned spirit before. However, considering her terrifying power as a Fire Element Commander Level Lord and his level, which was only about 15 or 16, Rhode could only helplessly shrug his shoulder and accept this fate. Originally, he planned to select her as part of his core card deck, but now it seemed that he wouldn't be able to. There were complicated requirements to create a core card deck; not only did he have to get the summoned spirit's approval, he would also need a large number of expensive magic materials to unlock the core card position. Rhode wanted to wait until he reached Level 20, since there was an opportunity to select a summoned spirit as the core card deck for free, but he needed to wait for some time in order to do this. After all, there was no way for him to select a summoned spirit that he couldn't summon as the core card. Although it was also okay to force summon it once he reached level 20, but after falling into this card's "trap," Rhode became very clear that things weren't as easy as he had thought. If at that time he did so, there might be other trouble that would await him.

That was why it was better for him to wait patiently and make the decision after seeing the situation afterwards.

When Rhode arrived back at Deep Stone City, the entire city was shaken.

The news regarding the Burning Blade mercenary group's attack had already spread out, and the entire Mercenary Association was in shock. It had to be said that the Mercenary Association was badly battered because of continuous problems that happened recently. Originally, they still hoped that the three top mercenary groups could help them to stabilize the

situation. Unfortunately, the Burning Blade mercenary group was suddenly attacked and they received very heavy casualties. For a while, everyone was worried. The Burning Blade mercenary group was the strongest mercenary group in Paphield area, but they actually also got attacked. So who would be spared?

The Old President and Sereck quickly investigated the situation with Rhode and Hiller. Both of them also explained the situation that happened. However, Rhode didn't talk about the relationship between the black-cloaked mage and the Jade Tears mercenary group, only ambiguously saying that the black-cloaked mage controlled a very strong Wind Serpent Lord and might be connected to the trade passage attack that happened recently.

This point was enough to catch the Old President's attention. Although Rhode had no evidence (since everything was burned by Gillian), Hiller's support gave his words a little more credibility. After all, unlike Rhode, Hiller had been in Paphield area for so many years and during his time here, he had built up a good reputation. Since he also said so, it would definitely be right. The Old President told them with serious expression that he would report to the administrative officer and leave this matter to him.

At this moment, in a luxurious room in Deep Stone City, there was a different scene.

Clang!!

An exquisite teapot was thrown to the floor, its fragments scattering on the floor. The entire room was in a mess, but the person that stood in the center of the room didn't care about that matter.

“How did this happen!”

Frank's expression was gloomy, and his fist heavily hit the desk. Not far from him, a mercenary silently stood there. He was one of the small group members that entered the Twilight Forest. He was responsible for contacting the black-cloaked mage and was the only survivor of this incident.

“Burning Blade wasn’t destroyed, Starlight still exists, but our people all died? How could this happen?!”

“E-everything that I told you is the truth, Master!”

After hearing Frank’s shouts, the mercenary hurriedly explained.

“We indeed have delivered your words, and that person also agreed to our request, but after that he never came back. Not only that, everyone also died, and according to the information from the Burning Blade, it seemed that person also...”

Bang!

Frank’s fist once again hit the desk, the extreme pain making his expression somewhat distorted. However, he wasn’t thinking about that right now. His body was trembling and fear was spread all over his body.

He messed up!

He messed up everything!!

Originally, he wanted to use this opportunity to destroy these two strong opponents, but he never thought that everything was occur completely beyond his expectations. How could this happen? According to his investigation, the strength of the two mercenary groups strength definitely rendered them unable to confront a Level 3 middle circle mage! How could they block his attack and kill him?

Thinking until here, Frank shivered.

He could already imagine his end.

Unauthorized commands that led them to suffer such a heavy loss, Frank was certain that once this matter reached the Hawk Nest’s ear, he would definitely die!

What should he do? What should he do to change all of this?

The current Frank had fallen into coldness and despair.

Chapter 131 - The Tip of an Iceberg

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

As a royal mage, Amund had lost count just how many times he had entered this glorious palace.

The smooth marble floor was clean enough to see even his own reflection. The surroundings were decorated with a luxurious crystal chandelier. The bright and soft lights gave off a warm and comfortable feeling. A hint of aroma spread around, bringing a warm and peaceful atmosphere. The thick wooden door from behind slowly closed and echoed a deep sound. However, Amund didn't show the slightest nervous expression. He smiled, then tidied up his red robe while walking toward the young maiden who was lying on the velvet sofa and slightly bowed his head.

“Your Highness.”

“Hello, Amund.” Lydia lazily lied down with her eyes half closed while looking at the elderly in front of her and smiled. “I hope you don't blame me for calling you here when you're busy.”

“Not at all, Your Highness.”

Amund lifted his head and gently looked at her.

“As someone who has been serving the royal family for generations, I certainly won't refuse your invitation.”

“Very well. If I had delayed an important schedule, I would feel very uneasy.” The girl said while slowly sitting up.

White, flawless, perfect skin that wasn't supposed to exist in this world was revealed under the chiffon. Six wings also slowly appeared behind her back,

giving off a holy atmosphere to this palace. Looking at her expression, Amund only shook his head and wryly smiled. He was already accustomed to her easygoingness. Before she succeeded in her position as the Grand Duke and was still his student, Amund had also reminded her several times to pay more attention to her demeanor. But she clearly had a different opinion about that.

“Sir Amund, my beauty has blended in together with the beauty of this world. It’s a sin to hide this kind of beauty. Since I never do anything wrong, then shouldn’t I show myself in dignity? Since my existence can make the world a more beautiful place, why should I refuse to show off myself?”

If others said these words, then they would really sound extremely arrogant, but hearing it from her mouth, it sounded just natural. She was always full of confidence and proud, not allowing anyone to change her views.

Of course, the outside world didn’t have a good evaluation toward her. Loose, cruel, and such words were the most common adjectives to describe her, but even so, she still followed her own path and didn’t care about such rumors. Perhaps it was because of that she was able to succeed.

“Then, what’s the matter for you to summon me here?”

“It’s like this.” She sat on the sofa and grinned, both of her hands placed on her cheeks while looking at the white-bearded old mage before her. “The thing that I’ve asked you to do; the situation has changed.”

“Oh?”

Hearing until here, Amund was a little surprised, but he didn’t question her immediately. He was looking at Lydia and waiting for her to say something. He knew clearly that Lydia was a thoughtful person. Although she usually looked relaxed, if people took her as a simple-minded and relaxed person, they usually would die miserably.

Amund still remembered one of the events that took place when Lydia was 12 years old and she had just succeeded in her position as a Grand Duke for two years. Her reign was still unstable, and the old general suddenly resigned because of an illness, leading to the vacancy of the holder of the country's military power. For many people, it was the best chance for them to gain that power. If one could grasp military power, it meant that one was likely to become the shadow ruler of the entire Munn Kingdom. After all, Lydia was still a 12-year-old girl at that time, and no one believed that a 12-year-old girl could lead a country well especially in military and political aspects. Of course, at that time, there were a lot of people who wanted to control her so they could gain the power and the ability to bring the most beautiful girls on the entire continent into one room. No one would miss that kind of opportunity.

In the end, the position was placed on the two East and West border Military Commanders. At that time, many people thought that it was the western Military Commander who would likely obtain this position because he defeated numerous of outer race that had tried to invade the country. On the other hand, the eastern Military Commander never did anything. Because of that many people thought that the western Military Commander was certainly to get this position due to his many actions.

However, the result was completely beyond their expectation. When they were called back to be officially appoint the General, Lydia, who had been staying silent suddenly made a shocking decision. Not only did she appoint the eastern Military Commander as the General, at the same time, she also put the western Military Commander into prison under the accusation of harming the royal family.

After this thing happened, everyone was in an uproar. Many people simply did not expect that the situation would change 180 degrees. There were people who thought that it was unjustified, people who protested, and people who opposed it. They thought that although this girl was young, but her thirst toward power was extremely heavy. She was worried that the western Military Commander might make her position unstable, which was why she made a move first. However, Lydia remained silent even after hearing these protests—until a month later.

A month later, the result of the trial made everyone shocked. The reason that the Western Military Commander had so much military power over the years was because he was deliberately provoking the outer races army from time to time and then killed them in order to gain military power. But because of this, the danger from the outer races had been eliminated. However, because of the continuous war, the inhabitants of the western Border were living in poverty. Although the war was fought by the military, the inhabitants were also affected. On the contrary, the eastern Border region had always been peaceful. The inhabitants there lived in harmony with people outside the Kingdom. Since there was no such thing as war, naturally there was no way for the eastern Military Commander to earn any military merit. Precisely because of this reason, the eastern Military Commander was always at the bottom of any honor rolls.

Until then, Lydia, who had been travelling all around to enjoy the scenery outside, finally showed up.

At the same time, the result of the trial was issued. All the officers in the entire western border close to the western Military commander was apprehended, and those who had previously accused Lydia for being unjust were also included. In just 10 days, a total of 580 people—including nobles and military officers—were arrested and all executed.

When they were sentenced to death, the successors to their positions had already been decided.

From that day onward, no one dare to look down on this violent girl who like to enjoy beautiful things.

Naturally, Amund knew about the Munn Kingdom's current situation. Precisely because of this, Lydia had personally appointed him to take care of this matter. However, now she suddenly said things were like that... *Was it because there was change in the situation?*

“You guessed right, Amund.”

As if Lydia had guessed his thought, she smiled and replied.

“From the information I got, the danger has already been eliminated.”

“Eh?”

Hearing until here, the Old Mage was surprised for a moment and then frowned.

“Do you mean...”

“This is the report that I received this morning.”

Lydia said then stretched out her hand and handed an exquisite, flower-patterned letter to him. After that, she took a cup of the black tea that circulated a sweet fragrance from her desk. Then, she narrowed her eyes and sipped it.

The old mage bowed, then opened the letter. He carefully began to read the information on it. Although his expression didn't change, the sudden sharpness in his eyes showed his surprised reaction. Then, he put down the letter in his hand and looked at her once more.

“What do you think, Amund?”

“If this is a joke, then please let me laugh at it.” The old mage wryly smiled then shook his head, but his expression didn't seem to be that of one smiling.

“If this is a fact... then I can only say that it's too unbelievable.”

“Unknown things are the most fantastic things in this world.”

Facing the old mage's awe, Lydia only showed her enjoyment.

“When you opened a door, you will never know what's hidden inside. This is the most interesting part. I love unknown things like this the most. It will make me nervous and happy, which, to me, is a must. Originally I thought that my cute little subordinates would take care of this matter, but I never thought that they actually gave me such a pleasant surprise.”

“But...”

The old mage wasn't as optimistic as Lydia. He rubbed his long beard with serious expression.

“Forgive me for being direct, Your Highness. However, I didn't think that an ordinary mercenary group would be able to defeat a Level 3 inner circle mage. Even if it were me, I would still need to use some effort to do it. I think there's something behind this...”

“I understand what you mean, Amund.” Lydia stretched out her hand and stopped his words.

“This is the reason why I called you here... I believe that the report from my cute little subordinates is correct, and they also brought some evidence for us. I think you also noticed that there's a person... central to this matter.”

“The young man called Rhode Alander?” Hearing until here, the old mage thought for a while and quickly asked.

“That's right; according to the report, it's not the first time he saved mercenary groups from the Paphield area and destroyed their plans. In addition, he also wiped out the Jade Tears mercenary group. If we put everything together, I don't think it's accidental. According to this report, this man only arrived in Deep Stone City for a month, but the plan that the Country of Light has made with a whole year of effort has been completely destroyed. I think it's quite a blow to that old man from Association who's very impatient.”

Saying until here, Lydia stopped talking then smiled.

“About his identity... is it true?”

“I have asked the Eastern Plain regarding this matter, but they kept their silence as usual. However, this isn't important; the most important thing is that this young man seems to know their plan and trying to destroy it. I

don't care about where he came from. Since he was able to bring me such a great pleasure, then I think he won't be our enemy."

"Then, you mean..."

Saying until here, the old mage already somewhat guessed the reason she called him here.

"I hope you can go to Deep Stone City together with me to investigate this young man in secret. It's better to see him up close. After all, this man is willing to help our Munn Kingdom. As the ruler, I think I need to pay my respect to him. And..."

Saying until here, Lydia clapped her hands and showed a very beautiful smile full of desire.

"I heard that he's a very beautiful person. If that's the truth, then it would be a pity if I cannot add him to my collection, right?"

Chapter 132 - Waiting at Ease, While the Enemy is Exhausted

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

“Achoo!” Rhode rubbed his nose.

“Are you okay, leader? Are you sick?”

Although she was sitting in the chair, Anne wasn't relaxed for even a second. She kept moving left and right while curiously looking at Rhode, who was sitting behind the desk.

“Do you need Anne's help?”

“There's no need; I think it's because there's someone who's having me in their thoughts... It definitely wasn't something good.”

Rhode shrugged his shoulder and easily brought up this topic.

Although everyone managed to escape from that damned mage, it didn't mean that no one was injured. As a human, Marlene received a very heavy injury. Perhaps it was because the duel between the black-cloaked mage from before. Not long after the battle ended, she collapsed to the ground. According to Lize, she was hurt because of the shock caused by the magic power. Because of that, after they went back to the Deep Stone City, Marlene always stayed on her room to rest and rarely get up from her bed.

After they went back to the Deep Stone City, Lize, who's half angel, and Anne, who's half beast, were also injured. However, their mixed blood helped them to recover quickly. As expected, there was no end to comparisons, only misery... Fortunately, Marlene was still in a deep sleep, or else there was no way to tell what kind of reaction she might have made.

Shauna and the other mercenaries also received heavy injuries, but they were all flesh wounds and not considered serious, so Rhode didn't really care about it. The only pleasant surprise he received after the battle with the Wind Serpent was noticing the improved skill of Randolph and the others. It seemed that that bunch of people needed to face danger first to be able to improve.

Rhode, who had been fighting constantly, also felt a little bit tired. Although he was a mercenary group leader, he definitely wasn't the leader of the Mercenary Association's reinforcement group. He had saved many mercenary groups and he was almost fed up. He couldn't just keep honing his combat skills, right? Occasionally practicing skills in life would also prove to be very interesting, right?

The Jade Tears mercenary group no longer had any movements after that incident. Rhode already asked Old Walker to investigate it. Although that old man was old, he was unlike normal old men in being able to resist loneliness. Whenever he had time, he always visited the tavern to drink and hang out, which was why it was better for him to make use of it. At least, it was better than letting him crawling on the table while having a nice dream.

However, there was no news from the Mercenary Association lately. Every mercenary group was busy on recruiting and resting. Rhode knew that this wasn't the end, but rather a new beginning. If they didn't gather enough members by the time assessments came, then their upcoming days wouldn't be too good.

Because of the Mercenary Association's prohibition, the tavern that had always been crowded had become a lot more relaxed. The Mercenary Association didn't allow mercenary groups to recruit outside help. People who usually hung out around the tavern and wished to join a mercenary group finally found a ray of hope: to become a regular. To a mercenary group that had been driven to the corner, right now, the significance of the quantity of members was far greater than the quality. As long as one could kill a chicken, they could already become a full-fledged mercenary.

It was chaos.

Rhode lifted his head to look at the window. The dark clouds looked repressed and there were also some changes in the top area. It seemed like there was a problem between nobles recently, but it wasn't something he should ponder. Right now, he was thinking about the next problem that might occur.

It was an accidental gain for him to meet the black-cloaked mage and finished him off, but also because of that, the Country of Light's plan had also been destroyed. As least, in Paphield area, their plan had also failed. However, because of his understanding toward the pig members of the Association who only knew how to eat, sleep, and talk sh*t, Rhode was sure that they wouldn't just let this go. There was definitely a new challenge awaiting him.

When that time came, what should he do?

Rhode frowned and lightly knocked the desk. This time, the matter was quite serious. Starlight most likely had been seen eyes by the Country of Light. If he couldn't think of any way, then it would definitely be troublesome.

Rhode thought that it's impossible for the Country of Light to take a large action now. This incident definitely had caught the Golden City's attention. Grand Duke Lydia had never been a person that could be provoked; even if the Country of Light dared to look for more trouble, at the very least, they would consider whether their decision might affect their future plan. Since Rhode clearly knew the reason that the Country of Light was making a move on the Munn Kingdom wasn't as simple as giving them a lesson for being too arrogant. Politics were all about interest; the same with war. No one would do free labor if there was no interest. Although the people from Country of Light kept talking about freedom, liberalism, and power, if they couldn't see the real gold and silver, then they wouldn't actually care whether those words should be spread throughout the world or not.

However, that didn't mean that there was no way.

In fact, when he gathered people to join him, Rhode had already thought of the same thing. But because of this sudden incident, his plan was

postponed. When everything turned back to normal, Rhode would once again add it into his schedule.

He was planning to increase the group's soft power.

To a mercenary group, hard power meant the number of people and their combat power. Having both of these was already enough for a mercenary group. However, to a player, it wasn't enough. They needed soft power and support. There were a lot of things that need to be improved in this area. For example, potions, money, equipment, and information. All of those fell into soft power category.

In this continent, the mercenary group that was created by NPCs didn't have to think about this issue since they were more accustomed to selling the equipments they had gotten in an adventure. Once they received the payment, they would buy the things they wanted. But to a player, this was definitely not a good way to deal with it. A player's mercenary group had a clear role for every person. There was someone responsible for forging and repair, someone for collecting materials and make potions, and someone for selling goods and exchanging it for profits. In this way, they could reduce the waste and shorten the time required, also bringing in profits to the mercenary group. Because the mercenary group would have a lot of expenses once it expanded, if they couldn't prepare it in advance, then when that time came, things would be hard.

This was how the mercenary guild survived. After mercenary groups leveled up into mercenary guilds, the increased size and structure no longer made them able to reap the profits in the way they did before. At this kind of time, the leader of the mercenary guild must make a decision: either choose a strong Trade Association to fund the guild or choose a powerful noble for backing.

To use a modern metaphor to describe it, the nobles and merchants were buying their shares in the mercenary guild to obtain authority. Through their funding, the mercenary guild would be able to operate normally, but they also had to obey the order of whoever was funding them. After all, mercenary guilds were considered strong combat forces. If this kind of

force wasn't linked to formal channels or the location they were in, then it would be dangerous for the manager of the territory.

Rhode didn't want his mercenary group to become a plaything for others once it became a guild. He didn't have any interest in getting involved in the struggle between money and power. To those merchants and nobles, having authority in mercenary guild wasn't a simple matter; it was like owning a private army. Naturally, if a battle occurred, they would inevitably sacrifice their mercenary guild to make sure they won.

Even if the sacrifice was human lives, who' would care?

So becoming economically independent was very important to Rhode. Unlike those NPCs, Rhode was more familiar with various missions and commissions. That was why he could assure his win as soon as possible. If so, he could use his spare time to increase the mercenary group's soft power. Being independent economically was very important.

Knock knock knock!

The door sounded. Rhode turned around and saw Lapis pulling her cloak tightly and nervously entered the room. To her, this was already considered a courageous move. Before, she even had to go in together with her brother.

“Are-are you looking for me, leader?”

The girl said in low voice, both of her hands twisting the cloak hem uneasily. Anne curiously looked at her as though she was considering something.

“That's right.”

Rhode nodded and gestured for her to sit down. The poor girl walked toward the chair with some hesitation. She was holding the chair and slowly sat down, as if she was going to be sold at the black market soon.

“It's like this.”

Rhode decided to ignore Lapis's nervousness in the name of her self-protection. He had tried to comfort her before, and told her to not be scared. In the end, she quickly jumped away like a rabbit whose tail had been stepped on and ran away as if she had seen a wolf. From that moment on, Rhode had given up on this stupid idea.

“I think that you know that you aren't strong enough to take risks and fight.”

“...”

Facing Rhode's words, Lapis lowered her head silently and kept holding onto her cloak tightly. After that, she loosened up, then tightly held onto it once again.

“That's why I plan to give you a new job.”

Rhode opened his hand and handed a piece of paper to Lapis.

“This...”

The girl curiously look up to read the content, her expression showing a little doubt.

“As you can see, this is a recipe for lower level potion.”

Rhode shrugged.

“Your next job is to create a potion according to the content above it. What do you think of this job?”

Chapter 133 - Change

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

The angel's wings were fluttering and slowly landed in the beautiful garden. She hurriedly lifted up her head and looked at the surroundings, before helplessly sighing, then stomped her feet on the ground.

“Celt, are you here?”

“What's up, Grandia?”

A white-robed girl walked out of the garden. She was holding a white wand in her hand while curiously looking at the messenger who was hovering above the ground.

“Has Her Highness Lydia come here? I'm looking for her. The Country of Light has sent their messenger here, hoping to negotiate the matter about the increasing trade flows. I wanted to report this to Her Highness first, but in the end I couldn't find her. She only left a message 'don't look for me' in the study room... but this kind of thing doesn't count, right!”

“Ah, so it's like that...”

After hearing it, the girl frowned and thought for a while, before exposing a gentle smile.

“But I think you shouldn't have to worry about it. I heard that yesterday evening, Her Highness and Grand Mage Amund left the Golden City... I think her habit of collecting has broken out once again”

“Again?”

Hearing until here, the angel maiden pressed her forehead and wryly smiled.

People who were close to Lydia knew about this habit of her. Her Highness like to collect beautiful things. Not only flowers, artwork, or animals, humans were also included. However, the way she “judged” beauty was different compared to other people. Her Highness didn’t just like beautiful appearances. She was more fascinated by those with a dazzling craft, clever mind, or bright soul and strong will. Once she found this kind of prey, she would definitely use any means to bring that person beside her to become her subordinates. It was her way of saying 'since I’m the ruler of this Kingdom, every beautiful thing in here should belong to me.’”

In fact, two-thirds of Lydia’s closest subordinates were all “captured” by her because of this reason.

“Her Highness always does whatever she wants; that’s why people like us are suffering.”

She took a deep breath. Then, the angel spread her wings and once again flew into the sky.

“There are still two more years; Her Highness’s coming-of-age ceremony has almost come. I hope she can find a man and get married, then maybe she would even be a little more restrained... I really do not get it; there are a lot of outstanding men around her, but how come there isn’t a single one who confessed to her?”

Hearing the angel girl complain, the woman only laughed and used her finger to point at her.

“Isn’t it because you kept scaring them away?”

“I never did such a thing!”

Hearing until here, the beautiful angel flushed red, then quickly frowned and refuted her words.

“We’re only guarding her Highness. If they were really serious about Her Highness, then they should be able to pass this kind of challenge easily! If they don’t even have this kind of courage, how can they make Her Highness

happy? We won't allow the incident that happened with the predecessor to happen once again!"

The atmosphere suddenly became tense, but the angel girl quickly noticed that she had made a slip of the tongue, then closed her mouth and bitterly smiled.

"Since Her Highness isn't here, then I won't waste more time... Her Highness also knows about this matter and doesn't seem to forget about it, rather wanting to avoid it deliberately... In that case, we also won't look for trouble. I'll report this matter to Miss Milla and ask her to deal with this. After all, this is not the first time she's done that."

After saying that in a hurry, as if she was hiding something, the angel girl spread out her wings. She turned into bright light and disappeared in the blue sky.

The white-robed girl looked at the angel figure that quickly disappeared. After awhile, she turned back and went inside the garden, looking at the girl who was hiding behind the bushes.

Rhode wiped his hands and looked at the room before him.

Originally, this room was an empty room, but he asked for this room to be modified after he gave an order to Lapis. He also bought some tools and materials for alchemy. He wanted to create an alchemical room. At first, he wanted to use the game's system, since there was also an automated alchemical room in the mercenary group system. Unfortunately, Rhode's mercenary group's level was still too low at Level 1. Although it had changed from "Unknown" to "Small Reputation," there didn't seem to be any difference.

It was more convenient to make it using the system, but Rhode didn't mind using his own money to create one. In just one day, the potion room was completed.

Unexpectedly, Lapis also seemed to agree with Rhode's suggestion. After all, she didn't really have any combat strength, and also seemed

uninterested in battle. She always preferred peace over war. This point could be seen from her instinctive reaction when she was attacked; she didn't show any resistance and could only go with the flow. Rhode really suspected that if there was a man who pushed her down in bed, Lapis wouldn't be able to do anything beside crying or shouting.

But if it were Marlene or Anne instead, then that man would definitely be in trouble...

Since it was her innate characteristic, Rhode couldn't force her to change it. That's why Rhode could only seek a second option and brought out the best in her through alchemy. At least no matter the result, Lapis's performance could be considered unique in this field. That's why it was better for him to at least try and see what happened. If she could do it, then it was definitely best, but if she couldn't, Rhode would consider making her dress in maid outfit and learn how to clean and make tea...

Even so, Rhode still had somewhat confidence in her. From the potion that she created in Twilight Forest, Rhode could see that her alchemical skill wasn't bad. The reason that she always failed before was because her broad knowledge affected her way of thinking. She knew the effect of those magic herbs and materials, which was why she was always hesitant and then failed. However, the materials that were used to make precipitation potion were things that she had never seen before. In addition, she also didn't understand the recipe Rhode had given her. When she didn't have anything on her mind and created the potion, both the effect and duration of the potion were not bad at all.

As the saying goes, the half-filled bottle will spill, while the full bottle remains still. The current Lapis was also like this; her brain was too full of knowledge of the three different subjects in alchemy. Thus, when she did any one thing, her brain subconsciously also thought about the steps in the other two subjects. It was just like trying to use chemistry to solve math problems, or use english ABCs to solve physics. Naturally, the result wouldn't be good.

Since Rhode couldn't fill her bottle up, the least Rhode could do was to keep it empty to make sure it wouldn't spill. That was why he decide to

train Lapis into a skilled worker and not researcher. She didn't have to know the characteristic or the effect of the materials. She only had to follow the steps and complete it well. As for the other things, she didn't have to think about it.

Randolf and the others also agreed to Rhode's suggestion. He was also worried about his sister, knowing that she was not the type that could adventure outside. Although she was forced to become a ranger, her performance was useless. This problem gave Randolf enough headache, and since Rhode was willing to have her do a job with no danger, he naturally agreed to it.

Rhode also wasn't stingy about their pay. Every month, they would give 10 percent of the total profits from adventuring as Lapis's rewards. That was not a small sum of money. Numerous mercenaries only got 15 percent or 20 percent of profits every mission. If there were more members, then the percentage would be smaller. However, Lapis only had to sit in the house and do her work. She could already get so much money, which could be considered quite good already.

However, it didn't mean that Lapis would be relaxed.

At this moment, Lapis crawled toward the table, focusing on making the potion according to the recipe that Rhode had given. It was the same as the element precipitation potion from before; these potion recipes were also uncommon. But it was made through a method that Lapis wasn't familiar with, so it prevented her from thinking it was too complicated. She just had to follow the recipe's steps and make it.

The potion recipe that Rhode gave her wasn't the type that could often be seen in the market. In the Dragon Soul Continent, players had to explore these recipe since the recipe in the system needed a lot of materials and the success rate wasn't too high. To cautious and stingy players, it was definitely not the best choice. Therefore, many players would choose to study recipes and find ways to get the most out of it by using the least amount of material.

Of course, these kinds of improved potions were usually strictly kept by large guilds that were managed by players. As the No.1 Guild Leader in the Dragon Soul Continent, he was of course familiar with them.

After making sure that Lapis was okay, Rhode left the potion room and entered the hall. Then, he saw Anne and Lize's figures.

Right now, both of them didn't seem to be communicating with each other. One of them was sitting in the chair while turning left and right, and another one was quietly staring outside the window peacefully. Randolph and others were currently training in the garden to familiarize themselves with the skills that Rhode had taught them. The sound of colliding weapons echoed throughout the windows, giving off the feeling of harmony and serenity.

How long will this moment last?

Looking at artistic scene before him, Rhode's mind couldn't help but drift.

After a year, wars will enveloped this continent. When that time comes, will they still able to enjoy this kind of life?

Thinking until here, Rhode couldn't help but bitterly smile.

What was the point thinking of this now?

Wasn't he is trying his best to make sure that day wouldn't happen? To make sure that he wouldn't run away pitifully, spending the rest of his days in battle? The reason he was trying his best now was to let this kind of life continue and prolong the time until the chaos arrived Of course, it would be better if that day wouldn't come.

Creak.

At this moment, the door slowly opened and Old Walker, who smelled of alcohol, walked in. He looked around the hall and quickly came beside Rhode while ignoring Anne and Lize's glances and in a serious tone, he said, "Kid, the Jade Tears mercenary group has begun to make their move."

Chapter 134 - Underground

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

As a mineral city, the Deep Stone City had many different kinds of mines. Part of them were located in the Deep Stone City's lower area. It was dark there and without light; even the soldiers who maintained law and order in the city rarely went there. Only miners and those who didn't have the money to buy a house above lived there. They had no choice but to live in this endless darkness, rely on the sewage water that flowed from the top area, and inhabit the same place as both animals and plants.

In this other world, there was no light.

“Are you sure it's here?” After going down, Rhode could feel unfriendly gazes from the surrounding darkness. He ignored the eyes of those people, pulling up his cloak to hide his appearance.

“I'm sure, kid.” Old Walker rubbed his nose with a serious expression.

“According to the information I got from the Mercenary Association, these two days, the Jade Tears mercenary group often went here. Not only that, but guess what? Every time those people came here, their strength suddenly increased! In the tavern, I encountered a kid. He was just trash in his previous mercenary group, but now he actually has strength equivalent to an ordinary mercenary! It's simply a joke!”

“Was it him who told you this?” Hearing until here, Rhode frowned.

“Of course not.” Old Walker shook his head.

“This kid came to the tavern to show off his strength. I asked him how he did, but he didn't tell me. Even if I bought five bottles of rum to make that kid drunk and tell me the answer, I still don't think he would have told me. Walker, me, I'm no idiot. Since I couldn't get the answer from him, I directly asked my old buddy in the tavern. Guess what? After that woman

got my 2 gold coins, she secretly told me where did he got it. That's why I've always said that women were troublesome, and it would be better not to offend any of them. But since it's not us, I don't really care. After I got this clue, I asked my old friend to help me find information regarding this matter. After that, I found out that a lot of Jade Tears mercenary group members came to the mine below. Every time, they always came secretly. No one knew what they were going to do, but the people here have their own rules. Since the Jade Tears didn't bother them, they also wouldn't trouble the Jade Tears. Everyone acts like nothing happened.

“Did Mercenary Association know about this matter?”

“There's no way those old folks would know about it.”

Hearing Rhode's question, Old Walker twitched his mouth. “Kid, you have to know that we are mercenaries and not miners. Even if we were given the money, we still wouldn't come to this dark and eerie place.”

“What about mercenaries? Are they amazing or what? You old thing!”

At this time, a loud sound echoed.

Rhode turned around and saw a dwarf wearing armor walk forward. His hand was holding a torch while he glared at Old Walker while straightening his beard.

“It seems that you have forgotten about the things that happened before. The stone is up there; I don't mind giving you one more lesson about the underground rules.”

“Enough, Barf. I didn't come here to hear you complain.” Old Walker walked forward and smiled. He patted the dwarf's shoulder, then slipped a gold coin into his hand.

“If I had time, I'd treat you a glass of wine, but I am quite busy now, you see...”

“Drink wine?”

Hearing this, the dwarf angrily glared at Old Walker for a moment. After that, he held his beard as if he were moved by this suggestion, but in the end, he still shook his head hesitantly.

“Just forget about it. I’m not used to living above. The sturdy cave here is my home. The stone is above; if I didn’t tie the iron ball to my leg, I’m afraid I would also go up there some day! Enough! Enough blabber, aren’t you guys in hurry? Follow me!”

Saying until here, after the dwarf received the gold goin, he turned around and walked toward the direction where he came from. Rhode and Old Walker glanced at each other, then followed behind him, ready to enter the cave.

“Be careful here. Here isn’t a place where people like you can come and go easily.” While walking, the dwarf didn’t forget to remind the both of them.

“Have to know, the caves here have been dug since the time of my great great great grandfather. No one knows how many caves are here! Even us, the people who are born, live, and die here only knew the mostly used caves. As for the others, we are also unclear. That’s why, without anyone leading, it’s best not to wander around carelessly. There are many people who have died here because they lost their way!”

This time, Rhode didn’t ignore the dwarf’s words. In fact, he also clearly knew this matter.

In the game, the Deep Stone City cave was considered a death end for many players. Before, there were a lot of players who lost their way and couldn’t return. Just how complex was this place? There was a player who wanted to find out the truth. He brought hundreds of directional signs called magic symbols and food supplies when he entered the underground. In the end, he couldn’t find the dead end even after walking for three whole days and nights. Have to know, three days and nights in real life was about ten or more days in the game.

There were only two choice for players who lost their way here: the first one was to use the teleportation crystal to go back to town, and the second

one was to die in the hand of an underground monster, and respawn.

However, in reality, there was no crystal teleportation and Rhode also didn't want to try to respawn here since it seemed impossible.

This was one of the reasons why Rhode rejected Anne and Lize's request to tag along. He was quite familiar with this place, so even if he lost his way, he still could find a way back if he didn't wander too far. But if he brought two people who were completely unfamiliar with this place, if he ever lost one of them, Rhode couldn't guarantee that he would be able to find her.

In addition, Rhode thought that they weren't suitable to do this kind of thing. The reason Rhode came here was to "knock down the enemy as much as possible," according to the players' saying.

What did it mean to knock down the enemy as much as possible?

Of course, it meant to completely killing all of the enemy.

In the game, killing a player would lead to EXP points and equipment being deducted. If it was accumulated, then the damage resulted would heavily affect even a big guild. However, here, Rhode didn't have to bother killing them until they reached the starting level. Just one death and everything would be finished.

The Jade Tears mercenary group lost half of its members in the Twilight Forest. Right now, it hasn't recovered yet, but if he didn't grasp this opportunity to completely destroy them, he would feel really sorry for himself.

He didn't have the hobby of feeding a tiger that would later harm him. He didn't want to keep guard against an enemy when his mercenary group was still developing. Especially mercenary groups like the Jade Tears, who had publicity become his enemy.

Even if Rhode could do it, Lize definitely couldn't. Anne also didn't look like that kind of person, and Marlene was still resting. It wasn't just because

she was feeling unwell; even if she wasn't injured, Rhode still wouldn't ask for her help. Such a proud girl definitely wouldn't like this kind of method.

That's why it was better for him to do it himself.

The dwarf kept mumbling while bringing them deep inside the cave. Soon, they reached the end. Then, the dwarf pointed toward the cave beside them, made a prohibition gesture, and extinguished the torch in his hand.

“Alright, I think those guys will come here after a while. From here, you guys can already see them. However, I hope the two of you won't make any ruckus. We aren't like the people up there who love to fight.”

Rhode didn't care about the dwarf's words. He only walked to the corner and hid himself in the dark. With the help of the dim light in the cave, he looked at the deserted mines.

As expected, in about ten minutes, people wearing black robes appeared before him.

From their equipment, it could be seen that they were indeed mercenaries. An ordinary miner wouldn't brought that much equipment to this kind of place. These people were wearing black cloaks to hide their appearance. Under the lead of the person who walked in front of them, they slowly entered the cave while vigilantly looking at their surroundings.

What made Rhode feel weird was that they didn't make any sound while walking. It was really too strange; they brought that much equipment, but their footsteps were still as light as a cat's. It was clearly not normal.

Thinking until here, Rhode carefully observed these people. At this moment, one of them seemed to have noticed Rhode's gaze and looked toward Rhode's direction.

However, he couldn't find anything. After curiously looking at his direction, that person only coldly snorted and walked forward to follow his comrades.

Only Rhode noticed that when that black-robed man turned around, there was a trace of red light in his eyes.

The three of them silently hid behind the cave. After a while, the dwarf once again lit the torch.

“Alright, as you both have seen, it’s these guys.”

“Do you know where they went?”

“It’s not difficult to find out.” Hearing Rhode’s question, the dwarf proudly answered.

“To the people underground, the footprints that you surface people leave are as obvious as camel poop. However, the place they went is extremely weird. They seemed to have found a passage that leads deep inside the cave. Frankly, that place has been deserted for decades; even I have never gone there. However, these people easily come and go from that place. It’s indeed really strange.”

Hearing until here, Rhode only stayed silent. After that, he took a deep breath, turned around, and said, “I will check the situation; you guys can go back now.”

“Hey, kid, are you sure you’re okay going alone?” Hearing until here, Old Walker showed a worried expression. “Do you want Barf to accompany you? Or maybe I can be some help for you.”

“It’s okay; there’s no need.”

Rhode politely declined Old Walker’s request. As player who once fought the guild who tried to kill him in this underground cave, he was experienced in tracking footsteps and could be compared to the dwarf who was born here and lived here.

“Just leave it to me, Old Walker. You have something more important to do... I hope you can go back to the stronghold and tell Shauna to increase the security and send somebody else to keep an eye on the Jade Tears

mercenary group's movement. I think those guys will most likely do something out of desperation. If they attack us, you must immediately ask for Sereck's help. I help them so many times; it's time for them to repay us."

"Alright, I got it." After hearing Rhode's words, Old Walker hesitated for a while. After that, he nodded and agreed. "But, kid, you must be careful, it's not safe here."

"Just rest assured."

Perhaps because it was dark here, Old Walker couldn't clearly see that Rhode was smiling, but he could hear the coldness in Rhode's tone.

"I guarantee that I won't leave any trouble behind."

Chapter 135 - Ghost in the Shadow

Translator: AtlasStudios **Editor:** AtlasStudios

Frank had never felt so unlucky before.

He was an ambitious man and always wanted to be successful. After working so hard, he finally reached the final stage of his plan but was completely ruined at the most crucial point.

Frank couldn't believe how a person could hold such a power.

When Frank first saw Rhode, he didn't put him in his eyes at all. While he still bothered to investigate on Starlight when it had first established, he didn't think that this man who 'appeared out of nowhere' would pose a threat to him. Still, he was rather surprised when he found out from Clinton about Rhode being a survivor of the floating ship attack who also escaped the assassins sent by the Country of Light.

However, he was only — just surprised — and that was it. He believed that Rhode wouldn't be able to guess the series of events that was going happen.

When Clinton failed to assassinate Rhode, Frank didn't seem to care. On the contrary, he felt happy. After all, Clinton was a traitor — even if his reason was for money, women or authority, betraying one's country was considered something despicable.

Alas, Frank had no idea that he would fall into the same hole as Clinton.

Holy Soul!!

He swore to the Five Dragon Creators that he had never seen Rhode before. Even until now he didn't know why Rhode was hostile to him when they first met. If it wasn't because of that mage who saved him, perhaps he would've already died.